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A Bembe for Chino Cubanos

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Prior to the Cuban Revolution of 1959, years before dispossession and displacement, my parents rented an apartment in a six-story building off *Calle Zanja* (Zanja Street) on the border of *el barrio chino* (Chinatown). Cuba's Chinatown consisted of several blocks lined with Chinese restaurants, cultural centers, and businesses, considered at the time the largest Chinatown in all of Latin America. Today *el barrio chino* is a shadow of its pre-Revolutionary days. A large portion of Chinatown's inhabitants migrated to the United States shortly after the Revolution,

leaving la Habana's *barrio chino* with about 400 native-born Chinese and approximately 2,000 descendants. When the Revolution nationalized their small businesses, many fled to Miami, New York, and Union City, New Jersey, seeking new opportunities – specifically in providing Cuban style Chinese cuisine, thus adding *restaurantes chino cubano* to the U.S. immigrant lexicon.

Shortly after the Revolution, my parents, along with their one-year-old child, joined the thousands who made the trek into exile. They traded the warmth of the Caribbean for the chill (climatically and socially) of New York City. We lived in the old tenement slums a few blocks from Hell's Kitchen. My earliest memories are of a rat and roach infested studio apartment with a communal bathroom down the public hallway shared by other tenants on the floor. Both my parents worked several jobs to make ends meet. But in spite of our poverty, every Sunday we went out for dinner as a family. We would walk to *un restaurante chino cubano* that was located on 8th Avenue and 57th Street, a few blocks from Columbus Circle. (Today a fast food restaurant occupies the premises.) There we would enjoy *sopa china* (Chinese soup), special fried rice, and a side order of *plátanos maduros* (fried plantains). The menus were, of course, in Spanish. Imagine my surprise as I grew into adolescence and finally met other Chinese people living in New York City who couldn't speak Spanish. In my childlike worldview, to be Chinese was also to be Cuban.

This sentiment is shared by many *chino cubanos*. Take for example the testimony of Frances Bu, born in Cuba in 1956, who also migrated to New York City. "I hate to say that, but race is an American hang-up... It would bug the heck out of [us] to have somebody ask [us], 'What race are you?' Yet they've got to know what your race is. And in Cuba, everybody was

Cuban... I never felt any different. I actually didn't realize that I wasn't Cuban. I always thought of myself as Cuban.”¹

And yet while *chino cubanos* were as Cuban as I, a concept I accepted in my pre-adolescent years, I still had to be taught how to “see” *chino cubanos* differently, as being less than what it means to be Cuban. Because they were neither white, black, nor *mulatto*, they failed to neatly fit the well-established Cuban racial categories that I was taught growing up. Nevertheless, our social network of light-skinned Cuban compatriots living throughout the five boroughs of New York during the sixties and seventies taught me how to gaze upon those Cubans who fell short of the Hispanic version of the white ideal. Asian physical features (as well as black skin pigmentation) were translated as being less than perfect, if not inferior.

As a Latino, specifically a Cuban, I am well aware of the web of oppression in which I am situated. Although discriminated against by Euroamerican social structures because I am Hispanic, I must admit that those same structures privilege me because I am light-skinned and male. Ironically, while all Hispanics find themselves in an oppressive Eurocentric social structure, still, internal forms of oppression are created depending on who falls closer to the Hispanic version of the white ideal. Within systems of oppression, the oppressions of others are usually developed to benefit those who remain “honorable whites” because they lack African, Native, or Asian features. Due to the overall system of white supremacy, additional oppression of group members by those with lighter skin-pigmentation develops among Latina/os

¹ Cynthia Ai-fen Lee, “Our Histories in Conversation” in *Tomie Arai: Double Happiness* (New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1998), 46.

How then, is the existing oppression against Asians constructed within the Hispanic community? Sandra Louk is a Miami owner of a *restaurante chino cubano* (along with her parents and brother). During an interview with the Spanish version of the *Miami Herald* Louk captures the disconnect felt by many *chino cubanos*: “I have never been able to feel as part of a group, neither with the Chinese, nor with the Americans, nor with the Cubans. But I identify more with the Cuban-Americans, although they see me as a Cuban Chinese.”² Japanese American scholar, Fumitaka Matsuoka, asks how ethnicity informs the meaning of life for Asian Americans, what it means to live in the balance between two cultures or generations.³ But what I want to ask is what does it mean to live in three or more cultures - not just Asian and American, but also Latina/o? How does ethnicity inform the meaning of life for Cuban Asian Americans? While Matsuoka attempts to understand people of Asian ancestries in the United States, I wonder how we can understand those people if they first stopped in a Latin American country (specifically Cuba) prior to their journey to the United States? Not only are they part of Asian and North American culture, they are also Hispanics.

In his attempt to create community amidst the memories of historical injuries, Matsuoka reminds us that “past oppression and injustice inflicted by the nation are also remembered mythically and in narrative form.”⁴ Concentrating on U.S. Executive Order 9066, which

² Minuca Villaverde, “Feliz Año del Jabalí,” *El Nuevo Herald* (January 29, 1995).

³ Fumitaka Matsuoka, “Churches and Seminaries in China: Personal Reflection,” in *With Faith We Can Move Mountains: Reflections of GTU Asia Pacific Bridges Consultation in China, 1995*, ed. Judith A. Berling (Berkeley: Asia Pacific Bridges, 1996), 2.

⁴ Fumitaka Matsuoka, “Creating Community Amidst the Memories of Historical Injuries,” in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts*, eds. Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2003), 37

incarcerated Japanese Americans during the Second World War, he explores “how collective memories and experiences of injustice, betrayal, and pain...help groups form their own identities and shaped their own perspectives for the understanding and interpretation of [his] society.”⁵ But what about historical injuries that occurred in other nations, specifically Latin American nations—in my case Cuba? Or what about the injuries that continues to occur within the U.S., not just those inflicted by Euroamericans, but by fellow Hispanics? Are these injustices also remembered; and if so, how? It would be presumptuous of me as a non-Asian, to attempt to describe or interpret Asian-Hispanic culture and society. But what I can do is recover how my Hispanic culture historically and presently privileged me at the expense of Asian Hispanics in order to uncover my complicity with internal Latina/o structures of oppression. By exposing the Latino/a complicity with Eurocentric structures that oppress others, I hope to advance a discourse concerning Asian Hispanics that seldom takes place.

Matsuoka asks, “How did we come to be as we presently are?”⁶ Although he asks this question from a North American perspective, for purposes of this chapter we will ask the question from a Cuban perspective. And like him, we will look at how the experiences of Asians within Cuban culture can give rise to common narratives that can be woven into the larger mosaic of the Asian experience within the dominant Euroamerican experience. In honor of Fumitaka Matsuoka’s retirement from the faculty of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fumitaka Matsuoka, “Reformation of Identities and Values within Asian North American Communities,” in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 119.

California, it is my hope to engage in a conversation with Matsuoka, a dance if you will, to uncover the intra-structures of Hispanic oppression.

In effect I will be participating in a *bembe* with Matsuoka. *Bembes* are Afro-Cuban dance rituals that invite the *orishas* (quasi-deities of the Cuban religion Santería) to possess the dancers so that mere mortals can hear a word from the Divine. *Bembes* are intimate fluid dances where gods and human become one so that deeper wisdom can be obtained. Like any dancer, we are constantly navigating through a crowded floor. In our case, exploring the oppression of our Cuban Asian roots requires us to dance around the meaning of identity and its intersection with race, ethnicity, and nationhood. To explore the Cuban Asian perspective is to ask what it means to be Cuban. I am convinced that the Hispanic Asian *comunidad* (community) has a word rooted in the Divine to share – a word that is not limited to Asian Cubans. To that end, this chapter will attempt to explore the web of intra-Hispanic oppressive structures (primarily Cuban), giving special attention to Hispanic Asians (specifically Chinese).⁷

Missing from the racial-ethnic discourse in both Latino/a and U.S. studies are the voices and experiences of Hispanic Asians. While *chino cubanos* are children of two cultural groups - Asian and Hispanic - they are ignored by both “parents” as part of, yet disconnected from, two ethnic groups, as expressed by restaurateur Sandra Louk. Few if any Asian Americans explore their Latino roots; and even less Hispanics have seriously considered their Asian roots.⁸ Although

⁷ The author recognizes the multiple and diverse voices existing among Hispanics from different nations of origins and the varied Asian people who settled in particular Latin American countries. Nevertheless, the focus of this chapter will be on the Chinese who first migrated to Cuba, and then to the United States.

⁸ An exception is Rudy Busto who has written on the intersection of the Hispanic and the Asian community.

the Asian Latino/a voice is not difficult to find, unlike Black or Native Hispanic conversations, few studies pay attention to the particular Asian Hispanic discourse. Even so, as Fabiana Chiu-Rinaldi reminds us, “Asian Latinos represent a unique link between two of the largest immigrant groups in the United States.”⁹ Therefore, this chapter will explore how the Chinese came to Cuba and the oppression they faced, along with their migration to the United States and how these Cuban Asians continue to find themselves oppressed by a Eurocentric dominant culture and a Latino/a disenfranchised community.

Cuba, it has been said, is a *mestizaje*, a mixture of cultures, people, races, and ethnicities. We are an *ajiaco* brewing on the Caribbean stove. *Ajiaco* is a native dish, a renewable Cuban stew consisting of different indigenous roots that symbolizes who we are as a people. According to Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, the first to use the *ajiaco* metaphor to capture the Cuban experience, native Indians provided the *maíz, papa, malanga, boniato, yuca*, and *ají*. The Spaniards added *calabaza* and *nabo*, while the Chinese added Oriental spices. Africans, contributing *ñame* and their culinary foretaste, urged a meaning from this froth beyond mere clever cooking. In effect, we eat and are nourished by the combination of all of our diverse roots.¹⁰

Fernando Ortiz used the term *ajiaco* within the context of a Cuba composed of immigrants who, unlike those in the United States, reached the island on the way to somewhere

⁹ Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Asian Latinos” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States, Vol. 1*. eds. Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. González (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125.

¹⁰ For a more detailed exploration of the *ajiaco* paradigm, see my earlier work *La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), specifically the first chapter.

else. His usage of *ajiaco* did not indicate his belief that Cuban culture achieved complete integration; rather, the *ajiaco* is still simmering, not yet reaching a full synthesis.¹¹ I have used this term to refer to the distinctive nexus of our people's roots; specifically our Native, African, Spaniard, Asian and Anglo roots; rather than accenting the immigrant's identity. While I portray the *ajiaco* metaphor as positive, Ortiz included a racist element in his ethnology. This is evident when he described the negative aspects of the *ajiaco*. He wrote:

The white race influenced the Cuban underworld through European vices, modified and aggravated under certain aspects by the social factor of the children of the ambient. The black race provided its superstitions, its sensualism, its impulsiveness, in short, its African psyche. The yellow race brought the addiction of opium, its homosexual vices and other refined corruptions of its secular civilization.¹²

Furthermore, Ortiz advocated that immigration occur solely from Northern Europe in order to "sow among us the germs of energy, progress, life." For him, to continue accepting other races only increased criminality on the island of Cuba.¹³

Ajiaco symbolizes our *cubanidad's* (Cuban community's) attempt to find harmony among our diverse roots. But *cubanidad* is more than just a Cuban community. For Ortiz, *cubanidad* is a "condition of the soul, a complexity of sentiments, ideas and attitudes."¹⁴ Unlike the North American melting pot paradigm that insists that immigrants who arrive upon U.S. shores are somehow placed into a pot where they "melt down" into a new culture - that nevertheless

¹¹ Fernando Ortiz, "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad," in *La Habana: Revista Bimestre Cubana* (XLV, 1940), 165-169.

¹² Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros brujos: Apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal* (Miami: New House Publishers, [1906b] 1973), 19.

¹³ Fernando Ortiz, "La inmigración desde el punto de vista criminológico," *Derecho Sociología I* (May 1906a): 55-57.

¹⁴ Fernando Ortiz, "La cubanidad y los negros," *Estudio Afrocubanos 3* (1939), 3.

remains Eurocentric in nature - an *ajiaco* retains the unique flavors of its diverse roots while enriching the other elements. While none of the inhabitants representing the “ingredients” originated from the Island, all repopulated the space called Cuba as displaced people.

The Asian roots added to our *ajiaco* occurred when Chinese laborers were brought to the island to work as indentured servants, an alternative to African slavery. As landowners moved away from a slave labor pool, a need to procure new domesticated workers arose. The opening of China to European penetration in the 1840s created a potential new source of labor as Asians were loaded at Maceo for the deadly journey eastward. As early as 1806 the first laborers arrived in the Caribbean (Trinidad). By 1847 the first 206 Chinese were brought to Cuba, a number that increased to 140,000 during the next two decades, surging in 1939 to more than 300,000.

Although by treaty Chinese laborers were not to be regarded as slaves, the distinction between slave and indentured servant lay in semantics. The increase of Chinese laborers to Cuba (and other Latin American countries) was probably due to their exclusion from the United States after 1882. It is interesting to note that some became citizens of the Latin American country in which they happened to settle in order to facilitate their entrance into the United States, not as Chinese, but as Cubans, Mexicans, Peruvians, etc.

Coolies were technically “free,” however their conditions were as horrific, if not worse than slavery. Although the word “Coolies” has been used as a racial slur, I use it here to refer to the Chinese laborers as this word best captures their social location of oppression. The word Coolie is composed of two Chinese characters, *coo* and *lie*. *Coo* is defined as “suffering with pain;” *lie* means “laborer.” Hence the Coolie is the “laborer who suffers with pain,” adequately

describing his/her condition in Cuba. Their painful suffering began before they even arrived on the Island to labor. Many died during their long voyage to Cuba, ironically on the same slave ships previously used to transport Africans. Similar to the slave ships that originally brought Africans, an iron grating kept Chinese separated from the quarterdeck, and cannons were positioned to dominate the decks in the event they rebelled. In some instances almost half the human cargo perished in transport. In a very real sense, just as a Middle Passage existed where many Africans died upon the slave ships transporting them, and were discarded in the Atlantic Ocean; so too was a Pacific Middle Passage created. One of the first shipments of Coolies that was procured by Waldrop and Company sailed from Amoy on February 7, 1853 with 803 Chinese and arrived in La Habana with 480. In 1859 the Spanish frigate *Gravina* embarked with 352 Chinese and arrived with only 82.¹⁵

For those who survived the journey, working conditions on the Cuban plantation were unbearable. Chinese laborers usually arrived in Cuba with an eight-year labor contract. Although they were supposedly free laborers, within the Cuban imagination they were a new form of slave labor. The Cuban landlord on his way to the *barracoon* to contract field hands would more than likely say, "I'm going to buy a *chino*;" rather than, "I'm going to hire a *chino*." Because these Chinese "laborers" lacked economic value after eight years (when their work contract expired), they tended to be treated worse than slaves. Suicide for many became an alluring welcome. From

¹⁵ Duvon Clough Corbitt, *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury College, 1971), 16, 54. For a description of the suffering and humiliation caused by the brutal treatment of Chinese laborers, see Ch'ên Lanpin, *Chinese Emigration: The Cuba Commission Report of the Commission sent by China to Ascertain the Condition of Chinese Coolies in Cuba*, trans. A. MacPherson and A. Huber (Shanghai: The Imperial Maritime Customs Press, 1876); and Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

1850 to 1860 Cuba had the highest suicide rates in the world, 340 per million, of which 92.5 percent were committed by Chinese. When compared to Spain's fifteen per million, the desperation Chinese faced in Cuba becomes apparent.¹⁶

If Chinese laborers disobeyed their "superiors," they were "corrected" with over twelve lashes and/or the stocks. They were usually paid four to ten *pesos* per month, although substantial portions of their wages were extracted under a host of pretenses. Technically, they were provided with clothes, food, medical treatment and slave quarters. At the end of their contract the laborers theoretically could become tenant farmers or pay for return passage to their native land. Few lived long enough to exercise either choice. An estimated 75 percent died during their eight years of servitude.¹⁷ The end result of this "free wage" system was so similar to slavery that until the abolition of African slavery, both systems could operate side-by-side. Since both systems were synonymous, the use of indentured servants did help facilitate the transition from slavery to a wage system.¹⁸

The procurement of Chinese laborers was at times similar to the procurement of Africans. According to a January 1859 report by the Spanish Consul at Amoy to the First Secretary of State in Madrid:

¹⁶ Jesús Guanche, "Procesos etnoculturales de Cuba," in *La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas* (1983), 319-320.

¹⁷ Gonzalo de Quesada, *The Chinese and Cuban Independence* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1925), 4-6.

¹⁸ Corbitt, *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947*, 1-5, 68. Also see Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 116-20; James J. O'Kelly, *The Mambi-Land, or Adventures of a Herald Correspondent in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1874), 60-71, 271-90; and Hugh Thomas *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 186-88.

Of each hundred Chinamen that have embarked for Havana recently, I can assure Your Excellency that ninety were hunted like wild beasts and carried on board the vessels..., or they were seduced by deceitful promises and were deceived about the Country to which they were being transported and the kind of work for which they were being recruited. This criminal conduct quickly spread alarm throughout these extensive coasts, increasing the complaints of mothers who asked for husbands and sons that had been carried off by force.¹⁹

In many cases, the plantation overseers of Asians were former black slaves who were held in supreme contempt by the Chinese. Because most Chinese laborers were literate, they saw black Cubans as their intellectual inferiors due to widespread illiteracy in the former slave population. In some cases they revolted against the blacks that they accused of harsh treatment, and it was not uncommon for such revolts to lead to the overseer's death.²⁰

Cuban structures of white supremacy constructed the Chinese laborer as similar to African slaves. Their worth was so insignificant that it gave rise to the popular saying, "*Vale más un muerto que un chino*," a corpse is worth more than a Chinaman. Like Africans, few Chinese women were transported to Cuba. Market demands dictated the need for young men to work the sugar fields, not women. According to an 1861 Cuban census, there were 34,834 Chinese in Cuba of which 57 were women. By 1871, out of 40,261 Chinese in Cuba only 66 were women.²¹ Additionally, social and legal regulations forbade Asian intermarriage with African or white Cubans, although cohabitation surely ensued.²² The lack of available marriageable women gave rise to a homosexual construction of Chinese sexual identity. The consequence of white and

¹⁹ Guanche, *Procesos etnoculturales de Cuba*, 28.

²⁰ Ibid., 63, 78, 113.

²¹ Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, 188.

²² Corbitt, *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947*, 114-115. Also see Guanche, *Procesos etnoculturales de Cuba*, 319-320.

black women rejecting Chinese men contributed to the cultural assumption that they had succumbed to “unspeakable vices,” a euphemism for sodomy.²³ Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz credits the Chinese for introducing homosexuality (as well as opium) to Cuba.²⁴ Cuban historian Hugh Thomas summarizes the situation by noting that: “The Spaniards accused the Chinese as they had once the Arawak Indians; they were thieves, rebels, suicides and *homosexuals* – the last scarcely fair, even if true, since the traders in Chinamen introduced almost no women.”²⁵

This sinophobia has continued to modern time, even effecting Cuban social policies. Early in Castro’s regime China exported to the island a shipment of “socialist” condoms; however, Cubans refused to use them claiming they were “too small,” thus contributing to both the myth of the Chinese’s small penis and to a national rise in pregnancy.²⁶ Unfortunately, such biases took on international proportions. Carlos Franqui, Castro’s friend and biographer, believes that the intensity of the Sino-Cuban feud early in the Castro regime was due to Cuban historical attitudes toward the Chinese.²⁷

Exploring the historical injuries to the Asian community leaves me wondering if the white Spanish roots of my Cuban *ajiaco* can find reconciliation with the Asian roots. While in

²³ Verena Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 79.

²⁴ Fernando Ortiz, “La inmigración desde el punto de vista criminológico,” in *Derecho Sociología*, 19.

²⁵ Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, 188. Italics added.

²⁶ Carlos Franqui, *Family Portrait with Fidel: A Memoir*, trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York: Random House, 1984), 146

²⁷ Carlos Moore, *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1988), 264.

Nanjing, China, Matsuoka, who is Japanese, spoke of what he had discovered; “the inescapable burden I carry of horrible historical injury my Japanese ancestors imposed upon the people of Nanjing some decades back.” The elderly woman he was addressing responded with loving words of comfort and forgiveness. Matsuoka stated that in her response he had “a glimpse of faith by which we together gain our humanity, seeing the power and glory and holiness beneath the world’s lost face.”²⁸ The hope of this particular Caribbean Latino is to also share the inescapable burden, yet easily forgotten horrible historical injury that occurred in my homeland, imposed upon Asians some centuries back by my Spanish ancestors. Only then can I, along with the Cuban people, hope to glimpse the faith that can bind the diverse roots of our *ajiao* together.

Besides the impact of historical injuries, Matsuoka insists that the diasporic experience, being in a “state of dislocation and dispossession,” is equally important in influencing and informing Asian American theology.²⁹ If this is true, how much more of a contribution does the Hispanic Asian experience of being twice exiled have on the discourse? The “double-consciousness” popularized by W.E.B. DuBois speaks to a triple-consciousness experience of knowing what it means to be Asian in a Hispanic culture, Hispanic in an Asian culture, and Asian Hispanic in a North Euroamerican culture - not fully accepted by either, yet having an epistemological advantage of being able to know all three. When in 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau first allowed individuals to select more than one category, Hispanics (who do not belong to a singular racial category) began to also identify themselves as white, black, Asian, etc. Of the

²⁸ Matsuoka, “Churches and Seminaries in China: Personal Reflection,” 47.

²⁹ Matsuoka, “Asian American Theology,” in *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (St. Louis: Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004), 218, 221.

approximately 35.3 million who first self-identified as Hispanics, almost 120,000 also checked the Asian box. Yet of people who first identified themselves as Asian, 249,000 also checked the Hispanic box.³⁰ Among these Hispanics who claimed an Asian identity were *cubano chinos*.³¹ This raises questions about group belonging among Asian Latina/os.

Take the example of Emily Lo, a *china cubana* whose mother was born in La Habana to a Chinese father and non-Chinese mother. She recounts that when she took standardized tests at the U.S. high school she attended, she would at times fill in the bubble for Hispanic and at other times fill in the bubble for Asian, wondering if she could lay claim to either one. “Secretly,” she wrote, “I disliked Chinese food, struggled with chopsticks, and was a bit frightened of my four uncles who spoke broken English. I would meet my younger cousins, born in China and attending school in New York’s Chinatown, and we would stare at each other like we came from entirely different worlds.” When she approached her grandma one day to ask if she was more Cuban or Chinese, her Grandma answered without any hesitation, “*Tú eres americana*.” You are an American.³² Matsuoka reminds us that, “Ethnic boundaries are difficult to draw. There is no way for the various groups to prevent or regulate individual crossings. Ethnicity is always fluid,

³⁰ Sarah J. Rangel-Sanchez, “Asians” in *Hispanic American Religious Cultures, Vol. I: A-M*, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (Santa Barbara, California: ABC CLIO, 2009), 38.

³¹ Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Asian Latinos,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States, Vol. I*, ed. Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. González (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125.

³² Emily Lo, “A Cuban-Chinese *Familia*,” in *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced*, ed. Andrea O’Reilly Herrer (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 218.

dynamic, and evolving. Racial and ethnic identities derive their meaning from social and historical circumstances and they can vary over time.³³

According to Emily Lo, “We had studied immigration in school, but our textbooks never considered families like mine, families that were of blended heritage before they ever set foot in America. We celebrated hyphenated ethnicities all the time in our diversity-conscious curriculums, but adding one more, like Cuban *and* Chinese Americans didn’t fit any mold.”³⁴ Matsuoka calls for a reorientation in theology that “utilizes, recognizes, and reclaims [the] resources of people wherever they are. This is a call to reclaim one’s own heritage as Asian [and I would add Cuban and American]...and the marks of God’s presence in one’s own history, society and culture.”³⁵ Emily Lo, along with multiples of *chino cubanos*, forces a new discourse concerning Cuban or Asian identity – a discourse which moves away from a narrow national paradigm of predominately “white” Cubans in *el exilio* (the exile) or Chinese-Americans (and their ancestors) who came directly from China. The *chino cubano* narratives move us toward greater complexities at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and nation(s). The question before us is if we *cubanos*, who have historically been privileged within our own marginalized U.S. Hispanic community, will continue to ignore the voices of *chino cubanos* except when it comes to *restaurantes chino cubano*. Surely *chino cubanos* have contributed more to our identity than mere culinary skills.

³³ Matsuoka, “Churches and Seminaries in China: A Personal Reflection,” in *With Faith We Can Move Mountains: Reflections of GTU Asia Pacific Bridges Consultation in China, 1995*, 47.

³⁴ Lo, “A Cuban-Chinese *Familia*,” *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced*, 217.

³⁵ Fumitaka Matsuoka, “Jesus Christ Our Lord from a Missiological Perspective” in *A Disciple’s Christology: Appraisals of Kraus’s Jesus Christ Our Lord*, ed. Richard A. Kauffman (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1989), 32-33