

*Our History Is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution.* By Armando CHOY, Gustavo CHUI and Moisés SÍO WONG. New York, London, Montreal, Sydney: Pathfinder, 2005. 216 pp.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT THE RESETTLEMENT, revolution and reform of the Chinese in Cuba, “a story largely unknown outside Cuba” (p. 3), and a story of the Cuban people. The three story-tellers, whose ancestors migrated to and settled in Cuba in early times, took part in the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro, became important leaders in the revolution and are now engaged in the important reform and transformation of Cuban society.

More importantly, this is a history of the evolution of Cuba from a dictatorship to a socialist country as told by the Chinese Cubans from their perspective. It is a history *about* the ordinary people, their suffering, their struggle, their revolution and creation. The person who carried out the interview is Mary-Alice Waters, president of Pathfinder Press and editor of *New Internationalist*, a magazine promoting the study of Marxist politics and theory.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, “‘The difference is a socialist revolution’: Chinese in Cuba,” is an introduction of the Chinese Cubans in general and the three revolutionary protagonists in particular. The three interviewees give us a lucid picture of why and how they became part of the revolution. Part 2, “Strengthening the revolution,” deals with the fight against the threat to the Cuban Revolution abroad and at home. The discussion of the internationalist mission to Angola (1975–91) is especially interesting as it discloses the ideal, goal and result of the mission and the response it aroused. According to Fidel Castro, “They (the US and its supporters) planned to take hold of Cabinda, with its oil, before November 11 [1975]; to seize Luanda before November 11 [1975]. And to carry out this scheme, the US government launched South African troops against Angola ...” (p. 79). Part 3, “The special period and beyond,” is about the food crisis in the early 1990s and the initiatives taken by the Cuban people in dealing with it. The Appendix includes three speeches, two by Fidel Castro and one by Nelson Mandela, about the Cuban internationalist mission in Angola. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom, and justice, unparalleled for its principled and selfless character” (p. 179). The “Glossary of individuals, organizations, and events” is useful especially for those who want to make a detailed study of the subject.

Apart from being an oral history which reveals many stories told by insiders involved in the Cuban Revolution, the book is unique in two other respects.

The authors come from a special background and the content has a strong ideological orientation. The three authors are Chinese Cubans, all members of the Rebel Army and actively involved in the fight against the US-backed Batista dictatorship. They are all founding members of the Communist Party of Cuba, and all currently occupying important positions in the Cuban government. Armando Choy, a founding member of the July 26 Movement in 1955 and leader of the guerrilla war, is now president of the State Working Group for the Cleanup, Preservation, and Development of Havana Bay. Gustavo Chui, actively involved in the July 26 Movement's urban underground in Santiago during the first part of the revolutionary war, now serves as the leader of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution, a national organization founded in 1993 which began in Pinar del Rio as a pilot project in 1990. Moisés Sío Wong, leader of the first Youth Brigade in Havana, came under the command of Gerardo Abreu (*Fontan*) soon after the founding of the July 26 Movement in 1955, and having worked closely with Fidel and other leaders, is now president of the National Institute of State Reserves.

A convincing picture of Cuban history and society unfolds as one reads the book. The Chinese in Cuba not only worked very hard in order to survive, they also took an active part in the War of Independence. Although there are glimpses of the history of Chinese immigrants in Cuba in the early days, it is the detailed account of the personal experiences in the Cuban revolution and reform that forms the core of the book and gives it its strength. For example, General Sío Wong gives an illustration of his service under three great figures, viz. his work under Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra, his experience in "Ciro Redondo" Column 8 under the command of "Che" (Ernesto Che Guevara), and seven years' work in collaboration with Raul Castro. The narration is deeply moving and exudes a strong sense of idealism and responsibility for the Cuban people and mankind in general.

Although there are striking descriptions of the anti-Batista struggle, the guerilla war and the socialist revolution, it is the depiction of what is happening in Cuba today that I find most appealing. In the early 1990s, the food crisis threatened to derail the revolution. The reader is given a vivid account of how creative and resilient the people and government were in taking measures "to save the revolution," such as allowing the free circulation of the dollar, expanding international tourism, and creating "organoponic" gardens (for the cultivation of agricultural products with organic material and biological controls), etc. In order to produce more food for the people, permission was given to workers to share the profit as an incentive.

"How is it possible that you, a descendent (sic) of Chinese, occupy a high government post, are a deputy in the National Assembly, and a general of the Armed Forces? How is that possible?" This is a question asked of Sío Wong in

1999 by the president of ISSCO (International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas) which was holding the International Conference on the Chinese Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean in Havana. The same question may well be put to the other two authors who also hold important positions in the Cuban government. The answer seems to lie in the nature of Cuban society. “The revolution eliminated discrimination based on the color of a person’s skin.” “Here discrimination — against blacks, against Chinese, against women, against the poor — was ended” (p. 75).

Although it is not an academic study, the book does provide valuable material on the Chinese in Cuba. Moreover, illustrated by contemporary photos, it has vigor and vividness, is full of the participants’ insight, and puts across an idealism badly needed in a world of materialistic pursuits. The book may be a history “still being written” as the title suggests, it has already struck a chord with me.

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