

**Sammelrez: Chinese in Latin America**

Delgado, Grace: *Making the Chinese Mexican. Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8047-7814-5; 304 S.

Look Lai, Walton; Chee-Beng, Tan (Hrsg.): *The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers 2010. ISBN: 978-900418213-4; 242 S.

Schiavone Camacho, Julia Maria: *Chinese Mexicans. Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8078-3540-1; 226 S.

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These books join a growing body of literature on the importance of transpacific migration to Latin America. Two monographs deal with Chinese on the U.S. – Mexican borderlands, covering overlapping time periods and with different emphases. The third, edited work, is a reprint of Volume 5 Number 1 of the „Journal of Chinese Overseas“ and a well deserved first for that journal. All make reference to the earlier period of the „coolie trade“ when both Chinese and South Asians workers came on indentured contracts, but mainly focus on the period after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which severely restricted Chinese immigration into the U.S. and redirected many immigrants to other states in the Americas.

These works enhance our understanding of the rich history of global labor migration. Most readers are familiar with migration from Europe to the Americas but less so with the diasporic experiences of Chinese mostly from coastal areas of South China. Their cultural, linguistic and racial differences set them apart setting the stage for the anti-Chinese movements especially in difficult economic and political times.

Schiavone Camacho has eight chapters organized into four parts. Chapters 1-4 deal chronologically with the arrival and settlement of Chinese in Northwestern Mexico and then their removal. Initially, they came to So-

nora to work in mines and help build railroads. They were followed by others excluded from entry into the U.S. Goods from China helped them win local customers and soon they competed with Mexican retailers to serve not only town residents but to supply goods for mining companies. „Chinos“ were subjected to a string of derogatory names in all of the areas of Latin America. In the period of the Mexican Revolution (1910-12) nationalist rhetoric dominated by ideas of race and „mestizaje“ left no place for Chinese, especially in Sonora, a hotbed of revolutionary zeal and home to many of Mexico's post-revolutionary leaders. Chinese who legally married or took local women in common union were especially targeted. Such women were openly insulted as sluts and their children were ostracized. Economic stress of the Great Depression, the author argues, caused anti-Chinese sentiment to rise again as many Mexican male workers were forcefully returned home from the U.S. Chinese were blamed for no jobs or available women for them. Expulsion by force of law and violence made most Chinese flee, taking their wives and children with them. Most returned to China, many with the aid of US Immigration Authorities who held them at the border and paid for their transportation back to China. Others re-migrated to other parts of Latin America.

Chapters 5-8 document the struggle of the Mexican wives and their mixed blood children to retain or create their Chinese-Mexican identities in the context of their husbands' reverse diaspora. Often, Chinese men already had Chinese wives; Mexican wives and their children struggled. Ties to the Catholic Church helped them organize, but neither Mexico nor China saw them as citizens. Prompted by political changes within both China and Mexico in the late 1930s, repatriation attempts began and continued through the war years, increasing after the Communist victory in 1949 and even into the 1960s. Personal stories of women's struggles in this process give depth to the social and political reality women faced.

Grace Pena Delgado covers similar issues, but mainly from the vantage point across the U.S./Mexican border. The book has six chapters with an insightful introduction that

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addresses and defines key concepts such as „borderlands“ and „fronterizos“ and points out the failure of both Mexican and U.S. historians to include the lived experiences of Chinese in this region. Chapters 1 and 2 cover the arrival and establishment of Chinese within the border regions. Initially, new arrivals hoped to use the fluid border to thwart the Chinese Exclusion Act. As security along the Arizona – Sonora border increased, the Mexican side became a settlement area. Nevertheless, extended family and old-country regional connections kept cross border ties strong. Claims to Mexican citizenship also allowed back and forth movements. Chapter 3 chronicles the increased crack-down on illegal Chinese entry into the U.S. in the early 20th century, noting that the Canadian border was also a path for illegal entry.

Chapters 4-6 explore the dynamics of Mexican anti-Chinese movements demonizing Chinese as racial polluters, after Porfirian liberalism yielded to the revolutionary nationalism of 1911-12. Sonora State prohibitions on marriage and loss of citizenship for women who married made the issue a moral as well as political one. Delgado focuses on legal measures used in conjunction with the anti-Chinese rhetoric of politicians, the press and businessmen on both sides of the border. A brief lull in the 1920s ended abruptly in the 1930s as Sonorans began to empty their territory of Chinese. Fleeing across the border resulted in deportation to China and led to the „unmaking“ of Chinese Mexicans in border region.

The third book contains a short introduction by Look Lai and eight chapters grouped into three parts. Edward Slack, Jr.'s article constitutes Part I, „The Early Colonial Period“. Slack provides an interesting overview of the earliest Chinese movements into Mexico, when New Spain's silver was used to purchase Chinese products first from Chinese traders in Manila then later directly from agents in South China. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Slack speculates that over 100,000 Asians [all called „chinos“] came to Mexico as immigrants or sailors. Before the mid-19th century, most of these migrants were in the coastal areas around Acapulco or Veracruz or around Mexico City, Puebla and other popula-

tion centers in the south. These male migrants married into the indigenous or African populations and over time became part of the lower caste in the colonial social hierarchy even as they „Sinofied New Spain.“ Chinese textiles, porcelains, and architectural influences were often of higher quality and volume than what reached Europe.

Part II (Chapters 2-5) is labeled „The Classic Migration“. Chapters 2 and 3, the anchors of the work, are by two of the best known scholars in this emerging field, Look Lai and Evelyn Hu-Dehart. Look Lai's chapter provides a comparative global perspective of Asian migration and sets the stage for the new kind of migration in the 19th century, especially to tropical regions after the end of the African slave trade. Empires, especially the British, tried to operate the Caribbean sugar industry using indentured „coolie“ labor alongside of slaves and to secure their investments in guano mining and railroad construction in Peru and Panama. So called „free“ Asian labors came later, many on the credit ticket system. Reports of abuse, however, resulted in an inquiry in 1877 by the Chinese and U.S. governments that ended indentures and allowed some workers to return home or re-migrate seeking better situations within the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Hu-DeHart's chapter focuses primarily on movements casting Chinese as scapegoats, similar to the treatment of Jews, because of their distinctive cultural and clannish characteristics alongside their successful business practices. Opium and human trafficking connections made targets of other Chinese. In places such as Jamaica, however, where Chinese made up only 1 percent of the population they controlled 10 percent of the commercial establishments and 80 percent of the retail grocery markets and a large part of the wholesale grocery trade. Periodic oppression, such as the riots in Jamaica in 1918, led to re-migration.

Chapter 4, by St. John Robinson, focuses on Central America, looking at the indenture experiences in Panama, Costa Rica and British Honduras (now Belize). Panama's **barrios Chinos** or Chinatowns were so successful that shopkeepers were limited to selling primarily items from China. Guatemala passed laws limiting new Chinese migrants and registe-

red all living there. As in other parts of Latin America, the shortage of Chinese women meant marriage to local women and eventually losing separate identity. Robinson, like other authors in the volume, gives attention to the variety of Chinese clan and regional associations.

Lisa Yun's chapter fits curiously into this section. In this interview with fiction author Ruthanne Lum, Yun examines the authenticity of the indenture experience in Lum's novel **God of Luck**. The novel describes the 120 days crossing the Pacific, as horrible as the infamous Atlantic middle passage during the slave era.

Part III, „Old Migrants, new Immigration“, looks at generational tensions between earlier and later immigrants. Isabelle Lausent-Herrera's Chapter 6 examines the situation in Peru after the indenture period into the early 21st century. Chinese made up a new Asiatic hierarchy with merchants at the top, distinguished by a complex of native place associations and delineated by being either fully Chinese or of mixed-blood or „injerto“. The older, more established residents or Tusans (a native place in Guangdong, China) used their press outlets and communal organizations to become engaged in local politics and to claim a separate identity when Peru became a target for a new wave of Asian migration in the 20th century.

Chapter 7 by Paul Tjon Sie Fat looks at longer term Chinese residents in Suriname known as „laiap“ or mud ducks, distinguished by speaking „kejia“, a language spoken in an outlying region of Hong Kong. The issues related to language and cultural identity and hybridity are very sensitive. The end of the 20th century brought a new wave of immigrants challenging local stereotypes of Chinese-ness, with the new immigrants seen by the established community as illegal, many on false passports and intending only to stay long enough to establish a new identity and get new papers so they could migrate to the U.S. This set up a new dimension between good and bad Chinese. The late comers have failed to assimilate, but to the general Suriname population these distinctions are not as clear, creating tensions within the broader community.

The final chapter, by Kathleen Lopez, looks at dynamic shifts toward Chinese in Cuba in the wake of the end of the Soviet Union. After brief treatment of the early period of indentures and the eventual assimilation mainly into the Afro-Cuban community, Lopez looks at reasons behind recent attempts to revitalize Havana's Chinatown. Cuban relations with the People's Republic of China have improved so that by 2005 China was Cuba's second largest trade partner. Architectural revitalization of the „barrio Chino“ accompanies an attempt to reclaim the ethnic history of Chinese as part of Cuba's history. This project can be seen cynically as an attempt to improve tourism. Lopez notes that a return to entrepreneurial autonomy would help more than festivals and buildings to restore Chinese identity in a multi-cultural and racial context of contemporary Cuba.

All of these books are rich in new details of experiences of Chinese in Latin America; this review only touches a few main points.

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