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Luís Alonso Álvarez

El Costo del Imperio Asiático: La Formación Colonial de las Islas Filipinas bajo Dominio Español, 1565–1800

Glòria Cano

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Book Reviews

LUÍS ALONSO ÁLVAREZ

El Costo del Imperio Asiático: La Formación Colonial de las Islas Filipinas bajo Dominio Español, 1565–1800

México: Instituto Mora, Universidade da Coruña, 2009. 372 pp.

El Costo del Imperio Asiático is the result of arduous and careful research made by the author in several Spanish, Mexican, and Philippine archives. Luis Alonso has discussed and outlined some topics found in this book in earlier conference papers, journal articles, and book chapters. Nevertheless, this book pulls together these various issues to offer a reinterpretation of the interaction between the public treasury, the economy, and the strategy of the Spanish administration in the Philippines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The book is divided into five sections, which contain nine very carefully selected essays that all deal with the Philippines, from the arrival of Legazpi in 1564 to the Bourbon reforms implemented after the British captured Manila in 1762. These essays deal with the interrelationship between the public and private spheres on matters such as political decision making in the Spanish administration in the Philippines, the organization of the Spanish treasury, and the galleon trade.

The first section, entitled “El proyecto asiático de Legazpi-Urdaneta” (The Asian Project of Legazpi and Urdaneta), makes us reflect on why the Spaniards decided to conquer and hold the Philippine islands. The

Spaniards' interest in the archipelago emerged when the Portuguese settled in Asia. Portuguese seafarers started to frequent the southwest coast of India in 1499, consolidating positions in the western Indian Ocean during the first decade of 1500, spreading later through other regions as the Persian Gulf, Ceylon, the Bay of Bengal, the Indonesian archipelago (Malacca, Timor, and the Moluccas), China, and Japan. For the Portuguese authorities the Far East was thus one of the regions embedded in a much broader space, coordinated from Goa, that included the long coast from the Cape of Good Hope to the Japanese beaches and Korean coast. Castile fell behind Portugal. Charles V decided to send different expeditions, which all failed until Legazpi's expedition took place in 1564. The Spanish administration did not want to miss the action in the spice trade. Once the conquest was completed, the Spaniards observed that the Philippines did not have precious metals as their Latin American colonies had, or lots of spices as those found in the Portuguese colonies. However, despite the fact that Philip II could not create in Asia an eastern empire similar to that in the western hemisphere, he decided to keep the archipelago as a defensive stronghold or bastion to support his western empire. In this section, Alonso expounds on how the Spanish administration tried to promote agriculture and the instauration of the Manila galleon as intermediary trade between Southeast Asia and New Spain.

In "Los orígenes de la Hacienda filipina y la organización del sistema tributario" (The Origins of the Philippine Treasury and the Organization of the Tribute System), Alonso discusses the tribute system as a *complex tax* imposed by the Spaniards, which became the key factor in the hispanization of the islands. In the exaction of tribute, forced labor called *polos* and forced purchases or cash distributions called *bandalas* must be included. *Polos* and *bandalas*, along with the *encomienda* system, were the backbone of the Spanish system. No doubt, both the tribute and the *encomienda* were coercive for the natives, but this does not imply, as some works in American and Filipino historiography do, that the prehispanic tenure system was idyllic and dissimilar to colonial innovations. Some American and Filipino historical works have assumed that the coercive systems imposed by Spain decimated the population, as happened in the Americas, with the population decline lasting until the eighteenth century. There was no such destruction of old native communities, at least during the first years of the Spanish conquest.

On the contrary, the Spanish system coexisted with old native practices until the Spaniards imposed a similar system like that of Latin America.

The third section, entitled "Los tópicos sobre la Hacienda filipina" (Clichés Concerning the Philippine Treasury), is one of the most controversial essays in this book, with its unorthodox and very provocative argument. Alonso's thesis is that the colony was self-sufficient, thanks to the collection of native tribute. The author questions the inveterate idea that the Philippine treasury was not self-sufficient and required fiscal aid from New Spain, called *situado* or *socorro*. As soon as Legazpi was established in Cebu, he approved the collection of tribute. It was a completely arbitrary order enacted by Legazpi because the king had not ruled on the effective colonization of the archipelago so as not to arouse the suspicions of Portugal, which deemed the Philippines as within its demarcation line. It is worth noting that the king did not revoke Legazpi's order, although he received complaints about abuse in tribute collection. The first forty years of Spanish colonization saw the greatest percentages of income derived from native tribute. Alonso explains in great detail how the native tax revenue did not appear in Manila's central treasury incomes but remained in the territorial treasuries. Thus it seemed that the Philippine treasury incurred a deficit, which became the reason to ask for subsidy from New Spain. Because the collection of tribute was important for the Philippine treasury, it was imposed more efficiently in the eighteenth century. To underscore his argument, Alonso relies on the *contaduría* or government accounting office records.

The third section concludes with a discussion of the Philippine deficit in Filipino, American, and even Spanish historiography. For Alonso the myth emerges when Pedro Chirino and Antonio Morga's works were published in the seventeenth century. These accounts have become standard references for American and Filipino scholars and were translated into English by Emma H. Blair and James A. Robertson in *The Philippine Islands 1493–1898* (Arthur H. Clark, 1903). The main purpose of the editors was to support the argument that the colony needed the *situado* of New Spain. Alonso does not deny this fact, but clarifies it by stating that the *situado* was needed only at specific moments. He introduces readers to a book not often consulted by scholars, Felipe M. Govantes's *Compendio de la Historia de Filipinas* (B. Memije, 1877), which categorically refutes the argument that the Philippines was a ruinous colony.

In the fourth section entitled “Algunos tributos significativos” (Some Significant Tributes), Alonso studies the most significant incomes of the royal treasury. He explains the nature of the tribute ordered by Legazpi, which required natives to pay a tribute of eight *real* coins in fruits or *granjerías* (profits of the lands). Philip II received complaints of abuse by the *encomenderos* in their collection of tribute. In order to cut the abuses, he dispatched what became the cornerstone of colonial government policy in the Philippines, that is, the first instruction to governors signed on 9 August 1589. Gov. Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas arrived in Manila with this instruction, which had fifty-four articles related to religion, finances, justice, government, and war. This instruction defined issues of a transcendental nature, and some of them remained unchanged until the nineteenth century. Two of the most important sections were sections 6 and 50, which dealt with the system of tribute. Section 6 established that the tribute had to be paid in cash or in produce (*granjerías*) and, until that year, the quantity to be collected had to be ten real coins instead of eight. The increase of the tax in two real coins was what has been called *situado real* (royal subsidy). One real and a half had to be used to pay soldiers and the other half to cover the tithes. Alonso emphasizes this point and makes it clear that this *situado real* must not be confused with the *situado mexicano* or Mexican subsidy. American and Filipino scholars have mixed up the *situado real* with the *situado mexicano*, overlooking or ignoring section 6 of the instruction. Finally, Alonso analyzes the tribute from the point of view of the business of *alcaldes mayores* (provincial governors) and *corregidores* (chief magistrates), linking this question with the purchase of goods, bandalas, and polo or corvée labor. He concludes that Spanish administrators knew how to force the native economy to divert significant resources toward the Manila treasury. Actually, the indigenous peasants became the main contributors to the maintenance of the Spanish presence.

The fourth section culminates with the most controversial argument of the book, which concerns the system called *situado*. Alonso defines the terms *socorro* and *situado* according to the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy. These terms are indistinctly used as synonymous. Alonso considers the Mexican *socorro* as not strictly a tax: although a source of income for the treasury, it was meant to beef up the military budget. In this section, Alonso reconstructs the gross and net figures of the *situado* based on shipments of the revenues of Acapulco and Mexico published in *La Real Hacienda de Nueva*

España: La Real Caja México (1576–1816), edited by John Jay TePaske (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976). However, Alonso deals with another question which has become a tautology in American and Filipino historiography, i.e., that the *situado* reached an annual figure of P250,000, something untrue. Curiously this figure comes from Blair and Robertson’s work, which rendered in English the royal decree of 11 January 1591 on the regulation of commerce. Scholars, including Alonso, refer to it as the decree of 11 January 1593, a confusion provoked by the dispatch of two other royal decrees enacted on the same day in January pertaining to the trade and commerce of the Philippine islands with China. The royal decree of 11 January 1591 stated:

He mandado que de ninguna parte de las dichas Yndias vaya â la China navio alguno, ni tampoco â essas Yslas, sino fuere de la Nueva España, dos en cada un año, de 300 toneladas; que en ellos no puedan llevar mas de doscientos cinquenta mill pesos de tepusquez en reales de lo procedido de las Mercaderias, que los vezinos de essas Yslas llevaren, ô embiaren â la dicha Nueva España. . . .

I have ordered that no vessel whatsoever from the said (Western) Indies should go to China, nor should a vessel go to those Islands, unless it is from New Spain, two to go each year, weighing 300 tons and carrying no more than 250,000 pesos of tepusquez in reales [coin] from the quantity of merchandise that the inhabitants from those Islands brought or sent to the said New Spain. . . .

The *tepuzque* peso was a coin made of gold mixed with copper. The coin was officially divided according to the ordinance enacted by Antonio Mendoza into eight real coins, each real coin having a value of thirty-four *maravedies* or twelve grains. The *tepuzque* coin disappeared in 1591. Blair and Robertson did not know how to define the term *tepuzque* and took for granted that this was an aid of P250,000 from New Spain to the Philippines. Since the publication of Blair and Robertson’s *The Philippine Islands*, scholars such as Schurtz, LeRoy, and Bauzon among others have accepted this assertion as a dictum of the truth.

The fifth and last section, *La renovación de la Hacienda: El Reformismo Borbónico* (The Reorganization of the Treasury: Bourbon Reformism),

discusses the Bourbon reforms of the treasury in the Philippines in the eighteenth century, particularly after the British capture of Manila in 1762. Alonso tries to fit the Filipino pieces in an imperial puzzle coherently, from the inception of free trade until the implementation of the tobacco monopoly in 1782, the emergence of the Company of the Philippines in 1785, and a better administration of native tribute.

On the whole, *El Costo del Imperio Asiático* transcends secular and traditional arguments by questioning well-established assertions, such as the Philippines's ruinous economy until the final collapse of the Spanish empire. According to this argument, the Philippines needed the Mexican *situado* or *socorro*, thus becoming a mere appendage of New Spain. This argument, which is widely accepted in American and Filipino historiography, was part and parcel of the black legend of the Spanish colonial system, which depicted the Spaniards as intolerant priest-inquisitors, bloody conquistadors of the Indies, and brutal oppressors of colonized peoples. There was considerable truth in this image, but Spaniards were as cruel as the people who denounced them. Alonso has written a solid work based on primary sources, and he has opened a new line of inquiry to rewrite and revisit Philippine history from the conquest to the colonial restructuring in the eighteenth century.

Glòria Cano

Universitat Pompeu Fabra
<gloria.cano@upf.edu>

FABIO BAGGIO AND AGNES M. BRAZAL, EDS.

Faith on the Move: Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008. 261 pp.

In 2006 the conference "Faith on the Move" was held in Quezon City at the Maryhill School of Theology, gathering ten theologians (Lou Aldrich, Agnes Brazal, Victorino Cueto, Emmanuel S. de Guzman, James Kroeger, Anselm Kyongsuk Min, William LaRousse, Felipe Muncada, Anthony Rogers, and Giovanni Zevola) to speak about migration in Asia. The essays gathered in this anthology are revised versions of the papers presented in that

conference. While the table of contents shows that the essays are organized according to the progression of topics with the following part headings—"The Migrant Context," "Ethical Challenges," "Reimagining the Church, Mission, and Eschaton," and "Pastoral Challenges"—in the body of the text itself the essays flow from one to another in a succession uninterrupted by part divisions. This suggests that the essays are united more cohesively than the divisions in the table of contents may suggest.

Underlying the essays is the question—a worry?—about the catholicity of the Catholic Church, i.e., the concern about whether the Catholic Church in general and the local churches of Asia in particular are able to respond to the needs of migrants and the challenges raised by the widespread migration of labor brought about by the globalized flow of capital.

Each of the responses to this problematic primarily takes one or a combination of several approaches:

(1) Some essays are primarily aimed at seeking or retrieving theological resources from within the tradition—both scriptural and magisterial—reinterpreting these theological concepts to specifically address the experience of displacement and conflict engendered by migration. (Zevola's chapter on "Migration in the Bible and Our Journey of Faith" is paradigmatic of this approach. From the Old Testament, he explores the notion of election—purifying it from its exclusionary implications—in order to ground the believer's identity in the experience of foreignness; from the New Testament, he draws from the Emmaus story a spiritual ethic of compassion for the stranger.)

(2) Others are more expressly grounded in their author's pastoral and missionary experiences and give an elaborated account of the economic and political conditions faced by migrant populations in their host countries. These essays are valuable for several reasons: they give their readers an appreciation of the *specificity* of each migratory experience, and the *complexity* of the problems arising out of migration. Muncada's paper, "Japan and Philippines," for instance, shows how one cannot deal with issues of migration without at the same time recognizing and addressing deeply seated views of Japanese society about gender relations. These essays are also valuable for their *concrete suggestions* for dealing with and responding to the needs of the migrant faithful. For example, Aldrich, in his paper on the situation of migrants in Taiwan, suggests that religious orders "dedicate [themselves] to creating honest labor-broker organizations" (65–66).