



**THEY CAME IN SHIPS:
IMPERIALISM, MIGRATION AND ASIAN DIASPORAS IN THE 19TH CENTURY**

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By

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Abstract

In this paper, Walton Look Lai develops a comparative overview of the pattern of East and South Asian labour migrations in the 19th century as both groups were steadily integrated into the expanding Atlantic world economy. He explores their respective push factors and destinations, the various mechanisms under which their labour was engaged, the relative issues of freedom/unfreedom attached to their engagement, the patterns of reception and treatment in their various host countries, and finally, their comparative mobility and assimilation options and choices in their host countries.

THEY CAME IN SHIPS: IMPERIALISM, MIGRATION AND ASIAN DIASPORAS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The economist W. Arthur Lewis spoke of late 19th century global development as being powered by two vast streams of international migration, 50 million people leaving Europe for the temperate settlements, and another estimated 50 million people leaving India and China to work in the tropics on plantations, in mines, and in construction projects.¹ The stimulus given to global production in the age of the industrial revolution created local boom scenarios not only in the industrial heartlands, but also in what was to become the tropical food producing and raw materials sector for the industrial world. This international division of labor took place within the framework of expanding Empire—whether British, Dutch, French or later in the century, American—or it evolved within the framework of what later came to be called neo-colonialism, as it did with the new Latin American republics. Because of the widespread demand for labor in all sectors of the global economy in this period, and because of the racialised thinking of the empire-builders, migration tended to adopt the racial and ethnic character that Lewis spoke about: the Europeans went largely to the industrializing and modernizing (and temperate) sector, and the non-Whites, principally from East and South Asia, went mainly to the tropical food-producing and raw materials sector. There was some overlap at the edges of this development—

¹ W. Arthur Lewis, *The Evolution of the International Economic Order* (Princeton, 1978), p.14.

some White labour immigration flowed to the tropics and sub-tropics, such as Brazil, Argentina and even Cuba, and a smaller migration of non-White (Indian and Chinese) labour took place to the fringe areas of the emergent industrial economy, mainly the American and Canadian West Coasts (400,000 Chinese, 7,000 Indians)²—but by and large this international racial division of labour was the standard pattern of 19th century migrations.

There is some uncertainty about the numbers of people who actually migrated out of East and South Asia. Lewis' estimate of 50 million may have been an overestimate. There was a tradition of seasonal and return migration among the Indians to the South Asian region which may have made the final numbers difficult to estimate. As late as 1910, a British Commission of Enquiry into the status of Indian indentured immigration within the British Empire said about Ceylon,

So far we have dealt only with the case of immigrants coming over as agricultural laborers. The immigrants coming annually from India for other purposes somewhat exceed these in number, being estimated at an average of 102,000 per annum during the last four years as against a yearly average of 98,000 agricultural immigrants.³

One author has suggested that as many as 30 million Indians emigrated, and that just fewer than 24 million returned to India,

² Also Australia and New Zealand (40,000 Chinese, about 3,000 Indians).

³ Report of the Committee on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates (Sanderson Committee): Gt. Britain, Parliamentary Papers 1910, XXVII, Cmd.5192-94, paragraph 129 (hereafter Sanderson Committee Report 1910).

principally from Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, leaving a net global migration of roughly 6.3 million Indians, 5 million in South and Southeast Asia, and about 1.3 million in the larger diaspora.⁴ Chinese migrations added another 7.5 million—6.5 million of these within Southeast Asia alone.⁵ In addition, there were at least another 200,000 Javanese, Japanese, and Pacific Islanders joining the migrant stream during this century of global labour mobility.

Much of the seasonal and long term migration within South and Southeast Asia was not new, and indeed its origins preceded the arrival of the West in this region by several centuries. While not always formally acknowledged or encouraged by the imperial authorities, coastal and maritime China had evolved a distinctive and vigorous tradition dating back as far as the Tang, and possibly even the Han, period. Chinese Buddhist travelers had reported encountering colonies of Chinese merchant settlers from Fujian and Guangdong in Sumatra and Java as early as the first century A.D. Indian traders and sailors from the province of Gujarat as well as the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of Southern India had, along with the Arabs, dominated maritime trade between the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and the Red Sea at least from the first century A.D. Their influence had even helped transfer Hindu, Buddhist, and eventually Muslim, religious and cultural influences to Southeast Asia by the seventh century A.D. However, large-scale migration and settlement of unskilled manual labourers in search of economic opportunity was not a feature of this early period.

It took the arrival of the European colonizers in the sixteenth century to inject new vigour into the traditional maritime networks. First the Portuguese and Spanish, then the Dutch, British and French injected themselves into the regional trade networks, and their activities eventually helped to integrate the region into the dynamic Atlantic world economy. Between the 16th and the 19th centuries, this was relatively small scale and gradual, since the Europeans operated out of coastal trading enclaves and forts rather than engage in territorial and inland colonization. Still, in response to this early regional stimulus, spontaneous Chinese migrations of traders and artisans into Thailand and the Philippines, Indonesia and the Malayan Straits gave rise to a Chinese middleman sector within these local economies well before the century of the industrial revolution. External Indian trader communities were smaller in number, despite their domination of the maritime trade routes, and up to the beginning of the 19th century their numbers were no more than a few thousand within the whole maritime network across the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea.⁶ However, as early as the 17th century, there was an active trade in Indian slave labor, carried on primarily by the Portuguese, French and Dutch from their coastal enclaves. Several thousand Indian slaves were transported by them to places like Dutch-held Ceylon and Southeast Asia, as well as Cape Colony in Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and French-held Reunion.⁷ Thus, well before the introduction of indentured labour in the 19th century, there was a forced migration of Indian slaves, and even some voluntary free labour, to the Indian Ocean colonies, in

⁴ Prakash C. Jain, "Emigration and Settlement of Indians Abroad", *Sociological Bulletin* 38 (1), (March 1989): 157, citing Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, NJ, 1968).

⁵ David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge, 1995), p.61.

⁶ *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, ed. Brij Lal, Singapore 2006, p.58.

⁷ Anand Yang, "Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries", *Journal of World History* 14:2, June 2003.

response to labour demands created by limited colonization, mainly in domestic, shipping and construction activity.⁸

Characteristics of 19th-century Asian migration

It was the 19th-century global economy, powered to a large extent by the industrial revolutions in both Britain and the USA, and the active and unchallenged territorial expansion of the British Empire, which introduced a qualitatively and quantitatively new dimension into this situation. For the Chinese and the Indians, in particular, it was the stimulation of new economies well beyond the Asian context, and the active thirst for labour in previously unfamiliar destinations, combined with the century's faster and more efficient shipping, which eventually embroiled both groups in migration beyond their traditional orbits. Roughly 2 million of them ventured beyond Asia, mainly to the tropical colonies and dependencies of the Caribbean, Latin America, the Indian Ocean, Africa and the Pacific, but a little less than half a million also migrated on the fringes of the great European migrations to the USA, Canada and Australia. Other Asians and Pacific Islanders also followed in their wake to some tropical destinations, but this movement was dominated by Chinese and Indians.

It is worthwhile to remember that, despite the broadening of the Asian diaspora in tandem with the continued expansion of the global economy, Asian unskilled labour migrants continued to make the South and Southeast Asian region their primary destination. As mentioned earlier, 6.5 million of the 7.5 million Chinese, and 5 million of the 6.3 million Indians—80

percent of the century's expanded Asian migration—continued to remain on traditional terrain, as these regional economies were themselves further transformed by territorial inland occupation by the colonial powers, led above all by the example of the British in India.

In the midst of this broad picture, a noticeable feature of the 19th-century tropical migrations was the different orbits within which these two Asian groups largely traveled. While the Chinese migrations were directed to a variety of countries operating under a wide variety of political jurisdictions and widely divergent legal and labour traditions—American, British, Spanish as well as the newly independent Latin American republics of Peru and Mexico—the overwhelming majority of the Indian labor migrations went primarily to the tropical regions of the British Empire (British Caribbean, Mauritius, Natal, and after 1870, Fiji and East Africa) and only exceptionally elsewhere.⁹ This applied even

⁹ The main exceptions were the three French Caribbean territories and Reunion in the Indian Ocean (154,000); Dutch Suriname, which had a brief arrangement with the British after 1873 to import labourers from British India (34,000); and the United States, where the push/pull factors as well as the origins of the migrants were unique, and did not follow the orthodox pattern, for reasons which are discussed later. (They were mainly Punjabi, as contrasted with the others, who were mainly from the United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal in the North and Madras in the South). The Spanish made abortive attempts to acquire Indian labour for Cuba in the 1880s: see Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, Oxford 1974, p. 274. Even Louisiana sugar planters with French Caribbean connections toyed with the idea of importing Indians in the 1860s: see Lucy Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, Louisiana 1984, pp. 48-9. There were also some small voluntary post-indenture Indian migrations to the Latin countries: Jamaica to Cuba and Central America, Trinidad to Venezuela: see W. Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, Baltimore 1993, pp. 148-51; I.M. Cumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854*, Oxford 1953, pp. 43-45; Jaime Sarusky, "The East Indian Community in Cuba," in

⁸ As many as 20,000, according to one account, representing 13 per cent of the servile population of these islands. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p.42-3.

within South and Southeast Asia itself, where the largest numbers went to Ceylon, Burma and Malaya (all British), while the Chinese continued to migrate to their (by now) familiar destinations—Thailand and the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya. The modern Indian labour diaspora was directly connected to the global expansion of the British Empire in the century after 1815. The removal of the French from the imperial race after 1815 paved the way for the unchallenged acquisition of a number of tropical and temperate island and mainland colonies in the middle of the century, and the peopling of these new acquisitions with fresh injections of colonists and labourers. All the new colonies added to the large food producing and raw materials sector of the Empire, but the emigration was racially divided into one of British settlers and colonists in the temperate zones (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and Asian unskilled labourers in the tropical zones. With the exception of Malaya, which was the primary Chinese tropical destination in the 19th century (almost 6 million), the majority of these Asian migrants was Indian.

Given the different experiences of Western domination experienced by China and India, it is perhaps not surprising that the emigration patterns and destinations of these two countries tended to diverge somewhat. However, despite the destination differences, it is noticeable how many of the migrants of both countries were imported into territories which needed labour for the still-expanding sugar industry: the Chinese in Cuba, Peru (partially), Hawaii, plus the British, Dutch and French Caribbean, the French island of Reunion, and even tropical Queensland in Australia; the Indians everywhere beyond South and Southeast Asia (except East Africa, where they were engaged mainly in railroad

building). The total number of Chinese labourers involved in producing sugar, most for the US market, was around 300,000, i.e. slightly less than the number of their countrymen who migrated to the United States; their Indian counterparts, producing mainly for the British Empire, numbered most of the 1.3 million who travelled beyond South and Southeast Asia, plus a large number (perhaps another 150,000) involved in the early sugar industry of Malaya itself.

The overwhelming majority of these migrant sugar workers, regardless of origin or destination, were recruited under some form of the indentured labour system. In fact, the revival of the indenture system in the 19th century seems to have been connected primarily with the expansion of the global sugar industry. A recent study of 19th century indenture¹⁰ hardly mentions any other industry in its overview of how this institution functioned during the period. The author identifies the revival of this modified form of coerced labour with the end of African slavery in the British Empire, and with the sugar planters' need to find alternative sources of labour when problems with the traditional labour supply began to arise in the post-Emancipation period. In fact, while this was largely correct, indenture was also used in several sugar destinations which had never experienced slavery. Such was the case with Hawaii, not to mention British Empire destinations like Natal in South Africa, Fiji, and Malaya, and even Queensland¹¹ in Australia (which used the indentured labour of Pacific islanders, Indians, Chinese and, according to one author, even Italians¹²). Moreover, Cuba was unique in the sense that its overheated

Frank Birbalsingh, *Indenture and Exile*, Toronto 1989, pp. 73-78.

¹⁰ David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism 1834-1922*, Cambridge U. Press 1995.

¹¹ Until 1859, a part of New South Wales.

¹² Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, Seattle, 2000, p. 66.

sugar industry used Chinese indentured labour, not *after* the end of African slavery, but *side by side with* it.¹³ There were numerous Cuban plantations which used slave and indentured labour simultaneously.¹⁴

It should also be mentioned that while sugar was the main global industry employing imported indentured labour, not all large sugar-producing countries resorted to it, nor was sugar the only plantation enterprise utilizing indentured labour. Java and the Philippines relied primarily on domestic labour.¹⁵

Brazil¹⁶ relied solely on its Black labourers, slave and ex-slave. In the Caribbean region, mid-sized producers Puerto Rico and Barbados relied mainly on their own workers (white campesinos and Black ex-slaves in the case of the former, ex-slaves in the case of the latter). Outside of sugar, coffee and rubber plantations in Malaya, cocoa in Trinidad, bananas in Jamaica, all used the indentured labour of Indians, alongside free and post-indenture labourers. The guano deposits in Peru (Chinese), and the mines and railways of the British Empire (Chinese in Transvaal gold mines; Indians in Uganda/Kenya railroad construction), even cotton in Tahiti (Chinese), became destinations for Asian

indentured labourers.¹⁷ In Singapore and the rest of Malaya, South Indian indentured laborers worked in public works projects, opening up the interior and building the infrastructure (roads, railways, bridges, canals and wharves) until 1910, when the practice was officially banned.

Both groups of Asians went to countries where they formed part of a multiracial labour force—occasionally with each other,

It was only in the Caribbean, in the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Reunion, and in Malaya, that Chinese and Indian workers actually worked together under similar conditions of indenture.

but more often with others. They also went to countries where they were the dominant element in the plantation

workforce. In Cuba, Chinese worked alongside African slaves; in the British West Indies, they worked alongside Indians as well as Portuguese immigrants from Madeira; in Hawaii, alongside native Hawaiians; in Peru up to the 1880s they worked as a majority workforce. Indians were generally part of a mixed workforce in Trinidad and Guiana during the 1860s, but by the late 1870s and after they were the majority (and often the only) element on the plantations. They were also the principal workforce on the plantations of Mauritius, Natal, and post-1890s Fiji. In Fiji before the 1890s, they worked alongside Pacific Islanders, and in Dutch Suriname after the 1890s, they shared the plantations with Indonesians from Java. By contrast, in the Windward islands of Grenada, St Vincent and St Lucia, as well as Jamaica, and even the French West Indian islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, they laboured as a minority element in a workforce still

¹³ Cuban slavery ended in 1886, while Chinese indenture existed between 1847 and 1874.

¹⁴ “Flor de Cuba plantation had 409 Negroes and 170 Chinese; San Martin 452 Negroes and 125 Chinese; Santa Susana 632 Negroes and 200 Chinese.” Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, London, Andre Deutsch 1970, p. 349.

¹⁵ In 1894 Java produced 552,667 tons of sugar—twice as much as the British West Indies combined (278,559) - while the Philippines produced above 191,277 tons.

¹⁶ 275,000 tons in 1894.

¹⁷ Between 1880 and 1902, the Brazilian government recruited thousands of indentured Italians on 6 year contracts for the coffee plantations of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, until it was stopped by the Italian government. Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's many diasporas*, Seattle 2000, p. 66.

made up of mainly African ex-slaves. *It was only in the Caribbean (British, French and Dutch), in the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Reunion, and in Malaya, that Chinese and Indian workers actually worked together under similar conditions of indenture.*

If sugar and indenture played such a large role in the making of the 2-million-strong Asian diaspora beyond South and Southeast Asia, this did not apply to the Chinese and Indian migrations to the temperate mainland countries, or to the mainstream migrations to South and Southeast Asia (11.5 million). This observation, however, needs to be immediately qualified. Firstly, it should be remembered that the Southern planters in the USA, who included the sugar growers of Louisiana, as well as others who wanted Chinese labour for cotton in Arkansas and Mississippi, or railway construction in Alabama and Texas, were not too far removed in their thinking and practice from the broad imperial-racial design which was the main feature of the century. They certainly referenced the same networks and used the same racial justifications as their planter counterparts elsewhere.¹⁸ Secondly, a large number of both groups who went to Southeast Asia, especially Malaya, went under a version of the indenture arrangement. About 250,000 Indians and an unquantifiable number of Chinese worked in the Malayan sugar and rubber plantations under indenture.¹⁹ Thirdly, about 5,000 Chinese in the 1850s and 3,000 Indians between 1862 and 1886 worked as indentureds on the sugar

plantations of tropical Queensland in Australia.²⁰

That having been said, it remains true that the 400,000 Chinese and 7,000 Indians²¹ who went to the USA and Canada were largely self-driven and self-organized. At that level they were a marginal non-white version of the large transatlantic European movements, motivated by the same overall expectations if not necessarily destined for the same fates.²² In North America, the Chinese were miners, railway workers, agricultural workers, laundrymen and merchants; the Indians worked in lumber mills, forestry, railroads and agriculture. While the Chinese who went to the US and Canada were of the same provincial origins as the rest of the global Chinese diaspora

²⁰ David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism 1834-1922*, p. 156. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p. 384.

²¹ There were 5,000 in Canada in 1908, reduced to 700 by 1918, because of Canadian restrictions. Most relocated to the USA. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p. 328. The US Census recorded 2,050 in 1900, and between 1905 and 1915 6,359 were recorded as entering the USA. Roger Daniels, "Indian Immigration to the United States", in *Global Indian Diaspora*, ed. J. Motwani, New York 1993, p. 440.

²² The discrimination, hostility and at best ambivalence which greeted them in these destinations from all social classes illustrated very forcefully that this migration was not meant to be a part of the global design for an international racial division of labor acceptable to the metropolitan thinking of the 19th century. In stark contrast, none of these negative responses greeted Asians in the tropical agricultural destinations, where their industry and work habits were always highly praised, and often contrasted with the "laziness" of the "native" inhabitants, whether in Southeast Asia, Hawaii, the Caribbean or Africa. (Spanish-speaking America may be the only exception here, although post-Independence Cuba did develop a favorable image of the Chinese, mainly because of their participation in the Independence movement.) Many negative judgments made by the White press and White labor on the West Coast against the Indians' lifestyles and culture were disregarded in Trinidad and British Guiana when raised by the African laborers.

¹⁸ See Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane*, Baltimore 2006. 2,000 Chinese worked in the South in the early 1870s, brought from California, Cuba and at least 2 vessels with 400 directly from China. Intense labor conflicts and court battles led to an abandonment of the experiment before the decade was finished.

¹⁹ As late as 1938, Chinese were 17 per cent of the rubber plantation workforce (28,925) of the Federated Malay States. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p.159.

(Guangdong and Fujian), the same cannot be said of the unique Indian migration to the West Coast. The 7,000 Indians who found themselves in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California in the early 1900s were Sikhs from the northwestern province of Punjab,²³ and distinct from the rest of the Indian diaspora²⁴ who were generally either Tamil and Telugu-speakers from southern Madras or Bhojpuri and Urdu-speakers from the northern United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal.²⁵ The Punjabis who migrated to North America were motivated to do so, not by British imperial design, as was the case almost everywhere else in the Indian diaspora, but by network knowledge gained from fellow Punjabis who were stationed in British Hong Kong, primarily as soldiers and security personnel. Hong Kong was the main emigration port for most of the Chinese diaspora, including the voluntary North American migrations. Most of the Punjabis who migrated to North America did so from Hong Kong.²⁶

For the mainstream Indian migrants, the push factors are more recognizable. British direct rule in India, and the land, taxation, and trade policies introduced in its wake, were largely responsible for generating disruptive push factors in the Indian countryside, which in turn created the large pool of floating labour directed toward

domestic destinations like Bengal or Assam, or to foreign destinations like Ceylon or the sugar colonies. Natural and demographic factors exacerbated the picture, and the southern Tamils had a tradition of seasonal migration to Ceylon, but the role of colonialism in disrupting the traditional economy while harnessing it to the needs of the distant British industrial revolution has been well documented.²⁷ Chinese push factors, on the other hand, were more complex, a combination of domestically generated economic decline and political crisis (the Taiping and other rebellions), and externally induced crisis (opium wars and unequal treaties). In both countries, however, it is noteworthy that the migrations were confined to specific sending provinces and districts, and were proportionately quite small compared to their respective populations.

Origins of the migrants

The majority of China's migrants historically came from two southern coastal provinces, Fujian and Guangdong. This pattern applies to the earliest periods of Chinese migration from as far back as the 7th century. Port cities like Quanzhou (Chuanchow) in Fujian and Guangzhou (Canton) in southern Guangdong had seafaring and overseas connections long predating the arrival of the Western traders. Formosa (Taiwan) had been gradually colonized by overseas Fujianese and northeastern Guangdongese between the 7th and 15th centuries, seeking a base for trade with the mainland as well as Southeast Asia. Moreover, the Philippines had direct and prolonged contacts with migrants from Fujian since the 1560s, stimulated by the

²³ The Americans called them all "Hindus", which they were not.

²⁴ Except East Africa in the 1890s, where the 38,000 Kampala-Nairobi railway construction and service workers (80 per cent of whom later returned to India) also came from the Punjab, recruited by the British. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p. 255.

²⁵ The larger diaspora also contained small numbers of Punjabis, many of them Sikhs.

²⁶ *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p. 328. The Sikh migrants who went to the West Coasts of Canada and USA were so atypical that modern analysts of the 19th century Indian global diaspora like Hugh Tinker and Steven Vertovec do not refer to them at all.

²⁷ Romesh Dutt, *The Economic History of India under early British rule*, New Delhi 1970; Neil Charlesworth, *British Rule and the Indian Economy, 1800-1914*, London 1982; Dharma Kumar, ed. *Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. 2*, Cambridge 1984.

newly established Manila-Acapulco connection. The Macao-Canton axis had also been an international enclave since the 16th century. The intensified intrusions of the 19th century in the aftermath of the two Opium Wars only served to heighten the activities and migratory movements

traditionally associated with these provinces. Within these broad regions, moreover, there were often

several clearly identifiable micro-districts or counties which had long traditions of migratory dispersal at the centre of their social and community life. Zhangzhou (Changchow), Quanzhou (Chuanchow), Jinjiang in south Fujian, Fuzhou (Foochow) in north Fujian, Chaozhou (Chaochow) and Jieyang (Chia-ying) in northeast Guangdong, had intimate links with the Southeast Asian nexus before the 19th-century migrations began.

Interestingly, the relative importance of these two sending regions was not the same to all destinations. Most Fujianese over time migrated mainly to Southeast Asia, whereas most American-bound 19th-century migrations originated from southeastern Guangdong. The Guangdongese are themselves subdivided into the northeastern Teochiu speakers emigrating from the port city of Shantou (Swatow) and surrounding districts, and the southeastern Cantonese emigrating from Guangzhou (Canton), Hong Kong, and Macao. Mingled among these groups was the Hakka dialect group, who lived dispersed in both provinces, but were especially concentrated in the border regions separating Fujian from northeast Guangdong. They emigrated out of all the sending ports.²⁸

²⁸ As late as the 1950s Fujianese constituted 50 percent of the Chinese population of Indonesia, 40 percent of that of Malaysia, and as many as 82

One fact which bears noting is that a number of destinations initially received indentured and contract migrants not directly from China, but via other regional or colonial connections: for example, from Malaya to Trinidad and Reunion, from Java to Suriname, from Singapore to Mauritius, from Panama to Jamaica, and from Cuba and California to Louisiana.²⁹

Two of the three French vessels which sailed to Martinique and Guadeloupe in the 1860s also recruited their passengers from Shanghai, rather than Guangdong or Fujian.³⁰

The links between sending and receiving regions for Indian labour migration also exhibited systematic patterns. Globally, South Indians, particularly Tamils, were the majority of the emigrants. They predominated in South and South-East Asia, South Africa (Natal) and all the French sugar colonies, while North Indians were the majority in the British and Dutch West Indies, Mauritius and Fiji. Punjabi railway workers predominated in East Africa. However, Indians from North and South as well as other regions were present in most destinations. Two British Indian

percent of that of the Philippines. By contrast, more than 90 percent of the pan-American and Hawaii Chinese before the 1970s were Cantonese. According to the *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Lynn Pan, Singapore 1998, up to the 1950s Guangdongese (northeast and southern) constituted 68 percent of the world's overseas Chinese communities.

²⁹ A vessel sailing from Hong Kong to Louisiana with 210 migrants in 1870 also picked up an extra 17 Chinese in Martinique. Lucy Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South*, Louisiana 1984, p.107; Moon Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane*, Baltimore 2006, p. 123.

³⁰ Jean Luc Cardin, "Chinese Immigration in the French West Indies: focus on Martinique", in *Essays on the Chinese Diaspora in the Caribbean*, Trinidad 2006, W. Look Lai, ed. p.179.

administrators, J. Geoghehan and George Grierson, who wrote comprehensive accounts of the origins of the Indian indentured migrants in the 1870s and 1880s,³¹ noted that the Bhojpuri-dialect region in northern India, for example, which the British artificially divided in the late eighteenth century into Bihar (westernmost Bengal) on the one hand, and eastern United Provinces on the other, was one major sending region.³² Within the northern region, specific districts provided most of the recruits for both domestic seasonal and overseas indentured migrations. By 1910 the Sanderson Committee of Enquiry into Indian Emigration was stating that most of the migrants to the sugar colonies were recruited in three districts of the eastern United Provinces—Fyzabad, Basti, and Gonda—and that 80 percent were born in 21 districts of Bengal and the United Provinces, with a combined total area of 55,000 square miles and a population of 34 million.³³

Of the Southern Indian migrants, the *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* (2006) states as follows:

Malaya and Ceylon drew most of their Indian labor from Tamil Nadu, while Burma drew a large

part of its supplies from Vizagapatnam, Coimbatore, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Malabar and Chingleput. From 1842 to 1870, Godavari, Ganjam, Madras, Chingleput, Tanjore, South Arcot, and Rajahmundry, were the principal recruiting grounds, and from 1870 to 1899 North Arcot, Vizagapatnam, Trichinopoly, Chingleput and Madras gained primacy.³⁴

Labour Arrangements: Free or Unfree?

The mainstream migrations of both groups displayed a mixture of organized free migration with several types of labour arrangement which hovered between free and unfree. Throughout the 19th century, the line between the two conditions was often hard to draw, even for European labour.³⁵ The global European migrations, however, were largely free and voluntary, while both Asian migrations took place under various forms of hybrid and semi-free arrangements, including some which were not far removed from the African slave trade. A close look at the various mechanisms involved reveals a complex picture, even when the migrations were

³¹ Report by J. Geoghegan on Emigration from India: Gt Britain, Parliamentary Papers 1874, XLVII (314); George Grierson, *Report on Colonial Emigration from the Bengal Presidency*, Calcutta, 1883.

³² John Hill, “Crucible of the Diaspora: Politics and Community in the Bhojpuri and Adjacent Regions, 1880-1910”, paper presented at *Conference on Challenge and Change: the Indian Diaspora in its Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, University of the West Indies, Trinidad, August 1995.

³³ Sanderson Committee Report 1910, paragraphs 68 and 77. A sizeable minority also came from outlying western regions of the United Provinces, Bengal proper and smaller surrounding states. In the initial years of the migration to the British sugar colonies (1840s and 1850s), most of the recruits were tribals from the Chota Nagpur district of southern Bihar.

³⁴ *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p.52.

³⁵ Slavery itself did not come to a decisive end until 1886 in Cuba and 1888 in Brazil. Penal sanctions for work offenses also existed in nineteenth century Britain, under an Act of 1823 which amended older master-servant legislation, but it was ended in the 1870s, whereas colonial indenture penal sanctions continued until the demise of indenture in 1917. See Sir William Holdsworth, *A History of English Law* 15, London 1956, pp.19-20. For a discussion on the thin line between free and coerced labor in different traditions, especially Britain and the USA, see Robert Steinfeld and Stanley Engerman, “Labor - Free or Coerced? A Historical Reassessment of Differences and Similarities”, in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern,1997) 107-126. See also the volume of essays edited by David Eltis under the title *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives*, Stanford 2002.

conducted under the supervision of the metropolitan power (USA or Britain).

Contrary to a common perception, quite a lot of Asian migration was free, voluntary and self-financed. Most of the Chinese migration to Southeast Asia after the 1870s, and an unquantifiable minority of those who went to North America or Australia, would seem to fit under this category. Many of the British Empire destinations also attracted a large number of Indian merchants and other service migrants, most of whom came from the traditional trading regions rather than from the province of origin of the labourers. Thus, an unquantifiable number of Gujaratis, Punjabis, and others from the Northwestern region of India diverted older networks to the new Empire locations in East and South Africa, as well as the Indian Ocean sugar islands, and later, Fiji.

All the labour migrations were conducted under hybrid arrangements, some of which were freer than others, and some of which were effected in illegal ways even if technically legal. Legitimate questions arise about the precise ratios of coercion to freedom under all these labour arrangements. One thing they all seemed to share in common was the fact that the passage was paid for by an intermediary or labour broker, and the essence of the future labour arrangement revolved around the issue of how, when and to whom these passage moneys would be repaid, and whether these arrangements were recognized by the laws of the receiving countries *and appropriately enforced*. This applied whether the arrangements were, in the case of the Chinese, the credit ticket system, the indenture system, or—on the US Southern plantations—a contract arrangement just short of indenture (Federal law having prohibited contract labour

immigration on US soil since 1868).³⁶ It also applied to the Indians whether they travelled under indenture or under what was called in South and Southeast Asia the *kangani*³⁷ recruitment arrangement. The key questions to be answered in making a determination about how free the particular migration was, can be summarized as follows:

- How were the migrants recruited, and who paid for and arranged their passages?
- How voluntary and legal was the recruitment and transportation process?
- How, to whom, and when were the migrants expected to repay their debts?
- How was enforcement of debt obligations organized? Did the law and the local courts play a part in the process, or was enforcement extralegal and/or communal, or even illegal?
- Did breaches of the formal or informal arrangements take place, at what points in the whole process, and what were the consequences, civil, criminal or other?

A close examination of the immigration process reveals that there were several kinds of arrangements simultaneously at work. There were actually two kinds of credit ticket arrangement, one in the temperate destinations (USA, Canada and Australia)

³⁶ Reinforced by the Foran Act of 1885 (Alien Contract Labor Law). However, contract labour was widely used in practice, even for Europeans. Unlike formal indenture, labourers were not physically bound to their places of work on pain of imprisonment, but their wages and property were often withheld pending repayment of their passage debts.

³⁷ *Maistry* in Burma. The term *kangani* meant overseer or foreman, *maistry* meant supervisor. Both terms are derived from Tamil.

and another in Southeast Asia. There were also two kinds of indenture arrangement, that organized by the British, and that organized by other nationalities, especially the Spanish (Cuba) and formerly Spanish (Peru). Another distinction was that between those arrangements which were technically enforceable in the local court system and those which operated beyond the law in a communal /community setting, sometimes questioned, often tacitly endorsed or even ignored by the local legal system.

Both versions of the Chinese credit ticket system were examples of a community-based arrangement. In both cases, the immigrant's ticket was paid for by a labour broker based in China or the destination country. The broker recovered his debt (with interest) in one of several ways. The labourer could either accept responsibility for the debt personally³⁸ or he could "contract" himself to an employer who would assume his debt and repay himself from the labourer's wages. In both North American destinations, an overall supervision was organised by a federation of Guangdong district association bodies³⁹ to assist migrants in finding jobs, to look after their welfare (and that of their home-based families) in case of death or indigence, and to make sure that they eventually repaid their debts from their earnings in the new society. Elaborate supervision was organized to ensure that the migrant did not abscond. For example, he could not embark on a return ship to China without being able to produce documentation of his

debt repayment. The potential for abuse was always present, which was why the US immigration authorities conducted investigations to determine whether this was indeed a "voluntary" arrangement. Immigrants had to convince them that it was, but the authorities were not always convinced, hence the cloud of suspicion which always hung over the whole process. Some writers interpreted the second option described above (self-contracting to an employer who assumed the debt on the migrant's behalf) as a form of indenture. Another area in which abuse could express itself was the potential for enforcement of debt repayment by illegal (including violent) means, since these debts were not recoverable in the local court system. Whether or how often this occurred is a matter of speculation. The question applied equally also where a labourer might have wished to find alternative employment against the wishes of his employer or the district association umbrella body.

In Southeast Asia, especially before the 1870s,⁴⁰ the overarching supervision of a recognized community body did not exist. In fact, the influence of the illegal secret societies was all pervasive in this environment, and abuse was rampant. The brokers and their agents were paid for the individual labourers right at the destination port by the future employers, similar to the second US option discussed above.⁴¹ There was no supervision over the subsequent fate of the migrants or their working conditions. Most of them ended up in the Chinese-owned gambier, pepper or tapioca plantations, or in the tin mines of Malaya.

³⁸ One writer states specifically that the debt in the 1850s was usually for \$40 in gold, and the repayment period 5 years at 4 to 8 percent interest. Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America*, Penguin 2003, p.32.

³⁹ The Six Companies in the USA.

⁴⁰ The Straits Settlements were not made a Crown Colony until 1867. Prior to that it was administered from India.

⁴¹ And similar to the privately run Cuban and Peruvian indenture schemes.

Where a migrant failed to find an employer at the port, the agents would take it upon themselves to arrange for him to be employed at another destination, regardless of his wishes. Many migrants to Penang or Singapore would find themselves sold off to tobacco planters and others in Dutch Sumatra under this arrangement. At all stages of this process, the migrants were guarded closely by secret society gang members, to ensure against their running away.⁴² So ethnically self-contained was this immigration that when the Straits Settlement became a Crown colony in 1867, a government official reported that

The government knows little or nothing of the Chinese who form the industrial backbone of these settlements.⁴³

When they finally intervened in the 1870s, the Commissioners actually recommended adopting something like the British indenture system as an improvement on this secret–society-controlled credit ticket arrangement⁴⁴.

The main differences between the credit ticket arrangements and the indentured immigration lay firstly, in who controlled the operations (native Chinese intermediaries or Western recruiting agents, private or official), and secondly, in the nature of the reciprocal obligations incurred on either side. Instead of the passage debt being voluntarily repaid by the labourer after arrival, under the watchful supervision of a legitimate community body, the

obligations were usually rigorously spelt out in the formal laws of the host country, and the supervisory functions were assumed by the local immigration and court system. Both the written indentured contracts as well as the laws stipulated that the passage debt was repayable over a fixed period (which could range from one to eight years, depending on the recruiting destination) from wage deductions. In addition to promising a stated monthly wage, they also promised further benefits, such as free housing and medical care, as well as food and clothing supplies; some of the British indenture contracts even promised small land grants.⁴⁵ In return, the labourer was bound to a specific plantation for a fixed term of years, his freedom of movement severely curtailed, and breaches of work regulations (desertion, absenteeism, unsatisfactory work performance, insolence towards superiors among them) punishable by fine and/or imprisonment.

There were often enough ambiguities on the ground to make the distinction between the two forms questionable, but the technical distinctions were at least clear. In addition, there were important differences between the state-subsidised and state-supervised system of indentured immigration typical of the British system, operating mainly out of Hong Kong and Canton, where all recruiting and immigration personnel on both ends were paid government officials, and the infamous private enterprise-operated Latin American indenture systems of Cuba and Peru, operating out of Portuguese Macao. In fact, the manner in which the Latin Americans, with collusion from local thug elements at the China end, recruited, transported and resold their passengers (not to mention the labourer's subsequent conditions of work) made that

⁴² Persia Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire*, London 1923, pp.4-8.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.9.

⁴⁴As late as 1910, the Sanderson Committee Report on Indian migration (paragraph 132 on Malaya) stated that "There is a large migration also of Chinese, but these for the most part come either in transit to the Dutch or Siamese possessions or are employed in other avocations."

⁴⁵ In the case of the Indians (though not in Malaya), a free return passage home was also provided, subject to certain conditions which varied over time.

exercise almost indistinguishable from slavery itself. Despite the existence of a body of formal laws theoretically regulating the Spanish “coolie” trade, the corrupt Spanish system virtually ignored the provisions of the law and kept condoning its numerous violations by recruiters (Chinese), shippers (of all nationalities), planters and their agents. Whether this kind of violation was inherent to the indenture system itself, or whether this illustrated the important role played by the *culture of labour relations* in the host countries, is a matter of opinion. The British indenture system was itself often described as a “new system of slavery,” testifying to its many contradictions and weaknesses, but there was nothing in the British Empire labour tradition to compare with what was standard practice in Cuba or Peru.

The official Chinese commission of enquiry which visited Cuba in 1873 to examine the conditions under which the Chinese lived and worked concluded that,

The distinction between a hired laborer and the slave can only exist when the former accepts, of his own free will, the conditions tendered, and performs in a like manner the work assigned to him; but the lawless method in which the Chinese were—in the great majority of cases—introduced into Cuba, the contempt there evinced for them, the disregard of contracts, the indifference as to the tasks enforced, and the unrestrained infliction of wrong, constitute a treatment which is that of “a slave, not of a man who has consented to be bound by a contract.” Men who are disposed of in Havana, who are afterwards constantly, like merchandise, transferred from one establishment to another, and who, on the

completion of their first agreements, are compelled to enter into fresh ones, who are detained in depots and delivered over to new masters, whose successive periods of toil are endless, and to whom are open no means of escape, cannot be regarded as occupying a position different from that of the negroes whose servitude has so long existed in the island, and who are liable to be hired out or sold at the will of their owner.⁴⁶

The British indenture system was itself often described as a “new system of slavery”

Indian migrations were usually governed either by the British version of the indenture system used in all the sugar colonies (including Malaya⁴⁷) or the kangani recruitment arrangements of South and Southeast Asia. The latter arrangement was informal and community based, and it was regarded as “free” by the colonial legal system and tacitly endorsed. Kanganis or labour headmen were influential immigrant workers sent by host country plantations back to their respective Indian villages to recruit new groups of workers on a seasonal or long-term basis. Unlike indenture, the immigrants were not bound by formal contracts or legal process, but there was an obligation owed to the kangani or recruiter-foreman who assumed responsibility for those recruited by him, most of them bound by extended family ties. The obligation here was more of a

⁴⁶ Denise Helly, ed., *The Cuba Commission Report: a Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba. The Original English Language Text of 1876*, Baltimore 1993, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁷ Malaya employed Indians (mainly Tamils) as indentureds in the sugar and coffee sectors between 1840 and 1910, and recruited them under the kangani system for the rubber plantations from 1910 to 1938. Between 1844 and 1938, when the kangani system was terminated, 62.2 per cent of the total Indian migration to Malaya was kangani-assisted, 13 per cent (250,000) indentureds. However, as late as 1905, 40 per cent of the immigration was of indentured labourers. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p.158.

communal nature, as contrasted with the individualistic obligation of the indentured worker.

Unlike the Chinese credit ticket or even the indenture arrangement, the passage expenses and all advances were usually shouldered by the recruiting plantations themselves through the kanganis, and there were no third-party money brokers, private or State. The Sanderson Committee Report of 1910 estimated the debt obligation of the average migrant labourer to be about 10 rupees, which it was expected he would repay within 2 years. But this debt obligation was handled in a communal fashion, and not subject to legal process.

...there is no obligation which can be enforced by legal process. The debt remains a debt to the kangany, not to the estate, and the coolie is at any time free to claim his discharge from the latter on giving a month's notice.

...though each cooly's name appears upon the estate check roll, and the pay earned by him or her separately calculated, the earnings of the members of a family group are held, in some sort, in common, though the women are almost invariably given for their own use any extra pay which their diligence or skill may have earned for them over and above the ordinary rates of wage.

Similarly, each member of such a family group considers him or herself liable for the joint debt of the group, and in the event of the death or desertion of one of its members the surviving or remaining members regard it as a point of honour to accept liability for his share of the common debt. This is a practice which is ingrained in the customs and traditions of the Tamil agricultural labourers, and

the acceptance of such liability is with them.... a point of honour.⁴⁸

The Committee carried the following description of the role of the kangani:

This system, commonly called the "kangany system", is ... of a purely patriarchal character in its origin and principles. The kangany, or labor headman, was in the beginning, and still is in a large number of the older and more solidly established estates, the senior member of a family group composed of his personal relatives, to whom may be added other families drawn from villages in Southern India from the vicinity of which he and his relatives also come. The labour force thus formed is subdivided into a number of smaller groups, each under its patriarch, the sub- or *silara* kangany: and the family principle is further manifested in the groups which are under these minor headmen, a man with his wife and children, and, it may be, one or more close relations assuming joint liability for advances made to them, and holding their earnings, in some sort, in common.

The head kangany, as patriarch of the whole labour force under his charge, transacts or supervises all the financial affairs of the estate with his coolies, with the exception of the payment of their wages. On a single estate there may be, and often are, several head kanganies. Often the head kangany is the sole debtor to the estate, he being the medium through whom all advances are made, the sub-kangany, and, it may be, his own personal gang of labourers, owing him money, while the remainder of his coolies are responsible for their debts, individual or collective, to

⁴⁸ Sanderson Committee Report 1910, paragraphs 110-112.

the sub-kanganies. In most of the older and more firmly established estates, the sub-kanganies and their coolies owe more money to their head kangany than the latter owes to the estate, and in such instances the head kangany, apart from being the head and the organizer of the labour force, actually assists the estate to finance its coolies.⁴⁹

Thus, compared to the indenture contract, the kangani arrangement was more flexible. However, from the recommendations made by the Sanderson Committee in 1910 for its improvement, it would appear that even this technically free labor arrangement was not without its defects. Most of these concerned the possibility of abuse and corruption by the kanganis themselves, to whom was entrusted the exclusive task of mediating between planters and their workforce, even of disbursing workers' payments.⁵⁰ Despite its problems, this method of recruiting migrant labour from India was preferred in South and Southeast Asia over the indentured contract system, and was the exclusive arrangement used after 1910 until its demise in 1938 (Malaya) and 1940 (Ceylon), when immigration from India was banned by the Indian government due to the conditions produced by the world Depression.

Turn-of-the-century aftermath of the classic migrations

All of the previously mentioned forms of emigration are distinguished from late-century and turn-of-the-century voluntary migration of family, trader, and artisan elements. For the Chinese, this late voluntary migration generally went to most of the earlier destinations, and it often involved small-scale chain movements based on family, clan, and village networks.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 109.

⁵⁰ At least in Ceylon.

It might be enhanced in some destinations by special local factors, such as the increased Latin America/Caribbean inflow after the closure of destinations like the USA following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, or special welcoming policies organized by local governments like Porfirio Diaz's Mexico (1876-1911). In certain non-Asian destinations, late free migration actually played a dominant role in the sense that more people arrived during this turn-of-the-century period than during the earlier indenture period. This was the case in destinations like Jamaica, Panama, and Mauritius, where very few indentured workers went in the initial immigration. It was also the case in Mexico, where there had been no indentured immigrants in the first period. For the Indians, this free voluntary migration, generally of traditional trader classes from other parts of India like Gujerat and Punjab, affected particular destinations such as East Africa, Natal, and the western Indian Ocean islands—all physically close to India—and, as discussed, there was the special migration of Punjabi Sikh laborers to North America.⁵¹ Technically, it would also include a minority of formerly indentured Indians who had returned to India and who later came back voluntarily to their original plantation destinations (or often alternative destinations) under new circumstances. They were described in the immigration reports as "casuals" or "passengers."⁵²

Free late-century or turn-of-the-century movements also involved a significant amount of relocating from one territory to another within a given regional nexus, for example among the different islands of the

⁵¹ It has been estimated that there were more than half a million of these trader/service migrants in the 1890s, scattered from South and Southeast Asia to the African continent. *Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, p. 58.

⁵² W. Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, p.227.

Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions. Chinese, for example, remigrated from Guiana to Suriname, French Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Central America; they moved between Reunion and Mauritius, Mauritius and Seychelles, and all of these and Madagascar. Several small communities of ex-Cuban Chinese were already living in the East and South before the Civil War. Indians relocated from the smaller West Indian islands (both British and French) to Trinidad and Guiana; they also migrated to Venezuela and Guiana from Trinidad; to Cuba, Costa Rica, and Panama from Jamaica; to Suriname and Trinidad from Guiana.

Adjustment and Assimilation across Diasporas

Chinese and Indians evolved diverse (and divergent) models of adapting to their new environments. The foremost issue for Chinese diaspora minorities was the nature of the formal restraints against mobility in the new societies, the range of options allowable in any given society. The levels and expressions of welcome for the Chinese migrant varied from society to society, and indeed from period to period within any given society. These manifested themselves in the form of laws passed by the local legislatures, laws which might be inspired either by elite policymaking imperatives (ranging from racism to legitimate or illegitimate elite power concerns) or by pressures emanating from below, from constituency sentiment. Local sentiment itself may be influenced by quite different factors in different environments. The immigration exclusion laws of the USA in 1882 were concessions to the fears of white trade union elements, resentful of job competition from the Chinese in a period of economic contraction, as much as they were reflective of an overall racism in the society towards non-white immigration. Laws passed in northern Mexico expelling the

Chinese in the early 20th century were designed to address popular resentment against a successful entrepreneurial and trader class perceived to be inimical to the interests of an incipient left nationalism.⁵³ Restraints existed not only in the laws, but also in the form of informal pressures to confine the Chinese immigrant to certain levels of advancement, certain physical and social spaces acceptable to the local power elites and local public opinion. Cuban post-indenture restrictions on mobility were not necessarily duplicated in Peru or the British West Indies; modern post-colonial Southeast Asian societies exhibit markedly different levels of tolerance towards their Chinese fellow citizens.

Other factors influencing assimilation include not just the range of concrete options open to the migrant in any given environment, but the migrants' own attitudes to these options, and also the nature of the difficulties (financial, competitive or otherwise) faced in making the transition from labourer or artisan to trader, in some societies. There were marked differences in levels of wealth acquisition, social status, and acceptance for the middlemen minorities of Southeast Asia and Mauritius, Cuba and Trinidad. There were also marked differences between the middleman minority experiences of these countries and the discriminatory ghetto-like minority experience in the white majority temperate industrial societies. As Edgar Wickberg and others like Lynn Pan have pointed out, up to the 1960s at least, the Chinese in Southeast Asia might feel culturally vulnerable, but they could take pride in a history of economic success and

⁵³ Evelyn Hu-de Hart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society: the Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932," *Journal of Arizona History* 21 (1980): 49-86; Leo M.D. Jacques., "The Anti-Chinese Campaign in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1931", Ph.D dissertation, University of Arizona, 1974.

local preeminence. North American and other metropolitan society Chinese were conscious of being marginal both culturally and economically.⁵⁴ The tasks faced, and the options open to, these groups in overcoming their unique local restraints were thus quite specific. In the metropolitan white majority societies, the struggle to change official national self-definitions from a Eurocentric model to a multicultural model constituted the basis of one kind of challenge. In Southeast Asia and the rest of the Third World, the need to effect some form of *modus vivendi*, first with the specific European colonizers, and later with the forces of anti-colonial nationalism and independence, constituted another.

Responses to the latter challenge have not been uniform. Some communities have chosen assimilation, some a form of plural integration into the local elite; many have chosen to remain a tactful and marginal *petit-bourgeoisie* within their host countries, while equally many have chosen flight and remigration to more receptive environments (which may be either regional or metropolitan).

Outside of the Asian region, Indian assimilation to their new host societies over time has taken on three basic models of multicultural adjustment: where the community is numerically large enough to create a competitive pluralism not only in the culture but also in the politics of the host country; where Indians have remained a culturally and politically marginal minority; and where the evolution is within a multicultural metropolitan environment with steadily evolving policies towards racial minorities. Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad,

Suriname, and Fiji—all with sugar-based immigrant communities formed in the 19th century—are examples of the first type. In all of these societies Indians form close to or more than 40 per cent of the new society, and their numbers have given them constituency strength and aspirations to state power on a scale achieved by no area of the Chinese diaspora.⁵⁵ The second model is divided between those societies where Indian numerical marginality is accompanied by economic underachievement (low status agricultural workers and peasants), and those where migrant economic achievement has corresponded to the middleman minority status achieved by most Chinese overseas

In the metropolitan white majority societies, the struggle to change official national self-definitions from a Eurocentric model to a multicultural model constituted the basis of one kind of challenge.

communities in the tropical Third World. Jamaica, the French and British Caribbean islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grenada, St Lucia, and St

Vincent, are examples of the former type of marginality. East Africa, 80 per cent of whose indentured Sikh railway workers returned to India after their period of service, and where Hindu and Muslim Gujerati and Punjabi traders dominate the local middle sector, represents the latter type. The third model, a metropolitan one, is a mid-to late 20th-century development, since Indian migration to the temperate industrial countries—barring the small Punjabi Sikh migration to North America mentioned before—basically started after the Second World War, with the migrations to Britain and later North America.

With the exception of the third model and the East African model, all the areas of the Indian diaspora mentioned differ from the Chinese diaspora in the sense that the

⁵⁴ *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Lynn Pan, p.114.

⁵⁵ Until the formation of Singapore in 1965 (and not counting Hong Kong).

majority of their communities have continued to remain largely agricultural communities, often—though not everywhere—still tied to sugar. Their economic and professional middle classes are made up of a combination of upwardly mobile sectors of a larger community still tied to agriculture in some form, as well as distinct immigrant trader groups who arrived during and after indenture from provinces different from the provinces from which the indentured workers came: mainly Gujerat and Punjab.⁵⁶ These latter groups are prominent in all destinations except the Caribbean, although even here there was the exception which proved the rule: one of the most prominent Trinidad Indian merchants up to the 1980s was an enterprising Sindhi merchant who migrated to the island around 1926.⁵⁷

Assimilationist challenges have not been experienced or posed in quite the same fashion for both groups, even where both Indians and Chinese have formed part of a vigorous expanded pluralistic entity of small and large commercial entrepreneurs (Guiana, Trinidad, Suriname). Differing group cultural attitudes, as well as differing host society attitudes towards both groups, have played a role in this differentiation. Host society attitudes can themselves be derived from a combination of related factors: local group interactions (or the lack thereof); international group perceptions (as received and interpreted locally); the

location of the migrants within the local social stratification system, in the past as well as the present; but, above all, by the fear of ethnic political domination in politically insecure environments. It should be noted, however, that throughout the Third World, including many of the countries of Southeast Asia where there is a large Chinese presence, the challenges of multiculturalism are quite different from the challenges of multiculturalism in a metropolitan white-majority society. Fledgling nations evolving out of colonialism often have no patience with the complexities of multiculturalism, especially where there is disagreement on whether its recognition would erode the economic and/or political aspirations of the dominant majority. Ironically, the temperate regions which experienced the most virulent forms of anti-Asian racism in the 19th century have since the late 20th century lost their sense of racial exclusiveness, while the entire post-colonial tropical world has seen a more problematic dynamic developing among the multicultural successors to the departed colonialists.

Thank you.

⁵⁶ The trader class in South and Southeast Asia come from a wider base, including many from South India.

⁵⁷ Murlidar Kirpalani (1907-1957); see Bridget Brereton, Brinsley Samaroo and Glenroy Taitt, *Dictionary of Caribbean Biography*, UWI (Trinidad) History Department 1998, p.68. A minuscule migration of Sindhi and Gujerati merchants to the West Indies in the 1930s and 1940s is discussed in Peter Hanoomansingh, "Beyond Profit and Capital: a study of the Sindhis and Gujeratis of Barbados," in Rhoda Reddock, ed., *Ethnic Minorities in Caribbean Society* (Trinidad, 1996), 272-342.