

Ana Paulina Lee. *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018. 256 pp. Hardback/paperback. ISBN 1503606015.

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Racial representation and racial discourse of the Chinese in Latin America has by and large been an understudied topic. Filling the gap, Anna Paulina Lee's *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory* details the development and implications of the racialized rhetoric pertinent to the Chinese in Brazil since the late nineteenth century by exhaustively investigating these discourses in various Brazilian cultural media including literature, poems, music, artworks, diplomatic memoirs, and cartoons/caricatures. The book convincingly shows that the Chinese racialization in Brazil was inextricably tied to the Brazil's post-colonial society in which Brazilians used Chinese racial figures and discourses to help define Brazilian nationality and socioeconomic functionality. However, *Mandarin Brazil* shows that Brazilian post-colonial racial construction was never free from the traits of colonial racial hierarchy. Indeed, in constructing a modern racial state, Brazilians situated the Chinese as the racial Other that would hamper Brazil's effort in whitening itself and disassociating itself from non-white people as they deemed the non-whites as inferior according to the colonial racial caste system. This kind of racial typology, according to Lee, was a salient characteristic found in a variety of Brazil's racial representations of the Chinese. Together, these racial representations intersected with the broader Pan-American racial discourse that relegated the Chinese to the racially inferior and disparaged them as the Yellow Peril. Unbeknownst to most Brazilians today, however, the historical Chinese racialization is still evident and extant within its contemporary culture, embedded in a Luso-Sino circumoceanic memory unique to Brazil.

Mandarin Brazil first shows that the initial Sino-Brazilian, or rather Sino-Portuguese, relationship was based on trade and business transactions. Porcelain, a common commodity traded between China and Portugal, were sometimes inscribed with Chinese figures, providing Brazil with the earliest racial representation of the Chinese and connecting "... once-distant societies, cultures, and ideas to a circumoceanic memory of race" (p. 25). In 1888, the Chinese racial representation became more salient in Brazilian culture as the country had just abolished slavery and was gradually recruiting foreign laborers, including the Chinese, to substitute the previous African slaves. This importation process, interestingly, coincided with some Chinese officials' desire to create a Chinese colony in Brazil as they looked to Brazil as a promising site to resettle the Chinese from the

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increasingly decadent China. Lee shows how most Brazilians responded negatively to the proposal of Chinese labour recruitment. Many believed that the Chinese coolies would revert the Brazilian abolitionist progress as the Chinese were viewed as no different from slaves, and thus “represented the barriers to liberty and nationhood” (p. 52). Some also feared that the Chinese would impede racial whitening in Brazil by creating a degenerative race called “Brazilian-Chinaman” through miscegenation. This Sinophobic sentiment, as *Mandarin Brazil* demonstrates, can be found in a large number of cartoons published by *Revista Illustrada* and various Brazilian literary works.

Resonating with these Sinophobic cartoons and literary works, Brazilian theatrical plays often characterized the Chinese as racially inferior. In a major work called *O Mandarim*, playwrights Arthur Azevedo and Sampaio Moreiro portrayed the Chinese as sexually deviant and androgynous, and thus unfit for the heterosexual normative construct of the eugenic theory. The play also depicted the Chinese as “the perpetual foreigner” who are unassimilable due to their petulant temperament, anti-western tendencies, and marginal role in the society as seafood peddlers. Similarly, as the last chapter of the book shows, Brazilian music produced between 1930 and 1945 also contains many elements of such derogatory views toward the Chinese, evincing the permanence and the legacies of the colonial racial politics. Lee argues that these Sinophobic songs served, perpetuated, and reinforced the white supremacist ideology in Brazil and were representative of the anti-Asian movements in the Western Hemisphere during the early twentieth century.

Mandarin Brazil is an edifying work. One of the most important features of the book is that it incorporates many comparisons between the Chinese racialization and racialization of other people groups. For example, the book indicates that there exists a close relationship between the racial representations of African Slaves and the Chinese, showing the ways in which these two representations are similar to and intersected with one another. The book demonstrates that the Chinese racialization did not occur in isolation; rather it continuously shaped and was shaped by the popular racial discourse in Brazil. It therefore contextualizes the development of Chinese racialization within the Brazil’s national discourse and discussion of racial nationalism, and foregrounds the important role that the Chinese racialization played in the formation of Brazilian national identity. Additionally, the book took into consideration the role that Japanese immigrants played in forming a racial-ethnic representation that was in direct contrast to that of the Chinese. This dialectical relationship points to the importance of the transnational racial imagination and presents Brazil as a crucial nodal point of this transnational framework. Furthermore, the book’s inclusion of diverse types of sources is brilliant. It shows that Chinese racialization transcended and

intertwined within various types of Brazilian cultural imagination. The analysis of Brazilian popular music is especially inspirational as it evinces the theme of gender and sexuality within the broader formation of Chinese racialization and how the contrast between masculine and feminine sexual constructs contributed to Brazilian Sinophobia—an understudied field within the current historiography. Overall, *Mandarin Brazil* charted a new territory in ethnic studies of Latin America. Bridging the historical and culture gap between Brazil and Asia, the book weaves together a mélange of complex racial and ethnic identities that were instrumental to the development of modern Brazil.

Mandarin Brazil both reinforces and contributes to the previous historiography on identity and racial formations of Asians in Brazils. For instance, similar to *Mandarin Brazil*, Jefferey Lesser's *Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy, 1960-1980* and *Immigration, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Brazil, 1808 to the Present* notes that Brazilians often used Japanese Brazilians to define its national identity. Yet unlike the Chinese Brazilians whose racial representation has always been deemed as inferior and alien, the foreignness of Japanese Brazilians often meshed with the broader cultural norms of Brazil, and hence demonstrated the duality of Japanese Brazilians' seemingly paradoxical existence of both foreign and yet Brazilian. Paulina Lee's work, on the other hand, offers a new visualization and conceptual understanding of racial representations of Asians in Brazil by presenting a stark contrast between the ways in which Brazilians viewed the Chinese and Japanese. This approach has also been used in Stewart Lone's *The Japanese Community in Brazil, 1908-1940* in which Stewart showed that racial representation of Chinese in Brazil often denigrated the Chinese as diseased and poor, while showing the Japanese as sedulous and have the potential to "whiten" the nation.

Mandarin Brazil also provides new insights into the ways in which the intersection of racial, sexualized, and gendered representations of the Chinese Brazilians differentiated from the previous historiography on Asians in Brazil. In Lesser's *Japanese Brazilians*, he showed that Brazilian characterization of Japanese sexuality often used a heteronormative and masculine lens that viewed and praised the femininity and submissiveness of Japanese *geisha*. Yet, contrastively, *Mandarin Brazil* shows that Brazilian characterization of Chinese sexuality centered on sexual deviance from heteronormativity and often focused on Chinese male sexuality rather than female sexuality. Although different in their perspectives, both representations of Chinese and Japanese sexuality contributed to Brazilians' understanding of themselves. Moreover, the gendered difference of sexuality between Chinese and Japanese complicates the historical understanding of the ways in which Brazilians used diverse means to define its national identity.

Mandarin Brazil would benefit from utilizing more sources that would reveal the overarching agenda and underpinning ideas of the Chinese government vis-à-vis the Chinese in Brazil. Although the book cited a few Chinese officials' words in describing their desire to colonize Brazil, it is rather unclear whether this was the official stance of the Chinese government and how prevalent this idea was within the Chinese government. Nonetheless, *Mandarin Brazil* is a great addition to the growing historiography of the Asian-Latino Studies. It would be suitable for advanced classes of Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, and Modern Brazilian History.