

## **Slave Trade in 17<sup>th</sup>-century East Asia: Case Study of the Philippines and Northern Taiwan under Spanish Colonial Rule**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Slavery existed in the Philippines long before the first Spanish expedition arrived. During the Spanish colonial rule, most of the royal family members and the religious orders were against slavery. However, owing to shortage of labor, slavery remained in the Philippines and most of the slaves in Manila came with military operations and trade. From the end of the 16th century to the 1640s, the Spanish expeditions captured and enslaved people in Maguindanao, Sulu, Terenate, Lutao, Calamianes and Batanes. These slaves were sold to foreign lands by Chinese and Portuguese traders. Muslim merchants and the Spanish in Manila also participated in the slave trade, though with the Portuguese playing the most important role. On the other hand, foreign slaves came mainly from Africa and Asia. Although many of them were converted to Catholicism, there seemed to be no *Ladinos* in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Filipino society. Many kaffir/cafre slaves were sent to northern Taiwan, some laboring in the galleys during the Spanish colonization era and some serving in the homes of the officials and merchants of northern Taiwan. Those who could not adapt to the weather tried to escape. There was even a Bengali slave, who used to be a surgeon, sent to northern Taiwan. After the defeat of the Spanish by the Dutch, many Cagayanos and Pampangos became Dutch slaves.

In the Philippines, most of the slave owners were Spanish military and government officials, religious groups, Portuguese, *Sangleys* and the Filipino upper class. Some slaves were on loan, given away, resold by their owners or transferred to their guarantors. To buy a slave, it was necessary to pay both the price and the freight fare. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, a buyer paid 12 pesos for the freight of a slave; this was later lowered to 10 pesos. The freight for a child slave cost only 8 pesos. If the traders fed them, the buyers would have to pay more. Generally, a slave was worth 50 pesos in the

17<sup>th</sup>-century Philippines and child slaves were cheaper. However, between 1648 and 1649, the prices of the slave market strongly fluctuated. Buyers who paid the highest prices were the *Sangleys*. The slaves were an important workforce, serving in the galleys, royal artillery, house of the owners, or the fields. Slaves who were mistreated could file a law suit against their owners and hire lawyers to represent them. Yet, winning cases were few. There were also owners who treated their slaves well. At the end of the 17th century, slaves started to be emancipated in the Philippines and slavery was eventually abolished.

**Keywords:** Spanish Philippines, Northern Taiwan, Slaves, Trade, Portuguese, 17<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Sources