

THE  
PHILIPPINE  
CHINESE LABOR  
QUESTION

By

JUAN MENCARINI.

*Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service.*

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Having been honoured by the U.S. Minister, H.E. Edwin H. Conger, and the Honble. A. Burlinghame Johnston, Consul at Amoy, with the request to write my opinion and experience of the Philippine labour question, some kind friends suggested I should translate the paper into Chinese and publish it.

In doing so, and putting it in print, I hope the reader will overlook its shortcomings, naturally existent in a work done at short notice by a foreigner, and necessarily concise.

I hope though I shall have obtained my object, which is to draw the attention of those concerned to the great want the Philippines have to be properly governed, so that peace and prosperity may soon succeed the ruin and chaos now afflicting those unfortunate islands, which should be the real El Dorado of the East.

J. MENCARINI.

Hankow, October, 1900.

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H.E. VICEROY CHANG CHIH-TUNG'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT  
OF A TRANSLATION OF THE PAPER

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Addressed to Mr. Assistant Mencarini of the Hankow Customs by the Taotai Managing the Iron Railway. The enclosed dispatch is a copy of that sent by the Viceroy and inscribed by him on the essay submitted to him for perusal.

"I have read the essay on the condition of the Chinese emigrants proceeding to and residing in the Philippine Islands, and have given it careful attention. This investigation by the foreign author shews that he has inquired with great assiduity into the mode of life existing among Chinese abroad, and the facts regarding their relation to the foreign governments in their adopted country, and the productions of the soil as well the qualities, social tendencies and capabilities of the emigrants themselves.

"The essay is very complete and proves convincingly how the native races and the emigrants are helpful to each other and how they depend each on the other for their prosperity.

"If in future the American government adopts from this book good methods in ruling the Islands as there recommended and carries them to a fulfilment, not only will the Chinese population be materially benefited but new land will be occupied and an increase of wealth and an advance in civilized order will be attained. The publication of this essay will lead to a wide circulation and the benefit resulting will be very great. I give it unstinted praise. If the foreign author wishes me to make it known to the Chinese mercantile class and the people generally I will have it printed with type metal in the Hupei Trade Journal. It will then be extensively read.

"I therefore direct Cheng Taotai, the manager, to inquire of the foreign author what his wishes are in this matter. The Taotai will inform me and I shall then give orders accordingly.

"The dispatch is to be returned to this office to be retained in the Records."

CONSULATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

AMOY, Sept. 26th, 1899.

DEAR MENCARINI,

His Excellency the U.S. Minister would be very glad to meet you at the Consulate this morning at 10.30.

He would like to hear your ideas of the Chinese question as it relates to the Philippines. If you will be able to get away from the office and come, please let me know at once.

Yours truly,

A. B. JOHNSTON.

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CONSULATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

AMOY, CHINA, October 12th, 1899.

J. MENCARINI, Esquire,  
Amoy.

SIR,

It having come to my knowledge that you spent considerable time investigating the question of Chinese labor for the Philippines, the Straits Settlements, and Java, both in the interest of the Spanish Government and that of China, I take this opportunity to solicit an opinion from you upon the relation of the Chinese and Chinese labor to the development of industries in those Islands.

Your life's work having been divided between the service of your native country, Spain, in connection with her Philippine possessions and in the Chinese Imperial Customs' Service, and having made your investigations in the interest of both, I am convinced that what you might say upon the question would be read with interest by American Legislators, who will soon be called upon to deal with the question of Chinese in the Philippines.

Hoping that I may have a favorable reply.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

A. BURLINGHAME JOHNSTON,  
U.S. Consul.

AMOY, CHINA, 28th Oct., 1899.

SIR,

I have much pleasure in acknowledging the receipt of your favor of the 12th instant, in which you do me the honor to request me to give you my opinion upon the relation of Chinese labor to the development of industries in the Philippines.

I beg herewith to enclose a paper, which I hope will comply with your request.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J. MENCARINI.

A. BURLINHAME JOHNSTON, Esq.,  
United States Consul,  
Amoy.



## THE PHILIPPINE LABOR QUESTION.

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BEING convinced that reliable information as to the best methods of developing Oriental tropical possessions would be valuable to our legislators, I solicited Mr. Juan Mencarini, Senior Assistant in the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs at Amoy, to prepare the enclosed document. Mr. Mencarini has spent twenty-five years in the Orient, three years of which he was located in the Philippines; a portion of the time he was located with his father, who was then Consul-General for Spain, located in Amoy, Singapore and Hongkong, and he has now been nineteen years in the Chinese Customs service.

Mr. Mencarini has had unusual facilities for studying the labor question in the Philippines and is thoroughly acquainted with the Filipino character. He is also thoroughly conversant with the Chinese language, both written and spoken. He is also well informed as to Cochin-China, Java, and the British Straits Settlements. He visited all these colonies for the purpose of studying the question in the interest of his own country, Spain, and with a view to recommending legislation which would promote a more substantial development of the Archipelago.

The time he devoted to the work he has recently regarded as fruitless, but at my request he has generously consented to briefly review the question, although now wholly disinterested, excepting for his great admiration for the Islands and his belief that their resources, if developed, exceed those of any other Oriental possession.

A. B. JOHNSTON,  
U. S. Consul.

## MR. MENCARINI'S REPORT.

The main points to be discussed on this important topic are :—

1st.—Is immigration necessary for the Philippines ?

2nd.—If so, what race is to bring the most beneficial results to the Archipelago ?

I contend that immigration to the Philippines is of the utmost necessity. The population of the Islands is variously estimated. The Spanish Government in its official census gave it as five and a half millions. Don Augustin de la Cavada, a notable writer and authority on the subject, gives it as eight millions.

If we accept a medium estimate we shall have about fifteen inhabitants per square mile. The superficial area of the Islands could undoubtedly contain more than sixty-five inhabitants per square mile, giving work and profitable results to all.

Java, which is about the size of Luzon, contains twenty-four million inhabitants, and it is an undisputed fact that it is every day increasing its productiveness.

To return to the population of the Philippines: out of the estimated five and a half million inhabitants, we have to discount the not inconsiderable number of dwellers in Mindanao and the Sooloo Archipelago, also the aboriginal tribes in all the islands, who by their traditions, character and inclination cannot be relied on for working fields, mines, etc. They live a nomadic and predatory life, and are savage and untamable.

The Filipino is not a very prolific inhabitant. Besides, up to this century, his coasts have been continually harassed from the south by the pirates from Mindanao and Sooloo, and from the north by the Chinese and Japanese, who on every occasion cruelly exterminated defenceless villages and carried away a large number as slaves.

It is an undoubted fact, that the wealth and fertility of the soil and subsoil of the Archipelago cannot be exaggerated. Minerals of all descriptions are to be seen lying on the surface, as if inviting the passer-by to the enormous wealth contained a few feet below the sole of man's foot. All experienced engineers have praised the wealth buried in the Archipelago, only waiting for intelligent, arduous workmen to bring it to the surface.

There is no one who has visited the Islands, who has not admired the ever-green, rich vegetation. In a few years an abandoned plot of ground is filled with a virgin forest impenetrable but with the axe. Productive plants of all sorts grow on its soil with the greatest luxuriance. Two, and even three rice crops per annum are reaped in some districts. Sugar-cane, tobacco, coffee, hemp, and other



products are well known all over the world, and could in good and intelligent hands improve in quality. Its virgin forests are replete with most valuable woods which only want cutting down to enrich thousands of persons.

I do not think anyone will dispute the fact, that the Philippine population is not sufficiently numerous to work out the enormous wealth contained in this unfortunate El Dorado, so long a prey to the cruel pangs of war.

As a race the Filipino is indolent. He is not a success as a field laborer. He cannot be induced to toil for a given number of hours each day and for months at a time as laborers in all civilized countries do. To hold up before him as an inducement for such labor a reward in the form of compensation does not appeal to him. He has never been confronted with the cold north wind, with frost and storm at a time when the fields are bare and no shelter from the pangs of hunger and cold available; hence the necessity to provide for the morrow is wholly wanting. Hitherto all efforts to engraft it upon him have failed. He simply won't work, as we define the term. He has lived without it; hence, why should he? An hour or two a day he has found it necessary to devote to seed-time and harvest. This much he will give and no inducement will secure a greater contribution from his life of indolence.

The reason for this characteristic in the Filipino is easily found. His necessities being few, civilization not yet having had time to make a victim of him, he requires little, and has accustomed himself even with plenty to be reasonable in his vice. Frugal in his meals, consisting principally of local products, for a few cents his appetite is satisfied. The climate does not allow any luxury in covering the body, and dwellings must necessarily be primitive on account of frequent earthquakes. He, therefore, is happy if he has a little surplus for his cards and cock-fighting. Why should he work harder? thinks he, and as a good Oriental, he is a fatalist and does not think of the morrow and abandons himself to the *dolce far niente*.

In Java, where the same race exists and with the same conditions of climate and necessities, we see the native work hard and with difficulty make both ends meet. The reason is its superabundance of population, which the Philippines do not possess.

Even if he were as energetic and industrious as our European farmer, the real native field workmen, who at the utmost number about two million, would never be able, unaided, to cultivate the vast fields now impenetrable forests. Besides, those who have taken pains to study the Filipino character have noticed a very clear fact. The native is not only not fond of agriculture but is physically not strong enough to endure the toils of the field.



Also, it is to be noted that he is patient, persevering, and intelligent; and these great qualities cultivated and brought to practical use have given admirable results, as any one who may have visited the Manila Exhibition of 1895 can testify. It was there that artistic work of high class could be admired—painting, sculptures, music, and other arts, mingled with mechanical work, all of which showed wonderful intelligence.

It is also worthy of note that the Filipino has shown himself to be efficient in many of the lighter tasks of the common laborer. He likewise makes a good police officer. He is brave and even fearless in battle. These qualities can easily be utilized, and while there will always be arduous work and to spare for all the natives who will accept the same, there are many lighter tasks offered for which he is better adapted. The Filipino will not be injured, but on the contrary, be benefited by the development of the Islands through imported labor.

In a very short time the Filipino learns what it would take another Oriental double the time to master and what even then he would not have the patience and intelligence to do. He is inclined that way, and therefore he should be encouraged in that direction.

Hence I say, if the Islands are to prosper and their natural resources to be developed, some labor other than Filipino is essential.

Could European or American laborers be successfully employed in the Islands? It is not necessary to go into an exhaustive discussion on this feature of my subject. The above question has been answered in the negative by too many costly experiments.

The constant heat and the perpetual dampness so essential for the rich vegetation of the soil, are fatal to the foreigner. Dysentery, intestinal catarrh, malarial fever, and general debility attack even the foreigner living in good, clean, comfortable residences in well-drained cities of the Islands.

What would occur to the poor unfortunate foreigner by having to toil under a tropical sun or a heavy equatorial deluge, and feeding himself necessarily on the not over nutritious produce of his fields?

In 1895 the artillery regiment—the only European force then kept on the Islands by Spain—numbered 1,000 foreigners and 180 natives. Of these, during that year, 739 Spaniards and 24 natives passed through the military hospital, 16 died, and 106 had to be sent back to their homes; and these results when the men were well cared for, comfortably housed in the walled city, well fed and not allowed to do the slightest hard work, this last being left entirely to the native contingent.

I have spent most of my life in the Orient. I have never seen a case where it could be said a European had been able to withstand the enervating effects of field labor under the tropical sun. This is the prevailing opinion of all white men residing in the Asiatic tropics. This being true, it would be worse than folly to undertake to develop the untold resources of the Philippines, whether of the fields or mines by the introduction of white men from the temperate zones.

In this connection one should not lose sight of the fact, that another equally potent objection to the introduction of white men as laborers is, that they would be brought in competition with the Asiatics already there, whose wages are so low that a white man could not maintain a family for a week on an entire month's salary. Any attempt to raise the wages would be successfully combatted by those employing Asiatics, and no white labor would be engaged. Neither the Indian from British India, nor the Japanese, would be desirable. The former has not proved a success in the Straits Settlements when placed side by side with the Chinese, and the latter have not proved useful colonists, as is clearly exemplified in the Formosa experiment.

The Chinaman is the most available, the most desirable, and the most useful immigrant obtainable for the Philippines. Being docile, amenable to law, industrious, and frugal, he accepts any proffered task which assures him of regular wages, or will till the soil if a market for its products is available.

Already there are 60,000 or more located in the Islands, and without any expense or effort other than the announcement that they would be justly treated, a sufficient number could be induced to settle there to increase the productiveness of the Islands tenfold within twenty years.

In 1896-7 I visited the French, British, and Dutch colonies in the Orient for the purpose of studying their immigration laws and to enable me to meet the Chinese, enquire into their grievances, if any, and to ascertain, if possible, any objections there might be to these immigrants. I collected a mass of data and much valuable information, and was about to compile the same for publication for the benefit of my own country—Spain—and her treasured colony—the Philippines—of which I am a sincere admirer, as well as of her interesting inhabitants. War was declared, and Spain had her colony wrested from her, and any further labor along this line became useless.

I believe a visit to the immigrant at the various foreign Asiatic possessions would be a useful support to my theory, and therefore I shall follow him to the Philippines, Cochin-China, Straits, and the Netherland Indies.

When the Spaniards discovered the Philippines they found that the Chinamen had preceded them by centuries, but few, if any, had established themselves there. They traded in large junks, taking a miscellaneous lot of cargo for barter with the natives, but with the monsoon most of them returned to their homes, principally Amoy and the surrounding districts.

In May, 1572, Don Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, then Governor-General of the Islands, wisely encouraged this trade, and even induced them to reside on shore in the newly conquered city of Manila, allotting to them a space which was named the Parian. They were also granted all sorts of protection and facilities, and exemption from customs duty for their goods.

Two years afterward, the great and redoubtable pirate Limahon, in the month of November, attacked Manila, but was repulsed. In the early days of the Spanish occupation, several other attempts were made by Chinese to drive out the possessors of the Philippines, but in every instance they were unsuccessful, and thousands of Chinese settlers were in consequence massacred by the natives.

Volumes could be filled with copies of more or less wise Royal decrees and rules concerning immigration to the Philippines. The principal ones were issued in 1679, 1776, 1804, 1834, and 1851, in which the Chinaman was supposed only to trade in the Parian at Manila, and was allowed special privileges if he devoted his time to agriculture.

It was only at the beginning of this century, January 24th, 1804, that a Royal decree was published in which Art. 6 repeats the order that Chinese could only trade in the Parian of Manila. To reside in the provinces the immigrant had to obtain a special permission from the Governor-General, it being understood that this privilege could not be obtained except by the immigrant binding himself to work in the fields only, being strictly forbidden to engage in any other profession. Art. 8 of the same decree reduced the taxes of the Chinese laborer to 6 reales (about 35 cents gold) a year. It also allowed the laborer to enter into contract with whomsoever he chose to work; the contract was to be necessarily for a term of years and must be in writing. Severe punishment was threatened in case the contracting parties failed to comply with the conditions. Only a few Chinese availed themselves of these facilities to locate in the tobacco-producing provinces.

On August 10th, 1834, a Royal decree annulled the former ones, establishing the right of the immigrant to choose his own profession and not limiting him to agriculture, so that what little benefit had been gained from the intelligent and energetic Chinese laborer by the former decrees was lost by this unwise one.

Not long after, on the 16th February, 1851, another Royal decree was issued. It was no doubt a well studied and reasonable document. It rendered homage to labor, it equalized the status of the Chinese immigrant *vis-a-vis* the native, bettered his condition and gave him advantages, encouraging him to work the inland lands.

By this decree, anyone was authorised to introduce Chinese labor for his field, but the immigrant landing for such a purpose could not be engaged in any other labor. He had to serve his contract time in the fields, and penalties were imposed on those not complying with these rules.

The Chinaman, before the issue of this decree, paid a yearly tax of \$1.50 silver. This was abolished for all who immigrated for the fields. The laborer who had served his contract time could engage in trade, but then he had to pay the usual Chinese poll-tax. But if he chose to continue to work his fields, his wife, children, and himself were exempt from all taxation.

Furthermore, a query put by the Insular authorities to Madrid brought the reply to consider in the same category as agriculturists, fishermen, wood-cutters, miners, naval constructors, and all other workmen, except the merchant.

In fact, all the most attractive terms were offered to encourage Chinese labor, which were recognized as absolutely essential, even in those days, for the prosperity of the Islands.

Very few, though, availed themselves of the privileges accorded to laborers. Close to the cities they willingly established their vegetable gardens and other industries, but to the fields it was difficult to draw them.

It is not difficult to understand the Chinese preference for city work to agricultural labor. In the fields he was constantly harassed by his enemy the native, who naturally envied the prosperity brought by his superior thrift and mercantile ability. Always in strife and in dread that the fruit of his labors would be destroyed, the immigrant, of a naturally timid race, could only exist under the protecting wing of the Government, or by being numerous and defending each other.

I have briefly indicated the rapidity with which at very close dates decrees for or against the Chinese immigrant were issued. Naturally this influenced very much the laborer, who felt insecure in his position. The consequence is, that of the 60,000 Chinese now residing in the Philippines there are few field laborers. Those who are not traders are employed in or near the cities.

United by a kind of Freemasonry and by their Guilds and Secret Societies, they have quietly but surely monopolized several industries. But where the Chinaman excels is in the bazaar or retail line, especially in the country villages. He supplies at retail prices to the rich and poor everything required, and by a system of *credits* very soon owns half the village and surrounding crops, which when gathered, he forwards to the Capital, making thereby handsome profits.

The poor wretched immigrant, who on landing on the Islands does not even own the clothing on his body, soon learns enough to extricate himself from the grasp of his creditors.

The majority of the Chinese in the Philippines arrive from the Amoy district, which, with a superabundance of population, has for many centuries been the largest field whence immigration is drawn to supply labor for the Straits, Java, and the Philippines.

On arrival at Manila he enters into a contract for a term of years to work at the industry chosen. Never grumbling, he toils, consuming his energy by working from ten to twelve hours a day. Only employing a few minutes for his meals, he resumes his labor like a machine. He is inexhaustible, indefatigable.

What strikes one is the few Chinese women one sees in the Philippines. It is estimated that not more than a couple of hundred have landed. This is accounted for by the fact that generally the immigrant from China leaves his home a lad, and when his time expires returns to marry in China. Then leaving his wife to the care of his own parents, he in almost every case returns alone to the Archipelago.

Many Chinese marry native women, the ceremony being solemnized by the Church. A great number of them have thus been Christianized, mostly not by conviction but by necessity, for in addition to the native woman serving him as a housewife she has natural commercial talents and considerably helps her husband in his business. This alliance has produced a Chinese-native half-caste who undoubtedly is superior in intelligence to the native, but as usual in these cases he has retained all the vices of both races.

The Spanish Government of modern days did not encourage labor immigration. Their only thought was to levy contributions from this exploitable article. About 1885 a poll-tax of \$10 was ordered on every Chinese immigrant landing on the Islands. This was increased a few years later to \$20. Besides this the Chinaman had to pay \$1 medical inspection fee and \$2 to the Chinese Tribunal

before he was allowed to go on shore. His *Cedula Personal*, or document of identity, cost \$9.40 per year, and another amount of \$3 was levied for being exempted from work on the public works.

Of course all these moneys were advanced by the broker, who in turn was refunded by the contractor, all together naturally being charged against the unfortunate immigrant, with high interest added.

Over a million and a half of dollars of the 1897 budget was contributed by the Chinese population in the Islands, in *cedulas*, opium-farm and industrial taxes, besides which fully a third of the Customs revenue was derived from goods imported by Chinese and for their sole use.

As will be seen in the Comparative Table No 1 appended, during the 24 years from 1875 to 1898, there emigrated from the port of Amoy for Manila direct 204,747 Chinese. There returned 168,166, leaving a balance of 36,581 who remained in the Islands. To these figures must be added a considerable number who left and returned *viâ* Hongkong and are mentioned in the above table. I have been unable to obtain reliable figures of the passenger trade with the Philippines from Hongkong; therefore I use the only actual figures obtainable.

Of these 36,581 balance remaining in the Philippines we may fairly say that 50% have died during this long 24 years, or have returned to their homes in Amoy *viâ* Hongkong or other Chinese ports; therefore only 18,000 actually remain of the original 204,747 landed.

But of course these figures are misleading. Undoubtedly there are more than 60,000 Chinese in the Philippines, and the balance therefore must be accounted for as immigration from Amoy, principally *viâ* Hongkong, as the great majority of the Chinese in the Philippines come from the Amoy districts, and comparatively few from Canton and other provinces.

I have no doubt that, if the Chinese laborer were encouraged by wise and liberal laws, he would emigrate to the Philippines rather than to the Colonies. The principal reason is, that the Islands are so near that the voyage only takes a little over two days, and another is, that the fields have not as yet been exploited, and therefore the wages, say about \$9 a month, could be easily obtained, as against \$5 or \$6 elsewhere.

The French, British, and Dutch colonial laws should be studied and advantage taken of their experience to adapt the most convenient ones to the Archipelago. Protectors, as well as a proper staff, understanding the Chinese language and their character, should be appointed to supervise the immigration.



With the fact in mind that Chinese immigration is absolutely essential for the development of the wealth of the Islands, laws encouraging and attracting them should be framed, so that the laborer would have special advantageous conditions conceded him in preference to the trader, who by his usurious proceedings has been the cause of the hatred of the native for the Filipino. In a very short time the native finds himself a debtor to the store-keeper of the village, who is always a Chinese. After mortgaging his house he does the same with his crops, and finally with his fields. Soon finding himself ruined by his negligence and vices he blames the Chinaman, who by his thrift and forethought has had the best of him.

There is no doubt, though, that the dislike the native bears toward the Chinese would soon be dispelled when the native understood that he did not come to labor as an opponent but as a help to develop the wealth of the ground. Then he would appreciate the Chinese laborer as a machine. He works his time, gathers a few dollars which may go back to China; but the essential thing for the Filipino is that the immigrant leaves behind him his labor, which constitutes the fortune desired, beneficial to the Chinese, to the native, and to the Government alike.

We shall now take a short cursory look into Chinese immigration of the French, British, and Dutch possessions.

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#### FRENCH COLONIES.

Saigon, the capital of the French Asiatic possessions, is the only port where Chinese immigrants can be registered at the *Bureau de l'immigration*. This office is now in charge of M. O'Connell, to whom I am indebted for much of my information. Each immigrant on landing is supplied with a *carte de sejour*, which costs the laborer \$5 per year.

On February 19th, 1890, a new law was passed to regulate Chinese immigration to Cochin-China and Tonkin. Up to then the laws of October 5th, 1871; February 21st, 1873; April 3rd, 1873; December 31st, 1873; June 2nd, 1874; November 24th, 1874; January 13th, 1875; February 24th, 1876; April 6th, 1876; and October 14th, 1876, had the same defect as the Spanish laws in the neighboring Philippine colony—that is, they were too uncertain, one encouraging immigration and the next rendering it impossible by too severe restrictions.

As a fact, the French have never encouraged the Chinese laborer, preferring to have the native work the fields. This is natural, as, with the abundance of the native population, which is