Sino-Filipino Artistic Collaboration: Agency Via Ivory Sculpture Production in Seventeenth-Century Colonial Manila

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Introduction

The Hispano-Philippine style of ivory sculpture production in colonial Manila is almost synonymous with the growth of Spain’s global empire from the sixteenth century onward. Crucified Christ (Figure 1) epitomizes this distinct, then-popular sculptural style: a porcelain-like face with a long nose, almond eyes, arched eyebrows, distinguished eyelids, and flowing hair along the side of the figure’s face. These sculptures, which exist today with “very few archival references to the [Ivory] manufacture . . . [and] no surviving contracts or artist names and no signed works from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries,” have been studied by historians and art critics alike in terms of Latin American consumer demand, marketability, Catholic devotion and conversion, and “Chineseness,” among other considerations. Common across these investigations is discussion of the significance of Chinese immigrants—called Sangleys (or “those who come to trade”) within the Spanish colony—who have been consistently identified as the creators of these sculptures. Up to this point, art-historical scholarship has not meaningfully interrogated this designation.

While crediting the Sangleys with the production of Hispano-Philippine sculptures is understandable considering art historians’ definition of the style and the few surviving archival documents that specifically mention Chinese immigrants, there exists a complex interplay of sociocultural forces that undergird the creation of these art objects. Intercultural interactions are not a new concept in relation to forces that undergird the creation of these art objects. Moreover, I engage the notion of intersubjectivity throughout this paper to frame the discussion of the style and the few surviving documents of the term “intersubjective” comes from Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” Cultural Studies 21, nos. 2–3 (2007): 173, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353. In his article, Quijano describes knowledge as “an intersubjective relation for the purpose of something.” I engage the notion of intersubjectivity throughout this paper to frame the Sangleys and native Filipinos’ collaboration in Manila, as well as argue for a broader, networked view of colonial art history in general.

5 Reyes, “Flaunting It,” 692.
7 The concept of historical silencing in relation to discursive power (who has it, who can wield it) has been explored by various scholars. The following book provides a detailed foray into, and application of, historical silencing as a critical framework: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). Also, my use of the term “intersubjective” comes from Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” Cultural Studies 21, nos. 2–3 (2007): 173, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353. In his article, Quijano describes knowledge as “an intersubjective relation for the purpose of something.” I engage the notion of intersubjectivity throughout this paper to frame the Sangleys and native Filipinos’ collaboration in Manila, as well as argue for a broader, networked view of colonial art history in general.

9 I mostly use “Hispano-Philippine” throughout this paper for consistency across art-historical scholarship. However, I occasionally use “Chinese-Philippine” when it behooves my argument and overall research goals.
ambivalence, and slippage, to frame my artwork analysis.\textsuperscript{10} After introducing Bhabha, I provide a brief historical overview of colonial Manila to better situate my argument within the specific sociocultural moment that existed in the city between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. I then analyze several pairs of sculptures depicting Catholic icons such as the Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus. These analyses solidify the desirability of the hybrid Hispano-Philippine style. Finally, I complicate the historical understanding of these sculptures’ manufacture by constructing a narrative of native Filipino collaboration, one that acknowledges these individuals’ artistic prowess, interactions with the Sangleys, and role in producing high-quality, internationally recognized art objects.

Hybridity of Colonial Artwork

Homi K. Bhabha’s The Location of Culture offers a theory of hybridity to account for the “borderline work of culture” present in colonial art history. He asserts, “Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.”\textsuperscript{11} The scholar’s move beyond binary conceptions of cultural difference, instead dwelling within the interstitial spaces where minority perspectives are articulated and negotiated, provides an apt framework for the reconsideration of sculpture production in colonial Manila.\textsuperscript{12} Instead of reinscribing unquestioned (or minimally questioned) knowledge regarding the development of the Hispano-Philippine style, I locate a commonality between the Chinese immigrants and native Filipinos in their collaborative creation of ivory statuary.\textsuperscript{13}

A few key terms related to cultural hybridity are significant to the construction of an in-between space of artistic agency for the Sangleys and native Filipinos. The first is mimicry, a word Bhabha uses to describe representation within a colonial state. At its most basic, mimicry reflects that which is “almost the same, but not quite” (emphasis original).\textsuperscript{14} If, for example, the colonized group were to recreate a colonizer’s sign, whatever that might be, it would be an imperfect imitation, only partial. Mimicry, then, exists as a tool of subversion for colonized subjects in their artistic creation, what Bhabha calls a “menace” (emphasis original) that discloses “the ambivalence of colonial discourse” and “disrupts its authority.”\textsuperscript{15} Ambivalence also emerges as an important consideration here, as colonial discourse itself lies within a state of in-betweenness. The conflictual, tense, and unstable axis colonialism exists upon enables the development of fluid colonized identities that simultaneously work inside colonial authority and against it.\textsuperscript{16} This ambivalent position is productive because it encourages the transformation of colonial discourse from that of unidirectional power (colonizer unto colonized) to that of colonized “recalcitrance which... poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers.”\textsuperscript{17} The final term, slippage, operates alongside mimicry and ambivalence to help buttress Bhabha’s theoretical framework of cultural hybridity. Slippage is, most simply, the excess or difference that appears in an act of mimicry within an ambivalent colonial state.\textsuperscript{18} The inappropriate, inconsistent elements of a colonized subject’s imitation of the colonizer’s culture, whether these aspects reflect native symbols and icons or something else entirely, constitute what Bhabha deems slippage.\textsuperscript{19} A clear example of mimicry, ambivalence, and slippage working in tandem to promote the subversive potential of colonized subjects appears in Bhabha’s “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817,” in which he considers the English Bible and the accompanying imperialist missions conducted using the language, endeavors that were co-opted by natives to create forms of “hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority.”\textsuperscript{20}

Considering mimicry and slippage as tools of the colonized and ambivalence as the larger state colonized subjects inhabit, I trace the agency of sculptors within colonial Manila by analyzing Hispano-Philippine statuary’s hybridized features and by comparing sculptures of the Hispano-Philippine style with contemporaneous art objects produced in China. My initial analysis of these sculptures does not interrogate the credit traditionally given to the Sangleys population for their production. However, establishing a sense of agency via hybridity regardless of creator is necessary to position native Filipinos as one part of an intersubjective relationship of artistic innovation, as mimicry and slippage were tools available to both groups in their representations of Catholic iconography. The development of an inimitable style, both aligned with and resistant to imperial authority, is key to the agentic positions of colonized subjects such as the Sangleys and native Filipinos. In the following section, I historicize colonial Manila and provide a sociocultural lens through which to view the artisans’ roles as artistic innovators.

Colonial Manila: A Brief History

Due to Spanish colonization in the early 1570s, Manila “was transformed into the colony’s preeminent political, religious, multiracial trading hub, and one of the wealthiest
and greatest entrepôts in Asia.” Key to this development were the Manila galleons, Spanish trading ships that “brought the commodities of Asia, the Americas, and Europe into global circulation.” Spanish-sponsored trade not only enabled Manila-made goods to be distributed worldwide; it also connected the various communities that lived within and traveled to the colonial city. Considered “a contact point for the meeting of peoples, ideas, and goods,” Manila, and the larger island of Luzon, featured an influx of Muslim missionaries and Chinese traders well before Spain colonized the region. Various chiefdoms across the Philippines throughout the second millennium CE were enmeshed in trade networks in East and Southeast Asia—societies that exchanged their raw materials, such as beeswax and cotton, for finished Chinese products, most notably porcelain. This interregional trade network across Asia pre–Spanish colonization set a historical precedent for Sino-Filipino collaboration to occur during and after the development of Luzon’s colonial city.

Although Manila’s newfound trading culture largely benefited the Spaniards who wielded imperial power over the territory, the native Filipino and Sangley populations played a fundamental role in the development of this milieu. Chinese immigrants lived in the Parían outside the Intramuros (the walled portion of Manila) and operated shops, markets, and taverns, in addition to offering a litany of services such as baking, tailoring, carpentry, and printing. Manileños of different backgrounds, whether Spanish or native Filipino, would frequent the Parían, relying on the Chinese immigrant community for essential services. In contrast to the Sangleys, native Filipinos generally lived along the Pasig River, which bisects Manila, and worked as market gardeners, domestic servants, and skilled craftsmen, among other roles. Both the Sangleys and native Filipinos immersed themselves in Manila’s culture, proving instrumental to the city’s growth as well as the development of the Spanish empire. A large part of the Sangleys and native Filipinos’ niche in this cosmopolitan metropolis was undoubtedly artistic production, as evidenced by the surviving ivory statuary of Catholic icons found in shipwrecks and archaeological excavations both in the Philippines and around the world. In the next section, I turn to analyses of this Sino-Filipino statuary in light of cultural hybridity and the social context of colonial Manila.

The Hybridized Hispano-Philippine Style: Marketable and Subversive

Meticulously carved Hispano-Philippine sculptures of Catholic icons such as Jesus Christ (Figure 1), the archangel Michael, and John the Baptist were produced in colonial Manila for more than 250 years and ranged in size from a few inches to more than three feet tall. The artisans who crafted these sculptures—whether Sangleys, native Filipinos, or both—incorporated a blend of European styles, Chinese motifs, and other imagery to depict Catholic figures in a distinct, irreplicable manner. Considering the flurry of trading, craftsmanship, and bold fashion statements throughout cosmopolitan Manila, coupled with increased immigration to the colonial city, artisans likely felt the pressure to create marketable sculptures. These sculptures’ hybridity and subsequent appeal to different Spanish territories around the world was the linchpin to their commercial success.

A pair of sculptures, one produced in China of the bodhisattva Guanyin, a (partially) enlightened Buddhist figure associated with mercy and kindness, and the other of the Virgin Mary (created in Manila), illustrates colonial artisans’ innovation in developing the hybridized Hispano-Philippine style. Guanyin Holding a Child (Figure 2) was sculpted sometime between 1580–1644, contemporaneous with the Virgin and Child statue (Figure 3), estimated to have been created within the first half of the seventeenth century. Viewed together, these sculptures depict similar curved stances, facial features (especially the arched eyebrows, rounded faces, and slight smiles), drapery along each figure’s torso, and positioning of hands underneath the children’s bodies. Notably different is the placement of the child—to the right of Guanyin’s chest, to the left of Mary’s—but both sculptures include a small toy for the infant to interact with. The Virgin and Child is also about half the size of Guanyin Holding a Child, while the former’s ivory material appears more lustrous than the latter’s.

Though the stylistic differences between the sculptures are understandable given the separate locations of manufacture, the many similarities demonstrate an intercultural linkage. Specifically, the curved stance, countenance, drapery, and hand placement represent an intentional act of mimicry and slippage à la Bhabha. The Chinese immigrants who participated in the production of Virgin Mary sculptures in Manila would have seen depictions of Guanyin similar to Guanyin Holding a Child, especially if these individuals immigrated to the city recently. Within the colonial context of Manila, the artisans, comprised in part by Sangleys, paid homage to the bodhisattva Guanyin by carving Mary with features suggestive of the Buddhist figure. The artisans menaced Mary’s representation

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21 Reyes, “Flaunting It,” 685.
25 Reyes, “Flaunting It,” 693.
27 See Trusted, “Survivors of a Shipwreck,” for an example of recently uncovered Hispano-Philippine sculptures.
30 The shorthand designation of “(partially) enlightened,” of course, does not account for the complexity of a bodhisattva’s journey toward enlightenment. While a bodhisattva has not reached Buddhahood, they have vowed to achieve perfection and are thus more accurately on a spectrum of enlightenment.
by incorporating, or “slipping in,” visual elements of a different religion's iconography. While some art historians have sought to demonstrate a shared “Chineseness” between the Hispano-Philippine Mary and figures like Guanyin, what links the depictions of these two figures is the stylistic choices informing their representation, not the ethnicity (or ethnicities) of the artisans.31

Scholars of Chinese religion have often referred to Guanyin as “the Buddhist Madonna."32 While this designation reflects a colonial response to Chinese religious practices, it more importantly points to a connection between the two icons much earlier than Guanyin's slippage into the Hispano-Philippine style in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.33 Christianity was first introduced to China in the seventh century, and representations of icons such as the Virgin Mary evolved within the country as centuries passed.34 By the fourteenth century, for example, Franciscan visitors to China often confused images of Mary and Guanyin (with or without children), as the two physically resembled each other and possessed “a shared register of protecting power and exemplary virtues.”35 A 1342 Yangzhou tombstone depicting Christian icons also features a hybridized Mary “dressed in Chinese clothes” and sitting in an “unmistakably” Chinese chair.36 The Franciscan visitors’ confusion and the Yangzhou tombstone reflect a religious syncretism, with depictions of Mary and Guanyin at the center.

When sculpting the Virgin and Child, Manileño artisans could choose to slip in Guanyin-like features, taking advantage of the ambivalent, destabilized colonial culture to offer a “similar, but not quite” representation of the popular Marian image that would satisfy the Spaniards’ religious goals but maintain a sense of agency in terms of portraying aspects of more familiar cultures.37 As Kwame Anthony Appiah notes about success in the art market, “To sell oneself and one’s products as art in the marketplace, one must, above all, clear a space in which one is distinguished from other producers and products.”38 Though the context is different, the notion of difference being desirable rings particularly true for colonial Manila and its glut of commercial activity. Ultimately, the city's artisans were successful in distinguishing their sculptures from other depictions of Catholic icons: “[T]hey effectively outcompeted images from Europe that had previously functioned as instruments of conversion and devotion and as artistic models. . . . Southeast Asian ivories, for a variety of reasons, were preferred over European ones in the Spanish colonies on both sides of the Pacific.”39

The slippage of Guanyin-like elements into the Virgin and Child sculpture, while significant, only offers one side of the artisans’ mimicry of Catholic icons. Another important consideration is the artisans’ copying of European representations of Christian figures, as well as how these stylistic elements interact with what Bhabha calls the “excess” components of Hispano-Philippine sculptures. While there exists uncertainty regarding which European models the Manila artisans used for their statuary, several art historians agree that Flemish sculptures bear the most resemblance to those produced in the Philippines.40 The Christ Child (Figure 4) exemplifies the Flemish style: wavy hair neatly positioned along the figure’s head, arched eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, and a contrapposto-like stance. While this sculpture is made of walnut, not ivory, the similarities among the Christ Child, Crucified Jesus (Figure 1), and the Virgin and Child (Figure 3), in particular their hair, facial features, and stances, indicate a shared cultural origin.

By pairing a Hispano-Philippine sculpture of Baby Jesus with a reclining Buddha created in China, the interplay of copying and slippage becomes more apparent. The Infant Jesus Asleep (Figure 5) was sculpted in Manila in the second half of the seventeenth century, while Qiao Bin's Par nirvana (death and transcendence of the Buddha) and attendant arhats (Figure 6), created in China, precedes it by about a century and a half. Though the two figures exist in different religious systems, their similar depictions point to a syncretism like that of the Virgin and Child and Guanyin Holding a Child, especially considering the history of Christianity and its development throughout China. Immediately noticeable when viewing the two figures together is their shared pose: Each figure’s right hand relaxedly sits against the cheek. Upon closer inspection, however, another similarity becomes apparent. If the Baby Jesus figure were rotated ninety degrees to the left, it would match the position of the reclining Buddha, with the left leg atop the right. Each figure's left arm would also rest upon the raised left leg in the same manner: curved and relaxed like the right hand on the cheek. To complete the comparison, both Baby Jesus and the reclining Buddha display a calm countenance, with eyes and mouth similarly set.

The shared pose between The Infant Jesus Asleep and Par nirvana (death and transcendence of the Buddha) and attendant arhats represents the artisans’ slippage, who paid homage to Buddha by incorporating visual elements of the
Buddhist figure into their sculpture of Baby Jesus. The artisans intentionally alluded to the likeness of the reclining Buddha, a figure on his deathbed, in their (partial) representation of Baby Jesus, a child beginning his life. This reversal, from death to life, further reflects the menacing—or the “mockery,” as Bhabha has also described it—of the sculptors’ choice to slip in certain details. This preservation of visual culture within the Spaniards’ religious iconography in colonial Manila exemplifies the artisans’ resistance, however subtle, to total imperial domination. The decision to depict Baby Jesus in the manner of a reclining Buddha, a figure Chinese immigrants would have seen before, establishes a sense of agency among the sculptors.

The artisans’ agency emerges more clearly upon considering the Flemish motifs they incorporated into The Infant Jesus Asleep. Comparing this Baby Jesus to the Flemish model represented in the Christ Child, the resemblance is striking. Both figures feature a wavy hairstyle, flowing almost flush against the head and curling outward around the ears; arched eyebrows and similar mouth and nose shapes; and a noticeable sheen, despite the Christ Child being made of walnut. The hybridized Baby Jesus figure, reflecting both a Flemish style in his hair, countenance, and luster and a Chinese style in the positioning of his hands and legs, as well as in the calmness across his face, arises as a sum greater than its constituent parts. The ambivalence of the colonial site of Manila enabled the artisans to mock the hegemonic religious culture by creating an inimitable style ironically desired by the colonizers themselves. The Infant Jesus Asleep’s marks of slippage are effective precisely because they interact with the expected Flemish features included on the sculpture. The excess of Chinese visual motifs transforms the statue into a marketable piece of Manila for Spaniards to distribute around the expected Flemish features included on the sculpture. The ambivalence of the colonial site of Manila enabled the artisans to mock the hegemonic religious culture by creating an inimitable style ironically desired by the colonizers themselves. The Infant Jesus Asleep’s marks of slippage are effective precisely because they interact with the expected Flemish features included on the sculpture. The excess of Chinese visual motifs transforms the statue into a marketable piece of Manila for Spaniards to distribute around the

But what about the native Filipinos? Up to this point, I have discussed the artisans’ agency in their mimicry and slippage, at times implicating the Sangleys in the creation of the Hispano-Philippine style. Though Chinese immigrants played an important role in the style’s success, I now turn to the native Filipino population and consider the sculptures’ cultural hybridity alongside this group’s artistic history and development.

Native Filipino and Sangley Intersubjectivity

Before Manila was established as a colonial city, native Filipinos engaged in various forms of artistic practice. Seated bulul figure holding a vessel (Figure 7) depicts an anito, or a graven image of a deity, carved in the fifteenth-century Philippines. The materiality of an anito provides a method of worshipping divata (or nature spirits); in other words, the anito acts as a bridge to the spirit world. Anitos “reside in the house . . . [to] serve as divine guardians who protect the members of the family and oversee their general welfare.” The name bulul given to Figure 7 also indicates that the carver (or group of carvers) resided in northern Luzon, as this idol is associated with the Ifugao people and province, located about a few hundred kilometers north of Manila. To create a bulul figure such as Figure 7, the Ifugao use “sharp tools to carve, mold, contour, and etch forms and patterns.”

The style of Seated bulul figure holding a vessel departs from the Hispano-Philippine sculptures of Catholic icons discussed above, but the early creation of anito carvings, especially near the eventual site of colonial Manila, serves as a precedent for native Filipino sculpture-making in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Native Filipinos turned to carving to produce humanlike forms, as represented by the bulul and other anitos, within the framework of a spiritual tradition. It would be reasonable to suggest that the native Filipinos’ sculptural practices primed them for participation within Manila’s art workshops, spaces that also created human figures meaningful within a religious system (Catholicism). The creation of bulul figures in the fifteenth century in Luzon highlights a perennial artistic intent on the part of the native Filipinos, one that has been previously disregarded, whether intentionally or inadvertently, in art-historical scholarship regarding Manila’s sculpture production.

The work of an early native Filipino sculptor, Juan de los Santos from San Pablo City of Luzon, further complicates the historical narrative of Philippine artistry. Active in the first half of the seventeenth century, Santos produced a variety of religious sculptures, many of which are housed today at the San Agustin Museum, Church, and Convent in Manila. One of his most famous works of art is Retablo (Figure 9)—previously used as the central altarpiece of the San Agustin Church—which features a broken-arch pediment, uniform niches, and various intricately carved saints. The complexity and symmetry of this altarpiece, reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance, reflects an attention to detail similar to that represented in Hispano-Philippine statuary. While the

41 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 126.
42 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 122.
48 Anitos, Highlands of Luzon. Anito of the Igorrotes. Igorrote Drums (Figure 8) displays an anito produced at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Igorrotes (the parent ethnic group of the Ifugao people) in a style similar to Seated bulul figure holding a vessel. The continuation of this style into modernity argues against a teleological approach to native Filipino sculptural practices, as the Igorrotes were still choosing to represent their anitos more abstractly hundreds of years into the future.
49 Hernandez, “The Spanish Colonial Tradition.”
50 San Agustin Museum, Church, and Convent, “RETABLO OF JUAN DE LOS SANTOS,” Facebook, November 27, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/sanagustinmuseum/posts/retablo-of-juan-de-los-santospoly-chromed-wood-17th-centurythis-retablo-altarpiece/1580918375298871/. This Facebook post from 2017 is one of the only available and accessible sources that discusses the work of Juan de los Santos.
individual sculptures themselves differ in form, their shared precision in polychroming, drapery, and rendering of facial features places Santos and the Manila artisans within the same constellation of sculptural innovation and achievement. Indeed, Santos was only one of many carvers who served the Catholic Church: Native Filipino artisans, almost always anonymous, would carve and gild church doors, pulpits, facades, reliefs, and, of course, altarpieces for the Spaniards.\textsuperscript{51}

The sculptural traditions of native Filipinos, both before Spanish colonization (as with anitos) and after (as with retablos), call into question the designation of Hispano-Philippine statuary as solely Chinese-made. Native Filipinos have always produced intricate carvings within a spiritual or religious context—a skill set that would lend itself well to the production of sculptures depicting Catholic icons. Additionally, native Filipinos were quick to learn European artistic practices post-colonization. Geoffrey C. Gunn notes, “Indios or Tagalog [other names for Indigenous Filipinos] artists proved good students of the Spanish friars in taking up two-dimensional art, especially in the reproduction of religious icons. . . . Nevertheless, it was sculpture in which the Tagalog artists excelled.”\textsuperscript{52} With knowledge of native Filipino artistry during the Spanish colonial period, it seems suspect that this group of artisans would be excluded from the development of the Hispano-Philippine style of ivory sculpture-making. This exclusion becomes more dubious when paired with the large population size of native Filipinos in Manila by 1620 (20,000), as well as with the amount of mixed-race individuals with native Filipino heritage at this time (more than 1,000).\textsuperscript{53}

As agentive artisans creating anitos, altarpieces, and other types of statuary, native Filipino artisans would have had the same access to mimicry and slippage as tools to subtly subvert Spanish imperialism within the ambivalent state of Manila. I contend that the native Filipinos collaborated with their Sangley counterparts to produce Hispano-Philippine sculptures, whether in the Parián or another area of Manila, as part of an intersubjective artistic relationship.

Returning to Crucified Christ (Figure 1), this statue offers a glimpse of the native Filipino and Sangley artisans’ intersubjectivity. This sculpture, much like the Virgin and Child (Figure 3) and The Infant Jesus Asleep (Figure 5), is a partial representation of Spanish Catholicism, depicting Christ with traces of Flemish and Chinese influence. These elements work together to constitute a mimicry, a menacing, of Spanish signification. However, there exists a third component of the sculpture that specifies a native Filipino influence. Christ’s loincloth bears resemblance to the striped cloths Filipino men would wear during the first half of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{54} As seventeenth-century Spanish rector Francisco Colín describes these breech-like garments, “[N]ative Filipinos in Manila] wore a richly colored cloth, which was generally edged with gold, about the waist and brought up between the legs, so that the legs were decently covered to the middle of the thigh.”\textsuperscript{55} The stripes on Christ’s loincloth, which is tucked between the figure’s legs and extends mid-thigh, coupled with the garment’s gilded edges match both Colín’s description of the item of clothing and historiographical accounts of it.

Part of the artisans’ act of slippage, then, was including this homage to native Filipino men’s breech-like garments. The inclusion of this detail would be more reasonable coming from a native Filipino hand, as it would not benefit a Sangley artisan in terms of cultural subversion or the reclamation of one’s culture to depict Indigenous men’s fashion sensibilities on a sculpture largely intended for export to other Spanish colonies.\textsuperscript{56} Native Filipinos must have collaborated with Chinese immigrants to produce this sculpture and others, ultimately shepherding in a Flemish-Chinese-Philippine hybrid style of statuary. The contact zone of Manila and its intersubjectively connected artisans made it possible for such a complex hybridized style to flourish and be distributed throughout Philippine churches and Spanish territories worldwide.

To further construct an intersubjective relationship between the native Filipino and Sangley artisans, I revisit certain documentation and narratives to interrogate commonly held historical beliefs, as well as to illuminate already-existing connections between the two groups. One of the most cited primary sources concerning Sangley artistry comes from Dominican bishop Domingo de Salazar of the sixteenth century:

Now I shall speak of the Sangleys, of whom there would be much to say. . . . What arouses my wonder most is, that when I arrived [they did not know] how to paint anything; but now they have so perfected themselves in this art that they have produced marvelous work with both the brush and the chisel, and I think that nothing more perfect could be produced than some of their [ivory] statues of the Child Jesus which I have seen. . . . The churches are being supplied with the images that these [people] make, which were greatly lacking before. And considering the ability they show in making likenesses of the sculptures that come from Spain, I think that before long we will not need the sculptures made in Flanders.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{51} Hernandez, “The Spanish Colonial Tradition.”
\textsuperscript{52} Geoffrey C. Gunn, First Globalization: The Eurasian Exchange, 1500–1800 (Lanham, United States: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 102. Some works of art have been identified as native Filipino–made because certain artisans would sign their pieces with terms such as Indios Tagalo or Indio Filipino.
\textsuperscript{53} Reyes, “Flaunting It,” 692 and 694.
\textsuperscript{54} Reyes, “Flaunting It,” 699.
\textsuperscript{55} Originally quoted in Park, “Made by Migrants,” 78.
\textsuperscript{56} Though the complexities of native Filipino religious practices are beyond the scope of this article, the Christ statue has the potential to also be read or coded as a figure represented in northern Filipino spiritual traditions. The allusions to Guanyin and Buddha in Manila sculptural practices, for example, beg the question: Which specific religious figures did native Filipino artisans consider when producing ivory statuary with the Sangleys?
\textsuperscript{57} See Park, “Made by Migrants”; Reyes, “Flaunting It”; and Porras, “Locating Hispano-Philippine Ivories,” for three contemporary examples that use the same letter from Salazar. Also, this translated version of the quote appears in Park, 71.
Salazar’s sentiments may appear innocuous to some, but further historicizing brings attention to a few possible misconceptions. During the same period across the Pacific Ocean, Spaniards collectively referred to Asian immigrants to the New Spanish territories as chinos regardless of specific ethnicity: Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, and Indian migrants, among other groups, were part of the same demographic under Spanish imperial rule.68 However, the Spaniards were inconsistent with their designation. In one example, Asian immigrants in the Acapulco militia were referred to as “Luzon Indians of the Philippines whom [the Spaniards] vulgarly call[ed] chinos”; in this case, chino functioned pejoratively to identify native Filipino groups (such as the Tagalogs and Pampangos) and Sino-Filipino mestizos apart from other militiamen of color, such as Africans, individuals of mixed African and European descent, and those with Indian ancestry.59 In another example, the Catholic Church would vacillate between defining chinos as either indios (Indigenous peoples) and gente vil (base folk) in tribunal cases, despite their status as “heathens” under ecclesiastical rule and their theoretical immunity from faith-based proceedings.60 Spaniards’ ethnic groupings were as reliable as the men who codified and acted upon them, with no recourse to the immigrants of color who existed under such categories.

Although the Philippines and other territories of New Spain were distinct geographically and, to some extent, culturally, all areas were controlled by the same government, and ethnic terms would have likely carried over in the galleon trade and during travel throughout the New Spanish empire. However, even if Spaniards in the Philippines disregarded terms used elsewhere in New Spain, or if they created their own set of descriptors (Sangley was specific to Manila), the inconsistent application of such language destabilizes the assumed truth of Salazar’s quote above. When he penned his letter to King Philip II in 1590, was Salazar acknowledging the Sangleys individually, or was he grouping them with the native Filipinos and Sino-Filipino mestizos who lived in Manila and frequently interacted with the Parián?61 Further, considering New Spain’s history of pseudoscientific ethnic classification, was there a political motive behind Salazar’s specification of Sangleys in his letter?62 Or was Salazar simply unable to differentiate among the various Asian communities that lived in Manila, particularly with the rise in mixed-race unions? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered with the scant documentation that exists in the historical archive of colonial Manila, with Salazar’s letter itself one of the only sources art historians can look to for “evidence” of statuary artisanship.

With this reality in mind, I propose a native Filipino and Sangley intersubjectivity as the origin of the Hispano-Philippine style. These two groups collaborating in Manila, each with histories of artistic practice and the tools of mimicry and slippage at their disposal, could unite artistically under Spanish imperial rule to develop a style that would secure their position in an unstable, ambivalent colonial society while also enabling them to exert a sense of agency in subtly mocking Catholic religious signification in their statuary. Such collaboration, too, was not unheard of, whether on a macro scale, the pre-colonial trade network the Philippines and China participated in, or at the micro level, the Chinese copying of native Filipino and Sino-Filipino mestizo prints post-colonization.63 The issue of artistic credit lies in the complex interplay of sociocultural forces that brought native Filipino and Sangley artisans together.

Concluding: Chinese-Philippine Statuary and Future Inquiry

In applying Bhabha’s framework of cultural hybridity and considering the sociohistorical realities of Manila, I have demonstrated the intercultural ties between native Filipino and Sangley artisans in the colonial city. When informed by the ambivalent state of Manila, the cosmopolitanism and trading fervor of the city, and the pressure to develop an artistic niche, the artisans’ ivory sculptures of Catholic icons, including works such as Crucified Christ (Figure 1), the Virgin and Child (Figure 3), and The Infant Jesus Asleep (Figure 5), represent a set of agentive choices in the statuary’s mimicry of Spanish signification and slippage of cultural difference. Upon initial inspection, when paired with contemporaneous or near-contemporaneous statuary such as Guanyin Holding a Child (Figure 2), Qiao Bin’s Par nirvana (death and transcendence of the Buddha) and attendant arhats (Figure 6), and the Christ Child (Figure 4), Hispano-Philippine sculptures reflect a mix of Flemish and Chinese styles. However, with knowledge of native Filipino artistic practices pre- and post-colonization, such as the creation of spiritual anitos (Figures 7 and 8) and Catholic retablos (Figure 9), as well as the depiction of Indigenous men’s breech-like garments on Crucified Christ, it becomes apparent that this style features a Flemish-Chinese-Philippine blend of visual elements. The act of mimicry extends to both Sangleys and native Filipinos as a tool of subtly subverting Spanish imperialism and establishing artistic agency within a colonial state.


63 Florina H. Capistrano-Baker, “Trophies of Trade: Collecting Nineteenth-Century Sino-Filipino Export Paintings,” *Archives of Asian Art* 67, no. 2 (October 2017): 237–56, https://doi.org/10.1215/00666637-4229719. This article by Capistrano-Baker points to an intersubjective painting relationship that existed between the Chinese immigrants and Filipino (both Indigenous and mixed) artisans of colonial Manila. Various prints thought to have been Philippine originals are, rather, Chinese copies of Filipino painters’ work. This dynamic, while of a different medium and within a different century (Capistrano-Baker considers nineteenth-century export paintings specifically), further solidifies a history of collaboration between the two communities, one that, if it existed to the extent it did through these prints, could reasonably exist through ivory sculpture production two centuries prior.
This intersubjective relationship between the two groups of artisans becomes clearer when interrogating commonly cited primary sources, such as Domingo de Salazar’s 1590 letter to King Philip II, and the narratives that have emerged from such documentation. The complexities of categorizing immigrants of color throughout New Spain and the inconsistencies in ethnic groupings, especially in light of the various territories’ sizable mixed-race populations, call into question the notion that the Sangleys were the sole producers of ivory statuary in Manila. With all these considerations in mind, I argue for a Sino-Filipino intersubjective relationship regarding these sculptures’ manufacture, partly to unsilence the native Filipinos who played an important role in the Hispano-Philippine style’s development but also to provide a colonially informed, intercultural lens through which to view the creation of these art objects in their historical moment.

I propose that art historians redesignate the Hispano-Philippine style as “Chinese-Philippine” due to the collaboration between the Sangleys and native Filipinos. This new description simultaneously credits both the Sangleys and native Filipinos in the sculptures’ creation and decenters the Spaniards’ role in the development of this subversive, yet marketable and desirable, style. Further, the placement of “Chinese” first pays homage to art-historical scholarship’s longstanding identification of the Sangleys as the creators of this sculptural style—only now the hyphenated term captures the broader intersubjective, intercultural reality of the sculptures’ manufacture. Along with the term “Chinese-Philippine,” I proffer the descriptor “Sino-Filipino,” which I have used throughout this paper, to characterize the intersubjective relationship between the two groups of artisans.

In endeavoring to construct an art-historical narrative that considers the intersubjectivity between the Sangleys and native Filipinos, as well as the sociohistorical moment of the sculptures’ production, I recognize that the intercultural forces of colonial Manila extend beyond these two groups and the trade networks surrounding them.65 Due to the dearth of archival records, especially outside the colonial Spanish archive, that specify who created these sculptures, the task for art historians instead becomes one of reconsidering the global trade networks, imperialist forces, and other sites of intercultural contact responsible for enabling the manufacture of this hybridized group of art objects. Part of this larger reconsideration, too, might include investigating the Sino-Filipino mestizo population apart from native Filipinos. In this paper, I have identified Sino-Filipino mestizos in relation to the Indigenous population of Manila to complicate the history of artisans and assert a specifically native Filipino artistic agency in the colonial city. However, future inquiry should trouble this differentiation, perhaps individually locating Sino-Filipino mestizos as distinct agents in Manila’s culture of artistic production.

Nevertheless, the native Filipino role in ivory sculpture-making has been understudied up to this point and warrants critical discussion. I have aligned a group of agentive artisans with their Sangley counterparts to reframe the historical narrative of colonial Manila’s artistic practices. What emerges from the silences of this history is a set of productive mistranslations that helps construct a clearer, although imperfect, portrait of art history’s colonialist past.66

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64 “Sino-Filipino” is also used throughout Capistrano-Baker, “Trophies of Trade,” to describe the intersubjective relationship between Chinese and Filipino painters during the nineteenth century in Manila. I have chosen to apply this term to ivory sculpture production in Manila because the two groups of artisans are the same and exist within a similar, though temporally different, colonial context.

65 As one scholar cautions, “It is also possible that some ‘Chinese-style’ Christian ivories shipped through Manila were actually made elsewhere in Asia.” (Clement Onn, “Circulating art and visual hybridity: cross-cultural exchanges between Portugal, Japan, and Spain,” Renaissance Studies 34, no. 4 (2019): 634–36, https://doi.org/10.1111/rest.12592.) While Onn similarly questions solely crediting the Sangleys for the creation of ivory sculptures in Manila, the scholar also suggests that Japanese, Thai, Indian, and other groups of Asian artisans could have participated in the development of this style of statuary.

66 I have adapted this idea of “productive mistranslation” from Aruna D’Souza, “Sea of Poppies and the Possibilities of Mistranslation,” in Traduttore, Traditore, ed. Karen Greenwalt and Katja Rivera (Chicago: Gallery 400, 2017), 46–58. In her article, D’Souza presents the novel Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh as an example of the inherent unknowability of a colonial event. Instead, what exists is a catalog of incomplete understandings. It is these misunderstandings (or mistranslations) that make new creative forms, especially through language, possible.
Bibliography


SINO-FILIPINO ARTISTIC COLLABORATION: AGENCY VIA IVORY SCULPTURE PRODUCTION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL MANILA

Figure 1. Crucified Christ, ca. 1600–1650, polychromed ivory, 24.6 x 26.8 x 5.1 in. (62.5 x 68 x 13 cm.). Harvard Art Museums / Fogg Museum, Cambridge. Public domain; photograph provided by Harvard Art Museums.
Figure 2. Guanyin Holding a Child, ca. 1580–1644, ivory, height 11.4 in. (28.9 cm.). The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Public domain; photograph provided by The Walters Art Museum.
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Figure 3. Virgin and Child, ca. 1600–1650, gilded ivory with traces of paint, height 5.5 in. (14 cm.). The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Public domain; photograph provided by The Walters Art Museum.

Figure 4. Christ Child, ca. 1510, polychromed walnut, 20.1 x 8.1 x 4.9 in. (51 x 20.5 x 12.5 cm.). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Public domain; photograph provided by the Rijksmuseum.
Figure 5. *The Infant Jesus Asleep*, ca. 1650–1700, gilded ivory with traces of paint, height 8.6 in. (21.7 cm.). The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Public domain; photograph provided by The Walters Art Museum.
Figure 6. Qiao Bin, *Par nirvana (death and transcendence of the Buddha) and attendant arhats*, 1503, polychromed earthenware, 14 x 17.1 x 9 in. (35.6 x 43.5 x 22.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Public domain; photograph provided by The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Figure 7. Seated bulul figure holding a vessel, 15th century, wood, height 18.9 in. (48 cm.). Quai Branly Museum, Paris. Public domain; photograph provided by Art Resource.
Figure 8. Anitos, Highlands of Luzon. Anito of the Igorrotes. Igorrote Drums, ca. 1900–1909, photographs. Cornell University Library / Southeast Asia Visions: John M. Echols Collection, Ithaca. Public domain; photographs provided by Cornell University Library.
Figure 9. Juan de los Santos, Retablo, 17th century, polychromed wood. San Agustin Museum, Church, and Convent, Manila. Public domain; photograph provided by Marc Lino J. Abila.