The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean
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All chapters of *The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean* originally appeared as articles in *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 5.1 (2009).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean / edited by Walton Look Lai and Tan Chee-Beng.

p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

F1419.A84C55 2010
980'.004951—dc22
2009049043

ISBN 978 90 04 18213 4

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS
CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements ........................................................ vii
  Tan Chee-Beng

List of Contributors ............................................................................. ix

Introduction: The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean 1
  Walton Look Lai

PART I
THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD

Chapter One  Sinifying New Spain: Cathay’s Influence on Colonial Mexico via the Nao de China 7
  Edward R. Slack, Jr.

PART II
THE CLASSIC MIGRATIONS

Chapter Two  Asian Diasporas and Tropical Migration in the Age of Empire: A Comparative Overview 35
  Walton Look Lai

Chapter Three  Indispensable Enemy or Convenient Scapegoat? A Critical Examination of Sinophobia in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1870s to 1930s 65
  Evelyn Hu-DeHart

Chapter Four  The Chinese of Central America: Diverse Beginnings, Common Achievements 103
  St. John Robinson
Chapter Five  Report: Archives of Biography and History in the *God of Luck*: A Conversation with Ruthanne Lum McCunn ................................................................. 129
*Lisa Yun*

PART III

OLD MIGRANTS, NEW IMMIGRATION

Chapter Six  Tusans (*tusheng*) and the Changing Chinese Community in Peru ......................................................... 143
*Isabelle Lausent-Herrera*

Chapter Seven  Old Migrants, New Immigration and Anti-Chinese Discourse in Suriname ........................................ 185
*Paul B. Tjon Sie Fat*

Chapter Eight  The Revitalization of Havana’s Chinatown: Invoking Chinese Cuban History ........................................... 211
*Kathleen López*

Index ............................................................................................................................................................................. 237
PREFACE

This publication is a reprint of articles published in volume 5 number 1 of the Journal of Chinese Overseas, 2009. The issue is in fact the first issue published by Brill for the Chinese Heritage Centre under the auspices of the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas (ISSCO). This is also the first time a JCO issue is reprinted as a book volume. The issue is devoted to the special theme on the Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean. Dr. Walton Look Lai was invited as guest editor to help solicit papers for review and for publication, and it represents a very successful collaboration between a guest editor and the JCO editor. Dr Kwan Siu Hing did the copyediting and we wish to register our thanks.

We are grateful to the contributors and the external reviewers who remain anonymous. The research articles not only enhance our knowledge of the Chinese in Latin America, they also contribute greatly to the study of the transnational links between Asia and Latin America since the early colonial days. Also fascinating are the discussions on acculturation and assimilation, ethnic relations and relations between the localized Chinese and the new migrants. We also thank Professor Wang Gungwu, chairman of the JCO editorial committee, for his advice.

Tan Chee-Beng
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INTRODUCTION

THE CHINESE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Walton Look Lai

This collection of papers is devoted to the Chinese diaspora in the Latin America/Caribbean region. It is part of a growing effort toward filling the knowledge gaps on overseas Chinese communities in this part of the world. To date, there are three excellent bibliographical resources, namely, Jane Cho, Asians in Latin America: A Partially Annotated Bibliography of Select Countries and People (Stanford, 2000); Lamgen Leon, Asians in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Bibliography (Queen's College, City University of New York, 1990), and the paper (in Chinese) by Li Anshan, “A Historiographical Survey of the Study of Chinese Immigrants in Latin America and the Caribbean,” in Collected Writings of Asia-Pacific Studies, vol. 1. Institute of Asian-Pacific Studies of Peking University, ed. (Peking University Press, 2004). Li’s paper which contains a particularly valuable survey of the past and current academic research in this field by Chinese scholars and their publications has been translated into English and published in Essays on the Chinese Diaspora in the Caribbean, edited by Walton Look Lai (Trinidad: History Department, UWI, 2006). A number of recent journals have also highlighted this theme and its larger implications, they include: the Pacific Historical Review (November 2007) and the special issue of Afro-Hispanic Review (Spring 2008), edited by Kathleen López and Evelyn Hu-DeHart.

The Chinese relationship with the Latin America/Caribbean region falls into three distinct historical time periods: the early colonial period (pre-19th century); the classic migration period (19th to early 20th centuries); and the renewed immigration of the late 20th century to the present.

The 16th and 17th Centuries

The relationship here is defined by the three-century Manila-Acapulco connection during a period when late Ming and early Qing China was a major regional (and world) power, and the Mexican connection via the
Philippines represented China’s main contact with the rising Atlantic economies. Research on, and knowledge of, this period is still very much in its infancy. This applies not just to the early migration of Chinese and other Asians to Spanish Mexico and Peru, as a byproduct of the Manila-Acapulco trade connection, but also to the little known cultural influence of China on early Mexican colonial society, again as a byproduct of this trade. Edward Slack’s original paper is a pioneering essay in this field, and contributes not just to the deepening of the Chinese diaspora project, but also to the continuing historical revaluation of the links between China, the New World and the rising Atlantic economies in the pre-industrial centuries, a topic explored best so far by Andre Gunder Frank in his ground breaking study, *Reorient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, 1998).

**The 19th Century**

This period is the best studied by far, and represents what most students of Chinese diaspora studies understand by the term *coolie trade*. Some clarifications are necessary regarding the use of this term. It tends to refer to the Chinese indentured-worker migrations to the plantations of slave and ex-slave America, especially to Cuba and Peru, and sometimes to the smaller flows to the British, French, and Dutch West Indies in the 19th century. Others apply the term *coolie migration* to the entire global movement of Chinese unskilled manual labor (*huagong*) in this period, to distinguish it from the centuries-old movement of traders (*huashang*), artisans, and skilled workers who migrated mainly to Southeast Asia.1

This latter usage is historically more accurate. It is worth remembering that the central factors stimulating the growth of all sectors of the Chinese diaspora in the 19th century were basically the same: the explosive growth of the global economy (powered by two industrial revolutions, the British and the American) and the consequential widespread demand for labor generated in a variety of labor-scarce local economies all over the globe (most of which became food and raw-material pro-

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INTRODUCTION

ducers for the industrial and industrializing world). Not all the migrations of indentured coolies were to countries with a history of slavery — Hawaii, the Malay Peninsula, Transvaal in South Africa (at least officially), and Queensland in Australia being the most obvious examples to the contrary. More than seven million of South China’s poor sought opportunities overseas owing to a variety of local push factors — among them famine, civil war, and regional ethnic strife — as well as in response to systematic recruiting in the South China region carried out by a multitude of private and government-sponsored agencies, both Chinese and Western. Within this broad coolie migration, some country-recruitment practices and some destinations ultimately proved more calamitous than beneficial for those who went there, and this is what came to distinguish what was called the coolie trade from the more general coolie migration. The Latin American indentured migrations (Cuba and Peru), being the most calamitous of these migrations, thus gave a negative connotation to the term coolie trade.

The international background to the Asian labor migrations of this century is discussed in my own article in this volume. Other articles devote themselves to the 19th-century labor experience. Evelyn Hu-DeHart discusses the issue of anti-Chinese racism in Latin America, mainly in Mexico and Jamaica; St. John Robinson explores an underresearched dimension to this immigration, the Chinese migrations to Central America, and Lisa Yun interviews a Eurasian novelist, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, on her use of the coolie trade theme in a recent novel, God of Luck.

The 20th Century

Our three final articles discuss the late-20th-century Chinese communities. Isabelle Lausent-Herrera analyzes the issues of identity and assimilation among the new Chinese of Peru, as contrasted with their earlier counterparts. Paul Tjon Sie Fat explores the same theme as it applies to the Dutch-speaking country of Suriname, and in addition discusses a new phenomenon, the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment arising from the new migration, with its connections to globalization, as understood by the local society. Finally, Kathleen López provides valuable insights on a topic still largely unexplored by scholars: the fate of Chinese Cuba after the 1959 Cuban Revolution.
PART I

THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD
Scholarship on the Asian diaspora in Latin America has been plagued by one incontrovertible weakness: an appalling lack of research on the “first-wave” (pre-Opium War) of migration. Speaking in terms of the past 5,000 years (and arguably longer), there is no reliable archaeological or humanly chronicled evidence of Asians ever having sailed to the Americas prior to 1565 aboard Friar Andrés de Urdanata’s trailblazing galleon the San Pedro (Lorenzo 1996: 99-105). A few years later, Miguel López de Legazpi’s conquest of Manila in 1571 ushered in a new era of regular maritime commerce across the Pacific Ocean. The Manila galleons transported Asian products and peoples to Acapulco and other Mexican ports until 1815 (Schurz 1939: 1, 60, 261). For almost two and one-half centuries travelers from Cathay, Cipango (Japan), the Philippines, various kingdoms in Southeast Asia and India were known collectively in New Spain as chinos (Chinese) or indios chinos (Chinese Indians), as the word chino/a became synonymous with the Orient.

It is an indisputable fact that Chinese sojourners or colonists, depending on one’s point of view, quickly established themselves in Manila following Spain’s conquest of that “insigne y siempre leal” (Illustrious and Forever Loyal) city. The population of Chinese, or Sangleys as they were called by the Castilians, reached upwards of 30,000 by the early 17th century (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 9, pp. 319-320; Vol. 12, p. 147; Vol. 16, p. 42, fn. 15). Friar Pedro Chirino related in 1602 that “there have come tradesmen of every calling — all clever, skilful, and cheap, from physicians and barbers to carriers and porters. The Chinese are the tailors, the shoemakers, the blacksmiths, the silversmiths, sculptors, locksmiths, painters, masons and weavers; in short, they represent all
the trades of the community” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 12, p. 192). A marketplace called the Parián, the first “Chinatown” of the modern age, was the economic engine driving Spain’s imperial ambitions in the Orient. Since all but a handful of Sangleys arriving in the Philippines were male, they married or cohabitated with native Filipino women, resulting in a large population of Chinese mestizos that numbered 120,621 by 1810 (Wickberg 2001: 13). Chinese converts and mestizos crossed the Pacific on the so-called naos de China (China ships — actually Spanish galleons and other vessels) in the late 1500s, bringing valuable skills and DNA that contributed to the cultural dynamism of the Viceroyalty of New Spain in kaleidoscopic fashion.

This exploratory article exposes the process of sinification that impacted colonial Mexico on many levels, focusing on Chinese and mestizo immigrants as well as the lucrative trade relations that bound New Spain and China together. One of the issues to be addressed is how and when the Chinese actually set foot in Latin America, and how they adapted to the socio-cultural reality of New Spain. Another issue examined is the impact of Chinese exports on the daily lives and economic activity of colonial Mexico’s inhabitants over the 250 years of transpacific exchange through the “frontier funnel” of Manila. Thirdly, a genealogical analysis of the term chino/a will illuminate the internal dynamics of New Spain’s society that would all but obscure its Asian heritage by the early 18th century.

Los Chinos in New Spain: Demographics and Occupations

Spanish galleons transported Oriental goods and travelers from Manila to colonial Mexico primarily through the port of Acapulco. During the long span of contact between the Philippines and New Spain a minimum of 40,000 to 60,000 Asian immigrants would set foot in the “City of Kings” (Acapulco), while a figure double that amount (100,000) would be within the bounds of probability (Benítez 1992: 38; Mercene 2000: 2-6; Israel 1975: 75-76.)

From Acapulco they would gradually disperse

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1 There are varied estimates for Asian immigration to Mexico during the colonial era. Guillermo Tovar calculated that during the 17th and 18th centuries 40,000-50,000 chinos arrived in New Spain. Floro Mercene claims that 60,000 Filipinos alone made the journey to Acapulco, while Jonathan Israel contends that 6,000 Asian slaves were arriving each decade in the early-to-mid-1600s.
to the far corners of the viceroyalty, from Loreto in Baja California to Mérida in Yucatan (Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, henceforth AGN; Mercene 2000: 2; Solano 1988: Vol. 1, pp. 21-26, 63-65, 81; Germeten 2006: 162). The majority, however, would eventually settle in two distinct zones: on the west coast in the districts of Guerrero, Jalisco, and Michoacán; and in the large, ethnically diverse municipalities of Mexico City and Puebla in the central valleys, and the eastern port of Veracruz. The two zones were transversed by the most heavily traveled arteries that connected Acapulco to Mexico City (known colloquially as el camino de China) in the west, and Veracruz with Puebla and Mexico City in the east, linking the strategic Pacific and Atlantic ports with the political, religious, and economic centers of the colony.

For the most part, the chinos disembarked at Acapulco as sailors, slaves, and servants. Over the longue durée of Mexican-Asian cultural exchange, the largest contingent of Asians arrived as sailors on the galleons and smaller vessels (capitanas, pataches, and almirantes) that annually plied the long (six months or longer) and perilous return voyage from Manila. The seamen were primarily Filipinos, Chinese mestizos (known in Manila as mestizos de Sanglei), or ethnic Chinese from the fortified port of Cavite near Manila that served as the primary Spanish shipyard in the archipelago (Gealogo 2005: 308-39; Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, pp. 130-31). Until the late 16th century Iberian sailors constituted the majority of crewmen, but by the early 1600s chinos had surpassed them, accounting for 60-80 percent of the mariners from that time forward (Taylor 1922: 651; Schurz 1939: 209-10). A historical snapshot of galleon seafarers in the mid-18th century is found in the crew manifest for La Santissima Trinidad. In 1760 this

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2 AGN Grupo 36 vol. 17, ex. 88, f. 139 (1771); Grupo 51 vol. 15, ex. 36, f. 28030 (1675); vol. 35, ex. 180, f. 141-142 (1746); vol. 47, ex. 18 & 19 (1762); Grupo 58 vol. 6, ex. 1200, f. 330 (1597); vol. 10, ex. 273, f. 155 (1630); vol. 13, ex. 248, f. 219 (1641); vol. 17, ex. 40, f. 62-63 (1654); vol. 21, ex. 220, f. 192 (1657); vol. 23, ex. 375, f. 351 (1659); vol. 30, ex. 381, f. 349-350 (1690); vol. 32, ex. 337, f. 297-298 (1696); Grupo 61 vol. 285, ex. 61, f. 258 (1609); vol. 355, ex. 18, f. 382-387 (1626); vol. 435, ex. 36, f. 94 (1650); vol. 456, ex. 2, f. 85-98 (1659); vol. 598, ex. 15 (1663); vol. 673, ex. 37, f. 5 (1688); vol. 789, ex. 23, f. 361-366 (1721); vol. 912, ex. 11, f. 30 (1641); vol. 1169, f. 263 (1719); vol. 1209, ex. 5, f. 60 (1782); vol. 1230, f. 375 (1786); vol. 1291, ex. 13, f. 60-70 (1790); vol. 1297, ex. 13, f. 82-100 (1783); Grupo 69 vol. 10, ex. 188, f. 418-422 (1629); vol. 54, ex. 35, f. 158-162 (1763); vol. 81, ex. 82, f. 213-216 (1682); vol. 122, ex. 58, f. 175-176 (1672); vol. 136, ex. 50, f. 40 (1631); vol. 154, ex. 8, f. 3 (1712); vol. 165, ex. 160, f. 3 (1758); vol. 179, ex. 89, f. 2 (1687); Grupo 82 vol. 6, ex. 39, f. 45-52 (1676); Grupo 100 vol. 20, ex. 30, f. 24 (1653); vol. 45, ex. 179, f. 306 (1706); Grupo 110 vol. 3624, cuaderno 2, f. 306 (1642).
Map 1. Chino Demographic Distribution in New Spain, 1590-1815
vessel was crewed by 370 men, consisting of 30 officers (Europeans or Mexican criollos), 40 artillerymen (27 chinos), 120 sailors (109 chinos), 100 “Spanish” cabin boys (96 chinos), and 80 “plain” cabin boys (78 chinos). In sum, 84 percent or 310 members of the crew were born and raised in Spain’s Asian colony, with 68 percent or 250 crewmen hailing from the port of Cavite alone (AGN). Although this source divulges the names, ages, and married or single status of the sailors, it does not categorize them as Sangley, mestizo, or indio (Filipino).

The Chinese worked in Cavite as sailors, carpenters, caulkers, blacksmiths, sawyers, and in the rope factory alongside Spaniards and various castas (castes) from Mexico, native Filipinos, and Lascars (men from the Portuguese colonies in India) (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 26, pp. 206-209). According to Juan Grau y Malfalcon’s memorial to King Felipe IV in 1637, at that time there were 160 Sangley sailors who served in the royal champans, in addition to 50 carpenters and sawyers, 14 caulkers, and 30 smiths (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, pp. 130-31). Certainly, some of these Chinese were employed on the galleons and other vessels which made the annual voyage to Acapulco. Given the large population of Chinese mestizos in the regions surrounding the port of Cavite, their employment in this maritime activity provided an equal opportunity for emigration to New Spain. For example, Juan de la Cruz, Agustín Carpio, or Juan Sansón, mestizos who acted as interpreters for the champans arriving from China, would have been ideal candidates for such an enterprise (Archivo General de Indias, Seville, henceforth AGI).

Pinning down an exact date for when the first Chinese or Chinese mestizos landed in Acapulco is problematic, to say the least. A scarcity of archival documentation makes this effort a matter of guesswork. During the early 1590s a Sangley merchant named Juan Baptista de Vera arrived in Acapulco, and it is highly probable that others had made the voyage in the previous decade (Oropeza 2005: 9). A source in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville from the year 1610 explains how a Chinese maestro polverista (master gunpowder manufacturer) named Antonio Pérez was granted a license for travel aboard the galleon Nuestra Señora de los Remedios to New Spain. In his petition to the Casa de Contratación in

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3 AGN Grupo 42, vol. 6, ex. 11, f. 357-372 (1760).
4 AGI Filipinas 33, N.2, D. 111. These men were employed by Spanish authorities in the year 1653.
Manila, Antonio Pérez described himself as an “indio natural de la gran China,” born in Macao and a resident of Manila. He was single and 28 years of age. A royal cedula dated the year prior to his departure decreed that Antonio Pérez be paid the handsome wage of 400 pesos for one year of service aboard his majesty’s ship to New Spain and its return voyage. The Spanish monarch also expressed concern over the lack of qualified polvoristas in Manila and whether or not his absence would adversely affect the military preparedness of troops in the Philippines (AGI).

In Acapulco, chinos were hired as laborers and craftsmen in the royal shipyards, and assisted in the construction of Fort San Diego (1615-1617) and other public works (Oropeza 2005: 4-5). In Juan Grau y Malfalcon’s memorial alluded to earlier, the administrator related how copper is brought from China with so much facility that the best artillery imaginable is cast in Manila, with which they [the Portuguese] supply their forts, the city of Macan [Macao] and other cities of India, and it is taken to Nueva España; for the viceroy, the Marqués de Cerralvo, sent the governor, Don Juan Niño de Tabora, twenty-four thousand pesos, in return for which the latter sent him eighteen large pieces to fortify Acapulco (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 80).

Alexander von Humboldt similarly described during his travels in 1771 that several cannons protecting Fort San Juan de Ullua in Veracruz were originally cast in Manila (Humboldt 1811: Vol. 4, p. 20). As early as 1598, Sangley smithies and their artillery foundry were utilized by governor-general Francisco Tello (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 10, p. 173). The contribution of Chinese labor, skilled craftsmen, and weaponry were essential to the military security of both the Philippines and New Spain.

Slaves and servants constituted the second largest group of Oriental immigrants during the colonial era. Manila quickly became an important entrepôt for the commerce in human flesh during the first century of Spanish rule. The greater part were transported by Portuguese vessels from colonies and trading ports in Africa, India, the Malay peninsula, Japan and China, although Chinese junks and Malay prahus also shipped large quantities to Manila. Non-Filipino slaves that fetched the highest price were from Timor, Ternate, Makassar, Burma, Ceylon, and India, because “the men are industrious and obliging, and many are good

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5 AGI Contratacion 5317, N. 2, R. 49. In light of Dutch attacks on Spanish vessels in the Philippines and Spice Islands, his majesty’s concern was well founded.
musicians; the women excellent seamstresses, cooks, and preparers of conserves, and are neat and clean in service” (Scott 1991: 28-29; Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 12, p. 192).

The Chinese were one of many Asian peoples sold into slavery in Manila and transported to Acapulco aboard the *naos de China*. Epidemics that ravaged the native *indio* population in New Spain from roughly 1600 to 1650 fueled the demand for indentured labor (Israel 1975: 27-28). Despite the absence of an *asiento* for slaves brought through the back door of Acapulco, it was an open secret that was tolerated by the crown and enriched colonial merchants, priests, military and civil officials (Aguirre Beltrán 1944: 419-421; Scott 1991: 18-47).6

*Chino* slaves owned by elites in Mexico were occasionally transported across the Atlantic to serve their masters in Spain. An archival source from the year 1621 provides a glimpse of this phenomenon. Doctor Juan de Quesada Hurtado de Mendoza, son of Juan Quesada de Figueroa — a superior judge of the Royal Audiencia in Mexico City — received approval to transport a *chino* slave named Manuel, originally from China, from Seville back to New Spain in order to serve Dr. Quesada’s mother (AGI).7 Similar documents from the early 1600s reveal that male and female *chino* slaves traveled to Madrid, Cadiz, and Seville, and then returned to New Spain, serving as fashionable, exotic expressions of privilege among the status-conscious nobility of España (AGI).8

The highest densities of urban Asian immigrants were located in Mexico City and Puebla. Mexico City, colonial capital and the crossroads between Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia, provided the most favorable economic opportunities for *chinos* in the viceroyalty. A small sampling of the diverse occupations listed for Oriental transplants includes harp players, dancers, scribes, tailors, cobblers, butchers, silversmiths, embroiderers, and coachmen. The most prominent vocations were barbers and venders of various goods, such as cotton and silk textiles from Asia, Mexico, and Spain/Europe, comestibles (including aguardiente, molasses, chickens, confectionaries, sugar and cacao), or second-hand items (AGN).9

6 *The asiento* was a royal contract made between the colonial government and merchants that permitted the transportation of slaves into New Spain.
7 AGI *Indiferente* 2076, N. 232 (1621). Manuel was one of three slaves transported from Mexico to Spain at an earlier, unspecified date.
8 AGI *Contratación* 5414, N. 75 (1633); 5348, N. 10 (1615); 5337, N. 17 (1614).
9 AGN *Grupo 58* vol. 10, ex. 249, f. 142 (1630); vol. 21, ex. 220, f. 192 (1657); vol. 24, ex. 85, f. 48v-49r (1665); *Grupo 61* vol. 999, ex. 6, f. 335-336 (1750); v. 1169, f. 263
In the Plaza Mayor (known today as the Zócalo), the mercantile heart of the Spanish empire, an outdoor marketplace of stalls and small shops called the Parián (named after the Chinese emporium in Manila) satisfied the exotic demands of elites and commoners alike. Asian vendors, craftsmen, and those with marketable skills successfully competed with European, African, Indian, and mixed-race groups to eke out a living in a strange, new land, surmounting formidable linguistic and other cultural challenges. Thomas Gage, a Dominican monk who chronicled his experiences in New Spain during the 1620s, related that “[i]n Mexico City, above all, the Goldsmiths’ shops and works are to be admired. The Indians, and the people of China that have been made Christians and every year come thither, have perfected the Spaniards at that trade” (Gage 1929: 84). A highly reliable source for this era, Gage confirms that Chinese who dominated the silver/goldsmith professions in the Philippines plied their vocation — exceedingly well — in Mexico City.

The arrival of chinos with a variety of vocational skills in colonial Mexico created frictions with other classes who plied the same trade. One profession in particular was that of barberos (barbers) in the capital. Iberians (and other Europeans) who had heretofore monopolized the occupation of barbering until the early 1600s began to face stiff competition from Oriental immigrants. Consequently, a group of Spanish barbers filed a petition with the cabildo (municipal council) of Mexico City on 22 June 1635 that vigorously criticized their Asian and Castilian counterparts for the following reasons: not employing Spanish apprentices; the use of chino slaves in barbershops; the “excesses” and “inconveniences” experienced from chino competition in the Plaza Mayor; and the fact that numerous Castilian barbers had perished from diseases contracted from their customers (Dubs and Smith 1942: 387-89). Acting on recommendations made by the municipal council, on 18 January 1636 the viceroy Marqués de Cadereita ordered that Asian barbers were to be banished from the Plaza Mayor, and that no more than 12 chino barbershops licensed by the government were permitted outside the walls of Mexico City. Also included in this municipal order were provisos regulating the possession or use of more than a specified number of

(1719); Grupo 69 vol. 46, ex. 53, f. 277-80 (1699); vol. 47, ex. 57, f. 162-165 (1745); vol. 93, ex. 111, f. 296-297 (1612); v. 100, ex. 31, f. 163-166 (1744); v. 113, ex. 135, f. 345-346 (1629); vol. 118, ex. 106, f. 277-29 (1717); vol. 139, ex. 38, f. 4 (1663); v. 183, ex. 80, f. 2 (1637); Grupo 100 vol. 35, ex. 254, f. 233 (1644).
razors, and a prohibition against Spanish barbers having *chino* apprentices in their shops (AGN). 10

Barbers or phlebotomists in New Spain were considered the fourth category of medical providers, ranked behind physicians, pharmacists, and surgeons (Hernández Sáenz 1997: 22, 50-51, 129, 179). The *chino* barbers in question were either Chinese or Chinese *mestizos*, for the reason that Spaniards who spent time in Manila mentioned this profession as being dominated by *Sangleys*. To quote the Dominican priest Pedro Díaz del Cosío discussing the Parián of Manila in his book published circa 1674, “[t]here are about 200 Chinese and mestizo barbers, all of whom live on Spaniards, and others in the same proportion” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 38, p. 55). *Chino* barbers in New Spain performed both medical and non-medical services, which included bloodletting, dental surgery, cutting hair, shaving beards, and ear cleaning (Hernández Sáenz 1997: 179-203; Viana 2004: 75). The complaint lodged by the Spanish barbers that many of their brethren suffered the occupational hazard of death by contracting their customers’ diseases was also a risk shared by the Asian interlopers. Nonetheless, it is not surprising that elites on the cabildo, desiring to protect the social status quo, played the race card in their decision of 1635/6. They exaggerated the perils to European bloodletters while minimizing the skills of the latter, stating in their letter to the viceroy that “the supposition is that these *Chinos* are of no benefit” in treating various ailments (Dubs and Smith 1942: 387).

During the 1640s, archival records perplexingly reveal that the government approved at least a half-dozen licenses for *chino* barbershops and kiosks in the Plaza Mayor, in spite of the previous ruling (AGN). 11 In response to complaints (again) from European bloodletters, by 1650 the government had created a new position “empowered to stop the movement of Chinese barbers,” and solicited bids from interested parties to purchase the rights of enforcement. Joseph Barenguel was the earliest chronicled holder of the “anti-*chino* barbershop commission” (AGN). 12 The position was sold to the highest bidder annually, who

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10 AGN Grupo 100 vol. 18, ex. 27, f. 40 (18 August 1650); vol. 18, ex. 507, f. 249 (23 August 1653); Grupo 51 vol. 14, ex. 40, f. 38-39 (25 August 1670).

11 AGN Grupo 51 vol. 8, ex. 66, f. 46 (13 January 1641); Grupo 58 vol. 15, ex. 28, f. 20 (12 February 1648); vol. 15, ex. 29, f. 20-21 (12 February 1648); vol. 15, ex. 62, f. 44 (25 May 1649); Vol 15, ex. 86, f. 154-155 (14 June 1649); Grupo 100 vol. 48, ex. 136, f. 56-57 (24 November 1643).

12 AGN Grupo 100 vol. 18, ex. 27, f. 40 (18 August 1650); vol. 18, ex. 507, f. 249 (23 August 1653); Grupo 51 vol. 14, ex. 40, f. 38-39 (25 August 1670).
administered justice by exacting a financial penalty from Oriental scoff-laws that had violated the 1635 decree. In any case, the rising number of *chino* barbers within and outside of the walls of Mexico City suggests that the position was lucrative enough to exist into the early 1660s.

By 1667, however, the commission had languished for one reason or another, much to the chagrin of the Spanish barber and bloodletter Miguel Conde. Motivated by the fact that over 100 *chino* barbershops — most of them unlicensed — were operating within the walls of Mexico City, he penned a memorial to the viceroy Marqués de Mancera requesting that the commission be reactivated. After three years of legal wrangling among lawyers and the fiscal of the Royal Audiencia, Miguel Conde was finally awarded the commission on 20 August 1670 (AGN). Although the “Barbers of Seville” had triumphed in this case, due to an absence of any subsequent documentation on this matter, it would appear that the commission most likely languished by the last decade of the 17th century. *Chino* phlebotomists, however, would remain a common fixture in Mexico City’s multi-tiered field of medicine. Even in 1812, records indicate that immigrants from Manila were licensed as *barberos* in the colonial capital (Hernández Sáenz 1997: 185-86).

*The Church and Chino Immigrants*

Asian immigrants in Mexico City were a common sight for foreigners who spent time in the colonial metropolis. Gemelli Carreri (who traveled from Manila to Acapulco) stayed at monasteries and hospices that supported missionary activities in Asia while traveling on *el camino de China* (the China Road) to the capital. During the celebration of Easter, Carreri described various processions winding their way through the streets of Mexico City to commemorate the Passion and other holy days. On 4 April 1697, three groups left in succession that morning — the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity, Jesuits of the Saint Gregory church, trailed by the Franciscans. The Franciscan procession, Carreri related, was “that which is called the procession of the Chinese, because those going out were Indians of the Philippines” (Carreri 1927: Vol. 1, pp. 102-103). In addition to the faithful who held crosses, candles, and holy images (*imagenes*) as they marched, was a group of men armed with

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maces in each cavalcade. When the three processions passed through the Plaza Mayor and drew near the Cathedral of Mexico City, a scuffle broke out between the followers of the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity and the “procession of the Chinese” regarding the priority in which they reached their destination. Upset that the chinos had risen above their station and arrived ahead of the other two processions, the acolytes of the Holy Trinity pummeled the Asians with maces and crosses, resulting in many injured penitents (Carreri 1927: Vol. 1, pp. 102-103). Although all were equal before the Lord, they certainly were not among subjects of the Crown.

The aforementioned scene captured by Gemelli Careri exposes an important ecclesiastical organization that facilitated social integration and provided charitable services for various castas in New Spain. Known as cofradías or confraternities, the ostensible function of these institutions that emphasized public flagellation was to honor the Passion of Christ, various saints, or a certain sacrament of Catholicism. Confraternities ensured members a decent Christian burial with the accompanying liturgies at the time of one’s death, and established hospitals to care for slaves and freemen of the lower castes (Germeten 2006: i, 82). In many ways, they were a significant driver in the process of acculturation for Asian immigrants. Careri’s observations of a purely Asian (“de los chinos”) Franciscan cofradía in the capital was the Confraternity of Holy Christ, affiliated with the Santa Catalina monastery. Founded by immigrants from the Philippines around the mid-17th century, in 1692 it was granted approval to construct a small chapel to the Virgin Mary within the monastery, and decorated its interior with ivory statuary imported from Manila (Armella de Aspe 1992: 221-22).

A veritable Noah’s Ark of religious artifacts manufactured in China and the Philippines were transported via the Manila galleon to New Spain. As a result of Iberian missionary activity in Cathay during the waning years of the Ming dynasty, an ivory carving industry began expanding in the late 16th century that catered to markets in Manila and New Spain. Located in the port city of Zhangzhou in Fujian Province, more specifically in the Haicheng district, Chinese ivory artisans manufactured sacred Christian images such as the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus, the crucifixion of Christ, various saints and angels all carved in the round, in addition to rosaries and crosses (Gillman 1984: 35-40; Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado 1986: 49-50, 86). Devotional objects were commissioned by priests in Manila through the Chinese community in the Parián, a large percentage of whom had emigrated from the Fujianese
ports of Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Zhangzhou, and Xiamen. Chinese artisans meticulously carved their figurines from woodblock printed breviaries provided by Spanish missionaries. Magnificent ivory sculptures embellished altars in churches, monasteries, and cathedrals in both the Philippines and colonial Mexico (Gillman 1984: 36-40, 62; Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado 1986: 51-59). The Obras Pías (Catholic charitable organizations) of Manila were granted cargo space on the galleons to transport religious items for sale in New Spain as a means to financially support the hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other charities in the Philippines. In addition to “the dragon’s share” of ivory carvings emanating from Zhangzhou, Sangley craftsmen, their mestizo offspring, and Filipino artisans manufactured Christian iconography in Manila that also disseminated throughout the New World from Acapulco (Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado 1986: 51, 64-66, 84-90).14

Of all the Catholic sanctuaries in the New World, the oldest and largest is the Cathedral of Mexico City. Constructed from blocks of stone taken from demolished Aztec temples in Tenochtitlan, it was continually expanded and rebuilt from the time of Cortez until the late 18th century (Toussaint 1992: 4-12). This imposing expression of Castilian evangelization was the site of many marriages between Asian immigrants and various castas, a colonial term employed to distinguish the ethnicity of Spaniards/Europeans, native Indians, Africans, Asians and their mixed-race offspring. The earliest extant marriage license granted to chinos for a wedding performed in the cathedral was dated 1605. A chino slave identified as Bartolomé Díaz was betrothed to Mariana de San Juan, a negra slave (AGN).15 Matrimonial records reveal that chinos — including Chinese and mestizos from Manila — served as witnesses in Catholic-sanctioned unions to a whole cross-section of residents in the capital, not only for mulatos, castizos, mestizos, negros, free and slave, but also for Spanish and Portuguese elites (AGN).16

The long-term ecclesiastical links between China, the Philippines, and New Spain are materially expressed in two magnificent metallic

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14 Sanchez-Navarro de Pintado distinguishes between these two types of ivories as “Chinese-Hispanic” (manufactured in China) and “Hispanic-Philippine” (manufactured in Manila).

15 AGN Grupo 69, v. 61, ex. 73, f. 288-290 (1605).

16 AGN Grupo 69, V. 7, ex. 73, f. 247-249 (1634); v. 10, ex. 106, f. 245-246 (1629); v. 31, ex. 43, f. 200 (N.D.); v. 47, ex. 57, f. 162-165 (1745); v. 48, ex. 88, f. 239-240 (1628); v. 113, ex. 135, f. 345-346 (1629); v. 172, ex. 61, f. 2 (1644); v. 183, ex. 131, f. 2 (1679); v. 213, ex. 32, f. 1 (1660).
structures which still adorn the Cathedral of Mexico City: the reja de coro (choral grate enclosing the choiry) and the crujiá (the sanctuary rails between the pews) leading to the choiry. The reja de coro was designed by the master artisan Nicolas Rodriguez Juarez in 1721, whose schematics were transported aboard the nao de China via Manila, and cast in Macao. The choral grate was manufactured using a variety of metals — iron, bronze, and a bronze/gold amalgam called tumbaga — by the hands of the Chinese master craftsman Quiauló Sangley. The blueprint of Rodriguez was translated into Chinese by an Italian Franciscan friar in Macao, and when completed was larger and more exquisite than ever imagined by the residents of Mexico City. Transported across the Pacific in 125 crates and bundles aboard the ship Nuestra Señora de los Dolores in 1724, the final tally for this work was 46,380 pesos — almost five times more than was originally estimated. Topped by Baroque figures of the crucifixion and other saints, it was considered unsurpassed in its elegance and superior to any counterpart in Europe (Toussaint 1992: 107-109). The adjoining crujiá was also fabricated in Macao and arrived at the cathedral in 1743, composed of the same precious metals, with angelic images adorning the top of the railing acting as candlestick holders (Toussaint 1992: 115).

Whenever the bells on the Cathedral of Mexico City sonorously announced the arrival of the galleons from the Philippines, setting off a procession of merchant caravans for Acapulco; celebrated the feast on St. Andrew's Day (30 November) to commemorate the miraculous defeat of the Chinese pirate Limahon in Manila; listened to the musicians and choir sing Te Deum from inside of the reja de coro; witnessed chino weddings or holy processions, inhabitants of New Spain's cosmopolitan capital were reminded of the “knot, tie, and strong bond” between themselves and the empire of Cathay (García del Valle Gómez 1993: 42; Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 9, pp. 315-325; Vol. 10, p. 271; Vol. 16, p. 168).18

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17 The original allocation for the reja de coro was 10,000 pesos, and the overage was covered by merchants, officials, and clergy in Manila; while the crujiá cost 18,000 pesos.

18 This phrase was uttered by governor Luis Perez Dasmariñas in a letter to the King of Spain in the 1590s. His specific words were “Indeed, this greed and covetousness is the knot, tie, and strong bond between us and this nation [Chinese residents in Manila], so different, injurious, and contrary to our own. It is expedient of the devil that this people shall obtain all or nearly all they want.”
From the time Manila was conquered in 1571, it was crystal clear to Spanish conquistadors and clergy in the Philippines that the only method to finance imperial endeavors in Asia was by selling Chinese silks and other products in the New World. To quote from Juan Grau Y Malfalcon’s detailed 1637 memorial, “The trade of the Filipinas is so necessary today in Nueva España, that the latter country finds it as difficult as do the islands to get along without that trade” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 110). He goes on to list a cornucopia of Chinese textiles sold at the Acapulco Fair, but distills the bulk of exports down to unfinished or raw silk and cotton fabrics. The importance of these two trade articles to the domestic economy of New Spain has been sorely neglected in the historiography of Latin America, therefore, it is imperative to reevaluate Chinese silks and cottons (some of which were grown in the Philippines) in this context.

In the year 1592, the King of Spain decreed that “Indios Chinos” who resided in New Spain and paid their royal tribute were not obliged to pay the alcabala — a sales tax — on the goods which they vended in their shops, so long as chinos were not wholesaling bulk quantities of Chinese or Spanish silks (AGN; Hoberman 1991: 18-32). Sangley and mestizo fabric merchants from the Parián of Manila peddled their wares in the Parián of Mexico City. In 1631, six chino retailers brought suit against the sales tax collector Juan Correa, claiming that he had illegally forced them to pay the alcabala on their “auction tables, shops, and kiosks” in the Plaza Mayor. The six plaintiffs, including Melchor López de Baño, Simon López, Domingo Pastrana and Gart Solomedras, are described as “free Chinese Indians” and natives of Manila who were merchants in the capital. The General Indian Court judged in favor of the plaintiffs, and warned the sales tax collectors not to harass or take any punitive actions against the chinos (AGN).20

Skeined silk, silk thread, and trama (a type of weaving silk) were woven into everything from the robes worn by clerics to veils and head-dresses adorning the ladies of the colony. Although vast quantities of Spanish silks were shipped from Cadiz and other ports to Veracruz...
annually, they were too oily, resulting in more labor and expense for those who dyed them. Likewise, the small amount of silk produced locally in Mixteca (Oaxaca) was viewed as an inferior product (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 199). Chinese silks, on the other hand, were not only less expensive, but the ease of dying and beauty of the whites was unmatched. To quote Guillaume-Thomas Raynal,

The whiteness of Chinese silk, to which nothing else can be compared, renders it the only suitable kind for the manufacture of blondes and gauzes. The efforts made to substitute our own in the manufacture of blondes have been fruitless... Besides this silk of unique whiteness — which is chiefly produced in the province of Tche-Kiang [Zhejiang], and which we know under the name of Nankin silk, from the place where it is especially made — China produces ordinary silks, which we call Canton silks (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 45, pp. 46-47, FN 4).

The colonial textile industry was heavily dependent upon this commerce, as Grau y Malfalcon testified that “more than 14,000 persons support themselves in Mexico [City], La Puebla, and Antequerra, by their looms, the whole thing being approved by royal decrees” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 199).

Puebla de Los Angeles, a city renowned for its industrial production of textiles, pottery, porcelain and glassware, was another significant reservoir of Asian immigrants pouring into New Spain from Manila. Workers in various trades were divided into guilds or gremios that had master/apprentice hierarchies jealously guarded by Iberian colonists. In 1676, Antonio Gonzales de Velasco, Emmanuel Felipe de Sanda, and Melchor de Ortega, the Spanish officers and overseers of the guild ofpañeros (weavers of tapestries, drapes, and other textiles) in Puebla, submitted a new set of organizational regulations to the cabildo (municipal council) that stipulated the guild “will not admit for consideration in the posts of overseers or officers of this gremio any negro, mulato, or chino slave, even if he is a freeman.” In its infinite wisdom, the municipal council did not agree with this anti-casta proviso, stating that “any person of any qualities or condition” should be allowed to serve in positions of authority (AGN).21 Undoubtedly, skilled chino embroiderers and weavers were employed in Puebla and other centers of textile production

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21 AGN Grupo 82 vol. 6, ex. 39, f. 45-52 (19 November 1676). Italics added by the author. The term calidades (qualities) has multiple definitions, including race, occupation, slave or free status, wealth and reputation.
in New Spain, sharing their techniques with local *indios* and various *castas* employed therein.

Master silk weavers from Toledo, Granada, Torrijos and other cities in Spain migrated to colonial Mexico and established work shops (*obrajes*) and smaller-scale enterprises with a few looms (*trapiches*) to dye, finish, and sell Chinese silks domestically or export them to the mother country (Hoberman 1991: 129-131). Manufacturers catered to what was fashionable and thus were heavily influenced by Oriental patterns and designs. For example, the *rebozos* that women of the vice-royalty desired had to be embroidered in the Chinese style, but blended with Mexican motifs such as bullfights, pastoral scenes, or the promenade of carriages that was *en vogue* for elites in Mexico City (Carballo 1985: 122). As trade relations intensified, Castilian and *criollo* merchants traveled to Manila with samples of clothing patterns that were in high demand by affluent subjects in the king’s American colonies. According to a Spanish source in the late 17th century, Mexican and Peruvian merchants arrived in the Philippines with specimens of Spanish fabrics, which were conveyed by *Sangleys* in the Parián to Chinese factories in Beijing, Canton, and other cities (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 45, p. 64).

Cottons fabrics, known colloquially as “elephant stuffs,” were equally prized for their low cost and durability. They were not only favored by the “Indians and Negroes,” but by those who provisioned the silver mining operations in New Spain. Grau y Malfalcon noted that “it [Chinese cotton] is cheaper and more durable and serviceable. Consequently, with 1,000 pesos’ worth of it they are maintained in their mining operations longer than they could with five thousand worth of that from España” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 27, p. 202). Writing almost a century later, Álvarez related that the elephant stuffs and raw silk woven in Puebla and Mexico City “which comes from the Philippines…is worked up, and in this industry many poor persons are employed, thus obtaining a suitable means of livelihood; and the fabrics which are made by them are consumed in this kingdom only” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 4, pp. 36-37). Suffice it to say that in terms of the domestic consumption and production of fabrics imported by the *naos de China* to Acapulco, the impact of Chinese textiles on Mexico’s economy was quite substantial.
The inhabitants of New Spain were well known for their conspicuous consumption of the Oriental riches brought to their shores by the Manila galleon. Silks and calicoes, porcelains and fans, furniture, spices and jewelry — all were embraced with an insatiable fervor. In 1610, one of the earliest poets of the colony, Bernardo de Balbuena, captured the affluence of the capital in his work *La Grandeza Mexicana* (The Grandeur of Mexico City):

It is the richest and most opulent city [in the world], with the most trade and the most treasure… The silver of Peru and the gold of Chile lands here, and the fine cloves of Ternate and the cinnamon of Tidor. Fabrics from Cambray [Cathay]… diamonds from India, and from gallant Scita [Ceylon] spinel rubies and fine emeralds, ivory from Goa and dark ebony from Siam; from Spain the best, the cream from the Philippines, the most precious from Macao, from both Javas exotic riches; fine porcelain from the timid Sangley… In short, the finest in the world, of all that is known and produced, here is abundant, is sold and is inexpensive (Balbuena 1971: 71-78).22

Following the capture of Manila by conquistadors, an increasing number of trade junks were drawn to Lusong (Luzon) by the glittering tons of silver transported aboard galleons from New Spain and Peru used to purchase Oriental exotica. Pedro Chirino confirmed as much in 1602, writing that “[f]rom China they… began to ship their riches in silks and glazed earthenware, as soon as they learned of our wealth of four and eight real pieces” (Blair and Robertson 1905: Vol. 12, p. 191). Porcelains were shipped to Manila from the famous Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi, the Dehua kilns in Fujian, the workshops catering to Europeans in Canton, and smaller facilities in Chaozhou (Swatow) and Zhejiang Province (Kuwayama 1997: 15). Not surprisingly, Chinese merchants who prospered from the Manila commerce became influential leaders of the Chinese community in the Parián. Li Tan (d. 1625), a Fujianese adventurer and trafficker of porcelains and silks served as a governor of the Sangleys in Manila (Kuwayama 1997: 16).

In 1573, when the first two Manila galleons arrived in Acapulco with a cargo that included over 22,000 Ming dynasty porcelains, a market for this product was firmly established (Kuwayama 1997: 11). In addition to

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22 Italics added by the author.
ceramics with gold and silver plating, Chinese porcelains of the \textit{qingbai} (blue and white) style were extremely popular in the haciendas of elites and the Catholic sanctuaries of New Spain. On the altars it was not uncommon to see Sangley ceramics holding flowers beneath the images of saints or Christ on the crucifix, as captured by the artist Pedro Calderon in the 1710 painting \textit{Christo de Chalma} (Kuwayama 1997: 22). George Kuwayama’s work, \textit{Chinese Ceramics in Colonial Mexico}, provides a detailed inventory of armorial dinner ware, cups, tureens, jars, pear and gourd-shaped bottles, etc. that circulated throughout New Spain during the colonial era.

The Manila porcelain trade stimulated a domestic pottery industry in the city of Puebla, which slavishly imitated the Ming dynasty \textit{qingbai} style that was all the rage in Europe. Blessed with deep and wide-ranging clay strata of various types, Puebla de los Angeles became the manufacturing center of Spanish colonial ceramics. It was here that master potters from Spain founded kilns that mass produced a variety of items, notably those fabricated in the \textit{Talavera} style, named after the kilns in Talavera de la Reina (McQuade 1999: 13–20; Bailey 2006: 99–101, 107). In 1653, a potters’ guild was officially sanctioned in the city. The guild regulations stipulated that “[i]n making fine wares the coloring should be in imitation of Chinese ware, very blue, finished in the same style and with relief work in blue, and on this pottery there should be painted black dots and grounds in colors” (Castro Morales 2002: 24, 78; Kuwayama 1997: 24). Given the large number of skilled Asians in Puebla, Chinese and \textit{mestizo} potters from Manila in all likelihood manufactured fine \textit{Talavera} porcelain from which Mexican ceramics achieved respectability and fame.

\textit{The Status of Chinos in Colonial Society}

Following the conquest of Mexico, the Spaniards established a race-based hierarchy which emphasized one’s \textit{limpieza de sangre} (purity of blood), in other words, the percentage of Spanish/European blood coursing through an individual’s veins. At the top of this eugenics ranking system were those born in Spain called \textit{peninsulares} and their offspring born in Mexico known as \textit{criollos}. Below this elite were Indians, Africans, Asians, and an amazing spectrum of mixed-race individuals. Where \textit{chinos} fit into this confusing blend of races has not been adequately addressed by scholars, despite their unheralded contribution to
what Latin American academics call the *mestizaje* (mixed-race) society of colonial Mexico.

The terms *chino* or *indio chino* underwent a startling metamorphosis from their original meaning once the galleons from Manila began transporting Asian immigrants to New Spain. Technically speaking, they meant “Chinese” or “Chinese Indian.” That unambiguous definition notwithstanding, *chino/a* during the late 16th and 17th centuries took on the more encompassing meaning of “Asian,” while the Philippines was commonly referred to as “la China” (Basarás 1763: Vol. 1, pp. 25-32). As various ethnic groups from China, Japan, the Philippines, Dutch East Indies, Malaysia, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and India were sold into slavery, they summarily received the appellation of *chino/a*. Numerous sub-castes that specified the national or regional affiliation of the individual were added for clarity. For example, *indios filipinos* were identified according to tribe or island, such as “de nacion Panpango [Pampanga]” or “natural de Cibu [Cebu]”, while those from Cathay or Japan as “de nacion Chino” or “de nacion Japon,” respectively (AGN).23 Similarly, slaves shipped from Portuguese colonies in India, Malacca, or Macao were given a rainbow of appellations: Mogo/Moco (Mughal), Chingala, Bengala, Parachi, Patanes, Malabar, and Pegu (Burmese) (Zavala 1967: 236-38; Aguirre Beltrán 1946: 148-50).

During the initial phase of intercourse between the Orient and Mexico, the view of the Spanish court was that *chinos* were *indios*, a universal term for those considered to be natives of the king’s dominions in the Americas and Asia. Accordingly, *chinos* received a variety of legal privileges and protections that were the prerogative of the Indians of Mexico. The right to appeal perceived injustices to the General Indian Court, such as the illegal collection of the *alcabala* (*indios* were exempted from the sales tax) or to challenge their slave status following the emancipation of *chinos* and native Indians in 1672, or trial by the Inquisition in an ecclesiastical court alongside *indios* (AGN).24 Asians were thus viewed equal with native Indians in the realm of jurisprudence.

Nonetheless, the waters became increasingly muddied by colonial authorities who began to lump *chinos* with the African mixed-race castes by the middle of the 17th century. Similar to restrictions placed on other

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23 AGN *Grupo 51* vol. 8, ex. 116, f. 74 (6 May 1641); *Grupo 58* vol. 17, ex. 19, f. 31-32 (15 November 1654); *Grupo 61* vol. 598, ex. 15 (1663); vol. 673, ex. 37, f. 5 (1688).

24 AGN *Grupo 100* vol. 30, ex. 94, f. 144 (21 April 1673); *Grupo 61* vol. 1184, ex. 8, f. 46-80 (1779).
castas in New Spain, in 1645 viceroy Conde de Salvatierra banned mestizos, mulatos, negros, chinos, and zambaigos, free or slave, from carrying any type of weapons in Mexico City (AGN). As was evidenced in the Puebla pañeros guild, chinos were synonymous with the lower caste elements of society. As human chattel, Asians shared the chains of slavery with Africans and their mixed-race offspring until the turn of the 18th century. In the eyes of colonial justice, Orientals were grouped together with negros and mulatos as a race predisposed to criminal activity (Israel 1975: 75-76). In Mexico City and Puebla, the political, religious, and economic centers of the viceroyalty, Asian immigrants were betrothed to lower caste negros, mulatos, pardos, and other Africanized groups in greater proportions than in the smaller pueblos scattered in the sierras, coasts, and frontiers. As the curtain closed on the 17th century, elites viewed Asian mixed-race offspring as more difficult to define (as they did with Spanish, Indian, and African hybrids) and consequently, it has been asserted that the term chino/a became synonymous with a physical trait (shape of the eyes, or other exotic features) rather than an actual reflection of Oriental ancestry as it had been previously (Vinson 2005: 254-57).

By the 1750s, the commonly-held assumption by elites in New Spain was that a chino was the result of a union between individuals with African and Indian blood. Antonio Joachin de Basarás in 1763 produced a work that described the offspring of union between the various castas in colonial Mexico, followed by painted renderings thereof. In his mind, the only other non-indigenous race in New Spain besides the Castilians was African slaves. Thusly, miscegenation between the three races — Caucasian (Spanish), Indian, and African — accounted for the 16 distinctly “impure” mixed-blood castes in the viceroyalty. According to his nineteen-tiered racial classification scheme, chinos did not arrive to the shores of New Spain via the Philippines, but were produced by mating between mulatos and indios (Basarás 1763: Vol. 2, pp. 1-2).

In the wonderfully illustrated volumes edited by Ilona Katzew, many other casta portraits from the mid-to-late 18th century reinforce the notion of chinos as an adulteration of African and Indian blood, and where they fit into colonial society based upon the policy of limpieza de sangre (purity of blood). The following mixtures of castas produced chino/a progeny: no te entiendo + india; barcino + mulata; barcina +

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25 AGN Grupo 100 vol. 15, ex. 178, f. 140-141 (18 August 1645).
indio; torno atras + grifo; chamizo + cambuja; negro/a + indio/a; and lobo + negra (Katzew 1996: 14, 39, 40, plates 23, 60; 2004: 30, 36, 95, 126, 146, 153). In the end, chinos were one of many “impure” castes created in genetically-engineered scenarios played out on canvas. There was no fourth bloodline outside of the European, Indian, or African races that was considered the source of chinos in New Spain. Expressing a sense of bewilderment in the late 1700s, Alexander von Humboldt remarked that “[t]he descendants of Negroes and Indian women bear at Mexico, Lima, and even at Havanah, the strange name of Chino, Chinese,” despite his meticulous observation that “many individuals of Asiatic origin, both Chinese and Malays, have settled in New Spain” (Humboldt 1811: Vol. 1, pp. 244-45).

Looking at a variety of sources, the historical turning point for this terminological metamorphosis appears to be around the time of the 1692 Mexico City riot. In June of that year, an angry mob of Indians joined by various castas attacked symbols of Spanish authority, looted the Plaza Mayor marketplace and torched the viceroy’s palace. Katzew explains that in the riot’s aftermath, “colonial authorities attempted to segregate the Indians from the Spaniards, and especially from the remaining castas who were thought to have prompted the Indians to rise in riot” (Katzew 1996: 12-13). A document from judicial proceedings following the melee relates how Antoniño de Arano, described as a free “chino o mulato,” was arrested with silk, linen, velvet and woolen fabrics that he had pillaged from the Plaza Mayor (AGI). The language used by court officials reveals that Mexico City elites viewed this chino as a person of African descent, and underscores the growing popular sentiment that the two races were similar, if not coequal.

In the pueblo of Coyuca, near Acapulco, the colonial state implemented its anti-casta agenda on a larger scale. Chinos had lived harmoniously together with indios in this farming community from the late 1500s until the 1720s. Around the year 1722, a degree-holding priest named Sebastian de Minute instituted a new policy that segregated “pure” indios (descended from servants of the haciendas) into a barrio of tributaries apart from the community of predominantly chinos (around 100 families) and a few pardos (a mixture of Indian and African blood). The

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26 AGI Patronato 226, n. 1, r. 6 (1692). Antoniño de Arano is described in this source as a mulato more often than as a chino, and his wife Maria de Ortega is also classified as a mulata. The court eventually sentenced Antoniño de Arano to six years of hard labor in a mortar factory, followed by life in prison.
Indian community elected its own governor to administer justice, while the *chinos* and *pardos* were subject to an alcalde mayor appointed by the government (Solano 1988: Vol. 1, p. 25). Perhaps Sebastian de Minute, in consultation with the Archdiocese of Mexico City, felt compelled to institute spiritual and temporal *apartheid* in order to limit the corrupting influence of *chinos* on local Indians in the aftermath of the 1692 Mexico City riot. Whatever the reasons may have been, it is evident from the documents penned by colonial officials in the 18th century and the *casta* portraits and cycles of that era that the term *chino* had undergone a drastic transformation which detached it from the continent and empire where it had originated.

Several factors contributed to the Mexicanization of this term from the late 1600s to mid-1700s. The first was a decrease in the number of Asian immigrants arriving in New Spain in the decades following the emancipation of *chino* slaves in 1672. Lacking a market for Asian slaves in the New World, the numbers dropped precipitously by the dawn of the 18th century. A higher frequency of unions between Asians, *indios*, and *castas* would have ensued, precipitating a trend toward mixed-race offspring surpassing the number of new arrivals and making the eventuality of “pure” Asian descendants less likely with each succeeding generation. Another factor was urbanity. In the cities where colonial elites lived in higher concentrations, they experienced larger and more diverse mixed-race population densities. In Mexico City and Puebla, Asian immigrants were betrothed to lower caste *negros, mulatos, pardos*, and other Africanized castes in greater proportion than in the smaller, mostly Indian pueblos of the Pacific coast (AGN).27 Perceptions of colonial society through this metropolitan lens certainly colored their definition of *chinos*. Finally, the separation of *chinos* and *pardos* from *indios* in Coyuca during the year 1722 stands out in bold relief. One could speculate that this incident was not isolated, but a microcosm of a larger state agenda (officially sanctioned or otherwise) to cleave *chinos* from *indios* and to unambiguously lump them together with the lower castes of colonial society.

27 Marriage licenses for *chinos* in Mexico City during the 1600s and 1700s support this contention. See AGN *Grupo 69* vol. 7, ex. 73, f. 247-249 (1634); vol. 10, ex. 106, f. 245-246 (1629); vol. 47, ex. 57, f. 162-165 (1745); vol. 48, ex. 88, f. 239-240 (1628); vol. 61, ex 73, f. 288-290 (1605); vol. 113, ex. 135, f. 345-346 (1629); vol. 172, ex. 61, f. 2 (1644); vol. 183, ex. 131, f. 2 (1679); and vol. 213, ex. 32, f. 1 (1660).
Conclusion

The picture that emerges from this study on the Chinese/mestizo diaspora in colonial Mexico is certainly incomplete, but offers some tantalizing clarity regarding a woefully understudied migration history. Once and for all we can lay to rest fanciful theories concerning when, who and how the first Chinese arrived in the New World: it was during the reign of Ming dynasty emperor Wanli (1573-1620); the Chinese were sailors, slaves, servants, artisans, merchants, barbers, laborers, etc., who lived in the greater Manila region and had been converted to Christianity; and they made their voyage across the Pacific on Spanish vessels vulgarly referred to as “China ships.”

On the other hand, social scientists specializing in colonial Mexico have ignored the totality of China’s trade relations with New Spain. For the most part, scholarship has overlooked the dependency relationship of domestic weaving on Asian raw materials, the rise of an import-substitution ceramics industry powered by the popularity of Chinese porcelains, or the impact of weaponry and assorted religious paraphernalia that were manufactured by skilled Sangley artisans in the Middle Kingdom or Manila. The most egregious oversight, however, has been the human dimension of the transpacific galleon trade. Asian immigrants, their adaptations to a foreign cultural milieu, their roles in both viceregal society and economy, and the social amnesia that emerged in the late 17th century regarding the origins of the chino caste are vital missing pieces of the enormous colonial puzzle that they have been attempting to reconstruct.

In some small measure, this research attempts to polish the links tarnished by time and scholarly neglect. The sinification of colonial Mexico inextricably bound these two empires together across the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean. The countercurrents of Cathay were strong enough to reach the beaches of Acapulco for nearly 250 years, each wave leaving behind important cultural and economic legacies that were abruptly washed away by the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821). Chinese and their mestizo progeny from Manila, part of the “first wave” of Asian immigration to the Americas, quickly receded into the murky depths of history along the riptide of Mexican nationalism.
Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Seville, Spain.
Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City, Mexico.


PART II

THE CLASSIC MIGRATIONS
CHAPTER TWO

ASIAN DIASPORAS AND TROPICAL MIGRATION IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Walton Look Lai*

The central driving factor of global history in the 19th century was the way in which the industrial revolution worked to transform, not only economic structures and social relations within the countries where the process was taking place, but also the momentum of global migration and the course of empire throughout the century. Operating from different but related axes, the British and American industrialization processes were at the heart of this dynamic, and consequently impacted on global movements of people and territorial expansion of empire more comprehensively than other Western powers influenced by the same dynamism. The economist W. Arthur Lewis spoke of the century’s global development as being powered by two vast streams of international migration: 50 million people leaving Europe for the temperate settlements, and another estimated 50 million people leaving India and China to work in the tropics on plantations, in mines, and in construction projects (Lewis 1978). The stimulus given to global production in the age of the industrial revolution created local boom scenarios not only in the industrial heartlands, but also in what was to become the tropical food producing and raw materials sector for the industrialized world. This international division of labor either took place within the political framework of expanding Empire — whether British, Dutch, French or later in the century, American — or evolved within the framework of what later came to be called neo-colonialism, as it did with the newly independent Latin American republics. Moreover, in the United States of America, this process occurred for much of the century not via traditional colonial expansion, but via relentless inland and westward expansion (internal colonialism).

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Because of the widespread demand for labor in all sectors of the global economy in this period, and because of the racialized thinking of the empire-builders, migration tended to adopt the racial and ethnic character that Lewis spoke about: the Europeans went largely to the industrializing and modernizing (and temperate) sector, and the non-Whites, principally from East and South Asia, went mainly to the tropical food producing and raw materials sector. There was some overlap at the edges of this development. Some White labor immigration (mainly of Southern Europeans) flowed to the non-industrial plantation tropics, such as post-slavery Brazil and Cuba, and even territories as far apart as British Guiana and Hawaii, while a smaller migration of non-White (Chinese and Indian) labor took place headed for the fringe areas of the emergent industrial economy, mainly the American and Canadian West Coasts (400,000 Chinese, 7,000 Indians). But by and large this international racial division of labor was the standard pattern of 19th-century migrations.

There is some uncertainty about the numbers of people who actually migrated out of East and South Asia. Lewis’ 50 million may have been an overestimate. There was a tradition of seasonal and return migration among the Indians to the South Asian region which may have made the final numbers difficult to estimate. As late as 1910, a British Commission of Enquiry into the status of Indian indentured immigration within the British Empire said about Ceylon:

So far we have dealt only with the case of immigrants coming over as agricultural laborers. The immigrants coming annually from India for other purposes somewhat exceed these in number, being estimated at an average of 102,000 per annum during the last four years as against a yearly average of 98,000 agricultural immigrants.

One author has suggested that as many as 30 million Indians emigrated, and that just fewer than 24 million returned to India, principally from Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, leaving a net global migration of roughly 6.3 million Indians, 5 million in South and Southeast Asia, and about 1.3 million in the larger diaspora (Jain 1989: 157). Chinese migrations

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1 Subtropical and temperate Argentina and Uruguay, which developed into Latin versions of temperate food producing countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, also attracted millions of mainly Southern European rural immigrants.

added another 7.5 million — 6.5 million of these within Southeast Asia alone (Northrup 1995). In addition, there were at least another 200,000 Javanese, Japanese, and Pacific Islanders joining the migrant stream during this century of global labor mobility.

Much of the seasonal and long-term migration within South and Southeast Asia was not new, and indeed its origins preceded the arrival of the West in this region by several centuries. While not always formally acknowledged or encouraged by the imperial authorities, coastal and maritime China had carried on a distinctive and vigorous tradition dating back as far as the Tang (618-907 A.D.), and possibly the Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), periods. Chinese Buddhist travelers had reported encountering colonies of Chinese merchant settlers in Sumatra and Java as early as the 4th century A.D. Indian traders and sailors from the province of Gujarat as well as the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of Southern India had, along with the Arabs, dominated the maritime trade between the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and the Red Sea at least from the first century A.D. They had even helped transfer Hindu, Buddhist, and eventually Muslim, religious and cultural influences to Southeast Asia by the 7th century A.D. However, large-scale migration and settlement of unskilled manual laborers in search of economic opportunity was not a feature of this early period.

It took the arrival of the European colonizers in the 16th century to inject new vigor into the traditional maritime networks of the Asian regional economy. First the Portuguese and Spanish, then the Dutch, British and French injected themselves into the regional trade networks, and their activities eventually helped to integrate the region more closely into the dynamic Atlantic “world economy.” Between the 16th and the 19th centuries, this was relatively small-scale and gradual, since the Europeans operated out of coastal trading enclaves and forts rather than engaging in territorial and inland colonization. Still, in response to this early regional stimulus, spontaneous Chinese migrations of traders and artisans to Thailand and the Philippines, and to Indonesia and Malaya gave rise to a Chinese middleman sector within these local economies well before the century of the industrial revolution. Overseas Indian trader communities were smaller in number, despite their domination of the maritime trade routes, and up to the beginning

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3 This applies to the period after the mid-1870s. The Straits Settlements Chinese population was 50,000 in 1860, just under half of the total population (Chen 1923: 82).
of the 19th century their numbers were no more than a few thousand within the whole maritime network from the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea (Brij Lal 2006: 58).

However, as early as the 17th century, there was an active trade in Indian slave labor, carried out primarily by the Portuguese, French and Dutch from their coastal enclaves. Several thousand Indian slaves were transported by them to places like Dutch-held Ceylon and Southeast Asia, as well as Cape Colony in Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and French Reunion (Brij Lal 2006: 41-43). Thus, well before the introduction of indentured labor in the 19th century, there was the forced migration of Indian slaves, and even some voluntary free labor, to the Indian Ocean colonies, in response to labor demands created by limited colonization, mainly in domestic, shipping and construction activity. Additionally, from the late 18th to the mid-19th century, the British East India Company made substantial use of several thousand Indian convict laborers transferred to prisons in Ben-coolen (Sumatra), the Andaman islands, the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore), Mauritius (British after 1815), and Burma for jungle clearing, road construction and other public works infrastructural activities (Yang 2003; Brij Lal 2006: 44).

Characteristics of 19th-Century Asian Migration

It was the 19th-century global economy, powered to a large extent by the industrial revolutions in both Britain and the USA, and by the active and unchallenged territorial expansion of the British Empire in Asia and elsewhere after 1815, which introduced a qualitatively and quantitatively new dimension into this situation. For the Chinese and the Indians, in particular, it was the stimulation of new economies well beyond the Asian context, and the active thirst for labor in previously unfamiliar destinations, combined with the century’s faster and more efficient shipping, which eventually embroiled both groups in migration beyond their traditional orbits. Roughly two million of them ventured beyond Asia, mainly to the tropical colonies and dependencies in the Carib-

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4 As many as 20,000 to Mauritius and Reunion over the century, according to one account, representing 13 percent of the servile population of these islands (Brij Lal 2006: 43).
bean, Latin America, the Indian Ocean, Africa and the Pacific, but a little less than half a million also moved on the fringes of the great European migrations to the USA, Canada and Australia. Other Asians and Pacific Islanders also followed in their wake to some tropical destinations, but this movement was dominated by Chinese and Indians.

It is worthwhile to remember that, despite the broadening of the Asian diaspora in tandem with the continued expansion of the global economy, Asian skilled and unskilled labor migrants continued to make the South and Southeast Asian region their primary destination. As mentioned earlier, 6.5 million of the 7.5 million Chinese, and 5 million of the 6.3 million Indians — 80 percent of the century’s expanded Asian migration — continued to remain on traditional terrain, as these regional economies were themselves further transformed by territorial inland occupation by the colonial powers, led above all by the example of the British in India.

In the midst of this broad picture, a noticeable feature of the 19th-century tropical migrations was the different orbits within which these two Asian groups largely traveled. While the Chinese migrations were directed to a variety of countries operating under a wide variety of political jurisdictions and widely divergent legal and labor traditions — American, British, Spanish as well as the newly independent Latin American republics of Peru and Mexico — the overwhelming majority of the Indian labor migrations went primarily to the tropical regions of the British Empire (British Caribbean, Mauritius, Natal, and after 1870, Fiji and East Africa) and only exceptionally elsewhere. This applied even within South and Southeast Asia itself, where the largest numbers went to Ceylon, Burma and Malaya (all British), while the Chinese continued to migrate as traders and workers to their (by now) familiar destinations — Thailand and the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya.

5 The laborers, if not the traders.
6 The main exceptions were the three French Caribbean territories and Reunion in the Indian Ocean (154,000); Dutch Suriname, which had a brief arrangement with the British after 1873 to import laborers from British India (34,000); and the United States, where the push/pull factors as well as the origins of the migrants were unique, and which did not follow the orthodox pattern, for reasons which are discussed later. The Spanish made abortive attempts to acquire Indian labor for Cuba in the 1880s (Tinker 1974: 274). Even Louisiana sugar planters with French Caribbean connections toyed with the idea of importing Indians in the 1860s (Cohen 1984: 48-49). There were also some small voluntary post-indenture Indian migrations to the Latin countries: Jamaica to Cuba and Central America, Trinidad to Venezuela (Look Lai 1993: 148-51; I.M.Cumpston 1953: 43-45; Sarusky 1989: 73-78).
The modern Indian labor diaspora was thus directly connected to the expansion of the tropical regions of the British Empire in the century after 1815. The removal of the French from the imperial race after 1815 paved the way for the unchallenged acquisition of a number of tropical and temperate island and mainland colonies in the middle of the century, and the peopling of these new acquisitions with fresh injections of colonists and laborers. All the new colonies added to the large food producing and raw materials sector of the Empire, but the emigration was racially divided into one of British settlers and colonists in the temperate zones (Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and Asian unskilled laborers in the tropical zones. With the exception of Malaya, which was the primary Chinese tropical destination in the 19th century (more than 6 million), the majority of the migrants to the tropical British Empire was Indian.

Given the different experiences of Western domination experienced by China and India, it is perhaps not surprising that the emigration patterns and destinations of these two countries tended to diverge somewhat. However, despite the destination differences, it is noticeable how many of the labor migrants of both countries were imported into tropical territories which needed workers for the still expanding sugar industry: the Chinese in Cuba, Peru (partially), Hawaii, plus the British, Dutch and French Caribbean, the French island of Reunion, and even tropical Queensland in Australia; the Indians everywhere beyond South and Southeast Asia (except East Africa, where they were engaged mainly in railroad building). The total number of Chinese laborers involved in producing sugar, mostly for the US market, was around 300,000, i.e. slightly less than the number of their countrymen who migrated to the United States; their Indian counterparts, producing mainly for the British Empire, numbered most of the 1.3 million who traveled beyond South and Southeast Asia, plus a large number (perhaps another 150,000) involved in the sugar industry of Malaya itself.

The overwhelming majority of these tropical sugar workers, regardless of origin or destination, were recruited under some form of the indentured labor system. In fact, the revival of the indenture system in the 19th century seems to have been connected primarily with the expansion of the global sugar industry. A recent study of 19th-century indenture (Northrup 1995) hardly mentions any other industry in its overview of how this institution functioned during the period. The author identifies the revival of this modified form of coerced labor with the end of African slavery in the British Empire, and with the sugar
planters’ need to find alternative sources of labor when problems with the traditional labor supply began to arise in the post-Emancipation period. In fact, while this was largely correct, indenture was also used in several sugar destinations which had never experienced slavery. Such was the case with Hawaii, not to mention British Empire destinations like Natal in South Africa, Fiji, and Malaya, and even tropical Queensland\(^7\) in Australia, which used the indentured labor of Pacific islanders, Indians, Chinese and, according to one author, even Italians (Gabaccia 2000: 66). Moreover, Cuba was unique in the sense that its overheated sugar industry used Chinese indentured labor, not \textit{after} the end of African slavery, but \textit{side by side with it}.\(^8\) There were numerous Cuban plantations which used slave and indentured labor simultaneously.\(^9\)

It should also be mentioned that while sugar was the main global industry employing imported indentured labor, not all large sugar-producing countries resorted to it, nor in fact was sugar the only plantation enterprise utilizing indentured labor. Java and the Philippines relied primarily on domestic labor.\(^10\) Brazil\(^11\) relied solely on its Black laborers, slave and ex-slave. In the Caribbean region, mid-sized producers Puerto Rico and Barbados relied mainly on their own workers (white campesinos and Black ex-slaves in the case of the former, ex-slaves in the case of the latter). Outside of sugar, moreover, coffee and rubber plantations in Malaya, cocoa in Trinidad, and bananas in Jamaica all used the indentured labor of Indians, alongside free and post-indentured laborers. The guano deposits in Peru (Chinese), and the mines and railways of the British Empire (Chinese in Transvaal gold mines; Indians in Uganda/Kenya railroad construction), even cotton in French Tahiti or coffee and pineapples in Hawaii (both Chinese), became destinations for Asian indentured laborers.\(^12\) In Singapore and the rest of Malaya, many South Indian indentured laborers worked in public works projects, opening up

\(^7\) Until 1859, a part of New South Wales.
\(^8\) Cuban slavery ended in 1886, while its Chinese indenture period lasted from 1847 to 1874.
\(^9\) “Flor de Cuba plantation had 409 Negroes and 170 Chinese; San Martin 452 Negroes and 125 Chinese; Santa Susana 632 Negroes and 200 Chinese” (Williams 1970: 349).
\(^10\) In 1894 Java produced 552,667 tons of sugar — twice as much as the British West Indies combined (278,559 tons) — while the Philippines produced over 191,277 tons.
\(^11\) 275,000 tons in 1894.
\(^12\) Between 1880 and 1902, the Brazilian government recruited thousands of indentured Italians on six-year contracts for the coffee plantations of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, until it was stopped by the Italian government (Gabaccia 2000: 66).
the interior and building the infrastructure (roads, railways, bridges, canals and wharves) until 1913, when indenture was officially ended.

Both groups of Asians went to countries where they formed part of a multiracial labor force — occasionally with each other, but more often with others. They also went to countries where they were the dominant element in the plantation workforce. In Cuba, Chinese worked alongside African slaves; in the British West Indies, alongside Indians and Portuguese immigrants from Madeira; in Hawaii, alongside native Hawaiians as well as other migrants from the Philippines or Japan; in Peru up to the 1880s as a majority workforce. Indians were generally part of a mixed workforce in Trinidad and Guiana during the 1860s, but by the late 1870s and after they were the majority (and often the only) group on the plantations. They were also the principal workforce on the plantations of Mauritius, Natal, and post-1890s Fiji. In Fiji before the 1890s, they worked alongside Pacific Islanders, and in Dutch Suriname after the 1890s, they shared the plantations with Indonesians from Java. By contrast, in the Windward Islands of Grenada, St Vincent and St Lucia, as well as Jamaica, and even the French West Indian islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, they labored as a minority group in a workforce still made up of mainly African ex-slaves. It was only in the Caribbean (British, French and Dutch), in the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Reunion, and in Malaya, that Chinese and Indian laborers actually worked together under similar conditions of indenture.

If sugar and indenture played such a large role in the making of the two million-strong Asian diaspora beyond South and Southeast Asia, this did not apply to the Chinese and Indian migrations to the temperate mainland countries, or to the mainstream migrations to tropical South and Southeast Asia. This observation, however, needs to be immediately qualified. Firstly, it should be remembered that the Southern planters in the USA, who included the sugar growers of Louisiana, as well as others who wanted Chinese labor for cotton in Arkansas and Mississippi, or railway construction in Alabama and Texas, were not too far removed in their thinking and practice from the broad imperial preference for non-white tropical workers which was the main feature of the century. They certainly referenced the same networks and used the same racial justifications as their planter counterparts elsewhere.13 Secondly, a large number

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13 See Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane* (Baltimore, 2006). Two thousand Chinese worked in the South in the early 1870s, brought from California, Cuba, and 400 in at
of both groups who went to Southeast Asia, especially Malaya, went under a version of the indenture arrangement. About 250,000 Indians (Brij Lal 2006: 158) and 750,000 Chinese (Chen 1923: 84-85) worked under indenture on the Malayan sugar and rubber plantations, as well as the tin mines (mainly Chinese). Thirdly, about 5,000 Chinese in the 1850s and 3,000 Indians between 1862 and 1886 worked as indentureds on the sugar plantations of tropical Queensland in Australia (Northrup 1995: 156; Brij Lal 2006: 384).

That having been said, it remains true that the 400,000 Chinese and 7,000 Indians14 who went to the USA and Canada went under different circumstances, and were largely self-driven and self-organized, if not quite as “free” as most of their European counterparts, most of whom came either as paying passengers, or were at least under no legal obligations to repay any assisted passages, whether the assistance came from state bodies, private sector sources or religious and philanthropic organizations. At that level the Asians were a marginal non-white version of the large transatlantic European movements, motivated by the same overall expectations if not necessarily destined for the same fates.15 In

least two vessels directly from China. Intense labor conflicts and court battles led to an abandonment of the experiment before the decade came to an end.

14 There were 5,000 in Canada in 1908, reduced to 700 by 1918 because of Canadian restrictions. Most relocated to the USA (Brij Lal 2006: 328). The US Census recorded 2,050 in 1900, and between 1905 and 1915, 6,359 were recorded as entering the USA (Daniels 1993: 440). See also Mazumdar (1985: 549-78).

15 The discrimination, hostility and at best ambivalence from all social classes which greeted them in these White settler temperate destinations illustrated very forcefully that this migration was not designed to be a part of the global division of labor acceptable to the metropolitan thinking of the 19th century. In stark contrast, none of these negative responses greeted Asians in the tropical agricultural “periphery” destinations, where their industry and work habits were always highly praised, and often contrasted with the “laziness” of the “native” inhabitants, whether in Southeast Asia, Hawaii, the Caribbean or Africa. (Spanish-speaking America, which formed part of the global “periphery” but was nevertheless also a settler society of Southern Europeans, displayed the same cruel prejudices of the “core” white settler countries, although post-Independence Cuba did develop a favorable image of the Chinese, mainly because of their participation in the Independence movement.) Many negative judgments made by the White press and White labor on the West Coast against the Asians’ lifestyles and culture were disregarded in Trinidad and British Guiana when raised by the African laborers.

This “double face” of Western capitalism — anti-Asian in the temperate settler countries (where Asian labor was not really needed, and entered largely of its own accord) and pro-Asian in the tropical plantation countries (where Asian labor was badly needed, and actively recruited) became a constant in the history of 19th-century Asian immigration. Writing in the 1920s, British economic historian Lillian Knowles commented on “the thorny question of the exclusion of Japanese, Chinese and Indians” as being “one of the great links between Canada, Australia, and South and East Africa.” At the same time,
North America, the Chinese were miners, railway workers, agricultural workers, laundrymen, restaurateurs and merchants; the Indians worked in lumber mills, forestry, railroads and agriculture. While the Chinese who went to the USA and Canada were of the same provincial origins (Guangdong and Fujian) as the rest of the global Chinese diaspora, the same cannot be said of the unique Indian migration to the West Coast. The 7,000 Indians who found themselves in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California in the early 1900s were Sikhs from the northwestern province of Punjab, and distinct from the rest of the Indian diaspora who were generally either Tamil and Telugu-speakers from southern Madras or Bhojpuri and Urdu-speakers from the northern United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal. The Punjabis who migrated to North America were motivated to do so, not by British imperial design, as was the case almost everywhere else in the Indian diaspora, but by network knowledge gained from fellow Punjabis who were stationed in British Hong Kong, primarily as soldiers and security personnel. Hong Kong was the main emigration port for most of the Chinese diaspora, including the voluntary North American migrations. Most of the Punjabis who migrated to North America did so from Hong Kong (Brij Lal 2006: 328).

For the mainstream Indian migrants, the push factors are more recognizable. British direct rule in India, and the land, taxation, and trade policies introduced in its wake, were largely responsible for generating disruptive push factors in the Indian countryside, which in turn created

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she acknowledged that “most people are aware of the emigration from the United Kingdom which gave an English impress to parts of three continents. Few people, however, seem to realize how important a part both Indian and Chinese emigrants have played in the development of the Empire, although the King rules over a miniature Chinese Empire in Malaya and a miniature Indian Empire in the West Indies. There have been, in fact, in the past century three mother countries of the British Empire, i.e. the United Kingdom, India and China, but the story of the latter two is at present buried in numerous reports” (Knowles 1925: viii, 50).

16 The Americans called them all “Hindus,” which they were not.

17 Except East Africa in the 1890s, where the 38,000 Kampala-Nairobi railway construction and service workers (80 percent of whom later returned to India) also came from the Punjab, recruited by the British (Brij Lal 2006: 255).

18 The larger diaspora also contained small numbers of Punjabis, many of them Sikhs.

19 The Sikh migrants who went to the West Coasts of Canada and USA were so atypical that modern analysts of the 19th-century Indian global diaspora like Hugh Tinker and Steven Vertovec do not refer to them at all.
the large pool of floating labor directed toward domestic destinations like Bengal or Assam, or to foreign destinations like Ceylon or the sugar colonies. Natural (drought and famine) and demographic (rural overpopulation) factors exacerbated the living conditions, and the southern Tamils had an independent tradition of seasonal migration to Ceylon, but the role of colonialism in disrupting the traditional economy while harnessing it to the needs of the distant British industrial revolution has been well documented (Dutt 1970; Charlesworth 1982; Dharma Kumar 1984). Chinese push factors, on the other hand, were more complex, attributable to a combination of domestically self-generated economic decline and political crisis in mid-century (the Taiping and other rebellions), and externally induced crisis (the opium wars and unequal treaties imposed by the West). In both countries, however, it is noteworthy that the migrations were confined to specific sending provinces and districts, and were proportionately quite small compared to their respective populations.

**Origins of the Migrants**

The majority of China’s migrants historically came from two southern coastal provinces, Fujian and Guangdong. This has been a tradition going as far back as the 7th century. Port cities like Quanzhou (Chuan-chow) in Fujian and Guangzhou (Canton) in southern Guangdong had established seafaring and overseas connections long before the arrival of the Western traders. Between the 7th and 15th centuries Formosa (Taiwan) was gradually colonized by Fujianese and northeastern Guangdongese seeking a base for trade with the mainland as well as Southeast Asia. Moreover, the Philippines had made direct and prolonged contacts with migrants from Fujian since the 1560s, stimulated by the newly established Manila-Acapulco connection. The Macau-Canton axis had also been an international enclave since the 16th century. The intensified foreign intrusions of the 19th century in the aftermath of the two Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60) only served to heighten the activities and migratory movements traditionally associated with these provinces. Within these broad regions, moreover, there were often several clearly identifiable micro-districts or counties with long traditions of migratory dispersal at the center of their social and community life. Zhangzhou (Changchow), Quanzhou (Chuanchow), Jinjiang in south
Fujian, Fuzhou (Foochow) in eastern Fujian, Chaozhou (Teochiu) and Jieyang (Chia-ying) in northeast Guangdong, had intimate links with the Southeast Asian nexus before the 19th century migrations began.

Interestingly, the relative importance of these two sending regions was not the same to all destinations. Most Fujianese over time migrated mainly to Southeast Asia, whereas most American-bound 19th-century migrations originated from Guangdong. The Guangdongese are themselves subdivided into the northeastern Teochiu speakers emigrating from the port city of Shantou (Swatow) and surrounding districts, and the Cantonese emigrating from the Pearl River delta region via Guangzhou (Canton), Hong Kong, and Macau. Interspersed among these groups were those in the Hakka dialect group, who lived dispersed in both provinces, but were especially concentrated in the border regions of Western Fujian and northeast Guangdong. They emigrated out of all the sending ports.\(^{20}\)

One fact which bears noting is that a number of destinations initially received indentured and contract migrants not directly from China, but via other regional or colonial connections: for example, from Malaya to Trinidad and Reunion, from Java to Suriname, from Singapore to Mauritius, from Panama to Jamaica, and from Cuba and California to Louisiana.\(^{21}\) Two of the three French vessels which sailed to Martinique and Guadeloupe in the 1860s also recruited their passengers from Shanghai, rather than Guangdong or Fujian (Cardin 2006: 179).

The links between sending and receiving regions for Indian labor migration also exhibited systematic patterns. Globally, South Indians, particularly Tamils, were the majority of the emigrants. They predominated in South and Southeast Asia, South Africa (Natal) and all the French sugar colonies, while North Indians were the majority in the British and Dutch West Indies, Mauritius and Fiji. Railway workers in East Africa were mainly Punjabis. However, Indians from the North and the South as well as other regions were present in most destinations. Two British Indian administrators, J. Geoghegan and George Grierson,

\(^{20}\) As late as the 1950s Fujianese constituted 50 percent of the Chinese population of Indonesia, 40 percent of that of Malaysia, and as many as 82 percent of that of the Philippines. By contrast, more than 90 percent of the pan-American and Hawaii Chinese before the 1970s were Cantonese. According to the *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Pan 1998), up to the 1950s, Guangdongese (northeast and southern) constituted 68 percent of the world’s overseas Chinese communities.

\(^{21}\) A vessel sailing from Hong Kong to Louisiana with 210 migrants in 1870 also picked up an extra 17 Chinese in Martinique (Cohen 1984: 107; Jung 2006: 123).
who wrote comprehensive accounts of the origins of the Indian indentured migrants going to the sugar colonies in the 1870s and 1880s (Geoghegan 1874; Grierson 1883), noted that the Bhojpuri-dialect region in northern India, for example, which the British artificially divided in the late 18th century into Bihar (westernmost Bengal) on the one hand, and eastern United Provinces on the other, was one major sending region (Hill 1995). Within the northern region, specific districts provided most of the recruits for both domestic seasonal and overseas indentured migrations. By 1910 the Sanderson Committee of Enquiry into Indian Emigration was stating that most of the migrants to the sugar colonies were recruited in three districts of the eastern United Provinces — Fyzabad, Basti, and Gonda — and that 80 percent were born in 21 districts of Bengal and the United Provinces, with a combined total area of 55,000 square miles and a population of 34 million.  

Of the Tamil and Telugu-speaking Southern Indian migrants, the Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora states as follows:

Malaya and Ceylon drew most of their Indian labor from Tamil Nadu, while Burma drew a large part of its supplies from Vizagapatnam, Coimbatore, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Malabar and Chingleput. From 1842 to 1870, Godavari, Ganjam, Madras, Chingleput, Tanjore, South Arcot, and Rajahmundry, were the principal recruiting grounds, and from 1870 to 1899 North Arcot, Vizagapatnam, Trichinopoly, Chingleput and Madras gained primacy (Brij Lal 2006: 52).

**Labor Arrangements: Free or Unfree?**

The mainstream migrations of both groups displayed a mixture of organized free migration with several types of labor arrangement which hovered between free and unfree. Throughout the 19th century, the line between the two conditions was often hard to draw, even for European labor.  

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22 Sanderson Committee Report 1910, paragraphs 68 and 77. A sizable minority also came from the outlying western regions of the United Provinces, Bengal proper and smaller surrounding states. In the initial years of the migration to the British sugar colonies (1840s and 1850s), most of the recruits were tribals from the Chota Nagpur district of southern Bihar.

23 Slavery itself did not come to a decisive end until 1886 in Cuba and 1888 in Brazil. Penal sanctions for work offenses also existed in 19th-century Britain, under an Act of 1823 which amended older master-servant legislation, but it was ended in the 1870s,
voluntary, while both Asian migrations took place under various forms of hybrid and semi-free arrangements, including some which were not far removed from the African slave trade. Legitimate questions arise about the precise ratios of coercion to freedom under all these labor arrangements.

A close look at the various mechanisms involved reveals a complex picture, even when the migrations were conducted under the supervision of the metropolitan power (USA or Britain). One thing they all seemed to share in common was the fact that the passage expenses were paid for by a third party intermediary or labor broker, and the essence of the future labor arrangement revolved around the issue of how, when and to whom these passage moneys would be repaid, in cash or in kind, and whether these arrangements were recognized by the laws of the receiving countries. This applied whether the arrangements were, in the case of the Chinese, the “credit ticket” system, the indenture system, or — on the US Southern plantations — a contract arrangement just short of indenture (Federal law having prohibited contract labor immigration on US soil since 1868).  

24 It also applied to the Indians whether they traveled under indenture or under what was called in South and Southeast Asia the kangani 25 recruitment arrangement (to be discussed later). The key questions to be answered in deciding how free the particular migration was can be summarized as follows:

- How were the migrants recruited, and who paid for and arranged their passages?
- How voluntary and legal was the recruitment and transportation process?
- How, to whom, and when were the migrants expected to repay their debts, in cash or in equivalent labor services?

whereas colonial indenture penal sanctions continued until the demise of indenture in 1917. See Holdsworth 1956: 19-20. For a discussion on the thin line between free and coerced labor in different traditions, especially in Britain and the USA, see Steinfeld and Engerman (1997: 107-26). See also the volume of essays edited by David Eltis (2002).  

24 Reinforced by the Foran Act of 1885 (Alien Contract Labor Law). However, contract labor was widely used in practice, even for Europeans. Unlike formal indenture, laborers were not physically bound to their places of work on pain of imprisonment, but their wages and property were often withheld pending repayment of their passage debts.

25 Maistry in Burma. The term kangani meant overseer or foreman, maistry meant supervisor. Both terms are derived from Tamil.
• How was the enforcement of debt or contract obligations organized? Did the law and the local courts play a part in the process, or was enforcement extralegal and/or communal, or even illegal?
• Did breaches of the formal or informal arrangements take place, at what points in the whole process, and what were the consequences, civil, criminal or other?

A close examination of the immigration process reveals that there were several kinds of arrangements simultaneously at work. There were actually two kinds of “credit ticket” arrangement, one in the temperate destinations (USA, Canada and Australia) and another in Southeast Asia. There were also two kinds of indenture arrangement, that organized by the British, and that organized by other nationalities, especially the Spanish (Cuba) and formerly Spanish (Peru). Another distinction was that between those arrangements which were technically enforceable in the local court system and those which operated beyond the law in a communal/community setting, sometimes questioned, often tacitly endorsed or even ignored by the local legal system.

Both versions of the Chinese “credit ticket” system were examples of a community-based arrangement. In both cases, the immigrant’s ticket was paid for by a labor broker based in China or the destination country. The broker recovered his debt (with interest) in one of several ways. The laborer could either accept responsibility for the debt personally26 or he could “contract” himself to an employer who would assume his debt and reimburse himself from the laborer’s wages. In both North American destinations, an overall supervision was organized by a federation of Guangdong district association bodies27 to assist migrants in finding jobs, to look after their welfare (and that of their home-based families) in case of death or indigence, and to make sure that they eventually repaid their debts from their earnings in the new society. Elaborate supervision was organized to ensure that the migrant did not abscond. For example, he could not embark on a return ship to China without being able to produce documentation of his debt repayment. The potential for abuse was always present, which was why the US immigration authorities often conducted investigations to determine whether this was

26 One writer states specifically that in the USA the debt in the 1850s was usually for $40 in gold, and the repayment period was five years at four to eight percent interest (Chang 2003: 32).
27 The Six Companies in the USA.
indeed a “voluntary” arrangement. Immigrants had to convince them that it was, but the authorities were not always convinced, hence the cloud of suspicion which always hung over the whole process. Some writers interpret the second option described above (self-contracting to an employer who assumed the debt on the migrant’s behalf) as a form of indenture. Another area in which abuse could take place was the potential for enforcement of debt repayment by illegal (including violent) means, since these debts were not recoverable in the local court system. Whether or how often this occurred is a matter of conjecture. The question applies also where a laborer might have wished to find alternative employment against the wishes of his employer or the district association umbrella body.

In Southeast Asia, especially before the 1870s, the overarching supervision of a recognized community body did not exist. In fact, the influence of the illegal secret societies was all pervasive in this environment, and abuse was rampant. The brokers and their agents were paid for the individual laborers right at the destination port by the future employers, similar to the second US option discussed above. There was no supervision over the subsequent fate of the migrants or their working conditions. Most of them ended up in the Chinese owned gambier, pepper or tapioca plantations, or in the tin mines of Malaya. Where a migrant failed to find an employer at the port, the agents would take it upon themselves to arrange for him to be employed at another destination, regardless of his wishes. Many migrants to Penang or Singapore would find themselves sold off to tobacco planters and others in Dutch Sumatra under this arrangement. At all stages of this process, the migrants were guarded closely by secret society gang members, to ensure against their running away (Campbell 1923: 4-8). So ethnically self-contained was this immigration that when the Straits Settlement became a Crown colony in 1867, a government official reported that

The government knows little or nothing of the Chinese who form the industrial backbone of these settlements (Campbell 1923: 9).

When they finally intervened in the 1870s, the Commissioners actually recommended adopting a version of the British indenture system as an improvement on this secret society-controlled “credit ticket” arrangement.

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28 The Straits Settlements was not made a Crown Colony until 1867. Prior to that it was administered from India.
29 And similar to the privately run Cuban and Peruvian indenture schemes.
This was enforced from the 1880s to 1913, when indenture was ended in Malaya.\textsuperscript{30} One source states that the number of labor contracts signed by Chinese migrants to the Straits Settlements between 1883 and 1913 was on average 25,047 annually i.e. one contract for every seven migrants (Chen 1923: 85).\textsuperscript{31} The same source also notes that a significant number who came as free passengers voluntarily chose to sign labor contracts along with those whose passages had been paid for by labor brokers, i.e. about 300,000 out of 750,000.

The main differences between the “credit ticket” arrangements and the indentured immigration lay firstly, in who controlled the operations (native Chinese intermediaries or Western recruiting agents, private or official), and secondly, in the nature of the reciprocal obligations incurred on either side. Instead of the passage debt being voluntarily repaid by the laborer after arrival, under the watchful supervision of a legitimate community body, the obligations were usually rigorously spelt out in the formal laws of the host country, and the supervisory functions were assumed by the local immigration and court system. Both the written indentured contracts and the local laws stipulated that the passage was free, but repayable in kind, i.e. by obligatory labor over a fixed period (which could range from one to eight years, depending on the recruiting destinations). In addition to promising a stated monthly wage, they also promised further benefits, such as free housing and medical care, as well as food and clothing supplies; some of the British indenture contracts even promised small land grants.\textsuperscript{32} In return, the laborer was bound to a specific plantation for a fixed term of years, his freedom of movement severely curtailed, and breaches of work regulations (desertion, absenteeism, unsatisfactory work performance, insolence toward superiors among them) punishable by fine and/or imprisonment.

There were often enough ambiguities on the ground to make the distinction between the two forms questionable, but the technical

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\textsuperscript{30} Copies of Malayan contracts can be seen in Chen 1923: 180-81.

\textsuperscript{31} Most went to the plantations and mines, and there was a category called “general unskilled labor,” but there were also some minor categories: sawyers, timber and firewood cutters; mechanics and artisans; domestic and shop coolies; sailors, fishermen, etc; and “miscellaneous” (Chen 1923: 85). When indenture came to an end in 1913, there were about 100,000 Indians and 45,700 Chinese on the rubber estates alone (Chen 1923: 93). As late as 1938, (free) Chinese still made up 17 percent of the rubber plantation workforce (28,925) of the Federated Malay States (Brij Lal 2006: 159).

\textsuperscript{32} In the case of the Indians (though not in Malaya), a free return passage home was also provided, subject to certain conditions which varied over time.
distinctions were at least clear. In addition, for the Chinese, there were important differences between the state-subsidized and state-supervised system of indentured immigration typical of the British system, operating mainly out of Hong Kong and Canton, where all recruiting and immigration personnel at both ends were paid government officials, and the infamous private enterprise-operated Latin American indenture systems of Cuba and Peru, operating out of Portuguese Macau. In fact, the manner in which the Latin Americans, with collusion from local thug elements at the China end, recruited, transported and resold their passengers (not to mention the laborer’s subsequent work experiences) made that exercise almost indistinguishable from slavery itself. Despite the existence of a body of formal laws theoretically regulating the Spanish “coolie” trade, the corrupt Spanish system virtually ignored the provisions of the law and kept condoning its numerous violations by recruiters (Chinese), shippers (of all nationalities), planters and their agents. Whether this kind of violation was inherent in the indenture system itself, or whether this illustrated the important role played by the culture of labor relations in the host countries, is a matter of opinion. The British indenture system was itself often described as a “new system of slavery,” testifying to its many contradictions and weaknesses, but there was nothing in the British Empire labor tradition to compare with what was standard practice in Cuba or Peru.

The official Chinese commission of enquiry which visited Cuba in 1873 to examine the conditions under which the Chinese lived and worked concluded that

The distinction between a hired laborer and the slave can only exist when the former accepts, of his own free will, the conditions tendered, and performs in a like manner the work assigned to him; but the lawless method in which the Chinese were — in the great majority of cases — introduced into Cuba, the contempt there evinced for them, the disregard of contracts, the indifference as to the tasks enforced, and the unrestrained infliction of wrong, constitute a treatment which is that of “a slave, not of a man who has consented to be bound by a contract.” Men who are disposed of in Havana, who are afterwards constantly, like merchandise, transferred from one establishment to another, and who, on the completion of their first agreements, are compelled to enter into fresh ones, who are detained in depots and delivered over to new masters, whose successive periods of toil are endless, and to whom are open no means of escape, cannot be regarded as occupying a position different from that of the negroes whose servitude has so long existed in the island, and who are liable to be hired out or sold at the will of their owner (Denise Helly 1993: 88-89).
Indian migrations were usually governed either by the British version of the indenture system used in all the sugar colonies or by the arrangement known as *kangani* recruitment in South and Southeast Asia (defined below). Malaya utilized both forms of arrangement, employing mainly Tamils as indentureds in the sugar and coffee sectors between 1840 and 1910, and recruiting them under the *kangani* system for the rubber plantations from 1910 to 1938. Between 1844 and 1938 when the *kangani* system was terminated, 62.2 percent of the total Indian migration to Malaya was *kangani*-assisted, and 13 percent (250,000) were of indentureds. However, as late as 1905, 40 percent of the immigration was of indentured laborers (Brij Lal 2006: 158).

There were some important differences between the indenture arrangements of the sugar colonies and those in Malaya. Firstly, before the 1870s, recruitment in Malaya did not follow the state-assisted and state-regulated pattern of the other British colonies, but was done on a private basis via speculators or via the employers and their own or private agents in India. During this period, moreover, the transportation was often handled by Indian-owned small shippers, somewhat similar to the Chinese private junk transport of Chinese laborers to Malaya during the same period (minus the secret society supervision). Secondly, the term of service was usually for one to three years, instead of five. Thirdly, the passage was not free, as it was to all the other sugar colonies, but the contract laborer was expected to repay all his original passage debts before he left the estate. Finally, there was no provision for a free return passage to India at the end of the workers’ terms of service.33

The *kangani* recruitment arrangement was informal and community based, and it was regarded as “free” by the colonial legal system and tacitly endorsed. It was in fact a mild form of debt bondage. *Kanganis* or labor headmen were influential immigrant workers sent by host country plantations back to their respective Indian villages to recruit new groups of workers on a seasonal or long-term basis. Unlike indenture, the immigrants were not bound by formal contracts or legal process, but there was an obligation owed to the *kangani* or recruiter-foreman who assumed responsibility for those recruited by him, most of them bound by extended family ties. The obligation here was more of a communal nature, as contrasted with the individualistic obligation of the indentured worker.

Unlike the Chinese “credit ticket” or even the indenture arrangement, the passage expenses and all advances were usually shouldered by the recruiting plantations themselves through the *kanganis*, and there were no third party money brokers, private or State. The Sanderson Committee Report of 1910 estimated the debt obligation of the average migrant laborer to be about ten rupees, which it was expected he would repay within two years. But this debt obligation was handled in a communal fashion, and not subject to legal process:

...[T]here is no obligation which can be enforced by legal process. The debt remains a debt to the *kangany*, not to the estate, and the coolie is at any time free to claim his discharge from the latter on giving a month’s notice.

...[T]hough each cooly’s name appears upon the estate check roll, and the pay earned by him or her separately calculated, the earnings of the members of a family group are held, in some sort, in common, though the women are almost invariably given for their own use any extra pay which their diligence or skill may have earned for them over and above the ordinary rates of wage.

Similarly, each member of such a family group considers him[self] or herself liable for the joint debt of the group, and in the event of the death or desertion of one of its members the surviving or remaining members regard it as a point of honour to accept liability for his share of the common debt. This is a practice which is ingrained in the customs and traditions of the Tamil agricultural labourers, and the acceptance of such liability is with them... a point of honour.\(^34\)

The Committee carried the following description of the role of the *kangani*:

This system, commonly called the “kangany system”, is...of a purely patriarchal character in its origin and principles. The kangany, or labor headman, was in the beginning, and still is in a large number of the older and more solidly established estates, the senior member of a family group composed of his personal relatives, to whom may be added other families drawn from villages in Southern India from the vicinity of which he and his relatives also come. The labour force thus formed is subdivided into a number of smaller groups, each under its patriarch, the sub- or *silara* kangany; and the family principle is further manifested in the groups which are under these minor headmen, a man with his wife and children, and, it may be, one or more close relations assuming joint liability for advances made to them, and holding their earnings, in some sort, in common.

\(^34\) Sanderson Committee Report 1910, paragraphs 110-12.
The head kangany, as patriarch of the whole labour force under his charge, transacts or supervises all the financial affairs of the estate with his coolies, with the exception of the payment of their wages. On a single estate there may be, and often are, several head kanganies. Often the head kangany is the sole debtor to the estate, he being the medium through whom all advances are made, the sub-kangany, and, it may be, his own personal gang of labourers, owing him money, while the remainder of his coolies are responsible for their debts, individual or collective, to the sub-kanganies. In most of the older and more firmly established estates, the sub-kanganies and their coolies owe more money to their head kangany than the latter owes to the estate, and in such instances the head kangany, apart from being the head and the organiser of the labour force, actually assists the estate to finance its coolies.35

Thus, compared to the indenture contract, the kangani arrangement was more flexible. However, from the recommendations made by the Sanderson Committee in 1910 for its improvement, it would appear that even this technically free labor arrangement was not without its defects. Most of these concerned the possibility of abuse and corruption by the kanganis themselves, to whom was entrusted the exclusive task of mediating between planters and their workforce, even of disbursing workers’ payments.36 Despite its problems, this method of recruiting migrant labor from India was preferred in South and Southeast Asia over the indentured contract system, and was the exclusive arrangement used after 1910 until its demise in 1938 (Malaya) and 1940 (Ceylon), when immigration from India was banned by the Indian government due to the conditions produced by the world Depression.

Free Migration

All of the previously mentioned forms of emigration are distinguished from late-century and turn-of-the-century voluntary migration of family, trader, and artisan elements. Contrary to a common perception, quite a lot of the century’s Asian migration was free, voluntary and self-financed (i.e. not bound by any form of debt bondage arrangement). Most of the Chinese migration to Southeast Asia after the 1870s, which included the small traders who flocked to French Indochina, plus a minority of those who went to North America or Australia, would seem

36 At least in Ceylon.
to be in this category. In Malaya alone, free Chinese migrants outnumbered contract migrants by six to one after the 1870s.

In addition, many of the British Empire destinations attracted a large number of Indian merchants and other service migrants, most of them coming from the traditional trading regions rather than from the provinces of origin of the laborers. Thus, hundreds of Gujaratis, Punjabis, Sindhis and others from the northwestern region of India diverted older mercantile networks to the new Empire locations in East and South Africa, as well as the Indian Ocean sugar islands, and later, Fiji. South Indian merchant and money-lending communities were also very active in Southeast Asia and even in French Indo-China, numbering several thousands in a rotating cycle of migration and remigration. In Malaya and Burma alone, some 20 percent of the Indian communities in the 1930s were from the trader class. This does not include the hundreds in South and Southeast Asia who worked as minor functionaries within the colonial bureaucracy. In Malaya alone, it has been estimated that between 1844 and 1931, there were 643,000 “non-labor” migrants (Brij Lal 2006: 59).

For the Chinese outside of Southeast Asia, late voluntary migration generally went to most of the earlier destinations to which the indentureds had originally gone, as well as to totally new destinations within the region. These were often small-scale chain movements based on family, clan, and village networks. In some destinations special local factors played a key role, such as the increased Latin America/Caribbean inflow after the closure of destinations like the USA following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, or special welcoming policies organized by local governments like Porfirio Diaz’s Mexico (1876-1911). Republican Cuba also imported several thousand free Chinese and other workers for the sugar industry during and after World War I. Most of these workers remained in Cuba, and constituted the core of Cuba’s prosperous Chinese small business community in the 1940s and 1950s. In certain destinations, the late free migration of Chinese actually outnumbered those who went in the original indenture phase. This was the case in destinations like Jamaica, Panama, and Mauritius, where very few indentureds went in the initial immigration. It was also the case in places like Mexico, Venezuela and parts of Central America where there had been no indentured immigrants in the first period.

The ex-indentureds of both groups also engaged in quite a lot of remigration between territories near and far. Many Indians who had returned to India later came back voluntarily to their original plantation
destinations (or often alternative destinations) under new circumstances. They were described in the immigration reports as “casuals” or “passengers” (Look Lai 1993: 227). A minority even re-indentured themselves a second time, often to new sugar destinations. Even among those who did not return to India, there was a significant amount of relocating from one territory to another after indenture. Indians relocated from the smaller West Indian islands (both British and French) to Trinidad and Guiana; they migrated to Venezuela and Guiana from Trinidad; to Cuba, Costa Rica, and Panama from Jamaica; to Suriname and Trinidad from Guiana. They also moved from Mauritius and Reunion to Madagascar or South and East Africa.

The Chinese, who did not have a right to a return passage to China, often remigrated within their regional nexus: from Cuba, Peru and the West Indies to the United States; from Guiana to other Caribbean territories (Suriname, French Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Colon in Panama). In the Indian Ocean they moved like the Indians between Reunion and Mauritius, Mauritius and Seychelles, and all of these and Madagascar or South Africa. Several small communities of ex-Cuban Chinese were already living in the East and South of the United States before the Civil War in the 1860s. Interestingly, the movements to the USA were not all one-way: several hundred Chinese left California and the rest of the US West after the Exclusion Act of 1882, and headed for Mexico and several countries in Central America.

*Adjustment and Assimilation across Diasporas*

The Chinese and Indians evolved diverse (and divergent) models of adapting to their new environments. The foremost issue for Chinese diaspora minorities was the nature of the formal restraints on mobility in the new societies, and the range of options allowable in any given society. The levels and expressions of welcome for the Chinese migrants varied from society to society, and indeed from period to period within any given society. These manifested themselves in the form of laws passed by the local legislatures, laws which might be inspired either by elite policymaking imperatives (ranging from racism to legitimate or illegitimate elite power concerns) or by pressures emanating from below, from constituency sentiment. Local sentiment itself may be influenced by quite different factors in different environments. The immigration exclusion laws of the USA in 1882 were concessions to the fears on the
part of white trade union elements resentful of job competition from the Chinese in a period of economic contraction, as much as a reflection of an overall racism in the white settler societies toward non-white immigration. Laws passed in northern Mexico expelling the Chinese during and after the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century were designed to address the popular resentment against a successful entrepreneurial and trader class perceived to be inimical to the interests of an incipient left nationalism (Hu-de Hart 1980; Jacques 1974). Restraints existed not only in the laws, but also in the form of informal pressures to confine the Chinese immigrant to certain levels of advancement, and certain physical and social spaces acceptable to the local power elites and local public opinion. Cuban post-indenture restrictions on mobility were not necessarily duplicated in Peru or the British West Indies; modern post-colonial Southeast Asian societies exhibit markedly different levels of tolerance toward their Chinese fellow citizens.

Other factors influencing assimilation include not just the range of concrete options open to the migrant in any given environment, but the migrants’ own attitudes to these options, and also the nature of the difficulties (financial, competitive or otherwise) they faced in making the transition from laborer or artisan to trader, in different societies. There were marked differences in levels of wealth acquisition, social status, and acceptance for the middleman minorities of Southeast Asia and Mauritius, Cuba and Trinidad. There were also marked differences between the middleman-minority experiences of these countries and the discriminatory ghetto-like minority experience in the white majority temperate industrial societies. As Edgar Wickberg and others like Lynn Pan have pointed out, up to the 1960s at least, the Chinese in Southeast Asia might feel culturally vulnerable, but they could take pride in a history of economic success and local preeminence. In North American and other metropolitan societies, the Chinese were conscious of being marginal both culturally and economically (Pan 1998: 118). The tasks facing, and the options open to, these groups in overcoming their unique local restraints were thus quite specific. In the metropolitan white majority societies, the struggle to change official national self-definitions from a Eurocentric model to a multicultural model constituted the basis of one kind of challenge. In Southeast Asia and the rest of the Third World, the need to effect some form of *modus vivendi*, first with the specific European colonizers, and later with the forces of anti-colonial nationalism and independence, constituted another. Responses to the latter challenge have not been uniform. Some communities have
chosen assimilation, some a form of plural integration into the local elite; many have chosen to remain a tactful and marginal petit-bourgeoisie within their host countries, while equally many have chosen flight and remigration to more receptive environments (which may be either regional or metropolitan).

Outside of the Asian region, Indian assimilation to their new host societies over time has taken on three basic models of multicultural adjustment: where the community is numerically large enough to create a competitive pluralism not only in the culture but also in the politics of the host country; where Indians have remained a culturally and politically marginal minority; and where the evolution is within a multicultural metropolitan environment with steadily evolving policies toward racial minorities. Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, and Fiji — all with sugar-based immigrant communities formed in the 19th century — are examples of the first type. In all of these societies Indians form close to or more than 40 percent of the new society and their numbers have given them constituency strength and aspirations to state power on a scale achieved by no area of the Chinese diaspora. The second model is divided between two distinct types: those societies where Indian numerical marginality is accompanied by economic underachievement (low status agricultural workers and peasants), and those where migrant economic achievement is identical to the middleman minority status achieved by most Chinese overseas communities in the tropical Third World. Jamaica, the British Caribbean islands of Grenada, St Lucia, and St Vincent (collectively the Windwards), also the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, are examples of the former type of marginality. East Africa, where 80 percent of the indentured Sikh railway workers returned to India after their period of service, and where later Hindu and Muslim Gujarati and Punjabi traders came to dominate the local middle sector, represents the latter type. The third model, a metropolitan one, is a mid-to-late 20th-century...
development, since Indian migration to the temperate industrial countries — barring the small Punjabi Sikh migration to North America mentioned before — basically started after World War II, with the migrations to Britain after the 1950s and to North America since the 1970s.

With the exception of the third model and the East African model, all the areas of the Indian diaspora mentioned above differ from the Chinese diaspora in the sense that the majority of their communities have continued to remain largely agricultural communities, often — though not everywhere — still tied to sugar. Their economic and professional middle classes are made up of a combination of upwardly mobile sectors of a larger community still tied to agriculture in some form, and distinct immigrant trader groups who arrived during and after indenture from provinces other than those from which the indentured workers came, viz. mainly Gujarat and Punjab.\(^{40}\) These latter groups are prominent in all destinations except the Caribbean, although even here there was the exception that proved the rule: one of the most prominent Trinidadian Indian merchant families up to the 1980s was an enterprising Sindhi family who migrated to the island, one brother in 1926 and the other in 1949.\(^{41}\)

Assimilationist challenges have not been experienced or posed in quite the same fashion for both groups, even where both Indians and Chinese have formed part of a vigorous expanded pluralistic entity of small and large commercial entrepreneurs. Differing group cultural attitudes, as well as differing host society attitudes toward both groups, have played a role in this differentiation. In the former sugar colonies, host society attitudes toward the Indians can be influenced by a combination of related factors: local group interactions (or the lack thereof); international group perceptions (as received and interpreted locally); the location of the migrants within the local social stratification system, in the past as well as the present; but, above all, the fear of ethnic political domination in politically insecure environments. It should be noted, however, that throughout the Third World, including many of the countries of Southeast Asia with its large and influential Chinese presence, the challenges of multiculturalism are quite different from the challenges of multiculturalism posed to a metropolitan white-majority society.

\(^{40}\) The trader class in South and Southeast Asia come from a wider base, including many from South India.

\(^{41}\) Murldar (1907-1957) and “Ram” (1924-1985) Kirpalani: see Brereton, Samaroo and Taitt (1998: 68). A miniscule migration of Sindhi and Gujarati merchants to the West Indies in the 1930s and 1940s is discussed in Hanoomansingh (1996: 272-342).
Fledgling nations evolving out of colonialism often have no patience with the complexities of multiculturalism, especially where there is disagreement on whether its recognition would erode the economic and/or political aspirations of the dominant majority. Ironically, the temperate regions which manifested the most virulent forms of anti-Asian racism in the 19th century have since the late 20th century largely lost their sense of racial exclusiveness, while the entire post-colonial tropical world has seen a more problematic dynamic developing among the multicultural successors to the departed colonialists.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to locate the worldwide movements of Asians, especially Asian labor, in the developmental stage of global capitalism in the 19th century. It has tried to distinguish between two types of labor movement in this century: the one involving Asians moving toward the tropical plantation “periphery,” where their labor was needed and actively recruited, and the other involving those moving toward the margins of the temperate white settler majority destinations, where they went largely on their own self-organized initiative. The reception and treatment received by the Asians in both types of destinations (at least from the host governments) differed profoundly, depending on the extent of their perceived indispensability to the local economic environments in which they found themselves. Even within the tropical and semi-tropical plantation destinations, however, the treatment they received was not uniform, and the levels of labor exploitation varied widely, firstly between those destinations where a powerful white settler minority society also existed (e.g. Latin America or Southern Africa), and those where it did not; secondly between those destinations where the immigration was under Western control, and those where the migrant laborers were under the informal control of their own kinfolk. Moreover, there was considerable variation between the various Western “periphery” colonies themselves, not just because of the relative local indispensability of Asian migrant labor or the strength of their minority white planter class, but also because of the different pre-existing cultural attitudes toward labor in general, and toward non-White labor in particular, within the different colonizing traditions. All of these variations help to explain not only the different manifestations and levels of anti-Asian racism, but also the mobility and/or assimilation opportunities available to the
Asian migrant within any given context, as well as the character of each society’s subsequent multiculturalism.

Clearly, we have barely scratched the surface of this topic, and better disciplinary tools will be required to fuse this macro-historical perspective with more sensitive understanding of micro processes. Our sole purpose in this modest overview was to locate and connect the multiple micro-movements of Asian labor within a larger 19th-century narrative, one that generated large-scale movements of laboring people of many and varied origins on a scale unprecedented before the age of industry and empire.

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Introduction

Throughout the world and over the course of the last two centuries, wherever Chinese immigrants have settled in any appreciable numbers and established themselves as an ethnic community, sooner or later negative reaction from those around them would arise, resulting in outbreaks of sinophobia (or antichinismo in Spanish), ranging from angry discourse to physical violence and extreme measures of ethnic cleansing. This phenomenon in the Chinese diaspora, which is by now unremarkable and arouses little controversy, has often been compared to the anti-Semitism experienced by the Jews in diaspora. In both cases, the resentment has something to do with the target group’s ethnic distinctiveness, clannishness, foreign-ness and, simultaneously troubling and intriguing, their perceived excessive success in limited but distinct occupations, especially in shopkeeping or local commerce.

Indeed, throughout the Americas where Chinese immigrants have settled from the north to the south, anti-Chinese agitation has been a frequent occurrence. The vast region comprising Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) presents no exception to the pattern already well established in the histories of Canada and the United States; it is just not nearly as well studied. Where colonial empires collided in violence and competition, LAC is also a cauldron of interaction and miscegenation among Europeans, Africans, and native peoples. Asians as relative late-comers have added to this volatile and creative multicultural and multi-racial mix, producing such cultural luminaries as the Afro-Chinese

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modernist painter Wilfredo Lam of Cuba, and the Indo-Caribbean writer and Nobel prize winner V.S. Naipaul of Trinidad. Then there is President Alberto Fujimori of Peru, son of Japanese immigrants who found himself indicted for crimes against humanity in the country he once ruled as a South American *caudillo* (military strongman) (Murakami 2007).¹

There have been recurrent anti-Asian attacks, verbal and physical, sometimes as part of general anti-foreign or xenophobic campaigns. Among the most egregious was the Peruvian government’s compliance with U.S. demands to round up its Japanese immigrants for deportation and incarceration in American concentration camps during World War II (Gardinier 1981; Masterson 2004: 166-74). But nothing against Asians in the hemisphere compared to the manifestations of specifically anti-Chinese hostility in geographical prevalence, regularity, persistence, and endurance, beginning shortly after the Chinese arrival in the mid-19th century. Among the Asians, Chinese constituted the earliest, largest and most widely-distributed immigrant group, their presence felt in practically every independent nation and Western colony of the Americas. Occurring so predictably, these attacks took on an aura of inevitability. Similar charges against the Chinese reverberated across the landscape: cheap Chinese labor taking jobs away from the locals, or depressing local wages; unscrupulous business practices driving out local competition; moral depravity corrupting national culture; Chinese men taking local wives and debauching national womanhood. In short, their inherent inassimilability (owing to both unwillingness and inherent inability) meant they would never integrate into local society, thus constituting a troubling, permanent alien presence.

But if the attacks were regular and predictable, the progression and resolution of Chinese-local conflicts did not always fall into familiar patterns. To be sure, there were many common characteristics, as already alluded to above, and these bear close examination. Equally important were the divergences in planning, execution, and outcome. Why did some anti-Chinese campaigns fizzle while others escalated? Why did some break out ostensibly as spontaneous grassroots mob actions, while others had markings of well organized campaigns from above? Some

¹ The title of this newly published, extensive analysis on the Fujimori presidency invokes Fujimori’s nickname, “El Chino,” a term applied by Spanish-speaking Latin Americans to all Asians regardless of ethnicity or nationality. Against the history of Japanese-Peruvian internment during World War II, the election of a Peruvian of Japanese descent to the presidency was particularly ironic and poignant.
movements were spearheaded by working-class elements, while others were clearly middle-class in character. What conditions gave rise to anti-Chinese animus, which appeared easy to provoke, and in what environment or context did such animosity escalate and degenerate into large-scale violence? This article seeks to provide a comparative and analytical examination of several cases of anti-Chinese mob attacks and organized campaigns, in order to understand the sources and nature of sinophobia (antichinismo or chinofobia) in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Looming large over this region and over this story was the United States, whose own history of first recruiting Chinese labor to open up the American West, then turning on the laborers in virulent attacks followed by the enactment of barely disguised, sometimes laughably clumsy, anti-Chinese discriminatory laws and policies that amounted to harassment, culminating in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, served as an inspirational role model for the rest of the Americas in tackling their own “Chinese question” (Miller 1969; Lyman 1974; Sandmeyer 1972; Saxton 1971; Barth 1964; Peffer 1999; Pfälzer 2007; E. Lee 2003; Wu 1972).

If much of the attention of this study is focused on Mexico, it reflects the frequency and intensity of anti-Chinese attacks and campaigns there, a fact that has piqued the interest lately of Mexican historians, who have begun to study the formation of Chinese communities in many states, and to expose and document the many instances of anti-Chinese attacks (Cinco Basurto 1999; Ramírez Camacho 1975; Romero Guzmán 1998; J.L. Chong 2006; Sosa Flores 1990; Cauich Carrillo 1998; Martínez Marin 1995; Becerra Juárez 1981; Ang Rivera 2008).2 Also, it was in Mexico that the largest mass massacre of Chinese in the Americas

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2 This list represents works by Mexican university students who have written theses on the Chinese question and anti-Chinese persecution and campaigns, most of which focusing on one state. Most of these are unpublished, and I thank Óscar Enrique Ang Rivera, 2008 graduate in History from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa for locating these and sharing them with me. While a few were written more than 20 years ago, most are recent works, indicating perhaps a growth in interest among young Mexican historians in the Chinese topic. Ang Rivera has a Chinese paternal grandfather whom he never knew; Chong is Chinese Mexican, and Cinco Basurto is close to her part-Chinese father. Her surname “Cinco” (meaning the number 5 in Spanish) is commonly assumed by Mexican Chinese, and is the translation of the Cantonese surname “Ng” which Mexicans find difficult to pronounce. This is a good example of how Chinese immigrants adapted to local circumstances, in this case, a linguistic challenge.
occurred, and only in Mexico did Chinese experience mass expulsion anywhere in the Americas.

Moreover, Mexico developed in the shadow of the eagle, the United States, just across the border from northern Mexico where most Chinese immigrants (almost all men) had settled, called home, formed families with Mexican women, and prospered. In short, Mexico was on the road to assimilation and integration. Across this border, not only did the Chinese forge transnational relationships with fellow immigrants and co-ethnics in California and Arizona and seek help from American business partners and the American government, but Mexican sino-phobes also found inspiration in, modeled their behavior and practices on, and freely borrowed from their American counterparts in dealing with the critical question of racial purity. Throughout the Americas, the issue of Chinese immigrants and their occupations aroused strong passions. At the same time, scholars who have examined sinophobia and anti-Chinese movements inevitably raise the question: were the Chinese an indispensable enemy, or convenient scapegoats (Saxton 1971)?

Migration to Latin America and the Caribbean in the 19th to Early 20th Century: An Overview

On the eve of the abolition of slavery in the early 19th century, the British who had no intention of abandoning the production and export of lucrative agricultural crops were already thinking ahead and looking for alternative sources of cheap, docile and unskilled manual labor. They found the answer in Asian indentured servitude, beginning with the transport of an experimental shipload of 192 contracted Chinese to Trinidad in 1806. By the time slavery definitively ended in the British, French and Dutch Caribbean in the 1830s, the British had added East Indian “coolies” from their empire in the subcontinent to the labor program, their numbers eventually surpassing the Chinese many times over.

Meanwhile, the Spaniards with their booming sugar plantations in Cuba also turned to Chinese workers to supplement a dwindling and increasingly costly African slave labor force which they did not emancipate until 1886. Between 1847 and 1874, Cuban planters conducted the “yellow trade,” importing about 125,000 Chinese coolies under eight-year contracts. Without slaves or a ready supply of indigenous laborers who remained in their highland villages, Peruvian landowners imported another 90,000 Chinese coolies to work the coastal guano mines and
During the same century, 18,000 or so Chinese indentureds were sent to Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica, British Honduras (Belize) and Bahamas (in that order). A few thousands went to the Dutch colony of Suriname, while the French colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guiana (Cayenne) introduced about one thousand. The Chinese constituted a far smaller number than the approximately half a million East Indian contract laborers sent to the same places. In addition to the Asians, about 40,000 Portuguese, mainly from the islands of Madeira, Cape Verde and Azores, also went under indenture. While contract workers on the Caribbean plantations were no doubt treated much like slaves, in fact the indenture system constituted a transition from slave to free labor in the Americas. The history of this phase of Asian migration to the Americas has been well documented elsewhere (Look Lai 1989, 1993; Hu-DeHart 1992, 1998; Roberts and Byrne 1966; Moore 1988; Girondin 1986; Hall 1998).

In all these labor migrant communities, especially in the Chinese ones, women were few. A gross gender imbalance made it difficult for the community to reproduce itself in the diaspora, and affect the nature and opportunities for Chinese-local interactions in the communities where they settled, as will be seen later in this study.

Chinese migration to the Caribbean at this time was not only part of a global movement of diverse labor migrants to the islands, but the approximately 150,000 who ended up in the Caribbean were part of a massive out-migration of Chinese men from the mid-19th century onward to all parts of the Americas, especially the newly opened western part of the United States with an insatiable demand for cheap labor in a labor-scarce environment. Almost all of these male migrants to the Americas came from a handful of districts in the southern province of Guangdong, a smaller number from nearby Fujian. The Cantonese speakers were identified as punti (local), to distinguish themselves from the hakka (guest people), who wandered south from northern China generations ago. Compared to LAC, the history of Chinese migration to the United States has been extensively studied and documented, with Canada a distant second (Barth 1964; Miller 1969; Chan 1986; Kwong and Miscevic 2005; Ward 1978; Ng 1999; K.S. Chang 2007).

Even before formal indenture had expired in Cuba in the 1880s, a second movement consisting of free and voluntary Chinese migration to Latin America and the Caribbean had begun, spurred unquestionably by the onset of Chinese exclusion in the U.S. in 1882. Mexico became the preferred destination, in large part due to its long, open border with
the United States West and Southwest. At exactly the same time along this same northern frontier and borderlands in Mexico, economic development stimulated by U.S. investment in railroad construction, mining and commercial agriculture created new labor demands and commercial opportunities which attracted Chinese and other immigrants including some Japanese, many North Americans from Canada and the United States, as well as Germans, Italians, French, Middle Easterners and the very familiar Spaniards. Peru and Cuba, with their history of Chinese migration, also received significant numbers of immigrants, as did the rest of the Americas where development was taking place, such as canal and railroad construction in Panama and the opening of saltpeter (nitrate) mines in Chile (Tam 2006; Chou 2004). As in the earlier wave, these migrants were valued initially for their labor, and were almost exclusively male.

Some secondary or re-migration within the Americas would also characterize Chinese mobility during these two centuries. For example, in the mid-to-late 19th century, Chinese businessmen from California, Mexico and Peru went to set up commercial enterprises in Cuba; from Guyana to Jamaica and Trinidad to seek better economic opportunities; from Jamaica and Guyana to Panama to work on the canal. During the 19th century, the experience of the Chinese in the British colonies and in the Spanish colony of Cuba diverged in one significant way. In Cuba, because of the massive and tightly managed contract labor system, Chinese migrants remained in agricultural work on the plantations until the 1880s, the last contingent of coolies working off the remaining years of their eight-year contracts. By contrast, in Guyana, Trinidad and especially Jamaica, they found ways, shortly after their arrival, to abandon the fields for the towns where they quickly established themselves in local commerce. But by the 20th century, few Chinese anywhere in the Caribbean were still involved in agriculture, except in the handful of

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3 This border was only recently established as a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which the United States of Manifest Destiny forced upon a weakened Mexico upon its defeat by the U.S. in the Mexican War of 1846. When this new border was drawn, two frontiers had collided and converged into a new boundary and a space appropriately and usefully dubbed “borderlands.” It is in these borderlands that Chinese have carved out a productive but turbulent history increasingly being recognized as “transnational” and “transborder” by historians, one that informs the histories of both the United States and Mexico. A similar phenomenon has developed along the U.S.-Canadian border (Katz 1983; Chao Romero 2003; Delgado 2004; Truett 2006; E. Lee 2005; K.S. Chang 2007).
extraordinary cases of Chinese sugar plantation and mill owners in Cuba (Chuffat Latour 1927: 70-89). By the early 20th century, Chinese everywhere in the Caribbean had seemingly gone into their own businesses as merchants and shopkeepers. To be more precise, Chinese merchants in Cuba and Peru were more likely to be free migrants of the later 19th and early 20th century, rather than coolies who survived the harsh regimen of the plantations.

That was certainly the case of the Chinese in Mexico, who were originally desired by the development-minded government of dictator Porfirio Díaz, who unified Mexico politically under his iron rule, fought the Mayan, Yaqui and Apache Indians to submission if not total and permanent defeat, and invited foreign investment from the United States and Europe to build railroads, open mines, and clear land for commercial agriculture. In view of the large supply of subsistence peasants and shortage of experienced industrial workers, some members of Díaz’ brain trust advised him to look outside Mexico for human resources. Identifying China immediately as a possible source, Mexico opened negotiations with the Qing government resulting in the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1899 that included a “most favored nation clause.” By the time this treaty was signed, there were already 2,718 recorded Chinese immigrants in the country, the majority in the northern and southern border states. The Chinese were also attracted to Sinaloa state on the Pacific, where Mazatlán was a major port of entry for Pacific steamships arriving with immigrants from China proceeding to Tampico on the Gulf coast, site of Mexico’s first petroleum fields owned by the British Pearson company (Hu-DeHart 2004: Table 1; Salazar Anaya 1996). In all these locations, the Chinese quickly and effectively established themselves as small manufacturers, shopkeepers and retail merchants, at the same time providing services such as laundry, tailoring, shoe repair, food preparation and hotels or boarding houses for single men. Whenever land was available, they quickly took to

4 There was one notable exception to this pattern: Chinese and Koreans were both recruited in the 19th century to work in the henequen (sisal) plantations of the southern state of Yucatán, which, significantly, lies on the Caribbean coast. Hence, this particular case conformed closely to the Caribbean labor model, particularly that of Cuba. In fact, Cuban planters actually recruited Chinese and Korean workers from the Yucatán plantations to work in their own estates, much as, in the immediately post-Civil War era, Mississippi and Louisiana planters recruited Chinese workers from the Cuban plantations (Jung 2006). This fascinating pattern of inter-American Chinese labor migration and recruitment is known, but barely studied, and merits serious research attention.
It may not be possible to locate and document the first indisputable case of anti-Chinese attack in LAC, but based on what we know about anti-Chinese hostility and aggression, it would be difficult to make a case for its saliency during the plantation labor period. In the coastal guano mines of Peru, Chinese laborers worked alongside some Peruvians and imported Pacific Islanders called “kanakas,” who did not survive (Méndez 1987). On the plantations, the Chinese coolies labored largely by themselves; as virtual slaves, they of course attempted to flee, individually and in groups. Impressively, small numbers managed to escape to the Amazon, where they formed scattered pioneer colonies, growing rice, interacting with native communities, and later serving as guides and cultural brokers to early Europeans exploring the region (Lausent 1986).5 They only incurred the wrath of Peruvians when they allied with the conquering Chilean Army in the War of the Pacific in 1879-1883, when they seized the opportunity to buy themselves freedom by helping the Chileans defeat the Peruvians in the long simmering contest for the lucrative nitrate fields of Iquique. When Chilean commanders grabbed the nitrate fields from Peru, they also incorporated many of the Chinese who followed them to victory into the saltpeter work force (Chou 2004: 149-54).

In the British West Indies, the Chinese for the most part did not stay long enough on the plantations to have provoked much reaction from the other workers. In Cuba, on the other hand, there was a large number of Chinese coolies (125,000) who were concentrated in sugar plantations where they worked closely alongside large numbers of black slaves, men and women, as well as white administrators, and a history of unbroken, though not long, indenture from 1847 to about 1888 (when the last contracts expired). Such factors were responsible for making Cuba into

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5 Isabel Lausent has not only discovered and documented the intriguing story of Chinese escape and adaptation to the Amazon, but also the erasure of this history in Peru’s official historical narrative by a government and a country that did not want to credit Chinese coolies as pioneers in the opening of the resource-rich Amazon as part of Peru’s national patrimony.
a good laboratory for observing inter-ethnic relationships among white, black and Chinese. Armed with a piece of paper that spelled out (in Spanish and Chinese) their obligations to the planters and their own rights as contract laborers, yet acutely aware of their everyday life in a work environment suffused with the history and practices of slavery, the Chinese insisted to whomever would listen that they were neither black nor slaves (Yun 2008; Metzger 2008). Cuban authorities seemed to be equally sensitive to this dicey situation, and tried to defuse tension when possible. In 1864, a local official appealed to any administrative judge for guidance on “whether or not it is permitted to transfer asiáticos to personas de color,” because one asiático resisted being owned by la negra Antonia, who had bought his contract from a white man. The judge ruled that, given the Chinese man’s resistance, “because he considers himself superior by race to the black person who owns him,” it was best to return him to his original white master. In a most telling moment, he reasoned that it was not “convenient” to allow gente de color to enjoy the same superiority as white masters over the colonos asiáticos (Hu-DeHart 1998: 82).

For their part, slaves on the plantations viewed the Chinese men and their strange ways warily and with some curiosity, but no particular animus or disdain. Take this remark by slave Esteban Montejo on opium-smoking, a habit which the slaves never picked up: “The Chinese were very fond of opium, I don’t think they knew it was harmful. They smoked it in long wooden pipes, hidden away at the back of the shops so Whites and Blacks wouldn’t see them, although no one was ever persecuted for smoking opium in those days” (Montejo 1968: 94). Not surprisingly, there was conflict between the two groups; antipathy toward each other was spontaneous.

Chinese coolies reacted to the harshness of the plantation regimen in much the way that the slaves did: they rebelled individually and collectively; they committed suicide (by plunging into wells or overdosing on opium); they torched buildings and crops; they engaged in various forms of sabotage; frequently they ran away (Hu-DeHart 2005). They seemed fully aware of the laws ostensibly enacted for their welfare and protection, but seldom enforced. During their indenture, hundreds of coolies filed complaints about the “baneful laws and evil deeds of Spain” (Cuba Commission Report 1993).

The concluding and most dramatic chapter of the Chinese coolie experience in Cuba came at the end, closely intertwined with Cuba’s protracted struggle for independence from Spain, which also brought
about the definitive end of slavery and Chinese indenture. At the most
crucial moments of their co-existence, slaves and coolies, black and Chi-
nese, were able to transcend their differences, their occasional antipathy
toward each other, and all other sources of conflict, to join in the strug-
gle for Cuban independence, both realizing that their own personal
freedom was intrinsically tied to the fate of Cuba as a nation. *Chinos mambises* or Chinese freedom fighters joined with their white and black
counterparts and fought under white and black commanders, as well as
their own Chinese commanders, such as José Tolon, José Bu, José Fong
and Andrés Cao. José Bu so distinguished himself in valor and leader-
ship that after independence, he was accorded the same right as Máximo
Gómez and Carlos Roloff “to be elected president of the Republic” (Hu-
DeHart 1998: 84; López 2006). Regarded as national heroes by Cubans
since that moment, their place in Cuban history has been secured by a
special tribute coined by fellow patriot Gonzalo de Quesada: “There has
never been a Chinese Cuban deserter, nor a Chinese Cuban traitor.”
Later in the century, renowned Cuban writer Severo Sarduy, who traced
his own ancestry to the coolie trade, proclaimed, “Three cultures, at
least, have been superimposed to constitute the Cuban — Spanish, Afri-
can and Chinese” (Sarduy 1994: 154).

If plantation laboring did not engender any particularly virulent or
sustained anti-Chinese antagonism, local commerce produced the
opposite effect, almost from the moment Chinese shopkeepers arrived
on the scene. While indentured Chinese struggled to survive under mis-
erable conditions on Cuban plantations, their compatriots in the British
West Indies quietly escaped a similar fate by deserting agricultural labor
for local commerce in villages, towns and cities. As early as the 1850s
and 1860s, Chinese in Trinidad were seen cultivating vegetables in gar-
den plots which they then peddled. By the 1880s and 1890s, “Chinese
shops” selling fruits and vegetables were noted everywhere on the island,
especially in the capital of Port of Spain. During this time, they also
expanded to the “cacao frontier” where they developed close commer-
cial relationships with small cacao producers. Usually short of cash,
these peasant producers bartered their cacao for provisions with the

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6 “No hubo un chino cubano desertor; no hubo un chino cubano traidor.” In the
1950s, this tribute was carved on a monument to the *chinos mambises* that stands to this
day in Havana.
Chinese shopkeepers, who in effect became cacao dealers or brokers, a middleman between small producers and large exporters.

By the end of the 19th century, Chinese merchants and shopkeepers had become a “conspicuously successful trading minority.” Not surprisingly, grumblings about unethical business practices of the Chinese who “exploited” their creole (native born) customers could be heard. Nevertheless, at no time did Chinese commerce constitute a monopoly in any sector. Their numbers were small, for fewer than 3,000 had entered the island between 1806 and 1866. They always had to compete in the retail food trade with Portuguese and creole shopkeepers, while Englishmen and Scotsmen continued to control the large import-export businesses (Johnson 1986; Look Lai 1993). This was probably the primary reason that resentment of perceived Chinese success in local commerce did not escalate into any serious large-scale and recurrent violence directed specifically at this community (Ho 1989).

Guyana was another place in the Caribbean where the Chinese did not provoke deep-seated, enduring animosity. Beginning in 1853, close to 14,000 indentured Chinese were brought into Guyana, where they were distributed to plantations throughout the colony, but their numbers dwarfed in comparison to the one-quarter million East Indian coolies. Like their counterparts in Cuba, the coolies were housed in old slave quarters and treated much like slaves, assigned primarily to back-breaking unskilled jobs in the field. But their relatively shorter five-year contracts were further reduced just ten years later to three, and within 20 years they were leaving the plantations. Some took up land offered by the government to establish a Christian community, which resulted in the unique Chinese community of Hopetown. There some took up small farming enterprises, while others developed successful charcoal-burning businesses.

Most Chinese in Guyana, however, preferred the big cities of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, where they readily established themselves in the food retail and transportation services, taking advantage of the rapid social transformation occurring in Guyanese society where peasants joined migrant workers as new consumers. Working in their own shops as butchers, druggists, barbers, hairdressers, laundrymen, and skilled artisans of all sorts, or operating transportation services involving “donkey and mule carts, cabs and carriages, horses, mules and donkeys, bateaux, boats, punts and schooners,” they gained fame and notoriety as “traders in anything for which a market can be found.” But
as in Trinidad, they did not monopolize any sector of the economy, having to compete with Portuguese and creole businessmen. Race relations with creoles were “tarnished by small-scale violence,” but as a small minority, the Chinese were not perceived by creoles as a serious threat (Moore 1988; Hall 1998; Sue-A-Quan 1999, 2003).

It was in Jamaica, more than any other place in the Caribbean, that Chinese success in local commerce was perceived by others as intolerable, so much so that, in the pre-war years, large-scale anti-Chinese violence broke out in the capital city of Kingston in 1918 and 1938, with smaller incidents in between and scattered around the island. In these incidents, Chinese businesses were burned and looted, and the shopkeepers physically attacked and threatened with expulsion. What was different about Jamaica from Trinidad and Guyana in comparable situations? The history of Chinese arrival and settlement in Jamaica was distinctive from the beginning, for barely over 1,000 coolies were sent there during the indenture period. Most deserted the plantations even before their five-year contracts expired. Re-migrants from Trinidad and especially Guyana, probably fleeing from plantations, started arriving in the 1860s and continued into the 1880s, doubling the Chinese population. They identified and occupied spaces and niches in local commerce, focusing in particular on the retail food trade, starting in rural plantation districts. By the turn of the century, 61 percent of the Chinese population had congregated in the capital of Kingston, with only 8 percent remaining in the plantation districts. While making up only 0.3 percent of the population, they comprised 13 percent of the total number in retail trade (Johnson 1983: 53-54; Look Lai 1998; Ho 1989).

Once a premier plantation economy, Jamaica’s intensely worked land had become quite exhausted when slavery was abolished. The plantation frontier moved to Guyana, while freed slaves in Jamaica congregated in small villages where they treasured their newfound life as independent peasant proprietors on their own land. Few were interested in going into the retail trade, preferring to cultivate export crops such as banana. This was the commercial opportunity that the Chinese immediately sized up and effectively seized, beating the handful of East Indians and Jews also eying this niche. Quite simply, they had practically no competition. They created a network of small retail shops catering to the needs of the

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7 Major anti-Chinese violence broke out again in 1965, but since this date lies outside the purview of this limited essay, it will not be included in the discussion here.
banana growing peasantry in the countryside and the small wage-earners in the towns and cities. These opportunities served as magnets attracting more free migrants than any other island in the early 20th century. From a small population of 2,111 in 1911, it grew to 3,366 by 1925, and doubled to 6,879 by 1943. By 1925, they held almost 30 percent of the trade licenses in retail grocery, with nearly one out of two Chinese engaged in this sector of the local economy. With this dominance, “Chinese” and “shopkeeper” became synonymous in the mind of the common people in Jamaica (Levy 1986: 15-16; Johnson 1983: 54; R. Lee 1998: 112-20).

Chinese grocers did not hold the majority of retail licenses, but they vastly outperformed their competitors and cornered a choice market in the trade for various reasons. One, their shops were located in the more profitable areas of operation, particularly in Kingston where most Chinese stores were located. Two, and more importantly, they succeeded in establishing themselves in the wholesale grocery trade, importing foodstuff from abroad as well as distributing locally grown and produced items. As wholesalers, they supplied their own retail outlets, forming in effect chains of shops or branch stores well-known for offering the lowest prices on the best produce. Another way of appreciating the extent of this Chinese business success is that a very small ethnic community constituting less than one percent of the total population came to own and operate ten percent of the commercial establishments in the British colony, specifically carrying over 80 percent of the total grocery retail trade. They were also inclined to enter areas previously neglected by the creole population, creating for the peasants their first and only contact with the market as both consumers and suppliers. In fact, the Chinese shopkeepers helped to take their perishable produce to market through their trading network, including those destined for export such as cacao and coffee (Levy 1986: 19; C.C. Chang 1956: 80-82; Johnson 1983: 54-57).

In addition to the measurable proliferation of shops, Chinese success can be attributed to the business practices they pioneered that helped build regular clienteles: they stocked up with creole staples such as salt fish, beef, pork, cornmeal, flour and rice. They routinely offered lower prices and readily extended credit, especially to small wage earners living from hand to mouth who often ran out of cash before the next payday. They sold provisions in very small amounts, leading to the coinage of the term, “farthing trade.” In the middle class neighborhoods, their better capitalized stores were better stocked in quantity and variety
than their competitors, and they gave better service, including home deliveries (C.C. Chang 1956: 82-84; Levy 1986: 20-24).

As a group, Jamaican Chinese enjoyed certain characteristics that helped advance their collective interests. Unlike in Cuba where punti and hakka had shared space and competed politically and economically since the coolie era, Jamaican Chinese were predominantly hakka and hence ethnically, linguistically and culturally fairly homogenous; they could rely on ethnic solidarity to develop a “closed ethnic community.” Using their extended kinship and ethnic ties, they created rotating credit associations to generate capital from within the community for co-ethnics to start new businesses, as well as a series of other institutions commonly found in the diaspora, such as mutual aid societies, schools, newspapers, chamber of commerce, and homes for the poor, elderly and infirm (Ho 1989: 14-15; Levy 1986: 20-24; R. Lee 1998; Lowe 2006).

Riot in Jamaica, 1918

The Chinese in Jamaica experienced two major attacks in the pre-war era, in 1918 and again in 1938. Bahamian historian Howard Johnson makes a pointed contrast between the two incidents: the earlier one targeted solely Chinese as a “racial” group, while the latter was directed more at the middle class of immigrant traders such as Jews and Syrians, in addition to Chinese. His in-depth study of the 1918 mob-led riot provides a prototype of spontaneous, popular anti-Chinese agitation. The mob’s stated rationale and tactics were common to many others across the hemisphere during the early 20th century.

The incident began one day in July in Ewarton, St. Catherine parish, when a Chinese grocer, Fong Sue, caught the local constable McDonald in a compromising position with his creole paramour. With the help of several friends, Fong chased McDonald into the woods where he hid for the next few days. When rumors — later proven false — spread in Ewarton that Fong had murdered McDonald, an angry mob descended upon Fong’s shop and several other Chinese businesses and proceeded to sack, loot and burn them, until the streets of Ewarton were “‘literally paved with cornmeal, flour and salt.’” Soon, “‘roving bands of hooligans’” went on a rampage to destroy and loot “‘every damn chiney man shop’” taking the fight to surrounding parishes and into villages of the rural interior where “‘de district people join wid them’” (Johnson 1983: 51). Rumors about the murder not only spread like fire but were also
embellished with details such as the Chinese murderers pickling the corpses, and the government ordering the destruction of Chinese shops etc. that further spurred on the marauding crowd. When the local police finally gained control several days later, considerable damage had been inflicted on Chinese businesses; more than 425 arrests were made, and 300 eventually convicted.

Johnson notes that the rioters attacked only Chinese establishments, sparing shops owned by other immigrants and by creoles; indeed, the rioters assured some creole owners that their property would not be damaged, or stopped looting when informed that the shop was creole-owned. But he also emphatically points out that, by all accounts, violence was directed at property, not at persons. Buttressed by Governor Leslie Probyn’s report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies attributing anti-Chinese sentiments to creole jealousy of Chinese success, Johnson concludes that “[t]he main intention of the rioters was to drive out the Chinese from those areas where they had established themselves in business” because of creole resentment of commercial competition and jealousy of the commercial success of the Chinese (Johnson 1983: 52-53).

As for the rioters themselves, although the Daily Gleaner on 12 July denounced all rioters as “‘the deliberately idle’” and ‘the naturally criminal,’” Johnson notes that rioters actually came from a cross-section of the working class in the rural towns and villages, including in some cases the local constables who, instead of curbing the violence, joined in the looting. Women were also seen by eye-witnesses among the rioters, hefting big stones over to the men who flung them against the Chinese shops (Johnson 1983: 54-55).

Regardless of who exactly took part in the attacks, the riot brought forth simmering tensions between the Chinese retailers, particularly those in the grocery trade, their working class local clients and their middle class creole competitors. The same editors of the Gleaner who took a dim view of the rioters were equally critical of the Chinese shopkeepers, accusing them of dominating the retail trade of Jamaica “‘by masterly and judicious knavery.’” Prior to the outbreak of the riot, parish after parish passed resolutions detailing charges of deceptive Chinese business practices, including the adulteration of products, such as adding hot water to kerosene oil, and selling “‘putrified’” meats that they themselves wouldn’t consume to unsuspecting “‘poor people.’” Local ordinances were passed limiting Sunday business hours as one way to curtail competition, for the Chinese were known never to close up shop and, having no family, were able to live on very little at the bare
margins of social necessity. Their willingness to extend credit and selling at the lowest prices came to be viewed as cutthroat practices that “‘made it impossible for the natives to compete,’” as one resolution argued (Johnson 1983: 56-57).

The actual picture of daily interactions, social relationships and economic transactions between Chinese and creoles were rather more complex than these strident stereotypes would suggest. As noted earlier, creole peasants in small towns and villages very rarely participated in the retail trade, preferring instead to work the land and produce food crops for the domestic market. Most creoles in these locations where the rioting spread quickly related to Chinese shopkeepers as consumers, not as competitors. Chinese shopkeepers also acted as middlemen between peasant producers of export crops such as cacao and coffee destined for the European market and the exporters in Kingston. Thus, Johnson concludes, the economic relationship between Chinese and most creoles was one of “symbiosis rather than competition.” Moreover, preferring to do business in fixed locations to the itinerant trading of Lebanese peddlers, Chinese shopkeepers “became an integral part of the creoles’ daily routine and existence” (Johnson 1983: 57).

In addition, perceptions of lacking cultural integration into Jamaican life to the contrary, the Chinese actually engaged the process of creolization or acculturation soon after their arrival, out of necessity, if not inclination. With so few women migrating, Chinese men in Jamaica early began living in concubinage with local women, as did Fong Sue, the Chinese grocer whose jealous rage is widely believed to have led to the rioting. For their part, poor black and mulatta women saw in the immigrant shopkeeper a good steady provider and guarantor of long term security. Another fundamental aspect of small businesses is their dependency on self-exploitation and family labor. Typically, they create few jobs for outsiders because they couldn’t afford the wages. This need to reproduce their own labor force was another compelling reason why male Chinese migrants had to find wives and produce children quickly. The need to learn the local language in order to communicate with clients led to further creolization while living in rural towns. Early in the 20th century, Chinese shopkeepers were already trading their Chinese names for more accessible Christian names and Westernized surnames (Johnson 1983: 58).

A rapidly growing mixed-race population had thus settled widely in Jamaican society by the mid-20th century. According to a 1943 census, of the 12,000 or so Jamaicans counted as Chinese, 54 percent were...
considered “pure,” while 45 percent were “colored” (Lind 1958: 152). Two notable contemporary Afro-Chinese Jamaicans, the artist, Albert Chong, and the international financier, Michael Lee-Chin, both claim to have a father and a mother who were both hybrids, that is, the offspring of union between a Chinese father and a local black women (Albert Chong 2008). The widespread creolization of Chinese Jamaicans led to their assimilation and social integration into the larger Jamaican society, while the children of the mixed marriages provided labor for the small family business. In short, being successful shopkeepers, especially as grocers, brought high visibility and drew resentment that arose from intimate contact, which escalated on occasions into violence, as happened in 1918. At the same time, male owners of small businesses felt the urgent need to form families with local women and move toward creolization, in so doing blunting, perhaps, the more drastic reaction to their at times unwelcome presence, such as immigration exclusion or expulsion.

Creole jealousy notwithstanding, why exactly did anti-Chinese rioting break out in Jamaica at this moment in July 1918? Johnson’s analysis points to the timing of World War I and the “structural strain” of wartime inflation and food shortages. In June 1918, the Agricultural Department in Jamaica predicted that the total food imports that year would pale in comparison to the previous ten years because the United States and Canada, traditional suppliers of the island’s staples, had to redirect their exports to their European allies. Historically, increased food prices often led to the looting of stores and granaries. In 1918, the reported murder of a local constable appears to have provided an excuse for hungry locals to loot the well-stocked Chinese stores. As one eyewitness recalled, “Well to be frank, the people at that time were only thinking about food. They had no other thought about anything else” (Johnson 1983: 59-60).

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Listen to Albert Chong explain how he navigated his hybrid identities: “…in my early adulthood… I came to terms with my Afro-Jamaican heritage and also with my allegiance and later deadlocked membership in the Rastarian Movement of Jamaica. In one perspective, I may only have been rooting for the underdog, but what was offered me in the form of Afro-Jamaican culture was concrete, real, and it provided me with a sense of place, a sense of people, a sense of culture, and ultimately, a sense of belonging” (Chong 2008: 198-99).

Again, a story from Albert Chong’s life illustrates this point: He recounts with pride his Afro-Chinese father’s high standing in the Chinese Jamaican community and simultaneously in the Afro-Jamaican community, where rioters spared his father’s shop during a looting rampage in the 1960s (Chong 2008: 200-201).
Chinese and locals in Jamaica continued to co-exist and cross-fertilize into the 20th century. The relationship remained unstable, however, so that anti-Chinese attacks and campaigns sporadically appeared. In 1930, for example, a group of urban blacks formed the Native Defender Committee to drive out the Chinese. In 1933, white merchants alarmed by Chinese encroachment on their turf resorted to legislative action, and convinced the Legislative Council to pass an Alien Restriction Law designed to curb Chinese immigration. And in 1938, another riot broke out, this time targeting other foreign merchants in addition to the Chinese. These pre-war attacks on the Chinese did not curb immigration, for the Chinese population in Jamaica continued to grow, as did their dominance in the retail food trade well into the post-war era. When the Chinese of Jamaica finally left en masse beginning in the 1960s, mostly to the United States and Canada, it had more to do with Jamaica's sharp left turn in the Socialist politics of the first Michael Manley regime than any direct anti-Chinese campaign or legislation, an out-migration similar to the contemporaneous exodus of Chinese from Cuba after Castro came to power and nationalized private property, big and small. In these cases, the middle class or petit bourgeois status of Chinese shopkeepers and businessmen was the operative factor in their strong reaction to Socialist politics.

Massacre in Torreón, Mexico, 1911

The 1918 riots in Jamaica paled in comparison to what happened to the Chinese in Mexico in 1911, in the city of Torreón, Coahuila, a border state that was home to the leader of the Mexican Revolution, Francisco Madero. Torreón was the last major city targeted by the Maderista forces in its plan to topple the dictator, Porfirio Díaz. On May 13, armed rebels entered Torreón; on May 14, the commander of the far-outnumbered federal forces withdrew from the city in the dead of night, effectively surrendering. On May 15, Commander Emilio Madero entered the city

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10 During the 1920s, elsewhere in the Caribbean local governments attempted to enact immigration restriction laws against successful “trading minorities,” but these were not necessarily aimed at only the Chinese. In the Bahamas, for example, a businessman and local politician offered a proposal for the “total exclusion of Chinese, Syrians, Turks, Arabs, Gypsies, Hindoos and Egyptians,” certainly an exhaustive list! Other immigrant groups scrutinized were the Lebanese, Greeks, and Jews (Johnson 1986).
in the name of the victorious revolutionary army, but was also confronted with the bodies of 303 Chinese men, most of them wantonly and brutally massacred in a mad rampage by his unruly men aided and abetted by a furious local mob. The Torreón massacre marked the single most violent and brutal aggression against the Chinese throughout the Americas. In the ensuing series of investigations undertaken by Mexican and Chinese authorities, military and civilian, it was determined that the Chinese were not armed, and offered no resistance or provocation to the revolutionary forces. Why then did the massacre take place, one so brutal that it was dubbed a “bloodbath” by one eyewitness (Puig 1992; Jacques 1974; Cumberland 1960; Craib 1996)? What was so unusual about Torreón and its Chinese community in 1911 that produced such a violent release of pent-up rage from their neighbors and customers? The attack on the Chinese was totally unforeseen, although hints had been dropped just before the revolutionaries entered the city, and in hindsight, it could have been anticipated.

So what was distinctive about the Chinese community of Torreón? At first glance, it was like the others springing up all over Mexico, especially in the north close to the U.S. border where development spurred by mining and railroad building underwritten by foreign investment outpaced other regions of Mexico. In the dynamic north, Chinese immigrants largely shunned manual jobs in mining and railroads to focus on local commerce and small businesses providing everyday services to the expanding domestic market and its growing consumers, the Mexican workers.

A city like Torreón was exactly the kind of urban environment that pulled in the Chinese in the late 19th century. As the meeting point of two new railroad lines that linked Mexico’s mining and agricultural products to the U.S. market, the Ferrocarril Central Mexicano (Mexican Central Railroad) to El Paso, Texas, and the Ferrocarril Internacional to Piedras Negras on the Arizona border, Torreón itself lay on the Nazas River which irrigated the fertile Laguna Valley and its cotton crop. Chinese and many other foreign entrepreneurs — Germans, French, British, Italians, Spaniards — flocked to Torreón from the United States and all over Europe joining local Mexican entrepreneurs such as the Madero family of Coahuila. Middle Easterners, known variously as Arabs or Turks, had also begun arriving (Alfaro Velcamp 2007). Benefiting from the generous tax abatements of the state and federal governments, these forward-looking businessmen built a diverse group of modern industries as well as department stores and banks such as the branches of the
Banco de Londres y Mexico, the American Bank, the Agricultural Bank, the Mercantil Bank of Monterrey, etc. With eight big ovens, the Fundición Metalúrgica de Torreón (foundry) was the most modern in Mexico when it was built in 1901, fed by the mines of Coahuila and two neighboring states. Two Madero brothers served as managers, as that family was one of the big investors. Americans built the Compañía Guayulera Continental Mexicana to refine the native rubber plant, guayule, for industrial use. The Germans built the city a new Municipal Market on land they acquired. The city had portable water, electricity, a modern drainage system, a modern hospital, and an electric streetcar system circulating downtown. At the dawn of the 20th century, the city’s population of 14,000 included some 500 Chinese, or 3.5 percent, constituting the largest foreign colony and the most conspicuous given their occupation and businesses scattered throughout the urban landscape.

In the midst of these industrial and commercial activities, the Chinese, as expected, opened their usual kind of small businesses, such as groceries and food stalls, laundries and restaurants, and retail shops dealing in daily consumer items. But they did not stop there: they joined the other foreign investors and entrepreneurs to establish banks and hotels. In addition, they acquired large tracts of urban real estate which they turned into impressive market gardens (cai yuan) to grow fruit and vegetables for local consumption. These “Chinese Gardens,” as they were known locally, employed upward of 100 Chinese horticultural workers, and by their sheer size and numbers, could not be missed by anyone entering the city. By 1911, Chinese food wholesalers and retailers were in control of production, distribution and sale of daily foodstuff to the local population, rich and poor (Jacques 1974: 237).

To top it off, they put up plans to build another electric streetcar line for downtown and had laid about 13 kilometers of tracks by the time of the massacre. The bank was originally named the Compañía Bancaria Chino y México (Hua-MoYin-Hang); later, with the tramway project underway, it expanded to become the Compañía Bancaria y de Tranvías Wah Yick (Hua Yi), housed in its own building downtown by the railroad station, next to the Chinese-owned Hotel Ferrocarril (Railroad Hotel) (Puig 1992: 147-69). In recognition of its growing stature, the U.S. government posted permanent consuls in Torreón; the second consul, longtime Torreón resident, George Carothers, would be an important eyewitness to the massacre.11

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11 Carothers reported that, in anticipation of rebel attacks on the city, the commander
It is not known exactly when the Chinese started arriving, but given the recent development of Torreón, they would have arrived along with other immigrants and foreign entrepreneurs in the 1880s and 1890s. Among the early arrivals were individuals from California including an English-speaking and American trained physician, Dr. Walter Lim, who would be a key eyewitness to the 1911 massacre. Also arriving were established Chinese businessmen, such as Wong Foon-chuck from the northern border town of Ciudad Porfirio Diaz (today’s Piedras Negras) and the capital city Mexico. They brought capital with them to invest, as well as connections throughout Mexico and in Chinese communities in the United States.

One person who encouraged Chinese investment and enterprises in Torreón was the intellectual and reformer K’ang Yu-wei, and then traveling throughout North America raising money and political awareness for his reform movement and organization, the *Baohuanghui*, or as it was better known in the Americas, the China Reform Association (*Zhong-Kuo Wei-Xin Hui*), with American headquarters established in Vancouver, Canada. Attached to it was the Commercial Corporation, set up to seek out promising investment opportunities in the Americas. Within a short time, K’ang and his students, who included the brothers Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Liang Ch’i-t’ien, established branch societies in 170 cities in the U.S., Canada, Hawaii, Panama, Mexico and Peru, with a claimed membership of several hundred thousands, creating in effect China’s first modern political party with strength in the Chinese diaspora. In 1903, Wong Foon-chuck and fellow Chinese in Torreón established the *Asociación Reformista China*, well in advance of a much anticipated visit by K’ang Yu-wei himself (Lo 1967: 179-200).

Accompanied by Liang Ch’i-t’ien and Lee Fook Kee, Vancouver businessman and director of the Commercial Corporation, K’ang visited of the small defense forces strongly suggested to Carothers that he and other foreign residents should pick up arms to defend the city against “bandits.” Carothers declined to collaborate, suggesting that by then he and other leaders of the foreign communities had joined local citizens and swung their allegiance to the revolution led by native son Francisco Madero, whose brother Emilio commanded the revolutionary forces that took Torreón and immediately ordered the cessation of anti-Chinese attacks upon learning of the massacre. This demand to arm themselves in defense of the city, which Carothers and the foreign community rejected, nevertheless circulated in a distorted form during the massacre, when rumors spread that the Chinese were armed as loyal supporters of the discredited dictatorship (Puig 1992: 173-206).

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12 K’ang Yu-wei and the two Liang brothers are so well known by these Western versions of their names that they will be kept in this form rather than rendered in pinyin.
Torreón twice, in 1906 and 1907. On his first visit, he immediately tested the waters for investment potential, using his own funds to buy up a block of land for 1,700 pesos and sold it several days later for 3,400 pesos. Then he bought a house for 2,400 pesos and sold it after a month for double that amount. These lucrative transactions led to his establishment of a local subsidiary of the Commercial Corporation, which was how the Chinese bank was established alongside all the other foreign banks. The bank, and by extension, Vancouver’s Commercial Corporation, continued to speculate on real estate, received a government franchise to build a new streetcar line, and constructed two buildings to house the Chinese, all men except for the wife of Dr. Lim, the sole woman in this prosperous community of 500 by the end of K’ang’s second visit in 1907 (Lo 1967: 202-203) In size, the Torreón Chinese community was not large, compared to the 4,486 in Sonora state, but certainly one of the most prosperous (Salazar Anaya 1996; Hu-DeHart 2003: Table 1).

This impressive flurry of foreign enterprises unnerved Mexican businessmen, who formed in 1907 a chamber of commerce to consolidate their power vis-à-vis the foreigners. As they lamented in the local newspaper *El Nuevo Mundo* (The New World): “We cannot compete against the foreigners in commercial ventures. The sad and lamentable fact is that the prostration of our national commerce has created a situation in which Mexicans are replaced by foreign individuals and companies, which monopolize our commerce and behave in the manner of conquerors in a conquered land.” Significantly the Mexicans did not single out Chinese for extra scrutiny, but vented against all foreign competitors (Craib 1996: 15).

In a few years, this industrious and enterprising Chinese community would be half decimated and nearly destroyed. Until the insurrection against Diaz in 1911, there had been no reported anti-Chinese action in Torreón, although throughout the north the Chinese had been targeted by newspaper editorials and local agitators. While no one could possibly

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13 K’ang was quite fascinated with Mexico, especially the pre-Columbian high civilizations in Oaxaca and the Yucatán, both of which he visited. Later he even took up Mayan language lessons. Arriving first in Mexico City in 1906, he met Wong Foonchuck as well as physician Dr. Huang Jih-ch’u, whom he would later induce to go to Torreón to help Wong manage the Bank and Streetcar Company. Also in Mexico City, he had a cordial meeting with President Díaz. K’ang held great hope for Latin America — particularly Brazil and Mexico — as good destinations for Chinese colonization, where the climate was like that in China (Lo 1967: 200-201). He never made it to Brazil.
have foreseen the slaughter, some leaders of the community seemed to have had an uneasy premonition.

On May 5, a week before the taking of Torreón, in nearby Gómez Palacio which had just fallen to the revolutionary forces, an exuberant bricklayer made a speech that took aim at the Chinese. Jesús Flores railed against the Chinese for taking jobs away from Mexicans, especially Mexican women, and argued for restricting further Chinese immigration. This was, in fact, not a new idea, for it had already been broached some years ago by the anarcho-syndicalist Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM), the most radical opposition movement to the Díaz dictatorship. In its 1906 political platform, a brief plank under the section on “Foreigners” stated simply: “Prohibit Chinese Immigration” (Cockcroft 1968: 240). The pro-labor PLM had been active in organizing the most serious strike in Mexico to date in the northern mining town of Cananea in 1906, where anti-Chinese agitation had already taken root (Cumberland 1960; Hu-DeHart 1980). So the idea of Chinese exclusion would have been familiar to Mexican workers such as Flores the bricklayer.

It appeared that Flores’ rousing anti-Chinese speech reached the ears of Woo Lam Po, secretary of Torreón’s Reform Society and manager of the Chinese bank. Woo wrote, printed and circulated in Chinese a notice to his countrymen of the imminent danger of rebels entering the city, and warned them not to resist rebel assaults on their properties, but to seek refuge behind closed doors of their own homes or shops:

Brothers, attention! Attention! This is serious. Many unjust acts have happened during the revolution. Notice have [sic] been received that before 10 o’clock today the revolutionists will unite their forces and attack the city. It is very probable that during the battle a mob will spring up and sack the stores. For this reason, we advise all our people, when the crowds assemble, to close your door and hide yourself and under no circumstances open your places for business or go outside to see the fighting. And if any of your stores are broken into, offer no resistance but allow them to take what they please, since otherwise you might endanger your lives.

Rather than signing the circular in the name of the Reform Society, Woo issued it in the name of the Torreón Merchants and Laborers Society, an organization hastily thrown together in the face of this anticipated crisis.14

14 This translation was provided to one of the investigating committees by Woo himself, who had English proficiency, suggesting that he too came to Mexico from the U.S. or Canada.
(Puig 1992: 176-77). The leaders of the Chinese community clearly braced themselves for an attack on their properties, but in no way, it appeared, did they expect the rampant and bloody violence that was to take place.

The Chinese followed all the instructions issued by Woo Lam Po, but to little avail, as they were rounded up and massacred without provocation. When the first contingent of rebels entered Torreón on May 13, they trampled and stationed themselves on Chinese vegetable gardens land, killing almost 100 Chinese workers caught at work on the private estates and unable to flee. But the worst came on May 15, when new contingents of Maderista rebels entered in the middle of the night and, for the next ten hours, massacred over 200 defenseless Chinese found wandering the streets, or pulled out from their hiding places in the boarding houses or shops. Augmented by about 4,000 poor and freed prisoners from Torreón and nearby cities, the huge faceless mob (*una masa anónima*) attacked foreign properties indiscriminately, but made their physical attacks almost exclusively on Chinese men, who were stripped, robbed and mutilated while their homes and stores were ransacked and burned. Eyewitness accounts, many given by American and European foreign residents, have been preserved; they record gruesome scenes of bodies hacked with machetes and knives, and severed heads and limbs thrown into the streets (Jacques 1974: 238-39). A few Japanese were also killed “owing to similarity of features.” But none of the eyewitnesses could identify or articulate a clear cause for the mob’s anti-Chinese fury.

In the Chinese government’s own investigation, the casualty list of 303 Chinese men was accompanied by a long list of property losses totaling some 850,000 pesos. The tally included: One building housing the Chinese Bank and Chinese Club (Reform Society), 40 grocery stores, four laundries, five restaurants, ten vegetable stands, 23 food stalls, and several large vegetable gardens. Though he escaped with his life, Wong Foon-chuck lost four workers in his laundry, and 32 in his vegetable garden (Jacques 1974: 228-29). Reporting the extent of their losses is also recognition of the prosperity they had achieved. The ubiquitous and highly visible Chinese businesses and their Chinese workers could not be ignored. Rallying to their defense by providing numerous eyewitness accounts for the numerous investigating committees, the American and European residents who owned and managed railroads, factories and businesses feared also for their own lives and perhaps wondered why they were spared.
In many ways, given so many examples from world history, it is not difficult to explain revolutionary violence, played out in many variations depending on the particular circumstances. In the case of Torreón, the highly charged revolutionary forces could have spontaneously chosen the hapless Chinese seen all over town as surrogates for the federal soldiers who sneaked away under cover of darkness without engaging them in combat, thus depriving them of the satisfaction and glory of victory in battle. But they also arrived infused with anti-foreign and anti-Chinese resentment. There was no report of rape, for the simple reason that the Chinese community had no women. Not surprisingly, scholars who have studied the Torreón massacre closely and carefully cite sentiments akin to what Howard Johnson called “creole jealousy” in the case of the 1918 Jamaican riots, that is, resentment of Chinese economic success. It may explain the eagerness of poor people to loot and receive stolen food and clothes. But can economic jealousy alone explain the ferocious mob fury unleashed against unarmed Chinese who put up no resistance? One who tried to make sense of the rampage was the investigator sent by the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Mexico City, Antonio Ramos Pedrueza. In his report, he referred to the “law of psychology” in these words: “The mob is always dangerous: and when the men enter armed and feel buoyed by the popular masses itching to loot and sack, and when for three or four hours they are given control of the circumstances, aware of their total power and without any higher authorities, become judge and hangman, the crime inevitably carries fatal consequences; that is what happened in Torreón” (Puig 1992: 243). In his explication of mob psychology, he did not implicate racial animus.

It would be easy to attribute Mexican rage against the Chinese in this unprovoked massacre to simple racism, but that still begs the question of how race was used, and for what purpose ultimately. To be sure, racist constructions were in the air. In the waning years of the 19th century, northern newspapers such as El Tráfico were tirelessly recycling anti-Chinese tropes well established in the United States, such as the “yellow plague,” the “locust invasion,” “morally more inferior to any race on earth,” by nature criminally inclined, who adulterated food and drinks to “poison the public,” and by nature inassimilable (Hu-DeHart 1982: 8-9). But the paper’s call for a “just crusade” against the Chinese did not fall on influential ears, and no organized persecution materialized at the turn of the century.

In examining the 1918 anti-Chinese riot in Jamaica earlier in this article, it is noted that, contrary to charges of unwillingness or inability
to assimilate, Chinese immigrants had begun the process of creolization early, primarily by creating family relations with local women and quickly producing mixed-race offspring. In Torreón, there was no indication that Chinese men had begun courting local women. Curiously, K’ang Yu-wei left no records of any concern he might have had on the gross gender imbalance of the Chinese communities in Torreón. But elsewhere in Mexico, as early as 1881, Chinese immigrants had married Mexican women (Hu-DeHart 1982: 6). Moreover, as in Jamaica, other signs of integration appeared early, such as Westernizing their Chinese names. A good example was Guillermo Leytón, owner and general manager of a large general merchandize store which imported goods from New York, San Francisco, St. Louis, Chicago, and Hamburg, Germany. By way of inventing himself as a progressive Mexican businessman and community leader, Leytón placed a full-page advertisement in a prominent commercial directory with this unabashedly effusive description of himself as

…an excellent Chinese who enjoys general popularity in the locality. In particular he is well loved by the working people, because he willingly and readily helps them out, especially when a poor harvest or some other cause raise the prices of basic necessities; at which time Leytón — making only a little profit or perhaps none at all — sells them these articles of primary need at prices they could afford, thereby averting the specter of hunger” (García y Alva 1905-1907).

Leytón clearly understood the importance of establishing a close and caring relationship with his customers and, moreover, had learned the language (Spanish) to express himself passionately. Furthermore, contrary to the widely-held popular perception that Chinese shopkeepers did not hire locals, Leytón’s chief clerk was a Mexican, one Modesto J. Lozano, a “conscientious and intelligent employee” (García y Alva 1905-1907).

Still, crude racism and the circulation of racial stereotypes by themselves are not sufficient to explain the 1911 Torreón and other anti-Chinese attacks that spread over northern Mexico in the next decade. A necessary precondition was xenophobia or its variant, nativism, which fed the racist discourses, images and aggression. One of the leading scholars of Mexican nationalism, Fredrick Turner, took note of the Torreón massacre, and offered the explanation that “the Chinese became victims of a general xenophobia” that might have been expressed against Americans and Europeans were they not backed up by powerful governments (Turner 1968: 204). If we place xenophobia in the context of
Mexico’s revolutionary nationalism then emerging and taking shape among the Mexico people, from Francisco Madero himself (whose revolutionary slogan was “Mexico for the Mexicans”) to educated middle class professionals and intellectuals, such as the Flores Magón brothers, founders of the pro-labor, anarcho-syndicalist Partido Liberal Mexicano which advocated taking measures to “[p]rohibit Chinese [i]mmigration” to legions of ordinary workers, such as the bricklayer Flores, who called for the expulsion of Chinese, we can begin to grasp a deeper understanding of the widespread manifestation of xenophobic — in particular sinophobic — sentiments and agitation from the turn of the century to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which saw a state-sanctioned expulsion culminating in an anti-Chinese campaign that was unmistakably expressed in the patriotic terms of post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism.

Organized Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico, 1916-1932

The five years after the Torreón massacre saw the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution in full swing as revolutionary factions fought each other for dominance. Chinese in northern Mexico caught the brunt of numerous xenophobic attacks on foreigners, suffering the most damage to their properties and occasionally maltreatment to their persons. In the aftermath of a violent anti-Chinese riot in Cananea in 1914 that was led by miners’ wives, U.S. Consul Frederick Simpich minced no words in reporting:

…the feeling against all foreigners and against Chinese in particular is very strong; the continued depreciation of money, and the subsequent rise in the cost of food…and the mistaken idea of the ignorant miners that American capitalists and Chinese merchants are in some way very responsible for this condition, is driving the people to increasing unrest (quoted in Hu-DeHart 1980: 286).

As was in the case in Torreón, it was not difficult to connect economic hard times with a burst of violent xenophobia.

While definitely no other single incident approached the magnitude of Torreón, numerous attacks on Chinese in their shops or while traveling on the open roads were documented during the decade after Torreón. Historian Charles Cumberland estimates that possibly 100 men died, while also noting that more Americans lost their lives to revolutionary forces (Cumberland 1960). At the same time, it must be noted that
during these turbulent revolutionary years of the 1910s, Chinese immigrants continued to arrive and settle all over the north, some to cross the border illegally into the U.S., but others were attracted by opportunities to do business with the many revolutionary armies which needed to be provisioned with food, clothing, shoes, and sundry items of everyday existence (Hu-DeHart 2003).

In 1916, when fighting among revolutionary contenders subsided with the rise of one victorious faction led by leaders from the northwestern state of Sonora bordering Arizona, a new anti-Chinese movement erupted in the state and spread to other parts of the north and the rest of the country. Spearheaded by Sonoran schoolteacher José María Arana, this was a “studied and deliberate” political campaign to mobilize local communities in support of the enactment of ordinances aimed at harassing Chinese shopkeepers, such as levying new or increased taxes on their businesses; prohibiting them to sell foodstuff, to launder clothes, to lease land and grow vegetables, to travel and visit each other; demanding the hiring of more Mexican workers; restricting the Chinese residentially, and requiring them to take public baths. The Chinese immediately protested to local, state and federal authorities, hiring their own lawyers to plead their case, while bribing local officials to look the other way (Hu-DeHart 1980: 291-92). Few of these discriminatory, unreasonable, and at times absurd, laws were enforced.

More than just harassing the Chinese, Arana’s campaign was notable for the way it was conducted. Originally called the Junta Comercial y de Hombres de Negocio (Commercial and Businessmen’s Junta), the Cananea chapter chose the name Unión Fraternal de Obreros Asalariados (Fraternal Union of Salaried Workers), so that between the two of them, their middle class and working class credentials were established. Meanwhile, chapters elsewhere assumed names that signified the movement’s political orientation such as the Junta of National Protectionism, and most graphically, the Junta Central Nacionalista “En Defensa de la Raza.” Not to be outdone, Arana produced a weekly tabloid which he boldly named Pro-Patria (For the Fatherland) in which he affectionately called his fellow nationalist zealots “co-religionarios.” In an expression of emerging popular nationalism, Arana explained why patriotic Mexicans should resist Chinese immigration and integration into Mexican society:

Improvement of the race is the supreme ideal of all civilized nations, so that if the Chinese are corrupting our race, we ought to restrict them. The Chinese produce on the towns the same effect that the locust does on the crops: they destroy them. The Mexican that defends the Chinese
with detriment to the national good is a traitor to the country (quoted in Hu-DeHart 1980: 294).\(^{15}\)

Despite his prodigious energy and inventiveness, Arana’s campaign had fizzled by 1920, largely because he failed to garner political support from the state’s top political leaders, and was insufficiently registered on the national political radar screen. Sonoran governor Cesario Soriano was quite outspoken in his condemnation of Arana’s inflammatory rhetoric and scandalous tactics. He publicly denounced the shrill and vulgar language in *Pro-Patria* and its cheap appeal to base chauvinism, charging that it amounted to an emotional exploitation of untutored lower-class Mexicans. Furthermore, as President Alvaro Obregón, Soriano’s fellow Sonoran, worked on the world stage for U.S. and world recognition of his new Revolutionary government, the governor regarded *Pro-Patria*’s “diatribes, insults and parochialisms” as a potential international embarrassment, its harassment constituting a violation of treaty agreements with China that guaranteed its people in Mexico full constitutional rights. It is also important to note that during this time Chinese immigration to Mexico continued to surge as Chinese businesses in Mexico proliferated and flourished. In 1920, a leader of the Chinese community acknowledged to U.S. Consul Bartley Yost that “Chinese business has recently increased a hundred percent,” prompting Yost to report to the State Department that “the trade in groceries, dry goods and general merchandise in Sonora is largely controlled by Chinese” (Hu-DeHart 1980: 296).

In the face of this setback, the Arana campaign retreated but was not shelved forever, while it awaited another propitious moment to regroup and resurface. Arana’s lasting achievement was to change the mode of engagement with the Chinese from physical attacks on their properties and persons to a political campaign, using the law and political pressure to force them out of Mexico, in effect resorting to a different kind of violence. Furthermore, he explicitly linked Mexican nationalism with xenophobia, and especially with *antichinismo*, by identifying the Chinese as the most pernicious among foreigners and advocating that they should be deported.

\(^{15}\) Arana and fellow sinophobes clearly borrowed freely many of the anti-Chinese tropes invented in California decades ago, such as the “yellow peril” and the “locust” (Miller 1969; Choy, Dong, and Hom 1994; Pfalzer 2007; Sandmeyer 1972).
Ten years later, the local and national political climate was ripe for an all out anti-Chinese campaign. Leading this new movement from 1929 to 1932 was José Angel Espinoza, state representative of Cananea, journalist and publisher of the tabloid *El Nacionalista*, and author of two tomes of anti-Chinese propaganda (Espinoza 1931 and 1932). Joining him were other newspapers — *El Intruso*, *La Gaceta de Cananea* among them — and together they formed a relentless chorus whipping up mass hysteria about the Chinese menace at a time when many working and middle class Mexicans confronted the economic crisis of the world depression. This time, Espinoza was able to align with a group of political luminaries from the president of the country, Plutarco Elías Calles (another Sonoran revolutionary), to successive governors (first his uncle, Francisco Elías, then his son, Rodolfo Calles), to the mayors, who dusted the old discriminatory laws concerning sanitation and health codes, jobs and work rules, residential restrictions, and Chinese-Mexican marriages, and proceeded to enforce them rigorously. For once, local officials resisted the temptation of bribes. Those Chinese unable or unwilling to comply with the new laws or pay the hefty fines were subjected to expulsion, which began to happen in 1930 until most of the 3,000 or so Chinese men and their families abandoned Sonora, fleeing to other states or back to China, some with children and Mexican wives in tow (Schiavone Camacho 2008).

Representative Espinoza of Sonora, for one, was too smart a politician to believe that expelling the Chinese would solve Mexico’s economic problem during the Depression. He himself, in fact, reported the sharp decline in state tax receipts when Chinese shuttered their businesses en masse (Espinoza 1932). He actually had another motive for whipping up antagonism against the Chinese, and against other foreigners to a lesser extent. Espinoza was a political ally and protégée of President Plutarco Elías Calles, himself a Sonoran familiar with the rhetoric of *peligro amarillo* (yellow peril) in his home and neighboring states. A one-time

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16 In between the two campaigns, in 1922-1924, about 50 Chinese were deported from Mexico, but these deportations were not the result of an anti-Chinese riots or campaigns. Rather, the Chinese broke out into violent partisan battles in the streets of Sonora, provoking fear and consternation among Mexican civilians and politicians who successfully petitioned President Obregón (who happened to be from Sonora) to apply Article 33 of the new Mexican Constitution to deport “undesirable foreigners,” meaning those who broke Mexican laws (Yankelevich 2004). These were self-inflicted wounds, so deportations under these circumstances do not fall squarely within the scope of this discussion (Hu-DeHart 2006).
teacher and small businessman (just like Calles), Espinoza came from the petit bourgeois middle class that often expressed resentment at foreign competition, couching its xenophobia in the form of a “vigorous nationalism” (Carr 1972-1973). What these Sonoran revolutionaries had in mind was a plan to exploit the simmering resentment against perceived Chinese control of the local economy to build a more cohesive Mexican nationalism around a new political party that would act as a lever to consolidate and institutionalize revolutionary power. Suggestively dubbed the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) at its founding in 1929, its leaders like Calles and Espinoza realized that an anti-foreign and anti-Chinese campaign could build party membership, solidarity and identity. Toward that end, the party provided office space for the anti-Chinese campaign and even helped organize the Comité Directivo de la Campaña Nacionalista Antichino for all the deputies (state representatives) in the National Congress, to facilitate their propaganda work in the key states of Sonora and Sinaloa, and to help spread the campaign to other states with sizable Chinese populations. Concludes Mexican historian José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, “Anti-Chinese animus functions like a lever within the nationalist project to develop cohesion among Mexicans” (Gómez Izquierdo 1991: 131). The anti-Chinese campaign became a truly national movement, with campaign chapters established in 17 states under a variety of names. Just as the renewed campaign took off, Sonora and other border states took the brunt of the United States expulsion (euphemistically called “repatriation”) of tens of thousands of Mexicans — many of them American citizens by virtue of birth in America — who flocked to a revolutionary Mexico that was unable to absorb them into jobs and the local communities (Hoffman 1979; Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995). Under these circumstances, the ubiquitous presence of the Chinese in local trade, especially in groceries, and their comparative prosperity in the midst of great misery were placed under a glaring spotlight.

While targeting Chinese, PNR proclamations attacked other undesirable foreigners — Jews, Lebanese, Palestinians, Russians, Czechs, Armenians and Poles — as well with suggestions that they too be expelled to eliminate competition for Mexican businessmen (Gómez Izquierdo

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¹⁷ Calles’ plan was a phenomenal success, as the PNR was the forerunner of the famous PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), which gave Mexico a “one party democracy” for 60 years, until toppled by President Vicente Fox in 2000 representing the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional).
Like the Chinese, Jews and Middle Easterners were attacked for unscrupulous business practices and “unfair” labor competition. In this virulent anti-foreign climate, Chinese and Jews received the brunt of xenophobic attention. Organizations sprouted all over Mexico with names such as Liga Anti-china y Antijudía, Comité Antichino, and Comité Juvenil (Youth) Antichino. More common were those which highlighted nationalism, such as the Liga Nacionalista Mexicana, the Acción Revolucionaria Mexicana, the longwinded Unión Nacionalista Mexicana “Patria, Justicia y Libertad,” the Comité Compañía Nacionalista, the Gran Asociación Nacionalista, the Comité Nacionalista Pro-Raza y Salud Pública (public health). A third group carried racial overtones in defending Mexico’s national identity, such as Por La Patria y Por La Raza, Comité Pro-Raza, and the highly suggestive Comité Depurador (purify) de Razas Extranjeras. Finally, a fourth group reflected the political base of support behind these anti-foreign campaigns: Comité Nacionalista Contra el Monopolio de Comercio por Extranjeros (Nationalist Committee Against Foreign Monopoly of Commerce), Liga Nacional Obrera Antichina (National Workers’ Antichinese League), Industrias en Pequeño del Ramo del Calzado (Small Shoe Factories), Sindicato Industrial de Trabajadores (Industrial Workers’ Sindicate), Unión Mutualista de Comerciantes en Pequeño (Mutualist Union of Retail Merchants) (Gojman de Backal 1988: 190-91).

Viewed in this context, xenophobia in general and antichinismo in particular played a key role in post-Revolutionary state and nation building (Gómez Izquierdo 1991: 85; Renique 2003).

Concluding Thoughts

That sinophobia in Latin America and the Caribbean had economic roots is indisputable. Certainly that was the situation in the two cases of anti-Chinese mob violence we examined, 1918 in Jamaica and 1911 in Torreón, Mexico. It is also clear that these incidents unfolded in political contexts that brought latent tension to the boiling point, despite close, daily interactions between Chinese immigrants and locals. In the case of Torreón, there was the added factor of revolutionary nationalism playing itself out in a totally chaotic moment before revolutionary commanders asserted control over an undisciplined invading rebel army fortified by a local mob of desperately poor people and freed prisoners. The battle for Torreón toppled the old dictator to launch the Mexican
Revolution in May 1911, and the large and prosperous Chinese community was thus caught in a conflict not of its own making and in fact, had tried studiously to avoid. The consequences for the 303 Chinese victims of extreme mob violence had no match in sheer magnitude and brutality in the annals of the Chinese diaspora in the Americas.

Yet well-organized anti-Chinese political campaigns cannot be understood by simply referencing economic resentment when it can be seen that they were devised and managed from above. Both the Arana and Espinoza-led campaigns were scrupulously planned political movements backed by an elaborate (if not entirely original) racial discourse and a crude racist ideology, and furnished with a rich array of campaign materials (newspapers, pamphlets, books, posters, broadsheets, caricatures, plays) that fed the slogans, marches, demonstrations and well-staged protests, such as the boycott of Chinese businesses (Espinoza 1931 and 1932; Hu-DeHart 1982). If the Chinese, albeit unwittingly, played a role in heralding the Mexico Revolution at the dawn of the 20th century, they were on the scene again two decades later, in the 1930s, at its culmination with the founding of the National Party (PNR) designed to keep power within the revolutionary elite (Renique 2003). Like the Nazi’s manufactured anti-Semitism, the “irrational prejudices” of sino-phobia were in full display:

Like Europe’s Jews, the Chinese were seen as both parasitic and idle, yet also industrious and overly successful. They spread disease (trachoma and beriberi), encouraged vice (opium addiction and gambling), and debauched Mexican womanhood (Chinese immigration had been overwhelmingly male). Thus, they prostituted the Mexican “race.” Images of tentacular octupuses and corrupt blood, of contagious disease and exotic perversion, accompanied the anti-Chinese campaigns. Damned if they miscegenated, the Chinese were damned if they didn’t, their separateness — “otherness” — giving rise to bizarre speculations and fantasies… (Knight 1990: 96).

The anti-Chinese campaigns helped forge the populist nationalism of the Mexican Revolution, based on ridding Mexico of racial impurities exemplified by the Chinese and other undesirable foreigners, Lebanese and Jews being the next most frequently targeted immigrant groups, although nowhere near as intensively. In 1965, shortly after Jamaica

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18 The next two oft-targeted groups, Lebanese and Jews, were attacked but not purged. It is ironic that today, the wealthiest and arguably most powerful man in Mexico is Carlos Slim Helú, son of a Lebanese immigrant (Alfaro Velcamp 2007).
ended its colonial relationship with England and became an independent nation, anti-Chinese and anti-foreign agitation broke out anew. As in Mexico, it seemed, building nationalism rested in part on pursuing a xenophobic and racist agenda. Anti-Chinese racism in and of itself was not the root cause of the violent attacks, verbal and physical, against Chinese communities in Latin America and the Caribbean, for unlike the deep-seated anti-black racism that ensued from centuries of African slavery, there simply was not a deep historical basis for its development and nurture over time. However, as an ethnic-specific variant of general xenophobia, *antichinismo* arose — indeed was invented over and over again by diverse social actors at the grassroots and state levels — to provide the rationale for eliminating Chinese immigrants as competitors in the local economy or singling them out for blame in times of economic crisis. Viewed in this larger, more complex context, in Jamaica, in Mexico, and throughout the hemisphere, did the Chinese find themselves thrust upon the role of an indispensable enemy or convenient scapegoat, sometimes a necessary ingredient in nation- and state-building in post-revolutionary and post-colonial moments, and as such, deeply emotional invocations with potentially violent consequences? As successful immigrants, have the Chinese been consigned to an inescapable paradox of being “integrated and foreign,” to borrow a phrase from a provocative essay by a young Mexican scholar trying to make sense of the recurrent anti-Chinese nativism and the otherwise inexplicable mass expulsion of Chinese from northern Mexico in the early 1930s (Cárdenas García n. d.). The answers await continuing research and further critical examination of the central questions that inform this study.

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INDISPENSABLE ENEMY OR CONVENIENT SCAPEGOAT?


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CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHINESE OF CENTRAL AMERICA:
DIVERSE BEGINNINGS, COMMON ACHIEVEMENTS

St. John Robinson*

Introduction

A walk through Belize City offers an array of Chinese restaurants, and hardware, fabric, and general dry goods stores. In any visit to the shores and islands of Belize, Honduras and Nicaragua, one cannot help noticing its Chinese stores or restaurants. And a major political writer notes that one of the more salient aspects of Costa Rican society is its Chinese population. The Chinese came to Panama to build its railways and dig its canal, and today control the cargo ports at both ends of that canal. Given that Chinese migration to each of these countries was at one time or another prohibited, the Chinese presence there today, in such numbers, is remarkable.

And yet, as Lok Siu has noted, there exists a “paucity and unevenness of scholarship on the Chinese in the region.” She goes on to point out how this state of affairs makes it “difficult to provide any substantive comparative analysis” (Siu 2005: 518). This article will attempt to address this concern by focusing on the Chinese in Central America, an area which itself goes largely unnoticed by scholars except when there is a major upheaval in the region. The period under study — from the beginnings of Chinese presence in the area to the surge in Chinese migration in the early 1980s — saw the establishment of the basic structure of Chinese existence in the region that allowed for the subsequent absorption of the new Chinese with greater ease than might otherwise have been possible. We begin with an examination of the indentured labor experience, which established a Chinese presence in the area from the second half of the 19th century. The discussion will address common themes in this experience such as flight, suicide, illness, and working conditions.

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We will then address the post-indenture Chinese presence, again looking for commonalities and seeking the first steps in the evolution of the Chinese settlement leading to the emergence of the Chinese merchants and the establishment of Chinese associations, and eventual integration of the Chinese into the societies of the region. The primary focus is on Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Belize.

Three groups of Chinese went to Central America. The first of these to be documented was made up of contracted laborers brought in to work on major railway construction, as in Panama and Costa Rica, or agricultural work, as in Costa Rica and Belize. The second phase in Chinese migration to the area was that of the independent laborers and small businessmen. This was easily the most far-ranging of the groups, establishing themselves from Panama in the south to Belize and Guatemala in the north. This phase was also the longest lasting, beginning in the last two decades of the 19th century and continuing to the present day. The third phase was that of the wealthy investors, primarily from Taiwan, whose heyday was the decade of the 1990s but whose presence is still being felt (Lau 2007: 9). If there is a fourth, it is the steady increase in immigrants from the PRC since the mid-1980s. However, unlike the Taiwanese investors of the 1990s, the last group is made up of more small business people akin to those who came in the first half of the 20th century.

The Indenture Experience

Origins

The origins of a Chinese presence in Central America before the 1850s remain uncertain. Chinese have been in the Americas since the 16th century and there are indications of Chinese in Honduras after 1650 (Anaya 2002: 54) and in Panama since the 18th century (Siu 2004: 80). However, the first documented Chinese in Central America in modern times came in response to the spread of a plantation-style economy in Belize and Costa Rica and to efforts at railway building in Costa Rica and Panama. In the late 1820s, as the newly independent states of Central America attempted to change what they perceived as backward social and economic conditions, they sought the diversification of agriculture and the introduction of non-Hispanic and non-Amerindian labor, particularly the introduction of yeoman farmers from northern Europe. Indeed Central America imported English, Irish, German, Bel-
gian and Italian workers to help it launch into the international world economy. It gradually became clear, however, that Europeans were for one reason or another not suited to the sort of labor which the Central American states envisioned, and these governments, separately or through the efforts of the Central American Confederation to which all territories but Belize and Panama belonged, began to look for other sources. The model of the European sugar colonies, which had a surplus of recently emancipated black labor and which imported first Chinese and then Indian laborers, offered one option. Later so did the governments of Cuba (1847), Peru (1849), and the United States (1850), each of which imported sizable numbers of Chinese.

Panama
Indentured Chinese laborers were first introduced to Panama in 1852, to Costa Rica in 1855, and to Belize in 1865. Panama, a province of Colombia/New Granada before 1903, did not develop a plantation-style economy and so did not import agricultural laborers as did Costa Rica and Belize. It had always had as its major resource, at least since the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, its location as a natural crossroads between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It first imported Chinese laborers to work on the completion of the American-operated Panama Railway. During much of the construction of this railway, laborers from Europe and the Caribbean (both black and Indian) had been employed. However, to speed up the final stages of construction, permission was granted to import Chinese labor (Cohen 1971: 311). Over 500 were introduced in 1852 and 1853, but little is known of them after their arrival in Panama (Chou 2002: 23). Two thousand Chinese laborers were recruited in 1853 by agents in the Pearl River estuary. Seven hundred and five arrived in March 1854, followed by at least one other ship with smaller numbers of workers making up a total of about 800. Shortly after arrival about 100 of the men fell ill. Within a few weeks a great number of the laborers were too weak to work. By the summer many were begging on the streets of Panama City and Colon. This seems to have been the result of flight from the workplace and the hospitals, and also the need to acquire opium. The local newspapers began to comment on the increasing number of suicides (Cohen 1971: 314-15). Much of the plight of the Chinese was made worse by the constant taunting by Irish workers (Chong Ruiz 1992: 26). Within six months such was the depletion of workers or the ruinous condition of their health that when a Jamaican Chinese agent arrived in September of that year offering to exchange Chinese laborers for black Jamaicans, his offer was quickly
accepted. By November 195 Chinese had gone to Jamaica, where virtually all died soon after (Cohen 1971: 312; Chou 2002: 25). Those in Panama who survived this experience often went into small scale retail trade (Chong Ruiz 1992: 29).

During the French phase of the construction of the Interoceanic Canal (1880-1889), Chinese were again employed as laborers, though they were not the major labor force. The French company then tried to get permission for the recruitment of more Chinese workers, this time as free immigrants. However, under pressure from the United States and other Western governments, the Chinese government refused to give permission. Nonetheless, some 671 workers had already been transported to Panama by the time of this decision. In 1889 and 1890, a further 4,000 to 5,000 Chinese laborers were contracted in China, Trinidad and Guyana and taken to Panama, but the bankruptcy of the French canal company which had hired them caused some 3,000 Chinese to be left suddenly jobless. A short-lived successor company, despite refusal of its petition for Chinese laborers, managed to get an uncertain number of Chinese laborers to Panama between 1894 and 1895 (Chou 2002: 27; Chong Rodriguez 1992: 29). Some would soon migrate to the two coasts of Costa Rica, but the majority stayed in Panama.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica followed Panama’s example in 1855 when two groups of Chinese workers arrived from Panama at the port of Puntarenas on the Pacific coast to work on private lands in the west of the country and to serve as domestics (Heusmann 1991: 715). Leon Azofeifa points out that these workers came to Costa Rica with experience of working on railroads in Panama (Leon Azofeifa 1988: 67). One of these importers of Chinese laborers was Baron von Bulow who had earlier been involved in a number of failed European settlements on the Caribbean side of the isthmus from Belize to Costa Rica.

In 1873 over 650 Chinese arrived at Puntarenas. Of these, slightly over 400 were assigned to work on the construction of a railroad connecting with the Caribbean coast. The rest were to work as domestics, in agriculture primarily coffee and livestock, and in the gold mines. Some 250 of these were immediately sold to landowners to do such work (Heusmann 1991: 717). Here two factors influenced the purchase price of a Chinese laborer: physical condition and work history (Loria Chaves 2000: 152-55). By March of the following year only 236 of the original total were left and they asked for better working conditions. The army’s
response was to shoot the Chinese while they were asleep, killing five and injuring nine in what some have called Costa Rica’s first labor uprising (Heusmann 1991: 717). Among these workers there were occasional incidences of suicide, seen as a means of escape and “return” to China. Flight was not uncommon and captured laborers were often flogged, shackled and forced to work in chains. Many Chinese, however, would rather risk the lashes and chains than work as plantation workers, an indication of the intolerable conditions on the plantations (Heusmann 1991: 718). Such were the conditions under which they labored that the United States consul compared it to slavery (Leon Azofeifa 1988: 72-73; Stewart 1964: 30-31).

Many attempts were made to import more Chinese laborers, but the Costa Rican government often thwarted them on moral grounds and even denied for a time the 1887 request of Minor C. Keith, the major force in the development of the Caribbean railroad, for 1,000 laborers. While the government deliberated, Keith turned to the surplus labor market in Panama after work there on the French effort to build the Panama Canal had ceased in 1889. This labor force, which also included Caribbean blacks and Italians, was easier and cheaper to acquire than laborers direct from China. The eventual approval of Chinese labor for Keith carried certain restrictions. These included a two-year limitation on Chinese residence in the country, restriction of workers to an assigned residential compound, and the registration of each laborer so that he should not be confused with the resident Chinese. Any violation of these conditions might result in the return of the laborer to China at the owner’s expense. It is apparent, though, that Chinese laborers continued to enter Costa Rica, for in 1895 officials on the Caribbean coast complained of their inability to stop illegal Chinese entering the country due to a lack of staff. Within two years of this complaint the government yet again banned all further import of Chinese, a ban which remained on the books until 1943, but which was regularly ignored in practice (Leon Azofeifa 1988: 74-75, 93-94; Heusmann 1991: 718).

Belize

Ten years after Costa Rica, Belize began its experiment with Chinese agricultural labor. Known until 1964 as the colony of British Honduras, it was, from its initial settlement in the mid-17th century, dependent on the extraction and shipment of forest products, primarily logwood and mahogany. However, by the 1830s the production of wood had begun to decline and efforts were made to diversify the economy. In 1857, sugar,
introduced and developed in the colony by refugees from Yucatan, was first exported from Belize. One result of this was the introduction of the plantation-style cultivation of sugar cane, for which indentured laborers were brought in from Barbados and China despite an increasing local mestizo work force (McNairn 1998: 244-45). This was to be Belize’s only experiment in the introduction of contracted Chinese laborers. The newly appointed Lieutenant Governor of British Honduras, John Gardiner Austin, had served for many years in China as labor recruiting agent for some of the British sugar colonies and it was hoped that his experience would make for a successful experiment. Over 400 laborers, mostly men, were recruited from Amoy (Xiamen) in June, 1865 and were assigned to plantations in the north of Belize. Within a year roughly 100 of the Chinese had fled to Yucatan and over 50 were dead. The flight and death of so many laborers prompted the reassignment of some to plantations in the central and southern coastal areas in 1866; thus began the dispersal of what had been a concentrated settlement in the north. By 1868 only 211 could be accounted for. In 1870 the experiment was declared a failure and by 1871 regular data on the indentured Chinese had ceased as interest turned to the importation of time-expired Indian laborers from Jamaica (Robinson 2006: 79-82).

Life under Contract Labor in Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize

Comparisons of the situations and experiences of the contracted laborers in these three countries show some commonalities: high mortality (from illness and suicide), flight from work, use of opium, poor diet and difficult working conditions. Many contemporary accounts also blame adverse local conditions but make scant attempt to seek the real reasons. Suicide among Chinese workers was highest in Panama, though it was also reported for both Costa Rica and Belize. (Peru and Cuba were best known for having very high numbers of suicides.) Many of the same situations prevailed in these three countries, leading to similar outcomes. Primary among the causes of suicide were the hard working conditions. In Belize, Panama and Costa Rica, Chinese workers were isolated from the rest of society, often being restricted to their compound. There were no nearby towns, unlike in Peru, for example, where one might find work as a domestic. They were obliged to work long hours in the tropical climate with only one day off per week. In Costa Rica, bosses were required to provide at least three holidays per year (Heusmann 1991: 716), but given their isolation, there was no place for the laborers to escape to in order to forget their hardships. In Costa Rica, as we have
seen, escapees were whipped, shackled when caught and forced to do further work in chains. Some were, at least in theory, returned to China at the owners’ expense. The high rate of mortality among their fellow-workers added to the despair. Suicide, mostly by hanging and drowning in Costa Rica and Panama and by drowning in Belize, was the most usual means of escape. In all these countries there were instances of workers killing themselves by falling on their machetes, sharpened bamboo sticks, or other sharp objects (Robinson 2006: 83; Cohen 1971: 114-15; Chong Ruiz 1992: 26; León Azofeifa 1988: 93-94; Chang Rodríguez 1958: 379).

The use of opium was also a factor. It had surfaced as an issue among Chinese in the British sugar colonies in the Caribbean but reached much higher proportions in Belize and Panama. In Belize the workers came with some opium and later purchased the drug with their earnings. In Panama, arrangements were made prior to the arrival of the Chinese in 1854 to supply them with a fixed amount for their use. The effects of the drug were mixed. Initially, many of the Chinese in Panama who fell ill were restored to health and productivity when given their supply of opium. However, regular use soon debilitated them. Chong Ruiz also sees a connection between the use of opium and high rates of suicide in Panama although he does not elaborate (Chong Ruiz 1992: 26-27; Chou 2002: 24). In Belize opium was used habitually as an escape and this seriously weakened the workers. Some sold their food rations for opium, leading to early deaths. There soon developed a monopoly in opium in the hands of a few. Attempts were made to control the drug. In Panama, laws were introduced banning its use; in Belize there was much discussion, particularly after March 1866, but all attempts to prohibit its use failed (Robinson 2006: 83; Cohen 1971: 313).

It is not clear what the diet of the Costa Rican Chinese laborers was. Laborers taken to Panama in 1854 were promised Chinese food, but this did not materialize. In Belize little rice was available, so some plantation bosses substituted corn for rice. The Chinese hated it. In the words of one of the planters, it “tends to open up the bowels” (Chou 2002: 24; Robinson 2006: 83).

**Post-Indenture Survival**

Though faced with the reality of death and hardship, the Chinese survived their indenture by either outlasting it or fleeing from it when they found themselves an alternative means of livelihood. In Belize, for
instance, some were absorbed into Amerindian society. While virtually nothing is known of these laborers, two works, by González Navarro (1970) and Bartolomé and Barabas (1978), note that they were welcomed into a relatively egalitarian Mayan society, assimilated into Mayan culture and took Mayan wives. Another author notes a descendant of one of these unions living in southern Yucatan in the 1970s (Quan 1973: 15).

In Panama and Costa Rica many stayed near to the railway lines on which they had worked, dedicating themselves to agriculture rather than the retail business. When Chang gathered his information about 1950 (Chang 1956: Map XI), many could still be found along the old railway lines in Costa Rica.

Other Chinese in all three countries gradually migrated to the nearest towns or cities and set themselves up as shopkeepers. In Belize this meant the towns of Corozal and Orange Walk in the north, but particularly in Belize City, administrative capital of the colony, where they settled primarily on the south side and established laundries, brothels, gambling houses, cook shops and some stores (Robinson 2006: 85). In Costa Rica Chinese tended to settle in the two port towns: Puntarenas, through which most had entered the country, and on the outskirts of the port of Limon, the eastern terminus of the railway which they had helped to build. Here by 1903 the Chinese had established a lottery. By the 1890s some had also settled in the Central Highlands (León Azofeifa 1988: 305).

The sudden release of large numbers of jobless Chinese into Panamanian society as the French abandoned their canal efforts soon brought about the first major anti-Chinese activity. In August, 1890 the Sociedad Antichina was founded to oppose the further introduction of Chinese into the country. By 1900 a barrio chino, or Chinatown, had come into existence in Panama City with small garden plots on the outskirts of the city. Made up originally of the Chinese left over from the construction of the railway and the French phase of the canal, the community was joined in the last decade of the 19th century by Chinese from Peru, Cuba and the United States, all complaining of mistreatment (Chong Ruiz 1992: 20-51). The continued increase in the size of the Chinese community and its increasing participation in the commercial sector led to a series of laws passed between 1904 and 1913 with a view to eliminating further Chinese migration (Chong Ruiz 1992: 52-53). Furthermore, those Chinese remaining in Panama were severely restricted in what they could sell, primarily goods imported from China (Shing
Many married Panamanian women in order not to lose their businesses and over 200 were deported in the 1930s. Despite all this, Chinese entered and left Panama seemingly at will throughout the 1920s and 1930s (Chou 2002: 34-36).

It is important to note that many Chinese tended to leave the countries to which they had been taken originally. Panamanian Chinese migrated to Costa Rica and Nicaragua and some Costa Rican Chinese migrated to Nicaragua. To combat the increasing numbers of Chinese entering the country illegally, Guatemala passed a law about 1895 requiring all Chinese to be registered so that the illegals might not be confused with Guatemalan Chinese (New York Times, 23 November 1897: 7). While it is not clear where the Chinese entering Guatemala came from, both Belize and Mexico, which had a number of Chinese in the south near the Guatemalan border, are likely places (McCreery and Munro 1993: 208). This situation has continued into the 21st century (Anaya 2002: 125).

The overwhelmingly male Chinese immigrants immediately began to assimilate, contracting alliances or marriages with local women. In Costa Rica this was seen as unwanted competition for the scarce number of local women (Heusmann 1991: 714) and repeated attempts were made to limit Chinese movement, to ban Chinese entry to the country and to repatriate others. Because of the isolated nature of the Chinese in Belize, this did not become an issue until well into the 20th century. In some cases, Chinese men began to lose their identity through marrying local women and gradually assimilating into local society. In other instances local wives were sometimes sent to China with their children to learn Chinese ways. Yet others returned to China periodically to find and bring out a Chinese wife. Not uncommonly a Chinese worker had both a local wife and a Chinese wife (Robinson 2006: 85; Lau 2007: 13).

Chinese imported into Belize and Costa Rica were assigned identification numbers. In Belize some documents recorded workers by both numbers and names or approximations of names. This sometimes allowed for the trading of numbers or the use of those of deceased persons to acquire more rations or opium. After the period of indenture, though, numbers were discarded in both Belize and Costa Rica and workers sometimes faced the issue of deciding on what names to use. In Belize the problem was usually solved by taking a Western given name and keeping the Chinese surname. In Costa Rica several options were open. Some simply followed the Belize way. Others attempted a translation of the Chinese surname. Yet others took the surnames of the landowners for whom they worked. Guatemala and Honduras primarily
kept the Chinese surnames but also attempted translations. The problem would resurface in the 1930s in Belize, where migrants from Guatemala had a mix of Chinese surnames and Spanish translations of those surnames (Robinson 2006: 83, 87; León Azofeifa 1988: 86-88; Loria Chaves 2000, 181-82).

Free Laborers and Merchants

Getting Established

The communities formed by the survivors of the indenture period served as nuclei for the settlement of increasing numbers of Chinese who came either from China or other parts of the Americas. When post-indenture Chinese started arriving in Belize, Panama and Costa Rica, there were already Chinese communities in place; Panama City even had a Chinatown. The last two decades of the 19th century witnessed the beginnings of Chinese settlers as small merchants in all the Central American republics. With the exception of the Chinese in Panama City, the provenance of the other Chinese settlers is unclear. However, the Chinese Exclusion Act, first passed in the United States in 1882, set in motion, or perhaps increased, the tendency of some Chinese to leave the United States for Mexico and other destinations to the south. Leon Azofeifa cites two references, Stewart (1967) and Perez de la Riva (1978), who claim the presence in Costa Rica of Chinese from the United States, and Lau mentions two businesses in Bluefields, Nicaragua, in the 1890s owned by Chinese from the United States (Lau 2007: 12). Loria Chaves supports this idea and adds that by 1900 settlers in Costa Rica came also from a wide variety of locations in Central America (Loria Chaves 2000: 187). Despite this trend, the Exclusion Act also led to the illegal immigration of Chinese into the United States via Mexico which occasionally reached 20,000 or more per year (Anaya 2002: 36).

As Costa Rica and Belize developed their agriculture and infrastructure from the 1850s to the 1870s, the other republics in the area also made tentative moves toward development of their own. By 1865 Nicaragua had issued its first call for foreign laborers to work the land in return for up to 60 manzanas (about 100 acres) for every bachelor. Chief among the respondents to this call were Germans who established themselves in the west of the country as coffee planters. There is a reference to one Frederick Alberding, “a trader who shipped Chinese from China to
Nicaragua” by 1869 but no further details are provided (Heusmann 1991: 715). Anaya cites one source which claims the presence of Chinese in Honduras by 1878 (Anaya 2002: 58). By the 1880s a shipping route had developed whereby Chinese were transported from Guangzhou to San Francisco and then south to the Gulf of Fonseca which borders El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua (Anaya 2002: 82). It is during this period that Chinese were first officially mentioned for Honduras in the census of 1889 (Anaya 2002: 56) and it is generally accepted that they arrived in Nicaragua in 1884 (Lau 2007: 12).

The 1880s also saw the development of mining in both Guatemala and Honduras as well as the beginning of the Northern Railroad in Guatemala, a railway connecting Guatemala City with the Atlantic Coast. While Europeans and North Americans provided the labor for these enterprises, there are references to Chinese as merchants in Honduras by 1895 who took their wares overland from El Salvador. Their exodus from El Salvador may be due in part to laws passed in that country which obliged Chinese at this time to register and to take Spanish lessons, suggesting an earlier Chinese presence in El Salvador (Anaya 2002: 82). Though they established themselves in the capital of Tegucigalpa, their primary foci were the settlements generated by the mining companies of central Honduras, particularly San Juancito. Here they supplied not only the tools and clothes for the workers but also food and sundries. Two of these merchant houses, Quan and Quinchon Leon, were to last for generations, Quan finally closing its doors in 1989 and Quinchon Leon still in business. With the expansion of the banana industry in the north of Honduras along the Caribbean Sea in the last decade of the 19th century, Chinese shops appeared in some of the coastal towns. In La Ceiba, one of these towns, a “legendary Chinatown” was established (Anaya 2002: 64).

Nicaragua
Unlike most of the other republics, Nicaragua’s Chinese population did not develop from a central focus and then spread out. Rather it developed separately in the east and west of the country and was better studied separately until the 1970s. Mention has already been made of Chinese being shipped to Nicaragua as early as 1869 and that 1884 is often cited as a date by which there were Chinese in Nicaragua. In the summer of 1891 interested parties in the west of that country approached the president of the Republic to authorize the introduction of Chinese workers for the mines, as well as for cotton and sugar plantations. While some
did go to work in the agricultural northwest, the majority, as in Honduras and El Salvador, came as small shopkeepers. At about the same time Chinese shopkeepers were supplying the needs of mining interests in Honduras and may have done the same in Nicaragua. The primary port of arrival at this time was Corinto, just west of the agricultural hub of Chinandega. The inauguration of a railroad in this area in the early 1890s facilitated the transfer of goods and persons, allowing for the establishment of Chinese stores from Chinandega in the northwest to Rivas in the southwest within a few years (Lau 2007: 11, 13).

The region of Nicaragua along the Caribbean Sea was until 1895 effectively a British protectorate. Economic and cultural forces along this coast, generally called the Mosquitia, were different from those pertaining in the west of the nation. Here there was no mining, or the cultivation of sugar and cotton; rather, first timber extraction and then banana plantations, with smaller fishing interests, were the dominant economic forces. The Chinese presence, at least as early as 1884, may be due in part to the development of the Bluefields Banana Company in the town of Bluefields consisting largely of Chinese who had moved up the coast from Panama and Costa Rica. These persons were mostly small businessmen, in the main shopkeepers, bar keepers and restaurateurs. At this date five Chinese firms were listed in Bluefields, among which were two fishing firms run by Chinese from the United States. By 1893 other Chinese names had appeared in Bluefields. Further south, at San Juan del Norte on the border with Costa Rica, five Chinese names had appeared by 1892. In 1895 Nicaragua occupied the Mosquitia and began its official reintegration into Nicaragua. One of the first steps taken by the government was to prohibit the further introduction of Chinese. Two years later Chinese in the region were ordered to dispose of their belongings and leave the country (Lau 2007: 12).

Expansion of the Communities

Costa Rica
In the second half of the 19th century Costa Rica concentrated primarily on increasing the numbers of Europeans living in the center of the country. Primarily northern Europeans and Italians, these settlers helped to form the essentially white concept of a Costa Rican (Loría Chaves 2000: 6-7). In this central area the growing of coffee was also introduced and brought about a boom, hence the need to build a railway to the
Caribbean coast. Little had been done with the northwest of the country in the regions of Nicoya and Guanacaste. Actually, Guanacaste had earlier seceded from Nicaragua and so came late to the Costa Rican mindset. Enterprising Chinese merchants in Puntarenas gradually opened up these regions and integrated them into the national economy. By establishing themselves as small merchants along the Gulf of Nicoya, they gradually penetrated the interior of Guanacaste. They were also peddlers, selling goods on credit. On top of that, they established themselves as major suppliers for smaller stores, both Chinese and non-Chinese. While most of this expansion was by way of the Gulf of Nicoya, these merchants also settled to a lesser extent on the Pacific coast of the region. Such was their success that in 1902 all Chinese in Guanacaste were rounded up and expelled from the region. Given the ebb and flow of pro- and anti-Chinese attitudes and legislation during and after the indenture period, it is not surprising that the Chinese returned to Guanacaste within a few years of their expulsion (Leon Azofeifa 1988: 96, 100). Chang notes that while the port cities of Puntarenas and Limon, along with the national capital of San Jose, held the largest numbers of Chinese, the valleys in Nicoya and Guanacaste north of the Gulf of Nicoya were still home to a number of Chinese settlers (Chang 1956: Map XI). By the mid-20th century the Chinese community had expanded from its mercantile enterprises to include both agriculture and livestock.

The community of Chinese which developed on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica near the port of Limon offers a few other interesting patterns of Chinese activity. The first of these, practiced into the 1930s, is the clandestine “dropping off” of Chinese on beaches south of Limon. This is particularly well documented by Leon Azofeifa in his 1988 dissertation. The phenomenon was not uncommon in other parts of Central America but is best documented in the case of Costa Rica. In general, local residents were advised in advance of the possible arrival of a ship bringing in Chinese, mostly from Panama but occasionally from Jamaica, and their help was requested in first hiding and then finding employment for the new arrivals. Relative secrecy was necessary since there were many attempts by the government of Costa Rica to closely monitor and regulate the Chinese of Limon Province (Leon Azofeifa 1979: 94; Loría Chaves 2000: 180). Given that there were Chinese already established near Limon, along the old railway line to the Central Highlands and in the Central Highlands, newly arriving Chinese were “passed along” the community until they reached a relative or someone who would employ them.
The second phenomenon of the Chinese on the Caribbean coast is that of the “black Chinese” so very well known and documented for Jamaica by H. Orlando Patterson (1975). The port of Limon was for many years a predominantly black city with a noticeable presence of whites, Chinese, Hispanics and a small community of Indians (Madrigal 2007; Olien 1968); it was until about 1990 the Costa Rican city with the largest Chinese population. Based on a few interviews conducted in May of 2008 two things have become clear. First, the topic is not a comfortable one particularly among later arriving Chinese, many of whom are unwilling to believe that “black Chinese” exist. Secondly, the number appears to be very small (Robinson 2008). It is not clear whether this phenomenon existed in Bluefields, Nicaragua, also a predominantly mulatto town with a large number of Chinese. According to Leon Azofeifa, the Chinese population in Costa Rica, and especially in Limon, remained overwhelmingly male until the 1940s. While liaisons with local women were common, the offspring were seldom considered part of the Chinese community. The situation began to change after 1940 as the number of Chinese women increased. With their arrival, families of pure Chinese began to develop and education in Chinese with an emphasis on the Chinese language began and continued until it was suppressed in the 1960s (Leon Azofeifa 1988: 336-37).

Nicaragua
As first the banana industry and later the timber industry expanded along the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and up many of its rivers, so did the Chinese community at Bluefields, which established branch shops in many of the small towns up and down the coast (Lau 2007: 12). Here the Chinese merchants gradually replaced the older West Indian merchants and by 1925, with 60 firms, they controlled all but two stores in the city. Chang’s data from 1950 reveal the same numbers (Chang 1956: Table XV). Within a few years Chinese merchants also began to settle in the second major town on the coast, Puerto Cabezas, popularly known today by its Miskito name of Bilwi. Here the expanded interests of the United Fruit Company were turning Puerto Cabezas into a major banana exporting hub, a situation that would last until the 1940s when Sigatoka disease, or Panama disease, destroyed the industry in the region. Possibly due to their close association with American fruit companies, Chinese began to migrate to the United States after 1922 (Lau 2007: 13).

In the north-central area of Nicaragua gold had been discovered in the mid-1880s and had been exploited primarily by American and British
firms around the settlement of Bonanza. By the 1930s interest in the area, with new mines at nearby Siuna, had created a demand for labor. Miskito Indians from the country's northeast, and particularly from the area of Puerto Cabezas, began to work the gold mines. The Chinese merchants in Puerto Cabezas were quick to follow and were soon competing successfully with company commissaries. Not only did they sell cheaper than the company stores, but they extended credit to company employees and non-company personnel alike. The exodus of Chinese from Puerto Cabezas in turn would create a further migration of Chinese from Bluefields to Puerto Cabezas (Wheelock 1981: 178-80).

In eastern Nicaragua, the Chinese remained a major economic force until the coming of the Sandinista revolution in the late 1970s. After the mines at Siuna and Bonanza were closed in 1962 some Chinese merchants returned to the coast. Others remained and prospered. With the closure of the mines, laborers were displaced but did not have the resources to relocate. They therefore turned to agriculture in the region. The Chinese were quick to supply both equipment and food. The result was the establishment of a major agricultural community in an area previously undeveloped (Wheelock 1981: 167-69).

Throughout the decades from the 1930s to the 1960s the Somoza family gradually established itself as the government in Nicaragua and tended to protect Chinese interests, even repealing from 1944 the anti-Chinese legislation laid down since the first years of the century (Lau 2007: 12). With the fall of the Somozas in 1979 and the accession of a socialist government, coastal Chinese were seen as classic foreign exploiters of the native people. Their properties were often confiscated and individuals imprisoned. One option which many Chinese took was to move to the United States. When some Chinese returned to the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua in the first years of the 21st century, they could find almost no trace of the earlier community (Pineda 2001: 211; Siu 2001: 17).

By the 1920s Chinese on the Pacific side of the nation had begun to expand their economic horizons, moving gradually into coffee and cotton production. Interestingly they were now the owners and managers in the production, not the laborers as in the 1890s. By 1950 (Chang 1956: Map XI) the major focus of Chinese business was on the capital, Managua, where Chinese merchants, as in Bluefields, had controlled about 90 percent of the local grocery stores. The Chinese tended to settle throughout the western part of the country for longer periods than on the Caribbean coast. There thus grew up a major community of part-Chinese with very
strong national sentiments. While the east coast languished after 1960, Chinese continued to arrive on the west coast in large numbers, coming from all areas including the PRC. When the Sandinista revolution broke out the Chinese community was divided (Siu 2001: 17, 27). Many fought on the side of the revolution and more abandoned the country as the violence escalated. For about 20 years Nicaragua experienced a steady emigration of Chinese, including the closure of its Chinese Association (Lau 2007: 17).

Panama
When the United States began its phase of the construction of the Panama Canal, the preference for Chinese workers over others was clear. Over 1,000 were sought but the Panamanian government would not hear of it. A disgruntled John Stevens, in charge of the construction, turned to West Indian, Indian, and other laborers and somehow managed to get several hundred Chinese added to the work force, perhaps including some of the 2,800 reportedly contracted in Fujian in 1905 and taken first to New York before being relocated to Panama (Chou 2002: 27). As has been noted, in open defiance of canal requests, the fledgling government passed a series of laws between 1904 and 1913 banning or severely restricting Chinese migration and activity (McCullough 1977: 474-75; Chong Ruiz 1992: 52). The Chinese population in Panama remained static from the 1920s to the 1940s but began to increase thereafter despite the promulgation of a new constitution in 1941 which expressly banned the further introduction of Chinese, Arabs, most blacks and Indians (Chong Ruiz 1992: 59). Shing (1943), a Chinese diplomat in the region, says that there was a total ban on Chinese immigration from 1933. Nonetheless, in 1944 the government granted permission for instruction in Chinese and the Escuela Republica de China came into being. Always a small institution, it was located in the barrio chino until 1986 when it changed its name to Instituto Sun Yat-Sen and then moved out of the barrio chino (Chong Ruiz 1992: 96). Chang notes not only large numbers of Chinese in Panama City and Colon but also the presence of a fair number of Chinese in western Panama (Chang 1956: Map XI). Perhaps attracted by the growth of the banana industry in the early 1900s, Chinese began to settle in the areas of Bocas del Toro and Sixaola near the Costa Rican border.
Belize

In Belize, the period between 1900 and 1930 witnessed the gradual assimilation of Chinese and the production of a very mixed community. By the 1930s, however, Chinese began to arrive in Belize from the United States, Canada, Jamaica and in particular Central America. From Honduras came members of the Quan family who established dry goods stores in both the capital, Belize City, and in the town of Punta Gorda in the far south. By 1938 Chinese from eastern Guatemala were also established in the same town of Punta Gorda. Many of these Chinese had gone to Guatemala as contract laborers when that country expanded its use of Chinese labor in the 1930s. By about 1950 this population had settled primarily in the cities of the western piedmont and the valleys east of Guatemala City (Chang 1956: Map XI). But many Chinese who were unhappy with the political situation there moved to Belize. There was for many years at least one person in the Chinese community in Punta Gorda who wrote letters in Chinese and acted as translator for those who had arrived from China, thus facilitating the flow of Chinese into Belize. Through this person, a Chinese businessman who had established himself could send for a relative or someone from the same hometown to come to work for his business in Belize in return for which the businessman would pay for this man’s passage and support him in the new country. Most of the Chinese later established themselves in Belize City as general merchants or as shopkeepers of specialty items such as cloth and sewing accessories. Certain practices relating to marriage also evolved among this group of Chinese. That is, arriving alone, Chinese men would establish relations with local women of all races. However, the relationship with the first woman did not necessarily cease despite the arrival of a Chinese wife and the start of a Chinese family (Robinson 2006: 89).

By the early 1960s a new wave of Chinese had arrived in Belize and spread to many of the district capital towns. In the towns of San Ignacio in the west and Dangriga in the south in particular, the Chinese came into stiff competition with the local merchants, mainly the Lebanese in the west and a variety of ethnic Chinese in the south. In what was called the “price wars,” local merchants took sizable losses in order to undercut the Chinese, effectively driving a number of the latter out of most of the small towns by decade’s end. At the same time on Orange Street in Belize City, the Chinese settled in such large numbers that, had the pattern continued, Belize would have had its first Chinatown. As it is, closed “Chinese only” communities did not develop in Belize until the 1990s
with the influx of yet another wave of Chinese immigrants (Robinson 2006: 89, 91).

**Honduras**

In Honduras, the Chinese expanded to the nation’s capital, where their original mining-related stores were turned into subsidiaries of larger, capital-based enterprises. These firms also continued to expand to the northern Caribbean coast of Honduras, run by relatives imported into Honduras as managers and staff. Here for the first time Chinese economic expansion was hindered by the merchant houses of the region’s Arabs, mostly Palestinians, who had been in the area since the 1880s.

As the Chinese population continued to grow during the first three decades of the 20th century, laws were passed in 1909 and again in the last years of the 1920s specifically prohibiting the entry of Chinese and Caribbean blacks considered as “undesirable.” From 1910 to 1923 a German newspaper editor living in Honduras waged an unceasing war on both groups; every effort was made to exclude them from taking part in the building of the railroad to the Caribbean, which began in 1912. During the civil war of 1924 Chinese businesses in particular were closed down by the warring parties on both sides. Anti-Chinese discrimination reached its peak from 1928 to 1933 during the Mejía Colindres presidency. After 1933 many Chinese sought the protection of the nation’s new dictator, General Carias Andino, but greater protection for the Chinese came only with the revolution of 1949-1950 (Anaya 2002: 95). At this time the Honduran Chinese Association was established with the blessing of the new military president. Pro- and anti-Chinese sentiments coexisted until the 1960s, after which time restrictions on the activities of Chinese began to be lifted as the contributions of the Chinese to the country were gradually recognized. An indication of this change was the election of one of the Quan family members to the Tegucigalpa Chamber of Commerce in 1960.

The tendency for Chinese men to marry Honduran women has created a culturally assimilated community. Many send their children to school in the United States and have gradually integrated themselves into all aspects of the country’s social life. In business, the community has expanded beyond the general stores sector, and moved into the areas of soft-drinks bottling as well as soap and shoe manufacturing. A Chinese partnership also formed the first Honduran airline company (Anaya 2002: 202). (The firm, thought to be the first, did not last long and gave way to several other airline companies.)
Chinese residents in all of the seven Central American countries currently have some form or other of Chinese associations. Indeed, since 1965 a Federation of Chinese Associations of Central America and Panama has been in existence. An annual convention of this organization is held in a different Central American capital and since 1971 has included youth and women’s meetings and beauty contests (Siu 2001: 7 and 2005: 518-19). However, the form of the association, its reason(s) for being, the time and place in which it was founded, and the circumstances under which it came into being vary. In some cases, like in Belize and Honduras, the associations appeared only at about the middle of the 20th century (Robinson 2006: 93; Anaya 2002: 93-95). By contrast, the associations in Costa Rica and Panama date back to the late 19th century (Chou 2002: 28; Chong Ruiz 1992: 94-95). Some, like the one in Nicaragua, were discontinued only to be revitalized decades later (Lau 2007: 23-24). In addition to associations at the national level, there have usually been associations at the city or regional levels, some of these antedating and sometimes forming the foundation for the national organizations. Perhaps the best known in Nicaragua is the Club Chino de Bluefields, founded in 1920 (Lau 2007: 33). These associations evolved under several names as their missions developed and changed. In 1925 the Unión Fraternal China was founded in Managua and existed under that name until 1942 when it was incorporated and had its name changed to Asociación China. The association continued to be active until 1979 when the exodus of Chinese due to the Sandinista Revolution brought about a hiatus which lasted until 1991 (Lau 2007: 23-24).

The functions of the Chinese associations were multiple. To begin with they were fraternal organizations which often pooled resources to help members in crisis, such as over the education of children and funerals. Sometimes the pooled resources of the association helped bring out from China a member’s relative. Likewise, younger members or more recently arrived members were often supplied with goods and funds to help them start their own commercial operations. A major function, at least in theory, was to preserve Chinese traditions and the Chinese language. Accordingly celebrations were held on October 10 (often called the “Double Ten”) in honor of the birth of the Chinese Republic, and to mark seasonal festivals, particularly that of the Chinese New Year. In Honduras the Chinese Association served for many years as a bank not only for members of the organization but also for other Hondurans.
seeking a secure depository for their funds. In both Honduras and Nicaragua the associations for many years had a resident cook to prepare authentic Chinese food for the members (Lau 2007: 23-24). By the 1990s the Belize Chinese Association had established translation services for recent arrivals, particularly as such services might be needed in court (Robinson 2006: 93).

On many occasions the associations functioned as a social club for the members; at other times the Chinese Association was an independent entity. In many cases the social club preceded the official Chinese Association by many years. In addition to providing gaming tables, exercise facilities and a venue for meetings of families and members of the association, at least one club, that in Managua, functioned (until its destruction in the earthquake of 1972) as a short-term hotel, providing a room for any Chinese who came to town with no place to stay (Lau 2007: 31). In times when anti-Chinese prejudice was rampant, this was a valuable source of support.

These days, many Chinese associations organized in individual nations have created Chinese Youth Clubs in an effort to gather Chinese youth under their wing. Most of the associations have also sponsored the Chinese School to provide instruction for the children of the members (Anaya 2002: 93). When one recalls that the majority of Chinese arriving in the area before 1950 were men who regularly formed unions with local non-Chinese women, the need for preserving and passing on both basic Chinese grammar and writing to the next generation becomes clear. Since the last decades of the 20th century the Chinese School has changed in focus. The pupils are now mostly the children of more recently arrived Chinese families who seek to preserve their heritage in communities which are increasingly pure Chinese. One response to this increasing dominance of the associations by recent arrivals is the founding in some countries of “associations of descendants of Chinese” (Anaya 2002: 105).

The Federation of Chinese Associations of Central America and Panama is a further development of the older regional and national organizations. One of its major roles is to supply economic, political and humanitarian resources on scales beyond the capabilities of the associations at the national level by organizing natural disasters relief efforts or exerting political pressure to address the adverse social conditions of its members in one or another of its member countries. As Siu states: “In short, this organization provides support when and where the nation-state fails to protect the interests and lives of diasporic Chinese” (Siu 2001: 18).
Another major function of the associations is to bring about the economic integration of the many Chinese communities in the region and to coordinate efforts in securing support from China. From its inception until 2007 such efforts were solely targeted at the Republic of China (Taiwan). With the decision of the government of Costa Rica in that year to recognize the PRC, such association efforts have become somewhat strained.

**Conclusion**

The Chinese experience in Central America before 1890 had been a very negative one. Bought and sold, lashed and chained, Chinese laborers were virtual slaves in many areas. While such extreme treatment slowly disappeared with the new century, Chinese continued to be resented because they were racially different, because they were in the main male and because of their entrepreneurship. “Unclean,” “unhealthy,” and “vice-ridden” were terms often used to describe Chinese laborers and used in arguments against their further admission. In times of economic adversity it was easy to find a Chinese scapegoat and accuse him of taking both local jobs and local women. During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th there were unceasing attempts at prohibiting the immigration of Chinese. Anti-Chinese movements were organized and Chinese residents were restricted in their freedom of movement and in the types of goods they were allowed to sell. At one point Panama legislated to incorporate such restrictions in its constitution. Nonetheless, international companies and local landowners simply ignored the laws, and with the exception of the civil wars of the 1980s, the Chinese have kept coming, aided by the network of help given to relatives to assist their clandestine entry into the country and the tradition of sponsorship in securing work for new arrivals in local Chinese businesses.

Up to ca.1980, the Chinese for their part responded to the harsh conditions in a variety of ways. One of these was to escape either to another part of the country or to another country. In many cases, they relied on the effects of opium to alleviate their pain, and not infrequently resorted to suicide, some in the belief that this might take them back to China in the next life. Some started mutual aid societies which grew into social clubs and Chinese associations whose functions included aspects of cultural preservation (such as food and language), the provision of temporary residence in an environment of housing discrimination, safe
banking, legal and translation services, and mutual help in times of crisis both personal and communal. As Lok Siu points out, “these associations are created and nurtured mostly for and by immigrants, and their existence, therefore, depends on immigration flows from their respective regions in China” (Siu 2005: 521).

Being mostly a male population, the Chinese sought relationships with local women of a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In some areas of Central America the result of this has been the development of a genuinely mixed community. Many of these part-Chinese individuals have integrated into local society in most areas of national life, in effect paving the way for the acceptance and integration of later Chinese migrants. Many Chinese have also maintained ties with China, sometimes returning there after years in the Americas. Others have sought to retain aspects of their culture despite their mixed marriages. Among those who could afford it, the native wife and the children have often been sent to China to learn Chinese ways.

The Chinese have served as pioneers in the development of a number of areas. They developed the shores of the Gulf of Nicoya in Costa Rica and integrated it with the mainstream of the Costa Rican economy. In Nicaragua they helped to explore the previously under-populated north central area of the country. Together with foreign companies, they helped to develop the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and Honduras. They also participated in the development of the western part of Panama. In all these areas they have filled a need in running small retail shops, working in light industry and providing a needed variety in restaurant offerings. In all of the countries under consideration they have held positions of distinction in government, education, sport, finance and the arts.

As indicated at the beginning of this article, much research is needed to produce a complete picture of the Chinese experience in Central America. There are several references to a Chinese presence in some countries which precede the dates generally accepted for their arrival there; more work needs to be done on this area of early arrivals. The communities in Guatemala and El Salvador also require closer attention. Equally there is the need to look into the issue of discrimination against the Chinese in the entire region, their process of assimilation and their relationships with China. Regional comparisons of the Chinese experience in Central America, Cuba and Peru would also seem appropriate.

Central America has witnessed Chinese migration of proportions never before imagined. As Taiwan expanded its aid, primarily in agriculture
Fig 1: Central America showing relevant Chinese sites.
and infrastructure, a new phenomenon has appeared in the region, viz. the emergence of the wealthy Chinese investors. With them came the closed, exclusive Chinese communities, highly inflated land prices, and very visible commercial activities and establishments including shopping malls, high-rise office buildings, hotels and *maquiladora*-style textile factories.

At the same time, in the 1980s came many in the “lost generation” from China, i.e. those who had experienced the Cultural Revolution and had not fared well. Unskilled, they formed a lower class often doing day labor or managing “cook shops” out of their houses.

Since the year 2000, the headlines in many newspapers from Belize to Panama have carried a common theme: the ever-increasing migration from the PRC. This has raised concern about the large numbers of illegal Chinese, and frequent passport- and visa- related scandals with the accompanying resignations of legislators or government ministers. Two further developments have become clear: the presence of strong criminal elements engaged in human trafficking believed to be operating primarily out of Fujian Province, and, at least in Costa Rica, cases of part-Chinese government officials either as free advocates for these migrants or as active members of criminal organizations.

The highly visible presence of the Chinese in Central America in the last 20 years has brought about considerable discussions in the newspapers of the individual countries, providing a rich source of information and topics for debate. Further studies of Chinese activities and the perceptions of the local communities regarding the new Chinese are clearly warranted.

**References**


CHAPTER FIVE

REPORT: ARCHIVES OF BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY IN THE GOD OF LUCK: A CONVERSATION WITH RUTHANNE LUM McCUNN

Lisa Yun*

In the *God of Luck* (2007), a wife in China discovers that her husband is “on board a devil-ship headed for Peru, a country even further away than Gold Mountain on the other side” (p. 86). So unfolds Ruthanne Lum McCunn’s novel, which revolves around family and the love of a husband and wife, encumbered by cultural traditions but challenged by changing destinies. It is the coolie trade to Peru, however, that brings forward and dramatizes this love story. By fleshing out this period in history, McCunn helps her readers to imagine a painful and dramatic story of diasporic movement and labor. I had the great fortune of asking Ruthanne questions about the fashioning of this new work. For example, how do history and biography interweave in her writing of this novel? What are the tensions in creating a fictional work that explicitly relates to historical representation? At various points, McCunn’s responses display a combined concern for cultural and historical representation and an understanding of her unique power as a writer who could creatively present histories through the art of storytelling. With these concerns in mind, *God of Luck* relates to themes in McCunn’s previous historical fiction, especially *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1988) and *The Moon Pearl* (2000) as well as *Wooden Fish Songs* (1995), and *Sole Survivor* (1985). As well, McCunn, who is Eurasian of Scottish and Chinese descent, generously provides an intriguing background story of her own parents, which provided the inspiration for her story. By sharing her family biography, she opens another productive avenue into the reading of her historical novel. One cannot help but think of wider debates in cultural politics related to genre, memory, authenticity, and truth (for example,

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take the debates that followed Maxine Hong Kingston’s memoir, *Woman Warrior*, or Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*). What follows is a condensed version of conversations with McCunn, touching on some of these questions but also on a common question of all readers and writers: How do you write the ending? This question inherently reveals the conflictedness of our criticisms. We want all the guts and glory, but what about the end...for a novel that treats the coolie trade? As McCunn notes, she has never had such trouble with an ending.

* * *

*Why did you pick Peru rather than, let’s say, Cuba, Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica?*

My initial thought was to have Ah Lung shipped to Cuba because I was already familiar with some of the history of the Chinese in Cuba. That was my brain’s impulse, but I always cast a wide net in my research and the more I read about Peru and the guano islands, the more deeply connected I felt with them.

These connections are both obvious and absurd.

Growing up in Hong Kong, which is itself a small island, I loved going to the many even smaller islands in the area — some completely uninhabited, others with just a small village or two. These islands were uninhabited because they didn’t easily support life: usually there was no fresh water source and they were too rocky for farming. Reading about the even harsher guano islands, I could instantly imagine them and the challenges facing those compelled to work on them.

So that’s the obvious. Now for the absurd!

Bird’s nest soup, as you know, is a Chinese delicacy. Our family didn’t have much money and on those rare occasions we did buy bird’s nest, it was very poor quality, meaning there was a lot of guano and feathers to pick out — work for small fingers. I was fascinated and disgusted — and the memories came back full force as I read about the guano islands.

Of course, there is NO comparison between what I did and the brutal labor of digging guano. As a novelist, though, I have to be able to inhabit the time and place as well as the people I am writing about, and I could feel myself, Ah Lung, and the other men on the islands. Once that happened, I knew the choice had been made.
What were your inspirations for writing this novel?

I had multiple inspirations, some conscious, some not, including the most central one, which I wasn't even aware of until I started writing my acknowledgments.

As a girl growing up in Hong Kong, I'd heard of “mai ju jai,” or what people in the west call “the coolie trade” and what the Chinese refer to literally as the selling of piglets, meaning men were bought and sold as if they were pigs. And the first time I went to China — in 1985 to research the life of Lue Gim Gong for my novel Wooden Fish Songs — I was invited to a welcome banquet where the man seated next to me spoke about the trade with such emotion that I became too choked up to eat. When I woke the next morning, I was still thinking about our conversation as I looked out of the window and saw some pigs headed for the market in those baskets that fit so tightly the animals couldn't even move... and although I had not intended to include anything about the pig trade in that novel, I did, but only briefly.

Similarly, I grew up surrounded by independent spinsters — or, more literally, “sze saw nui,” or self-combers. These women had made vows never to marry. In the Sun Duk district (Shunde County) where this tradition originated, the women worked raising silk worms and/or reeling silk from the cocoons. In Hong Kong, they supported themselves as domestic servants or working as laborers at construction sites. I admired their independence immensely. Well, Lue Gim Gong's parents had arranged a marriage for him when he returned from America to Lung On Village, in Toishan (Taishan County), but he ran away the night before his wedding. His betrothed was compelled to marry him anyway, with a rooster taking his place. Lue Gim Gong must have felt very badly about this because years later, when he came into money, he sent her US$500, an enormous sum of money. No one knows what she did with it, so I decided to make her a gift of independence in Wooden Fish Songs by having her use the money to go to live among the independent spinsters.

Again, this was only a very small part of that novel. But I became so emotionally involved with those women that I wrote my next novel about them, The Moon Pearl. When I finished The Moon Pearl, I still wasn't “done” with the spinsters, yet the time seemed right for exploring the pig trade more fully because contract labor has returned full force and affects all our lives, in fact every aspect of our lives since contract labor makes the clothes we wear, the toys our children play with, you
name it! Even in academia, contract labor is rampant. So I started thinking about how independent spinsterhood and the pig trade could be written about together and came up with the idea of the twins: Moongirl and Ah Lung.

Then, too, I had written about the trafficking of Chinese women in my first novel, Thousand Pieces of Gold, so you could say my telling the story of how Chinese men were brought to the new world in virtual slavery is long overdue!

The big surprise came for me when I sat down to write my acknowledgements and out came the sentence, “The emotional seed for this novel came from my parents.” I was so shocked that I came to a complete halt. And then it was so obvious that I couldn’t understand why I hadn’t been conscious of it from the start.

My parents were separated for most of their married life — initially by World War II and my father’s work as a merchant seaman, and then by the Cold War during which he was accused of being a Communist by the U.S. government and had his U.S. passport taken away, robbing him of both his livelihood and his ability to come to Hong Kong. Nor could we go to America. In Hong Kong, we were living with and supported by my mother’s family. That would have been completely beyond their means were we in America, and my father not only lost his passport but his health and was in and out of VA hospitals. So I only saw my father a couple of times before I was five or six, and then not at all until I was 15 and, after years of fighting with the U.S. government, he finally got his passport back and came home to die.

My mother died just before I started God of Luck. During her final years, her health was such that she had to leave Hong Kong to live with my sister in New Jersey, but my mother made us promise we would bury her in Hong Kong. She said it was because if she was buried here, her ghost wouldn’t be able to find its way back, and since I knew she had never wanted to leave Hong Kong, I thought that was her reason. Only after I looked at her instructions for how she wanted her remains to be interred with my father did I realize she wanted to be with him. And only then did I begin to see the two as husband and wife rather than father and mother — hence Ah Lung and Bo See struggling to reunite.
One of the most striking aspects here is the power of an author’s own history and biography (such as the story of your own parents and how this inspired your novel). Here is a rich story behind the story. Were there strengths and flaws of your mother’s and father’s characters, and in their relationship, that motivated you to create certain character traits in this novel (beyond the general plotting of a husband and wife struggling to reunite)? What about your own husband/wife relationship, roles, and struggles? In previous interviews, it has been noted that you have married for some 30 years, and since a husband/wife relationship is central to the novel, can you make further remarks here?

I should note that my mother was a very private person, and when I began writing with hopes for publication, she made it clear she did not want me to write about our family. We never had a direct conversation about it because I didn’t want her to outright forbid me. But, as you know, none of my work has been autobiographical. My books are, nevertheless, very personal — starting with Thousand Pieces of Gold which tells the true story of Lalu Nathoy/Polly Bemis who was sold into slavery as a girl in northern China.

You see, my own great grandmother had been sold into slavery about the same time, and her story made me very aware of slavery and issues of freedom ever since I can remember. But I never made any attempt to write about her, even though I wanted to, because it would go against my mother’s wishes. Then I found Lalu/Polly, and I was so happy because her life allowed me to tell a story of slavery on both sides of the Pacific, to illuminate a part of American history that most people didn’t know.

Obviously, I connected deeply with Lalu/Polly because of my own family story. Similarly, I connected deeply — if subconsciously — with the plight of Bo See and Ah Lung because of my parents. What is there about my parents in Bo See and Ah Lung? I would say their very physical, sensual relationship before their separation, and then their tenacity in struggling to reunite.

Is there anything of my husband, Don, and myself in Bo See and Ah Lung? Probably, although I’ve been very lucky in my own marriage of 40 plus years to have only had very brief separations from my husband. This has been deliberate: Our very first years together, he was in the Navy and we really disliked the separations. When he got out, we made a big bonfire at the beach with our correspondence of three years and...
vowed we’d never go through anything like that again. With the help of the God of Luck, we haven’t!

When we decided to marry, we were very young — 19 and 21. We’d both been on our own for several years, though. I’d left Hong Kong at 16 to come to America to go to college, and I’d been supporting myself all that time. He had been in the Navy for two years. Neither of us had finished college. This was 1965. Women’s Lib in the USA had yet to be! But I had had the good fortune of the independent spinsters as an example, and I agreed to marry only if we did so as complete equals. Don came from a very conservative family, but he has always been every bit as committed to an equal relationship as I. In fact, it was he who encouraged me to follow my childhood dream of leading a writing life.

Bo See and Ah Lung also enjoyed a relationship as equals—not in the view of other family members or the village, but between themselves. And, I suppose, there are other qualities in their relationship that my husband and I share. But I’m as private as my mother. So much so that I realize now, eight years after her death, it isn’t only because my mother didn’t want me to write anything directly autobiographical that I don’t, it’s because I don’t want to. In fact, my friends are always complaining that they have to pry personal information out of me!

What about archival inspirations, textual and visual?

*God of Luck* was definitely inspired by what I uncovered in my research, too. Certain incidents or facts just leaped out.

For example, the relatives of the kidnapped men would circle the ships in small sampans and call out for their relatives in hopes they would respond. I just found that so moving, and it gave me the idea for Moongirl to look for her brother in that way.

Then there was Ah Lung’s learning to swim underwater as a boy and his learning about Sahm Yuen Lei. Both came from my reading about the opium wars. And, of course, all Ah Lung’s observations on the guano islands came from books by naturalists, some with photographs.

What is also very inspiring is the work of scholars like you and Evelyn Hu DeHart, who provide analysis of the history that I am researching. That is crucial for me in contextualizing the facts I uncover, to keep the story and characters true to the period.

Then there’s happenstance. In the early stages of writing the novel, I was invited to give a talk to some Asian seniors in Oakland, California,
and afterwards, one elderly Chinese woman told me about the husband of a great aunt in Guangdong Province who had simply disappeared one day. No one knew what happened to him, but they guessed he'd been stolen for the pig trade. She was weeping the entire time she told me the story, which of course made me weep as well. Obviously the “disappeared” didn't just affect the spouse but the entire family, sometimes for generations.

*What aspect or part of the novel was the most difficult to write for you?*

The ending. I'd *never* had such trouble figuring out how to end a book! Historically, very few of the contract laborers returned to China, and the few that did were broken men. As for the guano diggers, their life expectancy wasn't even the length of their contracts. This was why it was important to get Ah Lung off the island as quickly as possible. That wasn't hard to accomplish, but once he got off the island, then what?

Getting Ah Lung all the way back to China and Bo See was riddled with problems of plausibility. So I thought about ending the book with Ah Lung just getting off the island, but that seemed too abrupt. Yet I couldn't convince *myself* that Ah Lung could survive on the mainland, let alone try and convince a reader!

I really have to credit my editor at Soho, Laura Hruska, with what I ended up doing. I'd about given up, but we had a wonderful conversation in which she didn't offer any specifics and yet somehow, at the end of it, I knew the boatmen would find a way to help Ah Lung.

Mind you, I wasn't sure exactly what they would do. But I just started writing, and every day the boatmen took Ah Lung — and me — a little closer to the end that is in the book now.

*What were the major concerns or tensions in creating this novel while also representing history?*

For me, staying true to history is critical in all my books. It drives me crazy when I read an author’s note in a historical novel that admits to changing facts “to serve the story.” I honestly don't see how that is possible! When I embark on writing a book, what I want to do is to illuminate history, to show what was happening to people in a certain time
and place, to discover — and then share with my readers — how people survived, or were defeated by, their particular circumstances. How, then, is it possible to change those circumstances?

In *God of Luck*, the greatest challenge history presented me was creating an ending that could be true to history and also satisfy a reader. I have to admit that there *are* readers who have told me they missed a definitively happy ending because they’d become so attached to the characters. But I would argue that had I written a neat and tidy “happy ending,” I’d have betrayed those very readers.

Similarly, it’s always important to me to be culturally accurate. For example, Ah Lung and Bo See enjoyed a very sensual relationship, but “rules of propriety” forbade any public demonstration of their affection, whereas independent spinsters who fell in love with each other had no such prohibitions.

*As an author, what or which aspects of culture do you feel an especial pull to be accurate about and why?*

I have found that the Chinese concepts of luck and fate are often misunderstood by westerners who seem to equate belief in luck and fate with passivity. Not at all. This is why I open my novel with a tale about the origin of the God of Luck that illustrates luck is outside forces coupled with individual action. Similarly, Bo See’s visit to the fortune teller in her opening chapter shows that fate is a blend of forces beyond our control and individual action. Throughout the novel, then, the characters never stop being agents of their own fate and luck despite outside forces.

*What were the creative challenges in recreating the coolie ship passage?*

The middle passage lasted an average of 120 days, which for most of the men was spent entirely below decks wedged in spoon fashion! For a novel, that would be very static. So I decided to have Ah Lung take on the job of “steward” to allow him to move around. Many of the voyages had mutinies, and that allowed for drama.

There’s an incredible amount of documentation about the voyages with tremendous detail, so that made the creation of the characters and their interactions easy. What was hard is that the circumstances were so
horrible. When I was researching, there were times I simply had to stop reading because it was so painful. And, writing the book, I realized I couldn't keep the reader below decks for too long without providing relief.

I have a question about your book Sole Survivor (in relation to God of Luck), which is about Poon Lim and his voyage of endurance. Are there connections between the creation of these two books and the protagonists of these books?

I must say that while I was researching and writing about the middle passage, I thought a lot about Poon Lim, whom I wrote about in Sole Survivor. Poon was working as a steward on a British ship during World War II when it was torpedoed and he was adrift on a raft for 133 days — a record of survival that has yet to be beaten. When researching that book, I read dozens of accounts about castaways, those who succeeded as well as those who failed. Of those who were alone, a large percentage went mad or came close to it. In my interviews with Mr. Poon, however, he reiterated several times that he believed he survived because he was alone, that were he with others, fights would invariably have broken out, and he might have been hurt or killed. Well, the survival stories I read certainly bore out his contention about disagreements, squabbles, fights — as did the documentation for the middle passage. At the same time, Mr. Poon might yet be on the raft had it not been for the fishermen who rescued him!

Like Mr. Poon, Ah Lung was the youngest in his family and a loner. Despite being surrounded by hundreds in the middle passage, Ah Lung did manage to survive. But the one person on board the ship who appeared to have been rescued, Ah Ming, did it with the help of someone else, Joe. And Ah Lung's own escape/rescue came through the help of others. I wouldn't say I constructed Ah Lung's experience with Poon Lim's as a model so much as my personal belief that self-reliance just isn't enough to get any of us through this life!

What unique challenges did you face in writing this novel versus your previous novels?

Writing the middle passage was four months of agonizing tedium, but so was the daily grind of digging guano. How to convey the daily grind
without boring the reader? How to keep the reader turning the pages? Fortunately, he had to escape.

Here, though, I was really on my own since I didn’t find any documented escapes from the guano islands, only from plantations. The solution came to me through my volunteer work at a soup kitchen, which coincidentally is named after Martin de Porres, a Peruvian saint! So maybe he helped. Anyway, many of the guests at the soup kitchen were Latinos — and they became the basis for the boatmen who helped Ah Lung in God of Luck.

I also had to come up with a plan for Bo See to bring in more income from raising silk worms! Fortunately, I came across a compilation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chinese treatises on the subject that had been translated into French then into English. Let me tell you, I studied that book as if my own life depended on it before I finally was able to piece together a combination of ploys.

What were the unique challenges you faced in creating the protagonist Ah Lung as versus Bo See? And Moongirl?

From my research, I knew that there were Chinese men who were kidnapped from the Sun Duk district in Guangdong Province, and since I wanted Moongirl to be an independent spinster, I decided to set the China portion of the novel in the same fictional village I’d created for The Moon Pearl. That novel was set in the 1830s, when the existence of independent spinsters were first recorded, and it’s about how girls came up with the idea of making vows of spinsterhood and how they struggled for — and eventually won — acceptance in the community. For God of Luck I just jumped forward a few decades to the time when girls, like Moongirl, knew from childhood that independence was a viable choice for them. She was the easiest character for me because I knew many women like her when I was a girl.

Moongirl’s twin brother, Ah Lung, really had no choices because he was a son. This turned upside down the way people usually perceived gender in that time and place (i.e. sons always had it made and daughters always suffered). It seemed to me that for Ah Lung — and all the real-life “piglets” — the challenges they faced were that much greater because until they were kidnapped, they’d always had everything laid out for them. I realized that I would be going against the norm by denying Ah Lung the usual attributes of a “hero.” To me, though, what is really heroic
is a person who rises above his or her limitations, a person who fails, learns from those failures, and tries again and again and again.

With Bo See, I wanted to show the parallels between what happened to Ah Lung as a “piglet” and what any Chinese bride at that time went through, even a fortunate bride: She had to leave home and everything she knew to go and live among strangers. Because of Bo See’s special talent in raising silkworms, she never did gain real acceptance, so she was almost as isolated as her kidnapped husband — even though she was ostensibly with family.

What is central to my creation of Bo See, however, is not just her gift for raising silkworms but her passion for her work as well as her husband. It was important to me that she burn with both, not just one or the other. I wanted to show through her that it is possible to enjoy both, also to show Ah Lung’s respect for her work.

What do you admire about some of the characters? And are there particular ones that stand out in your heart and mind as having obvious flaws, even unlikable aspects, to you?

While I’m writing a book, I live with the characters 24/7. So I try to avoid characters I don’t care for, and I think it’s pretty evident from my responses to your other questions that I admire Bo See, Ah Lung, and Moongirl. But I must admit I do not like Pedro Chufat.

I actually didn’t consciously conceive this character. He just appeared on the page one day. It’s really exciting for me when that happens because it means to me that the story has taken on a life of its own. Initially, Pedro had the name Pablo and seemed like a good fellow. But he turned out to be so self-serving that I had to change his name from Pablo, which happens to be the name of a good friend, to Pedro!

Are there aspects or problems in this writing that remain unresolved for you?

Invariably I want to convey more in my books than I do. When researching for God of Luck, I came across references to captured men who

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1 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
formed attachments to each other during the middle passage. So emotionally intertwined did some of the men become that when buyers came on board in the New World to pick out whom they wanted as laborers, couples would plead to be taken by the same buyer and, if refused, would throw themselves overboard and drown rather than live apart. I was deeply moved by these accounts and wanted very much to include this aspect of the trade in God of Luck. But my attempts all failed. Finally, I gave up.

The truth is that it’s impossible to tell the whole story. Dozens of novels could be written about the trade and the subject wouldn’t be exhausted. So here’s hoping for more books to be written, one of which will cover this aspect of the trade!
PART III

OLD MIGRANTS, NEW IMMIGRATION
Plagued by political instability and the prospect of freeing the African slaves, the reconstruction of Peru after independence had been slow. It was only in 1846 that the opening of the guano and the increase of sugar exports to Europe brought in the necessary capital for modernization of the infrastructure of the young Republic. This new-found income also allowed the state in 1854 to free the slaves by compensating their owners. In order that production would not be adversely affected, Domingo Elias, hacendado, eminent liberal and progressive politician, had a law passed in 1848 to encourage immigration. This law, called Ley china, allowed the introduction of an indentured work force from China thanks to an extremely lucrative commercial enterprise which replaced the slave trade.

More than 100,000 coolies\(^1\) were thus brought to Peru between 1849 and 1874. This large group of immigrants was characterized by its masculinity, the almost total absence of women.\(^2\) During their contract,

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\(^1\) The 1876 census registered 49,956 Chinese — a figure slightly underestimated — out of a total population of 2,699,160 inhabitants. Between 1849 and 1876 nearly half of the Chinese brought into Peru (aged from 9 to 40, rarely older) died from exhaustion, suicide or ill treatment.

\(^2\) Women made up less than 1% of the Chinese recorded. In 1851, José Sevilla, importer of Chinese, presented to the Chamber of Senators a report on the problems posed by this imbalance and recommended, in vain, the bringing in of families and Chinese women (BNP, Miscelánea Zegarra.XZ.V.58: p.37). Some women were nevertheless brought in from 1860 when commerce with China increased and the first Chinese merchants from California settled in. Traces of them can be found particularly in the cemeteries — open to converted Chinese — from 1870. See Lausent-Herrera (1992 and 2006).
which ran from four to eight years, often longer depending on the goodwill of the hacendados, the men had almost no contact with the local women, particularly African women. But in the cities, and especially in Lima, where they were employed as domestic servants and artisans and where they enjoyed greater liberty, there was the formation of Sino-Peruvian households — as evidenced by the first mixed-raced births listed in the parish records — from the beginning of the 1850s. According to this source, the majority of the women companions, life-time or temporary, were not originally from Lima but the coastal and Andean provinces. Rarely servants, these women often ran small shops and it can be said that they contributed, by helping out and sharing their experience, to the establishment of the first small businesses of the free Chinese.

In the rural milieu, it was more difficult to form union with women, even for Chinese liberated from their contracts. According to the traveler, Ernest Middendorf, they at times had recourse to Chinese matchmakers who carried out collective ceremonies during which young serranas or indígenas were married to them (Middendorf 1993: 262-63; Lausent-Herrera 2006: 294). Apart from this form of union, other households were formed depending on the wanderings of the Chinese; some were in flight, some were refugees, and some households were established in the Andean communities on the Amazonian borders of the Andes or in the Amazon region.

The Injertos: A New Asiatic Caste in the Republican Universe of Peru

As part of Peruvian society, the Chinese were not inconspicuous and their appearance, as well as the fact that they had wives and children, disturbed and offended the Peruvian observers and intellectuals many of whom were brought up on racial prejudices inherited from the Col-

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3 On this theme, see Cuche (1976).
4 In 1876 nearly 12,000 Chinese were living in the capital; they represented 10% of the urban population at that time.
5 The national archives show that numerous Chinese living with Peruvians worked in the same shops, particularly butcher stores (AGN,T647,1891), (AGN, T906,1888).
6 In the 1880s young women from the Andean communities of the central Andes began to come to work seasonally in the coastal haciendas. The Chinese preferred the indígenas acclimatized to the coast to African women.
7 On these themes, see Lausent (1983), Lausent-Herrera (1996 and 1998).
ony and nourished by the works of Spencer, Le Bon and the hygienists who condemned the crossbreeding resulting from the union between Chinese and Peruvians, which in their view could lead to the degeneracy of Peruvian society. Clemente Palma (1897: 36) described in offensive terms the sight of this new miscegenation in Peruvian society:

Although this race crossbreeds with difficulty and the fruit of this cross-breeding has little chance to live, it is dangerous because of the vices it teaches our people and the maladies it leaves in them, which, even if the women are not fertile, finally remain in their blood, thinning it, weakening them and giving disastrous results (Palma 1897).8

This perception of crossbreeding as a stain and a degeneration characteristic of the Colonial period was still held by the elite during the Republican period. Clemente Palma’s ideas would be taken up again to the end of the 1930s, a time when anti-Chinese racism was spread not only through pamphlets and manifested in violence but also enforced by law.

What is interesting here is that no authors who castigated the fruit of such unions, no priests, no missionaries and no municipal agents, were able to fit the group into their traditional classification.9 The arrival of the first Chinese coolies made necessary the inclusion of a new racial component into Peruvian society, that is, the raza amarilla o china represented by the chinos de la Gran China, chinos del imperio celeste, and Celestes or Nación asiática as the most respectful terms; los amarillos or Macacos were the popular, deprecating adjectives also used in the newspapers. On the other hand, the generation of the first half-Chinese which became visible from 1870 was not called by any name.

Like Edmond Cotteau (1886), Marcel Monnier (1890: 111), another French traveler, was speechless when he tried to describe the new “mixture”: “the type coming from the relations of the Chinese coolie and

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8 Clemente Palma’s assertions against crossbreeding were taken up again 20 years later in the same terms and with the same conviction by Sixto Santisteban: “We are not among those who believe that a privilege of the races exists; however, it cannot be denied that our race is debased by contact with the Asiatic race and that crossbreeding of the American and the yellow degenerates and weakens it.” Santisteban (1905: 8) (translation from Spanish).

9 The complexity is even greater since there already were in Lima, before the introduction of the coolies, the Chinos de Manila who arrived in the 17th century and the mixed blood “yndia con mulato” called chinos or chinas which could lead to confusion with the use of chino or china (see the classification made under the Viceroy de Montesclaros, “Padrón de los Indios de la Provincia de Lima en 1613” (Lima, UNMSM, 1968). See also Cook, 1985.
the woman of the Indian or black race has not yet received a special denomination,” the term mestizo being reserved in most cases for children born of Indian or Spanish fathers or mothers. Such hesitation, such classifications, revealing of the state of mind of the time, were due mainly to the fact that, as has already been noted, the Republic had not accepted the Chinese half-breeds, the fruit of “racial degeneracy.” They had not “officially” been given a name, and therefore a place. The written form of the term injerto or transplant appeared only at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is impossible to know exactly when the term injerto appeared and when it was applied to Chinese-Peruvian half-bloods. The term brings to mind the world of agriculture, and no doubt originated in the rural classes in contact with the Chinese working in the haciendas. In addition, it seems to refer to only the mixed race children of Chinese and native women viz. indígenas, indias, cholas et natives, and not the Afro-Peruvians. Used for a long time in the domain of popular speech with no pejorative connotations, it was taken up in the press and in official papers only at the beginning of the 20th century, and thereafter became offensive.

Deprived of Chinese wives,10 these injertos or half-bloods made up the first group of a local-born Chinese community in Peru. The very young girls or injertas were particularly desired in marriage, either to mixed race Chinese or Chinese freed from their contracts, especially from 1870 on. As such, from the second generation the household thus created approached that of the Chinese model.11 This return to the model of Chinese kinship after passing through the obligatory stage of a mixed-blood generation reflects the desire of the first Chinese to regain their identity12 and to become organized as a community. In 1868 the first native place associations (huiguans), viz. the Ku y Kong (Guangzhou), the Hakka association Tungshing (Tongsheng) and that of Canton (the future Punyui or Panyu society) petitioned, in the name of the Chinese ill-treated in the haciendas, for protection from the Emperor of China. Between 1881 and 1895, a group of Chinese, encouraged by the Catholic

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10 On this theme, see Lausent-Herrera (2006).
11 Concerning the strategies used to reconstitute the Chinese families and conserve a minimum of traditions, see Lausent (1983: 70-121).
12 One notes also at the same time a great number of Chinese who renounced the Spanish names they had adopted on their arrival and took up again their Chinese names.
Church, sought to create an association capable of protecting all of them. The arrival of Zheng Zaoru, the imperial emissary, put an end to this initiative, however. Zheng ordered the creation in 1886 of the Sociedad de Beneficencia China, the Tonghuy Chongkoc\(^{13}\) and La Beneficencia, to be led by representatives of the great Chinese commercial enterprises, themselves directors of the huiguans. These men would henceforth defer to the ambassador of China posted to Washington; they were also the only community representatives recognized by the Peruvian authorities. Influenced by the climate of reform then prevailing in China, they were enterprising and far more educated than the first group of Chinese. Being responsible for maintaining the social order, they established an elitist hierarchy based upon social and economic success thus relegating the first Chinese immigrants to the ranks of ordinary members. A large part of the half-bloods originating from the first generation — those preceding the installation of this new order within the community — would be absorbed over time into the Peruvian population, though not without difficulty.\(^{14}\) Another group, offspring of a succession of inter-marriages, would remain within the community, acquiring little by little certain economic and social success, and take up traditional practices again such as returning to China for a Chinese bride and sending the children there to study.\(^{15}\)

In the new community hierarchy we thus find at the top the merchants and owners of the big enterprises, the local directors of the huiguans, themselves merchants, the commercial managers, and sons or relatives of the directors who were educated in China and brought over by their parents. Below them were the children born in Peru of

\(^{13}\) On the origin of the formation of the Chinese community, see Lausent-Herrera (1997, 2000).

\(^{14}\) Between 1887 and 1895, the Peruvian army conscripted the mixed blood Chinese-Peruvians. Manuel Lazure, a Chinese, protested to the Legation, saying that his son “is subject to His Majesty the Emperor of China and that he had been enrolled by force.” This example illustrates, among other things, the difficulty of both the first Chinese fathers and the first half-bloods to situate themselves in a society which did not welcome them.

\(^{15}\) From the beginning of the century the father sent his daughters and sons to China, sometimes accompanied by their Peruvian mother. The children, taken in either by the first wife or the paternal grandmother’s family, received a Chinese education which served them when they returned, either in helping the daughter to get married to a Chinese established in Peru, or the son to find work in the large commercial establishments such as Wing On Chong or the Pow Lung. These practices, customary in Lima, were also observed in large provincial cities as far away as Amazonia. See Lausent-Herrera (2006).
Chinese fathers and mothers, the famous Tusans or native-born; but their standing in the community would depend on their knowledge of the Chinese language as well as the level of their economic success. After them came the children born of a Chinese father and a half-blood mother. Last in the order were the children born of a Chinese father and a Peruvian mother (Lausent-Herrera 1997: 134-40).

Thus despite the internal political dissensions, there was the consolidation of a Chinese community with fewer and fewer mixed blood members. As the new migrants continued to be predominantly male, the alliance with half-Chinese women or native born Tusun women did not cease. Owing to the absence of reliable national censuses between 1876 and 1940 it is not possible to establish the size of the incoming migrants. But there is little doubt that it was big enough to bring about a rich community of artisans, small businessmen and employees. Because of the scarcity of female immigrants, the expansion of the community depended upon the voyages to China for matrimonial purposes. Very often, the Chinese who had settled in Peru looked for the young half-blood girls and Tusans born in Peru and who were sent to study in China (mainly Macao) or to stay with their Chinese family. This situation led to unrest in 1909 when there were popular uprisings calling for, among other things, a halt to Chinese immigration. The signing in the same year of the Protocole Porras-Wu Tingfang obliged China to control and restrain the immigration of its subjects to Peru. Owing to the prevalence of corruption in both countries, immigration did not slow down despite the increasingly drastic restrictions in Peru. According to A. McKeown (2001: 147), from 1910 to 1930, during the protective regime of President A. B. Leguía, the entry of 12,263 Chinese was recorded. The overthrow of A. B. Leguía by Commander L. M. Sanchez Cerro not only drastically reduced Chinese immigration (to a quota of 20 a month), but also marked the beginning of the anti-Asiatic laws lasting until World War II. According to one national census in 1940, there were only 10,915 Chinese residents in Peru. However, for the period

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16 For an assessment of different sources quantifying Chinese immigration, see McKeown (1996). However, it is difficult to estimate with precision the importance of Chinese immigration due to illegal entries at the Chilean and Ecuadorian borders and via the Peruvian Amazon River (Manaos-Iquitos route).

17 A substitute clandestine immigration was set up via Ecuador; numerous young women promised in marriage to the Peruvian Chinese took this route. The network via Guayaquil was also set up after the establishment of the Communist regime.

18 Ministerio de Hacienda y Comercio, Dirección Nacional de Estadística. 1940.

*Censo Nacional de Población y Ocupación de 1940. Lima.*
from the beginning of the 20th century to World War II, the community progressed, developed, became integrated and modernized. Also during these years the half-bloods and the Tusans (children born in Peru of both Chinese parents) won, little by little, their own space and the recognition of the *chinos legítimos*.

In 1909, the Chinese empire was on its last leg; many progressive Chinese overseas were active in the anti-Qing movement especially through the press. In Lima a young Tusan, Juan Iglesias (Chan Kaichu, 1878-?), who had perfect command of both Chinese and Spanish, was working as translator for the Chinese Legation. He was assigned to assist Minister Wu Tingfang (Chinese Ambassador to the United States) who had come to Peru to sign the Porras-Wu Tingfang Protocol in relation to the limitation of Chinese immigration. The same year also saw the publication of the review, *El Internacional*, with the encouragement of Wu and the local support of Juan Iglesias. The review, which appeared only a few times, supported the reformist ideas of Li Hongzhang. Two years later the Chinese in Peru, divided politically but not to the point of being torn by fratricidal conflicts as in Cuba, produced two new newspapers, *La Voz de la Colonia (Kum Yen Po/Kongyan Bao)* in 1910 which defended the position of the Chee Kung Tong (Zhigontang), and the *Man Shing Po (Minxingbao)* which supported the new Republic of Sun Yat-sen. The case of the native-born Juan Iglesias is exceptional, for at this time the universe of the *chinos natos* or *huaqiao* was especially restricted. Despite the modernity of their political ideas and commercial practices, the only way for them to preserve their culture and their identity was, for those who were married, to send the women and children to China or, for those as yet unmarried, to bring in wives from China. Such arrangements could only be made by an elite group able to use bribe or pay the expenses of such an enterprise, particularly at the time when the Wu Tingfang Protocole was in force. Even if they could speak Cantonese or were fortunate enough to be sent to China, the Tusans were — in their large majority — cut off from institutional or political activities. As for the half-bloods, they were definitively excluded. Hence, for this

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19 This period has been studied by Lausent-Herrera (1997) and McKeown (2000: 138-77).
20 He had previously worked as departmental head in a large commercial company, Hop On Chong, in Lima.
21 Inaugurated on March 2, 1910.
22 Inaugurated on March 10, 1911, twice a week, then daily in 1917.
23 *Chinos natos* (those born in China) is a popular, non pejorative term employed in Peru to designate the first generation of Chinese immigrants.
reason, and sharing the socialist ideas of their fathers, they were drawn
to the movements of students, intellectuals and workers mobilized in
Peru to put an end to the conservatism of the oligarchic creole society.

Dissonant Voice of the First Injerto

Pedro Zulen Aymar (1889-1925)\textsuperscript{24} was one such half-blood who chose
to devote his political thinking to the improvement of the lives of the
Indians, the most oppressed group in Peru society. Son of a modest Chi-
nese merchant and a Peruvian, Pedro Zulen studied in a Peruvian sec-
secondary school — exceptional at that time — before entering San Marcos
University. He divided his life between his academic career (in philoso-
phy and logic) and his engagement in the Indian cause. In 1909, he
co-founded the Asociación Pro-Indígena to which the great intellectuals\textsuperscript{25} of the generation of the 1920s belonged. In 1912 and then from
1920 to 1922 he studied at Harvard University. He became a candidate
in the regional elections of Jauja in the Central Andes in 1909 which
made him the very first politician of Chinese origin in Peru. However,
he was arrested and imprisoned just before the election on charges of
being a Bolshevik and was disqualified from participating in the elec-
tion to be deputy. In retrospect, 1909 and 1919 were two significant
years in the short life of Pedro Zulen. In 1909 he united within his asso-
ciation the Peruvian intellectuals in promoting the cause of the Indíge-
as, at the time when anti-Chinese riots by the working classes broke
out in Lima. The riots were so violent, murderous and devastating for
the Chinese that Ambassador Wu Tingfang came to Peru to defend the
interests of his countrymen.\textsuperscript{26} Ten years later, in January 1919, other
equally violent and murderous riots took place against the Chinese led
by the workers of the Federación Obrera Regional Peruana,\textsuperscript{27} who fought

\textsuperscript{24} His name is sometimes spelled: Sulem Aymar.

\textsuperscript{25} Those belonging to the Association included Alfredo Gonzales Prada, writer and
first propagandist of “Anarchism in Peru,” Alberto Ulloa, José de la Riva Agüero, Víctor
Andrés Belaunde and the journalist, Dora Mayer. For a better understanding of the
thinking of Pedro Zulen, his intellectual work and his influence on Peruvian treatment
of the Indian population, see Leibner (1997).

\textsuperscript{26} May 10, 1909, rioting workers led by F. Caceres, candidate for the office of deputy,
destroyed the Chinese quarter, shouting “death to the Chinese!” The next day the mayor
of Lima ordered the destruction of a block of houses where hundreds of Chinese lived.

\textsuperscript{27} In 1917 among the members of the guild of bakery workers — in direct competi-
tion with the Chinese — were the founders of the Liga Antiasiatica.
for the right to an eight-hour working day. The riots led to the destruction of shops in the Chinese quarter and violence against the Chinese and the Japanese. Among the instigators and leaders of this movement was another Chinese half-blood, Adalberto Fonken, a textile worker from Vitarte and an anarcho-syndicalist.

On these two occasions Pedro Zulen said nothing. Other intellectuals of the time such as Mariategui also kept their silence.28 At no time did Zulen denounce or criticize the racist demonstrations targeting the Chinese and their descendants. Did he feel so different from the Chinese, being a mixed blood, or was this a deliberate political stance that he had chosen? Leibner (1997; note 19) thinks that Pedro Zulen had “renounced his otherness”: even if it was a political choice, it was difficult to believe that he was able to remain unmoved by what was happening in the streets.

Could it be that as half-blood intellectuals and unionists, Pedro Zulen and Adalberto Fonken were totally cut off from the Chinese community? In the case of Fonken, this is possible, although at this time several of those who were sons of Chinese29 like him were members of the APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, 1924) whose founder Haya de la Torre claimed all the while that the alliance was inspired by the Kuomintang and the Revolution of 1911.

In the case of Pedro Zulen, the links between the Chinese community and this educated and scholarly half-blood were not severed, contrary to

28 It is interesting to note that Pedro Zulen’s stand — which came as a shock because his father was Chinese — was also that of the majority of the intellectuals surrounding him who, like him, were Pro-Indigenistas. Only racist attitudes toward the Indians was considered condemnable while the attitude of members of the working class who saw the Chinese as foreigners who “eat the bread of the people,” was not worth combating. In 1908 the feminist journalist, Maria Jésus Alvarado (close to Pedro Zulen’s circle) who defended in her writings the anarcho-syndicalist thesis distributed among the working class, was one of those who began to use publicly the term injerto in all its pejorative sense (Lausent-Herrera 2006: 298, note 31). This view was also shared by the oligarchy. For example, the Peruvian Consul at Hong Kong, B. Seoane, wrote the next year: “in Peru the Chinese compete with the working class and impoverish them, leaving behind them the detestable heritage of the injertos, who have received from their fathers only their vices and none of their virtues, this to the clear detriment of our native race.” (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, 8.23A: Peruvian Consulate in Hong Kong, May 22, 1909). It thus seems clear that for Pedro Zulen, even if he was in contact with the “Chinese world” and no doubt admired by a part of the elite among the Chinese merchants, there was only one clear choice. If one caste should be defended in Peru, it was the Indians, the legitimate inhabitants of the country and not the new immigrants and their descendants who had no place and of whom no legitimacy was recognized.

29 Notably V. Polay-Risco, cofounder with V. Haya de la Torre of the newspaper La Tribuna and the political party APRA.
what Leibner believes. In 1913 the Asociación de los Comerciantes Chinos en el Perú offered him the position of honorary secretary, a position he refused saying that he was preoccupied with other duties and could not serve to the best of his abilities (*Boletín Bibliográfico de la Biblioteca San Marcos*, n° 1 October 1923, p. 2). Even if this platonic relationship was very embarrassing for him, Pedro Zulen was very close to the journalist, Dora Mayer, director of the review, *El Deber Pro-Indígena*, and great defender of Chinese immigrants to Peru. Finally, in 1923, when Pow Sanchia (Xie Baoshang, 1860-1939), president of the Chinese community30 and the most powerful and respected person among his countrymen, offered a gift of 200 Peruvian pounds to the University of San Marcos which was presented to Pedro Zulen who had just been nominated director of the University library and entrusted with the responsibility of cataloguing the library holdings (*Boletín Bibliográfico de la Biblioteca San Marcos*, n° 1 October 1923).31

Therefore there existed a relationship, based on recognition or ideological affiliation between some Chinese half-bloods and the Chinese community. In 1925, at the death of Pedro Zulen, Enrique Bustamente wrote in an article in *Variedades* titled “Pedro S. Zulen, Una pérdida Nacional” (*Variedades*, n° 883, 3161, 1925) in which he implied that, for Zulen, a half-blood, the road to recognition by the intellectuals was a belated and difficult one.

*The Modern Nationalist Voice of the Tusans or the Longing for Recognition*

Between the establishment in 1899 of la República Aristocrática and the end of the regime of A.B. Leguía in 1930 the Chinese community fortified itself. In fact, the new Chinese who arrived at this time replaced the former coolies and their leaders who organized affairs in the native-place associations; these newcomers had the capital and shared with the members of the local oligarchy and important foreign entrepreneurs established in Peru the same vision of future investments in major proj-

30 Aurelio Powsan Chia no doubt intervened through his legation to defend his countrymen but publicly he remained discreet and diplomatic.
31 *Boletín Bibliográfico de la Biblioteca San Marcos*, n° 1 October 1923. See also San Marcos’ Library official web page http://sisbib.unmsm.edu.pe/exposiciones/pzulen/Vida/vida1.htm “Pedro Zulen, San Marcos y su tiempo.”
ects relating to agricultural exports, mining development, manufacturing, international commerce and the colonization of new territories. Despite the political instability which accompanied the country’s transformation, the rising demands of the budding working class and above all the increasingly virulent anti-Asiatic racism, the leaders of the Chinese community prospered and behaved like members of the bourgeoisie. Their thriving joint stock companies boasting of different Cantonese investors from Hong Kong, California and, to a lesser extent, China, were flourishing in Peru. The principal ones were Pow Lung (1896), Pow On (1897) and Wing On Chong (1872) which were directly linked to the Ton Huy Chong Koc. The stockholders held diversified investments through buying and managing the *negociaciones agrícolas*, haciendas of sugar, cotton and even animal husbandry; they set up La Union, an insurance company, the Chumwha Navigation Company Ltd, a navigation company, and a Chamber of Commerce. Besides the large commercial companies, the Chinese and Tusans, at times in conjunction with the half-bloods, developed small local industries especially in the provinces which made them the agents of modernity.

The growth in the number of migrants despite the policy of immigration control was sizable, as reflected in the increase of all forms of associations, particularly the brotherhood associations and fraternal-political associations, with the engagement of important members of the community during these years. In 1920 there were 30 associations — not counting the *huiguans* — founded in the different regions of Peru, and numerous guilds (doctors, shoemakers-repairers, butchers etc.) besides those on the list produced by the Beneficencia China (*Bilu Zhonghua Tonghui Zongju yu Bilu Huaren, 1986: 217*) in 1886.

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32 At the beginning the population rejected the Chinese. When the new rule admitting Japanese immigrants was introduced into Peru thanks to A. B. Leguia, twice president of the Republic, the demonstrations and pamphlets targeted the latter as well. The Japanese, although rejected by the population, were protected during the 11 years (1919-1930) of Leguia’s second term. While the Chinese were denied entry, the Japanese obtained a great number of authorizations. See Lausent-Herrera (1991).

33 There were no censuses in Peru between 1940 and 1961, however there was evidence corroborating this increase: opening of commerce, multiplication of associations, registry of marriages, etc.

34 In 1920 the political engagement of members of the community was shown by a great number of brotherhood and fraternal-political associations.
In 1924, a publication appeared with the title, “The Chinese Community of Peru. Its institutions and outstanding members. Its beneficial contribution to national life.”35 Edited by the Beneficencia China, it is testimony to the eminent positions held by members of the elite of the Chinese community — we are not speaking here of the immigrants or of the descendants of coolies — who had succeeded economically and contributed to the prosperity of the country. It was also to show that the community had produced remarkable men, some educated internationally, who shared qualities of excellence with the nascent Peruvian high bourgeoisie.36 Some rare references were made to their Tusun collaborators or to those among them who formed a family in this country (“formaron su hogar en este país”) without saying if they had taken in Peru a wife of Chinese or Peruvian origin.

Oriental: Birth of the Tusun Community

Into this idealized world as portrayed in various community journals, a new Peruvian Chinese culture was born: modern in tone, ideas and form. Its voice was the journal Oriental (Dongfang yuebao/Tonfu Yipo). Its founders, Alfredo Chang Cuan (Chang Hongweng, 1911-1992) and his cousin, Gabriel y Leonor Acat Cuan, launched themselves into the venture in 1931. Alfredo Chang was born in Trujillo, cradle of the APRA, of a Chinese father married to a mixed-blood Chinese woman. At his mother’s death about 1922 he went with his father to China where he was left in the care of his father’s family. When he returned to Peru and settled in Lima, he was 19, and very distressed by the political crisis which divided China and its vulnerability in face of the Japanese. Together with his cousin, Gabriel, and initially with another cousin, Leonor, and then with his future wife, Guillermina Ruiz Chong, also a

35 “La Colonia China en el Perú. Instituciones y hombres representativos. Su actuación benéfica en la vida nacional.”
36 It is in this spirit that in 1917 the Chinese bought a piece of land in order to set up their own tennis club in the seaside resort of Miraflores which was becoming urbanized. The club was opened in December 1917. The Peruvian review, Variedades, saluted this event in an article entitled “el deporte del tennis en la colonia.” The comments were subtly sarcastic and racist, alluding to the fact that “in its upward march, the Chinese Colony does not miss an occasion to copy white civilisation by taking what, among other things, is best in it, that is the practice of sports, such as tennis, an elegant sport reserved for the elite.”
Tusans (tusheng) and the changing Chinese community

Tusans, Alfredo Chang mobilized his future sponsors, the big Chinese and Peruvian wholesalers, in financing the production in April 1931 of the first issue of a publication where he exhibited a strong Chinese nationalism. He explored in Spanish — with a ten-page insert in Chinese — the most diverse themes affecting Peruvian society such as the world situation, cinema, the position of women etc. This journal also had as its aim to report on all social events concerning the Chinese half-bloods (the *injertos*), and the Tusans residing in Lima and in the province. Thanks to this monthly publication the Tusun spirit was uplifted, and the Tusun community was presented as an economic, social and even political entity vis-à-vis the group representing the “legitimate” Chinese (those born in China) who controlled the fortunes and direction of the regional associations, the native-place associations and above all the representatives of the Kuomintang in Peru.

With the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the content of the editorials was radicalized and became very nationalistic. As in Chinese overseas communities everywhere, the publication sought to foster Chinese nationalism in all its forms. Thus, Alfredo Chang, very touched by the situation in Guangdong when he left China, decided upon returning to Peru to pass himself off as a “legitimate” Chinese so as to be able to integrate into the Kuomintang, to climb the rungs of community power and above all to enlarge the influence of his journal. The political engagement of the journal contrasted with the light-weight, worldly or feminine articles designed to appeal to the Tusans and mixed-blood public who did not read Chinese and knew very little of their fathers’ history.

In 1931 the Chinese in Peru found themselves in a difficult situation not only because the country was suffering from the economic effects of the Great Depression beginning in 1929 but also because a dictatorship had come to power which would last until World War II. Successive governments passed laws not only prohibiting immigration but also restricting the freedom of the Asians and their descendants who were born in Peru but who were also registered with their respective legations (such as laws nos. 7505 and 7705 on foreign quotas authorized to do business, *Oriental* n° 36, January 1935). During the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the great famine that struck the Guangdong region, *Oriental* criticized the directors of Beneficencia China for their lack of

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37 See for instance the appeal launched by Javier Loo Kung to “his dear compatriots and their sons,” to boycott the Japanese products sold in Peru: *Oriental*, n° 12, May 1932.
initiative and community work, their narrowness of spirit, and above all, for not reacting against the governmental discriminatory measures against the Chinese and the Tusans.

One of the important victories scored by Oriental was in calling upon the first-generation (China-born) Chinese to give more respect and consideration to the injertos and the Tusans. In its editorial of November 1934, Oriental urged the Chinese ambassador to “give back their dignity to the descendants, born of Chinese parents in Peru, and to try to become closer to them.” Oriental stressed:

This idea should be welcomed with pleasure because it benefits our collectivity. For it is true that those who are called “injerto” have not in the past been considered by our compatriots as well as they should have been… It is a fact that they didn’t obtain the social recognition to which socially they have a right.

The Chinese ambassador responded by persuading the Chinese to take advantage of law 7505 to hire Chinese-blood Peruvians. He added:

[T]he “injerto” carries his race reflected in his physical traits. He cannot deny his paternity. He is made to work with his own people and he is in the privileged position of mastering two languages and making himself understood perfectly by the Peruvians as well as by the Chinese.

The hour has come for the sons of Asians to feel they are true Chinese and the Chinese to feel “injertos”… Our paisanos [compatriots] should understand that the isolation of one or the other branch is unfavourable to the interests of the colony and that this behaviour will keep them from progressing.

Written in an outmoded style and vocabulary, the reasoning of Oriental may appear ambiguous, for it did assert first that the injertos were completely Chinese and at the same time also Peruvians. Now that the Chinese needed them to support the war effort, they argued that the Tusans and injertos should be given more consideration. This was based on the reasoning that the Tusans and injertos, both in need of recognition in a

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38 This law particularly forbade Asian (Chinese and Japanese) merchants to have more than 20% of foreigners among their personnel and to employ a member of the family. What Oriental meant was that by employing an injerto, a half-blood to whom he was not related and who would be Peruvian by birth (jus soli), the Chinese businessman would have the advantage of having in his business a faithful employee with Chinese features, authorized by law.

39 Although the ambassador was speaking strictly about the Chinese born in China, the term paisano refers to both a compatriot born in China and the Chinese born in Peru (Tusans) and by extension a half-blood Chinese.
country where anti-Asian racism was more and more oppressive, would respond to such mobilization for the defence of an invaded China. In so doing they would prove their attachment to and affiliation with China.

Following this editorial and encouraged by the ambassador, the Man-shing Po and La Voz de la Colonia carried out a campaign to bring together the Chinese born in China and the Tusans and injertos. To be accepted and appreciated by the Chinese born in China, they had to show a veritable and sincere patriotism for China.

A second journal, New Chung Wa, founded in October 1934, followed Oriental in the latter’s crusade both to rehabilitate the Tusans and half-bloods not by integrating them into Peruvian society — as no doubt they considered themselves already part of it — but by making them return to their roots. The debate raised by Oriental on the theme of the injertos and their rehabilitation was taken up by a reader of New Chung Wa, Luis T. Lu Carliche, who was in favor of collaboration. Lu Carliche defined himself as an injerto, a technical term which signifies “el cruce de dos razas definidas” (“the breeding of two well defined races”) but also an integral part of the Chinese community because of his engagements with it and his mixed blood of which he was proud. What he desired was a strong union between the two generations (New Chung Wa, n° 15, January 1936, p.14).

Thus by 1939, the Chinese community, which the generations who arrived in 1890-1929 had built on the model of economic success, discreet patriotism and non-interference in Peruvian political life, had fallen apart and disappeared, at the same time that its most eminent representative, Powsan Chia, passed away. The ideas and initiatives launched by Oriental and then The New Chung Wa had modified the structure of the Chinese-Peruvian community as well as the perception that the descendants of the Chinese had of themselves. This initiative accorded with the new policy of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (1932) which decided to send to the overseas communities professors41 and scholarly

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40 This journal paid attention to the education of youth, the problems of society such as health and the position of women. The tone was pacifist despite supporting China and one senses the influence of the Catholic Church upon its authors. Since the foundation of the college, the Jesuits had the right to give courses in religion to the young pupils. After that the youth would be organized in Catholic associations, no doubt also to counter the appearance of the YMCA. From 1961 on the Chinese curacy of Peru was entrusted to the Franciscans.

41 Peru benefited from this program particularly by being sent a specialist in the editing of journals in Chinese and professors. See The New Chung Wa, 1935, n° 12, pp. 23-27.
material, and to support local initiatives aiming to forge a strong Chinese identity in uniting the Chinese and their descendants.

At the end of World War II and after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the community was shaken and a number of families were broken up. Up until 1937 the Chinese of Peru were still sending their women — among whom Peruvians and their children — to China to receive a Chinese education, because the secondary schools in Lima could not offer the perfect education they wanted.\textsuperscript{42} For many years, children and parents were separated and communications were cut off. It was through the Taiwanese and Hong Kong networks that arrangements were made for the clandestine return of not only those who had stayed on in China — as Peru had barred them from returning for fear of Communist infiltration — but also for the entry of relatives who had never been to Peru but who wanted to flee from China. Many among the Hak- kas from Zhongshan County, particularly Chiqi, had already a part of their family sent to Macao and Hong Kong since the 1920s, a period when the sending of the Sino-Peruvian children\textsuperscript{43} (girls and boys) to Catholic and Protestant secondary schools rapidly increased. The clandestine road passing through Guayaquil which had been used during the preceding regimes saw a redoubling of its activity.

In Peru, the aggression against the Chinese community, widespread during the military dictatorships of L. M. Sanchez Cerro (1930-1933) and O. Benavides (1933-1939), came to a halt. However, the post-war governments, civilian and military, were no more clement toward the Chinese community insofar as they did not authorize, with exceptions, the return of those who had been retained in China. It is impossible to

\textsuperscript{42} The existing schools were the secondary school Chungwha created in 1924 and the San Min (Three Principles of Sun Yat-sen: Nationalism, Democracy, Social Welfare) founded in 1925. In 1934 the director was Gabriel Acat, co-director of Oriental.

\textsuperscript{43} It is interesting, in this respect, to see that contrary to what A. McKeown claims (2001:47), the religious networks between Peru and China not only existed but also served to help young girls of mixed blood (from Catholic secondary schools in Macao) and Tusans to be married to Chinese residing in Peru or wanting to immigrate to Peru. A document of the Ministry of Foreign Relations MRE (6-11) of June 28, 1938 thus authorized the entry of a young Chinese girl with a certificate of engagement to marriage delivered by the Catholic Mission of Chiqi (Chockai). Between 1949 and 1961 the link between the church in China and that of Peru was loosened although some Jesuit missionary work on the spot continued, especially through the young Catholic associations, both to keep them in the Catholic religion and to save their Chinese identity by favoring marriages between Tusans and half-bloods and accepting religious marriages with clandestine Chinese newly arrived and not baptized (parish marriage records, San Pedro Church, Lima).
know the number of Chinese who were able to enter Peru during the years 1949-1965.44 It is reasonable to assume that there were many, for it is still common to find among those between 60 and 80 years old who, entering by Ecuador or Panama, have acquired a new identity on their arrival in Peru. The huiguans, previously active agents of exchange with the mother country, particularly in helping with the settlement, not always legal, of new arrivals and in the sending to China money for the families, were destabilized. They had now to find other means of maintaining their networks in China and bringing in new migrants. The great houses of commerce which had been active in Guangdong and Hong Kong were also affected by the closing of China. From then on, the community turned to Taiwan.

**Disillusions**

In Peru the Chinese realized that returning to the mother country had become impossible. The reconciliation between the generations so much desired by the Tusans before the war had come naturally but before long the internecine quarrels over the future of Communist China began. In this respect, the journal *Oriental* which had put all its energy into defending the values of the Kuomintang found itself rather disoriented editorially after the war. In 1953, when the country fell under the dictatorship of General M. Odria (1948-1956), the journal was pessimistic: “*China no ha logrado la paz*” (China has not won the peace). How could it be that the coalition of the democracies was not able to re-establish peace? What would the Cold War entail and what would be Taiwan’s future?45

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44 From 1950 to 1955 the frontier was completely closed to the Chinese who were barred from entering as well as leaving. In April 1955, Ambassador Chu Shushi obtained for the Chinese of Peru the right to travel. This permission was above all given to the Chinese wishing to go to Taiwan for political reasons. A request was later made on the basis of an authorization of return and entry for the Chinese who had been retained in the People’s Republic or who had a relative in Peru and wished to leave China. In reality the new Immigration Law of February 3, 1958 (intended for the Chinese and Japanese) allowed the entry of only 150 people a year. The conditions required for entry were so restrictive and the possibility of getting out of China was practically zero such that other ways — illegal — were used to resolve difficult family situations. In 1965 only 33 Chinese were legally authorized to enter Peru. See Ho Mingchung 1967: 11.

45 *Oriental*, December 1953, n° 259. Note that the Chinese advertisers, very numerous before the War, had almost disappeared.
There was a sense of withdrawal on the part of the eldest from the institutions of which they felt they were the guardians, while the young generations looked to their future in Peru. The term *injerto* disappeared; little by little the term Tusans was recognized and began not only to reunite the descendants of Chinese parents but also to include certain half-bloods in their associations. In the provinces, more than in Lima, the recognition of and praises for the Tusans, due above all to their strong mobilization during the war, enabled the communities to survive. This young generation, between 18 to 30 years old, still desired to gather together in the political, religious and social organizations; however, pragmatically, they realized that their future was in Peru. Their future depended now on the role which the Tusans could play in Peruvian society. The traditional commerce, battered by the economic crisis and the scarcity of supplies in Asia, was abandoned for the liberal professions like engineering, medicine and law. After the depression of 1953 the Chinese and the Tusans began to invest in all sectors of the economy: industry, agriculture, fisheries; they continued to stay away from the mining sector which was traditionally controlled by the oligarchy and its foreign associates. Under the dictatorship of General Odria (1948-1956) who clamped down on social unrest for a while, and also under President M. Prado Ugarteche, the Chinese and Tusans of Peru profited from the encouragement given to private enterprise by establishing start-ups. The great commercial enterprises such as Pow Long and Pow On were confined to the Chinese quarter and no longer played the same role in the community; their time of splendor was over.

**New Hopes for the Peruvian Tusans**

The 1960s was an interesting time in Peru-Taiwan relations. While the frontiers were slow to open for the Chinese, Peruvian politicians were not hostile to the nationalist government of Taiwan. In 1961, after paying an invited visit to Taiwan, President Prado congratulated himself on discovering a democratic China on its way to modernity. In 1963 and

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46 There were of course parents who insisted, out of hope, nationalism and political conviction, on sending one or several of their children to Taiwan or Hong Kong and even to Communist China, but they were few.

47 From 1960 on, the *Huashang ribao, Diario Commercial Chino*, May, n° 1526, Peruvian-Chinese monthly, hailed the enthusiastic return from Taiwan of a parliamentary
1964 other political personalities were invited, all of whom stressing the desire for social progress displayed by Taiwan — a theme taken up by both the Peruvian Left and Right. In 1966, Victor Haya de la Torre, founder of APRA, was invited to give conferences, and was extremely well received in Taiwan. For his part, Haya de la Torre praised the success of the agrarian reform and the industrialization of his host country.

The interaction of commercial and industrial interests among the Chinese, Tusans and Peruvians was immense, as shown clearly in the monthly *Diario Comercial China* and the newspaper of the Chinese merchants in Peru, *Huashang ribao*. This was an indication of not only the total integration of the majority of the Chinese and their descendants into Peruvian society but also, for a great number of them, the radicalization to the right and political conservatism. Nostalgic for the military regime of Odria, the writers for the publications were ferociously anticommunist and denounced with equal vehemence the strikes and demonstrations of the Peruvian students as well as the Great Leap Forward, in support of the APRA and the Peruvian government. Whether in the pages of *Oriental, Huashang ribao*, or a little later on in those of *La Voz de Oriente* (Dongfang zhiyin), one notes in the media the active participation of numerous Tusans in public life.

*The Church’s Role: Artisan and Guardian of the Tusan Identity*

From 1870, the integration of the Chinese and their children was marked by religious conversion. It seems that the Hakkas, already quite numerous at that time, were the ones who converted earliest. Between 1882 and 1885, they were, with the support of the Peruvian church and Monsignor Giovanni T. Raimondi, Cardinal of Hong Kong, who were the principal backers behind the formation of a great Chinese charitable organization, federating all other associations already in existence. On his arrival in Peru at the end of 1884, Ambassador Zheng Zaoru took commission which recommended after this visit that Peru persevere in its struggle against Communism and in its belief in God!

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48 Illustrated magazine of 1968.

49 Archivo Arzobispal de Lima, “Carta de Comunicaciones, 7 de noviembre 1883; Carta de Kuh Tacqui (alias Manuel Benavides), Presidente de la Beneficencia China al Ilustrísimo y Reverendísimo Señor Arzobispo del Perú; Carta del 22 septiembre 1883 de Kuh Tacqui a nombre de la Sociedad Asiática de Beneficencia al Señor Provisor y Gobernador Eclesiástico.”
over from the Church and the government the control of the Chinese community and handed it over (so that it would prosper) to the successful Chinese merchants who would later become the directors of the *hui-guans*. With that the relations then existing between the Church and the community leaders was broken. The evangelization of the Chinese was thus carried out discretely from then on, even as relations between the clergy in China and the community continued. In Lima the evangelization of the poorer Chinese was in large part the work of the beatified Dominga Gazcón.\(^{50}\)

It was through the access to education that the Church would recapture a part of its control over the community, at least over the Tusans and their parents. First, with the help of the Peruvian wife of the president of the community, Pow Sanchia, the Peruvian wives of the Chinese or half-bloods created in 1898 the first association of “*damas católicas de la comunidad china*” (Catholic Ladies of the Chinese Community). This was based on the reasoning that the organization of women was the first step to improving education which in turn was essential for integration. The first Tusans, supported by the Tong Huy Chong Kock, established a secondary school, Chung Wha, in 1924 which was followed by the San Min. Influenced by the progressive ideas spread by the nationalism of Sun Yat-sen, the Tusans were open to new educational experiences and agreed to have a Jesuit chaplain put in charge of religious education for those who wanted it. In 1934 it was the Spanish Jesuit, Jacinto García, who took charge of the educational development of the young children until they became adults. The associations of young Catholic Tuscan men and women also brought together numerous young people leading to marriage, thus bringing about certain stability in the Tusun community. Often the isolation, lack of support, and incomprehension felt by the Tusans were compensated by the sense of belonging and recognition brought to them by the religious figures they encountered, particularly the Jesuits of the San Pedro Church. Two important stages can be noted: the first, after World War II and the arrival of Communism in China, and the second, after 1972 and the departure of the Taiwanese Ambassador, followed by the takeover by the Communist diplomats of all the Chinese institutions in Peru. It was at these two moments that the Franciscans, followed by the Jesuits, took control of the education of the

\(^{50}\) For further developments on this point, see Lausent-Herrera (2008).
Younger generations of Tusans and brought them into the Church, supposedly without making them lose their identity.

After 1949, there were persecuted priests who succeeded in leaving China after several years of imprisonment and turned to the overseas Chinese communities. Monsignor Te Shien-Kao, Franciscan and Bishop of Guangzhou, came to Lima in 1950. Before him, Monsignor Yu-Ping had brought catechism in Chinese and in English to the Chinese of the San Pedro Church. Father Francisco Keng from an old Catholic family in Hebei who had fled China in 1953 also came to Peru to visit the Chinese secondary schools. But the person who definitively left his mark on the Chinese community was Monsignor Orazio Ferrucio (1911-1990), Bishop of Kichow. Having been expelled from China in 1952, he was made responsible for the Chinese clergy of Peru from 1955 by Pope John XXIII when the project of a large secondary school was then underway. Monsignor Ferrucio arrived at a difficult time for the Chinese community whose members saw in this religious figure who spoke Chinese, kept in contact with China and who had suffered in the Communist jail, a sort of guardian of the Chinese identity of the Tusans. The journal *Oriental* also played a part in playing up this reassuring and charitable image of the Catholic Church. In 1960, Francisco Leon used the journal to appeal to the Tusans to form an association which would work with Monsignor Ferrucio and help him build a secondary school.51 The Tusan Club was thus founded in 1961 with the collaboration of the Franciscans led by Juan Wu. This led to the establishment in 1962 of the secondary school Juan XXIII (John XXIII), which became the seat of the clergy consecrated to the Chinese in Peru and their families. In return, the two secondary schools, Chung Wha and San Min, where nationalist values were inculcated in the students, and where the teachers were often Protestant, merged the same year into one school, the Diez de Octubre.

The post-war Tusan Club was very different from that created by *Oriental* in 1931 which was above all nationalist. Another generation of Tusans was now asserting itself. In 1964 everything had changed and so had the Tusan youth. In opening the school to the descendants of the Chinese and in welcoming the several generations of half-bloods,

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51 In asking the members of the Tusan association to collaborate in the creation of a school and to send their children there, he entered into competition with the secondary school Diez de Octubre.
the Church in a certain way had made the condition of the Tusans normal. From then on the Tusans and the Peruvian Church would be linked, for there is no better way of social integration other than through church attendance. This closeness with the Tusan youth allowed the Church — which took charge of education and culture in Chinese — to maintain good relations with the Sociedad de Beneficencia Central China although this group was more favorable to the Diez de Octubre school.

During the 1960s, certain Tusans began to involve themselves in matters outside the economic and became engaged in Peruvian political life, as Pedro Zulen had done before them, but in isolation. Intellectuals such as the philosopher Victor Li-Carrillo (1929-1998) and Emilio Choy Ma (1915-1976) chose to enter politics by studying. A self-taught Tusan, the latter came out with an innovative Marxist reinterpretation of the history and anthropology of Peru. In politics, the leftist movement was making headway in Peru and reaching the middle classes and the students. For the Chinese community traumatized by the advent of the People’s Republic of China, the sure values remained anticommunism, Taiwan and the Church. For this reason the community was perturbed in 1964 by the decision made by France, one of the world powers, to recognize the People’s Republic, to the detriment of Taiwan. Would the democratic powers let down the Chinese Nationalists once again? (Oriental, 1964, n° 385.)

To Stay or To Leave?

In 1968 General J. Velasco’s coup d’état put an end to the neoliberal policies. The agrarian reform which Belaunde had not been able to carry out was thus vigorously pursued. Expropriations and the confiscation of agricultural properties and industrial enterprises touched a number of Chinese and Tusans of the older generation. It is not known how many families of Chinese origin chose then to leave Peru. Following the example, still vivid in memory, of the Chinese of Cuba who chose exile in 1959 after Fidel Castro took power and left for the United States, an unknown but large number of Peruvian Chinese chose to leave for the West Coast of the United States and Canada. The coup de grâce was given by the Velasco government in 1971 when it recognized the People’s Republic of China, thus accelerating the departure of the Chinese from the country.
In the same year Oriental made a new appeal. “What is happening with the Tusen youth?” asked Jorge Lam. Even if the Chinese institutions were paralyzed, even if the community was completely divided by political events, the Tusans should not desert it. Juan Wu, who had founded the Tusen Club in 1961, launched the same appeal: “Get to work, young people in the Tusen association!” Aware of the fact that a “vital cycle” was coming to an end, Lam and Wu appealed to them not to give up, but to take up the relay, so that the gap would not widen between the members of the older generation who strove on strict morality and the young who no longer believed in the conservative institutions of the community. In its November 1971 editorial, Oriental made a poignant appeal (Oriental, 1971, n° 470, p.22 and n° 473) to the readers to address the concerns of the young Tusans who were looking toward the People's Republic. That would not prevent Oriental, a free journal, from dispensing information on Communist China and claiming to be the only link between the Peruvian Chinese community and the government of Chiang Kai-shek.

This was a time when the Chinese community, as much as the entire population of Peru, was presented with a trial. Because of the restrictions on imports, Wing On Chong (dating from 1872), the last symbol of success of Chinese commerce in Peru, disappeared, and the directors of the associations faithful to Taiwan had to leave, taking their archives with them and leaving the premises to those who sympathized with and supported Communist China among whom were the post-1949 migrants and the Tusans who had gone to study either in Hong Kong or in the People's Republic. The changes in Peru, which came about between 1971 and the return to democracy in 1980, are very well observed and recounted in the novels of Siu Kamwen, a young Chinese who arrived with his parents in Peru in 1960. One can read in “El tramo final” how individualism took the place of community spirit, how the population of mixed races spread and with that came the end of traditions including respect for the parents. The young looked toward Canada while the old closed their shops and remembered their arrival in Peru 60 years earlier.

Despite the construction of a beautiful gateway at the entrance to the Chinese quarter by the government of Taiwan in 1971 (just before Peru chose to recognize the People's Republic of China), the inhabitants of the Chinese quarter were dwindling; many were leaving for the more comfortable parts of the city, particularly San Borja. The modern and more spacious Chinese restaurants also moved out to other more bourgeois
neighborhoods, offering — thanks to the arrival of new Chinese cooks — new dishes while conserving those of the creole Chinese cuisine special to Peru. But Chinese migrants continued, in much smaller numbers than before certainly, to enter Peru illegally. Changing their identity on arrival with the help of the huiguans, they integrated with few problems, the population of Lima having got used for decades to living side by side with Chinese who spoke Spanish badly and worked in the restaurants.

*The New Soul of the Tusans: A Generation of Shorn Hopes*

The decade of the 1980s saw a total change in the life of the Chinese in Peru and the Tusans youth. Deprived of the freedom of speech during the years of the military dictatorship, the return of democracy allowed the Tusans to enter, now officially, the political life of Peru. In 1978 Rubén Chang Gamarra of the Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), a Tusun, was persuaded to be a member of the future Constituent Assembly which was charged with holding future elections. In 1980, several members of the Chinese community were elected: Eugenio Chang Cruz and Ruben Chang Gamarra for APRA, and Ernesto Lao Rojas for the party in power, Acción Popular. Ernesto Lao Rojas who had lived in the Amazon region, represented Loreto, in support of Belaunde's ambition of opening up the eastern provinces of Ucayali and Loreto. Dr. Juan Wong Espinoza also supported Action Popular so as to increase social security; his cousin, Enrique Wong-Pujada would be elected deputy of Callao in 1985. Victor Polay Risco52 (1904-1994), son of a coolie, represented the APRA of which he was one of the founders. He was a member of the parliament's education commission, having promoted the improvement of literacy skills among the working class and the upgrading of professional training. But the long-awaited democracy soon suffered from the aggressive attack of the Maoist movement of the Shining Path in the Andes, which was followed in 1982 in Lima by a Castrist movement, Tupac Amaru, which was founded by Victor Polay-Campos, son of the

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52 The father of Victor Polay Risco, Po Leysen arrived in Peru in 1864 and was sent to work in a sugar factory in Paramonga to the north of Lima. This is the greatest sugar cane producing region and also one with the highest concentration of coolies and Chinese workers. It is also in this region (Trujillo) that APRA was born and where the most numerous revolts of agricultural workers took place. V. Polay-Risco, agitator and militant, was one of the founders of APRA. His son, Victor Polay-Campos, founded in 1982 the movement of the Tupac Amaru guerrillas.
Aprist Victor Polay-Risco who was the grandson of the coolie, Po Ley-  
sen. The violence and the economic crisis broke the impetus which had  
been generated by the return of President Belaunde from which the  
Chinese and Tusun entrepreneurs had hoped to benefit. The arrival of  
the APRA in 1985 would only aggravate the situation. The urban guerrillas, led by Tupac Amaru in particular, attacked the entrepreneurs. The  
Tusans were plaqued by kidnapping and obliged to pay the revolution-  
ar-y tax which hurt their businesses, notably in the case of the largest  
distributor of paper supplies in Peru, Laukong.53 All the related com-  
mercial activities, Chinese as well as Tusun, slowed down and the Chi-  
inese quarter was deserted because of the terrorist attacks. However,  
during these years the Chinese migratory current into Peru resumed  
and the new migrants discovered *Lima la horrible*.54

The individual enthusiasm born after the years of restriction on the  
neo-liberal policies of the second Belaunde government was not sympa-  
thetic to the preservation of the old values. The situation within the Tusun  
Club also was far from settled. In an open letter to the community, Raul  
Chang, who succeeded his father as head of the *Oriental*, proposed in an  
address to the Tusans, who were also the parents of pupils of the school  
Juan XXIII, to join him in forming the CCPCh or the Peruvian-Chinese  
Cultural Center. According to the statute, “Peruvians of Chinese ascen-  
dance will be members, and also foreigners of Chinese origin, without  
discrimination concerning social, economic, political or religious status”  
(*Oriental*, 1981, n° 586). The definition of Tusans had become increas-  
ingly broad in meaning, as more and more Chinese entered Peru with  
the opening of China. The Peruvian-Chinese Cultural Center was inaugu-  rated officially on 30 August 1981, but the hopes of this group of Tusun  
parents, shared later by some of the new migrants, were much too ambi-

53 Jorge Lau Kong, owner of this enterprise, was congressman and minister in 1993.  
54 Title of a novel written in 1960 by Sebastian Salazar Bondy.
with the secondary school, John XXIII, their piece of land was divided in two; the part belonging to them was called Villa Tusun while the part managed by the Franciscans was called Villa Asis. It would be nearly 20 years later and after much effort was made before the Villa Tusun finally materialized, much to the gratification of its founders. Villa Tusun, with its chapel, offered the community a place of retreat.

New Flux of Immigrants

Just as it is impossible to give the exact number of Chinese living in Peru and those who can be considered (or who consider themselves) Tusans, it is also impossible to know the exact number of Chinese immigrants entering Peru between 1980 and 2008.

The 1981 census recorded 1,714 Chinese residents in Peru compared to 19,915 in 1940. The figures obtained from the DIGEMIN\(^\text{55}\) for the period 1994 — first semester of 2004 show that there were 3,216 entries into Peru and 2,398 departures, i.e. a migratory surplus of 818 persons. However, also from the same DIGEMIN figures, we know that there were apparently 18,604 Chinese who were naturalized between 1990 and 2003. The migratory surplus is underestimated because of the many cases of illegal entry. As for the cases of naturalization, they do not correspond to any real figures as they do not include the cases where Peruvian nationality was offered for sale during the Fujimori presidency in 1994.\(^\text{56}\) The last bulletin of the DIGEMIN of 2008 indicates that between 2001 and 2007 there was a migratory surplus of 3,780 people of Chinese nationality, 2,702 of whom for the one year of 2006.\(^\text{57}\)

\(^{55}\) Dirección General de Migraciones y Naturalización (General Direction of Migration and Naturalization).

\(^{56}\) From 1990 and the coming to power of A. Fujimori, Peru’s relations with Asia changed. Japan came prudently closer to Peru, Taiwan wanted to profit from Peru’s opening to Asia, and APEC looked to investing in Peru. The British companies sought to place their funds in Peru before the retrocession of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic. The Taiwanese–Hong Kong mafias wanted to profit from a new law — in force from March to June 1994 — offering Peruvian nationality on a deposit of $20,000 from Chinese entrepreneurs wishing to settle in Peru. A bogus company, Blooming Strong Development, was then set up, to run a new enterprise dealing in Asiatic immigration. The Senate which denounced the “sale of Peruvian passports” and the resulting scandal put an end to this attempt by the Mafia to organize under cover of legality an illegal immigration scheme serving as Chinese money laundering (Demelas and Lausent-Herrera 1995: 23).

\(^{57}\) http://www.digemin.gob.pe/estadisticas.asp
official figures purposely do not take into account the large numbers of illegal immigrants even when they are detained by the police.

If the official figures relating to the Overseas Chinese in Peru are lower than the actual numbers, those produced in Asian countries are, it seems, exaggerated and untrustworthy. According to the Overseas Chinese Economy Yearbook of Taipei, there were in Peru, in 1987, 39,000 people in the category of Overseas Chinese (the criteria for which are unspecified) and 500,000 people in 1991 (Poston 1994: 637). Some other sources go as high as 800,000. One wonders how many generations are counted, and what degrees of mixed blood entered into these calculations? In reality it is already difficult to know the number of people composing the primary circle of the community and that of the second-generation Tusans. It is even more difficult to do the same with the third category which includes the half-bloods.

In 1980, when a number of Cantonese entered Peru (many staying illegally once their temporary visas expired) to join their families, networks of clandestine entries were also formed within the DIGEMIN, designed to help all those who did not have visas to enter the country. These networks, as mentioned previously, became even more powerful during the ten years of the Fujimori regime. Several people from the Chinese and Tusan community were held for questioning as was the Tusan minister Victor Joy Way. Other Chinese entered Peru as managers or workers in the steel industrial complex that the Shougang-Hierro-Peru company had bought back from Peru in 1992 under the privatization scheme. These workers were not Cantonese and did not integrate. As for the Cantonese who continued to arrive, the fate awaiting them was not what they had expected. They were sometimes exploited, particularly if they worked in the restaurants and family factories, before being able to establish themselves. Generally, the enthusiasm of the Peruvians for Chinese food was in their favor. Once their debt was paid (for airplane ticket, fees for administrative procedures, false residence papers, etc.), they contributed to the setting up of Chinese restaurants in all quarters of Lima. Their relocation to the provinces (far from the Chinese quarter and the inhabitants of Lima who were accustomed to the sight of numerous Chinese) only took place after 1992 with the pacification of the country. It should not be forgotten that they had arrived in Peru while the country was going through its worst social and economic crisis. For many this came as a shock because on top of the poverty and hyperinflation, they had to deal with violence and the danger of terrorist attacks. But neither the moribund economy nor the state of
insecurity in the country slowed down the flow of the new migrants into the country.

Where Cantonese immigration is concerned, there are many cases that are worth mentioning. Many of the migrant women (nearly 40 percent of the total) came from rural families or outlying suburbs with a number of children. According to them, their families in China wanted them to leave so that they would not be a burden at home. The work they found in Peru was usually linked to the Chinese restaurant business or the Chinese food industry and later to sales, after they had acquired a little Spanish. The men too took up mostly restaurant work and received low wages. When they succeeded in freeing themselves, they opened small shops linked to the import of products which were often of low quality except for those destined for the restaurants. Those who had the support of the family, emotional or otherwise, or who found in the hui-guans of their home counties the necessary help to develop other activities, managed to integrate into the community where, thanks to their knowledge of Chinese and their “legitimacy,” they tended to take up responsible positions in the traditional associations and adjust quickly in the community. When they became richer, they went into business; some became owners of furniture or Chinese foods factories or proprietors of hotels or casinos.

But within a relatively short time, the migration flow which was limited to 15 or so counties from the province of Guangdong changed drastically into human trafficking on a large scale because of the involvement of the mafia. From then on Peru became a place of transit for those coming from Guangdong and Fujian whose ultimate destination was the United States or Canada.

Proud to be a Tusan: Celebrations and a Providential Leader

After nearly breaking apart because of the consequences of their disengagement from China and the political conflict which weakened the country during the preceding two decades, the Tusans of Peru found a renewed dynamism which until then had been employed in maintain-

58 On this theme, see the different testimonies gathered from the Chinese women in Lausent-Herrera (2007). Even when earning a factory worker’s salary which they sent back to their parents, these young women were considered a hindrance to the enrichment of the family or the education of a son.
ing their identity almost exclusively by holding onto their attachment to the Catholic Church. The year 1999 was significant in this context. A national program was launched to organize public discussions and publish works concerning the national and non-national minorities which make up the cultural diversity of the Peruvian nation. Two important symposiums were organized by the Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, one relating to the 100th anniversary (1899-1999) of the arrival of the Japanese in Peru, and the other concerning the 150-year history of the Chinese presence in Peru (1849-1999). The second event was dreaded by the discrete Beneficencia China which feared that too much attention would be paid to the period of Chinese coolies — a subject of study for most of the researchers — and that the occasion would lead to the emergence of a new class of Tusans led above all by a leader such as they had never encountered.

Everything began in 1942 when Erasmo Wong, a Chinese who had arrived in the 1930s and opened his bodega (grocery store) in the upper middle class quarter of San Isidro. The location of the store, the quality of his products, the warm welcome he gave the clients and the on-going modernization of his sales techniques enabled his business not only to survive but grow spectacularly. Together with his children, all university-educated in different fields, Wong expanded his business. Before long, the Wong supermarkets were set up everywhere in Lima and the provinces. These days, the figurehead of the Wong commercial empire is Erasmo Wong Lu, the son. The 8,000 employees are very well treated and celebrate May 1st every year by putting on a show for the public. But what the inhabitants of Lima appreciate the most is the national holiday parade, an immense, extremely colorful and joyful event followed by a setting off of firecracker which the Wong enterprise organizes every year, and which even the government cannot offer to its citizens. The Peruvians have taken Wong to their heart; for them he is not only someone who has improved their daily life but who has also enhanced the well-being of Peruvians over and above their Chilean competitors. He is actually worth 500 million dollars.

59 Erasmo, Efrain, Eduardo, Edgardo, Eric and Edna (note the E of each given name chosen to indicate the same generation). There are other similar cases among Tusman families.

60 Concerning the worth of this group, see Yamada and Chacaltana (2007: 75-83).

61 Since the Pacific War (1879-1883) during which Peru was occupied by Chile, there has been a strong anti-Chilean sentiment manifesting itself particularly in relation to Chilean investments in Peru especially relating to two chain stores.
In 1999, Erasmo Wong Lu decided to take in hand the commission overseeing the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Chinese presence in Peru. To do this, he surrounded himself with a certain number of Tusans from among the young entrepreneurs. The symposium adopted the spirit of the album published in 1924 by the Chinese community showing what the Chinese had given to the national economy, and would above all give a new place and preponderance to the Tusans, highlighting their intellectual as well as economic success.62 This celebration of the Tusans was made easier by the great visibility which they had enjoyed for ten years, as the first Fujimori government had included numerous collaborators and ministers of Asiatic origin.63

Using his economic clout and social prestige, Erasmo Wong Lu financed the repairs of the main street of the Chinese quarter, the calle Capón, which was decorated to accentuate its Chinese character. He also took advantage of his status in a number of Tusans institutions such as the CCPCh to gather around him the Tusans elite of his generation, i.e. those between 40 and 50 years old who were recognized for their success in different fields such as commerce, finance, the upper echelons of the civil service and academia. This new elite who had not yet found its place either within the Beneficencia China or in institutions that were too closely-linked to the Church (the CCPCh) or to recreation (the Tayouk Club), would surround Erasmo Wong Lu with men of excellence and function as a network of influence, the very illustration of the culture of guanxi. His association, the APCH or Asociación Peruano China, thus came to be known in Peru as the symbol of awakening vis-à-vis the lethargy of the old institutions, in part in answer to the ever growing presence of China in the Peruvian economy and the new immigrant entrepreneurs.

The goals of Wong’s APCH are the search for identity and the attainment of economic success. In its Boletín Informativo Integración published in 2001 (8,000 copies), the reference to the Tusans identity appears

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62 In October 1999 the historian Celia Wu-Brading, professor at Cambridge, Eugenio Chang Rodriguez, professor of literature at New York University, and José Chang, rector of the University San Martín de Porres, participated in the forum on Tusans intellectuals.

63 Between 1990 and 2000, besides having developed an ‘Asiatist’ economic policy, taking as a model the development of the Asian tigers and taking Peru into APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), Fujimori surrounded himself with a number of Tusans and Nikkei. Among the Tusans: Victor Joy Way, Minister of Energy and Mines, Prime Minister, President of Congress (now in prison for serving as broker for a Chinese pharmaceutical company), J. Lau-Kong, Martha Chavez, L. Chang Ching, J. C. Lam and J. C. Chu-Rubio.
explicitly as the motor of any undertaking. Four moral principles should
dictate the conduct of the Peruvian Tusans: hard work, trustworthiness,
honesty and respect for the elderly. However, the term *Integración* appears
in the title of the bulletin only after the third year of its appearance.
This term poses problems. Why would the descendants of the Chinese
Peruvians, known throughout Peru as the Tusans and particularly well
integrated, their visibility growing ever since the era of the Fujimori gov-
ernment and the success of the Wongs, need to reconstruct an identity
around the theme of integration? One wonders if the desired integration
is one which would position them for globalization, making them the
necessary intermediaries between China and Peru? Even if this interpre-
tation is correct, it is ultimately the Tusans’ need for recognition in Peru-
vian society which predominates. It appears therefore that integration, as
conceived by the APCH, should break down the sense of isolation felt by
certain Chinese descendants who are prisoners of their milieu, and who
should now prepare themselves for the globalization in which China is
an important player.

For Julio Chang Sanchez, director of the APEC (Asia Pacific Eco-
nomic Cooperation) at the Foreign Trade Ministry, “the role of the
Tusans is to assemble the efforts and promote foreign trade and invest-
ments…Become the motor and the spearhead of trade between Peru
and China, and fortify relations with Asia” (*Integración*, APCH, n° 37,
2007). He adds, “[W]e should make known the existence in Peru of a
large Chinese community which would surprise and interest more than
one […], and would allow us and our associations to establish new per-
sonal and economic links.” According to the APCH, “the community’s
support of the work carried out by the government in the framework of
the presidency of the APEC 2008 is fundamental and permits us to form
relations with other communities on the other side of the Pacific” (*Ori-

In this spirit, the APCH organized in 2005 and 2007 meetings of the
Tusans, “Los Herederos del Dragón” (Heirs of the Dragon) in collabora-
tion with the prestigious ESAN, the Business School. These meetings,
plus their work on the theme of relations with China, also allowed the
Tusans who had succeeded in business or in the administration to trans-
mit their experience to members of the younger generation, and, when
the latter prove their worth,64 to support them. The young Tusans (from

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64 Another institution, the CAPECHI (Association of the Peruvian-Chinese Cham-
ber of Commerce) has the same aim but its members are above all Peruvians and the few
20 to 40 years old) who had joined the association APCH-Youth could, on production of a letter of motivation, benefit from study groups conducted by people well-known in the business world. The aim was to make this generation of Tusans become leaders in the world of finance and business, “who would have positions of influence, [and] who would direct and have great ambition” (Integración, APCH, n° 33, 2006). On their part, the young Tusans were aware that in entering into this privileged circle they would be part of a network of social contacts, or guanxi.

**Tusans versus New Immigrants**

New Chinese migrants may be divided into four categories. The first consists of mainly Cantonese who began to arrive in the early 1980s, following in the footsteps of the traditional Chinese immigrants. As has been mentioned, the conditions under which they arrived were not always easy; they had to endure the abuse of foster families, pay off debts and live through the Peruvian economic and political crises. The first arrivals came via the traditional networks, more or less legally assisted by the *huiguans*, and the more recent arrivals are smuggled in by “snake-heads.” For at least 20 years in Peru, if they did not spend time in other countries during that period, these migrants would have by now, in varying degrees of success, their own businesses, mostly in restaurants and small industries located in the suburbs of Lima. Some of the more successful have become presidents of *huiguans*, replacing the older generation which favored Taiwan, or members of the directorship of the Beneficencia China which obliges them to show allegiance with the Embassy. One of the examples of this success is Alan Chang, owner of the Wa Lok restaurants (Yamada and Chacaltana 2007: 63-73). After this group of successful men comes the next legitimate generation of Tusans consisting mainly of those born of Chinese fathers and mothers.

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65 Between December 2006 and February 2007, two boats with 100 Chinese each were captured by the coast guards, one to the north of Peru and the other adrift along Costa Rica. The snakehead of the Dragón Rojo stationed in Lima, who was responsible for this failure, was immediately executed.
The second category is made up of immigrants from Fujian. There were immigrants from Fujian in the past as shown by the abandoned premises of their huiguans (Lausent-Herrera 2000: 54). Their association, Hokkien Gongs, indicates that they originated in the south of Fujian Province. The present migrants are not related to the former migrants; they came from eastern Fujian and their Fuzhou and Fuqing dialects are incomprehensible to the local Cantonese and Hakkas. They arrived in Peru at the end of the 1980s via an illegal immigration network which could take the migrants first to Peru and then north to the United States, following the same route as the Latin American migrants but with leaders from the network, or to settle in Lima. The first Fujian migrants were all men but very soon the women arrived, almost as many as the men, followed by the couples’ parents, to take care of the children. These days we see the entry of single women. The Fujian migrants who occupy numerous premises in the Chinese quarter are not well accepted by the Cantonese. Mafia-like activities often related to Chinese restaurants are linked to their presence injecting fear in the community and Beneficencia China which lodged a complaint with the Embassy. As the town center and the middle class neighborhoods became saturated, they opened numerous Chinese restaurants of all categories in the Lima suburbs. They are also present in the district of San Borja where the wealthy Tusans middle class resides. They operate internet parlors, hairdressing salons and spas. Hotels are also their domain and are associated with the increase in prostitution. Four years ago they set up an association, outside the movement of the Beneficencia China which did not want to include them. But as it was implicated in the activities of an illegal immigration network, the association ceased to exist in 2007. Although the successes of the new migrants are now apparent, their failure to integrate has excluded them from the life of the Tusans. If their children do not have access to an education comparable to that of the Cantonese children, it is difficult to see how the children of these migrants will be well-integrated in the years to come.

A third group, very small compared to the migrants from Fujian, comes from the central regions comprising Hubei, Anhui and even Sichuan. They have come to Peru generally as employees of Chinese enterprises. One can group them with the immigrants, not yet numerous,

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Lausent-Herrera (2000: 54). The premises were bought in 1879 but abandoned for several years.
from Dongbei, i.e. the three Northeastern Provinces in particular Liaoning, but also from Beijing. As in other places outside China, these are Chinese migrants with a higher level of education arriving with a small capital and looking to invest in industry and the import of Chinese computer equipment and spare parts. They tend to be drawn, as were the Taiwanese, to the free exchange zones opened in Peru about ten years ago. They are beginning to invest in the interior provinces in projects relating to the building of factories.

The fourth group is distinguished neither by its geographical origin nor its dialect insofar as it puts together the Cantonese and the migrants from Fujian. What unite them are the very hard conditions in which they work as cooks or employees in Lima. They are isolated and unable to leave Peru for the United States or Canada, for they do not earn enough money to pay the smugglers and have no choice but to live with false identities or outdated passports. The recent evangelical church, Alianza Cristiana Misionera (led by Pastor Michael Chang), which is affiliated to the CCCOWE (The Chinese Coordination Centre for World Evangelization), looks for its new converts in this group. In 2006 it organized the “Global Chifa Mission Conference” in Lima and succeeded in establishing itself with the new migrants, those who have no huiguans to go to and who do not expect to get help from the Beneficencia China.

The last fact is significant because, as has been seen, the cohesion of the Chinese community owes a great deal to its connection to the Catholic Church which, thanks to its associations and to its teachings, has allowed the Tusans to preserve their identity. Never before had the Catholic Church been in competition with another church or religion.67 One should note that in view of the size of the new immigrants which no one can quantify, the clergy in charge of the Chinese community has not been equal to the task. The Church offers the new arrivals a paid education but few places and few scholarships. Moreover, in order to be well informed of the aid offered by the clergy one must be well-integrated into the Cantonese milieu which excludes the young from Fujian. In being so out of touch with the situation of the rejected members of

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67 In reality there exists since 1979 within the Evangelical church of the China Alianza Cristiana a Chinese church. But this church has no Chinese-speaking pastor and also accepts Peruvians. Recently the Iglesia China of the Alliance has turned to the new migrants with success, with the help of translators from the new immigrants. Alerted to the importance of this new migratory current, the Alianza Cristiana has sent a new Chinese American pastor to intensify its mission of evangelization. Mr. Chang has allied himself with the CCCOWE and formed his own church.
the new immigration, the Church has interrupted a process that it has spent more than 100 years to put in place. As such, the Church is helping to put up a barrier between the Cantonese and the other groups of migrants who do not have the financial means to give their children born in Peru a good education. The following comment made by the President of Beneficencia China, Jau Kinsiu, when he was invited to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the foundation of CCPCH, is very revealing:

I consider that as a social institution, the CCPH should try to develop the friendship and integrate the new Chinese immigrant as much as the Tusans. The new immigrant today differs in his way of thinking, of dressing, in his customs and his beliefs. Moreover, I think that it would be important to have sporting events with the new immigrants so as to recreate the unity of the Chinese community of Peru (Boletin Informativo CCPCH, n° 9, 2006: 12).

Jau Kinsiu has made a valid point. But what is surprising is that he thinks it is for the CCPCH, therefore the clergy, to solve the problem of the new migrants which was traditionally the work of the huiguans. Is Jau implying that the huiguans are no longer capable of playing their role, or does he think they have simply walked away from a traditional commitment? Are the new immigrants seen as potential competitors? There are no easy answers to these questions. The Chinese and the Tusans who claim a special identity have won recognition of their social and economic position in Peruvian society which has taken them more than one generation, with the exception of the Wongs. But just like the American dream, there is also a Chinese dream, waiting to come true.

Conclusion

Thanks to the publication, Oriental, the injerto or Chinese-Peruvian half-blood won dignity, recognition and visibility in the 1930s by becoming simply a Tusan, that is, almost the equal to the child born in Peru of a Chinese mother and father. He learned to count very little on the paternal institution and preferred to form his own institutions to keep his Chinese identity while becoming an example of integration.

The Church understood that it was in the child’s interest to maintain his/her identity and took the place of the traditional huiguans; the clergy can thus be looked upon equally as the founder of the great Tusan family. One may criticize the Church for keeping the Tusans from losing
their identity the better to prevent them from leaving it, but it should be recognized that in so doing, the Church has actually brought about the emergence of a well-integrated elite in Peruvian society.

The majority of former huiguans have had difficulty in maintaining their traditional form, some of them even selling their premises or renting out a part to operators of slot machines in order to increase their income. Their directors are aging and slowly being replaced by the immigrants arriving in the 1980s. These late comers, although already accustomed to Peru, do not have the same romantic, cultural references and are guided by pragmatism. Soon to become the majority, they will doubtless not be concerned with conserving the long heritage of 160 years of Chinese presence in Peru. As they have said themselves, they do not feel they are the guardians of the patrimony they have received. For the first time in decades, a new huiguan was recently inaugurated, assembling those coming from Dongguan. It is the only huiguan where an understanding exists between the former migrants (previously attached to the Panyu huiguan) and the new arrivals, mostly small investors, and which approximates a traditional form of association, while the present tendency is for huiguans to disappear or be reconstructed.

On the other hand, the Tusans of today, coming from the Sino-Peruvian community, are very concerned about the preservation of the institutions; they are fighting to preserve this heritage which is testimony to their legitimacy as Tusans. But here again changes are foreseeable. Contrary to the thinking of Erasmo Wong Lu and his declaration made at the time of the creation of his APCH-Youth, the Tusan tradition will not pass forever from generation to generation even if the practice of intermarriage has allowed certain families to claim to be Tusans for two or three generations. Within APCH-youth, dissensions have appeared: the young arriving from China with their parents in the 1980s or those born in Peru to new immigrant families have begun to contest the legitimacy of the term Tusans for those born in Peru of mixed parents, for those in the second and third generations, or again for those who do not have a Chinese family name, a fact that actually means nothing in Peru since a great number of Chinese have Spanish names. This debate is quite revealing of the state of mind of certain young people who, influenced by a strong nationalist Chinese sentiment, attribute to themselves qualities superior to those of the Peruvians. In other words, they are saying that not just anyone — among the half-bloods — can claim to be Tusans. This new situation is totally opposite to the one in 1931 which led the descendants of the Chinese of Peru to group together. But perhaps one
can say that these young Chinese-Tusans who would like to profit from the APCH have at least in common with its founders a great admiration for the economic success of China.68

Another sign of change has become noticeable in recent years. Certain Tusans are beginning to be referred to and to refer to themselves as Wah Joy or Huayi. Little by little the term Huayi is gaining ground particularly in the journal Oriental where it is used more and more often. Should one see in this the increasing influence of mainland Chinese culture? Has the term become a form of identification? If the Tusans allow themselves to be supplanted by the Huayi, this would be extremely significant. This is not impossible as China has great draw and the sense of identity for the Tusans is diminishing in the process of globalization in which the individual becomes a part of the encompassing whole. The Chinese Embassy in Peru which in the past had been little inclined to support cultural activities, is now encouraging them notably in the establishment of the Confucius Institutes which control the teaching of Chinese and cultivate the young from the new generation of Tusans. Erasmo Wong Lu may have faith in the future of the Tusans, he will nevertheless have to accept the possibility that in a few years from now the new Chinese community will no longer share the same past as the present generation and that it will undoubtedly have a different dream of its future.

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68 Another interesting aspect of these young people is their negative response when asked if they will marry Peruvians, an attitude stemming no doubt from that of the parents who do not want mixed marriages for their children.
Since 1987, the E. Wong Tusan’s commercial empire has organized a huge parade every year on national day.
Paruro street in Lima’s Chinatown. Since 2000 there has been a significant increase in the number of internet parlors that allow new migrants to keep in touch with their relatives in China and the Chinese diaspora elsewhere.

Fujian immigrant who has taken over a small chifa (Chinese restaurant) in a popular neighborhood in Lima.
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Up to the 1990s, ethnic Chinese in Suriname were ethno-linguistically homogenous; virtually anyone with a Chinese background could trace his or her roots back to Kejia-speakers\(^1\) from the Fuidung'on-region on the Hong Kong periphery, particularly Dongguan.\(^2\) The main cleavage within the Fuidung'on group in Suriname is between migrants and local-born. Local-born are called *laiap* (泥鴨 / 塥鴨, lit. “Mud Duck”), which refers to people born in Suriname.\(^3\) With only few Fuidung'on women immigrants, the first Suriname-born were mixed Chinese; local-born eventually became synonymous with mixed (usually Afro-Surinamese) ancestry.\(^4\) China-born Fuidung'on migrants are called *tong'ap* (唐鴨), the word *tong* alluding to China. That the colloquial term *laiap* is negative
is clear from the adjective *si* (in Kejia, depending on the tone: “dead”; “shit”; “corpse”) that some *tong'ap* place before it: “goddamned half-breed.”

“*Tong'ap*” and “*laiap*” are labels, not categories in the sense that “*tong'ap*-ness” and “*laiap*-ness” are inheritable and reproducible over time. In contrast to the Peranakan of Indonesia and the Straits Chinese of Malaysia, the highly assimilated *laiap* component in the small Chinese segment in Suriname has never been categorized as an ethnic group and has never developed a substantial hybrid culture. The *tong'ap*/*laiap* distinction is basically generational, and so one may find both *tong'ap* and *laiap* in ethnic Chinese families in Suriname.⁵

The issue of hybridity makes quantifying the Chinese group in Suriname extremely difficult. Kent (2003: 124) quotes widely diverging estimates for the number of Chinese in Suriname for the period of 1990-2000: 3,000, 10,000 and even 40,000. Data from the 1950 population census suggest that numbers of local-born and foreign-born self-identifying ethnic Chinese were about equal: of 1,099 ethnic Chinese in Paramaribo, 585 were Suriname-born and 514 foreign-born (506 born in China).⁶

The latest population census puts the number of ethnic Chinese in Suriname at 8,775; of these 5,575 were foreign-born, while the number of Chinese nationals was 3,654.⁷ This means that 3,200 individuals self-identified as local-born ethnic Chinese, but one should not assume that *tong'ap* outnumber *laiap*.

Reliable migration data are lacking in Suriname. Through the 1980s the number of PRC nationals entering Suriname are estimated at a steady 200 persons up to 1990, when about 4,800 Chinese citizens were registered at the Surinamese border controls. The next year a record number of 7,587 Chinese citizens (more than 11 percent of all non-resi-

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⁵ As a generation gap, the *tong'ap*/*laiap* cleavage makes for an ethnic group apparently without a history. Many older immigrants were — and are — unwilling to speak of their past in any detail. Their stories boil down to: “What’s to tell? Life was hard. So we left.” There are virtually no current memories of the *qiaoxiang*, except a number of cultural and linguistic items preserved from the 19th and early 20th centuries, and maybe the most basic rituals regarding death, some family relationships and anecdotes. Such experiences are common. Two *laiap* sisters once asked their *tong'ap* father to explain to me which piece of his writings he would suggest I translate for his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Knowing they would not be able to understand him, the old man turned to me and said, half in Mandarin and Kejia: “The beginning. Just translate that. The rest they won’t understand anyway.”


⁷ Data from SIC 213-2005/2. (SIC: acronym for *Suriname in Cijfers*, the title of a series in Dutch published by the Surinamese General Bureau of Statistics, translated literally as “Suriname in Numbers” or more loosely as “Suriname Quantified.”)
dent aliens entering Suriname) was recorded. The numbers sharply dropped in 1996, and averaged a little over 1,100 through to 2003. Numbers were rising again in 2004: 2,041 (data from ABS 2006). Chinese were a minor part of the influx of non-resident aliens during these 19 years; however, the majority consisted of holders of Dutch passports.

That new influx of Chinese migrants was immediately noticeable to local observers: Putonghua was spoken in the street, names were transcribed in Pinyin, new Chinese shops were springing up everywhere and, in a break with the stereotype of Chinese shopkeeper, these new shopkeepers spoke no Sranantongo (Surinamese Creole). Because they were so unlike the Chinese of the past, these unfamiliar immigrants were soon commonly called nieuwe Chinezen (in Dutch, “new Chinese”). They were “new” to Fuidung’on Hakka observers in Suriname too; the Chinese-language newspapers in Paramaribo refer to the New Chinese as “new migrants” (in written Chinese, 新移民 xin yimin), a term transplanted from the People’s Republic. Wang Gungwu (2004) notes that this term was coined by PRC authorities to refer to the renewed emigration following economic reforms.

The New Chinese in Suriname hail from every imaginable region in the Chinese world, but the vast majority come from the coastal provinces of the PRC, from Hainan in the south all the way to Liaoning along the North Korean border. With their arrival, the linguistic and cultural situation within the Chinese segment of Suriname became unusually complex. Up to then, the main variables affecting Chinese identity in Suriname were hybridity (tong’ap-laiap) and Hong Kong modernity, and to this were now added regional variation and the modernity of the PRC. Fuidung’on Hakka identity was rephrased as a specific regional (Guangdong) and linguistic (Kejia) background.

Chinese Stereotypes

Local reactions to the New Chinese were not favorable. The first text identifying New Chinese as a threat to a stable Surinamese economy and nation appeared in De Ware Tijd on 8 January 1999, which already
contains the basic objections to the new Chinese immigration. The writer worries about Chinese construction workers threatening the livelihood of local, non-Chinese, workers. The Chinese are described as barely visible in daily life, but working as massive, close-knit teams on construction sites. Hard-working, never resting, more productive and cheaper than local laborers, these people threaten to annihilate whole segments of the Surinamese work force. The text is anti-immigrant; not only Chinese construction workers are problematic, but also Haitian agriculturalists and Brazilian goldseekers, and suggests that the government should step in immediately to protect locals against these foreigners.

Anti-immigrant sentiments are obviously not unique to Suriname, and are not even new to Surinamese history. Orientalist stereotypes determined the style and vocabulary of popular objections to Chinese migrants. This reflected the institutionalized way Surinamese think about ethnicity and Surinamese multiculturalism that describes as well as prescribes Chineseness in Suriname, making facts at once irrelevant and controversial. As ethnic stereotypes, most apply to Overseas Chinese, though some portray views of Chinese and China in general. Some stereotypical images of Chinese in Suriname are based on the way the older immigrants adapted to local conditions, so they are not always meaningful to non-Surinamese: Chinese are shopkeepers; Chinese language is Kejia; Chinese surnames are tri-syllabic transcriptions of Dutch and English approximations of Kejia and Cantonese readings; the Chinese homeland means Hong Kong, Chinese must be reached through Sranantongo. Generally speaking, the negative and positive images that have accumulated around ethnic Chinese as a consistent part of the multicultural landscape remain unchallenged despite changes in the status quo of ethnic Chinese in Suriname. The negative set of Chinese stereotypes reflect abjection; they are consistently dehumanizing and signal that Chinese identity in Suriname is separate and largely unacceptable.

One needs to know the pattern of Chinese stereotypes in Suriname in order to understand the meaning of anti-Chinese statements, but their contents are determined by four underlying issues relating to the renewed Chinese presence in Suriname: illegal migration, violent crime, cheap Chinese commodities, and the effect of Chinese globalization.

1. Illegal Migration

New Chinese became associated with illegal migration fairly quickly. Identity crime (false passports) involving New Chinese was an issue in
Suriname in the early 1990s. In 1998 a network was discovered that had smuggled at least 235 Chinese nationals into the USA, mostly via Suriname and St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles. In the same year a Korean from New York was caught smuggling Chinese, apparently all Fujianese, from Suriname to the USA via Bermuda (Bermuda Sun Newspaper, 15 July 1998)\textsuperscript{11} and the Bahamas (The Associated Press, 12 July 1998).\textsuperscript{12} On 2 October 1999 Surinamese police detained 35 Chinese after the chartered plane they were boarding turned out to have the wrong passenger namelist (De Ware Tijd, 5 October 1999).\textsuperscript{13} Apparently they were to be smuggled out of Suriname, probably to Brazil. More and more reports of irregular Chinese migrants followed. In 2001 members of a group smuggling people to the USA via St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles, were arrested and stopped in Paramaribo (De Ware Tijd, 15 March 2001).\textsuperscript{14} In 2003 the FBI investigated another smuggling route from Suriname to the USA via St. Maarten, after 15 Chinese were reported to have drowned at sea when a boat carrying 25 illegal migrants capsized, and another network was discovered that extended from Suriname, St. Maarten, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean to Thailand and the Philippines in Southeast Asia.

Though the cases of Chinese irregular migrants signaled a new trend in international migration affecting Suriname, local authorities conducted no studies and produced no data on irregular migration in the country (Brabants Dagblad, 12 October 2001).\textsuperscript{15} The media fed the


\textsuperscript{13} De Ware Tijd, 5 October 1999: “Police prevent smuggling of Chinese.”

\textsuperscript{14} De Ware Tijd, 15 March 2001: “Chinese arrested for people trafficking.”

\textsuperscript{15} Though irregular migration remains unquantifiable and intangible, Chinese nationals do not make up the bulk of illegal residents in Suriname, nor are they the only foreigners smuggled or trafficked to or via Suriname. Most illegal residents are from neighboring Guyana and Brazil, while irregular migration from West Africa, the Caribbean and India have been noted. The only media reports on non-Chinese organized irregular migration were on Indian nationals. In October 2001 seven employees at the Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport were dismissed, including the head and acting head of Airport Operations, who had been paid to help seven Indian nationals without US visas and with only tickets to Trinidad, to reach the USA. After arrival in Trinidad, the Indians switched boarding passes with Surinamese in an attempt to transit to the USA. Passengers in transit flights are normally not counted, but heightened controls after “9-11” meant that all passengers had to disembark as the plane could not proceed to the US. The illegals were caught and sent back to Suriname (Brabants Dagblad, 12 October 2001).
public with updated versions of persistent negative (international) Chinese stereotypes, such as the image of a flood of smuggled Chinese threatening Suriname, vectors and victims of a Chinese mafia etc. Illegal migration was assumed to be human smuggling, which in turn came to be confused with human trafficking, where the goal of the smugglers is to profit from the exploitation of their victims. Unsubstantiated rumors of debt bondage and servitude quickly arose with regard to New Chinese migration networks. When ethnic Chinese women sex workers were spotted, they were assumed to be trafficked. The New Chinese prostitutes shattered the myth among non-Chinese Surinamese of an ethnic Chinese social safety net, and challenged the Fuidung’on Hakka’s self-defining view of Chinese women as virtuous, hard-working shopkeeper’s wives, but also fed the local stereotype of the irredeemably morally corrupt Chinaman.

Government response to the issue of Chinese illegal migrants was relatively muted. Despite calls to rethink Surinamese immigration and emigration policies from the Surinamese business community (fearing unfair competition from immigrants) and politicians (usually opposition members attacking ruling coalition parties which, in the context of partisan-political racialization of immigration, are considered pro-immigration and thus unpatriotic),\textsuperscript{16} the question of restricting migration was not up for discussion under Suriname’s liberal tradition. The state had no real reason to act on irregular migration; irregular immigrants and illegals are no real burden to the state as they are effectively absorbed by the informal economy, and there is no evidence that Chinese immigrants (both legal and undocumented) have a negative impact on (unskilled low-income) employment. But the ability of the state to react was also limited due to the general institutional weakness that hampers any government response to societal developments.

Initial actions were bureaucratic and fragmented, and focused on Chinese illegal immigrants; these were the stereotypically “real” illegal

\textsuperscript{16} E.g. \textit{De Ware Tijd}, 9 December 2004: “Kruisland asks for change in immigration policy.” The different parties that dominated government since the late 1980s could not be considered distinctly pro- or anti-Chinese, though political opposition to immigration of non-Westerners reflects the perception that such immigration would serve to strengthen certain ethnically based political parties and so upset consociational harmony. Individuals in the (Creole-dominated) NPS (Nationale Partij Suriname or National Party of Suriname) and DNP (Democratisch Nationaal Platform or Democratic National Platform) were said to have benefited from facilitating Chinese immigration, using personal influence to ease entry and residency procedures.
immigrants who were more easily tracked because they were more visible in society, and because they almost exclusively entered the country via the one international airport. Around 1999 the Visa Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started paying special attention when handling visa applications involving people from Fujian Province, not because they were the most prominent applicants for entry visas but because Fujianese were the main illegal immigrants in the USA. In 2002 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it had temporarily stopped issuing entry visas to Chinese nationals, and explained the move by pointing out the fact that Chinese arrived almost exclusively by plane via the international airport.17

Poor communication with Chinese target groups (New Chinese migrants, tong'ap without Surinamese citizenship, and various Chinese institutions) and the general public made the government appear to be criminalizing ethnic Chinese. The Aliens Department of the Ministry of Justice and Police added a number of requirements to tighten the procedure for obtaining residence permits by non-Dutch foreigners (e.g. health insurance, educational requirements but no language tests, etc.). This exacerbated long-standing problems of Chinese immigrants (Hakka as well as New Chinese) who legally entered Suriname but who often waited for years for the extension of their residence permits, despite meeting all legal requirements.

Surinamese attempts at structural measures to fight illegal immigration only came after firm American pressure. In the 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report, Suriname was labeled a “Tier 3” country whose government did not fully comply with the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and was not making significant efforts to do so.18 For the first time, such governments faced potential sanctions, including the loss of certain types of U.S. assistance. The assumption that Chinese prostitutes were trafficked was the basis for placing Suriname in Tier 3 in the 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report. In the section on Suriname of the 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report, Chinese were mentioned in only one sentence: “Suriname is a transit country for Chinese smuggled to the United States, some of whom may be trafficked.”19

The local newspapers reported the Surinamese authorities as touching

17 Unlike Guyanese and Brazilian irregular migrants, who could cross the western and southern borders unchecked.
19 http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/
on prostitution only in passing and focusing instead on Chinese illegal immigrants, apparently taking “irregular migration,” “smuggling” and “trafficking” to mean the same thing (De Ware Tijd, 13 June 2003, 15 July 2003). 20

The Surinamese government managed to present evidence of actions that were acceptable to the U.S. authorities before the October deadline, and in September 2003 Suriname was moved to Tier 2 (countries whose governments do not fully comply with the Act’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards). 21 Suriname remained on the Tier 2 Watch List for a second year for its failure to show evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking, but in the 2006 TIP (Trafficking in Persons) Report Suriname was moved from the Tier 2 Special Watch List to Tier 2 status. The Surinamese government had worked to improve a legal framework for the problem of human trafficking, but action in the field remained weak because of a lack of funds, material and manpower (De Ware Tijd, 31 July 2004). 22 The status of Suriname remained unchanged in the 2007 and 2008 TIP Reports. The 2008 report stated that “Chinese men are subjected to possible debt bondage in Suriname, and are subject to forced labor in supermarkets and the construction sector. Chinese women reportedly are exploited sexually in massage parlors and brothels.” 23

The public remained convinced that the numbers of Chinese immigrants — and thus illegal immigrants — were increasing, but investigative reporters could uncover no evidence to substantiate the rumor that Chinese illegals were still arriving (De Ware Tijd, April 2004). 24

2. Violent Crime

Reports of violent crimes committed by ethnic Chinese (local or foreign) were scarce before 2002, and ethnic Chinese were seen, and saw themselves as victims of crime rather than as perpetrators. But all through 2002 the Surinamese media reported cases of kidnapping, armed robbery and murder committed by Chinese. One widely docu-

20 De Ware Tijd, 13 June 2003: “Suriname risks US sanctions because of human smuggling”; 15 July 2003: “Dealing with human smuggling was no priority.”
23 http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2008/105389.htm
24 De Ware Tijd, April 2004: “No measurable increase of illegal immigration” by Carla Tuinfort.
mented example was of a Chinese gang that stole US$70,000 from a
shopkeeper in downtown Paramaribo in broad daylight (De Ware Tijd,
28 February 2002).25 After consulting representatives of the “Chinese
community” — tongâp and laiap — the police concluded that this
unusual Chinese crime-spree was linked to New Chinese immigrants.

Hakka immigrant informers could recount rumors of gang-related
crime, such as groups of young men demanding protection money from
Chinese shopkeepers, as well as things suggesting organized crime, such
as loan-sharks, drugs-related murder and cases of kidnapping that were
never reported to the police. One persistent story circulating among the
Fuidunon Hakka describes gangs in Hong Kong and southern China
sending members who are in trouble with the authorities to Suriname,
to be sent back when things blow over. Stories of Chinese gangs in Suriname are more likely stereotypical assumptions: Chinese migration is
undocumented migration, facilitated by a Chinese criminal organization
based in an isolationist and self-reliant Chinese enclave.

The murder of the Fu children in 2005 is a particularly gruesome
example of the way violent crime was associated with New Chinese. On
19 July 2005 two Zhejiangese brothers, Fu Wei (12) and Fu Tewei (6),
were found brutally murdered in a bathroom of what used to be the
restaurant named Sheraton in David Simonsstraat in Northern Para-
maribo (De Ware Tijd, 20 July 2005).26 One had been bludgeoned, the
other’s throat had been slit, after which they had been decapitated,
scalped, disembowelled and hacked to pieces, their body parts collected
in pails with some flushed down the toilet. A New Chinese immigrant
who had been living in Suriname for some nine years, Chen Shaoxian
(61), was also found dead, having apparently hung himself in the living
room (Times of Suriname, 23 July 2005).27 The boys had failed to return
home from the Chinese school the previous evening, when the family
was called on the phone by a man who demanded US$ 200,000 for the
release of the two boys and warned that the police were not to be involved
(Times of Suriname, 23 July 2005; De Ware Tijd, 13 January 2006, 20 July

25 De Ware Tijd, 28 February 2002: “Criminal investigation sheds light on violent robbery in the Gravenstraat.” There were no reports of non-Chinese victims of such New Chinese criminals, but there are indications that non-Chinese may sometimes be involved as henchmen (De Ware Tijd, 28 February 2002: “Fourth suspect in kidnapping of Chinese arrested”).
26 De Ware Tijd, 20 July 2005: “Barbaric murders in Northern Paramaribo: The boys were slaughtered like hogs.”
27 Times of Suriname, 23 July 2005: “Why this man cannot have been the murderer.”
Chen Shaoxian’s son, Chen Jie (33), a remigrant from Hungary, was arrested and charged, but evidence against him remained elusive (De Ware Tijd, 5 September 2005, 13 January 2006, 24 June 2006).

Not unexpectedly, the public reacted with horror and indignation at what was one of the most horrific murder cases in Paramaribo’s history. The media fueled the developing public discussion with a good measure of populism. The day after the story broke, an article based on an interview with an anonymous “member of the Chinese community” was published in De Ware Tijd, 21 July 2005). The source reiterated stereotypes of New Migrants in a narrative: there is a Chinese community, inaccessible and secretive; a clear distinction should be made between Surinamese Chinese and new immigrants who have been arriving since the early 1990s; weak national immigration policy means that there is nothing to prevent undesirable Chinese immigrants from entering Suriname; new immigrants are responsible for crime, and they commit more crime than the Surinamese public is aware of — kidnappings, blackmail, assault, disappearances, etc (Times of Suriname, 21 July 2005).


29 Chen Jie spoke Wenzhounese, Putonghua, Hungarian, but no English, Kejia, Sranantongo or Dutch. Chinese translators were reluctant to get involved and the Chinese lawyer Chen Jie had engaged spoke Kejia but no PTH. Eventually the court appointed a translator and a lawyer (De Ware Tijd, 5 September 2005: “Investigation into murder of Chinese boys hindered by language barriers”). In September Chen Jie was finally charged with kidnapping and murder, and his trial started on 12 January 2006 (De Ware Tijd, 13 January 2006: “Trial in the murder of Chinese brothers starts”). Six months into the trial prosecutors still only had circumstantial evidence linking Chen Jie to the crime (De Ware Tijd, 24 June 2006: “Case in slaughter of Chinese boys weak”).

30 The quality of media coverage was uneven. The newspapers printed the name of the dead suspect as Chen Shao Chen, Chen Doo, Chen Shaou, as well as Chen Shaoxian. In the same way the name of one of the murdered children, Fu Tewei, was reported as Fu Lahu, a Mandarin transliteration of “Raoul Fu.”

31 De Ware Tijd, 21 July 2005: “Member of Chinese community on horrific murder of boys: ‘A drama like that was in the making.’”

32 On 21 July 2005, “Street Talk,” a short daily item in Times of Suriname consisting of comments from “people on the street,” was dedicated to the murders. Two of the four remarks were about Chinese:

1st remark: “I think it’s a bad thing. Sad, pitiful. They were just small innocent kids. What did they have to do with money. What’s going on in Suriname lately? Chinese used to be the quietest ethnic group among the Surinamese people.”

4th remark: “The government should stiffen its immigration policy. The government has no way of knowing what kinds of people are coming in. Most Chinese are here
Then on 2 December there was a second murder case involving ethnic Chinese, this time Fuídung’én Hakka migrants. Harry Mo Tin Sung, owner of a shop selling bicycle and motorcycle parts, and his wife, Hoi Oi Lin, were found murdered (*De Ware Tijd*, 3 December 2005). Both were in their sixties and had moved to Suriname from Guangdong Province more than 40 years earlier. He was found in the bedroom, and his wife in the bathroom, tied up, with their throats slit (*De Ware Tijd*, 20 December 2005). The feelings of shock in the Blauwgrond neighborhood and anxiety about increasingly violent crime were fanned by the sensational handling of the affair by the media. An emotional wake and a silent procession (*stille tocht*) were organized in the neighborhood. The family tried to keep the funeral service, which was attended by Vice President Ramdien Sardjoe, and cremation as quiet as possible. Father Gerard Gijskens praised the couple as good people, “real Surinamese Chinese.”

With the murder of the two children in July fresh in the mind of the public, the Mo Tin Sung murders gave rise to talk of “Chinese triad-style” executions. “They’re looking down on us now, because we’re Chinese after all,” Max Man A Hing commented in *De Ware Tijd* (6 December 2005) four days after the murders. Once more he stressed the difference between Old Chinese and New Chinese, focusing particularly on differences in upbringing and outlook. He typified New Chinese as ambitious and hard, often unable to handle freedom. About a week later, George Findlay, the editor of the evening paper, *De West*, and known for his anti-Chinese articles, more explicitly suggested in his weekly column (10 December 2005) that organized Chinese crime was behind the murders (*De West*, 10 December 2005). According to illegally and they get permits very easily. They can hardly speak Dutch, yet they have a driving licence.

33 *De Ware Tijd*, 3 December 2005: “Mysterious double homicide shocks Blauwgrond; elderly Chinese couple tied up and stabbed.”

34 *De Ware Tijd*, 20 December 2005: “Mr and Mrs Mo Tin Sung robbed, but not of money.”

35 This was not the first unsolved murder of an older Chinese shopkeeper in 2005. On 31 January Lou Ying Joe (62) was found murdered in her shop, where she had been living alone for two months while her relatives were abroad. No public outcry followed. *De Ware Tijd*, 1 February 2005: “Chinese shopkeeper killed.”

36 *De Ware Tijd*, 6 December 2005: “Safe of murdered Chinese couple plundered; Blauwgrond still embraced by terror.”

him, the presence of Chinese criminals from Chinese and Hong Kongese triads was common knowledge in Suriname, and this was murder rather than robbery committed by professionals rather than the typical Surinamese criminals. But he denied that there was much difference between Old and New Chinese, as both closed ranks against the outside world.

The Old Chinese establishment clearly felt that Chineseness was under attack in Suriname. On 29 January 2006, the first day of the Year of the Dog, President Ronald Venetiaan and Minister of Justice and Police, Chandrikapersad Santhoki, attended the public Chinese New Year’s Celebrations at the Chung Tjauw Huiguan. In his speech, Chou Joe Jin, chairman of Chung Tjauw and Fa Tjauw, the Chinese organization within the NPS (National Party of Suriname), said that it was important for the Chinese community to work at improving its image (De Ware Tijd, 31 January 2005). 38 He referred to the murders and the issue of immigration, and though he spoke of new and established groups, he carefully avoided suggesting a major split. He complained that Chinese regularly found the media biased against them, for no fact-based reasons.

The common perception that violent crime in Suriname was on the increase had resulted in heightened anxiety among Surinamese for quite some time. To be fair, not only Chinese migrants but migrants in general, including Brazilian goldseekers, Guyanese adventurers, and disenfranchised Maroon men from the interior, were being blamed for the perceived rise. The issue of crime tended to blur the distinction between various Chinese migrant cohorts in the public mind. The tong'ap establishment did not attempt to distinguish between New Chinese crime and victimization of Fuidung’ on Hakka entrepreneurs in Suriname, but stressed the need for unity of Overseas Chinese under attack. Laiap reactions were less mindful of loyalty to universal Chinese ethnicity. Instead, the pattern of labeling established ethnic Chinese as Surinamese Chinese in contrast to New Chinese outsiders was repeated in the media.

3. Cheap Commodities

Chinese migration to Suriname basically remains sponsored migration based on privately owned businesses of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs.

38 De Ware Tijd, 31 January 2005: “Chinese want new start to improve image.”
Old as well as New Chinese sponsor relatives or coregionalists to come to Suriname to work as apprentices in their retail businesses, to learn the ropes and eventually set up their own businesses. The system may be stable, but the businesses themselves are not necessarily intended to last; very few plan to set up a sustainable long-term investment that would cross generations. Most Chinese migrants prefer some form of retail business, as no special diplomas are required for that in Suriname and very few other niches allow for chain migration. The nature of ethnic Chinese businesses in Suriname reinforces the stereotype of Chinese as temporary residents, using Suriname as a stopover on the way to more prosperous destinations.

At first glance the main difference between the shops of Fuidung’ on Hakka and those of New Chinese is that the latter do not carry food-stuffs. Wenzhou migrants in particular came to base their chain migration to Suriname on the trade in cheap everyday consumer products imported from Yiwu in Zhejiang Province. The organization of baihuo business in Suriname closely parallels that in the Cape Verdian islands (Østbø & Carling 2005) and Namibia (Dobler 2006). Fuidung’ on Hakka and New Chinese businesses could be complementary in principle, but competition is a common source of Fuidung’ on Hakka grievance against the New Chinese. Surinamese consumers tend to welcome the availability of cheap products, especially cheap textile imports from the PRC. Though it is impossible to quantify the effect, it is clear that local retailers, especially of clothing, are driven out of business under the new competition. The idea that New Chinese are either rich or able to quickly generate hard currency has driven up the rental. It is not uncommon to find New Chinese entrepreneurs stuck with unaffordable rents as well as loans to be repaid to chain migration sponsors, and accordingly most business have been unsustainable.

From an initial assumption that big profits were being made in the new shops, locals inferred that New Chinese were either rich or were laundering money from the PRC, that the PRC was dumping its surplus in Suriname, and that the Surinamese government either ignored the problem or was complicit by giving ethnic Chinese preferential treatment. The new shops have come to represent the most concrete consequence

39 Cheap Chinese clothing has even begun to impact the Lebanese monopoly in the Surinamese clothing market. Some Lebanese entrepreneurs have started to import textile products directly from China (De Bruijne 2006: 112-13).
of New Chinese migration; people object to more and more Chinese supermarkets popping up all over the place and demanded some kind of government response. Jenny Simons of the NDP opposition party brought the issue to parliament in December 2004, demanding government action against “China price,” Chinese migration, lack of regulations, and Chinese laborers in the new shops who do not even speak Surinamese (De West, 8 December 2004).40

4. Chinese Globalization

Many Surinamese assume that the PRC is in control of Chinese immigration, and distrust of the intentions of the emerging superpower can run high. The PRC is keenly interested in strengthening relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries such as Suriname for two main reasons: recognition of its claim to represent the only true undivided Chinese state, and access to natural resources for its growing economy. Diplomatic ties between the Republic of Suriname and the People’s Republic of China continue to be dictated by the dominant paradigm of PRC diplomacy, the One China Policy, which in practice is about the PRC and Taiwan using aid and investments to entice the New World to switch or deepen allegiance to either side. The PRC is winning this “pocketbook diplomacy” through its increasing economic reach in the New World. The PRC increasingly presents itself as as a model of development and an alternative source of funding for the cash-strapped Surinamese State, and technical cooperation projects now dominate the PRC’s relationship with Suriname.

The technical cooperation projects are not proper outward foreign direct investment: most are prestige projects; PRC multinationals are not actually directly investing their own capital in Suriname, but are indirectly funded by soft government loans from the PRC (i.e. loans with below-market interest rates and long repayment periods); the PRC is not accumulating foreign currency (US$) through its technical cooperation projects in Suriname; PRC companies have never attempted to acquire local business interests; PRC technical cooperation projects are not creating local employment (local labor and subcontractors are generally not employed and workers are still imported from the PRC); the

40 De West, 8 December 2004: “Simons argues for protection of Surinamese producers against China price.”
PRC is not out to control local markets, etc. On the other hand, the PRC is the vehicle by which technical cooperation projects increase Surinamese infrastructural capital.

In the 1990s the Venetiaan I administration saw the first foreign resource-extraction projects. However, both the North American (mostly Canadian) gold mining companies and Asian logging companies are notorious for human rights and environmental violations in the third world countries they operate in. The logging companies are Chinese resource development projects in the sense that they are commercial projects designed to harvest and/or process natural resources for the purpose of supplying the Chinese market, organized through transnational Chinese personal and business networks. Only some, such as the Manchurian logging companies, might be considered PRC outward FDI. Like the PRC technical assistance projects, some resource extraction projects have enjoyed a measure of political and financial support from within different levels in the PRC, though company links with the PRC government may be passively or actively misrepresented as development programs, usually by Surinamese counterparts.

As a result of such official misconstruction the general public never fully appreciated the nature of the relationship between the PRC and the Republic of Suriname. People made up their minds about the role of the PRC through the rhetoric of decolonization combined with images of China as the Yellow Peril: the Chinese were replacing the Dutch as the new colonizers, the Chinese were not actually doing anything for the Surinamese, just taking advantage of them. By obfuscating, successive Surinamese administrations risked appearing to elevate the interests of a foreign power over those of the people at home. The only government views on the relationship with the PRC that filtered down to the general public were official foreign policy and diplomatic discourse reflected in the press, aimed at the representatives of the PRC in Suriname. Chinese organizations in Suriname did not effectively mediate to project the “peaceful rising” image of the PRC to the Surinamese public, as the PRC appealed to the patriotic pride of Overseas Chinese, who thus risked being labeled outsiders and collaborators by non-Chinese Surinamese. This lack of public relations management meant that the technical cooperation projects could not be guaranteed to bolster the image of the PRC in Suriname, and could even harm it.

China Zhong Heng Tai is a concrete example of everything that can go wrong with Chinese/Chinese-related development projects in Suriname. On 25 July 2002, a company called China Zhong Heng Tai
Investment Company Ltd. and the Surinamese Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries signed a memorandum of understanding on a new palm oil project (also known as the Patamacca project) in Marowijne District in eastern Suriname (De Ware Tijd, 25 July 2002). The Surinamese government welcomed it as a way to revive the palm oil sector and to generate foreign exchange. The company would construct factories, plant palms, and do some logging. The business plan was basically a description of an agreement with the Surinamese government for a palm oil enterprise to be started up with funds generated from the sale of timber cut from the palm oil concession. But it soon became clear that China Zhong Heng Tai had no track record in the palm oil industry, and that the project might be a cover for logging activities (De Ware Tijd, 1 September 2003). The state therefore could only expect income from taxes on timber exports, without guarantees for the creation of local jobs or cessation of activities once logging was completed (De Ware Tijd, 4 September 2003).

The deal seemed to be more about clear-cutting than earning revenues from palm oil; there was no reason why the timber should be harvested without ever any income generated from palm oil. The paradox of a foreign investment company financing its operations in Suriname by exploiting Surinamese natural resources was not lost on the public, who were now squarely against the deal. The company never came up with its first bank guarantee for US$16,200,000. Apparently, the Chinese embassy in Suriname said that the PRC government was now more wary of companies working abroad with state funds. It is unclear if, and how, this project will proceed.

Criticism of the China Zhong Heng Tai deal focused on, among other things, the government's incompetence, or willingness to facilitate a deal that was so obviously flawed in many ways (De Ware Tijd, 12 January 2004). The government persisted in referring to the Patamacca project as a “large-scale investment” and a crucial alternative to donor aid (De Ware Tijd, 12 January 2004, 17 January 2004, 24 November 2003).

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41 De Ware Tijd, 25 July 2002: “Marowijne District to get new palm oil industry.”
42 De Ware Tijd, 1 September 2003: “The International Capital Market: The value of nature versus China Zhong Heng Tai.”
43 De Ware Tijd, 4 September 2003: “Contribution of palm oil project investor about US$110,000,000.”
45 De Ware Tijd, 12 January 2004: “Details of the Patamacca deal.” by Richard Kalloe.
ber 2004), and the opposition continued to accuse the government of selling off Suriname's natural resources (e.g. *De Ware Tijd*, 8 April 2004). As expected there were oblique suggestions of government corruption, followed by direct statements about “the Chinese” attempting to exploit Surinamese resources (*De West*, 7 February 2004, 25 June 2005). As Richard Biswamitre Kalloe, columnist and former Minister of Trade and Industry (Venetiaan I) and Public Works (Wijdenbosch) puts it:

The project is owned by Chinese, for Chinese and by Chinese. Our brothers in Marowijne can stand by and watch. It is a foreign colony and enclave, crude natural resources will be exported as in colonial times. This is not about the development of Suriname but China’s need for resources (*De Ware Tijd*, 12 January 2004).50

**Anti-Chinese Sentiments as Anti-Government Protest**

By now anti-Chinese sentiments had taken on the form of a conspiracy theory: the government was allowing Chinese, and even actually collaborating with them, to ruin the country. There was a widespread sense of anomie in the Surinamese, a feeling of dislocation from society and authority, which made it easy to see New Chinese migrants as a shadowy, secretive group with implied links to the government — the enemy. The theory of an adversarial government in cahoots with the Yellow Peril was woven around contemporary newsworthy events: cases of irregular migrants, instances of violent crime, scandals involving

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46 *De Ware Tijd*, 12 January 2004: “The struggle for survival requires a change in attitude.” Interview with Minister Michael Jong Tjien Fa of Trade and Industry on the Free Trade Area of the America’s (FTAA). *De Ware Tijd*, 17 January 2004: “Patamacca palm oil deal finalized,” quoting Minister Franco Demon of National Resources.

47 For example, *De Ware Tijd*, 8 April 2004: “Venetiaan wants Suriname to be China’s gateway to FTAA,” describing President Venetiaan’s reaction to remarks by NDP chairman Desi Bouterse.

48 *De West*, 7 February 2004: “Turning Point: Looking back at the week…” *De West*, 25 June 2005: “Turning Point: Chinese Patamacca deal was fishy from the start.”

49 Kalloe also used to be director and project manager of the original palm oil project in Patamacca.

50 *De Ware Tijd*, 12 January 2004: “Details of the Patamacca deal” by Richard Kalloe.
transnational companies. The theory was constructed from selected information, and items that did not fit were reinterpreted in line with the theory, and existing evidence was constantly questioned.

The conspiracy theory (re)produced the truth of a failing State via narratives of the contamination/Yellow Peril stereotypes: no controls of food safety and health, lack of a strict immigration policy, and no integration policy. Patriotic narratives were incorporated, particularly about supposed preferential treatment of Chinese migrants over Surinamese citizens. One narrative lays the blame at the feet of the NPS, which was always too positive about Chinese immigration. Chinese migrants were said to acquire permits too easily, and driving licenses in particular became symbolic of preferential treatment (De Ware Tijd, 1 June 2006, 9 June 2006).51 In the addition to populist patriotism, anti-Chinese sentiments started to resemble naïve monarchical resistance. Appealing to the conservative myths of Surinamese patriotism became a justification of resistance to the ruling elite through attacks on a particular type of dangerous foreigner: to be for Chinese was to be against Suriname. For example:

Editorial article: “Countering the Chinese invasion of Suriname?” Suriname, 13 March 2005:

Involvement with regard to the problem of the Chinese is indeed also a responsibility of the National Assembly. It should be more than merely raising questions. A parliamentary inquiry is called for. This subject has been ignored for years. We the people see very strange things going on around us. No one understands the CSME [Caricom Single Market and Economy] in Suriname. By now they have given another meaning to the acronym of CSME (Chinese Super Market Economy). Our middle class, the shopkeepers, has been decimated and it just keeps going on and now the construction sector has also been badly affected through inferior materials and cheap labour. The ease with which Chinese shops and supermarkets are set up in neighbourhoods and districts is unbelievable. And our government seems to tolerate that by issuing permits without taking into account zoning plans or local market saturation. One is tempted to believe that the shop or supermarket is not the main business, but just a secondary activity. Another question on our minds is: are they paying enough taxes and where do they get the capital to run

51 The narratives defined the truth. In 2006 the Surinamese traffic police observed that many ethnic Chinese actually did not drive with a license (De Ware Tijd, 1 June 2006: “Chinese should be aware of traffic regulations”). This was followed by the rumor that the police had been ordered not to fine Chinese caught without a driving license (De Ware Tijd, 9 June 2006: “Keizerstraat station ordered not to fine Chinese”).
discourse in suriname 203

The shops and supermarkets? Where do the cash flows originate and are these cash flows legal? The privileges are great and it looks like organized crime with many social consequences. By now the new groups of Chinese have introduced many effects to our society (crime, murders and hit men, inferior goods, social tensions, changes to our towns and country, etc.). Political parties have already embraced this target groups and there are certain lines there as well. The average Surinamese rightly wonders about having been demoted to second or third class citizen.

The article specifically referred to the increasing number of Chinese-owned shops and supermarkets selling cheap consumer goods from Yiwu (Zhejiang) or building materials, which to many people confirmed the contamination/Yellow Peril stereotype while reinforcing the image of a failing government. In private and in the street, opinions were remarkably uniform: the Chinese government (the PRC) was behind the Chinese (New Chinese immigrants) overrunning Suriname, they (the PRC and the migrants) were taking over, they bled Suriname of foreign currency without contributing anything to the country, and then left Suriname for another destination without ever having integrated into Surinamese society in any way. Chinese, along with Brazilians for that matter, were spoken of as the new colonizers and colonials.

As an apparent vindication of the Yellow Peril invasion stereotype, “Chinese guest workers” are a cause of particularly harsh criticism of the government. Surinamese residence permits are linked to work permits, which means that all immigrants from the PRC are technically workers, from chain migrants employed in family-run stores, supermarkets and restaurants, to construction workers imported from the PRC for the various PRC projects. It is unclear what percentage of PRC guest workers choose to stay in Suriname and for how long, so the current number of legal or illegal construction workers from the PRC is basically unknown. In response to the perceived problem of illegal Chinese labor, the Surinamese Ministry of Labour commissioned a survey of illegal labor in April 2003, with a special focus on PRC nationals. According to the report PRC nationals were one of the largest groups of foreigners in the Surinamese labor market, with 47.3 percent of the applications for work permits in 2002 submitted by PRC nationals. During the survey

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52 Data on Chinese enterprises are unreliable. De Ware Tijd, 10 November 2006: “Many Surinamese returning business permits,” quoting the Shopkeepers Association (Vereniging van Winkeliers): the number of shops increased from roughly 2,000 in 1995 to more than 7,000 in 2006.
illegal PRC workers were encountered in all economic sectors where ethnic Chinese were employed: fishery, construction, retail trade, bars and restaurants. The most commonly mentioned reason for the lack of work permits was that the Ministry of Labour had not (yet) issued any.

Most importantly, anti-Chinese sentiments are tightly linked to dissatisfaction with government, as illustrated in the following post in the De Ware Tijd Online discussion forum (21 May 2008):

Mister President, in order to break the economic power of the East Indians and win the elections you import large numbers of Chinese. While born and bred Surinamese pine for a piece of land, while Surinamese students in the countryside have to leave home at 4 in the morning because there is nowhere for them to stay in town, and while born and bred Surinamese have no houses and have to become squatters, and risk violent expulsion, the Chinese get land, houses, shops and even the right to vote right away. They don’t speak a word of Surinamese, they look down on us, their logging companies ravage our jungle. They spend their resources to import products from China rather than the CARICOM countries, which causes flight of capital. Moreover Chinese-made products are of an abominable quality, but yet you do nothing. The Chinese get everything, while true Suriname cannot even get a piece of land. What is your response? The government is aware of the problem (…) Radjindre Ramdhani. (Response to De Ware Tijd 21 May 2008, “Venetiaan gives Jong Tjien Fa last chance; ‘Enough is enough.’”)

The Laiap Response: Hyphenating “Surinamese-Chinese”

The anti-Chinese discourse collided with different Fuidung’ on Hakka views of Chineseness to produce the beginnings of new (sub-) ethnic boundaries. The growing public perception of “large numbers of Chinese flowing into Suriname” (De Ware Tijd, 6 March 2002) combined with the tong’ap and laiap view of themselves as victims (the hardworking Chinese businessman brutally robbed by non-Chinese) rather than perpetrators to make New Chinese the real outsiders: New Chinese are non-Hakka, not Kejia-speakrs, criminal, and transient foreigners instead of loyal Surinamese citizens. These representatives stressed that the “Chinese community” distinguished between “settled” Chinese, who

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53 De Ware Tijd, 6 March 2002: “New forms of crime appearing.” Editorial article: “Large numbers of Chinese from other areas in China than those the first Surinamese Chinese came from, are flooding into the country these last years.”
had been living and working in Suriname for years, and “newcomers,”
transients who were not Kejia-speakers from the Pearl River Delta (De 
Ware Tijd, 6 March 2002).54 The *tong*ap and *laiap* were making sure that
the public’s search for outsiders to blame was deflected toward the “real”
outsiders.

The problem with that view was that it was by no means uncontested —
etnic Chinese had never had a particularly positive image in Suriname.
A small survey of Afro-Surinamese attitudes toward other ethnic groups
in 1963 revealed a relatively low opinion of Chinese (Van Renselaar
1963). Surinamese opinions of Chinese have not been measured recently,
though a public opinion survey held in Paramaribo between 26 and
28 January 2007 probed voters’ opinions of ethnic party politics. The
results hinted at deeprooted anti-immigrant sentiments among Surin-
amese; 69 percent of respondents had negative feelings about Brazilian
immigrants, versus 61 percent who disliked Chinese immigrants.55

Anti-outsider prejudices among Fuidung’on Hakka transplanted from
the *qiaoxiang* inherently motivated them to produce a similar set of pos-
itive-negative sub-ethnic labels, despite the general anti-Chinese senti-
ments of non-Chinese. Relations between Fuidung’on Hakka and the
New Chinese were bad almost from the start. Because New Chinese
used PTH (Putonghua 普通话) as a lingua franca, the *tong*ap initially
described them as “Northerners,” which is nominally accurate as practi-
ically any other region in the PRC (except for Hainan Province) is north
of the Fuidung’on Hakka homeland. Eventually the homeland of the
major immigrant cohort — the Wenzhounese, who self-identified as
Zhejiangese — was generalized to indicate all New Chinese. Kejia speak-
ers then called them *zetgongzai* (浙江仔), a stigmatizing term meaning
“those from Zhejiang Province.” The Fuidung’on stereotype of the
untrustworthy outsider, now updated to *zetgongzai*, nicely matched the
reports of irregular migration and allegations of organized crime among
the New Chinese in the local and international press.

In their study of the English village of Winston Parva, Elias and
Scotson (1994) described how a new group found itself ostracized by an
existing group, exclusively on the grounds of their newness. The elite of
the established group dictated the positioning of the the newcomers as
outsiders, shifting all negative images that could conceivably apply to

54 *De Ware Tijd*, 6 March 2002: “Chinese community plagued by violent criminals.”
55 http://www.dewestonline.cq-link.sr/main.asp?id=14740
both groups toward the outsiders. The authors noted that the village elite used gossip and avoidance of social contact to position the outsiders as inferior to their respectable selves. Something very similar happened in Suriname when Fuidung’on Hakka spoke about New Chinese. Anti-outsider gossip aimed at New Chinese was very difficult to get from tong’ap informants, but laiap informants were far less circumspect. Note how the level of prejudice increases as one moves away from the tong’ap side on the laiap continuum:

So they’re not Hakka? Those really are strange people. They’re a bit arrogant. I’m not acquainted with them, but I was there with my daughter not long ago, and I asked something in Kejia and they answered in Sranantongo. Rather strange.

(Kejia- and Cantonese-speaking laiap informant in her sixties, fully accepted by tong’ap huiguan elite, talking of her experiences in a supermarket run by non-Hakka.)

You know, I have shop premises to let. But I’d rather rent it to a Surinamese than rent it to a Zetgongzai. Get involved with one of those, and you can forget about being paid. Untrustworthy.

(Kejia-speaking laiap informant in her fifties.)

Those Chinese from China are not civilized like we are.

(laiap woman in her sixties, does not speak Kejia.)

The paradigm used by Elias and Scotson seems to be applicable to the Chinese of Suriname, but closer scrutiny reveals one particular problem: the contrast between the established (the Fuidung’on Hakka — tong’ap as well as laiap) and the outsiders (the New Chinese) only appears to be limited to the length of residence to non-Chinese, who are less attuned to the extremes of Chinese linguistic, and to a lesser extent, cultural variety. Chain migration from the Fuidung’on homeland meant that there were always some non-integrated, non-assimilated, recent ethnic Chinese immigrants around, who had less status for all kinds of reasons: they were poorer, rural, unable to speak anything besides Kejia, not well-connected, or something else. As immigrants, all tong’ap individuals had been new outsiders to earlier cohorts of Fuidung’on Hakka. But even there linguistic and cultural differences existed. Especially after the 1950s, Fuidung’on newcomers came to be acculturated to Hong Kong and used Cantonese as a prestige language. From the 1990s Fuidung’on Hakka newcomers entered Suriname more or less directly and were bilingual in Putonghua as well as Kejia. They were positioned as outsiders by established Fuidung’on Hakka through a system of gossip and avoidance of social contact. Such gossip and character assassinations only slowly percolated out to laiap and non-Chinese.
Motivations behind tong'ap and laiap reactions to New Chinese were also different. Tong'ap distanced themselves from New Chinese mainly out of fear of the consequences of increasing anti-Chinese sentiments, while laiap were strongly defending their higher status within Surinamese society. The tong'ap view of Chinese identity in Suriname was constructed to define ethnic borders: Chinese identity was patriarchal and thus excluded women; it was primordial and thus excluded hybridization; normative huaqiao cultural values such as reverence for written Chinese defined membership, and Hong Kong modernity served to provide status among tong'ap. New Chinese presented the tong'ap elite with a dilemma. New Chinese may have been unwelcome competitors, but tong'ap never denied that they were Chinese.

Though laiap could also be included in the newly generalized, negative meaning of “Chinese” in the media, they generally share non-Chinese and tong'ap annoyance about New Chinese. They were equally fluent in the use of Chinese stereotypes as non-Chinese, and just as blind to what exactly New Chinese were. But laiap were different in their understanding of the exact distinction between laiap and New Chinese. To non-Chinese the central difference between Chinese immigrants and Surinamese is that between foreigners and citizens, while to Chinese migrants the only relevant distinction among ethnic Chinese is between the established and the new. To laiap the central distinction between themselves as established, integrated and assimilated ethnic Chinese and the New Chinese was class. The difference between laiap and tong'ap on the one hand and between laiap and New Chinese on the other was basically the same — the issue of assimilation/hybridization and the laiap lack of Chinese culture. In any case, laiap were expected to choose between self-identifying as Chinese, or follow their Creole reference group and invoke anti-ethnic patriotic discourse, actively voice anti-Chinese prejudices, or otherwise disassociate themselves from Chinese ethnicity or migration. In that way the basic laiap view of Chinese identity was reactive: “we are not them” or “we are not Chinese.”

What happened next was that laiap agents repositioned themselves in the Surinamese multicultural landscape by rearticulating their Chineseness to exclude New Chinese. The patriotically correct distinction between “good Chinese” and “bad Chinese,” the native Fuidung’ on Hakka distinction between locals and outsiders, and the dualistic set of negative and positive Chinese stereotypes all merged in this laiap rearticulation of Chineseness. All three elements create channels of agency, as “good Chinese” achieve the power to define legitimacy through exclusion. Though negative stereotypes are not easily discredited, the missing
positive messages in the matrix of Chinese stereotypes may be filled in to balance out the negative image: e.g., “Chinese are foreigners and temporary residents” is balanced by “Chinese are loyal citizens and successful and essential contributors to Surinamese society.” Excluding New Chinese as zetgongzai reaffirms Fuidung’on Hakka coherence in public settings as well as out of sight of non-Chinese; laiap and tong’ap are both Hakka by virtue of common ancestry in the Fuidung’on qiaoxiang. Finally, excluding New Chinese is a patriotic act, making Surinamese-Chinese loyal Surinamese citizens.

Conclusion

Anti-Chinese sentiments should obviously be considered in the context of wider anti-immigrant sentiments which reflect the considerable anomie in Surinamese society. More than the result of predictable established-outsider frictions, these anti-immigrant sentiments direct popular resentment at the Surinamese ethno-political establishment. The anti-Chinese sentiments are therefore not unique; equally persistent anti-Brazilian sentiments are focused on the image of Brazilian artisanal gold miners as polluters of environment and society, which becomes an indictment of the Surinamese State. What makes anti-Chinese sentiments remarkable in Suriname is that they are a reaction to increasingly visible immigration, as well as changing global economic and geopolitical alignments (symbolized by the growing influence of the People’s Republic of China), both of which are combined as a symbol of migration issues and state failure. Expressed in patriotic cliches framed in terms of a conspiracy theory, anti-Chinese sentiments are a vehicle of resistance to the hegemonic ethnopolitical establishment. As the group that has always dominated the articulation of collective Chinese identity for the non-Chinese public in Suriname, but also the one Chinese segment that is the least familiar with Chinese cultural markers, laiap respond by redefining “Surinamese-Chinese” as the only legitimate kind of Chineseness in Suriname on the basis of proven assimilation and loyal citizenship. Non-laiap are marginalized in this redefinition: New Chinese migrants because they are foreigners, and tong’ap because of their lack of obvious assimilation. However, out of view of the general Surinamese public, behind barriers of spoken and written Chinese language, other instrumental views of Chinese identity are more important. The elites in particular constantly need to balance claims to universally legitimate
Chineseness, so essential for attaining and preserving leadership status, with the need to avoid the suggestion of ethnic Chinese communalism in the Surinamese State.

References


CHAPTER EIGHT

THE REVITALIZATION OF HAVANA’S CHINATOWN:
INVOKING CHINESE CUBAN HISTORY*

Kathleen López1

Introduction

Each year on the third of June, a group of elderly Chinese Cubans, along with diplomats and officials from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Cuba, gather at the historic port of Regla across the bay from Havana to commemorate the arrival of the first shipload of 200 Chinese indentured laborers in 1847. This event marks the culmination of a five-day festival celebrating, honoring, and promoting the history of the Chinese in Cuba, Chinese traditions and culture, and relations between Havana and Beijing. Most of the few hundred remaining Chinese in Cuba today emigrated in the 1950s and are far removed from the earlier coolie trade. But commemoration of their predecessors is a symbolic reminder of the status of the Chinese in Cuban history and national identity. Despite their small numbers, the story of the Chinese in Cuba is one that has recently resurfaced through a restoration project in Havana’s Chinatown, renewed ties between Cuba and the PRC, and an engagement with the popular imagination. After a brief discussion of the historical

* Part of this article originated as a paper presented at the international symposium “Cuba Today: Continuity and Change since the ‘Periodo Especial,’” organized by the Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies/Cuba Project, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 4-5 October 2004 (www.bildner.org). I am grateful to the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School for travel grants to Cuba from 2002 to 2005; Lehman College, City University of New York, for a George N. Shuster Fellowship to attend the Tenth Festival of Chinese Overseas in Havana in 2007; and the Research Foundation of the City University of New York for a PSC-CUNY Award during the summer of 2008. I also thank Walton Look Lai for his guidance and encouragement and the JCO anonymous reviewer, who offered insightful commentary and suggestions on this material. Most of all, I am grateful to the Chinese Cubans in Havana who have welcomed me into their extended community.

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context for Chinese migration to Cuba and the ways in which the mid-20th century Chinese and Cuban revolutions played out in Havana’s Chinatown, this essay analyzes the elements of the current revitalization. I argue that tensions are inherent within a project that, on the one hand, claims to promote the interests of the Chinese community and an “authentic” Chinese culture, and on the other hand, is spearheaded by “mixed” descendants and promotes the Chinatown as a tourist attraction to boost the Cuban economy. However, despite these points of potential friction, state promotion of the Chinese community in Cuba has provided new spaces in which Chinese Cubans and their descendants can make claims on identity, culture, and politics.

Pre-1949 Era

The Chinese community, or “la colonia china” as it was called in Cuba, was formed by different layers of migrations. From 1847 to 1874 tens of thousands of men from southeastern Guangdong Province were recruited as indentured laborers on Cuban sugar plantations prior to and during the period of gradual abolition of African slavery. Like slaves, Chinese resisted the deception and coercion of the recruitment system and the harsh conditions on Cuban sugar plantations through suicide, flight, rebellion, and legal challenge. In the hope of being released from their contracts, some Chinese joined slaves in the struggles for independence from Spain beginning in 1868. The abusive coolie trade ended after an investigative commission exposed its atrocities in 1874. An 1877 treaty between China and Spain established Chinese consulates on the island. Beginning in the 1860s, a smaller influx of about 5,000 free Chinese, many with capital, arrived from California and directly from China (Pérez de la Riva 2000). They settled in Havana and throughout the provinces and established branches of transnational business firms, associations, and theaters. In 1893 the Casino Chung Wah (Zhonghua Zonghuiguan, equivalent to the San Francisco Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association) was formed as an umbrella organization to represent the Chinese community in Cuba.

Although Chinese immigration to Cuba was restricted in the early part of the Cuban republic (1902-1959), migrants continued to stream in through loopholes permitting entry of merchants, students, and tourists.
Demand for agricultural workers to boost sugar production during World War I officially opened the gates for a new wave of immigration beginning in 1917. Unlike the majority of indentured laborers, the free Chinese migrants in the early 20th century were better able to sustain transnational ties to their home villages through remittances and return trips. By the 1920s food stands, restaurants, bodegas (grocery stores), tailors, shoe and watch repair shops, and photography studios lined the streets of Havana’s Chinatown, one of the best known in the Americas. Dozens of regional and clan associations were established in Havana and other provincial towns in Cuba. As spaces for socializing, networking, and receiving financial, legal, and medical assistance, these associations held the most significance for a typical migrant’s daily life (López 2004). When Lü Qiantong arrived in Havana from his village in Xinhui County in 1926, his first stop was the Chinese association for those with the surname Lü on Cuchillo Street, where he rented a room. The associations gave new Chinese migrants their Western names, and Lü Qiantong became known as Felipe Luis (Espinosa 2004).

As in other Chinese overseas communities, in Cuba the Zhigongtang (Triads) and Guomindang (Nationalist Party) vied for leadership of Havana’s Chinatown and the broader Chinese population. Branches of the Partido Republicano “Chee Kung Tong” (Zhigongtang), which had been established in 1902 in Cuba, multiplied throughout the provinces. Triad members in Cuba generally came from among the lower strata of the Chinese community — small traders, itinerant vendors, laundrymen, tailors, barbers, gardeners, fruit stands operators, and restaurant employees.² According to one report, the association maintained 10,000 members across the island in 1928.³ After the 1911 Chinese Revolution toppled the Qing government, branches of Sun Yat-sen’s Nationalist Party were established overseas, competing with Triads for the loyalty (and funds) of Chinese overseas. The Cuba branch of Guomindang was founded in Havana in 1921.

Chinese leftists in Cuba participated in both homeland and Cuban politics beginning in the 1920s.⁴ During Sun Yat-sen’s short-lived alliance

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² “Centro Republicano Asiático,” exp. 420, leg. 28, Registro de Asociaciones, Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Cienfuegos.
³ La Correspondencia (Cienfuegos), 17 July 1928: 12.
⁴ For an interesting discussion of the links between Chinese overseas and internationalism, including a chapter on Chinese leftists in Cuba and the Cuban communist movement, see Benton 2007.
with the Soviet Union and Chinese Communists, the ranks of the Guomindang overseas swelled with left-leaning members. The Cuban Guomindang and the Casino Chung Wah contributed financially to the new Cuban branch of the Liga Anti-Imperialista (Anti-Imperialist League), while the Cuban Communist Party extended words of solidarity toward the ongoing revolutionary struggle in China (Benton 2007: 42-45; García Triana 2003: 233-34). After Sun’s successor Chiang Kai-shek consolidated power in Nanjing in 1927, his purge of Communists reduced the number of Guomindang members both in China and in overseas branches. One result of the purge among Chinese in the Americas was the birth of new Marxist political groups (Lai 1991: 190-91). In Havana, Chinese now alienated from the Guomindang founded an organization for workers and peasants, the Alianza Protectora de Obreros y Campesinos (Alliance Protecting Workers and Peasants), which published an underground monthly newspaper. Some of its principal leaders also crossed ethnic lines to join the Partido Comunista Cubano (Cuban Communist Party) from 1928 to 1929 (Jiménez 1963: 116-17). After the Japanese invasion of China, members of the Alianza reconstituted their organization as the Alianza en Defensa de la Cultura China (Alliance in Defense of Chinese Culture), which began operating in Havana in 1938 (although it was not registered until 1943). During the internal strife in China between 1946 and 1949 it supported the Communists and changed its name to Alianza Nacional de Apoyo a la Democracia China (National Alliance to Protect Chinese Democracy). In 1946 it registered with the Cuban government as a cultural and mutual aid association with the mission of “promoting the widest support among the Chinese community of Cuba and the Cuban people to the democratic movement of China, to progress, and to the complete liberation of that country.”

The numbers of Chinese in Cuba declined during the economic depression of the 1930s, when the Cuban government nationalized labor and, amidst anti-foreign sentiment, many Chinese returned home or remigrated elsewhere. The Japanese occupation of China from 1937 to 1945, while uniting Chinese overseas, exacerbated difficulties in transnational communication and travel. A new Cuban constitution in 1940

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5 “Alianza en Defensa de la Cultura China,” exp. 10672, leg. 355, Registro de Asociaciones, Archivo Nacional de Cuba.
liberalized entry procedures for families of immigrants already in Cuba, and after World War II, more Chinese women came than in previous decades. At the same time, marriages between Chinese men and Cuban women increased after the war. Overall, the relatively low numbers of Chinese women in Cuba led to a “mixed” community by the mid-20th century (Baltar 1997: 100-105).

Chinese Cubans and the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949

Politics, warfare, and revolutions disrupt migration flows, dislocate people, and sever homeland ties, sometimes forever. The mid-20th-century revolutions in China and Cuba are emblematic of the link between domestic political change and international migration. Refugees displaced by the Communist victory over the Nationalists in China in 1949 fled to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other places around the world, including Cuba, while Chiang Kai-shek relocated the Nationalist government to Taipei. The decade following the Chinese Revolution witnessed a spike in migration to Cuba. Those already in Cuba made official requests for their relatives to join them, and an estimated 3,000 Chinese entered Cuba from 1950 to 1959, among them Catholic priests and Guomindang officials (García 2003: 17).

The establishment of the People’s Republic of China on the mainland in 1949 politically polarized the Chinese community in Cuba. Over the course of the next decade, entrenched Chinese merchant interests were pitted against individuals and organizations supporting the Chinese Revolution. Although it remained influential throughout the 1950s, the Guomindang lost its monopoly on the political life of the Chinese community in Cuba after 1949 (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 147). The Communist victory in China lent momentum to leftist movements in Latin America. In Havana’s Chinatown, political associations became more vocal in their support of China’s new government. In 1949 the Alianza’s president Enrique León publicly declared support for the

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6 Official census figures indicate 10,300 Chinese in 1919 (10,016 males and 284 females) and 24,647 Chinese in 1931 (24,445 males and 202 females). By 1943 the total Chinese population dropped to 15,822, and by 1953 to 11,834. However, the highest numbers of Chinese women were recorded in 1953 (484, representing 4.09 percent) (Baltar 1997: 90). Given the widespread illegal immigration to Cuba, 20th-century census figures generally underreport the number of Chinese entries.
People's Republic of China and advocated its recognition by Cuba. But Cuba was under the political and economic influence of its North American neighbor, and a directive from Washington to support the new Chinese government never came. On the tenth of October, the anniversary of the 1911 Chinese Revolution, members of the Alianza hung flags and placards celebrating Mao Zedong’s victory on the balconies of the Guomindang building. This date coincided with Cuba's commemoration of the beginning of the armed uprising against Spanish colonial rule in 1868, thereby lending legitimacy to the Alianza's support of the Chinese Communist Revolution. Confrontations erupted between Mao’s supporters and the much more numerous Guomindang followers (Álvarez 1995: 78-83).

While inspiring leftists in Cuba, the Chinese Revolution contributed to the Cuban government’s hardline stance toward opposition politics. In 1950 the government shut down the socialist newspaper Hoy. When a group of Chinese protested, their own publication (Kwong Wah Po) in Santiago de Cuba, on the eastern part of the island, became a target of government censorship and repression. The press was destroyed, and police detained 13 Chinese for being “Communist spies,” among them newspaper director Juan Mok (Eng and García 2003: 31-35). In 1951 the Alianza in Havana declared the dissolution of the association due to lack of funds, and in 1955 its registration with the Cuban government was officially canceled. But the tradition of a Chinese leftist political organization in Cuba lay dormant, ready to be mobilized during the tumultuous next decade.

Meanwhile, along with the influx of Chinese fleeing the Communist Revolution came new community institutions. In 1954 members of the wealthy merchant community constructed a four-story building for the Casino Chung Wah, so opulent that it became known as “the palace” of the Chinese community. The Guomindang and the Cámara de Comercio China (Chinese Chamber of Commerce) controlled the association, and the building’s first floor housed the Bank of China, attesting to the patronage among institutional leaders of the community in Havana (Chang 2005: 133). The growth of Chinese community institutions in Cuba extended beyond Havana to the provinces. In August of 1952, for example, Guomindang members of Cienfuegos in central Cuba cele-

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7 Alianza en Defensa de la Cultura China, exp. 10672, leg. 355, Registro de Asociaciones, Archivo Nacional de Cuba.
brated the inauguration of a new building on Santa Clara Street, a main commercial artery.\footnote{El Comercio (Cienfuegos), 13 August 1952: 5.}

\textit{Chinese in the Cuban Revolution of 1959}

The growing revolutionary movement of 1950s Cuba sought to overthrow what had become a repressive and corrupt government, halt dependence on the United States and the related inflation and fluctuations of an export economy, and in the process, create a new social order. Cuban youth throughout the island became involved in the political struggles against Fulgencio Batista, who had seized government power through a military coup in 1952. Some of them were of Chinese descent, children of early-20th-century Chinese immigrants in Cuba. Three of them who fought in the rebel army eventually reached the rank of general: Armando Choy Rodríguez, Gustavo Chui Beltrán, and Moisés Sío Wong. All three were born on the island in the 1930s (Choy in 1934 and Chui and Sío Wong in 1938), which shaped their identity as Cubans. In a recently published testimonial of their experiences in the Cuban revolution, the generals discuss their lives growing up in prerevolutionary Cuba and their motivations for joining the revolutionary movement. Although from different regional and class backgrounds, they became part of a generation of Cuban youth who identified with the 26th of July Movement (inspired by Fidel Castro's daring but unsuccessful 1953 attack on the Moncada Army Barracks in Santiago de Cuba). They joined the rebels in the struggles against Batista from 1956 to 1958 and continued to serve in the Cuban army for decades after the revolution (Choy 2005).\footnote{Currently Choy is president of the State Working Group for the Cleanup, Preservation, and Development of Havana Bay, Chui is president of the Casino Chung Wah, and Sío Wong returned to active service in 2006 and is president of the Cuban-Chinese Friendship Association.}

The generals discuss instances of racial and class discrimination that informed their political views. Armando Choy recalls a customer in his father's store who had been unable to feed his family because he was short seven cents. He also remembers a friend who was part-Chinese being denied entry to a dance (despite having a white mother). Gustavo Chui reveals that Chinese business associates pressured his father to
change Chui’s birth certificate in order to strip his mother, a black woman of lower socioeconomic status, of any parental rights. And Moisés Sío Wong, the only one of the three with two Chinese parents, describes feeling oppressed as a child working for his Chinese brother-in-law without pay. When asked if his Chinese heritage had an impact on the development of his revolutionary consciousness, Choy replied, “I joined the movement as a Cuban. I thought like a Cuban, not like someone from China” (Choy 2005: 33).

Just a decade after the most recent Chinese migrants had fled their homeland and settled into their new businesses in Cuba, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 transformed the island’s landscape with sweeping political, economic, and social reforms. Initially, the revolution maintained a wide base of support in Cuban society. Chinese community leaders enjoyed a brief “honeymoon” with the new Cuban government. The January 1959 issue of the bilingual Chinese retailer magazine Fraternidad saluted the Cuban revolution. In the Barrio Chino, the famous restaurant El Pacífico hosted banquets for both Fidel and Raúl Castro in June 1960 (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 157). However, as with the rest of Cuban society, the revolution engendered profound changes in the class and institutional structure of the Chinese community. Chinese merchant relations with the new government deteriorated after the “First Declaration of Havana” on 2 September 1960, when Cuba announced its intent to establish diplomatic ties with the People’s Republic of China (García 2003: 49).

Members of the main leftist Chinese political organization had maintained their building on Zanja Street in Havana’s Chinatown, and after 1959 they reemerged as the Alianza Nueva Democracia China en Cuba (Chinese New Democracy Alliance of Cuba). At the national rally in Havana organized in protest of the U.S. attempt to align Latin American nations against Fidel Castro, members proudly marched with a banner proclaiming (in Spanish and Chinese) “Resident Chinese support the Cuban Revolution and its leader Fidel Castro!” (Choy 1995: 24) The Alianza also approved the founding of a Chinese militia as a continuation of the tradition of Chinese “freedom fighters” during the 19th-century wars of independence from Spain. During a meeting in February of 1960, Pedro Eng Herrera and others announced the creation of the Milicia Popular China, Brigada “José Wong” (Chinese Popular Militia, José Wong Brigade) for the defense of the Cuban Revolution. The all-Chinese brigade was part of the Milicia Nacional Revolucionaria (National Revolutionary Militia), and its name invoked the memory of an earlier
Chinese communist activist (Huang Taobai or José Wong) who had been murdered by government agents in a Cuban prison in 1930. Another suggestion, reaching even further back into a Chinese revolutionary tradition, was to name the brigade after José Bu Tak (Hu De), one of the Chinese captains known for his service in all three wars for independence from 1868 to 1898. Dozens of members joined the militia’s ranks (most were natives of China and a few, like Eng, were descendants of the same generation of politicized youth who had rallied around Fidel Castro’s 26 of July Movement) (Baltar 1997: 70-72; Eng 2002).

The Chinese militia first ascended to the stage on 1 October 1960, during a public celebration of the 11th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. Several days later, the brigade asserted control over two longstanding community institutions, the Guomindang and the Casino Chung Wah. With its choice of the tenth of October as the date for action in the heart of the Barrio Chino, the brigade drew upon two revolutionary traditions — the 1911 Wuchang Uprising against the Qing Dynasty and the 1868 Cuban rebellion against Spanish colonial rule. With Pedro Eng at the front of almost 40 Chinese, the militia occupied the buildings of both the Guomindang and its newspaper and for the first time raised the flag of communist China on its balcony. In a relatively peaceful transition, a new board of directors, three of them Communists, assumed positions in the Casino Chung Wah (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 160). The Chinese brigade continued its campaign to eliminate prostitution, gambling, and opium in Havana’s Chinatown. Militarily, they fortified the Isla de Pinos (Isla de la Juventud), off the coast of Cuba, “to prevent it from becoming another Taiwan” (Eng 2002). Cubans believed the island to be the site of an imminent U.S. invasion (which eventually occurred at the Bay of Pigs).

Keeping in step with the ideological current of the new Cuban government, the Chinese leftist organization once again changed its name to the Alianza Socialista China de Cuba (Chinese Socialist Alliance of Cuba). In 1968 the Alianza had 138 members nationwide, the majority from Havana and Oriente, the eastern part of the island known for its tradition of rebellion against colonialism and imperialism (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 165). Today, the Alianza remains the main political organization in Havana, occupying the former Guomindang residence. One after another, the remaining Chinese associations folded after the Cuban Revolution. As membership in the regional and clan associations decreased during the 1960s, so did the dues required to maintain activities. Even the more prosperous clan associations suffered (Zhou 1998:...
Felipe Luis, along with his fellow Lü kinsmen from Xinhui County who remained in Cuba, joined the larger Zhongshan association after his own longtime huiguan had dissolved (Luis 2002).

In addition to these political and institutional upheavals, profound changes in the fabric of daily life within the Chinese community came with the nationalization of private commerce. Businesses such as bodegas, fruit and vegetable stands, and laundries formed the economic base of the Chinese community. In 1927 there had been only 63 Chinese-owned grocery stores in Havana, but 293 laundries and 535 fruit and vegetable stands. By the mid-1950s, there were 277 Chinese groceries, an increase of 214. Over the same time period the number of smaller Chinese businesses shrank. For example, in 1954 there were only 130 laundries (a decrease of 163) and 173 fruit and vegetable stands (a decrease of 362). The tremendous increase in groceries and decrease in enterprises such as laundries and fruit and vegetable stands reflects the growth of the retail sector and rising influence of bodega owners within the Chinese community, as well as economic and political factors after 1930, leading to the loss of smaller businesses and compelling more Chinese migrants to return to China (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 151-52).

Although small businesses were already in decline, the flight of upper- and middle-class Chinese after the Cuban revolution greatly accelerated this trend. Xinhui migrant Felipe Luis eventually owned a bodega in Havana. Like many others who remained in Cuba, he was forced to become an employee of a state-owned store after the revolution. For those working in selling produce, the agrarian reforms and the depopulation of truck farms also forever altered their livelihood. Like other Cubans, Chinese who refused to work for the state depended on the black market economy (Luis 2002).

After the revolution, Chinese Cuban families were divided over whether to remain in Cuba or join those fleeing the island for Miami, New York, Toronto, Madrid, and elsewhere. The Seuc family, who by the 1950s had settled in Cuba permanently, embodies the uncertainty and divisiveness brought about by the revolution. Armando Seuc Chiu was born in 1922 and Napoleón Seuc Chiu in 1924 in Havana to a Chinese father and mother — one of the few Chinese women to emigrate to Cuba. During the depression their father lost his fruitstands, and in

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10 For a detailed analysis of the changing landscape of Chinese businesses in Havana from 1959 to 1968, see Herrera and Castillo 2003.
1929 their mother and three younger siblings embarked for her family home in Guangdong, their journey subsidized by the Chinese consulate. Owing to the Japanese occupation of China and ensuing political turmoil, she did not return to Cuba until 20 years later. The two brothers who remained in Cuba were thus separated from their mother until after the Chinese Communist victory in 1949. They had been inseparable growing up, so much so that people mistook them for twins. But, like thousands of other Cubans, their trajectories parted after the 1959 revolution. Politically, their father had been a left-leaning Chinese nationalist. Napoleón, a Guomindang member who had actively defended the Chinese merchant community as a lawyer in Havana, initially supported the Cuban Revolution, as it was directed against corruption and imperialism. But, like other Cubans, his enthusiasm waned over the course of the next two years. As active members of the Chinese community, his parents and his brother Armando accepted an invitation to an event honoring the new PRC diplomats in Cuba, but Napoleón did not. After his refusal to attend the reception and his subsequent dismissal from his position as a lawyer in the Ministry of Labor, Napoleón recalled being past the point of no return: “I felt that I had crossed the Rubicon” (Seuc 1998: 149).

Napoleón joined the newly formed anti-communist Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Movement). In September of 1961 he and his family boarded a Delta flight from Havana to New Orleans, becoming part of the first wave of Cuban exiles. He spent the 1960s in Puerto Rico, Miami, and Costa Rica, engaging in anti-communist movements and criticizing the revolutionary tribunals. While Napoleón eventually settled in Miami, his brother Armando remained in Cuba, dedicating himself to the medical profession. Despite his reservations about the Cuban revolutionary government, years later Napoleón visited his brother and others in the Chinese community in Cuba (Seuc 1998).

Other Chinese did not leave Cuba until the final stage of the nationalization of private commerce in 1968 through a “revolutionary offensive” on the remaining 57,000 small businesses (Pérez 1995: 341). Records from the Casino Chung Wah indicate that 142 members returned to China or remigrated elsewhere in 1968. Among these, only 19 were owners, while 74 were workers and 49 unemployed. Those who left for a second country were all under 50 years old (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 168). Recently in Dade County, Florida, approximately 3,000 Chinese Cubans accounted for less than one percent of the greater
Cuban exile community (Chardy 1994). Settling alongside the exiled Cuban community in Miami, Napoleón Seuc remarried a Cuban woman after the death of his Chinese wife. Chinese Cuban exiles have formed their own associations in major cities of Cuban settlement, such as New York and Miami (Seuc 2000; Zhou 1998: 150-52).

The Changing Tide of China-Cuba Relations

Ironically, the international context and the particularities of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions strained the relationship between the two governments during the first decade after the Cuban Revolution. Due to a complex set of ideological and national interests, the friendship between Cuba and China deteriorated, exacerbated by the Sino-Soviet dispute and the beginning of China’s Cultural Revolution in 1965. The Soviet Union economically and militarily supported Cuba during the Cold War, and it was not until the end of the 1980s that relations between Cuba and China began to warm (García 2003: 83).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of subsidies brought about a severe economic crisis in Cuba. The government instituted reforms resulting in a “mixed socialist economy” and the legalization of the U.S. dollar.11 Cuba’s search for new trade and investment partners coincided with China’s desire to strengthen its relationship with Latin American and Caribbean nations. In 1992 activities of the Asociación de Amistad Cubano-China (Cuban-Chinese Friendship Association) under the leadership of General Moisés Sío Wong were reactivated (the organization had been formed in 1960). In 1993 President Jiang Zemin made a landmark visit to Cuba, and in the following year Fidel Castro went to China, with younger brother Raúl Castro following in 1997. During his 2001 visit to Cuba, Jiang Zemin expressed his appreciation for the firm support from the Cuban people and government for China’s stance on human rights, Taiwan, and Tibet, China’s entrance into the World Trade Organization, Beijing’s candidacy for the 2008 Olympics, and Shanghai’s candidacy for the 2010 World Fair (La Rotta 2001: 37).

Since Chinese President Hu Jintao’s trade deals with Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Cuba in 2004, Chinese relations with Latin American and

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11 In November 2004 U.S. dollars in circulation were replaced with “convertible pesos,” and a ten percent fee was imposed on conversion of dollars to the new currency.
Caribbean nations have strengthened. China’s economic activities in the region are driven by an enormous need for natural resources such as nickel and oil, food products such as soybeans, as well as markets for manufactured products. In 2005 China emerged as Cuba’s second largest trading partner, after the latter’s Latin American neighbor Venezuela. Chinese buses and bicycles line the streets, while pressure cookers, light bulbs, refrigerators, and television sets fill Cuban homes (Erikson 2005). An additional benefit of the two countries’ economic partnership as perceived by both China and Cuba is the inherent challenge to long-standing U.S. dominance in the region. Currently 12 of the 24 nations that recognize Taiwan are in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the PRC vies for influence through local Chinese communities.

The Revitalization of the Barrio Chino and Chinese Cuban Ethnic Identity

Linked to the renewed China-Cuba relationship is the Chinese government’s support of developments in Havana’s Chinatown. In a symbolic display of friendship, China funded the construction of a traditional-style portico at the entrance of the historic district. The extension of China’s reach into Chinese migrant communities overseas is not a new phenomenon, whether represented by reformers and revolutionaries as the Qing dynasty came to an end, Guomindang government agencies after 1927, or PRC organizations dedicated to attracting investment in hometowns in the reform era (Wang 1991; Cheng and Ngok 1999). However, in contemporary Cuba, with only a few hundred native Chinese who are unable to send remittances home or invest capital in China, the involvement of the Chinese government in local affairs takes on unique characteristics.

With little new immigration since 1959 and the loss of private businesses, the Barrio Chino had fallen into decline. Even before the post-revolutionary exodus of Chinese, Chinese institutions had adapted to shifting demographics. After 1951 the Casino Chung Wah accepted women as well as children born in Cuba to a Chinese mother and a Chinese father (Jiménez 2007). The change reflected the increase in Chinese women in Cuba during the post-war period. By the early 1970s, association records had shown an increase in members, especially children born in Cuba to two Chinese parents (Herrera and Castillo 2003: 168). In 1980 the Casino Chung Wah carried out a census of the remaining
Chinese population in Cuba. Only 4,302 Chinese remained throughout the island, the majority from Taishan and Xinhui counties in Guangdong Province (Baltar 1997: 92). After 1983, faced with dwindling membership, the association further modified its regulations to accept children of one native Chinese parent. In 2002 the Casino Chung Wah registered 2,866 members, 314 being natives (Jiménez 2007).

Today the broader Chinese Cuban community is composed of two major groups: *chinos naturales* (native Chinese) and *descendientes* (descendants), i.e. children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Chinese. In addition to the few hundred elderly native Chinese who remain, it is these mixed descendants who form contemporary Chinese Cuba. The 13 remaining Chinese clan, regional, and political associations have opened their doors to descendants, and the Minzhidang (formerly the Zhigongtang) remains the center of social activity. In contrast to other Chinese communities overseas, women have been particularly active as presidents of these Chinese organizations.¹² Mirta Sam Echavarria, for example, serves as president of the prominent Alianza Socialista China de Cuba. Yrmina Eng Menéndez, another Cuban woman of mixed descent, spearheaded the current revitalization project (Eng 2007).

**Grupo Promotor del Barrio Chino: A Project is Launched**

In 1993, at the festivities for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Casino Chung Wah, a group of descendants discussed the importance of restoring and preserving the Barrio Chino and solicited permission to establish a state enterprise, the Grupo Promotor del Barrio Chino (Havana Chinatown Promotion Group). Its main objectives were to “recover” Chinese culture, customs, and traditions for the Cuban nation and to transform the historic Barrio Chino into a tourist attraction. The initiative also aims “to improve relations between the Chinese people and the Cuban people” (Paneque 2002).

The Grupo Promotor’s initial projects included a center for Chinese arts and traditions, an evening language school with native Mandarin speakers as teachers, a martial arts club, a clinic for traditional Chinese medicine, a residence for the elderly, celebrations of festivals, food stands

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¹² Isabelle Lausent-Herrera contrasts this phenomenon of female leadership with the role of women in other Chinese overseas communities, such as Lima, Peru (Lausent-Herrera 2008).
and Chinese restaurants on the pedestrian walkway, support for the Chinese newspaper, and the publication of a magazine dedicated to the Chinese Cuban community. Each year the Festival de Chinos de Ultramar (Festival of Chinese Overseas) commemorates the arrival of the first shipload of Chinese coolies and adopts a theme focusing on one of the main objectives of the revitalization project, such as Chinatowns as tourist attractions, martial arts, or Chinese medicine.

Cuba’s only remaining Chinese newspaper, with its delayed news of China, remains an important link in the maintenance of Chinese identity and community and is a focus of the preservation campaign. Before the revolution, Kwong Wah Po was published daily and had a circulation of 1,500. In addition, three other Chinese newspapers circulated in Havana representing the Nationalists, the Triads, and the merchant community. Today Kwong Wah Po has a bi-weekly circulation of 600. It contains articles mostly on events in Cuba and China, and since 1996 has printed a section in Spanish for descendants who are unable to read Chinese. The turn-of-the-century U.S.-made printing press stands in a small room surrounded by shelves containing thousands of metal Chinese characters that must be typeset by hand. Its former administrator laments that, despite support from outside, the intricate knowledge required for operating the press will disappear with the remaining native Chinese (Fung 2003).

Cubans of all ethnic backgrounds participate in martial arts, with older practitioners drawn to taijiquan. The Asociación Cubana de Wu Shu-Kung Fu (Cuban Association of Wu Shu-Kung Fu) was formed in Havana in 1995, led by descendant Roberto Vargas Lee. The association operates dozens of schools in Havana and in some of Cuba’s provinces (Espinosa 2002: 21). A Cuban team participated in the first World Taiji-quan and Health Conference in 2001 in Hainan, returning home with two gold, one silver, and one bronze medal. For Meyling Wong Chiu, the practice of martial arts offers her potential health benefits and the opportunity to represent Cuba in international competitions. Furthermore, continuing this Chinese tradition represents a promise she made to her Chinese grandparents (González and Hun 2002: 20).

In the commercial arena, the aim is to restore Chinese culinary traditions and restaurants and make Chinese products available to the public. Descendants of Chinese may apply for a permit to open a food stand. The associations have also received permission to open restaurants in former meeting rooms (even the political Alianza Socialista China de Cuba runs a bustling enterprise). The Chinese embassy donated materials for
the restaurants, including chopsticks, porcelain spoons, fountains, tea-pots, tablecloths, furniture, and decorative lamps (Álvarez 1995: 53-54). Los Tres Chinitos has become one of the most well-known restaurants, though not for Chinese cuisine. Originally a Chinese association, it is the restaurant’s pizza that draws long lines of Cubans outside. Another focus of the project has been establishing contacts with Chinese overseas communities in other regions, especially the Americas. During the 1998 festival, among interested investors from Toronto were two Chinese businessmen already familiar with Latin America, as they had previously lived in Peru (Lausent-Herrera 1998: 10).

**Chinese Cuban Ethnicity and the Role of the State**

In January 2006 the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana (Office of the Historian of the City of Havana) took over the work of restoring Havana’s Chinatown from the Grupo Promotor. This move toward centralization represents greater state control over what essentially began as a localized project by descendants of Chinese. It also reflects the strengthening of official China-Cuba ties. In the process, some of initiatives of the restoration project’s founders have been lost. For example, publication of Fraternidad II ceased. This small magazine, produced on a computer beginning in May 2002 and much endeared by members of the community, contained news about developments in the Barrio Chino, interviews with some of the elderly Chinese displaying photos of them “yesterday and today,” and articles on China and Chinese culture.¹³

A movement that focused on a particular ethnic group and was launched after the revolution — a revolution that claims the elimination of racial distinctions as one of its pillars — is indeed remarkable. The project is permissible precisely because of the particular role of the state in guiding initiatives. Today, the claiming of Chinese descent (like the claiming of Jewish or of African descent) falls within an overarching Cuban national identity. In 2002, Grupo Promotor Director Neil Panceque emphasized that one of the most important goals of the project “is

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¹³ The original magazine Fraternidad was founded in 1934 as the official publication of the Unión de Detallistas del Comercio de la Colonia China en Cuba (Union of Commercial Retailers of the Chinese Community in Cuba). It also represented an important component of building a community across ethnic lines, as it contained articles in Chinese and Spanish and devoted a section to marriages, baptisms, and social events.
to promote and realize the role of the Chinese in the formation of the Cuban Nation” (Paneque 2002 “Grupo”: 4).

To this end, the history of the Chinese in Cuba has emerged from the sidelines of both academia and popular culture in Cuba, and the story of Chinese coolies and “freedom fighters” is being recovered and highlighted as an integral component of the story of the nation. Alongside the government-sponsored revival, the University of Havana has established the Cátedra de Estudios sobre la Inmigración China en Cuba (School of Studies on Chinese Migration in Cuba) to promote the study of the Chinese presence. Journals and books published by prestigious Cuban research institutions have recently focused on the Chinese (Catauro 2000; Abdala Pupo 2003; Herrera and Castillo 2003; Valdés 2005). Mercedes Crespo has compiled a book on Chinese legends accompanied by the illustrations of celebrated Chinese Cuban artist Flora Fong (Crespo 2001). When Mayra Montero’s novel Como un mensajero tuyo (translated as The Messenger) became available to Cubans in 2001, the fictional account of internationally acclaimed opera singer Enrico Caruso and his Chinese Cuban mistress, set in the Barrio Chino of 1920s Havana, generated a buzz among its contemporary residents. These publications have stimulated new interest in the Chinese in Cuba, as well as in China itself. Books published in Cuba remain one of the few remaining products that are affordable for Cubans who only earn the non-convertible Cuban peso. Cuba maintains a high literacy rate, and with the lack of varied programming on state-run television, many Cubans are avid readers who flood local book fairs. Given the spread of Chinese migrants throughout the island, the restoration project today extends throughout Cuba’s provinces. The Tenth Festival of Chinese Overseas in 2007, celebrating the 160th anniversary of the Chinese presence in Cuba, brought Cubans from the provinces who presented an impressive array of local research from Holguín, Ciego de Ávila, Camagüey, Remedios, and Bayamo.

The aspirations of the community of aging native Chinese and the goals of the state overlap but do not necessarily coincide, resulting in a complex set of interactions between the two groups. Some of those who

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14 Mercedes Crespo spent a decade in Asia as the wife of Cuba’s former ambassador.
lost ownership of their businesses in the urban reform and watched buildings decay through disuse and neglect, for example, retain considerable skepticism about the subsequent enthusiasm of the state for “revitalizing” the neighborhood. Like Felipe Luis, the former bodega owner who spent his final years looking out over his balcony in the Barrio Chino, many members of the aging community of native Chinese in Cuba are often mere observers of the government-sponsored activities.  

Efforts from above to impose a homogenizing coherence on the Chinese Cuban “community” can be both exclusionary and artificially inclusive. Ironically, those excluded have been the native Chinese themselves, mostly retired men who spend their days sitting in the associations. In one sense, they are being “commodified” as part of the tourist circuit.

Despite criticism of the project from both within and outside of the Chinese community, however, there is no denying that some native Chinese and descendants have gained greater access to scarce resources through these initiatives. A residence located in the heart of the Barrio Chino houses elderly Chinese who do not have family in Cuba. In addition to accommodation, the residence arranges excursions and provides medicine and food. Profits generated from the restaurants have enabled occasional Chinese to renew ties to their home villages in China through visits, which until recently were an impossibility. The Sociedad Regionalista Chung Shan (Zhongshan Regional Society) operates the restaurant/bar Los Dos Dragones. Association Secretary Francisco Lee has recently made four trips to China. Although he has family in China, Lee has decided not to return permanently because he is “accustomed to Cuba” (Lee 2002). Former Grupo Promotor Director Neil Paneque emphasizes that the entire community living in Havana’s Chinatown benefits from the organization’s social work, such as street repairs and building renovation. Additionally, jobs for the general population have been created (Paneque 2002).

No doubt, the native Chinese are receiving some material benefits. But some Chinese Cubans (both ethnic Chinese and descendants) have expressed concern that the project’s ends are more economic than cultural. These tensions did not go unnoticed by the Grupo Promotor. In 2002 the director declared, “The biggest challenge we have encountered is to make it understood — above all by the native Chinese — that the

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16 Felipe Luis died in 2003 at the age of 99.
Promotion Group’s project is not economic, but cultural, and to achieve unity of action to perfect the work.” When further questioned about the push for tourism, he responded, “The project is not essentially economic,” though he recognized the financial impetus; his aim was to build a coalition between the elderly native Chinese, younger descendants, and the state organization (Paneque 2002).

For a restoration to an “authentic” Barrio Chino to reach the elderly native Chinese, a return to some form of entrepreneurial autonomy would probably accomplish more than festivals. Some of the retired Chinese lament the devastating impact of losing their businesses (and livelihood). Former bodega owners vividly recalled the Barrio Chino of the old days: ice cream made with fresh fruit, a plethora of Chinese food and products, Sunday cockfights after the shops had closed, and most significantly, fellow migrants (Espinosa 2004). In the current system of state-run enterprises, these are unlikely to return.

Making of a Chinese Cuban Culture and Identity

Compounding the picture even more is the involvement of multiracial descendants of Chinese who maintain varying notions of a “Chinese” identity. As the state seeks to encompass native Chinese and mixed descendants within a greater Chinese Cuban community, some members of this group themselves question their self-identification as Chinese. One descendant in Havana describes his “mixed” father as follows: “He was not raised by his [Chinese] father. People call him ‘chino’ because of his last name, but he’s Cuban. I know how to use chopsticks better than him. I look more Chinese than him” (Tang 2002). In her discussion of Asian American identity, Lisa Lowe analyzes a short story in which two Asian American women together explore their guilt complex about not being “authentically” Chinese enough. Lowe observes that “the making of Chinese American culture — the ways in which it is imagined, practiced, and continued — is worked out as much ‘horizontally’ among communities as it is transmitted ‘vertically’ in unchanging forms from one generation to the next” (Lowe 1996: 68). In a similar vein, the making of a Chinese Cuban culture is a negotiation between the state, the mixed descendants, and the native Chinese.

In part as a result of the state’s efforts, Cubans of all backgrounds have joined the Chinese Cuban community, discovering they have an ancestor who came from China. Given the economic and cultural incentives, it is not surprising that even relatively distant descendants of Chinese
are finding their way to the Barrio Chino. The “pull” of the revitalization project has reached those who previously had little knowledge of their Chinese heritage. Sanctioned by the state, they have appropriated essentialized markers of Chinese culture, such as the qipao worn by Cuban women greeting tourists or the lion dance performed by Cuban youth, in a practice of “self-Orientalization” or what Frank Scherer terms “strategic Orientalism” (Scherer 2001: 153; López-Calvo 2008: 80-89). However, beneath these outward symbols, expressions of Chinese ethnicity among Cubans involve a complex host of factors. As Lynn Pann argues in her history of the Chinese diaspora, the lives of Chinese are “balanced on an invisible see-saw between two or more identities. Circumstances, the nature of their audience, and calculations of risk and benefit dictate whether their ‘backstage’ or ‘frontstage’ identity is to the fore in any particular situation” (Pan 1990: 247).

Like their counterparts in the United States, descendants of Chinese in Cuba have begun journeys to fill in the gaps and ruptures produced by migration. While immersed in historical research in the provincial archive of the town of Cienfuegos in 2003, I met a young Cuban seeking information about her Chinese grandfather. Her questions about how to join a Chinese association fused with a desire to recover her own family history, a desire that resonates with descendants of Chinese Cubans in the United States. The multiple migrations and remigrations of Chinese in Cuba, especially after 1959, have produced a population of Americans of both Cuban and Chinese descent. Some of them, like photographer Maria Lau, have made their way to Havana’s Barrio Chino to locate missing pieces of the puzzle and document this journey through creative mediums (Lau 2008). Writer Emily Lo’s Chinese grandfather, who had married a Cuban woman, was never heard from again after he returned to China in 1949. Lo describes her motivation for a search that eventually led her to the Barrio Chino in Havana:

I just wanted to know how I fit in my family. And I wanted to know how my family fit in a larger scope of history. We had studied immigration in school, but our textbooks never considered families like mine, families that were of blended heritage before they even set foot in America. We celebrated hyphenated ethnicities all the time in our diversity-conscious curriculums, but adding one more, like Cuban and Chinese American, didn’t fit any mold (Lo 2007: 217).

Within the broad, supposedly inclusive category of Chinese Cuban, subtle racialized distinctions are nonetheless maintained. Although the 1959 Cuban Revolution embraced the notion of cubanidad (Cubanness)
and declared an end to institutionalized racial discrimination, it failed to achieve a color-blind society. The editors of *Afrocuba* contend that “few countries can boast the advances made in Cuba since the Cuban Revolution in breaking down institutionalized racism. It would, however, be shortsighted to think that racism has been eliminated” (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 1993: 7). As Cuba enters an undetermined future with the reforms of the past two decades, the unresolved question of race and *cubanidad* has resurfaced explicitly. Native Chinese are still viewed in a sense as “foreign.” Cuban-born descendants, on the other hand, fall into the full spectrum of racial categories that exist in Cuba. Whiteness and blackness thus figure into the formulation of a “Chinese Cuban” identity. Although a black Cuban may be just as “Chinese” as a white Cuban, and equally attracted by the economic and cultural “pull” factors of the revitalization project, the difference is often implicitly or explicitly noted.

As contemporary Cuban society experiences a resurgence of racial discrimination toward blacks (especially in the tourist economy), the celebration of ethnic identity can reinforce racial divisions. Sociology graduate student Alejandro Campos García asserts that the recent claiming of ethnicities such as Asian “has become a tacit strategy to move from blackness as a social marker of status” in Cuba (Yun 2008: 216). Campos self-identifies as Afro-Cuban with some Spanish and Chinese background, and he has embarked on a quest to learn about the Asian connection. He recently discovered that his Chinese ancestor was actually female, a great-grandmother. For Campos, claiming an identity based on both his African and Chinese heritage would be a way to resist binary conceptions of race (black/white) and racial dynamics. An Afro-Asian identity would also “make explicit the complexity of the national ethnic-racialized background” and “challenge simplistic and almost uncontested racialized and ethnic representations” (Yun 2008: 216).

With government-imposed economic restrictions and the absence of major new immigration flows, the Chinatown in Havana obviously cannot be restored to what it once was, a bustling neighborhood with the sound of Cantonese filling the streets. Jorge Alay, in his presentation on the history of the Barrio Chino at the Fifth Festival of Chinese Overseas, described it as a “Chinatown without Chinese” (*barrio chino sin chinos*). Some critique the restoration project for offering Mandarin Chinese language classes, rather than the Cantonese spoken by immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries. But the shift to Mandarin actually began before the current revitalization project. The Alay brothers are three
ethnic Chinese who now live in Havana, born to Chinese parents who arrived in Cuba in 1949. Growing up, their parents stressed the importance of Mandarin, the PRC’s official language. Now Jorge Alay can communicate with the Chinese tourists he leads through the city and can teach Mandarin in the Barrio Chino (Alay 2002).

In addition to thousands of tourists from China each year, the growing relationship between Havana and Beijing has engendered cultural and educational exchanges, as well as a trickle of new immigrants. Tao Qi came to Cuba from Shanghai in 1995 with her parents to work in tourism. When meeting with the Grupo Promotor about opening a restaurant of authentic Chinese food, Roberto Vargas Lee translated for her, and the two married a year later. Tao Qi’s family opened the restaurant in 1997, importing a Shanghai cook (Espinosa 2003: 10). Hundreds of Chinese students are learning Spanish in Havana, and Cuba has further committed to host 1,000 students annually from poorer regions of China.  

Conclusions

Chinatowns throughout the world have undergone significant changes in response to demographic patterns and tourism initiatives. Havana’s Barrio Chino — known as a “Chinatown without Chinese” — provides a unique locale for an analysis of diasporic ties, urban renewal, and ethnic identity. Two trends over the past decade emerge. There has been a steady increase in both Chinese official presence and Cuban state control over the process. At the same time, members of the Chinese Cuban community (both natives and descendants) are more involved in initiatives and activities. The 2007 Festival of Chinese Overseas officially opened in the Casino Chung Wah, marked by national anthems and speeches by Chinese and Cuban dignitaries and key figures in the restoration project. But the academic papers and community reports were presented in the associations themselves, making the conference more accessible to community members. In addition, more elderly Chinese

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17 Chinese students use their newly-acquired Spanish to serve as liaisons and interpreters for foreign delegates at events such as the FIELAC (Federación Internacional de Estudios sobre América Latina y el Caribe) Congress, held in 2007 for the first time in China (Macau), and the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing.
have renewed transnational connections through a return to their Chinese village, some for the first time in fifty years, and some permanently.\footnote{Visits to the Chinese cemetery (Zhonghua Zongyishan) also reveal several exhumations for return passage of bones to China.}

The multiracial nature of societies in Latin America and the Caribbean, coupled with the fact that the revitalization of Havana’s Barrio Chino is government-sponsored, allows for an inclusive project, drawing in white, black, and mixed descendants who have made varying claims on their own “Chineseness.” The project brings together native Chinese and descendants, providing organization, public space, and in a restricted society, an outlet for personal expression. Alongside the state-directed initiatives percolates another phenomenon, one not marked by Chinese ornaments, chopsticks, and lion dances. A “restoration” is occurring around the touristy pedestrian walkway, and even beyond Havana in other provinces. What transpires in private interactions and among individuals is a matter often outside of the hegemonic construction of a Chinese Cuban identity. Second-, third-, and fourth-generation descendants of Chinese, by taking advantage of special economic opportunities and learning about and participating in Chinese traditions, are claiming an ethnic and cultural heritage and redefining themselves. In the process, they are ultimately forging new spaces along the margins, where the expression of identity and the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity may develop.

Rather than being restored to an approximation of what it once was, Havana’s Chinatown is being “remade” into something new, both out of demographic and economic necessity. While it has not attracted many new Chinese immigrants, the revival has created economic and cultural “pull” factors to draw in descendants who may have had little prior “Chinese” identity. In this manner the Barrio Chino continues to evolve as have other Chinatowns, although not quite in the same way. In a different political and economic context, Chinese migration to Cuba would likely reflect the types of changes that have occurred elsewhere in the diaspora. As Lisa Lowe points out, “…rather than representing a fixed, discrete culture, ‘Chinatown’ is itself the very emblem of shifting demographics, languages, and populations” (Lowe 1996: 65). In the 1950s, the composition of the Barrio Chino was similar to that of other “bachelor society” Chinatowns in cities such as San Francisco and New York. These Chinatowns have since been transformed due to a continual flow of
migrants from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as movement of original settlers to the suburbs (Kwong 1979; Fong 1994).

The degree to which new Chinese entering Cuba will reinforce the state’s urban renewal of the Barrio Chino remains an open question. As China-Cuba relations and niches for entrepreneurs grow, so does the possibility for new Chinese immigration (albeit on a smaller scale). In February 2008 the Cuban National Assembly elected Raúl Castro to succeed Fidel as president of Cuba. Observers of all political leanings anxiously watch for changes, if any. Whether Cuba will follow the “China model” of transition to a market economy is unclear (Cheng 2007). But the relationship between the two nations will shape future migration trends, and the revolutionary history of the Chinese in Cuba will continue to be invoked as China plays a significant role in Cuba’s present and future.

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INDEX

Acapulco, 7-13, 18-20, 22-23, 27-29
Africa, 12-13, 39-40, 43, 46, 56-57, 59
Africans, 18, 27, 39, 65
Afro-Surinamese, 185
Alianza Popular Revolucionaria America, 151
Alianza Socialista China de Cuba, 219, 224-225
Amazon, 72
Americas, 13
Amerindian society, 110
Andaman Islands, 38
Anhui, 175
Arabs, 120
Argentina, 36, 222
Asia, vii, 13, 160, 173
Asian immigration/Asian immigrants, 8-9, 11, 13, 18, 14-15, 21, 25, 28-29, 38-39, 48, 65, 69
Asians, 155-156
Assimilation, vii, 58, 68, 90, 110-111, 119, 124, 207. See also integration
Asociación Pro-Indígena, 150
Australia, 3, 36, 39-41, 43, 49, 55
Bahamas, 69, 189
Banana industry, 113, 116, 118
Barbados, 41, 108
Barrio chino, 110, 118. See also Chinatown
Beijing, 22, 176, 232
Belize, 103-109, 111-112, 121, 126
Bermuda, 189
Bird's nest, 130
Blacks, 74, 118
Brazil, 36, 41, 47, 189, 222
Britain 60, 148
British East India, 2, 38
British East India Company, 38
British Honduras, 69, 107. See also Belize
British West Indies, 42, 46, 58, 74
Burma, 12, 25, 36, 38-39, 56
Cambodia, 25
Canton (Guangzhou), 22-23, 45, 52
Caribbean, 39, 41-43, 56, 65-72, 96, 98, 105, 109, 120, 198, 222-223, 233; British Caribbean, 59, 139; Dutch Caribbean, 40; French Caribbean, 39-40, 59.
Caribbean railroad, 107
Casino Chung Wah (Zonghua Zonghuiguan), 212, 214, 216, 219, 221, 223-224, 232
Castro, Fidel, 164, 217-218, 222
Castro, Raúl, 218, 222
Casta, 18 (defined), 22, 25-28
Catholicism/Catholic Church, 17, 147, 157-158, 161-164, 171, 176-178; Cathedral of Mexico City, 18-19; Catholic education, 162; Dominican monk, 14; Franciscans, 157, 162-163, 168; Iberian missionary, 17; Jesuit missionary, 158; Jesuits, 162; San Pedro Church, 162-163
Cathay, 7, 17, 19, 29, see also China
Central America, 3, 39, 56-57, 103-105, 115-116, 119, 123-124
Central American Confederation, 105
Ceylon, 12, 36, 38-39, 45, 47, 55
Chaozhou (Swatow), 23
Chiang Kai-shek, 165, 214-215
Chile, 70, 72, 171, 222
China ships, see nao de china
Chinatown, 7, 112, 119, Ch. 8 (211-236) here and there. See also barrio chino
Chinese: black Chinese, 116; Cantonese, 67, 174-177, 188, 206; Chinese Mexicans, 67; Chinese Peruvian half-bloods, 146-147, 149-152; creole Chinese, 166; Fuidung'on Hakka, 186 (fn 2, defined), 190, 195, 204-208, 196-197; Hakka (Kejia), 46,
INDEX

69, 161, 175, 185-188, 191, 193-194, 206, 208; laiap (local-born), 185-187, 193, 204-208; New Chinese (Nieuwe Chinezen), 187-188, 190-197, 201-208; Overseas Chinese, 188, 196, 199; Part-Chinese, 117; Sino-Peruvian, 178; Straits Chinese, 186, tongap (China-born), 185-187, 191, 193, 196-204-208. See also Chinese mestizos, Chinos, indio chinos, injerto, Sangleys, slavery
Chinese associations (including huiguan), 104, 118, 121-123, 146-147, 152-153, 160-161, 166, 170, 173-178, 196, 212-213, 216, 219-220, 223-225, 228; Asociación Peruano China (APCH), 172-173, 179; Beneficiencia China, 153-155, 171-177; Chee Kung Tong (Zhigong Tang), 149, 224; Chinese Reform Association (Bao Huanghui), 85; Honduran Chinese Association, 120; Sociedad de Beneficiencia China, 147; Tonghuy Chongkoc, 147, 153, 162
Chinese Chamber of Commerce, 216
Chinese Communist Revolution, 215-216
Chinese Cubans: Armando Choy Rodríguez, 217; Gustavo Chui Beltrán, 217; Moisés Sío Wong, 217-218
Chinese mestizos, 8-9, 11, 15, 18
Chinese Exclusion Act, 56-57, 67, 69, 112
Chinese food, 166, 169-170, 232
Chinese globalization, 188, 198-201
Chinese junk, 12, 53
Chinese New Year, 121, 196
Chinese silk, 20-23
Chinese porcelains, 23-24, 29
Chinese Revolution of 1911, 213, 216
Chinese textiles, 20-22
Chinese triads, 193, 195-196
Chinese traders/Chinese shopkeepers, 2, 37, 75, 114
Chinos, 7-15, 17-18, 20-21, 24-28; Chino barbers, 14-17, Chino caste, 29, Chinos natos (huaqiao), 149, Indios Chinos, 20, Chino phlebotomists, 16
Christianity/Christian, 14, 29
Coffee, 114, 117
Cold War, 132, 159, 222
Colonialism, 61
Confucian Institutes, 179
Coolie, 2 (fn), 71, 73-74, 152, 166-167; Chinese coolies, 68, 72, 145, 171, 227; East Indian coolies, 68-69; Spanish coolies, 52
Coolie migration, 2-3
Coolie trade, 2-3, 129-130, 212
Coton, 22, 117
Creole society, 150
Creolization, 90
Cuba, 2-3, 36, 39-42, 46-47, 52, 56-58, 66, 68, 70-74, 130, 149, Ch. 8 (211-236) here and there
Cuban Comunist Party, 214
Cuban Revolution, 3, 217-222, 230
Cultural Revolution, 126, 222
Depression (Great Depression), 90, 94, 155
Diaspora: Asian diaspora, 35, 39, 42; Chinese diaspora, 44, 57, 59-60, 65, 97, 181, 230; Indian diaspora, 40, 44, 60; Sikh diaspora, 44
Dutch, 37-38, 199
Dutch East Indies, 2, 25
Dutch West Indies, 46
Ecuador, 148, 159
Education/schools, 121, 167; Chinese education, 116, 147, 158; Chinese schools, 122, 162-163, 193; John XXIII, 163, 167-168
El Chino, 66 (fn)
El Salvados, 113-114, 124
England, 98
Erasmo Wong Lu, 171-172, 178-179
Eurasian, 129
Europe, 13, 105, 143
Europeans, 14-15, 27, 37, 65, 113
European labor, 47, 105, 114
European migration, 39, 47, 104-105
Festival of Chinese overseas, 225, 227, 231-232
Fiji, 42, 39, 41, 46, 56, 59
Filipino, 8-9, 11, 18
Formosa (Taiwan), 45
France, 164
French, 37-38, 167
French East Indies, 2
Fujian, 17, 23, 45-46, 118, 126, 170, 175-176, 191; Dehua, 23; Fuqing, 175; Fuzhou, 18, 46, 175; Haicheng, 17; Jinjiang, 45; Quanzhou, 17; Xiamen, 18, 108; Zhangzhou, 17-18
Fujianese, 189
Fujimori, Alberto, 66, 168-169, 172-173
Galleon trade, 29
Gambling, 97, 110, 219
Germans, 112
Germany, 90
Globalization, 3, 179
Gold, 116-117
Gold Mountain, 129
Great Leap Forward, 161
Grenada, 42, 59
Guadeloupe, 69, 189
Guangdong, 45-46, 69, 135, 155, 159, 170, 187, 195, 212, 221, 224; Bao'an 185; Chaozhou, 46; Guangzhou, 113, 163; Huiyang, 185; Jieyang, 46; Shantou, 46; Shenzhen, 185; Shunde, 131; Xinhui, 213, 220, 224
Guano, 72, 135, 137, 143; Guano islands, 130, 134, 138
Guatemala, 104, 111, 119, 124
Guomintang, 213-214, 216, 219, 221
Guyana, 42, 57, 59, 69; British Guiana, 36, 43; French Guiana, 57; see Guyana
Guyana, 69-70, 106, 130, 189
Hainan, 187, 205
Half-bloods (mixed blood), 147-148, 153-154, 159-158, 163, 169, 178. See also injerto, mestizaje
Havana, Ch. 8 (211-236) here and there
Hawaii, 42, 3, 36, 40-43
Haya de la Torre 151, 161
Honduras, 103-104, 111, 113-114, 119-121, 124
Hokkien Gongsi, 175
Hong Kong, 44, 46, 52, 59, 130-132, 134, 151, 153, 158-160, 185, 188, 187, 193, 196, 207, 215, 234
Hu Jintao, 222
Hubei, 175
Huaqiao, 207
Hungary, 194
Indentured immigration, 3, 51
Indentured labor, 3, 13, 38, 40-42, 48-49, 68-69, 72, 103, 143; Asian indentured labor, 41; Chinese indentured labor, 2, 40-41, 47, 69, 74, 123, 211-213; Chinese indentured experience, 104-112; Contract labor, 119; Credit ticket, 48-51, 54; Indian indentured labor, 41; foreign laborers, 112; Latin America indentured system, 52; “piglets”, 138-139. See also kanganí recruitment
India, 7, 11-12, 25, 35-37, 39-40, 44, 50, 56-57, 59, 189
Indian migration, 42, 44, 46, 53
Indians (India), 36, 39, 41-43, 57, 59-60; Indians of the Philippines, 16; Overseas Indian trader community, 37
Indians (Native Indians), 18, 25, 27-28, 71, 150-151; Indians of Mexico, 25; West Indian Indians, 114
Indios, 22, 25-28
Indios chinos (Chinese Indians), 7, 20, 25
Indochina, 55-56
Indonesia, 37, 39, 46
Industrial Revolution, 35, 37
Internal colonialism, 35
Injerto (half-bloods, Chinese half-bloods), 144-146, 150, 155-157, 160, 162, 177, 185
Injertas (girls), 146
Integration, 90, 104, 162, 164, 173, 177, 207. See also assimilation
Interoceanic Canal, 106
Irish workers, 105
Italians, 41, 107, 114, 167
Ivory carving 17-18
Japan, 7, 12, 25, 42, 168
Japanese, 151, 154, 156, 159, 171; Japanese immigrants, 37, 66
Japanese occupation, 214
Java, 37, 41-42, 46
Javanese, 37
Jews, 65, 97
Jiang Zemin, 222
Jiangxi, 23; Jingdezhen, 23
K'ang Yu-wei, 90
Kanganí recruitment, 48, 53-55
Kenya, 41
K'ang Yu-wei, 90
Kangani recruitment, 48, 53-55
Kenya, 41
Koreans, 71
Lam, Wilfredo, 66
Latin America, vii, 1-3, 7, 20, 35, 39, 56, 65-69, 72, 96, 98, 198, 222-223, 226, 233
Laundries, 110
Lebanese, 97, 119, 197
Li Hongzhang, 149
 Liaoning, 187
Logging, 199-200
Mao Zedong, 216
Macao, 12, 19, 25, 148, 158; Macau, 52
Madagascar, 57
Makassar, 12
Malacca, 25, 38, 45-46
Malay prahu, 12
Malaya/Malay peninsula, 3, 12, 36-37, 39-42, 46-47, 51, 53, 55-56
Malays, 27
Malaysia, 25, 46; see also Malaya
Manila, 7-9, 13-14, 16-20, 23-24, 29
Manila-Acapulco connection, 1-2, 45
Manila galleons, 7, 12, 17, 23
Marriage, 18, 90, 110-111, 131, 133-134, 139, 144, 146-148, 154, 158, 162, 226;
Chinese bride, 147; intermarriage, 147; mixed marriage, 145, 179
Martinique, 69
Maxime Hong Kingston, 130
Mauritius, 38-39, 42, 46, 56-59
Men attaching to each other, 139-140
Mestizaje (mixed race), 25, 144
Mestizo, 8, 11, 18, 20, 24, 26, 29, 146, 185
Mexican nationalism, 29, 90-98
Mexican Revolution, 58, 91, 97
Mexican War of Independence, 29
Mexicanization, 28
Mexico, 2-3, 7-9, 11-14, 18, 22, 24-27, 39, 56-58, 67-71, 90-98, 111-112
Migration: Cantonese migration, 170;
Chinese migration, 212; Indian indentured migration, 36; illegal migration, 188-192, 215; new immigrants, vii, 174-177, 187, 194;
new Chinese immigration, 188; new migration, 3; remigration, 70, 230; white labor migration, 36
Miguel López de Legazpi, 7
Minzhidang, 224, see Chec Kung Tong
Mixed-blood, see half-bloods
Mixed race, 90, 146
Multiculturalism, 60, 188
Naipaul, V.S., 66
Names, 67, 90, 111-112, 114, 178
Nanjing, 214
Nao de China (Chinese ships), 7-8, 13, 19, 22, 29
Nationalism, 58, 162, see also Mexican nationalism
Neo-colonialism, 35
New world, 2, 18, 20, 28-29
New Zealand, 40
Nicaragua, 103-104, 111-118, 121, 124
North America, 55, 60
Olympics 2008, 222
Opium, 73, 97, 105, 109, 111, 123, 219
Opium Wars, 45
Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, 159
Pacific Islanders, 37
Pacific War (1879-1883), 171 (fn)
Palestinians, 120
Plaza Mayor (Zócalo), 14-15, 20, 27
Panama, 46, 56-57, 70, 103-112, 115, 118, 121, 123-124, 159
Panama disease (sigatoka disease), 116
Panama Canal, 107, 118
Panama Railway, 105
Parián (of Manila), 14-15, 17, 20, 22-23
Parián (of Mexico City), 20
Pearl River Delta, 46, 105, 205
Pedro Zúlen Aymar, 150-152, 164
Penang, 38, 50
Peranakan, 186
Peru, 2-3, 23, 39-41, 52, 57-58, 66, 70-72, 108, 110, 124, 129-130, 143, Ch. 6 (144-183) here and there, 224, 226
Peruvian Chinese Cultural Center, 167
Philippines, 7-8, 12, 17-20, 22, 25, 37, 39, 41-42, 45-46, 189
Plantations, 107, 138, 146
Porras-Wu Tingfang Protocol, 148-149
Portuguese, 12, 37-38, 42
Prostitution, 219; Chinese prostitutes,
190-192
Puerto Rico, 41
Putonghua, 187, 194, 205
Qiaoxiang, 186, 205, 208

Racial classification, 26; Spanish race-based hierarchy, 24
Racism: anti-Asian racism, 61, 66, 153; anti-Chinese discourse, 185, 204; anti-Chinese in Sinora, 91-96; anti-Chinese legislation, 117, 120; anti-Chinese racism, 3, 65-67, 72, 90-98, 110, 114-115, 120, 122-123, 145, 157, 201-205, 207-208, 217; anti-Chinese riots, 150-151; antichinismo, 65, 67, 93, 98; anti-chino barbershop Commission, 15; anti-foreign agitation, 95, 98; anti-immigrants, 188; anti-Semitism, 65, 97; Chinese questions, 67; Chinese stereotypes, 187-201, 207, 207; massacre of Chinese, 67; racial agenda, 98; racial discourse, 90, 97; racial stereotypes, 90; shooting Chinese, 107; Sinophobia, 65, 67-68, 72, 91, 96-97; Sociedad Antichina, 110; Torreón massacre, 83, 90-91; Yellow Peril, 93-94, 199, 201-203. See also xenophobia
Railway construction, 104, 106, 110, 114, 120; Northern Railway (Guatemala), 113
Reunion, 39-40, 42, 46, 57; French Reunion, 38
Revolution of 1911, 151
Ruthanne Lum Mccunn, 3, 129-140
Sandinista Revolution, 117-118, 121
Sangleys (Chinese), 7-8, 11-12, 15, 18, 20, 22-24, 29
St. Lucia, 42, 59
St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles, 189
St. Vincent, 42, 59
Seychelles, 57
Shanghai, 46, 222
Shining Path, 166-167
Sichuan, 175
Silk: Canton silk, 21, Nankin silk, 21
Singapore, 38, 41, 46, 50, 59
Sinification, 8, 29
Sino-Peruvian, 144, 158
Sinophobia, see racism
Slavery/slaves, 3, 9, 12-13, 17-18, 35-26,
29, 41, 52, 68-69, 72-74, 107, 123;
African slavery/African slaves, 26, 40-42, 48, 68, 72, 98, 143, 212; Asian slaves, 8, 28; Chino slaves/China slaves, 13-14; 18, 21, 28-29; Indian slave labor, 38; negra slave, 18; virtual slavery, 132-133
Snakeheads, 174
Spice Islands, 12
South Asia, 36, 39
South Africa, 37-38, 40-42, 46
South Pacific, 3
Southeast Asia, 2, 7, 36-40, 42-43, 45-46, 49-50, 56, 58-60
Soviet Union, 222
Spain, 13, 19-20, 24; New Spain, Ch. 1 (7-31) here and there
Spaniards, Ch. 1 (7-31) here and there
Spanish, Ch. 1 (7-31) here and there, 37, 39, 73, 90, 105, 212; Spanish barbers, 16
Sranantongo (Surinamese creole), 187-188, 194, 206
Straits Settlements, 37-38, 50-51
Suicide, 103, 105, 107-109, 123, 143, 212
Sugar, 40-42, 107, 143
Sugar industry/ sugar plantation 39-41, 72, 108, 113; British sugar colonies, 108-109; Chinese sugar plantation, 71; Cuban sugar plantation, 212; European sugar colonies, 105; sugar colonies, 47, 53;
Sumatra, 37-39, 50
Sun Yat-sen, 162, 213
Suriname, 3, 42, 46, 57, 59, 69; Ch. 7 (185-209) here and there
Tahiti, 41
Talavera porcelain, 24
Thailand, 25, 37, 39, 189
Taiwan, 159-168, 174, 198, 215, 219, 222-224
Taiwanese, 104, 158
Timor, 12
Toishan (Taishan), 131, 224
Treaty of Amity and Commerce (1899), 71
Trinidad, 39, 41-43, 46, 57-59, 66, 68-70, 74, 106, 130, 189
Tusan, 144-183, 149 (defined), also Tusang, 185
Tusan Club, 163, 165, 167
Uganda, 41
United Kingdom, 44
Uruguay, 36
Venezuela, 39, 56-57, 223
Wah Joy (Huayi), 179
Wenzhou migrants, 197, 205
West Africa, 189
West Indies, 57
West Indian Islands, 57
Wing On Chong, 153, 165
Women/wives, 69, 90, 94, 97, 110-111, 121, 131, 144, 146, 148-149, 154-155, 158, 162, 207; African women, 144; black women, 218; Chinese wives, 119, 222; Chinese women, 132, 143, 154, 170, 175, 185, 190-192, 215, 220, 230, 223-224; Cuban women, 222, 224, 230, 215; independent spinsters, 131, 138; local women, 116, 120, 123-124; Mayan wives, 110
World Trade Organization, 222
World War I, 56, 213
World War II, 66, 132, 137, 149, 155, 158, 162, 215
Wu Tingfang, 149-150
Xenophobia, 90-98
Zhejiang, 23, 197, 203, 205
Zhejiangese, 193, 205, 208
Zheng Zaoru (imperial emissary), 147, 161
Zhigong Tang, see Chee Kung Tong
under Chinese associations