

Spanish colonialism in The Philippines

Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan successfully led the European expedition to Philippines in the service of the King of Spain. On 31 March 1521 at Limasawa Island, Southern Leyte, as stated in Pigafetta's *Primo Viaggio Intorno El Mondo* (First Voyage Around the World), Magellan solemnly planted a cross on the summit of a hill overlooking the sea and claimed for the king of Spain possession of the islands he had seen, naming them *Archipelago of Saint Lazarus*. The invasion of Philippines by foreign powers however didn't begin in earnest until 1564. After Magellan's voyage, subsequent expeditions were dispatched to the islands.

Four expeditions were sent: Loaisa (1525), Cabot (1526), Saavedra (1527), Villalobos (1542), and Legazpi (1564) by Spain. The Legazpi expedition was the most successful as it resulted in the discovery of the *tornaviaje* or return trip to Mexico across the Pacific by Andrés de Urdaneta. This discovery started the Manila galleon trade¹, which lasted two and a half centuries. In 1570, Martín de Goiti having been dispatched by Legazpi to Luzon², conquered the Kingdom of Maynila (now Manila). Legazpi then made Maynila the capital of the Philippines and simplified its spelling to Manila. His expedition also renamed Luzon *Nueva Castilla*. Legazpi became the country's first governor-general. The archipelago was Spain's outpost in the orient and Manila became the capital of the entire Spanish East Indies. The colony was administered through the Viceroyalty of New Spain (now Mexico) until 1821 when Mexico achieved independence from Spain. After 1821, the colony was governed directly from Spain.

Spain had three objectives in its policy toward the Philippines, its only colony in Asia: to acquire a share in the spice trade, to develop contacts with China and Japan in order to further Christian missionary efforts there, and to convert the Filipinos to Christianity. Only the third objective was eventually realized, though not completely because of the active resistance of both the Muslims in the south and the Igorot, the upland tribal peoples in the north. Philip II, king of Spain explicitly ordered that pacification of the Philippines be bloodless, to avoid a repetition of

¹ Galleon refers to Spanish ships which were used for warfare and later for trade.

² Luzon is the largest and most populous island of Philippines.

Spain's sanguinary conquests in the Americas. Occupation of the islands was accomplished with relatively little bloodshed, partly because most of the population (except the Muslims) offered little armed resistance initially. However there have been several incidents of atrocities committed by the Spanish authorities, one of the most incredible acts of heinous torture took place in the Fortress of Sebastian Intra Mores in Manila where there was a dungeon known as the Black Hole. The prison had only two small apertures, one three feet square in the ceiling, the other a little gated hole in the floor through which the sea could be seen washing underneath. The Spanish authorities used to confine state prisoners in the hole to the brimful without food and water and just sufficient air to prevent them from dying immediately. Physical torture was meted out to the unmanageable prisoners.

During most of the Spanish colonial period, the Philippine economy depended on the Galleon Trade which was inaugurated in 1565 between Manila and Acapulco, Mexico. Trade between Spain and the Philippines was via the Pacific Ocean to Mexico (Manila to Acapulco), and then across the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean to Spain (Veracruz to Cádiz). Manila became the most important center of trade in Asia between the 17th and 18th centuries. All sorts of products from China, Japan, Brunei, the Moluccas and even India were sent to Manila to be sold for silver 8-real coins³ which came aboard the galleons (Spanish ships) from Acapulco (city in Mexico). These goods, including silk, porcelain, spices, lacquer ware and textile products were then sent to Acapulco and from there to other parts of New Spain, Peru and Europe. The European population in the archipelago steadily grew although natives remained the majority. They depended on the Galleon Trade for a living. In the later years of the 18th century, Governor-General Basco introduced economic reforms that gave the colony its first significant internal source income from the production of tobacco and other agricultural exports. In this later period, agriculture was finally opened to the European population, which before was reserved only for the natives.

During Spain's 333 year rule in the Philippines, the colonists had to fight off the Chinese pirates (who lay siege to Manila, the most famous of which was Limahong in 1574), Dutch forces, Portuguese forces, and indigenous revolts. Moros from western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago also raided the coastal Christian areas of Luzon and the Visayas and occasionally

³ Silver 8-real coin was the silver coin minted by the Spanish empire after 1598.

captured men and women to be sold as slaves. On April 25, 1898, the Spanish–American War began with declarations of war. On May 1, 1898, the Spanish navy was decisively defeated in the Battle of Manila Bay by the Asiatic Squadron of the U.S. Navy led by Commodore George Dewey aboard the *USS Olympia*. Thereafter Spain lost the ability to defend Manila and therefore the Philippines.

The Filipino movement against Spanish authorities had both violent and non-violent proponents. Jose Rizal was the most prominent face of the moderate opposition to the Spanish rule who advocated political reforms of The Philippines under Spain. Jose Rizal was a man of incredible intellectual power, with amazing artistic talent as well. He excelled at anything that he put his mind to - medicine, poetry, sketching, architecture, sociology. In 1882, he traveled to Spain to complete his medical degree. While in Europe, José Rizal became part of the Propaganda Movement, connecting with other Filipinos who wanted reform. He also wrote his first novel, *Noli Me Tangere* (*Touch Me Not/The Social Cancer*), a work that detailed the dark aspects of Spain's colonial rule in the Philippines, with particular focus on the role of Catholic friars. The book was banned in the Philippines, though copies were smuggled in. Rizal returned to the Philippines in 1892. Although the reform society he founded, the Liga Filipino (Philippine League), supported non-violent action, Rizal was still exiled to Dapitan, on the island of Mindanao. In August 1896, Katipunan, a nationalist Filipino society founded by Andres Bonifacio, revolted. Though Rizal had no ties to the group, and disapproved of its violent methods, Rizal was arrested shortly thereafter. After a show trial, Rizal was convicted of sedition and sentenced to death by firing squad. Rizal's public execution was carried out in Manila on December 30, 1896, when he was 35 years old. His execution created more opposition to Spanish rule.

On May 19 1898, Filipino radical revolutionary Emilio Aguinaldo returned to the Philippines from self exile in Hong Kong aboard an American naval ship and on May 24 took command of Filipino forces. Filipino forces had liberated much of the country from the Spanish. On June 12, 1898 Aguinaldo issued the Philippine Declaration of Independence declaring independence from Spain and later established the First Philippine Republic. Filipino forces then laid siege to Manila, as had American forces. The Americans entered into a pact with the Spanish governor-general in which they agreed to fight a mock battle before surrendering Manila to the Americans.

The Battle of Manila took place on August 13 and Americans took control of the city. In the Treaty of Paris (1898) ending the Spanish–American War, the Spanish agreed to sell the Philippines to the United States for \$20 million which was subsequently narrowly ratified by the U.S. Senate. With this action, Spanish rule in the Philippines formally ended. However the sovereignty status of The Philippines remained unchanged till 1946, as the void left by Spain was immediately filled with the U.S.A. The Philippines was illegally ceded to the United States at the Treaty of Paris for US\$20 million, together with Cuba and Puerto Rico. A Filipino-American War broke out as the United States attempted to establish control over the islands. The war lasted for more than 10 years, resulting in the death of more than 600,000 Filipinos. The little-known war has been described by historians as the "first Vietnam", where US troops first used tactics such as strategic hamleting and scorched-earth policy to "pacify" the natives.

The United States established an economic system giving the colonizers full rights to the country's resources. The Spanish feudal system was not dismantled; in fact, through the system of land registration that favored the upper Filipino classes, tenancy became more widespread during the US occupation. Native elites, including physicians trained in the United States, were groomed to manage the economic and political system of the country. The U.S. also introduced western models of educational and health-care systems which reinforced elitism and a colonial mentality that persists to this day, mixed with the Spanish feudal patron-client relationship. Eventually after the second world war, where Filipino forced fought alongside U.S.A to thwart the Japanese force, Philippine independence came on July 4, 1946, with the signing of the Treaty of Manila between the governments of the United States and the Philippines. The treaty provided for the recognition of the independence of the Republic of the Philippines and the relinquishment of American sovereignty over the Philippine Islands.