

June 2005

Wilson, Andrew. *The Chinese in the Caribbean*.

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## Recommended Citation

Morris, Kathryn (2005) "Wilson, Andrew. *The Chinese in the Caribbean*," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.  
Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol3/iss1/12>

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**Andrew R. Wilson, Editor**

***The Chinese in the Caribbean***

**Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2004, xxiii+230 pp.**

***Reviewed by Kathryn Morris***

The Hakka are a migratory people. We move outwards on the tides of history. Most of us have relatives in Surinam, Panama, the British West Indies, as well as Singapore, Malaysia and other parts of South-east Asia. After several more generations in Canada, will it still be significant that we sojourned for a few generations in Jamaica? For now and as far we can see, that is how we identify ourselves and that is also how we are perceived by the wider Canadian community . . . In this generation we became part of a North American community, with significant concentration in Miami, New York, Toronto and other U.S. and Canadian cities and even London, England, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan.

—Patrick A. Lee, *Canadian Jamaican Chinese 2000*.

Culturally, the signifier “Chinese” in the Caribbean context has evolved into a broad term that encompasses the latest group of emigrants to the region; the hyphenated (Trinidadian, Jamaican, etc.), third- or fourth-generation, mixed-ancestry Chinese; and the countless members of the Chinese Caribbean Diaspora who are still “on the move.” Toronto, home to a large population of people who define themselves as Chinese—*insert Caribbean country here*—Canadian, has become a major center for Chinese Caribbean diasporan activity aimed at maintaining connections to the Caribbean and to China. For example, Patrick Lee’s work, excerpted above, presents pictorial and narrative histories of Jamaican Chinese families spanning five generations; Lee’s work pays tributes to his father, Lee Tom Yin’s earlier work, *Chinese in Jamaica* (1957), which commemorated the 100-year anniversary of the Chinese arrival in Jamaica. Reaching further out into the world, the celebrity of Jamaican reggae artist Sean Paul, who claims Chinese among his ancestors, has put the Chinese-Caribbean connection in the international spotlight. This substantial community is now a dragon with a foot on every continent and is growing in size and visibility. Andrew R. Wilson’s *The Chinese in the Caribbean*, which begins with the statement, “The macro-historical significance of Chinese emigration [since the 1830s] is undeniable,” is the latest publication to bring critical attention to this Caribbean and global phenomenon (vii).

*The Chinese in the Caribbean* is a collection of eight essays that together provide a fairly detailed overview about the Chinese presence in the Caribbean. Divided into three parts—The

British West Indies, Cuba, and Re-Migration and Re-Imagining Identity—this book manages to be accessible to those seeking introductory information on the topic, and yet detailed enough for scholars to engage in topical research.

The mix of statistical research, exposition, and biography gives this volume of essays an artful balance. It documents the lifelines of a community that has, in many ways, resisted study. After reading these essays, it becomes clear that even with these attempts to study ‘the Chinese in the Caribbean’, that the notion of ‘the Chinese’ in the Caribbean is, like the dragon, enigmatic. Through its various trajectories, one begins to see the dragon-like skeleton of a far-reaching and complicated community.

There is a statistical account of the 19th-century emigration of Chinese ‘coolies,’ indentured laborers who were brought to toil in the Caribbean’s sugar industry. Walton Look-Lai’s essay painstakingly charts the origins, arrivals, and welfare of these early emigrants; his research posits the first arrival of Chinese in the Caribbean in 1806 in Trinidad, revealing a 200-year history of “the Chinese” in the region. “The Chinese” were politicized groups leveraged by 19th-century colonial governments to sustain social hierarchies based on race, and cultural and religious assimilation, according to Anne-Marie Lee-Loy in her essay. “The Chinese” also refers to those whose migratory patterns in and around the Americas in the 20th-century have made them a defiantly transnational, “serial migratory” culture; these Chinese, whom Patrick Lee describes, are the subjects of Andrew Meyer’s and Lok Siu’s studies in the closing section of the book. In addition to these Chinese are the new immigrants who are taking jobs in factories and free trade zones throughout the region, echoing the migration described in Kathleen López’s report on early 20th-century Chinese migrant communities in Cuba, aptly titled, “One Brings Another.”

The essays vary widely not only in topic, but in narrative mode as well; they mirror the diverse ways in which Chinese have come and continue to come to the Caribbean, shaping the culture, economics, and politics of the region. The reach between the empirical and the subjective in the collection is beguiling—consider, for example, the difference between Li Anshan and Gail Bouknight-Davis’s detailed studies of the Chinese economic sector in 19th and 20th century Jamaica and Mitzi Espinosa Luis’s as-told-to story of a Chinese-Cuban centenarian named Felipe Luis. The entrepreneurial renown of the Chinese community in Jamaica is well-documented by Anshan and Bouknight-Davis, whose essays trace their evolution from small shop owners on Barry Street in downtown Kingston to owners of the largest grocery store chain in modern Jamaica. As a cultural minority, Chinese described in these essays often navigated difficult social and economic circumstances to build a stronghold in the business community while, with each generation, they became an inseparable part of the social fabric of the Caribbean through intermarriage and bi-directional cultural assimilation. The community became splintered along linguistic, religious, class, and racial lines while, at the same time, cultural and business societies such as the Chinese Benevolent Association formed a center for the

community by maintaining ties to families and even fundraising for the community's political interests in China.

However, it is Mitzi Espinosa Luis's piece that stands out among the others in the book. In this disarming, episodic narrative, Espinosa Luis, a Cuban woman of Chinese descent, gets to know the 99-year old Luis (Lui Cuan Chong), with whom she has a nominal relationship (he has the same surname and is from the same village as her grandfather, Lü Fan), and in the process, she recovers her own ancestral story. His tale seems typical of many of the historical experiences of the Chinese described in the other essays in the book; in 1926, at age 23, Lui Cuan Chong left his wife and two children in Guangdong Province, one of the sending-communities of Southeastern China, for Cuba. His grandfather had immigrated to Cuba, and in his letters encouraged Felipe to join him. Felipe endured the bitter separation, "through the hope of a happy return with pockets filled with money" (133). In Cuba, he was welcomed into the Chinese Cuban community: "each one arrives and enters the society of his surname, rents a room, and is given a name [by his countrymen];" at "No. 15 Cuchillo Street for immigrants of the surname Lü," he became Felipe Luis (134). For a while, he sold vegetables, fruit and ice cream in his shop; he always sent money home to his family. At 99, Felipe still recalls his life in China vividly and voraciously reads Chinese newspapers, yet he speaks of Sunday afternoons in Cuba, swimming at the beach, watching cockfights, and buying sandwiches at the local bodega with equal zeal.

*The Chinese in the Caribbean* represents one of a few publications that focus exclusively on Chinese-Caribbean history or experience. Most notable of these are Walter Look-Lai's works, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (1993) and *The Chinese in the West Indies, 1806-1995: A Documentary History* (2000); and Trev Sue-a-Quan's *Cane Reapers: Chinese Indentured Immigrants in Guyana* (2003). Considering the number of studies that focus on other places in the Chinese Diaspora and the number of studies in other Caribbean ethnicities, the field of Chinese Caribbean studies is still in its infancy. However, if one considers the growing interest in representations of Chinese in Caribbean fiction—Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1999), Margaret Cezair-Thompson's *The True History of Paradise* (1999), and Cristina Garcia's *Monkey Hunting* (2003) all feature representations of the Chinese Caribbean subject—this volume will certainly benefit a large community of creative writers, researchers, and scholars.

Andrew R. Wilson is Associate Professor of Strategy and Policy at the U.S. Naval War College. He is also the author of *Ambition and Identity: Chinese Merchant Elites in Colonial Manila, 1880-1916*.