

archaeology to gain new insights into pirate activity and culture but offer little in the way of concrete examples. The book also fails to live up to the potential of its title: if anthropological archaeology is a universalist discipline, why then do the authors confine inquiry to the conventional Golden Age sphere? The archaeology of piracy is a global subject that should span the centuries, taking in Hellenic Mediterranean ports and wrecks, medieval Norse and Danish ships and raiding sites, raiders and wreckers in 18th-century coastal Vietnam or 19th-century Cuba, and present-day Indonesian and other Asian bases alike. Perhaps by the expanding temporal and spatial scope beyond Anglo-American Golden Age pirates, archaeologists might find the signature pirate patterns that Skowronek and Ewen hope to find.

Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, Moisés Sío Wong. 2005. *Our History Is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution*. New York: Pathfinder Press. 216 pp. ISBN: 0-87348-978-0.

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Like other volumes from the socialist press Pathfinder, this book highlights the struggles and accomplishments of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, but through the unique lens of three Chinese-Cuban generals. President of the press and editor of *New Internationalist* Mary-Alice Waters and her associates conducted interviews with the generals, Armando Choy Rodríguez, Gustavo Chui Beltrán, and Moisés Sío Wong, over a period of four years. The men discuss their roles in the revolution, their participation in international military, medical, and educational missions, and their continued involvement with Cuban government initiatives today.

In Part I the generals describe their own backgrounds and provide a short history of the Chinese in Cuba. While Chinese were imported as contract workers throughout the post-abolition Caribbean, in Cuba, where slavery did not end until 1886, they labored alongside African slaves for the duration of the coolie trade (1847 to 1874). Like slaves, Chinese resisted the deception and coercion of the recruitment system

and the harsh conditions on Cuban sugar plantations through suicide, flight, rebellion, and legal challenge. In the hope of being released from their bondage, some Chinese joined slaves in the struggles for independence from Spain beginning in 1868. A battalion of five hundred Chinese fought under the command of General Máximo Gómez in the 1874 battle of Las Guásimas. Chinese also gained recognition for their auxiliary roles in providing provisions and gathering information about Spanish troops. Sío Wong's father, who arrived in Cuba in 1895, contributed supplies from his store to a group of rebels passing through Matanzas. Sío Wong explains how the Spanish inability to distinguish between Chinese helped the independence cause: "If anyone questioned them, they'd just say, 'I no understand, I no understand.'" (p. 61). Rather than being descended from indentured laborers, the generals are the sons of later free Chinese migrants. However, they contextualize their individual life stories within a larger narrative of Chinese coolie history and Cuban revolutionary history, thereby following a Cuban tradition of directly linking the independence wars of 1868 to 1898, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and internationalist missions today.

In 1952 U.S.-backed Fulgencio Batista seized government power through a military coup, setting off political protests among all sectors of society. Although from different regional and class backgrounds, Choy, Chui, and Sío Wong became part of a generation of Cuban youth who identified with the 26 of July Movement (inspired by Fidel Castro's daring but unsuccessful 1953 attack on the Moncada Army Barracks in Santiago de Cuba). They joined the rebels in the struggles against Batista from 1956 to 1958 and continued to serve in the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) for decades after Fidel Castro's victory in 1959. The generals' own account of their experiences—their youth, their revolutionary activities, and their continued work within the Cuban government—provides the narrative core of this volume. Through their anecdotes, readers gain insight, for example, into the impact of the personal leadership style of Fidel and Raúl Castro upon their followers, even years later.

The generals discuss instances of racial and class discrimination that informed their political views and support of the growing revolutionary movement. Armando Choy recalls working in his father's store when a customer was unable to purchase corn meal to feed his family because he did not have seven cents. In another instance, a friend of Chinese descent was denied entry to a dance. "That act of discrimination convinced me of the injustice prevailing in Cuba before the triumph of the revolution," he said (p. 28). Choy describes his Cuban mother as a "fanatical supporter" of Orthodox Party leader Eduardo Chibás and his Chinese father as a devotee of the famous weekly radio broadcasts. When Choy informed his mother that he was joining the armed struggle in the mountains, she

implored him to “be careful” rather than forbidding him to go (p. 26). Gustavo Chui grew up without his mother, a black woman of lower socioeconomic status. His Chinese father’s business associates pressured his father to change Chui’s birth certificate in order to strip his mother of parental rights. Chui was cared for by a group of Chinese men and several “foster mothers” who were married to them. As a result, he grew up speaking Cantonese rather than Spanish. When he decided to join the struggle, one of his foster mothers took him to the Sierra Maestra (p. 37). And Moisés Sío Wong, the only one of the three with two Chinese parents, describes working alongside his siblings in his brother-in-law’s bar-restaurant for substandard or no wages (p. 40), a pattern typical of immigrant family businesses.

The narrators hint at the ambiguous position of the Chinese in the prerevolutionary Cuban social hierarchy as well as class differences within the Chinese community. Sío Wong notes, “Blacks were the main target of that kind of discrimination” (p. 68). He recalls separate promenades for whites and blacks in the park in Santa Clara, an arrangement repeated throughout the island. Although they were permitted to use the promenade for whites, Sío Wong explains, “. . . Chinese were discriminated against racially because we were Chinese. But I would say that the economic discrimination by the rich against the poor was greater” (p. 69).

In understanding the history of the Chinese in Cuba, a distinction must be made between members of the immigrant generation and the next generation, many of whom were born to Cuban mothers and Chinese fathers. All three generals were born in Cuba in the 1930s, and two were born to Cuban mothers. They self-identify as Cuban. When asked if his Chinese heritage had an impact on the development of his revolutionary consciousness, Choy replied, “. . . I joined the movement as a Cuban. I thought like a Cuban, not like someone from China” (p. 33). Their experiences, therefore, are not representative of the vast numbers of Chinese immigrants who came to Cuba during the first part of the twentieth century for economic opportunities. We do not learn, for example, what happened to the families of the Chinese Cuban generals after the revolution, especially the small business owners. Mirroring the rest of Cuban society, the 1959 revolution and its aftermath polarized the Chinese community, when many wealthy merchants fled Cuba and the formerly powerful Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang) was disbanded.

In Part II the generals discuss Cuba’s involvement and their personal experiences in Angola from 1975 to 1991, after Angolan independence from Portugal, as well as Cuba’s continuing commitment to internationalist medical and educational projects. In Part III on the “Special

Period” and beyond, the narrators relate some of the initiatives ordinary Cubans have taken to deal with the economic crisis brought about by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Among these measures were circulation of the dollar, expansion of the tourist industry, development of small-scale urban agriculture, and profit incentives. These ongoing reforms, however, have not been without their downside. The claim that “[t]he revolution eliminated discrimination based on the color of a person’s skin” (p. 75) seems particularly open to debate in light of the recent resurfacing of prejudicial policies in the tourism industry. Sío Wong acknowledges some of the contradictions brought about by the economic measures intended to preserve the revolution. “Many of them we didn’t like, since they increased inequalities. We had always fought for a more just society, a socialist society, one that guarantees the basic needs of the whole population: health, education, food, housing, everything” (p. 127).

On an official level, the generals continue their involvement with the Chinese community in Cuba and with improving Sino-Cuban relations. Currently, Choy heads a massive project to clean up Havana Bay and to improve the infrastructure of its port. Chui is a leader of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution. Since the book’s publication he has become the president of the Casino Chung Wah (the main association representing the remaining Chinese in Cuba and their descendants). Sío Wong returned to active service in 2005 and continues his work as president of the National Institute of State Reserves (INRE). He is also president of the Cuba-China Friendship Association.

This collective memoir is suitable for a general readership interested in Cuba’s revolutionary history from the point of view of three participants, as well as its present-day situation. It can be a compelling selection for undergraduate classrooms, especially when used in conjunction with texts offering different perspectives on the Cuban Revolution, such as scholarly monographs, critical essays, and exile literature. It is available in both English and Spanish (and a Chinese edition is planned).¹ Visual images bring the narrative to life, such as the cover photograph of a Chinese leftist political organization in 1960 proudly marching with a banner (in Spanish and Chinese) proclaiming “*Los Chinos Residentes Apoyamos la Revolución Cubana y a su Jefe Fidel Castro!*” (Resident Chinese Support the Cuban Revolution and its leader Fidel Castro!). The book also contains maps, charts, a glossary, and an appendix of speeches by Fidel Castro and by Nelson Mandela on Cuba’s involvement in Angola.

In February 2008 the Cuban National Assembly elected Raúl Castro to succeed Fidel as president of Cuba. Academics and commentators of all political leanings anxiously wonder what changes, if any, will come. The title of this book, “Our history is still being written,” aptly captures

the current sentiment. Whether Cuba will follow a “China model” of transition to a market economy is unclear. But this memoir of three Cubans of Chinese descent comes at a time of renewed Cuba-China relations and Chinese investment across Latin America and the Caribbean. As the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution approaches, and as China plays a significant role in Cuba’s present and future, the revolutionary history of the Chinese in Cuba will continue to be invoked.

Note

- ¹ The reference for the Spanish version of this book is Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, Moisés Sío Wong. 2005. *Nuestra historia aún se está escribiendo: La historia de tres generales cubano-chinos en la revolución cubana*. Nueva York: Pathfinder Press. 230 pp. ISBN: 0-87348-979-9.