Manila: An International Trade Port at the end of the Eighteenth Century

Marina Alfonso Mola and Carlos Martínez Shaw

During the XVIII century the Spanish monarchy made numerous changes in the organization of its ultramarine trade. These measures affected the trade of the city of Manila, the capital of the Spanish Empire in Asia, in a gradual, but by the end of the century had deeply transformed the nature and volume of the transactions in what became one of the most important ports of the region. The following pages outline the important landmarks in this evolution and offer a point of reference based on unpublished quantitative and qualitative information on port activity in Manila at the end of the century.

As with the Carrera de Indias and the so-called Project of 1720, the trade associated with the route of the Galleon of Manila during the first two thirds of the XVIII century was shaped by the Regulation of 1702. The system remained essentially the same as that of the previous century. That is, the shipment of goods of Asian origin (arriving in Manila mainly in Chinese ships) from Manila to Acapulco was matched by large quantities of Mexican silver that was sent to Philippines.

We begin with some debatable premises. The first is that commercial agents in Manila had to "Philippine Spanish" merchants -- that is to say, permanent inhabitants in the city who were not part of the military assigned to Cavite. "Outsiders of those islands" were excluded, as were secular and regular clergymen. Bills of lading were distributed among a list of paymasters and could not be assigned to anyone not on the list. As a result, if any participant left the list, his quota was distributed among the remaining commercial agents.

The second formal constraint was that the trade quota was set at 300,000 pesos of goods on the outward journey from Manila and twice as much in silver on the return from Acapulco. That figure that was habitually surpassed fraudulently, reaching as much as two million pesos. Officials tried to distribute the shipment in two ships while the merchants that, to reduce costs, preferred the single ship of the traditional regulation, despite of the real risk
implied by overloading the ship. Officials also insisted on an inspection of the goods in the royal warehouses, contrary to the preference of the merchants that, without found it easier to engage in illicit trade using the older method of submitting detailed bills of lading.

This was the basic system during sixty years after the regulations of 1702. It was, however, accompanied by constant (if unsuccessful) litigation over silks rejected for export to Cádiz. The limit on the amount of trade was increased in 1734 to 500,000 pesos worth of goods on the outward journey and twice that value silver on the return trip. The 1760s, however, brought important changes, prompted, on the one hand, by a new understand of the role of Philippines after the English occupation of 1762-1764 and, on the other, by the accelerating reform movement inside the metropolitan government.

Several key changes took place between 1765 and 1789. The first of these dates saw the first direct sailings between Cádiz and Manila, creating an alternative route to that of Acapulco, initially limited to a series of armed ships that mad thirteen trips in the course of eighteen years and explored possibilities for a regular line. Also in 1765 the commercial Consulate of Manila was founded, with the official goal of developing production and the trade in the islands. In practice, it worked to defend the interests of its members and the traditional commercial system, much as did the similar remaining consulates in Spain (Cádiz) and in America (Mexico and Lima). In 1769 limits on the Manilatrade were again expanded, to 750,000 pesos of goods bound for Acapulco and double of silver on the return trip to Manila. In practice, the change did not go into effect until galleon of 1782. In 1785, after some preliminary ventures by the Compañía de los Cinco Gremios Mayores of Madrid (1775) and the private firm of Ustáriz, San Ginés y Compañía society, the direct route between Cádiz and Manila via either the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn was regularized with the foundation of the Real Compañía de Filipinas – an arrangement that remained in effect until 1834. The last major reform came 1789 with the liberalization of trade at Manila to include delivery of Asian goods by ships of all countries.

All of these dispositions, especially those of the period 1785-1789, were a response to the analysis by some especially lucid witnesses in the 1760s. One key example was
Francisco Leandro de Viana, in 1765 fiscal of the Audience of Manila, who argued in favour of the creation of a privileged trading company and the development of the industry of the archipelago. Viana compared the "miserable and deplorable state of the Philippines" with the prosperous trade of the Europeans in Canton thus: "... in most years 24, 28, or 30 English, French, Dutch, Swedish and Danish ships arrive in Canton in the Chinese Empire, bringing our strong pesos, which are the most appreciated currency in China and India, along with European goods such as fine cloth, “carro de oro” that the Chinese spend for their bad habits in winter, pearls, clocks, a great deal of wine, seeds from our America, and opium from the India...."

Viana’s recommendations were not forgotten, although it would take twenty years to bring the trade company into reality as part of the process that transformed Manila into a port open to the international trade – a development that really dates from 1789. Before that date, aside from the galleons of the Carrera de Acapulco, the only ships putting in at Manila were Chinese vessels and various ships flying flags of convenience (Indian states, Armenians or the Sulu Islands sultan), most of which carried contraband British trade for individual merchants or the English East India Company. After 1789 ships from any country were authorized to trade at Manila with any non-European goods, taking advantage of the liberalized liberalization that freed the trade in Asian products (Fradera, 1999, 91). This way Manila initiated a real free trade (with the restrictions mentioned) and really become an international port. These measures were a success, opening up a golden age in trade at Manila that lasted at least until 1810 (Cheong, 1971, 144; Fradera, 1999, 94).

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Our contribution to this general framework is the study of data of the Customs of Manila between June 1º 1797 and May 31st of 1801, as they appear in the records conserved in the Archivo General de Indias of Seville (Indifferent General, File 2198). The dates of the records reflect the chronology of the local business year in Manila, from first of June to the end of May of the following year. The period examined corresponds to the years of the so-called Trade of Neutrals made necessary by the war with England. It was decreed
November 18 1797 and that lasted until the signature of the peace of Amiens (March of 1802).

When discussing these records, it is necessary to point out that the war and concurrent regulation allowing trade by neutrals diverted from Manila English ships that frequented Manila to buy indigo and sugar. At the same time, we don’t know if the trade by neutral ships allowed others to replace the Englishmen or also diverted the trade in indigo and cotton, as suggested by the customs official Esteban Martínez Ballesteros and the governor, Rafael María de Aguilar, who maintained that:

"That the decline in the export of local products is due to the current war with the Englishmen, who took away most of the exported sugar and indigo although, because of the mentioned war, many European ships from neutral nations have come in search of the sugar and indigo and are those that take them out" (Esteban Martínez Ballesteros)

"This already developed (export) of sugar and indigo would be much bigger, in contrast to that of pepper and cotton, in their opinion not well developed, if the present war didn't impede free sailing" (Rafael María de Aguilar).

In spite of these reliable declarations by the authorities, it is necessary to point out important qualifications. First: there are as many ships, European or American, Chinese and Suluan that load as much sugar as indigo. And second: among the European ships that look for that sugar and indigo we have not only Danish, Swedish and Portuguese, but also Americans.

This way, the ships that entered the port of Manila include Spanish frigates, schooners, the packet, and a Philippine “pontín” with Hispanic flag as well as European ships (very possibly also frigates and schooners), Chinese sampans and Philippine “pancos”. The composition, however, is what we would expect given the structure of the Philippine external trade, with a high percentage of ships with European flag (56% of those
that entered), a fairly high proportion of Asian vessels (especially Chinese, with 31%), and a very low proportion of Spanish or national ships (only 9 ships), given that the number of ships of the Carrera de Acapulco and of the Compañía de Filipinas is reduced by the war with English, which cuts of the trade of the countries at war.

In the same way, among the European ships, it is necessary to highlight the primacy of those that correspond to powers with interests in the region (with prevalence of Danes that, favoured without a doubt by their status as neutrals, make up half of the total). We don’t, however, know just what share of the trade was actually English but carried out under the guise of other flags, among which the Americans were most likely to take advantage of the war to exploit its non-beligerant situation.

This first approach to the nature of the external trade of Manila should be profiled with the analysis of the values recorded in the Customs for imports and exports. The outline of the imports of Manila is clear: Manila received 70% of the goods (plus a modest quantity of pesos -- 1%) in foreign ships that for the most part was in Asian products, although the prohibition on import of European goods was not respected in all the cases, as the customs documentation shows). To this we have to add the goods (obviously also Asian) contributed by Chinese sampans and the Philippine “pancos” that represent another 12% of the total. The reduced volume of goods and products Spanish ships (around 8% of total arrivals) is augmented by pesos that, accounted separately, would suppose other 9% of the value of arrivals, with the result that more than 17% imports arrived in national ships.

In any case, if the direct regional trade between China and Philippines seems fairly balanced (although always with more participation by Chinese sampans and Suluan “pancos” that by Spanish ships), the larger Asian trade was in the hands of the European powers and, increasingly, those of the United States). The Europeans and Americans continued to function as middlemen between Philippines and the rest of Asia, with this role even more pronounced in absence of the regular traffic of the Compañía de Filipinas, which was interrupted by the war.
The analysis of the exports improves our understanding of the sense of the Manila trade. The records show a remarkable imbalance, since the global value of the exported shipments only represents (in the best in the cases) 12%, that is to say less than an eighth part, of the imported goods. In consequence, the group of the Philippine exports (on whose contents we have precise data, contrarily to that of the imports), cannot compensate at all the arrivals of Asian products and (in a much smaller measure) European goods, leaving a deficit in the trade balance of more than eight thousand pesos, for which it is necessary to admit a cash compensation in American silver. However, the difficulty at this time resides in fact in the impossibility of providing this money in the required quantities because the war disrupted both sides of the trade of the Manila Galleon, depriving Manila of Mexican silver, and of the Compañía de Filipinas, while the modest quantities of pesos brought by neutral American ships made up only a small part of the imbalance.

Here the trade of national ships can give us some keys. We know that in 1800 the frigate San Francisco Javier, of the Compañía de Filipinas, brought from Lima a shipment of 500,000 pesos and that the same year the frigate San Javier (a) El Filipino, also freighted by the Royal Philippines Company, also brought from Lima a similar quantity, 505,000 pesos. Similarly, two other ships, the frigate San Rafael and the ship Magallanes, set sail in February and July of 1800 for Acapulco, no doubt hoping to return with silver to pay for the Asian imports.

We can get a clearer measure of the content of the rest of the trade, although the documentation offers us detail on exports but only some generic indications regarding the import except for cash transactions. In the first place, exports to Asia are very similar regardless of the ship's flag and destination, although a close analysis reveals certain slight differences. The goods most in demand are always Filipino: wood (ebony and sibucao), hides (cow, deer, carabao), sugar and indigo, plus some other less necessary products or of smaller quantity. The cargoes of the American crafts to American ports are very similar. In contrast, exports to Spanish America in 1800 were very different, including indigo, wax,
algaria, diverse fabrics for Lima, and gold, pepper, cabalonga, hats, algaria. and diverse fabrics for Acapulco.

As for imports, their nature depends mainly on the place of origin. Spanish ships, leaving aside the routes of the Manila Galleon and of the Compañía de Filipinas (whose bases in America are mainly Acapulco and Lima), pick up regional products in the Chinese ports of Amoy in Fujien and Ningbo in Zhejiang, the Javanese port of Batavia (headquarters of the Dutch East India Company) and the Muslim Kingdom of Joló (Sulú).

Meanwhile, the European ships (with the exception of a Swedish ship from Goteborg) and some of the Americans (typically from Boston, Salem, Newport and Providence) came from Asian ports (Table n. 5): the Chinese ports of Canton and Macao in that order), Bengal, the coast of Coromandel in India (Madras and Tranquebar, in that order), Mauritius, Japan, Java (Batavia), Malaysia (Pulipinan) and the Kingdom of Joló in Philippines. The destinations vary only quantitatively, with a clear preference for China (Canton and Macao again), followed by the coast of Coromandel (with specific indication of Tranquebar in three occasions), Bengal (with specific indication of Serampor in one case), Java (Batavia) and the Kingdom of Joló. Regarding the composition of their cargo, American ships register in several occasions pesos and in others they declare that their goods are, respectively, goods from Europe, Europe and America and of Rhode Island. In the same way, some European ships also register goods coming from the Old World: four Portuguese ships declared goods from China and Europe, while three Danish ships register goods from India and Europe.

As for the Asian vessels, Chinese sampans came, in this order, and according to the documentation, from Nankín (Lanquín in the documentation, in Jiangsu) Amoy or Xiamen (Emuy in the documentation) and Quanzhou (Chancheo in the documentation, in Fujien as the previous one), while the Philippine pancos came from Nankín and from the Kingdom of Joló. In both cases, the destinations are the same. In general, therefore, while the ports of Canton and Macao appear as the big markets of the international trade, the remaining Chinese ports are reserved for the exclusive (and more limited) trade between China and Philippines.
These incontrovertible findings present Manila as an intercontinental commercial port that had direct relationships with Europe through the Compañía de Filipinas (although the war blocked this communication in these years) and through European and American ships; with Spanish America through the Manila Galleon (Acapulco) and the Compañía de Filipinas (in these years limited to Lima); with United States through the ships of that country; with the Asian ports of China (Canton and Macao), India (Coromandel and Bengal) and Java, plus the Philippine Kingdom of Joló. Much of this trade used foreign ships of the country trade and connected with the nearer ports in China (Nankín, Amoy and Quanzhou), plus Java and Joló, through the local merchant marines (Chinese and suluan) and, in smaller measure, through some national ships.

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In conclusion, beginning in 1789 Manila reached full maturity as a port open to international trade, in addition to the two areas of privileged trade -- the traditional Carrera de Acapulco and the more recent privileges of the Compañía de Filipinas that included direct trade with Europe and various Spanish American and Asian ports. The scope of Manila as international port can be appreciated through the comparison of diverse magnitudes. In the first place, although the brevity of the chronological period doesn't allow firm statements, we can observe a expanded trade by neutrals through the rising value of registered exchanges in the customs: 3.215.096 pesos (1798-99), 4.211.221 (1799-1800), 5.161.439 (1800-01). On the other hand, if we track the number of ships, by the end of century the port of Manila saw the same traffic in foreign ships that Francisco Leandro de Viana saw with envy earlier in the port of Canton -- in the last mercantile year 26 European ships anchored at its wharfs. The trade also reaches a considerable magnitude, since during the last year of the series, the five million pesos registered are very close to the slightly large quantity found by W. E. Cheong for the year 1809-1810 (a much more reliable number that the excessively high and suspiciously rounded offered for the year 1810 by the priest Esteban Vivet that doubles the amount, although perhaps is necessary to keep in mind the 3.300 pesos coming from Acapulco). We are left with the impression that, even under the effects of the war, Manila
was able attract trade that matched the historical maximum of 1809-1810. Thereafter is
trade declined drastically, defining the zenith of Manila as a commercial emporium as the
twenty years between 1789, date of the decree of commercial freedom, and 1810, when the
last Manila Galleon arrived in Acapulco.

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TABLES

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TABLE 1.
SHIPS ENTERED IN MANILA (1798-1801)

NATIONAL SHIPS: 9
EUROPEAN SHIPS: 54
CHINESE SAMPANS
(+PANCOS FILIPINO): 33
TOTAL: 96

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

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TABLE 1bis.
EUROPEAN SHIPS ENTERED IN MANILA ACCORDING TO NATIONS (1798-1801).
DANISH: 25 (46%)
PORTUGUESE: 16 (29%)
AMERICAN: 12 (22%)
SWEDISH: 1 (2%)
TOTAL: 54 (100%)

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

TABLE 2

VALUE OF THE IMPORTS RECORDED IN THE CUSTOMS OF MANILA.
(IN PESOS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Strong Pesos</th>
<th>China and Joló</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1798-1799</td>
<td>380.803-5-9</td>
<td>2.058.290-2-2</td>
<td>22.500-0-0 *</td>
<td>524.607-2-1</td>
<td>2.986.201-2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1799-1800</td>
<td>7.913-7-4</td>
<td>2.983.393-2-0 **</td>
<td>500.000-0-0 *</td>
<td>429.110-5-8</td>
<td>3.920.417-7-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-1801</td>
<td>509.003-3-1</td>
<td>2.782.940-1-7</td>
<td>92.000-0-0 * *</td>
<td>341.625-0-11</td>
<td>4.230.568-5-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Introduced by ships from USA.
** In this sum we include 62.000 strong pesos coming from Boston.
* Introduced by the Compañía de Filipinas from Lima.
** Introduced by ships from USA.

1798-1801 (additional)

National: 897,720-6-2
Strong pesos: 1,005,000-0-0 *
Foreigners: 7,824,623-5-9 **
Strong pesos: 114,500-0-0 ** *
China and Joló: 1,295,332-8-8

TOTAL: 11,137,177-4-7

* Introduced by the Compañía de Filipinas from Lima
** It includes 62,000 strong pesos coming from Boston.
*** Introduced by ships from USA.

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

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**TABLE 3**

**VALUE OF THE EXPORTS RECORDED IN THE CUSTOMS OF MANILA.**
(IN PESOS)

1798-1799

National: 45,875-0-0
Foreigners: 86,292-6-0 *
China and Joló: 96,727-0-0

TOTAL 228,894-6-0
(Sum of the customs official: 228,916-6-0)

* According to a loose note at the end of the general inventory of 1798-1799, correcting the national and foreign values, in favour of the load of the Spanish packet San Juan Nepomuceno, in 43,425 pesos.

1799-1800

National: 33,198-7-0
Foreigners: 147,196-7-0
China and Joló: 110,408-0-0

TOTAL 290,803-6-0
(Sum of the customs official: 293,384-2-0)

1800-1801
National: 161.694-6-3 *
Foreigners: 509.142-6-0.
China and Joló: 260.033-4-0 to Verify sum with calculator

TOTAL: 930.871-0-3)

* Estimate using the customs official's sum.

1798-1801 (additional)

National: 240.768-5-7
Foreigners: 742.631-7-0
China and Joló: 467.168-4-0

TOTAL: 1.399.670-6-1) Calculator.
(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

TABLE 4

ORIGIN OF THE SPANISH SHIPS (1798-1801)

21-09-1798: Frigate San José (a) El Caballito. Amoy
03-06-1799: Frigate San José (a) El Caballito. Batavia.
Javier (a) El Filipino (Royal Company). Lima.
(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

TABLE 4bis

DESTINATION OF THE SPANISH SHIPS (1798-1801)

02-09-1799: Frigate Santa Gertrudis. Amoy

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)
### TABLE 5

**ORIGIN OF THE FOREIGN SHIPS (1798-1801)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Danish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macao</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquebar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauricio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joló</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The coast)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulipinan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goteborg</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

### TABLE 5bis

**DESTINATION OF THE FOREIGN SHIPS (1798-1801)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Danish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canton</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macao</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coromandel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 to Sarampor)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranquebar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joló</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The coast)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay (sic)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)
(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

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TABLE 6

ORIGIN OF THE SAMPANS AND PANCOS (1798-1801)

SAMPANS
Nankin: 18
Amoy: 8
Quanzhou: 5

PANCOS
Joló: 1
Nankin: 1

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

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TABLE 6bis

DESTINATION OF THE SAMPANS AND PANCOS (1798-1801)

SAMPANS
Nankin: 20
Amoy: 5
Quanzhou: 3
Joló: 2

PANCOS
Joló: 2

PONTIN
Joló: 1

(Source: own, using AGI. I. G. 2198)

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TABLE 7

FOREIGN COMMERCE OF MANILA (1810)

(IN PESOS)

Countries Ins Outs
India 1.150.000 1.190.000  
China 1.150.000 1.675.000  
Europe-USA 175.000 250.000  
Foreigner 900.000  
New Spain 2.100.000 1.100.000  
Peru 550.000 530.000  
Other areas of the Empire 124.000

(Source: Esteban Vivet: Statistic review... of the Philippines Islands in 1845, Barcelona, 1846. Apud: J. M. Fradera: Philippines, the most peculiar colony, Madrid, 1999, p. 94).

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TABLE 8.

FOREIGN COMMERCE OF MANILA: Inputs and outputs (1785-1818)

(IN PESOS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Values</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>1.185.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>1.908.932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795-1796</td>
<td>2.083.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1798-1799</td>
<td>2.582.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809-1810</td>
<td>5.329.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817-1818</td>
<td>3.054.511</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ABSTRACT

Maniila: An International Trade Port at the end of the Eighteenth Century

The Hispanic Monarchy introduced along the XVIII century a series of considerable changes in the organization of its ultramarine trade. Some of these measures affected the trade of the city of Manila, the capital of the Spanish Empire in Asia, in a gradual and stepped way, but with the effect of deeply transforming at the end of the century the nature and the volume of the transactions made in its port that became one of the most important of the region. The lines that come next outline the most outstanding landmarks in this evolution and they offer a point of reference illustrated with unpublished information of quantitative and qualitative order on the port movement in the years of the turn-of-the-century.

Some key measures happened among the years 1785 and 1789. In 1785 (and after some previous rehearsals in charge of the Compañía de los Cinco Gremios Mayores from Madrid in 1775 and of the Ustáriz, San Ginés y Compañía society) the direct route between Cádiz and Manila through the Cape of Good Hope was consolidated (and also through the Cape Horn) with the foundation of the Real Compañía de Filipinas that would stay effective up to 1834. And, finally, in 1789 the liberalization of the port of Manila was decreed.

Our contribution to this general frameword is the study of the data of the Customs of Manila between June 1º 1797 and May 31st of 1801, as appear in the records conserved in the Archivo General de Indias of Seville (Indifferent General, File 2198). The dates of the
records come given by the consideration of the business year from first of June at the end of May of the following year. It corresponds to the years of the so-called Trade of Neutrals, imposed by the war with England, decreed November 18 1797 and that continued until the signature of the peace of Amiens (March of 1802)

The less controvertible verifications present us Manila as an intercontinental commercial port that has direct relationships with Europe through the Compañía de Filipinas (although the war blocked this communication in these years) and through some European and American ships; with Spanish America through the double via of the Galleon (Acapulco) and of the Compañía de Filipinas (in these years limited to Lima); with United States through the marine of that country; with the Asian ports of China (Canton and Macao), India (Coromandel and Bengal) and Java, plus the Philippine Kingdom of Joló, using the foreign ships of the country trade; and with the nearer ports in China (Nankín, Amoy and Quanzhou), plus Java and Joló, through the local navies (Chinese and suluan) and, in smaller measure, through some national ships.

In conclusion, Manila, starting from 1789 reaches its full maturity as open port to the free international trade, although it has two areas of privileged trade as the traditional Carrera de Acapulco and the most recent granted to the Compañía de Filipinas that navigates directly from Europe and reach port in diverse Spanish American and Asian ports before finishing in the Philippines. The peak of Manila as international port can be appreciated through the comparison of diverse magnitudes. In the first place, although the brevity of the chronological period doesn't allow firm statements, we can observe a bigger trade in the considered period of the trade of neutrals through the general volume of the registered exchanges in the customs: 3.215.096 pesos (1798-99), 4.211.221 (1799-1800), 5.161.439 (1800-01). On the other hand, if we abide to the number of ships, it can be said that at the end of century the port of Manila was able to get the number of foreign ships that Francisco Leandro de Viana saw with envy in the port of Canton, since in the last mercantile year 26 ships of that class anchor in its wharfs. The trade also reaches a considerable magnitude, since during the last year those five million pesos are very next to the quantity only very slightly superior of W. E. Cheong for the year 1809-1810 (a much more reliable number that the excessively high and suspiciously rounded one offered for the year 1810 by the priest Esteban Vivet that duplicates it, although perhaps is necessary to keep in mind the 3.300 pesos coming from Acapulco). Anyway, we have the impression that, even under the effects of the war, Manila was able to come near that historical maximum of 1809-1810, starting from which its trade should come to a hopeless decadence, in such a way that its zenith as commercial emporium should embrace the twenty years that are between 1789, date of the decree of commercial freedom, and 1810, when the last galleon arrives in Acapulco.

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