Hacienda Gomantong: The 1888 Chinese Immigration Decree, A German Tobacco Plantation, and Chinese Laborers in Jolo, Sulu, Southern Philippines

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Abstract

Through primary and contemporary sources, this paper chronicles the emergence and later closure of a German-owned tobacco plantation in Jolo which operated from 1884 to 1889. It touches on the Spanish colonial government's regulations on Chinese labor and immigration, specifically in relation to the September 1888 immigration decree, as well as to the plantation's employment of Chinese coolies from Singapore. The article shows how the decree adversely affected the importation of Chinese laborers to the estate, incurring financial loss that later led to closure, which was also precipitated by horrible working conditions and cruel European administrators. By focusing on this relatively unknown episode in Philippine and Mindanao history, I contribute to the continuing interrogation of Manila-centric narratives, discuss an episode in the history of Europe-Philippines-Southeast Asia ties, and shed more light in the story of the Chinese in the Philippines.

Keywords: September 1888 Immigration decree, Hacienda Gomantong, Chinese in Jolo, tobacco cultivation in the Philippines

A German Complaint

On 20 November 1889, the German Ambassador to Spain filed a complaint against the Spanish government on behalf of the German Borneo Company (*Deutsche Borneogessellshaft*).[1] In the complaint, the Company's Director, Hermann Frederick Meyerink, was demanding $28,000 (Mexican dollars) from Madrid as indemnity for their financial loss during the fiscal year 1888-1889. According to Meyerink, the amount was equivalent to the Company's expenses for salaries and transportation allowances of personnel and laborers, repair and maintenance of shops and tobacco drying sheds, and other miscellaneous incidentals. Meyerink claimed that the unexpected major loss was caused by a decree issued on 28 September 1888 by the Governor-General of the Philippines Valeriano Weyler.[2]

The decree required all Chinese immigrants to the Philippines to disembark and register only at the port of Manila, the colonial capital. Governor-General Weyler, in defense of the decree, explained that the measure was necessary to "curb illegal entries"[3] of the Chinese, particularly in the southern part of the country. He further emphasized that this unlawful movement of people had resulted in an increasing number of *chinos indocumentados* or undocumented Chinese (i.e. those who came to the colony without the necessary travel permits and documents of identification), who, in effect, were evading their financial obligations to the Spanish colonial state. Since the Chinese paid the most taxes compared to Chinese mestizos and Filipinos, the perennial problem these indocumentados posed immensely affected the treasury.[4]

Meyerink asserted that the decree was absolutely injurious to the Company's tobacco plantation in Jolo, which opened in 1884. Jolo was then an important trading center that employed Chinese coolies in the southern Philippines' Sulu archipelago.[5] Contrary to other foreign firms' practice of importing laborers from southern China or Manila, the German Borneo Company brought Chinese coolies directly from Singapore. Meyerink insisted that the September 1888 decree prevented the arrival of some 170 laborers contracted to work on the tobacco plantation.[6]

Juan Arolas, the Spanish military governor of Jolo, on the other hand, had a different view. Arolas stressed that the decree had nothing to do with the Company's unfortunate fate. The financial loss, he maintained, must be blamed on the plantation's European administrators. While he did not elaborate on his allegation, Arolas urged the Manila authorities to look into the plantation's management and the labor conditions on the estate.[7] Because of the scarcity of source materials, it is uncertain whether an investigation was indeed made. The Madrid government, however, sided with Arolas and did not pay what the Company was claiming.[8]

This paper is about the establishment and consequent abolition of a German-owned tobacco plantation in Jolo which operated from 1884 to 1889. It explores the brief history of the only tobacco plantation on the island during the period, by highlighting the Spanish colonial government's regulations on Chinese labor and immigration, specifically in relation to the September 1888 immigration decree, as well as to the Company's employment of Chinese coolies from Singapore. Furthermore, it examines the said decree's negative impacts on the importation of Chinese laborers to the estate and how such issue led to the Company's huge financial loss, as Meyerink claimed. It also interrogates Governor Arolas' assertion on the harsh labor conditions on the plantation, made possible by the cruel European administrators, as the major factor that led to the failure of this short-lived agricultural venture in the south.

This paper is divided into four parts. I first discuss the existing literature on the Chinese in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao and Sulu in the nineteenth century. Next, I focus on the September 1888 decree in relation to the undocumented and "dangerous" Chinese in the Philippines, and the role Sulu played in this unregulated movement of people. I will then examine the establishment of the German Borneo Company's tobacco plantation in Jolo and its importation of Chinese coolies. Lastly, I will probe the German complaint by elaborating on the labor conditions and the abuses against the laborers, leading to the plantation's abolition in 1889.

The Chinese in Southern Philippines: Themes, Sources, Historical Studies

The history of the Chinese in Sulu and Mindanao is a neglected topic of historical inquiry (See 1990; Wu 1959). This is lamentable considering the longstanding commercial and diplomatic relations between Sulu and China that began centuries before Spanish colonization. Based on ancient Chinese records, the Chinese brought prestige goods to Sulu in exchange for pearls, tortoise shells and other marine products. The Sultan of Sulu's tributary mission to the Ming Emperor in 1417 also demonstrates a strong diplomatic link between Sulu and the Celestial Empire (See 2017; See et al. 2005, 32-37). While these mutually beneficial interactions continued, sources about them and on the Chinese in particular, who migrated to these parts of the Philippines, are relatively scant. Pre-nineteenth century Spanish materials, written by military officials and friars, commonly highlight the colonial government's military campaigns to subjugate the "Moros," and the Church's missionary efforts to convert the "heathens" in the colony's southern frontier (Arcilla 1989; Warren 1977; Wu 1959).

After the Chinese massacres and expulsions in the preceding periods,[9] new economic opportunities were opened to the Chinese in the 1800s (Wickberg 2000). The Spanish colonial government and private merchants considered Chinese labor necessary for the economic development of the Philippines (de Comenge 1894; Marcaida 1861). Hence, in 1839, Chinese immigration was liberalized, permitting the Chinese to conduct business again in the islands, and even travel to and reside in the provinces.[10] In Mindanao, the increase in the number of the Chinese depended on the success of the Spanish military forces in subduing the local populations and in occupying the latter's territories (Wickberg 2000). For example, in 1850, there were 563 and 40 registered Chinese in Misamis, and Zamboanga, respectively (Diaz Arenas 1850, 4b–4c).[11] After forty years, the following southern provinces had varying Chinese populations: Cotabato: 158; Davao: 45; Misamis: 469; Surigao: 257; Isabela de Basilan: 41; and, Jolo: 599.[12]

The Spanish colonial state meticulously tracked and controlled the movements and activities of the Chinese. Starting in 1804,[13] the Chinese had to regularly register with the authorities. They were required to possess documents of identification, pay taxes, and secure poll-tax certificates (*cedula de capitacion, cedula personal*). When travelling outside their registered places of residence, and especially to "unpacified" territories like Mindanao, they had to seek internal travel permits from municipal and provincial officials. Moreover, new Chinese immigrants and those who wanted to leave the Philippines had to apply for passports from the Governor-General (*Chinos, Sus reglamentos y sus contribuciones* 1893).[14]

This state's "policy of vacillation"—treating the Chinese favorably, and with suspicion and disgust at the same time—generated voluminous official records now located in Philippine and Spanish archives. However, only a few scholars have, thus far, utilized them specifically to examine the lives and circumstances of the Chinese in Sulu and Mindanao. Wickberg (2000), in his classic work on the Philippine Chinese, provides short discussions on the general history of the Chinese in southern Philippines. Warren (1985), on the other hand, describes the activities of Chinese traders relative to slave raiding and trading in the region between the 1760s and 1898. In his biography of Captain Leopold Schück, Montemayor (2005) briefly mentions some Chinese laborers employed on the German captain's plantations in Sulu in the 1880s. Similarly, Salazar (2000) comments on the importance of Chinese labor in Sulu, but this particular topic was only peripheral to his focus on the German economic interests in nineteenth-century Philippines. By using oral traditions, genealogies and interviews, Tan (1992), a renowned academic of Tausug-Chinese ancestry from Sulu, reconstructed his family history, and published a short article. Finally, Agdeppa-Cañones (2018) used archival materials for her research on the *Chinos* of Zamboanga.

It is apparent from the abovementioned works that there is a gap in the existing literature on the history of the Chinese in Mindanao and Sulu. Despite the availability of abundant primary source materials, a narrative on the emergence and evolution of various Chinese communities and their socioeconomic contributions in the Philippines' southern region during

the Spanish colonial period is yet to be written. The present paper is, therefore, a modest attempt to contribute to fill in this historiographical lacuna.

The September 1888 Immigration Decree and the Undocumented Chinese

The September 1888 immigration decree must be understood within the context of the Spanish colonial administration's policies on the Chinese in Mindanao, Sulu in particular, during the nineteenth century.[15] These policies, aimed primarily at thwarting Chinese penetration of the colony's southern islands, were motivated by three factors (Wickberg 2000, 90–91). First, Spain wanted to assert her sovereignty over the Muslim south, which had resisted Spanish encroachment and political control for centuries. The Spaniards suspected that Chinese traders were supplying the Sultan of Sulu with arms and ammunitions for Sulu's protracted war against Spain. Second, the Spanish authorities, because of their negative stereotypes of the Chinese, wanted to prevent the latter from "contaminating" the unconquered "native peoples," or the Lumads of Mindanao, with their "immoral" and "heathen" beliefs and practices. Lastly, the Spanish government wanted to curb the increasing number of undocumented Chinese who came to the Philippines through Sulu.

The September 1888 immigration was promulgated based on the Spanish colonial government's financial considerations. All non-Spanish subjects were required to pay taxes. The Chinese, however, paid the highest monetary obligations since the beginning of the colonial rule in the Philippines in the mid-sixteenth century.[16] This system was based on the Spanish view that the Chinese, who had a strong commanding presence in the economy, had to pay more than the mestizos and the *indios naturales* (i.e. Filipinos) (Plehn 1901, 1902).[17]

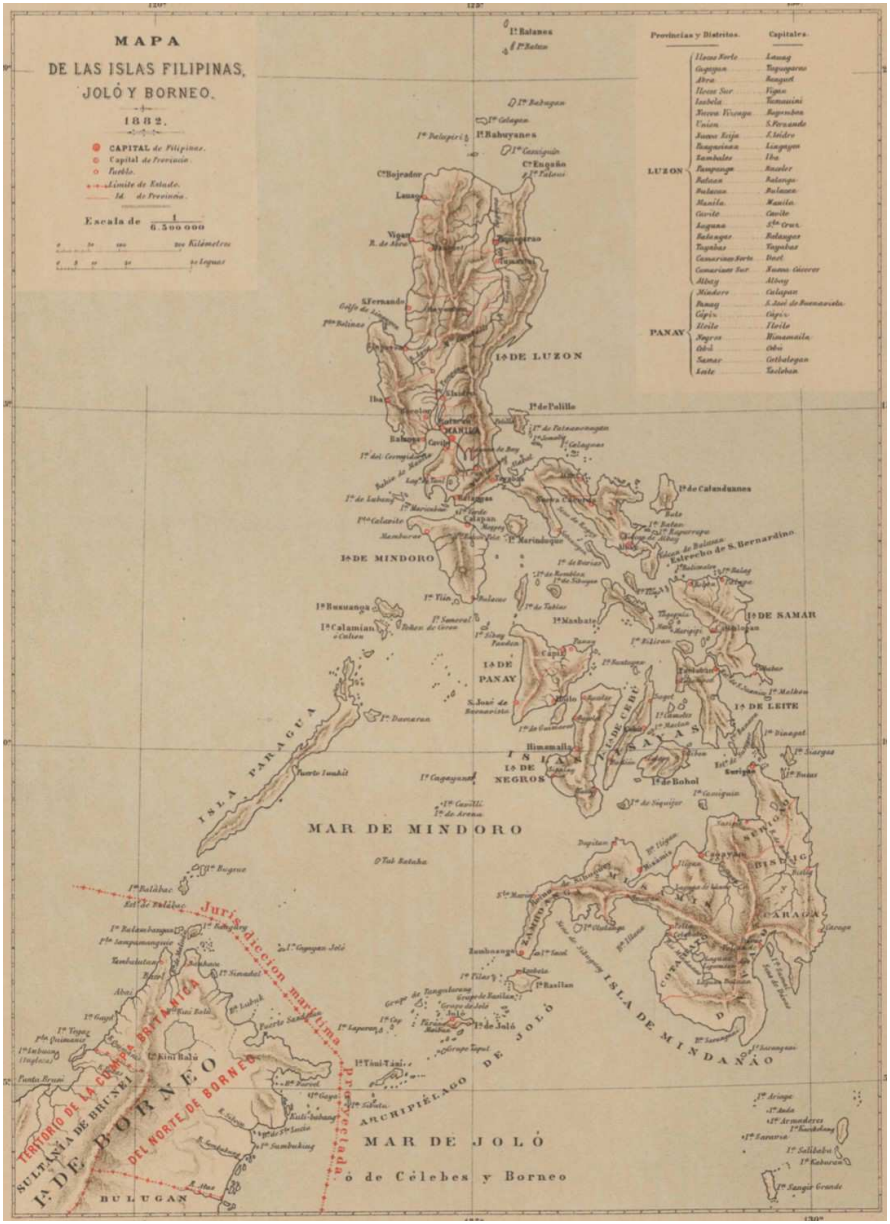
To efficiently collect taxes from the Chinese, the Spanish administration issued restrictive policies on Chinese immigration,

registration, and mobility. All Chinese arriving in the Philippines had to possess passports issued by the Spanish legations in Macao, Amoy, or Hong Kong.[18] Those Chinese travelling to the provinces also had to secure licenses to travel from the Governor-General and other administrative officials.[19] Coolies contracted to work in areas outside the colony had to have labor permits. Upon arrival in Manila, Chinese migrants had to register with the officials of the *Aduana* (Customs). Copies of these registers were sent to the *gobernadorcillo de sangleyes*—the highest representative of the Chinese community in the colony—and the city treasury of Manila for tax collection purposes (Buzeta y Bravo 1850, vol. 1, 114, 138, 147; de Comenge 1894, 29–31; Gonzalez Fernandez and Moreno Perez 1875, 101; *The Chronicle and Directory* 1888, 567).[20] During the second half of the nineteenth century, periodic registrations of resident Chinese were also undertaken. All Chinese were listed in the *padrones de chinos* (tax-census registers of Chinese). Furthermore, any Chinese who wanted to change his residence had to obtain a license (*licencia de radicación*) from the Governor-General, and it had to endorsed by the gobernadorcillo de sangleyes and the treasury department. For a Christian Chinese, a certification from the parish priest (*cura parroco*) of the town where he resided was also required.[21]

Despite these colonial measures, however, some Chinese found ways to enter the Philippines without the required identification and travel permits because of fiscal considerations. By being *indocumentados*, these Chinese had the liberty to move around and conduct business within the islands beyond the gaze and control of the authorities. More importantly, they were able to avoid paying the burdensome legal and extralegal financial impositions by the government.

Travelling through the "backdoor route" in Sulu was the common means by which some Chinese illegally entered the colony.[22] Once there, they were transported by Muslim boats to Zamboanga and then moved on to the interior parts of Mindanao and other islands of the Philippines. This illicit method of immigration continued even when the Americans occupied the Philippines in 1898 (Fonacier 1949, 3–28).

Map of the Philippines showing Jolo and Borneo, 1882



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de España, Mapa de las Islas Filipinas, Jolo y Borneo [Material cartografico] (Litografia de la viuda de Roldan, 1882)[23]

Sulu made a suitable point of entry for undocumented Chinese, firstly, because of its geographical makeup, "comprising hundreds of volcanic and coral islands and numerous rocks and reefs" (Britannica). It was difficult for the Spanish naval forces to conduct regular patrols over Sulu's waters. Sulu's proximity to British-controlled Singapore, Labuan and North Borneo was also important because the Chinese engaged in Sulu's trading activities came mainly from these areas. Finally, Spanish political, military, and economic presence on the islands were relatively weak (Warren 1985, 112–25). For example, there was no existing customs house in Sulu at the time. The closest was in Zamboanga, some ninety miles away from Jolo island (Hurley 1936, 141). Moreover, in the 1870s and 1880s, trade in the "Sulu Zone"[24] was in the hands of British and German merchants, who found ways to evade the Spanish blockade initiated in 1872 (Wright 1972, 67). British, German, and Chinese traders were also engaged in gunrunning activities in the area.[25]

The Spanish administration was aware that its weak position in the Sulu Zone[26] had led to an unregulated movement of people such as the Chinese.[27] These undocumented Chinese would supply the Muslims with guns, ammunition, and saltpeter, which the Spaniards described as "a mutual relationship between "contrabandistas y piratas" (smugglers and pirates).[28] According to an article written by a Spaniard for the *Diario de Manila* in May 1889,

> *El chino* [*en Mindanao y Sulu*]*, en vez de querer al español, le aborrece sin el mas ligero motivo, y hace estrechas alianzas en contra nuestra hasta con los moros...* (*China en Filipinas* 1889, 31)
>
> The Chinese [in Mindanao and Sulu], instead of loving the Spaniard, hates him without the slightest motive, and makes close alliances against us even with the Moros. (author's translation)

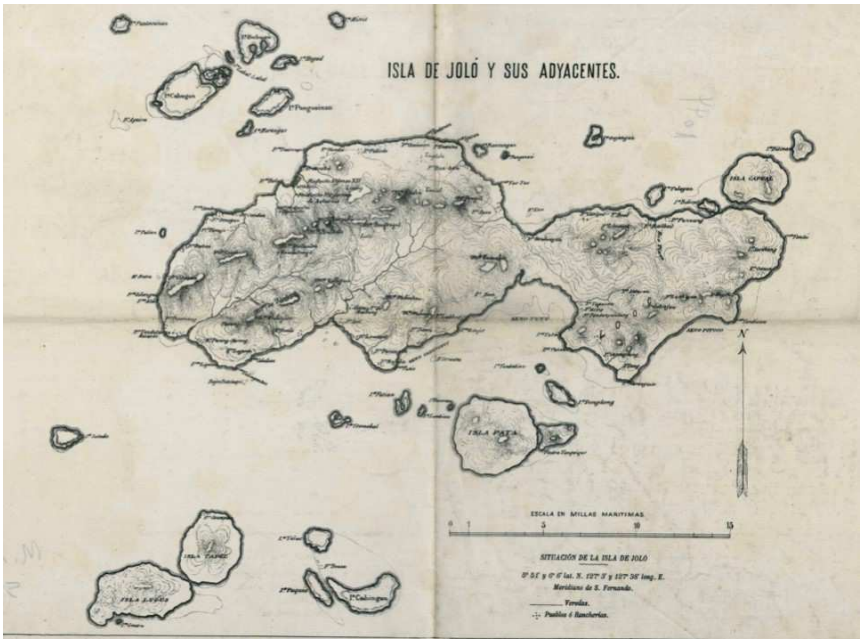
In the 1880s, Spanish governors in Manila had been exhorting military officials in Jolo to only grant residence to Chinese who had obtained Philippine residence permits from the authorities in Manila. These military

governors were ordered to expel from Jolo and Mindanao all Chinese who had not acquired the necessary residence license (de Comenge 1894, 42–44; *Chinos. sus reglamentos y contribuciones* 1893, 64–65, 70–71). To strengthen this harsh stance, the Chinese immigration decree of September 1888 was issued, which directly affected the importation of Chinese coolies to work on a German-owned tobacco plantation in Jolo.

Tobacco Plantation and the Chinese Coolies in Jolo

The origins of large-scale tobacco cultivation in Sulu in the 1880s can be traced to the tobacco industry in Sumatra and North Borneo. The success of Dutch and British tobacco plantations in these areas spilled over to Sulu. In 1884, the German Borneo Company, founded in Hamburg on 23 January 1884, took up a 10,000-acre concession from the British North Borneo Company and began planting tobacco on Banguey Island in North Borneo. This German-owned estate was called "Hacienda Nicolina" (*BNBHOG* 1 September 1884, 1–2, 12; *BNBHOG* 1 May 1884, 4). Banguey's soil and climate were well-adapted for tobacco, so Hacienda Nicolina had good prospects (*BNBHOG* 1 July 1883, 4; *BNBHOG* 1 May 1884, 4). However, the Company Administrator, Hermann Frederick Meyerink, and his assistant, Eduard Funcke—experienced managers of tobacco estates from Sumatra—encountered difficulties with their Chinese laborers imported from Penang and Singapore. This unfavorable situation was exacerbated when these German planters were implicated in the killing of two coolies (Cited in Salazar 2000, 230). After the incident, Meyerink "left full instructions with Mr. [John] Carnarvon ... to carry on temporarily the affairs of his company," (*BNBHOG* 1 September 1884, 12) and, together with Funcke, discreetly travelled to Jolo (John and Jackson 1973, 92; Schult 2000, 97).

Map of Jolo, 1800s



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de España, Isla de Jolo y su adyacentes [Material cartografico], 1801-1899?[29]

Meyerink and Funcke arrived in Jolo in the latter part of 1884, on board the pearling vessel *Sree Pas-Sair*. Besides escaping persecution from murder, the Germans' purpose in Jolo was to establish a tobacco plantation.[30] Their project was part of the German Borneo Company's commercial plans of establishing plantations and industrial firms in Borneo and Australia (*BNBHOG* 1 May 1884, 7–8; Montemayor 2005, 89; Salazar 2000, 229–30). Sulu rightly fit into the Company's agenda because in the early 1880s, foreign travellers and businessmen who visited Sulu stressed the feasibility of tobacco cultivation on the islands. An 1883 report even claimed that Sulu "is one of the fairest spots on God's earth" (*BNBHOG* 1 September 1883, 8). Because of its "rich volcanic soil," "Sulu possesses a more important advantage over North Borneo" in terms of agricultural productivity (ibid.).

In addition, the inhabitants of Sulu—even children—smoked tobacco (Espina 1888, 52). Jolo possessed fertile soil and had an abundant supply of water. Both were favorable for the cultivation of tobacco, as well as rice, corn, cacao, sweet potato, and coffee (Garin y Sociats 1882, 95–96).[31] Agriculture, however, was not Jolo's major economic activity, as the town was a regional trading center. In particular, tobacco was not a primary agricultural crop in Jolo since its cultivation was labor intensive and required abundant capital investments. Changes in atmospheric condition, such as the amount and regularity of rainfall, and the occasional attacks of locusts, also greatly affected the type of leaves that could be harvested (*BNBHOG* 1 May 1884, 7–8; Garin 1882, 95–96; See also Treacher, 1891, 119).[32]

The high demand for tobacco and its insufficient supply, therefore, compelled Jolo to import it from Singapore. Known in Sulu as "*tabaco chino*" (Chinese tobacco), this merchandize was brought to Jolo by British, German, and Chinese traders (Espina 1888, 52). In the 1880s, there were four general types of tobacco available in the region: Chinese, European, American (tobacco, cigars and cigarettes), and "Other" tobacco, which included Javanese tobacco, Sumatran tobacco, Burmah (sic) cigars, and "Philippine" cigars (*BNBHOG* 1 March 1884, 14). In 1882 alone, Jolo imported 500 cases (*cajas*) of Chinese tobacco for local consumption (Garin 1882, 115).

In Jolo, the German Borneo Company acquired lands from Captain Leopold Hermann Schück, an ex-member of the German consular service in the Philippines. Captain Schück had established good relations with the Sultan of Sulu and began cultivating crops in the vicinity of Jolo in 1874. He leased some property from the Sultan to the Company. In this arrangement, the Company had to pay an annual rent to Schück, who, in turn, had to pay concession rights to the Sultan. It is evident that the Spanish colonial administration was excluded in this commercial set-up. As will be discussed below, the government's role was limited to providing security personnel on the plantation against "dissident" Tausugs in the mid-1880s. The Company estate was called "Hacienda Gomantong," after the caves

in North Borneo where birds' nests that the Chinese used to make soups were harvested (Montemayor 2005, 90; Salazar 2000, 230; *BNBHOG* 1 March 1881, 6; *BNBHOG* 1 July 1884, 6; See also Treacher 1891, 110, 113). Located two kilometers away from Jolo town, "on a piece of slightly rising ground" (*BNBHOG* 1 April 1885, 1–2), the plantation was known among local inhabitants as "the German Hacienda" (*la hacienda de los Alemanes*).[33]

The major problem of the German planters in Jolo was the lack of native ("*indigenas*") laborers to work their plantation (*BNBHOG* 1 July 1883, 9–10; Salazar 2000, 226).[34] In addition, the locals required higher wages than what the Company could afford. This was due to the fact that Jolo inhabitants, who were aware of the necessity and the active circulation of labor in the region, had some knowledge of the heavy work in planting tobacco. The Germans, therefore, had to import Chinese coolies[35]—a tried-and-tested method used in Dutch and British tobacco plantations in this Southeast Asian area[36] (John and Jackson 1973, 95).[37] The Company also imported Javanese laborers, but their numbers were minimal compared to the Chinese coolies,[38] who were considered "so much superior of any other laborer[s]" (*NTTG* 18 October 1889, 3).

Beginning at the end of 1884, with permission from the Spanish authorities in Jolo,[39] Chinese coolies were shipped to Jolo at the expense of the Company on foreign trading vessels voyaging between Singapore and Hong Kong (*BNBHOG* 1 April 1885, 2). Before reaching their final destination, these ships would stop at Jolo to deliver the laborers and other merchandize needed on the island. As plantation work was labor-intensive, only young and physically fit laborers were selected.

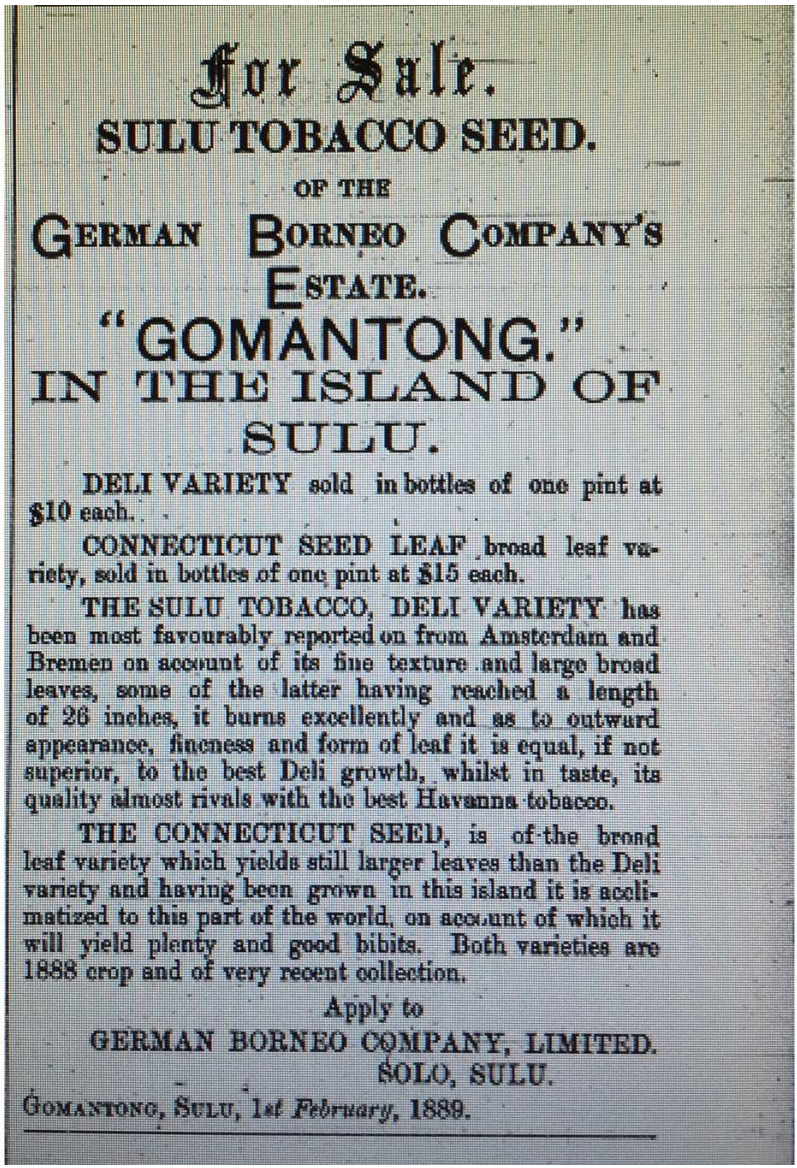
Before transportation, however, each laborer had to sign a three-year contract. The signing of contracts was done in Singapore under the supervision of the Protector of Chinese,[40] who ensured legal processes involved in coolie traffic were observed by both parties.[41] Upon signing, each laborer was paid thirty dollars for the duration of his labor contract.[42] This initial amount served as the laborer's "advance money" (*anticipio*),

as he would receive his "regular" annual salary after each harvest season. The coolie would use his anticipio to cover his expenses while waiting for his harvest.[43] His regular yearly compensation was fundamentally dependent on how hard he worked the part of the hacienda assigned to him, on the class of tobacco produced and on its international market price. Every year, the Company hired 170 coolies. Meyerink, in his 1889 letter, did not identify the linguistic affiliation of the Chinese that the Company employed. However, Chinese coolies shipped from Singapore to North Borneo in the 1880s were composed of Macaos, Teuchus, Hokkiens, Hainans, Khehs and Hakkas (*BNBHOG* 1 May 1884, 1–3). The Company did not pay any travel or registration taxes for its workers.[44] From the port of Jolo, the laborers walked to the Company plantation, where they were accounted for and registered. This registration process was important in managing the laborers.[45] After registering at the Company office, they were sent to barracks called "*kongxi*," where they would be assigned their respective tasks.[46]

In March 1885, a few months after the arrival of the first batch of Chinese coolies, an official of the British North Borneo, who visited Jolo, reported that the German-owned tobacco plantation was "being opened" (*BNBHOG* 1 April 1885, 1–2). He said that "[f]elling and burning ... the jungle [which was] so slight and the trees, all fruit trees, are far apart" were being undertaken (ibid.). More than two years later, in July 1887, L.B. von Donop, British North Borneo's Superintendent of Agriculture visited the German hacienda. In his conversation with Meyerink and Funcke, the plantation managers told him that "the tobacco enterprise is proceeding most favourably" (*BNBHOG* 1 August 1887, 187). Besides producing packaged tobacco, the Company, by February 1889, began selling tobacco seeds classified as *Deli Variety* and *Connecticut Seed* (*BNBCOG* 1 June 1889, 199).

The venture's "favourable" status and operation, however, were disrupted when the September 1888 immigration decree was issued. Meyerink claimed that this decree was impractical for his company. Manila was farther away than Jolo from Singapore, his company's source of labor. A longer trip meant additional shipping expenses for the coolie vessels, as

Advertisement for the sale of tobacco seed from Hacienda Gomantong



For Sale.

SULU TOBACCO SEED.

OF THE

GERMAN BORNEO COMPANY'S ESTATE.

"GOMANTONG."

IN THE ISLAND OF SULU.

DELI VARIETY sold in bottles of one pint at $10 each.

CONNECTICUT SEED LEAF broad leaf variety, sold in bottles of one pint at $15 each.

THE SULU TOBACCO, DELI VARIETY has been most favourably reported on from Amsterdam and Bremen on account of its fine texture and large broad leaves, some of the latter having reached a length of 26 inches, it burns excellently and as to outward appearance, fineness and form of leaf it is equal, if not superior, to the best Deli growth, whilst in taste, its quality almost rivals with the best Havanna tobacco.

THE CONNECTICUT SEED, is of the broad leaf variety which yields still larger leaves than the Deli variety and having been grown in this island it is acclimatized to this part of the world, on account of which it will yield plenty and good bibits. Both varieties are 1888 crop and of very recent collection.

Apply to

GERMAN BORNEO COMPANY, LIMITED.

SOLO, SULU.

GOMANTONG, SULU, 1st *February*, 1889.

Source: *British North Borneo Herald and Official Gazette*, 1 June 1889, 199, Microfilm, National Library of Australia and Library of Congress, Photoduplication Service. Image supplied by the author.

well as anchorage fees and the coolies' temporary housing and living arrangement in Manila. The Company also had no agent based in Manila. It would be financially difficult to hire additional people just to oversee the registration of the coolies before bringing them to Jolo.[47] The German Ambassador in Spain also stated that if the colonial government in Manila persisted to implement the decree, it would lead to the Borneo Company's "inevitable [and] complete destruction."[48]

Labor Conditions in Hacienda Gomantong

Chinese coolies were the backbone of labor force in Hacienda Gomantong. They worked in all areas of the plantation, which was divided into preparatory work and planting proper. Preparatory work took place between November and March; it consisted of clearing the jungle, cleaning the soil by digging out stones and roots, and building or repairing old and damaged roads. All the pre-planting work was assigned to recently arrived coolies; the older, more experienced ones focused on the planting proper.[49]

Once the area was ready, cultivation began, which was considered "less strenuous ... more pleasant and better compensated."[50] In April, two-thirds of the coolies would start planting tobacco seeds. After four months, the tobacco seedlings would be ready to be transplanted. Between August and November, the coolies had to make sure the tobacco plants were properly watered, exposed to sunlight and that the young leaves would not be damaged until they matured.[51] They did this by regularly removing worms and other pests from the leaves. In Sumatran plantations, young children of laborers shouldered this task (*BNBHOG* 1 June 1887, 124–28, See also Breman 1989, Photo No. 21). By November, the mature leaves were harvested, dried, cut, classified, and packed from December to March. Several large sheds were built to house the drying of the tobacco leaves (*granjas de fermentación*). Afterwards, the distribution and exportation of the packaged tobacco leaves would commence.[52] Normally, it took 110 to 120 days (or four months) after the seedlings were planted before the harvest (Treacher 1891, 121).

Meyerink's letter of 26 August 1889 depicted a well-maintained, satisfactory labor condition in Hacienda Gomantong. He told the Manila authorities that coolies had their own barracks and a mess hall (*casa china para cocinar*) where they cooked and ate. A hospital was also available free of charge. Moreover, the company store sold them food and other basic necessities. Based on his letter, there was no existing labor concern on the estate, except the disruption of the importation of Chinese coolies caused by the September 1888 decree.[53]

But Jolo's military governor, Juan Arolas reported a different scenario. Arolas asserted that the main issue was not the immigration decree, but rather, how the hacienda was governed. While he did not discuss the details, and sources on daily work in the hacienda are scarce (Salazar 2000, 231), his allegation requires a deeper examination. Terrible labor conditions existed in many European-owned plantations in Sumatra and North Borneo. The important works on Breman (1989), and Stoler (1985) on the conditions of the laborers in Sumatra offer clues on how Hacienda Gomantong was administered, especially because Meyerink and Funcke were former Sumatran planters. In Sumatra, white capitalists enjoyed the harvests of the land at the expense of miserable Asian workers. The inhumane and degrading living and working conditions led to flights from the plantations and violent confrontations with the planters (Breman 1989; Stoler 1985).

Furthermore, it has to be highlighted that one of the reasons why Meyerink and Funcke left Hacienda Nicolina in North Borneo in 1884 was that they murdered two of their Chinese coolies. The German Company's Hamburg Director Stockmeyer claimed that the deaths were a "mishap," as Meyerink and Funcke merely "forcefully inhibited the running away of their coolies and accidentally wounded two who, for want of medical assistance, died later on" (Cited in Salazar 2000, 230). However, when Meyerink and Funcke fled to Jolo, and John Carnavon took over the administration of the hacienda, "the Chinese coolies ... signified their willingness to return to work at Banguey" (ibid.), and the hacienda continued to operate (John and Jackson 1973, 92; Schult 2000, 97).

In Jolo, Chinese coolies were overworked but underpaid. Hacienda Gomantong was divided into blocks, each comprising 56,000 square feet (approximately 1.3 square acres). Each coolie had to work one block of land (ibid.). This block was more than the space assigned to laborers on tobacco plantations in Sumatra and North Borneo, which was one acre per two coolies (*NTTG*, 18 October 1889, 3). As his yearly salary was dependent on the harvest of his block,[54] the coolie had to work "with so much care" day and night (ibid.). J.R. Hood, a British planter, who visited the tobacco plantation in Jolo in early 1889, commented that a Chinese coolie was a "slave," who was "doing the work ... of three or four Tamils" in North Borneo (ibid.). Moreover, each coolie received only 30 dollars as "advance money" (ibid.), which was less than half of what coolies in Sumatra and North Borneo received—between 60 and 70 dollars a year (ibid.).

The coolies' salaries were also "recycled" because they used them to buy supplies from the store owned by the Company. Rice, as on other tobacco plantations in the region, was the staple for Chinese laborers. But since Jolo had a mixed economy, rice was imported, and thus relatively more expensive.[55] The amount was also marked up for the Company's profit. As Chinese laborers could not work properly without smoking opium, the Company also supplied them the substance. The opium balls available at the Company store were imported from Singapore and Labuan,[56] and were also sold to the laborers at a relatively high price.

The death of the Sulu Sultan in 1884 and the installation of Sultan Harun Ar-Rashid two years later also affected the workers in Hacienda Gomatong. The Tausugs did not recognize Harun's legitimacy because he was installed by Spain. And since the hacienda was receiving protection from Spanish forces,[57] the Tausugs in May 1886 began stealing from the German estate and attacking the coolies. Some Chinese laborers were wounded while others were killed. The presence of 27 Spanish soldiers assigned to protect the Company's lands, also prevented the Chinese laborers from leaving the plantation to escape these assaults (Salazar 2000, 233). Because of this precarious situation, the Company found it difficult to recruit new coolies from Singapore (234).

The coolies' resentment and desperation in Hacienda Gomantong reached its peak in June 1889, when they took drastic steps to address their wretched condition. In protest, they burned two large tobacco shops which contained recently harvested crops (*BNBOG,* 1 July 1889). The Company thus lost approximately 700,000 pesos (cited in Salazar 2000, 234). The coolies also wanted to avenge the abuses they had suffered from the hacienda's European planters, especially Meyerink, who was known to be ill-tempered (ibid., 232). It was said that the laborers "intended to murder Mr. Meyerink if that gentleman gave them the opportunity while trying to put out the fire" (*BNBHOG,* 1 July 1889; *The Morning Bulletin*, 10 September 1889, 4).

Because of these untoward events, Hacienda Gomatong was abolished in the latter part of 1889 (ibid.). This promising but short-lived venture and experiment did not significantly affect Sulu's economy. And because of the internal arrangement between the Company and Captain Schück in relation to land use and cultivation in Jolo, and the importation and employment of Chinese coolies, Jolo inhabitants gained limited, if any, financial benefits from the establishment and development of the plantation. All the Chinese coolies previously imported from Singapore were abandoned by the Company in Jolo.[58] These coolies became part of the existing Chinese population in Jolo in the early 1890s. In 1890, the total Chinese population in Jolo was 599, comprising 536 male adults and 63 minors.[59] When the tobacco plantation in Jolo failed, Meyerink went to Hong Kong and became an agent and Hong Kong representative of the Shanghai-based W. M. Meyerink & Co. (*THKGG*, 5 January 1884, 6; *THKGG* 19 January 1884, 26; *THKGG* 3 January 1891, 6). By 1892, no trace of Hacienda Gomantong existed. It was reported that Jolo had fields planted with coffee, cacao, palay, corn, coconut, and sugar cane but no tobacco.[60]

Conclusion

A historical inquiry on the establishment and subsequent abolition of the Hacienda Gomantong in Jolo, and the effect of the 1888 Immigration decree on the plantation is relevant, not only because it offers some insights on the Germans' increasing involvement in Philippine colonial economy but more importantly, it stresses certain issues relative to Chinese labor and immigration to the Philippines during the latter part of the nineteenth century. For the German Borneo Company, it was a necessity to employ Chinese coolies from Singapore to work on its estate; they were hardworking and considered suitable for back-breaking agricultural work. On the other hand, in her quest to claim sovereignty over Sulu, Spain had to control the movements of people and goods. Because of the perennial problem posed by undocumented Chinese, who had been unlawfully coming into the Philippines through Sulu, the Spanish administration had to issue the September 1888 immigration decree. This measure may have had affected the importation of Chinese coolies in Gomantong, as Director Meyerink claimed. It was also evident, however, that the miserable labor conditions in the plantation and the European planters' abusive treatment of their Chinese workers—a practice not uncommon in the region—were the primary reason for the hacienda's eventual downfall.

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Notes on Sources

The materials I used in this paper came from archives and libraries in the Philippines and Spain. At the National Archives of the Philippines (NAP) in Manila, I was able to gather official primary documents on the conditions of the Philippine Chinese, as well as the regulations related to immigration, registration and taxation imposed upon them during the nineteenth century. Of primary importance were the 148 bundles (*legajos*) of documents labelled *Chinos* (Chinese). Each bundle contains various files (*expedientes*) on various aspects of the lives of the Chinese in the colony. At the *Archivo Historico Nacional* (AHN) (National Historical Archives) in Madrid, I found numerous diplomatic correspondences between Spain and different European and Asian nations. One of these had to do with the German complaint against the 1888 Chinese immigration decree. Primary documents at the AHN relative to Philippine affairs were labelled *Ultramar* (Overseas). Additional primary materials like the immigration decrees of Governors General Luis Lardizabal and Narciso Claveria were culled from the *Archivo de la Provincia Augustiniano de Filipinas* (APAF) in Valladolid, Spain. I was also fortunate to find nineteenth-century materials like rare books and unpublished manuscripts at the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (National Library of Spain), an institution that also has a digital archive that can be easily accessed. Other related materials were located at the University of the Philippines Main Library in Diliman, Quezon City.

Note from the editorial team: We decided to categorize the sources in order to help the general reader, who may be unfamiliar with the Philippine-related archives, identify, if not track down, the sources. It is also hoped that such a guide may also help budding historians get acquainted with the range and extent of materials needed for historical research. There is still much to be unearthed in the archives to help shed more light on unknown or understudied aspects of Philippine history and society.

Abbreviations

AHN	Archivo Historico Nacional
APAF	Archivo de la Provincia Augustiniano de Filipinas
BNE	Biblioteca Nacional de España
BNBHOG	British North Borneo Herald and Official Gazette
NAP	National Archives of the Philippines
NTTG	Northern Territory Times and Gazette
THKGG	The Hong Kong Government Gazette

End Notes

[1] Archivo Historico Nacionál (AHN), *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 2.* Nota del Embajador de Alemania al Ministerio de estado (20 November 1889).

[2] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[3] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 1. C. 3.* Informe del Gobierno General de Filipinas (No. 1351, 16 May 1890); See also "Reglamento para la imposicion y administracion del impuesto de Capitacion personal de chinos," (16 August 1889), Capitulo 2, Seccion 2, Articulo 36, *Chinos. Sus reglamentos y sus contribuciones* 1893, 20.

[4] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 1. C. 3.* Informe del Gobierno General de Filipinas (No. 1351, 16 May 1890)*;* See also "Reglamento para la imposicion y administracion del impuesto de Capitacion personal de chinos," (16 August 1889), Capitulo 2, Seccion 2, Articulo 36, *Chinos, Sus reglamentos y sus contribuciones* 1893, 20.

[5] The term "coolie" (spelled as *couli* or *culi* in some archival materials) referred to Chinese laborers, who arrived in the Philippines during the nineteenth century. Earlier studies have traced the linguistic origins of the term to Indian, Tamil or other South Asian languages, or have directly linked it with the Chinese words, *ku* (bitter) and *li* (strength) (Tinker 1974, 41).

[6] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[7] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 6.* Carta del Gobernador de Jolo Juan Arolas al Gobernador General de Filipinas (14 April 1890, Jolo).

[8] National Archives of the Philippines (NAP), *Chinos (Manila, 1887-1888), SDS 13017,* S 652–654b.

[9] The major Chinese massacres were done in 1603, 1639, 1662, and 1686. The last mass expulsion of the Chinese from the Philippines was undertaken by the Spanish authorities in 1766, as the Chinese sided with the British when the latter invaded Manila in 1762-1764.

[10] Archivo de la Provincia Augustiniano de Filipinas (APAF), 205/2-c. *Sobre el empadronamiento de Chinos*, Decree of Governor General Luis Lardizabal, 31 August 1839.

[11] Two hundred out of 563 Chinese in Misamis were reported to be living in the capital of Misamis. During the 1850s, the term "Misamis" pertained to the provinces of Surigao, Davao, Cotabato, and Cagayan.

[12] NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1890-1891), SDS 13066,* S 123-123b; NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1892-1893), SDS 13067*, S 766–766b.

[13] The earliest official nineteenth-century Chinese registration was made in 1804, when Chinese skilled laborers in Manila, such as shoemakers and carpenters, were required to register with the provincial government.

[14] AHN, *Ultramar 5360, Expediente 3 [CH-D], 1846-91.* Doc. 1: Sobre pasaportes a Mindanao. AHN, *Ultramar, 5360, Expediente 3 [CH-D], 1846-91.* Doc. 6: [Decree of] 3 Nov. 1885; AHN, *Ultramar 5360, Expediente 3 [CH-D], 1846-91.* Doc Doc. 12: Chinos-Mindanao, 29 Julio 1888; AHN, *Ultramar 5360, Expediente 3 [CH-D], 1846-91.* Doc.13: Chinos-Pasaportes; Radicacion-Venta de polvora, hierro, armas, etc.: Order of 21 May 1887; AHN, *Ultramar 5360, Expediente 3 [CH-D], 1846-91.* Doc 19: Chinos-Pasaportes.

[15] On the role of the Sulu archipelago in the regional and global trade in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Warren 1985.

[16] For a discussion on the types and amount of taxes, both legal and extralegal, imposed upon the Chinese in the Philippines during the galleon trade era, see Schurz 1939.

[17] Spaniards were exempted from paying taxes while Chinese mestizos paid higher than the Filipinos but lower than the Chinese.

[18] Art. 10, AHN, *Ultramar 5217, Expediente 43, Doc. 3, No. 4,* Proyecto de Bando del Exmo Señor Gobernador Superior Civil Don Rafael de Izquierdo (5 June 1871); Decree of the Gobierno Superior, 30 May 1873, Miguel Rodriguez Berriz, *Diccionario de la Administración en Filipinas* 1887-1888, vol. 2, 250–51; See also "Pasaportes," *Chinos, Sus Reglamentos* 1893, 12-13; Archivo de la Provincia Augustiniano de Filipinas (APAF), 207/4-b. *La Admisión de Chinos en Las Islas*, Proclamation of Governor Narciso Claveria, 20 December 1849.

[19] AHN, *Ultramar 5360, Expediente 3, Doc. 19*, Chinos-Pasaportes.

[20] NAP, *Chinos, SDS 13067 (1891-1892),* S 169–179, Expediente relativo a la propuesta de otro funcionario para hacer codigo del Negociado de "Entrada y Salida de Chinos" (1891); NAP, *Chinos, SDS 13064 (1866-1889*), S 35b–36.

[21] Arts. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. AHN, *Ultramar 5203, Expediente 14, No. 4*, [Decree of Governor Narciso Claveria] (Manila 20 December 1849); NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1891-1892), SDS 13044*, S 244, 251–52.

[22] AHN, *Ultramar 5360, Expediente 3, Doc. 12,* Chinos-Mindanao (29 July 1888).

[23] http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000248153 (Accessed 29 July 2019).

[24] On the geographical scope and importance of the Sulu Zone in the regional and global trade in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Warren 1985.

[25] AHN, *Ultramar 5221, Expediente 57.* Toma de medidas para evitar contraband chino en Mindanao; AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 13.* El Subsecretario del Ministro de Estado traslada con R.O. fecha 4 de Febrero de 1890 una instancia del gremio de Sangleyes solicitando reformas en el Nuevo reglamento sobre capitacion personal de Chinos.

[26] "Sulu Zone" is a term used by Warren 1985, to refer to a geographical area "comprising the Sulu archipelago, the northeast coast of Borneo, the foreland of southern Mindanao and the western coast of Celebes" (xxviii).

[27] AHN, *Ultramar 5221, Expediente 57*. Toma de medidas para evitar contrabando chino en Mindanao; AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 13.* El Subsecretario del Ministro de Estado traslada con R.O. fecha 4 de Febrero de 1890 una instancia del gremio de Sangleyes solicitando reformas en el Nuevo reglamento sobre capitacion personal de Chinos.

[28] *AHN, Ultramar, 5221, Expediente 57*. Toma de medidas para evitar contraband chino en Mindanao; AHN, *Ultramar, 5339, Expediente 13.* El Subsecretario del Ministro de Estado traslada con R.O. fecha 4 de Febrero de 1890 una instancia del gremio de Sangleyes solicitando reformas en el Nuevo reglamento sobre capitacion personal de Chinos.

[29] http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000069644. Accessed 29 July 2019.

[30] As stated earlier, Spanish control of Jolo was relatively weak even during the 1880s. It was rather difficult for the state to regulate the movement of foreigners in the area. Thus, instead of seeking permit from Manila, the German Company leased a land from Capt. Schück, who was allowed by the Sultan of Sulu to own and cultivate lands. The Sultan's power on Sulu's lands emanated from the government, a way to make the Sultan believe Spain's "good intentions" in this part of the colony. With regards to the plantation administrators' crime, it appears that the Spanish officials in Jolo only looked into the matter after the German Ambassador to Spain forwarded the Company's complaint.

[31] In addition to Jolo, the larger islands of Tapul and Pata in Sulu were also planted corn, rice, and sweet potato. In many cases, slaves called "*banyaga*" were used in the cultivation of such lands. See Warren 1985, 221–22.

[32] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[33] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 6.* Carta del Gobernador de Jolo Juan Arolas al Gobernador General de Filipinas, 14 April 1890 (Jolo).

[34] Interestingly, the Tausugs ("Tausug Moros") were the main cultivators in Schück's Lukut Lapas estate. It was reported in 1883 that Schück employed 70 to 100 Sulus (Tausugs) on his estate.

[35] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[36] Available documentary evidence only provides details on wage differentials among various non-Filipino (i.e. Chinese, Javanese, Indian) laborers employed on tobacco plantations in the region. Archival materials, on the other hand, only state that the "indigenas" of Jolo sought higher wages compared to other laborers contracted outside of Jolo but not the exact amount of wages they sought.

[37] In the tobacco plantations on the east coast of Sumatra from the 1880s onward, Chinese laborers formed the majority of the laborers, followed by Javanese, Indians, and other groups outside Sumatra. See Breman 1989, 50–64.

[38] According to Meyerink's letter, one house (*casa javanes*) in the tobacco estate was exclusively for the Javanese laborers. AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[39] The documents suggest that since Capt. Schück had leased out lands to the German Company with the auspices of the Sultan of Sulu, the Sultan was, therefore, in charge in making sure that all official protocols and procedures were strictly observed in the Company's importation of Chinese laborers. It is unclear, however, if the Sultan did indeed exert efforts to undertake what the Spanish colonial government expected him to do.

[40] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8. No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila). The Chinese Protector was the head of the Chinese Protectorate in the Straits Settlements. The office was created in 1877 to address matters concerning the Chinese community. The Protector functioned to establish a pool of civil servants, manage coolie laborers, regulate secret societies, rescue female victims of prostitution, and contain sexually-transmitted diseases. See Tang 1970, 66–134.

[41] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] There was no existing customhouse in Sulu during this time. The closest customs port was in Zamboanga, some ninety miles away from Jolo. (Hurley 1936, 141).

[45] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[46] Ibid. *Kongxi* was the term used by Director Meyerink to describe the Chinese quarters or barracks in the Hacienda Gomantong. In its strict definition in colonial Southeast Asia, however, a *kongsi* was "form of open government based on an enlarged partnership and brotherhood." The kongsi's main purposes were to protect the rights of its members, to promote economic productivity among them, and to resist outside powers that would abuse or mistreat them. See Wang 1994, 4.

[47] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[48] "La aplicacion de la orden del 28 del setiembre... a los laborantes de dicha compania ocasionara invetablemente su complete ruina." NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1887-1888), SDS 13017,* S 652–654b.

[49] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid. This yearly schedule was also observed in the tobacco plantations in the Cagayan Valley and the Ilocos region during the nineteenth century. See Martinez Rivas 1874.

[52] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[53] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[54] AHN, *Ultramar 5339, Expediente 8, No. 3.* Memoria del Director de la Sociedad de Borneo (26 August 1889, Manila).

[55] In 1882 alone, Jolo imported 15,000 cavans of rice and 2,000 cavans of *palay* (unhusked rice). Garin 1882, 114.

[56] See AHN, *Ultramar 153, Expediente 17.* Medidas adoptadas por el Gobierno Colonial en el trato del opio; *La politica de Espana en Filipinas,* June 7, 1891, p. 122.

[57] This action by the Spanish colonial government was a means to somehow demonstrate (albeit resisted by the Tausugs) its power over the political affairs of the Sultanate.

[58] NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1887-1888), SDS 13017*, S 654–654b.
[59] NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1890-1891), SDS 13066*, S 123–123b; NAP, *Chinos (Manila, 1892-1893), SDS 13067*, S 766–766b.
[60] NAP, *Chinos, (1891-1892), SDS 13044*, S 30–42.

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Note from the editorial staff: Ultramar (Overseas) is the document series while expediente refers to the file or folder where particular documents (e.g. Nos. 1, 2, etc.) can be found.

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Note from editorial staff: "Chinos" is the title of the document series or bundles (legajos) pertaining to materials related to the Chinese in the Philippines. It is followed by the location where all or most of the documents came from (e.g. Manila, Cebu, Iloilo, etc.) and then the period covered by the documents. SDS or "Spanish Documents Section," on the other hand, refers to all Spanish documents housed at the National Archives of the Philippines (NAP).

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