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The Many Names of Limahong:
Remembering a Chinese Pirate in the Philippines

William Martin

Abstract:

The 1574 attack of Limahong on Manila and the subsequent expulsion of his attempted Pangasinan colony left a profound impact in Philippine history. The threat once presented by Limahong cast a long shadow over Spanish colonization and Philippines security, particularly regarding relations with China and Chinese. As a result, his name was continually evoked in the centuries after his attack. This paper examines how Limahong is remembered in the Philippines. Limahong is remembered as a generic sea-borne threat, a pirate whose name is evoked at any threat from the sea or from China. But, he is also remembered as a liberator who was the Philippines’ last chance to stop Spanish colonization. He is remembered as a stereotypical Chinese, driven to the Philippines through business interests and exoticized as a womanizing vengeance-seeking corsair. The memory of this stereotypical Chinese icon is carved into the land via the Limahong Channel and implanted into native Pangasinan people via his descendents. But, due to recent efforts by historians, his memory is being converted into a representative of Hokkien nationalism whose Hokkienness was erased by Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino narratives unable to account for it. Ultimately, Limahong is a mirror, through which the diverse competing nationalisms of the Philippines remember their own history.
Introduction

In 1574, just three years after the founding of Spanish Manila, Spain encountered an enormous challenge to its rule in the Philippines in the form of the Hokkien pirate Limahong (Guingona 2017, 96). Limahong set out to take the fledgling colony from the Spanish along with his Japanese pirate ally Sioco,¹ but failed after a prolonged battle. After establishing a colony in the north Luzon town of Lingayen, Pangasinan, he was finally expelled by a combined Chinese, Spanish, and native Filipino force after a four-month siege, which he only escaped by secretly building a canal, now called the Limahong Channel, to sail out of his fort. This is not his whole story. Limahong, known as Lin Feng 林鳳 in Chinese records, pirated the Guangdong and Fujian coasts long before and long after his attack in the Philippines (Kenji 2010, 73–84). However, whereas in Chinese history Lin Feng is remembered simply as a late (if troublesome) example of wokou piracy (Shutz 2019, 320), Limahong still looms large in Philippine history. His story has been the subject of novels, comics, and plays, and his name is still invoked at discussions of overseas threat in the Philippines.

¹ The name “Sioco” comes from Spanish records and would likely have been romanized as “Shoko” today.
A map of Limahong’s activities in China and the Philippines. Based on the accounts recorded in the Ming Shi-lu and Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza’s History of the Great Kingdom of China.

During his tenure as military dictator of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. privately claimed to be Limahong’s descendant, despite the obvious association with piratical crimes this would bring (Seagrave 1988, 7–8). Marcos even kept a statue of Limahong, itself a gift from Mao Zedong, inside his mansion (Buncombe 2013). Sterling Seagrave, in his biography of Marcos, argued that this was meant to be a tacit reference to his supposed secret Chinese-Filipino
father, Ferdinand Chua (Seagrave 1988, 7–8, 22–23, 82). However, as James Hamilton-Paterson pointed out, this theory does not seem to hold water, not least because few Filipinos have made the same accusation (Hamilton-Paterson 1999, 71–73). The confusion over the proper interpretation of Marcos’s personal association with Limahong suggests that there is a fundamental misunderstanding over what such an association would mean. This investigation will attempt to resolve this misunderstanding and uncover how Limahong is remembered in the Philippines.

The sources used for this investigation are diverse. Articles on Limahong, from both scholarly journals, and from newspapers, are obvious resources. Other resources include national histories, which usually give the Limahong Incident at least a few pages. Some regional histories are also included. Rosario Cortes’s seminal history of Pangasinan, Pangasinan, 1572-1800 was of course consulted, as well as a volume called A Pangasinan Folio. This 1970 gazetteer was commissioned for the centenary of the birth of Daniel Maramba, a notable Pangasinan politician (A Pangasinan Folio ’70: A Historical Document 1970, 4). A preface written by Ferdinand Marcos Sr. indicated that he was very pleased with the project and hoped that it would serve as an inspiration to other provinces, suggesting it was the first of its kind (A Pangasinan Folio ’70: A Historical Document 1970, 6). Limahong is mentioned in several parts of the folio. Though author names are not given for every section that mentions him, the similar language used each time Limahong is mentioned suggests they were all written by Baldomero Pulido, who is credited for the account of Limahong in the biographies section of the work. Another work which is analyzed throughout this investigation is Cesar Callanta’s The Limahong Invasion. This

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2 This author, however, has not identified any other examples of gazetteers created under the Marcos regime with the same level of sponsorship from the government.
work, the only English-language book solely about Limahong, is frequently cited uncritically in discussions of the Limahong incident, both inside and outside academia, and is therefore worth thorough investigation. Finally, some attention is given to popular culture about Limahong, such as Rio Alma’s 1981 poem “Si Limahong” and M. Franco’s 1970s comic book Limahong.

Limahong has been known by many names since his invasion of the Philippines. He is variously reported in non-Chinese sources as Limahong, Limahon (Kenji 2010, 80), Lymahon (Knowlton 1963, 343), Dim Mhon (Callanta 1979, 2), and many other names. Because his Spanish name, Limahong, was derived from the Hokkien pronunciation of his Chinese name, it contains a syllable, Lim, which does not exist in Mandarin. As a result, some sources, Western and Chinese, have invented alternative Chinese names for him that match Mandarin phonetics, including Li Mahong 李馬鴻 (Jouglet 1983, title page), Li Mafang 李馬芳, and Li Maben 李馬奔 (Li Changfu 李長傅 1930). The diversity of names in the literature on Limahong, both popular and academic, reflects the many ways in which Limahong is seen: as a sea-borne threat, as a liberator, as a stereotypical Chinese, and more recently, as a representative of Hokkien people in particular.

**Limahong as a Sea-borne Threat**

The earliest sources see Limahong through the lens of the threat he posed to the Philippines as a generic sea-borne, foreign invader. In some cases, this is not limited by his Chinese ethnicity. For example, Cesar Callanta’s *The Limahong Invasion* describes Limahong as

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3 A nonacademic example is the 1983 edition of Jouglet’s *The Treasure of Limahong*, which includes some editorial material based on Callanta’s book. Some academic examples include Chen (2021, 87) and Elleman (2018, 50)
flying a skull and crossbones flag, a trait very characteristic of Western stereotypical pirates (Callanta 1979, 11). This process began soon after Limahong’s defeat: just three decades later, Governor-General Pedro Bravo de Acuña invoked the former threat posed by “Liamon” in a letter on Dutch piracy to the Viceroy of Fujian (Tremml-Werner 2021, 212–13). As the earliest of many sea-borne threats to Manila, Limahong became a representative of threat to colonial authorities, both Spanish and American. Even after Philippine independence, there was still a need to unite the country against foreign threats, and as a result this narrative persisted into the independence era.

Spanish rulers used the threat of the Chinese, represented through Limahong, to assert control. The memory of the threat Limahong posed was used to justify periodic massacres of Chinese living in the Philippines (Guingona 2017, 98–102), which further cemented Spanish power by ensuring that Chinese could not grow too powerful and would not be trusted by the native population. Some authors came to view this as a turning point in Spanish control of the islands. Ethan Hawkley (2014) notes that just 13 years after the Limahong Incident, the Spanish were powerful enough to have Rajah Soliman’s son executed for rebellion, something they could never have done before (293). Birgit Tremml-Werner (2021) argues that fears of piracy stimulated fortification and surveillance architecture in the Spanish Philippines throughout its history, a sentiment which echoes the earlier Walter Robb (1963), who noted that Limahong’s invasion gave the Crown impetus to fortify Manila with stone walls to defend against further attacks (133–36). Even modern authors, such as Philip Guingona (2017, 96) and Tonio Andrade (2004, 443), have also argued that the events demonstrated the precariousness of the Spanish colony.
The threat represented by Limahong was later a source of unity for all inhabitants of the independent Philippines. In his 1962 Independence Day speech, President Diosdado Macapagal characterizes Limahong’s invasion as a threat so great that Rajah Lakandula halted his revolt to join the Spanish in fighting it (Macapagal 1962). Macapagal characterized Limahong as a force so dangerous to Philippines independence that the natives chose to help the Spanish who were actively colonizing the area. As Juan de Salcedo’s forces were nearly all native Filipinos (Cortes 1966, 84), the fight against Limahong is a powerful image of Philippines colonial unity. Native Pampangan participation in Juan de Salcedo’s army has even been cited as an example of their integration into colonial life just three years into the life of colonial Manila (Cushner and Larkin 1978, 108). The unity of the Spanish-Filipino resistance to Limahong both emphasizes the righteousness of the fight and serves to bring native Filipinos closer to the forces of Spanish colonization than to the Chinese people who made up a much larger portion of the population and held economic power that could be exploited against the Spanish.

Similarly, A Pangasinan Folio mentions the defense against Limahong in the same breath as the revolt of King Kasikis, the Palaris Revolt, the revolutionary wars against the Spanish and the Americans, and the resistance against the Japanese (“Lingayen” 1970). By equating these invasions of the Philippines with Limahong’s invasion, the compilers of A Pangasinan Folio make the fight against Limahong into another example of national unity between Spanish and native Filipinos.

Limahong continues to be evoked in the face of Chinese threat. For example, at the height of the Second Red Scare, an article in the journal Hispania argued that Spanish classes should teach about Limahong because the story connected Spanish-speaking countries to ongoing fears of Chinese threat (Anderson 1951). More recently, a 2019 Manila Times article
places the Limahong incident as the first example of a South China Sea conflict between the Philippines and China (Jimenez 2019). Thus, more than 400 years later, Limahong continues to be a powerful piece of overseas threat rhetoric in the Philippines.

**Limahong as Liberator**

Many authors, particularly Philippine nationalists, considered Limahong as a potential liberator from Spanish oppression. This narrative began appearing in the early days of agitation for Philippine independence but continues to appear among both scholarly and popular sources. For example, Artemio Guillermo’s (2011) *Historical Dictionary of the Philippines* introduces Limahong as a “Chinese privateer who almost succeeded in stopping the colonization of the Philippine archipelago” (217). Rosario Cortes’s (1974) history of Pangasinan echoes this sentiment, describing Limahong as the first serious threat to Spanish domination (59). The same sea-borne threat that frightened the Spanish was equally empowering for those who opposed Spanish colonialism. A *Pangasinan Folio* even speculates that had Limahong’s kingdom survived it could have converted the apocryphal kingdom of King Kasikis⁴ into a Chinese kingdom and expelled the Spanish (Pulido 1970, 125). Interestingly, these sentiments erase the role of native Filipinos in both supporting and opposing the Spanish. By describing Limahong as the first serious threat to Spanish colonization in the Philippines, these narratives suggest that native Filipinos were uniquely powerless to stop the Spanish without outside help.

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⁴ King Kasikis is a supposed 16th-century monarch centered around Pangasinan who appears in histories of early Pangasinan, but the evidence for his existence is poor. See E. S. Fernandez (2010, 190–91)
The poet Rio Alma sardonically praised the defense against Limahong in his 1981 poem “Si Limahong” (Alma 2002, 75):

“The Sangley merchants were sent away
And there’s a plan to triple the tax
For the strong walls and towers
As the beloved Governor-General said
‘We should prepare for the return of Limahong’
There really is one lesson in this incident
To enlarge the army and suppress the countryside”

For Rio Alma, while Limahong was a uniting threat, this was ultimately not a desirable unity. Instead, it was a unity created by hanging a continuous threat over the people of the Philippines until other means of maintaining control had been developed. In reality, Limahong’s represented liberation from the Spanish, and his defeat represented Spanish victory.

Moros are seen in some accounts as rallying to the cause of Limahong in overthrowing the Spanish. Ethan Hawkley describes Rajah Soliman and other Moro chieftains as part of Limahong’s alliance against a coalition of Spanish, Visayans, and other Moros (Hawkley 2014, 293). The Limahong Invasion describes this revolt as less of an alliance and more of an opportunistic power grab, even remarking that the Moro leaders apologized for their rebellion after learning that Limahong had been captured (Callanta 1979, 53). However, even if this revolt

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5 A term that refers of Chinese Filipinos.

6 Original text: Pinalayo ang puwesto ng mga komersiyanteng Sangley, / At may balak na triplehin ang buwis / Para sa mas matibay na pader at tore. / Sabi nga ng mahal na Gobernador-Heneral: / “Dapat paghandaan ang pagbabalik ni Limahong.” / Talaga namang isang aral ang nangyari / Para palakihin ang hukbo’t supilin pa ang nayon.
Translated by a colleague of the author.
was aborted at the very beginning, Callanta still describes it as the beginning of the Filipinos’ fight for liberty (55). Carlos Quirino’s *Filipinos At War*, a book about how Filipinos have resisted colonization and foreign invasion, places its Limahong narrative in the same chapter as the first native revolts against the Spanish. In his narrative, Limahong’s invasion instigates the largest anti-Spanish revolts in the Philippines before the establishment of the Katipunan (Quirino 1981, 36–37). While Limahong himself is not portrayed as interested in liberating Filipinos from the Spanish (Quirino 1981, 33), there is no doubt that his intervention in Manila ultimately gave them the chance to liberate themselves. Ultimately, in this and the other narratives mentioned above, Limahong is a liberator against the Spanish forces. Using this narrative, Filipino historians appropriate Limahong into their own history of resistance against foreign forces.

**Limahong as Stereotypical Chinese**

Perhaps the most enduring aspect of the Limahong narrative in Philippine history is his portrayal as a stereotypical Chinese. These narratives are most common in Marcos-era works; though they predate Marcos to some extent, they were most pervasive during his rule. As a result, understanding this type of narrative is critical for understanding how Marcos used the Limahong and why he would have compared himself to Limahong.

China itself is characterized as both poor and rich depending on narrative necessity. For instance, in *The Limahong Invasion*, Callanta describes China as prosperous, strong, and “exclusively” a producer of luxury goods (Callanta 1979, 1, 7–8), but also as an incredibly poor country of oppressed farmers, soldiers, and laborers (Callanta 1979, 3–5). This narrative makes China into both a poor country that is worse off than the Philippines, yet also a powerful country
that can extract wealth from the Philippines. Ironically, the narrative of China’s combined poverty and greed for trade has made Limahong into a powerful symbol of the Philippines’ unrecorded past. James Hamilton-Paterson argues that legends of Limahong’s treasure reflect a desire to remember the glorious past of the prehistoric Philippines, a country for which written history has meant, in almost its entirety, colonization (Hamilton-Paterson 1999, 9–10). By bringing in a fellow Asian attracted by the riches of the Philippines, Filipino historians can stake a claim to Filipino greatness.

Chinese people in Limahong narratives are characterized as purely focused on trade, with no loyalty to the Philippines. In some narratives, this is taken to seemingly comical limits. For example, in The Limahong Invasion, Callanta describes Limahong’s crew on entering Manila Bay as feeling “as if they were a part of a vast commercial system on the sea carrying the coveted goods from Cathay” (Callanta 1979, 39). This narrative is incredibly strong in M. Franco’s comic Limahong, which, in its introduction, describes the Philippines as a “second home” to the Chinese who traded there and only migrated for their love of trade and gold (Franco 1970, 2). Limahong is thus used as a representative of the itinerant Chinese trader, who is always foreign even when they have established homes in the Philippines.

Chinese people are also characterized as unskilled hordes. Callanta repeatedly describes the Chinese as the larger force who are subdued by higher-quality Spanish troops (Callanta 1979, 45, 50–51). This reinforces the facelessness of the Chinese, who arrive en masse in search of plunder, unlike the Spanish who are characterized as valiantly defending the territory they own. In some narratives, this is reinforced by omissions made by the author. For example, Leandro

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7 Because this comic was not paginated, page numbers are counted from the front cover.
Fernandez’s *A Brief History of the Philippines* makes little mention of Limahong’s tactics besides a reliance on numeric strength, but Fernandez describes in detail Spanish preparations for war (L. Fernandez 1919, 90–92). By focusing on the volume of Limahong’s troops and ignoring the possibility that they may have had their own tactics, Fernandez characterizes Limahong, and thus the Chinese, as inept hordes intent on capturing the Philippines for themselves.

**Limahong’s Physical Legacy**

One of the most important parts of Limahong’s legacy as a stereotypical Chinese is his physical legacy, which serves as a reminder of everything he represents. Through his physical legacy, authors justify telling his narrative and thereby justify telling their own story of the Philippines. His physical legacy lies not just in the land, but also the people of the Philippines, both Chinese and native.

The first part of Limahong’s physical legacy lies in Pangasinan’s Chinese population. Many authors claim that the large Chinese population of Lingayen derives from those of Limahong’s crew who were abandoned when he escaped the Spanish and Chinese siege. This is most clearly explained in Rosario Cortes’s history, which notes that Lingayen is the only Pangasinan town which had a large enough Chinese population during the Spanish period for them to have their own local government. This community is not recorded to have existed before Limahong despite the history of trade with China. It is possible that at least part of this community came to the area afterward, as Lingayen was the capital of the province. However, Cortes argues that Lingayen did not have a large enough Spanish population at any point to warrant a large Chinese population. Because Lingayen is reported as having a Chinese
population since the region was organized into a province, Cortes argues the local Chinese population is likely descended from Limahong’s people (Cortes 1974, 61–62).

A more common belief, however, Limahong’s abandoned crew married and assimilated into local people. Artemio Guillermo’s *Historical Dictionary* (Guillermo 2011, 217) and *The Limahong Invasion* (Callanta 1979, 94) both say that the crew abandoned during Limahong’s escape settled and mixed with the local Tinguians. Others go farther, and argue that Limahong’s crew passed down stereotypical Chinese traits to the local population. John Foreman described the “Igorrote-Chinese”, who he claimed were popularly considered in the region to be descendants of Limahong (Foreman 1899, 48–49). In his ethnographical section, they are described as a unique “species.” He believes that because they have “cunning and astuteness of the Mongol,” they are thus superior to the average Igorrote, but still unable to apply their intelligence in a way he deems correct (Foreman 1899, 135). A *Pangasinan Folio* similarly describes Limahong’s invasion as a “blessing in disguise” for the region as his short stay apparently “embedded in the lives of the natives some good Chinese characters [sic] such as thrift, industry, tenacity, and farsightedness” (Pulido 1970, 126). For these authors, Limahong’s invasion and the subsequent intermarriage to which it led confirms that the business Chinese trope is justified. Because Limahong and his crew, in their view, passed down these traits to their offspring, it confirms their worldview that Chinese stereotypes are both real and genetic.

This engraving of Limahong onto the people of the Philippines is also evident in the land itself. The Limahong Channel remains at the site where it was built in the 16th century. Though the channel was incorporated into a larger canal in the 20th century to prevent flooding (Callanta 1979, ii), it has remained a powerful symbol of Limahong’s impact on the Philippines. Limahong’s inclusion in the biographies section of *A Pangasinan Folio*, which otherwise
consists of figures from Pangasinan, is justified by evoking the Limahong Channel (Pulido 1970), and mentions of Limahong in the news are generally because of mentions of the channel (Cruz 2017). The channel is such an important part of Limahong’s legacy that very few authors express doubts about its existence despite its extraordinary origin as a canal built secretly while under siege from the Spanish and Chinese. John Foreman's history is a notable, if lone, exception (Foreman 1899, 58), and its author did not originate in the Philippines. The more common approach to the channel is to use it as an opportunity to reincorporate native Filipino participation that may have been lost. After all, as Cortes argued, Limahong’s method of escape would probably not have been possible without the help of some native Filipinos (Cortes 1974, 60–61). Ultimately, however, neither Limahong nor the Channel are significant in and of themselves. The Limahong Channel and Limahong himself are mutually reinforcing foci of memory. The Channel is not significant without Limahong having built it to leave his mark on the land, and Limahong is not significant without the Channel to symbolize how he marked the people.

It should be noted the infusion of stereotypical Chinese traits into the Philippines is seen as positive. As noted above, A Pangasinan Folio describes Limahong as a “blessing in disguise” for this reason. The introduction to M. Franco’s comic Limahong praises Chinese-Filipino intermarriage as the source of all prominent people in the Philippines, particularly the independence leader Jose Rizal (Franco 1970, 2). It is these stereotypical Chinese traits which Ferdinand Marcos Sr. wished to claim for himself. His official biography, For Every Tear a Victory (later released as Marcos of the Philippines), relies heavily on racial essentialism to describe the origins of his family and the peoples of the Philippines in general. On Josefa Edralin, Marcos’s mother, his biographer writes:
“On Josefa’s [Edralin] mother’s side there was a distinct Chinese resemblance, particularly in the half-moon, heavily lidded eyes. The story in the family of Emerenciana Quetulio was that their Chinese blood had been deposited by a fifteenth-century pirate who had overrun much of the coast along the China Sea and had left behind, as invaders usually do, a few potent souvenirs among the native women. […] The Chinese infusion was supposed to be the reason the Quetulios were shrewder than their neighbors, cannier in business and more resourceful. […] Fructuoso was eminently satisfied with his marriage. His bride had many Chinese characteristics, including thrift and driving ambition. She worked harder than he did, and his fortune grew” (Spence 1969, 19).

The 15th century date differs from the historical Limahong, possibly due to confusion between the 1500s and the 15th century, but the general narrative and the traits described match stereotypical views of Limahong. Thus, this story seems to be designed to evoke Limahong without naming him in person. Rather than being a hint at some conspiracy to cover up Marcos’s real parentage as Seagrave speculated, Marcos’s self-comparison to this pirate was an attempt to appropriate the stereotypical Chinese traits embodied in Limahong. As a military dictator, Marcos had to prove that he was stronger, shrewder, and more resourceful than any other alternative. Marcos’s description of his mother emphasizes the stereotypical Chinese traits of thrift, ambition, and intelligence, which helped him to cultivate the superman image he used to legitimize his rule. By evoking Limahong in this way, Marcos tied himself to a story about Chinese Filipinos which has existed since almost the beginning of recorded history in the Philippines.
Nearly all Marcos-era works on Limahong rely on this type of racial essentialism, including works such as *A Pangasinan Folio* which were created with government funding and the loud approval of Marcos. Exceptions were generally created by anti-Marcos writers such as Rosario Cortes. This is unlikely to be a coincidence; Marcos would have promoted these narratives because he found them politically useful.

**Toward a New Identity: Limahong as Hokkien**

A new current in scholarship on Limahong has sought to reclaim him as a positive figure who represents Hokkien people in the Philippines. These scholars have attempted to uncover his Hokkienness, reading through both Spanish and Chinese records to expose facts about his identity or his purpose that have been lost in the historical record. While this new narrative has not found its way outside scholarship, some of its proponents are relatively popular figures, such as Teresita Ang See, a leader in the Chinese Filipino community who participated in the uprisings against Ferdinand Marcos Sr (de Sequera 2002).

Teresita Ang See, arguing in the Tulay Fortnightly in 2010, proposed that Limahong should be seen less as an attacker or colonizer than as the leader of a group of Hokkien refugees seeking asylum in Manila. This places the story of Limahong within the uniquely deprived economic conditions of his native Fujian. Ang See argues that if Limahong had really been intent on conquest he would not have brought women, plants,
domestic animals, and luxury goods. Instead, Ang See proposes that Limahong and his fellow Hokkien people were victims of government oppression which kept them poor and forced them to resort to piracy to feed themselves (Ang See 2013, 292–93). Considering the considerable numeric strength of Limahong’s forces and the lack of commotion caused by their initial entrance to the city, Ang See argues that it is more likely that Limahong was initially intending to plead for asylum with the Governor-General rather than attack (Ang See 2013, 298–99). By looking at Limahong from a Hokkien perspective, Ang See reframes the entire narrative and presents him as a misunderstood, sympathetic Hokkien character rather than as threat, stereotype, or even as a Philippine liberator. She reclaims Limahong and Filipino Chinese as people with their own story, rather than people subject to the wider narrative of Philippine history.

Writing in 2019, Philip Guingona argues for an interpretation of Limahong that centers Hokkien nationalism. Guingona argues that the Southeast Asian trade network of the 16th century should be seen as a Hokkien-dominated trade system, of which Limahong was a part (Guingona 2017, 95). Guingona argues that Limahong and his attempt to colonize the Philippines served as a model for later Hokkien people in the Philippines who supported Hokkien statehood during the Warlord Period in China (Guingona 2017, 103–9). Guingona argues that Chinese, Spanish, and Filipino histories have all erased Limahong’s Hokkienness because it does not fit cleanly into any of their national narratives. As a character who is not a businessman, Limahong defies the business Chinese narrative present in Spanish and Filipino sources, and as a character whose ethnolinguistic identity is not mainstream Chinese, he defies Chinese narratives of a united China (Guingona 2017, 110–13). By emphasizing Limahong’s Hokkienness,
Guingona reframes the Limahong narrative as part of a centuries-long national struggle for Hokkien people. Like Ang See, Guingona places Limahong within a *Hokkien* rather than Filipino narrative, but he also injects new symbolic meaning into the Limahong narrative: the dream of a Hokkien nation.

The trend in historiography to view Limahong through a Hokkien lens is relatively recent and has not yet coalesced into a single consistent narrative. Time will tell how this trend evolves, especially as Hokkien speakers gain more prominence in areas such as Taiwan and other parts of Southeast Asia.

**In Conclusion—Who is Limahong?**

More than a historical figure, Limahong is a myth. Like all myths, the story of Limahong has evolved to suit the needs of the storytellers. As the personification of one of the earliest events to happen to the Philippines as a united unit, Limahong became a symbol of national identity for the many competing nationalisms of the Philippines. He was, of course, a historical figure and a real person, whose attacks may have had a diverse range of motivations: lust for gold, desire to escape the Ming Emperor, or even the salvation of his own people. But, his memory has grown much larger than himself. Once he left Pangasinan, his story was no longer about one man and his pirate band. It was about the people who remembered him, whose perspectives were just as diverse as the many names they had given him.

For the Spanish, Limahong was a sea-borne threat that symbolized the precariousness with which they held the Philippine Islands. For the newly independent
Filipinos, Limahong was a symbol both of liberation and of the common enemies they had faced. For Ferdinand Marcos, Limahong was a stereotypical Chinese whose own racial traits symbolized the power of the dictatorship itself. And, for a newly developing strain of Hokkien scholars, Limahong is a symbol of their own people, once appropriated by both Chinese and Filipino narratives but now reclaimed as a beacon of freedom and independence. Ultimately, Limahong is a mirror, through which the many peoples of the Philippines—Filipino, Spanish, and Hokkien—remember their own history.

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