

Afro-Asian Sociocultural Interactions in Cultural Production by or About Asian Latin Americans

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Abstract

This essay studies Afro-Asian sociocultural interactions in cultural production by or about Asian Latin Americans, with an emphasis on Cuba and Brazil. Among the recurrent characters are the black slave, the *china mulata*, or the black ally who expresses sympathy or even marries the Asian character. This reflects a common history of bondage shared by black slaves, Chinese coolies, and Japanese indentured workers, as well as a common history of marronage.¹ These conflicts and alliances between Asians and blacks contest the official discourse of *mestizaje* (Spanish-indigenous dichotomies in Mexico and Andean countries, for example, or black and white binaries in Brazil and the Caribbean), which, under the guise of incorporating the Other, favored whiteness, all the while attempting to silence, ignore, or ultimately erase their worldviews and cultures.

Keywords: Afro-Asian interactions, Asian Latin American literature and characters, Sanfancón, *china mulata*, “magical negro,” *chinos mambises*, Brazil, Cuba, transculturation, discourse of *mestizaje*

Among the recurrent characters in literature by or about Asians in Latin America are the black slave, the *china mulata*, or the black ally who expresses sympathy, solidarity, or even marries the Asian character. This reflects a common history of bondage shared by black slaves, Chinese coolies, and Japanese indentured workers, as well as a common history of marronage.² In all these cases, the conflicts and alliances between Asians and blacks contest the official discourse of *mestizaje* (Spanish-indigenous dichotomies in Mexico and Andean countries, for example, or black and white binaries in Brazil and the Caribbean), which, under the guise of incorporating the Other, favored whiteness, all the while attempting to silence, ignore, or ultimately erase their worldviews and cultures. In the case of Brazil, the Japanese presence (the largest community of Nikkei in the world)

and heritage contests the myth of the country's three founding races (indigenous, black and white) and their history of oppression also contests the myth of "racial democracy" in Brazil. Asian and African descended characters in Latin American literature, in their interactions with one another and in their articulation of agency, offer alternative knowledges to that of a Western modernity that used their bodies as mere labor tools. At the same time, these African and Asian characters reflect the contributions made by these two ethnic groups to nation-making processes and the ensuing enunciations of national identity in Latin America.

In the case of Cuba, the presence of approximately 6000 *chinos mambises* along with black freedom fighters in the three wars of independence (1868-1878, 1879-1898, and 1895-1898) against Spain, after the first president of the Republic in Arms, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, issued a decree in 1869 abolishing slavery and indentured servitude, adds another nuance to this shared history. Although most freed slaves and coolies were often relegated to auxiliary positions during the wars (digging trenches, cooking food, delivering messages), many also participated directly in combat and some Chinese even became officials in the Cuban insurgent army, sometimes leading battalions of their own co-ethnics. During the post-war period, both ethnic groups would flag their participation in the liberation of Cuba as evidence of their unquestionable patriotism and their belonging within the national project. For some time after the independence, this strategy was indeed effective in improving their racialized image in the national imaginary and their integration into mainstream society. However, subsequent circumstances, such as the imposition of the ideology of the American exclusion act after 1998, along with other racist views held in the United States, or the advent of the Great

Depression during the 1930s, would remind both Chinese and blacks that the road to full citizenship is not always progressive or inevitable, but rather contingent on economic, national, and geopolitical events. Economic jealousy or a harsh economic crisis, for example, may suddenly turn an ethnic group like the Chinese into “unfair competition” for national merchants.

Whereas Chinese Cubans may always resort to reminding mainstream Cuban society about the *chinos mambises* during the wars of independence or about Chinese participation in the Cuban Revolution, the Chinese community in Peru, by contrast, has a more difficult time finding similar arguments, since approximately 1500 coolies, angry at the terrible oppression and mortality rate they had suffered in plantations and guano pits, sided with the Chilean army that was sieging Lima during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883). Even though many other coolies did support the Peruvian resistance, after the war hundreds of Chinese were massacre in retaliation for what was considered a betrayal against Peru.

As is well known, Chinese coolies were initially brought to Cuba and Japan as a result of a labor shortage (often code words for what in reality was a refusal to pay appropriate wages to local agricultural workers) after the gradual abolition of black African slavery and the subsequent failure to attract European laborers, who were deemed more desirable for their capacity to whiten the nation. After Chinese coolies finished their eight-year contracts and, in many cases, their ensuing forced recontracting, they moved to urban areas, mostly to become merchants or work in niche ethnic professions. The new “labor shortage” was temporarily solved by recruiting Japanese

agricultural workers who were brought to cover their absence in the plantations and guano pits in Peru or to replace disgruntled Europeans in coffee plantations in Brazil.

The experience of Chinese coolies in Peru and especially in Cuba is quite different from that of Chinese immigrants in Mexico not only because the latter were free laborers, but also because in Mexico the interaction with blacks was never as common. In fact, to prevent interethnic alliances that could potential bring racial wars like the one in neighboring Saint-Domingue (today's Haiti), which created the first black republic in the world, Cuban and Peruvian planters would house them in different buildings (with no objection from either ethnic group) and would also promote hostility between the two groups by pitting black overseers with whips against Chinese workers. On some occasions, Chinese coolies would kill these black foremen either to escape the plantation or in revenge for corporal punishment and other abuses that, in theory, their contract did not allow. In addition, black slaves were often used to defend the plantation, its owner, and his foremen from coolie rebellions. In fact, Chinese coolies would often complain about a perceived preferential treatment for blacks, and would lament the fact that whereas black slaves' only oppressors were white overseers and plantation owners, in their case they had to withstand abuse at the hands of both blacks and whites.

However, Latin American literature also records multiple cases of cross-ethnic alliances, solidarity, and cooperation between blacks and Asians. For instance, former coolies would sometimes purchase the freedom of black enslaved women with whom they would form common-law unions or whom they would marry. Their descendants, such as Cuban intellectuals Antonio Chuffat Latour and Regino Pedroso, would be of mixed Asian and African ancestry. Chinese and blacks also worked together in work

gangs or *cuadrillas*. Kathleen López, in the introduction to her study *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*, mentions, for example, a former coolie named Pastor Pelayo who kept a gang of black workers.

Along these lines, challenging claims about the isolationism of Asian communities in Latin America, marriages between male Asian immigrants and black or mulatto women were not uncommon. In fact, in Cuban society, literature, and culture the sexualized and eroticized figure of the *china mulata* become iconic. In Cuba, one can find additional proof of the solidarity between Chinese coolies and blacks in the realm of religion, with Afro-Cuban creeds blending with Chinese folk religion. The most visible outcome of this fusion is the syncretic Chinese *orisha* or saint Sanfancón (associated with the *orisha* Changó in Santería and with Santa Bárbara in Catholicism), often accepted by Afro-Cubans themselves as one of the most powerful *orishas*. The figure of Sanfancón evidences the fact that Chinese indentured workers were open to the influence of Catholic saints as well as that of Afro-Cuban religions such as Santería, Palo Monte, and Abakuá. In what follows, I shall offer a brief summary of the most significant examples of literary Afro-Asian interactions in cultural production by or about Latin Americans of Asian descent.³

Although less frequently than in Brazil or Cuba, Peruvian literature offers some reflections of these sociocultural, cross-ethnic exchanges. In the case of Japanese Peruvian literature, one finds Peruvian Nikkei Félix Toshihiko Arakaki's (1941—) short story "Un cuento muy largo de contar" (A Very Long Story to Tell, 2002), where a Nikkei character named Juan Takeshi Chiritori, known as El Loco, feels that he is African at heart because he lived in Chincha, a Peruvian city with a large black

population. Takeshi recalls that even fellow Nikkei children would insult him with racial slurs for blacks. Yet now in Paris, he is surprised to see that African immigrants will not accept him as one of their own.

Likewise, Chinese Peruvian literature counts with the novel *Viaje a Ítaca*, by Siu Kam Wen, a Peruvian author who was born in China. It recalls several episodes of Peruvian Sinophobia, one of which includes Afro-Peruvians. As he explains, in revenge for the coolies support to Chilean troops during the War of the Pacific, in 1881, “Lima now occupied, and the country in disorder, the Indian and black populations of Cañete rise in arms to settle and old score with coolies in the valley. They are out to vindicate a black woman's beating at the hands of an Oriental during carnival. According to Juan de Arona's conservative estimate, about one thousand coolies are killed in one day.”⁴

Besides topics and characters, there are also Peruvian authors who are themselves of mixed Chinese and African ancestry. Although the poetry of the recently deceased Afro-Chinese poet Chinese Enrique Verástegui does not usually deal with issues of ethnicity or race, it does address Peruvianness, national identity, and social justice in collections such as *Angelus Novus* (New Angel, 1989 and 1990), *Monte de Goce* (Mount of Pleasure) or *Libro del pecado* (The Book of Sin), *Taki Onkoy* or *Libro de la redención* (The Book of Redemption), *Albus* (White) or *Libro de la gnosis* (The Book of Gnosis), and *Ética* (Ethics). Another Afro-Chinese Peruvian author is Mario Choy, who published short stories in the 1980s, such as “Butaca del paraíso” (Seat in Paradise, 1981) and the bilingual “May God Grant You Happiness” / “Dios quiera que seas dichosa” (1987).

Black-Asian interactions are much more prevalent in Japanese Brazilian literature, where it is not uncommon to find supporting black characters who risk everything to

selflessly help the Asian protagonist (who here takes the place of the Caucasian protagonist in American film and fiction). These “Magical Negro” characters are often endowed with mystical powers or special insight. We find one such character in Brazilian Nisei Júlio Miyazawa’s (1948-) first novel *Yawara! A Travessia Nihondin-Brasil* (*Yawara! Crossing Nihondin-Brazil*, 2006), where a black neighbor name Zefa (Josefa) feeds a Japanese character named Akemi when she falls ill and even breastfeeds her baby. Connections between Nikkei and Brazilian characters continue throughout the novel. Later, another Afro-Brazilian character named Alberto helps the Nikkei Mariano Goro Harikawa recover from a psychological crisis and becomes his close friend. In other passages of *Yawara!*, Miyazawa expresses his sympathy for his countrymen of African descent by acknowledging that part of the Japanese neighborhood of Liberdade in São Paulo used to be populated by Afro-Brazilians in the early fifties until the arrival of the Japanese made them feel out of place there. In his second novel, *Uma Rosa para Yumi* (2013), the author again laments the fact that Nikkei economic success contributed to displacing blacks from Liberdade.

Afro-Brazilian characters also help Japanese immigrants in Brazilian Nikkei Oscar Nakasato’s first novel, *Nihonjin* (2011): a black healer name Maria, who is also close to the “magical negro” category, befriends and cures a Japanese immigrant character named Kimie against the wishes of the latter’s husband Hideo, who considers blacks lesser people. Maria and Kimie’s friendship will continue afterwards, despite Hideo’s prohibition.

In another Japanese Brazilian novel, Ryoki Inoue’s *Saga. A História de Quatro Gerações de uma Família Japonesa no Brasil* (*Saga. The History of Four Generations of a*

Japanese Family in Brazil, 2006), the author openly portrays Nikkei characters' racist and xenophobic sentiments toward blacks and other Brazilians. Yet in the fifth part of the novel, the mestizo Nikkei character Ryumi comes to embody miscegenation and transculturation when he introduces his Afro-Brazilian girlfriend Maria Rita, who has embraced Japanese culture, to his family. Their interracial union symbolizes not only solidarity between Nikkei and Afro-Brazilians, but also—reflecting real-life Nikkei choices—the full integration of younger generations of Nikkei into mainstream Brazilian society. These progressive passages, however, make the reader wonder whether Ryumi's family accepts her only because she is so familiar with Japanese culture, after being adopted by Japanese parents.

Along with Japanese Brazilian literature, Chinese Cuban cultural production is the one where black-Asian interactions are more prominent. This reproduces the fact that in real life, those relationships were more intense in Cuba and Brazil than in other Latin American countries with significant Asian migration but much smaller black communities. Moreover, as Lok Siu points out, “one important difference between Asians in Latin America and those in the United States (with the exception of Hawaii) is the historical high rate of interracial unions and family formation [McKeown 2001; Lesser 1999]. Anti-miscegenation laws did not exist in Panama (and Latin America more generally), as they did in certain parts of the United States at one time” (91). The literary representation of Afro-Asian sociocultural mixing in these Cuban counter-narratives also challenges the stereotypes of Chinese insularity and clannish behavior. Cuban cultural production thus replicates historical black-Chinese alliances against *criollo* oppression as well as the animosity among themselves. For instance, in the report of coolie depositions *The Cuba Commission Report. A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba*, originally

drafted in 1877, we read: “four Negroes in league with certain recently arrived Chinese killed the new administrator. By an outlay of money on the part of our employer, the participation of the Negroes was not mentioned, and the crime was imputed to us” deposed Wu Yeh-ch’êng (88). Yet the Chinese complain, as they often did, about the preferential treatment received by blacks. In this same report, coolies condemn the beatings and killings they suffered at the hands of black overseers: “I saw a man named A-chi so severely struck on the neck by the Negro overseer that he died in three days” (105). In their depositions, they even protest the efforts of different nations to end black slavery while simultaneously ignoring coolie semi-slavery in Cuba. Evelyn Hu-DeHart points out potential reasons for enslaved blacks’ animosity towards coolies in Cuba: “Even if slaves could see that the daily treatment meted out to them and to the coolies were not substantially different, they also observed the somewhat greater facility with which coolies were able to free themselves from the plantations and open up small businesses nearby” (89).

In Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo’s testimonial *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (*Biografía de un cimarrón*; 1966), Montejo, the former runaway slave being interviewed, reminisces about how common it was for blacks to participate in the activities organized during Chinese festivities in the town of Sagua la Grande. He also contrasts blacks’ and Chinese’s reaction to slavery (believing that the Chinese committed suicide too often because they would think too much) and explains the similarities in their beliefs about the afterlife: whereas blacks held that once their spirit had left their bodies, it returned to Africa while still alive, “The Chinese didn’t fly and didn’t even want to go

back to their homeland” (43). Later, however, he remembers that the Chinese were convinced that, after death, they would come back to life in Canton (117).

A recurring Chinese Cuban character is the exoticized *china mulata*, which appears, among other Cuban works, in Mayra Montero’s *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*, 1998), Zoé Valdés’s *Te di la vida entera* (*I Gave You All I Had*, 1996), Leonardo Padura Fuentes’s *La cola de la serpiente* (2001), and Antonio José Ponte’s short story “A petición de Ochún” (“At the Request of Ochún;” 1964), included in his collection *Tales from the Cuban Empire* (*Cuentos de todas partes del imperio*; 2000). The legendary beauty of the Chinese mulatta is embodied in this last short story by a character named Luminaria Wong, whose phenotype is immediately sexualized:

“Luminaria Wong, unlike Ignacio, was not completely Chinese. In other words, she was a *china mulata*. The color of her skin could not be determined and it would change as the color of other women’s pupils change. That skin was at its best after dark, for sure” (48).⁵

A more developed *china mulata* character is Aida Petrirena Cheng, the protagonist in Montero’s *Como un mensajero tuyo*, where her mixed blood is not only libidized but also rejected and regarded with suspicion. That she has been the object of racialization is evident in her own self-descriptions: “I was a mulatta who had her father’s Chinese eyes and a nose that came from the Lucumi part. I was a combination, as mixed as Neapolitan fever” (59);⁶ “All I did was take him inside me, but it was his will, he sank into this Chinese flesh because he wanted to, this flesh that turned mulatta when we made love” (176).⁷ The character of Aida Petrirena Cheng, Enrico Caruso’s lover in the plot, rewrites Cuban history by challenging the black and white binary, and reinscribing Afro-Asian racial, cultural, and religious mixtures as another important way to narrate the

nation. She is protected by both Yuan Pei Fu, a powerful practitioner and *babalawo* (spiritual guide, priest) of Chinese witchcraft and the santero José de Calazán “Cheché” Bangoché, believing that “what the black nganga can’t do, the Chinese nganga always can” (21).⁸

In *Como un mensajero tuyo*, however, marriages between Chinese men and black women are depicted in a less positive light than in other novels such as Cuban American Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting*. Thus, the mulatta Domitila tells her daughter Aida that she and the Chinese immigrant Noro Cheng Po reluctantly married each other because neither could aspire to anything better. In her own words, a Chinese man “was the worst man a woman could marry but all a girl like her could hope for, since she was poor and had nappy hair” (13-14).⁹ Likewise, according to Aida, Noro Cheng Po fantasized “about those silent paisanas, dreamed about going to Canton to find a wife of his own race and make up for all the years he’d had to settle for a dark-skinned woman, which was all he could hope for in Cuba” (169).¹⁰

In another novel, Zoé Valdés’s *I Gave You All I Had* (1999), the *china mulata* Cuca Martínez becomes again the object of the male gaze: “She had a way of sashaying down a street, with a swish to the left and a swish to the right, of bobbing back and forth between Irish passion and Oriental patience, that could bring even the most languid penis to attention” (36).¹¹ Curiously, however, the Chinese mulatta in this novel, who pulls her own teeth one by one after her boyfriend leaves her, ends up allegorically representing the progressive decay of Old Havana since the Cuban Revolution, thus becoming a vehicle to criticize Fidel Castro’s regime.

Finally, chinas mulatas are once again objectivized for their “exotic” sex appeal in Padura Fuentes’s detective story *La cola de la serpiente*. Thus, the protagonist, lieutenant Mario Conde, unfairly describes Patricia Chion as a nymphomaniac, a prostitute, and a man-eater, while fantasizing about her *vagina dentata*: “After the thick bush, Conde explored the furrow climbing up toward a deep, mossy and ravenous well, through which his hand entered, and then his arm, and finally the rest of his body, as if sucked in by a relentless whirlpool” (189).¹²

There are also several Cuban authors of mixed Chinese-African blood. One of them was Regino Pedroso, who was born to a black mother and a Chinese father. In the “auto-bio-prólogo” (auto-bio-prologue) to his poetry collection *Nosotros*, he declares his pride in his racialized “black-yellow. (With no other mixture)”¹³ pigmentation and “Ethiopic-Asian” race. Aware that “bourgeois ideology” considers both races inferior and has exploited them throughout history, Pedroso asserts his agency by claiming to belong to “the human race.”

Another Chinese mulatto author is Antonio Chuffat Latour compares and contrasts the accomplishments of blacks and Chinese in his *Apunte histórico de los chinos en Cuba* (*Historical Notes about the Chinese in Cuba*; 1927), where he attempts, at the expense of Afro-Cubans, to empower the Chinese community by praising its contributions to Cuban freedom and true belonging to the national project. Even though his mother was black and throughout his life he fought for the rights of Afro-Cubans as well, in this book Chuffat Latour contrasts the refinement of the Chinese and their efforts to assimilate themselves to Cuban mainstream society and to “civilize themselves” (16)¹⁴ with the perceived failures of blacks: “While the other race pitifully wasted time in silly

things and stupidity, without any aspirations or pretensions to anything.”¹⁵ He then attributes Chinese socioeconomic success to their whiteness, education, and supposedly superior intellectual capacity to that of blacks: “The intellectualism acquired by the Chinese is the main reason they have surpassed other races in every social order. The Chinese considers himself white, period. His level of intelligence is superior.”¹⁶ And while Chuffat Latour praises Chinese participate during the wars of independence in Cuba, he argues that blacks become more a nuisance for the insurgent army than anything else (63).

As stated, Cuban cultural production also re-creates religions syncretism between Catholicism, Chinese folk beliefs, and Afro-Cuban religions, as well as the interracial marriages between these two ethnic groups. The creation of the syncretic Chinese Cuban orisha or saint Sanfancón, based on the figure Kwang Kung worshiped in China, is the most obvious example of Afro-Asian religious syncretism in Cuban literature. In Leonardo Padura Fuentes’s novella *La cola de la serpiente*, which takes place in Havana’s Chinatown, Sanfancón takes on an evil nature that is uncommon in other Cuban texts. When lieutenant Mario Conde asks the Chinese private Juan Chion (Li Chion Tai) to help him solve the mystery of another Chinese man’s assassination, Chion suspects the influence of Sanfancón, even though he claims that “Sanfancón does not kill in this manner, he uses a knife.”¹⁷ This, however, does not surprise Conde, who, as a child, had heard his grandfather say that “someone was worse than Sanfancón, it was because he was really bad.”¹⁸ In one of the Chinese society buildings, Juan Chion, along with his compadre Francisco Chiu, show Conde the altar devoted to Sanfancón and explain his Cubanized history: “—That took place here. He came as Cuang Con, but he was

Cubanized as San Fan Con, and since he is a led [red] saint, blacks say that he is Shango, see, Captain.”¹⁹ Francisco Chiu then describes him as the product of Chinese-African religious syncretism: “Chinese who plactice black witchcraft and of blacks who plactice Chinese witchcraft.”²⁰ These religious beliefs are eventually derided when Conde mocks them in the story’s denouement.

An equally skeptical representation of the esoteric worlds of African and Chinese witchcraft appears in Arnaldo Correa’s novel *Cold Havana Ground* (2003). Chinese Cuban witchcraft becomes one of the key cultural traits of this ethnic group, even though two different characters discredit Chinese and Afro-Cuban witchcraft as primitive and dangerous, and as mere “instruments for delinquents and other antisocial characters” (200). In the epilogue, the author even discourages his readers from practicing them on their own. As is common in Cuban cultural production, in *Cold Havana Ground* Chinese witchcraft is described as the most powerful one by followers of three African-rooted religions: Santería (Regla de Osha), Palo Monte (Regla Mayombe), and the Abakuá Secret Society, an initiatory male fraternity. A character named Jacinto also explains that the corpse of a Chinese man could be used as an infallible magic shield: “No one can undo a Chinese curse, not even the person who made it. The old *Paleros* used to say that the cadaver of a Chinaman protects against anything; it’s infallible” (133). A gravedigger adds that if the *paleros* (Palo Monte priests) cannot manage to steal a non-mixed Chinese corpse, it is enough for them to get some dirt from the four corners of the Chinese cemetery in Havana. Later, a *Santera* (Santería priest) finds out that the spirit of a Chinese man has taken possession of her brother Lorenzo Bantú, a *nasakó* (Abakuá priest). After managing to expel it from her brother’s body, she scolds Lorenzo for

naively believing that his own magic “could prevail over the spirit of a Chinaman!” (220).²¹ Then, Lorenzo tries to understand what it interfering with the Chinese spirit’s work until he learns that what he wants is a cross.

Another novel that portrays tensions between Chinese and black is Ramón Meza’s *Carmela* (1887), where the protagonist, a Chinese named Cipriano Assam threatens to stab Tocineta, a jealous black domestic servant who mocks him and sings disparaging songs about the Chinese. In the end, it is Tocineta who ends up killing him.

The last representative work I will consider is Cristina García’s novel *Monkey Hunting* (2003), where the Chinese-Afro-Cuban-American character Domingo Chen remembers, as seen in *Cold Havana Ground*, that *paleros* coveted the skulls of suicide victims. The great-grandson of the Chinese coolie Chen Pan, Domingo Chen embodies the transculturation of Chinese and African cultures, as he prays to the Santeria orisha Ochún, uses abakuá words, and loves conga music. He also suffers an identitarian crisis as a result of the constant racialization of his phenotype throughout his life.

Overall, these Latin American production, in its re-creation of social interactions between subalternized Asians and blacks, challenges the official discourse of mestizaje imposed by politicians and governments, which brought about the erasure of Asian communities, among others. Besides whites, blacks, and indigenous people, Brazil, Cuba, Peru, Mexico and other countries had significant Asian communities that participated in the socioeconomic and political life of their host countries and informed national identities. In many cases, it is precisely their interactions with people of African ancestry that challenges orientalist stereotypes of insularity, mystery, or clannishness. Afro-Asian sociocultural exchanges makes certain communities, such as the Chinese Cuban or

Japanese Peruvian ones, different from the Chinese communities in Mexico or Peru, for example, which had a less intensive interaction with blacks because of the smaller number of blacks in their host countries. Literature by authors of mixed Asian and black descent or the representation of black-Asian interfaces highlight the commonalities of two racialized, overlapping diasporas who often shared a common history of bondage, marronage, and participation as freedom fighters in the wars of independence. These cross-cultural narratives contribute to restoring the agency and alternative knowledges of these silenced ethnic groups. They also unveil a shared history of resistance to racialization, oppression, and violence, with moments of inter-ethnic alliance and solidarity alternated with others of confrontation and struggle.

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Notes

¹ Because other Asian migrations to Latin America, such as that of East Indians and Koreans, is more recent, they do not have a similar articulation in Latin American literature or an equally significant number of Latin American authors of Korean descent. Similarly, the first Asian migration to the Americas, that of Filipinos, was not massive enough to have left the same imprint as those of the Chinese and Japanese communities.

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³ For a more detailed analysis of these works, see my books *The Affinity of the Eye: Writing Nikkei in Peru* (2013), *Dragons in the Land of the Condor: Writing Tusán in Peru* (2014), *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (2008), and *Japanese-Brazilian Saudades: Diasporic Identities and Cultural Production*. UP of Colorado (Forthcoming).

⁴ “Con Lima ocupada y el país en desorden, la población india y negra de Cañete se alza para saldar una vieja cuenta con los culíes chinos que viven y laboran en el valle. El pretexto es el altercado entre uno de los orientales y una morena durante el carnaval. Según el cálculo conservador de Juan de Arona, unos mil culíes son muertos en un día de desmanes desaforados” (99).

⁵ “Luminaria Wong, a diferencia de Ignacio, no era completamente china. Para usar una manera rápida de describir tanta belleza, Lumi era una mulata china. Tenía un color de piel que no acababa de resolverse y que cambiaba como cambia en las demás mujeres el color de las pupilas. Lo mejor de aquella piel se ganaba, seguramente, en la oscuridad” (45).

- ⁶ “Yo era una mulata clara, con los ojos achinados por la parte de mi padre, y la nariz sospechosa de la parte de los lucumíes. Estaba tan mezclada como la fiebre napolitana” (80)
- ⁷ “No hice más que recibirlo en mí, pero él se empecinó, se hundió por su gusto en esta carne china, una carne que en la intimidad se mulateaba” (213).
- ⁸ “Lo que no puede la nganga negra, siempre lo ha podido la nganga china” (38).
- ⁹ “Era lo peor con lo que se podía casar una mujer, pero lo único a lo que podía aspirar una muchacha como ella, pobrecita y con el pelo duro” (31).
- ¹⁰ “Aquellas paisanas silenciosas, con viajar a Cantón para buscar una esposa de su propia raza, y desquitarse con ella de todos los años que había tenido que conformarse con una mujer de piel oscura, que era lo único a lo que podía aspirar en Cuba” (206).
- ¹¹ “Es que ella caminaba con un meneo, muy propio de su paciencia china y de su pasión dublinense contenida, que era un p’ aquí, p’ allá, de allá p’ acá, que ponía duro al más blando” (62).
- ¹² “Tras la maraña del vello el Conde recorría el surco que ascendía hacia un pozo profundo y musgoso, devorador, por el que entraba su mano, su brazo, y todo su cuerpo después, succionado por un remolino implacable” (189).
- ¹³ “Negro-amarilla. (Sin otra mezcla)” (9).
- ¹⁴ “Civilizarse” (16).
- ¹⁵ “Mientras que la otra raza perdía lastimosamente el tiempo en sandeces y boberías, sin aspiraciones ni pretensiones a nada” (16).
- ¹⁶ “La intelectualidad adquirida por los chinos es el factor principal que ha superado a otras razas en todo el orden social. El chino se considera blanco y basta. La superioridad de inteligencia” (16). Incidentally, we have a similar perspective, this time based on inherited cultural and traditional values, in a recent study by the Chinese Cuban author Napoleón Seuc entitled La colonia china de Cuba 1930-1960 (1998). After pointing out the economic success of the East Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea) and particularly of overseas Chinese in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Taiwan, he states: “The dissimilitude in economic growth among different peoples and ethnicities in this century makes us think that there are factors of a cultural, traditional and hereditary nature, but not of a genetic one, that provide a margin of advantage for certain races--in the free and competitive world market of modern economy, in the free-trade doctrine of open (not protectionist) societies--over other races and peoples of the Earth.” (“La disimilitud en el crecimiento económico de este siglo de pueblos y etnias diferentes nos inclina a pensar que hay factores tradicionales, hereditarios, pero de origen cultural, no genético, que dan cierto margen de ventaja a ciertas razas--en el libre y competitivo mercado mundial de la economía moderna, en el librecambismo de las sociedades abiertas [no proteccionistas]--sobre otras razas y pueblos de la tierra” [172]). Later, Seuc reveals some of the survival tactics used by the Chinese in Cuba: “They managed to have influential friends--a judge, chief of police or rural guard in the countryside--to whom they resorted in times of need.” (“Ellos se las agenciaban para conseguirse un amigo influyente--un juez correccional, jefe de la policía o de la guardia rural en los campos--a quienes acudían en momentos de necesidad” [162-3]).
- ¹⁷ “San Fan Con no mata así, él usa cuchillo” (155). By way of contrast, Leandro Chiu, the guide of the Kung Long Society, states that in the Chinese pantheon there is no room for curses and bad actions. One can never ask Sanfancón to hurt someone.
- ¹⁸ “Alguien que era más malo que San Fan Con, es porque era malísimo” (155).
- ¹⁹ “—Eso fue aquí. Vino Cuang Con pelo se cubanizó en San Fan Con, y como es santo cololao, los neglos dicen que es Changó, mila tú, capitán” (160).
- ²⁰ “--Yo no cleo en eso, capitán, pelo hay gente que sí, ¿tú sabes? Eso es cosa de paisanos que hacen blujelías de neglos y neglos que hacen blujelías con cosas de chinos” (160).
- ²¹ These explanations about the power that a Chinese skull can provide a nganga are corroborated by a character named Alcides Varona in Leonardo Padura Fuentes’s novella La cola de la Serpiente: “Look, if you want to make a Jewish nganga, to do evil, you must look for a deceased person who was really bad during his life... because the spirit continues to be as bad as the person when alive on earth. And sometimes it is even worse... That’s why the best bones are those of crazy people, and even better than those of crazy people are those of Chinese, who are the most ill-tempered and vengeful folks on the face of the earth... I inherited my nganga from my father and it has the kiyumba [skull] of a Chinaman who committed suicide out of rage because he didn’t want to be a slave, and you don’t even imagine the things I’ve done with that nganga... God forgive me.” (“--Mira, si quieres hacer una nganga judía, para hacer mal, debes buscarte un difunto que en vida haya sido bien malo... porque el espíritu sigue siendo tan malo como el vivo que fue en

la tierra. Y a veces es peor... Por eso los mejores huesos son los de los locos, y mejor que los de los locos, los de los chinos, que son los tipos más rabiosos y vengativos que hay en el plano de la tierra... La mía yo la heredé de mi padre y tiene la kiyumba [cráneo] de un chino que se suicidó de rabia porque no quería ser esclavo, y tú no te imaginas las cosas que yo he hecho con esa nganga... y que Dios me perdone” [176]).