

Original Title: Print Capitalism and the Overseas Chinese in Cuba

Working Title: The Chinese Diaspora in Cuba: Wielding the Tools of Overseas Identity

David Kenley
Associate Professor of History

For more than a century, Chinese have migrated around the world in search of better opportunities. Known collectively as the “overseas Chinese,” this group today includes roughly 60 million individuals, making “overseas China” the rough demographic equivalent of the United Kingdom. Within that group, 1.6 million Chinese live in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this paper, I will examine the development of Chinese identity among this sizeable overseas community. In particular, I will investigate the Chinese immigrants in Havana, Cuba between 1887 and 1934.¹

During this period, intellectuals helped spread Chinese nationalism. Since the nation, as constructed in the meta-narratives of the day, emphasized territory, citizenship, and international boundaries, overseas individuals fell outside this traditional definition. Therefore, their identity was conflicted and multifaceted. Many rival groups understood the contested nature of overseas Chinese identity and competed for the immigrant’s loyalty. Furthermore, they employed several structures, or “tools,” to define and perpetuate the meaning of being Chinese. Newspapers and guildhalls became public spheres in which community elites constructed and deconstructed collective identity. At the same time, sub-elites used these same venues to challenge and contest a group’s “borders.” Discourse helps to define social reality, reinforce accepted identities, and

¹ I selected these dates based on the subjects of this paper: guildhalls and newspapers. The San He Hui guildhall was formed in 1887 whereas the *Fraternidad* newspaper was created in 1934.

replicate social structures. At the same time, discursive outlets can also transform widely accepted realities, challenging cultural and social assumptions. In short, the malleability of these structures allowed Cuba's overseas immigrants to continually reconstruct Chinese identity, creating space for their widely divergent community within the Chinese nation. In this paper I will investigate the public spheres created by the Chinese in Cuba to debate and construct overseas Chinese identity.

While research on Latin America lags behind work on the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and North America, it is a quickly developing field, especially in regard to Cuba. Some of the earliest scholars include Chang Ching Chieh, Duvon Clough Corbitt, and Arnold Joseph Meagher.² More recently, Latin American specialists have assumed a leading role in the field, including José Baltar Rodríguez, Jesús Guanche, Miriam Herrera Jerez, Mario Castillo Santana, Mauro García Triana, and Pedro Eng Herrera.³ Some researchers, such as Andrew Wilson, Walton Look Lai, and Chee Beng Tan have studied the Chinese in Cuba within the larger context of the Caribbean and Latin America.⁴ Others, including Kathy López, have sought to understand

² Ching Chieh Chang, *The Chinese in Latin America: A Preliminary Geographical Survey with Special Reference to Cuba and Jamaica* (College Park, Md.: University of Maryland, 1956); Duvon Clough Corbitt, *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947* (Wilmore, Ky: Asbury College, 1971); Arnold Joseph Meagher, *The Introduction of Chinese Laborers to Latin America: The "Coolie Trade", 1847-1874*. (S.l: s.n., 1975).

³ José Baltar Rodríguez, *Los chinos de Cuba: apuntes etnográficos*, Colección La fuente viva, 4 (Ciudad de La Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 1997); Jesús Guanche, *Componentes étnicos de la nación cubana*, Colección La fuente viva, 3 (Ciudad de La Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 1996); Miriam Herrera Jerez and Mario Castillo Santana, *De la memoria a la vida pública: identidades, espacios y jerarquías de los chinos en La Habana republicana (1902-1968)* (La Habana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2003); Mauro García Triana and Pedro Eng Herrera, *The Chinese in Cuba, 1847-Now*, Gregor Benton, trans. (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009).

the sociological and economic connections between the Chinese in Cuba and their home villages in south China.⁵ This paper builds on this already impressive body of research to demonstrate that the residents of Havana's Chinatown, or Barrio Chino, created similar structures—namely guildhalls and newspapers—as seen in other overseas locales.⁶ Within these arenas Cuba's immigrants grappled with the multilayered meanings of “being Chinese.”

History of the Overseas Chinese in Cuba

Between 1848 and 1860, nearly 60,000 Chinese migrated to Cuba. Arriving as indentured laborers, they worked in the emerging sugarcane plantation industry. As such, they

⁴ Andrew R. Wilson, *The Chinese in the Caribbean* (Princeton, N.J.: M. Wiener Publishers, 2004); Walton Look Lai and Chee Beng Tan, *The Chinese in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010). By contrast, Lisa Yun looks at Chinese immigrants in relation to other immigrant groups, namely African slaves. See Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

⁵ Kathleen López, “Transnational Histories: A Dual-Sided Approach to Researching Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Migration to Cuba,” in Tan Chee-Beng, Colin Storey, and Julia Zimmerman, eds., *Chinese Overseas: Migration, Research and Documentation* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2007), 167-200.

⁶ Several scholars have looked at the roll of guildhalls and newspapers in overseas communities beyond Cuba, especially those in Southeast Asia and North America. See Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya: A Historical Study* (London: Oxford U.P., 1969); Chen Mong Hock, *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore, 1881-1912* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1967); Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Cheng Lim-Keak, “Reflections on the Changing Roles of Chinese Clan Associations in Singapore,” *Yazhou Wenhua* (Asian culture) 14 (April 1990): 57-71; David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership: Case Study of Victoria in Canada* (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2010); L. K. Francis Hsu and Hendrick Serrie, *The Overseas Chinese: Ethnicity in National Context* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1998); Hermon Dunlap Smith Center for the History of Cartography, *History of the Chinese Clan Associations in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore News & Publications, 1986); Lau-Fong Mak, *The Sociology of Secret Societies: A Study of Chinese Secret Societies in Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981); David Kenley, “Overseas Print Capitalism and Chinese Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century,” Rohit Chopra, ed., *Global Media, Cultures, and Identities* (New York: Routledge Press, 2011), 68-82.

David Kenley

“The Chinese Diaspora in Cuba”

Paper for the 2011 American Association for Chinese Studies Conference

Page 3

mirrored the experience of Chinese migrants in other plantation climates including Hawaii, Malaysia, and Madagascar. These early residents remained virtually secluded from the larger Cuban population, living in ramshackle labor camps adjacent to their fields of labor. The working conditions were deplorable, making it difficult for plantation managers to maintain a dependable and steady labor force. Consisting entirely of men, this earliest Chinese community did not plant deep roots and dreamed of quickly returning to China. Indeed, they were known as *huaqiao* (华侨), or “Chinese sojourners” temporarily living away from home.⁷

With the international decline of slavery, Chinese indentured labor became even more vital for Cuba’s economy.⁸ From 1861 to 1874, approximately 85,000 new Chinese arrived on Cuba’s shores. Ironically, the working conditions of coolie laborers declined and their managers frequently treated them worse than slaves.⁹ However, not all new immigrants were indentured laborers. Within this new group, approximately 5,000 came not from China, but from the United

⁷ Romanizing Chinese is especially difficult when dealing with overseas Chinese topics. Because the immigrants typically came from non-Mandarin speaking areas, their chosen Romanization systems were very unorthodox. For the purpose of this paper I have used the Romanization spellings preferred by Cuba’s Chinese population, but have attempted to supplement these spellings with either Chinese characters, the standard Mandarin pinyin Romanization spelling, an English translation, or a combination of all of the above.

⁸ Britain outlawed the international slave trade in 1807, but slavery continued in Cuba for several more decades. In the Western Hemisphere, only Brazil allowed the legal practice of slavery longer than Cuba. In 1868, the Spanish crown declared slavery illegal in Cuba. See Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (1995), 33-34.

⁹ In 1874, the Chinese government sent a delegation to investigate working conditions among the immigrant community in Cuba. According to the delegation’s report, the Chinese were working under coercive and deplorable conditions. Upon completing their contracts, plantation owners would refuse to issue the *cédula*, or certificate of completion of contract as required by law. Consequently, the coolies were often jailed until they agreed to sign on for a second contract period. See Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba in the Nineteenth Century: Free Labor of Neoslavery,” *Contributions in Black Studies*, 12.1 (1994): 50. Available online at <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cibs/vol12/iss1/5> (last accessed 21 September 2011).

States. Frustrated by America's anti-Chinese legislation, many *huaqiao* left the U.S. to try their luck in Cuba. Known as the "Californians," they were skilled shopkeepers and businessmen. Setting up storefronts in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and other large cities, these Chinese created new economic opportunities for frustrated contract laborers. Now, instead of immediately returning to China upon completion of their contract, some Chinese chose to remain in Cuba and join Havana's growing Barrio Chino.

Despite these improved financial prospects, the average Chinese immigrant remained extremely poor. Many came to believe that the Spanish colonial authorities perpetuated a system that kept them in near slave-like conditions. Not surprisingly, thousands joined in the rebellions of the late nineteenth century. First during the Ten Years War (1868-78) and again during the Cuban War of Independence (1895-98), Chinese immigrants played significant roles. Since many of them used Hispanic names, historical records do not accurately reveal the total number of participants. Scholars have estimated the number at between 5,000 and 10,000.¹⁰ Besides their impressive numbers, the Chinese filled crucial leadership roles. Commander Jose Bu Tack and Captain Alfredo Lima are only two of the many who rose to high positions during the wars of independence.¹¹

¹⁰ Pérez de la Riva, *Demografía De Los Culiés Chinos En Cuba, 1853-74* (La Habana, 1967), 266-67 and Triana and Herrera, 9-10.

¹¹ Triana and Herrera, 15. In 1946 the Cuban government created a memorial to the Chinese fighters in the wars of independence. The monument claims: "There were no Chinese Cuba defectors; there were no Chinese Cuban traitors" (No hubo un chino cubano desertor; no hubo un chino cubano traidor. 古巴中国人无有倒戈者古巴中国人无有逃亡者). Triana and Herrera, xv, 218 and López, "One Brings Another," 112.

Between 1900 and the 1930s, approximately 30,000 Chinese arrived in Cuba, making the *huaqiao* community vibrant and substantial. There were still many coolie laborers working in the rural agricultural sector, but there was also an impressive presence in urban Havana. Located primarily along the Zanja corridor—the ditch carrying water into downtown Havana—the Chinese created an energetic community consisting of restaurants, grocery stores, and other small shops. Today, Zanja Calle remains the central viaduct through Barrio Chino. Because of the critical mass of the community, including its diverse financial opportunities, this period represents the highpoint of the *huaqiao* community.

Despite their reputation as independence fighters and successful businessmen, the Chinese remained isolated from the larger Cuban community. Inter-marriage with white Cubans was nearly non-existent. Instead they married Africans or more frequently simply remained single.¹² Thus, Barrio Chino remained “exotic” and “alien,” lacking many of the familiar aspects of a family-based society. At the same time, many Chinese came to believe that the dominant community would never accept them as equals nor would the Cuban government protect their basic interests. Not surprisingly, they looked to China to provide them with status and identity.

It is possible to describe the Chinese in Cuba as members of a diaspora. According to William Safran’s classical definition, members of a diaspora:

¹² Many of the Chinese immigrants had wives and children in China, whereas others never married. Still others had two families, one in China and one in Cuba. For one such interesting family story see Mitzi Espinosa Luis, “Si tú pleguntá, a me gusta hacé cuento. ‘If you ask, I’ll be happy to tell you’: Felipe Luis narrates his story,” in Andrew Wilson, ed., *The Chinese in the Caribbean* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2004), 129-144.

1. have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral", or foreign, regions;
2. retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland - its physical location, history, and achievements;
3. believe that they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
4. regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return - when conditions are appropriate;
5. believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
6. continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.¹³

Not all diasporas share all of these characteristics. Nevertheless, the Chinese community in Cuba manifested many of them. They certainly believed they would never be accepted in Cuban society and therefore formed cohesive community organizations with extensive ties to the homeland.

Between 1887 and 1934, Cuba's *huaqiao* built institutions to perpetuate and define their diaspora identity. Though many had either never been to China or would never return, they still saw themselves as transnational Chinese and wanted to maintain that identity. At the same time, however, there was never consensus on the meaning of being Chinese. Various individuals utilized these institutions to create, propagate, and challenge definitions of community membership and identity.

¹³ William Safran. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83-84 as quoted in Christine Kavazanjian, "What is Diaspora?" *International Institute for Diaspora Studies*, <http://www.diasporastudies.org/WhatIs.html> (last accessed 25 August 2011). Others, such as Rogers Brubaker, have argued that the term "diaspora" has become so overused as to be "stretched to the point of uselessness" (3). See Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28.1 (January 2005): 1-19.

Barrio Chino's Guildhalls

Because of their limited political and economic protection, the Chinese in Cuba quickly formed organizations for their own benefit. Formally registered with the government as “sociedades de instrucción and recreo” (educational and recreational societies), these social groupings provided a wide variety of functions. Furthermore, they revealed the layered and at times contested nature of overseas Chinese identity. At times these groups joined to achieve common goals. At other times they fought bitterly and violently one with another. Often referred to as *huiguan* (会馆, guildhall), they demonstrate the fluid nature of Chinese nationalism within Cuban society.¹⁴

Huiguan (referring to both the social group as well as the physical building in which they congregated) fulfilled many functions within Barrio Chino. When a new immigrant arrived in Cuba, he would frequently report to a guildhall for temporary housing, assistance in finding a job, and introduction to the local resources. After establishing himself in the community, he would remain in frequent contact with the group for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most importantly, the *huiguan* provided a forum for social interaction. Used as a theatre, a reading room, a gambling hall, or simply a gossip-center, the *huiguan* was vitally important for the largely bachelor society that lacked family networks and other opportunities for social contact. But these guildhalls were not simply entertainment centers. They also provided letter-writing services for illiterate men to keep in contact with their home village and they functioned as money transfer stations to handle the remittances sent to clansmen in the home country. Most

¹⁴ These guildhalls were also occasionally referred to as *qiaotuan* (侨团, emigrant group).

huiguan maintained a shrine, allowing its members to worship the Chinese deities of their choice. When a member became sick or fell into financial distress, *huiguan* members would pool their resources and function as a welfare distribution center. If an immigrant were lucky enough to be married with children, the *huiguan* might provide Chinese lessons, ensuring that the language would be passed on to future generations. Even after death, the *huiguan* would handle funeral service and—if financially possible—the shipping of the corpse back to China for burial in the family plot.

While most guildhalls provided similar services, it is interesting to study their various organizational principles (see Table 1). For example, one of the most common types of *huiguan* was the “native-place society.” To become a member of this type of guildhall, you must share a common point of origin within China. Because of dialectic differences, it was difficult for all members of Barrio Chino to communicate with one another. Naturally, they would coalesce into social organizations made up of individuals sharing a common dialect and point of origin. Some of the more long-lasting native-place guildhalls included Kow Kong Asociacion (Kow Kong association, 九江公所, *jiujiang gongsuo*), which was founded in 1920 for immigrants from Jiangxi Province and the Chung Shan Society (中山自治所, *zhongshan zizhi suo*), which was also founded in 1920 for immigrants from the Chung Shan (Zhongshan) region south of Guangzhou City.¹⁵

¹⁵ Triana and Herrera, xxxv.

Table 1. Types of Guildhalls in early twentieth-century Havana¹⁶

<i>Type</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
Native-place	Based on the point of origin within China, often corresponding to dialect divisions.
Clan based	Patronymic, consisting of one common surname or multiple less-common surnames.
Secret society	Originally committed to the overthrow of the Manchu regime in China, including secret rites and symbols indigenous to China and supplemented by Cuban Freemasonry.
Political	Including Nationalist and Communist organizations, frequently overlapping with secret societies.
Corporate	Representing common economic interests.
Artistic	Opera and theatrical artistic groups.
Sport	Primarily martial arts groups.
National	Groups seeking to represent all overseas Chinese, such as Casino Chung Wah.

Similar to the native-place society was the clan-based *huiguan*. Southern China, the origins of nearly all Chinese immigrants to Cuba, was especially renowned for its strong and vibrant clan traditions. Upon arriving in Cuba, the immigrants eventually reestablished clan organizations. Some of the larger clan-based *huiguan* included the Wong Kon Ja Tong, the Long Sai Li, and the Yi Fung Toy Tong (see Table 2). Other clans were not large enough to support their own guildhalls, and therefore they combined with smaller clans, such as the Lung Con Cun

¹⁶ Taken from Grupo Promotor del Barrio China de la Habana, *Presencia China en Cuba* (Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, Grupo Promotor del Barrio China, y Ediciones GEO, 1999).

Sol, the Chi Tack Tong, and the Sue Yue Tong. Of course, membership in a clan's *huiguan* did not preclude an individual from joining another type of guildhall, one based on native-place, politics, or economics. However, the continuing popularity of these clan organizations demonstrates the importance of real and fictive family structures even in the face of rising Chinese nationalism.

Table 2. *Clan-based guildhalls in Cuba*¹⁷

<i>Name of Guildhall</i>	<i>Clan(s)</i>	<i>Established</i>
Lung Con Cun Sol (龙关亲义总公所, Long Guan Qin Yi Zong Gong Suo)	Lau (刘, Liu), Kuan (关, Guan), Chiong (张, Zhang), and Chiu (赵, Zhao)	1900
Wong Kon Ja Tong (黄江夏堂, Huang Jiang Xia Tang)	Wong (黄, Huang)	1920
Long Sai Li (李陇西公所, Li Long Xi Gong Suo)	Li (李)	1920
Yi Fung Toy Tong (余风彩堂, Xu Feng Cai Tang)	Yi (余, Xu)	1920
Chi Tack Tong (至德堂, Zhi De Tang)	Eng (吴, Wu), Chao (周, Zhou), Choi (蔡, Cai), Yong (翁, Weng), and Chiong (蒋, Jiang)	1920
Sue Yue Tong (朔源总堂, Shuo Yuan Zong Tang)	Lui (吕, Lü), Kong, and Fong(方, Fang)	1921
On Ten Tong (安定堂, An Ding Tang)	Bu (胡, Hu), Leon (梁, Liang), Cheng (程), and Eng (伍, Wu).	1928
Chi Pui Kon Tong	Chi (朱, Zhu)	1933

¹⁷ Zhou Li (周莉), "Guba huashe lüe ying (古巴华社掠影)," *Guo wu yuan qiaowu bangongshi* 《Qiaowu gongzuo yanjiu》 bianjibu (国务院侨务办公室《侨务工作研究》编辑部) 5 (2004), <http://qwgzyj.gqb.gov.cn/hwzh/120/475.shtml> (last accessed 4 October 2011); Triana xxxiv; Mitzi Espinosa Luis, interview by David Kenley, 7 June 2011.

(朱江堂, Zhu Bu Jiang Tang)

Lam Say Jo Tong
(林西河堂, Lin Xi He Tang)

Lam (林, Lin)

1936

Some guildhalls transcended regional and clan boundaries, unifying individuals under common political agendas. For example, in 1887 members of the Triad secret society founded the Sanhehui guildhall in Barrio Chino (see Table 3).¹⁸ The Triads trace their origins to the seventeenth century, when the Manchus established the Qing Dynasty in China. Opposed to the imposition of foreign rule, the Triads vowed to overthrow the Manchus and reestablish indigenous Chinese rule. To become a member of the triads, individuals had to participate in various secret initiation rituals. By the nineteenth century, these societies had lost their original intent, but remained powerful political organizations nonetheless. In Cuba, the Triads established the Sanhehui as an overseas version of these organizations. The founding members in Cuba included Li Sheng, Wen Zhuchi, Tan Gen Pin, Li Kai Rin, Chen Zhong, and Li Jin. They believed the guildhall would integrate Chinese society across dialect and clan lines while defending its rights within Cuban society. In 1902 the Sanhehui was renamed the Chee Kung Tong (Partido Republicano), but otherwise maintained its original structure, including secret initiation rites.¹⁹ According to some sources, these rites included animal sacrifices, blood oaths,

¹⁸ Kathleen López, "Transnational Histories: A Dual-Sided Approach to Researching Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Migration to Cuba," 179.

¹⁹ The original Chee Kung Tong was created by the Hongmen society at the urging of its North American counterpart. Throughout its history, the Chee Kung Tong remained deeply intertwined with international Chinese groups. In 1946 at a conference in Shanghai, the Chee Kung Tong was again renamed as the Min Chih Tang (民致堂) and in 1967 was renamed the National Association Min Chih Tang (Asociación Nacional Min Chih Tang). Today it is the oldest, most respected, and most influential *huiquan* in Barrio Chino. Letter from Kathleen López, 21 September 2011. For more information on

David Kenley

"The Chinese Diaspora in Cuba"

Paper for the 2011 American Association for Chinese Studies Conference

and the performance of various secret ceremonies.²⁰ The Triad leaders soon supplemented these with other rites associated with local Freemason groups. The result was an amalgamation of Chinese and Western symbols, each taking on new meaning within the overseas environment.

Table 3. Political guildhalls in Cuba

<i>Name of Guildhall</i>	<i>Sponsor</i>	<i>Established</i>
Sanhehui (三合会), later renamed Chee Kung Tong (至公堂)	Triads/Masons	1887
Casino Chung Wah (中华总会馆)	Qing government	1893
Alianza Socialista	Nationalist Party	1927
Partido Comunista Cubano	Comintern	1925

Rather than ceding control to the secret society organizations, the government in Beijing sought to create a loyal, credible political guildhall in Havana. Established in 1893, Casino

Cuba's secret societies see Kathleen López, "One Brings Another: The Formation of Early Twentieth Century Chinese Migrant Communities in Cuba," in Andrew Wilson, ed., *The Chinese in the Caribbean* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2004), 106; "Shijie hongmen zonghui" (International Hongmen Association, 世界洪门总会), *Baidu baike* (Baidu Encyclopedia, 百度百科), <http://baike.baidu.com/view/229230.htm> (last accessed 22 September 2011); "Guba Zhigongtang" (Cuba's Chee Kung Tong, 古巴致公堂), *Baidu baike* (Baidu Encyclopedia, 百度百科), <http://baike.baidu.com/view/355415.htm> (last accessed 22 September 2011); and "Guba Zhigongtang" (Cuba's Chee Kung Tong, 古巴致公堂), *Hudong baike* (Hudong Encyclopedia, 互动百科), <http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E5%8F%A4%E5%B7%B4%E8%87%B4%E5%85%AC%E5%A0%82> (last accessed 22 September 2011).

²⁰ Trevor W. McKeown, "Chinese Freemasons," Grand Lodge of British and Yukon website, http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/history/chinese_freemasons/index.html (last accessed 22 September 2011); Dian H. Murray and Qin Biaoqi, *The Origins of the Tiandihui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 31.

Chung Wah (China Club) functioned as the *de facto* embassy for the Chinese in Cuba.²¹ It provided many of the same services as other guildhalls, including coordinating philanthropy and providing basic services to newly arrived immigrants. However, it sought to transcend all regional, clan, and political divisions in its attempt to represent all overseas Chinese. Despite this stated goal, community elites frequently contended with one another to assume leadership roles with the Casino Chung Wah, and the *casino* reflected many of the political shifts of the early twentieth century. Throughout this period, however, Casino Chung Wah remained generally conservative in its politics.

Whereas the Chee Kung Tong and Casino Chung Wah had more nebulous agendas, the Nationalists (国民党, Kuomintang or Guomindang) established a much more clearly defined political entity in Havana. Known in Spanish as the Alianza Socialista (Socialist Alliance), this guildhall was dedicated to establishing a republican form of government in China.²² The alliance was first established in 1927, the heyday of Nationalist influence in China. Within two years, the Nationalists had secured political control in China, and Alianza Socialista became a center of power and influence. Nevertheless, it never fully eclipsed the importance of some of the longer-established guildhalls, and local leaders of the Nationalist Party often focused on securing

²¹ L. Eve Armentrout Ma, *Revolutionaries, Monarchists, and Chinatowns: Chinese politics in the Americas and the 1911 Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 14-21; López, "One Brings Another," 103; and Zhou Li, <http://qwgzyj.gqb.gov.cn/hwzh/120/475.shtml> (last accessed 4 October 2011).

²² Confeccionado por Dirección Municipal de Cultura de Centro Habana, "Alianza Socialista China de Cuba," http://www.sancristobal.cult.cu/sitios/mun/centrohabana/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=159&Itemid=5 (last accessed 22 September 2011).

positions as directors of Casino Chung Wah rather than limiting themselves to membership in Alianza Socialista.²³

The *huaqiao* in Cuba also joined non-Chinese-sponsored organizations. In 1921, Chinese intellectuals in Shanghai—with the assistance of Comintern agents—established the Chinese Communist Party (共产党, Gongchandang). Four years later, Comintern agents in Havana helped establish the Partido Comunista Cubano (Cuban Communist Party or PCC). Predictably, Chinese immigrants who had already been exposed to communist ideology quickly became affiliated with the PCC. For the first years of its existence, the government in Havana was ambivalent toward the PCC. By 1929, however, they began cracking down on suspected communists, including those within the Chinese community. In that year four *huaqiao* were deported because of their communist ties. The next year, pro-Nationalist Chinese collaborated with the Cuban government in the arrest and imprisonment of José Wong (黄淘白), a PCC associate and member of the Defensa Obrera Internacional (a Comintern organization). Wong was later murdered in prison.²⁴

Predictably, the overseas Chinese also organized themselves according to economic factors. For example, in 1926 merchants organized the Cienfuegos Association of Chinese Agriculturalists (Asociación Cienfueguera de Agricultores Chinos). By working together, the members of this organization hoped to secure better prices for their produce and pool distribution

²³ For more information on leadership struggles among overseas Chinese communities, see David Chuenyan Lai, *Chinese Community Leadership*.

²⁴ “Huang Taobai (黄淘白),” *Huaqiao huaren baike shu* (Encyclopedia of Overseas Chinese, 华侨华人百科全书), renwu juan (“people” volume, 人物卷) (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 2001) available online at <http://www.chnqxw.com/2011/0514/4754.html> (last accessed 28 September 2011). See also Triana and Herrera, xv-xvi.

networks. Several additional commercial unions and organizations sprang into existence in Havana. Some had their own meeting locales. Others simply met within existing guildhalls.²⁵

As can be seen by the proliferation of guildhalls, the overseas Chinese in Cuba had multiple, conflicting identities. Not only did the various *huiguan* compete with one another for power and influence, but at times such competition became deadly. The non-Chinese residents of Havana accused the *huiguan* of illicit activities, ranging from opium use to prostitution. Others suggested they were fronts for organized crime. While such fears were no doubt exaggerated, the competition within and between the guildhalls was very real. In 1926, such rivalries became painfully obvious. At that time the Casino Chung Wah's board of directors was divided into two factions: the Nationalist Party faction and the Chee Kung Tong faction. The Nationalist Party faction supported Chiang Kai-shek's policies in China, and in a violation of established protocol, sent Casino Chung Wah funds to China to purchase military supplies for Chiang's troops. Accusations flew back and forth within the board of directors and on August 16, 1926, the Nationalist Party member Andrés Chiu Lión and his wife were shot and killed. On his deathbed, Andrés identified his murderer as a Chee Kung Tong member. Over the next several days, non-Chinese Cuban newspapers told stories of depravity, violence, and immorality involving the Chinese community. The government launched a wide-spread crackdown on Barrio Chino's guildhalls, especially targeting those of Triad/Freemason origins. This single example clearly demonstrates the fractures that existed in China's overseas community. Some privileged family ties while others preferred to organize according to dialect and native-place.

²⁵ López, "One Brings Another," 105.

Some preached fraternity and brotherhood, while using secret rituals and signs to exclude non-initiates. Still others sought to establish community-wide organizations, yet even within these groups consensus and agreement remained elusive. Whereas they saw themselves as members of common diasporic community, the exact borders of that community were subject to vociferous and at times violent debate.

Newspapers

Just as social organizations reveal contestations over Chinese identity, so too do newspapers reveal disagreement and debate. Overseas Chinese intellectuals have long used newspapers to broadcast their views on nationalism and Chinese identity. It is illuminating to study the convergence of these two trends—the growth of nationalism and the proliferation of newspapers—within the overseas Chinese communities. It has been nearly three decades since Benedict Anderson first described nationalism as an “imagined community.”²⁶ For those living beyond the geographic borders of the nation, this “imagined community” was certainly more ethereal. Yet, as Craig Calhoun points out, space-transcending media, such as newspapers, create powerful linkages across dispersed populations.²⁷ It should not surprise us, therefore, that overseas Chinese communities saw the simultaneous growth in nationalism and newspaper publications.

There have been approximately 20 Chinese-language newspapers/periodicals published or distributed in Cuba during the twentieth century (see Table 4). A quick scan of their titles

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1980).

²⁷ Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and ethnicity,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 211-239.

reveals much about the concerns and community structures that characterized the *huaqiao* in Havana and throughout Cuba. For example, *Glorious China News* and *National Salvation Weekly* suggest that editors and readers remained intensely concerned about events in China. Others, including *Cuba Chamber of Commerce Weekly* and *Literature and Art of South America* seem to suggest the *huaqiao* were establishing roots in their adopted homeland. Still others, including *Alliance Monthly* and *Unity Times*, belie a concern over community solidarity. Given the sheer number of publications, it is apparent the Chinese community was diverse in its interests and seeking self-definition.

*Table 4. Chinese-language Periodicals of Cuba*²⁸

<i>Title</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
工农呼声	<i>Voice of the Workers and Peasants</i>
光华报（日报）	<i>Glorious China News</i>
光华报[半周刊/周刊]	<i>Semi-Weekly/Weekly Glorious China News</i>
古巴中华总商会月刊	<i>Cuba Chamber of Commerce Weekly</i>
古牙开明公报	<i>Cuba-Asia Enlightenment Gazette</i>
救国周报	<i>National Salvation Weekly</i>
开明公报	<i>Enlightenment Gazette</i>
联合月刊	<i>Alliance Monthly</i>
民生报	<i>People's Livelihood News</i>
民声日报	<i>Voice of the People Daily</i>
南美侨友	<i>Sojourner Friends of South America</i>

²⁸ Information in this table is take from Ohio University Libraries, "Shao Center Database for Overseas Chinese Newspapers and Journals," <http://cicdatabank.library.ohiou.edu/opac/newspaper.php> (last accessed 22 September 2012); Triana and Herrera, xxxvi-vii; and Lopez, "Transnational Histories," 179.

南美文艺	<i>Literature and Art of South America</i>
圣保罗时报	<i>Saint Paul Times</i>
同声报	<i>Unity Times</i>
华文商报	<i>Chinese Commercial Newspaper</i>
<i>Fraternidad</i>	<i>Fraternity</i>

Two of the earliest and most influential newspapers in Cuba were *Voice of the People Daily* and *Voice of the Workers and Peasants*. From approximately 1915 until 1928, China was wracked with civil war. Regional military commanders fought one another to expand their territory and exert influence at the national level. In effect, there was no central government. Two groups, however, were increasingly influential in national debates: the Nationalists and the Chinese Communists. As demonstrated in previous studies, these two groups turned to overseas Chinese communities for support, and Cuba was no different.²⁹ In 1921, Nationalist sympathizers in Havana established *Voice of the People Daily*. Serving as the semi-official mouthpiece of first Sun Yat-sen and then Chiang Kai-shek, for the next 38 years *Voice of the People Daily* maintained close ties with the Chinese News Service and the Central News Service in China.³⁰ It frequently printed unedited stories provided by these agencies over the wire from China. After the Nationalists secured control of China in 1928, *Voice of the People Daily* established itself as one of the preeminent news outlets in Havana. The paper's editors reminded its readers that Barrio Chino was inextricably tied to China and that the overseas Chinese were only temporarily sojourning away from home. At the same time, it propagated Nationalist

²⁹ Kenley, "Overseas Print Capitalism and Chinese Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century," 68-82.

³⁰ Triana and Herrera, xxxvi.

concepts of Chinese identity, including state-guided capitalism, self-sacrificing patriotism, and anti-Japanese sentiment. Other newspapers, including *People's Livelihood News*, supported *Voice of the People Daily* in these areas.

By contrast, *Voice of the Workers and Peasants* served as the organ of the communists. The paper was founded by Huang Taobai (黄淘白) in 1928 in Santiago de Cuba.³¹ Designed to counter the influence of *Voice of the People Daily*, the paper harshly criticized the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Because of its association with communism, authorities attempted to stamp out the publication, but it spread along secret channels and soon had an island-wide readership. Like the *Voice of the People Daily*, *Voice of the Workers and Peasants* also covered events in Nanjing, Beijing, and Guangzhou. It too helped maintain intellectual and emotional ties between China and Cuba, fostering a sense of connection with the homeland. However, unlike the *Voice of People Daily*, the editors of *Voice of the Workers and Peasants* had a different view of the Chinese nation. Rather than simply focusing on patriotism, it also took a decidedly class-based view of society. In 1944, the paper changed its name to *Glorious China News*, but it was not until after the 1959 Cuban Revolution that the paper was legally distributed publically.³²

³¹ As discussed above, José Wong was imprisoned and murdered in jail in 1930 because of his communist ties. For more on the founding of the *Voice of the Workers and Peasants*, see Cheng Sheng (程省), Guba wei yi zhongwen baozhi 'Guanghua bao' zouguo 80 sui (China's only Chinese newspaper 'Glorious China News' is 80 years old, 古巴唯一中文报纸《光华报》走过 80 载), Zhongguo baoye wang (China journalism website, 中国报业网), <http://www.baoye.net/News.aspx?id=239356> (last accessed 22 September 2011).

³² In 1959 it relocated its press to Barrio Chino in Havana and still operates with the support of the Casino Chung Wah.

Glorious China News was one of the few newspapers that transcended the 1959 divide and it is the only Chinese-language newspaper still in existence in Havana today.³³

Besides *Voice of the People* and *Voice of the Workers and Peasants*, another major paper was the *Enlightenment Gazette* established by the Chee Kung Tong triads.³⁴ As with its sponsoring guildhall, the *Enlightenment Gazette* sought to unify triad members and provide them with news and information that would benefit them both individually and as members of the society. As such, the *Enlightenment Gazette* was not as politically engaged as was *Voice of the People* or *Voice of the Workers and Peasants*, though it too provided extensive coverage of news from China.

Despite the popularity of these newspapers, other members of the community were more focused on the financial realities of their home in Havana. *Chinese Commercial Newspaper*, for example, was popular among the small business owners in Barrio Chino. While they also were concerned about events in China, they were just as concerned with events in Havana, especially if those events might affect their financial bottom line. First published in 1914, *Chinese Commercial Newspaper* carried news of local shipping companies, commodity prices, and of course, many advertisements from Havana's *huaqiao* businesses. As such, it was the mouthpiece of Cuba's financial elite. Other papers, including *Voice of the Workers and Peasants*, also

³³ Today the newspaper is still being published under the auspices of two septegenarians. Guillermo Chiu, the typesetter, is the only individual in the community that knows how to operate the press, which was designed in the early twentieth century and consists of dozens of trays of moveable type. The four-page paper is published twice a month with a circulation of around 200. The Cuban government funds the publication and monitors its contents. Guillermo Chiu, interview by David Kenley, 7 June 2011.

³⁴ Napoleón Seuc, *La colonia china de Cuba 1930-1960: antecedentes, memorias y vivencias* (Miami, Fla: Napoleón Seuc, 1998); López, "Transnational Histories," 179.

focused on Cuba's economy, but rather than supporting a capitalist version of transnational China, it championed the concerns of the unskilled proletariat struggling to make ends meet in Cuba's harsh financial environment.

In 1934, a new serial arrived in the streets of Barrio Chino. Known as *Fraternidad*, it was published in both Chinese and Spanish.³⁵ Sponsored by the Union of Commercial Retailers of the Chinese Colony in Cuba (Unión de Detallistas del Comercio de la Colonia China en Cuba), the paper avoided a purely political agenda. Instead, as with the Chinese Commercial Newspaper, it was designed to inform its reading public of commercial trends and to advertise local businesses. It also belies the changing nature of being Chinese in Cuba. By the 1930s there was an emerging second-generation of Chinese who spoke fluent Spanish. Even those who were first generation were increasingly using Spanish in their day-to-day lives. The bilingual nature of the paper clearly demonstrates the bifurcated identity within Barrio Chino.³⁶

There was one additional type of serial publication that deeply influenced identity among the overseas Chinese. Known simply as "emigrant journals" (侨刊, qiaokan), these papers were published in the home districts of the Chinese immigrants. Taishan, Xinhui, Enping, Kaiping, and several other districts in southern China had long traditions of encouraging migration overseas, including to Cuba. The migrants from these regions desired to remain informed regarding their homelands and thus the "emigrant journal" was born. Published in China and

³⁵ López, "Transnational Histories," 179.

³⁶ Similar trends happened in other overseas newspapers. For instance, San Francisco's *Young China* was initially published in Chinese, but by the 1930s contained both Chinese as well as English-language sections, with the English portion becoming increasingly larger. See Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American*.

distributed around the world, these journals contained articles on migration policies, population flows, emerging economic trends, remittance reports, and of course, local news from the home district.³⁷ These “emigrant journals” perpetuated the transnational nature of Barrio Chino and fluctuating Chinese identity.

As with social organizations, newspapers demonstrate that the overseas Chinese were divided along political, regional, and economic lines. With a Chinese-speaking population averaging around 20,000 between 1900 and 1940, it is remarkable that Barrio Chino supported approximately 20 different newspapers (see Table 3).³⁸ In other words, the readership was diverse and multi-faceted. Newspaper editors understood the power of the printed word for community definition, and yet this same industry allowed for a multiplicity of voices.

Conclusion

In 1923, leaders of Cuba’s Chinese community gathered to establish a Cienfuegos branch of the Nationalist Party (Guomindang). The ceremony included party leaders, representatives of the Casino Chung Wah, wealthy merchants, and Chinese newspaper editors. The Cienfuegos mayor spoke favorably of the Chinese and the Nationalist Party, comparing Sun Yat-sen to the revered Cuban patriot José Martí. At a predetermined signal, both the Chinese Nationalist flag

³⁷ Cen Huang and Michael R. Dodley, “Appendix Chapter: A Note on the Study of *Qiaoxiang* ties,” in Leo Douw, Cen Huang, and Michael R. Godley, eds., *Qiaoxiang Ties: Interdisciplinary Approaches to ‘Cultural Capitalism’ in South China* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1999), 313-319; López, “Transnational Histories,” 176.

³⁸ López, “One Brings Another,” 95.

and the Cuban flag were simultaneously raised.³⁹ Indeed, this single episode demonstrates the rich texture of Chinese identity in early twentieth-century Cuba, and the role played by guildhalls and newspapers in fostering this identity. Dialect, clan, politics, and economics were just some of the constituent parts of the formula. At times, individuals would privilege one aspect over the rest. At other times, the balance would shift. Throughout, the guildhalls and newspapers remained important venues for constructing an overseas identity. Though there was a common diasporic experience, the contours of the community remained open to debate and reinterpretation.

Since the 1950s, the wave of Chinese immigration has crested and receded. According to various sources, the population of Chinese in Cuba has dropped from roughly 30,000 in 1949 to about 10,000 in 1979.⁴⁰ Following the 1959 Cuban revolution, only those individuals born in China are entered in the census as being Chinese. Their Cuban-born decedents are simply “Cuban.” Furthermore, the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s suddenly made the pro-Soviet Cubans suspicious of the Chinese immigrants within their midst. As a result, Chinese identity became a liability, leading the residents of Barrio Chino to deemphasize their cultural markers.

³⁹ López, “Chinese Overseas,” 175-76.

⁴⁰ There is much disagreement regarding the number of Chinese living in Cuba after the 1959 revolution. Some suggest the number was as high as 30,000, whereas others put it closer to 15,000. Numbers become even more problematic in later years. By the 1970s some argue the population was as high as 10,000 while others say it was merely 3,000. As this paper has demonstrated, the meaning of being Chinese is fluid and constructed, and therefore impossible to quantify. If Chinese identity consists of being born in China, or being the decedent of someone born in China, then these numbers are obviously unrealistically low. For more information on Chinese demographics see Liu Quan 刘权, *Guangdong huaqiao huaren shi* (A history of Cantonese overseas and ethnic Chinese 广东华侨华人史) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2002), 87-88; Huaqiao jingji nianjian bianji weiyuanhui (华侨经济年鉴编辑委员会), eds, *Huaqiao jingji nianjian* (华侨经济年鉴 Overseas Chinese economic yearbook), (Taipei: Qiaowu weiyuanhui, 1979), 325; Triana and Herrera, xxx-xxxi.

Today, Havana's city planners are hoping to revitalize Barrio Chino, and therefore are encouraging the Chinese to celebrate their rich cultural heritage. The newspaper *Glorious China* is still issued every other week, though only with the financial support of the government. The various *huiguan* are also experiencing a revival, especially since the government allows them to operate restaurants to supplement their finances. In the large dining hall of the Casino Chung Hua, Cubans and Chinese mingle and visit over large plates of chop suey and fried rice while reconstructing the meaning of being Chinese.