Home Across the Pacific: Locating the "Chinese-Cuban" Identity and Immigrant Impact on Cuba During the 20th Century

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Introduction

Since 1995, Havana's once-renowned *barrio chino*, or Chinatown, has seen a concentrated effort by the Cuban government to "revitalize" it, in accordance with its effort to preserve the Chinese-Cuban heritage of Cuba. Due to these efforts, the *barrio* has been deeply involved with the government goal of "developing culture," and has seen renovations and a new emphasis on its notable history—at its height, a century ago, Havana's Chinatown was one of the largest in Latin America, spreading over several city blocks.[1]

The *barrio*'s origins lie in the 1850s, with the efforts of "retired" coolies who formed settlements throughout Cuba following the completion of their 8-year labor contracts. In these settlements, they often opened small business ventures, and thus eventually in the case of Havana, a "small Chinatown of shacks grew up along the Zanja Canal that brought water to the city."[2] The founding of these Chinatowns owes its occurrence to the advent of the large-scale coolie trade to Cuba begun a decade earlier in 1847, in a "scheme to import low-cost workers for Cuban sugar plantations prior to and during the period of gradual abolition of slavery."[3] By the early years of the 20th century, Havana's *barrio* had reached its height, integrating into main Havana, inhabited by almost 40,000 Chinese migrants, and was filled with restaurants, businesses, newspapers, and the like. Today, the *barrio* is comprised of numerous Chinese restaurants, a ghost town-like aspect, and a Chinese population in heavy decline. Like the nature of the Chinese population of Cuba today, the nature of Havana's Chinatown has drastically evolved from the coolies and coolie settlements first arrived and established in the 1840s and 1850s.

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[1] Hearn, Adrian H. "Harnessing the Dragon: Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs in Mexico and Cuba." p.118.
[2] Goering, Laurie. Chicago Tribune.
[3] Lopez, Kathleen M. "Remaking Havana's Barrio Chino."

Questioning the "Chinese Cuban" Identity

Despite the drastic differences between the Chinese in Cuba now and its coolie and trade past, representing their role in Cuba's history as a single, coherent narrative appears to be an essential goal of contemporary Cuba in regard to its Chinese population. The revitalization project of which Havana's *barrio chino* is a part finds its roots in the Havana Chinatown Promotion Group, a state-sponsored group run by Chinese *descendientes* of earlier generations of Chinese emigrants. Founded for the furthering of Chinese tourism, and the supposed revival of traditional Chinese culture and custom in Cuba, it appears to be both a product and promotion of increased political relations between China and Cuba.

Havana's *barrio chino* well-illustrates the broader experience of the Chinese migrants to Cuba—the beginning of the Chinese Cuban community through the coolie trade, the later free Chinese immigration to the island, the successful early to mid- twentieth century rise of Chinese entrepreneurship, and its decline into an almost invisible community in the late twentieth century. It is a story of minimal stability and much turmoil that begs at its heart the question of who the Chinese of Cuba are—caught between the intricacies of the transnational ties they formed across the Pacific between China and Cuba, and their changing position in Cuban society from one of the least regarded classes in Cuba. Attempts such as the Promotion Group's to portray the entire community in the same light, as a broadly homogenous "Chinese-Cuban" identity, assume a same cultural experience among those who arrived in Cuba from China. Yet this is far from the case. The labor migrants who arrived in Cuba during the latter half of the nineteenth century through *la trata amarilla* were reacting to entirely different circumstances than the twentieth century migrants escaping immigration restrictions and anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States. The communities in Cuba established by these two migration movements were aimed

toward the Chinese "bachelor" societies, and were quite different from the later Chinese communities throughout the twentieth century, geared increasingly toward people of both Chinese and Cuban descent.

The majority of the available historical scholarship on the Chinese in Cuba concentrates extensively on the dynamics of the coolie trade and declining African slave trade, but this leaves much room for the analysis and exploration of the ways in which they formed a changing Chinese and Cuban identity in response to the subsequent circumstances surrounding them. By tracing through the major influences in which this changing idea of identity manifests itself, I am hoping to catch some of the ways in which the Chinese in Cuba identified themselves, as well as others' characterizations of them. The first influence is that of the Chinese coolies who arrived in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the ways in which they laid the foundation of their futures and descendants in the twentieth century. The second influence is that of Chinese businessmen and entrepreneurs who gave rise to the success of Chinese businesses in Cuba between the 1880s and 1959. The third is that of the changing place of Chinese identity through Cuban independence and political and cultural life around the turn of the 20th century through the mid-part of the century. The fourth is the deeply geo-politically involved influences on the Chinese in Cuba's identity since the Revolution in 1959. Through examining these, this paper will attempt to show the identity of the Chinese community in Cuba as not a solid, static issue, but as a narrative in flux, that changed with the times and situations those varying periods brought.

Asians in Latin America, and the Chinese Diaspora

The area this paper is concerned with is one in which the majority of the scholarship on the topic has only been completed within recent decades. Traditionally, the main focus of Asian-American scholarship has concentrated on North America—often contained in the nineteenth century Chinese labor migration to the West Coast during the Gold Rush and railroad work,[4]and in general migration from Asia to the United States. Consequently, the literature available on Asian Latin America has remained somewhat scarce, and advances covering the topic have come only within the last few decades. But regardless of the more recent popular concerns of the available literature, the fact remains that a significant number of the Asian American population grew extensively not only in North America, but also in the Caribbean and South America, throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century.

As in the case of the Chinese in Cuba, the primary reasons behind this migration to both Americas are due to developments in trade, the service industries, and the need for labor—traditionally, "Asians have come to the Americas as free and indentured laborers, miners and farmers, merchants and shopkeepers, craftsmen and artists, doctors and scientists, nurses and seamstresses, dissidents and refugees."[5] Discovery of gold in California and the North American West brought Chinese immigrants to the United States, whether as laborers or as businessmen, and in both North and South America, Chinese commerce and traders became common (in the American West, and particularly Mexico and Peru).[6] British Caribbean plantation owners began importing "indentured Indian and Chinese to the Caribbean, Guyana, and Peru" in the nineteenth century. With the passing of the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, Chinese migration to

[4] Wong, K. Scott. "Diasporas, Displacements, and the Construction of Transnational Identities." p. 49.
[5] W.W. Anderson and R.G. Lee, *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, p. 4.
[6] Ibid.

Mexico and Canada increased, particularly on the borders with the United States.[7] Japanese presence in Brazil is well-marked, particularly following the United States' 1924 exclusion of "Japanese farmers and laborers [who had earlier come] to the United States and Hawaii."[8] Cuba's own Chinese population is quite noticeable: not only were they a part of the largest migration group from Asia in Latin America (the Chinese),[9] but later, in 1922, the Chinese population in Cuba numbered about 90, 000 and was even "larger than that of the Chinese diasporic community of the continental United States."[10]

The development of these overseas migrant communities had the effect of forming transnational, trans-Pacific ties between the communities in diaspora and their home countries. For the Chinese in Cuba, the ties these migrants formed between their homes in China and their new place in Cuba would be influenced by the two major migration flows between the countries—the first wave of immigration coming in the form of the Chinese sugar plantation laborers (better known as coolies) of the nineteenth century, and the second wave of immigration of voluntary, free migrants, arising alongside World War I. The early coolies of the nineteenth century would be less equipped to maintain relationships with their home communities, relatives, businesses in China than would the later migrants of the second wave of immigration, who through their different place in society would be able to maintain international networks.[11] The nature of these ties resulted in an identity for the Chinese in Cuba that was aside from traditional senses, and was an identity balanced between the retention of familial and professional ties to the home country and their increasing integration into Cuban society. Their home, it could be said,

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[7] Lee, Erika. "Cracks in the Gate." p.148.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Lopez, Kathleen Maria. "Asian Diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Historical Overview." p.12.
[10] R.C. Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico*, p. 33.
[11] Schiller, Nina Glick. Transnationalism defined "as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement…familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political." "Towards a Transnationalization of Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered."

was on either side of the Pacific—whether with their legal families and continued lineage in Southeast China villages, or with their livelihood and increasing integration into Cuba.

Outline of the paper

This paper is divided into four themes contained within four chapters: the coolie context of the Chinese community in Cuba during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the increasing importance Chinese businesses took on in the Chinese sense of self between the decline of the coolie trade and the Cuban Revolution, the cultural and social role the Chinese immigrants fell into during Cuban independence and the formation of Republican and later Communist China, and fourth, the evolution of the post-1959 Chinese community in Cuba after Castro's revolution.

Chapter One addresses the original context surrounding the history of the Chinese in Cuba—that of the coolie trade from China to Cuba and Peru in the nineteenth century, and the ways in which it laid the foundation of the identity of the Chinese in Cuba. It examines the dynamics of this then-new agricultural labor population caught between the existing racial tensions of Cuba, and the economic value and place in Cuban culture and society into which the coolie population came to fit. Of note also are the developments of the ways in which the Chinese and Cuban reception of the coolies was formed. The manner in which these first Chinese migrants to Cuba arrived on the island provides both a basic background behind their existence in Cuba, and an understanding of their social standing in Cuban society—an understanding that would evolve, but would leave lasting implications. It is a legacy tied deeply into Cuba's own transition from slave-owning society to free wage-earning laborers, integration of racial differences, and a history that sets the foundation for the Chinese population in Cuba's existence—those coolies who never left the island formed the basis for a future Chinese Cuban

population, albeit one that would be haunted for a long time by what was perceived as its "inferior past."

With the decline of the coolie trade in Cuba, the increasing role of merchants, businessmen, and small wage earners became an integral part of the Chinese in Cuba. Chapter Two covers the ways in which Chinese activity in Cuban commerce evolved between its rise in the 1870s and its disappearance during the Cuban Revolution in 1959, and the ways in which this influenced Chinese Cuban identity. The rise of Chinese entrepreneurship and business in Cuba evolved out of the coolie trade's end, alongside the second migration flow to Cuba during the era of anti-Chinese sentiment and exclusion in the United States in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. During this period, the Chinese role in Cuba's local economy gradually became more integrated—between prominent Chinese businessmen and merchants working in international trade and making use of international networks to help support local Chinese endeavors, and the local Chinese entrepreneurship in small businesses and ventures, these new roles led to a further integration of the Chinese community into Cuba. Following the events of the second migration flow from China to Cuba, the Chinese community's involvement in commerce would become a defining element—contributing to prosperity and development of the Chinese Cuban community as a whole.

The role and extent of the integration of the Chinese community into the larger Cuban identity and culture is the subject addressed in Chapter Three. The place of the Chinese Cubans in Cuba's and China's histories of the early twentieth century is the main question examined—how did the Chinese Cuban population participate and become an embedded part of both? Cuba's political turmoil as it strove for independence from Spain and the subsequent reining in by U.S. interventions brought serious implications for Chinese immigration. During U.S.

intervention on the island, stricter immigration laws would be passed, in keeping with the States' own immigration laws. At the same time, the downfall of Imperial China and political change sweeping through China provided a different atmosphere, influencing the communities overseas. Caught between these two rapidly changing political scenes, the Chinese in Cuba found themselves in new situations.

Chapter Four looks at the Chinese in Cuba after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and the unique position into which they fall as their identity is called into question by the balance of international relations faced by Cuba. For the Chinese who remained in Castro's Cuba, they encountered the nationalization of property, and a Cuba radically changed not only by Castro's policies, but by the fleeing of Cubans (prominent Chinese Cuban business owners among them) to the U.S. and Canada. A differing element during this period is the fact that the population is predominantly composed of Chinese Cuban descendants of the native Chinese workers and businessmen, and the Chinese community has experienced almost no immigration influx throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Complicating matters are the dynamics between Cuba and its fellow Communist benefactors since 1959—Castro's original aligning with Soviet Russia as a close ally fell apart when the USSR collapsed in the early 1990s. Since then, Cuban relations have turned toward the People's Republic of China (PRC) in an attempt to find another Communist ally and benefactor. In face of these developments, the evolving nature of the identity of the Chinese in Cuba is quite evident—borne and influenced by all these factors, the formation of this community and its identity is still evolving.

Chapter 1:

Coolie Legacy and Origins of Chinese Migration to Cuba (1847-1874)

On June 3, 1847, the first group of Chinese immigrants to Cuba arrived in Havana aboard the *Oquendo*—numbering around 206, they had spent 131 days at sea. With their arrival came the beginning of large-scale Chinese migration to Cuba in the form of the ever-infamous coolie trade, a trade supplying contracted Chinese agricultural laborers to sugar plantations and guano mines of Latin America. During the length of Cuba's coolie trade, from 1847 to 1874, over 100,000 Chinese would come to the island, participating in the first of two large-scale migration movements of Chinese emigrants to Latin America. The movement and trade were so large that by the 1860s, the Chinese population in Latin America and the Caribbean was larger than that in North America—by the time the trade ended a decade later, about 1.5 million laborers in total would leave China.[12] All in all, the coolie trade would have lasting effects on the identity of the Chinese in Cuba through its placing them in a unique position in Cuban society—one neither as legally restrictive as slavery, nor as socially equal as free Cubans. They were caught in between: contracted laborers with basic legal rights working in severe conditions. This legacy of a nearly slave status and occupation of the lowest levels of Cuban society would long remain a lingering influence on the Chinese Cuban identity.

Context for the Coolie Trade—Early Chinese Migration to Cuba, Colonial Politics and the Slave Trade's Decline

Though the *Oquendo*'s human cargo was to be the beginning of significant Chinese migration to Cuba, it was not the first time Asian immigrants had come to Latin America. Chinese and Filipino merchants began arriving in Mexico as early as the 17th century through the

[12] Hu-Dehart, Evelyn, "Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century.

Spanish Manila galleon trade. Through this long-running global trade system—it lasted for 250 years—goods from China were bought in the Philippines by Spanish merchants, who then transported them to Mexico:

> From the port of Manila, Spanish merchants transported their cargoes of exotic eastern goods to the port of Acapulco, Mexico, on board large Spanish galleons. From Acapulco, these luxury items were then distributed throughout Mexico and the rest of Latin America…small numbers of Chinese immigrants entered colonial Mexico as personal servants of Spanish merchants from the Philippines.[13]

These arrangements of Chinese servants traveling and settling with their Spanish masters throughout the Spanish colonial empire came to exist in early nineteenth-century Cuba as well, where they were known as *chinos manilas*.[14] This strain of Chinese domestic servants from the Philippines continued throughout the duration of the coolie trade, though coolies themselves most often came from south China, from Guangdong.[15]

When the British Empire ended the African slave trade throughout its empire in 1807, the generations-long dependence of the empire on labor continued, forcing them to search for alternatives. The effect of the loss of slavery was heightened when Great Britain officially ended slavery in 1834, and applied pressure on other European empires to enact similar measures. Thus, experimentation with the coolie trade began with the British bringing 200 Chinese laborers to Trinidad in 1806, due to a popular perception of Chinese as more civilized than African slaves, who would produce a double benefit in the society into which they were to be put. Potentially the Chinese could serve as a "middle class'…as a barrier between [the British] and the slaves."[16]In addition, the five Chinese port cities won by the British through the Opium War treaty gave them an imperial foothold in China from which to recruit and exploit Chinese labor and goods.

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[13] Chao Romero, Robert. *The Chinese in Mexico 1882-1940*. p.12.
[14] Lopez, Kathleen Maria. "Migrants Between Empires and Nations: the Chinese in Cuba 1874-1959," Ph.D. diss.(University of Michigan, 2005), p.29.
[15] Look La, Walton. "The People from Guangdong." pp. 1-10.
[16] Higman, B.W. "The Chinese in Trinidad, 1806-1838." Essays on the Chinese Diaspora in the Caribbean.

Though the first exportation of Chinese to Trinidad ultimately failed, attempts to tailor the potential value of Asian indentured labor—the British exported both Indian and Chinese laborers—to the needs of the West Indies plantations continued throughout the next few decades. Though they were not the sole proponents of the coolie trade, due to the prevalence of use of Asian labor "among Americans, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch," the British were for many years the leading power and profiteer in the trade. [17]

Spain's own empire, meanwhile, was working to prolong the entire abolition of slavery within its boundaries, in order to protect the business interests of their elite planters in Latin America and the Caribbean. They were successful: Spanish slave trade did not officially end until 1886. But with the occurrences of the bloody slave uprising in Haiti that collapsed that colony's sugar production, and the decline of the slave trade throughout the British West Indies, the timing was perfect for Cuba to develop a powerful sugar industry as its rivals faltered. Develop it they did, even in the face of the present and wearing fear of Cuba's own slave revolt. They exploded onto the world sugar economy as its indisputable leader between the 1840s and 1870s, leading to a Cuban achievement so substantially grown that:

> By the 1840s Cuba [was]…accounting for 21 percent of world production—outdistancing Jamaica, Brazil, and Puerto Rico. From the 1840s to the 1870s Cuba leapt forward [even more] precisely during the period when Chinese coolies were introduced and installed on Cuban sugar plantations. In1830 Cuba produced 105,000 tons of sugar. Forty years later, Cuba produced almost seven times more sugar (703,000)…Cuban sugar accounted for 41 percent of world output.[18]

The coinciding of the rise of Cuba's coolie population with the rise of Cuban sugar then, is no particular surprise. With slavery in an obvious demise, the very fuel by which Cuba's sugar empire was able to exist, Spain and Cuba's problem was very clear: new labor for the sugar plantations had to be found. With a huge amount of wealth and power on their hands from the

[17] Yun, Lisa. *The coolie speaks: Chinese indentured laborers and African slaves in Cuba*. p.8.
[18] Ibid. pp.12-13.

sugar industry's take-off, Cuban creole planters knew that to retain their position and even to simply survive, a replacement for slavery was imperative. The African slave trade was no longer viable on the world stage, nor profitable for them.

In 1847 Cuba, the coolie trade's success did not come with that first ship of Chinese workers. Of the cargo of the *Oquendo*, "twenty-eight percent of the coolies died from the effects of the voyage, [and] from poor and inadequate food."[19] The possibility of continued importation of Chinese coolies disappeared when, due to an unenthusiastic first reception of the trade, Cuba discontinued involvement after the terms of the first 1847 contract were completed. It would take the failure of other labor experiments—the exploitation of immigrant labor from Mayan Indians, Mexico, Gallegos, Europe—for Cuba to officially resume the coolie trade, which it did in 1853, in light of their desperate and rising need for labor. When it did take up the coolie trade again, Cuba did so with all enthusiasm and haste for the reasons given above. The operating needs behind this empire called for as much labor as could be found, and as cheaply as possible. Coolies were cheaper than slaves because they could be sold for around 500 pesos, though often due to physical health, they were only worth 200. Denise Helly notes that "An Asian immigrant represented the outlay of about 884 pesos…a slave whose life expectancy was estimated at ten years was worth from 700 to 1,000 pesos from 1840 to 1850."[20]

Working Conditions, the Coolie Experience, and the End of the Coolie Trade

Though they were a significant element to the production of sugar, Chinese coolies to Cuba did not migrate equally to every part of the island. When it came to smaller plantations, Chinese were sometimes 50 percent of the workforce, while they were a scarcity to the larger plantations. In general, they tended to compose "a minority in a larger population of African

[19] Rodriguez, Eugenio Chang. "Chinese Labor Migration into Latin America in the 19th Century," p. 379.
[20] Helly, Denise. "Introduction to the Cuba Commission Report."p.10.

slaves and were concentrated in a larger population of African slaves and were concentrated in the sugar plantations of Matanzas, the central province of Cuba, and secondly in Las Villas."[21] When it came to who the coolies were themselves, it was clear that they came from distinct areas of China: in the original Commission Report performed by Qing government emissaries sent to investigate the mistreatment of Chinese workers in Cuba, the laborers are said to have come from the five port cities of Canton places which provided quick access to European influence and Cuban coolie recruiters due to the cities' status as European (British) port cities won through post-Opium War treaties.[22] Ninety-six percent of the coolies came from this Guangdong province, and four percent came from the neighboring Fukien province.[23] In this region of China, the Guangdong, Canton province, the lack of land and wealth available for lesser families resulted in a large portion of the peasant population without hope of much better existences if they remained in China. The economically disadvantaged Chinese peasantry of South China proved a perfect target for coolie "recruiters."

On paper, the coolie trade was a well-thought out, free wage earning buffer and alternative to the slave trade. It referred

> Specifically to Chinese and East Indians bound under contract…five years under the British system, eight in Cuba and Peru. The contract was a legal document between a free persona and an employer…The coolie was to be paid during the period of contract, usually a combination of wages and in kind (food, clothing, lodging and medical attention).[24]

Following the end of their five to eight years of service, they were to be released free. In practice, though, the conditions were far worse. In 1874, the conditions of the coolie trade to Cuba were so bad—the name "*la trata amarilla*" resulted from the trade's close resemblance of the African

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[21] Yun, Lisa. *The Coolie Speaks*. p.32.
[22] *Cuba Commission Report* (CCR), p.36.
[23] Look Lai, Walton. "The People of Guangdong." p.1-2.
[24] Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. "Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labor or Neoslavery?" p.39.

slave trade—that the Qing dynasty governing China commissioned a report to be made, and facts to be gathered in order to ascertain the truth about the Chinese working in Cuba. The immediate effect of this report was the cessation of the Chinese coolie trade to Cuba.

For those Chinese peasants who did agree to contracts taking them to Cuba as agricultural laborers, the illusion of perceived fairness of the legal agreements was soon stripped away, as they were shipped off to Cuba by uncomfortable means. Thousands of those sent to Cuba would die enroute long before reaching Cuban shores—as many as 25 to 30 percent of coolies transported per ship would die in the holds below the decks, lending the ships the names floating coffins.[25] And even before these often fatal voyages, they were often tricked, forced, and inhumanely treated before they were loaded onto ships to Latin America. In the numerous testimonies drawn by the Cuba Commission Report, the recruiting tactics were often nothing more than outright kidnapping and "decoying," deceiving Chinese men as to the nature of the coolie business. One coolie worker and 89 of his fellows stated that:

> We were induced to proceed to Macao by offers of employment abroad at high wages, and through being told that the eight foreign years specified in the contracts were equivalent to only four Chinese, and that at the termination of the latter period we would be free. we observed also on the signboards of the foreign buildings the words 'agencies for the engagement of labourers,' and believed that they truthfully described the nature of the establishments, little expecting that having once entered…exit would be denied us; and when on arrival at Havana…it became evident we were not to be engaged as labourers, but to be sold as slaves.[26]

While awaiting shipment to Cuba, the recruits were housed in 'barracoons,' and when the time came for them to leave, the ships carrying them were often the same that had been used to transport African slaves. They were loaded on in the same inhuman ways, and were then forced to cross a distance to Cuba even further than that of the Middle Passage of the slave trade. Once they arrived in Havana, the coolies were housed in locked buildings where they were awaited

[25] Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. "Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labor or Neoslavery?" p.45.
[26] CCR Section 1; p.37.

their fate, which as Cheng A-mou (whose statement appears above) says, was to "be sold as slaves" at auction. There another coolie, Lin A-pang, testified that they were examined for physical health and strength just as livestock on auction for purchase. [27]

Once on the plantations, treatment of the coolies mirrored that of the slaves. Again and again, the Imperial Commission Report documents hundreds of testimonies from coolies: Liang A-hsiu and 23 others noted in their deposition that not only were they without "habitation" on the plantation, but that:

> I and 23 others, driven by hunger and by a consequent weakness which disabled us for labour, begged our employers son to increase the allowance of food, and for so doing we were all chained and beaten….we were told to provide [habitation] ourselves. Our monthly wages were but $3, and as even a grass hut for two would cost $10, it was not in our power to obey. We explained this to our employer's son, who became very wrathful, struck us indiscriminately, and together with certain negroes, seizing knives killed one of our number, a native of Hiangshan, and wounded the remainder.[28]

Conditions were grim. Rights activist and abolitionist Julia Ward Howe wrote of an 1860 trip to Cuba, saying that the coolie population was so given over to suicide as a remedy for their situation that even the masters were forced to recognize the dire conditions, and to lighten the load of the workers. Even so, she said, the mistreatment continued on one level or another, for men "will treat a hired horse worse than a horse of their own."[29]

Of course, also mirroring the same treatment given to slaves, there were at times masters who treated their laborers well, feeding and housing them as best as could be done. Another coolie, Chang A-wen, working for a Frenchman's farm said that he had been well used, his wages paid without fail, and he had been well fed. But such stories were not the norm. Coolies were looked upon as an extension of the slave trade, and the primary well-being the majority of

[27] CCR, p. 48.
[28] CCR, p.56-57.
[29] Ward Howe, Julia. *A Trip to Cuba*, pp. 219-220.

Creole planters cared for was that of the Cuban sugar empire. The planter elites were determined to curry as much profit as possible from the entire empire—whether that be in the sale of sugar, or the production, and thus the cost of the agricultural labor used. They wanted to control the end of slavery "on their own terms," and nothing less.[30] Thus, though often recruited through seemingly innocent and encouraging manners, the true lives of the coolies were not much more than those of African slaves, and in many cases shared exact treatments.

Anti-Emigrant and Merchant Policy in Qing China

Not that the coolies and their mistreatments found an abundance of sympathy from the Chinese government. It was a centuries-old tradition for the Qing government, and for general Chinese culture, to view emigration and foreign trade negatively. The moral values so entrenched in Chinese culture through Confucian teachings found their antithesis in those social mores encouraged by the merchant trade. As for emigration, it performed the offensive act of erasing the possibility of fulfilling the essential "filial duties toward parents and ancestors."[31] In many cases, the Qing issued decrees deeply anti-merchant decrees: In 1656 and 1661, decrees ordering death on any anyone found to be working in private overseas trade were put in place. Descriptions and sentiment concerning emigrants and overseas Chinese throughout the rest of the seventeenth century cast them in an unfavorable light. This treatment continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with views of the overseas Chinese as "materialistic deserters" who had neglected their familial and country duties, and thus were no longer worthy of government protection[32]. Thus, when the Qing government sent the mission to investigate the reports of the Chinese coolies' abusive treatment, it marked a turning in Qing policy toward Chinese emigrants. This turn came only after international pressure, but its effects were

[30] Helly, Denise. "Introduction to the Cuba Commission Report." p. 21.
[31] Lopez, Kathleen. *Migrants between Empires and Nations*. p.27.
[32] Ibid. p.28.

immediate and impactful in the case of the Chinese in Cuba, marking a large turning point in the Chinese Cubans' story in respect both to their Cuban mistreatment and the Qing ignorance of their plight.

The Coolie Trade's Lasting Legacy for the Place of the Chinese in Cuba

Though the Cuba Commission Report of 1874 officially ended *la trata amarilla*, those coolies whose contracts had not yet ended by the time that verdict was given were still obliged to complete the contracted service time. Thus, the decades-long trade still existed well into the 1870s. In addition, unofficial incentives were found and made for Chinese laborers to re-contract and stay to work in Cuba, since the demand for labor was still high. Forced recontracting of Chinese coolies had gained traction in the early 1860s, with the *Reglamento* of 1860 (laws regulating coolie trade) forcing coolies who had completed their first contract after 1861 to either recontract or return home, if they so wished and possessed the funds. Through this recontracting, Cubans were able to their workforce, knowing full well that few of the coolies' wages had been sufficient enough for them to earn passage to China. Between 1880 and 1885, when the coolies who had contracted for the first time in the early 1870s would have completed their contracts, only 1,887 made their way back to China. During the corresponding period in the 1870s, from 1870 through1874, almost 100,000 had left China in the coolie trade.[33]

In Cuba, starting in 1870, it may be that many of those who did not return were instead working in the formation of the *cuadrillas*, work gangs formed of former coolies led by a free Chinese *enganchador* (labor contractor) who would hire themselves out to the plantations in set periods of time or for particular projects. Through such projects as the *cuadrillas*, the former coolies won for themselves more of a measure of autonomy and independence, while still realistically encountering the realities of nineteenth century Cuba.

[33] Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. "Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labor or Neoslavery?"p. 46.

Beyond the labor benefits for the plantations in Chinese coolies' recontracting there lay another reason for wanting coolies immediately recontracted. Asians occupied a strange place in Cuban society—classification said they were white but in reality they were treated *de color*—the regulations of 1860 were precipitated by the fact that a large wave of Asian coolie population was about to complete service. A potentially large population of free Asians who had completed their labor contracts, and that was still remaining in Cuba seemed to be a threat to Spanish Cuban culture. And the Creoles of Cuba already were faced with the difficulties of controlling the slave population.[34] In many ways, the recontracting of the coolies was another result of nineteenth century Cuba's rampant racism.

Several factors complicated matters. There were about to be vast numbers of free Chinese laborers working and intermarrying with slaves throughout Cuba, a land already terrified of losing its slave force.[35] Free former laborers, whose conditions had never been much different from slaves' were providing "visible evidence of the possibility of freedom, as well as contributing funds for their partners' and children's freedom." But dislike was tempered by legal ambiguities.[36] The Chinese legal situation defined them as free individuals, who would be given the choice of whether to continue their work once the first contract's terms had been completed and were ended. Corporal punishment was to never be used on coolies, after a regulation proclaimed in 1854 that specifically prohibited it, and thus banned the "shackles, floggings, stocks [as] commonly meted out to slaves."[37] In addition, coolies were given the surprising rights of contracting their own marriage, parenting their offspring, and could not be taken forcibly

[34] Cuba's population was recorded in 1841 as less than half white, and the remainder was either African slave or mestizo—thus making the fears of slave revolt quite real.
[35] The Saint Domingue slave uprising on Hispaniola, during which black slaves revolted against plantation owners and drove out the white elites and French soldiers in a series of bloody confrontations was a prime example of their fears.
[36] Scott, Rebecca J. "Emancipation in Cuba," p.106-107.
[37]Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. "Race Construction and Race Relations: Chinese and Blacks in Nineteenth Century Cuba." p.107.

away from their families. Legally, coolies held also the right to private property and the ability to bring charges against a master if treatment of the coolies was inhumane. In practice, none of this happened.

Placed in this odd legal position, the Chinese tended to inhabit an unusual social stratum as well. The coolies worked right alongside slaves on the sugar plantations, regardless of their higher theoretical legal position to them. It produced a unique dynamic and an ambivalent attitude about where the Chinese fit into Cuban society—essentially, they belonged nowhere. They were often officially "white;" in official Spanish censuses of the time they were generally categorized as such, rather than as black. In other censuses, they were simply recorded as *asiatico* (whether first-term contract Asians, or recontractors). While not black, they still held lower occupational status than whites and were thus considered an inferior class. Chinese were often recorded in parish records inside the baptismal registry for blacks. But essentially, they retained an awareness of their actual legal position rights that was unavailable to slaves. Evelyn Hu-Dehart says that "[they] were keenly aware that they were free men under contract, very distinct from the slaves."[38] Regardless, neither legally black, nor socially white, they still occupied an in-between space in Cuban society.

Conclusions

Interaction between the Chinese and slaves was fraught with complication. The fundamental difference between coolie status and slave—that the latter was chattel for life, while the former would eventually regain his independence, and were not slaves—was one that neither group could forget.[39] The differences became more obvious as Chinese began to be trained in the semiskilled work in sugar processing, while slaves were relegated to the manual, unskilled labor

[38] Hu-Dehart, Evelyn. "Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labor or Neoslavery?" p.50.
[39] Ibid.

in the fields. The Cuba in which these racial and legal categories played themselves out was a fascinating place of evolving relationships between the social strata of Cuba. But more essentially, the Chinese who remained in Cuba would continue to find themselves placed within an odd limbo in Cuban society throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Great Britain's powerful insistence on the freedom of slaves and the elimination of like trades juxtaposed with the deeply embedded slave culture of Cuba inevitably forced the strangeness of the coolie position. What remained to be seen was how the Chinese in Cuba would evolve beyond these issues and tragic legacy as Cuba herself evolved from the height of laborer exploitation for the sake of her sugar empire.

Chapter 2:

The Rising Role of Chinese Businesses in Cuban Commerce (1874-1959)

Not all Chinese chose the traditional recontract route after their initial indenture period—some went on to small businesses, setting up restaurants, retail outlets, and in other cases, numerous fruit and vegetable stands around villages and cities. Others chose to join the new *cuadrillas*, the Chinese work gangs willing to contract themselves out to planters and farmers for particular periods of time or projects. In the 1880s, international politics resulted in the Chinese in Cuba being joined by international merchants and businessmen emigrating from the United States to escape the growing anti-Chinese sentiment. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese immigration to the U.S., would continue this trend of Californian Chinese arriving in Cuba. Merchants from mainland China arrived as well, though not in the numbers of the Californian Chinese businessmen. Both provided further ties to China previously unavailable to the former coolies. After their arrival, the second large-scale migration movement from China to Latin America would bring thousands of new labor immigrants to Cuba, whose numbers and work would help bring a new vitality to the Chinese community. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, these businesses provided a framework from which a more cohesive Chinese identity and community in Cuba was formed.

The Post-indenture Status of Chinese in Cuba

Kathleen Lopez writes that the option of choice for those staying in Cuba after their indenture period ended was that of settling down into the local communities. In light of the contrast between their original intent—returning to China after fulfilling their terms of service with something to contribute to the family name—and the reality of earning only a few pesos per

month, few were able to go back home. In their post-coolie life, not only did they often choose to work in *cuadrillas*, or enter small business ventures, but they also chose to intermarry with the local population, have children, and build new lives in Cuba. Their transition from their former laborer status to the business and entrepreneur status for which they would later be known was far from a simple matter, involving the large scale cooperation of the Chinese population, and the resources and networks of the newly arriving migrants. Their communities formed around shops, as in the case of Havana's *barrio*. As they completed coolie work and moved on to other forms of employment, the Chinese laborers tended to move eastward, while others moved from the large plantations to smaller and more isolated towns, initially just outside sugar plantations. They found their rights upheld, and their requests seriously considered, and through new legal developments, were able to request official recognition of legal cases, whether civil or criminal. Possession of a *cedula*, a card indicating identity and legal status, ensured that as long as an individual had one in his keeping, he could engage in official transactions, such as buying property, or bringing cases to court.[40]

Still, their non-white heritage was marked in official records, usually as *asiatico* or *chino*. Also marked was the presence or absence of a second name, since the absence of such indicated a coolie labor past, and lack of legitimacy—coolies would take only one name, from their master, while socially respectable and legitimate Cubans took both their parents' names. Regardless of difficulties, Chinese entrepreneurs were able to set up groceries, laundries, restaurants and vending stands between 1874 and the next decade, before the wave of large scale free migration began. Even during this poverty-stricken stage of the majority of the Chinese in Cuba, it is notable too that remittances, communications, and the occasional voyage home were common. The transnational connections and community roots of the Chinese Cubans were beginning.

[40] Lopez, Kathleen. *Migrants*. p.125.

The Second Migration Flow: The California Chinese and the Free Migrants

The migrants arriving in Cuba between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s formed two distinct groups: the first was a smaller migration of merchants and craftsmen, the second a part of the second large migration movement of free Chinese men immigrating to the Americas. Their migration came at a time coinciding with Chinese exclusion in the United States and Latin America, and lasting until the Great Depression, and World War II. With their arrival came a renewed force and development of Chinese business and community in Cuba.

The California Chinese—who arrived between 1860 and 1890—were about 5,000 Cantonese immigrants,[41] mostly merchants and craftsmen from California arriving "in response to economic opportunities, and Chinese businesses, associations, and theaters multiplied in the provinces of Cuba. They were either elite merchants of either Mexico or the post-gold rush American West, in possession of notable wealth and status.[42] Often also they were former American railroad workers attempting to find a more receptive environment. For almost all of them, reasons behind remigration were due to their desperately trying to escape racism in the Mexico and the United States, following the voter referendum approval of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1880, and the wave of white nationalism and racism.

Mauro and Eng note that these *chinos californianos* were indispensable in the introduction of "modern food stores…business practices…that served as banks in Havana and other cities." The elites of the group were also connected to Chinese companies throughout the US and Mexico, and were often quite wealthy. These upper-class migrants' access to capital was so much above that of the former indentured coolies that in one case, two merchants of this elite

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[41] Look Lai, Walton. Essays on the Chinese Diaspora in the Caribbean.p.112.
[42] Lopez, Kathleen Maria. *Migrants between Empires and Nations*. p. 113.

group actually bought “sugar mills in Sagua la Grande and Santo Domingo in Las Villas.”[43] They were able to open businesses in Cuba—investments into the local economy that eventually poured visible results and a reinvigorated life for the Chinese barrios and cultural associations across the islands. It was a far cry from the small agriculture and entrepreneur business ventures of the poor, former coolies could hardly compete.

Following the final Cuban war for independence and the U.S. occupations of Cuba during which Chinese immigration to Cuba was restricted, the second major period of Chinese to Cuba movement began during World War I. Due to need for agricultural labor arising from Cuba’s sugar and molasses boom during the first World War, once again thousands of free Chinese men came to Cuba for work in the sugar industry, and would continue to serve in key roles until the infamous global economic downturn of 1929. Because of the desperate need for labor in the sugar industry, a law was passed in 1917, allowing for the use of imported laborers, of whom many were Chinese. The original intent was that after two years, the permit would expire, and that there would be less of a need for international laborers. But the need for workers would continue, and thus the influx of immigrants looking for work would continue until it was ended by the Great Depression.

Many of these migrants, unlike their indentured predecessors of 1847-1874, “quickly moved into other occupations.” Earlier migrants helped these free migrants’ situations by “providing housing and employment.”[44] In many ways, the Chinese immigrants of the early twentieth century held numerous similarities to their predecessors: the majority came from the Guangdong Province, near the Pearl River Delta, and their eventual goal was to return home to

[43]Triana, Mauro Garcia and Pedro Eng Herrera. *The Chinese in Cuba, 1847-now*. p.56.
[44] Lopez, Kathleen. “The Chinese in Cuban History.” p.114.

China, bringing with them a small fortune.[45] In keeping with this goal was the fact that the number of males emigrating far outweighed the number of women who left China for Cuba—in hopes of maintaining the ancestral home and family lineage, wives and children remained in China. But unlike the Chinese immigrants of 1847-1874, the newer immigrants were far better equipped to maintain ties back to China, whether through remittances, investments, or simply returning. But joining with the first generation of the Chinese emigrant community in Cuba and the wealthy post-gold rush elite, this wave of Chinese newcomers to the island contributed to the forming Chinese communities as well—it was at this time that the barrio chinos in Cuba began to reach their height. In the 1920s, for instance, Havana's *barrio chino* reached its height of fame and commercial interest, and its reputation as perhaps the most famous Chinatown in the Americas, with the exception of San Francisco's. Its cultural achievements and ties to Chinese emigrant communities all throughout the Americas, as well as to China, made it a center of the Chinese Cuban community.

Survey of Chinese Cuban Businesses between Post Indenture Period and 1959

The businesses formed by these various groups during the late nineteenth and particularly the early twentieth century, formed a diverse body of entrepreneurship and commercial activity. From the formerly indentured Chinese vendors of fruit, fish, vegetables, garments, and trinkets, to the more profitable shopkeepers and restaurant, grocery, and laundry owners, and then also to the merchant endeavors and international trade networks of the wealthier Chinese, the Chinese Cuban community was far from homogenous. On one end were poor vendors, and on the other end of the spectrum were bankers and Chinese millionaires. The Chinese labor migrants during World War I depended on the generosity of former coolie relatives, and lived modestly. In

[45] Ibid.

contrast, one millionaire in the early twentieth century simply decided to commission a custom house for himself that still stands in Cuba:

> There was one millionaire who built a house by the Almendares River that is now the Pavo Real Restaurant. It's an exact replica of a house in Hong Kong, on the banks of the Pearl River, which belonged to the man's father. So he sent for architects, and we have that house.[46]

Census records from Cuba in 1899 indicate the sort of areas in Cuban society and life that the Chinese inhabited. Of the professions listed for the Chinese, there were sixty-five different occupations of the turn-of-the-century Chinese in Cuba. These were as diverse as from confectioners and milkmen to engineers and barbers. The most significant number of the Chinese population was to be found either in the "day laborer" category, of which there were 8, 033, or among the 2,754 servants, or the 1,923 merchants.[47] Of the only nineteen Chinese women recorded in the census, their categorizations were the following: laundress, dressmaker, peddler, servant, cigar-makers, and laborers. The poorest classes' work as fresh fruits and vegetable vendors and truck gardeners had a particularly interesting impact since until their success, finding fresh produce in Cuba was nearly impossible. The Chinese vegetable gardens that sprang up across Cuba's towns became a practical choice of business to go into, as long as land was "low-lying, sufficiently wet, and amenable to canalized or manual irrigation…close to rivers, streams, or canals near city or village centers or in the suburbs."[48]

By the 1920s, Havana's *barrio chino* was just one of several Chinese communities throughout Cuba, although Havana's *barrio*, with its numerous businesses and cultural institutions (newspapers and schools and hospital), was the largest and one of the best known

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[46]Choy, Armando, Gustavo Chui, Moises Sio Wong, Alice Mary Waters. *Our history is still being written*. p.69.
[47] Triana, Mauro Garcia and Pedro Eng Herrera. *The Chinese in Cuba, 1847-now.* p.57.
[48] Ibid. p.61.

Chinatowns in the Americas. These communities, while deeply tied to their homes in China, had earlier begun to root themselves in Cuba's realities too—the needs of the Chinese immigrant community. A hospital established in 1924, the Jiujiang Overseas Chinese Merchants Hospital, served as the Chinese hospital in Havana, mainly serving the Chinese population of the *barrio chino*. While still clearly neighborhoods dedicated to Chinese culture and tradition, the ways in which they interacted with Cuban reality reflected an increasing tie between the Chinese immigrants and the island in which they found themselves.

Unsurprisingly, due to the events of the Great Depression, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Chinese businesses numbered about 4,000; dwindled into half the total number that had existed at the turn of the century. During this time, numerous Chinese returned to China or moved out of Cuba. The majority of businesses were groceries (in 1932, there were 1,802 out of almost 4,000), as well as laundries—always popular and well-known for cheap food, good product, and prices lower than their Cuban competitors. The first stage of the transition often took the form of growing fruits and vegetables for sale in towns or becoming a contractor of Chinese workers. Once only selling fresh fruit and other vendors' mainstays, the former indentured laborers and their children managed to move on to these sorts of business endeavors, since by then, they had a secure income.

A 1932 study by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce shows the Chinese population is divided into three categories: businessmen, workers, and miscellaneous, of which the "businessmen" category was the largest, with 8, 611 registered Chinese businessmen. Their businesses' success continued on into the 1940s, thriving so well as to necessitate the founding of business associations, such as the Association of Chinese Restaurants and Inns of Cuba in 1945, among others. The endurance of these businesses even in the face of the Chinese

population's dwindling numbers—ever more decreased by widespread xenophobia during the Great Depression and the deaths of the elderly generation of the community—proved extraordinary resilience on the part of the Chinese in Cuba. Their businesses were the ways from which they helped form their own communities and cultural institutions, but beyond practical use, they were the very foundation of the lives the Chinese were building.

Conclusions

"The scholarly literature on international migration tends to demarcate labor immigrants from entrepreneurial immigrants," Lopez writes.[49] For the Chinese in Cuba's transition from coolie to entrepreneur, though, this was not the case. Finding work as self-employed vendors and restaurant owners and small business owners was both a feasible and practical option for them as they sought to improve their stations in life. And in addition to proving practical endeavors, the earnings and connections and social respect these business ventures gave their owners proved building blocks from which a more entrenched and supported infrastructure could be created for the Chinese in Cuba. And as Chinese migration to Cuba continued, the Chinese communities in Cuba grew more extensively in numbers and in resources for community-building and in the ability to build stronger ties both in Cuba and in China through remittances and through local institutions, such as banks and hospitals. Privately-owned businesses gave the Chinese community an enhanced ability to construct their own neighborhoods and support systems throughout Cuba, but they also contributed a sense of a grounded life in Cuba.

[49] Lopez, *Migrants Between Empires and Nations*. p.113.

Chapter 3:

Chinese Immigrants' Role in Twentieth-Century Cuba from Independence Until the Cuban Revolution

The place of the Chinese in Cuban culture and life of twentieth-century Cuba until the Cuban Revolution is irrevocably tied to the Chinese history of the late nineteenth through early twentieth century, as well as developments in the Americas. In strangely parallel ways, this era surrounding the early to mid-twentieth century was one of great turmoil for both China and Cuba. In Cuba the three wars of independence fought between the 1860s and the 1890s finally resulted in Cuban independence from Spanish imperialism. China during this time was experiencing the downfall of the 250-year old Manchu Qing dynasty, and the rise of the Chinese Republic under Sun Yat-sen, a native of the overseas Chinese' home region, Guangdong. The Chinese immigrants played an unavoidable role in Cuban independence and culture, and were at the same time caught between associations with home and the social reactions to the Great Depression and anti-Chinese movements throughout the Americas. Through encountering the social challenges brought by these three events, inherent contradictions about their place in Cuban society emerged, whether depicting them as members of Cuba, or as foreigners from China. Still, through all of these factors, the Chinese managed to demonstrate that they were active participants in Cuba and China, and were an embedded part of both.

Chinese Cubans and Cuba's Wars of Independence

The Chinese population's role during Cuba's Wars of Independence from Spain during the latter decades of the nineteenth century has become a well-known and acknowledged part of Cuban history. During the first two wars in particular, the Chinese themselves took up arms as freedom fighters, or mambises, fighting as part of the army—partially influenced by the atrocity

of coolie conditions, their contributions are deeply respected. During the third war, Chinese contribution to the Cuban independence cause was "especially noted for their contributions in bringing food, medicine, clothing, and shoes from the towns back to the camps and for offering refuge to insurgents."[50] Famed Afro-Chinese Cuban author Antonio Chuffat speaks of a Chinese innkeeper who hosted the general headquarters of the Liberation Army in his inn. Today their memory possesses such a place in Cuban nationalism that in Havana a statue was erected in the 1950s that still stands, memorializing their role. The engraving is a quote from Cuban patriot Gonzalo de Quesada: "No hubo un chino cubano desertor; no hubo un chino cubano traidor."[51] In return for their service in the army, Chinese coolies were released from their contracts, and African slaves who had participated were also freed. Throughout the next two wars, Chinese participation as freedom fighters against the Spaniards and as refuge-givers and food and goods suppliers of the mambises would cement their legendary position in Cuba's independence narrative.

Cuba's wars—the Ten Years' War spanning 1868-1878, the Small War from 1879-80, and the War of Independence from 1895-1898—are often thought to demonstrate the Cuban dedication to a certain "raceless-ness" or the independence fight's status as a "certain social leveling ground." Chinese participation as mambises in the Cuban Liberation Army, such as those listed above, lend credence to this view of Cuban identity's formation. "People of color could join," Louis Perez Jr. writes. "And indeed, their participation as equals was actively solicited… 'Marti knew,' writes Gerald Poyo, 'that Cubans of color would have to be accepted

[50] Lopez, Kathleen. *Migrants Between Empires and Nations*. p. 170.
[51] Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. "Indispensable Enemy or Convenient Scapegoat? A Critical Examination of Sinophobia in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1870s to 1930s." p.74. Translation reads: "There has never been a Chinese Cuban deserter, nor a Chinese Cuban traitor."

as equal partners in the nationalist movement before they would embrace it unconditionally.'"[52] This played a practical role as well: the general population of Cuba in the Ten Years' War was 1.5 million inhabitants, of whom 500,000 were slaves, in a land where the white Creole landowners had feared slave uprisings and racial conflict for generations. The only way to avoid widespread "postcolonial race conflict…was to devise a way to accommodate people of color into nation," and thus create a national narrative that portrayed Cuba as striving to give equality to every part of its population.[53] It was into this narrative that the Chinese at the turn of the century appeared to fit well.

Anti-Chinese Movements through U.S. Exclusion and Imperialism and the Great Depression

For the Chinese living in post-independence Cuba, the idea of a Cuban national equality between its ethnically-varied inhabitants was not actually within reach. Following Spain's defeat in 1898, those in power in Cuba were not only the aristocratic Creole planters, but also the United States. In response to the commercial interests of several of its companies and estate owners in Cuba, the U.S. possessed a vested interest in political stability in the new republic. Such stability, it was believed, could be best ensured through U.S. intervention. With its intervention came also its anti-Chinese policy: during United States occupation of Cuba from 1899-1902, and from 1906-1909, restrictions on Chinese immigration to the island were passed.

In 1882 the United States passed its Chinese Exclusion Act, setting a precedent in immigration policy for the States, and proved a prescient mirror of treatment to come for the Chinese in the Americas. Reacting to the Chinese success in the gold rush, and to the Chinese dominance of the working force in several industries, such as agriculture, shrimp-fishing,

[52] Perez Jr., Louis A. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*. p. 91.
[53]Ibid. p.90.

canneries, and shoe and boot factories, the American fear was that the Chinese were taking over possible job opportunities, as well as contributing to the wage decline.[54] Originally meant to ban Chinese migration to the United States for ten years, it would remain in place until its repeal by the Magnuson Act in 1943, legitimizing discrimination against the American Chinese population. "It shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come," it proclaimed, "or…to remain within the United States."[55] Not only was their immigration entirely banned, but ship captains could be fined and imprisoned if found transporting them, ships carrying Chinese could not allow them to disembark on American soil, and for those Chinese who had quite recently immigrated to the U.S., they would be deported. It was legislation paving the way for the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, in which an immigration cap was set, no matter the home country of the emigrant was from, and barred all migration from East Asia (primarily targeted toward Chinese and Japanese). Such now were the official sentiments toward the Chinese, and thus they would remain during the early years of the Cuban Republic.

Chinese migrants to Cuba were not entirely deterred by these policies, and they continued coming to the island, drawn by the abundance of commercial opportunity there. Falsified documents listing them as "students and merchants" were provided by such organizations as the CCBA (Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association), or the Chinese Six Companies, and through the Chinese consulate in Havana. Their endeavors were largely successful: Lopez reports that there are no "official entries of Chinese between 1908 and 1917, seven in 1918, and 1,100 in 1919."[56] Duvon Clough Corbitt, who lived in Cuba during from 1927 through 1931, recorded that "The Chinese Consulate in Havana recorded 6,258 Chinese immigrants between 1903 and 1916, along with data such as name, date of entry, name of ship, and category of

[54] Sowell, Thomas. *Migrations and Cultures*. pp.221-224.
[55] U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882.
[56] Lopez, Kathleen. *Migrants Between Empires and Nations*. p.190.

immigrant."[57] The convenience and ease with which Chinese were smuggled quietly into Cuba was a testament to the illegal immigration mechanism perfected by Chinese reaction to the Exclusion Act. Since the passing of the act in 1882, both Cuba and Mexico served as avenues from which to gain entrance into the United States, and associations such as the Chinese Six Companies had helped facilitate this movement. And in fact, in the late nineteenth century, Havana had served as the geographic headquarters for the Chinese Six Companies, since one of the best-connected CCBA officials lived there.[58] In fact, the CCBA rapidly developed such a known skill for this work that it established a global smuggling network spreading throughout China, Cuba and Mexico, and multiple U.S. cities, with multiple methods of smuggling. Its work providing illicit passage to Cuba would last until 1917, when the express encouragement of international labor migration to the island (including Chinese) would be officially given in hopes of aiding the sugar and molasses industry's World War I boom.

With the Great Depression's start in 1929, Cuba's immigration goodwill since 1917 would end, and with it, the immigration heyday of the Chinese in Cuba. During this period, and even just before, the Chinese began to be the target of discrimination. Spanish merchants disliked the competition given them by Chinese *bodega* owners, and a rising political party encouraged anti-immigrant sentiments. In addition, the anti-Chinese policies encouraged by the U.S. still influenced racial attitudes. But the high unemployment rates following the 1929 global depression were a tipping point—here the space opened for the success of nativist labor movements. Originally, "directed against Haitians and Jamaicans in agriculture and against Spaniards, Jews, and Chinese in commerce...[it] even extended beyond the boundaries of Cuba,

[57] Corbitt, Duvon Clough. *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba*, pp.95-96., qtd. Lopez, ibid.
[58] Chao Romero, Robert. *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940*. p.4. Chin Pinoy was the official whose connections to The Pacific Railroad Company, the Morgan Steamship Line, and the Ward Steamship Company were strategic and important to the Six Companies' smuggling network.

to encompass Cubans abroad."[59] In 1934, the Nationalization of Labor decree ordered that at least 50 percent of employees in industrial, commercial, and agricultural businesses had to be Cuban—leaving difficult implications for numerous small Chinese businesses. The most practical choices left by the Nationalization of Labor decree were: leave and return to China, or remain, gain Cuban citizenship, and continue one's business. While many left for China, many also remained.

While anti-Chinese and nativist labor groups seemed to gain stronger footing in Cuba, the Chinese in Cuba inhabited a far more secure place in their society than the Chinese in either the U.S., where they were excluded until 1943, or in Mexico, where virulent anti-Chinese sentiment prevailed during the 1920s and 1930s. Chinese immigration to Mexico found itself booming after the 1882 Exclusion Act, in light of the fact that it shared a 2,000 mile northern border with the U.S., providing easy illegal immigration routes into the U.S. Yet eventually, several thousand Chinese stayed in Northern Mexico, in the Sonora region.[60] The Chinese came to control "trade in groceries, dry goods, and general merchandise,"[61] and influenced deeply by "racist nativism," Mexican Sonorans raided and expelled the Chinese from the region during the 1920s and the Great Depression.[62] For the Chinese in Cuba, this was far from the case. The monument finally erected in the 1950s to the Chinese mambises of Cuba's independence was, intriguingly, actually begun in 1936 in the middle of the Depression.[63] Even in the midst of widespread xenophobia, the Chinese migrants were still deeply Cuban.

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[59] Lopez. *Migrants*. p.259.
[60] Lee, Erika. At America's Gates. 12,300 Chinese immigrants illicitly entered the U.S. between 1882 and 1920.
[61] Hu-Dehart. Evelyn. "Spanish America." p.257.
[62] Lim, Julian. "Chinese Mexicans in Baja California." p.77.
[63] This is why it would take another 15 years for the monument to be completed, but the fact that it would be started during the 1930s, during the virulent anti-Chinese sentiments in places such as Mexico, is surprising.

China's Transformation and Chinese Cultural Institutions in Cuba

The fall of the 250-year-old Qing dynasty in the early twentieth century was no less influential for the Chinese in Cuba than were the domestic and international politics of Cuba. The Qing dynasty's fall and the rise of China's Republic were closely watched in the cultural and social organizations of the immigrant community. For the Chinese migrants in Cuba, as well as those throughout the diaspora, "Traditional Chinese voluntary organizations…were regarded as supporters of Chinese nationalism and courted by the imperial and Republican governments in backing various nationalist causes."[64] It was through these organizations that the Chinese population not only took sides in political struggles, but also organized itself, recreated cultural elements of China, and retained its ties to home.[65] In the Chinese neighborhoods across Cuba, these were some of the most influential voices in the communities. Though they all shared the common interest of advocating for the retention of at least some cultural memory of China, each association often had its own specific mission within the broader theme, but specifically managing to provide practical aid for the Chinese population living in Cuba, and performing invaluable social functions for the community as a whole.

The associations' evolution throughout their existence illustrates the changing positions of the Chinese in Cuba—from neighborhood gathering place exclusively for Chinese men of the late nineteenth century, to the dwindling centers of the early twentieth century, to the male-dominated political party gatherings of the 1920s through 1930s, to the gradual family focus and disrepair of the latter part of the twentieth century.

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[64] Kuah-Pearce, Khun Eng, and Evelyn Hu-DeHart. "Introduction: The Chinese Diaspora and Voluntary Associations." *Voluntary organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*. p.15.
[65] Often associations would assist with "sending remains of the deceased home for proper burial." Lopez, Kathleen. *Migrants Between Empires and Nations*. p. 149.

These were the "*casinos asiaticos*" initially founded by former indentured laborers in the nineteenth century, and that also benefited from the later contributions of the elite merchants arriving between the end of slavery and the beginning of the twentieth century. While in other cases of Asian migration, associations were formed to "[enable] Asians to carve a place for themselves in a host society that did not like them," in Cuba they were primarily founded for the further benefit of the Chinese immigrant population.[66] Theaters, schools, health centers, and homes for the elderly were among the common institutions sponsored by these groups. Chinese theaters too, were integral in these goals. Other endeavors often included assistance in paying fares to go home to China, fund-raising, and employment searches.

The first of the associations were founded by the first major wave of Chinese immigration—that of formerly indentured Chinese, wishing to retain a bit of home, and to have a place in which they could gather to live a more familiar life. The most notable of them were the Casino Chung Wah in Havana, founded at the direction of the Chinese consulate in Havana in 1893, and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Cuba in 1897. The former was the Cuban equivalent of the CCBA and Chinese Six Companies, and was associated with them. These organizations had been founded sometime during the mid-nineteenth century by six district associations San Francisco community, for the purpose of "[promoting] the interests and general social welfare of the Chinese in San Francisco, in the state, and throughout America."[67]

Chinese Cuban interest in events "back home" may not have been as immediate in the early twentieth century as it had been in the mid-nineteenth, but particularly for transnational Chinese businessmen, maintaining connections and networks between Cuban and China, interest

[66] Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: an Interpretive History*. p.63.
[67] Hoy, William. *The Chinese Six Companies* (San Francisco: Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 1942), p.19. The CCBA's involvement in trade and its heavy political influence among overseas Chinese communities led it to become the most influential Chinese association in the United States and the Americas.

in China was still important. News traveled by way of consulates, diplomats, businesses, and associations, providing updates about the latest in imperial China. Thus in 1911, when the Chinese Revolution broke over China under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, Chinese immigrants in Cuba were quick to hear the news through the newspapers and connections sponsored and held by their various associations.

When Sun came to power, he proved a fascinating character to watch—he was a native of Canton, in the Guangdong province, as were the majority of the Chinese in Cuba. [68]Disillusioned with the inefficient, decaying, corrupt state of the Qing ruling family of China, Sun's life goal had been to overthrow the Manchu Qing dynasty, establish a democratic republic, and "instill in the people a strong sense of nationalism with which to reconstruct the country and preserve their independence."[69] His method of doing so would include seeking aid from minority groups, such as the Chinese overseas, some of whom he would win over. The politics of Sun Yat-sen and the imperial family would provide intrigue and shifting political allegiances across Cuba, as well as the world, as overseas Chinese communities throughout the continents began to respond to the changes in mainland China. But though now serving with a particularly political climate, the associations' work in the community essentially remained the same. Even if they did provide a meeting place in which to discuss the changes of China and gather to express support and dissent, their work in the migrant communities of Cuba continued. Aid, cultural events, mediation of disputes, and the necessities of the Chinese in the various Chinatowns and associations continued to be their primary focus.

[68] Hsu, Immanuel C. Y. *The Rise of Modern China*. p.454.
[69] Ibid. p.456.

Conclusions

The rise of the Cuban and Chinese republics would remain influential moments of the early twentieth century, and the Chinese societies and associations would prove the meeting ground between the Chinese Cubans' lives in Cuba, cultural retention of home, and involvement in revolutionary politics in Imperial China. The Depression of the 1920s and 1930s brought with it a telling time in Cuban history, forcing the question of how far Cuba had progressed from its deeply racist, slave-based society. But in the midst of the difficulties of anti-Chinese policy, and the economic hardship of the Great Depression, the Chinese resilience and resistance of adverse circumstances would become evident. At the end of it all, the Chinese of Cuba were still considered national heroes and figures of the island, and the political turmoil both in Cuba and China would not change much—Chinese business would endure in one form or another, and the remittances and communications back home to Southern China would still go on.

Chapter 4:

The Post-1959 Chinese Community in Cuba

For the Chinese in Cuba, a different story emerges from the shadows of the Cuban and Chinese revolutions of the mid-twentieth century—during this era, Chinese ties to China and their migration to the island slowed, and the population fell into decline. With the revolutionary outings of the U.S.-backed Batista regime in Cuba in 1959, and with the 1949 Communist revolution in China pushing out the Guomindang (Nationalist party), the Chinese in Cuba found themselves in a drastically altered world. International political strife between the various Communist states placed them in a precarious position—the Chinese Cubans' ties to what was now Mao's China were unpopular with Cuba's benefactor, the USSR. The Chinese Cuban reputation for privately-owned businesses, the very foundation of the community, was also a downside in Communist Cuba—petty entrepreneurship being directly against Communist ideals and practices. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Cuba's circumstances shifted dramatically once again, as it is now a political partner of the People's Republic of China. Today it is a country whose very existence is a testament to the tumultuous evolution of circumstances, and for its Chinese population, their fortunes would seem to be on the rise as new partnerships arise between they and the PRC.

The final influx of Chinese migrants occurred in the decade between 1949 and 1959, with numerous Chinese refugees fleeing the Communist Revolution of China, and poverty. Illustrating the dramatic interplay between the domestic politics of China and Cuba and Chinese use of transnational networks as a response, the

> "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…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."[70]

Often Guomindang supporters, they no longer felt that China's revolutionary environment provided the optimal atmosphere for them.

Emigration of Chinese Cubans out of Cuba

With the Cuban Revolution of 1959, migration to Cuba was abruptly ended. Nationalization of private businesses occurred within the next decade, taking with it the life-long, and sometimes generations-long, endeavors of Chinese Cuban business owners. Agrarian reform, depopulation of truck farms, the rise of state businesses, the disallowance of remittances back home, and sweeping social change stripped away the possessions of business owners, leaving many with only a few feasible options. One option was to simply resign oneself to the new Cuba and apply for work at a state-owned business and the other, chosen by thousands of Cubans and Chinese Cubans alike, was to re-migrate elsewhere—usually Miami, New York, and Toronto. In some cases, the Chinese returned to China, Taiwan, or other areas of Latin America. Regardless, there were thousands of Cubans who left during the initial years of the new Cuban nation, and thousands more would follow suit in the next decades to come.[71]

Political tension among the Communist states

Cuba's path into Communism was not an immediate one—in January 1959 Castro's revolution came to power, and his declaration of the country as Communist came only after March 1959, in response to his dislike of U.S. treatment of the new government, and a solid Soviet-Cuban relationship from the 1960s until the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s

[70] Lopez, Kathleen. "The Revitalization of Havana's Chinatown." p.215.
[71] Ibid. "records from the Casino Chung Wah indicate that 142 members returned to China or remigrated elsewhere in 1968…those who left for a second country were all under 50 years old." p.221.

provided Cuba with the necessary support it needed—financial subsidies and military support from the USSR. As a result of this close relationship with the USSR, Cuba's relationship with Communist China was hardly warm. The Sino-Soviet split in ideology and practice of communism contributed to long-term enmity between the two great Communist powers.

That Cuba should have aligned with the Soviet Union is a curious thing, since for many years Communist China had been interested in the possibility of several revolutions in Latin America undermining United States' authority. They lost influence with Castro, who was much interested in the financial aid and general economic support available from the USSR.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Cuba's own economy was faced with a disaster, and without the support of a larger benefactor Communist state to help them. A severe economic depression set in, with the lack of the subsidies and support from the USSR Cuba had been accustomed to receiving. Stripped of its economic and ideological partner, Cuba was forced to make changes—legalizing the U.S. dollar bill, and creating a "mixed socialist economy." It was during this period, as Cuba was in search of a benefactor, that China was continuing its search for ways to enhance relations and influence with Latin America. This search by the PRC "dramatically expanded its political and economic presence in Latin America,"[72] as well as resulting in a strategic bond between itself and Cuba—access to Cuba gave the PRC a nearby location to the United States, as well as providing the People's Republic with "an important ideological point of reference for the Latin American left, and thus its good will is useful for the PRC."[73] Landmark visits by former Chinese presidents Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin to Cuba, and Fidel Castro to China since the mid-1990s have marked the growing closeness of the two countries. Today, the PRC is the second largest trading partner of Cuba, behind only Venezuela.

[72] Ellis, Robert Evan. *China in Latin America: the whats and wherefores*. p.236.
[73] Ibid. p.237.

The economic and social links between the two have heightened considerably since the mid-1990s.

Recreating "Chinese Cuba" in Havana

The political influence of Chinese relations is very evident in the Havana of today, in which the Havana Chinatown Promotion Group's work continues. Among the group's efforts are tasks ranging from festivals celebrating the particular events of Chinese Cuban identity, such as the arrival of the first Chinese coolies on June 3, 1847, and the function of Chinatowns in migrant Chinese communities, to a facelift of sorts of the *Barrio Chino*. With abundant funding coming from the *barrio*'s many Chinese restaurants, the group also lists among its accomplishments the establishing and sponsoring of a home for elderly Chinese with no families left to care for them, language school teaching Mandarin, an Arts and Culture center offering classes in Tai Chi as well as traditional Chinese medicine, and upkeep the ever-present Chinese restaurants and food vendors, and new office space for the *Kwong Wah Po,* the last remaining Chinese weekly in Cuba, running 600 copies every issue.[74]

Other efforts are aimed at recording the oral history of the native Chinese immigrants before the generation passes. For this venture, the Group has brought in Chinese Cuban filmmakers such as Angel Ma Argudin, of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television. Argudin's repertoire includes three documentaries concentrating on Havana's Chinatown, and research on those Chinese immigrants who were involved in Cuba's late nineteenth century wars for independence. Overall, the Promotion Group emphasizes its hope that the work of the group

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[74] Bauza, Vanessa. "Havana's Chinatown Ushers In The New Year." Sun Sentinel. Feb. 17, 2002.

and its value lies in the "benefits from the organization's social work, such as street repairs and building renovation."[75]

The Chinese population available for the Promotion Group to work with is no longer the thousands-strong population it was at the end of the nineteenth century, or in the 1920s. There are now only about 300 native Chinese living in Cuba—most of whom migrated between 1949 and 1959. Since there has been nearly no new immigration since the Cuban Revolution, and the once ubiquitous privately-owned businesses are now gone, the population and community of Chinese migrants has fallen into steep decline. The landscape of contemporary Chinese Cuban society is now comprised of the *chinos naturales*—"native Chinese"—and the descendants of the Chinese—*descendientes*, who are usually the children and grandchildren of Chinese men and Cuban women.

The exclusively Chinese associations and societies through which once the native Chinese population of Cuba faced the foreign land in which they lived, and approached the difficulties of migrant life with fellow Chinese immigrants is now an idea that is gone. Sio Wong says of the associations that their mission is now to rescue the cultural past of the Chinese in Cuba, a task that is increasingly more difficult as

> Nearly all the children of Chinese are fully integrated into Cuban society. We've tried to bring them together, but undoubtedly it's not the same as in other countries. The societies that exist have forty or fifty members, and they've had to be opened up to third, fourth, fifth, even sixth-generation Chinese to make the societies a little bigger.[76]

But through the opening of the associations to the descendants of the original Chinese in Cuba, a revival of Chinese culture has more chance of success. Lopez writes that the "profits generated

[75] Lopez, Kathleen. "Remaking Havana's *Barrio Chino*." p.158.
[76] Choy, Armando, Gustavo Chui, Moises Sio Wong, Alice Mary Waters. *Our history is still being written.*p.73.

from restaurants [housed in former association houses] have enabled occasional Chinese to renew ties to their home villages in China through visits."

Since opening ties with the People's Republic of China, the potential for developing Havana's barrio chino into a successful business of tourist attraction, as well as the evident strategic political move has been thought to be a possible motive for the revitalization of the neighborhood. When such concerns were expressed by several in the Chinese Cuban community, the director of the project emphasized that while it is an economically beneficial enterprise, the actual goal is to help bring together the "elderly native Chinese, younger descendants, and the Promotion Group."[77] Kathleen Lopez expresses her doubt that the revitalization process brings about any benefit for those who are the original members of the community—the native Chinese men who are now in their old age, and mourn more the absence of the Chinatown they once knew than the oft-artificial new "Chinese-ness" of the *barrio*.

In contemporary Cuba, there is much room for questions of the Chinese in Cuba's identity. Since there are now less than 500 Chinese who were born in China, and the official contemporary Cuban ideas of "Chinese Cuban" identity include their grandchildren and great grandchildren, what does it now mean to retain, enjoy, and respect a Chinese heritage in the context of the community's Cuban history? The men to whom that heritage belonged, and who sought consistently to maintain ties between themselves and their families in China, are now in their later years, and many have died or migrated elsewhere. For their descendants to claim such an identity, many of whom have had hardly any lived experience with Chinese cultural tradition or contact with China, how does the very notion of Chinese Cuban identity transform itself?

[77] Lopez, Kathleen. "Remaking Havana's Barrio Chino." p.162.

Conclusion

The questions presented by the contemporary Cuban ideas of the Chinese community in are intriguing, but the current wondering of who Chinese Cubans are to the community is only a repetition of an old question. Although renewed relationships with the People's Republic of China, international politics, and desire to reap the fruits of tourism on Cuba's part may currently be the driving force behind these questions, the inquiries are not new. Who it is that the 'Chinese in Cuba' are has been a standing issue since the end of the coolie period. The Creole elites importing the Chinese coolies never meant them to remain in Cuba and integrate into society through marriage, families, owning businesses, and investing in political and cultural interests. Yet this is exactly what the Chinese who came to Cuba achieved—they became themselves a part of Cuban society, history, and culture. Even as harsh immigration policies and racist and nativist waves of reaction to the Chinese and their commercial success spread over the Americas, the Chinese in Cuba were still living the contrast of belonging in Cuba, and yet being Chinese. They were the subject of racial discrimination, while having Cuban national monuments erected in memory of their contributions in Cuban independence and history. During the migration from the 1949 Chinese Revolution, the Chinese population drew closer to its Chinese heritage, requesting and making room for the relatives displaced by the Guomindang's fall, drawing in more migrants to Cuba. Ten years later, some of the community members would fight for Castro and his new Cuba. The complexities and contradictions of the Chinese Cuban identity are quickly evident.

The complexity and unusualness of the Chinese Cuban population and community are fascinating—few Chinatowns in the contemporary Americas are undergoing what Havana's

barrio Chino is going through[78]—but it must be considered that of all places they are in, they are living in Cuba. Underlying the questions of Chinese Cuban identity are the questions of Cuban identity—which is itself a quite unusual thing. Since the independence wars of the beginning of the twentieth century, Cuban ideas of *cubanidad* and race-lessness, and a society in which the underlying identity is that of a national Cuba, no matter what the race of its people, have been core to the island peoples' understanding of themselves. The Cuban version of communism is itself an intriguingly unusual experiment. In the last twenty years, it has been the partner of first the Soviet Union, and later the PRC: two versions of communism whose vastly differing interpretations of Marxist-Leninist theories took them in opposite directions.

The Chinese in Cuba have adapted themselves and their identity to the circumstances they found themselves in throughout their time in Cuba, never finding a completely solid single narrative within which their lives fit. The Cuban idea that the Chinese migrant has always been an accepted part of Cuban society is inaccurate. But it is true that Chinese migrants to Cuba have inhabited a particularly unique and somewhat gentler area of society than their counterparts to Mexico or the United States. The difficulty of delineating or clarifying where they fit into Cuban life, though, remains a highly difficult question. Scholarly understanding of it is complicated by the difficulties inherent to the very mechanics of the academic studies of the Chinese in Cuba.

For the most part, the literature and documentation enabling the study of the evolving Chinese Cuban sense of identity lie in the papers and records they left in Cuba. Studies of their community quickly encounter multitudes of questions and problems. The strange space the Chinese Cubans occupy as migrants placed them both as actors in Cuban history, as well as causing them to retain a deep sense of Chinese identity. Issues in studying their history then, result not only from the minimal documentation of their past, and from the difficulties of

[78] Many of the overseas Chinese communities are still aligned with Taiwan; a fact that grates on the PRC.

dealing with the small amount of analysis of those records, but also in the fact that record of their history lies on both sides of the Pacific. As Lisa Yun explains, several of the early primary documents, such as the *Cuba Commission Report*, were written in older dialects that are now highly difficult to translate, even for Chinese scholars. In Cuba the corresponding documents, from the government or the associations, use entirely different terms and language where the coolies are concerned, and are recorded in Spanish. When both are translated into English, yet another layer of interpretive difficulty is added.

Regardless of these obstacles, academic research on the Chinese in Cuba and Latin America by scholars of the twentieth century has proved fruitful, perhaps, even more so than one might expect of a slight population minority in a small Caribbean island. Scholarship on the Chinese in Cuba, and Asian immigrants in Latin America has been a topic throughout the length of the twentieth century, albeit a quiet one. Duvon Clough Corbitt's seminal 1947 *A History of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947* still remains one of the leading works on the Chinese in Cuba. Doctoral dissertations such as Chang Ching Chieh's 1956 "The Chinese in Latin America, A Preliminary Geographical Survey with Special Reference to Cuba and Jamaica," and Arnold Meagher's 1975 "Introduction of Chinese labourers to Latin America and the 'Coolie Trade'" remain leading works in the field. But the research pioneered in the last quarter century into Asians in the Americas by such scholars as Professor Evelyn Hu-Dehart of Brown University, and by many recent doctoral students throughout the U.S. such as Kathleen Lopez, Ignacio Lopez-Calvo, Julia Schiavone-Camacho, and Robert Chao Romero, has opened up ever-widening understanding of a rarely-broached topic.

The great Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier echoed a common saying among Cubans when he said of his people that an authentic Cuban is composed of one-third Spanish, African, and

Chinese. Ignacio Lopez-Calvo's *Imaging the Chinese* speaks of the same widespread Cuban cultural memory of the Chinese, indicating numerous instances in which Chinese culture has touched Cuban. In fact, "Cubans take Chinese Cubans for granted."[79] But regardless of the widespread cultural heritage, there is still only little officially recorded of the Chinese in Cuba—the majority of known fact about them consists of family stories, and personal histories. Analysis of church records, for instance, has not yet been analyzed—and thus while the descendants of the first Chinese "bachelor migrants" are obvious and spread throughout Cuba, there is not yet much known of who it was whom the Chinese married, or known of their demographics.

For the Chinese population in Cuba, these questions are quite present, but within a different setting. Questions of Chinese Cuban identity are explored as they are lived. In an interview related by Lopez, one young man said of his mixed Chinese Cuban father that while the father was called *chino* because of his last name, the father knew hardly anything about his Chinese heritage. The young man himself knew better than his father how to use chopsticks, and even looked more Chinese.[80] Wenchang Lay[81], a Chinese Cuban American whose personal story appears in Ignacio Lopez Calvo's *Imaging the Chinese*, speaks of growing up proudly acknowledging both her Cuban-ness and her Chinese heritage, though she never learned Chinese or attended a Chinese school. Of note too, is the way she identifies herself—in Cuba, she is Chinese Cuban; outside of Cuba, she simply calls herself Cuban. The very fact of Lay's identifications of herself exemplify the way in which the Chinese Cuban identity is both particular and broad, representing and changing with the different happenings of its past, while drawing on the larger, shared experience of those events. Even now, the Chinese Cuban identity

[79] Hu-Dehart, "Intro to Imaging the Chinese in Cuban literature and culture." p.xii.
[80] Lopez, Kathleen. Migrants. p.287.
[81] Lopez Calvo, Ignacio. *Imaging the Chinese*. p.162-63.

continues to evolve through the process of being lived out—which is perhaps not so far from the experiences of the Chinese Cubans throughout the twentieth century.

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