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The impact of the 1949 Chinese Revolution on a Latin American Chinese community: shifting power relations in Havana's Chinatown

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Abstract

This article argues that, while initially constrained by U.S. Cold War policies both in the Americas and in Asia, China's 1949 Communist Revolution could finally have a transformative impact on Latin American Chinese overseas community after the Cuban Revolution opened up new avenues for socialist influence in Latin America. By using new archival sources and interviews, we will analyze this changing impact by highlighting the intertwined layers of shifting power structures with a specific focus on the Chinese community in Cuba.

Keywords: Global Cold War; Chinese diaspora; Cuban Revolution; transnational history.

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Introduction

Recently, historian and eminence on Latin America Herbert S. Klein stated that the “‘historical turn’ in the social sciences has brought a fuller appreciation of the importance of historical understanding for answering basic questions” (Klein 2018, 311). In turn, he called upon historians to engage with social sciences in order to connect to current debates and, at the same time, avoid being isolated “from the major issues facing the modern world” (Klein 2018, 312). One of the major issues that the world is currently facing is China's growing economic and geostrategic influence, which is taking place at stunning speed, against the backdrop of the gradual decline of U.S. power and the general diversification of world powers.

If we consider the Cold War as a formative period of current international relations on a governmental level, and possibly also

on the level of migrant communities, it seems helpful to achieve a better understanding of how communist China's relations with the world developed during that era, and what impact they had on Chinese overseas communities. To that end, this article proposes a little-known subject of global Cold War studies, which is the study of the impact of China's Communist Revolution on Cuba's Chinese community in the early Cold War. By focusing specifically on the power struggle in Havana's Chinatown between the two revolutions (the Chinese in 1949 and the Cuban in 1959), the aim is to highlight some of the manifold and intertwined layers of power relations in the Americas. In the end, we hope to show that the developments intertwined on local, national and transnational levels, not only in the sense of interconnectedness but also in specific forms of mutual dependence and effects, thus contributing to the discussion about the place and negotiation of power in diasporic community agency.

The Chinese Revolution and its impact on the Americas at the hemispheric level

After the triumph of the Chinese communist forces under the leadership of Mao Zedong and the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the United States supported and protected the Republic of China (ROC) led by Chiang Kai-Shek. In spite of differences between Stalin and Mao concerning their respective socio-economic and ideological interpretations of the advance of communism (Lüthi 2010), Communist China built an alliance with the Soviet Union, ratified in 1950 through the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance (Worden et al. 1988).

The United States, allied with Taiwan, worked hard to keep the PRC outside the United Nations. They pressured Latin American countries not to extend diplomatic recognition to Mainland China, but to maintain diplomatic relations exclusively with the ROC (Hearn and León-Manríquez 2011). This procedure of hemispheric control proved so effective that no Latin American country established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic during the 1950s, and in the 1960s, only revolutionary Cuba did so. Nevertheless, the absence of formal diplomatic ties did not mean that Communist China had no contact with or influence in Latin America. As has been shown in detail by Rothwell (2013) through country studies of Mexico, Peru and Bolivia, multiple ties developed between the PRC and its most prominent leaders on the one side, and Latin American individuals, as well as (predominantly) leftist movements and parties that admired Mao's policies on the other¹. The impact of Maoism (*i.e.* both the Chinese adaptation of Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts and living example of Mao Zedong) on left-wing Latin Americans cannot be

¹ Labor leaders Vicente Lombardo (Mexico) and Lázaro Peña (Cuba) visited Beijing just weeks after the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to attend the World Federation of Trade Unions conference (Rothwell 2013, 30), and other revolutionaries, politicians and artists followed. Relations between Latin American communist parties and the PRC evolved quickly: In 1956, "leaders from 12 Latin American communist parties attended the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of China. By 1960, 22 Latin American communist parties had formal relations with the Chinese Party" (Rothwell 2013, 22). In addition, the levels of transpacific trade grew steadily (Rothwell 2013, 20), and the personal ties proved to be an excellent and increasing avenue for transnational and transcultural exchange. It has to be stated, though, that the majority of Latin Americans who traveled to the PRC between 1949 and 1960 were not communists (Rothwell 2013).

underestimated. It had a lasting impact throughout the Cold War, and even beyond that period (Rothwell 2013). Many of these conveyors of transpacific communist ideas were part of a network of global leftist revolutionaries (and/or intellectuals and artists), such as Ernesto **Che** Guevara (Rothwell 2016), who disseminated and connected different interpretations of leftist ideologies and inspired thousands of followers. The heaviest impact of imported Maoism on a Latin American country as a whole was caused by Peru's Maoist guerrilla known as the Shining Path, a major player in Peru's cruel Civil War during the 1980s and early 1990s (Rothwell 2013).

Going back to the early years of the Cold War, the PRC did not really try to intervene in the U.S.' **backyard** on a state-to-state level, but concentrated on its regional strategic goals in Asia instead. Evaluating Mainland China's engagement in the war in Korea, Friedman described the PRC's role as that of the Soviet Union's "chief lieutenant in Asia" (Friedman 2015, 26). In addition, while the conferences in Geneva (1954) and Bandung (1955) "had introduced the PRC on the world stage" (Friedman 2015, 27), they "served largely only to break the cloak of fearful isolation in which China found itself among its Asian neighbors" (Friedman 2015, 27), not to enter the Western Hemisphere as a new global player.

A change of attitude was tangible only after profound political-ideological shifts in the Americas had taken place. It was not until 1960 that (now revolutionary) Cuba recognized the PRC. It was the first – during the 50s and 60s the only – Latin American country to do so, followed by socialist Chile under Allende in 1970 and Peru under the regime of the leftist military junta in 1971 (Connelly and Cornejo Bustamante 1992). In 1972, the rapprochement between the United States and the PRC initiated by President Richard Nixon paved the way for other Latin American countries that could also strengthen their ties with the PRC if they desired to do so. However, due to both commercial considerations and fears of communist influence, many countries in Latin America continued to maintain their diplomatic ties with Taiwan for decades. Today, their number has decreased significantly, with El Salvador being the most recent one to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC (Fontdeglòria 2018).

Overseas Chinese: conflicts in a diasporic community before 1949

As we have seen, during the 1950s, the Chinese Communist Revolution did not entail a significant change for the Latin American countries at the diplomatic, state-to-state level, though it did so on a people-to-people level in the "[...] hidden world of communist parties and militant guerrilla organizations that adopted Maoist politics in Latin America" (Rothwell 2013, 19). In addition, another group directly felt the impact of the Chinese Revolution of 1949, as it did during all the major events that struck China since the mid-nineteenth century: the members of the Chinese diaspora², or Chinese Overseas, as they also called themselves according to Wang

² For a critical discussion of using the term **diaspora** for Asians in the Americas, see Anderson and Lee (2005, 8–10), especially the chapter "Asian America and the Diasporic Imagination."

(2002). The Chinese had migrated to the Americas in large numbers since the late 1840s, both as indentured laborers in the coolie trade (1847–1874) – mostly to Cuba, Peru, and the Caribbean – and as (supposedly) free laborers through the credit-ticket system – mostly to the United States, Hawaii, Canada, and later also to Mexico (Young 2014, 21–94). Young (2014) estimates that from the 1840s to the 1940s, about 670,000 Chinese migrated to the Anglo-North America and Hawaii, and roughly 340,000 to Latin America and the Caribbean³.

In the Americas, discriminatory practices, persecution and exclusion hardened the daily life of many Chinese from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the (American) exclusion era in the mid-twentieth century⁴, though there were important differences in the receiving societies⁵. These pressures and internal rivalries sometimes led to infighting in Chinese communities, as was the case with the Tong Wars (**tongs** being the name used by American authorities for Chinese secret societies, fraternities or triads) in San Francisco towards the end of the 19th century (Gong and Grant 1930; Dillon 1977). In addition, major events back in homeland China usually led to reactions in the overseas communities, and sometimes internal conflicts and external events that merged to produce violent outbreaks. After Chiang Kai-shek's anti-Communist coup in 1927, the United Front between Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party had ended. As Fowler (2008) showed, this had immediate consequences for Communists in the United States, including the Chinese immigrants. According to González' (2017) recent study, the Kuomintang also clashed with the Chinese secret society Chee Kung Tong (Chinese Freemasons), first in the aftermath of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, and again with more ferocity in the 1920s. Similar struggles erupted in the United States, Canada, and Cuba (González 2017). In Cuba, as of 1925, both local interests and loyalties to their respective counterparts in China led to clashes between the Kumintang and the Chee Kung Tong (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017). In Mexico, these violent encounters were used by nationalist and fascist Mexicans to advocate for even harsher exclusionary policies against all Chinese in Mexico, particularly in the state of Sonora (Espinoza 1932). The differences between Kuomintang, communists and secret societies reverberated in the Americas in the 1920s and 30s but were temporarily settled during the resistance against the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and World War II. They re-emerged after Japan's defeat in 1945 and led to the new outbreak of the Chinese Civil War, which ended with the triumph of Mao's Communist army and the establishment of the PRC in 1949.

³ For Mexico, Hu-Dehart provides the highest number of Chinese living there at one moment for the year 1927, with over 24,000 men and women (Hu-Dehart 2005). In Cuba, the climax was reached around the end of the coolie trade, with over 40,000 Chinese recorded in the census of 1877. In the 20th century, the highest figure for Cuba was over 24,000 in the year 1931 (López 2013).

⁴ The literature about anti-Chinese sentiment is quite extensive. See, among others, Lee (2006), Hu-Dehart (2009), Chang (2017), Young (2014). For a comprehensive overview of the exclusion in North America era see Lee 2003. For a broader view of migrant policies in the Americas, see Fitzgerald and Cook-Martín (2014).

⁵ López states: “[...] Chinese in Cuba did not experience institutionalized discrimination to the same extent as their counterparts in the United States [...], or Mexico [...]. Nor were they victims of sustained anti-Chinese riots, as in Peru and Jamaica” (2013, 4).

Ideological differences among the Chinese overseas in the early Cold War: the Cuban case

In 1949, with the Communists in power and the antagonism between the PRC and Taiwan, a time of definitions began once again for the Chinese overseas communities: “For the next several decades, both regimes [the PRC and the ROC] attempted to influence the millions of overseas Chinese living in such nations as the United States, Malaysia, and, of course, Cuba” (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017, 145). Both the context of the Cold War, with its strong global polarization, and the Chinese Revolution situated in this very conjuncture contributed to the existing conflicts in the Chinese diasporic communities, and at times exacerbated them. Adding to the political conflicts were the personal tragedies of exile and separation of families⁶. From an internal perspective, Chinese overseas communities in Latin America experienced once again a growing politicization and polarization. For a better understanding of the dynamics that unfolded in the intra-community relations among Chinese in Cuba at the crossroads of two revolutions (the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959), it seems helpful to look at this kind of development in the preceding years.

At the end of the 1940s, the main political organizations of the Chinese community in Cuba were the Min Chih Tang (Minzhidang, Cuban branch of the aforementioned Chee Kung Tong, or Chinese Freemasons), the Kuomintang (nationalist) and the National Alliance of Support for Chinese Democracy (Communist). In 1949, the widely circulating Cuban magazine *Bohemia* calculated the membership of the Min Chih Tang in some 4,000 followers, that of the Kuomintang in 2,000, and that of the Alliance in 300 (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017; Montes de Oca Choy and Ydoy Ortiz 2009). The Kuomintang had lost its monopolistic position to the Min Chih Tang, and, at the same time, the Alliance had failed to expand its base in a significant way. *Bohemia* considered that the Min Chih Tang, whose position it saw as more central or neutral, represented the majority of the politically active Chinese in Cuba. However, the Kuomintang still dominated the main political and social institution of the Chinese community in Havana, the Casino Chung Wah (García Triana 2003). In addition, it maintained a position of ideological leadership, despite the need to coexist with the Min Chih Tang (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017). The Kuomintang’s political enemy par excellence was the Alliance. As the Alliance was to play a key role in the Cuban Revolution of 1959, we will briefly describe its fate from its foundation to the late 1940s.

The Alliance was founded on April 30, 1927 in Havana, under the name Revolutionary Protector Alliance of Workers and Peasants of Cuba. Its founder, José Wong (Wong Tao-Bai or

⁶ Many Chinese in Latin America who maintained family ties with Mainland China found themselves separated from their relatives due to this conflict. In some cases, this separation would last for decades, sometimes for the entire Cold War. This was the case for Guillermo Chiu, who migrated to Cuba from Guangdong province after 1949. According to his memories, he was not able to see his relatives between the early 1950s and 1999, when he was invited to China on a paid trip for the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the PRC (personal communication, interview with him in Havana, August 1, 2014). He attributed this to the isolation of Communist China first, and then of revolutionary Cuba. He did not mention the Sino-Soviet split and Cuba’s siding with the USSR, though.

Huang Tao-Bai), was born in Guangzhou (China) in 1898 and had arrived in Cuba in the early 1920s. Soon after, Wong got in touch with leftist circles, including the Anti-Imperialist League and the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). After being arrested at a PCC meeting, he was extra-legally executed in 1930, during the Gerardo Machado's dictatorship, and became Cuba's best-known Chinese revolutionary martyr. After an initial growth financed by the Kuomintang, the Alliance suffered severe persecution under the Machado regime. Even after its prohibition, it continued clandestine operations in Santiago de Cuba, but after the fall of the dictator in 1933, it had lost its relevance. In 1938, at a time of Chinese national unity against the invasion of Japan in China, the organization was relaunched in Havana's Chinatown by leftist members, under a new name: Alliance in Defense of Chinese Culture. During the Civil War in China in the 1940s, the Alliance aligned with the Chinese Communist Party, registering in 1946 under the name: National Alliance to Protect Chinese Democracy (see *Historia de la Alianza Socialista China de Cuba* 2003).

In 1949, immediately after the victory of Mao Zedong's troops, leftist Chinese in Cuba initially felt strengthened (López 2013). Their increased self-esteem became evident in a political-ideological clash that took place between the Kuomintang and Communist nationalists on October 10 (an important national anniversary for both Chinese and Cubans), 1949, in Havana's Chinatown. Members of the National Alliance to Protect Chinese Democracy hung the PRC flag at the Kuomintang's headquarters, which led to confrontation between the two groups: "[...] Mao's sympathizers posted a few large bulletins and hung a flag of the People's Republic of China from the balcony. Hundreds of Chinese with opposing ideologies gathered around, threatening to start a riot. Violence was prevented by the quick intervention of the Cuban police" (*Bohemia* November 1949) (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017, 145). This was the first time the flag of Communist China was raised in public in Cuba, and it happened just a few days after the president of the Alliance, Enrique León, had declared the solidarity of Chinese **patriots** in Cuba to the PRC, and called for diplomatic recognition of Communist China (López 2013; Álvarez Ríos 1995).

However, at that time, the Cuban State and its president, Carlos Prío Socarrás, proved to be a loyal ally to the United States, supporting the persecution of individuals and groups with leftist ideas, in the name of anti-Communist ideology. When the PRC was founded in 1949, Cuba's position in this regard was clear, as López (2013, 222) states: "[...] Cuba was under the political and economic influence of its North American neighbor, and a directive from Washington to support the new Chinese government [PRC] never came." As a result, Cuba did not recognize the PRC, but maintained its diplomatic relations with the ROC. Consequently, in the above-cited case, the Cuban police intervened quickly, and the flag of Red China was taken down.

Only months later, in 1950, the Prío government closed down the Cuban Communist newspaper *Hoy*. When Cuban Chinese protested against this censorship, their own newspaper, *Kwong Wah Po* (founded in 1928, also of Communist orientation), had the same fate. The newspaper's press was destroyed and 13 Chinese were arrested and accused of being **Communist spies**. Among them was the newspaper's director, Juan Mok (Mo You-Ping). The Alliance had been dissolved again in 1951 due to financial problems, and in 1955 its official registration was canceled (López 2013).

This anti-Communist tendency continued, and was accentuated by Fulgencio Batista, who had risen to power through a *coup d'état* in 1952. For its part, the political leadership of the Chinese community in Havana, represented by the commercial elite of the Casino Chung Wah, had a nationalist-anticommunist orientation and remained attached to the country's political elite: "Upper-class Chinese merchants enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with Cuban politicians [...]" (López 2013, 223), while Chinese communists continued to be persecuted. However, Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana (2017) observed that after the purge of left-wing individuals and groups, and the unification of nationalist forces under the anticommunist banner: "The Chinese community in Havana appeared to be a cohesive ethnic community adapted to the sociopolitical circumstances of the Cold War" (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017, 158--9). That covered the political divisions for some time.

One of the consequences of the repression against Chinese communists during the 1950s was that several Chinese and Chinese descendants joined the clandestine revolutionary organizations and the guerrillas that rose against the Batista dictatorship (Eng Herrera and García Triana 2003). These would prove crucial for the profound transformation that would soon shake the established conservative power structure in Havana's Chinatown.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959: An unclear path

In 1959, when the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro triumphed, the situation changed again. In its first year, the revolution opened up possibilities for various types of organizations to participate in public life, among which, organizations that had been banned until then, such as the Popular Socialist Party and a branch of the New China News Agency (Xinhua) in 1959 – its first office in Latin America (Sidel 1983). The political climate promoted a shift towards more egalitarian and distributive policies, although the revolutionary leaders still followed a nationalist course within the capitalist system, not the path of socialism. At first, the merchant leaders of Chinatown in Havana supported the revolution, in a "period of interclass consensus" (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017, 159) for a democratic and liberal Cuba. However, this "honeymoon" (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017, 159) would not last long. The revolution was not a mere change of regime, but soon led to profound transformations of the Cuban economy and society. Faced with the first revolutionary measures that interfered with U.S. interests (such as the Agrarian Reform Law of May 17, 1959), the Eisenhower administration increased the economic and political pressure against the Cuban revolutionary government.

In Havana's Chinatown, former members of the Alliance reestablished their association in early 1959 under the name Chinese Cultural Alliance, and soon renamed it Chinese New Democracy Alliance in Cuba – alluding to Mao's concept of "New Democracy" (López 2013, 226). The Taiwanese embassy in Cuba observed this development with distrust. It informed the Cuban government of any **suspicious** movement of the Chinese, and tried to block any influence

of the PRC in Cuba (García Triana 2003). Referring to a public act of the Alliance in April 1959, the embassy warned that members of the Alliance could fly the flag of Communist China, “[...] an act that is inadmissible under international law, which would not only be demeaning to Cuba, but incongruent and harmful to the traditional friendship of more than half a century that has so happily united our two republics” (García Triana 2003, 43).

However, Cuban diplomacy took another course. In that same month of April 1959, during his visit to New York, Prime Minister Fidel Castro spoke in favor of the PRC, advocating its inclusion in the United Nations. This provoked an immediate protest from the embassy of Taiwan directed to Cuban president Manuel Urrutia Lleó, by means of which Taipei tried to find out the Cuban revolutionary government’s political inclination. Still in New York, Fidel Castro suddenly aligned with those who were criticizing the PRC for quelling the rebellion led by the Dalai Lama in Tibet. As we can see, the position of the new Cuban government towards Communist China seemed diffuse, and the consequences for the Chinese community in Cuba remained equally blurred (García Triana 2003). Even though its political orientation was not yet clear, as Martínez Heredia (2005) and Díaz Castañón (2004) have explored, this was a revolution that introduced energetic changes in the socio-economic structure of the country. In view of these changes, many wealthy Chinese feared losing their properties. Others simply faced an insecure situation. They had been fleeing from the Chinese Revolution a few years earlier, just to find themselves in yet another social revolution. Several Chinese began to conspire against the revolutionary government (García Triana 2003). On the other hand, there were Chinese who organized for the defense of the Cuban Revolution while, at the same time, trying to change the balance of power in Havana’s Chinatown.

A key character to organize the support of Chinese employees in a specific union sector of Havana was Pedro Eng Herrera (Ng Tai-Chao). In his career, we can see how the dynamics of the Cuban Revolution and the Chinese Revolution converged to effect a change of powers in the Chinese quarter of Havana, the Chinese community’s center of power in Cuba. Eng was born in 1933 in Havana to a Cantonese father and a mother from the Canary Islands. During the Batista’s dictatorship, he had been part of the Trade Union of Workers’ left wing and Employees of Retail Commerce and its Annexes. Along with his partner Rufino Alay Chang (Deng Gue-Xuan), he secretly supported Fidel Castro’s 26th of July Movement. After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Eng was organizing several Chinese in this workers’ militia, and in February 1960, Pedro Eng, Rufino Alay and Jesus Eng Guerra (Wu Guang-Xuan) finally founded a militia whose members were only Chinese and Chinese descendants (Manke 2015). To carry out this plan, they sought support in the Chinese Cultural Alliance, but the Alliance’s leadership (then headed by the new president Manuel Luis) did not approve their plans. Faced with this refusal, they contacted Juan Mok, the editor of the Chinese communist newspaper *Kwong Wah Po*, who ran a leftist faction within the Alliance. Mok and Luis Li, both elderly communists and companions of José Wong in the 1920s, helped Eng found this militia. They named it Popular Chinese Militia – José Wong Brigade, to refer directly to the Cuban-Chinese communist martyr José Wong and, at the same time, to show their affiliation to Popular China (pers. comm. interview with Pedro Eng Herrera,

November 25, 2006 in Havana; pers. comm interview with Guillermo Chiu, August 1, 2014 in Havana). That is to say, Eng and his companions allied with the most leftist forces in order to found their militia and carry out a change of course in Chinatown that reflected the growing radicalization of the Cuban Revolution.

The change of alliances in the Cold War and the struggle for power in Havana's Chinatown

In the realm of international relations, the political climate began to reflect Cuba's clearer shift to the left. In February 1960, the USSR's Exhibition of Science, Technology and Culture stopped in Havana and attracted a huge number of visitors (Yost 2015; Guerra 2012). In May, Cuba and the USSR resumed diplomatic relations; soon after, the conflict between Cuba and the United States worsened. In June, with the support of the Eisenhower administration, U.S. refineries in Cuba refused to refine Soviet crude oil. To guarantee the vital oil supply, the Cuban government expropriated them. In response, but (as we know today) perfectly framed in a policy of economic strangling, the United States' government canceled the imports quota of Cuban sugar. These measures were accompanied by a program of subversion and support for the irregular counterrevolutionary war in Cuba directed by the CIA, which was to culminate in the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. On April 17, 1960, Eisenhower approved these and other measures contained in the Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime (Glennon and Landa 1991 ; Schoultz 2009; Diez Acosta 2006; Manke 2009). In June and July 1960, Fidel Castro secured the basic supply for revolutionary Cuba in economic and defensive terms through trade and military agreements with the USSR and China. In August, when he announced large-scale expropriations of U.S. companies, the struggle for Cuba's economic sovereignty had reached its climax (Manke 2014a; 2014b).

The deterioration of Cuba's relations with the United States was also felt in Cuba's position towards the PRC. On September 2, 1960, Fidel Castro proclaimed the First Declaration of Havana, a speech and document that underscored Cuba's right to self-determination in the face of U.S. attempts at economic and political blockade (Adler 1970). In his speech, Castro announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC and, at the same time, the severance of relations with the ROC (Castro 1960). As mentioned above, with this decision, Cuba became the first country in Latin America to establish diplomatic relations with Communist China (Álvarez Ríos 1995; Benton 2009). The following day, Taipei officially suspended its relations with Cuba (García Triana 2003). Suddenly, Cuba became an important platform for Latin Americans who wanted to know more about the PRC or travel to China, and for China to extend its influence in Latin America.

However, this would only last a few years, until Cuba ultimately sided with the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet split:

During the first half of the 1960s, until the rupture in Sino-Cuban relations that accompanied the Sino-Soviet split, Latin Americans who were ideologically attached to the Chinese socialist model, such as José Venturelli, circulated in Cuba. While in Cuba, Latin Americans drawn to the example of the Cuban Revolution could encounter pro-Chinese Latin Americans and learn about China from them. Operating under regular diplomatic conditions, the Chinese embassy could then facilitate travel to China more easily than roving Xinhua correspondents or cultural delegations could. For the few years that China and Cuba enjoyed warm relations, the Chinese embassy in Havana was well situated for making contact with progressive and revolutionary Latin Americans from across the continent (Rothwell 2013, 22).

After Cuba had recognized the PRC in September 1960, in Havana's Chinatown, power relations changed at an elevated rate, and the ROC's embassy could no longer interfere. While Fidel Castro made the Declaration of Havana on September 2, a large group of Chinese Cubans – including several members of the Alliance – put up a banner that stated: “Chinese residents support the Cuban Revolution and its leader Fidel Castro!” (Galería histórica de la Embajada de Cuba en China (n.d.)⁷). On October 1, 1960, members of the Alliance and of the Chinese militia participated in a public event to commemorate the eleventh anniversary of the PRC (López 2013, 227). That day, the Chinese militia became more visible in Chinatown. Its members raised the Cuban flag and that of the PRC, and publicly proclaimed: “We are Chinese residents and we are in the National Revolutionary Militias. And you, what are you doing for your country? Get enrolled in the MNR” (García Triana 2003, 175). Nine days later, the revolutionary fervor also affected the traditional institutions of the Chinese community. October 10, as noted above, was the national liberation anniversary for both countries, and the Chinese-Cuban militia intervened in the Casino Chung Wah and the Kuomintang headquarters, including its newspaper *Man Sen Yat Po*. Rufino Alay was the first person to permanently raise the PRC's red flag on the former Kuomintang building, and the Communist newspaper *Kwong Wah Po* became the Casino Chung Wah's official publication (López 2013; García Triana and Eng Herrera 2009).

Conclusion

Our research reveals that the Chinese-Cuban militia decisively influenced the resolution of the political-ideological conflict in the Casino Chung Wah, in favor of the leftist faction in Havana's Chinatown, which was led by the Alliance. As Herrera and Castillo have shown, the Casino's management, in addition to having been composed, up to that point, by followers of Taiwan's conservative policies, had not agreed to clarify the financial management's details of the institution, as demanded by Cuban authorities. Consequently, it lost its power. In a

⁷ My translation from Spanish (Galería histórica de la Embajada de Cuba en China, [n.d.]).

meeting, a new group was elected for the leading positions: The head of the Alliance, Manuel Luis, was elected president, and Enrique León its secretary (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017). Intervention on the Casino became effective on October 13, and both were confirmed in their posts. On the same day, through Law No. 891, all foreign banks that had not been left untouched (except the Canadian banks) suffered intervention from the Cuban government, including the Cuban branch of the Bank of China (López 2013). In addition, the Kuomintang building, its newspaper and several other establishments and properties of Chinese who had cooperated with Batista were confiscated. Although the Casino's new Communist leadership did not have a significant social base in the Chinese community, there were hardly any protests against this change of power, which took place in relative peace. The reasons for this might lay in the growing discredit of the nationalist faction since the 1940s (Herrera Jerez and Castillo Santana 2017).

As we have seen, the change of power in Havana's Chinatown and in the Chinese community in Cuba as a whole was intimately linked to the social, political and economic situation of both the Cuban Revolution and the Chinese Revolution. Both were framed in the context of the global Cold War, which, especially in the Americas, was heavily shaped by hegemonic U.S. politics. In addition to the heavy people-to-people diplomacy and transnational exchange promoted by both the PRC's leadership and Latin American politicians, labor leaders, revolutionaries and artists (as shown in Rothwell 2013), the Chinese Revolution of 1949 also had a huge impact on Chinese overseas communities in the Americas. Constrained by the political-ideological dynamics of the Cold War on a global, hemispheric and national level, and by internal power structures in their respective communities on a local level, the members of the Chinese community in Cuba made their choices based on the political opportunity structures that framed them (for this type of process cf. Kriesi 2004).

As Rothwell (2013) has shown, between 1959 and the end of the Sino-Soviet split, the Cuban Revolution made a difference in how the Chinese Revolution was able to impact the Americas, as Cuba became a platform for leftist Latin Americans that wanted to get in touch with the PRC, thus giving the PRC the first opportunity to establish official diplomatic relations with a Latin American country. As we have shown in this article, the establishment of diplomatic ties and the severance of ties with Taiwan, in connection with revolutionary upheaval in Cuba, also had a direct impact on the Chinese community. We have seen how the Chinese community in Havana was divided by the Chinese Revolution, and this fact can be embedded in how the reformulation of concepts and strategic orientation in Cold War geopolitics that entailed the Cuban Revolution created a new framework of opportunity (Manke 2017).

At this juncture, leftist groups and individuals in Havana's Chinatown were encouraged to bring a new vision of society into being. They were inspired by the Chinese Revolution and by the leftist ideas already developed in Cuba since the 1920s, personified in characters such as José Wong. There are more twists to the story: Wong, in turn, was part of Cuban Communist groups

that were not of Asian origin and that were nourished as much by the Russian Revolution as by Cuban-Spanish Communism and anarcho-syndicalism.

However, if we consider the full impact of the sociopolitical, economic and ideological quarantine that the United States imposed on revolutionary Cuba, to try to prevent the spread of the revolution in Latin America, the Cuban Revolution does not seem to have constituted a real watershed moment for relations between the RPC and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. Through the exchange with Cuba, the study of Latin America in the PRC and the translations of works in Spanish multiplied, but it did not reach far beyond Cuba. A quite different dynamic unfolded in Peru, beginning in the 1960s: Maoist Peruvians adapted Maoist ideas to local conditions and spread their ideology far beyond their home base in Ayacucho. Nevertheless, it discredited its own guerrilla, the Shining Path, with a level of violence hitherto almost exclusively ascribed to the Peruvian military (Rothwell 2013).

On a state-to-state level, a more profound change at the hemispheric level took place when the hegemonic power itself changed its attitude: the rapprochement between the United States and the PRC initiated by Richard Nixon in 1972, and the PRC's admission to the United Nations paved the way for the opening of diplomatic relations between the PRC and several Latin American countries. A change that, with the rise of the PRC to world power today, does not seem to be reversible, but could possibly be interpreted as a sign of a new era.

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