

The Mexican Colonial Term “Chino” Is a Referent of Afrodescendant

by

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“The descendants of negroes and Indian women bear at Mexico, Lima and even at the Havannah the strange name of chino [...]”

Alexander von Humboldt¹

Abstract

Apparently unaware of the existence of at least three Spanish language homonyms of “chino” with different significations, times and places of origin, there is a considerable research corpus inaccurately translating as “Chinese” the Mexican colonial name “chino,” found in Mexican colonial documents from the late sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To disentangle the confusion of the linguistic problem outlined, this work tracks the distinct etymologies of “chino” meaning “curly-haired African-First Nations offspring;” and of “chino” as Chinese. The objective is to show that the name “chino” as referent of Afrodescendant derives from “chino,” a synonym of ‘pig.’ “It is shown that a homonym of “chino” arose in Philippines as a synonym of *Sangley*, the Tagalog name of the merchants from Cathay (the Middle Kingdom). Based upon the foregoing, three findings are exposed. First, that the term “chino” in most Mexican colonial documents is not a referent of Chinese, but to Afro-Mexicans. Second, that the word “chino” meaning Chinese, which began to be used generally in nineteenth-century Philippines, applies to the *Sangley* merchants exclusively. Third, that the ethnically diverse people who entered Mexico via Acapulco were called “chinos” because they were perceived as people with tainted blood.

Apparently unaware of the existence of at least three Spanish language homonyms of “chino” with different significations, times and places of origin, there is a considerable research corpus inaccurately translating as “Chinese” the Mexican colonial name “chino,” found in Mexican colonial documents from the late sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For the most part, those “chinos” are Afro-Mexican “chinos-cambujos,” *çambujos*, or *zambujos*. “Chino,” in New Spain archival records, generally, is a referent to people of African heritage whose lineage was perceived by the Spanish and other Europeans as “tainted” by African blood. Therefore, they were labeled “chino,” a synonym for “pig” in the Murcia region of Spain; or “chino-cochino” (dirty pig). Although the animal connotation of “chino” has disappeared, the “dirty” lineage implied by the term has survived until present;² curly hair in Mexico is “pelo chino.” The general usage of the homonym “chino,” meaning Chinese, emerged in nineteenth-century Manila, Philippines as a synonym of *Sangley*, the name given to Chinese merchants.

The distortion appears to have originated with Alexander von Humboldt during his visit to New Spain in 1800. Although von Humboldt understood the meaning of the term “chino” as applied in Mexico at the time, he failed to realize that he was dealing with homonyms of “chino” when he mentioned that it was “strange” to call Afrodescendants “Chinese.” Nevertheless, von Humboldt reported that “chino” in Mexico referred to the offspring of Black men and “Indian women” [First Nations herein after] (184). John Black (1783-1855) translated von Humboldt’s work *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* from French to English for the 1811 publication. While applying the term “Chinese” to Afrodescendants made no sense, John Black overlooked the translation problem.

John Black mistranslated “chino” as “Chinese male” and “china” as “Chinese female,” which, in context, were referents of male and female African offspring and not Chinese people in the current sense. To avoid misinterpretations, John Black should have translated “china” as “*china* female” and not “Chinese female.” Magnus Morner cites von Humboldt where he states, “The offspring of Indian and Negro were called *chinos* in both Mexico and Peru” (59 n.22). Von Humboldt was an observer in situ as he traveled in the American Spanish colonies from 1799 to 1804.

The Americana: A Universal Reference Library, in the section entitled “Mexico: History and Modern Development” reports in 1912,

In 1827 the British Minister to Mexico divided the population into seven classes: (1.) Old Spanish or Gachupines. (2.) Creoles or Mixed whites of pure European race, born in America and regarded as natives. (3.) Indians or indigenous copper colored races. (4.) Mestizos or mixed whites and Indians gradually merging into Creoles. (5.) Mulattoes or descendants of whites and negroes. (6.)

Zambos or chinos, descendants of negroes and Indians. (7.) African negroes, either manumitted or slaves. The first and last three classes he claimed to be pure and to have “given rise, in their various combinations” to the fourth class, which in turn was subdivided many times. (Beach 12-13) (emphasis added)

The same source explains that in 1900, Mexico had a foreign born population of 57,507 of which: “2,565 were Germans; 278 Arabs; 234 Austro-Hungarians; 140 Canadians; 2,721 Cubans; 2,834 Chinese; 16,258 Spaniards; 3,976 French; 3,325 Greeks; 5,804 Guatemalans; 2,845, English; 2,564 Italians; 15,265 North Americans; 391 Turks” (Beach 12)(emphasis added).

The misguided research corpus mentioned at the onset, disregards New Spain’s *casta* label of “chino” or “chino-cambujo” as a referent of African-First Nations offspring. Said works overlook that the enslaved people who arrived in Mexico through Acapulco, including Africans, were also tagged as “chinos” given their perceived “impure” lineage. Instead, those studies have applied “chino” as meaning “Chinese” indiscriminately to all non-European people who arrived in New Spain via Manila. With this light, the allegation that 40,000 to 100,000 “Chinese” arrived in New Spain during the colonial period, besides being a physical impossibility is based on a mistranslation.

A case in point is “The Chinos in New Spain: A Corrective Lens for a Distorted Image” (herein after referred to as “The Chinos in New Spain”), by Edward Slack, Jr., published in the *Journal of World History*, Volume 20, Number 1 (2009): 35 to 67. “The Chinos in New Spain” seeks to obtain recognition of the “Chinese” roots of Mexico. The essay’s main thesis is that during the 244 years (1571-1815) of the Philippine-Acapulco trade, Spanish galleons transported the,

“first wave” of transpacific Asian migration, [composed of] travelers from Cathay, Cipango (Japan), the Philippines, various kingdoms in Southeast Asia, and India [who] were known collectively in New Spain as chinos (Chinese) or indios chinos (Chinese Indians), as the word chino/china became synonymous with Asia. (35)

“The Chinos in New Spain” and like research, if left unchallenged, would erase from the Mexican national memory a major portion of African Mexican archival history and lead to further misinterpretation of Mexican historical data.

Paradoxically, “The Chinos in New Spain” cites *La población negra de México (The Black Population of Mexico)* by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán to support its premise. Notably, *La población* has a full paragraph dedicated to explaining that the name “chino” in Colonial Puebla, Mexico was a referent to the offspring of a Black male and a First Nations woman; and that “circa the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mulatto and chino were synonyms” in that region (179). *La población* also quotes nineteenth-century Colonial *Casta* documents where: “chino” is a referent to the offspring of a “Morisco” and a “Spanish woman” (Aguirre 177); Morisco is the offspring of a Spanish male and a Mulatto woman (Aguirre 175); and that “*china, lépera* [foul mouthed woman] or prostitute meant the same thing” (Aguirre 179).

The present work exposes that most Tagalogs, Japanese, South East Asians, Hindi and Africans who arrived through Acapulco were perceived as colored, non-Christians or “dirty pigs,” therefore subject to enslavement. It is stipulated that (long before China was called China and its people Chinese) there were “Slaves from the Great China taken to Mexico,” but they were “scarce; as generally were all slaves from the Portuguese India” (Aguirre 148).

To disentangle the confusion of the linguistic problem outlined above, this paper will track the distinct etymologies of “chino” meaning curly-haired African-First Nations offspring; and of “chino” as Chinese. The objective is to show that the name chino as referent of Afrodescendant derives from “chino,” a synonym of “pig” and/ or through aphaeresis from “co-chino” used often as “chino-cochino” meaning “dirty pig.”

Conversely, it will be shown that another homonym of “chino” arose in Philippines as a synonym of Sangle, the Tagalog name of the merchants from Cathay (the Middle Kingdom). Based upon the foregoing, three findings will be exposed. First, that the term “chino” in most Mexican colonial documents is not a referent of Chinese, but to Afro-Mexicans. Second, that the word “chino” meaning Chinese, which began to be used generally in nineteenth-century Philippines, applies to the Sangle merchants exclusively. Third, that the ethnically diverse people who entered Mexico via Acapulco were called “chinos” because they were perceived as people with tainted blood.

Preceding that, the history of the Spanish arrival to Mexico in 1519, the catastrophic decline of the original inhabitants,³ the transatlantic trade of Africans brought to Mexico up to 1570, the establishment of a “racial” classification system,⁴ and the commencement of the Manila–Acapulco–Manila commerce and slave trade in 1571 will be reviewed concisely. To conclude, “The Chinos in New Spain,” will be read critically from a multidisciplinary perspective. It is noted that, even if inadvertently, the archival research work of “The Chinos in New Spain” contributes to African Mexican studies.

The Spanish colonization of the lands occupied by Mexico and much of the current United States' South West and Central South started in 1519. The Spanish christened these territories as "New Spain." As many as 25,000,000 First Nations people may have inhabited those lands at the time of contact. By 1570, their number was reduced to 3,336,860 and to 1,269,607 by 1646. The Spanish, to help penetrate the land, started to bring Africans across the Atlantic immediately after 1519. It is reported that by 1570, there were 20,559 Africans; and 6,464 Spanish (Aguirre 198). By 1571, the Spanish established a shipping line across the Pacific between Acapulco and Manila, in the Philippine Archipelago. For the next 244 years one to two ships sailed regularly, although not always annually: "At times [ships] got lost or were unable to go back given the storms, shipwrecks or Hollandaise harassment" (Ollé 41). Diverse Asian and African people entered Acapulco, many enslaved (Aguirre 49-52).

In accordance to the social structure and ideology on race developed in Spain, the Spaniards established in their colonies, a social pyramid or "pigmentocracy" based upon the amount of the perceived whiteness of a person. Peninsular Spaniards who saw themselves as "pure-white-blooded" positioned themselves at the top. To keep under control and in their place all people they invented as non-white, various "racial" labels were forged along the lines of the so-called "racial miscegenation" of Mexico. One of such "distinctions" was the tag "chino." This "chino" voice emerged independently and earlier than its homonym "chino" for Chinese. "Chino" meaning "Chinese" developed in the Philippines and began to be used generally in that sense in the nineteenth century as a new name for the *Sangley* merchants; more regarding this will follow later. *Sangley* was the Tagalog name applied to Middle Kingdom or Cathay merchants ("Middle Kingdom" and "Cathay" are earlier names referring to the area later called China).

According to María Luisa Herrera Casasús,

The Spanish China Ship or Galleon, —that from the end of the sixteenth century, until the beginning of the nineteenth, traveled periodically from Manila in the Philippine Islands to Acapulco in [New Spain's] Pacific Coasts—transported slaves from West Africa, India, Malacca, China and other Asian countries. African and Asian enslaved who entered [New Spain] via the Pacific, were commonly nicknamed "chinos." (467)

In this same historical vein Aguirre elucidates:

Soon after Manila was conquered [by the Spaniards], enslaved people from the West began to arrive in New Spain. General López de Legazpi sent some, who were the property of his heirs, until the early seventeenth century. These slaves obtained their freedom afterward and founded a borough in the small port [of Acapulco]. They called themselves *Philippine Indians*, but among them, there were many Mulattoes.

This allows one to suppose that they were not only natives from the [Philippine] Archipelago, but from many other places of the West (50). They were called “chinos,” even though they were not exactly—in effect in the majority of the cases—[...] of the Mongolian race (144). Almost all Philippine slaves came under individual contracts between the slave’s owner and a ship sailor. The sailor would take the slave to New Spain under his care be responsible to give him food and water, and upon arrival to the port to sell the slave at the best possible price, keeping for himself, a commission of a third of the slave’s value. (52)

The individual contracts, the size and number of ships, the number of trips made over the years, and the Spanish archives allow one to project the number of enslaved people who entered New Spain through the Pacific. Hugh Thomas expounds, Many captives were also obtained from Madagascar “a vast Island abounding with slaves” in the words of William Beckford, lord major of London. In the seventeenth century, these were sometimes shipped eastward, via Manila across the Pacific to Acapulco, where they were sold as “chinos” (369).

Thomas cautions that these Madagascar “*chinos*” should not “be confused with the small number of Chinese and Filipinos, also known as *chinos*, who after the opening up of the Pacific by Miguel de Legazpi in 1564-65, were carried to Mexico in the Manila galleons” (369 note) (emphasis added). In Manila, the indigenous Tagalogs had traded long before the Spanish arrival with people from Cathay (China). As mentioned, the Tagalogs referred to those merchants they traded with as *Sangleys*. The Spaniards adopted the term *Sangley* in the sixteenth century and used it commonly until the nineteenth century when a homonym of “chino” replaced *Sangley*.

Benedict Anderson explains, “Only very slowly the *Sangley* turned into ‘Chinese’—until the word disappeared in the early nineteenth century to make way for a VOC-style chino”⁵ (168). Caroline Sy Hau affirms that by Jose Rizal’s (1861-1896) time “chino replaced *Sangley* in bureaucratic usage” (141). Thus, the homonym “chino” connoting “Chinese” was not usually applied in that sense until the nineteenth century. During prior centuries, the Africans, Hindi, Southeast Asians, Philippines, *Negritos*, *Sangley*, etc. who entered New Spain via Acapulco were labeled “chinos” meaning non-white people.

As the above mentioned people were not Christian, European, and lacked a noble lineage, Spaniards perceived them as savages, bad, despicable, treacherous, vicious, pagan, etc. They were an inferior *Other* (*la brosa, los de abajo, la chinaca, la morenada*, etc.). *Sangleys* lived outside the city walls of Manila. They were periodically exterminated by the Spaniards to quell revolts just as had been done to the Jewish and *Morisco* populations in Spain; and First Nations, Africans, and their offspring in the Americas.

In addition to lumping all transpacific arrivals to New Spain as “Chinese,” (meaning Mongolian-type) “The Chinos in New Spain” ignores Southeast Asia and Philippine diversity and diminishes to a “small number” the Africans from “Mozambique, Guinea and Cabo Verde” who were among these “chinos” (Slack 41). The African Malagasy and “Negritos” presence throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific Archipelagoes is bypassed. Much of the theory supporting “The Chinos in New Spain” comes from *Race, Class and Politics in Mexico 1610-1670* by Jonathan I. Israel. *Race, Class and Politics in Mexico* also misinterprets as “Chinese” the voice *chino* found in colonial documents. Roberto Gómez Ciriza, the translator of the work into Spanish, makes no clarifications to the readers. Afro-Mexican *chinos* thus are lost in translation.⁶

A parallel misreading is present in *Africans in Colonial Mexico* (120-21). Herman Bennett mentions, “The increasing presence of *chinos* in the archival records indicates that Mexico’s *chino* population experienced growth in the first half of the seventeenth century;” he notes also a *chino* “proclivity for partners of African descent” (121). The last part of the sentence quoted above reveals that he does not see Mexican *chinos* as Afrodescendants. Bennett may have assumed this because mentioned in the archival documents is: some of the people had met in Philippines during childhood or that they had arrived in Mexico via the Manila Galleon. Nevertheless, Philippine people were not Chinese then or now. The Tagalogs from the Philippines were known as *Philippine Indians* and not Chinese.

In the 1950 *Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado* dictionary, there are two entries for “chino.” In the first instance, “chino/china” means Chinese man or woman. The second “chino/china” is an American adjective and substantive that has diverse meanings depending on the country. In some countries the child of a Mulatto man and a Black woman is called “chino;” in others, “chino” is applied to the children of “Indian and Zambo; in Colombia chino means young man, ass; in El Salvador “chino” signifies bold headed or foul mouthed; in Cost Rica, chino refers to a furious or arrogant person; in Chile, a person of the lower classes is called “chino/china;” in Cuba, Mexico and Colombia, “chino” is a term of endearment. These three countries have a considerable population of Afrodescendant chinos.

As mentioned, the term “chino” in New Spain was a synonym of “pig.” It linked the “chino” *casta* with an animal, just as did Mulatto (Mule), Coyote, Lobo (wolf), and Cimarron (wild horse), among others. The first entry for “chino” in the *Diccionario breve de mexicanismos* (Brief Dictionary of Mexican Terms) presents “chino” as the masculine voice for a curl of hair; and “chino” and “china” as masculine and feminine adjectives that refer to curly hair. The Nahuatl term “*cuculuste*” meaning “curly hair” provides another piece of the puzzle.

Deborah E. Kanter in “Their Hair was Curly,” in addition to historicizing First Nations-African relations and the birth of Mexican Red-Black people, elucidates, Given this shared blood, physical differences between Afro-Mexicans and Indians were not always obvious. Sometimes a person’s ‘true’ race could be determined only by searching for a grandparent in a dusty old parish register or by a recollection of telltale curly hair. (165)

In addition,

The native population, so devastated in the first centuries of colonial rule, had recovered and was growing after 1700 [...] As a result, competition over land, even house sites, became endemic [...] Individuals who could not deny their mixed heritage faced dispossession, even expulsion from the pueblo. (171)

Although she makes no mention, Kanter’s work allows one to see the relation between the Nahuatl term “*cuculuste*” and “*pelo chino*” meaning “curly hair.”

Norma Angélica Castillo Palma and Susan Kellog in “Conflict and Cohabitation Between Afro-Mexicans and Nahuas in Central Mexico” explain further,

In Puebla, Tlaxcala and Veracruz, a *chino* or *china* was an individual of both indigenous and African descent, with the term referring to an individual of African heritage mixed with mestizo or indigenous heritage. In Guerrero, such individuals were termed *cambujos*. (135 n. 22)

Those interpretations above and the white aesthetic mentality underlying the name “chino,” within the context of New Spain, are further illustrated by the terms “Jarocho,” and “Cocho.” “Jarocho” was applied in the Veracruz region of New Spain to the African-First Nations offspring and “Cocho” was applied to the same in Michoacán. Aguirre expounds,

The Mulatto-Pardo was the product of the mix between the Black male with the Indian woman. Mulatto-Pardos were the most abundant in New Spain and the color of their skin produced the most varied and curious naming. [...] In general terms, we can assert that they were called *cochos* en Michoacán, *Cambujos* in Oaxaca, *chinos* in Puebla, *Jarochos* in Veracruz, *Loros* in Chiapas and *Zambos* in Guerrero; just to mention the most common. (169) (emphasis added)

Thus, *cocho*, *cambujo*, *chino*, *Jarocho*, and *loro* were synonyms and referents to people perceived as “dirty,” due to their African-First Nations lineage.⁷

Beyond the Mexican colonial and current connotation of “chino” meaning “curly hair,” the link of the word “chino” with pig (*cochino*) is lodged in the history of the Spanish medieval mentality. The term *Morisco* was forged in Spain in the late fifteenth century as a referent to the defeated Black Moors who converted to Catholicism to avoid expulsion. The *Moriscos*, just as the converted Jewish, who were suspected of practicing their original faiths, were called *marranos*, meaning dirty pigs. “Cochino” is a synonym of pig and dirty. *Moriscos* “were forbidden to wear their customary clothes, and were expressly prohibited from taking baths. Bathing was presumed to be prima facie evidence of apostasy. The phrase ‘the accused was known to take baths...’ is a common one in the records of the Inquisition” (Crow 149).

Antonia Ibarra Lario shows that “chino” is a synonym of “pig” in the speech of Lorca and its surrounding area in Andalusia, Spain. According to the *Diccionario de la lengua española*, the voice “china” signifies a small, sometimes round, stone and that the word derived from the child voice “chin,” an interjection used to call pigs.

According to the *Diccionario de la lengua española*, “*cochino*” derives from “*cocho*” which comes from “*coch*” (sound to call pigs) and two of its pertinent meanings are: a very dirty and untidy man; and a lewd man lacking manners. “Cochino” could have derived from “*cocho*” which comes from “*coch*” (sound to call pigs) and two of its pertinent meanings are: a very dirty and untidy man; and a lewd man lacking manners. The voices “*chin*” and “*coch*” are both pig calls. Inverted and juxtaposed these pig calls produce the voice “*coch-chin*.” With the addition of a final “a” or “o” the word signals a feminine or masculine gender. The result is, *coch-chin-a* / *coch-chin-o*. The loss of one of the two “ch” sounds is a matter of economy, the meaning is unaffected by the elimination of one, thus the terms *cochina/cochino* emerge.

The statutes regarding “*Limpieza de sangre*” (blood purity) appeared in Spain in the fifteenth century. Henceforth, in the sixteenth century, they were validated when all religious, military and civil congregations adopted them. It can be said that they are policies that barred the Jewish who had converted to Christianity and their descendants from diverse posts in the Church, universities, military, guilds and civil institutions. Later, the statutes were extended to the Moors, Protestants and people tried by the Saint Inquisition. (Chami)

The *conversos* (people who converted to Christianity) were the Jewish in Spain who adopted Christianity by force in the fourteenth century; or those who had adopted it instead of being banished from Spain in the fifteenth by order of the Catholic King and Queen. *Moriscos* were those Moors who had converted to Christianity. “These statutes of blood purity are race statutes as they depend on the origin and heritage of a person, and not on a crime or fault. The crime is to belong to the ‘Caste of New Jewish’ or *Moriscos*” (Chami). Converted Jewish and *Moriscos* suspected of practicing Judaism and Islamism secretly were called *marranos* (pigs).

Those lineage statutes were transferred to the Spanish colonies including New Spain and applied with unprecedented rigor to the Afrodescendant castas. The meaning behind the names *Jarocho*, *Cocho* and *Chino* in New Spain, all synonyms of “pig,” reveals a direct link to the above mentality. Spaniards forged white supremacy. They professed that they were the latest product in a chain of evolution. That Spaniards saw Afro-Mexicans as inferior, comparable to animals, becomes clear in the following quote “Especially in central Mexico, peasant rebels insulted district officials in the same terms that Spaniards had heaped upon them—“dog,” “nigger,” and “pig” (Taylor 117).

As mentioned, several ethnic groups tagged as “chinos” (pigs) entered New Spain via Acapulco, among them an unknown number of Sangleys, Southeast Asians, Hindi and Africans, among others. Still, “The Chinos in New Spain,” interprets the voice chino as meaning “Chinese” (Mongol type) and applies it to all and sundry. “The Chinos in New Spain” bypasses the etymology of the term and completely misses its primary meaning of “pig” as applied generally in New Spain and in various places of the Spanish empire until the nineteenth century. The term has preserved up to present its original reference to Afrodescendants in Mexico (*chino*) and Peru (*cholo-chino*).⁸

“The Chinos in New Spain” asserts that the image of the *chino* is distorted in the colonial casta paintings, because there is no “Chinese” (Mongol type) image recorded. *La pintura de castas: representaciones raciales en el Mexico del siglo XVIII* (simultaneously published as: *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*, in 2004) by Iona Katzew reports: “*Chino cambujo*” is the offspring of an “Indian male and Black female” (Casta Painting 108 circa 1761); “*China cambuja*” is the daughter of a “Black male and an Indian female” (Casta Painting 112, circa 1763); the mix between “*Barcina*” and an “Indian” male produces “*china*” (Casta Painting 156 circa 1770-1780). Noticeably, there is no image of an Asian component. The casta paintings have guided much of the research regarding colonial Mexico. In addition to the casta paintings, von Humboldt, and the current use of the term in Mexico, various reputable dictionaries confirm the connotation of “chino” as a referent to African offspring.

“The Chinos in New Spain” declares that “During the two and a half centuries of contact between the Philippines and the Viceroyalty of New Spain, a minimum of 40,000 to 60,000 Asian immigrants would set foot in the ‘City of Kings,’ while a figure double that amount (100,000) would be within the bounds of probability” (Slack 37). In footnote 3, “The Chinos in New Spain” cites, “Jonathan Israel contends that 6,000 Asian slaves were arriving [to Acapulco from Philippines] each decade of the early 1600s.” According to such figures, 600 slaves would have entered Acapulco annually.

The Manila galleon was supposed to leave Manila and arrive in Acapulco annually, although they did not arrive every year because many were lost, others succumbed to the weather, mutiny, or to pirates. Peter Gerhard, for the 214-year period between 1566 and 1784, mentions 148 recorded sailings from Acapulco (40 n. 34). To transport 600 slaves, and the food and water required for each individual’s survival (850 kg per person),⁹ it would have required a displacement of around 600 tons. In the light that one to two 300-ton¹⁰ galleons of the Manila-Acapulco route traveled during the last decades of the sixteenth century and the first of the seventeenth, arithmetic exposes the impossibility of transporting that number of enslaved even if the ships were used exclusively as slave transports.

To transport forty thousand enslaved individuals over 244 years the following is revealed: 40,000 divided by 244 (years of trade) equals 163 slaves per year: 163 times 850 kg of food and water per person equals 138 tons, slightly under half the 300 ton weight capacity of the first Manila Galleons. Keep in mind that slave contracts were handled on an individual basis (Aguirre 51). This would mean an additional 163 people to care for the enslaved and an additional 138 tons of food and water supplies. Even where the Manila Galleons were built to displace up to 1200 tons of cargo by the seventeenth century, it is hard to conceive that the number of enslaved in “The Chinos of New Spain” was the case where the Atlantic enslavers kept a watchful eye to protect a line of business they considered theirs. China ware, fine woodworks, rugs, silk, spices, etc. did not need water and food, could not revolt and were the declared main business of the Manila-Acapulco route.

At the beginning of the Manila-Acapulco *carrera* (route) small vessels of two to three hundred tons were used. Aguirre recounts,

toward the end of the sixteenth century a galleon laden with slaves and merchandise began to depart [Manila] toward New Spain; it unloaded its cargo in Acapulco and returned with Mexican silver, a metal appreciated by the Sangley. Later, 26 August 1633, the number of galleons was increased to four and then reduced again to one with larger cargo capacity of 600 to 800 tons. (50)

According to Cindy Vallar,

Spain eventually built much larger, more elaborate galleons with the combined purpose of carrying cargo and soldiers. More than two thousand trees--pine, cedar, oak, and mahogany--were required to build the largest of these, some of which became the warships that guarded the *flota*, or fleet, of vessels bound for Spain from the New World with holds laden with riches. A typical galleon weighed five hundred tons, but the largest were 1,200 tons. The high superstructure, which clearly identified a Spanish galleon, made the ship clumsy and slow. While larger [...], life aboard the galleon was no better for mariners than previously designed ships. Wealthy or influential passengers plus their servants could put the total number of people aboard a galleon at two hundred soldiers and sailors and up to fifty civilians, which made for very cramped quarters.

Another source reports:

On September 20, 1638, the *Nuestra Senora de la Concepción*, a Spanish galleon plying the lucrative trade route between Manila in the Philippines and Acapulco, foundered in bad weather and was hurled onto a reef. Most of the 400 people on board perished, and her precious cargo from the Orient spilled into the sea.

At the southernmost point of Saipan, in the Northern Mariana Islands (200 miles north of Guam), one of the grand Spanish merchant ships [foundered]-- loaded with Chinese silks/rugs, porcelain, ivory, cotton from India, ivory from Cambodia, camphor from Borneo, cinnamon and pepper and clove from the Spice Islands, band precious jewels from Burma, Ceylon, and Siam. (Spanish Galleon Trade)

Aguirre mentions that on occasion slaver ships entered Acapulco (52); and there are accounts of whole crews jumping ship in Acapulco. It is unlikely that every Manila ship was full of enslaved and even where whole crews jumped ship this cannot support the number of "Chinese" asserted as entering Mexico. Who were the crewmembers? Were all the crewmembers Tagalog or Sangley? How were the Tagalog called during the various centuries before Spanish bureaucrats adopted the name "chino," to replace Sangley? Would the Spanish and the populations at large trust that many Sangleys in New Spain given their known rebelliousness? According to Thomas,

In New Spain (Mexico) the scarcity of slaves from Africa did for a time lead colonists to use the Philippines as a source for a few workers: the Manila galleons which made their regular journeys across the Pacific from Manila to Acapulco after 1565 rarely failed to bring one or two slaves. (137)

Manuel Ollé informs that soon after the Spanish conquest of the Archipelago, they named it “Philippines,” the Chinese merchants who came to Manila were identified in Spanish sources as “Sangleys” or “Sangleyes.” The Spanish authorities in Manila attempted to establish a quota for the accepted Sangley merchants; as the numbers swelled, the Spanish carried out a sort of “‘ethnic cleansing’ in which the Spanish of Manila executed in total many tens of thousands of [Sangleys] throughout the seventeenth century, as a response to rebellions, [and] indications of conspiracies” (43).

The first Sangley rebellions were related to their “quasi” forced recruitment for the diverse “pacifying” campaigns of the Philippine Islands. A case is cited where a crew made of 250 Sangley rebelled on board a Spanish “pacifying” ship and killed all Spaniards including “Governor Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas” (Ollé 44). “The recurring uprisings in protest and the ensuing summary repressions and exterminations with tens of thousands of dead Sangleys in each case, respond to precise historical circumstances” (Ollé 44-45). A few hundred armed Spaniards lived inside the city walls under constant fear that the Sangleys would overpower them. Henry Kamen cites, “The Spanish governor in 1768 calculated that there had been fourteen sanguinary [Sangley] insurrections since the founding of the colony, perhaps the most serious of them in 1603 when the [Sangley] killed nearly half of the Spanish population” (220).

Some 30,000 Sangley, who provided the Spaniards’ livelihood, inhabited outside the walls and in the towns surrounding the area. Thus, the question must be asked, would the few Spaniards who commanded the Manila Galleons risk navigating months with Sangley crews (who were well versed in the Spanish mentality) in the long lonely journey across the Pacific? Would the Spanish authorities in New Spain allow such a large migration of rebellious Sangley? How about the cultural endowments that such a sizable population of Sangley/Chinese would have brought along? Where is it?

“The Chinos in New Spain” by mistranslating the Mexican term “chino” as “Chinese” invents Chinese Catholic brotherhoods, Chinese militias, and Chinese generals of the Mexican Insurgent movement. Said work claims that in New Spain there were companies of “Chinese” (Mongol type) militias (Slack 52). The essay positions these supposedly “Chinese” militias in the hot lands of Mexico and asserts that “Ethnically speaking they were mostly Tagal, Pampangan, or *mestizos de Sangley* [Chinese mixes] who came over in the China ships in the eighteenth century as sailors, and included offspring from several generations of interracial unions” (Slack 52). According to the Spanish census of 1745, Acapulco had a population “of around four hundred families of chinos, mulattos and blacks” (Villaseñor 171).

These Acapulco *chinos* appear in the first position of importance signaling that they were the largest portion of the population. The *chinos* of the hot lands were acclimatized *cuculustes* or curly-haired people who had been there for generations. Where are the Sangley legacies of Acapulco, Atoya, or Coyuca towns? Nonetheless, the cultures of the South Pacific regions of Mexico, as in other places, reveal a rich African-First Nations heritage in the food, music, dance and world visions, among others.

Regarding religious brotherhoods or *cofradías*, “The Chinos in New Spain” cites the Italian traveler Gemelli Carreri as the source for identifying a Mexico City *Cofradía de Chinos* “through that which is called the procession of the Chinese, because those going out were Indians of the Philippines” (Slack 53). The zealous Catholic Church allowed this type of organization among Catholic orders who oversaw casta confraternities of Blacks, Mulattoes, Pardos, Zambos, *chinos*, and mestizos. Keeping in mind that the Spaniards did not exchange with other Middle Kingdom people, except the *Sangley* and the *Sangley* were systematically exterminated, when and where did the *Sangley* learn to trust the Spanish enough to convert to Catholicism by the thousands?

On the other hand, the Spanish never trusted the Moors, Jewish, First Nations, Blacks and Black offspring as true converts to Catholicism; this is lodged in the Spanish language written of earlier. Why would the Spanish view the *Sangley* differently and trust them in large groups across the Pacific ocean right into the heart of Spanish New Spain’s urban centers, mines, plantations, roads, transportation, homes, among others? Where are the *Sangley* cowboys of Mexico, what do they sing and eat? Julio Cesar de Tavares, in another context that applies elucidates, “there will never be a [cultural] space absolutely shielded and able to conceal the flow of the characteristics and parts of a civilization” (85). The traveler Carreri cited in “The Chinos in New Spain” mentions Philippine Indians and not *Sangley*. This begs the question, how can the confraternity be Chinese?

Although Tagalog, Malay, Javanese, Papuans, Timorous, Mozambique-ans, etc. entered Mexico, at the end of the day they were “scarce” (Aguirre 143-48) (Thomas 369 note). Otherwise, the cultures of the regions would show a Chinese influence of a sort. The lands, histories and cultures that “The Chinos in New Spain” is usurping—even if unintentionally, belongs to Africans and their Diaspora offspring also known as Chinacos, Cochos, Jarochos, Boshitos, Chocos, Campechanos, Cambujos, Lobos, Coyotes, Loros, Mulatos, Prietos, Pintos, Pardos, Chilangos, Pelados, Costeños, etc. The Black female partner of the *chino* is known as “China Poblana,” “China Tehuana,” “China Jarocha,” “China Tapatía,” etc. During the Manumission war of 1810-1821, the *Charro* of today was known as *Chinaco*, which evolved from the term “*chino*” (pig). In Mexico, the *Chinaco* was the Insurgent soldier, who formed the Black Armies of the South. His female partner is known as the “China.”¹¹

The *Chinacos* came from all over the country as seen in the places in Map 1 of the “The Chinos in New Spain” entitled “Chino Demographic Distribution in New Spain, 1590-1815.” The *Chinacos*, under the leadership of José María Morelos y Pavón, formed the Black Armies of the South who were instrumental in obtaining manumission and Independence from Spain. The *Chinacos* played a fundamental role in building the Mexican nation and its ethos. This is reconstructed in another work by this author.¹² Another portion of the *chino* history has been documented in works and cultural texts previously analyzed.¹³

“The Chinos in New Spain” lacks the foundations necessary to demand sharing a cultural and physical space that was hard-won by the children of Chango and Yemaya: the *zamba rumberos* who learned the pulse of the lands of Anahuac and its life forms. We are talking about the people who worked the land and fertilized it with their blood, sweat and tears. Those *chinos cochinos*, not Chinese but African and their descendants, produced Mexico and the rainbow of African-based identities, including those mentioned above.

There were Philippines, Sangleyes, Japanese, Tamils, Hindi, Malays, Cebuans, Negritos, Kefirs, Bantues, Malagasy, etc. who entered New Spain via Acapulco during the 244 years of the Acapulco-Manila trade. Upon arrival, as a whole, everybody as a unit entered as “chinos” meaning non-white. Archival documents refer to Tagalogs and others from the Philippine Archipelago as *Indios Filipinos*. If *Filipinos* Tagalogs were the majority of Asians who arrived in New Spain during the period 1571-1815 and not *Sangley*, then “Chino” meaning Chinese cannot apply to *Indios Filipinos*. It must also be understood that the homonym *chino* meaning Chinese that developed currency in nineteenth-century Philippines applies only to the *Sangley* and therefore is not a referent to the *Indios Filipinos*, other Asians or the Mexican *chinos* of African descent.

Up to the nineteenth century, “*chino*” in New Spain was a Spanish-invented label to refer to those with tainted non-white lineages. Said people included a small number of diverse populations from areas today called China, the Philippines and other places of Asia. However, it had no association specifically with the idea of Mongolian type. Africans who entered via that route were called “chinos” as well. It was in the nineteenth century, that a new connotation or homonym of the term “chino” replaced *Sangley* to refer to Chinese people. Thus, the term “chino” in the Mexican colonial archives is mainly a referent to African-First Nations offspring.

The Mexico City “Chinese ghetto” of San Juan mentioned in “The Chinos in New Spain,” (Slack 43) is located in the area of San Juan market next to the Alameda central park. There are various Chinese restaurants and businesses sprinkled within a few blocks; whether Chinese merchants have occupied this area since colonial times or if it is a newer development connected to post-Colonial Chinese migrations needs to be documented. The *Chinaca* (*chinacos* and *chinas* as a group) however, is preponderant in San Juan and all surrounding barrios: Tepito, Lagunilla, Peralvillo, Centro, Viaducto, Doctores, Guerrero, San Simon, and Morelos, among others.

The diverse Asian, including Chinese-*Sangley*, immigration to New Spain requires and deserves further study. During the period 1521 and 1594, 36,000 slaves arrived in Mexico (Cope 13). “The vast majority of these slaves were Africans” although “parish records reveal the existence of a few enslaved *Filipinos* (called *chinos*) and Chichimecs (Indians from Northern New Spain captured during wars)” (Cope 174 n.27). *Filipinos* negotiated their new environment by relating to Afrodescendants. *Filipinos* appear in some colonial documents as *Chinos Filipinos*; “chino” in this context connotes their non-white lineage, just as is the case of Afromexican *chinos*. The term “chino” found in “The Chinos in New Spain,” is based on the “chino” mistranslation in von Humboldt and various works that have followed suit. The vitiated circle of misunderstanding needs to be broken. This will open the door for renewed research in the area of Mexican Asian Studies and a robust dialogue with African Mexican Studies.

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Endnotes

¹ See full citation in Bibliography under von Humboldt.

² “Frijoles chinitos,” a specialty in Chinese restaurants of Mexico City are black refried beans that resemble curly or Afro hair.

³ There were various First Nations with different names in the region.

⁴ This work subscribes to the notion that there is one human race of multiple ethnicities. It acknowledges Mexico’s African, First Nations, Asian, and European ethnic heritages. Contrary to the African-disappearance-by-miscegenation-hypothesis-turned-ideology, it is based on the theory of the widespread Africanization of Mexico from the sixteenth century onward, introduced by this author in a previous study.

⁵ Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie. According to Anderson, this Dutch company imagined “with its trans-oceanic eye an endless series of Chinezen” when they began to lump under the denomination of “*Chinees*” the “heterogeneous populations of the Middle Kingdom; of the mutual incomprehensibility of many of their spoken languages; and of the peculiar social and geographic origins of their diaspora across costal Southeast Asia” (168).

⁶ In 1999, The Spanish translation of *Race, Class and Politics in Mexico* was in its third printing (1000 books printed) by the prestigious editorial house Fondo de Cultura Económica.

⁷ The expression “Chino libre” [Free Chino] in Mexico refers to a person without obligations or a boss to obey.

⁸ According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*:

“Cholo ‘Indian or mixed-race person of Latin America,’ 1851, from American Spanish. (c.1600), said to be from Nahuatl (Aztec) *xolotl* “dog, mutt.” Proposed derivation from Mexican city of *Cholula* seems too late, if this is the same word. In U.S., used of lower-class Mexican immigrants, but by 1970s the word began to be embraced in Latino gang slang in a positive sense.” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Cholo>. 27 Feb. 2011.

In Peru Black-Indians are called “cholos-chinos.” Cholo derives from “Xolotl, the Twin, the Shapeshifter, Venus as the Evening Star, the Lord of the West, Double of Quetzalcoatl. Xolotl is the dog-like deity, often depicted with ragged ears. He is identified with sickness and physical deformity. As a double of *Quetzalcoatl*, he carries his conch-like *ehcailacacozcaatl* or *wind jewel*. Xolotl accompanied *Quetzalcoatl* to *Mictlan*, *Land of the Death* or the underworld, to retrieve the bones from those who inhabited the previous world (*Nahui Atl*) to create new life for the present world, *Nahui Ollin*, the sun of movement. In a sense, this re-creation of life is reacted every night when Xolotl guides the sun through the underworld. In the tonalpohualli, Xolotl rules over day Ollin (movement) and over trecena 1-Cozacuauhtli (vulture).” <http://www.azteccalendar.com/god/xolotl.html>. 27 February 2011.

⁹ <http://www.armada15001900.net/galeonconstruccion/avituallamiento.htm>

¹⁰ http://www.maquetasnavales.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78:srapiar&catid=31:corbetas&Itemid=37

¹¹ Interestingly, the female partner of the Pampa’s gaucho is a “China” as well. The myth goes that “china” in the Pampas’ case evolved from the Quechua word for young woman. In Mexico today, young *chinas* are called *chamacas*, a term derived from *zambaca* through Spanish linguistic diversity, Castillian /z/ of *zambaca* may be pronounced as /ch/ambaca by a Galician. The loss of the central /b/ can be attributed to syncopation, thus “chamaca/ chamaco.” *Zamba/Samba* is a synonym of Black; the suffix “ca” adds a pejorative tone to the stem.

¹² “The Black Armies of the South: A Historical Reconstruction of The Mexican War of Manumission and Independence (1810-1821)” Forthcoming.

¹³ See: *The Africanization of Mexico from the Sixteenth Century Onward: A Review of the Evidence*. (Foreword by Dr. Álvaro Ochoa Serrano, Colegio Michoacense, Mexico). Lewiston: E. Mellen P., 2010. *África en México: una herencia repudiada* (Africa in Mexico: a Repudiated Heritage) (Foreword by Dr. Quince Duncan, Professor Emeritus Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica). Lewiston: E. Mellen P, 2007. *África en el Carnaval Mexicano. (Africa in Mexican Carnival)* (prologue by Dr. Ian I. Smart, Howard U.) México D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2005. *African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation*. (Foreword by Dr. Richard L. Jackson, Dean of Afro-Hispanic Literary Criticism, Professor Emeritus Carleton University, Ontario, Canada) Lanham: University P of America, 2004.