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**Book Review: The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers  
and African Slaves in Cuba**

Donna Chollett

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admirably in combining economic history perspectives with approaches drawn from the history of disease. Similarly, in accounting for resistance and accommodation to Spanish laws and institutions, the authors draw deftly upon insights from cultural history, legal history, and the history of religion and of mentalités. *People of the Volcano* wears its theory lightly, but uses it effectively. Although there is no direct reference to Foucault in the text, in a particularly interesting chapter, the authors interpret Toledo's reforms as what can only be described as a Foucauldian project of governmentality – “social engineering on a scale previously unthinkable” (p. 82) – whose object was the creation of an ordered “New World” society, regimented through technologies of rule such as the census and the creation of new urban experiences (a new “habitus” perhaps) through the *reducciones*. The authors see this project as an Andean utopia distinct from, and, in effect, opposite to the Andean utopia that Alberto Flores Galindo identified in his now classic study.

Some readers may find the lack of a systematic discussion of the ways in which *People of the Volcano* fits with, or differs from, analogous studies on other regions of the Andes a weakness. Others may query the paucity of consideration given to the ways in which the story told here inflected, and was inflected by, gender relations in a colonial context (a topic that has received considerable attention in both studies on the Andes and in studies on other colonial contexts and which would have provided a rich theoretical and comparative seam for the authors to mine). I was not completely convinced by the attempt to frame the book within the “Andean counterpoint” of the subtitle. This counterpoint refers to the duality that the authors see as key to Andean society (evident in institutions such as the *saya* or in the centrality of reciprocity to Andean social relations) and which the Epilogue, unsuccessfully in my view, attempts to discuss on a broader historical canvas. But there is no doubt that this is a major piece of historical scholarship that students of Peruvian and Latin American history, and those interested in the colonial experience more generally, will have to take very seriously for many years to come.

**Paulo Drinot**

*University of Manchester*

LISA YUN: *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.

Lisa Yun's book *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* is an extraordinary exemplar of scholarship that examines the under-investigated and often misunderstood phenomenon of Chinese coolie

servitude in Cuba. The book interrogates liberal philosophies and modernist epistemologies, and offers new theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that shatter long-held notions of the labor “contract.” Yun’s analysis explores a unique body of 2,841 testimonies and petitions by Chinese coolies compiled in the 1876 Report of the Commission Sent by China to Ascertain the Condition of Chinese Coolies in Cuba. The author’s nuanced inquiry into the narratives of coolies while still under bondage traverses disciplinary boundaries of history, philosophy, and literature to expose the agonizing manifestation of global struggles over markets that perpetuated trade in human labor.

The book offers a revision of history that rescues radical coolie narratives, counter-narratives, and subjectivities from their marginalized locations in global and local history. Yun repudiates long-held and unproblematized binary assumptions that situated contracted coolies as transitional between African slave and free labor during a period in which slavery came under increasing international critique. As Cuban plantation owners’ demand for labor outpaced the slow demise of the system of slavery, in 1847 massive trafficking of Chinese coolies to Cuba ensued. Indeed, African slave labor and Chinese coolies overlapped for four decades until slavery was abolished in 1886. Unusual was the fact that unlike many ex-slave accounts, Chinese narratives were proffered while still under bondage.

The three-member Chinese, British, and French commission, headed by Chen Lan Pin, proved particularly adept at collecting and interpreting cultural implications embedded in coolie narratives. Yun’s analysis discloses the cultural values and subversive cultural forms employed by coolies to protest their dire situation and their relentless demands for freedom. Potential physical retribution and even death as a consequence of testifying clarify the agency of coolies in appropriating testimonies as acts of resistance to a repressive system. Yun’s interpretive skill circumvents essentializing coolie labor and yields a rich cacophony of dissident perspectives, yet she situates these accounts within the complicities of colonial political economy.

Complementing Yun’s uncharted examination of voices that speak from the past, a significant contribution of this volume consists of her probing critique of the “contract.” She problematizes contract labor by counterposing it to the assumptions of liberal and modernist philosophy. The coolie “contract” in Cuba lacked any semblance of voluntarism generally ascribed to legal contracts. Her analysis blurs the lines between slave, contract, wage, and other forms of labor. The coolie contract obfuscated inequality and enslavement as it legitimized racial inequality. The author’s bold new historical perspective on the commodification of human beings brings into relief how Chinese of all socioeconomic strata were forcibly abducted from China, chained and imprisoned on slave ships, sold into

bondage, denied freedom upon expiration of contracts, and recontracted multiple times, as plantation owners, merchants, and others profited on resale of confiscated papers. Chinese coolies, indeed, were often considered of lower status than African slaves, not infrequently put under control of African slaves, and suffered beatings, stoning, and acts of terror. Coolie children inherited their parents' status and coolies required permits to walk in the street, marry, and beg, while constantly entrapped in a "paper chase" for freedom papers and various permits, as the same were confiscated from them or denied to them.

Attuned to the cultural traditions of coolie laborers upon whom were imposed horrific abuses, Yun evokes the physical and mental anguish suffered as their physical bodies, families, and cultures were torn asunder. A voice from the past cried out: "We were all naked when we were inspected by buyers... We were sold to sugar plantations and treated worse than dogs... People with cracked head and broken legs still had to work" (120). Testimonies spoke of remorse that parents, spouses, and children would never know their fate. Coolies' names were changed as they were repeatedly resold, cutting them off from their families and lineages. Denial of funeral rites destabilized the importance of Confucian traditions, ancestor veneration, and generational continuity. Laments from the past expose coolies' anguish: "My gut is being cut by knives. My heart is being burned by fire. How sad and desperate I feel" (87), or, "We cry to heaven, but there is no reply; we appeal to earth, but there is no entry" (100). Testimonies recount innumerable individual and collective suicides by hanging, poisoning, or jumping into boiling sugar cauldrons in the sugar mills.

Nonetheless, the book's re-writing of history and inserting "people without history" back into colonial records evades proscriptions of absolute victimization. Testimonies also expressed individual styles that appropriated poetry, metaphors, rhetorical phrases, and allusions indicative of pre-contract social status to express dissidence, resistance, and defiance. Even plunging into the sugar cauldrons is theorized as an act of sabotage that disrupts the very production process that renders profits to plantation owners. Yun recounts the often neglected role that Chinese coolies played as protagonists in Cuba's Ten Years' War and struggles for independence. Moreover, participating in the process of witnessing engendered a collective resistance among coolies whose testimonies ultimately contributed to the demise of coolie trafficking.

The arrival of Chinese from the United States and rise of a Chinese merchant class in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century further complicates the historical account as intra-cultural antagonisms emerged. Yun explores the work of Antonio Chuffat Latour, a second-generation Afro-Chinese activist who published on the transition from bondage to freedom. Chuffat commanded the cultural capital to translate both

Afro-Cuban and Chinese cultures. His work lends a bricolage of genres that represent the cultural hybridity of social history.

Yun exposes complex heterogeneities of local social history as she contextualizes them within globalizing systems of international rivalry and power in search of a subjugated labor force. This book makes a significant contribution through its unique revision regarding the diaspora of transnational subjects whose lived realities were for too long obscured by the received wisdom of global structures of labor control, racialized hierarchies of power, and misconstrued philosophical notions of the contract.

**Donna L. Chollett**

*University of Minnesota, Morris*

GINETTA E. B. CANDELARIO: *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007.

Dominican racial schemas have long confounded outsiders. Since the eighteenth century, travelers have marveled at the curious combination of extensive racial admixture combined with a local taxonomy which precludes blackness, in which Dominicans are cast as “*indio*” expressed through minute shades of coloration. Unlike other nations in the Caribbean, the plantation complex did not define the formation of Dominican society. The first wave of sugar production using slave labor declined during the sixteenth century, and the economy developed into cattle ranching and a thriving peasant subsistence economy by the eighteenth century, when the overwhelming majority of peoples of African-descent had become free. In this context, as Candelario explains, the *indio* became the “central point of the racial continuum, the ‘native’ alternative to foreign blackness and whiteness alike” (p. 58). Notwithstanding its very different historical path compared with many of the slave plantation societies of the Americas, the tone of much U.S. scholarship has alternated between estrangement and admonishment, as Dominicans are chastised for denying their purported blackness. Candelario’s book is a welcome departure from this vein. Drawing upon historical travel narratives, comparative sociological data, ethnography and photo elicitation, Candelario very effectively penetrates and explains local perceptions of race and explores the nuances and complexities of Dominican racial ideas and practices as they have changed over time.

The first chapter treats Dominican racial identity as expressed in travel accounts by European and U.S. visitors to the island. Candelario argues that Dominican ideas of race first emerged in negotiations over diplomatic recognition