

# Our History is still being written

THE STORY OF THREE  
CHINESE-CUBAN GENERALS IN  
THE CUBAN REVOLUTION



ARMANDO CHOY

GUSTAVO CHUI

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*Armando Choy*

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COVER PHOTO: Members of Chinese New Democracy Alliance at Havana rally, September 2, 1960. Organized in response to Washington's efforts to line up Latin American governments against Cuba, the rally of more than one million approved a reply to the U.S. rulers known as the First Declaration of Havana. Banner says: "Resident Chinese support the Cuban Revolution and its leader Fidel Castro!"

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# Introduction

MARY-ALICE WATERS

OUR HISTORY IS STILL BEING WRITTEN adds one more chapter to the chronicle of the Cuban Revolution as told by those who were—and more than fifty years later remain—on the front lines of that epic battle.

Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong, three young rebels of Chinese-Cuban ancestry, became combatants in the clandestine struggle and 1956–58 revolutionary war that brought down the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and opened the door to the socialist revolution in the Americas. Each, in the course of a lifetime of revolutionary action, became a general in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba. Through their stories the economic, social, and political forces that gave birth to the Cuban nation and still shape our epoch unfold.

We see how millions of ordinary human beings like them—the “men and women from nowhere” who the rulers cannot even see—simply refused to accept a future without dignity or hope, refused to settle for less than they dreamed of. They marched onto the stage of history and changed its course, becoming different human beings themselves in the process.

**Mary-Alice Waters**, president of Pathfinder Press, is the editor of *New International*, a magazine of Marxist politics and theory. She has edited more than a dozen books of interviews, writings, and speeches of leaders of the Cuban Revolution.



The suggestion for this book originally came from Harry Villegas, himself a brigadier general of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces as well as a Hero of the Cuban Revolution. Villegas is today executive vice president of the National Directorate of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution. He is known throughout the world as Pombo, the nom de guerre given him in 1965 by Cuban-Argentine revolutionary leader Ernesto Che Guevara when together they fought at the side of the anti-imperialist forces in the Congo, and over the next two years in Bolivia as well.

In February 2002 Pathfinder editors had just completed work on *From the Escambray to the Congo: In the Whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution* by Víctor Dreke. The book had been well received at the Havana International Book Fair and in spirited meetings across the former province of Las Villas in central Cuba, organized in collaboration with the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution. We were already far along in preparing two more titles related to the Cuban Revolution and its place in the world: *October 1962: The 'Missile' Crisis as Seen from Cuba* by Tomás Diez; and *Marianas in Combat*, the story of Cuba's highest-ranking female officer, Brigadier General Teté Puebla, and the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon in Cuba's revolutionary war.

Planning ahead, as a competent officer does, Villegas invited us one morning to the national headquarters of the Combatants Association and introduced us to Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong. *Our History Is Still Being Written* is the product of the work that began that day.



The three young Chinese-Cubans, of similar age, grew up in different parts of Cuba, under different class and so-

cial conditions. With each following his own path, all three came to the same revolutionary course of action. They threw themselves into the great proletarian battle that defined their generation—the struggle to overthrow the Batista tyranny and defend Cuba's sovereignty and independence against the onslaught of the imperialist empire to the north.

The significance and historical weight of Chinese immigration to Cuba starting in the mid-nineteenth century emerges from their accounts. In proportion to population, this immigration to Cuba was greater than anywhere else in the Americas, the United States included. In fact, thousands of Chinese laborers brought to build railroads in the U.S. West later emigrated to Cuba in hopes of finding better conditions of life and work.

The lucrative trafficking in tens upon tens of thousands of Chinese peasants—their impressment, their death-ship transport to Cuba, their indentured labor on sugar plantations supplementing the dwindling supply of African slaves, and above all their resistance, struggles, and unblemished record of combat in Cuba's 1868–98 independence wars against Spain—all that is sketched here in broad outlines. It is a story largely unknown outside Cuba.

What is presented, however, is not history alone. This is one of the indispensable strands of revolutionary Cuba today—from the pre-1959 racist oppression of Chinese as well as Blacks, to the measures taken by the popular revolutionary government headed by Fidel Castro to end this discrimination and combat its legacy, to the integration of Cubans of Chinese origin into every level of social and political life today. As Sío Wong puts it so forcefully, the greatest measure taken against discrimination “was the revolution itself.”

“The Chinese community here in Cuba is different from

Peru, Brazil, Argentina, or Canada," he emphasizes. "And that difference is the triumph of a socialist revolution."



The revolutionary overthrow of the Batista dictatorship was not the end of a story. It was the beginning. The working people of Cuba began building a new society that posed an intolerable "affront" to the prerogatives of capital. For nearly half a century they have held at bay the strongest imperialist power that will ever stalk the globe. In doing so the Cuban toilers and their government have become a beacon, and an ally, to those the world over seeking to learn how to fight to transform their lives—and how to fight to *win*.

Among the many responsibilities Choy, Chui, and Sío Wong have each shouldered over the years within the Revolutionary Armed Forces as well as in government assignments and in the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba, participation in Cuba's internationalist missions abroad stands out.

"Because our system is socialist in character and commitment," Choy explains, revolutionaries in Cuba have always sought to act "in the interests of the majority of humanity inhabiting planet earth—not on behalf of narrow individual interests, or even simply Cuba's national interests."

Each served in Angola at various times between 1975 and 1988, as Cuba responded to the request of the Angolan government, just gaining its independence from Portugal, for aid to defeat an imperialist-backed invasion by the armed forces of South Africa's apartheid regime.

Chui helped establish Cuba's internationalist military aid missions in Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. Choy served as ambassador to Cape Verde from 1986 to 1992. Sío

Wong, president of the Cuba-China Friendship Association, has helped Venezuela's toilers in their efforts to establish and extend small-scale urban agriculture.

The full story of Cuba's sixteen-year internationalist mission to Angola is still to be told. Even in Cuba, no comprehensive account is yet available. But the first-hand experiences and assessments offered here by each of these three generals provide insights into that important period in the history of southern Africa not readily available outside Cuba. Their accounts are reinforced by excerpts from speeches by Cuban president Fidel Castro in December 1988, and by Nelson Mandela and Castro in Matanzas, Cuba, in July 1991, reproduced in the appendix. The significance for Africa and the world of the March 1988 victory of the Cuban-Angolan forces over the South African apartheid military in the battle of Cuito Cuana-vale is powerfully presented.



*Our History Is Still Being Written*—the title comes from Chui—captures the revolutionary perspective and ongoing intensity of work of the book's three protagonists. In the final section, "The Special Period and Beyond," each of them is looking to the future.

Today Choy heads the massive, multifaceted, multiyear project he describes here to clean up Havana Bay, and to transform the infrastructure of the port of Havana through which flows some 70 percent of Cuba's imports and 90 percent of its exports, sugar and nickel excluded. It is a task irreplaceable to Cuba's economic and social development.

Sío Wong continues to hold the responsibility he assumed almost twenty years ago as president of the National Institute of State Reserves. It is an assignment decisive not only to

the current military defense of the revolution, but also to the Cuban government's ability to respond—in marked contrast, on every level, to the capitalist government of the United States—to the needs of the population in times of natural disaster such as Hurricanes Dennis and Wilma, which struck the island this year.

Chui has since 1990 shouldered national responsibilities for the founding and leadership of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution. That organization today comprises more than 300,000 Cubans with decades of experience as the backbone of the revolution—from cadres of the Rebel Army and clandestine struggle against Batista's tyranny, to young doctors and teachers completing internationalist missions around the world today, to the five Heroes of the Cuban Revolution framed up on charges of conspiracy to commit espionage and murder, now serving draconian sentences in the federal prisons of the United States. It is responsible for a political education program that reaches into every school and neighborhood in the country.

As each of the three generals makes clear, the future will be decided not *for* the working people of Cuba, but *by* them.



*Our History Is Still Being Written*, published simultaneously in English and Spanish, came together over a period of almost four years. It is the product of several rounds of interviews, some collective and some individual, that took place in February 2002 and 2004, and were completed in February and August 2005. In preparing the book for publication, we have, insofar as possible, smoothed over the discrepancies of time and circumstances that were an inevitable result of this long gestation.

When we began, for example, Sío Wong, like Choy and Chui, held reserve status as an officer of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba. By the time of our final interview in mid-August 2005, he had been called back to active duty. The enormous effort that falls under the rubric of the cleanup, preservation, and development of Havana Bay advanced considerably in the course of those four years. The damage wreaked by Hurricane Michelle in 2001 was matched or superseded by a half dozen other major storms, from Ivan to Charley to Dennis.

Most important, intensifying conflicts among contending classes on an international scale these last four years have opened a new political situation worldwide. The imperialist political offensive, spearheaded by Washington, is advancing under the banner of the "global war on terrorism" and the "transformation" of the military activity of the U.S. rulers and their allies from the Middle East to the Pacific, from Africa to Europe to the North American "homeland" itself. In response to the course of the bipartisan war party and sharpening assaults by the barons of capital, the resistance of working people, at home and abroad, is being transformed as well.

In our hemisphere, the challenges faced and surmounted by the combative toilers of Venezuela have altered the political equation. In face of inevitable aggression from the empire to the north, the stakes are being substantially raised—for us, and for the fighting vanguards of the people of Cuba, Venezuela, and throughout the Americas.



Arrin Hawkins, Martín Koppel, Luis Madrid, and Michael Taber each participated with me in one or more of the inter-

views that gave us this book. Michael Taber supervised the translation into English and prepared the glossary, annotation, and index. Luis Madrid was responsible for the manuscript in Spanish.

Production of these two books—from transcription to initial translation, from composition, proofreading, and preparation of the digital files for printing, to distribution—has been the work of more than 200 volunteers around the world who make their time and skills available through the Pathfinder Printing Project.

A special note of thanks is owed to the Biblioteca Nacional “José Martí” in Havana, including its director Eliades Acosta, assistant director Teresita Morales, and senior librarian Lisia Prieto, who is responsible for the archives that encompass the library’s collection of materials related to Chinese immigration in Cuba. Aid from the library’s staff was indispensable in locating and reproducing a number of the graphics that bring these pages to life.

Other historical photos and graphics were located with the help of Delfín Xiqués of *Granma*, Manuel Martínez of *Bohemia*, Milton Chee of San Francisco, California, and through the individual efforts of Generals Choy, Chui, and Sío Wong.

Iraida Aguirrechu, current affairs editor at Editora Política, the publishing house of the Communist Party of Cuba, participated at each stage in all the interviews. Without her determination, diligence, concern for accuracy, and attention to detail, this book would not have seen the light of day.

Finally, and above all, our thanks go to Generals Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong for the many hours they each made available for the work necessary to bring this book to fruition.

We are confident it will be received with thanks by those to whom it is dedicated: the new generations of fighting “men

and women from nowhere" now emerging around the world, for whom the example of Cuba's socialist revolution shows the way forward.

*November 2005*



# Cuba

