

Trade, war and industrial policy in Southeast Asia: Spanish shipbuilding outside the Philippine Islands (1619–1753)

Iván Valdez-Bubnov

To cite this article: Iván Valdez-Bubnov (2021) Trade, war and industrial policy in Southeast Asia: Spanish shipbuilding outside the Philippine Islands (1619–1753), *War & Society*, 40:1, 43-63, DOI: [10.1080/07292473.2021.1860321](https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2021.1860321)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2021.1860321>



Published online: 25 Jan 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 216




View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Trade, war and industrial policy in Southeast Asia: Spanish shipbuilding outside the Philippine Islands (1619–1753)

IVÁN VALDEZ-BUBNOV 

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Mexico City, Mexico

The purpose of this article is to understand a specific variant of the Spanish shipbuilding policies in Asia during the early Modern period: the attempts to transfer the shipbuilding industry from the Philippines, where it was based since almost the beginning of the Spanish occupation of that Archipelago, to different foreign maritime regions in the Southern Pacific. Important studies on the Spanish presence in the Philippines have mentioned a few of these episodes, but their significance for the Spanish shipbuilding industry in that region, and for the Spanish Pacific system as a whole, remains undiscussed. It demonstrates that the motivation behind these policies did not obey a single cause, but rather reflected specific strategic mercantile and military contexts, among which State-intervention, private interest, and violent social unrest played a prominent role. This interpretation is based on existing historiography and the examination of first-hand sources still unused to this day.

KEYWORDS Spanish Philippines, Spanish shipbuilding, South East Asia, resource mobilisation, contractor state

1. Introduction

This article examines the evolution of a specific variant of the Spanish shipbuilding policies in Asia during the early modern period: the various attempts to transfer the shipbuilding industry from the Philippines, where it was based since almost the beginning of Spain's occupation of that archipelago, to different foreign maritime enclaves in the Southern Pacific. Important studies on the Spanish presence in the Philippines have mentioned a few of these episodes, but their significance for

the Spanish shipbuilding industry in that region, and for the Spanish Pacific system as a whole, remains undiscussed.¹ This is partly due to the limitations of available first hand sources, which, unlike other documentation related to the history of Spanish shipbuilding in the early modern period, contain very few technical, administrative and financial details.

Shipbuilding outside the Philippines has been identified as a structural aspect of imperial strategy only very recently, leading to two hypotheses. The first one, put forward by Ostwald Sales-Colin, points out the fact that the official correspondence by Spanish colonial administrators repeatedly mentioned the bad quality of ships built in the Philippine shipyards, particularly, but not exclusively, the large Manila-Acapulco galleons.² This was seen as the cause of many tragic maritime accidents, and also of the rising costs of the Philippine shipbuilding industry. Sales-Colin has described two relevant characteristics of this line of thought. First, the perception of bad quality was frequently linked to the technical characteristics of Philippine timber, which was denounced as unsuitable for shipbuilding. Secondly, the colonial administrators who made such observations were involved in projects of military expansion in the South Pacific, in trade ventures undertaken outside the official Manila-Acapulco trade route, or in both. This points out the possibility that the complaints against Philippine timber and the expressed necessity of cancelling the shipbuilding industry in the Philippines might have been, in reality, an argument for the indirect promotion of economic interests, either by war or trade.³

The second hypothesis has recently been put forward by the author of the present article, recuperating some elements of the proposal by Sales-Colin.⁴ It is indeed true that there were complaints about the quality of Philippine timbers. There was though also much more praise of their quality and effectiveness for shipbuilding applications, not only in official correspondence, but also in the memoirs of Iberian Pacific explorers, friars, and entrepreneurs. Moreover, the Spanish colonial administration strongly developed the Philippine woodcutting industry in the nineteenth century, with timber becoming the main export commodity of the islands, leading to the production of detailed scientific reports on their varieties, technical characteristics, and applications.⁵ After 1898, the United States continued the exploitation of Philippine timbers, thus confirming their quality and enhancing their positive reputation.⁶

¹ Javier Ortiz de la Tabla Ducasse, *El Marqués de Ovando, gobernador de Filipinas 1750–1754* (Seville: EEHA, 1974); Ana María Prieto, *Filipinas durante el gobierno de Manrique de Lara, 1653–1663* (Córdoba: CSIC, 1984); José María Silos, *Las embajadas al sureste asiático del gobernador Bustamante* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2005).

² Ostwald Sales Colin, 'Polistas y arquitectura naval: una polémica contra los recursos de la tierra filipina durante el siglo XVII,' *Revista de Historia Naval*, 31 (2013), 59–76.

³ Ostwald Sales-Colin, 'Intentos de fortalecimiento español allende Filipinas: Moluco, Matheo e Isla del Norte, 1605–1653,' *Estudios de Asia y África*, 2 (2015) 355–94.

⁴ Ivan Valdez-Bubnov, 'Las islas Filipinas y la etapa formativa de la construcción naval española en Asia (1519–1657),' *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 28 (2019), 29–54.

⁵ Sebastián Vidal y Soler, *Memoria sobre el ramo de montes* (Madrid: Imprenta Estereotipia y Galvanoplastia de Aribau y C., 1874).

⁶ Cheek Sangalang Fadríquela, Kahoy: *Wood in the Philippines. Wood and its uses from Pre-Hispanic to Spanish Colonial Philippines* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2013), 2. vols.

It is also important to bear in mind that, in several cases, the mentions of rotten timbers in ship hulls were linked to petitions to increase or maintain the silver remittances from New Spain to the Manila treasury (*situados*), and they did not necessarily imply the timbers were intrinsically bad. In contrast, there was another, possibly more important issue, directly linked to the exploitation of timber, and considered to be deeply detrimental to the efficiency of the Philippine shipyards: the rebelliousness of the Filipino workforce. Violent indigenous rebellion in the island of Luzon was frequently linked to the intensity of woodcutting and/or shipbuilding campaigns.⁷ The connection of this phenomenon to the evolution of Spanish shipbuilding legislation has been addressed by recent historiography, and it will only be briefly outlined here.⁸ Nevertheless, the idea that social conflict in the Philippines led the crown to increase its supervision over shipbuilding procedures, prompting local officials and administrators to promote the transfer of the shipbuilding industry to other regions, is fundamental to the present study. This is complemented by the idea that criticism of timber quality was in reality a veiled attempt by the Philippine government to promote inter-Asian trade, in order to seek financial autonomy from the Mexican treasury and the Manila-Acapulco trade route, and in direct connection to missionary efforts and outright military expansion.⁹ Therefore, the second hypothesis does not wholly cancel the first one, but they rather complement each other, excepting the discussion against timber quality. This explanation, however, will be taken further, showing that the repeated attempts to transfer the shipbuilding industry from the Philippines to other regions in fact coincided with the main periods of Spanish military and mercantile expansion in the South Pacific until the mid-seventeenth century, and they must be seen as part of the attempts to consolidate or strengthen Spain's foothold in Asia by multiplying the possibilities to obtain ships. Moreover, it will be shown that, in the eighteenth century, these attempts were undertaken in the context of an increased state-intervention in transpacific trade, and especially over the Philippine shipyards and woodcutting procedures. Therefore, there was not a single driving cause for the attempts to transfer the shipbuilding industry, but several, each derived from the specific political, military, economic and social circumstances of each period. The final aim of this article is to outline all of these in one single, analytical narrative.

2. Spanish perception of the resources of the South Pacific and the establishment of the shipbuilding industry in the Philippines

The first Spanish explorers of the Pacific, such as Antonio de Pigafetta, chronicler of the 1519–22 Magallanes-Elcano expedition, paid great attention to the natural

⁷ William McCarthy, 'The Yards at Cavite; Shipbuilding in early Colonial Times', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 7 (1995), 149–62.

⁸ Valdez-Bubnov, 'Las islas Filipinas y la etapa formativa de la construcción naval española en Asia', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 28 (2019), 44–50.

⁹ Ivan Valdez-Bubnov, 'Crown, trade, church and indigenous societies: The functioning of the Spanish shipbuilding industry in the Philippines, 1571–1816', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 31 (2019), 559–73.

resources of the islands they encountered, but their main interest, in that early stage, was focused towards the presence of spice trees.¹⁰ This began to change with the first natural history of the new world, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo's *General Historia de las Indias*, published between 1535 and 1557, which provided important information about the abundance of shipbuilding resources in the Molucca islands.¹¹ Oviedo's work made subsequent explorers aware of the existence of dense forests of varied and high-quality trees; of populations skilled in navigational and shipbuilding practices; of active inter-Asian markets providing all sorts of manufactures, and also gave precise details on the technological complexity of native craft. His work also became the blueprint that future Spanish observers – friars, soldiers, and merchants – followed to describe the resources of the South Pacific region.

Oviedo also mentioned the first episodes of Spanish shipbuilding in Asia. The first one was an order given in 1527 by an officer of the Loaysa expedition (1525) to build a ship in the island of Tidore, in the Moluccas. A vessel that the Spaniards built in the island of Gilolo was also launched before the end of 1527. These launchings took place in the context of intense warfare with the Portuguese, established in the archipelago since 1512, in alliance with the ruler of Tidore against his rival of Ternate. Oviedo's narrative implies that the Portuguese already had a functional shipbuilding capacity in those islands, and explicitly stated that the Castilians had problems in selecting adequate timbers for building their ships.¹² On the other hand, the first specific mention of the possibility or relying on regional political centres for shipbuilding comes from García de Escalante Alvarado, one of the participants of the 1542 Villalobos expedition. Referring to the previous Loaysa voyage, he wrote that the sovereign of Tidore, having previously helped the Portuguese, offered the king of Spain 'carpenters of this land, and timber, and planks, and pitch... to build a ship as large and as good as needed to find the return route to New Spain'.¹³ Nevertheless, the difficulty of finding such a route and the loss of the Loaysa and Villalobos expeditions prompted the Emperor, Charles I, to cede the Moluccas to Portugal in 1529, thus delaying the establishment of a Spanish foothold in the Pacific for several decades.

The *tornaviaje*, or return voyage, was finally discovered by the Legazpi-Urdaneta expedition of 1564–65, leading to the first Spanish settlements in the Philippine archipelago. The first description of the craft used by the Muslim populations of the Southern island of Mindanao was written in this context, and opinions stating the necessity to establish shipyards in the Northern island of Luzon began to appear in official correspondence.¹⁴ In 1570–1, the military conquest of Manila Bay

¹⁰ Antonio de Pigafetta, *Primer viaje en torno del globo* (Madrid: Espasa, 2004)

¹¹ Fernández de Oviedo, *General Historia de las Indias* (Valladolid: Francisco Fernández de Córdoba), vol. II.

¹² Valdez-Bubnov, 'Las islas Filipinas y la etapa formativa de la construcción naval española en Asia', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 28 (2019), 3–5.

¹³ García Escalante Alvarado, *Viaje a las islas del Poniente* (Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 2015), 82.

¹⁴ Valdez-Bubnov, 'Las islas Filipinas y la etapa formativa de la construcción naval española en Asia', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 28 (2019), 6–7.

allowed further exploration and settlements, under the leadership of Martín de Goiti. For this purpose, at least 15 native craft were used, and there are indications showing that Legazpi built, or attempted to build, six galleys in Luzon during the same period.¹⁵ Also in 1571, shipbuilding and caulking materials were sent directly from Spain, through the Cape of Good Hope. This made it possible to undertake the first careenings of the transpacific ships arriving from Acapulco. In 1576, Governor Francisco de Sande initiated the import of European shipbuilding materials and craftsmen from New Spain, leading to the construction of the first Filipino galleons.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the crucial factor for the creation of the Spanish shipbuilding industry in the Philippines was the growing presence of foreign merchant communities who had followed Spanish settlement, surpassing the Spanish in population and each acting as representatives of the export markets of their respective homelands.¹⁷

The possibility of purchasing high-quality, low-priced shipbuilding manufactures (such as iron, copper, lead, etc.) from Chinese and Japanese merchants became central to the operation of the nascent shipbuilding industry, and it certainly surpassed the importance of European imports transported from New Spain. Other manufactures, such as cotton sails, cables and ropes, and caulking fibres, were obtained through forced purchases from the indigenous populations of the archipelago, at very low cost, or without any compensation whatsoever. Construction timber was obtained through woodcutting campaigns known as *elas*, for which large numbers of workers were forcibly mobilised.¹⁸ In all, this made the Spanish shipbuilding industry financially viable, and it soon outperformed the option of building ships in Spanish America. During the first years of its operation, royal administrators commented on the remarkably low costs of Filipino ships.¹⁹

The shipbuilding industry provided the material infrastructure that allowed the Manila-Acapulco trade route to function, taking large volumes of luxury exports to Spanish America and bringing back not only the silver needed to pay for them, but also the royal remittances required to sustain the colony, to finance expansive warfare, and to build more ships. This allowed Manila to become a mercantile entrepot in which these manufactures, and the export markets of the South Pacific intersected with Spanish silver export from New Spain and Peru.²⁰ Direct trade between the Peruvian port of El Callao and Manila was sanctioned by the Spanish crown in 1579, and some government officials from Peru managed to trade directly with

¹⁵ Sebastián Amaya, 'Poderío naval en las Indias: las galeras de Cartagena y Manila (1571-1621)', *Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional*, 3 (2017), 169-88.

¹⁶ Valdez-Bubnov, 'Las islas Filipinas y la etapa formativa de la construcción naval española en Asia', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna*, 28 (2019), 11-12.

¹⁷ Juan Gil, *Los chinos de Manila. Siglos XVI y XVII* (Lisboa: Centro Científico y Cultural de Macau, 2011); Antonio García-Abásolo, 'Españoles y chinos en Filipinas. Los fundamentos del comercio del Galeón de Manila', in *España, el Atlántico y el Pacífico. V centenario del descubrimiento de la Mar del Sur (1513-2013)* (Llerena: Sociedad Extremeña de Historia, 2013), 9-29.

¹⁸ Valdez-Bubnov, 'Crown, trade, church and indigenous societies', 564.

¹⁹ Francisco Mallari, 'The Spanish Navy in the Philippines, 1589-1787', *Philippine Studies. Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 37 (1989), 384-411.

²⁰ Marina Alfonso Mola and Carlos Martínez Shaw, 'La era de la plata española en Extremo Oriente', *Revista Española del Pacífico, año XIV*, 17 (2004), 33-54.

China. In 1582, after widespread protests by representatives of transatlantic trade, trade between Peru and the Philippines was prohibited. It nevertheless continued, and prohibition edicts had to be re-issued in 1593, 1595, 1604 and 1640.²¹

3. The disfunction of the Spanish shipbuilding industry in the Philippines, 1574–1663

Despite its success in overtaking the production of Spanish American shipyards, the shipbuilding industry in the Philippines had a most serious problem in the exploitation of indigenous forced labour for woodcutting, timber transport and shipyard tasks. The draft system for the *elas*, known as *polo*, was the Philippine version of the *repartimiento* used in New Spain and Peru, and implied the temporary mobilisation of the native workforce – mainly for shipbuilding operations – under the authority of a Spanish settler (*encomendero*), or a local magistrate (*Alcalde Mayor*).²² The crown had prohibited the use of slave labour almost since the beginning of the colony, in 1574, and the first government regulations for the Philippines, issued by Governor Francisco de Sande in 1576, specified that salaries had to be paid to the natives employed either in the shipyards or in the woodcutting operations.²³ Nevertheless, this obligation was seldom met, and the Spanish royal treasury accumulated a huge debt in the form of unpaid salaries. Another form of *polo* related to the shipbuilding industry was the forced recruitment of rowers for war galleys or other royal vessels, known as *esquipazones*, which was often described as a death sentence for its unfortunate conscripts. As mentioned, the indigenous populations also produced important shipbuilding manufactures, such as cotton sails and *abacá* cables, which were initially obtained by the Spanish administration as tribute, and later through forced purchases below market prices, often unpaid, known as *vandalas*. This added to the public debt of the Manila treasury. Between 1608 and 1637 public expenditure exceeded income twice, with debt consisting mostly of unpaid purchases and salaries owed to the native population.²⁴

In 1609, the crown formally regulated shipbuilding practices, prohibiting the use of unpaid labour and forced recruitment either for *polos* or *esquipazones*. Nevertheless, that same legislation also specified that forced labour could be tolerated in cases of public urgency or strategic interest. Since the very existence of the colony depended on the construction of ships, and the mercantile, military and missionary expansion described in the previous section created a constant demand for

²¹ Woodrow Borah, *Early colonial Trade and Navigation between Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954); Guadalupe Pinzón Ríos, *Acciones y reacciones en los puertos de la Mar del Sur* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Instituto Mora, 2011) 44, 45.

²² Patricio Hidalgo Nuchera, *Encomienda, trabajo y tributo en Filipinas (1570–1608)* (Madrid: Polifemo, 1995), 55–81.

²³ Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (Madrid: Polifemo, 1997), 52.

²⁴ John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press) 99–100; Birgit Tremml-Werner, *Spain, China and Japan, 1571–1644* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 114.

new launchings and repairs, shipbuilding fell precisely into those two categories.²⁵ As a result, the oppression of the native populations continued unabated, and violent rebellion erupted in the provinces where shipbuilding or woodcutting campaigns were undertaken, in the years 1574, 1585, 1587, 1589, 1596, 1601, 1607, 1621, 1649, 1650, 1660, and 1663.²⁶ Also, the negative social effects of the shipbuilding industry were aggravated by the constant state of war with the Muslim populations from Mindanao, who raided the Luzon shipyards and targeted carpenters and other native shipbuilding workers. After 1600, attacks by the Dutch made the situation worse.²⁷ Moreover, since most of the native sailors also served as carpenters too, recruitment for service in the Manila-Acapulco galleons, or in the naval expeditions sent against regional rivals, added to the strain on the Philippine shipyards.

These problems converged with the scarcity of qualified European shipbuilding personnel in the archipelago. Master shipwrights from Spain or Spanish America were always in demand, and a constant worry for royal administrators in Manila. The 1609 regulation attempted to solve this by ordering that qualified shipyard tasks were to be reserved for salaried Chinese technicians, under the supervision of Spanish officers.²⁸ The privileged condition of the Chinese shipyard workers, however, also aggravated social tensions. The Chinese community, more numerous than the Spanish and better paid than the natives, was the target of both official and popular suspicion. In 1603, 1639 and 1662, the Spaniards and the native population perpetrated large massacres of Chinese settlers, which naturally contributed to the difficulties of the shipyards.²⁹

There was another source of pressure for the shipbuilding industry: the activity of the religious orders deployed in the provinces of the archipelago. Since the late sixteenth century, the friars had identified shipbuilding as the main scourge of the native populations, and exercised significant political pressure against the Manila government. Several wrote directly to the king denouncing the horrors caused by the industry, and the 1582 Synod of Manila had shipbuilding as one of its main themes.³⁰ There were also documented cases of friars assisting local populations in burning the forests to prevent a woodcutting campaign, although some of them, especially the Augustinians, were accused of various forms of exploitation that allowed them to participate in inter-Asian trade.³¹ The pressure exercised by the

²⁵ Valdez-Bubnov, 'Crown, trade, church and indigenous societies', *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 31 (2019), 559–73.

²⁶ Prieto, 144–5; John T. Wing, *Roots of Empire, Forests and Forestry in Early Modern Spain, c. 1500–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 156.

²⁷ Charles Boxer, 'War and Trade in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, 1600–1650', *Mariner's Mirror* 71 (1985), 417–36; Martín Onrubia, Miguel, 'La ofensiva naval neerlandesa sobre Filipinas en el contexto de la guerra de los Ochenta Años y su analogía con la llevada a cabo en los territorios americanos de la monarquía hispánica', in Marta Manchado López and Miguel Luque, *Miguel, Fronteras del mundo hispánico: Filipinas en el contexto de las regiones liminares novohispanas* (Córdoba: Servicio de Publicaciones, 2011), 255–80.

²⁸ Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Filipinas, 200, n. 206.

²⁹ Prieto, 145.

³⁰ Domingo de Salazar, *Sínodo de Manila* (Madrid: CSIC, 1988).

³¹ Wing, 156.

Church reached a peak after 1657, when the *oidor* (magistrate of the high court) Salvador Gómez de Espinosa published his *Discurso Parenético*, a detailed denunciation of the many injustices committed against the natives, in which shipbuilding occupied a prominent place.³² This created a serious upheaval in Manila, with public burnings of the book; its author had to face trial before the Inquisition in Mexico city, although he was acquitted at the end. Despite this, the work of Gómez de Espinosa created an important precedent that was to shape the shipbuilding reforms developed by the Bourbon dynasty during the first half of the eighteenth century, which, in turn, became a renewed source of pressure for the industry.³³

4. Spanish military expansion in the South Pacific, 1582–1663

Despite all its problems, the development of the Philippine shipbuilding allowed the Spanish settlement in Luzon to prosper, and integrated the Philippines in both state-driven and private commercial expansion from China and Japan, and to a lesser extent Siam and Cambodia, which, in turn, dragged the Spaniards into interstate conflict in Indochina.³⁴ In parallel, the Spanish drive to compete with the Portuguese in the spice trade led to a second wave of expansion towards the Moluccas and, later on, to other islands of the South Pacific. All this converged in the concepts of ‘consolidation’ (*consolidación*) or ‘strengthening’ (*fortalecimiento*) of the Spanish position in the Philippines, which amounted to a set of policies aimed at deeper integration in regional economic networks in order to seek greater financial and material autonomy from the viceroyalty of New Spain. In fact, authorities such as Governor Sebastián Hurtado de Corcuera went as far as to propose optimistically to eliminate the royal subsidies from New Spain, in order to concentrate entirely on obtaining resources from the South Pacific region.³⁵

These ideas led Spanish administrators to entertain schemes for further military and missionary expansion. Their origins can be traced back to the first years of the colony, when attacks by the Chinese and Japanese pirates were repulsed, and the Manila government initiated formal diplomacy with the Ming court. In 1578, an expedition was sent against Muslim Brunei, in order to counter its influence in the Cebu area. In this context, Governor Sande gave the first concrete instructions for shipbuilding outside the Philippines, with several galleys being built in that island.³⁶ Between the late 1570s and early 1580s, Governors Guido de Lavezares and Francisco de Sande promoted an ambitious military expedition against China. Detailed intelligence about Chinese capabilities was obtained from the 1575 embassy led by Augustinian friar Martín de Rada, which stressed the abundance of

³² James Cummins and Nicolas Cushner, ‘Labor in the Colonial Philippines. The *Discurso Parenético* of Gómez de Espinosa’, *Philippine Studies*, 22 (1974), 117–48.

³³ Valdez-Bubnov, ‘Las islas Filipinas y la etapa formativa de la construcción naval española en Asia’, 21–2.

³⁴ Carlos Martínez Shaw, ‘The Philippine Islands: a vital crossroads during the first globalization period’, *Culture & History Digital Journal*, June 2014, 6–16.

³⁵ Oswald Sales-Colin, ‘Intentos de fortalecimiento español allende Filipinas: Moluco, Matheo e Isla del Norte, 1605–1653’, *Estudios de Asia y África*, 2 (2015), 355–93.

³⁶ Amaya, 178.

shipbuilding resources, but also the vast dimension of Chinese naval and military power. Early Spanish observers also paid attention to the shipbuilding resources of Tunkin, Siam and Cambodia.³⁷

The union of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns, in 1580, fostered new schemes of military expansion, when the Bishop of Malacca, Joao Ribeio Gaio, again suggested the conquest of China, as well as that of the kingdoms of Aceh and Siam. This occurred in the context of Siamese ships arriving in Manila to sell various products, which led Governor Santiago de Vera (1584–1590) to seek the establishment of diplomatic and mercantile relations with its rulers. In 1593, however, the Spanish became unofficially involved in the power struggles of that region, when governor Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas (1590–1593) received a Cambodian embassy asking for military support against a Siamese invasion. Although Manila's government remained neutral, Spanish and Portuguese soldiers fought for Cambodia against Siam in 1596, 1598, and 1602.³⁸ This, however, did not prevent Governor Francisco Tello de Guzmán (1596–1602) to send an embassy to the latter, obtaining authorization from king Naressuan of Ayutthaya to establish a trading settlement. A formal trade agreement was achieved by his successor, Juan Tello, but the incursions made by the Dutch East India Company in that region obstructed further development of Spanish-Siamese commerce, which, in any case, was considered of little value by Spanish officials. Governor Tello also sought a trade agreement with the Portuguese settlement of Macao, Canton, in 1598, specifically looking for war materials (iron, copper and saltpeter). The Chinese authorities granted the Spaniards a strip of land to settle a *factoría* in Pindal, ten leagues from Canton, but they were harassed by the Portuguese, leading to its abandonment the following year.³⁹

The Iberian union also led successive Spanish governors to renew the expansion towards the Moluccas. Military expeditions aimed at supporting the traditional Portuguese ally of Tidore against its rivals in Ternate were sent in 1582 (Francisco de Dueñas), 1583 (Juan Ronquillo), 1584 (Pedro de Sarmiento), 1585 (Juan Morón), 1593 (Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas), and 1603 (Juan Pérez de Gallinato).⁴⁰ In 1605, the Dutch captured Ternate and built a fortress, which was conquered in 1606 by Pedro Bravo de Acuña. Intermittent warfare with the Dutch continued to rage during most of this period and the Spanish presence in the Moluccas was strengthened in the two decades following the establishment of their Ternate garrison. This offered further opportunity to participate in the networks of inter-Asian

³⁷ 'Relaçion Verdadera de las cosas del Reyno de TAIBIN por otro nombre China y del viaje que a el hizo el muy Reverendo padre fray Martin de Rada', Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, 325.9 (MF 13184), f. 15–30. Transcribed by Dolors Folch Fornesa and Alexandra Prats.

³⁸ Gabriel de San Antonio, *Breve y verdadera relación de los sucesos del Reyno de Camboxa* (Valladolid: Pedro Lasso, 1604).

³⁹ Florentino Rodao, *Españoles en Siam* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1997), 8–35.

⁴⁰ Fray Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola, *Conquista de las islas Malucas* (Madrid: Alonso Martín, 1609), vol. I.

trade, particularly the export of cloves to India, and consolidated the Spanish presence in the Moluccas until 1663.⁴¹

Governor Alonso Fajardo (1618–1624) also made a serious attempt to occupy the kingdom of Macasar, in Matheo island (Celebes), in order to compete with the Dutch nutmeg trade, but also to protect the Spanish position in Ternate and to make further missionary efforts. The island was occupied until 1625, a period in which resources were shipped directly from the Moluccas, thus creating a triangular line of supplies stemming directly from Manila. Effectively, the silver remittances from New Spain allowed the Manila government to transfer a surplus *situado* to maintain the garrisons in Ternate, which was complemented by provisions and war materials, and also artillery sent directly from Peru.⁴²

Between 1624 and 1626 there were serious diplomatic frictions with Siam, as Fernando de Silva captured ships from that nation, and from their Dutch partners. In this context, a Spanish naval squadron composed of warships of Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Cambodian, and Indian origin sailed from the Portuguese settlement in Macao, in order to reinforce Manila against Dutch attack.⁴³ In 1626, Silva sent a military expedition to the island of Formosa (Taiwan), under command by Antonio Carreño de Valdés, in order to curb the Dutch settlements established there two years earlier, and to establish a trading outpost closer to the Chinese mainland. Fortifications were built, and intense missionary activity followed, with several thousand Chinese baptisms taking place. In 1627, Juan Niño de Távora sent a reinforcement expedition, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain royal sanction for direct trade with Peru. The same year he also authorised a raid against Siam, in reprisal for previous piratical incidents and for their collaboration with the Dutch. In turn, the Spanish settlements in Formosa were attacked by the Dutch and were finally surrendered after a protracted siege in 1642.⁴⁴ In 1668, a military-missionary expedition composed of Jesuit friars and soldiers created a new settlement in the Marianas islands, in the North Eastern part of the Philippine Sea, which became a refitting base for the Manila-Acapulco galleons.

Thus, the first century of the Spanish occupation of the Philippines was defined not only by the establishment of the Manila-Acapulco trade route, but also by a deep integration in the international commercial networks of the South Pacific, and by a series of expansionist efforts combining military, missionary and mercantile aims. Luzon was not only the mercantile hub in which the export economies of China, Japan, Siam and Cambodia converged, but also the link that allowed further Spanish military expansion, first in the Moluccas, and later elsewhere. In parallel, the Spanish government had to face intermittent warfare from the Muslim

⁴¹ Fray Juan de la Concepción, *Historia general de Phillipinas* (Manila: Seminario Conciliar y Real de San Carlos, 1788) Vol. IV.

⁴² Ostwald Sales-Colin, 'Intentos de fortalecimiento español allende Filipinas', *Estudios de Asia y África*, 2 (2015), 361–370.

⁴³ Tremml-Werner, 165.

⁴⁴ Luis Delgado Bañón and Dolores Delgado Peña, 'La presencia española en Formosa', *Revista de Historia Naval*, 37 (1992), 55–72; Fernando González de Canales, 'Presencia española en la isla de Formosa (Taiwan), 1626–1642', *Revista de Historia Naval*, 89 (2005), 61–78.

kingdoms of Joló and Mindanao, in the southern part of the archipelago, and serious naval attack from the English and the Dutch. In all, this created a significant pressure on the shipbuilding industry, which had to provide not only the transpacific galleons, but also the various types of ships required by the multiple aspects of the war effort and by private participation in inter-Asian trade networks. This imposed an enormous strain on the human and material resources of the Philippines, but also offered possibilities to build ships abroad. By the early seventeenth century, many Spanish officials saw this as an urgent necessity, due to the dangerous social instability generated by every woodcutting and shipbuilding campaign in Luzon.

5. War, diplomacy and the first attempts to transfer the shipbuilding industry abroad

One of the earliest and most persuasive requests for the transfer of the shipbuilding industry outside the Philippines was made in 1619 by the procurator-general of the islands, Hernando de los Ríos Coronel. He wrote directly to Philip II, describing the problem in the following terms:

Inasmuch as the ships built in the Philippines cause your Majesty great expense, and have ruined and exhausted the natives; and inasmuch as your Majesty owes them a great sum of money ... for their personal services and things that he took by force from them: it is very advisable, not only for your royal service, but also for your royal conscience, to relieve them from so great oppression.⁴⁵

Ríos Coronel petitioned the king to order the governors of the Philippines 'to avoid, as far as possible, the injuries inflicted upon the natives in the cutting of wood and in personal services; for they [the Governors] sometimes draft them in the planting season or at harvest, so that they lose their fields, as I have seen. In addition to this, many times they do not pay the Indians, because there is no money in the treasury, which is continually short of funds'. He also asked the king to 'order your governors that now and henceforth they shall endeavour most carefully to avoid, as far as possible, harassing the Indians; and that they shall also avoid the building of galleons, since ... these can be brought from India at a much less cost to your Majesty; and that an effort be made to remunerate the natives for a part of the debt due them'. He explained that ships built in India would be 'incomparably cheaper' and would last as longer than those built in the Philippines, saving large sums for the Manila Treasury and preventing further mistreatment of the natives.⁴⁶

In order to achieve this, Ríos Coronel asked the king to order the Portuguese viceroy of Goa to facilitate the purchase of ships in Bengala and Cochin, where

⁴⁵ Emma Hellen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *Explorations by Early Navigators, Descriptions of the Islands and their Peoples, their History and Records of the Catholic Missions, as Related in Contemporaneous Books and Manuscripts, Showing the Political, Economic, Commercial and Religious Conditions of those Islands from their Earliest Relations with European Nations to the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (Cleveland: The Arthur and Clark Company, 1904), Vol. XVIII, 99–100.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

they were made of an ‘incorruptible wood’ and fitted with rigging made of *cayro*, a fiber he believed to be superior in quality and inferior in cost to those used in the Philippines.⁴⁷ He expected to promote the import of *cayro* to Manila, in order to sustain the purchase of further ships. This aspect of the proposal makes it seem that Ríos Coronel was in fact attempting to obtain royal sanction for a trade venture in Portuguese India under the guise of relief measures for the indigenous population of the Philippines. Cochin had been the first Portuguese fortified factory for the spice trade in the sub-continent, after the abandonment of the original settlement in Calicut, early in the sixteenth century. The Portuguese ability to exploit rivalries between the rulers of both cities had not only granted them a permanent settlement in Cochin, but also gave them control over the Malabar pepper trade, just as the rivalries between the sultans of Ternate and Tidore had allowed them to dominate the clove trade in the Moluccas before the arrival of the Spaniards.⁴⁸

Ríos Coronel was not the only high-ranking official to support the end of the shipbuilding industry in the Philippines. Also in 1619, the master shipwright of Cavite, Sebastián de Pineda, shared his interest in building ships in India, specifically at Cochin:

... therefore your Majesty must order ... (the) governor and captain-general of the islands, that in case galleons are to be built, it should not be in the islands ... In order that, those islands might have and keep ships that last thirty years and cost the same as in Manila, or less, your Majesty must order the governor to order them built in India in Cochin; for they can be built there very strong, and at less cost if the said governor sends men for it from Manila, both masters and other persons, who know the art of having them built ... for the said reasons it will be highly important for the conservation of the islands for your Majesty to order that no ships be built in them, since there are so many places, so well provided in everything, as have been proposed, to enable them to be built in India.⁴⁹

There is evidence dating from 1617 showing that a Spanish warship built in India was stationed at Cavite, among others built in the Philippines.⁵⁰ Also, as already mentioned, Indian ships were used in regional armadas during the 1620s, together with ships built elsewhere. In 1629, Governor Juan Niño de Távora (1626–1632) informed the Indies Council of his intention to contract the construction of ‘some ships’ in India, through a merchant of saltpeter named as Felipe Mascareñas. Since this would relieve the Philippines of the ‘great burden’ of shipbuilding, the Governor asked the king to thank Mascareñas for this effort, and to motivate him in that endeavour.⁵¹

Niño de Távora also dispatched an embassy to Cambodia, with a similar purpose. On 1 August 1629, he informed the King that high-quality shipbuilding

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Charles Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), 50.

⁴⁹ AGI, Filipinas, 340, L.3.; Blair and Robertson, *Explorations*, Vol. XVIII, 169–88.

⁵⁰ Ivan Valdez-Bubnov, ‘Comercio, guerra y tecnología: la construcción naval para la Carrera de Filipinas (1577–1757)’ in Antonio Rodríguez Hernández et al., *Comercio, guerra y finanzas en una época en transición* (Valladolid: Castilla, 2017), 241.

⁵¹ AGI, Filipinas, 8, R. 1, N. 17.

timber was abundant in that region, and that the embassy had received authorisation to establish a trade settlement (*factoría*) and a shipyard. A transport ship (*patache*) had been purchased locally, and construction operations were scheduled to begin soon. In contrast, an attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations with neighboring Siam failed.⁵² To justify these measures, Niño de Tavorás correspondence introduced complaints against the shipbuilding timber of the Philippines, which he considered very heavy, and detrimental to the quality of ships built in Cavite.⁵³ In July 1632, the ship contracted in Cambodia was launched, and a *patache* sent to pick it up. According to the Governor, the ship turned out to be larger than he expected, but it had been much cheaper than any of the ships previously built in the Philippines. Unfortunately, and perhaps significantly, he provided no further technical or financial details. He also expected this ship to last longer, due to the 'great difference' in the quality of timber, and announced his intention 'to build many more' outside the Philippines, for the relief of its population.⁵⁴

The idea to transfer the shipbuilding industry out of the Philippines to these regions was also supported in the official correspondence of Governors Sebastián Hurtado de Corcuera (1635-1644) and Diego Fajardo y Chacón (1644-1653).⁵⁵ During Fajardo's tenure, a series of calamities occurred: in 1645 an earthquake ravaged Manila; an attack by a Dutch squadron caused the scuttling of a large galleon; and attacks from Mindanao ravaged the coastal populations of Luzon. As a result, there was a great scarcity of ships for the Acapulco run, and for local defence. In 1649, the Governor resolved to start a shipbuilding campaign, but since the villages around Manila Bay were exhausted, he decided to transfer the operations to the Bisayas. This required the relocation of shipbuilding personnel from Cavite, and new drafts of indigenous carpenters and woodcutters. The long distances that the workers were expected to travel became a cause for resistance, and soon unrest began to spread. Despite the intercession of the friars, Fajardo instructed regional magistrates (*Alcaldes Mayores*) to impose discipline. In 1649, a full-scale rebellion erupted in Ybabao, in the island of Samar, where the friars and local officials were massacred, and there were fears that the insurgents were in league with the Dutch. The insurrection soon spread to other provinces where carpenters were to be drafted: Papalag, Camarines, Masbate, Cebu, Caraga, Tandag, Zamboanga, and Basilan. In October that year there was another serious loss, when the galleon *Encarnación*, which had arrived from Acapulco loaded with silver, ran aground in Bula beach, in the coast of Camarines.⁵⁶

According to fray Diego de Aduarte, in the face of these misfortunes, Fajardo was advised by the Jesuits to sub-contract the construction of a galleon in Cambodia.⁵⁷ His correspondence, however, demonstrates that he had already taken this decision by the first half of 1649. Moreover, in a letter to the Indies Council, he

⁵² AGI, Filipinas, 8, R. 1, N. 6.

⁵³ AGI, Filipinas, 8, R. 1, N. 17.

⁵⁴ AGI, Filipinas, 8, R. 1, N. 19.

⁵⁵ AGI, Filipinas, 200, N. 206.

⁵⁶ Casimiro Díaz, *Conquista de las Islas Philippinas* (Valladolid: Luis de Gavia, 1890), 542-3.

⁵⁷ Fray Diego de Aduarte, *Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario de Philipinas, Iapon y China* (Zaragoza: Domingo Gazón, 1693, 2 vols.), vol. II, 407-14, 454-55.

stated that he was partly motivated by the abundance of quality iron and timber in those regions, and also of specialised workers willing to work for a wage. But his main reason was the scarcity of funds in the Manila treasury, produced by the reduced subsidies received from New Spain.⁵⁸

By the second half of that year, Fajardo asked the viceroy of New Spain to send four master shipwrights to direct the simultaneous construction of six galleons in that region. The language of this letter is ambiguous, making it seem that Fajardo was actually asking the viceroy for funds, as he requested authorisation to build 'as many as possible' of those six ships.⁵⁹ The project was initiated, and two Jesuit friars, together with shipwrights and technicians from Cavite embarked on the galleon *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, praised as one of the strongest ships ever built in the Philippines. When it reached the mouth of the Mekong river, the ship ran aground, being completely lost. With great difficulty, salvaged materials were used to set up a woodcutting camp (*real*) and a shipyard on the nearby coast. After a payment of 40.000 pesos, the Cambodian sovereign gave permission to begin the shipbuilding operations, which led to the launching of a 'strong and capable' galleon. Nevertheless, a further 25.000 pesos were demanded before the ship was allowed to depart.⁶⁰ This money had to be sent by the succeeding Governor, Sabiniano Manrique de Lara (1654–1663).⁶¹ The ship built in Cambodia, named *San Salvador*, had an unfortunate fate. In 1655, after a return voyage from Acapulco, it was caught by a storm near the port of Borongan, 80 leagues from Cavite, where it sank, together with the galleon *San Francisco Xavier*, taking the lives of three captains, all officers, and all of the crew. Most of the silver was salvaged, as well as the iron fittings.⁶²

This incident prompted Manrique de Lara to forbid the practice of building ships outside the Philippines, but the correspondence in which he informed the Indies Council records no complaints about the quality of the *San Salvador*. In that same year, Manrique de Lara ordered the construction of a new galleon in Cavite, possibly the 500-ton *San José*, which used iron from the ill-fated vessels, and was launched in 1656,⁶³ together with a galley for the garrison of Ternate.⁶⁴ A larger ship, the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, was built in ten months, and launched in 1658. A new shipbuilding campaign initiated in 1660 led to further native uprisings, and Manrique de Lara was forced to borrow from the Spaniards in Manila in order to pay the workers, and resume construction activities in Cavite.⁶⁵ Soon after, the keel of a 700-ton ship was laid, together with those of several galleys. This might have been the galleon *San Sabiniano*, launched in 1663.⁶⁶ The Governor also informed about formal diplomatic relations with the kingdoms of Macasar and Manados

⁵⁸ AGI, Filipinas, 9, R.1, N.6.

⁵⁹ AGI, Filipinas, 31, N.23.

⁶⁰ Prieto, 38–43.

⁶¹ AGI, Filipinas, 285, N.1.

⁶² Díaz, 542–5.

⁶³ AGI, Filipinas, 31, N.40.

⁶⁴ Prieto, 25, 41.

⁶⁵ Díaz, 572–86.

⁶⁶ Prieto, 27, 42, 43.

(Célebes), Tidore (Moluccas), Decalonga, Cambodia (whose king was described as 'barbarous and unreliable' as a result of the previous shipbuilding operations), and Joló and Mindanao. He also stated that he kept commercial relations with Tunkin, Siam and Cochinchina, but no formal treaties had been signed.⁶⁷

The correspondence of Governor Manuel de León (1669–1677) records a personal visit by the king of Siam in September 1671, asking for military support against the kingdoms of Tidore and Ternate (Moluccas), which interfered with his clove trade, and were under Dutch protection. The Governor judged it convenient to help him, and an infantry detachment was sent to Siam. Later that year he wrote to the Indies Council asking for ratification, arguing that only Siam remained friendly to Spain, making the alliance very valuable for the containment of other potential enemies. This was approved by the king and a positive diplomatic precedent was thus established.⁶⁸

6. The Bourbon monarchy and renewed efforts for the transfer of the shipbuilding industry abroad (1700–1718)

The next Spanish attempt to build ships outside the Philippines came under the Bourbon dynasty. By the end of the War of Succession (1700–1714), there was a threat of famine due to a locust plague in the islands, and there were great scarcities. When Governor Manuel de Bustamante took office in 1717, he found a high public debt in the Manila Treasury; massive indigenous uprisings in Luzón, Cebú and Negros made the situation worse. Bustamante tried to surmount these difficulties by promoting inter-Asian trade, as his predecessors had done.⁶⁹

Two embassies heading for Siam and Tunkin were prepared in early 1718.⁷⁰ The first one embarked under command of Governor Bustamantés nephew, Benito Carrasco Paniagua and Andrés García Fernández, from Cavite. Gregorio de Bustamante, another nephew of the Governor, was named ambassador, and Gregorio Antonio de Valdez was appointed secretary. They also embarked two Portuguese interpreters (Guillermo Dant and Juan de Signeyra) who were not considered entirely reliable. The embassy was instructed to avoid any harassment of foreign ships in its voyage, to reach the coasts of Siam, to offer gifts, and to seek an interview with the king through the local mandarins. The final aim was to obtain a commercial and shipbuilding treaty. They had been advised by the rector of the

⁶⁷ AGI, Filipinas, 285, N.1.

⁶⁸ AGI, Filipinas, 10, R.1, N.7.

⁶⁹ José Montero y Vidal, *Historia General de Filipinas desde el descubrimiento de dichas islas hasta nuestros días* (Madrid: Imprenta y Fundición de Manuel Tello, 1887) 410–15.

⁷⁰ These embassies have been mentioned or described in the following works: Benito Carrasco, *Relación de la navegación de estas Yslas Philipinas para el reino de Siam, y sus efectos ...* (Manila, S/E, 1719); Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *Historia de las islas Philipinas* (Sampaloc: Fray Pedro Argüelles de la Concepción Religioso Francisco, 1803); Francisco X. Baranera, *Compendio de Historia de Filipinas* (Manila: Imprenta de los Amigos del País, 1878); José Díaz de Villegas y Bustamante, *Una embajada española a Siam en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Montañeses, 1952); Silos, *Las embajadas al sureste asiático del gobernador Bustamante, 201–20*. This section is mostly based on Carrasco's 1719 printed manuscripts and the Siam file kept in AGI, Filipinas, 462, which covers the years 1717 to 1753.

Jesuit order in Manila, Father Jesús Antonio Suares, to seek help from Jesuit friars in that kingdom, and were provided with backup letters addressed to the rulers of Cambodia and Tunkin, in case the first objectives could not be reached.⁷¹

The embassy reached the river Rayacham (Mae Nam Chao Phraya), Siam, in April 1718, and sought to be received by the *Barcalam*, or prime minister. After tense discussions on protocol, they were feasted and received by King Phra Naray, and succeeded in obtaining a treaty equal to those already granted to other European nations.⁷² The Spanish obtained a strip of land in the riverside to set up a trade settlement (*factoría*) and a shipyard. This location had previously been used by other Europeans, possibly Portuguese, and was known in Spanish documents as *Campo Japón*. It was renamed *Nuestra Señora del Soto y San Buenaventura*, and was 100 fathoms long and 64 wide. Benito Carrasco took possession in the name of King Philip V, and raised a cross. The treaty authorised the construction of a shipbuilding infrastructure there, and specified that the most common type of timber used in the region – teak – could be purchased at local market prices, as well as iron and other shipbuilding manufactures. Local carpenters, woodcutters and caulkers could be hired at normal wages, and the construction of galleons and smaller sailing ships (*chalupas*) was authorised. The possibility of changing the place of the shipyard without losing possession of the camp was also mentioned in the treaty, in case the Spanish officer in charge of the operations (*Sargento Mayor*) found that convenient. Special clauses were added to prevent the introduction of undeclared merchandise from Manila, and the royal Khang officers, in the name of Sharipaya Barcalam, were given authority to punish any infractions by the Spanish officers. Detailed instructions were given on the sizes of the packages (*patacas*) introduced by Spanish ships, according to local units of measurement (*ticales*). These conditions were considered better than those granted to other Europeans who had factories in the same region.⁷³

Regarding Siamese trade to the Philippines, the treaty specified that any products could be sold, excluding saltpeter and ivory, which required a special permission from the royal Khang.⁷⁴ Leather products were also excluded, because that trade had already been granted to the Dutch. All products sent by the Khang to Manila were to be exempt from any import duties, as well as those sent by private Siamese merchants, including iron, lead and rice. The treaty was signed on August 9, 1718.⁷⁵

When this embassy returned to Manila, in late 1719, they found out that a mutiny had taken place in early October, in which leading Spanish officials had murdered Governor Bustamante. The returning ambassadors were imprisoned and investigated. When Siamese merchant ships began to arrive, they found a hostile climate, ‘and left in despair’.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Carrasco, 18–50; Villegas, 82, 84, 85, 89–92, 123–52.

⁷² Carrasco, 111–15.

⁷³ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁷⁴ Carrasco, 113.

⁷⁵ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁷⁶ AGI, Filipinas, 462; Martínez de Zúñiga, 445–6; Montero y Vidal, 427; Villegas, 169–74.

There was an alternate version of these events recorded in the archives, which blames the Siamese side for the breakdown of relations. Antonio Barzabal, a Spanish merchant who arrived from Bengal, said that after the embassy left, the treaty had been denounced by Siamese officials under the argument that it had not been signed in the name of the king of Spain, but in that of the Governor of the Philippines. It was also stated that there had been irregularities in the exchange of presents; that the granted land was abandoned and only the cross was left standing there. Benito Carrasco was accused of not fulfilling his promises. Barzabal seemed to lament all this, and stated that the *factoría* could have been set up with just 30,000 pesos. He also declared that, when Siamese merchants started to arrive in Manila, they brought presents for Carrasco, and a house was assigned to them. But when they tried to sell their rice, the treaty was not respected, and they left 'horrified by the greed with which foreigners were treated in Manila'.⁷⁷ In 1720 a new Governor, Toribio Cossío, Marquis of Torre Campo, arrived in the Philippines, and relations with Siam were frozen.

The second embassy organized by Governor Bustamente was appointed to the kingdom of Tunkin, in Cochinchina, and embarked on the galleon *Nuestra Señora de Loreto* in March 1718. It was composed of Franciso de Echeveste, named general and ambassador; José Sánchez Milla, named captain (*Capitán de Mar y Guerra*); Juan de Vera Guzmán, named alternate captain, and by four friars. They were instructed to purchase a ship in the mouth of the Mekong river, hire a local practitioner, and then to seek an audience with the king. They were to offer him presents, to seek a commercial treaty and, finally, to purchase iron and copper for cannon smelting in Manila. They reached the Mekong in early April 1718. Once there, they found themselves unable to hire a local pilot. The ship ran aground when trying to navigate the river, allegedly after being misguided by a British merchant. The rudder was lost, and replaced, only to run aground again soon afterwards. Eventually, the *Nuestra Señora de Loreto* was completely lost, but its artillery and cargo were salvaged. A camp was set on the riverside, and they received assistance by Spanish friars, but had difficulties in purchasing food from the local population. They attempted to reach the king, but were only received by his eunuchs. At the end, they succeeded in obtaining a license for trade, and a strip of land to set up a *factoría* near the village of Hien. There they set up a camp, purchased an old ship, and careened it. After 284 days, they left the Mekong, assisted by three local pilots who left them when they reached open seas. Unfortunately, they were caught by a storm that dragged them all the way to Batavia. The local Dutch authorities confiscated their ship, but allowed them to purchase a small boat (*chalupita*), which they named *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, as well as some cargo. When they finally reached Manila, in June 1720, they met the same fate as the members of the Siam embassy: they were accused of collaborating with the late Governor Bustamante, imprisoned, and investigated. No further relations with Tunkin were promoted by the next Governor, Marquis De Torre Campo.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁷⁸ This paragraph is based on Silos, 201–20.

7. The reform of the shipbuilding system in the Philippines and the last attempts for the transfer of the industry abroad (1700–1753)⁷⁹

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Bourbon monarchy sought to reform the shipbuilding industry, largely following the contents of the already mentioned *Discurso Parenético*, by Gómez de Espinosa. The crown also attempted to reduce the independence of the Mexican investors of the Manila-Acapulco trade route by setting new limits to the volume of Asian goods imported to New Spain, and the amount of silver shipped back to the Philippines. As part of this strategy, stricter control was imposed on the shipbuilding industry, by passing new technological legislation devised by Antonio de Gaztañeta, and by limiting the size of the Manila-Acapulco galleons to 500 tons. Additionally, a decree ordering the strict supervision and accounting of royal funds in the Philippine shipyards was issued. In 1718, a major social reform was attempted by abolishing private *encomiendas*, although public ones continued to exist. Stricter norms for the contracting of public works, partly aimed at the shipbuilding industry were also introduced in the 1730s. More far-reaching legislation was issued in 1736 and 1738, aimed at separating the lower levels of Spanish regional administration from woodcutting and shipbuilding operations, and limiting the exploitation of the natives by their own *caciques*. Executive authority was transferred to the friars, and new standards for working hours and payment of salaries were decreed. In all, the crown attempted to tackle the most serious problems of the shipbuilding industry by involving the Church and reducing the power of civil administration.⁸⁰

Relations with Siam were re-established in 1747, when a Siamese ship named *San Vicente Ferrer* arrived at Manila, carrying various products and letters from its king addressed to Governor Archedera. On 21 September the cargo registry was examined by local officials, the ship was measured, and its armament described. On 11 October, it was resolved to honour the free trade clauses of the treaty signed in 1718 by Governor Bustamante, and the ship was allowed to sell its merchandise without paying any duties.⁸¹ An officer of the Royal Exchequer, Dr. Figueroa Leyva, protested this measure, arguing that the 1718 treaty had not ratified by the king of Spain, who could not be deprived of his fiscal rights. He wrote that there was no economic justification for the exemption of duties, since on the only occasion a Spanish ship had been sent to Siam, seeking to purchase rice, it was charged with a duty of 25 percent ‘for the benefit of its king’.⁸² In 1748 another Siamese ship arrived in Manila, under the command of a Portuguese captain – Theodosio Pereyra *Rhin Throng Ppranit*. It carried an embassy led by the Jesuit prior of San Salvador of Siam, Father Jacinto Simoens, who presented letters from Champpaya Sitharma, first minister of that kingdom, in which Governor Archedera was thanked for the exemption of duties executed the previous year. He was also gifted with twelve elephant tusks. The letters

⁷⁹ This section is based on the dossier on Siam kept in AGI, Filipinas, 462, which covers the years 1717 to 1753.

⁸⁰ Valdez-Bubnov, ‘Crown, trade, church and indigenous societies’, 569–71.

⁸¹ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁸² AGI, Filipinas, 462.

were written in Latin, and were translated by the master of grammar of the Jesuit order in Manila, Father Juan Regis Aroche.⁸³

In 1751, the new Governor, Marquis of Ovando, received diplomatic correspondence from the king of Cambodia, but a formal treaty was not agreed.⁸⁴ In contrast, he ordered the Siam dossier to be re-opened in order to respond to the 1748 embassy. His explicit purpose was to arrange the construction of a new galleon, for, in his words, the 'misery or happiness' of the Spanish colony depended on shipbuilding.⁸⁵ There were sound reasons for this attempt. After a review of the ships available in Cavite, he found out that only the *Santísima Trinidad* fit for service, and another one built in Pangasinan was rotting, and condemned to be scuttled.⁸⁶ In 1751, a woodcutting campaign for the construction of a 60-gun galleon was started in the province of Palicpan, not far from Manila, but the costs appeared to be prohibitively high. When they reached 14,000 pesos, it was calculated that the final cost of the required *guijo* timber was going to reach 100,000 pesos, and the operations were cancelled. This decision was also justified by the low quality of Philippine shipbuilding, which the Governor considered to be 'plagued with many errors', due to the 'low intelligence' of the Cavite shipwrights, who were unable to 'build to the modern standards'.⁸⁷ To make things worse, there were suspicions that the galleon *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* had been lost; there were menacing forays by the Muslims of Joló, and rebellion had erupted again in the provinces of Panay, and Boxol. There was no hope to obtain another ship for the voyages to Acapulco scheduled for 1753 and 1754. This, in turn, opened the possibility of being left without the corresponding *situados*.

In consequence, Ovando resolved to re-activate the 1718 commercial treaty with Siam, with the explicit objective of building a ship there without further delay. In view of the dire situation of the Manila Treasury, he devised a detailed shipbuilding plan under the title *Proyecto político y de Marina; que ha dictado la urgencia del estado presente de las reales cajas*. In it, he proposed to create a company to sell 100 shares of 300 pesos to the merchants of Manila, based on the model of the shipbuilding responsibilities of the Royal Habana Company (1739–1751). Each subscriber was allowed to buy a maximum of ten shares, and the poorer ones could buy one share among three subscribers. The process was to be opened to Spanish settlers of any condition and worth, including royal officials and members of the clergy, a practice hitherto forbidden. The 30,000 pesos thus obtained was judged sufficient to order the construction of a large galleon in Siam, with which to complete the next voyages to New Spain, and to deter attacks from Mindanao. This estimate must have seemed attractive, for the galleon *Santísima Trinidad*, recently built in Bagatao, had cost 191,156 pesos.⁸⁸

⁸³ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁸⁴ Ortiz de la Tabla Ducasse, 91–3.

⁸⁵ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁸⁶ AGI, Filipinas, 153, N.17.

⁸⁷ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁸⁸ AGI, Filipinas, 158, N. 25; Montero y Vidal, 544–5.

After its launch, the new ship could transport shipbuilding timber, iron, lead and tin from Siam to the Philippines, on the company's account. These products could then be purchased by the Manila Treasury, and leftovers offered to the general public, an idea presented as financially advantageous to the crown. In the case the costs of the ship were not covered, subscribers were to be allowed the right to load merchandise on it, and sell it in Siam, New Spain, or China. The purchase of each share further granted the privilege of one licence – *boleta* – to load cargo in an ordinary voyage to Acapulco, apart from those already allocated to legitimate traders. The subscription was open until 20 February 1752, and shares could be reserved until 15 February by paying 150 pesos, with the obligation of paying the rest in October of that year, under penalty of losing the deposit. The remaining half-shares were to be then sold to those willing to pay the outstanding amount.⁸⁹ Before the end of that month, the shipbuilding embassy, composed of a commissary, two shipwrights, two master blacksmiths, two caulkers, two drillers and a midshipman, was scheduled to depart to Siam. On 19 February 1752, the Royal Treasury certified the delivery to Father Jacinto Simoens of several gifts for Barcalam Champayya, prime minister of Siam. Their value was estimated at 200 pesos, and contrasted with the value of 93 pesos attributed to gifts sent by the Barcalam to Governor Ovando. Simoens was also provided with a letter in Latin, addressed to the Barcalam. The embassy embarked on the *San Vicente Ferrer*, together with a cargo of cloves, iron and paper belonging to the Spanish merchants of Manila. One month after they left, the officer of the Royal Exchequer who had contested the payment of duties in the first voyage of the *San Vicente Ferrer*, Dr. Leyva Figueroa, issued an order stating that, without seeking to erode the friendship of Siam, any Spanish merchant who wanted to trade with that country had to pay a duty of eight percent to the Royal Treasury of Manila.⁹⁰

The ship, named *Nuestra Señora del Rosario y San Juan Bautista*, was successfully launched in Siam at some point in 1753.⁹¹ In that same year, it became the subject of a new fiscal controversy, for it was carefully inspected and measured in the Philippines. The shipwright who had been in charge of supervising its construction was accused of falsely reporting its cargo capacity, which turned out to be significantly larger than declared. A difference of more than 30 percent was detected, and the payment accorded for its use as a merchantman for the Manila-Acapulco trade route was tailored accordingly.⁹² This is the last known case of a ship built by the Spanish government outside the Philippine archipelago.

8. Conclusions

This article has shown that the motives for seeking an end to the Spanish shipbuilding industry in the Philippines, and its transfer abroad, did not stem from a single cause, but rather depended on the specific strategic contexts, mercantile and military, in which these attempts were made. The proposals and operations described

⁸⁹ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁹⁰ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁹¹ AGI, Filipinas, 462.

⁹² AGI, Filipinas, 462.

here reveal an ongoing perception among Spanish officials of the shipbuilding industry being deeply dysfunctional, as well as a certain cause of suffering and violent unrest among the populations of the archipelago. Nevertheless, the cases studied here also show that private interest could also have been a significant factor in these initiatives, without necessarily cancelling the social, financial or technical concerns expressed by Spanish officials. The attempts to make this industrial transfer coincided with the main axis of Spanish political, military and mercantile activity in the region, and they corresponded with two, well defined periods. The first one was the period of ‘consolidation’ or ‘strengthening’ of the Spanish foothold in South East Asia, defined by military expansion towards the Moluccas, Matheo, Formosa and the Marianas, and ranged from the early years of the seventeenth century to 1668. The second one occurred during the first half of the eighteenth century, and it coincided with the introduction of much tighter royal control over trans-Pacific trade and the shipbuilding industry in the Philippines. The cases of industrial transfer studied here seem to sustain this chronology. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that they could have been more numerous than what the information contained in the Spanish archives reflects.

Funding

This article was supported by the project *Redes empresariales y administración estatal: la producción de materiales estratégicos en el mundo hispánico como escenario de la globalización temprana* UNAM-PAPIIT IG400318.

Notes on contributor

Iván Valdez-Bubnov is a full-time research fellow at the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. His field of specialisation is the history of Spanish naval shipbuilding in the Age of Sail, and he teaches military and naval history and historiography at both graduate and undergraduate levels. His recent publications include ‘Comercio, guerra y tecnología: la construcción naval para la carrera de Filipinas (1577–1757)’, in *Comercio, guerra y finanzas en una época en transición (siglos XVII–XVIII)*, ed. J.A. Rodríguez Hernández (Valladolid: Castilla Ediciones, 2017) and ‘Piezas, toneladas, quintadas y arqueo en el Pacífico hispano. Fundamentos para una interpretación tecnológica de la construcción naval española en Asia durante los siglos XVII y XVIII’ in *Redes empresariales y administración estatal: la provisión de materiales estratégicos en el mundo hispánico durante el largo siglo XVIII*, eds. Iván Valdez-Bubnov, Sergio Solbes and Pepijn Brandon (México: UNAM, 2020).

ORCID

Iván Valdez-Bubnov  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1324-6363>

Correspondence to: Iván Valdez-Bubnov. Email: ivaldezbubnov@yahoo.com