

Kathleen M. López. 2013. *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 384 pp. ISBN: 978-1469607139.

Benjamín N. Narváez

History Discipline, Division of Social Sciences
University of Minnesota, Morris
bnarvaez@morris.umn.edu

Few outside of Cuba are aware of the history of Chinese immigration to the island. Kathleen López's excellent book, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*, seeks to fill this void by examining the complex experience of Chinese immigrants in Cuba and the important role they have played in this country's history from the mid nineteenth century to the present. López takes a transnational approach to her topic by examining the multiple factors inside and outside of Cuba that shaped Chinese identities and experiences on the island, as well as how developments in Cuba affected local communities back in China. In constructing this history, she draws on archival material (plantation, associational, judicial, civil, and merchant records), newspapers, memoirs, and oral history from Cuba, China, and the United States. López deftly weaves analysis of Chinese in the capital with Chinese in other parts of the island (especially Cienfuegos), reminding us in the process that the Chinese Cuban experience did not occur solely in Havana's Chinatown.

Ultimately, López argues that Chinese immigrants in Cuba forged transnational identities; they became Cuban while never losing their connections to China and the larger diasporic community. In making this argument, López balances a sojourner interpretation of Chinese migration with an immigrant one. Whether migrating to Cuba under forced pretenses as many Chinese laborers did during the mid nineteenth century or more freely as merchants and laborers did from then on, most Chinese arrived in Cuba believing they would be temporary residents on the island. However, many soon realized that returning to China was difficult or nearly impossible due to a lack of money or to having developed strong social and economic ties in Cuba. Thus, the majority of these individuals came to terms with staying in Cuba and increasingly began to identify with it. Chinese integration and claims to citizenship were based on interracial marriage (ninety-nine percent of Chinese immigration was male), raising children as Cuban, adoption of Spanish names, baptism and religious conversion to Catholicism, blending Chinese traditions with Cuban ones (i.e., the saint Sanfancón), reminding Cuban society of heroic Chinese participation in Cuba's wars of independence, participation in Cuban patriotic events, and some participation

in Cuban politics, labor organizing, and revolutionary activity. Yet, in becoming Cuban, these immigrants never stopped being Chinese: they formed Chinese neighborhoods, they sent remittances back to China and maintained family ties across the Pacific despite having families in Cuba, they passed on some of their traditions to their Cuban children, they created Chinese associations for mutual aid, entertainment, and in hopes of preserving their traditions, they created Chinese newspapers and followed and participated in Chinese modernization campaigns and larger political developments (i.e., Sun Yat-sen's republican movement, the Japanese invasion of China during WWII, and the struggle between the KMT and the Chinese communists), and merchants maintained ties to the Chinese diaspora and China through business.

López's work suggests that the construction of a hyphenated or transnational identity (i.e., Chinese-Cuban) was accidental, defensive, and reactive, while also willingly and actively sought out. The desire to maintain a connection to the homeland in combination with anti-Chinese sentiment, marginalization, and exploitation in Cuban society led Chinese immigrants to band together as a community and thereby maintain a Chinese identity. Nevertheless, the fact that Cuba was undoubtedly becoming their home encouraged many Chinese to actively identify with Cuba and, in the face of Cubans who did not welcome them with open arms, these Chinese sought to demonstrate to their neighbors that they belonged and were a part of the Cuban nation. Thus, the Chinese community attempted to balance their own desires and interests with larger societal pressures and international conditions and in the process constructed a hyphenated identity. Although López focuses on the Chinese immigrant experience in Cuba, her work reminds us that immigrant, national, and transnational/diasporic identities in general are negotiated between marginalized groups (i.e., immigrants, overseas communities, minorities, and the popular classes more generally) and dominant groups (i.e., elites, host societies, and societies of origin).

As transnational history, *Chinese Cubans* goes beyond issues of identity. López observes that anti-Chinese sentiment existed in Cuba without the influence of the United States, but American Sinophobia in combination with American power in republican Cuba contributed significantly to the hostility Cuban Chinese experienced during the first several decades of independence. During the 1898-1902 U.S. military occupation, the U.S. extended its own Chinese exclusion laws to Cuba. Following independence, the U.S. government continued pressuring the Cuban government to exclude the Chinese. This pressure stemmed in part from a general American fear of Chinese immigration to the Western hemisphere, but also from the fact that Chinese began using Cuba as a stepping-stone to enter the United States illegally. The Cuban

government largely pursued anti-Chinese measures during the early republic, but, ironically, American pressure, this time from business interests, led president Menocal to temporarily lift the ban on Chinese immigration during the World War I era to increase the country's labor supply. Another transnational component of this study is López's examination of how the actions of Chinese Cubans influenced developments in China. In the process of maintaining ties to their homeland, Chinese Cubans played an important role in developments in China by sending money across the Pacific to support family, local and regional modernization projects, and Chinese nationalist politics. López's recognition that the study of overseas Chinese history should include the experience of women who stayed behind is astute; her brief examination of how absent fathers strained family life in China, but also created opportunities at the local level for women to manage their homes and family finances despite the patriarchal nature of Chinese society, suggests future avenues of fruitful research.

When asked about the Chinese presence on the island, Cubans (including Chinese Cubans) quickly emphasize the Chinese *mambí* (freedom fighter). López examines the complex nature of Chinese participation in the Cuban wars of independence (i.e., not all fought and some actively supported Spain with their actions; many served in auxiliary roles; participants had various reasons for joining the fight for *Cuba Libre*, etc.). She also observes that this participation did not automatically guarantee the inclusion of the Chinese in the Cuban nation. However, Chinese Cubans and their supporters could use the image of the patriotic Chinese fighter to claim a firmer place in the Cuban nation. As López notes, the Chinese in Cuba never experienced the same level of hostility that their compatriots did in other parts of the Americas, largely because of their support for *Cuba Libre* and the rhetoric surrounding these actions. Moreover, even when the majority of Chinese Cubans left the country following the 1959 Revolution, Cubans continued to view the Chinese population positively and uphold the image of the Chinese *mambí*. Although the Chinese population is a fraction of what it used to be, the growing present-day relationship between Cuba and China has given the Chinese community new social prominence on the island (including the building of a new Chinese archway at the entrance to Havana's Chinatown). By including a nuanced analysis of the Chinese *mambí* within a larger history of the Chinese Cuban experience, López gives recognition to these Cuban heroes while also communicating the hardships Chinese Cubans experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the multifaceted ways in which the Chinese contributed to Cuban history.

Chinese Cubans reminds us that the experience of an immigrant

group is often internally varied and includes intragroup tension. Chinese came to Cuba with different ethnic backgrounds, which could limit larger group cooperation. Some Chinese economically exploited their compatriots. The experience of Chinese merchants and laborers differed significantly and at times the former sought to protect their interests at the expense of the latter. Disagreements over politics also emerged (i.e., supporting the KMT vs. communist revolution in China, advocating for a lack of involvement in Cuban politics or for the status quo vs. supporting labor organizing and communist revolution in Cuba, etc.). López notes intergenerational tension and questions over the inclusion of mixed children into the larger Chinese community as well. Further research on this last topic would help us understand the Chinese Cuban experience even better. In any case, *Chinese Cubans* is the most comprehensive history of the Chinese in Cuba and is extremely insightful. Scholars interested in Cuba, the Chinese diaspora, immigration, race and ethnicity, and related topic will definitely want to read this book.

María Teresa Cortés Zavala. 2013. *Los hombres de la nación: Itinerarios de progreso económico y el desarrollo intelectual, Puerto Rico en el siglo XIX*. México: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo/ Ediciones Doce Calles. 178 pp. ISBN-13: 978-84-9744-143-8.

Pedro L. San Miguel
Departamento de Historia
Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras
psanmiguel@prtc.net

La Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, localizada en la ciudad de Morelia, en México, es un lugar singular. En ella trabajan varios estudiosos cuya labor resulta un tanto excéntrica en el medio mexicano, sobre todo en un contexto como el del estado de Michoacán, geográficamente alejado del Caribe. En efecto, no deja de ser sorprendente que justo en esta institución laboren académicos que han dedicado parte sustancial de su quehacer a investigar y escribir acerca de la historia caribeña. Un fenómeno como éste se puede achacar, quizás, a la alegada seducción que ciertas partes del globo pueden ejercer sobre los fuereños. Yo, como forastero en México, puedo dar fe de ello, si bien en sentido inverso, es decir, de la fascinación que ejerce México sobre mí. Me refiero, por supuesto, al hechizo o embeleso que