

# Chinese Migration to Brazil



# Chinese Migration to Brazil:

*History, Mobility and Identities*

By

Chang-sheng Shu

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To the Memory of My Mentor, Professor Theotônio dos Santos  
To the Memory of My Father and Mother



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APRC	Association for the Peaceful Reunification of China (中国和平统一促进会)
BCCA	Brazilian Chinese Cultural Association (巴西华人协会)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CHL	Chinese Heritage Language
CLS	Chinese Language School
CNIg	Conselho Nacional de Imigração (Brazilian National Council for Immigration)
CPD	Central Propaganda Department of CCP
CPPCC	Chinese Peoples' Political Consultative Conference
CSC	Chinese Social Center ( <i>Zhonghua Huiguan</i> 中华会馆)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
<i>Guanxi</i>	Inter-personal Connections
HSK	Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (Chinese Proficiency Test)
IPFSP	Igreja Presbiteriana Formosa de São Paulo (Taiwanese Presbyterian Church of São Paulo)
JCA	Jornal Chinês Americana (Chinese Journal Americana 美洲华报)
JCAS	Jornal Chinês da América do Sul (Chinese Journal of South America 南美侨报)
JCB	Jornal Chinês do Brasil (Chinese Journal of Brazil 巴西侨报)
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
MEC	Ministério da Educação e Cultura (Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC
OBMigra	Observatório das Migrações Internacionais (Brazilian Observatory of International Migrations)
OCAC/ROC	Overseas Chinese Affairs Council of the ROC (中华民国侨务委员会)
OCAO/PRC	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the PRC (中华人民共和国国务院侨务办公室)

OCSC	Overseas Chinese Service Center ( <i>Huazhu Zhongxin</i> 华助中心)
PLA	People's Liberation Army (中国人民解放军)
PRC	People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国)
<i>Qiaowu</i> (侨务)	Overseas Chinese Affairs
<i>Qiaoban</i> (侨办)	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the PRC
<i>Qiaolian</i> (侨联)	All China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (中华全国归国华侨联合会)
<i>Qiaoxiang</i> (侨乡)	Migrant-Sending Places
ROC	Republic of China
ROC (Taiwan)	Republic of China exiled in Taiwan, 1950 to Present
<i>Shetuan</i> (社团)	Voluntary Social Association
SINCRE	Sistema Nacional de Cadastro e Registro dos Estrangeiros (Brazilian National System for the Registration of Foreigners)
SisMigra	Sistema de Registro Nacional Migratório (Brazilian National System for the Registration of International Migrants)
ZLT	Zu Lai Temple of Foguang Shan Association

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## PREFACE

Brazil was a very marginal player in the notorious nineteenth-century Chinese coolie trade to the Latin America / Caribbean region, but it was not entirely free from its taint. As Shu Chang-sheng has shown, several sporadic one-off efforts were made to import Chinese plantation, construction and mine workers in the years 1855, 1866, 1874, 1878, 1882 and 1893, in addition to an earlier royally sponsored experiment at export tea cultivation in the 1810s, which was eventually abandoned in favor of coffee cultivation. There were also several exploratory diplomatic and commercial efforts in the 1880s and 1890s, on both the Brazilian and Chinese sides, to initiate a regular and steady labor migration, but none of these bore fruit. The pressures from local and foreign abolitionist lobbies, and the racial ambivalence of influential sectors of the Brazilian elite, eventually ensured that Brazil would remain a marginal player in this trade. Of roughly 10,000 imported workers in the nineteenth century, no more than 1,000 Chinese lived in Brazil in 1949 and their impact on the society was negligible, unlike their counterparts in Cuba or Peru or even British Guiana. It was the large-scale migration released by the reform and opening up of China in the 1980s that has altered this picture, as it has in many other countries in the Americas. Shu Chang-sheng's study on the Chinese in Brazil is the latest of many studies in progress, documenting and analyzing the impact of the new Chinese migration on countries in Latin America, where the Chinese presence had been previously negligible.

The augmentation of the Chinese community in Brazil, and the beginning of its multi-class nature, actually began during the Maoist years, and consisted of middle-class refugees from Communism—from the mainland itself as well as from Taiwan. These were also the years when, following the example of the United States, Brazil's diplomatic relations were with Taiwan, and diplomatic initiatives led to several commercial and technical personnel exchanges with the Chinese from Taiwan, many of whom remained in Brazil. But the main migration began in the post-reform 1980s, from the mainland, and has continued uninterruptedly since then. It too has been multi-class in nature, ranging from fugitive capital in search of a haven, to those with technical or professional skills, to the more ubiquitous small traders in search of opportunity, to globally mobile labor desperately, and often illegally, in search of a new beginning in the Americas. Not

surprisingly, educational levels among many migrants, most of whom are under forty-five, are higher than earlier generations of migrants. Though dispersed throughout Brazil, they mainly live in the southeast metropolitan areas of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. One continuity with the older migration has been the provincial origins of the new migrants—mainly Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces. Using official government statistics, Shu estimates that, by 2020, 50 % of the 280,000-strong Chinese communities of Brazil are originally from Guangdong, 20 % from Taiwan, 18 % from Zhejiang, and 10 % from Fujian, with the remaining 2 % from other provinces.

Shu Chang-sheng describes the self-preservation and self-organization of the Chinese in their new environment, a pattern which tends to replicate itself in all the new destinations where the migrants find themselves—their voluntary community associations, a few of them umbrella organizations, but most inevitably reflecting their diverse regional origins, social functions and often political affiliations (as many as 100 by the 2020s); their diverse religions with their varying degrees of assimilation to local practices; and their Chinese language schools and community newspapers. For such a small community, these are very complex and multi-faceted, reflecting their collective innovative skills despite their many regional and political divisions. The adaptive and assimilative trends inherent in their many social practices, as they adapt to functioning in Brazil and among Brazilians, are closely analyzed. Some of these, like the Confucius Institutes, are the result not of community self-help, but of diplomatic top-down initiatives.

One valuable contribution to Shu Chang-sheng's discussion is his survey of the literary output of the Brazilian Chinese, books and newspaper articles produced by community writers reflecting on migrant experiences in the new society. Chapter 10 describes two moving novels written in the 2000's about (admittedly selective) real life experiences in immigrant Brazil. In Yuan Yiping's *Married to Brazil* (2002) and Wang Xiang's *Chinese Merchants in Brazil* (2010), one written by a former journalist with deep community roots, the other based on biographical experiences, we are transported into the subterranean world of the new Chinese lower middle class migrants: the social marginality and insecurity, with its constant threats from the law, its financial precariousness, the potential treachery from fellow immigrants and strangers alike, and the constant prospect of failure, all heightened by lack of social and language skills, which is the indispensable backdrop to immigrant existence in the new milieu. How the different protagonists cope with, and rise above, their straitened circumstances (one marries a successful local Chinese businessman, one

marries his Brazilian landlady and opens a thriving Kung Fu school, one gives up and returns to China) provides us with a vivid but sober portrait of the subterranean life of many of the (often irregular) Chinese immigrants not only in Brazil, but perhaps everywhere in the diaspora.

Shu Chang-sheng's pioneering study is a valuable contribution to the history and sociology of the new Chinese communities emerging in Latin America in the twenty-first century, and covers all the main bases of community life. A dimension that seems to need special additional attention is the one on the Brazil-born Chinese, although they are discussed in the chapters on religion and language schools: their numbers and age groups, their mixed vs pure Chinese heritage, their levels of education and employment, their evolving views on their identities, and their aspirations. Also, because of the relative newness of the Chinese in Brazil, it will be some time before the story of their assimilation reaches a higher level, as it has in other regions of the Americas: that of chronicling the contributions of Brazilian-born Chinese to the highest levels of Brazilian social and civic achievement.

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# CHAPTER 1

## CHINESE MIGRATION TO BRAZIL: HISTORY, MOBILITY AND IDENTITIES

Since the 1970s, Chinese immigrants in Brazil, their history, their collective culture, their livelihood and, more importantly, their internal social structures, have attracted scholarly attention from Brazil, mainland China, Taiwan and the United States. A myriad of original data, bibliographic references and meaningful research results have been made available recently. Based on the data and literature, this book is a tentative synthesis of the existing research about the Chinese migration to Brazil with the objective of creating a basic reference book for future studies on this new and promising field.

As I have demonstrated throughout the book, the Chinese communities in Brazil are heterogeneous in terms of their hometown origins, their migratory patterns and the multiplicity of the waves of their migration. In fact, there is no single and unified Chinese community, rather, there are many communities formed by Chinese immigrants. Nevertheless, living in a foreign land, they often forge a sense of single Chinese collectivity, for they belong to the same Chinese cultural heritage. At the aggregated level, despite individual differences in upbringing, in training and in life experiences, before and after their migration, they have identified themselves, and are always identified by the non-Chinese, by their shared Chinese background. To ensure a better future in their host country, the Chinese immigrants have organized themselves through visible and invisible links, creating their own voluntary associations, constructing their own temples and churches, establishing their language schools, publishing their newspapers and periodicals, sporadically (or consistently) engaging in literary activities, to express their sentiments and emotions, and to write down their *ethos* and *pathos* from their post-migration life experiences.

To understand the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the Chinese migration to Brazil, and the complexities of their communities, in this book, I try to give some answers to the following questions: When and why did Chinese migrants begin to settle down in Brazil? How did the Chinese communities

grow? When did they begin to set up their own associations and why? What are their organizational activities? How do they, at both an individual level and a collective level, relate to their homeland and hostland? How do they construct and perform their ethnic identities? Specifically, how do they conduct their religious activities? How do they transmit their heritage languages? And, finally, how do they express themselves through their literary writings?

Starting from tracing the history and the development of the Chinese (im)migration process, I analyze the Chinese voluntary associations, language schools, newspapers, ethnic churches and temples, in order to portray the collective social and cultural features of the Chinese communities in Brazil. As Professor Minghuan Li (1999) has posited, the general characteristic of Chinese immigrants is that they are living in “two worlds”: one is the world of their origin, which is a physically distant but psychologically familiar world; the other is the world of their everyday life, which remains psychologically distant despite its physical presence. Inspired by Prof. Li’s two-worlds perspectives, this book will also explore the “two-worlds” practices of the Chinese immigrants in Brazil: on the one hand, they, whether consciously or unconsciously, have used their social resources from their homeland to survive and develop themselves in their host society; and, on the other hand, their overseas experiences, regardless of whether or not they have realized their dreams, have changed their social status in their original world.

The studies of international migration are inherently multi-disciplinary. Scholars of various backgrounds have contributed to this fertile and promising field with their distinctive approaches and meaningful insights. My academic training was as an historian and my research relies on historical approaches, for example, archival analysis and bibliographic studies constitute a large portion of my scholarly efforts, but my historical orientation does not preclude my application of other approaches as well. In this book, rather than being limited by written sources, I benefited from some valuable oral history materials obtained from my interviews and conversations with some immigrants. I believe that the oral history method is essential for studies of Chinese migration, because it is indispensable in dealing with a number of emotive social issues that the Chinese immigrants in Brazil currently face. By analyzing the Chinese migration history, settlement patterns and exploring their associative practices and cultural expressions, I try to show the individual and collective sense of ethnic or national identities, and how they strive to benefit rather than suffer from the *marginal* social position that often follows a long-distance transnational migration.

## 1. Mobility as a Paradigm

John Urry (2008) observed that “it sometimes seems as if all the world is on the move” (7). He noted there are four main senses of the term “mobile” or “mobility.” First, mobile is a property of things and of people; second, there is the sense of mobile as a *mob*, a rabble or an unruly crowd. The mob is seen as disorderly precisely because it is mobile, not fully fixed within boundaries and, therefore, needs to be tracked and socially regulated; third, the vertical sense of upward or downward social mobility; fourth, a horizontal sense of being “on the move,” which refers specifically to moving across a country or continent, often in search of a better life or to escape from drought, persecution, war, starvation and so on (7–8).

Urry seeks to establish mobilities as a paradigm. He argues that thinking through a mobilities “lens” provides a distinctive social science that is productive of different theories, methods, questions and solutions. The term *paradigm* is derived from Thomas Kuhn’s exemplary analysis of normal science, scientific exemplars and what constitutes scientific revolution (Kuhn 1970). John Urry posits that the mobilities paradigm is not just substantively different, in that it remedies the neglect and omissions of various movements of people, ideas and so on. “But it is transformative of social science, authorizing an alternative theoretical and methodological landscape. It enables the ‘social world’ to be theorized as a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail or curtail various kinds of movement of people, or ideas, or information or objects. And in so doing this paradigm brings to the fore theories, methods and exemplars of research that have been mostly subterranean, out of sight” (Urry 2008, 18).

In this book, I focus on the transnational mobilities of the Chinese migrants, especially their post-migration life experiences in Brazil. I will explore their migration history, and their economic, social, political and cultural practices. I also find it necessary to study their intra-regional mobilities, i.e., their linkages and movements within the South American region (Chan 2018). Nevertheless, due to time and space limitations, the question of intra-regional mobilities will not be analyzed here, and I prefer to cover it in separate studies.

## 2. Defining Key Concepts

I combine historical approaches with sociological and anthropological perspectives. An interdisciplinary approach is applied in my selection and

treatment of the written materials and oral sources. The classification systems and explanatory treatments presented in this book are organized in a way that combines some current Western and Chinese ideas and practices. What follows are definitions for some of the key concepts utilized.

### ***A. Immigrants: the General Attributes of the Chinese in Brazil***

In China, the common terms used to name their compatriots abroad are “Huaqiao”, “Huaren” or “Huaqiao-Huaren”; sometimes “Huayi” is included. In this study, however, I prefer to use the concept of *Chinese immigrants* to label my target, emphasizing their post-migration life experiences. To help Western readers understand the differences between the terminologies mentioned above, a brief explanation is necessary.

*Huaqiao*: Originally, it referred to those Chinese who spent some time abroad, but it did not include settlers. Nowadays, it simply refers to Chinese who have the permanent right to reside in their adopted country but retain their Chinese citizenship, either the citizenship of the People’s Republic of China or the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Hong Kong Special Administration Region or Macau; *Huaren*: This refers to the Chinese who have settled down somewhere outside China and have also obtained foreign citizenship; *Huaqiao-Huaren*: A general term to combine the above-mentioned two groups of people together; *Huayi*: Chinese descendants who were born and have grown up outside of China or have been educated and socialized in the country that their parents or ancestors have adopted (Wang 1981; 1991; 1993; 1998).

In this book, however, I have selected neither “Huaqiao” nor “Huaren”, but have opted instead to use the concept of *Chinese immigrants* (sometimes interchangeably with *Chinese migrants*) because it is a more comprehensive concept that includes all of the Chinese in Brazil; that is, not only those who emigrated directly from Greater China (i.e., mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Macau) to Brazil, but also the Chinese offspring who re-emigrated from Southeast Asia or somewhere else. To a certain degree, it also includes the three groups mentioned above: “Huaqiao”, “Huaren” and “Huayi”.

I have not chosen the term “Huaqiao,” even though Chinese migrants identify themselves as “Huaqiao.” This is because, before they emigrated, they knew from their own experiences that all Chinese government administrations (both on the mainland and in Taiwan) that deal with the affairs of overseas Chinese use the label *Huaqiao*. Therefore, it is logical that they simply identify themselves as “Huaqiao” because they are now

abroad. Many do not know and do not care about the differences between *Huaqiao*, *Huaren* and *Huayi*. One may notice that some Chinese associations in Brazil continue to title themselves “Huaqiao” and proclaim that they are a “patriotic overseas Chinese association.” However, their patriotic complex is nothing more than “long-distance nationalism” and, in Anderson’s words, is just “politics without responsibility or accountability” (Anderson 1991, 11 Apud Li 1999, 15). In effect, the members of these associations prefer to live in Brazil rather than in China. Regardless of whether they are committed to it or not, the political situation in Brazil affects them and their families much more directly. Undoubtedly, it is true that their hopes regarding the prosperity of China are indeed stronger than those cherished by most of the Brazilian people, and their happiness about the progress made by China is indeed greater. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the fact that they want to gain social elevation in Brazil from the strength and prosperity of China.<sup>1</sup>

I have chosen the term “immigrants” (or “migrants”) because it is a standard term used in Brazil both officially and unofficially, albeit an implicit connotation that these (im)migrants eventually would assimilate to the host society. The assimilation of Chinese immigrants in Brazil, although living in a tolerant and multi-cultural environment, is inevitable starting from the second and third generations. Of course, I am aware of the limitations of the *old* and *assimilationist* concept of “immigrants,” which may imply an outdated notion of one-directional movement. In an age of accelerated globalization, the old conceptions of international migration are simply incapable of capturing the essence of the rapidly changing nature of global migration, and new analytical frameworks are needed to understand the complex nature of new migrant geographies, social behaviors, economic activities and shifting cultural identities. To account for these new developments, two related conceptual frameworks have surfaced in the last two decades in the terms of “transmigration” and “diaspora” (Ma 2003, 4). Transmigration (i.e., transnational migration) is an important constituent element of the concept of transnationalism. Schiller *et al.* (1992, 1–2) have conceptualized transnationalism as the process by which immigrants built social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated *transmigrants*. “Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and

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<sup>1</sup> I draw these ideas from Minghuan Li (1999, 14-15). I thank her for these brilliant ideas.

develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (Ma 2003, 5).

The term “diaspora” and “Chinese diaspora” are also frequently used by scholars of Chinese migration to mean, simply, migratory dispersal, and are sometimes interchangeable with the term overseas Chinese communities. The term Chinese diaspora is applied when they “are not concerned with the boundaries of sovereignty claims or with distinctions of citizenship or with whether the sojourn abroad is seen as temporary or permanent” (Lever-Tracy et al. 1996 apud Ma 2003, 6). Diasporic perspectives “can direct the analysis of geographically dispersed institutions, identities, links and flows” (McKeown 1999, 307). Cultural theorists have interpreted diasporas as “social form,” “type of consciousness” and “mode of cultural production” (Vertovec and Cohen 1999). In the book *Ungrounded Empire*, Ong and Nonini argue that Chinese diaspora is characterized by multiplex and varied connections of family, kinship, commerce, sentiments about their native place in China, shared memberships in transitional organizations and associations, and so on (1997, 18).

The selection of a concept and its corresponding term mirrors the user’s principal opinion on the general characteristics of the Chinese abroad (Li 1999). Therefore, rather than limiting the discussions to terminology definitions, I shall explain why I have selected the term *Chinese (im)migrants* even though “Chinese transmigrants” and “Chinese diaspora” have appeared frequently in research literature of Chinese migration. First, this book exams the phenomenon of Chinese immigration from the starting point of the receiving country. It is conceived in Brazil, written in Brazil, and about the Chinese population in Brazil. By the word “immigrants,” I put major emphases on post-migration life experiences, which is the major target of the book; second, the Chinese migrant communities in Brazil have been dominated by first-generation immigrants. They are the creators and articulators of the Chinese associations, language schools, and newspapers and periodicals at this moment. They are the protagonists of my narratives, therefore, adopting the concept of Chinese immigrants is indeed appropriate if I want to focus on the post-migration life experiences of the *first generation* of Chinese in Brazil.

It is also important to clarify that there are small groups of “transmigrants,” i.e., transnational entrepreneurs or professionals, who shuttle between Brazil and China, but the majority of the Chinese population and their descendants in Brazil are settlers, they are not “frequent flyers” and travel only occasionally to China. They may long for their hometown and home

family, but they do not think of “returning to China.” One restaurateur of Rio de Janeiro, Mr. Wu, told me, “I don’t have home families in China. My brother’s family is in Germany, my family is in Brazil, I have nobody left in China except old memories and sentiments” (My conversation with Mr. Wu in 2012, then fifty-seven years old).

### ***B. Segmented and Selective Assimilations***

When choosing the term “immigrants,” I touched upon the sensitive question of *assimilation*, because the word “immigrants” implies their incorporation (and final absorption) into the host society. Classical assimilationists argue that migration leads to a situation of the “marginal men,” in which immigrants are pulled in the direction of the host culture but drawn back by the culture of their origin (Park 1928; Stonequist 1937). This bipolar process, as Park sees it, entails a natural race relations cycle of contact, competition, and accommodation (Park 1928 apud Zhou 1997). Impacted by biotic forces (impersonal competition) and social forces (communication and cooperation), diverse immigrant groups from underprivileged backgrounds are expected to eventually abandon their old ways of life and completely “melt” into the mainstream through residential integration and occupational achievement in a sequence of succeeding generations. Although complete acculturation to the dominant culture may not ensure all immigrants’ full social participation in the host society, immigrants must free themselves from their old cultures in order to begin rising up from marginal positions (Zhou 1997).

Starting from the 1990s, scholars of international migration started to rethink the assimilation question. Portes and Zhou (1993) have observed three possible patterns of adaptation most likely to occur among contemporary immigrants and their offspring: “One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight into the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity” (82). These scholars refer to the divergent destinies from these distinct patterns of adaptation as “segmented assimilation,” posing an important theoretical question of what makes some immigrant groups become susceptible to downward mobility and what allows them to bypass or to get out of this undesirable route.

Fenggang Yang (1999) argues that “the classic conceptualization of assimilation expects complete disappearance of ethnic distinctiveness. It presumes the existence of an American core society and core culture to which immigrants are expected to assimilate. In contemporary American society, however, the core has been eclipsed and pluralism has become more acceptable. Accordingly, recent conceptualizations of assimilation and ethnicity are leading to the construction of an integrated theory that recognizes immigrant assimilation as occurring within American pluralism and increasing transnationalism. Within the new context, assimilation or Americanization has to be selective” (17). According to Yang, *selective assimilation* is also the process of the selective preservation of ethnic identity and traditional culture. Instead of choosing either American or ethnic identities, immigrants may construct adhesive identities that integrate both together. “In the process of attaining American identity and retaining ethnic identity, religion may play an important role because religion itself is a powerful source of personal identity, and because particular religions are often closely associated with particular ethnic and American identities. The religious community, where face-to-face interactions are regular and frequent, serves as a major social mechanism in the construction of adhesive identities” (17–18).

The Brazilian assimilationist perspective on immigrants appeared in the 1870s during the congressional debates on the necessity of importing Chinese *coolies* to replace the Black slaves (Elias 1970; Lesser 1999). It was further developed during the First Republic (1889–1930). Since 1908, with the entry of a large number of Japanese immigrants to Brazil, renewed debates occurred in Brazilian society. In addition to being non-white, *they* (i.e., Chinese and Japanese) had, from the beginning, been considered “unassimilable.” This was due not only to the cultural and linguistic difference that lay between them and the Brazilians, but also to a legacy of obstinate and enduring racism. Intoxicated by racial prejudices, anti-Japanese sentiments disseminated in Brazil throughout different historical, domestic and international contexts, before culminating in the 1934 quota laws, which restricted Japanese migration to Brazil, reducing their entry, then at a peak, to an abrupt halt. It also led to the persecution of the Japanese as an ethnic group during the World War II years (Schpun 2009). Although the post-war times were marked by the pacification of such tensions, the debates that preceded 1946 had greatly influenced the opinions of the Brazilian society, which were contaminated by the anti-Japanese racism of the previous period. The *yellow* immigrants, as well as their descendants, became the object of the “appearance-based racism” (Nogueira 2006). Unlike the white European migrants, the yellow immigrants were easily



recognized by their phenotypes and, thus, could not benefit from anonymity in public spheres.

The term “assimilation” began to be used in Brazil, soon after its first uses in the United States in the 1920s by the Chicago School. One of the first Brazilian intellectuals to use the term was Alfredo Ellis Jr. In his book *Populações Paulistas* (Populations of the State of São Paulo), written at the end of the 1920s but published only in 1934 in São Paulo, the author distinguished two assimilation processes: one was interethnic marriages and the other was education or adaptation. In his book, the concept of assimilation was both racial and cultural in nature, and the outcome of assimilation would be the elimination of the alien cultures in favor of a white (and “*paulista*”) primacy. Thus, Ellis Jr. defined assimilation as the reduction and absorption of the pre-migratory cultures of the immigrants by the mainstream Brazilian civilization. These immigrants would abandon all their previous cultural ties, acquiring new ones that were transmitted to them by the host society. From the contacts and interactions between the foreigners and the local population, the homogenization of different mentalities would end up with the predominance of the mainstream *Paulista* culture (Ellis Jr. 1934, 84–85 apud Seyferth 2000).

In an article published in 1951, Emílio Willems made a brief reference to the prevalent idea in Brazil, which defined assimilation as a process in which alien groups must disappear—metaphorically “diluted,” “absorbed” and “digested” by the dominant Brazilian society. In this context, the existence of minorities was neither admitted nor accepted in the public discussions of the assimilation problems, and the possible cultural influences of foreign immigrants and their descendants would be contained in the vague idea of their “contribution” to the host country (Willems 1951, 29 apud Seyferth 2000).

In his study on the influence of the immigrants on the urbanization and industrialization processes that took place in Brazil in the 1960s, Manuel Diegues Junior (1964) highlighted the economic activities of different groups of immigrants and their cultural contributions to Brazilian development. He did not let the idealized view of the “melting pot” escape, although he defined Brazilian culture as something vaguely plural within its Lusitanian (i.e., Portuguese) base (Diegues Junior 1964, 371 apud Seyferth 2000). For both Willems and Diegues Junior, assimilation was clearly associated with the process of economic development and social mobility and, above all, interethnic contacts and interactions.

Terms such as adaptation, fixation, accommodation—common in Willems’ work—also appeared in the works of Saito (1961), who focused on the social mobility of the Japanese in Brazil. Rattner (1977) appropriately spoke of Jewish integration without assimilation. Even though, under the situations of mixed marriages, the Jewish active participation in the political and economic life in Brazil, as well as other indicators of assimilation, Rattner saw the “contrary forces” that produce a pluralist structure in Brazilian society.

In fact, after 1988, with the end of military dictatorship, Brazilian society experienced a gradual re-democratization. A new constitution had been enacted and the very use of the term “assimilation” began to be criticized as synonymous of white ethnocentrism and racial intolerance. Pluralism and multiculturalism have become the norms of Brazilian migration and ethnic studies (Truzzi 2012). Within this context of pluralism and multiculturalism, Jeffrey Lesser (1999) argues that the assimilation of foreign immigrants into Brazilian society is a “negotiated” process where the immigrants (Japanese, Lebanese, Jews) struggle to maintain their ethnicity, for this reason, their cultural identities are often “situational” and frequently “hyphenated.”

### *C. Negotiating the Hyphenated Chinese Identities*

It has been widely recognized in migration literature that social networks are crucial to the livelihood of immigrants in the hostland. These networks are generally based on geographic factors (*di yuan*) and lineage/consanguineous factors (*xue yuan*). Social networks are largely homeland based and nourished; they continue to remain strong in contemporary China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and among the overseas Chinese communities (Ma 2003). The homeland is a social incubator that contains the basic ingredients of networking, including people with a shared experience, local culture, family ties, home, landed property, social clubs, schools, workplaces, and a common language, all playing a role in binding individuals together and transforming them into kinsmen, co-villagers, neighbors, friends, classmates, alumni, colleagues, and fellow club members, capable of creating, instilling and reinforcing common feelings of a shared life. Home places provide a strong foundation through which various types of social networks can be structured, which in turn lead to personal trust and social ties, and to a sense of *camaraderie* for individuals who have just moved to a foreign land (Ma 2003, 4).

You-tien Hsing (2002) argues that “the making and the working of ethnic identity are historically embedded. The materials for its construction are

provided by historical possibilities...” and “historical and territorial experiences at the local level set the boundary of imagination” (221).

In a Latin American country like Brazil, the Chinese identities, or the ethnicities of the Chinese immigrants, are quite complex, historically shaped, hyphenated and situational. A good example is provided by Lorenzo Macagno (2012), who traces the dispersion itineraries of a small group of Chinese from Guangdong, first settled in Mozambique and, after the Mozambican independence, in 1975, remigrated to Brazil. From the 1920s to 1940s, a small group of Chinese from Guangdong (*Si Yi* regions) migrated to the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and settled in the city of Beira, the second largest city in that country. In the 1950s, they were incorporated by the colonial administration of Mozambique and were considered as “good Portuguese.” After the independence of Mozambique, in 1975, being ex-collaborators of the defeated Portuguese colonial government, these Chinese had to abandon Mozambique. Some settled in Portugal, Canada, the United States, and Australia, but the majority, about 200 families, chose Brazil and, in particular, the city of Curitiba in the State of Paraná. In Brazil, they were soon adapted to the Curitiba environment, which was considered very similar to that of the city of Beira, their Mozambican home.

These Mozambican Cantonese assumed different identities in different stages of dispersion. In the first phase of dispersion (or displacement), from China to Mozambique, the majority did not cut their ties with their home villages in Guangdong, nor with China more generally. Some of the children and grandchildren were sent home to study, or to spend time with family members who were unable to travel to Africa. In 1938, the violent Japanese attacks on the villages of Guangdong during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) caused those who still had hopes to return to China to change their minds. Thus, Africa became a destination of permanent settlement. The Cantonese of Mozambique were incorporated by the colonial administrators as “good Portuguese” and were considered “exemplary” citizens. With the independence of Mozambique, in 1975, and the democratic movements which ended the Salazarist dictatorship in Portugal (i.e., the Carnation Revolution), the Chinese, ex-allies of the Portuguese colonialism, lost their relevance in the new political scenarios of Mozambique and Portugal. Overnight, those “good Portuguese” were transformed into threatening enemies of the new regime of Mozambique. While some families settled in Portugal, Australia, Canada and the United States, most of them opted for Brazil, a country that, at that time, was still ruled by military government. For those with anti-communist feelings, Brazil seemed a good destination.

Fortunately, the Brazilian military regime, under General Ernesto Geisel, granted them resident visas and work permits.

In the second phase of their dispersion, from Mozambique to Brazil, they soon adapted themselves to the Brazilian milieu which was considered similar to that of their Mozambican home. After remigration, those former “good Portuguese” would have their Portuguese citizenships denied when they tried to renew their passports at the Portuguese Consulates. This denial ended their self-assumed condition as “good Portuguese.” Disillusioned and frustrated, one Mozambican Cantonese, now living in Curitiba, complained: “I was born in Mozambique, I served the Portuguese army for forty-five months. I fought [for the Portuguese] in Mozambique. I had sworn allegiance to the Portuguese flag. And after all that, they don’t even recognize me” (Macagno 2012).

As a result of the Portuguese denial, these Mozambican Chinese, having settled in Brazil, naturalized themselves as Brazilian. As a matter of fact, they were never full Portuguese, never fully African, never fully Brazilian, nor fully Chinese, they were eternally “in-between.” The end of the story is that, in 1989, these Mozambican-Brazilian-Chinese founded the *Associação Cultural Chinesa do Paraná* (Chinese Cultural Association of Paraná) and maintained a good relationship with Beijing (even though they had been anti-communist). Apparently, their problem of ethnic identification has finally been resolved—they are Brazilian by citizenship, Chinese by ancestral linkages and cultural belonging, and Mozambican by historical background and emotional attachments.

### **3. Some Methodological Considerations and My Own Positions**

This book studies the history of the Chinese immigrants who emigrated from China (including the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan) to Brazil, or Chinese descendants who remigrated from elsewhere in the world to Brazil. Although Chinese immigrants have arrived in Brazil ever since the early nineteenth century, their massive entry to Brazil occurred, essentially, in the twentieth century, especially after 1979, when communist China abolished its thirty-year emigration ban (1949–1979). Therefore, our focus will be on the post-1978 Chinese migration to Brazil and on the first-generation migrants. I am aware of the importance of studying the Chinese descendants, because their aspirations and behaviors are rather different from their parents, but this needs a separate investigation. Therefore, in this

book, their activities will be touched upon only a few times, when they have some relation to the social spaces created by the first generation.

I rely on published documents and data from Brazilian sources (especially the demographic surveys of the IBGE-Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística), official archives and research papers produced by scholars of various academic disciplines. I also draw on materials from Chinese language sources, i.e., written materials authored by Chinese immigrants, Chinese scholars, journalists and diplomats. Besides my heavy reliance on the written materials of various origins, I also benefitted from oral history methods, i.e., materials produced from my interviews with my co-ethnic immigrants.

The reasons why oral accounts are so essential, here, should be viewed from at least the following perspectives. First, on the basis of interviews, I try to fill in gaps and weaknesses in the written sources in the Brazilian language by tracing the psychological processes that coincide with the settlement of these immigrants in their host society. On the Chinese side, there have been some publications—such as newspapers, periodicals, and reports—edited and published by the Chinese journals in Brazil. From these written sources, the activities of the Chinese communities can be reviewed, especially after the 1980s. In addition, some articles written by Chinese immigrants show their feelings about living in a strange country, their personal life stories, their psychological ambivalence, and their expectations for the future. Nevertheless, such articles are few in number, and the writers are limited to a few well-educated migrants. On this point, oral sources can also be used to fill in gaps and weaknesses in the written sources.

Just as Alessandro Portelli has pointed out: the first thing that makes oral history sources different is that “they tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know of, for instance, the material cost of a given strike to the workers involved; but they tell us a good deal about its psychological costs” (Portelli 1991, 50 apud Li 1999). Minghuan Li has pointed out, “in sum, written and oral accounts do not exist in separate worlds. Instead of being mutually exclusive, oral and written sources may be mutually complementary. Also, the assumption that written sources are objective and oral sources are subjective is not always correct. In contrast, by utilizing comparative studies of relevant oral and written sources, the history can be constructed in a richer and deeper way” (Li 1999, 5).

Finally, since I am studying my own community, I know how difficult it is to maintain a necessary detachment from my object. Nevertheless, as a Chinese man who has been trained in Brazilian historiography and tries to study his own community from the inside, the study has benefitted from my insider's perspective because I believe I have a better understanding of the situation.

#### 4. Source Materials of this Book

When we talk about the Chinese immigrants in Brazil, we are basically referring to the two cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where nearly 70 % of Chinese population in Brazil live, therefore, the bulk of this book is based on the source materials found in these two cities and is related to the Chinese migrants in these two cities. Compared with other Latin American countries (such as Cuba and Peru), Brazilian Chinese communities have several special characteristics, first, the migration inflows are relatively new, most of the immigrants are post-1949 arrivals. The Chinese migration to Brazil gained preeminence in the 1980s and 1990s, when a large number of immigrants entered Brazil legally or illegally from mainland China. Due to their recency, numerous accounts about Chinese immigration to Brazil have been preserved.

Second, being the largest Latin American country in the world, Brazil has received much attention from the ROC government (in Taiwan), whose anti-communist attitude, since the 1950s, pleased the conservative governments of Brazil which was considered the best choice for Taiwanese immigration (by Taiwanese, I refer to the native Taiwanese and mainlanders who migrated to Taiwan Island after 1945) until 1965 when the USA finally removed its restrictions on Chinese immigration. To maintain its influence on Brazil, the ROC (Taiwan) has been strengthening its *Qiaowu* (overseas Chinese affairs) activities in Brazil by investing in the cultural activities of the Chinese communities, to maintain their unity and to nurture pro-Taipei sentiments. From the 1970s, Taipei subsidized the publication of Chinese-language newspapers in Brazil, sent teachers to establish the Chinese heritage language schools, and offered generous scholarships to the pro-Taipei diasporic children to study at Taiwanese universities. As a result of the investments made by the ROC and thanks to the history-consciousness of some migrant intellectuals, valuable written materials have been published and made available for scholarly analysis.

Among the published historiographic materials, the most important is the book *Baxi Huaren Gengyun Lu* (Records of the Chinese Immigrants in