

# The Chinese in the Caribbean



**Andrew Wilson**  
Editor

THE  
Chinese  
IN THE  
Caribbean

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
Andrew R. Wilson



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# Introduction

## *New Perspectives on the Caribbean Chinese*

ANDREW R. WILSON

The massive outflow of émigrés from the Chinese mainland that began in the 1830s has had a profound effect on global history. Since then, millions of migrants have left China to sojourn or settle overseas. This movement was driven by domestic chaos in China and by global demand for labor—demand that was driven by the hunger for the commodities and raw materials that fueled the industrial revolution. In large measure the Chinese facilitated the emergence of the modern global economy. Moreover, the export of Chinese was just one human wave among many (African, South Asian, etc.) that supplied labor to and transformed the world economy. The macro-historical significance of Chinese emigration is undeniable.

That the Chinese were so important to global history goes beyond simply the vast number of Chinese who emigrated or the economic forces pulling Chinese into the global market. Virtually whatever the developed or developing world needed in terms of manpower, China could provide. Merchants, craftsmen, and laborers of every stripe existed by the millions in China, and since China also possessed an immense and complex economy, where trade in skills was equally important as trade in goods, there was a preexisting system of internal labor migration. If a European colony, even one as far off as Spanish Cuba, could “plug in” to this massive economy, they could almost immediately fill their labor needs—that is, if they could provide sufficient incentives.

Chinese émigrés were not passive subjects of mechanical “push” or “pull” forces; they played a major role in the process. The sending communities of Southeast China (called *qiaoxiang* or “native-places”) were key nodes in elaborate migration networks that bound sending and receiving communities in a dialectical relationship. For example, a *qiaoxiang* might begin to specialize in exporting a particular type of

labor, and migrants might work to create demand in the receiving society's economy for those specific skills. The fact that the various flows of Chinese emigration were not one single surge, but rather coincided with specific labor needs—such as with the decline of slavery or the building of the Panama Canal—and that once in the Caribbean, the Chinese worked to exploit or open market niches that required subsequent inputs of Chinese talent, demonstrates the dialectical connection between China as a source of labor exports and the Caribbean basin as a labor market.

Not all Chinese émigrés, however, enjoyed such a high degree of agency: there were tens of thousands of victims in this process. The coolie trade, by which many Chinese were imported to the Caribbean, was characterized by the use of recruiters, or “crimps,” that either tricked Chinese laborers into unfair contracts or simply kidnapped them. The inhuman conditions under which coolies were transported and subsequently employed were so deplorable as to become an international scandal requiring multilateral treaties to end. It is the cruel forced migration of the coolie that has largely become the symbol of the Chinese migration experience. Many of the Chinese who made the arduous journey to the Caribbean fell under the category of coolies and were destined to fill the labor shortages created by the decline of slavery and the industrialization of sugar processing. Other Chinese went to work on the Isthmian railroad and later on the Panama Canal. For these émigrés, life in the Americas was often one of hardship and disease—a far cry from the Chinese merchant elites who grew rich in the emporia of the east. For other Chinese in the Caribbean, migration was voluntary and strategic. Many of these émigrés prospered and encouraged friends and kin to follow them.

Beyond the tragedy of the coolie trade, millions of Chinese traveled abroad willingly, and while their migration was a significant event, it was not necessarily the violent uprooting and alienation suffered by the coolie. Many Chinese migrations were little more than pragmatic efforts to enhance the economic well-being of an individual or a family. The majority of Chinese migrations consisted of unremarkable border crossings that, when viewed at the regional and global levels, are remarkably important. The intentions of the average Chinese

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traveling overseas were mundane, yet the consequences of his migration and those of his peers were tremendous.<sup>1</sup>

We should thus remain cognizant of the nearly infinite range of migration experiences that make up the larger history of Chinese emigration. Even while we view this spectacular human wave as a single historical phenomenon, the great range of personal and family experiences, types of migration, and degrees of interconnection between sending and receiving societies should alert us to the dangers of historical reductionism. The contemporaneous migration systems that directed Chinese migrants out from China into the global labor market were not identical parts of the same “Chinese diaspora.” Rather, the unique structures and specializations of the migration systems of China’s southeastern provinces were dictated by distinct local systems, regional economic developments, and the labor market of the receiving society. As such these systems only converged as part of the same larger historical process at the global level.

Not even China’s moribund Qing dynasty could ignore the significance of these massive labor flows. To bind expatriate Chinese more closely to their homeland, the dynasty introduced the term *huaqiao*, or “Chinese sojourner,” into its official vocabulary. This new term emphasized the migrants’ membership in a larger cultural-ethnic Chinese community (*hua*) and directed their loyalty toward the homeland as “sojourners” (*qiao*) rather than toward their places of residence as immigrants. A later Nationality law of 1909 declared, by the principle of consanguinity, that all Chinese, everywhere, were subjects of the emperor. Beijing also tried to co-opt the money and talent of the Chinese overseas for its “self-strengthening” program. Chinese merchants and students were encouraged to return to China to either invest or serve in the bureaucracy. At the same time the Qing established embassies and consulates overseas which, not surprisingly, corresponded to the major concentrations of Chinese émigrés. An intense interest in Chinese migrants was shared by Western governments, who saw the import of industrious Chinese as an expedient way to fill labor shortfalls, exploit colonial possessions, and meet the rising global demand for commodities. Both the British and the Spanish enacted policies to attract Chinese to the sugar islands of the

Caribbean for exactly this purpose. As Anne-Marie Lee-Loy's "Kissing the Cross" shows, the authorities in the British West Indies consciously sought to portray Chinese labor as the most desirable way to develop the economy and craft a more harmonious structure for colonial society.

When the multiple migration systems emerging from China were drawn to the Caribbean basin by these policies, the possible trajectories of individual, family, and community narratives increased exponentially. The history of the Caribbean is a history of migrations. The non-native peoples of the region came as conquerors and planters, slaves and indentured laborers from all parts of the globe. Each group contributed to the social fabric, culture, and commerce of the region by weaving the traditions of their native-places into the warp and weft of the New World. The Chinese exist both as distinct ethnic groups within Caribbean societies and as shapers of unique Caribbean cultures. Given the malleability of Caribbean cultures and societies at the end of the nineteenth century, a time of upheaval and experimentation, the integration of the Chinese into the numerous cultural tapestries of the region was remarkably rapid. Economic growth and the emergence of new market niches in Jamaica, for example, allowed Chinese, once their indenture contracts had expired, to move quickly into small-scale retail. By the early twentieth century, "Chinaman" had become virtually synonymous with shopkeeper.

Caribbean Chinese communities are certainly a more recent phenomenon than those of the major Southeast Asian entrepôt ports, such as Manila and Batavia, where Chinese have lived and traded since at least the sixteenth century. Still, the great influx of hundreds of thousands of Chinese laborers, merchants, and craftsmen in the late nineteenth century quite literally changed the course of Caribbean history and fundamentally transformed the societies in which the Chinese settled. The unique social, economic, and cultural landscape of each locality exercised a powerful influence on shaping the Chinese experience there. As a result, to be a "Chinaman" in Kingston or Demerara differed in many subtle (and a few not-so-subtle) ways from what it was to be a *chino* in Havana.

We have chosen the Caribbean as a discrete unit of analysis because

of the intra-regional diversity, but also because larger historical trends—trade, migration, sugar, and colonialism—bind the region together and therefore allow for some degree of generalization. The present volume offers a broad sociohistorical definition of the Caribbean basin that embraces islands in the Caribbean Sea and bordering coastal areas such as those in Panama, and this definition can even be extended to the Caribbean diaspora. Such a definition permits the contributors to work across traditional boundaries, such as those between the Spanish- and English-speaking Caribbean. The Caribbean region forms a microcosm for examining the diversity of issues facing Chinese in the Americas (and in the diaspora), as they came into contact with different cultures and polities.

After the initial spectacular surge of migration, there followed periods in which multiple paths of community evolution can be traced. Some Chinese fully assimilated into local society; others intermarried to form a Creole group that created a new stratum in colonial society; yet other émigrés self-consciously advertised their “Chineseness,” founded Chinese schools and Chinese Chambers of Commerce, and tried to develop more robust linkages with the Chinese state. These processes were the product of personal choice, local conditions, economic opportunity, and global historical developments. The result was, in the words of G. William Skinner, “a wondrous array of adaptive, acculturative, and assimilative phenomena.”<sup>2</sup>

In the twentieth century, seismic historical forces were at work and the attentions of the Chinese state were continuously drawn to the Chinese overseas. Chinese consulates, like the one founded in Havana after a Chinese investigative mission in the 1870s, were followed by Chinese Chambers of Commerce, which began to crop up in the early 1900s, further enhancing the linkage between Beijing and *huaqiao*. Such developments would seem then to encourage Chinese in the Caribbean to more readily identify themselves with the Chinese state and as Chinese. Beijing, however, was not the only political entity that took an interest in the émigrés; nascent Chinese political parties like those founded by Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen thrived among the *huaqiao*. In many ways, Chinese communities overseas were the birthplace of Chinese republicanism and were the place where many



ethnic Chinese first began to identify with the Chinese nation. The strength of these ties between the Chinese state and Chinese overseas ebbed and flowed throughout the tumult of China's long revolution in the twentieth century. Simultaneously the Chinese in the Caribbean were also under pressure to identify more closely with their host societies. These conflicting demands of loyalty required a subtle hand to manage.

With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the subsequent failure of China's first republican government, followed as it was by two decades of political chaos known as the Warlord Period, formal ties to the Chinese state were of marginal value. Only with the emergence of a relatively unified Kuomintang government under Chiang Kai-shek in the late 1920s did formal ties to the Chinese state regain their value. During this interregnum, the Chinese in the Caribbean, like Chinese elsewhere, directed their attention and energies toward local rather than national projects. Despite the chaos in China, links to native-places often remained strong and provided a small but steady stream of new émigrés to staff the shops, truck gardens, and restaurants in the Caribbean, as well as a means to send remittances back to China.

At the same time that the Chinese were responding to developments in China, other historical forces were converging on the Caribbean basin. Booms and busts driven by market demand, rebellion in Cuba, the Spanish-American War, the completion of the Panama Canal, World War I, and the emergence of the United States as the dominant regional power (to name just a few challenges of the modern era) forced the Chinese to re-craft existing social and economic strategies or to invent wholly new responses. While native-place ties remained critical, some ethnic Chinese attempted to gain a degree of control over their surroundings by tentatively engaging in local politics. They leveraged their economic clout and used venues of collective action, like Chambers of Commerce, to enhance their prosperity and establish themselves as players in emerging Caribbean polities. And yet there was no single or typically "Chinese" formula for success. The essentially comparative nature of the essays in this volume allows us to evaluate the individual, family, and community responses to

these events across a wide spectrum. It helps to illuminate certain patterns within the history of the Chinese overseas and provides fresh perspectives on the history of the Caribbean. The most skillful and successful Caribbean Chinese deployed an array of strategies and identities. What immediately strikes the reader about these essays is the remarkable variation in experiences and sense of identity among the Caribbean Chinese.

The Japanese invasion of China, which began in earnest in 1931 and accelerated in 1937, in many ways sharpened the national identity of the Chinese overseas. The Chinese in Jamaica, for example, raised more than £200,000 for China's war effort. Yet the global character of World War II meant that the Caribbean Chinese participated in the conflict both as Chinese expatriates and as local residents. Support for China's defense had to be balanced by contributions to the war efforts of the United States and Great Britain and with participation in the wartime economies of the region.

Following the Communist victory in China's civil war, Chinese overseas faced even starker choices. Because of Mao Zedong's victory, linkages to native-places were often severed. Correspondence once readily shared became impossible. Only recently, as Kathleen Lopez shows us in "One Brings Another," have the connections been re-forged between Chinese in Cuba and their *qiaoxiang* of Southeast China. Throughout much of the Caribbean, the range of identity, social, and economic choices were significantly narrowed. This went beyond local Chinese having to choose between Beijing and Taipei, but also included having to deal with changes occurring in the Caribbean. Decolonization, emerging Caribbean nationalisms, and the pressures of the Cold War all compounded the dilemmas that many of Chinese descent faced. The Chinese in Castro's Cuba were in a particularly awkward position, given the tensions between Moscow (Havana's benefactor) and Beijing and the fact that petty entrepreneurship, which was the foundation of Havana's Chinese community, was anathema to the Communist regime. One response to changes in the Caribbean was re-migration, both within Latin America as well as to the United States and Canada. This opened new types and varieties of linkages and fostered new systems of identity. The native-place ties

that once connected Caribbean Chinese to the sending communities of coastal China are now supplemented and even replaced, for example, by ties between the large and active Jamaican-Chinese community in Toronto and their families and “hometowns” in Jamaica.

The subsequent essays will explore not merely the arrival and experience of Chinese in the Caribbean but also the ways in which Chinese have adapted to and altered the region. Included are the histories of Chinese people in Cuba, Panama, and the British West Indies, their arrival as indentured laborers, the discrimination they suffered and overcame, their slow rise to economic independence and success, their contributions to cuisine and literature, their roles in the region’s national revolutions, their place in post-colonial polities, and the subsequent re-migrations of individuals, families, and entire communities. The authors highlight the uniqueness of numerous Caribbean Chinese histories to assess the impact of geographic, economic, religious, and policy factors on the history of Sino-Caribbean interaction. The Caribbean is an ideal venue in which to study migrant communities not merely because there are so many migrants but also because of the dramatic social, economic, and political changes outlined above that have shaped the region over the last century and a half.

Of late, there has been a boom in Chinese emigration studies, and scholarly products run the gamut from the macro (Lynn Pan’s *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*) to the comparative (Adam McKeown’s *Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936*) to discrete histories of individual migrant communities (such as my own *Ambition and Identity: Chinese Merchant Elites in Colonial Manila, 1880–1916*).<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the study of Chinese communities in Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and (in recent years) the United States, the field of Caribbean-Chinese studies has been relatively dormant. This is not to say that it has been entirely neglected. There are several historical, sociological, and anthropological studies of the Caribbean Chinese, many of which have been produced by Caribbean scholars and by ethnic Chinese themselves, that shed light on the complexity of community dynamics. We are fortunate to have as one of our contributors

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perhaps the leading figure in the field, Walton Look Lai of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, whereas Chinese migrations to Southeast Asia and North America receive significant attention, the experiences of Chinese migrants in the Caribbean remain a poorly understood and largely unchronicled chapter in the region's history. And yet the Chinese, as we will see, have played a significant role in the economies of Caribbean nations and have contributed immensely to Caribbean cultures. To date, no single book has attempted to systematically place these Chinese communities in the history of the broader Caribbean region or to place the Caribbean Chinese within the larger history of the Chinese diaspora. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It may be premature to attempt a comprehensive history of the Chinese in the Caribbean. The experiences are too varied over space and time, as many of the articles in this volume demonstrate, and we have yet to develop a sufficient corpus of quality scholarship comparable to that on the Chinese in Southeast Asia or the United States from which to craft a more general history. Rather, it may be better to first build a foundation of discrete studies of phases of migration, communities, families, and individuals.

Moreover, the range of academic disciplines—history, anthropology, sociology, biography, and cultural studies—that are applicable to this topic are as diverse and as complementary as the historical forces that converged in the Caribbean basin in the modern era. Therefore, as impossible as it is to confine the history of places as unique as, say, Havana or Kingston—liminal points, where numerous global, regional, market, national, and personal histories converged—within a national or even regional history, it is equally impossible, at present, to tell the story of the Caribbean Chinese as a single narrative. The assembled authors view this book as a unique opportunity to bring together numerous disciplines and community histories and perhaps inspire future research into this fascinating but little-understood field.

This volume opens with four chapters that lay out the historical background of Chinese emigration to the British West Indies and the evolution of these communities over the course of the twentieth century. Walton Look Lai, in his chapter on the Chinese indentured labor

system, situates Chinese labor movements within the contexts of both Chinese and Caribbean history. The pressures of rebellion and overpopulation in China impelled many Chinese to move overseas, but their settlement in the British West Indies was far from inevitable. In fact, the first attempt to recruit Chinese labor to work Trinidad's plantations was a complete failure; rather, the eventual migration of almost 18,000 Chinese to Britain's Caribbean colonies in the late nineteenth century was the result of planter lobbying for new labor inputs and the presence of British officials on the China coast to facilitate out-migration. Nonetheless, the Chinese migration to the British West Indies was dwarfed by those of other ethnic groups, notably Africans, Portuguese, and more than 400,000 South Asians, primarily from British India. Quite different patterns obtained elsewhere in Latin America, such as Cuba and Peru, where Chinese immigration topped 100,000 in each locale. In British Singapore, there was more of a balance between Chinese and Indians, but even there the Chinese dominated despite the proximity to India. Disparate patterns such as these force us to seek explanations of why migration streams take certain trajectories. Obviously supply (abundant in China) and demand (significant in the British West Indies) equations are insufficient. The mechanisms of migration, such as recruitment systems, contracts, and transportation, as well as conditions in the receiving society are equally, if not more, important. Likewise, the ability of local officials and the migrants themselves to guarantee follow-on migrations deserve scholarly attention.

As to the conditions under which the Chinese migrated and worked, Look Lai has mined contracts, shipping manifests, and British official documents from both China and the West Indies for a wealth of detail on the contract system and local conditions encountered by the Chinese. Look Lai also locates the Chinese within the multicultural landscape of the British Caribbean. Chinese interacted with other groups in the islands in a range of ways: from outright ethnic hostility and fierce economic competition to mutual participations in each other's hobbies and holidays.

Having explored the early history of Chinese migrations to the West Indies through the experiences of the émigrés, Anne-Marie Lee-

Loy's "Kissing the Cross" allows us to look at the import of Indian and Chinese labor from the perspective of colonial officials and the planter elite. Drawing from her larger work on popular representations of ethnic Chinese in Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana, Lee-Loy shows that British officials and planters viewed the import of Chinese as not only a response to labor demand but also a way to craft a stable ethnic hierarchy in the midst of tumultuous times. To the British, the Chinese were more industrious, frugal, and sexually abstemious than the Africans or Indians—a set of assumptions not shared by officials elsewhere, such as in the American West. The British also believed the Chinese to be more inclined to assimilate European values and Christianity. They hoped that this cultural flexibility would allow Chinese immigrants to form a loyal cadre of subalterns to facilitate the colonial enterprise and create an ethnic "firewall" between the whites at the top of colonial society and the Indians and Africans filling out the lower strata. Whether or not the Chinese consented to this positioning is unclear, but this chapter does highlight the range of social and economic roles that different ethnic groups can play in their host environments. Migrants, especially those moving into societies undergoing significant changes, are not automatically destined to fill specific roles. In other words, first-generation Chinese immigrants are not fated to be launderers or stevedores. Rather, government policy, the skill sets and inclinations of the migrants themselves, as well as local conditions can all inform where they end up in the socioeconomic landscape.

Li Anshan turns his significant expertise, gained from the study of Chinese in Africa, to a brief history of the Chinese community in Jamaica. In addition to providing a narrative of early migrations to complement Look Lai's chapter and exploring the Chinese transition from agricultural laborers to petty entrepreneurs, Li uses community institutions to help frame his chapter. Beyond descriptions of Chinese newspapers, homes for the elderly, sports clubs, and political party branches, it is Li's description of the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) that serves as a parable for the community's evolution.<sup>5</sup> Initially founded in the 1890s as a venue for collective action and to protect fledgling commercial interests in an often hostile environ-

ment, the CBA rapidly became the dominant Chinese organization, and leadership of the Association was synonymous with prominence in the Chinese community. In the early 1900s the CBA's board was more concerned with intra-community functions and local projects—hospitals and old-age homes—and preserving Chinese culture and language through the establishment of a Chinese school. By the 1920s and 30s the CBA, thanks to the rising economic clout of the Chinese, was more active in extra-community affairs, such as lobbying the colonial government and raising funds for China's anti-Japanese resistance. As second- and third-generation Chinese moved toward assimilation on the eve of Jamaican independence, the need for institutions that defined the Chinese community as something apart from Jamaican society declined and the influence of the CBA waned. We are thus reminded of the integrative function of institutions in shaping community dynamics and informing identity choices among émigrés. The example of the ebb and flow of community cohesion and the varied patterns of assimilation evident in Li's story of the Jamaican Chinese also challenge reductionist tropes of characteristically "Chinese" insularity.

Gail Bouknight-Davis uses her chapter to show that class and occupation, as much as race, account for ethnic distinctions. She chronicles the Chinese rise to prominence in Jamaica's grocery sector in the early twentieth century: a rise facilitated by the immaturity of the Jamaican retail sector and the ability of the Chinese, many of them Hakka,<sup>6</sup> to leverage family connections for labor inputs and market information. The high profile of Chinese shops contributed to a general, albeit inaccurate, perception that the Chinese monopolized retail groceries and served to sharpen ethnic distinctions in Jamaica. Not only did the family network structure of Chinese businesses encourage insularity, but retail competition was directly equated with competition between Chinese and Afro-Jamaicans—a view that may have been perpetuated by the white elite. Ethnic tensions further encouraged the Chinese community to cohere for self-protection. Thus Bouknight-Davis argues persuasively that the formation of ethnic identity must be understood as a process of interaction driven by context. There were numerous commercial advantages to being "Chinese"

in colonial Jamaica, and both government policy and the economy encouraged the Chinese to define themselves as a community apart. This self-identification was complemented by external “othering” and ethnic antagonism. Following independence, Jamaica’s Chinese took one of three main paths. A small group stayed the course of insularity, another group—the second and third generations of Jamaican- and American-educated Chinese—integrated into the island’s new Creole elite, while a third group fled to Toronto. Although they are not covered in this chapter, it is interesting to note that those who moved to Toronto identify themselves as Jamaican-Chinese while simultaneously locating themselves as members of the larger Chinese diaspora and more specifically as members of the global Hakka community.

Turning from the West Indies to Cuba, Kathleen Lopez describes the fluid environment through which Cuba’s Chinese moved in the early twentieth century. More than just providing an excellent community history, Lopez demonstrates that her subjects were, in the words of Adam McKeown, both “here and there.” In other words, the *chinos* in Cienfuegos and Havana were both firmly entrenched in their local environments and at the same time remained intimately linked with their native-places (*qiaoxiang*) in China. Being both “here and there” was how Cuban Chinese recruited talent, moved money, researched markets, sired heirs, and invested. Lopez judiciously applies the concept of transnationalism that has gained currency in international migration studies over the past decade.<sup>7</sup> The case study of the Chinese in Cuba demonstrates how one group of migrants developed a “transnational social field” linking places of origin and settlement.<sup>8</sup> Lopez’s work provides a set of local and personal histories that underscores the utility and ubiquity of transnational migration networks in exploiting economic opportunities in Cuba and providing income and employment in the native-place.<sup>9</sup> But “transnational” is perhaps a misleading term without significant qualification and refinement. These transnational linkages were usually quite narrow, if not parochial, in terms of the connections between the “sending” community and the “host” community.

By following the intimate and dialectical relationship between Xinhui County in Guangdong Province and Cienfuegos, Lopez high-



lights the inherent local character of migration and shows that the ties that shaped migration, settlement, and employment patterns of Chinese overseas were primarily translocal and transurban. For a Chinese *tendero* (shopkeeper) or coolie it was the link between his immediate locale and his *qiaoxiang* that mattered most. The same was true for family members who remained behind in China and whose fortunes were inexorably tied to the Cuban countryside. The distance between China and Cuba and the intervention of historical forces, notably war, revolution, and the emergence of nationalism, could significantly disrupt migration networks, but *qiaoxiang* ties were remarkably resilient. Ironically, it was Castro's revolution that ultimately spelled the end to robust linkages between Southeast China and Cuba.

One of Lopez's main interlocutors during her research in Cuba was the archivist Mitzi Espinosa Luis. Ethnic policy in Castro's Cuba was largely successful in achieving social leveling and fostering the belief that all Cubans, regardless of race, are equally "Cuban." This achievement, however, often came at the expense of a more nuanced understanding of individual ethnicity. Luis is representative of a generation of young Cubans who have recently been encouraged by the state to explore their ethnic backgrounds. For Cubans of Chinese descent this process has primarily consisted of pilgrimages to Havana's once vibrant, but now faded, *barrio chino* as well as participation in academic colloquia and Chinese cultural festivals. At Chinese New Year in 2001 Luis met two elderly men who were from the same village and shared the same family name as her grandfather. Following this chance encounter, Luis adopted the two men as "relatives." While far more personal and certainly less scholarly than the other chapters in this volume, Luis' retelling of her "grandfather" Felipe's life story is worthy of inclusion here. Many of the colorful vignettes drawn from Felipe's experiences are valuable, especially the descriptions of *barrio chino* in its heyday, but it is Luis' delivery that is most illuminating. In many ways the author has become the subject and Felipe the prism through which she grapples with her own identity. That Luis portrays Felipe, who has spent more than seven decades in Cuba, as something of a quaint oddity says a lot about race, ethnicity, and identity in contemporary Cuba.