8

Coolies and Scandals

Skullduggery, Bankruptcy, and the Coolie Question after the Free Womb Law

If the slave trade ban of 1850 gave rise to the expectation that foreign colonos would replace the dwindling ranks of the enslaved, a new gradual abolition law in 1871 put an expiration date on the horizon that lent an unprecedented urgency to planters forecasting a dearth of labor. In this context, what could the Brazilian government do to fix and perfect the business of migration? And what remained beyond its capacity to stoke and oversee colonization efforts?

The decade that followed the 1871 Free Womb law threw these questions into sharp relief. As Pedro II did his victory lap around the United States, Europe, and northern Africa following the Triple Alliance War, princess regent Isabel set the tone for a muscular government hold over colonization. Processing the proposals streaming in since before her Regency, the princess regent captained the Conselho de Estado as their numbers peaked. From 1870 to 1875, a minimum of 19 colonization projects came before the Conselho, 8 of which from companies, while the rest came from individuals or commercial partnerships. Together, these proposals represented an expected net importation of 298,200 colonos over the following decade that amounted to a 3 percent increase in the country's population in 1872 and that would have more than doubled the population of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's main port. Stringent government contracts over these proposals indicated the consolidation of hard-won lessons learned by Brazilian authorities from prior efforts and celebrated by new promotional tracts on Brazilian colonization. Indeed, the princess regent and the Conselho closely oversaw contracts,

granting extensions when necessary and canceling agreements for noncompliance lest past colonization scandals repeated themselves.[1]

Through their efforts, the government consolidated its ability to regulate increasing migration throughout the 1870s, in no small part aided by a wartime atmosphere that produced a fad for military colonies.[2] In peacetime, many of these settlements quickly translated to "national colonies" and *colonias de libertos*. By 1878, *O Cruzeiro* counted a total of 43 colonies across the Brazilian Empire, including state-led and private ones receiving government subventions. Their combined population of 96,760 colonos absorbed over 2,000 contos in imported goods and produced over 3,000 contos in exports.[3]

Health and environmental crises further bolstered government capacity-building. The yellow fever epidemic of 1870–1871 compelled the Empire ministry to set up a special commission to board incoming migrants onto the Pedro II railway and catapult them to Juiz de Fora, where coffee grandees like the barão do Rio Bonito offered to cover additional costs.[4] Similarly, a brutal drought in the northeastern province of Ceará between 1876 and 1878 obligated the Empire ministry to transfer thousands of climate refugees from the northeast. Many of these *colonos da seca* (drought colonos) settled permanently in Rio, while others beseeched the imperial government to subsidize their return once the drought receded.[5]

[1] AN, GIFI-4B-13, vol. II includes the 40 contracts or extension provisions from Nov. 1870–July 1876 used for these calculations. The population of the Brazilian Empire was estimated at 1,332,274 in the *Recenseamento do Brazil em 1872*, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. de Leuzinger e Filhos, 1872); Jacaré Assu, *Brazilian Colonization, from an European Point of View* (London: E. Stanford, 1873).

[2] AHEx, Relação das Colônias Militares, M13,E-A,P4, cx. 1, pac. 1–2, 6. Many of these military colonies were established in the late 1850s and rarely numbered above a couple hundred people. By the 1870s, complaints of understaffing and budget shortages abounded.

[3] *O Cruzeiro*, no. 192 (12 July 1878).

[4] AN, Diversos-cód. 552, "Instruções . . . para regimen. da comissão encarregada do desembarque e transporte dos colonos ou emigrantes" (23 Jan. 1873); barão do Rio Bonito to Jerônimo José de Mesquita (20 Aug. 1875); "Nota das quantias que o barão do Rio Bonito recebeo do Ex^{mo} Sr. barão de Mesquita."

[5] Paulo César Gonçalves, *Migração e mão de obra: Retirantes cearenses na economia cafeeira do centro-sul (1877–1901)* (São Paulo: Humanitas, 2006); and "O mandacaru não floresceu: A ciência positivista a serviço do combate à seca de 1877–1879," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 25, no. 2 (2018): 515–539; María Verónica Secreto, "A seca de 1877–1879 no Império do Brasil: Dos ensinamentos do senador Pompeu aos de André Rebouças: trabalhadores e mercado," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 27, no. 1 (2020): 33–51.

These emergency feats in population transport reflected significant gains in logistical capacity-building within the state apparatus, underscored by the Brazilian Empire's first-ever census in 1872 and later by the attendance of a Brazilian representative to the ninth International Statistical Congress of 1876 in Budapest. By embracing demographic data-gathering, authorities also fine-tuned their ability to account for migratory patterns, as seen most immediately by the ever extensive data collection on the 10,252 migrant entries recorded in Rio by 1876. For every migrant incomer, authorities could now systematically ascertain family composition, number of families and function, name, age, gender, civil status, and professional background for each member, nationality, vessel and port of provenance, religion, arrival date, colony of destination, plus general observations.[6] The state's embrace of statistics compounded the lessons learned by the Brazilian statesmen from their recurrent interactions with colonization companies to prop up a booming migrant landscape.

Yet one topic in particular cast a pall over these achievements: Chinese immigration. Journalists, empresarios, planters, and literati acrimoniously battled out whether coolies could and should replace the enslaved after 1871. A raw and blatant racism pervaded these debates.[7] Even Chinese colonization enthusiasts commented on the inadequacy of Asian workers for settlement projects, drinking from a well of sources including news about Chinese migrations elsewhere, Positivist propaganda, and emergent notions of "race" as a civilizational and criminal marker. Regardless of such prejudices, however, Chinese migrants were already showing up in Brazilian port cities. The coolie trade to Cuba, then at its height, was largely responsible for bringing Chinese migrations back into public debate. For some years, ships bound for Havana with workers from the Celestial Empire delivered curious stories for Brazilian journalists. In 1866, when the Lubeck-based galleon *Emma e Mathilde* shipwrecked off the coast of Pernambuco, 55 Chinese individuals were

[6] AN, GIFI-5F-358, Francisco de Varnhagen to Empire minister Cunha Figueiredo (31 May 1876); Agricultura-IA[6]129, "Registro de Colonos" (1876). On the Congress and its impact, see Mara Loveman, *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87–99.

[7] Robert Conrad, "The Planter Class and the Debate over Chinese Immigration to Brazil, 1850–1893," *International Migration Review* 9, no. 1 (1975): 41–55; Rogério Dezem, *Matizes do "amarelo": A gênese dos discursos sobre os orientais no Brasil (1878–1908)* (São Paulo: Associação Editorial Humanitas, 2005); Ana Paulina Lee, *Mandarin Brazil: Race, Representation, and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

rescued by a nearby steamship. In mid-1867, at least three ships called at Rio on their way to Havana with a total of 1,018 Chinese colonos, while a few others stopped en route to Macao with returnees.[8]

Conditions were not inviting for Chinese subjects to settle in Brazil, where Sinophobia roamed unchecked. But, contending with and often surmounting racist blowback, a bourgeoning entrepreneurial drive to bring Chinese coolies unfolded consistently throughout the decade, followed by a separate experiment with Indian workers. Emerging as a novel conceit by the hand of Quintino Bocaiúva and others, "coolie labor" inspired yet another company drive, this time bankrolled by powerful merchants in Rio. Their enterprise obtained support from Liberal ministers and even from coffee planters who sought to employ Chinese workers under a coercive system analogous to slavery.

Vociferous racist protestations accompanied this emergent Chinese colonization campaign. But bigoted, xenophobic rants paled in comparison to the weight of business factors in determining the feasibility of coolie importation schemes and the ultimate outcome of plans to implant Chinese labor in Brazilian society. Indeed, a host of other variables, many of them business-related, drove the din of Brazilian elites' racist banter and also eventually drowned it out. Competition for government contracts among newspapers, colonization empresarios' efforts to secure a Sino-Brazilian treaty, the 1873 financial crisis, and the tenuous hold of cabinets over public respect and, indeed, offices all shaped the coolie question in more profound ways than the superficial jingoism of its detractors. Ultimately, in the face of international, domestic, and local adversities, including the rise of a new planter lobby rallying behind rural credit as its root concern, the campaign for coolie labor wore itself out as its advocates waited in vain for Brazilian diplomatic inroads in China.

RACIALIST CONSENSUS AND THE LIMITS OF DEBATE

Back in the newsroom after his adventure as a colonization agent in New York, Bocaiúva closely followed episodes involving Chinese sojourners. During his absence, the *DRJ* had already printed a piece by Maurice Irisson from *Paris-Magazine* on "The Family in China," opening the way for a reconsideration of the "Chinese question" among Brazilian readers. After his stay in New York, where he came across the Chinese

[8] *DRJ*, nos. 189, 169 (9 Aug. 1866, 5 July 1867).

domestic servants kept by Cuban friends such as the Moras and immersed himself in news about the Chinese workers completing the Transcontinental Railroad, Bocaiúva possessed an arsenal of ideas about the uses of coolies. Further inspired by a long exposé by Jules Duval on Chinese contract labor, Bocaiúva marked his return to public life in Rio with *A crise da lavoura* (1868), a sprite opuscule championing the adoption of coolie labor in Brazil.[9]

A crise da lavoura extolled coolies' productivity while repeating commonplace prejudices about their behaviors, including their alleged penchant for gambling, suicide, and focusing excessively on their salaries, not to mention their resistance to assimilation, which according to him would benefit Brazil. Yet the catalog of contexts flaunting growth in exports thanks to Chinese or Indian labor seemed endless: Guiana, Perú, Cuba, Trinidad, California, Réunion, plus Australia, Java, Borneo, Manila, and Cochinchina. The math spoke for itself. Organizing "a commercial company founded on the basis of official aid," offering a "prize" of 40$000 for every coolie brought to Brazil, and instituting seven-year contracts capped at 1:183$500 per colono would yield exports totaling 160$000 in taxation revenue, four times the value of the government's initial investment.

Meaningfully, Bocaiúva dissected colonization as a "doubly complex question" pertaining to, on the one hand, the old trope of "peopling [Brazil's] immense, uninhabited territory" and, on the other hand, "furnishing arms for an agriculture threatened with [the] profound and inevitable revolution [of abolition]." Bocaiúva thus bifurcated emigration and colonization by differentiating between wealthy incomers –"the intelligent force that creates and directs" – and colonos –"the material force that works and produces," a distinction also articulated by French political economist and Wakefield enthusiast Nicolas Villiaumé. These contrasting definitions appeased conservatives' preference for spontaneous migrations that would increasingly feed the business of passenger travel and eventually replace government-subsidized colonization drives.[10]

[9] *DRJ*, no. 78 (31 Mar. 1867); Lisandro Pérez, *Sugar, Cigars, and Revolution: The Making of Cuban New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 165–166.

[10] Quintino Bocaiúva, "A crise da lavoura" [1868] in *Idéias políticas de Quintino Bocaiúva*, vol. 1, ed. Eduardo Silva (Brasília: Senado Federal, 1986), 239–262; Nicolas Villiaumé, *Nouveau traite d'économie politique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Guillaumin, 1857), 64–78; and "La colonistion et l'émigration," *Journal des économistes* 15, no. 42 (July 1869): 122–137; Alain Clément, "French Economic Liberalism and the Colonial Issue at the Beginning of the Second Colonial Empire (1830–1870)," *History of Economic Ideas* 21, no. 1 (2013): 47–75.

A crise da lavoura instigated a strong response in the press. Bolstering Bocaiuva's tract, the *DRJ* translated an encyclopedic extract on coolies from Duval's *Histoire de l'émigration*. Later, the newspaper sought to dispel any misunderstandings with a front-page article in English titled "What the Word Coolie Means." Chinese in California, the piece claimed, were "emigrants . . . who have voluntarily left the shores of the Celestial Empire, just as Irishmen have abandoned their mud cabins . . . to seek a wider field and a higher scale of remuneration in the teeming West."[11] In contrast, the *Anglo-Brazilian Times* referred to coolies as "a species of temporary slavery" that distracted from seeking an immigration that took its destinations as "new homes, and aim[ed] at proprietorship and independence." According to William Scully, Brazilians should enable "sugar-making to be profitably carried on by farmers without slaves, without coolies, and optionally with hired labor," definitely with new machinery.[12]

Bocaiúva's tract also ignited debates in improvement circles. The IIFA received numerous copies, which attendees to its August 1868 meeting quickly snatched up. Among those present were the emperor himself, as well as scions like Nicolau Antonio Nogueira Valle da Gama, and public officials with colonization track records such as Ignácio da Cunha Galvão (see Chapters 5 and 7) and Bernardo Nascentes de Azambuja (see Chapter 6).[13] Two years later, the SAIN's colonization section, headed by Galvão, presented a report on Chinese colonos that reiterated Bocaiúva's dichotomy between "supplying workers for agriculture" and "peopling [Brazilian] lands." The report concluded that temporary reliance on Chinese workers would prepare Brazil for more permanent settlement schemes with European colonos.[14]

Dr. Nicolau Moreira, who attended both the IIFA and SAIN meetings, balked at the report's support for coolie schemes. As *AIN* editor and director of the SAIN's agriculture section, Moreira spoke after Galvão's delivery. He attacked Bocaiúva's ideas with a cannonade of sources, from Buffon to Malthus to Jules Duval. "Should a nation," asked the doctor,

[11] *DRJ*, nos. 219, 236, 243, 246, 250, 252, 256, 260, 264, 110 (11, 29 Aug., 5, 8, 13, 15, 19, 23, 27 Sept. 1869; 22 Apr. 1870).

[12] *Anglo-Brazilian Times*, no. 13 (6 July 1870).

[13] "Acta da 55ª sessão" (20 Aug. 1868), *Revista Agrícola do Imperial Instituto Fluminense de Agricultura* 7, no. 2 (June 1876): lxxxvi–lxxxix.

[14] "Parecer da secção de colonisação e estatística sobre a questão 'se convirá ao Brasil a importação de colonos chins,'" *AIN* 8 (Aug. 1870): 318–327; Nicolau Moreira, "Discurso," and Júlio Parigot, "Discurso," *AIN* 9 (Sept. 1870): 374–404.

"indifferently receive in its bosom a people whose crossing with its aborigines would result in a defective product?" Moreira relied on the incipient language of racial theory and foregrounded moral sanitarianism by surveying the ostensible deficiencies of Chinese and Indian peoples. The former, he claimed, would not offer "a proper immigration, but an artificial and systematic barbarity," as they were "a people among whom man is a beast of burden," and whose "individuals poison themselves daily with opium." ... "The race," he continued, "languished because of the insufficient nutrition of rice" and its "cult of idols." With Indians, in turn, he suggested that "assassinations, thefts, arson, attempts against modesty [became] quotidian" in countries welcoming their immigration, not to mention the stalling populations and drops in exports in places that had implanted coolie labor in the 1860s, such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion and French Guiana.

Moreira's racist jeremiad consolidated the distinction between colonization and (e/im)migration first discussed publicly during the Confederados expeditions. It also firmly situated migratory issues within the realm of "applied sciences," particularly ethnological anthropology. Most importantly, while Moreira and Bocaiúva profoundly disagreed on the adequacy of coolie labor for Brazil, they both agreed on the general outline of colonization as a policy, a scientific pursuit, and a field of historical debate. Their shared parameters on the value and necessity of colonization allowed for the two to spar amicably at the end of 1870.[15] For them, race provided a new lens for talking about colonization that did not fundamentally alter underlying colonization dynamics. If anything, in fact, these discursive transformations brought new interest to the business of migrations.

THE ASIAN WORKERS IMPORT ASSOCIATION (SITA) AND THE COOLIE HONEYPOT AFFAIR

Expectation tempered the tenor of the gentlemanly controversy unfolding over coolie labor in late 1870. Even though Moreira bordered on insult in calling Bocaiúva a "fervent apologist of Indiatic colonization," both men showed restraint while awaiting the outcome of a scandal regarding a 10-year permit to import workers from Asia. The permit had been secured by José da Costa Lima Viana and João Antônio de Miranda e Silva, who

[15] "Colonisação asiática: Polémica entre o Sr. Quintino Bocayúva e o Dr. Nicoláo Moreira," *AIN* 10 (Oct. 1870): 422–437.

then organized the Sociedade Importadora de Trabalhadores Asiáticos (Asian Workers Import Association, hereafter SITA). The contract, drawn by colonization secretary Galvão, put firm limitations in place, including the requirement that 90 percent of each shipment be field hands and that none evince "weak complexion" or opium addiction. Prior colonization statutes applied in full force, including the 1837 contract law and the 1858 Emigrant Transport Ordinance. Of particular interest, however, was that Agriculture minister Teodoro Machado Freire Pereira da Silva initially opposed authorizing the proposal but changed his mind when negotiations between the empresarios and the director of the state-owned Dom Pedro II Railroad resulted in an unofficial request for 500 Chinese laborers for rail construction.[16]

The contract elicited a swift rebuke. *A Reforma*, the main newspaper of centrist Liberals founded in 1869 by Zacarias de Góis, Nabuco de Araújo, Teófilo Ottoni, and others, raised serious concerns about the price the government had committed to pay: £60 for each Chinese worker signed on to an eight-year contract, £50 for five years. While the paper refrained from accusing the "citizens who signed the contract, being as they are in their full right to seek all possible advantages from their business," it reserved special condemnation for the director of the Dom Pedro II Railroad and for the Agriculture ministry not only due to the exorbitant costs of the scheme but because of an inexcusable and questionable lapse in the chain of command.

After weeks of concerned coverage, Conservative deputy for São Paulo Antonio Prado called fraud in the Chamber. Questioning why the contract with Lima Viana and Miranda e Silva had proceeded without legislative approval, he indicted the government-appointed director of the Pedro II railway, Mariano Procópio Ferreira Lage, for signing a contract without the approval of his superior. But Procópio deflected his responsibility by blaming the company's secretary, Augusto de Castro, for carelessness, an accusation that quickly compelled the secretary's resignation. Kicking up the dirt thrown on him, however, the day after Prado's damning speech, secretary Castro issued a veiled threat, calling attention to the "ease with which, in an opportune moment, with the documents I have at hand, I could shut down the rumors [Mr. Mariano] has been

[16] Decree no. 4549 (9 July), *CLIB* (1870), vol. 33, pt. II, 382–387; *Diário de Pernambuco*, no. 179 (8 Aug. 1871); Cândido Borges Monteiro, *Relatório da Agricultura* (1871), 20–23.

whispering against me with the sole purpose of covering his own responsibility."

Meanwhile, the Agriculture minister, a Conservative who had just traded Rio's provincial presidency for a cabinet position, instilled calm by clarifying that the initial contract was temporary, although, according to *A Reforma*, the long-term contract had been finalized with paid duties to the Treasury. A series of exchanges between Procópio and minister da Silva – probably leaked by Castro – laid bare that the former knew he needed ministerial authorization, which the latter never conclusively granted. The "coolie honeypot" (*a melgueira dos coolies*), as the press nicknamed the affair, raised "grave concerns" over a contract "hurtful to public coffers" and conducted under obscure circumstances.[17]

The episode inserted coolies and companies into the debates over the Free Womb bill of 12 May 1871, not on account of labor replacement conceits but in relation to questions pertaining to company profiteering. The questions around potential unlawful gains could be politically exploited, especially as lines of fracture deepened even within parties. The "dissidents of the conservative party," as the likes of Prado were dubbed, pounced on the coolie honeypot affair, aligning against other conservatives.[18] The new Liberals involved in *A Reforma* went even further, weaponizing the affair to discredit the cabinet responsible for the Free Womb bill. The suggestion that Agriculture minister Teodoro da Silva was a swindler grew stronger with a report that, at around this time, a mail carrier for the Foreign ministry had approached an applicant for a lucrative mining privilege and had formalized a government contract without any express authorization from da Silva. When the transaction came to light, the carrier was fired from his post, but no official inquiry followed.

With these allegations in the air, the coolie honeypot affair emboldened the opposition. Senator Zacarias requested copies of the official contract, an act that in itself constituted an indictment of the railway director and his secretary. Pressed by newspapers, particularly on the fact that "the public would profit much" with said contract, a newly appointed Agriculture minister was forced to address the issue in his yearly report. Meanwhile, SITA's Lima Viana and Miranda e Silva stood their ground.

[17] *A Reforma*, nos. 163, 165, 176 (21, 23 July, 5 Aug. 1871); *ACD* (1871), vol. 4, 4 Aug., 47–52; *JC*, no. 215 (5 Aug. 1871); *Almanak administrativo, mercantil e industrial* (Rio de Janeiro: E. & H. Laemmert, 1871), 313–314.

[18] *JC*, no. 210 (31 July 1871).

They asserted that the Agriculture minister's allegations that he had not authorized their contract with the Pedro II railway could not revert the rights they had legally acquired. When Procópio finally broke his silence, he claimed he was hurried to sign a contract without reading it. Sousa Dantas, the conservative senator from Bahia who had welcomed Confederados and was now known as barão de Cotegipe, defended him on the floor, summoning a statement in which Procópio's secretary admitted making a mistake in transcribing the contract. Still, according to Zacarias, the empresarios were liable for the serious criminal offense of swindling government to "build up their own fortune," as they had unremorsefully publicized their contract in order to gather shareholders.[19] Colonization companies and their quest for profit became the ideal moving target in a tense political moment.

In September, the Free Womb bill carried forth with 98 favorable votes in both chambers combined and a minority of 45 deputies and 7 senators voting against it. Afterwards, the coolie question receded from public view, though with a strong measure of backing from Ignácio da Cunha Galvão at the colonization secretariat. At the end of the coolie honeypot affair, Galvão publicly asserted that it was not the time to "submit to discussion whether it is convenient to introduce Asian workers" and asked "adversaries" of Chinese labor to "resign themselves ... to this point of view: CHINESE WANTED." Using information from Cuba, Galvão demonstrated that neither the empresarios nor Procópio had sought self-enrichment. The costs stipulated in the contract – £50–60 per Chinese worker, then equivalent to US$236–283 – were only slightly higher than the cost of importing coolies to Cuba, which averaged $225 per head. Moreover, contracts were sold at US$374 in Havana, landing importers a profit margin of US$149. This amount corresponded to the many capital inputs necessary for long-haul operations. With every contract under his purview, Galvão said, he paid close attention "to the sources of profits for contractors, and far from *impeding* them," he sought "to shape the clauses so that they *can* obtain them." Otherwise, contracting parties would avail themselves of trickery (*alicantinas*) to reap higher profits. Lima Viana and Miranda e Silva took advantage of this public clearance to secure an extension in 1871 of the two-year window

[19] *A Reforma*, nos. 166, 168, 170 (25, 27, 29 July 1871).

for the first Chinese workers to arrive and asked for the same in 1872 and 1874.[20]

The coolie honeypot affair interrupted ongoing controversies regarding the desirability of coolie labor to Brazil and for a time risked derailing the very possibility of Chinese colonization. Accusations that hinged on the profiteering behind coolie labor contracts showed that the profit motive was a guiding principle of this emergent trade and also one of its biggest liabilities in the public eye. Yet Galvão's support, and his recourse to information probably obtained through diplomatic channels, gave a necessary lift to the future of privately led colonization by opening up the coolie market in the wake of the Free Womb Law.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

What the SITA empresarios lost in public confidence during the honeypot scandal, they made up for in new associates. They brought in George Nathan, Confederate Charles Nathan's brother (see Chapter 7). And they started a partnership with Antonio Martins Lage and Robert Clinton Wright, a promising lineup considering their prior entanglements in migration matters. Lage had imported Azoreans and mainland Portuguese settlers for the Mucury Company in 1857 and a year later attempted to seek colonos in Germany. Wright, who was Lage's long-standing business associate, headed the prominent Rio commission house Maxwell, Wright & Co. and had bankrolled the travels of James Fletcher, one of the authors of *Brazil and the Brazilians*.[21]

Despite its all-star lineup, the SITA met resistance at every turn. With particular force, emigration bans compelled it to request periodic deferrals. Moreover, as the coolie trade reached fever pitch, nations involved in it enacted competing regulations to stall or at least control the exit of Chinese migrants. Macau, from where the SITA expected to obtain its Chinese workers, had closed down the coolie trade in the wake of reported abuses and high death rates at sea. In the worst of cases, such abuses led to mutinies that later required a thorny diplomacy. The case of the *Nouvelle Penelope* was exemplary: after wresting control of the vessel

[20] Ignácio da Cunha Galvão, *Relatório da Agência Official de Colonisação* (1871), annex D of *Relatório da Agricultura* (1872); Decree no. 4702 (18 Mar. 1871), no. 5099 (2 Oct. 1872), no. 5881 (11 Nov. 1874), no. 7898 (15 Nov. 1880), *CLIB* (1871), vol. 34, pt. II, 149; (1872), vol. 35, pt. II, 855; (1874) vol. 37, pt. 2, 1168; (1880), vol. 43, pt. II, 794.

[21] *JC*, nos. 201 (22 July 1874); Jarnagin, *Confluence*, 111–137.

in 1870, the 360 coolies headed for Perú killed all but five crewmen, who they obligated to sail back to Canton. The French consul in China then followed the ringleaders and their collaborators all the way to Macau, where the colony's Portuguese governor effectively surrendered them to Chinese authorities. The prisoners were then handed to the French consul for execution by beheading.[22]

Together with growing denunciations of atrocities, such disregard for due process and for the need for treaties to mediate jurisdictional conflicts informed bourgeoning efforts to restrain abuses in the Macau market. After trying to regulate the *trata dos chins* ("Chinese trade") in 1872, the Portuguese government launched a massive inquiry whose results came to light in 1874 and led directly to a clampdown on coolie transport networks.[23] The Chinese government launched its own inquiry on the abuses of the Cuban *trata amarilla* ("yellow trade"). Its findings, published in French and English in 1876, led to a Chinese ban on coolie emigration.[24]

Cautious but undaunted by these diminishing prospects, the SITA expended 100 contos in addition to the 10 contos it had deposited as a guarantee at the National Treasury to send representatives to San Francisco to negotiate with established shipping firms involved in the coolie trade. The same envoys later went on to China, where the French consul at Canton, baron Gilbert-Gabriel de Trenqualye, offered to line up 30,000 migrant workers pending permission from his government.

To succeed in these efforts, SITA also had to defuse the impassioned opposition aginst Asian migrants in Brazil. In 1875, João Cardoso de Menezes e Souza, future baron of Paranapiacaba, presented a report on colonization commissioned by the Agriculture ministry. With a fancy for French discourses on race and civilization – from Michel Chevalier's "Latin races" to Leroy-Beaulieu's moralizing science in *De la colonization chez les peuples modernes* – Menezes e Sousa relegated Indian and Chinese workers to the last pages of his report, referring to their presence

[22] *O Oriente*, nos. 2, 8, 9, 23 (25 Jan., 7, 14 Mar., 20 June 1872).

[23] *Regulamento da emigração chineza pelo porto de Macau approvado em portaria nº 34 de 28 de maio de 1872* (Macau: Typographia Mercantil, 1872); João de Andrade Corvo, *Relatório e documentos sobre a abolição da emigração de chinas contratados em Macau; apresentado às Cortes na sessão legislativa de 1874* (Lisboa: 1874).

[24] Ch'ên Lanpin, Angus J. Macpherson, and A. Huber, *Report of the Commission Sent by China to Ascertain the Condition of Chinese Coolies in Cuba* (Shanghai: Imperial Maritime Customs Press, 1877); Elliott Young, *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era through World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 21–58.

in British and French colonies as a "second slavery." He also warned against the high probability of "racial crossing" by pointing out that males constituted the majority of migrants from China and India.[25]

Far more cutting were the systematic and unrelenting views of Nicolau Moreira. In advance of the Philadelphia World Fair of 1876, which Pedro II would attend, the Agriculture minister commissioned Moreira to study immigration in the United States as the basis for a new emigrant guide for Brazil. The result was a detailed and extremely tendentious report, half of which was dedicated to criticizing Chinese migration as an affront to free labor and a source of prostitution, the corruption of youth, etc. Moreira's attacks served the double purpose of defending migration from Europe or the United States as the best option for Brazil.[26]

SITA associates, including Lage, Wright, and George Nathan, understood the degree to which these reports undercut their efforts and responded with a formidable compendium promoting Chinese immigration. The volume included all the laws applicable to their proposed trade, favorable news clippings, and a resounding speech on the Senate floor by Cândido Mendes. He drew from his past experience as manager of the 1850s Companhia Maranhense de Mineração, in which position he had managed some of the Chinese colonos from the government contract with Sampson & Tappan. Mendes could thus speak with ample authority on Asian labor, though he also cautiously qualified "the Chinese as worker, not as colono."[27]

However, no public figure took up SITA's cause with greater zeal than Cansansão de Sinimbú, the Alagoan who had begun his steady ascent in the imperial state when he received honorary titles with like-minded coevals like Souza Franco and Cândido Baptista de Oliveira in 1841. Paving his rise to notoriety was his report on the Nova Friburgo colony, which he penned for minister Ferraz in 1852 (see Chapter 5). Having served as provincial president of Alagoas and Sergipe, Sinimbú possessed

[25] João Cardoso de Menezes e Souza, *Theses sobre colonização do Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Nacional, 1875); Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1874 [1866]).

[26] Nicolau Moreira, *Relatório sobre a imigração nos Estados-Unidos da América* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Nacional, 1877), 91–166; and *Agricultural Instructions for Those Who May Emigrate to Brazil* (New York: "O Novo mundo" Printing office, 1876).

[27] Antonio Martins Lage, Robert Wright, Manoel José da Costa Lima Vianna, João Antonio de Miranda e Silva, and George Nathan, *Demonstração das conveniências e vantagens à Lavoura no Brasil pela introducção dos trabalhadores asiáticos (da China)* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. de P. Braga e C^{a}, 1877).

a personal interest in the sugar economy as Agriculture minister in the cabinet of 1862.[28] Auspiciously chosen to preside over the Conselho de Estado and take the Agriculture portfolio once again in 1878, Sinimbú took up Olinda's mantle as regulator and informed modernizer.

In 1878, Sinimbú convened a multitudinous Agricultural Congress celebrated in separate assemblies in Rio and Recife. In preparation, a questionnaire devised by Sinimbú surveyed the 279 attendees (plus the 121 other planters who registered but did not attend) on seven discussion points dealing with the agricultural industry's travails. Questions two to four directly addressed concerns over labor shortages, asking participants to predict whether *ingênuos* born free after the law of 1871 would remain in large estates and to identify the best means to make up for dwindling field hands.

The queries turned the July Congress in Rio into a gladiatorial arena where the coolie question came to a head. A number of attendees as well as commissions from coffee-growing districts such as Juiz de Fora and Paraíba do Sul entirely rejected Chinese workers, with one individual referring to them as "retrograde and spent machines." As a general rule, however, planters maintained a rote racism that nonetheless consented to using Asian workers as transitory labor, a stance adopted by a group of São Paulo planters. Conversely, growers from sugar districts such as Quissimã, north of Macaé in Rio province, weighed positive precedents with coolie labor in Australia against Brazilians' ignorance regarding the benefits of Asian workers. Meanwhile, northeastern planters' views on coolies at the second Congress celebrated in October in Recife did not align with those of provincial Rio's sugar growers. Interventions by Henri Auguste Milet and António Coelho Rodrigues in fact advocated for employing Brazilian labor, including adult ingênuos, by means of more stringent policing over vagrants.[29]

The week after the Rio Congress, SITA empresarios pressed their case for coolie importation in the pages of *O Cruzeiro*, a newspaper launched by Portuguese emigré Henrique Corrêa Moreira to unseat the *JC* as the Court's journal of record. In a series of six letters published from July through September, the company men followed-up on the parliamentary

[28] AN, 69.CAI.OCR.7872201, Decree (17 July 1841).

[29] José Murilo de Carvalho, ed., *Congresso Agrícola* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa, 1988 [1878]), 39, 70, 76; Sociedade Auxiliadora da Agricultura de Pernambuco, *Trabalhos do Congresso Agrícola do Recife* (Recife: Typ. de Manoel Figueiroa de Faria & Filhos, 1879), 308–321, 443–451.

debates by dismissing anthropological assumptions of Chinese inferiority and updating readers on their efforts. In one of their early interventions in the *Cruzeiro*, they responded to a letter from planters in coffee-rich Valença that criticized the monopoly conceded to the SITA. Government, argued the planters, had extended its protection to "a specific enterprise *under the mantle* of favoring agriculture and at the cost of planters." This public accusation, the letter asserted, reeked of favoritism and also of commercial fraud. In response, the SITA circle doubled down on justifying their endeavors, explaining that long-distance shipping and a lack of markets for Brazilian products in China presented considerable difficulties. In the face of these challenges, "the need for solid and constituted guarantees and advances of considerable sums" called for a suspension of "free competition, at least at first" in order to "consolidate navigation and open the horizon of a serious speculation."[30]

And there was more to their defense. SITA's empresarios further explained that attempts to secure coolie shipments from Canton through the French consul foundered due to the Chinese Empire's objections to treaty nations remitting workers to third parties holding no agreements with China. They promised, therefore, to recruit workers from the United States and Perú as well and clarified that they did not seek to reap undeserved benefits. "We ask for no subvention whatsoever nor for planters to give us advances . . . only for reasonable prices and the support of public credit to watch over the interests of contractors and workers, and seek the just and discreet remuneration of our heavy advancements and efforts." Pushing for a Sino-Brazilian treaty as essential to their success, the empresarios continuously invoked the "patriotism, intelligence and judgement of the actual cabinet" and especially the "experience and administrative wisdom of the statesman leading the agriculture portfolio."

In this case, the medium was the problem. As the venue chosen by the empresarios, *O Cruzeiro* dragged the question of Chinese colonization and its advocates into a business feud with other newspapers. Editor Corrêa Moreira, long ridiculed as a "pato tonto," or lame duck, due to his apparent disingenuousness, was relentlessly targeted by other news outlets such as the *Gazeta de Notícias*. Because of *O Cruzeiro*'s business structure as a sociedade em comandita rather than as a sole proprietorship, other media outlets criticized the newspaper as a racket, an image

[30] "O Congresso Agrícola e a empreza dos trabalhadores asiáticos," *O Cruzeiro* nos. 200, 222, 229, 243, 256, 264 (20 July, 11, 18 Aug., 1, 14, 22 Sept. 1878).

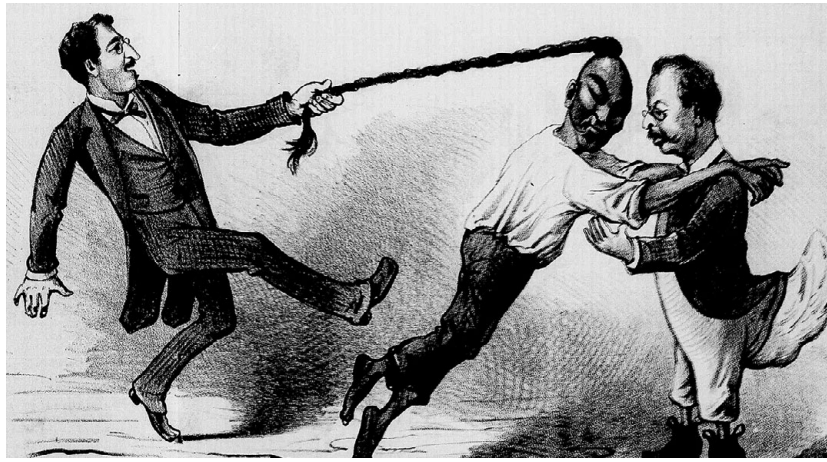

FIGURE 8.1 Coolies between business competitors
O Mequetrefe, no. 184 (24 Sept. 1879). Image Courtesy of Fundação Biblioteca Nacional.

that further deteriorated when Corrêa Moreira sought exclusive government contracts to announce official news.[31] While the *JC* kept its distance, weekly lampoons spared no opportunity to poke fun not only at Corrêa Moreira but at the myriad causes his newspaper championed, Chinese colonization prominent among them (Figure 8.1).

Indeed, while scholars have remarked on the racist underpinnings of the Chinese question, it is essential to note that tendentious stereotyping did not arise in motu proprio. Rather, it derived from, and even coded, greater political controversies, especially those mired in business disputes over government-bestowed privileges – the case both of *O Cruzeiro* and the SITA.[32] As *O Cruzeiro* continued to legitimize coolie schemes – publishing extracts from the *Révue Scientifique* or citing an Australian governor favorable to Chinese workers – sarcastic weeklies such as *O Mequetrefe* subjected the idea to withering scrutiny, mocking Chinese colonization with unabashed racist bromides and demonstrating that the coolie question had become the interphase of a business competition rather than a subject to be debated on its own merits.

While illustrated weeklies spent a good part of 1878 and the early months of 1879 skewering the Chinese as indolent workers or shifty

[31] Jaison Luís Crestani, "*O Cruzeiro* e a reinvenção de Machado de Assis," (Post-doc thesis, USP, 2015), 17–66.
[32] *A Lanterna*, no. 4 (6 June 1878).

FIGURE 8.2 The coolie question as political weapon: Sinimbú rechristened Chimnimbú
O Mequetrefe, no. 183 (17 Sept. 1879). Image Courtesy of Fundação Biblioteca Nacional.

chicken thieves, talks of a Chinese diplomatic mission gained traction. Shortly, Sinimbú approved sending a delegation to the Celestial Empire to secure a Sino-Brazilian commercial treaty. For this, lampoons rechristened him Chim-Nimbú, casting him as the figurehead of a new cohort of Brazilian Mandarins beset by "Chino-mania" (Figure 8.2). Clearly, attacks did not target the cause of Sino-Brazilian engagement as much as its paladins' activities. *O Mequetrefe*, for instance, quipped about the cabinet's *chinoiseries* in reference to obscure business transactions among empresarios and upper-crust politicians. And as talk of a diplomatic mission gathered force, so did attacks against those who supported Sino-Brazilian relations, putting in evidence the political and business motivations underscoring Sinophobic tirades.[33]

Sinimbú, however, contrived a clever counteroffensive. By the time Pedro II went to inaugurate the Philadelphia World Fair in 1876, Sinimbú had already commissioned Brazil's general consul to the United States, Salvador de Mendonça, to write a study on the Chinese question. Sinimbú strategically chose to release that study some months after the Agricultural Congress of 1878. The study was printed at the offices of the *Novo Mundo*, a singular New York–based Brazilian newspaper with an ambivalent track record on the Chinese question. While the paper had published Bret Harte's "The Heathen Chinese," a poem that pandered to commonplace biases, its editor, José Carlos Rodrigues, also reported positively on the Chinese in San Francisco and on 30 Chinese men studying at Yale College. Rodrigues's newspaper brought the Chinese

[33] *O Cruzeiro*, nos. 21, 62 (21 Jan., 3 Mar. 1878); *O Mequetrefe*, nos. 180, 183, 184 (20 Aug., 17 Sept., 24 Sept. 1879).

question to the attention of Brazilians not unlike the Chinese students at Yale, the sons of a rising technocracy in the Paulista West and Rodrigues's intended audience, as historian Roberto Saba has demonstrated.[34]

Hot off the press at the offices of the *Novo Mundo*, Mendonça's work thus found a ready public. *Trabalhadores Asiáticos*, as the study was titled, was not just a master lesson for these informed mechanizers but even more so for the ranks of coolie naysayers in Brazil.[35] Mendonça's text made a compelling case for Asian emigration. The book surveyed the history of the Chinese Empire up to the most recent commercial treaties before examining the role of Chinese entrepreneurs and workers in the bourgeoning economies of the Hawai'ian archipelago, California, British Guiana, Indonesia, and Cuba. Mendonça's erudite and encompassing study easily surpassed Moreira's and Bocaiúva's chatter and more subtly left racial questions to the very last four of its 229 pages. In *Trabalhadores Asiáticos*, Sinimbú thus counted on a persuasive and unimpeachable defense of Chinese labor that recentered public conversation in substantive arguments rather than invectives.

Indeed, *Trabalhadores Asiáticos* could have riled up support for SITA had the company not encountered greater obstacles. SITA had in fact made little headway in its attempts to recruit workers either from Canton or San Francisco due to the Chinese government's insistence on maintaining its ban until it received guarantees of safe and just treatment for its subjects. SITA also lost the support of French consul Trenqualye when he got reassigned to Brussels after twenty years in Canton.[36] Then, SITA associates beseeched the imperial government to pursue a formal treaty with China as the only way to guarantee access to that emigrant pool. Sinimbú complied, but the decision signaled a long wait.

SITA empresarios formally voided their government contract as they awaited the outcome of the newly appointed diplomatic expedition to China. All their paths had closed. To be sure, the SITA associates had organized a relentless campaign that successfully steered the government to its favor. Prime minister Sinimbú had in turn put in his effort to steer planter classes in Rio and in the northeast toward a more positive

[34] *O Novo Mundo*, nos. 2, 14 (23 Nov. 1870, 24 Nov. 1871); Roberto Saba, *American Mirror: The United States and Brazil in the Age of Emancipation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 171–218; George Boehrer, "José Carlos Rodrigues and *O Novo Mundo*, 1870–1879," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9, no. 1 (1967): 127–144.

[35] Salvador de Mendonça, *Trabalhadores Asiáticos* (New York: Typographia do Novo Mundo, 1879); *O Novo Mundo*, nos. 2, 14 (23 Nov. 1870, 24 Nov. 1871).

[36] *Journal officiel de la République française* (8 Nov. 1877).

appraisal of coolie labor and weathered sardonic press attacks before finally moving toward a political overture to China. And yet, even after all these exertions, the pace of international diplomacy bore down on pro-coolie efforts, demonstrating the weight of global forces on domestic dynamics in Brazil. A similar experiment with Indian coolies would yet yield analogous lessons.

THE OTHER COOLIES: INDIAN LABORERS AND MAUÁ'S COLLAPSE

Concurrent with SITA's efforts, Brazil's topmost tycoon skirted the Chinese question altogether in a bid to explore the possibilities of "Hill coolies," as British authorities referred to migrant workers from India transported to colonies like British Guiana or Trinidad after the end of apprenticeship in 1838.[37] As with the Chinese question, Brazilians cast aspersions on Indian laborers, but the latter's alleged contentment with their place within the caste system magnified their allure for the sugar cane industry in Brazil. The "Hindou coolie," reported *O Cruzeiro*, was ideal for Brazilian planters ostensibly because he "did not long for other horizons. Limiting his ambition to carrying out his work, he focuses on earning more money, which makes him more productive."[38]

French industrial manufacturers informed such opinions by promoting coolie labor as part of their push to modernize sugar production. In 1874, for example, Louis A. Dolabaratz, an agent for Société Jean-François Cail & Compagnie, arrived in Rio to sell sugar refining machinery in the name of such a modernizing agenda.[39] By then, Cail & Co. was the second largest rail developer in France and a leading machinery provider for the

[37] The literature on the subject is considerably vast. See David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[38] *O Cruzeiro*, no. 222 (11 Aug. 1878).

[39] *JC*, no. 94 (5 Apr. 1875); Daniel Kinnear Clark, *The Exhibited Machinery of 1862: A Cyclopædia of the Machinery Represented at the International Exhibition* (London: Day & Son, 1864), 262, 266, 316; Philippe Mioche, "Histoire du chemin de fer sucrier de Beauport, 1863–1990," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 165 (May–Aug. 2013): 3–73; *O Globo*, no. 119 (1 Dec. 1874); *Jornal do Recife*, nos. 296, 22 (29 Dec. 1874, 28 Jan. 1875).

global sugar industry. Cail-built innovations such as the triple-effect vacuum-pan apparatus and the centrifugal machine powered a sugar surge in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Cuba, southern Spain, and Egypt, where central mills had taken hold as Cail's preferred form for spatially organizing the industry.

Naturally, Dolabaratz's sojourn in Brazil enticed planters and government alike. As Dolabaratz sold hard on his allegedly cost-saving wares, he proposed that the imperial government build central mills in sugar-growing provinces and retool them as agrarian normal schools.[40] Off record, he also insinuated the need for coolies by providing officials with documentation on Indian workers in Mauritius and Réunion. There they had proved pivotal to growth, although the Mascarene islands' sugar boom began to recede once drought, a searing malaria epidemic, and a potent cyclone brought planters to their knees from 1866–1868. After Dolabratz's departure, Sinumbú shared some of those documents with conservative Paulino José Soares de Sousa and convinced him that Indian emigration was the most convenient substitute for slave labor.[41]

The barão de Mauá, as one of the wealthiest men in the Brazilian Empire and a sugar producer himself, was particularly attuned to these new ideas. Atalaia, his estate in the Macaé district north of Rio, had earned plaudits at the National Exposition of 1875 thanks to the sugar refining process perfected by André Paturau, a mechanical engineer hired by Mauá straight from Mauritius. Although Atalaia fell short of the snow-like product of Five-Lille mills established by Khedive Ismail in the Lower Nile, some in Brazil believed that Mauá produced sugar of greater quality than other Brazilian planters in "the integrity and transparency of its crystals."[42] After his dashing demonstration of

[40] *JC*, no. 94 (5 Apr. 1875); *Jornal do Recife*, no. 82 (12 Apr. 1875).

[41] BN, Manuscritos-63.04.002 no.108, Sinimbú to Soares de Sousa (4 Apr. 1876); Richard B. Allen, "The Slender, Sweet Thread: Capital and Dependency in Mauritius, 1860–1936," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16 (1981): 177–200.

[42] Benjamin Franklin Ramiz Galvão, *Catálogo da Exposição Nacional em 1875* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia e Lithographia Carioca, 1875), 374; José de Saldanha da Gama, *Estudos sobre a quarta Exposição Nacional de 1875* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. Central de Brown & Evaristo, 1876), 151; Augusto Emilio Zaluar, *Exposição Nacional brasileira de 1875* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia do Globo, 1876), 245; *O Globo*, no. 138 (21 May 1875); *DRJ*, no. 347 (18 Dec. 1875); Roberta Barros Meira, "A quimera da modernização: do terceiro distrito de engenhos centrais ao complexo agroindustrial sucroalcooleiro paulista, mineiro e fluminense, 1875–1928" (PhD diss., USP, 2012).

technological innovation, Mauá devised his own coolie importation scheme in an intentional effort to capitalize on the surging interest in the sugar industry. Of course, Mauá could not afford not to, given the dire state of his finances. In 1869, the Uruguayan branch of his lead firm, Mauá Bank & Company, ran afoul of the government in Montevideo. In 1876, when colonel Lorenzo de la Torre took over the Uruguayan government, he canceled Mauá Bank's special concessions, forcing the bank to suspend up to £10 million in payments, mostly to Brazilian creditors.[43]

Going into receivership, Mauá scrambled for opportunities to diversify and recapitalize his portfolio and in the process reinvented himself as an "agricultural entrepreneur."[44] Luckily, the crisis coincided with Pedro II's departure to the Philadelphia World Fair. In his absence, Mauá approached a perhaps more receptive princess regent Isabel, who had given birth to her first surviving child five months beforehand.[45] Mauá's proposal of an ambitious coolie importation scheme was premised on the need to ensure the "reproductive elements of invested capital" and called attention to France's treaty with Great Britain to import workers from the latter's Asian territories. Soon enough, French possessions attained production levels unmatched by the British Antilles themselves. According to Mauá, failure to follow a similar path meant that Brazilian "investment of liquid capital in [mechanical] improvements will disappear." Indian coolies, he believed, would also bolster European colonization by providing settlers with a cheap workforce.

Mauá requested a 25-year company privilege to import coolies from Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay under an Anglo-Brazilian treaty arranged by Brazilian diplomats. The company would distribute coolies on request from three model plantations spread across the Empire. Government

[43] Lídia Besouchet, *Mauá e seu tempo* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1978), 157–160; Roderick Barman, "Business and Government in Imperial Brazil: The Experience of Viscount Mauá," *JLAS 13*, no. 2 (1981): 239–164.

[44] Jorge Caldeira, *Mauá: empresário do Império* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), 515–536; J. J. Aubertin and S. Paulo Railway Company (Limited), *Pretenções do visconde de Mauá: carta circular do presidente da companhia dirigida aos accionistas* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Acadêmica, 1875).

[45] Roderick Barman, *Princess Isabel of Brazil: Gender and Power in the Nineteenth Century* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 121–158; Jeffrey Needell, *The Sacred Cause: The Abolitionist Movement, Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, and Imperial Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 53–56.

would cover the voyage for the first 2,000 coolies, after which the company would cover 5,000 more in its first year. The company could begin operations within eight months, with fiscal revenues closely behind considering the high interest rates on travel cost subsidies recommended by Mauá.[46] Mauá then found a partner in [Charles Antoine] Auguste de Chazal, a prominent fourth-generation Mauritian planter.[47] And on 3 April 1877, the 453-ton French barque *Jean Pierre* arrived in Rio from Port Louis via the Cape of Good Hope carrying 197 "Indian immigrants" below deck and reporting no casualties. Some days later, at least 186 coolies took another steamer to the port of Imbetiba in Macaé, where they settled in at Atalaia.[48]

But Mauá's scheme devolved quickly. Within a month, 14 aggrieved coolies made their way from Macaé to Rio by foot to protest their treatment with the British consul.[49] After four days at the Court, a steamer took them back to Atalaia, but the incident marked only the beginning of Mauá's difficulties. Mauá and his managers were blindsided by the Indian workers' labor expectations and customary practices in Mauritius, as well as by the impact of gender imbalance on a majority-male cohort. Then, in early June 1877, one of the Indian workers was assassinated. Three others were arrested and transported to Rio as suspects, until a fourth later confessed to the public prosecutor at Macaé.[50]

Mauá, however, was more concerned with his finances than with the scandal. The same day, as news of the homicide emerged, a lawyer for one of his debtors accused him of intentionally avoiding paying damages to his English client during the construction of the Santos-Jundiaí railroad. Mauá's *Exposição aos credores* (1878), an autobiographical and exculpatory letter to exasperated creditors, narrated his banking enterprises' progression from 1854 until a debt moratorium in 1875, whose expiration in 1878 brought his operations to a crash. Facing personal liability

[46] IHGB-(vm), Lata 514, Pasta 6, Mauá to princess Isabel ("Projeto do Barão de Mauá de Imigração de coolies" (12 Oct. 1876); NAk, F.O.13/560 "Emigration of Coolies from Mauritius to Brazil (Mana Estate)" (1877–1879).

[47] "Rev. Mr. Nussbaum's Trip to the Indian Ocean," *New-Church Messenger* 109 (July–Dec. 1915): 27.

[48] *DRJ*, no. 88 (4 Apr. 1877); *JC*, no. 97 (8 Apr. 1877).

[49] *O Globo*, nos. 108, 112, 113, 122 (2, 6, 7–8, 18 May 1877).

[50] *DRJ*, nos. 154, 173, 183 (9, 29 June, 9 July 1877); *O Globo*, nos. 183, 229 (27 July, 19 Sept. 1877).

for his crumbling financial emporium, Mauá surveyed his accomplishments and admitted enacting the coolie scheme exclusively to salvage his finances, as agrarian pursuits had never interested him.

According to Mauá, the "coolie experience" was somewhat successful. He judged half of the Indians as "good workers" and the other half as hoodlums hired in the immediacy of Port Louis against his express instructions. Mauá wished well to future coolie schemes, hoping that "100,000 coolies came every year for a whole decade," even if Brazilians had to pay for their return trip, although he also admitted that "it never crossed [his] mind to colonize Brazil with that race." As part of the liquidation of Mauá's assets, Atalaia passed to government hands.[51]

The Mauá episode ensured that Chinese rather than Indian coolie labor remained the core topic of debate around colonization alternatives in the aftermath of the Free Womb Law. Atalaia and its coolies flagged the unexpected liabilities that came from hiring Indian workers from the less regulated entrepot of Mauritius rather than from India, and it had thus laid bare the complications and interdictions that would follow if that supply channel to Brazil became routinized. Significantly, the episode also exposed the limitations that one man alone confronted in mobilizing a colonization scheme even if he possessed great wealth and opportune international connections. Collective enterprises such as SITA, with the experiential know-how provided by its advocates' previous links to the SII, remained more powerful vehicles for colonization projects. Even if they faced their own adversities, they reaffirmed the greater might of companies as vehicles for colonization.

LOBBIES AND CREDIT IN THE UNRAVELING OF THE CHINESE QUESTION

In 1878, Sinimbú reinvigorated debates and business plans around Chinese coolie labor as the new prime minister and president of the Conselho de Estado, countering old coffee planters who rejected the idea amid tightening financial constraints. Sinimbú had become the

[51] Irineu Evangelista de Sousa, *Exposição do Visconde de Mauá aos credores de Mauá & C e ao público* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. Imp. E Const. De J. Villeneuve, 1878); Joseph Mulhern, "Mauá's Indians: An Experiment in Indian '*Coolie*' Labour in Brazil, 1876–1878" (MA thesis, King's College, 2013).

uncontested architect of sugar's revival, not of coffee, championing investment-heavy improvements that cemented a "web of mutually advantageous complicity" between foreign capital and the Brazilian government. Through his policies, these two spheres worked as symbiotes: imperial government guarantees unmatched at the provincial level benefited foreign factors as their technologies and investments allowed central-government officials to distribute infrastructural projects as favors to local clienteles. The Agricultural Congress further strengthened Sinimbú's program by streamlining ideas about agricultural credit and coolie labor. In 1878, therefore, Sinimbú could drown opposition voices including among centrist liberals weakened by the recent death of senator Zacarias, a vehement detractor of Chinese and Indian immigration.[52] The new liberal ascendancy also diminished the clout of conservative sugar interests in the northeast.

To be sure, the coolie question waned after SITA's demise, but the afterglow of its and Sinimbú's efforts lit the path for similar daring proposals of coolie importation. Bernardo Caymari, for instance, came up with a Brazilian Mutual Aid Company of Coolie Emigration. His proposed company would negotiate with Chinese mutual aid societies in San Francisco or China to repatriate or directly import Chinese coolies with pre-approved contracts. The scheme cleverly adapted to the ongoing liquidity crisis by offering planters the possibility of covering the workers' cost of travel with credit letters committed to repaying in six-month terms, that is, "when the salaried work had rendered its fruit."[53] Although Caymari's plan was less ambitious than SITA's, its very existence signaled SITA's exemplary role and added pressure for Brazil to negotiate a treaty.

SITA's decade-long campaign for a Sino-Brazilian treaty finally succeeded in 1879, when the Foreign ministry secured an extraordinary credit to finance the Brazilian Empire's first diplomatic mission to the Celestial Empire. Chosen for the voyage were Eduardo Callado, then minister in Paraguay, and Artur Silveira da Mota, the son of senator

[52] Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *O Norte agrário e o império, 1871–1889* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 1999), 161–190; *The Anglo-Brazilian Times*, no. 1 (8 Jan. 1878).

[53] Bernardo Caymari and William de Lara Tupper, *Prospecto apresentado aos lavradores do Brazil para organisação de uma Companhia Mútua Brazileira de Emigração-Coolie* (Rio de Janeiro: Leuzinger & Filhos, 1878), cited in *Anais da BN* (1881–1882), vol. 9, pt. 2, 1258; *JC*, no. 252 (9 Sept. 1878).

and coolie labor enthusiast José Ignácio Silveira da Mota. A young intern from the Madrid legation, Henrique Carlos Ribeiro Lisboa, joined as secretary, entering government service in the footsteps of his grandfather, Junta do Comércio officer and mathematician José Maria Lisboa, and his father, Edinburgh-educated US envoy Miguel Maria Lisboa.[54] Timing favored the mission. As the British customs commissioner at Shantou reported, the Brazilians would probably seek emigrants from that port, about 175 miles east of the Pearl River delta. In 1879, 17,216 emigrants left from Shantou, marking a slight decline in exits, but the following year a rice harvest failure spurred 49,500 new departures and hastened Brazilian efforts to reverse the Chinese ban on company agents.[55] A Sino-Brazilian treaty was finally promulgated in 1881, although the Brazilian envoys excluded any stipulations on migrations to avoid jeopardizing their initial rapport.

The treaty slightly shifted public opinion toward a more positive appreciation of Chinese questions over the following years. French scientist Louis Couty, for instance, offered a relatively supportive lecture on Chinese immigration and salaries in Rio's Polytechnical School.[56] Brazilians who visited China or learned about it in the United States confronted prejudices more boldly – even if reproducing biases of their own. José Custódio Alves de Lima, for example, was a technocratic modernizer who edited the *Aurora Brazileira* in Syracuse University and was commissioned by São Paulo planters to recruit 3,000 Chinese workers in the United States in 1881. In a book on the United States he published in 1886, he repudiated complaints that the "Chinese element" could "completely nullify the national element, as if our Latin race, and the Teutonic race, did not have enough autonomy to resist such imaginary nullification." The Sino-Brazilian mission secretary even more adamantly defended China by pointing to its internal diversity while blaming coolie-trade mishaps on the Tankia, who he described as the most destitute of Chinese peoples and the bulk of Macao's emigrants.[57]

[54] *Relatório dos Assuntos Estrangeiros* (1879), 14, 19.

[55] *Reports on Trade at the Treaty Ports, for the Year 1879* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General, 1879), 219–220; "Swatow," in *Reports on Trade at the Treaty Ports, for the Year 1879*, pt II (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General, 1881), 10.

[56] *Gazeta de Notícias*, no. 177 (28 June 1882).

[57] José Custódio Alves de Lima, *Estados-Unidos e Norte-Americanos, acompanhado de algumas considerações sobre a imigração chineza no Império do Brazil* (São Paulo: Typographia de Jorge Seckler, 1886), 158, 185–194; Saba, *American Mirror*, 204–206;

Then, in 1881, as planters worried about a gathering liquidity crisis and strained government budgets, they organized a propagandistic lobby, the Centro da Lavoura e Commércio, to develop new consumer markets. Centro members fiercely debated the Chinese question. China envoys Henrique Lisboa and the younger Silveira da Mota took to the floor to vouch for the honesty and utility of Chinese workers, but their speeches were rudely interrupted. Portuguese expatriate Ramalho Ortigão, the Centro's vice-president, was forced to defend them. He declared that the Centro would protect the Chinese the same as any free immigrant. Despite the strained atmosphere of most meetings, members passed a resolution supporting Chinese immigration and petitioning the Brazilian government to name a consul and provide subsidies for a Chinese navigation company.[58]

The Centro's polemics fired up abolitionists and Positivists as the most impassioned opponents against what liberal Joaquim Nabuco described as the looming threat of "Mongolization." Among the former, the Black abolitionist intellectual José do Patrocínio became the leading avenger against a "yellow slavery," speaking of the Chinese as "an eminent threat to the present European and Brazilian worker" and later turning to the *Gazeta da Tarde* with tireless tirades in line with the paper's continuous criticism of "a Chinese mania" started by Sinimbú. Under the pseudonym of Proudhomme, Patrocínio satirized the request for subsidies for a Chinese steamship line while peppering his weekly political review with reference to the figure of the yellow slave. Sinophiles, he claimed, broke ranks with Brazilian "civilization, with our nature, which opened a horizon to the descendants of slaves, and asks for the Chinese *worker*, that is, the Chinese machine with no aspirations but the modest salary determined by the plantation or the barracks."[59]

Miguel Lemos, the president of the Positivist Society of Rio de Janeiro, led his brethren against what he similarly perceived as the dangers of Chinese immigration. Lemos publicly opposed Salvador de Mendonça's

Henrique Antonio Ré, "Os esforços dos abolicionistas britânicos contra a imigração de chineses para o Brasil no final do século XIX," *Vária História* 34, no. 66 (2018): 837–838; Henrique Ribeiro Lisboa, *A China e os chins (recordações de viagem)* (Montevideo: Typ. de A. Godel, 1888), 275–285.

[58] *Gazeta da Tarde*, nos. 86, 88 (18, 20 Apr. 1882); *Diário do Brazil*, no. 90 (22 Apr. 1882).

[59] *Gazeta da Tarde*, nos. 74, 91 (3, 24 Apr. 1882); Robert Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850–1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 151–156.

conferences on Chinese immigration and was a spirited participant in the Centro's soirées. Later, he sought to sink coolie schemes once and for all by warning the Chinese ambassador in England and France, the marquis Tsêng, of Brazilian planters' quest to install a new "disguised slavery." Lemos called off any "solidarity with degenerate men who ... confound their own greed with national dignity and interests," unequivocally denouncing planters as speculators, and their plans as a racket.[60] Whereas coolie supporters focused on Chinese workers' utility, abolitionists and Positivists alike harped on the money-oriented nature of both coolies and their advocates – and targeted colonization as nothing more than a profiteering business pursuit.

In the end, however, it was financial dynamics, not political ones, that demoted Chinese immigration from the list of the Centro's priorities. In the early 1880s, the Centro began its transformation from a simple agrarian lobby to what its promotional material published in Europe described as a "commercial-agricultural corporation" dedicated to perfecting production and promoting Brazilian coffee in "countries where its consumption is limited or close to null." The three conferences celebrated at the end of 1882 accompanied the Centro's first domestic Coffee Expo, which set the tone for a second such event a year later and for international exhibits as far as St. Petersburg. A short time later, the World Cotton Centennial in New Orleans also welcomed a Centro commission headed by none other than the consul general in the United States, Salvador de Mendonça. A leading authority of Chinese immigration now bowed to the internationalization of Brazilian coffee.[61]

The Centro's conferences prepared the ground for the ambitious rebranding of Brazil's main export by focusing on financial and

[60] Miguel Lemos, *Immigração chineza. Mensagem a S. Ex. o Embaixador do Celeste Império junto aos governos de França e Inglaterra* (Rio de Janeiro: Centro Positivista Brazileiro, 1881); *Gazeta de Notícias*, no. 342 (10 Dec. 1881); *JC*, no. 79 (20 Mar. 1882); Miguel Lemos, *L'apostolat positiviste au Brésil* (Rio de Janeiro: Société Positiviste, 1884), 33–36.

[61] Centro da Lavoura e Commércio, *Breve notícia sobre a primeira exposição de café do Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. de Moreira, Maximino e C., 1882); *Segunda Exposição do Café do Brazil: Relatório* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. de Moreira, Maximino e C., 1883); *La Société Centro da Lavoura e Commercio à Rio de Janeiro* (Amsterdam: Typ. de Brakke Grond, 1883); *Le Brésil à l'Exposition Internationale de St. Pétersbourg* (St. Petersburg: Imprimerie Trenké et Fusnot, 1884); *The Empire of Brazil at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition of New Orleans* (New. York: E. P. Coby & Co., 1885); Álvaro Lins, *Rio-Branco (O Barão do Rio-Branco): biografia pessoal e história política* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1965), 107–108.

administrative reforms rather than immigration per se. At the first of four conferences, José Pereira de Faro made a resounding case for immediate capitalization needs. As part of the Darrigue Faro clan, the third barão do Rio Bonito had inherited not just his nobiliary status but also a long acquaintance with migration promotion efforts: his grandfather's firm, Faro, Vergueiro & Co. was shareholder in the SPC of 1836, while his father, João Pereira Darrigue Faro, oversaw colonization affairs as provincial vice-president of Rio de Janeiro in the early 1850s. Having spoken to Nicolás de Avellaneda, Argentinian president and author of the famous colonization and immigration law of 1876, Rio Bonito credited Argentinian success in drawing foreigners to the "hefty sums" expended in propaganda and a "revolutionary militarism" that "opened way . . . to the plow."[62]

Yet the lack of an adequate work contract law marred Brazilian progress. After shouldering heavy expenses to bring colonos, planters lacked the means to coerce them to contractual compliance. Working in the immigration service, Rio Bonito knew firsthand that colonos fled to the "vastness of this empire," shortly after signing contracts. Thus, besides a passing allusion to Asian workers as a "transitional means," this was as much as this conference would offer on the topic of migration promotion. Beholden as it was to old slaveholding and merchant classes, the Centro's intelligentsia, led by Rio Bonito, simply abandoned the Chinese question. In no uncertain terms, the conference demonstrated how clearly domestic debates on foreign labor could decelerate when new means of wealth creation emerged, which confirmed colonization as a business pursuit in and of itself and not always indelibly tied to labor replacement concerns.

To be sure, Chinese labor migration was not entirely off the table. In 1882, private company-led Chinese colonization was still possible despite the gradual loss of support among the planter class. Prominent merchants could still put on offer the "comfortable and secure acquisition of [Chinese] workers at modest salaries" at their bureaus in Rio or São

[62] On Rio Bonito's predecessors, APERJ, PP, Secretaria, 19, mç. 2, Faro to Rio Police Chief (4 June 1853); mç. 4, Faro to Municipal Chamber of Macacú (10 June 1850). Regarding Argentina, Rio Bonito was referring to the genocidal campaign begun by Julio Argentino Roca in 1878 to eradicate Tehuelches, Mapuches, Rankulches, and other indigenous peoples in the pampas and Patagonia. See Carolyne Larson, ed., *The Conquest of the Desert: Argentina's Indigenous Peoples and the Battle for History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020).

Paulo.[63] As Eduardo Callado conducted negotiations for a coolie trade in Rio with visitors G. C. Butler, a US merchant recommended by the marquis Tsêng, and Tong King-Sing, the director of the state-owned China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company, a new company popped up in Rio. The Companhia de Comércio e Imigração Chineza (Chinese Commerce and Immigration Company) quickly acquired 100 Chinese workers for the St. John d'el Rei Mining Company in Minas Gerais, a decades-old British enterprise still bristling from the freedom suits of hundreds of enslaved workers. Notably, in view of the dismal conditions at St. John d'el Rei's Morro Velho and Cata Branca mines, the Chinese refused to work and fled, but their defection did not hinder negotiations for a broader coolie trade.[64]

In part, the pressure exerted by Miguel Lemos and later the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society on the Chinese ambassador in London achieved its intended effect – Tong King-Sing and Butler left Brazil less than a month after their arrival.[65] In part, the hasty departure was the fallout of the marquis Tsêng's tense encounters with the Brazilian minister in London on account of the latter's alleged plans to send gunboats to China to secure coolies, as reported in the press.[66] But taking a wide view, the latest Chinese immigration scheme fell through due to a mismatch between China's expectations of good treatment for its subjects and the actual slavery-like conditions that awaited those colonos in Brazil, a problem that could not be easily resolved due to Brazil's funding shortfalls.

In 1884, C. van Delden Laërne, a Dutch envoy who had served six years in Java, arrived in Rio to study coffee cultivation. Poring over statistics and news, he judged that the British government had directly foiled the Chinese colonization project. Yet, Laërne underlined the lack of

[63] *O Globo*, no. 123 (31 Jan. 1882).

[64] Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 22–36; *Anti-Slavery Reporter* 4, no. 2 (Aug. 1882): 207–210.

[65] "Scheme for Introducing Chinese Labor into Brazil," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 4, no. 3 (Mar. 1884): 63; Chi-King Lai, "China's First Modern Corporation and the State: Officials, Merchants, and Resource Allocation in the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company, 1872–1902" (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 1992); Ré, "Os esforços."

[66] "Extracts from the Diary of the Marquis Tsêng," *The Nineteenth Century* 82 (Dec. 1883): 999–1000.

an expected subsidy for the China Merchant's line as a factor that also frustrated the possibility of a Chinese migration treaty. Lobby groups in Rio had certainly pressured against any subsidy, but in truth the Brazilian government could ill-afford such an extraordinary expense. As the Finance minister reported, a "regimen of deficits" had "imprisoned" the Empire by widening budgetary gaps between allocations and actual expenses. The regular budget for 1882–1883 featured a deficit of 899:801$000, which, with extraordinary expenditures, more than doubled to 21.314:596$000, of which 79 percent went to the Agriculture ministry alone.[67] From this perspective, budget shortfalls doomed the Brazilian Empire's most eventful overture yet toward the Celestial Empire, putting in evidence that financial expectations and the dearth of credit at different scales posed a more serious obstacle to Chinese immigration than the xenophobic tirades of some Positivists, abolitionists, and planters.

* * *

Above the din of racist rants, Brazilians rooting for coolie labor found their foil in the lack of diplomatic agreements with China and in credit constraints, not only among planters but more importantly in government budgets already stretched thin. Whereas the imperial government needed colonization companies like SITA as pathbreakers, these in turn necessitated government support. The absence of this delicate symbiosis inevitably thwarted empresarios' expectations and government hopes alike.

Yet the Brazilian government's stark inability to, for example, subsidize migrant transports or offer per capita recruitment prizes at this time was not the only indication of the implausibility of coolie schemes. The timing did not help either. In the early 1880s, governments embedded in coolie-trading networks doubled down on their vigilance over long-simmering problems in the trafficking or settlement of Chinese or Indian persons overseas. In the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 inaugurated an era of restrictions that, in principle, could have seen the Celestial Empire resort to Brazil as a preferred destination for its

[67] C. F. van Delden Laërne, *Brazil and Java Report on Coffee Culture in America, Asia and Africa* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1885), 148–151; 1 Aug. session, *ACD* (1885), vol. 3, 280; *Relatório da Fazenda* (1884), 11–25.

subjects but in fact led to greater guardedness among Chinese and US authorities reeling from the anti-Chinese violence that followed.[68]

Similarly, in the case of Mauá's Indian coolies, long-standing internal dilemmas in the British government about how to handle re-emigration of coolies from Mauritius boiled over. An ongoing jurisdictional dispute pitted the India and Foreign Offices, which mutually attributed to the other any responsibility for the repatriation costs of the Indian coolies of Atalaia. Starting in 1880, the India Office was charged for the return of 153 of Mauá's coolies to Mauritius but objected that, if allowed, its involvement could serve as precedent for covering the expenses of all destitute coolies. After a couple of years of wrangling, the India Office ended up defraying the costs of repatriation, but only as an exception.[69]

Indeed, this question of repatriation, which had already become a mainstay of work contracts in both the Indian and Chinese trades, epitomized the economic barriers to a workable coolie system for Brazil. Mauá's inability to defray the relocation of Atalaia's Indian laborers to Mauritius or India became a negative externality to a number of British government offices suddenly enmeshed in a sour dispute. Compounded by charges of maltreatment in Brazil, the certainty that Brazilians would not carry the costs of repatriation vaporized the possibility of future coolie transports under British sanction.

By 1883, after fifteen years of acrimonious debate, the conceit that Asian workers could replace the "servile element" had failed to gather more support. The cause had racked up a rather bizarre track record: starting out as a pet issue of unrepentant young radicals like Quintino Bocaiúva, it got picked up by the dashing merchants of the SITA and was defended by Sinimbú's Liberal center before slaveholding elites from the Paraíba Valley ostensibly adopted it as a stratagem to perpetuate slavery by another name. In the face of mounting agitation, the planter-friendly Centro da Lavoura shed its initial interest in Chinese immigrants in favor of new credit lines.

[68] Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[69] NAk, F.O.13/585, "Emigration of Coolies from Mauritius to Brazil (Mana Estate)" (1880–1882); BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/19, File 1093, "Emigration between Mauritius and Brazil: Further request for reconsideration of decision not to charge Indian reserves with expenses on account of return to Mauritius of a portion of deserters amongst Indians brought to Brazil in 1877" (1880). For a recent study confrming this outcome, see Reshaad Durgahee, *The Indentured Archipelago: Experiences of Indian Labour in Mauritius and Fiji, 1871–1916* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 215–221.

Then, when the Brazilian government refused to subsidize a regular packet between Chinese ports and Rio, the Chinese question simply lost steam. And finally, as an emboldened abolitionist movement reemerged in the mid-1880s, a new colonization association, the Sociedade Central de Imigração, arose that aggressively flaunted its contempt for Chinese workers and celebrated the Chinese Exclusion Act. As this new association lambasted the likes of the SITA merchants as lowly pursuers of "fabulous lucre," it concocted its own moneymaking colonization pursuits and sank the Chinese question further into irrelevance.[70]

[70] *Gazeta de Notícias*, no. 287 (14 Oct. 1883); *Sociedade Central de Immigração*, no. 1 (1 Dec. 1883).