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Ignacio López-Calvo. 2008. *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 227 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8130-3240-5.

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What does it mean to be Cuban? What role have different ethnic groups played in creating Cuban national identity? How do members of one ethnic group represent themselves to the rest of society and how, in turn, does the rest of society imagine members of that ethnic group? These are some of the main questions that Ignacio López-Calvo explores in his illuminating book *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture*. By focusing specifically on the Chinese diaspora in Cuba and the various cultural representations of this group in Cuban society, López-Calvo sheds light on this group's collective experience and the important role the Chinese have played in Cuban history, culture, and society. Moreover, López-Calvo's work suggests that Cuba deserves a place at the center of Chinese diasporic studies.

López-Calvo analyzes Cuban, Cuban American, and Sino-Cuban depictions of Sino-Cubans and "Chineseness" in Cuban literature (fiction, poetry, and testimonials) and art and makes it clear that scholars need to go beyond the traditional African-European binary vision of Cuban history and national identity and recognize the contributions of the Chinese. Although not really a part of official discourse, the island's cultural productions have long considered and recognized the importance of the Chinese presence in Cuban history and society. López-Calvo argues that Cubans have had a contradictory relationship with the Chinese based on affinity and mistrust since the very first boatload of Chinese coolies arrived in 1847 (approximately 125,000 entered the island between 1847 and 1874). Beginning with coolies and lasting into the Cuban Revolution, López-Calvo demonstrates how Cubans became fascinated with the Chinese and imagined China and the Chinese as a source of hope and a danger at the same time. Over time, representations of the Chinese have progressed from demonization, to Orientalist depictions, and finally to more realistic portrayals of the Chinese and their experiences.

López-Calvo turns to the concept of Orientalism to make sense of the ambiguous reactions towards the Chinese in Cuba. Many cultural productions depict mainland and Cuban Chinese in Western stereotypical fashion: Chinese rulers live lavishly while the masses starve in virtual

slavery, the Chinese are cruel and masters of torture, the Chinese are passive and their culture static, the Chinese are secretive and unable to assimilate, the Chinese are refined, China is exotic, and Chinese women and *china mulatas* are fetishized. Some of these characteristics obviously contradict each other, but this makes sense when one considers the simultaneous Western captivation with and aversion to the East. López-Calvo notes that some more recent works, such as Zoé Valdés' *La eternidad del instante*, are much kinder in their portrayal of the Chinese but still suffer from what he terms "benevolent Orientalism," particularly due to their focus on Chinese exoticism. He also suggests that many of these portrayals of China and the Chinese, typically within an Orientalist framework, are more a reflection on Cuban realities than musings on China and the Chinese diaspora.

In *Imaging the Chinese*, López-Calvo contends that despite the continuous ambivalence toward the Chinese, the Chinese community in Cuba has resisted marginalization, has evolved over time, and has increasingly gained acceptance. Some important nineteenth and twentieth-century Cuban intellectuals, including José Martí, have all but ignored the Chinese presence and contribution to the Cuban nation, while others have acknowledged the Chinese presence but have misrepresented Sino-Cubans as silent separatists who created their own secret societies and isolated themselves from the rest of Cuban society. Both the lack of acknowledgement and misrepresentation imply that Sino-Cubans are not really Cuban. However, a competing discourse, which began to emerge in the late nineteenth century and has continued to develop to this day, has sought to correct these responses to the Chinese. Based largely on their participation in the wars of independence as Chinese *mambises*, the Chinese in Cuba are frequently seen as great defenders of Cuban liberty, even if few of their descendants remain in Cuba at this point in time. The increased concern on the island for the well-being of Cuba's Chinese societies and attempts at revitalizing Havana's Chinatown—an effort spearheaded by Sino-Cuban leaders and supported by the Cuban government—are signs of the growing acceptance of the Chinese as part of Cuban national identity.

López-Calvo astutely argues that cultural productions by Chinese Cubans are at the heart of this process of acceptance and recognition of the Chinese in Cuba. Many of these efforts to incorporate the Chinese into the Cuban collective consciousness have involved Chinese Cubans resorting to both self-Orientalization and de-Orientalization (distancing one's self from conceptions of "Chineseness" and embracing "Cubanness" or a Hispanic identity). The Chinese *mulato* poet Regino Pedroso, for example, chose to embrace a Chinese identity in his work in an effort to promote Cuban nationalism. Worried about increasing "Yankee

imperialism,” Pedroso linked himself to a traditionally oppressed group that had participated in the Cuban wars of independence. Yet, Pedroso still Orientalized China, considering it the past and Cuba the future, thus remaining a true Cuban patriot. Similarly, Antonio Chuffat Latour combined self-Orientalism with promotion of the Chinese community in his 1927 work *Apunte histórico de los chinos en Cuba*. Chuffat Latour described the Chinese as patriotic defenders of Cuba who were eager to assimilate to a superior western civilization.

In their efforts to acknowledge Chinese involvement in the nation, Cuban and Sino-Cuban intellectuals have also spent much of their energy highlighting the Chinese contribution to Cuban religiosity (namely in the form of *Sanfancón*), the supposed compatibility between Chinese religious thought and Christianity, and the interactions between Chinese and African “witchcraft” and Cuban national identity. Ultimately, as reflected in the various works he examines, López-Calvo maintains that the Chinese have gone through a process of transculturation as they have striven at the same time for acceptance and maintenance of their culture, in the process creating transnational or hybrid identities. Interestingly, *Imaging the Chinese* notes that it is recent works by non-Chinese authors, such as Zoé Valdés and Cristina García, rather than Sino-Cuban ones, that deal the most with the painful nature of transculturation and the sense of incompleteness that this type of hybridity can create.

Through his examination of Chinese coolie testimonies in the *Cuba Commission Report* (the result of a Chinese investigation into the situation of coolies in Cuba in 1874), López-Calvo provides the reader with sufficient evidence that many, if not most, Chinese immigrants during this time suffered greatly in Cuba. López-Calvo acknowledges the need for a careful reading of testimonials because of the biases of the interviewers and interviewees. Thus, he correctly problematizes the issue of Chinese participation in Cuba’s first independence war, observing that thousands participated despite the report denying it. Later, when discussing the image of the Chinese *mambí* he also correctly notes that many avoided fighting and questions the motives of those who participated (self-preservation vs. fighting for the Cuban nation). At times his discussion of the coolie experience could be more nuanced. As similar as the situations were between African slaves and Chinese coolies, he could be more careful about equating coolies with slaves. The legal status of the Chinese as free white men who signed temporary labor contracts, combined with Chinese resistance, did make enough of a difference to allow for a free Chinese community to develop within a couple of decades. Not all *patronos* were as cruel as suggested; many were rather paternalistic and paid bonuses to some Chinese workers. Overseers tended to be the sadistic ones and this included many Chinese overseers,

not just Afro-Cuban or white ones. His use of the term “genocide” for describing what happened to Chinese coolies is inappropriate since there was no real systematic plan to eradicate the Chinese as a group. None of this is meant to question the suffering of the Chinese or to suggest that coolie labor represented free labor; rather, it is to note that we cannot fully understand the Chinese experience during this period if we conceptualize it as slavery or free labor.

Imaging the Chinese reads more like a collection of essays than as a book that conveys a central argument in its pages. Moreover, at times, López-Calvo does not seem to focus on the main point that he is developing in a chapter. In particular, his chapter on Sinophobia could explore the issue of fear itself more, rather than just denigration of the Chinese. *Imaging the Chinese* is intended for a specialized audience, since the author assumes that the reader is well versed in the theory it incorporates and the texts it examines. That said, López-Calvo’s work remains essential reading for anyone interested in constructions of identity (both at the individual and national levels), Cuban history and culture, and the Chinese diaspora in general.

Roberto Márquez. 2007. *Puerto Rican Poetry: An Anthology from Aboriginal to Contemporary Times*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press. 490 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55849-562-3.

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With his *Puerto Rican Poetry: An Anthology from Aboriginal to Contemporary Times* Roberto Márquez makes a significant and substantive contribution to scholars, students, and general readers of poetry wishing to explore the breadth and nuances of Puerto Rican poetry, from its indigenous and inter-racial roots and colonial underpinnings, to its Creole-conflicted national formation and contemporary diasporic experimentations. Presenting more than 60 poets and nearly 200 poems from 1589-2003—many in English for the first time through his own translations—Márquez admirably achieves his goal of providing Anglophone audiences with a vast and varied selection of poetry from

Download Citation | On Jan 1, 2011, Kathleen López published *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* - by López-Calvo, Ignacio | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. The written and oral testimonies of nearly 3,000 Chinese laborers in Cuba, who toiled alongside African slaves, offer a rare glimpse into the nature of bondage and the tortuous transition to freedom. Trapped in one of the last standing systems of slavery in the Americas, the Chinese described their hopes and struggles, and their unrelenting quest for freedom. Interested in research on Cuban Literature? Join ResearchGate to discover and stay up-to-date with the latest research from leading experts in Cuban Literature and many other scientific topics. Join for free. Ignacio López-Calvo. Newcastle, Inglaterra: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 95-112. One of the earliest examples of the representation of the Chinese in Cuba during this period is the short story "Los chinos" (The Chinamen; 1924), from the collection *Piedras Preciosas* (Precious Stones), by Alfonso Hernández Catá (1885-1940), which explores a case of class-specific conflict between the Chinese and non-Chinese labor force.[2] Following the. Each one unveils a human palimpsest that reflects the evolving nature of the imaging of this ethnic group. "The most comprehensive study of Chinese in Cuban literature and culture available in any language. Lopez-Calvo has consulted all the imaginable sources and has left no stone unturned. This is an imperative, fascinating, necessary, and timely topic."--William Luis, Vanderbilt University. More than 150 years ago, the first Chinese contract laborers ("coolies") arrived in Cuba to work the colonial plantations. Ignacio Lopez-Calvo's interpretations often go against the grain of earlier research, refusing to conceive of Cuban identity either in terms of a bipolar black/white opposition or an idyllic and harmonious process of miscegenation. He also counters traditional representations of chinos mambises, Chinese immigrants who fought for Cuba in the Wars of Independence against Spain. *The Chinese in Cuba, 1847-Now*. De Mauro García Triana, Pedro Eng Herrera. "El dios chino" Guan Gong. *God: Literary and Cultural Representations of the Dominican Dictator* (University Press of Florida, 2005); *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (University Press of Florida, 2007); and *Latino Los Angeles in Film and Fiction: The Cultural Production of Social Anxiety* (forthcoming; University of Arizona Press, 2011). Ignacio López-Calvo, author of *Written in Exile: Chilean Fiction from 1973-Present* and "God and Trujillo": *Literary and Cultural Representations of the Dominican Dictator*, is a professor of Spanish at the University of North Texas California, Merced. Product details. Publisher : University Press of Florida; 1st edition (June 8, 2008).