Chinese in the Cuban revolution

An ethnically marked political mobilization?

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While the history of Chinese immigrants in Cuba since 1847 has been investigated by a number of studies that have focused primarily on the coolie trade and on the immigration wave of the 1920s,[1] the history of Chinese immigrants, and also that of their descendants, in revolutionary Cuba after 1959 still remains a field of study worthy of exploration.[2] In particular, their participation in the Cuban revolution of 1959 seems quite significant, though, like the history of Overseas Chinese in other regions of the world during the Cold War, this has also not been studied in detail (Ho/Madokoro/Peterson 2014: 131). Scholars have pointed to the turn away from Cuba and the revolution, mostly for economic reasons, of a large part of the Chinese Cuban community due to economic problems that hit them with the revolution, especially after the expropriations of small and medium-sized business in 1968 (Herrera/Castillo 2003: 166).

But there were also groups and individuals of Chinese descent that actively supported the Cuban revolutionary government, some of them for decades.[3] In

1 On coolies, cp. Álvarez Ríos (1995); Yun (2008); García/Eng (2009); for a more general approach the already classic study Meagher (2008, on Cuba in particular pp. 201-221). For studies that partly include the 20th century, cp. Chong Martínez (1986); Baltar Rodríguez (1997a). Kathleen López (2004; 2013) has written the first comprehensive overview of Chinese in Cuba from 1847 to the late 20th century.

2 Exceptions include the above cited López (2013), Herrera/Castillo (2003), García/Eng (2009), García Triana (2003), and to some extent Waters (2005).

3 Like three Chinese Cuban revolutionaries who fought in the guerrilla war alongside Fidel Castro and were appointed generals some years after the triumph of the Cuban revolution (cp. García Triana 2003; Waters 2005; my interviews with Pedro Eng

the first years, the revolution of 1959 was defended by a significant part of the Cuban population, who enrolled in popular militias (Vellinga 1976; Manke 2014a; 2014b). Significant numbers of Chinese immigrants and descendants of Chinese immigrants in Cuba also joined what can be referred to as a mass movement to defend the revolution (Eng/García 2003: 39–49), forming a 'Chinese Popular Militia'. In the course of the research underlying the present article, new evidence on Chinese Cubans involved in the revolution of 1959 emerged, especially through interviews with Pedro Eng and Guillermo Chiu, two veterans of that militia.

The aim of this article is not only to focus on the foundation and development of that militia and the agency of its members against the background of other leftist Chinese that became organized in Cuba. In reporting the first results of ongoing research, this article will elucidate whether and how ethnic identity was used as a political resource, and describes the different ways in which ethnic self-attribution on a personal level and constructions of identity on a national level entangled and interacted in this dynamic setting. This is of special interest, as the demands of national unity under the flag of a new revolutionary identity do not necessarily seem compatible with the self-attributions of individuals that also stressed their personal identity, as did many Chinese Cubans. In this respect, a key question is whether this process can be interpreted as an ethnically marked mobilization during the political conflict that characterized the early years of the revolution. The main findings will show that this is indeed possible to some extent.

CHINESE IN CUBA BEFORE AND AFTER THE CHINESE REVOLUTION: A DIVIDING COMMUNITY

When Siu-Song Chiu was born in 1933 in a village in Guangdong province, Southern China, his father, Hao-Wo Chiu, was already living in Havana.[4] At the age of around 18, Siu-Song followed his father's call to come to Cuba to work with him in a *bodega* (grocery store) in Havana, adopting the name Guillermo Chiu. He arrived in Cuba in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Nevertheless, in an interview he did not point to political reasons for his relocation to Cuba. We can assume that

Herrera (half-Chinese, half-Cuban/Spanish) and Guillermo Chiu (born in China, both parents Chinese).

4 Cp. Interview with Guillermo Chiu, August 1, 2014, Havana, also for the following.

familial and economic reasons were important, but the turbulent Chinese political situation probably also contributed to this decision, as thousands of 'nationalist' Chinese left mainland China in those years, approximately 3,000 of them going to Cuba.[5] This had an impact not only on the quality, but also on the size of the Chinese community in Cuba, which numbered 28,829 persons in 1948 – at that time the second-largest group of 'foreigners' (i.e. persons without Cuban citizenship) in the country after the Spaniards.[6]

With the victory of Mao Zedong's troops in 1949, leftist-oriented Chinese in Cuba and their organizations were initially strengthened, among them those active in the *Alianza Nacional de Apoyo a la Democracia China* (National Alliance to Protect Chinese Democracy) (López 2013: 222), which would play a key role in Cuba's 1959 revolution. The *Alianza* had been founded in 1927 by José Wong (Wong Tao-Bai)[7] in Havana as the leftist *Alianza Revolucionaria Protectora de Obreros y Campesinos de Cuba* (Chinese Cuban Revolutionary Alliance Protecting Workers and Peasants). Arrested by the secret police of Cuban dictator Gerardo Machado, Wong suffered extralegal execution in 1930; later he became Cuba's best-known revolutionary martyr of Chinese descent. After an initial growth sponsored by the Nationalist Party,[8] the *Alianza* also faced severe persecution under Machado and went underground in Santiago de Cuba. In 1938, during a moment of national unity against Japan's invasion of China during the Second Sino-Japanese War, it was re-established as *Alianza en Defensa de la Cultura China* (Alliance for the Defense of the Chinese Culture) by leftist members of Havana's Chinatown. During China's Civil War in the 1940s, it aligned with the Chinese Communist Party, registering under its new name *Alianza Nacional de Apoyo a la Democracia China* (National Alliance for the Support of Chinese Democracy) in 1946 (López 2013: 199, 207, 222).

After World War II, Cuba became an even closer ally of the United States in its struggle against communism, including at the level of internal politics. When the PRC was founded in 1949, Cuba's position was clear; as López put it: "[…]

5 Though there were also a considerable number of returnees to China after 1949 (Ford 2014: 239). For Chinese migration to Cuba in the 1950s, cp. López (2013: 222).

6 The authors stress that this is only true if we do not count the Haitians, whose numbers temporarily reached to 70,629 during the sugar harvest. The Spanish population in Cuba numbered 153,429 in that year (Herrera/Castillo (2003: 141).

7 When Chinese names are cited in Pinyin, the family name is written first, without separation by comma. Wong was an immigrant from Guangdong province, China (cp. Baltar 1997b: 22; Historia de la Alianza Socialista China de Cuba 2003: 1).

8 Though never reaching the importance of other established associations and institutions like the Casino Chung Wah (cp. Kenley 2011: 14–15).

Cuba was under the political and economic influence of its North American neighbor, and a directive from Washington to support the new Chinese government never came" (2013: 222). Consequently, Cuba did not recognize the PRC, but maintained diplomatic and commercial ties with the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan formed by the Kuomintang. In 1950, the Cuban Communists' main daily newspaper *Hoy* (Today) was shut down by the Cuban government. When leftist Chinese Cubans protested, their communist newspaper *Kwong Wah Po* (Bright China) was also forbidden; their press was destroyed, and 13 Chinese were detained and accused of being 'Communist spies' among them the newspaper's director, Juan Mok (Mo You-Ping) (ibid: 223).

The Chinese community in Cuba was experiencing an increased politicization and polarization (Herrera/Castillo 2003: 143–144). The first political clash between followers of the Kuomintang (now politically represented through Taiwan) and followers of the PRC took place on October 10, 1949, (a meaningful patriotic date for both Chinese and Cubans), when *Alianza* members hung the flag of Communist China at the Kuomintang headquarters in Havana, just days after its president, Enrique León, declared the solidarity of the 'Chinese patriots' in Cuba with the PRC (Álvarez Ríos 1995: 81; Herrera/Castillo 2003: 143; López 2013: 222). Though it had lost its monopolistic political position in Cuba after 1949, the Kuomintang still dominated the principal political and social institution of Havana's Chinatown, the *Casino Chung Wah* (García Triana 2003: 20), and maintained an ideologically leading position (Herrera/Castillo 2003: 149).

Conflicts between different groups in Cuba's Chinese community were being shaped by Cuba's political climate, which ultimately favored anti-communists and the Chinese merchant class.[9] This was accentuated under President Fulgencio Batista, who installed a pro-U.S. dictatorship through a coup d'état in 1952. Also under Batista, "[u]pper-class Chinese merchants enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with Cuban politicians […]" (López 2013: 223). The *Alianza* had already been dissolved in 1951 due to economic problems; in 1955 its official registration was canceled. On the other hand, towards the end of the 1950s, the Cold War ideology endorsed by the Batista regime also had a coalescing impact on the leadership of the Chinese community in Havana. After purging leftist elements and uniting the nationalist forces under the banner of anticommunism, it reached an "ethnic-communitarian cohesion of great strength" (Herrera/Castillo 2003: 156)[10] that covered political divisions for some time.

9 This had not always been the case, as Herrera and Castillo have shown (2003: 81, 82, 117).

10 All translations are mine, unless noted otherwise.

CHINESE IN REVOLUTIONARY CUBA: FROM HONEYMOON TO INTERNAL SPLIT

When the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro triumphed in 1959, the situation changed. In its first year, the political climate stood for a turn towards more equality and distributive politics, and the revolutionary leadership promoted a nationalist course within a capitalist system, rather than socialism. The revolution opened possibilities for many kinds of organizations to participate in public life, among them previously banned leftist ones like the *Alianza* in Havana's Chinatown. Former members re-established this association in early 1959 as *Alianza Cultural China* (Chinese Cultural Alliance), soon renamed *Alianza Nueva Democracia China en Cuba* (Chinese New Democracy Alliance of Cuba), alluding to Mao Zedong's concept of "New Democracy" (López 2013: 226).[11] Taiwan's embassy in Cuba observed this development with mistrust, reporting to the Cuban revolutionary government any 'suspicious' movement of Chinese in Cuba, and trying to block any kind of influence of the PRC (García Triana 2003: 42–43). The ideological position of the Cuban government was unclear at that time. Even so, it was a revolution in course that tried to introduce rapid changes in the economic and social structure of the country (Díaz Castañón 2004; Martínez Heredia 2005: 199–220).

In the beginning, the leaders of Havana's Chinatown joined in what Herrera and Castillo appropriately call a "revolutionary consensus" (2003: 157) for a democratic and liberal Cuba. But this "honeymoon" (ibid.) would not last long. In view of the radical changes, many better-off Chinese were frightened to lose their property, and some started conspiring against the revolutionary government (García Triana 2003: 40). But there was no ethnically marked formation of an opposition group at that moment.

THE FORMATION OF A CHINESE MILITIA FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION

In the summer and autumn of 1959, the revolution came under attack from a counter-revolutionary invasion attempt by the Dominican Republic and the

11 When Fidel Castro proclaimed the socialist character of the revolution on April 16, 1961, the *Alianza* changed its name to *Alianza Socialista China de Cuba* (Chinese Socialist Alliance of Cuba), the name it still bears today (cp. History of the Alianza Socialista China de Cuba 2003: 2).

bombing of cane fields with the acquiescence of U.S. authorities (Zaldívar/ Etcheverry 2009). Gradually, the political conflict escalated into an ideological confrontation, and the revolution started to radicalize. As the country was not prepared to confront an external invasion or a large-scale internal destabilization campaign, many civilians began to ask for arms and military training, and popular militias were founded in all provinces. Around 90 percent of all Cubans supported the revolution in 1959, and this support developed into a mass movement to defend both country and revolution (Manke 2014a: 101–149).[12]

At this early stage, militias were mainly organized in a decentralized way, but there was no militia organized for or by members of any specific ethnic group. From August 1959 mobilization was particularly high in the labor unions of the gastronomy and retail sectors in Havana.[13] Many Chinese of Central Havana were organized in this sector (García Triana 2003: 176), some of them in the union of *Víveres al Detalle* (supplies for retail traders). In this union, a key person in the organization of the support of Chinese was Pedro Eng Herrera. Pedro Eng was born in 1933 in Havana; his father was from Guangdong province, China, and his mother from Spain. According to his memoirs, he had been active against the Batista dictatorship in the labor sector together with another Chinese Cuban, Rufino Alay Chang.[14] After the triumph of the revolution, the revolutionaries took over the labor unions, and many founded militias to defend the revolution against external aggressions and internal resistance. Pedro Eng organized the militia in his union, in his position as *subresponsable* (second in charge).[15] He passed a short intensive military training course in Havana's Fifth Military District, which was under the direction of Captain Miguel Galán, chief commander of all militias in Havana province (Manke 2014a: 204–207). He then became the military and political instructor of this militia, and soon several Chinese employees of the gastronomy sector asked him to admit them for training in this militia.

But the course of the revolution was still not clearly leftist. After an accusation of alleged leftist political agitation initiated by Adolfo Rodríguez, the union's secretary general, Eng was dismissed from his position by the National Direction of Revolutionary Militias in early 1960. Eng left the militia, and about 20 Chinese that had been trained by him also resigned. Then he, Rufino Alay

12 For quantitative details of support for the revolution cp. Gutiérrez Serrano (1959).

13 Cp. "*Reiteran Apoyo los Camareros*" ("Waiters Renew Their Support"). In: *Revolución* (August 11, 1959: 2).

14 Interview with Pedro Eng Herrera, November 25, 2006, Havana.

15 Interview with Pedro Eng Herrera, November 25, 2006, Havana. For the role of the responsables (local leaders) in the militias cp. Manke (2014a: 208–211).

and Jesús Eng Guerra had the idea of founding a militia whose members would be Chinese residents and descendants of Chinese like himself. They contacted the *Alianza Cultural China* asking for support, but the *Alianza*'s leadership did not immediately approve of their plans. So they contacted Juan Mok, the former editor of the newspaper *Kwong Wah Po,* who led a leftist branch of the *Alianza*. He and Luis Li, both elderly communists and comrades of José Wong in the 1930s, helped the men around Pedro Eng to found the *Milicia Popular China Brigada José Wong* (Chinese Popular Militia José Wong Brigade), as it was named in Wong's honor. After approval by Captain Miguel Galán and the new labor union leader Narciso Sautié Socarrás, this Chinese militia was founded on February 17, 1960, with 54 founding members (among them Guillermo Chiu) who were soon joined by more leftist Chinese.[16]

THE SHIFT OF POWER IN HAVANA'S CHINATOWN

In the summer of 1960, due to both U.S. economic aggression and low-intensity warfare against Cuba and to the radicalization of the revolution, the political climate shifted decisively and Cuba turned towards the socialist bloc, including the PRC (Manke 2014a: 223–224, 266–273, 300). On September 2, 1960, Castro made his first 'Declaration of Havana', which underscored Cuba's right to self-determination against the United States' attempts to strangle it economically and politically. In this speech, he also announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC, and declared the rupture of those with Taiwan. With this move, Cuba would become the first country in Latin America to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing – an act which formally took place on September 28 (Álvarez Ríos 1995: 99; García Triana 2003: 49–51, 56; Benton 2009: xx). In Havana's Chinatown, power relations now changed with increasing pace, and Taiwan could no longer interfere. On October 1, 1960, the Chinese militia and members of the *Alianza* participated in a public festival to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the PRC (García Triana 2003: 175; López 2013: 227). Shortly afterwards, the revolutionary tide also hit the traditional institutions of the Chinese community. On October 10, the Chinese militia invaded both the *Casino Chung Wah* and the Kuomintang headquarters, including its newspaper *Man Sen Yat Po*, and raised the red flag of the PRC on the Casino's premises for the first time in history (Herrera/Castillo 2003: 159; García/Eng 2009: 40; López 2013: 227).

16 Interview with Pedro Eng Herrera, November 25, 2006, Havana (cp. also García Triana 2003: 174).

According to Herrera and Castillo (2003: 159), in the political conflict in the Casino the militia backed the leftist faction in Havana's Chinatown, which reflected the loss of power of the conservative faction. On October 10, a new Casino leadership took power: *Alianza* leader Manuel Luis became the president, and Enrique León became his secretary. Three days later, through bill no. 891, all foreign banks that had not yet been subject to such intervention – with the exception of the Canadian ones – were nationalized by the Cuban government, including the Cuban branch of the Bank of China (López 2013: 227). Furthermore, the takeover of the Casino was made officially effective; the Kuomintang building, the *Man Sen Yat Po*, and several establishments and private property of Chinese who had cooperated with Batista were confiscated. Though the new communist leadership of the Casino did not have a significant social basis in the Chinese Cuban community, there were almost no protests against this move, which took place in an almost peaceful manner.[17]

WAS THIS AN ETHNICALLY MARKED MOBILIZATION? AN ANALYTIC APPROACH

How can we interpret the agency of Chinese Cubans in the Cuban revolution, and specifically of those who were members of the Chinese militia? Were they participating in a purely political conflict, or did ethnicity play a more relevant role? To approach these questions, it is necessary to clarify the concepts and terms in use. When writing about 'Chinese' in Cuba, one can observe that the term is used with a variety of connotations and intentions by different speakers. From the point of view of the Chinese community in Cuba, this was heavily influenced by the events in China. In 19th-century China, nationalist tendencies had set in motion the buildup of a Chinese national identity. This led to a weakening of the relevance of ethnic differentiations in terms of identity formation – especially among Chinese outside of China, as Ford observes:

"The spread of nationalism through the Overseas Chinese community in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries can be conceived as the beginning of a breakdown of 'ethnic' boundaries within Chinese society." (Ford 2014: 243)

17 López speaks of a "transition relatively free of violence" (2013: 227; cp. also Herrera/Castillo 2003: 160–161).

In Cuba, according to Martín (1939: 17), ethnic in-fighting (mostly between *hakka* and *punti*) eased off towards the 1920s, also influenced by nationalist and centralist agendas. In the 20th century, migrants from China to Cuba mostly used this generalizing term to refer to their country of origin when talking to persons outside the Chinese community in Cuba.

Inside the communities, the local origin and family ties of Overseas Chinese remained strong markers. José Baltar Rodríguez (1997b) pointed to the importance of patrilineal clan associations in Cuba, whose members were grouped and admitted according to their family name and their location of origin. Herrera and Castillo agree with this, adding that the wave of immigration in the 1920s, "played the role of an ethnic adhesive" (2003: 74) in that community. These authors also highlight the role of clan associations in the (re)construction of the migrants' cultural identity (ibid: 73). During the next decades, the conflicts between ethnic groups within the Chinese community in Cuba gradually decreased. At the same time, political conflicts between Kuomintang followers and communists became increasingly relevant, particularly during the Chinese Civil War and after the establishment of the PRC. So, inside Havana's Chinatown, the clash of 1960 seemed to be a more politically than ethnically marked conflict.

If we look at the conceptual placement of Cuban Chinese in the context of the whole Cuban population through the writings of Cuban intellectuals, there has been a tradition of identifying Chinese in Cuba as a minority group not belonging to the core of what was considered Cuban national identity. The egalitarian principles developed by José Martí at the end of the 19th century advocated an inclusive Cuba to which all Cubans belonged, no matter what color their skin. In contrast to discriminatory politics during the Spanish Empire, he emphasized that all Cubans were part of the same human race (Martí 1991). Scholars have argued that the idea of a "raceless nation" (Benton 2009: xii) could not take hold completely, in part due to the U.S. intervention in 1898 and the consecutive reinforcement of already existing segregationist and supremacist thinking. Instead, the long-standing idea of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) prevailed again (Santamaría/Naranjo 1999: 13), leading to the planned attraction of hundreds of thousands of Spanish immigrants in the first decades of the 20th century, and the "election of the white population of the island as the transporter of national identity" (Naranjo Orovio 2003: 517, footnote 17). Cuban society continued to experience strong racial tensions similar to those evident in the 19th century, and ethnic groups of non-white descent were considered a menace to the stability and integrity of the nation well into the 1920s (ibid: 525, 527), even by prominent historians like Ramiro Guerra and Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring. Roig

de Leuchsenring argued that Chinese, Haitians, and Jamaicans were undesired immigrants, and that they were in competition with white Cuban laborers and desired immigrants (e.g. Spaniards), thus facilitating the expansion of U.S. trusts and companies through cheap labor (ibid: 532–533). In his early writings, the eminent anthropologist and historian Fernando Ortiz argued along the same lines, establishing parallelisms between a person's ethnic origin and his/her social behavior. He assumed that especially people of African and – to a lesser extent – Asian descent were more inclined towards criminal activities (ibid: 526).

Though Ortiz's racial prejudices reduced over the years, he still relegated the Chinese to a place of low importance inside the Cuban *ajiaco* (a metaphor for 'melting pot' in his concept of transculturation).[18] Equating the Chinese with other people of "yellow descent" (Ortiz 2008: 14) in general, in 1939 he did not appraise the Asian influence in Cuba as very remarkable, and situated the Chinese among other groups he considered of minor importance. Interestingly, Jesús Guanche Pérez further developed and expanded this line of argumentation, now (under the impact of the Cuban revolution) advocating the concept of a large "intraethnic consolidation" (1997: 52) that took place in Cuba since the end of the large waves of migration in the 1950s. Forty years after the revolution of 1959, he saw that an "etnos cubano" (ibid.) had formed in Cuba as a result of this consolidation. He identified a majoritarian group (98 percent) of the total population including white, black, and mulatto Cubans. He seems not to have included Chinese in this kind of Cuban melting-pot, though their heritage was significant. Counting merely the number of Chinese still living in Cuba, he said they belonged to the remaining two percent of minorities, along with Spaniards, Catalans, Canarians, Galicians, Basques, Haitians, Jamaicans, and others, who he interestingly also lists as ethnic groups. As he mingles notions of ethnic and national origins, 'conceptual meddling'[19] seems to surface here. Furthermore, we can observe the above-mentioned tendency to minimize the impact of the Chinese (with around 124,000 immigrants arriving in Cuba during the 19th century alone)[20] on the formation of Cuban national identity and the opposition

18 Céspedes gives a good resume of the concept of *ajiaco*: "[…] a traditional Cuban stew of ameridian origin that is cooked over a long period by continuously adding new ingredients to the simmering mixture. Like the ingredients of mixed race and culture, additions to the dish maintain their identities to varying degrees; some dissolve fully or evaporate, while others remain more distinct. This Ortiz described as 'transculturation' […]" (Céspedes 2007: 71). For his definition of transculturation, cp. also Ortiz 2001.

19 For this concept cp. Wolfgang Gabbert's contribution in this volume.

20 Of around 141,000 coolies that embarked (cp. Hu-Dehart 2004: 17) (table).

to their inclusion in a majoritarian we-group. In more recent publications, Herrera and Castillo (2003), Benton (2009), López (2013) and others are trying to reverse this trend by adding various strands of academic knowledge to the subject. And on a local level, for about 20 years now, descendants of Chinese immigrants have invoked a renaissance of the consciousness of the Chinese heritage in Cuban society, thus contributing to a redefinition of Chinese Cuban identity from an individual perspective (Benton 2009: xiv-xix; xx).[21] In general, in the late 20th century one can observe that little effort was made to draw distinctions between different ethnic groups from China; they were usually subsumed under the common marker 'Chinese' or 'Chinese Cubans', thus ethnicizing a nationality.

Against this background, for the present case it is important to consider in which conjunctures the marker 'Chinese' became relevant, and to whom. To disentangle these issues, it is useful to look at the intentions tied to the use of this marker. When the Cuban revolution triumphed in 1959, the Cuban government did not particularly emphasize the issue of 'race', beyond stressing the efforts that were being made toward the creation of an egalitarian society. But when the issue did become relevant, Fidel Castro usually did not mention Asians (Benton 2009: xix). On the other hand, the application of egalitarian policies and their effects was a process that would endure for decades, even if the government tried to declare Cuba to be a color-blind society from the beginning. In early 1959, in the Chinese community there were groups (like the *Alianza*) whose political activity can be interpreted as ethnically marked political activism (López 2013: 226). Now, was this also the case for Pedro Eng and the militia he co-founded? In the beginning it was certainly not: Eng was integrated into a workers' militia whose membership was not defined by ethnic markers but by affiliation to his trade union and by personal commitment to the revolution.[22] But when he and Rufino Alay started to organize a militia whose members should be Chinese and descendants of Chinese, they began to use the marker 'Chinese' to gather pro-revolutionary men for the defense of the revolution. From inside the Chinese community, this meant a formation of a new pressure group to influence the political balance in Havana's Chinatown in favor of the Cuban *and* the Chinese revolutions at that moment (February 1960), trying to strengthen leftist

21 This can also occur in the opposite direction (Ang 2001: 21-25).

22 This is also visible in a photo of him with four other members of this militia posing in the workers' militia uniform (cp. the image in García/Eng 2009, photo spread between pages 140 and 141).

groups like the *Alianza*.[23] Only after Castro officially announced Cuba's turn towards the PRC on September 2, 1960, were they able to effectively question the power balance in Havana's Chinatown. According to López, the militia members "[…] merged their Chinese ethnic identifications with political support of both the Chinese and Cuban revolutions" (2013: 226). Still, we have to observe that though the Chinese militia had been playing a key role in the execution of that political change, the Revolutionary Armed Forces did not officially approve it until November 1, 1960, weeks after the shift in powers in Havana's Chinatown.[24] Furthermore, it was dissolved only months later, in the process of integration of the militias organized by sectors into regular, ethnically mixed units of the armed forces, the police, and the secret services.[25] Returning to the personal experience of Guillermo Chiu, he saw his participation in that militia as a patriotic duty, like his integration into the police after its dissolution. Although he really wanted to work as a typesetter (as he finally did at the *Kwong Wah Po*), he also simply wanted to do something to help the security and success of the revolution. For him, the militia was but one of several possibilities to do this.[26]

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, on the one hand we can interpret the formation and development of the Chinese militia in line with the overall process of popular mobilization for the defense of the revolution. However, though this process was a common phenomenon, that militia clearly stood out among others, as it seems to have been the only revolutionary militia organized on the basis of an ethnic marker (Manke 2014a: 18). The revolutionary leadership considered it opportune to tolerate the mobilization of a single ethnic group in this exceptional case, but maintained a position of 'watching and waiting' before it extended official recognition. The strategy was to let the leftist and progressive forces in the

23 At this point, Cuba was on an ideological ground that still remained relatively open to future developments. For an analysis of the changing ideological development in Cuba in 1959 and 1960, cp. Martínez Heredia (2005); Manke (2015).

24 Cp. a copy of the official document signed by Rogelio Acevedo González, chief of the *National Direction of Revolutionary Militias* in García/Eng (2009, photo spread between pages 140 and 141).

25 Interview with Pedro Eng Herrera, November 25, 2006, Havana.

26 Cp. Interview with Guillermo Chiu, August 1, 2014, Havana.

various sectors carry out ideological disputes on a local level and support them only if necessary. In that way, the government did not interfere directly in the affairs of the Chinese community, but rather created favorable conditions for the success of these forces. In addition, from a transnational perspective, the leftist Chinese Cubans who got involved in the revolution in this or other ways were unique in the context of the Cold War on a global level, as Benton emphasizes (2009: xx).

Getting back to the question of the instrumentalization or even construction of ethnicity, one can partly agree with the processual concept of ethnicization elaborated upon by Frederik Holst in this volume. Nevertheless, in the present case study at no point were we able to state that ethnicity did not play a role for the individuals. In consequence, we think that it is appropriate to speak of ethnicity as one of several markers that can have relevance at certain points in time and space. As Thomas Widlok also stresses in his contribution to this volume, the relevance of ethnicity in comparison to other forms of reference depends on other situational settings and on the varying intentions of those who use or even exploit it.

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