

Afro-Hispanic Review
Volume 27, Number 1 (Spring 2008)

Contents

Editor's Note.....5

SPECIAL ISSUE: AFRO-ASIA

GUEST EDITORS: EVELYN HU-DEHART AND KATHLEEN LÓPEZ

INTRODUCTION

Evelyn Hu-DeHart and Kathleen López, Asian Diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Historical Overview.....9

ARTICLES

- Edith Wen-Chu Chen, "You are like us, you eat *plátanos*": Chinese Dominicans, Race, Ethnicity, and Identity.....23
- Scott Kurashige, Crenshaw and the Rise of Multiethnic Los Angeles.....41
- Kathleen López, Afro-Asian Alliances: Marriage, Godparentage, and Social Status in Late-Nineteenth-Century Cuba.....59
- Ignacio López-Calvo, Sino-Peruvian Identity and Community as Prison: Siu Kam Wen's Rendering of Self-Exploitation and Other Survival Strategies.....73
- Ryan Masaaki Yokota, "Transculturation" and Adaptation: A Brief History of Japanese and Okinawan Cubans.....91
- Sean Metzger, Ripples in the Seascape: The *Cuba Commission Report* and the Idea of Freedom.....105
- Yoon Park, White, Honorary White, or Non-White: Apartheid Era Constructions of Chinese.....123
- Rolando Pérez Fernández and Santiago Rodríguez González, *La corneta china (suona)* en Cuba: Una contribución cultural asiática trascendente.....139
- Lok Siu, Chino Latino Restaurants: Converging Communities, Identities, and Cultures.....161
- Lisa Yun, An Afro-Chinese Author and the Next Generation.....173

CRITICAL DIALOGUE

Lisa Yun, Signifying “Asian” and Afro-Cultural Poetics: A Conversation with William Luis, Albert Chong, Karen Tei Yamashita, and Alejandro Campos García...	183
---	-----

NARRATIVE AND POETRY

Darryl Accone, A Chinese Family in South Africa.....	219
Aristides Falcón Paradí, Selected Poetry.....	233
Blas Pelayo Días, Selected Poetry.....	239

ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Mitzi Espinosa Luis, De Amoy a Regla.....	243
Mitzi Espinosa Luis, Encuentro con el pintor Pedro Eng.....	244
Maria Lau, “71” Series Photo Essay.....	247

BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Desnoyers (Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong. <i>Our History is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution</i>).....	251
Luisa Marcela Ossa (Lisa Yun. <i>The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba</i>).....	254
Contributors.....	257

BOOK REVIEWS

Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong. *Our History is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution*. Ed. and Intro. Mary-Alice Waters. Atlanta, Pathfinder, 2005. 240 pp.

The history of the Chinese diaspora has become increasingly important for scholars of China and East Asia more generally, as well as those who have long specialized in Asian-American studies. With the exception of those who have looked at the suppression of the infamous "coolie trade," however, the history of the Chinese in Latin America has been largely subsumed under the histories of individual countries, with Cuba and Peru among the most prominent. Yet for those concerned with the role of emigrant labor, international relations, transnational studies, and world history, the story of the Chinese in Cuba is especially important, if at present understudied.

From the late 1840s, hundreds of thousands of Chinese emigrated to Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, and especially the United States, Cuba, and Peru. In the case of Australia and the United States, they were drawn initially by the lure of gold and later by the promise of high-paying employment in railroad construction and other labor-intensive trades. The "pull" of "Old" and "New" "Gold Mountain," as San Francisco and Australia were known to the emigrants, was balanced in equal measure by the "push" of tragically epic dislocations in China during the 1850s and 1860s.

Following the First Opium War and Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, trade was increasingly directed away from Guangzhou (Canton), centuries-old commercial links were disrupted, and economic depression set in. The Taiping Rebellion, originating in South China and lasting from 1851 till 1864, devastated China's richest provinces, nearly brought down the Qing Dynasty, and carried away an estimated 20–30 million people. Thus, although the Qing statutes still carried the death penalty for those who left the country, tens of thousands fled during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

While those going to the United States were so-called free emigrants, those arriving in Cuba and Peru were nearly all victims of the "coolie" or "pig" trade: Men kidnapped, tricked, or forced by debt to sign labor contracts for eight to ten years and transported to their destinations under conditions scarcely distinguishable from the worst years of the Middle Passage. In Cuba, they were seen as an increasingly important supplement to slave labor because of the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade. Relatively few survived the terms of their contracts, and those who did were usually forced to sign new ones. The conditions were so bad that two of China's first diplomatic missions abroad were sent to

investigate the situation in Cuba and Peru. The Chinese commissioner to Cuba, Chen Lanbin, was moved to write a poem lamenting the ashes of the bones of Chinese laborers being used to "whiten the sugar of Havana." Significantly, because of the concentrations of Chinese immigrants in the Americas—numbering perhaps 140,000 in Cuba alone—Chen and the commissioner to Peru, Yung Wing, were named the first Chinese ministers to the United States, Spain, and Peru in 1875.

In *Our History is Still being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution*, the high points of this early history form the prologue to the story of the Chinese in Cuba's revolutions from the 1860s to the present, with the personal stories of three prominent generals in Fidel Castro's Cuba—Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong—occupying center stage. With the ending of the coolie trade and emancipation of the Chinese in the 1870s, their struggles against racism and economic inequality, as elsewhere in their diaspora, continued apace. Nonetheless, they participated in disproportionate numbers in Cuba's independence struggles in the uprising of 1868–78 and in 1898. Today, a prominent monument to those Chinese fighters in Havana proclaims the words of General Gonzalo de Quesada: "There was not a single Chinese-Cuban deserter. There was not a single Chinese-Cuban traitor."

As elsewhere, too, Cuban Chinatowns grew up in the twentieth century and some merchants, business men, and craftsmen prospered while day laborers, cane cutters, and others struggled economically, and all chafed under the pervasive racism directed at them. Not surprisingly, one of the prominent groups ultimately supporting Castro's movement was the Cuban-Chinese Democratic Alliance. Young and idealistic, the three generals, hailing from different backgrounds and economic strata, each found their way to the revolutionary movement in the Sierra Maestra in the 1950s.

Their stories are told in the form of extended interviews by Mary-Alice Waters—the president of the work's publishing house, Pathfinder Press, and editor of the *New Internationalist*—along with Arrin Hawkins, Martin Koppel, Luis Madrid, and Michael Taber. Each of the men talks about how he came to join the revolution in the 1950s and their respective work during the new Cuban polity's early years; their participation in the "Internationalist Mission" to Angola in the 1970s and 1980s; and their roles in Cuba's ongoing "Special Period" following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and subsequent loss of foreign aid. In connection with this last topic, it is a shame that the book was not published more recently than 2005 as its readers might have benefited from some insights about the direction of the new post-Fidel regime.

Their personal accounts are, on balance, compelling and worth the effort of specialists willing to work their way through them. As it is, however, the book raises a number of problems in assessing it as a work of history. As the latest in Waters's series by and/or about such Cuban revolutionary luminaries as Fidel himself, Che Guevara, and Victor Dreke, with titles such as *In Defense of Socialism*, *U. S. Hands Off the Mideast!*, *Cuba and the Coming American Revolution*, and *Che Guevara Talks to Young People*, it threatens from the outset to degenerate into the kind of Marxist hagiography seldom seen since the height of the Cold War. Indeed, in many places it has a distinct period-piece quality to it, as the generals marvel anew at the revolutionary fervor and ingenuity of the masses, the selfless qualities of the 350,000 volunteers battling "U. S.-backed apartheid forces" in Angola, and the omniscience and wisdom of Fidel in directing his general's tactics in Africa by remote control from Havana.

The interviews themselves are conducted by people whose Marxist reductionism and determinism is deep and broad and for whom the nuances of Fidel's doctrines have become second nature. The effect is similar in this regard to watching the didactic *faux* exchanges characteristic of "infomercials" in the United States. Consider, for example, the following:

Waters: There are Chinese minorities in other countries of Latin America, as well as the United States. But the conditions they live and work under are very different from those in Cuba today. How do you see the changes that have taken place in your lifetime?

Sio Wong: In 1999 there was an international conference on the Chinese diaspora held in Cuba...The organization's president lives in Singapore [. . .]. I recall that the president and his wife asked me, "How is it possible that you, a descendent of Chinese, occupy a high government post [. . .]? How is that possible?" [. . .] What's the difference in the experience of Chinese in Cuba and the other countries of the diaspora? The difference is that here a socialist revolution took place. The revolution eliminated discrimination based on the color of a person's skin. Above all, it eliminated the property relations that create not only economic but also social inequality between rich and poor.

Unfortunately, the president from Singapore—one of the world's focal points of Chinese capitalist pre-eminence, long under the firm hand of Chinese diaspora descendant Lee Kuan Yew—did not have his reply recorded.

While those committed to the conceits of the Cuban Revolution will no doubt have their faith sustained, the usefulness of this book is severely circumscribed for non-believers. As primary historical material, it certainly has a degree of value for specialists seeking evidence about officially-sanctioned positions on the eve of the post-Fidel era; and the occasional snipes at the Soviets and muffled disappointment with China's current version of socialism go far to

humanize the men's replies. Yet one must wade through so much relentless ideological cant to reach these morsels that only the most stalwart will not fall by the wayside from exhaustion.

CHARLES DESNOYERS
La Salle University

Lisa Yun. *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2008. 305 pp.

In the introduction to *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba*, Lisa Yun states, "The coolies, ambivalently figured as transitional figures, take their place as helpmates to history. Though hotly debated, they have been portrayed as having something to do but not having anything to say" (xvi). Much of the aim of Yun's book is to change this perception of Chinese coolies and demonstrate that they did indeed have much to say about the contract labor system of which they were a part, as well as their place and treatment in Cuban society. To accomplish her goal, Yun examined the written and oral testimonies of 2,841 Chinese coolies in Cuba. Through Yun's study of their testimonies, it is quite apparent that Chinese coolie laborers in Cuba questioned, criticized, and protested against the contract labor system to which they were subjected. What is particularly noteworthy about Yun's work is that she aims not only to draw attention to the coolie testimonies from a historical and cultural perspective, but also from a literary one: "[. . .] my investigation conducts a dialogue with history (of slavery and freedom), literature (of bondage), and philosophy (of the 'contract')" (xvi). She also states that the testimonies she studies "can be read as 'narratives' that display certain tropes and conventions and that also contain certain themes and arguments" (xvi).

Yun's book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides a historical overview of Chinese coolie labor in Cuba. The second, as well as other chapters, studies the testimonies from the perspective of "writing as resistance." Chapters three and four focus particularly on the testimonies as "literary protests," while the fifth discusses the work of Afro-Chinese Cuban author and activist Antonio Chuffat Latour. It is also important to note that early on in the book Yun addresses the use of the term coolie. According to Yun, despite there being a history of a pejorative use of this word, there has been a "reclaiming" of the term by scholars. She describes her use of coolie as "deliberate and strategic." Yun states, "the term 'coolie' is a socially and historically specific designation used here in distinction to the diplomat and merchant, for example." She goes on to say that

Contributors

Darryl Accone is a research associate of the Centre for Sociological Research, University of Johannesburg, participating in its Chinese in Africa/Africans in China project. A third-generation South African-born Chinese, he explores the Chinese Diaspora, most recently in "A Century of Not Belonging—the Chinese in South Africa," written with Professor Karen Harris in *At Home in the Chinese Diasporas: Memories, Identities and Belongings*, edited by Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng and Andrew P. Davidson (2008).

Alejandro Campos García is a doctoral student of sociology at York University. After receiving an M. A. in sociology in Mexico City, he worked as a teaching assistant and researcher (CIDE). He has also served as an editorial assistant for *Gestión y Política Pública*. Campos García's scholarly interests include the impact of public policy on racism, specifically in socialist Cuba.

Edith Wen-Chu Chen is an associate professor of Asian American Studies at California State University, Northridge. She is the editor, with Glenn Omatsu, of the pioneering teaching anthology and resource guide, *Teaching about Asian Pacific Americans: Effective Activities, Strategies, and Assignments for Classrooms and Communities* (2006). Chen is the editor and a contributor, with Grace Yoo, for *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Asian American Issues Today* (forthcoming 2009). She has also been working with her students on the on-going online web exhibition, "Telling Our Stories: Japanese Americans in the San Fernando Valley, 1910s–1970s," <<http://www.discovernikkei.org/nikkeialbum/en/node/8520>>.

Albert Chong is an internationally acclaimed photographer. He was born in Kingston, Jamaica and attended the School of Visual Arts in New York (1978–81). As an artist, Chong has been involved with photography, installation, and sculpture. His main bodies of photographic work have explored still life genres, in both black and white and color. Chong also creates installation works, one of which, entitled *Winged Evocations*, was funded by Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio.

Charles Desnoyers is the Chair of the History Department at La Salle University. While his research interests are varied, his recent scholarship has revolved around political, social, and intellectual issues in world history. Desnoyers is co-editor of the *World History Association's Bulletin* and has published articles in a wide variety of journals, including *Pacific Historical Review*, *Journal of Third World Studies*, and *Journal of World History*.