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The Chinese Problem in the Early Modern
Missionary Project of the Spanish Philippines

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Figure 1: Saint Michael Slaying a Chinese Devil (1700s).
Photograph by Regalado Trota Jose, *Images of Faith* (Pasadena: Pacific Asia
Museum, 1990), 91.

Accounts of the Spanish conquest of the New World contain varying legends of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in which she comes to the aid of the Spanish colonizers at key moments. This warring Mary moves forth the *deus ex machina* scheme, intervening always on behalf of the Spanish side in order to turn otherwise imminent Christian defeats into victories. With slight variations, Mary is said to come down from the sky—sometimes alongside Santiago—and cast dirt or sand in the eyes of those opposing the Conquistadors, whether they be Incas or Mexicas.¹ In contrast, in the Philippines, neither Mary nor any of the other saints was believed to have appeared amidst battles to help slay Indians.² And while icons of Santiago Matamoros abounded in Philippine religious sites, its Mataindios variant appears to have never left the other side of the Pacific. The more popular warring saint, the Archangel Michael, does occasionally appear, however, slaying a Chinese devil (figure 1). Such iconographical depiction of, what could be termed, the “Matachinos,” epitomizes the Spanish missionaries’ anxiety towards the Chinese inhabitants in the Philippines in the early modern period. In this article, I discuss the efforts of the Spanish missionaries to subject the Chinese to Hispanic Christian practices and the strategies utilized by the Chinese to passively resist them while, at the same time, observing their own forms of belief.

The Chinese began to move en masse from the south coast of China, especially Fujian province, to the lowlands of Luzon and the Visayas islands with the opening of Manila as a trading port in 1571. Although the Chinese were essential for the sustenance of the economy of the colony, they were perceived to pose a threat to the project of proselytizing because of their manifest refusal of conversion and the harmful influence they were believed to exert over the Indios. Gonzalo Ronquillo de Peñalosa, responded to this anxiety by ghettoizing the Chinese in 1581 in an area outside of the walls of the city known as *parián*. The fear of the Chinese was caused largely by the fact that the number of Chinese immigrants was exponentially larger than the Spanish population in the Philippines, and especially in Manila and surrounding areas. Antonio García-Abásolo estimates that while the number of Spaniards dwindled to about 2,000, the Chinese reached up to 30,000 in the seventeenth century.³ An order was passed in 1620 to limit Chinese residents to 6,000, but it was not enforced, as it appears that the

officials in charge did not hesitate to make a profit from selling residence licenses to new immigrants.⁴

The Chinese (and their descendants) in the Philippines were called by-and-large Sangleys. The Spanish took the term from the Tagalog Indios who used the term to designate Chinese traders.⁵ The word might have been derived from “sionglai” (常来), which in the Hokkien dialect literally means “frequently coming.” It could have also been a transliteration of “sengdi/shengli” (生理), meaning trade or commerce.⁶ Domingo Fernández de Navarrete, a Dominican friar who lived in the Philippines in the 1650s, offers an explanation that cements such a use of the term by the Tagalogs. According to the Dominican:

Los mercaderes Chinas [sic], que passaban a Manila, preguntados que gente eran, o que querían. Respondian, Xang Lai, esto es, venimos a tratar, y contratar. Los Españoles, que no entendian la lengua, concebian, que era nombre de Nación y juntando aquellas dos vocez, la hizieron vna, con que hasta oy nombre a los Chinas [sic], llamandoles Sangleyes.⁷

In other words, the Spanish took the term used by the Tagalogs and the Chinese to signify merchant or trader and used it to designate the very specific type of Chinese person who resided in the Philippines. The fact that this neologism was overwhelmingly preferred to Chino means that the Spanish found it necessary to distinguish between the Chinese from Juan González de Mendoza’s *Gran reino de la China* and the less desirable Chinese they encountered on a daily basis in the new colony. Manel Ollé’s words concisely express what is evidenced in piles of missionary and official discourses: “La China lejana admiraba; los chinos cercanos asustaban y se les despreciaba.”⁸

Sangleys became quite skilled at learning how to fulfill the demands of the tastes of the Spanish, and made themselves indispensable as stonecutters, tailors, bakers, carpenters, shoemakers, silversmiths, silk weavers, ironworkers, and locksmiths. Domingo de Salazar, the Dominican bishop of Manila, describes the key role of Sangleys in the functioning of Manila in a report he sent to Philip II in 1588:

dentro desta çiudad está el alcayzería de los mercaderes sangleyes con çiento e çinquenta tiendas, en que puede aver seyscientos sangleyes hordinariamente, sin otros çiento que están poblados de la otra banda del rrío desta çiudad, cassados e muchos dellos cristianos, e sin los dichos más de otros trescientos, pescadores, ortelanos, cargadores texeros y ladrilleros, caleros, carpinteros y herreros, que estos biven fuera del alcaycería y de la çiudad por la rribera de la mar y del rrío della; y dentro de el alcaycería ay muchos sastres, çapateros, panaderos, carpinteros, pasteleros, boticarios, plateros y de otros ofiçios.

En la plaça de la ciudad ay mercado público cada día de cosas de comer, como son gallinas, puercos, patos, caça de benados, puercos de monte y búffanos, pescado, leña y otros bastimentos y hortaliza, y muchas mercaderías de China, y que se venden por las calles.⁹

Increasingly, Spaniards and Indios depended on Sangley merchants for the provision of basic food staples (meat, legumes, spices, sugar, flower, fat, fruits, and bacon), wood, and farming animals (cows and horses) as well as luxury goods. The center of Chinese commerce was located in the *parián*, which was also known as the *alcaicería*, that is, silk market.¹⁰ Sangleys were also the painters, carvers and sculptors of choice for the production of religious imagery until the eighteenth century.¹¹

Sangleys were not the main focus for conversion in the first decades of Spanish colonialism, though there were some sparse attempts to Christianize them.¹² The Augustinian friars, the only missionaries in the Philippines until 1577, were interested in proselytizing in China and interacted with Sangleys with the primary objective of learning their language and obtaining practical information that they could use in their projected missions. Martín de Rada, for instance, eagerly sought qualified Sangleys to help him enter China, and took at least one Sangley merchant (by the name of Sinsay) as his translator in the delegation he took to Fujian in 1575.¹³ The Dominican Order established the first mission to be dedicated to their conversion in 1587, though there were interspersed attempts to convert them.¹⁴ Bishop Salazar was the first eyewitness to write an account of the Chinese community in Manila. Salazar blames the Augustinian order for failing to minister to the Chinese who eagerly seek to

learn about Christianity.¹⁵ Salazar's account emphasizes the desire of Sangleyes to convert, their gratitude ("es la gente más agradeçida que yo e visto"), their exceptional evolution after conversion ("la extraña mudança que obo en los sangleyes [...] quån de buena gana començaron á tomar la christiandad, y an perseverado"), and speaks of an optimistic prospect if the successful work of the missionaries continues ("quando Dios sea servido de alumbrallos, no ay duda sino que aprovechará mucho la christiandad").¹⁶

Salazar's narrative stands out for its positive perception of Sangleyes among the letters, official documents, and published accounts on the Philippines. The dominant opinion among Spaniards—both government officials and religious professionals—was that Sangleyes were a problem for the missionary project in the Philippines because, unlike the Indios, they manifested by-and-large a visible resistance to abandoning their cultural practices. Even when there were about two thousand Sangleyes in Manila (in the 1580s and 1590s), they were stereotyped as materialistic, excessively self-interested, and unreliable due to their lack of morality.¹⁷ There was, of course, the concern that, if given the opportunity, the Sangleyes would join the Chinese from the mainland in an attack to take over the islands. This fear grew after the first mass rebellion of Sangleyes in 1603, but as early as 1583, Salazar speaks of his Spanish peers' anxieties about the Chinese threat. Salazar voices the threat the Spanish felt about the possibility that the Chinese in the Philippines and the Chinese in the mainland were joining forces to kill all the Castilians in the islands.¹⁸

Antonio de Morga, who spent eight years in Manila, first as lieutenant-governor (1595-1598) and then as *oidor* (judge) of Manila's royal court (1595-1603), voices the dominant and more disparaging view that Sangleyes only cared about their immediate physical needs and, despite their intelligence, were idolaters and averse to true conversion. For Morga, because the Chinese were not ruled by any moral law and did not possess a conscience—"sin ley ni conciencia"—were deceitful and untrustworthy.¹⁹ Moreover, Sangleyes who do convert should be mistrusted because "el haberse hecho cristianos no ha sido deseo ni motivo de su salvación, sino comodidades temporales que allí tienen, y, algunos, no poder volver a China por deuda y delitos que allá hicieron."²⁰ Morga, like other Spanish officials and religious leaders, believes that the harmful influence of the Sangleyes is a stumbling block for the converted Indios.²¹ Philip II, concerned enough about the "pecados secretos y hechicerías que enseñan,"

sent a mandate in 1586 (and again in 1589) expelling all Sangleys except those who are Christians or provide a trade essential to the sustenance of Manila.²² One of these secret sins was believed to be homosexuality, as Morga states.²³ Archbishop Miguel de Benavides is more explicit when he writes in 1598, “que está entre ellos tan introducido el pecado nefando como en Sodoma, y le usan con los naturales, assí hombres como mugeres que, como son miserables y amigos del interés y los chinos para sus deleytes manirroto, cunde mucho esta desventura sin manifestarse en publico.”²⁴ An order was passed in 1599 punishing homosexual activity at the stake, but it was rarely enforced for unclear reasons.²⁵

After the Sangley rebellion of 1603, which decimated about 23,000 people, almost all Sangleys, the latter appear depicted en masse as a “problem” that must be overcome for the success of the Spanish colony. Individual Sangleys figure favorably in exemplary narratives of conversion written by religious professionals such as the Dominican Diego de Aduarte’s *Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario* (1640) and the Jesuit Francisco Colin’s *Labor evangélica, ministerios apostólicos de los obreros de la Compañía de Jesús* (1663). These narratives are meant to serve as proof that despite the covetous nature of Sangleys, they can be saved, though generally with some form of divine intervention. Alvarado de Bracamonte, the assigned official public defender of Sangleys, epitomizes the more predominant view. In 1619 he qualifies the people he was supposed to protect as “gente de la nación más perbersa que se a conosciado y hallado en este archipiélago, según muestran sus obras por sus viçios carnales, y dados al pecado nefando; y en particular son inclinados a jurar falso.”²⁶ This kind of hyperbolic characterization of Sangleys led to a number of royal rulings limiting their numbers, but without much success.

In 1620, a decree stated that the number of Chinese residents should be limited to six thousand in an attempt to keep the Sangley population to an absolute minimum. Spanish officials in the Philippines, however, willfully ignored the decree as they relied heavily on the monetary proceeds the Chinese provided for the treasury. As Morga reluctantly acknowledged decades later, the Chinese are necessary for the sustenance of the city: “Verdad es que sin estos Sangleyes, no se puede pasar ni sustentar la ciudad.”²⁷ Sangley merchants paid three percent in taxes on all their goods. They were also required to pay for special residence licenses that allowed them to live in the *parián*.²⁸ In addition, as Governor Juan Niño de Tavora

tells the King, “[n]o hay español seglar, ni religioso que coma, vista, ni calce, sino no es por sus manos y así apenas hay sangleyes que no tenga su protector.”²⁹ The answer, according to Niño de Tavora, was to have a penal system ruled independently from the royal *audiencia*. Such a system was meant to allow the Sangley *alcalde* and assigned Spanish local judges the authority to apply corporal punishment on the lawless as soon they violated given rules and protocols.³⁰ The pragmatic approach, thus, was to discipline Sangleys into a more compliant and controllable labor group.

The opinion that Sangleys converted for convenience might not have been completely unfounded. Gil found in his research of the tributes paid by Sangleys that the number of Christian Sangleys sharply increased right after the subjugation of the Sangley revolts of 1603 and 1639. I concur with Gil. These post-revolt conversions might have been nothing short of forced, as it was the only means to survive the mortal penalties inflicted on the vanquished Sangleys.³¹ The truthful conversion of Sangleys was considered to be so rare that writers who cite cases of good Christian Sangleys, such as Aduarte or Colin, insist on the exceptionality of their subjects and almost always consider their cases to be “miraculous.” The miracle discourse reinforced the notion that Sangleys needed nothing short of divine assistance to convert or to legitimate the sincerity of their conversion. At least in one case, a Sangley utilizes the miracle discourse to justify his survival of a death sentence during the Sangley rebellion of 1639, in which more than twenty-two thousand Sangleys, three hundred Indios, and forty-five Spaniards were killed.³²

The name of the Sangley is Juan Imbin and ecclesiastical authorities, upon the request of Archbishop Hernando Guerrero, investigated his case in January 1640. The testimony of Juan Imbin is particularly compelling because it is one of the few instances in which we can hear the voice of the Sangley, albeit filtered through translation. It is also a rare representation of a common Sangley’s attempt to construct a discourse that would exempt him from his abject status. This narrative of divine intervention also gives us a rare insight into the strategies utilized by a newly converted Chinese man to convince the ecclesiastical authorities that the miracle he experienced was legitimate. As we see below, his miracle narrative contains elements that were probably inspired by Spanish religious practices, as well as some elements that were culturally Chinese but were not recognized as such by Spanish authorities.

The Case of Juan Imbin

Juan Imbin shocked the residents of Taal when he seemingly re-emerged from the dead four days after he had been presumably executed, and his lifeless body was thrown into the sea along with twenty-eight other Sangleys. According to Juan Imbin, the image of Our Lady of Caysasay appeared at sea and guided him back into his town. The residents of Juan Imbin's town—both Spaniards and Indios—almost instantly spread the news of the Sangley's miraculous redemption and, within a month, the archdiocese of Manila mandated an official investigation. Archbishop Guerrero states in the document commissioning the investigation,

que todo lo susodicho [by Juan Imbin] son efectos que sin particular milagro y ayuda de tan gran Señora [Our Lady of Caysasay] no podrían suceder. Y para mayor honra y gloria suya y de su precioso y bendito hijo importa que este milagro tan estupendo se autentifique con información de todo lo sucedido para que asimismo se alienten los fieles a su devoción [...].³³

It is evident in Guerrero's use of the verb "authenticate" that even before the investigation started, Juan Imbin's miracle narrative had been established as factual. All he had to do was to retell his story with consistency and without deviating from the expectations of his audience in order to "enliven" the devotion to Our Lady of Caysasay.

Juan Imbin, speaking through a bilingual Sangley translator, gave the following testimony in the following order. He had worked in the church of Our Lady of Caysasay, as a stonemason for about three years. One of his jobs had been to build the vault over the spring near the church, which was believed to be miraculous. He was sleeping one night after cutting stone in the church, when he was woken up and taken by the forces of Don Juan de Cabrera to the fort of Bonbon. His hands were tied, his neck put in a brace, and he was placed with other Sangleys in the prison of the fort until the next day. In the evening of the next day, the mayor of the province of Balayan arrived and told the prisoners that if they were Christians, and they should take confession. If they were "heathens," and if they so wanted, the priest of Taal was there to baptize them. But even those who converted to

Christianity were destined to die because they were believed to be involved with the mass revolt of the Sangleys.

Juan Imbin took confession with the priest and, then, he entrusted himself to Our Lady of Caysasay, pleading that she release him from death, because he had served in her church for such a long time. He was then removed from the fort with a neck brace and tied hands and taken to the shore. Once he arrived, he saw other Sangleys who were already dead and had been previously taken out of the fort. He kneeled down and lowered his head and an Indio hit his neck with a machete. He did not remember anything that happened after that.³⁴ But that night, he was awakened from a dream and he found himself in the sea on top of a white leaf, though he does not know what kind of leaf it could be. And he saw a small girl of the size of the statue of Our Lady of Caysasay, who was very resplendent and was pulling the leaf [on which he was lying] towards the shore. He saw that caimans and other types of fish [in the water] were repelled by the presence of the girl. In the early morning, he arrived at the beach called Mayhayhay where he lost consciousness and did not see daylight.

After Juan Imbin regained consciousness he saw the same girl who had rescued him from the waters. She told him that he could return to Caysasay to continue the work he had started there. When he replied that he did not know how to get there, she guided him to the town of Bonbon. He lost consciousness again. Upon waking up, he saw that the girl was guiding him from above and transported him over the Bonbon river [lake] to a place near the vault in Caysasay where he was eventually found. The girl disappeared and he felt, for the first time, the pain of his wounds. He attempted to get up to walk towards the town, but he was unable to do so. He saw an Indio who had come to bathe in the waters and asked him through signs to give him some of the holy water. As soon as he drank the water he was more energized and could speak. The Indio [who found him] brought another Indio, and together they were able to bring the Sangley to Caysasay. [When he was examined], it was seen that he had four large wounds: two on his neck, one on his right breast, and the other one on his side. He states that he believes that he was killed with the first stroke on his neck because he did not feel any of the other three blows. He declared to be forty-five years old and he signed his name according to his usage (that is, in Chinese).

Juan Imbin's testimony follows the expectations of miraculous legends of visions of a saint or an advocacy of Mary in which he or she appears to a devotee in danger and saves him from imminent death.³⁵ For protection at sea, Mary was called upon more than any other saint in Spanish lands, and it was more so in regions located close to water.³⁶ According to a church investigation conducted between 1619-1620, the devotion to Our Lady of Caysasay was prompted with the miraculous healing some Indias experienced in a spring near her apparition site. The site where Juan Imbin claimed to have been found is over this very spring. This was probably not a coincidence given that he worked in the shrine and was probably aware of the purported miracles carried out by the famed icon in, and near, the spring. The resplendence that accompanies Our Lady of Caysasay in Juan Imbin's story is also a feature that appears in previously recorded miracles of Our Lady of Caysasay, as well as in apparitions in general.³⁷

As in the early modern miracles studied in William Christian Jr.'s work, Juan Imbin's narrative served a number of practical functions.³⁸ It proved that he was a sincere Christian and provided an explanation for his survival. Without having the vision and experiencing the miracle, Juan Imbin would be another Sangley who was subjected to a failed execution. His loyalty to Spanish rule would have been questioned and he would have possibly been taken to trial. Without such a vision, Juan Imbin would not have been able to voice the injustice of condemning all Sangleys residing in the area without any judicial proceedings. His miraculous resuscitation alludes to divine opposition to the enterprise of Don Juan de Cabrera, who did not care to distinguish between Christian and non-Christian Sangleys.³⁹ Additionally, the news of his miraculous revival built momentum for the shrine, which had the effect of increasing devotees and, by extension, more resources. It also aimed to secure a source of livelihood for the Sangley, since he claimed he was asked in the vision "se bolviere a Caysasay a trabajar en la obra que estava haciendo."⁴⁰ That divinity had chosen Juan Imbin also secured him an elevated status in his community.⁴¹ But his special status could be only retained as long as his supernatural experience was remembered.



Figure 2: Juan Imbin Signature.

“Año de 1640—Information que el maestro Joseph Cabral, beneficiado del partido de Balayan [y vicario] foraneo en esta provintia a fecho en virtud del orden del Illustrisimo Senor Don Fray Hernando Guerrero Arçobispo Metropolitano destas yslas.” Philippine Manuscripts II, Misiones, Legajo 1, Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington. Image 27.

I refer to the protagonist of the miracle as Juan Imbin, because it is the name he cited and the one by which the witnesses in the examined case identified him. But his signature reveals a side of his identity that could not be detected by the Spanish investigators. The signature only bears his surname in Chinese, which could be transliterated as Ma, which means horse. Imbin was probably his given name; Ma Imbin his full birth name. One could also see a hesitation in the act of signing his name. As seen in figure 2, he first sketches the characters on the right hand side to finally imprint it more intelligibly, though somewhat erratically, on the left. The unsteady handwriting and the missing characters for the first name are

indications of humble origins and lack of formal schooling, if not illiteracy. The fact that Juan Imbin could not speak Spanish well enough to testify and that he chose to sign in Chinese—when he could have used a cross or abstained from signing—suggests that he was still entrenched in Chinese cultural practices. Although Juan Imbin does not state the length of time since he arrived in the Philippines, he and other witnesses specify that he had worked as a stonemason at the church of Our Lady of Caysasay for about three years, and he does not mention having resided in any other town.

It is then possible that Juan Imbin's references for producing his miracle narrative were religious practices derived from both Hispanic Christianity and Chinese religion. Was his story influenced—consciously or not—by miracle narratives of both Our Lady of Caysasay and a Chinese goddess with similar attributes? It is not so unlikely, especially if we consider that Spanish friars often complained about Sangley converts casually adapting Christian devotions to Chinese forms of spirituality. While pre-Hispanic indigenous practices could be channeled into more acceptable Catholic devotions, it was less feasible to do so with Chinese practices because there was a constant stream of spiritual beliefs and rituals brought by new Sangleys coming to Manila. The Dominican friar Cristóbal de Salvatierra, for instance, complains bitterly in 1592 about the Christian Sangleys who participated in New Year's celebrations, and about the fact that the Chinese openly staged plays that opposed Christian beliefs. Salvatierra is especially outraged due to the following:

todas las comedias que hacen los chinas van mezcladas sus supersticiones é idolatrías [...] aunque en las comedias sean historias, siempre son oferta y hacimiento de gracias o peticiones que hacen á sus dioses, y esto mismo contienen las que hacen cuando acaban de llegar á algún puerto que las hacen por hacimiento de gracias por haber llegado a salvamento, los cuales ofrecimientos hacen a sus ídolos, todo lo cual es en grande escándalo de los nuevos cristianos y en daño y perjuicio de nuestra santa fe católica.⁴²

Salvatierra notices that Sangleys are attached to “idols” that protect them when traveling by water, and that these are the idols they honor in their plays.

An edict of 1756, more specifically, prohibits lighting candles before icons of the Chinese Goddess of Mercy Guanyin (觀音) and Mazu (媽祖), patroness of seafarers (by extension, travelers, fishermen, etc.), and identifies them as the Virgin Mary.⁴³ The edict is reinstated in 1759 due to a number of baptized Sangleys who were detained by Spanish authorities for continuing to practice “idolatries.” Among other violations, friar Matheo Villafaña reports seeing Sangleys handle “un ídolo llamado quám ím [Wanyin], que tiene/figura de mujer, a la cual le han añadido un rosario, diciendo que es María Santísima con esta advocación.”⁴⁴ The 1759 iteration of the edict also adds, more explicitly, “no llamen los sangleyes Má Choú [Mazu] a Nuestra Señora de Casasay, a la cual imagen le llaman así por estar ellos en inteligencia de que es figura del Má Choú de China.”⁴⁵

The conflation between Our Lady of Caysasay and Mazu is manifested in Juan Imbin’s testimony. Juan Imbin never asserts seeing the image of Mary, though he does say that after finishing confession, he had “encomendado muy de veras a nuestra señora de Caysasay pidéndole le librase de la muerte.”⁴⁶ He comes close to identifying the “niña” and Our Lady of Caysasay when he mentions that the first was “del tamaño de nuestra señora de Caysasay.”⁴⁷ The explicit association was made by the other witnesses who corroborated Juan Imbin’s testimony and by the officials in charge of the investigation, who as mentioned above, had already pre-determined that the miracle was valid. Although it was not uncommon for seers of apparitions in the Spanish-speaking context to first refer to a vision of an icon of Mary as a girl, girl-sized or small lady, it was exceptional that Juan Imbin did not care to change the denomination from girl, woman, or lady to “Our Lady” or “The Virgin” in his testimony, as often happened with seers of Mary.⁴⁸ In the 1619 investigation that led to the building of the church of Caysasay, all forty-three witnesses say that they experienced the apparition of the Virgin Mary or of a figure “que en su entendimiento era verdaderamente la Virgen.”⁴⁹ Having said that, the statuette of Our Lady of Caysasay is a very small image of less than a foot and depicts Mary as the Immaculate Conception. Photographs of Our Lady of Caysasay without her regalia show her with the semblance of a young woman with flowing long hair (figure 3). There is also the possibility that he

was thinking about legends and icons of Mazu. Literary productions of Mazu of the period tended to show her as a maiden, because she was believed to have died and risen to the heavens at a very young age (figure 4).⁵⁰



Figure 3: Our Lady of Caysasay Without Manto.
Photograph taken by June Perez.

If Juan Imbin was originally from the region of Fujian, like the large majority of Chinese in the Philippines, it would have been natural for him to entrust himself to the Chinese Goddess best known for protecting those in danger at sea. When Juan Imbin describes “caimanes y otros géneros de peces que se iban apartando por desde yba aquella niña y al cuarto del alba,” he might be making a reference that derived from both legends of miraculous icons of Mary and/or of Mazu.⁵¹ It is possible that Juan Imbin

had heard of miracles in which an image of Mary appeared and saved men attacked by water reptiles and predatory fish (figure 4). Such events were believed to have occurred by Marian shrine devotees, and especially so when the shrines were located near water masses. It is also likely that Juan Imbin might have been thinking of Mazu's reputation as tamer of evil sea creatures. Legends of Mazu, as recorded in the *Account of Blessings Revealed by the Celestial Consort* (*Tianfei xiansheng lu* or 天妃顯聖錄) emphasize her ability to surrender dragons, giant fish and turtles, and other terrifying water creatures.⁵²

Regardless of what specific elements inspired Juan Imbin's narrative, he managed to convince his neighbors in Taal, its Indio nobility, and local Spanish authorities that the survival of his given death penalty was due to a miracle. As mentioned above, the diocesan's investigation was conducted pro-forma, as archbishop Guerrero's reference to the "miracle" of the Sangley in his commission, makes apparent. By the time Juan Imbin was called to give testimony for the diocesan investigation, his story had been disseminated widely. He had repeated the same story multiple times and through the process of repetition had formalized the narrative. It is curious, however, that Juan Imbin does not at any point in the narrative assertively identify his redeemer as Our Lady of Caysasay, but rather as a girl with the semblance of the image of Caysasay. If his objective had been only to tell a convincing miracle narrative to the Augustinian friars who oversaw the local and the diocesan investigations, there is no reason why he would not expressly make the identification. This would have made practical sense, especially because all the other witnesses had asserted that the image of his vision was the one in Caysasay. My interpretation is that for Juan Imbin, Our Lady of Caysasay and Mazu were one and the same, and thus, he did not feel compelled to insist on one advocacy over the other. It could have been that in his recollection, he prayed to Our Lady of Caysasay and the Chinese protectress of the sea appeared to save him. In his mind, as in the minds of other newly converted Christian Sangleys, there was probably no contradiction despite the insistence of the Spanish friars that co-existence of devotions was nothing short of diabolical. Juan Imbin, as unrefined as he may have seemed, did not give in to the pressure to change his Mazu into Mary.



Figure 4: She [Mazu] makes an appearance and saves a life (1778).
In Klaas, Ruitenbeek, “Mazu, the Patroness of Sailors, in Chinese Pictorial
Art.” *Artibus Asiae* 58.3/4 (1999): 281–329, at 299.

The Spanish church in Manila, led by the Augustinian order, did not scrutinize the details of Juan Imbin's description and were pleased to confirm the miracle Our Lady of Caysasay bestowed on the Sangley. On 18 February 1640, Archbishop Guerrero declared:

por caso milagroso el que Dios nuestro obró con el dicho Juan Ymbin y por la invocación e intersección de nuestra señora de Caysasay contenido en estos autos el cual para que sea en mayor honra y gloria de Dios y Nuestro Señor y su Santísima Madre y mayor piedad y devoción suya y corroboración de la fe católica mandaba y mando se publique con solemnidad y fiesta, y se predique en los púlpitos. Y se pinte. Y [se] ponga en público en todas partes para que a todos pueda ser notorio.⁵³

What was the Augustinians' incentive to promote the view that Sangleys were capable of redemption? One likely explanation is that it was a response to having seen the indiscriminate near extermination of the Chinese population in the areas surrounding Manila. Juan Imbin, as well as Indios and Spaniards had emphasized in the investigation—and without prompting—that both Christian and non-Christians had been executed at the time of the Sangley rebellion. The friars might have wished to disassociate themselves from the leadership of the Sangley massacre and present themselves as the better order to properly evangelize to Sangleys. Moreover, it was in their interest to use the miracle of the Sangley as a means to promote the shrine and confraternity of Our Lady of Caysasay.

Juan Imbin's miracle was indeed used as material for sermons and religious histories, but not in the way intended by Archbishop Guerrero. With the rise of the Sangley population in the following decades came a resurgence of anti-Sangley sentiments and Juan Imbin's narrative was appropriated to show that although exceptional Sangleys could be Christians, they could not be Christians without exception. In the early 1700s, the Augustinian friar Gaspar de San Agustín inserted the case of Juan Imbin in the twelfth chapter of the second volume of *Conquistas de las islas Filipinas: la temporal por las armas de nuestros católicos reyes de España, y la espiritual por los religiosos de la orden de San Agustín*. In his version of the legend, he tries to neatly consolidate the disparate narratives that pre-existed about the apparition and miracles of the Virgin of Caysasay.⁵⁴ In melding popular

beliefs as well as elements from the mentioned investigation, San Agustín aims at fashioning his Marian legend in a way that would be consistent with Spanish Catholic practices as well as serve his ideological vision of Philippine society.

San Agustín's account is titled "De la invención milagrosa de la santa imagen de Nuestra Señora de Caysasay; y de un notable milagro que esta Señora hizo con el Sangley christiano."⁵⁵ San Agustín narrates the "notable milagro" following Juan Imbin's testimony more or less.⁵⁶ Juan Imbin (sic) was a Christian Sangley stonemason who was working in the construction of the chapel of Our Lady of Caysasay at the time of the Sangley rebellion of 1639-1640. After he had entrusted himself to Our Lady of Caysasay, Juan Imbin was then struck with machetes and spears, and left for dead in the river. On this same night, Juan Imbin woke up and found himself floating on the river with the aid of a giant white leaf and saw a resplendent beautiful girl bearing the shape of Our Lady of Caysasay pulling the leaf through the water. There were ferocious caimans and wild fish in the water, but they fled from the sight of Our Lady. Our Lady of Caysasay told him to go back to Caysasay and continue building her chapel there and then transported him to the spring of water where she had first been found. It is here that some Indios found him and took him to the prior of Taal and the Province scribe who were able to verify his testimony as truthful. Up to this point, San Agustín generally follows the information compiled in the official investigation.



Figure 5: Giant fish devouring a ship before Mazu comes to the rescue (1600s).

In Roderick Ptak, *O culto de Mazu—Uma visão histórica (da dinastia song ao início da dinastia qing)* (Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2012), 53.

What he says next is not found in any surviving source. San Agustín narrates a sequel to the story that he could have fashioned from lost sources or from non-sanctioned oral anecdotes. The friar tells us that after being healed from his wounds, Juan Imbin promised to be one of the custodians of her chapel, which he did with great devotion for many years. But, in time, Juan Imbin stopped caring for Our Lady's chapel and his faith progressively diminished. In his words,

Muchos años vivió Juan Imbin, despues de haber sanado de las heridas, que fué muy en breve, mostrando su agradecimiento á la Virgen Santísima sirviéndola en su ermita, con mucha devoción y cuidado, hasta que) con el tiempo se le fué resfriando tanto la devoción, que volvió á la sequedad ordinaria de los demás Sangleyes cristianos, que es muy trabajosa, hasta que se vino á salir con ser peor que ellos, no oyendo misa, ni confesando.⁵⁷

Nobody came to his rescue and he died from the injuries sustained in the attack. According to San Agustín, his sad death was to serve “para escarmiento de los demás que son desagradecidos á los beneficios del cielo, tuvo muy desgraciada muerte.”⁵⁸ The fact that San Agustín felt compelled to include this story as a conclusion to the founding legend of the chapel of Caysasay is indicative of San Agustín's stance on the Chinese problem in the Philippines. For the friar, the simplest way to unyoke and sanitize the messy cultural currents that merged when Sangleys were converted was to deny them of the truth of their conversion, and to discursively construct them as extraneous to the Christian body politic and essentially irredeemable. For San Agustín, the death of Juan Imbin ultimately proved that as the Sangley could not ultimately pass for a true Christian, his Chinese goddess could not pass for a true Mary.

Notes

¹ One of the best-known examples may be found in Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's *El primer nueva corónica i buen gobierno* (1615), in which Mary is shown throwing earth to Inca warriors while standing on a cloud. José de Acosta writes (ca. 1590): "Por relaciones de muchos y por historias que hay, se sabe de cierto, que en diversas batallas que los Españoles tuvieron, así en la Nueva España como en el Peru, vieron los Indios contrarios en el ayre un Caballero con la espada en la mano, en un caballo blanco, peleando por los Españoles[...]. Otras veces vieron en tales conflictos la imagen de nuestra Señora de quien los Christianos en aquellas partes han recibido incomparables beneficios" (223). According to Amy Remensnyder, Bernardino Vázquez de Tapia composes the first account (ca. 1540) that mentions the intervention of Mary in warfare in the New World (294). Vázquez de Tapia recalls that after the Toxcatl massacre, about a hundred and thirty Spaniards were about to be captured when for mysterious reasons the Mexica retreated: "Y preguntando después a indios principales, que eran Capitanes, cómo nos habían dejado, tiniéndonos en tanto aprieto y peligro, dijeron que [...] vieron una mujer de Castilla, muy linda y que resplandecía como el sol, y que les echaba puñados de tierra en los ojos y, como vieron cosa tan extraña, se apartaron y huyeron y se fueron y nos dejaron" (41-42).

² By 1588, the Spanish had gained unopposed political control of much of Luzon and the Visayas. According to John Phelan, most Barangays did not meet the Spanish with armed resistance, with the exception of the Moros of Mindanao and mountain people of Northern Luzon, who remained unincorporated into the Spanish colonial province until the last decades of the 1800s (9-10, 144-145).

³ García-Abásolo 223-242.

⁴ Ollé 61-90.

⁵ I find the first use of the term in an account composed by one of Miguel López de Legazpi's crew members in May 1570 (Blair and Robertson 73-74).

⁶ See Ollé 64 n. 8.

⁷ Fernández de Navarrete 2.

⁸ Ollé 68.

⁹ Salazar 288-289.

¹⁰ See García-Albásolo 232.

¹¹ Pedro Chirino wrote the most extensive Jesuit account about the Spanish presence in the sixteenth century. In his *Relacion de las islas Filipinas i de lo que en ellas an trabajado los padres de la Compañia de Iesus*, he recalls that the superior to found Jesuit enterprise the Philippines, Antonio Sedeño, sought out Chinese painters to make images of Mary for the churches in Manila. According to Chirino, Sedeño “[b]uscó pintores Chinos y los tenia en casa, a fin de pintar imágenes, no solo para nuestras iglesias, sino para otras de Manila y fuera: y animaba a los encomenderos y curas proveyesen sus iglesias de ellas; facilitándoles con esta comodidad. Así adornó casi todas las iglesias de imágenes, que casi todas eran de la madre de Dios” (31). Bishop Salazar also mentions the fact that religious imagery was produced by the Chinese: “Banse proveyendo las yglesias de las ymágenes que éstos haçen, de que antes abía mucha falta, y según la abilidad que muestran al retratar las ymágenes que bienen de España, entiendo que antes de mucho no nos harán falta las que se haçen en Flandes; y lo que dixen de los pintores, digo también de los bordadores, que ban ya haçiendo obras bordadas muy perfetas y se van cada día perfeccionando” (*Carta-Relación*). Art historian Fernando Zóbel de Ayala’s research also shows that most images of devotion were imported in the first decades of the colonization, and were domestically produced by the 1600s by Chinese artisans skilled at copying Hispanic models (12-16).

¹² Chirino 60-61, 90-93, and 116-117.

¹³ Gil 124.

¹⁴ The Franciscans arrived in 1577, the Jesuits in 1581, and the Augustinian Recollects in 1606.

¹⁵ “se estuvieron los sangleyes sin aber quién los doctrinase, ni tratase de su combersión, con las veras que es menester, asta que el año de ochenta y siete traxo Dios á estas yslas los religiosos de S. Domingo” (*Carta-Relación*).

¹⁶ Salazar, *Carta-Relación*. Gil also cites a letter by the Dominican friar Juan Cobo dated in July 1589, in which he recalls the devotion of a number of newly converted Sangleys. On holy Thursday, Sangleys “salieron disciplinándose con su pendón y imagen y processión muy concertada, con mucha cera” (320).

¹⁷ Chirino 114; Morga 295-298.

¹⁸ “En esta çiudad, e se dezía públicamente que desde la China benían concertados de matar a todos los castellanos que en ella abía, e que se abían hecho una con los naturales de la tierra para el dicho efecto” (Qtd. in Gil 463).

¹⁹ Morga, 289. For Sebastián de Covarrubias someone without a conscious, was someone without a soul, “no tener conciencia, ser desalmado” (346).

²⁰ Morga 297.

²¹ Morga 296; Chirino 114.

²² Gil 121.

²³ Morga 257.

²⁴ Qtd. in Gil 406.

²⁵ Gil 414-417.

²⁶ Qtd in Gil 404.

²⁷ Morga 296.

²⁸ Ollé 74-75, 76 n.51.

²⁹ Niño de Távora 3-4.

³⁰ Niño de Távora 5-6.

³¹ Gil 323-324.

³² Gil 506.

³³ “Año de 1640,” 5-6. The orthography has been modernized in all of the respective citations.

³⁴ “Año de 1640,” 25-26.

³⁵ Christian Jr., *Local Religion* 75-105.

³⁶ Hall 121-2; Warner 265-9.

³⁷ See Christian Jr., *Local Religion* 75; Velasco 406.

³⁸ Christian Jr.’s research of apparitions (mostly of Mary) shows that there is a certain “logic of divine behavior,” in the sense that they serve a specific and material purpose for the seer and his/her community. Often times, the general purpose was to sacralize or localize devotions of a specific saint or advocacy of Mary, but apparitions also served to cool village rivalries, and to diminish crimes. (*Apparitions* 212-215).

³⁹ In some areas, the Spanish leaders attempted to exempt the baptized Sangleys and those who had not been involved in the revolt from execution, but it was generally to no avail (see Gil 473-481).

⁴⁰ “Año de 1640” 26.

⁴¹ In Spain, apparitions gave seers a special position, in the sense that they served as intermediaries between a people and its God (Christian Jr. 22).

⁴² “Auto de Cristóbal de Salvatierra sobre representar comedias” 2. I modernized the orthography in the citation.

⁴³ See Ptak 10-18.

⁴⁴ “Carta de fray Mateo de Villafaña” 1. I am grateful to Kar-Min Lim for pointing me to this document and to Jorge Mojarro for providing me with a copy of it from the archives at the University of Santo Tomás. The orthography has been modernized in all respective citations.

⁴⁵ “Carta de fray Mateo de Villafaña” 3.

⁴⁶ “Año de 1640” 14.

⁴⁷ “Carta de fray Mateo de Villafaña” 14.

⁴⁸ See Velasco 407. Christian Jr. hypothesizes that the apparitions or visions of Mary-as-child or child-sized-Marys emphasized the view of children as pure and precious members of society (*Apparitions* 219-220).

⁴⁹ “Ynformadon del gran milagro de el pueblo de Casasui” 347r. The orthography has been modernized in all of the respective citations.

⁵⁰ Ptak 34. See Klaas 281–329.

⁵¹ “Año de 1640” 14.

⁵² Ptak 40-42.

⁵³ “Año de 1640” 122.

⁵⁴ San Agustín 234-248. Current scholarship has inadvertently attributed the first written record of the founding of the devotion in Caysasay to Casimiro Díaz Toledano rather than to Gaspar de San Agustín. As explained in a catalogue of Augustinian writers, Díaz compiled the second part to the *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas* from the manuscripts San Agustín left at the time of his death (*Revista Agustiniiana* 375). I agree with Manuel Merino that the style of the prose is also unmistakably San Agustín’s (xxxiii). San Agustín alludes to his intention of introducing the legend of Our Lady of Caysasay in chapter 10 of his first book when he states, “[h]a obrado Dios por medio de esta santa imagen [de Caysasay] muchos y muy grandes milagros, de los cuales trataremos en su lugar” (*Conquista de las Islas Filipinas*, ed. Manuel Merino 370). Francisco Bencuchillo, another Augustinian missionary in the Philippines, published the first version of the legend in a Tagalog *novena* circa 1754. Bencuchillo is likely to have based his narrative on San Agustín’s version of the legend.

⁵⁵ San Agustín 244.

⁵⁶ San Agustín 244.

⁵⁷ San Agustín 248.

⁵⁸ San Agustín 248.

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