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On The Koxinga Threat of 1662

CHARLES J. MCCARTHY, S.J.

A pivotal point in the colonial history of Spain and the Philippines was Governor Sebastian Manrique de Lara's 1662 decision, in response to threats from Koxinga, to strip his outposts in Iligan, Zamboanga and the Moluccas of their garrisons, and to take costly, draconian measures in Manila. These measures included banishment or sequestration of the Chinese in the Islands. The subsequent dissipation of the Koxinga threat made his precautionary steps appear unnecessary. At the time, Jesuit missionaries protested the decisions which De Lara felt he had to make, and since then, historians have censured the Governor for having thrown away immense resources because of panic.

A suspicion, as a consequence of the hysteria during the Koxinga incident, survived through the years that the Sangleyes (overseas Chinese) of Luzon were a potential fifth column, likely to prove disloyal in time of foreign attack. This suspicion of political unreliability has become, perhaps even to these days, part of a stereotype detrimental to full sympathy and integration between Filipinos and Chinese.

These pages are written with intent to offer material for a fairer judgment of De Lara's policies, and for a more understanding assessment of the plight and losses experienced by the Manila Chinese during this tragic episode.

In 1664 non-Chinese *Manchus* from northeast "borderlands" beyond the Great Wall ousted a worn-out Chinese Ming dynasty from the imperial throne of Peking. Down the north-China plain, and then on to Yunnan in the southwest and Canton in the southeast, forces, Chinese by race and loyal to the Ming rulers, fought a rear-guard action for more than fifteen years. The fighting was sporadic, but at times it was appalling in savagery. Chinese records tell how non-combatants in several besieged or ravaged cities perished literally by the hundreds of thousands. Early in the turmoil, in 1643, Li Tzu-chéng tried to take Kaifeng in Honan province, but found the city's 50 foot walls too high to scale and too stout to breach by projectiles and mines. He withdrew to higher ground, got boats or rafts for his army, and cut away a great hole in the Yellow River embankment at Nia Chia-K'ou, not far from Kaifeng. In the countryside 100,000 peasants perished; the flood swept into Kaifeng through its north gate.

A million people were crowded within the city; of these scarcely one-tenth escaped alive.¹

The city of Yangchow is strategically placed where the Grand Canal (China's north-south trade artery) meets the north bank of the Yangtse river, the great east-west waterway. There the Ming general, Shih K'o-feng in 1646 bravely defied siege by Manchu hordes. When they broke in, the Tartars killed, raped, and burned ruthlessly. "Here and there on the ground," an eyewitness recounted, "lay small babies who were trampled either under the hooves of the Manchu horses or the feet of soldiers. The ground was stained with blood and covered with mutilated and dismembered bodies, and the sound of sobbing was heard everywhere in the fields. Every gutter and pond was filled with corpses lying one upon the other. The blood turned the water to a deep greenish-red color, and the ponds were filled to the brim. . . . According to the official records of bodies found, the total number of those who perished during those days was 800,000, but this does not include those whose bodies were consumed in the flames or who drowned themselves in the river."²

"Canton, after an investment of 10 months, was captured and a horrible massacre took place in which over 100,000 persons perished. In Szechwan the Ming 'Western Monarch' reacted to an uprising by putting 30,000 *literati* to death. . . . This monarch believed his army would be invincible if only his soldiers were free of domestic ties. So, at his bidding, 4,000 women were slain."³

In the tide of war, an old walled city could change swiftly from being a safe shelter to being a fearsome death-trap. Although China then was somewhat sealed off under a bell jar, without a mass media communicating news to or from the outside world, it is hard to see how echoes of these events would not reach the Manila Sangleys, and then scurry next door to the rumor-prone people of Intramuros. Within fairly well-recorded history, and without benefit of A-bombs, terror struck at hearts with intensity not surpassed by Hiroshima, Stalingrad, or Dresden in World War II.⁴

¹ Backhouse and Bland, *Memoirs and Annals of the Court of Peking* (London: Wm. Heinemann).

² "Diary of an Eye-witness," *Ibid.*, pp. 188-207.

³ H. H. Gowen, *Outline History of China* (Boston, Sherman and French, 1917), p. 186.

⁴ "This was the greatest conflagration and havoc the world has seen. . . . only populous China could be the fit theatre for such a tragedy and only the cruel barbarity of the Tartars could make them the inventors and executors of such destruction." Casimiro Diaz, O.S.A., *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas* (Valladolid: Luis de Gavia, 1890), p. 619

The pro-Ming patriots broke into segments. Tasting defeat, they became demoralized. But one of their leaders, Cheng Ch'eng-kung, proved himself an able and resolute commander on land and sea. Macao Portuguese wrote his name into Western annals as Koxinga; the Dutch, with piracy aplenty in their hearts, dubbed him for Western history as a pirate. But in China, in his own time and today, he has been regarded as a patriot-hero.⁵

Koxinga fought loyally for the Ming cause. He took Amoy in 1653, after storming and sacking other cities along the China coast. In the Yangtse river he seized Tsungming island and the important forts at Chinkiang. He led 50,000 cavalry and 70,000 foot-soldiers in the Yangtse campaign. Ten thousand of the infantry wore armor of mail and were known as the *Iron Men*. In the front ranks of Koxinga's battle array, they hacked the hooves from the Tartar horses which the dread Manchu cavalry rode. When, however, he tried to

⁵ Koxinga was born in Japan; his Japanese mother was of illustrious family. His father, Cheng Chih-lung (likewise known as Iquan or Icoa) played a part in Philippine history. Without paying for them, he picked up oriental goods from cargo ships plying the Nagasaki-Taiwan and Amoy-Taiwan sea lanes, and at cut-price but pure profit marketed a share of them in Manila, with few questions asked, for export to Mexico and the western world. Governor Corcuera cast upon Cheng Chih-lung some blame for occasioning the Sangley massacre of 1639, but gave no details to prove intrigue (cf. de Zuñiga, *Estadismo*, II, p. 53.) Cheng served under the Ming regime as commander of the imperial fleet in South China, and later held office under the Manchus also. Finally, however, he was recalled to Peking where in 1661 he was executed. In his youth, at Macao, he had been baptized a Christian and named Nicolas. Some historians (Goddard and de Zuñiga) say that he had come to reside in the Manila Parian as merchant and tailor, and that his baptism took place here, before he settled in Japan. Conversant with the Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Japanese languages, he readily found employment from the Dutch as interpreter and middleman. What he learned from them about the basics of sea power, he soon applied on his own to the waters and ships of the China Sea; by 1630 he directed a fleet of his own out of Amoy. The 1661 sentence of execution was passed on him in Peking when Koxinga, his son, flatly refused to turn the fleet over to the Manchu regime. Cheng Chih-lung, in his last days, returned to the Christian faith which he had neglected for four turbulent decades. He attended Mass daily in a small Peking chapel; two missionary friends, the Portuguese, Gabriel de Magalhães and the Italian Luigi Buglio, administered the Sacraments to him before he died (Goddard and Davidson).

re-take the city of Nanking, dissension among his officers snatched victory from him just when it seemed within his grasp.⁶

This Nanking defeat made Koxinga return to his base along the Fukien coast. The Manchu troops could not dislodge him directly, but they moved towns and villages inland, and scorched the earth in a belt six-leagues wide around his mainland bridgehead.⁷ Koxinga could only look across the Straits of Formosa for the safe base and ample provisions he needed. He assembled an expeditionary force of 26,000 crack troops, sailed from Amoy, and soon enough forced the 2,200-man Dutch garrison at Fort Zelandia (Tainan of today) to surrender all of Formosa to his Chinese rule.⁸

In May, 1662, Koxinga sent de Lara an embassy and letter demanding that the Manila authorities submit promptly and fully to his sovereignty. Since 1653 he had held *de facto* control of the waters and cities where Philippine-China trade flourished. The Governor of Manila, Manrique de Lara, had entered rather friendly trade agreements with him in 1656. Koxinga's success in seizing Taiwan, however, emboldened him to try to extend his island base (for recovery of the mainland) by adding to it the Philippines, wrested from the Spaniards. The letter read, in part: "You have oppressed and maltreated our junk traders as badly as did the Dutch anywhere; you have been double-dealers and sowers of discord. I have hundreds of thousands of trained troops and thousands of ships, and am now based only a day's voyage from the Philippines. I first thought of going with my fleet to punish your evil ways, but then reflected that in recent years you have shown some readiness for repentance.

⁶ This "purpose to be crowned at Nanking and regain the kingdom from the Tartar ruler of Great China had caused Koxinga's cruelty, so great that more than three million had died for his satisfaction alone." (The report, *Events in Manila, 1662-1663*, in Blair and Robertson, *History of the Philippines*, vol. 36, p. 252. The writing of this document is placed at July 1663; Manila, then, really knew of Koxinga's mainland ruthlessness.)

⁷ Precautions against Koxinga in Fukien and Chekiang "wrought more destruction than his cruelty could have.... The Manchus felt forced to depopulate the extensive coasts, a strip of land six leagues deep, embracing cities of one to two hundred thousand inhabitants, lest they furnish supplies and men to Koxinga", (*Events....* Blair and Robertson vol. 36, p. 252).

⁸ "Men uprooted in the scorched-earth zone, finding themselves without land or settled way of life, crowded into the corsair's service to spend their lives or maintain themselves on the abundant booty offered them by his power as absolute master of the seas". *Ibid.*, p. 253.

So I keep the fleet here in Taiwan and send this embassy, announcing that the Spaniards must acknowledge my sovereignty and send me tribute. Otherwise, I shall destroy you all."⁹

Fr. Vittorio Ricci, an Italian Dominican, was the ambassador who bore this stern message to Manila, May 5, 1662. Ricci had served the spiritual needs of Manila Sangleys from 1648 to 1655, and then had preached seven years in Amoy, gaining the respect and confidence of Koxinga. Koxinga's military resources at the time seemed formidable indeed. His fleet was large, and his fighting men bade fair to sweep aside the thin ranks of Spanish defenders in the Philippines.¹⁰ Terror sat on his side, for the soldiers of the Ming-Tartar battles had been hardened to atrocity and slaughter.¹¹ The swift collapse of Dutch defenses in Formosa must have impressed the Spanish Governor; it was the first major defeat of western forces by orientals. With full concurrence of his Council, however, De Lara decided to send by Ricci a reply flatly rejecting Koxinga's demand to surrender. But the demand spurred him to drastic action.

From Mindanao and the Moluccas, the Governor recalled whatever Spanish garrison forces were posted there. This measure took Spain permanently out of what is modern Indonesia, and set back by decades the "pacification" of Mindanao. By hindsight, de Lara's move has been judged unwise even tactically, for it did little to build up Manila's fighting strength. Had these troops been left free to operate outside Manila, they could later have created a diversion, troublesome to forces which might attack the city itself.¹² Yet at the time, Manila's defenses were woefully weak; without more troops de Lara must have seen that he could not offer even token resistance to forces of the quantity and quality Koxinga commanded.

In Manila, the Governor levied native troops who swaggered and breathed bold threats as young recruits do.¹³ The residents were put

⁹ Text in Pedro Murillo Velarde, S.J., *Historia de la provincia de Philipinas* (Manila, 1749: Nicolas de la Cruz Bagay), n. 642.

¹⁰ Eyewitnesses told de Lara that Koxinga had 15,000 junks; many of them carried 40 guns. (*Events* . . . , in Blair and Robertson, v. 36, p. 220.) "Manila had not 600 soldiers, and of these hardly 200 were in condition for the hardships of a campaign or for service on the walls." *Ibid.*

¹¹ "For that arrogant tyrant, it was the same to slay five or six thousand men as it was to kill one," *Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹² Cf. H. de la Costa, S.J., *Jesuits in the Philippines* (Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 484.

¹³ "Irresponsible soldiers told the Sangleys they were to have their heads cut off, and were men already condemned to death. They

to work feverishly digging ditches and filling breastworks. The city took on the tone of an armed camp. Muñoz, an engineer among the friars, designed and built a fortified gate able to mount 20 heavy guns, "which could fire directly at the Chinese in the Parian, our domestic enemies," he wrote with strange relish.¹⁴ This hubbub, and the sense of grave threat over the city, naturally alarmed the Chinese in the Parian.¹⁵

To obtain more quickly ready-cut stone for his elaborate new fortifications, and to clear the city's approach of vantage points an enemy might use for observation or command posts, or to screen its attack, de Lara ordered the main suburban churches (of Bagumbayan, Ermita, Malate, Parañaque, Dilao, Santa Cruz and Binondo) levelled to the ground. "How much more harm could this heathen, Koxinga, have done us, even had he actually come?" men asked. The countryside was scoured to provision the city against siege; the south was stripped of defenders. Construction work on walls and fort, which normally would have been slow and costly, went up rapidly and with no great output of money.

De Lara and his Council feared that the Chinese who then lived in the Philippines might "in an emergency dangerously divide our attention and forces." The majority wanted to banish the 11,000 non-Christians and let the 4,000 Christian Chinese remain. They soon learned, however, that they lacked shipping-space to deport so many. "One junk departed for Taiwan with 1300 deportees, so crowded that they could hardly sit down; the cost to each was ten pesos."¹⁶ De Lara then ordered all the Chinese still in the city or in the provinces to gather in a Parian-Binondo internment zone.

As in other cases, the several accounts of various historians reflect considerable confusion in the details and sequence of the events they narrate. Fr. De La Costa writes: "De Lara's ordinance was broadcast in Manila and the provinces. Again mobs thirsting for loot taunted and harried the Chinese into providing them with some excuse for anticipating the ordinance."¹⁷ A demonstration of the Parian residents

uttered a thousand insults and inflicted many injuries on them." (*Events...* in Blair and Robertson, v. 36, p. 222.)

¹⁴ Letter of Muñoz, in Colin, III, p. 825 (cited by Santamaria. O.P., in *Chinese in the Philippines*, vol. I), n. 110.

¹⁵ "From the first news of Ricci's embassy and Koxinga's letter, the Sangley's were afraid for their lives and safety." (*Events...* loc. cit., p. 240).

¹⁶ Events, loc. cit., p. 240.

¹⁷ "By May 26, so many lies were current against the Sangleys, and these were so well received by those who desired to destroy them, persons actuated more by avarice and selfishness than by interest in

before the city gate was mistaken by the garrison for a general uprising.¹⁸ With no more ado, they shelled the entire quarter, causing much carnage and sending the survivors along with the Chinese from the suburbs fleeing out into the countryside. Manrique de Lara had succeeded in producing precisely what he wanted to forestall, a Chinese rebellion."¹⁹ De Zuñiga reports that the Chinese merchants "believed that the knife was already at their throats; a number fled to the mountains, from which some passed at great risk in small boats to Formosa. On the day the Governor summoned the Chinese leaders to inform them that they must leave the Islands, the rest of the Chinese, believing they were all to be murdered, took up arms. But the Dominican friars had enough influence to prevail on them to keep quiet."²⁰ Davidson, with access to Formosan sources, says that violence broke out with the killing of a Spaniard in the market-place. Suddenly artillery fire poured into the Parian (a loaded gun not seldom goes off.) "Many peaceful Chinese traders, in terror, hanged themselves; many were drowned trying to reach small boats and escape to sea. A few did safely arrive in Taiwan and joined Koxinga's camp.... Eight or nine thousand Chinese remained quiet, ready for any emergency; they were suddenly attacked by the Spaniards and natives. The confusion was general until the Governor sent the ambassador, Fr. Ricci, and a certain friar, Jose de Madrid, to parley with them. The Chinese accepted the terms offered through Ricci,

the welfare of the community, that even the more cautious and prudent were assailed by doubts.... Evil advisers are the great danger.... One seldom finds a person who is not interested in the ruin of the Sangleys: some led by prospect of loot, some borrowers from the Chinese with loans to repay, some guarantors of profligate borrowers, some holders of merchandise bought from Sangleys merchants on credit, some 'friends' to whom the Chinese had entrusted articles or moneys for safekeeping. Simply to liquidate the Chinese and so clear accounts without payments was an alluring temptation. In 1639 it was found that those in whom the Sangleys put more confidence were the first and most importunate voters for their ruin". ("Events...." *loc. cit.*, pp. 230, 232.)

¹⁸ "It was evident their determination was not to revolt, but to flee as best they could from the death which they regarded as certain" ("Events...." *loc. cit.*, p. 223).

¹⁹ *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, p. 484.

²⁰ "On the morning of the 25th, the Governor tolled a bell to summon all the Sangleys ship captains in port to a meeting, so that more security could be provided the fear ridden Sangleys in the Parian. All the Chinese watched until thirty of the more uneasy, seeing the last captain about to enter the gate, intercepted him that he might become their leader. A guard on the walls suspected them of greater

who returned to consult the Governor, leaving Fr. de Madrid with the rebels. But when Ricci went back with a general pardon and a promise to restore the two junk masters, he found that malcontents had beheaded the priest. A general carnage of the Chinese followed."²¹ Davidson suggests a larger and more general loss of life than occurred. De Lara, by restraint and fairness, kept the number of casualties far below what it might have been.

About 2,000 Chinese rejected the offer and withdrew to the San Mateo hills, fortifying themselves there. Francisco Lacsamana, the Filipino master-of-camp, with a force of Pampango militia, pursued them and killed 1,000 Chinese. The rest surrendered; of these, two ringleaders were executed. On July 10, Ricci sailed for Taiwan with de Lara's reply to Koxinga's "ultimatum". Upon reaching Taiwan, he was accused by Manila escapees of having betrayed Chinese interests, and for a time was in grave personal danger. Koxinga heard of the threats and slaughter suffered by the Manila Chinese, and at once began to organize a large expedition which would wreak vengeance on the Spaniards.

Suddenly, however, the whole menace causing all this commotion was dissipated. The Chinese invasion fleet never left Taiwan. On Jan. 10, 1663, after a week of coughing and fever, Koxinga died "of an illness which had been plaguing him a long time", apparently tuberculosis.²²

In Amoy, Cheng Ching, Koxinga's eldest son, claimed the right to succeed his father. He had, however, been in Koxinga's disfavor, because he had begotten a son and heir-apparent by one of his father's concubines. The Formosan "court" did not want to see this child (Cheng, K'o-tseng) of such antecedents advanced to the position of successor to headship of the rising dynasty or House of Cheng. An uncle, Cheng Shih-hsi, claimed the right to rule Formosa, but when Cheng Ching landed there with his troops the uncle yielded to him without fighting.

At about this time the Manchus, subjugating west and southwest China, had driven the chief Ming pretender into Burma. Mopping-up

designs, took up his weapon and, without the order he should have had for doing so, shot down some Sangleys. The Sargento Mayor fired two cannons...and bloodshed began." (De Zuñiga, *History*, p. 118; Cf. "Events....," in Blair and Robertson, v. 36, p. 223.)

²¹ James W. Davidson, *The Island of Formosa* (Taiwan, 1903), p. 55.

²² Historians are not agreed on these exact dates; perhaps discrepancies between Chinese and western calendars have not been rightly reconciled.

work in that sector was almost completed, and the Tartar force was ready to return and close a pincer from west and north on the resistance pocket along the southeast coast. Dutch forces also reappeared in China waters and seemed hopeful of retaking Formosa. With help from the Dutch, the Manchu forces occupied Amoy and the last loyalist strongholds on the mainland coast. (However, reciprocal help was not forthcoming from Peking when the Dutch sailed against Taiwan and asked for Manchu aid.)

Notwithstanding these pressures, some of Koxinga's lieutenants urged his son to carry on the planned campaign against Luzon.²³ But most of his counsellors advised against it. Ricci persuaded Cheng Ching that he had more advantage to gain from trade with the Spaniards than from armed action. In April 1663, Cheng Ching sent Ricci again as legate to Manila. No conditions to peace were imposed beyond restitution of expropriated Sangley properties which remained in the custody of private citizens. In Manila, the need of Chinese craftsmen and traders was being keenly felt. Ricci concluded a treaty of amity and commerce between the new Taiwan regime and the Spaniards.

This crisis was an aftershock of upheaval during the mainland change of dynasties. As in other outbreaks, however, brooding mistrust, antipathy and lack of communication escalated a needless tragedy so that it shattered many homes, destroyed much property, and cut short a thousand lives and more. Deep and lasting wounds were inflicted upon fraternal good will between Chinese and Filipinos. Fear and suspicion only provoked more fear and suspicion; oppressive treatment begot rebellion. "If you want your neighbor's dog to be enraged, announce that it is rabid," wrote Rizal in this precise context.²⁴

²³ "Koxinga's plan early in 1662 was: Provoke a war and take the Philippines. With his son, Cheng Ching, controlling the south coast of China with his fleet, and with his own dominance over the Pescadores and Formosa, possession of the Philippines would complete Koxinga's command of the China Sea, and assure him of good bases and supplies for a campaign to recover the mainland, including Peking. He could land a two-pronged force, first, in South China and then in North China, crowd the Manchus into an ever-narrowing corridor, and eventually close the pincers to crush these invaders of his country into its dust. Then Ming emperors would rule over China again. It does not seem that Koxinga planned to set up his own 'House of Cheng' as a new dynasty." [W. C. Goddard, *Formosa, A Study in Chinese History* (Michigan State U. Press and Macmillan, London, 1966), pp. 83-85].

²⁴ In Rizal's edition of De Morga's *Historical Events of the Philippine Islands* (Paris, 1899), republished in Rizal Centennial Edition, (Manila, 1962), p. 208.

Extremism and inhumanity raise walls which keep people at a distance affectively for long years, even though, as every Chinese child learns early: "*Sshu hai chih nei chieh hsiung-ti yeh*—Within the four seas, all men are brothers."

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