

NEW WORLD CONTACTS WITH ASIA *

SILVIO ZAVALA

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA UNDERWENT AN IMPORTANT change after the Portuguese found a maritime route around Africa at the end of the fifteenth century. The Portuguese expansion in the Orient brought to the Iberian Peninsula many Oriental influences. The Portuguese used the experience that the Arabian seamen had in the Oriental seas. Vidal de la Blache points out that this produced a connection between the existing lanes of navigation; that progress consisted in overcoming the ancient limits.¹ The relations between Asia and Portugal influenced Brazil with the incidental arrival of ships plying the route to the Orient or through the contacts that took place in Portugal, the mother country.²

Spain reached the Orient in the sixteenth century by way of the Pacific route. And soon she became involved in a controversy with Portugal for the possession of the Moluccas and the Philippines. These rivalries continued even during the period of the union of the Iberian crowns (1580-1640).³ The Spanish occupation of the Philippine archipelago (1564) served as a basis for the relations between Mexico and Peru with areas across the Pacific. The Manila-Acapulco run supplied Oriental merchandise to the Spanish-American Vice-Royalties and Spain, through the Vera Cruz route and its connection with the Atlantic fleet.

A. *The Portuguese.*

Even though Brazil had been discovered in 1500 when the Portuguese were travelling to Asia, and even though Pedro Vaz de Caminha—in his

* I acknowledge collaboration received from the Brazilian historian J. H. Rodrigues to present the story of the Portuguese connections.

¹ *Principes*, p. 268. When Vasco da Gama reached Melinda on the Eastern Coast of Africa, he found the pilots who knew the route to Calicut. The Indies, were the vestibule of another dominion very well established; Chinese, Malaya seas or Sino-Malayan.

² G. Friederici, *Der Charakter der Entdeckung und Eroberung Amerikas durch die Europaer* (Stuttgart, 1925-1936, 3 vols.), II, 23, thinks that many characteristics of colonial Brazil are difficult to understand without a previous knowledge of the backgrounds and conditions of Portuguese Africa and Asia. Several of the first founders and receivers of the Brazil captaincies had served in India.

³ Cf. C. R. Boxer, "Portuguese and Spanish Rivalry in the Far East during the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April, 1947), pp. 91-105.

Letter about the discovery⁴—and the king Don Manuel, in his report to the Catholic sovereigns (Ferdinand and Isabella⁵), said “that this land is a stopping place in the route to Calicut” and that it was “very convenient and necessary for the navigation to India,” in reality, the fleets avoided Brazil and did not use its ports as stop-over and/or winter stations. The route to India and the Brazil shipping lanes were always different lines of navigation. The ships that departed from Lisbon in March or April had to reach Mosambique before the southwest monsoon was over, that is, before the end of August; from there they continued directly to India.⁶ The initial idea was soon abandoned because of the experience gained through navigation. We know that between 1500 and 1730, only twenty ships deviated from the route to India to reach Brazil, due to different circumstances.

Therefore, it was not because of the arrival of boats enroute to India that continuous as well as frequent contacts between Brazil and the Far East were established. Probably, the Portuguese expansion and the use of the Portuguese languages in the Orient helped these communications, observable more by their efforts than by their motivation.⁷ The rich documentation existing in Goa and the former Portuguese possessions shows the assistance sent from Brazil to India; the transplanting of pepper and cinnamon to Brazil in 1631 and during all the seventeenth century, and the opening of free trade between Brazil and India (1689-1700). All the different parts of the Portuguese colonial empire were in contact with each other and their men served in any part from Brazil to China.⁸

⁴ *Letter of Pedro Vaz de Caminha*, ed. by Jaime Cortesao, (Rio de Janeiro, 1943), p. 240.

⁵ Letter of July 29, 1501, in *História de Colonizacão portuguesa no Brasil*, ed. by Malheiro Dias, Vol. II, pp. 155-157.

⁶ Cf. Alexander Marchant, “Colonial Brazil as a Way Station for the Portuguese India Fleets,” *The Geographical Review*, Vol. XXXI, no. 3. (July, 1941).

⁷ Revealed by John Le Roy Christian, in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (February, 1945), by Panduronga Pissurlencar, *Boletim Geral das Colonias* (March, 1951), and by Charles R. Boxer, *A Glimpse of the Goa Archives*, reprinted from the B.S.O.A.S., 1952. On the activities of the Portuguese in Asia, cf. C. R. Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550-1770. Fact and Fancy in the History of Macao* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1948). “The Portuguese in the East, 1500-1800,” in *Portugal and Brazil*, ed. by H. V. Livermore and W. J. Entwistle (Oxford, 1953), p. 42 and the following. F. C. Danvers, *The Portuguese in India* (London, 1894), 2 Vols.

⁸ G. Freyre, *Sobrados e Mocambos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1951), Vol. III, p. 753, points out the constant transfer from the Orient to Brazil of Portuguese officers, military and religious, and slaves permeated with the same influence. There were Asiatics introduced as cooks, “Mascates,” or itinerant retail merchants, tea-growers in the area. In the nineteenth century, there was an immigration of Orientals to Brazil. In regard to the streams of influence, Freyre gives the Portuguese ships which arrived from Lisbon and from Oporto to Brazil carrying not only products from Portugal and from the rest of Europe but also Oriental articles. He also considers the arrival of foreign trade ships from India, *ibid.* Vol. III, pp. 758, 761.

From these communications, we know of the transplanting to Brazil of several fruits and drugs like the palm tree, the coconut tree, *jaqueiras*, the cinnamon tree, the mango, tamarind, the *carambolas*, the *jambos*, and even the vine which produces black pepper, "still called improperly pepper of the kingdom."⁹ The tropical countries, such as Brazil, could easily adapt a variety of plants indigenous to other tropical countries such as India.

The contacts between Brazil and the Orient (especially with India) were not only in the form of the transplanting of fruits and plants. Gilberto Freyre observes that "the significant fact in the social history of the Brazilian family is the discovery and colonization of Brazil (from the end of the sixteenth century on [,] Brazil colonizes and defends herself from numerous foreign aggressions) at a time when the Portuguese, lords of extensive lands in Asia and Africa, have taken possession of a rich variety of tropical products. Some of them unable to be adapted to Europe, but all products of fine, rich and old Asiatic and African civilizations. Brazil was perhaps the part of the Portuguese Empire which, thanks to its social and climatic conditions, took advantage for a longer period of time of the following things: parasol, *palanquins*, *leque*, *bengala*, silk bedspreads, the clothes in the Sino-Japanese fashion, the tiles for the houses twisted on their sides, their twistings on the ends in the fashion of a moon, the porcelain from China, and the glasses or furniture from India and China."¹⁰ Moreover, Freyre adds that the characteristics of Asiatic architecture, taken from China and Japan and introduced into Brazil, do show the great plastic ability of the Portuguese settlers and their talent to adapt themselves in the tropics. The gentlemen of the seacoast of Pernambuco and of the Reconcavo, comments the same author, began immediately to enjoy the advantages which in Europe, in the sixteenth century, only the refined courts were acquainted with. The Portuguese were the first to bring to Europe the *leque*, porcelain for the table, the quilts of China and India, tea service and, it appears, also the parasol. All these had come into use among the richest inhabitants of Brazil, that is, the gentlemen of the plantations of the Northeast—of Bahia, and of Rio de Janeiro.¹¹

⁹ Preface by Francisco Adolfo de Varnhegen to *Coloquios dos simples a drogas e cousas medicinais* by Garcia de Orta (Lisbon, 1871). J. A. Concalves de Mello, *Tempo dos Flamengos* (Rio Janeiro, 1947), p. 186. Notice that the spices from Oriental India kept on arriving in Brazil during the Dutch occupation. R. C. Simonsen, *História econômica do Brasil, 1500-1820* (Sao Paulo, 1937), 2 vols., Vol. II, p. 209, observes that the Jesuit from Maranhão called Brother Joao de Assumpcao from India to take care of the cultivation of pepper. The cultivation of rice, though it does not come directly from Asia but through Europe, becomes very important to the Portuguese in America.

¹⁰ *Casa Grande e Senzala*, 2nd. ed., (1936) pp. 192-193.

¹¹ The same author, *Sobrados e Mucambos* (1951), Vol. III, p. 746, points out the advantages which the traditions of the Orient offered for adaptation in

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the migration to Brazil of the royal family of Portugal took place on the eve of independence, the effects of this long contact between Brazil and Asia could already be better observed. Such effects have been little studied as a whole, but they can be observed—here and there—especially in the work of Gilberto Freyre who, more than anyone else, has undertaken the comparative study of the social history of the Portuguese civilization throughout the world.¹²

Tea was so common in Pernambuco at the time of Henry Koster, a traveller who visited Brazil from 1809 to 1820,¹³ that it was judged to be indigenous, having arrived from Macao in 1811. The tea of India became in Brazil a symbol of civilization, polish, sweetness and grace of manners. The Orientalisms introduced in Brazil are innumerable, and made of the Portuguese *Nababo*, the carrier of the tropical values of garb, perfume for the mouth and hair, as well as of adornment and personal hygiene which—within a short time—was carried to the most wealthy Brazilians. Oriental values, food, drugs, textiles, perfumes spread over Brazil. The *canja indiana* (chicken soup with rice) became the national dish. It was from Goa, from Portuguese India, “more than from anywhere else—that the Portuguese brought to Brazil Oriental imports, that his sense as a people, plastic like no other, understood that they would be superior to European ones for the life of the Europeans themselves or of their descendants in tropical lands. Thereby, the Brazilian came to encounter in India the origin of many features of his culture and of many products of his country which, thanks to the Portuguese, it acquired from old cultures and Oriental experiences. Here (in Goa) were met the railings for houses, now so habitual in the domestic architecture of Brazil; the *copiar* or roof (*telheiro*) in front of the house which here was found not only on the churches but the very cemeteries of the Christians, giving protection against rain.”¹⁴

In this intimate contact and in this crossing of cultural values between two tropical cultures (Indian and Brazilian) there were also in-

tropical Brazil. These Oriental values were assimilated through the Portuguese, the moor, the Jew, the negro, and facilitated life in tropical America. The characteristics of the Orientalization of the Portuguese effected by their contacts with Asia are mentioned in some cases in documents; for example, J. A. Azevedo, *Epocas de Portugal Económico* (Lisbon, 1929), p. 157, cites an example of wealth composed of different animals, horses, and wild beasts “which in Asia are most precious among the princes.”

¹² See *Sobrados e Mucambos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1936), p. 258. I also find pertinent, in the same work (Rio de Janeiro edition, 1951), Vol. III, pp. 738, 758-765, 815-819.

¹³ Cf. *Viagens ao Nordeste do Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1942), p. 464.

¹⁴ G. Freyre, *Aventura e rotina* (Rio de Janeiro, 1953), p. 320.

roduced into the Orient plants, artifacts, and luxuries from Portuguese America. The presence of the *cajueiro* in India, of the Brazilian sweet potato in Macao, of tapioca, tobacco, *mamoeiro*, the hammock in Portuguese India—all these, from Brazil—are some interesting examples.

Concerning this relationship between Brazil and India, Gilberto Freyre is right when he declares that "Brazil was fortunate, certainly, in having been in the beginning undervalued by Portugal, by virtue of which all the nobility, all the worth, all the subtlety of the Portuguese was directed toward concern for India or the Far East; [?] in order to absorb, smooth . . . down rough places, Orientalisms which the Brazilians later assimilated in the form of cultural cream."¹⁵

The Orientalisms which were dissolved in the Brazilian complex of culture are naturally much more numerous than the Brazilianisms or Portuguese-Americanisms transplanted into Indian or Oriental culture. The latter already constituted a civilization which was much more complex and ancient when the Portuguese established contact between West and East. Thus, the Oriental influences upon Brazil were much more numerous than those which are briefly sketched here. Only an extensive study, based on investigation in the archives of the Far East, will reveal the limit these contacts and these cultural features were passed on. The true foundation of the interchange of cultures, values, and people of the civilization of the tropics was Goa and not Salvador (Bahia), as Gilberto Freyre pointed out.¹⁶ The Portuguese in Goa, were the vehicles of the Romanization or Latinization or Christianization spreading throughout various parts of the Far East, as Portuguese culture of America was Orientalized.¹⁷ Flowers, fruits, plants, trees, food, porcelain, customs, were either brought from the Orient to America or from America to the Orient.

B. *The Spaniards.*

Beginning with the voyage of discovery of Columbus, launched for the purpose of finding the route to the Orient, European explorers of various nationalities competed in searching for a route of communication with Asia.

The discovery of the Pacific Ocean by the Spaniards from the heights of Panama (1513), the exploration and the later occupation by them of the extensive Western American coast from California to Chile, the discovery of the Strait of Magellan (1520) and the first voyage of circumnavigation of the globe which Elcano completed, the voyage to the Mo-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

luccas by the fleet of Jofré García de Loaysa (1525), the expeditions in the southern ocean from Mexico—beginning with the ones headed by Alvaro de Saavedra Cerón (1527-1529) and Villalobos (1542)—and from South America by Alvaro de Mendaña (1568 and 1595) and Pedro Fernández Quirós (1605) and, even more, the occupation of the Philippines (1564) and the establishment by Andrés Urdaneta in 1565 of the return route, resulted in connecting the American continent with the world of the Orient during the colonial period. These trans-Pacific relations (whatever may have been the possible pre-Columbian connections) represented a historical innovation, as were the trans-Atlantic routes between Europe, Africa and America.¹⁸

By means of the Pacific route, however, no current of immigration took place comparable to that which reached the New World by way of the Atlantic from Europe and Africa. Nevertheless, there was a demand for Oriental slaves who were transported by way of the route of Manila, and who were seen working in New Spain's workshop. Their influence, in terms of domestic service and the presence of women, may have been of some importance (let us recall the legend of the China Poblana in Mexico¹⁹). On the other hand, there were emigrants and deportees from Spain and America who were sent to the Philippines.

The movement of emigrants from Asia to the New World did not succeed in modifying considerably the composition of the population of America during the colonial period. However, it would be on a scale which was more considerable in later times.

As a consequence of these activities on the American continent, while the Portuguese established traffic between Europe and the Orient by the sea route of the Cape of Good Hope, the Spaniards reached the Asiatic world to trade and to settle, by way of the southern routes of the Pacific or from their possessions in America. The Portuguese and Spaniards

¹⁸ Cf. H. R. Wagner, *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century* (San Francisco, 1929), Id., *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca* (Santa Ana, 1933). Id., *Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America, to the year 1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937), 2 vols. I. S. Wright, *Voyages of Alvaro Saavedra Cerón, 1527-1529* (Miami, 1951). M. Cuevas, *Monje y Marino, la vida y los tiempos de Fray Andrés de Urdaneta* (Mexico, 1943). Justo Zaragosa, *Historia del Descubrimiento de las Regiones Australes* (Madrid, 1876-1882), 3 vols. A. Gschaedler, "Explorateurs d'Espagne et d'Amérique dans les îles du Pacifique," *Revista de Historia de América* (Jan.-Dec. 1953), pp. 35-36, 161-173. H. H. Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast* (1884), 2 vols. John W. Caughbey, *History of the Pacific Coast, 1933*.

¹⁹ An Indian girl from Delhi, captured by Portuguese sailors, was brought to Manila, and then to Acapulco and Puebla. She died in 1688 and is remembered because of her spiritual life and supposed introduction of the women's national dress of Mexico.

competed in the Moluccas and in the Philippines, as they had done on the coasts of Africa and on the islands of the Atlantic, at the beginning of the Atlantic expansion. Spain yielded in the Moluccas (1529), although she soon participated in enterprises of war and commerce there; she persevered in the Philippines until 1898—with the brief interruption of the 1762 English occupation of Manila. A complicated web of Oriental and European relations was formed in the proximity of the Spanish outpost in the Philippines, with the hope to take part in the trade of the ships bringing silver from New Spain. The construction of ships gained importance in the Philippines.

In the period which we are studying, there were—by way of the Pacific—contacts of administration, commerce, missions, and culture, that sometimes had their terminal in the Philippines, sometimes reaching even the Asiatic continent and Japan. Navigation to the Philippines, the occupation of this archipelago, its administration and defense, the sending of missionaries and the establishment of trans-Pacific commerce, were as much the imperial activities of Spain as they were of the Vice-Royalty of New Spain.²⁰ New Spain sent payments or *situados* for the military support of the Philippines as it did to their Atlantic possessions (Cuba, Puerto Rico).²¹

The ships from China represented for the economy and the culture of Mexico an important element in the colonial period, within the limitations imposed by the mercantilistic politics of the mother country. From China and other Oriental lands were imported—by way of Manila—plants such as the mango and the tamarind, as well as other commercial goods, including silks, cotton cloths, carpets, fans, ivories, furniture, porcelains, spices. From Mexico were exported cacao, cochineal, oil and wine (im-

²⁰ A presentation of the Spanish beginnings in the Philippines, with an extensive bibliography, can be found in Edward J. McCarthy, *Spanish Beginnings in the Philippines, 1564-1572* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1943). John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines. Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1959). Angel Nuñez Ortega, *Noticia histórica de las relaciones políticas y comerciales habidas entre México y el Japón, durante el Siglo XVII* (Mexico, 1879); 2nd edition, Mexico, Publicaciones de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1923. Zelia Nuttal, "The earliest historical relations between Mexico and Japan," University of California Publications, Archaeology and Ethnology, IV (Berkeley, 1904), James Alexander Robertson, "Bibliography of early Spanish-Japanese Relations." *The Asiatic Society of Japan, Proceedings*, Vol. LXIII, pt. I (Tokyo, 1915). Rodrigo de Vivero, *Relación del Japón (1609)*, introductions and notes by Manuel Romero de Terros, *Anales del Museo Nacional*, 5a. época, I-1 (Mexico, 1934), pp. 67-111. In regard to the *China Poblana* cf. Rafael Carrasco Puente, *Bibliografía de Catarina de San Juan y de la China Poblana* (Mexico, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1950).

²¹ Cf. J. A. Leroy, "The Philippine *Situado* from The Treasury of New Spain," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. X, pp. 929-932; Vol. XI, pp. 722-723.

ported to Mexico from the mother country), and principally Mexican and Peruvian silver which, as much by the Pacific route as by that of Lisbon, came to constitute a notable factor in the Asiatic economy. The Spanish shawl—*el mantón de Manila*—with other Oriental articles, reached Spain by way of the Mexican route. This commerce, in turn, was related with the one which extended from Acapulco to Callao, located along the Pacific Coast of Spanish-America. Peru's first efforts towards direct communications with the Philippines were interrupted by the Spanish crown. The commerce in Oriental merchandise between Mexico and Peru was not well received by the merchants of the mother country who sent their goods by the Panama route. Thus, as the Sevillian monopoly succeeded in keeping the land route from Buenos Aires to Peru closed, it obtained the prohibition of the commerce of Oriental goods between Mexico and Peru from 1631 to the first decades of the eighteenth century. New Spain had been successful in a certain development of silk cultivation in the sixteenth century, and the arrival of Oriental textiles created different competition. Peru maintained its Acapulco interest in Oriental commerce and sent merchants and money, upon the arrival of the galleon from Manila. Some sale of Mexico fabric was effected in Peru; by the coastal routes, cacao from Guayaquil and Sonsonate arrived at the Mexican Vice-Royalty which was partly re-shipped to the Philippines.²²

The Catholic missionaries were interested not only in converting and administering to the natives of the Philippines, but also in extending their activities to the populous world of Asia. The Portuguese as well as the Spaniards discovered—from their first contacts in India, China, Japan—the differences between the world of the American neophytes and those of the ancient Asiatic culture. In some parts of Asia and Oceania, they again encountered the Mohammedan creed against which they had struggled in the Peninsula and in parts of Africa; this was the case with the inhabitants of Mindanao, which was taken into consideration in the *Recopilación de las Leyes de Indias* (Laws of the Indies). Traces of the Spanish efforts and failures in their struggle against Islam remain in the ecclesiastic and administrative writings about Iberian colonization.²³

²² Some aspects of this vast theme are treated by W. Borah, *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, 1943), and *Early Colonial Trade and Navigation between Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley, 1954). And the work of W. L. Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York, 1939); 2nd edition (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959). P. Chaunu, *Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibériques (XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1960).

²³ The Jesuit José de Acosta, in the XVIth century, distinguished well between the civilization of the Orientals and that of the Mexicans and Peruvians). Cf. *De Procurande Indorum Salute* (Salamanca, 1588), proemio, pp. 117-123. A recent edition has been published by Francisco Mateos, S. J. (Madrid: Concejo Superior de Misiones, 1952).

When the Chinese began trading with the first Spaniards who settled in the Philippines, they brought sugar, wheat and barley flour, nuts, grapes, pears, oranges (*naranjas de China*), silks, porcelains, and iron. Unlike pre-Columbian America, the use of the wheel and of horses and oxen was common in Asia. And their arms were not completely unequal.

Manila was thus a port of trade and cultural interchange between the Spaniards and the Orientals and, in its turn, a port of entry for the products and the tastes of other Oriental countries as well as the arts of Spanish America.²⁴ The ivories of the Orient introduced a peculiar style in Christian statuary, as can be observed in the beautiful examples which are preserved in the Mexican museums. There is Oriental influence in the lacquers of Michoacan. The magnificent railing of the choir loft in the cathedral of Mexico was made in Macao by the native artist Quiaulo, as M. Toussaint has noted.

As we have indicated, Spanish monopoly artificially restricted commercial contacts with the Orient, as it also tried to limit the mercantile exchange of the Atlantic. But it could not close the stream of activities and communications with the Philippines without putting in danger the stability of this Spanish possession and without harming the interest of the commerce in Oriental merchandise of the mother country itself. The commerce of Manila with China gained in importance as the "Country trade" with India became significant, in particular, trade with Madras.²⁵

The operation of the Royal Company of the Philippine Islands, conceived by Cabarrús and founded in 1784, shows—as in the establishment of the Guipuzcoan Company for the commerce of Venezuela—the late penetration in Spain of the system of large, privileged mercantile companies which had been put into practice since the seventeenth by Holland, England and France. The planned Philippine route was to start from Cadiz, *via* Cape Horn, with possible stop-over along the coasts of Peru to acquire silver, and then to continue through the Pacific to the Philippines; the return route direct to Cadiz was to be undertaken *via* the Cape of Good Hope. The Company was affected by Napoleon's occupation of Spain. Fernando VII paid attention to the Company (there is a picture of Goya

²⁴ On the mediation of the Portuguese in the commerce of the Orient with Manila and the difficulties which caused in 1642, from this traffic, the separation of the Iberian crowns, see C. R. Boxer, *Macao, na epoca da restauracao* (Macao, 1942).

²⁵ The studies of G. Freyre leave the impression that the Oriental influences which he finds in Brazil correspond mostly to the last decades of the XVIIIth century and the beginning of the XIXth, and that origins from India have an outstanding part in them. In the case of the Philippines and Mexico, the contacts were working at the end of the XVIth century, and most frequent mention is made of China.

which shows him presiding over a council). When Spain lost her continental possessions, she succeeded in saving Cuba and Puerto Rico, on the one hand, and the Philippines on the other, until 1898. The navigation line of the Pacific between Acapulco and Manila was interrupted; the last galleon left Manila in 1811 and returned from Acapulco in 1815. Afterwards, the Philippines again had an American connection; this time, with the United States of America and not with Spanish-America.