CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ASIANS IN THE IBERIAN WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter on “Asians in the Iberian world” might better be titled “Iberians in Asia”.

The first implies that the Iberian empires were the dominant political structures in this part of the world, while the latter recognises that Iberians were a minority population that wielded economic, political, and religious power only in small enclaves, mainly fortified port cities, where their main purpose was trade. Iberian colonists in these commercial entrepôts categorised and interacted with indigenous people according to their own determinants. People in Asia who were Christians were allies, and it was they who maintained relations with Iberians for their own political ends.

This chapter illustrates the diversity of experiences lived by Asians under Iberian rule through a legal lens. Legality, in other words, provides an analytical framework for examining the extraordinary diversity of peoples and geographic regions encompassed by the term Asia. This endeavour requires parsing out the legal status of the native populations in each region and articulating the different legal structures that shaped people’s lives on the ground. For instance, in certain colonial cities like Goa and Manila many natives converted to Christianity and accepted Iberian sovereignty, thus becoming indigenous vassals of the Spanish and Portuguese Crown with legal rights and tributary obligations. In these contexts, there was also some degree of intermarriage, which resulted in the creation of new groups of people who were both Asian and Iberian. In other coastal outposts in India, by contrast, native peoples remained under the political jurisdiction of local rulers and were thus less susceptible to Iberian influence.

The chapter also considers those Asians who travelled to Spain, Portugal, and their American colonies, where their status often changed, as did their experiences. In Mexico, for example, enslaved people from all over Asia who arrived on the Manila Galleon were all called “chinos” and their legal status was as chattel property, until the end of the seventeenth century when the crown abolished chino slavery. In Portugal, Asian slaves lived in Lisbon and elsewhere, while free natives from Asia were found studying at the University of Coimbra.

These topics are addressed in two sections, one on the Portuguese State of India (Estado da Índia) and the other on Spanish Asia. The Portuguese sphere is divided into two sub-sections: one on the legal framework that covered Asians living under...
Portuguese rule; and another that is a case study regarding Asian attitudes towards the Portuguese. The Spanish section primarily focuses on the three main groups of Asians who lived under Spanish rule. Both the Portuguese and Spanish sections end with references to Asian diasporas in the Iberian world.

PORTUGUESE ASIA

The Portuguese State of India wielded political dominion over territories and sea routes in Asia. It was created to sustain the *Carreira da Índia*, which was a rentable trade route that connected Lisbon to the Indian Ocean from 1498 onwards. These were vast dominions, spanning from Macao to the eastern coast of Africa, and including commercial spots like the factories of Cananor, Calicut, and others, as well as territorial dominions like Goa (capital of the State of India from the 1530s onwards), Bassein, and, for a short period, parts of Sri Lanka. The king’s official title—the “Lord of the conquest, navigation and commerce” of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, India, and so forth—was meant to evoke the diversity of his dominion, which allowed for direct and indirect rule, and for different jurisdictional and institutional solutions (Thomaz 1994; Hespanha 1995; Saldanha 1997; Biedermann 2009; Marcocci 2012; Myrup 2015).

The State of India’s multi-dimensional structure is evident in the Portuguese Crown’s relationship with regional rulers and local sites of government. There were municipalities, fortresses, factories, “feudal” grants (*prazos*), as well as contractual grants that accorded the crown royal prerogatives over navigation and trade. Some Asian princes were vassals of the king of Portugal, while others were formal allies (Thomaz 1994; Hespanha 1995; Alves 1999, 2007; Flores 2018). Portuguese interactions with local populations depended on the type of rule they exercised in any one particular area.

By virtue of a number of papal bulls, the papacy granted the Portuguese king royal patronage and political dominion over Africa and Asia, as well as jurisdiction over the souls of Asian peoples. In return for such power, the king had the duty to convert Asian people and provide the necessary administrative structures to promote and conserve Asian Christianity, namely dioceses, parishes missions, and schools. In the sixteenth century, the Archdiocese of Goa was the largest in the world; it included China, Japan, and Persia, which were territories under the political rule of non-Christian princes, but whose Christians were under its own jurisdiction. Religious missions and convents (as well as schooling) provided another form of sovereignty—the spiritual and cultural one (Jacques 1999; Alberts 2013). However, in the majority of cases, pre-existing laws and customs regulated the daily life of Asian populations in Portuguese spheres of influence, where the crown was heavily dependent on the support of indigenous elites (Scammel 1989; Thomaz 1994; Pearson 2006; Subrahmanyam 2012; Xavier 2012, 2015).

Asians’ political and legal status under Portuguese rule

During the first decades after contact, Portugal’s general policy was to harmonise different interests, even while employing extreme violence in the processes of
conquest. One tactic was Viceroy Afonso de Albuquerque’s policy of encouraging intermarriages, which resulted in a difficult-to-classify social group that consisted of the descendants of unions between Portuguese men and Asian women. These people carried both metropolitan blood, which was a sign of distinction, and Asian blood, which placed them in a liminal condition. Portuguese born in the kingdom of Portugal (reinóis) derided them for having engaged in a process of indigenisation. In response, people with mixed-blood engaged in multiple strategies of differentiation, with the explicit goal of whitening their own condition and separating themselves from other locals (Boxer 1965; Tavim 2003; Pearson 2006; Subrahmanyam 2012; Xavier 2012).

This approach (miscegenation or métissage) for inscribing Portuguese power in their Asian territories shifted dramatically from the 1540s to the end of the seventeenth century, when métissage became undesirable, and conversion to Christianity became mandatory. Additionally, the pluralist template developed into a kind of assimilationist model based on the legal principle that birth (generatio) and baptism (regeneratio) were equivalent (Souza 1979; Hespanha 1995; Pearson 2006; Xavier 2015). Disregarding the sociocultural multiplicity of Asians living under Portuguese rule, this change in policy “created” two main categories of Asians: those who converted to Christianity, known as newly converted (novamente convertidos), and those who did not, frequently called gentiles (gentios) when professing an Asian religion, or moors (mouros), if Muslims.

In those regions where the Portuguese wielded direct rule, Asians who accepted baptism became vassals of the king of Portugal. They enjoyed similar rights to Portuguese people living in the State of India. Theoretically, the newly converted (novamente convertidos) were to be submitted to a process of cultural conversion, which included learning the Portuguese language and enrolling in Portuguese schools. Few of the newly converted, however, went on to higher education, though some travelled to Portugal for this purpose. In contrast, those who did not convert usually suffered negative consequences. Conversion rates were asymmetric: the territories and municipality of Goa were almost fully Christianised, while Hormuz, Bassein, Kochi, Columbo, Melaka, and Macao had large segments of their populations who remained “gentiles” (Boxer 1965; Flores 1998; Alves 1999; Pearson 2006; Strathern 2007; Biedermann 2009).

Considering that political conditions were much more complex, conversion was relatively more successful in territories with Portuguese fortresses and factories (approximately 50 spots in the early 1600s), but without municipalities. In these places, almost all native peoples remained non-Christian and kept many dimensions of their cultures intact. The few who converted became a Christian minority that reproduced itself, sometimes to this day. Such was the case in the majority of Portuguese settlements along the western and eastern coasts of India and the Bay of Bengal, as well as in Southeast Asia (such as East-Timor and Solor) (Hespanha 1995; Strathern 2007; Xavier 2015).

Conversion was somewhat more successful outside the borders of the State of India, such as in Japan, China, and Persia—territories that were under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Goa, and where Jesuit, Franciscan, Dominicans, and Augustinian missionaries carried out evangelisation projects. These missionaries engaged in different types of dialogue and negotiation with the local population,
often depending on pre-existing social groups (Županov 1999; Hsia 2006; Brockey 2007). While missionaries claimed to protect and educate Christian natives, they were also known to exploit them (or their non-Christian counterparts) as labourers or slaves (Bayly 1989).

Non-Christian Asians were also known to support Portuguese imperial rule (in political or financial terms). These non-Christians tended to enjoy a privileged legal status, sometimes better than those who had converted. Diplomats and merchants who lived transitorily in the State of India also had privileged rights (Scammel 1989; Pearson 2006; Flores 2018). Overall, the situation of Asians under Portuguese rule started to change in the eighteenth century, when the political dimension of conversion became less important to the Portuguese Crown, and the dimensions of the State of India were highly reduced, even if the territories of Goa more than doubled.

### Converted and non-converted Asians of the territories of Goa

Given the multiplicity of societies that interacted with the Portuguese in the State of India (Persians, Indians of different sorts, Chinese, Japanese, Malays, Javanese, Tamul, Chingalas, among others), it is difficult to address the richness of Asian attitudes towards Portuguese domination. As such, this section only examines Asian attitudes in Goa—the central territory of State of India—through the lens of conversion. As already noted, the majority of Asians under Portuguese rule did not convert, even where systematic conversion was attempted. This was the case in the much larger territory of Sri Lanka, where churches and schools abounded, and with some 250,000 Catholics at the time of Dutch arrival. The evangelisation of Sri Lanka under Dutch rule integrated new agents, namely Asian missionaries who had a different impact; their cultural conversion was minimal, and many of them continued to live as previously. Yet in 1723, and at least nominally, there were between 50,000 and 55,000 Catholics in the kingdom of Kandy. Christianity in Japan, by contrast, faced dire threats. From the seventeenth century onwards, the Hideyoshi and Tokugawa shogunates persecuted Christians, killing many of them during the martyrdoms of 1613, 1630, and 1632, and afterwards.

Comparatively, the Christians of Goa had a quieter life, the majority having converted pragmatically. Many collaborated and zealously operated within the imperial power system, while keeping features of their previous identity. Brahmans and Kshatriyas (Charodos) refashioned themselves as Christians, wearing Portuguese outfits, speaking and writing in Portuguese, and living in Portuguese-style houses (Thomaz 1994; Xavier 2015). These groups were tangentially supportive of Portuguese rule, but their aspirations to legal equality remained unsatisfied, and they existed in a liminal condition similar to conversos in Portugal.

Goans’ efforts to overcome their subaltern position are documented by several petitions from the sixteenth century onwards, manuscript and published treatises, as well as other testimonies. In response, the Portuguese government issued new decrees, established institutional procedures (like the statutes on purity of blood), and promoted implicit social norms in order to reduce the scope of legal equality. For example, an official called Father of Christians was charged with supervising the careers of Asian Christians who sought to participate in Portuguese government, but these tended to be minor offices. Mateus de Castro and other seventeenth-century
Image 16.1  View of Kandy, in Ceylon. Joris van Spilbergen (Amsterdam, 1617), “De Stadt Kandi gelegen int eilant van Celon”
Source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands/Public Domain
Brahmans illustrate Asian aspirations and their strategies to overcome the obstacles they faced in the State of India. Through the protection of Propaganda Fide and the Pope, Castro and others became bishops, a dignity that they would not have accessed otherwise (Sorge 1986; Xavier and Županov 2015). In spite of their status, the Portuguese accused Castro and other Brahmans of conspiring with the Dutch against them.

The liminal status of Asian converts persisted into the eighteenth century, fuelling different forms of resistance. The royal norm of 1761, similarly to that of 1542, decreed that all Christians born in Portuguese dominions, independently of their nation, were to be granted the same honours, distinctions, rights, and privileges as those born in Portugal. This mandate, however, had little impact, as demonstrated by the 1787 “Pinto’s Conspiracy”, when several Brahman priests and their relatives prepared a revolt against Portuguese power in order to resolve existing inequalities (Rivara 1990; Lopes 1995).

Lower social groups similarly collaborated and/or resisted Portuguese rule. Many of them, for example, openly returned to their previous religious affiliations, prompting prosecution by the Portuguese Inquisition. Christian apostates also engaged in internal and external rebellions against the crown, inciting fierce persecution (Kamat 1999; Xavier 2015). Non-Christian Asians living in Goa (around 10% in the early 1700s) exerted passive or open resistance, while others were indifferent. As in other parts of the State of India, they were local informants, translators, moneylenders, and members of strong mercantile networks. Many of them were functionally important to the conservation of Portuguese rule, namely those involved in financial activities. Few of them, however, kept their privileged positions for long (Subrahmanyam 2012; Carreira 2014).

The competition among non-Christian rich elites for collaborationism could be high, as illustrated in a collection of documents produced by eighteenth-century Vaishnava and Smarta Brahmans of Goa, translated into Portuguese, and stored in the office of the secretary of the viceroyalty. Smarta Brahmans, for example, accused Rama Sinai, one of the heads of the opposite party of being the “author and the motor of all disturbances”, an “astute and intelligent” man, who always tried to “please the government, and succeed in this way”. Based on these allegations, these Brahmans asked the king to expulse Sinai from Goa. Clearly, Smartas were the one who sought to “please the government” and succeed in “that way” (Historical Archives of Goa, Livro das Monções, n° 101, fls. 730–860; Rivara 1992; Xavier 2012; Xavier and Županov 2015). The Portuguese Crown’s awareness of the conflicts between these two groups (collaborators vs. collaborators), and the ways it coped with them, increased its local power, as well as the influence of elite groups.

Asians in Portugal, Europe, and Brazil

“No one can think better than us, because we know both Goa and Europe”, wrote José António to his brother living in Goa, João Baptista Pinto (one of the members of the “Pinto conspiracy”). In this letter, José António commented on the community of upper caste Goans living in Lisbon, their beliefs, their aspirations, as well as their intellectual practices (“Letter of José António to his brother, 1787” in Lopes 1995). Among them were father Caetano Vitorino Faria, and his son, José Custódio
de Faria; they arrived in Lisbon in 1771 and soon became leaders of that party (Lopes 1995, 254). These elites sought to promote the condition of their relatives back in Goa. Some of them studied at the University of Coimbra, while others tried to pursue ecclesiastic or military careers. Members of the Portuguese nobility with connections in Goa usually supported their efforts. A few like Caetano Vitorino were welcomed in the homes of high clergy like the Nunzio of Rome and Cardinal da Cunha, some of the most powerful men in Portugal. They even gained access to the houses of high nobility and the royal court (Rivara 1990).

Apart from strengthening their Portuguese connections, these Goans sought additional ties elsewhere in Europe, just like their seventeenth-century ancestors. Caetano Vitorino and his son travelled to Rome to pursue studies in theology, where Caetano wrote a doctoral thesis that he dedicated to Queen Mary I of Portugal, and a theological treatise about the Holy Spirit dedicated to the Pope. The Pope was impressed and invited Caetano to preach at the Sistine Chapel. His son studied in the college of Propaganda Fide, and pursued doctoral studies, returning to Lisbon, where he preached in the Royal Chapel (Rivara 1990).

These two Goans enjoyed high social standing when their participation in the “Pinto conspiracy” was uncovered. José Custódio fled to Paris with other Goans, but Caetano Vitorino was incarcerated. José’s fascinating life in revolutionary France inspired Alexander Dumas to create the picturesque character Abbé Faria in The Count of Mont Christ. Their lives in Europe were extraordinary. Asians forced to travel to Portugal were more numerous.

There were different sorts of Asian slaves in Lisbon and elsewhere in Portugal (Indian, Chinese, Malayan, Japanese) though fewer in number than those of African origin (Saunders 1982; Fonseca 2002; Nelson 2004). Many of them were the result of military conquests (war captives), individuals enslaved as punishment for rebellion, while others were simply purchased in Asian slave markets (Seijas 2008). The majority engaged in domestic works, and those who lived in the countryside also did heavier agricultural labour.

Manuel was one among these slaves. Born in Sri Lanka, he arrived in Portugal with a Portuguese bomber. Manuel’s relatives were already dead, and he had neither siblings, nor wife and children. In February of 1610, when he was 30 years old, the Portuguese Inquisition accused him of sexual crimes. Some Portuguese men had seen him having sex with a young boy in Rossio, near the Royal Hospital. The boy said that Manuel had forced him. After six months of interviews, the inquisitors acknowledged that Manuel was almost deaf, and by the end, surprisingly, they considered that he was a good Christian who had mistaken the boy for a woman, releasing him by the end of the year (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisbon) [hereafter ANTT], Conselho Geral do Santo Ofício, Processo de Manuel, proc. 315, fl. 34). The story had a happy end for Manuel, but not all slaves survived the Inquisition.

Inquisitorial records reveal the forced journeys of other Asians, non-slaves, to Portugal and Brazil. Antonio Lourenço, for example, was accused of Islamism and condemned to exile in Portugal in 1623; and Deugo, a Brahman, was condemned to exile in Brazil for ten years in 1697 (ANTT, Maço 34, Caixa 113, Junta do Comércio). Unfortunately, we do not know anything else about their experiences. Their stories only became visible because of the judicial system intervened in their
lives. Otherwise, they would have remained anonymous, as were many other Asians who lived in the kingdom of Portugal or its imperial territories.

Asians travelled to Portugal and elsewhere (like Bahia, in Brazil) for transitory periods, such as commercial agents and diplomats. Besides the Japanese princes who travelled to Portugal, Madrid, and Rome in the late 1500s, the best known were Indian merchants who went to Bahia. Around 130 Indian merchants arrived in Bahia between the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth century—many of them involved in the tobacco trade (Antony 2004). Like other Asians who were useful to the Portuguese imperial power, their movement of action and the commercial opportunities they exploited testify to Asian agency (Faria 2015). The lives of the majority of Asians in the Portuguese sphere still await historical recovery.

SPANISH ASIA

Spain’s colonial presence in Asia was limited to a number of islands in the Western Pacific Ocean—the Spanish East Indies in historical parlance. The Spanish Crown claimed political sovereignty over the Philippines Archipelago, the Caroline, and Mariana Islands, as well as the Moluccas for a short time, but its military presence was nearly insignificant in most of these territories (Bohigian 1994; Villiers 1986). The so-called Spanish Philippines (Luzon and the Visayas) were strategically and economically the most important. The ceremonial naming of the whole Archipelago after a Habsburg king did grant Spain universal dominion over the varied ethnic groups living in this vastly complex topographical space. First, the southern islands of Mindanao, Jolo, and other Muslim regions remained largely independent into the eighteenth century. Second, Spain’s sovereignty over “colonised” areas was entirely contingent on indigenous elites (principales).

Spain relied on the support of native lords to exert political and economic power—a model that began from the first decades of Spanish settlement and persisted for most of the colonial period (dated, somewhat imaginatively, from 1521 and truly ending in 1898). In the mid-sixteenth century, indigenous elites in Luzon Island, for example, consented to Spanish settlements and some local governance in return for wider trading networks and imperial privileges (Gerona 2001). During this time, Spanish colonists also partook in local power struggles, lending assistance to friendly rulers, who verified their alliance to Spain by accepting Catholicism. Soldiers and churchmen committed untold crimes in settling parts of the Philippines, but the emphasis on Spanish violence and native exploitation distorts the complicated history of this European-Asian encounter. Local actors had agency depending on their status in indigenous societies. This lived reality begs for a reconsideration of Spain’s triumphant imperial narrative about the “conquest” of the Philippines, which continues to dominate the historiography in spite of research that underlines Spain’s relatively weak political grip on its main colony in Asia.

Four main groups of “Asians” lived in the Spanish sphere of the early modern world; three of them came together in the Philippines Islands, while the fourth was a diaspora. These groupings, of course, reflect Spain’s perspective, and do not represent the ways people in Asia self-identified (based on ethno-linguistic differences and the like). These groupings, instead, replicate the categories Spaniards employed to identify people born in Asia who were, in some sense, the concern of the crown.
Image 16.2  Eighteenth-century Map of Asia (Madrid, ca. 1795). “Mapa de Asia dividido según la extensión de sus estados” by Tomás López de Vargas Machuca
Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, USA
The first group of Asians was indigenous people of islands claimed by Spain, who accepted sovereignty to some degree, and whom Spain legally classified as Indians (*indios*). The legal category Indian was the same whether people were from the East Indies (Asia) or the West Indies (America). This grouping might also be conceived as native Filipinos who converted to Christianity. The second group was people from islands that Spain sought to possess, but who effectively blocked Spanish incursions. These people were primarily from Muslim kingdoms in Mindanao, Palawan, Jolo, and other islands in the Philippines Archipelago that remained firmly part of the Islamic world; Spain categorised them as moors (*moros*) (Majul 1973; Donoso 2011). The third group of Asians was people from China (mainly from south Fujian or Hokkiens), called Sangleys (*sangleyes*), who lived next to Spanish settlements, where they formed part of the trading and artisanal class (Gil 2011b; Laufer 1967). The fourth and final group was people from Asia who lived in the diaspora, having mostly arrived in the Americas and Spain as slaves. Spaniards categorised these individuals as chinos (*chinos*), because China stood in for Asia in the western imaginary. The following section examines the experiences of Sangleys, Filipino Indians, and chinos (in that order), with special reference to their status in Spain’s legal realm. Those people categorised as moors are not included precisely because they remained independent, Spanish law only impinged on those who were captured and enslaved (Seijas 2019).

The Sangley community in light of Spain’s commercial interests

Manila, officially founded as a Spanish city in 1571, was the colony’s reason for being (Reed 1978). The capital served as the seat of the Governor of the Philippines and High Court (*Audiencia de Manila*), but its primary purpose was to sustain Spain’s “Asia Trade” by means of the Manila Galleon (Schurz 1959; Fish 2011). Each year, Manila residents awaited the fleet that arrived laden with silver from Mexico, which then returned with Chinese goods, Indian textiles, spices, and slaves. Spanish residents (*vecinos*), Portuguese traders, Chinese wholesalers, elite Filipino investors, and Mexican merchants all profited from this trade. Manila was a transit market, with little local industry beyond ship building in nearby Cavite, and entirely reliant on imports. For the majority of Spaniards in the Philippines, who mainly resided in Manila, commerce was everything, and most of what occurred beyond this entrepôt held little interest. The few exceptions were some of the missionaries who lived in rural areas to fulfil their evangelising mission.

The Sangley community (one of the “Asian” groups) was the lynchpin in the Asia trade (Chin 2010; Gebhardt 2015; Tremml-Werner 2015). Their economic importance, however, was not reflected in their social standing. Spanish society insisted on their outsider status and relegated Sangleys to live in a designated neighbourhood called the Parian (*parián*) outside the walls of Manila, which functioned as a kind of ghetto. The colonial government gave a religiously inflected justification for this residential segregation, which was that Sangleys as non-Christians would negatively influence native Filipinos if allowed to gather among them. Beyond religion, Spaniards insisted on the Parian’s existence because they remained mistrustful of Sangleys’ loyalty (Crewe 2015). The government, in fact, recurrently imposed harsh taxation to limit the growth of the Sangley population and declined to grant them
resident (vecino) rights, such as representation in the municipal council (cabildo) (Alva Rodríguez 1997).

Events in 1639 and 1640 further illustrate the way Spaniards mismanaged relations with the Sangley community. That fall, the government forcefully lured several thousand Chinese residents from Manila to Calamba to grow rice for the urban market (McCarthy 1970). Ill-prepared to do this kind of work and after hundreds of malaria deaths, the remaining Sangleys resolved to kill the local official and started back to the capital. Spanish and allied Filipino soldiers slaughtered a great number of Sangleys along the way, but enough continued on their march to inspire a much wider uprising at the Parian. During the following months, the Governor of the Philippines ordered the killing of thousands of Sangleys leaving a much-reduced community. A number of other Chinese protests and ensuing massacres occurred before and after this episode.

Spaniards were generally unwilling to include Sangleys as colonial actors in the way that was done for other foreigners, such as Armenians (Borao Mateo 1998; Aslanian 2011). Chinese migrants continued to be allowed to gain a livelihood in this colonial outpost, but their presence was always cause for suspicion. This was a contradictory position, because Spaniards relied on Sangleys to broker the import for all manner of goods, everything from rice to Chinese porcelain, into Manila. This unresolved tension, between needing Sangleys as intermediaries and wanting to welcome Chinese merchants on the one hand, and disparaging them on the other, coloured everyday life in Manila (Iusquets i Alemany 2006).

The colonial government periodically expelled Sangleys from Manila, usually when their numbers increased, which threatened to make them the majority population, or when officials blamed Sangleys for economic downturns. Their absence, however, always prompted the same officials to encourage their return, in a way conceding their central role in the colony’s economy. Sangleys, for their part, repeatedly came back because it was in their financial interest to do so. Overall, the precarious status of Sangleys in the Spanish sphere reveals that the crown did not aim for their social or cultural integration into the colony. The standing policy, instead, was to accept, in some sense, that the colony depended on the presence of these outsiders, and that it was through the Sangleys that Spain had access to the wealth of a much greater empire: China.

Native vassalage and slavery

Spaniards’ orientation towards commerce, the centrality of Manila for governmental concerns, and the colony’s vast distance from Spain produced a settler society in which pre-contact forms of social organisation remained largely in place for centuries (Scott 1994). The majority of Filipinos lived in rural areas that remained outside of the Spanish sphere. Spain divided Luzon, Mindoro, and other islands into administrative provinces such as Batangas and Cagayan, which were each ostensibly governed by an appointed official (alcalde mayor), with some additional powers accorded to local churchmen. The reality on the ground, however, was that native governors (gobernador) and municipal heads (cabeza de barangay) were the ones who carried out the legal and fiscal oversight of native communities, and also collected tribute (Alonso Álvarez 2005; Woods 2015; Cruikshank 2011).
Principales (usually from the nobility or datus) administered their regions according to their individual abilities and goals, which could range from seeking their community’s well-being to prioritising self-enrichment. Principales, for example, employed the Spanish charge of recruiting and organising indigenous soldiers both to consolidate their own power vis-à-vis the Spanish government (which was wholly reliant on this military assistance), as well as to demand better terms for their men (Mawson 2016; Borao Mateo 2013). Indigenous people of the Philippines were thus far less politically subjugated to Spain than the crown professed, or that historians have subsequently acknowledged.

The allowance for indigenous slavery and other forms of forced labour underlines the bounded nature of Spain’s sovereignty in the Philippines. In the wider empire, indigenous people who accepted Spanish sovereignty and Christian baptism were said to belong to the Republic of Indians, which made them native vassals of the crown. Tribute was paid in exchange for legal rights and privileges, including freedom from slavery. This governing model failed in the Philippines because the power and wealth of principales depended on bonded labour, including chattel slavery and kin-based dependencies. These economic structures remained in place into the eighteenth century. Forced labour was integral to the encomienda system, for example, which accorded grants of Indian workers to leading colonists and principales (Cushner 1976; Hidalgo Nuchera 1995). Such labour grants maintained pre-existing forms of agricultural organization. Spain’s reliance on principals, in turn, prevented colonial officials from intruding into local governance and administration even if they had sought to do so, which, in any case, seldom occurred. Abolishing existing forms of bonded labour would have undermined native power brokers and destabilised agricultural production. It was of slight concern, as such, that this allowance contradicted Spain’s claim that vassalage imparted protection from human bondage, as articulated with the passing of the “New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians” in 1542.

Slavery and Christianity made for remarkable contradictions in the East Indies. The papacy granted Spain ecclesiastical control over its colonies in return for funding the missionary enterprise, which ostensibly aimed to extend the spiritual and spatial boundaries of Christendom, but also legitimised Spain’s imperial ambitions (Phelan 1959; Rafael 1988; Irving 2010). Baptism, as such, symbolised entry into Spain’s political order and was supposed to impart legal protections, but not in the Philippines. There, baptism justified indigenous slavery. As late as the 1680s, churchmen warned that Filipino slaves would “abnegate the faith they promised to His Majesty” and “abjure evangic law” if they were not “subdued by force” (i.e., kept in legal bondage) (AGI Filipinas 24 R.5 N.28, 1684). The open disregard for the political significance of baptism in the Philippines should raise serious questions about the historical validity of Spain’s sovereign claim to all of its colonies, especially as indigenous slavery was far more widespread than has ever been accounted for.

The Protector of Indians Office (protectoría de indios), charged with safeguarding the legal rights and privileges of indigenous vassals, struggled to do so in the Philippines from its inception in 1589, especially in regards to slavery (Hidalgo Nuchera 1998). As evidence, the Laws of the Indies published some 100 years later included reference to the ongoing practice, noting the necessity of having the High Court protect Indians in the Philippines who were “tyrannically enslaved by native
chiefs” (Laws of Indies 1943, Book 6, title 2, law 9 of the Laws of the Indies). Court-appointed protectors, however, generally failed to secure the legal evaluation of individual people’s captivity, even if that person came forward to denounce his or her master. This one outlet for enslaved Filipinos to secure their freedom thus remained closed into the eighteenth century.

Notably, Filipinos had a much easier time finding recourse to legal protections in Spain, where a number of enslaved individuals appealed at court for their freedom (Seijas 2012). Pedro de Mendoza, a native of Jolo, and once slave of Governor Sebastián Urtado de Corcueru, was one such man. He successfully defended his belief in 1655 that “by royal decree all Indians are free” (AGI Filipinas 4 N.40, 1655). In this regard, indigenous people of the Philippines had a similar experience as those from America, who similarly gained their liberty in Spain—a great achievement even if they did find themselves so far from their native lands (Gil 2011a; Van Deusen 2015).

**Chinos as an early modern Asian diaspora**

The fourth group of “Asians” in the Spanish sphere formed a kind of diaspora, for most of them ended their days far from their homelands in Spain’s American colonies. Starting in the 1560s and through the 1670s, the trans-pacific slave trade carried people from culturally diverse communities in South and Southeast Asia to Mexico (Seijas 2014). A small minority of chinos ended their days in Peru as evidenced by a surviving census, but their story remains to be told (Cook and Escobar Gamboa 1968).

Upon arrival in Acapulco, Spanish officials and masters categorised all of them as chinos, similarly to how they grouped enslaved people from Africa as “blacks” (*negros*). Spain dictated the legal status of people living in the colonies, but the sprawling empire also allowed for contingency and individual agency. Such was the experience of enslaved Filipinos who fought in varied ways to cast off the chino category and regain their identification as indigenous vassals of the crown. Their joint achievement was that in 1672 a royal decree confirmed their identity as naturally free Indians and abolished chino slavery. Once manumitted, former chino slaves joined existing communities of free indigenous immigrants from the Philippines, who had long claimed membership in New Spain’s Republic of Indians. It is one of the many contradictions of Spain’s Indian legislation that individual Filipinos gained their freedom from chattel slavery first in Spain, then in Mexico, and finally in the Philippines.

**CONCLUSION**

The Portuguese and Spanish Empires wielded varying degrees of political sovereignty in their Asian strongholds; and their power on the ground, as a generality, remained much more circumscribed in this part of the world than in the Americas. The varying degrees to which Asian peoples living in Portuguese and Spanish strongholds converted to Catholicism offers some indication of Iberians’ command over local populations.
The Portuguese State of India claimed a vast geographic extension, but its territorial presence was uneven, as was Portugal's expression of political power and interest in sustaining the rentable Carreira da India. The Portuguese Crown also exerted varying levels of spiritual rule in Asia by virtue of papal donation (padroado), in a similar way as Spain in the Philippines (patronazgo). In most places, pre-existing laws and customs regulated the daily life of people throughout the region, as the Portuguese depended on the support of non-Christian local rulers, who retained their own social norms, until about 1530.

During the first decades of the Estado da India, métissage appeared to be a good strategy for re-socialising native inhabitants to become Christian subjects of the Portuguese Crown. This approach, however, was soon abandoned, and it became Portuguese policy, instead, to force cultural conversion through Christian indoctrination. Once baptised, indigenous peoples became vassals of the crown and subject to more direct rule; such was the case of Goa. For their part, Christianised peoples negotiated and collaborated with local government officials for their own purposes. Non-Christians who benefited from the financial infrastructure of Portuguese rule and the Asian trade also experienced a privileged condition by collaborating with colonial officials. At the same time, Christians and non-Christians also resisted, more or less openly, at different times in order to maintain certain degrees of political sovereignty.

Spain had a small political footprint in the Western Pacific for most of the so-called “colonial” period. That said, Spaniards stubbornly remained in their outposts (Manila most importantly) as a matter of imperial pride, and also to reap the benefits of trading with China. Silks, porcelain, and human chattel all sailed away from Manila bound to New Spain where these commodities sold for immense profits. Given this commercial orientation, as well as the poverty of the local royal treasury, the Spanish Crown mainly relied on Christianised native lords to administer local government beyond the walls of their capital and a few fortresses elsewhere. From the Spanish perspective, indigenous people of the Philippine Islands who converted to Christianity and accepted the king's sovereignty (always negotiated), and paid some tribute, were legally Indians—indigenous vassals in the same manner as natives of the American colonies. Indigenous peoples who lived in the Archipelago under the sovereignty of Muslim Sultans were Spain’s enemies. The other “Asian” group in this mix was Chinese migrants (sangleyes).

The tri-partite categorisation proposed here (Indios, moros, and sangleyes) is a broad generalisation of society, but suffice it to say that there was no “Spanish Philippines”. Instead, diverse groups of people, including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and so on (if we take religion as the main identifier), resided in different parts of the Philippines Archipelago, where individuals experienced similar challenges—from monsoon floods to ongoing warfare. Local powerbrokers determined the legal frameworks that bounded people’s lives, be they Augustinian friars, noblemen (datus), Muslim judges, or Spanish governors.

In the case of Luzon Island and the Visayas in the Philippines, the Spanish colonial government, which arguably included the clergy and religious orders, had relative success in Christianising the native inhabitants, and it was in these areas that Spain could be said to have had a colony with indigenous vassals that paid tribute and with colonists that benefited from membership in the Spanish Empire.
At the same time, the Sangleys community outside of Manila remained relatively independent, refusing conversion and retaining instead their Hokkien culture and wide-reaching trading networks. Colonial officials may have expelled Sangleys on numerous occasions, and also carried out gruesome massacres against them, but they always returned to take control of the local economy and to reap great benefit from the Asia trade.

Iberians had great political aspirations in Asia and in some places they did indeed wield considerable power over local populations. In these colonies, Portuguese and Spanish officials, secular and ecclesiastical, sought to Christianise their subjects and impose legal and economic structures that would benefit themselves and their respective royal treasuries. Native communities, for their part, reacted to these impositions by negotiating for privileges that imparted varying degrees of social and economic status. Local elites were particularly successful in this respect, as evident, for example, in the experiences of native Goans who held local offices, or principales in Manila who participated in the Asia trade and retained their wealth in slaves into the early eighteenth century. Overall, Iberian colonialism in Asia remains a vastly understudied subject; future research should continue to question imperial paradigms that elide the everyday experiences of peoples who lived far removed from the claims of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns.

NOTES
1 Asia is defined as the continental landmass that includes modern-day countries like India and China, as well as the island nations of Southeast Asia.
2 Thanks to Bruno Feitler and Jaime Rodrigues for citations to these cases.

ABBREVIATIONS
AGI Archivo General de Indias
ANTT Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo

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