

The Loyal Foreign Merchant Captain: Thomé Gaspar de León and the Making of Manila's Intra-Asian Connections

*El leal capitán mercante extranjero: Tomé Gaspar de León y la
construcción de las conexiones intra-asiáticas de Manila*

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Abstract

This article presents a micro-historical analysis of the life of Thomé Gaspar de León, the South Indian-born Christian who became one of the most successful merchants in Manila's intra-Asian trade, and one of the most trusted agents of the Hispanic monarchy in Asia in the mid-eighteenth century. Combining methodologies of social and economic history, this study provides new insight into patterns of empire-building in maritime Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It highlights Manila's previously neglected role as an intra-Asian trading hub and reveals how its commercial connections to Batavia, Macao, and other regional port cities, forged by men like Gaspar de León, ultimately strengthened Spain's Asian empire.

Keywords: Philippines, Intra-Asian Trade, Iberian Asia, Agent of Empire, Social Network Analysis.

Resumen

Ésta es una aproximación microhistórica a la vida de Tomé Gaspar de León, un cristiano nativo del sur de la India, quien a mediados del siglo XVIII se convertiría en uno de los más exitosos comerciantes intraasiáticos de Manila, así como uno de los más confiados agentes de la monarquía española en Asia. Combinando los métodos de la historia social y económica, este estudio brinda nuevas perspectivas

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sobre la construcción imperial en el sudeste asiático y el Pacífico. También resalta el minimizado papel de Manila como eje comercial intra-asiático y muestra como los nexos comerciales forjados por figuras como De León, en puertos como Macao o Batavia, fortalecieron la presencia española en Asia.

Palabras clave: Filipinas, Comercio intraasiático, Asia ibérica, agente del imperio, análisis de redes sociales.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the mid-eighteenth century Thomé Gaspar de León, a Catholic Paravar man from Cuddalore in Southeastern India, petitioned the King of Spain to make him a *vecino* of Manila. In the early modern Iberian world, a *vecino* was a lawful permanent resident of a city. In Manila, *vecindad* came with special commercial privileges including the right to participate in the trans-Pacific galleon trade that connected the Philippines to Mexico (YUSTE, 1984: 41). Historians have paid scant attention to De León despite the fact that this dark-skinned foreigner was one of Manila's most successful merchants and an important agent of the Spanish empire in Asia. De León built his fortune in intra-Asian trade, captaining at least sixteen voyages between Manila and ports in Java, China, and the Malay Peninsula from 1736 to 1769. De León claimed that he was deserving of *vecino* status because of his devoted service to the crown. His biography reveals how the Spanish empire in Asia successfully coopted diverse subjects to advance its imperial interests. For more than three decades this loyal foreigner spied on Spain's most powerful rivals, the British and the Dutch. He procured wine, weapons, and iron for the government in Manila: commodities that were essential to the stability of a Catholic colony surrounded by enemies. He also donated ships for the Spanish colony's war against *moro* (Islamic) pirates, and he rescued and repatriated Christian Filipino and Spanish slaves.

Combining methods from social and economic history, this article explains how Thomé Gaspar de León became one of Manila's most successful intra-Asian traders, and one of the most trusted agents of the Hispanic monarchy in the region. De León left a marked presence in the dispersed Philippines colonial archive. His petitions to the crown for privileges and relevant correspondence between Manila's colonial government and the King and Council of the Indies reveal that De León was integrated into the port city's tight-knit Spanish community. He married a Spanish woman from a local military family, and military officials and priests became the godparents of his Manila-born children. A social network analysis of voyages and cargo data collected in the Manila Intra-Asian Trade database (MIAT) shows that De León also belonged to a clique of non-Chinese, Manila-based captains.¹ These overlapping colonial and maritime networks enabled De León to gain the trust of local colonial officials. De León's commercial and political ventures were entangled and mutually reinforcing: simply put,

1 The MIAT database (1680–1840) has been created using data from the Escribanía and Contaduría fonds at Archive of the Indies (AGI) and Aduana de Manila section in the National Archive of the Philippines (NAP). It has been constructed as part of RUIZ-STOVEL (2019). References to voyages and cargo in the text are all extracted from this database.

serving the Hispanic monarchy was good for De León's business, and business was good because De León served the crown.

As a microhistory, our approach differs from existing studies of commerce and colonial rule in the Philippines that serve as collective biographies of merchants (YUSTE, 2007; GOODE, 2012). Within the field, Consuelo VARELA'S (2013) microhistory of a seventeenth-century galleon is only a loose precedent. In contrast, this article focuses on how a single individual's life history can offer new perspectives on the dynamics of globalization and imperial expansion in maritime Southeast Asia and the Pacific world. However, we by no means claim De León was a cosmopolite Menocchio of the South China Sea (GINZBURG, 1980). The captain left us no writings that could reveal the mentalité of an early modern cross-cultural broker.

This study makes an important contribution to the wave of new research on the Philippines' intra-Asian connections. It builds on scholarship that poses a challenge to the galleon-centricity of previous studies by demonstrating the nature and importance of the intra-Asian trade, not only to Manila's economy, but also as an information highway that made Spain's Asian empire more resilient to external threats (TREMML-WERNER, 2015; PERMANYER 2018). Recent work has highlighted that the development and maintenance of the entangled processes of long-distance trade and empire-building in Asia was contingent on a range of cross-cultural brokers. In the Chinese mainland, the key figure was the comprador: the agents that allowed foreign principals to penetrate China's domestic market with their imported wares, without having to deal directly with cultural and linguistic barriers. Jason Oliver CHANG (2017) has extended this portrait to encompass a wider 'comprador Pacific', where rival empires resorted to Chinese agents beyond the borders of China itself, including the Spanish Philippines (CHANG, 2017). This article suggests that a restrictive focus on the Chinese comprador overlooks other cross-cultural intermediaries that were just as important to facilitating commerce in the region and beyond the China route. Thomé Gaspar de León's trans-imperial biography speaks to the diversity of agents of empire in early modern Asia. Birgit TREMML-WERNER (2017) highlighted the prominent place of merchants from 'minor trading nations' in Manila's intra-Asian trade. This study offers the first in-depth portrait of one such merchant. Retracing De León's maritime sojourns and contextualizing his activities as a trader and an imperial agent enables us to develop a deeper understanding of the processes through which long distance commerce was carried on in this world region.

2. MANILA: SPAIN'S ASIAN EMPORIUM AND THE INTRA-ASIAN TRADE

Thomé Gaspar de León's Manila was one of the early modern world's most cosmopolitan cities. The Jesuit priest and scholar Padre Pedro Murillo Velarde captured the city's awing diversity in a poem:

In Manila there are Persians, Malabars,
Ethiopians, Armenians, and Dutch,
Mindanaoans, Ternatense, Makassarese,
Spaniards and Portuguese from the Americas,
Chinese, Bengalis, Tatars, and Lascars,
Mongols, Africans, and Frenchmen,
This unrivaled assembly
Is the happy essence of the world.²

The city was a meeting place of people of all nations because it lay at the crossroads of trade routes that extended west across South China Sea and into the Indian Ocean and east into the Pacific Ocean. Scholarly focus has historically been on the Manila-Acapulco commercial route (SCHURZ, 1939; CHAUNU, 1960), though a more recent boom in galleon studies, as exemplified by YUSTE (2007), BONIALIAN (2012), BERNABÉU (2013), BERNABÉU & MARTÍNEZ SHAW (2013), and GIRÁLDEZ (2015), has introduced more inclusive geographies and approaches. Yet, historiography devoted to Manila's intra-Asian routes during the galleon era remains marginal, with recent scholarship on the China trade focusing on Manila's Chinese community (CHIA, 2006; GARCÍA-ABÁSULO, 2008, 2012; GIL, 2011; KUEH, 2014), thus eschewing the operation of the China routes or the connections between Manila and Chinese ports (CHEONG, 1970a; VAN DYKE, 2007). There are a handful of works that address the South Asian routes and trade dynamics more directly (QUIASON, 1966; CHEONG, 1970b; BHATTACHARYA 2008). Within this body of literature, the systematic study of specific commodity flows as the nexus between Manila and its intra-Asian destinations has its only precedent in the analysis of the seventeenth-century junk trade by FANG Chen-chen (2012). The analysis of the MIAT data (RUIZ-STOVEL, 2019), which is the basis for this section of this article, extends this commodity-based approach into the eighteenth century in order to flesh out the world of intra-Asian 'circulations' (TAGLIACCOZZO & CHANG, 2011).

In De León's lifetime, Chinese and non-Chinese merchants (including Spaniards) traded with ports in Southern China, while trade with European enclaves in the Coromandel Coast and Bengal, as well as with Dutch Batavia, was exclusively in the hands of non-Chinese. As the long-run data in the MIAT database shows, the China trade held the dominant position as the main source of imports for the galleon, such as silk yarn and cottons. However, the South Asian trade in cottons competed with this product mix for re-export to Mexico. In addition to these goods, Chinese ships known as junks and ships from Java carried goods for domestic consumption in the Philippines, ranging from metals and dyes to foodstuffs. Trade with Siam, in the hands of both Chinese and non-Chinese captains, was important before the turn of the eighteenth century, but was negligible after this, as was trade with the Malay peninsula. Though the records are fragmentary, there was also a commercial route to Borneo, operated by indigenous captains and the Chinese. This provided luxury commodities for re-export to the Chinese market, such as the birds' nests that continue to be harvested today (CHIANG, 2011).

² MURILLO VELARDE (1729).

The anatomy of the annual trading season is indicative of the relative importance of each of these destinations and how this changed over time (CHAUNU, 1960: 160–198; COSANO, 1986: 215–306). Between De León's initial period of activity in the 1730s and the British Occupation of Manila in 1762, the average trading season was composed of thirteen junks and two Western-style ships arriving in Manila from China, in addition to two from Indian ports, and another two from Java. In contrast, between the end of the Occupation and the turn of the nineteenth century, the annual number of junks calling into Manila each year dropped to an average of seven, for a series of possible factors. On the other hand, the annual number of non-Chinese vessels leaving China for Manila rose to five. This expansion attests to the direct involvement of Manila merchants in the China trade in the second half of the eighteenth century. The annual number of ships from India remained the same, while the average for ships from Java was reduced to one per year. This change was perhaps due to the opening of direct trade with Cadiz in the 1760s, which would have been a new source of the European goods that Manileños had been procuring from Dutch Batavia.

The nature of the decline in Chinese junk traffic is more difficult to evaluate. Data from junk traffic at Dutch Batavia for the latter period reveals equally low volumes of Chinese arrivals at this port. This suggests a systemic stagnation, likely the product of new trade dynamics in the wake of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). However, the reduced number of vessel arrivals are also misleading, as the Batavia data shows that Chinese junks were increasing in size, especially after 1770.³ This increase would have offset some of the reduced traffic. Decline in the Philippine case would have also responded to internal dynamics. Between 1764 and 1772, the Spanish colonial government expelled almost every Chinese resident from the colony, as this community was scapegoated for the British occupation (ESCOTO, 1999). However, the actual impact of the expulsion on trade volumes is ambiguous. The ban on the permanent residence of Chinese in the Philippines, in place until 1779, had a limited effect in reducing the hundreds of itinerant Chinese that came to Manila for the trading season, and stagnation continued for about a decade after the Chinese began to return in earnest after the ban.

Manila's main trade connection was the Chinese junk trade with Amoy (present-day Xiamen). This trade was in the hands of the South Fujianese network that cornered Chinese trade along the China Coast, Taiwan, and maritime Southeast Asia (NG, 1983). To a lesser extent, South Fujianese merchants also made voyages to Manila originating in Shanghai and Ningbo. Non-Chinese also competed in the China trade, predominantly with voyages to Canton and Portuguese Macao. They also called at Amoy with some regularity, with at least twenty voyages between the 1720s and 1790s. Even after the establishment of the Canton system in 1757, which barred Europeans from all other Chinese ports, the

³ Figures for Batavia are calculated from Leonard Blussé, *Universiteit Leiden* (1983): *South China Sea trade, 1681-1792*. DANS. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17026/dans-x39-5xed>. This database is the precedent for MIAT and is based on VOC sources. Dutch sources provide records of tonnage, which Spanish sources do not. However, the Leiden database does not include itemized cargo manifests for individual ships, which is one of the features of MIAT.

Spanish continued to visit Amoy, at least non-officially. Recognition of this trade came in 1782, when the Qianlong emperor formally sanctioned Spanish trade at Amoy, as long as it was conducted according to the regulations of the Canton customs house.⁴

Subsuming the junk trade to a silk-for-silver exchange (FLYNN & GIRÁLDEZ, 1995, 2002) undercuts the importance of the China route for other forms of domestic consumption in Manila. The shipping manifests of Chinese junks arriving in the Philippines read like veritable general stores, loaded with everything from nails; iron plows and pans (*carajayes*); earthenware, foodstuffs; and even fresh fruit. On the return trip, junks not only carried profits in the form of silver pesos, but also took with them luxury items such as sappanwood (*sibucao*), birds' nests, sea cucumber (*balate*), and deer hides.⁵ These were brought to Manila from Borneo and elsewhere in the Philippine archipelago.

Ship traffic between Manila and Indian ports was considerably lower in terms of arrivals, though it involved some of the largest ships calling into the Spanish port. These ships originated predominantly in European enclaves on the Coromandel Coast: Portuguese Sao Thome and Porto Novo, French Pondicherry, Danish Tranquebar, and to a greater extent, English Madras. Ships also sailed from Bengal and Surat. As found by Serafin QUIASON (1966), most ships arriving in Manila from India before the English Occupation belonged to the English East India Company (EIC), though others were also in the hands of 'marginal players' from minor trading nations (TREMML-WERNER, 2017).

Since Protestant nations were officially barred from trading at Manila, these ships sailed incognito with nominal captains who were chosen from among South Asian Muslims and Christians (like De León), as well as Armenians. All of these had the status of 'Asian foreigners' who were allowed to sojourn in Manila. As far as Armenians were concerned, it is difficult to differentiate between those who were acting nominally and those who were bona fide captains on Indian voyages. The Armenian network from New Julfa was active on the Asian seas, operating its own voyages and ships (ASLANIAN, 2011). In the case of Manila, Armenian captains are recorded as arriving not only from India but from China and Java as well. Some of these even set up permanent residence in Manila (BAENA ZAPATERO & LAMIKIZ, 2014).

Competing manufactures from the India and China routes were in the form of textiles. The major textile export from China was not finished cloth but rather silk yarn that could be used for weaving and embroidery in New Spain. It was priced according to a combination of quality rank, place of production, form of manufacture, and color. Reeled silk (*seda quiña*) from the Yangzi delta commanded the highest prices, especially if it was dyed with cochineal imported from Mexico.⁶ Other silk imports included stockings, ribbonry, and fine fabrics

4 *Xiamen zhi* 廈門志 (Xiamen Gazetteer), 1839, juan 5: 35b.

5 A small sample of outgoing manifests for junks bound for China are found in NAP, Aduana de Manila, SDS-6208 (1784) and SDS-6213 (1803-04).

6 From the finest to the roughest form of manufacture, silk yarn took the form of reeled silk (*seda quiña*), spun silk (*seda maso*), and silk noil (*seda floja*). It was sold by weight in piculs (*picos*), with one Manila picul equal to 137.5 pounds (the China picul being approximately 133 pounds). The three places of manufacture were Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangnan (Yangzi River delta), with Jiangnan silk being

like satin and damask. Finished cloths were mostly imported from Canton-Macao by non-Chinese.

Cotton fabrics were the main Indian item for re-export on the galleon, though some silk yarn from Bengal also reached Manila. These fabrics ranged from rough cottons (*manta*) to finer cottons (*lienzo*) and kerchiefs (*pañitos*).⁷ However, the cotton market was not exclusive to ships from India. As supported by FANG Chen-Chen's (2012) analysis of seventeenth-century manifests, and the eighteenth-century data in the MIAT datababase, the volume of cotton imports from the Chinese junk trade has been greatly underestimated. Chinese cottons also came in these three classes and their vast quantities suggest that these were used for re-export as well as local consumption.⁸

The Manila-Java route was only partially linked to the galleon trade but played a key role in domestic Philippine consumption. More importantly, it had a strategic importance to Spain's Asian empire as a source of European iron. Due to its product mix, the Java trade was overwhelmingly in the hands of Manila-based traders, both Spaniards and non-Chinese foreigners. The ship and captain arrival data analyzed in the final section of this article suggests that both groups of Manila-based traders did not act independently: they formed mixed networks, primarily for the Java trade but also in the organization of voyages to China.

The Spanish colonial government in Manila commissioned captains including Thomé Gaspar de León to procure European iron from the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Chinese iron, imported in considerable quantities, was an imperfect substitute for European iron, and Dutch Batavia was a more a reliable and less distant source of this metal than were Indian ports. Particularly prized was iron from Biscay, produced in the Basque country. Iron cast as anchors for European-style ships was also transported back to Manila.⁹ Products important to defense, as were munitions and saltpeter, were additionally purchased in Batavia.

The VOC was also the primary source of cinnamon for the galleon trade, which was transported to Batavia from Sri Lanka. Cinnamon was a major, if not the most important, non-textile export to New Spain. Sri Lankan cinnamon was more prized than cinnamon from less distant sources, like Makassar or the Philippine archipelago (YUSTE, 2007: 267). Some cottons from Java and South Asia also appear on the manifests of vessels who plied this route, though in relatively small amounts. Java was additionally the source of European goods for nostalgic consumption, including manufactures like hats and quills; foodstuffs like cheese and olives; as well as ample amounts of beer and spirits in addition to consecration

the most expensive across the board.

⁷ These cloths came in a variety of forms and sizes. For example, the South Asian *manta*, appropriately referred to as *elefante* reached 40 varas (33 metres). There were also half and quarter *elefantes* (the latter referred to as a *garra*). *Lienzos*, like the *cambaya*, were produced both in South Asia and China, ranged between 6 to 10 varas (5-8 metres). *Paños*, like the red bandanas produced in Pulicat, were denominated in pieces without a reference of size.

⁸ Chinese cottons like the *manta* Anque (named after Anxi county in Southern Fujian) were in parallel demand to the export of silk and other fine fabrics. These cottons were used to pack these textiles in the bales that were loaded onto the galleon. See Filipinas, 940, Expediente *San Carlos*, 1767.

⁹ A shipping manifest for De León's voyage to Java on the *Espíritu Santo* in 1768, shows that 8 large anchors (of about 4,000 pounds) were purchased for the crown (*a cuenta del Rey*).

wine. These goods allowed Spanish Manileños to partially recreate a European lifestyle at the far edge of the world. With its overall product mix and primary importance for the domestic market, the Java route afforded opportunities for Manila merchants that were harder to grasp in routes with greater competition from outside players.

The procurement of European red wines was another product of strategic importance to Spain's Asian empire. Soldiers serving in Philippines presidios were allotted a daily wine ration (PIKE, 1978: 27). Any disruption to the supply of this alcohol might have contributed to military unrest in the forts that defended the islands against internal and external enemies alike. Red wine, moreover, when transformed into the blood of Christ, was crucial to the Christianizing mission of the colonial state and its legitimating rituals. In the late seventeenth century, King Charles II ordered the Viceroy of New Spain to ensure that high-quality European wine was loaded on the galleon ships bound for Manila because it was essential for consecration in the Catholic mass.¹⁰ The frustrated king noted that the dean of the metropolitan church of Manila had complained that previous shipments of wine from Mexico were spoiled when they arrived in the Philippines. This may have contributed to the expansion of the intra-Asian trade in wine, which is yet to be studied in depth.¹¹ Wine from Java came largely in the form of *vino Carlon*, whereas wine from Macao was mostly sherry. The importance of this product cannot be underestimated. In 1748, the crown deputized the Spanish ship *Santo Domingo* to journey to Macao expressly to purchase wine for Catholic mass.¹² It returned with over 5,000 bottles of the precious liquid. De León himself embarked on a voyage to Malacca for this same purpose in 1758.¹³

Carmen YUSTE'S (2007) detailed study of Mexican merchants in Manila is a pivotal contribution to Philippine economic history, but renders the Manila merchants as having very limited autonomy vis-a-vis their senior partners on the other side of the Pacific. Missing from Yuste's account of Manila's Spanish merchants is a story that has been peripheral to 'galleon studies': the progressive entanglement of Manila's Spanish merchants (and their non-Chinese associates) in intra-Asian trade. This escalated in the second half of the eighteenth century and posed a mounting challenge to the previously dominating Chinese shipping sector. In the 1780s, the direct route to Spain brought with it an unprecedented boon for intra-Asian shipping in the hands of Manila Spaniards, even as the galleon market contracted.

3. THOMÉ GASPAR DE LEÓN: FROM CUDDALORE TO MANILA

What we know about Thomé Gaspar de León's early life comes from the short autobiography that he presented to the King and Council of the Indies in

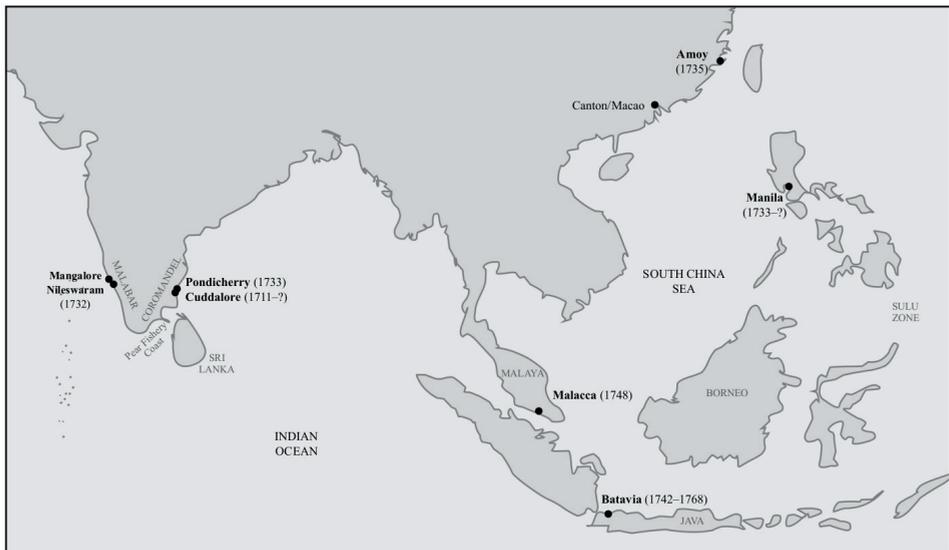
10 *Aviso de la orden de enviar géneros de calidad a Filipinas* (1682), AGI, Filipinas, 331, L.7, F.377v.

11 In contrast, the transatlantic wine trade has been closely examined by David HANCOCK (2009).

12 AGI, Escribania, 434A, Q6, 947v.

13 *Relación de Méritos y servicios de Tomé Gaspar de León, Guardacostas de las Islas Filipinas* (1755), AGI, Indiferente, 155, N.47.

1755 as part of a petition to formalize his appointment as coastguard captain (*capitán de guardacosta*) in the Philippines.¹⁴ De León was born in or near the coastal town of Cuddalore on the of present-day Tamil Nadu, where the Portuguese priest Padre Clemente Pereira baptized him on the 11th of April, 1711. De León was the legitimate son of Don Thomé de León and Doña Thomasa de Acuña. Both of his parents belonged to the Paravar ‘nation’ and were acknowledged as nobility: León identified them as ‘Old Christians’ with *limpieza de sangre* (blood that was without the ‘stain’ of Jewish or Muslim ancestry). The Paravars were descendants of the once low-class fishing community on the Pearl Fishery Coast that converted en masse to Catholicism in the early sixteenth century and grew powerful through alliances with the Portuguese. De León set out to sea at a young age, in the service of the Portuguese empire. In 1732, when he was approximately twenty-one years old, De León was a corporal and commander of a Portuguese war ship equipped with seven cannons and twenty-five European soldiers. This escorted a convoy ship along the Malabar Coast from the port of Mangalore to the fort at Nileswaram.¹⁵ The map below indicates these and other locations pertinent to De León’s biography, and the available dates of his visits to them.



Map 1. The trading world of Thomé Gaspar de León.
Source: modified from National Geographic Society (2009).

By sifting through archives of the Spanish colonial government in Manila, we learn that De León arrived in the Spanish port city for the first time in 1733. He came from the French port of Pondicherry in a trading ship called *La Confianza*, 14 Ibid.

¹⁵ *Relación de Méritos y servicios de Tomé Gaspar de León*. AGI, Indiferente, 155, N. 47

which on this voyage was captained by the Malabar Christian Luis Bergason.¹⁶ De León set up a home in Manila shortly thereafter. By the mid-1740s he had married the Manila-born Spanish woman Juana Hilaria Franco, a union that produced at least three children. This marriage strengthened De León's ties to the city and its small and influential Spanish community.¹⁷ De León and his family most likely lived outside of the walled city in Santa Cruz, the parish where his wife and their children were all baptized. This neighborhood was home to relatively wealthy Spaniards and Chinese mestizos in the mid-eighteenth century, as well as some Christianized Chinese who lived outside the confines of the Chinese Quarter.¹⁸ Impoverished Spaniards and indigenous Filipinos clustered in Bagumbayan, the suburb that unfurled from the southern city walls along Manila Bay (REED, 1978: 62–63).

Intra-Asian trade was a family business for De León. Spanish government accounting records place De León's father, Thomé, in Manila in 1729, when he arrived as the captain of the ship *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores* from the Coromandel Coast.¹⁹ Thomé Gaspar followed in his father's footsteps and went on to captain sixteen voyages between Manila and other Asian destinations over the course of four decades, between the years of 1736 and 1768. These voyages are summarized in the table labeled 1. A line can be drawn between his early career before 1750, when he made voyages to China, Java, and the Malay Peninsula on a variety of ships, and his later career when De León dedicated himself to the Java trade on a single ship, the *Espíritu Santo*. This would appear to indicate that by the age of forty, De León had accrued adequate wealth to purchase his own ship. This was a respectably sized sloop (*chalupa*), a class of ship with a single mast measuring 27 *codos* (50 ft).²⁰ More importantly, De León had become a well-established conduit between Manila and Dutch Batavia.

TABLE 1
The voyages of Thomé Gaspar de León

Year	Inspection date	Ship	Class	Port of origin	Crew	Valuation	Customs duties	Same year ships on same route
1736	1/2	Santa Ana	sloop	Amoy			351	9 *
1736	7/19	Santa Ana	sloop	Java	28		1,100	2
1742		N Sra del Rosario	sloop	Java / Malaya	33			3 **
1748	7/3	San Vicente	Spanish junk	Malacca	36	2,904	200 (7%)	1

16 AGI, Escribanía, 330C, Cuaderno 7. For the arrival records of *La Confianza* in 1731 and 1733 see AGI, Escribanía, 428A, Q6, ff. 775v-778v.

17 AGI, Escribanía, 330C, Cuaderno 7, ff. 151r-52v.

18 Evidence of Chinese living in Santa Cruz comes from the 1769 census (*filiación*) of the Chinese in AGI, Filipinas, 716.

19 AGI, Contaduría, 1264A, Almojarifazgo, 1729.

20 Far more common than the *chalupa* (sloop) was the *patache*, which had a double sail and was suited for longer voyages.

Year	Inspection date	Ship	Class	Port of origin	Crew	Valuation	Customs duties	Same year ships on same route
1750	7/13	Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java	27	3,833	307 (8%)	2
1751	7/3	Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java	32	2,585	300 (12%)	2
1753	7/14	Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java	45	3,517	350 (10%)	2
1754	6/21	Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java	40	3,050	100 (3%)	2
1755		Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java	34	1,659	200 (12%)	2
1756	7/2	Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java	50	2,387	800 (34%)	3
1759		Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java		3,680	1,000 (27%)	3
1761		Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java		3,560		3
1765		Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java			1,700	1
1766		Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java			1,942	1
1767		Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java				1
1768	7/12	Espíritu Santo	sloop	Java		13,972	419 (3%)	1

* 7 Chinese junks, 2 European-style ships

** Remaining 2 only visited Java

Source: MIAT

There are eight extant cargo manifests and two passenger lists for De León's intra-Asian voyages. From these we learn that the number of crew and passengers on the *Espíritu Santo* ranged from 27 to 50, and that these were multi-ethnic in composition. Primarily included among these passengers and maritime workers were the usual crop of Muslim and Christian sailors from the Philippine archipelago, but other natives of maritime Southeast Asia and lascars from India also found their way on board. The crew on De León's 1765 voyage to Java include a Malay man fittingly known as Matheo Malayo, and the Chinese man, known by the Christian name Agustín Gonaga, who was reportedly a native of Beijing. The ship's European officers included at least one Frenchman and what can be gathered to be Luso-Asians like De León himself.²¹ Evidence from a journey to

²¹ In addition to the Frenchman Munsieur Dulubier, who was pilot in the Java voyage of the *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* 1742, there is a boatswain named Ignacio Hermann in the Java voyage of the *Espíritu Santo* in 1751. Based on the surname we can only speculate that he was German or of some other northern European origin.

Java in 1754 shows that De León's family members José Roselio and Hilario de León were aboard as pilots.²² José Roselio was most likely lateral kin since he also appears in the passenger manifest for 1751, too early for De León's children to have come of age. Passengers included both Spaniards and Armenians. There is also record of 'black' servants on the ship, who were mostly likely enslaved or indentured dark skinned Southeast Asian men.

TABLE 2
Valuation of the Espíritu Santo, Java, 1751

Quantity	Units		Items	Amount (pesos)
15	burlaps (<i>churlos</i>)		cinnamon	1,200.00
500			[cotton] cambays from Java	300.00
50	piculs	(3.12 t)	iron from Biscay	250.00
50	piculs	(3.12 t)	wheat	250.00
600	bottles		beer	112.50
2	crates		Carlou wine	80.00
6			mirrors	72.00
4	barrels		cabbages	60.00
4	cases (<i>frasqueras</i>)		oil from Castille	60.00
4	cases (<i>frasqueras</i>)		olives	60.00
100			planks for ships	50.00
20	piculs	(1.25 t)	red soil from Siam [red lead?]	30.00
2	kegs (<i>cuñetes</i>)		butter	30.00
20			lanterns	30.00
			Total	1435
			Customs duties	300 (12%)

1 Manila picul = 137.5 lbs, approximately 62.37 kg

Source: AGI, Escribanía, 436D, Q9, 263v-277r

As far as the cargo that accounted for De León's wealth, a representative shipping manifest from his 1751 voyage to Java is shown in the table labeled 2. Cargo included three tons of iron, three tons of wheat, 100 planks for the building of ships, and two crates of wine; all items of strategic importance. There were also 15 burlaps of cinnamon and Javanese cottons for the export market. Items for nostalgic consumption ranged from manufactures, such as lanterns and mirrors, to foodstuffs like cabbage and butter. While the range of products is representative, the quantities of these goods imported by De León in that year could have been much higher. In 1754, he transported as much as 22 tons of iron,

²² AGI, Escribanía, 436D, Q9, 1722r-ss.

and in 1768, as many as 3,000 bottles of Carlon wine. It is important to note that, at this time, customs declarations for both Chinese and non-Chinese ships suffered from chronic underreporting, and that there was no system of routine customs inspections to verify the actual composition of cargo. To compensate for this, there was a process of customs adjustment (*ajuste de derechos*). Through this process, the Spanish governor of the Philippines and his council negotiated a payable amount beyond the 8% customs rate to reflect what they considered to be the true value of cargo.²³ De León engaged in this tug-of-war, which explains why the effective customs rate on the 1751 cargo was 12%. In 1756, the cargo of the *Espíritu Santo* was deemed so underreported that the tax rate was hiked to 37%.

As indicated by the data in MIAT and shown in the first table, De León's extended period of activity as captain and his high number of voyages set him apart from the typical Manila merchant captain. With 16 recorded voyages, De León made three times as many journeys to Asian ports as the second ranked non-Chinese captain, an Armenian by the name of Sarat Cruz, who helmed five voyages. De León also completed more repeat voyages than any single Chinese captain, which came to a maximum of ten. This makes De León a true outlier in terms of shipping activity.

Combining business ventures with services to the Crown, De León became a man of strategic importance to Spain's Asian empire. De León began working for Manila's colonial government soon after he settled in the Philippines. In 1735 the city and its hinterland were suffering from a wheat shortage and a corresponding scarcity of bread. To resolve this crisis, Manila's *Ayuntamiento* commissioned De León to go to China to purchase wheat to feed the hungry city, entrusting him with 2,000 pesos for this purpose. De León set out on a ship named the *Santa Ana* for Amoy. The mission was a success: De León returned to Manila in January the following year with 2,800 piculs (*picos*), or about 174 tons of wheat.²⁴ He humbly refused to accept a salary for this return voyage, a move that would have impressed senior colonial officials. Yet he still made a hefty profit, pocketing one peso for the freight cost of every picul of wheat. Being an agent of Spain's Asian empire proved lucrative.

Manila's colonial government placed significant trust in De León in the following decade. The governor of the Philippines, Juan de Arechederra, appointed De León as the colony's 'security corporal' (*cabo celador*) in 1745. Like a border patrol agent, De León was responsible for policing foreigners in Manila, and specifically for ensuring that the Chinese, Armenian, and other non-Spanish crew members that arrived in the city on foreign ships did not stay in the Philippines after the annual trading season had ended.²⁵ Arechederra promoted De León to captain of the coast guard (*capitán de guardacostas*) in 1746. In other parts of the 23 Shipping manifests for the period after the Spanish Occupation show that, by then, inspections of cargo had become customary. This resulted in longer lists and higher valuations than those seen in previous documents. For such manifests from 1768 to 1772 see AGI, Filipinas, 942, 943. These include the 1768 manifest for the Java voyage of De León's *Espíritu Santo* (942, f. 2-27).

²⁴ AGI, Indiferente, 155, N.47.

²⁵ AGI, Indiferente, 155, N.47. For example, the royal order issued in 1744 instructed Armenians, other Christian *extranjeros*, and infidels (non-Christians) who came to the Philippines to trade not to linger in the colony, and to leave the islands as soon as they wrapped up their business: *Orden de dar bando para expulsar a extranjeros infieles*, (1744), AGI, Filipinas, 334, L. 15.

Spanish empire, the coastguard was focused on the prevention of smuggling; in the Philippines, this position fused the roles of spy, explorer, and postman.

Early modern maritime Asia was a news-hungry world. In 1742, after the English privateer George Anson seized a Spanish galleon ship full of Mexican silver in Philippines waters, colonial officials in Manila were particularly anxious for news of British ships in the surrounding seas. They relied on ship captains engaged in intra-Asian trade to report on the movements and machinations of British pirates, as well as the EIC and Britain's Royal Navy. Ernesto BASSI (2017: 63) has shown that Spanish officials similarly relied on ship captains for news of rival empires and their navies in the Caribbean in this era. In 1746, the Spanish government in Manila dispatched De León to Macao and Batavia in the galley *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* to gather intelligence about the English squadron that went around 'infesting the coasts of these Islands', in addition to obtaining general news on the state of war between rival European empires. De León claimed that he risked his life to complete this mission, having smuggled a secret [British? Dutch?] report on English and Dutch corsairs in and around the VOC stronghold at Batavia for the Spanish.²⁶

Besides espionage, in 1746, De León served the Spanish empire by transporting the colonial government's highly sensitive mail to Batavia, from where it was sent to Spain.²⁷ This packet of papers included copies of letters and reports that would have been sent to the King and Council of the Indies via the trans-Pacific galleon route: duplicates increased the likelihood that mail would complete its journey to the other side of the world. Moreover, De León contributed to the creation of geographical knowledge about maritime Asia that was useful to the Spanish empire. He created maps of the Philippine islands and charts that described the sea routes that connected the archipelago to neighboring ports. Some of De León's maps and charts fell into British hands when the combined forces of the British Royal Navy and EIC invaded Manila in 1762.²⁸

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Spanish colonial government in Manila escalated the naval war against the slave-raiding 'moro pirates' from the Islamic sultanates in the Southern Philippine islands and the region that James WARREN (2007) has described as the Sulu Zone.²⁹ De León became a patron of the armadas that the government dispatched to protect merchant vessels and coastal communities from moro pirate raids, and to conduct counter raids against this enemy. In 1748 he oversaw the construction of seven boats in the Pasig estuary that

26 AGI, Indiferente, 155, N. 47

27 *Duplicado de carta de Juan de Arechederra, obispo de Nueva Segovia, gobernador de Filipinas, dando cuenta con testimonio de las diligencias que precedieron al libramiento de las cantidades que se mandaron hacer a Gaspar Tomé de León, quien de orden de aquel gobierno motivada de otra del marqués de la Ensenada, salió para la costa de la Java*, AGI, Filipinas, 453, N. 7.

28 The Royal Navy's hydrographer Alexander DALRYMPLE (1786: 4) cited and reproduced charts and maps authored by Thomé Gaspar de León in the 1770s. For example, his notes on the route 'from Tanjong Baram to Borneo-proper... is from a Chart of Thomé Gaspar de León, who commanded a Ship from Manila to Borneo in 1752.' MANCINI (2016: 41) shows that maps and charts were among the treasures that the British stole from Manila in the 1762-1764 invasion and occupation.

29 For an overview of the moro wars in the first half of the eighteenth century, see BARRIO MUÑOZ (2012).

were destined for this long war.³⁰ The suppression of pirates who were threatening merchant vessels was surely in the merchant captain's interests. De León's support for the war may have also been politically motivated. The campaign against *moro* pirates was popularly understood as a Holy War, a Southeast Asian manifestation of the global conflict between Muslims and Christians for control of territory, trade, and souls (FLANNERY, 2019: 1-68). De León's aid to the war effort, like other aspects of his service to the Spanish empire, may have been a calculated effort to strengthen his relationships with the colonial governor and the broader Spanish community in Manila. As in other parts of the Spanish empire, elite Manileños would have recognized that many of the privileges that they enjoyed depended upon good relationships with the governor, and as Carlos MARICHAL (2007: 98) observes, 'financial advances to the royal treasury in emergency situations might reinforce these privileges and open doors to new business or favors'. Notably, De León also supported the colonial government's simultaneous pursuit of diplomacy with neighboring sultanates. He loaned his boat, the *Espíritu Santo*, to transport a Spanish ambassador to Borneo in 1752. León covered the costs of the crew who went on this voyage.³¹

De León appears in the colonial archive rescuing and repatriating Christian Filipino slaves from elsewhere in maritime Southeast Asia. In 1759, he arrived in Manila aboard the *Espíritu Santo* carrying an indigenous Filipina woman named Maria Josefa from Catabalona, and Doña María Dominga de Villanueva, a Manila-born Spaniard married to Don José Franco, the lieutenant of the *castellano* of the Tanda presidio. Both women had been enslaved by the *moros* from the Sulu Zone in a raid on the ship near the presidio. Villanueva testified that she had been trafficked to Borneo where a 'Chino' sold her to an Englishman called 'Mester Garden, who lives in the Port of Batavia'.³² This story is consistent with what we know about the Southeast Asian slave trade in this period (WARREN, 2007). De León's decision to purchase these women's freedom might have been another strategy to gain respect and influence among colonial elites in Manila. However, it is also likely that Villanueva, along with her husband and children who had also been enslaved, were related to De León's wife, Juana Franco. Kinship ties that stretched across the Philippine archipelago beyond the Manila cosmopolis affected De León's actions, too.

With decades of loyal service to the crown under his belt, Thomé Gaspar de León petitioned King Charles III for *vecindad* in 1760. Intangible benefits like 'honor' aside, *vecino* status would have given De León the right to a share of lading space on the galleon and, in principle, a reduced rate in customs duties (*almojarifazgo*), which were charged on goods he imported into Manila.³³

30 AGI, Indiferente, 155, N. 47.

31 *Relación de méritos y servicios de Tomé Gaspar de León (1755)*.

32 *Carta de Nicolás de Echaz y Beaumont a Julián de Arriaga dando cuenta de haber cautivado los moros algunos indios y españoles de ambos sexos que fueron vendidos como esclavos a los borneyes que los vendieron a los holandeses en Batavia*, (1759), AGI, Filipinas, 192, N.108.

33 Shipping manifests from the 1720s through 1750s show that, while Spaniards were to be assessed duties at 6% and foreigners at 8%, the 8% in *almojarifazgo* was actually applied for Spaniards and foreigners alike. After the English Occupation, the crown set a reduced rate of 5% for five years across the board. It is only after 1769 that manifests record different rates for Spaniards (3%) and foreigners (6%).

Imperial officials in Spain refused De León's request in 1766. Surviving notes on this case from the Council of the Indies emphasize that De León was 'de color pardo, malabar de nación' (dark-skinned, and belonging to the Malabar nation). While De León was a native of the Coromandel Coast on the opposite side of the subcontinent, as a South Asian Christian he was likely lumped with the celebrated Syrian Christians of Malabar. Yet De León's blackness and foreignness rendered him ineligible for *vecindad*. The crown was happy to have De León remain in the Philippines, but they issued another order prohibiting the merchant from leaving the islands and venturing into 'the open sea'.³⁴ This decision reflected the increasing intolerance of foreigners in the Spanish Philippines in the aftermath of the British invasion of Manila (FLANNERY, 2018). Yet this prohibition had little effect in Manila. De León continued to trade with Java, making two more voyages in 1767 and 1768, once again acting for the crown. In 1768 he brought back from Batavia 200 barrels of gunpowder, six tons of iron, and eight anchors bought on behalf of the King.

Despite refusing *vecino* status to De León, there are multiple reasons why Spanish colonial officials in Manila embraced a dark-skinned foreigner as a trusted agent. Thomé Gaspar de León was clearly useful to Spain's Asian empire. Merchants, and particularly non-Spaniards like De León, made good spies because they could travel between ports without arousing suspicion (MALCOLM, 2015: 223–24). Governor Juan de Arechederra described De León as being 'very intelligent in nautical matters, and ready for any service'.³⁵ León was not only a highly skilled navigator, we can make an informed guess that he was also multi-lingual. He was fluent in Portuguese and Spanish, and as a Paravar from Cuddalore, his native tongue would have been Tamil. While a Malay-infused Portuguese was a *lingua franca* in Batavia, it is also likely that he gained some proficiency in Dutch through his regular dealings with the VOC.

Religion mattered, too. Recent scholarship has shown that the Chinese and Armenian merchants who settled in Manila in the eighteenth century frequently converted to Catholicism, which suggests that religion influenced traders' prospects in this city (BAENA ZAPATERO & LAMIKIZ, 2014; LEE, 2016). It is especially telling that Armenians converted to Catholicism despite their already accepted status as non-Protestant Christians. De León's Catholic identity surely facilitated his integration into Manila society as a merchant and agent of empire. De León's homeland was far from the Philippines, yet it stood firmly within the Catholic geography of Iberian Asia. As mentioned above, De León constructed a lineage that identified his parents as Paravars, the descendants of the low-status fishing community that forged an alliance with the Portuguese and converted to Catholicism in exchange for patronage and protection in the sixteenth century (VINK, 2002; SUBRAHMANYAM, 1993). Paravars were widely recognized as black

In 1784, a Manila-based Irishman by the name of Santiago Linche (James Lynch), filed a plaint with the Audiencia arguing that he should be assessed the 3% rate on cargo he brought as second pilot on the Spanish ship *La Flecha*. His case was eventually decided by the Council of the Indies, and as with De León's claim for *vecindad*, the request was denied. See AGI, Ultramar, 517.

34 *Orden de permitir residir en Filipinas a Tomé Gaspar de León*, (1766), AGI, Filipinas, 335, L. 17 ff. 388r-390r

35 AGI, Filipinas, 453, N. 7

Christians across the Iberian world by the mid-eighteenth century thanks to their appearance in hagiographies of Saint Francis Xavier. For example, the founder of the Franciscan Order's celebrated first mission in India, established in 1542, was a Paravar.³⁶ De León asserted that his Paravar identity defined him as an 'Old Christian' with *limpieza de sangre*. He must have anticipated that claiming this genealogy would allow him to access privileges typically reserved for Spanish Catholics in Manila.³⁷

As noted above, De León forged ties to Manila's small and tight-knit Spanish community through marriage. In De León's petition for *vecindad*, his lawyer declared that De León's wife Juana Hilaria Franco 'and all of her family have been esteemed and reputed as principals and nobles of this republic.'³⁸ This was a slight exaggeration. Juana Hilaria Franco came from a Spanish military family whose members were not necessarily highly educated or wealthy, but they were recognized as 'Europeans,' and this allowed them to rise through military ranks in the Philippines. Juana Hilaria Franco's father, Nicolás Franco, served for 45 years in the Spanish colonial army in the islands. He deployed on three campaigns against *moro* pirates and achieved the rank of *cabo alférez* (roughly equivalent to sub-lieutenant). His brother, Juan Franco, became the *alférez capitán teniente* (lieutenant captain) of Fort Santiago, the citadel occupying the northwest corner of Manila's walled city. He ultimately died serving the crown – most likely in Tanda. Juana Hilaria Franco's extended family included influential colonial officials in Manila. Gaspar Sánchez Quiroz, the *alguacil mayor* (bailiff) of Manila, was her uncle by marriage.

Across the global Spanish empire, the Catholic institution of *compradazgo* (godparentage) forged intimate spiritual and familial bonds between people of different ethnicities. The identities of the men who became godfathers to Gaspar Thomé De León and Juana Hilaria Franco's children indicate that De León was integrated into Manila's tightknit Spanish community by the time he reached middle-age; *compradazgo* may have strengthened the foreign merchant's fictive kinship bonds to this powerful sector of colonial society (PÉREZ, 2011; KUEH, 2013). Juan González del Pulgar and Doctor Don Pedro de Salazar y Guzmán were the godfathers of the couple's daughter, Vicenta Ambrosia. González was another career soldier. He appears in the colonial archive in 1746 as the Sargento Mayor that led a troop of militiamen that were mobilized to suppress an indigenous Tagalog revolt of Balayán in 1746.³⁹ In 1753, he was promoted to Governor of the Presidio at Zamboanga, the largest and arguably most important Spanish fort in the archipelago outside of Manila.⁴⁰ Doctor don Pedro de Salazar y Guzmán was a priest who served the small community of Spaniards who attended mass in

36 See, for example, Francisco GARCÍA, S.J. (1683: 43). This episode is also described in Pedro MURILLO VELARDE (1752: 90–91).

37 Chloe Ireton (2017) has shown that Africans and Afro-descendants constructed 'Old Christian' identities tied to Ethiopian heritage as strategies to travel from Spain to the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

38 AGI, Escribania 330C. Cuaderno 7, f.151-156v.

39 *Expediente sobre la sublevación de los pueblos tagalos. Segunda parte*, (1745), AGI, Filipinas, 262, N.1.

40 *Duplicado de carta del marqués de Ovando sobre hospital del presidio de Zamboanga*, (1753), AGI, Filipinas, 464, N.5.

the sanctuary of Manila's cathedral.⁴¹ The fact that De León counted these men among his close friends would have consolidated his reputation as an upright and reliable character in the eyes of the local government.

4. MANILA'S SHIPPING NETWORKS AND THOMÉ GASPAR DE LEÓN

A snapshot of Manila's intra-Asian trade at mid-century is afforded to us by a cache of maritime loans (*correspondencias*) found in the Manila archive.⁴² These show just how important this cohort of intra-Asian merchants was already at the time of De León's operation. Between 1765 and 1766, the loans notarized by Martín Dominguez Zamudio show that 65% of loan amounts were intended for voyages on intra-Asian routes, rather than the galleon. Of these, 20% were loans to Chinese traders and 35% to non-Chinese on the China and Java routes. Premiums for non-Chinese on intra-Asian voyages were far lower (14%) than those imposed on Chinese (30%) or on the galleon trade (up to 50%). This would have made the intra-Asian trade attractive from the perspective of borrowing traders, presuming profits were as proportionally high as on the galleon route.

Within this sample of principals and co-signers (*fiadores*), we can readily identify only two non-Spaniards on Asian routes: De León and the Armenian Antonio Piñón, both of whom were fixtures of the Manila business community.⁴³ Piñón's business trajectory mirrored that of De León. He captained eight voyages to Java between 1746 and 1764, six of these on a ship belonging to the Spaniard Antonio Pacheco, a major player on the China route.⁴⁴ Both De León and Piñón borrowed for voyages to Java, on ships which they also helmed, but by 1766, Piñón appears to have had a more diversified portfolio.⁴⁵ He was a *fiador* on five loans for the galleon trade and the Canton route.⁴⁶

Piñón ceased to captain intra-Asian voyages after 1764, and would appear to have shifted focus to trans-Pacific trade. He boarded the galleon *San Carlos* as 'silver master' (*maestre de plata*) in 1768, making the crossing to Acapulco.⁴⁷ This

41 *Carta de Juan Ángel Rodríguez sobre sujetos que sirven las prebendas*, (1737), AGI, Filipinas, 291, N.21.

42 National Archives of the Philippines, Manila (NAP), Protocolo de Manila, 1765-66, SDS 19770-19771.

43 While Piñón is indistinguishable from Spaniards in loan and cargo documents, he is clearly identified as an Armenian in the inspection summary of the *Carnat*, which arrived from Coromandel in 1770. Here he is listed as the father of one of the Armenian passengers on board and 'resident of this city [Manila],' AGI, Filipinas, 942, N. 7, ff. 244-624. He is similarly listed as heading a list of five Armenian witnesses in March 1779, who testified in the proceedings of a case involving captain Agustín Vivanco. It is specified that he gave his deposition in Portuguese, AHN, Consejos, 21030, Pieza 6, f. 11r. Yet another document, an inquest into Piñón's business with an Englishman from Madras, suggests that there is not one Antonio Piñón but that he had a child who was his namesake, AHN, Consejos, 21017, Pieza 7.

44 Manila Intra-Asian Trade database (MIAT).

45 De León: *Espíritu Santo* to Java, 1766 (2,000 pesos), principal. Piñón: *Santa Gertrudis* to Java, 1762, repaid until 1766 (1,825 pesos), fiador. NAP, SDS 19771.

46 Piñón: 2 loans for the *Santa Rosa* to Acapulco (1765); 1 for *San Carlos* to Acapulco (1766); 1 for the *Rosario* to Amoy (1766); 1 for the *Carmen* to Canton (1766). NAP, SDS 19770-19771.

47 Cosano (1986: 359-376) provides lists of galleon passengers and crew from 1750 to 1772 based on

entails that, at least extra-officially, he enjoyed the galleon trading privileges of a *vecino*, a status he would have been able to achieve by capitalizing on his standing as an Armenian Christian and the fact that Manila had been his port of operation for decades. However, there is no evidence that he was an agent of the crown in the same way as De León.

From the perspective of shipping operation, non-Chinese foreigners like De León and Piñón operated in concert with other non-Chinese foreigners as well as Spaniards, forming what is referred to in social network analysis as cliques. (Note that no overlap existed between the Chinese and non-Chinese networks.) While some captains made repeat voyages on a same ship, others did so on two or more ships. For example, out of the 16 intra-Asian voyages made by De León between 1729 and 1769, 12 were on the *Espíritu Santo* (presumably owned by him), but in his earlier career he captained four other ships. Similarly, Piñón's eight voyages were made on three different ships. A ship like the *Santa Ana*, which De León helmed to Amoy and Java in 1736, employed as many as seven captains between 1735 and 1755. Four of these captains can be identified as foreigners and three as Spaniards. This twenty-year period will be the focus of the analysis given that there is reliable name data based on shipping manifests and inspection summaries.⁴⁸

To visualize this interlocking pattern of captain activity, we have used the name data from arrivals by non-Chinese during the period 1735–55 to create a social network graph of ships and captains (figure labeled 1).⁴⁹ In terms of arrivals to Manila, the non-Chinese shipping sector accounted for about 30% of all traffic during this twenty-year period, with a total of 131 voyages. Of these, 89% of voyages were helmed by captains who fit within a network formation. Excluded are individual ship-captain pairings that made non-repeat voyages to the port. Of the voyages represented in the graph, 37% were to Java, 36% to Indian ports, and 23% to China.

In terms of notation, the labeled white nodes represent non-Spanish captains like De León, which make up 60% of the captain pool and are the focus of the graph. Nodes for Spanish captains, which were secondary in number, are represented in black. The larger nodes, which are in grey, represent ships. The size of ship nodes is proportional to the length of the ship's keel, as recorded in cargo documents. This had a range of 30 to 90 ft and average length of 72 ft.⁵⁰ Lines connecting captains to ships represent journeys. When there are multiple journeys made by a same captain on a same ship, the width of connecting lines is weighted accordingly. This is clearly exemplified by the pairing of De León and the *Espíritu Santo*. A thick line represents the five voyages to Java completed within this period aboard this ship. This is a number only matched by the five voyages made by the Armenian Sarat Cruz on the *Jesús Nazareno* (four to Canton-Macao

media annata payments recorded in AGI, Contaduría.

48 This is the core data in MIAT, taken from AGI, Escribanía, 428A, 431A, 434A, 436D; Contaduría, 1289.

49 Part of a larger social network analysis of Chinese and non-Chinese shipping in Guillermo Ruiz-Stovel, "The Eastern Ocean: the Minnan-Manila trade in China's long eighteenth century," Ph.D. dissertation, in progress.

50 Recorded as 17–50 *codos de ribera* in the shipping manifests.

and one to Java). This pairing is visible at the center of the graph. In contrast, Antonio Piñón, found to the right of Sarat Cruz, made two single journeys to Java during this period, represented by two thin lines between him and two different ship.

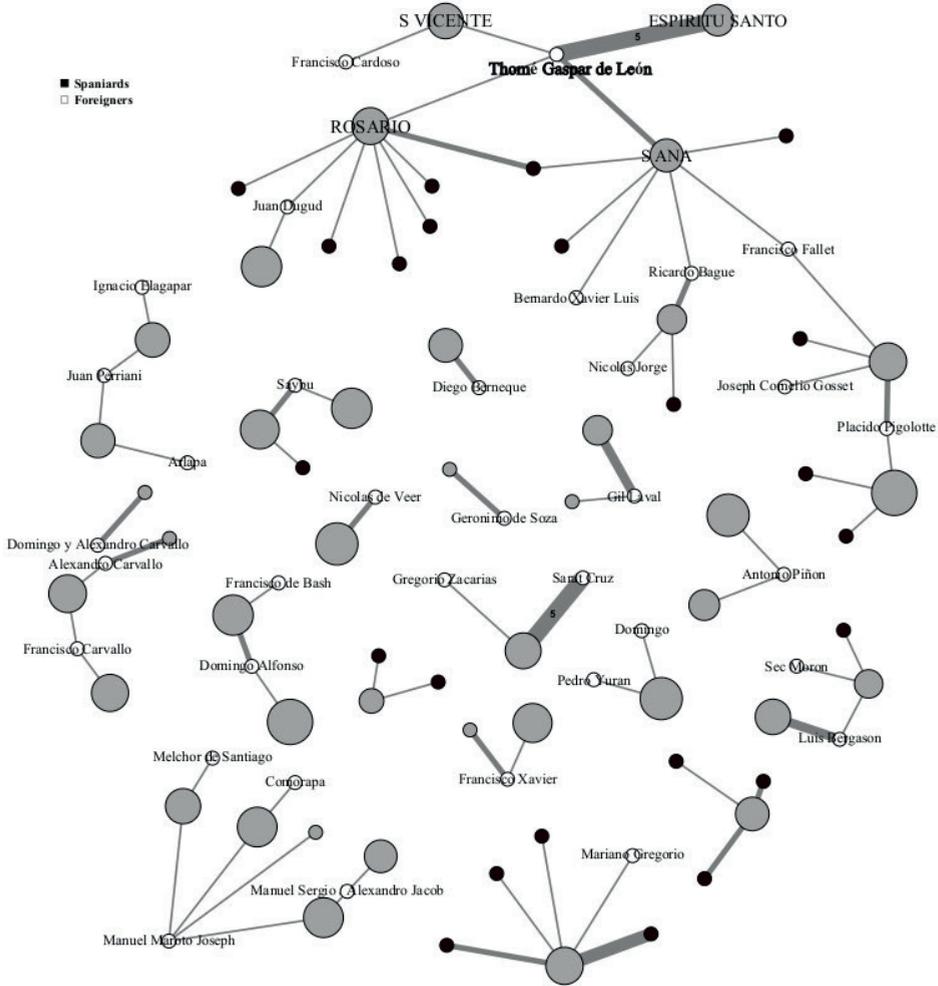


Figure 1. Non-Chinese captain network, 1735-55.
Source: MIAT

How do we explain this pattern of interlocking voyages and captains? We must consider three organizational scenarios. In the first, ship owners hired professional captains (who were more properly supercargos) on a voyage-by-voage basis. In the second, a scenario which gives these supercargos greater

agency, supercargos leased ships from owners for individual voyages. In the third, which assumes some ships were partnerships, partners would have taken turns helming voyages from year to year. To these scenarios we must also add the possibility of the captain-owner who helmed his own voyages, as appears to be the case with De León and the *Espíritu Santo*. With a single exception, during its entire period of operation, the *Espíritu Santo* rotated captains only once. This exception was a voyage to Macao in 1758, captained by the Armenian Manuel Maroto Joseph. In this scenario, Maroto could have been hired by De León or he could have independently chartered the *Espíritu Santo*.

These scenarios mirror the array of arrangements that Ng CHIN-KEONG (1983: 155-156) has explored in the case of the Chinese Amoy network that operated voyages across the South China Sea and the China coast. When it came to shipping, Manila-based traders, who like Chinese merchants were private traders and operated outside the structure of the East India companies, would have arguably been more similar to their Chinese competitors than to other maritime Europeans. However, not all captains in the graph would have been Manila-based private traders. We know the EIC used South Asian Muslim and Christian 'captains' as well as Armenians, as figure heads in their voyages from Indian ports to Manila, to eschew the ban on Protestant traders (QUIASON, 1966). As for independent private trade by Armenians, some, like Antonio Piñón, would have taken Manila as their trading hub, while others would have been based in South Asia or Macao (BHATTACHARYA, 2008; ASLANIAN, 2011; BAENA ZAPATERO and LAMIKIZ, 2014). Separating outside traders from those based in Manila is difficult, but the presence of multiple foreign and Spanish captains within a same networked component would seem to indicate that these foreigners were Manila-based. The clique we find at the top of the previous graph is a clear example.

While most networked components are made up of only a couple of nodes, the clique at the top of the graph presents a more complex structure. second graph labeled figure 2 shows a close-up of this clique with the names of all individuals and ships. Its formation stands out because, contrary to the majority of the smaller components, it includes both captains that were Spanish (12) and non-Spanish (9). This leads us to assume that the foreign captains in this clique were Manila-based, like their Spanish associates. In terms of voyages, which totaled 37, the distribution of destinations in this clique is very different from that in the complete sample. Relatively absent are voyages to Indian ports (5% vs. 36%), with Java being the overwhelming destination for this clique (70% vs. 37%). The percentage of voyages to China is, however, relatively constant (19% vs. 23%).⁵¹ Out of the 40 voyages to Java in the full sample, 26 (65%) were helmed by members of this Manila-based clique. Due to the nature of imports from Java, it is highly likely that other captains who operated on this route outside this clique formation were also Manila-based, as was the case of Antonio Piñón.

⁵¹ The single voyages to Malacca and Siam pointed earlier occurred within this sub-sample.

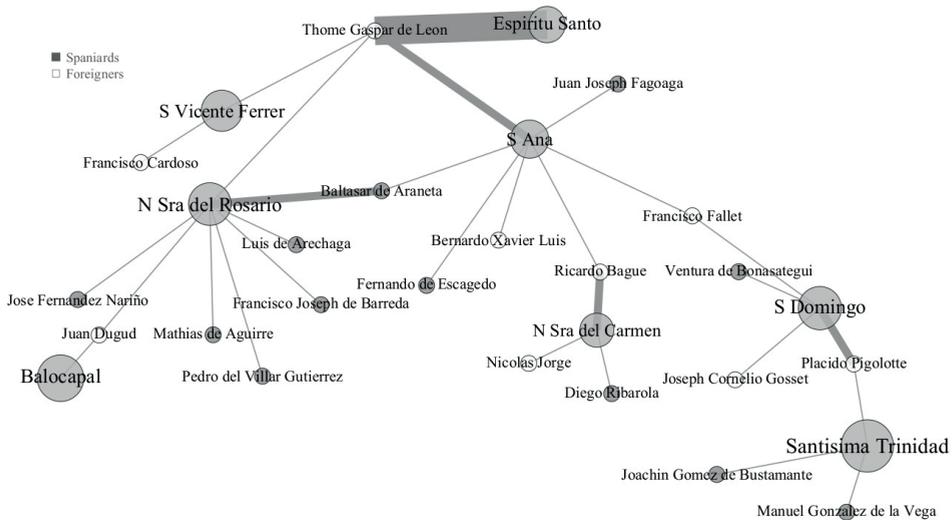


Figure 2. The De León network.

Source: MIAT

By metrics of centrality used in social network analysis, De León can be considered the most influential or ‘well connected’ captain, both within his clique and the network as a whole. While the majority of captains in the full sample were connected in star formations to a single ship, De León had connections to four different ships, giving him the highest measure in terms of degree centrality. Sharing this value of degree was Manuel Maroto Joseph (shown at the bottom left corner of figure 1), who was similarly connected to four ships. Maroto coincidentally captained De León’s *Espíritu Santo* to Macao in 1758, a connection outside the period of the graph which would have further expanded De León’s share of the ship-captain network. These connections to different ships in turn linked him directly to a dozen other captains.

De León also stands out because of his relatively high measures of closeness and betweenness centrality within the main clique. The measure of high closeness indicates De León was an influencer within his clique of key active players, with the ability to reach these players more closely and quickly than others. High betweenness, on the other hand, meant that De León was also key in connecting distant players at opposite ends of the clique. With this relatively high betweenness, De León was also important to the flow of information and other networkable resources beyond his close associates, connecting distant nodes at the ends of the clique with each other, perhaps even brokering these interactions.

This article has previously argued that the influence of De León was based on hierarchical interaction with the colonial government, which came with both social and economic rewards. However, as shown by social network analysis, lateral ties with his peers also translated into a prominent social position, though

this does not imply he was the richest among Manila's intra-Asian traders. The wealthiest of Manila merchants did not necessarily dabble in intra-Asian trade but would have had a significant stake in the trans-Pacific route. Nothing suggests De León participated in the galleon trade, and in fact, his failed attempt to secure *vecindad* (and with it lading rights on the galleon) suggests quite the opposite. Furthermore, the supply line of the Java voyages operated by De León was domestic, with only a tenuous connection to the trans-Pacific trade.

5. CONCLUSION

Microhistories such as the study Thomé Gaspar de León's life history are not merely valuable because they entail 'human dramas that make history come alive,' adding 'balance' to a field that is preoccupied with 'global silver flows, strange parallels, divergences great and small' (ANDRADE, 2010: 574). By reducing the scale of observation, microhistories also have the potential to both reveal previously unseen aspects and deepen our understanding of those meta-processes that made the early modern world (PUTNAM, 2006: 615). The border-crossing biography of Thomé Gaspar de León provides a unique lens through which to understand how Manila's local residents cultivated intra-Asian connections. Despite his foreign origins and dark skin, De León gained the trust of local officials and provided services to the crown, playing the dual role of private merchant and agent of empire. It is unclear whether commercial success preceded the undertaking of official duties (or vice-versa), but both of these roles were ultimately complementary. This article has explored the dual aspect of De León's career with Manila's intra-Asian setting as a backdrop. By piecing together De León's biography, it has explored his role as imperial agent and his business ventures in broad strokes. De León attracts attention from a statistical perspective because he captained more voyages overseas than any of his contemporaries. A social network analysis of Manila's non-Chinese captains and ships further reveals that De León was a key player among Manila-based private traders. Arguably and according to the available data, this gave him extraordinary influence in the local merchant community.

Historians have long recognized the importance of the galleons that sailed between Manila and Acapulco to the Philippine political economy, with one scholar describing the trans-Pacific trade as an 'umbilical cord' that underpinned the survival of Spain's Asian empire (GASCOIGNE, 2014: 29). Galleon-centric conceptualizations of Philippine history have long marginalized studies of Manila's intra-Asian trade, and the merchants who operated in this space. While the Chinese trade network has garnered growing attention, especially overlooked have been non-Chinese private traders based in Manila, like De León. These competed with Chinese junks and other Western-style ships on routes to China, India, and Java. They definitely did so at a disadvantage to the East India companies, but a pending question is whether they faced similar constraints to private merchants based in other Asian ports.

This analysis has illustrated not only the economic importance of intra-Asian trade to the Philippines, but also the extent to which this commerce strengthened the empire by providing the colonial government with strategic commodities like European iron and consecration wine. These intra-Asian voyages also facilitated alternative communication routes between the colony and the metropole and funneled valuable information about Spain's imperial rivals in maritime Asia to the seat of colonial government in Manila. The case of De León suggests that the colonial government of the Philippines experienced constraints in their deployment capabilities and relied on private agents to realize some of its strategic goals. The data footprint left by De León in the Spanish colonial archive allows historians to flesh out a personal history in ways that may not be possible to replicate for other foreign cross-cultural brokers. There is nonetheless a need to further delve into the role of these Manila-based actors, individually and collectively, for a fuller understanding of the economic and political dynamics of the archipelago.

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