

“HOW THE CHINESE LIVED IN THE PHILIPPINES FROM 1570 to 1898”

On September 10, 1953, Mr. Shubert S. C. Liao gave a conference on the subject: "How the Chinese lived in the Philippines from 1570 to 1898" at the American Historical Collection.

Although Mr. Liao has referred eight times to Spanish sources of information (Morga, Pastells, Montero, Liqueite, Santa Cruz) nevertheless the reports were based on American research work. (Foreman, Blair and Robertson). It is to be regretted that the use of these versions, written many years ago, lack precision, information and colors. The American compilation of Spanish textbooks of the period reflect very poorly these facts. It is necessary to read the Spanish writings which date back to the XVI and XVII Centuries in order to be acquainted with the continuous and profound admiration of its authors with regard to the sobriety, capacity and manual ability of the Chinese laborers, who already possessed a highly elaborate culture. In the first days of the Spanish regime, they comprised the proletariat and artistic block. The Chinese were the first laborers employed in the Spanish printing press in this area of the world. Chinese masons too under the guidance of Spanish engineers wholly constructed the massive walls of Intramuros.

Something more should be added. Manila was established because of economic reasons. It was the center of a flourishing trade initiated in 1572 between China-Mexico and Europe. Without this commercial traffic that accounted for immense profits, this City would not have excelled many European metropolises as the case was back in the XVII Century.

In 1750, the Chinese in Manila numbered 40. The trade between Mexico and Spain was established in 1572 and 30 years later, there were 40,000 Chinese in the Philippines, 30,000 of them lived in Manila alone (at that time there were about 1,000 Spaniards). The numeric disproportion coupled with the threats that came from the Chinese mainland, resulted in persecutions that never quite succeeded in reducing the referred to figure. It was then that the King of Spain ordered that the Chinese community should at no time exceed 6,000. He knew quite well that the Philippines was the glorious haven for many who fled from political tyranny and periodic hunger of their Motherland.

Dating back to the XVI and XVII Centuries, hospitals for laborers, (San Gabriel), schools and social laws two centuries advanced as compared with many European countries of the epoch were instituted in the Philippines. All this social progress was due or attributed to the policy of Spain.

The "not fair treatment" alleged to was only an aftermath of revolts against authority, in two or three occasions, where an imminent danger of an invasion was feared. The Chinese acquired great wealth in Manila and returned to their country years after very much enriched. In 1850, they were granted equal rights in the economic field as any other existing race in this Archipelago. They could participate in public auctions, banking transactions, etc., thereby giving them a chance to expand commercially in an extraordinary manner. As a consequence of which, trade in Manila was controlled by the Chinese and the English.

By the end of the XIX Century, the Chinese immigration into this country was so great that in 1893 a more severe law was promulgated in order to avoid a change in its population. The rich had to pay a cedula tax of Thirty Pesos annually, and a scale of taxes was set consisting of eight categories (25, 20, 15, 10, 6, 3 and 0 pesos). This ruling however, did not impede the Chinese influx into the Philippines, as they were convinced that this was the Promise Land.

There is one objection to Mr. Liao's conference. By making use of antiquated American information, he has adopted adjectives half a century old, which are inadequate at present. It is for that reason that he determines the existing 3% and 6% taxes levied on commercial transactions as "exorbitant" (despite the likewise fabulous returns from business). But when we take into account the actual taxes imposed throughout the world ranging from 15, 20, 40, up to 98%, is it not unjust to define an insignificant 6% tax as "exorbitant"? What adjective would historians use in the future to define an 80% or 98% tax?

The adjectives in common usage in the year 1900 have become obsolete. The necessity for a revision and clarification of terms is evident.

O. A.