Ana Paulina Lee. *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory.* Asian America Series. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018. xxii + 229 pp. $25.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-5036-0601-2.

Reviewed by Fredy González

Ana Paulina Lee's *Mandarin Brazil* demonstrates how the circulation of ideas and cultural goods spread racist ideas about Asian migrants in the Americas, which became deeply ingrained in popular culture. These attitudes then affected the reception of the Chinese and Japanese migrants who arrived in Brazil during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book complements the recent wave of social and transnational histories of Asian migration to the Americas and contributes to our understanding of nation-building in Brazil as well as of orientalist discourses in the Americas.

Though Lee's work extends as far back as the sixteenth century and all the way to the present, its focus is the late nineteenth century, during the gradual abolition of African slavery in the last slaveholding country in the Americas. At that time, the Chinese were central to Brazilian debates on race and labor, particularly on whether the Chinese helped or derailed Brazil's nation-building and whitening projects. Lee provides the historical context behind the country's transition from plantation society to liberal republic, which influenced the debates taking place in cultural and literary production. A major insight of her work is that these exchanges of ideas around the Chinese were crucial to the stories that other scholars have told about Asians in the Americas:

they are critical context around the arrival and settlement of the migrants themselves, and they lurk behind the popular discontent that led to attempts to ban and remove them.

Mandarin Brazil's transnational methodology allows it to demonstrate the circulation of ideas on the Chinese throughout the Americas and throughout the Lusophone world, thus demonstrating the "overlapping racialization" of the Chinese in Brazil (p. 87). Indeed, the book is impressive in its scope and versatility. The archive that the author built extends far beyond Brazil, from the United States and Southeast Asia to the Iberian Peninsula and the Caribbean. Sources for the work include poetry, popular theater, visual culture, and popular music. The work identifies the multiple sources of Sinophobic ideas; moreover, it demonstrates that Brazilians adapted transnational racist discourses to adapt to local conditions.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 situates Brazil in the wider Portuguese Empire, as Portugal connected its far-flung overseas possessions and "visual and material objects circulated images and motifs of Asia and Europe to Asian and European consumers alike" (p. 20). Thus, hundreds of years before the arrival of Chinese migrants themselves, ideas of the Chinese circulated in Portugal's American possessions. Fascinating is the author's examination of *chinoiserie*

among the Estrada Real, demonstrating both the reach of the trading routes that connected Brazil's colonial settlements and the staying power of the images that circulated among colonial roads. As Lee demonstrates, these maritime routes were based in part on the trade in forced labor, particularly the African slave trade. The Portuguese also trafficked Chinese laborers to the Americas; even when the Portuguese Crown outlawed such trade, it appears to have continued. Both Brazil's slave-holding past and the treatment of Chinese coolie labor influenced arguments around the immigration of Chinese laborers to Brazil.

Chapter 2 shows how the debate over Chinese immigration followed three major axes. First, there were major questions about how the immigration of Chinese and other Asians would affect *branqueamento*, the idea that continued immigration would gradually whiten the Brazilian population over time. Elites feared that the mass arrival of Chinese would disrupt the progression toward whiteness or would turn the country yellow instead. A related second anxiety was whether the Chinese could assimilate to Brazilian ways or, alternatively, whether mass Chinese immigration would make Brazil culturally Chinese. Third was the fear that the importation of Chinese laborers would continue the forced labor regimes that had existed under slavery and pose a threat to free labor. These ideas were not debated solely among Brazilians; the Chinese, such as Fu Yunlong and Kang Youwei, debated whether Brazil could offer social mobility or the chance to remake Chinese society abroad.

Chapter 3 illustrates how the *teatro de revista* was a forum on these questions, becoming "a critical site to deliberate citizenry and Brazil's future" (p. 65). Revues like *O Mandarim* featured performances of yellowface to demonstrate anxieties around Chinese immigration, sexuality, and assimilation. The recurring nature of imagery and symbolism around the Chinese, despite the fact that there were few Chinese migrants in this peri-od, "makes it possible to see how stories about Chineseness related a larger narrative about the attitudes that were shaping labor, race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship" (p. 86).

Chapter 4 follows the "Chinese question" through the writings of major Lusophone writers Joaquim Machado de Assis and José Maria de Eça de Queiroz, both of whom opposed Chinese immigration and used racist and dehumanizing language to refer to the Chinese. In this chapter, Lee analyzes their writings across multiple genres, including poetry, fiction, and *crónicas*, to illustrate how circulating ideas on the Chinese in the United States and in the Caribbean were deployed in Brazil to racialize Asian immigrants.

Chapter 5 centers on the writings on China and Japan by author-diplomats Eça de Queiroz, Aluísio Azevedo, and Luis Guimarães Filho, which "circulated political ideas and swayed public opinion about Asia and Asians" (p. 115). Collectively, their writings depicted China in a negative light and by extension cast doubt on the desirability of Chinese immigration. Guimarães Filho, for example, wrote about the Boxer Rebellion in ways that cast the Chinese as anti-Western and potentially menacing. Others asserted the relative superiority of Japanese society and suggested that the Japanese would better serve to improve Brazil.

Chapter 6 carries the analysis forward to twentieth-century Brazilian Popular Music (MPB), particularly of how such music made reference to Asians in shaping ideas of Brazilian *mestiço* nationalism. Lee finds that MPB song lyrics "repeat[ed] the same negative opinions that were circulating in the nineteenth century during the worldwide debate about the Chinese question" (p. 139). Many of these songs made explicit reference to the sexuality of Chinese men and women in ways that made them seem unnatural or subhuman.

I would like to suggest two ways scholars could build on Lee's important contributions. First, future work could explore how the Chinese

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in Brazil were able to respond to their own racial-
ization and contest the Yellow Peril stereotypes
and racial anxieties presented in the book. This
would follow the lead of scholars like Ignacio
López-Calvo who has worked on literary produc-
tion among *tusanes* (Peruvian-born Chinese) and
nikkei (descendants of Japanese immigrants) in
Peru. On a related note, Lee's work acts as a cru-
cial foundation for future scholarship on the
much more recent migration of tens of thousands
of Chinese migrants to Brazil, particularly to São
Paulo. In these and other ways, Lee's work is path-
breaking. *Mandarin Brazil* is required reading for
interdisciplinary scholars of Asian migrations in
the Americas as well as scholars of Brazilian and
Latin American history, and its evocative source
base will make the book an attractive option for
undergraduate courses in Latin American history,
Spanish and Portuguese, and ethnic studies.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
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