

Armenian Merchants from Madras in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Manila:

A Story of Love and Hate

Xabier Lamikiz

Manila was a rarity within the Spanish empire: it was the only Spanish colonial seaport to trade with foreign countries and welcome foreign ships. In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Armenian merchants gained a foothold in the international trade of Spanish Manila. Until then, the Chinese had totally controlled textile imports (mainly silks) to Manila, but around 1680, Spanish merchants began to complain about the lower quality of Chinese products. To an extent, Armenian and Indian merchants filled this market gap with cotton textiles and silks from Coromandel and Bengal. Although the Chinese remained the leading foreign merchant community in Manila during the eighteenth century, Armenians and Indians increased their presence and importance in relative terms. Their trade became indispensable in providing the cargo of the Manila galleon that navigated to Acapulco (Mexico) every year. However, as schismatics and infidels, they raised the suspicion of the ecclesiastical authorities and were sometimes persecuted and expelled. The paper will provide an overview of this love and hate story.

Bio: *Xabier Lamikiz is an Associate Professor of Economic History at the University of the Basque Country (Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain). He received his PhD from the University of London (2006) and completed his post-doctoral project at the University College London (2009). He was an assistant professor of Economic History at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid from 2010 to 2012, when he moved to the Basque Country. He is the author of a book entitled Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and their Overseas Networks (2010). He has published several journal articles and book chapters on early modern Spanish merchants and trade institutions and is currently writing a book on the Spanish Atlantic World trade in the seventeenth century. Lamikiz and Alberto Baena Zapatero (University of Salamanca) are working on an article about the Armenian merchants of Manila in the eighteenth century, a subject they already explored in 2014.*