

# Rebel Coolies, Citizen Warriors, and Sworn Brothers: The Chinese Loyalty Oath and Alliance with Chile in the War of the Pacific

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*Abstract* This essay interprets Chilean accounts of a loyalty oath by Chinese coolies to the Chilean army during the War of the Pacific against a broader social history of Chinese agrarian resistance in Peru and military experience in China. The essay argues that masculinity and labor were central to articulating divergent political agendas and defining national differences as racial differences. Chilean tales about emancipating Chinese slaves affirmed Chile's superiority over despotic Peruvians. Moreover, in stories about a Chinese oath, Chileans affirmed their civilizing mission by recognizing Chinese men as similar to themselves: brave warriors prepared to die for freedom and nation. For Chinese men, the oath was not about loyalty to Chile but loyalty to each other in an ongoing fight against bondage on Peruvian plantations. The ceremony enacted a Chinese fraternity of mutual protection and hierarchy that helped leverage Chile's invasion to replace coolie arrangements with Chinese-controlled subcontracting and free peonage.

On January 11, 1881, hundreds of Chinese men swore a solemn oath to join with the Chilean army as it invaded and occupied Peru during the War of the Pacific (1879–84). Chile had already seized large swaths of western Bolivia and southern Peru in a conflict begun over the nitrate-rich Atacama Desert. By January 1881, Chile had amassed 25,000 troops in the Lurín Valley, just 15 miles south of Lima, and was preparing for a final attack on Peru's capital.<sup>1</sup> According to numerous Chilean accounts, Chinese men pledged fidelity in gratitude for Chile having freed them from slavery. Since 1849, over 100,000 Chinese men had been trafficked from southern China through the coolie trade to work as indentured contract laborers on Peruvian plantations and guano mines.<sup>2</sup> Chinese workers replaced African-descendant slaves, emancipated in 1854, but the brutal conditions of coolie labor were regularly likened to chattel

I am deeply grateful to Jason Oliver Chang, Yong Chen, Ray Craib, Qitao Guo, Patricio Ibarra Cifuentes, Jeff Gould, Tom Klubock, Erik Kongschaug, Ulrike Strasser, Steven Topik, Jeff Wasserstrom, and the two anonymous readers at *HAHR* for their guidance and comments on this article.

1. Barros Arana, *Historia de la Guerra del Pacífico*, 2:189–90.

2. Meagher, *Coolie Trade*, 222.

slavery. Reports of a “Chinese loyalty oath” (*juramento de los chinos*) to the Chilean army in 1881 all emphasized that the participants were coolies seeking to avenge their cruel bondage to Peruvian masters. A well-heeled Chinese merchant named Quintín Quintana officiated the event and served as the Chinese men’s erudite leader. But even Quintana had originally arrived in Peru as a coolie.<sup>3</sup>

According to Chileans, the ceremony took place at noon in a makeshift Chinese temple on Hacienda San Pedro. Chinese men gathered before an altar to the Chinese god of war, Kuongkong, in a room adorned with colorful paper lanterns and numerous flags of the Celestial Empire: yellow and red pennants emblazoned with a dragon. According to one account, the altar also displayed the Chilean flag. Quintín Quintana addressed the assembly and pledged to liberate his brothers from bondage. A rooster was decapitated and its blood gathered in a special goblet, from which all men drank and swore to likewise drink the blood of any man who betrayed the cause. The men then offered their services to Chile’s commanding officer, General Manuel Baquedano, and organized into auxiliary brigades of ambulance workers, bomb detonators, ammunition loaders, and supply carriers.<sup>4</sup> In the following days, some 2,000 Chinese men participated in the pitched battles at Chorrillos and Miraflores that killed a staggering 15,000 men in two days, inaugurated Chile’s three-year occupation of Lima, and paved the way for Chile’s permanent annexation of Tarapacá (from Peru) and Antofagasta (from Bolivia).<sup>5</sup> After the war, Chinese men appeared regularly in Chilean veteran parades in Santiago and the newly acquired city of Iquique. Several men received medals of commendation and pensions from the Chilean state.<sup>6</sup>

The extraordinary image of Chinese coolies tendering their lives and service to the Chilean army and being heralded as Chilean patriots opens a new window on the racialized and gendered violence that reshaped national borders

3. This essay analyzes four eyewitness accounts of a Chinese oath: “Juramento de los chinos” (by journalist Daniel Riquelme), in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:407–9; “Batalla de Chorrillos” (by an unnamed journalist for *La Patria*, most likely Ricardo González y González), in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 5:149–63; “Diario de la campaña a Lima” (by army captain Elías Casas C.), in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 7:38; and the war memoir Urquieta, *Recuerdos de la vida*, 159–66. Pascual Ahumada Moreno’s eight-volume *Guerra del Pacífico* (1884–91) collects military documents and periodical sources from all sides of the war.

4. “Juramento de los chinos,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:407–9. Chinese volunteers were formally received by Baquedano’s deputy, Domingo Sarratea.

5. Sater, *Andean Tragedy*, 348–49.

6. Chou, *Chile y China*, 150–54.

and political cultures in nineteenth-century South America. Most histories of the War of the Pacific stage the conflict as contending factions of Peruvian and Bolivian elites, with their overwhelmingly indigenous armies, going up against a united and vaguely Europeanized Chilean invader; stories of subaltern resistance emphasize the tenacious guerrilla warfare (and betrayal) of Andean communities in Peru's highlands.<sup>7</sup> But there was also constant rebellion on the Peruvian coast by black and mestizo peasants as well as by Chinese workers. By the 1870s, Chinese men were the backbone of Peru's export economies, including its still profitable guano mines and, in far more massive numbers, sugar and cotton estates, where they comprised over 70 percent of workers.<sup>8</sup> During the war, Chinese men engaged in a variety of shifting alliances on multiple sides. Some actively fought in guerrilla groups against Chileans or were impressed into the Peruvian army; most tried to stay neutral and survive as best as possible. Where Chinese men teamed up with Chile, Chileans were not always reliable allies. Chinese shopkeepers suffered horrendous property loss from the Chilean army's uncontrolled looting and war taxes. At other times, Chinese communities were brutally slaughtered by Peruvians in retaliatory and racially charged massacres that Chileans were in a position to prevent.<sup>9</sup>

Histories of Asians in Latin America reshape national narratives and the very idea of Latin America as a region. Latin America has long figured as part of an Atlantic world but more rarely as part of a Pacific world. Despite early, pathbreaking scholarship on Chinese and Japanese workers in several countries, the broader field of Latin American studies has treated Asians as minor side stories and been complicit in articulations of Latin American nation that excluded Asians from the mix.<sup>10</sup> Happily this has begun to change, thanks to a more robust Latin Americanist scholarship on racial formation and the transnational turn's emphasis on thinking across area fields. A number of superb monographs now trace the long-standing connections between Latin America and Asia and the centrality of Chinese communities, in particular, to struggles

7. Bonilla, "War of the Pacific"; Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*; Manrique, *Las guerrillas indígenas*.

8. Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru*, 84–85; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers," 105.

9. Mallon, "Nationalist and Antistate Coalitions," 261–64; Peloso, "Racial Conflict and Identity Crisis."

10. Pioneering scholarship on Chinese labor in Peru includes Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru*; Lausent, *Pequeña propiedad*; Méndez, "Los chinos culíes"; Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture and Social Control*; Rodríguez Pastor, *Hijos del Celeste Imperio*; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers."

over Latin American citizenship. Latin Americanists are engaging paradigms from Asian American studies, a field now less exclusively focused on the United States, while Asian studies models for tracking “overseas Chinese” have shifted to discussions of diasporic nationalism and Pacific Rim networks.<sup>11</sup>

This essay centers Asians in Latin American history by drawing on traditions of gender and labor studies to explore Chinese alliance with the Chilean army during the War of the Pacific. I interpret Chilean stories about a Chinese loyalty oath in January 1881 in relation to a broader history of Chinese resistance to coolie labor in Peru and experience with war in imperial China. The essay asks why Chilean men elaborated such ornate tales about Chinese men and what the oath meant to Chinese struggles against bondage on Peruvian plantations. While Peruvians also had much to say about Chinese and Chilean men, the focus here is on the story of the oath: a masculine drama between Chilean and Chinese men that affirmed male alliances through new labor pacts. Feminist scholars have long emphasized divisions of labor, including within all-male workforces, as sites of political contestation and gender solidarity. Studies of masculinity and war have underscored links between violence, male honor, and fraternity. This essay brings such insights to bear on the rich scholarship on Peruvian plantations that highlights agrarian resistance and the complexity of labor contracts.

During the War of the Pacific, masculinity and labor were central to articulating Chilean and Chinese political agendas and to defining national differences as racial differences. Chilean stories about emancipating Chinese slaves affirmed Chile’s civilizing mission and superiority over despotic Peruvian men too weak for modern governance. Chileans likewise affirmed superiority over Chinese men, whom they depicted as violent, comic, and grotesque. But more surprisingly, Chileans also portrayed Chinese men as similar to themselves: brave men who fought on behalf of freedom and nation. Chilean stories about a Chinese loyalty oath acknowledged the agency of Chinese men as a distinct national group who understood their freedom as wrongfully stolen and who actively pursued its recuperation. Chileans projected onto Chinese actions the very ideals of masculine honor and citizenship through which they understood their own mission in Peru. Where scholars such as Elliott Young and Jason Chang have compellingly argued that constructions of Latin American *mestizaje* and national belonging relied on anti-Chinese racism, this

11. Chang, *Chino*; González, *Paisanos Chinos*; Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*; López, *Chinese Cubans*; Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans*; Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*; Young, *Alien Nation*; Yun, *Coolie Speaks*.

essay illuminates how Chilean understandings of national heroism relied on moments of identification and validation of Chinese masculinity.<sup>12</sup>

From a Chinese perspective, the oath was less about Chinese loyalty to Chile than Chinese loyalty to fellow Chinese in a collective struggle against coolie labor. Chinese men saw Chileans not as liberators but as strategic allies for accomplishing their own goals. The oath enacted a Chinese sworn brotherhood, a fraternal organization common in China, through which men pledged mutual military and economic protection. The oath affirmed Chinese men as warriors and expanded on an already established pattern of revolt on Peruvian plantations that was currently shifting control over Chinese labor into Chinese hands. As the war progressed, Chinese men leveraged Chile's invasion to replace coolie arrangements with free peonage and subcontracted work gangs run by Chinese labor bosses.

There are no known Chinese accounts of the oath. However, the sheer variety of Chilean stories about the event leaves little doubt that some form of ceremony took place. This essay approaches Chinese meanings of the oath in two ways. I begin by considering the multivocal and ethnographic nature of Chilean stories about Chinese men. These narratives include written reports by Chilean journalists who traveled with the Chilean army as well as field diaries and published memoirs by Chilean military officers. Chileans recorded astonishing details about Chinese religious practice and political goals. The stories are steeped in orientalist fantasy, but they are not wholesale fictions. As early modern scholars have noted, even the most self-serving New World discovery narrative can leave imprints of subaltern worldviews.<sup>13</sup> Chilean accounts of a Chinese oath reflect the interplay of Chileans' mythologies about themselves and concrete experience with Chinese men, whose actions merited comment precisely because they exceeded and confounded Chilean expectations. Chilean stories about Chinese loyalty often destabilized the very hierarchies of masculine and racial command that they sought to affirm.

Second, this essay makes a case for Chinese meanings by heeding Madeline Hsu's call for Asian American studies to engage historians of China and extends that call to Latin American studies.<sup>14</sup> It interprets War of the Pacific records and Peruvian labor history in dialogue with scholarship on Chinese popular rebellion and religious practice during the late Qing dynasty. Chinese men in Peru drew on their experiences of war and fraternity during China's tumultuous

12. Young, *Alien Nation*; Chang, *Chino*.

13. Douglas, "In the Event."

14. Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints."

nineteenth century to survive the war in Peru and negotiate better labor pacts. Other scholars have highlighted connections between Latin America and China by tracing transpacific circuits of commodities and capital.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, this essay highlights transnationally generated meanings in a particular locale by using China historiography to read Latin American archives. Chinese alliance with the Chilean army constituted a transpacific cultural encounter not simply because people from China crossed paths with people from Chile in Peru, yet a third country bordering the Pacific Ocean. Rather, the alliance sprang from how Chinese and Chilean men articulated distinct national and racial agendas vis-à-vis a shared Peruvian enemy and in relationship to one another as men.

### Chilean Liberators

Reports of Chinese support for Chile's invasion of Peru began well before stories about a Chinese loyalty oath. In late 1880, Chilean naval captain Patricio Lynch invaded Peru's northern and central agricultural districts in two separate missions aimed at destroying enemy infrastructure and morale. Thousands of Chinese plantation workers rebelled against masters, abandoned estates, and joined with Chilean soldiers in setting fire to sugar refineries and cane fields. Over 1,500 Chinese men served in Lynch's brigade in a more formal capacity, working as guides, hauling supplies, and building pontoon bridges. Several dozen were assigned to a special explosives unit commanded by the Chilean engineer Arturo Villarroel, which used dynamite to open water wells and detonate land mines planted by Peruvians.<sup>16</sup> Both Lynch and Villarroel had experience in south China and spoke some Cantonese. Lynch spent his early adulthood in the British Royal Navy, serving three years in the first Opium War (1839–42). Villarroel traveled in Guangdong during the 1860s with Peru's largest trafficker in coolie labor, Domingo Elías.<sup>17</sup>

Chilean journalists who accompanied Patricio Lynch in Peru portrayed the Chilean army as liberators of Chinese slaves, freeing coolies from cages, dungeons, and chains across the northern and southern coasts. They reported on grateful Chinese men who offered their services to Lynch and jubilantly

15. Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*; McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks*; McKeown, *Melancholy Order*.

16. Barros Arana, *Historia de la Guerra del Pacífico*, 2:105–11; "Descripción del viaje por tierra de la División Lynch," 20 Dec. 1880, in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:262.

17. "La comisión conservadora acuerda ascender a Contra-Almirante Lynch," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 5:450–51.

helped demoralize Chile's enemies. In September 1880, the correspondent for the Valparaíso *El Mercurio* could barely contain his own glee as he described Chinese men sacking a plantation in the northern district of Chimbote:

It was something to see the pleasure with which these unhappy [Chinese workers] abandoned their harsh captivity and the enthusiasm with which they ran in all directions in search of combustibles for burning the sumptuous buildings, amid shouts of "Take that, boss! Long live Chile! Die Peru!" spattered with orangutan gesticulations. . . .

. . . The Chinamen of the hacienda ceaselessly poked the fire, so meticulous and conscientious in their work that they even entered the flames to rearrange the charred bits so that no vestige of the furniture would remain. . . .

. . . The Chinamen continued their devastating work of art such that from far away one could contemplate with great emotion the enormous tower of flames and crown of smoke that announced to nearby towns Chile's punishment and vengeance.<sup>18</sup>

Here Chilean liberators tapped Chinese rage at unjust bondage to send a terrifying message of retributory justice to Peruvians. Chinese coolies figured as animallike weapons that Chileans had the power to unleash. When Patricio Lynch wrote to the prefect of Lambayeque in October 1880 to demand 150,000 soles in silver, he warned, "You should be advised that my troops are followed by a phalanx of more than 1,000 Chinamen to whose care I cannot devote my energies and who are likely to sack anyplace that I pass through."<sup>19</sup>

Chilean claims about Chinese violence were partly a cover for Chile's own loot-and-burn policies, casting Chinese men as foils to the honorable war conduct of Chilean men. But reports about Chinese violence also underscored the illegitimacy of Peru as a republic that practiced slavery, now Chinese rather than African. As historian Carmen McEvoy has brilliantly argued, Chileans projected themselves as "civilizing warriors" whose own violence was justified by international law and the requirements of divine progress.<sup>20</sup> Chileans described Chinese attacks on Peruvian property as understandable vengeance in a quest for freedom that Chile made possible. In one of the more poetic anecdotes about Lynch's march from the southern hamlet of Tambo de Mora to Lurín in December 1880, Arturo Villarroel reported freeing coolies on a

18. Vicuña Mackenna, *Historia de la campaña de Lima*, 570–72.

19. Chou, *Chile y China*, 137.

20. McEvoy, *Guerreros civilizadores*.

plantation previously owned by Bernardo O'Higgins, Chile's war of independence hero and first president. Having thus restored liberty to former "Chilean territory," the troops commenced again for Lima, trailed by hundreds of zealous Chinese volunteers who had to be persuaded not to sack and burn every plantation that they passed.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to telling stories about freeing Chinese slaves, Chileans commented at length about the significant numbers of Chinese merchants whom they encountered. They expressed surprise that Chinese shopkeepers dominated local commerce in dry goods and textiles in towns up and down the Peruvian coast. Most Chinese vendors were former coolies with petty enterprises that supplied local plantations; a few operated on larger scales with ties to Chinese import-export companies in Lima. In some towns where Peruvians had fled Chile's advance, Chinese men constituted the vast majority of all residents. Chileans viewed Chinese shopkeepers with a mix of fascination and revulsion, likening them to rats and medieval Jews who lived in filthy ghettos and sold exotic wares at usurious prices.<sup>22</sup> Daniel Riquelme, a journalist for the Valparaíso *El Heraldo*, described Chinese in Pisco as ghostly skeletons and grotesque mummies, "extravagances of Nature laughing at the human species."<sup>23</sup>

But even amid disgust, Chileans recognized Chinese shopkeepers as a distinct national community with evident leadership structures and repeatedly commented on copious displays of Chinese flags, the imperial standard of the Qing dynasty. The junior officer José Clemente Larraín recalled arriving in Pisco to the spectacle of "a thousand Chinese banners" waving from rooftops as signs of foreign neutrality; while Italian and British merchants also hoisted national colors, these were overwhelmed by the sea of yellow pennants. As he recounted, "That strange flag, in triangular form, edged with red triangles and prominently displaying in its field of yellow, like the race whose nationality it represented, the dragon symbol of the Celestial Empire, cast a peculiar, dubious light on that solitary and dusty people, making us think for a moment that we were in a remote and distant country."<sup>24</sup>

The Chinese flag simultaneously underscored the bizarre exoticism of the "yellow race" and conferred Chinese men with a foreign national status that legitimated Chile's invasion. The sheer volume of Chinese flags illustrated Peru's cowardly abdication of authority such that Pisco no longer seemed part

21. "A. Villarreal al ministro de guerra, Lurín," 29 Dec. 1880, in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:255.

22. Solar, *Diario de campaña*, 251.

23. Riquelme, *La expedición a Lima*, 44–45.

24. Larraín, *Impresiones y recuerdos*, 233.



of Peru. Riquelme reported flag-bearing Chinese merchants welcoming Chilean commanders in the provincial capital of Ica and inviting them to take charge to prevent looting; Chinese warned Chileans about poisoned water wells and buried land mines, which Peruvian troops had planted before fleeing the area.<sup>25</sup> Such narrative details countered the robust criticism of Chile's invasion by US and European ambassadors who complained that Lynch had destroyed foreign property in violation of international law. The story of Celestial Empire subjects welcoming the Chilean army and requesting protection functioned as a proxy for international approval. The story also imagined a hierarchy in which Chinese merchants were positioned to channel the energies of their more violent countrymen (coolies) to cooperate with Chile's mission.

This logic was fully operative as Chile gathered its troops for the final attack on Peru's capital. In mid-December 1880, a convoy of 30 warships delivered 25,000 Chilean soldiers to the Lurín Valley, just outside Lima; Lynch's brigade arrived on foot the day after Christmas. Chile's military camp included some 3,000 Chinese men, half of whom had followed Lynch from the south and the rest from Lurín itself.<sup>26</sup> As before, Chileans reported that Peruvians had fled the area and that Chinese men welcomed them with flags unfurled, so many that the soldiers "could not take a single step without running into one dragon or another."<sup>27</sup> As José Clemente Larraín wrote, "Lurín was totally abandoned and gave every impression . . . of being a city of Chinamen, precisely those slaves whom the Peruvians knew we would not only respect but also join, since they were the most desperate and demanded justice against their oppressors."<sup>28</sup> Here it was Chileans who joined the Chinese and added their formidable military power to "a city of Chinamen" longing for freedom. As the army prepared to seize Lima, Chile's camp was a flood of international colors: imperial China's yellow dragon and the Republic of Chile's red, white, and blue.

### The Chinese Oath in Lurín

Chilean stories about a Chinese loyalty oath on January 11, 1881, served as a climax for mythologies about Chilean heroism and Chinese gratitude that became embedded in Chilean popular culture and early histories of the war. But

25. Barros Arana, *Historia de la Guerra del Pacífico*, 2:174–75.

26. Chileans estimated that there were 900–1,500 Chinese in Lurín district and another 500 in neighboring Pachacamac, which they also used as a base. "Descripción del itinerario del ejército chileno, desde la bahía de Paracas hasta Lima," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:305, 312.

27. Solar, *Diario de campaña*, 205.

28. Larraín, *Impresiones y recuerdos*, 282.

the actual texts by commentators who claimed to have witnessed the ceremony evince genuine amazement that exceeds the self-serving and orientalist nature of the genre. Chilean stories recognized that Chinese men fought for their own liberation and had their own agendas. These stories also affirmed Chilean ideas about citizenship and national purpose by acknowledging similar forms of masculine honor in Chinese men. Tropes about Chinese subhumanity gave way to images of Chinese self-control and mutual commitment. In narrating the eve of Chile's seminal triumph over Peru, Chileans reinvented Chinese men as international allies and honorary Chileans.

Chileans were clearly impressed by what they saw. Estimates of the number of Chinese men who participated in the oath vary from 400 to over 1,000, but all commentators noted a considerable mass. Journalist Daniel Riquelme provided the most extensive description of the ceremony, published just a few weeks after it had occurred in Chile's occupation newspaper in Lima.<sup>29</sup> Riquelme emphasized the ceremony's political significance and the central role of the Chinese merchant Quintín Quintana. As he began:

At 12 noon, all the sons of the Celestial Empire began to arrive at this phantasmal affair, convoked by the omnipotent voice of Quintín Quintana, a kind of Rothschild of this yellow tribe, and an hour later the temple area seemed like the Valley of Jehoshaphat before [the battle of ancient Judah against enemy armies]. Quintín Quintana is, without any doubt, an estimable type, but this official may have erred in taking on the role of redeemer, as all redeemers must be crucified. . . . *But one will not find another [Chinese man], who with his Christian form and voice like a pagoda cymbal, better combines his natural type and his effective Chileanness.*<sup>30</sup>

Riquelme alternately likened Quintana to a powerful Jewish banker, an Old Testament warrior king of Israel, and Jesus Christ—all of which contributed to Quintana's de facto "Chileanness." There was ridicule in the description's biblical grandeur and its comparison of Chinese men to insects and Jews. But Riquelme respected Quintana as a man of stature and a Christian convert who likely took his Spanish name at baptism; the journalist emphasized Quintana's commitment to the Chilean army. Elsewhere in the narrative, Riquelme

29. "Juramento de los chinos," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:407–8. Riquelme's account first appeared in *La Actualidad* (Lima), 1 Feb. 1881.

30. "Juramento de los chinos," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:407. Emphasis added.

reported that Quintana first teamed up with the Chileans in November 1880 when Colonel José Domingo Amunátegui's brigade occupied the town of Ica. Quintana housed Chilean officers on his properties, which included two stores and two farms; he served as a guide and organized Chinese workers to reassemble a railway. In December Quintana followed the troops to Lurín aboard a Chilean warship, together with his Peruvian wife and children, and formalized his alliance by asking Amunátegui to serve as godfather and Christian namesake for an infant son.

Having established Quintana's credentials, Riquelme proceeded to describe the oath itself, stressing its patriotic qualities and parallels between Quintana and Chilean commanders:

In the Chinese religion there is an oath that is made only on the most solemn occasions, in face of public danger, great hatred, for the fatherland or for love. They sacrifice a rooster before the altar, and drinking its blood, promise to finish off any man who betrays the cause, and drink his blood in the same way as that of the rooster, so that all men are mutually obligated. And by the blood of the rooster, they swore to unite under the direction of Quintín Quintana, offering their services to the Commanding General, and to obey him such that "if ordered to work, to work; if to kill, to kill; if to burn, to burn; if to die, to die," according to the formal testimony of the promise.

From the temple, they all passed in procession to see the General [Manuel Baquedano]. Quintana spoke, dressed in an undefined military uniform, he uttered these and other phrases: "I have lived in Peru for 20 years. It is certain that here I have secured, through my work, the means to live. [Peruvian] gentlemen have behaved well with me and my family; I have no personal hate. But I am bound to sacrifice my fortune and do what I can for these unhappy [Chinese] whose sufferings no one can imagine. There are brothers here who during eight years have been laden with chains and never seen the sun, and the rest have labored like beasts. I want nothing more for them than food and the security that they will not be abandoned in this land of damnation. *May the General take them where he will, I command all to follow.*"<sup>31</sup>

Riquelme attributed to Quintín Quintana the very masculine qualities idealized in Chilean officers: command over other men in a divine mission to defend freedom and national honor. Quintana appears in military uniform, albeit of

31. Ibid. Emphasis added.

unrecognizable origin, and speaks eloquently about his revulsion to slavery and willingness to sacrifice his own wealth to emancipate his brothers. It is Quintana who articulates the Enlightenment vision of human freedom, and it is Quintana who has the authority to “command all” Chinese men to follow the Chilean general. No Chinaman makes a better Chilean than he.

Chilean affirmations of Chinese men’s honor were also generated by descriptions of Chilean rituals. Several Chilean commentators noted that the Chinese oath took place immediately after a Chilean ceremony held the same day to bless the Chilean flag and a military banner for the Second Line Regiment, which had previously lost and then recuperated its flags in battle. Descriptions of the Chilean and Chinese ceremonies appear sequentially in written accounts, emphasizing how the Chinese oath mimicked Chilean patriotism. The Chilean flag ceremony began at 9:00 a.m. with an open-air Catholic mass in which a priest draped the banners over the altar and “implored the blessings of the God of the Armies” that Chile be victorious in the battle to come. After Holy Communion, Chilean troops paraded in front of General Baquedano and Chilean officers pledged “to make the ultimate sacrifice [that Chile’s flag] might wave from the tallest towers in Lima.”<sup>32</sup>

Chilean accounts of the Chinese oath likewise featured national flags, divine sanction, and a willingness to die. All commentators described the temple as bedecked with yellow and red Chinese flags; according to the field diary of Elías Casas C., there was also a Chilean flag.<sup>33</sup> The most effusive descriptions emphasized the religious nature of the ceremony. An unnamed journalist for *La Patria* reported on a trinity of Chinese deities on the temple altar whom he equated to Catholic saints:

[The Chinese] gathered in the San Pedro Pagoda . . . before an altar adorned only with three statues or wooden figures, similar to our own churches. The statue or saint in the middle represented Kuongkong, a sort of Martyr in the [Chinese] religion and a man of great size, with a large tongue, a kind of beard and face colored red, with an enormous sword in his right hand, a sword that according to the beliefs of the faithful was wielded by Kuongkong despite weighing 1,000 pounds. The saint on the right was a beardless youth with a white face who they believed was the son of Kuongkong, and he was called Yong-long; and on the left, [there was] a kind of military deputy to the aforementioned

32. “Entrega solemne de su estandarte al Rejimiento 2nd de Línea,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:405–7.

33. “Diario de la campaña a Lima,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 7:38.

god of war: a black man [*un negro*] with large white eyes, who also had a sword and was named Affay. In front of the strange trinity, a Chinaman officiated something like [Catholic] Mass and then immediately proceeded to decapitate a rooster, a symbol of war, whose blood was deposited into a flask. . . . All 658 colonists partook in the mystical liquid, taking turns drinking the blood mixed with water.<sup>34</sup>

In a war memoir, junior officer Antonio Urquieta also stressed the military purpose of the ceremony and called the three altar figures “Chinese Gods,” including the “God of War”:

The middle one was a likeness of a bearded gentleman, tall and massive, with a round face, low nose, and eyes as are customary in that kingdom; but altogether his face showed him to be a man of intelligence, and his name was Kuong-Kang. In his right hand he held an enormous sword taken halfway out of its sheath. This one was respected as the God of War. To his right was the likeness of a young man said to be the God’s son and to his left, a massive black man, ugly as a storm, who is said to be one of the bravest deputies to the God.<sup>35</sup>

Like the *La Patria* journalist, Antonio Urquieta noted parallels with Catholic ceremony and sacred uses of blood. He emphasized the central role of a Chinese “priest” (not Quintana) who delivered a sermon before enacting the blood rite. Chinese men not only drank sacramental rooster blood but also wore special blood ornaments on their bodies similar to Catholic martyr medallions:

An old Chinese man was the one who presided over the religious act. Dressed in a white suit, whose overcoat seemed a loose and long robe, around his neck was a cord about two meters in length; this cord represented the threat of punishment to the impious. Presently the priest gave a speech . . . which the Chinese listened to in the most profound silence, giving it their full attention. Now and then the priest took a little stick and struck a small tin box painted with signs, each little strike symbolizing an accentuation of certain phrases and, above all, commanding the auditorium’s attention.

After this act, another Chinese man presented a rooster conveniently tethered to a kind of wooden paddle. The priest put it on

34. “Batalla de Chorrillos,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacifico*, 5:149.

35. Urquieta, *Recuerdos de la vida*, 161–62.

the altar and then cut off its crest, collecting the blood in a rubber washbowl, in which were then placed a large number of little sticks about an inch long and round like lapel pins, to absorb the blood. Each Chinese man in attendance received one of these sticks as he was leaving after the ceremony ended. We learned that the purpose of these little sticks was to place around one's neck, just as our believers do with religious badges.

Immediately the priest beheaded the rooster, collecting the blood in a special beaker. Throughout the ceremony the priest spoke in a loud voice, occasionally uttering little shouts that provoked our laughter, without understanding what they meant. The blood of the dead rooster, now collected in the beaker, was mixed with a little water and after various other ceremonies and exaggerated gestures, it was offered in a jar, using a mango as a spoon, to each person in attendance to drink, as they approached the altar in an orderly fashion and then returned to their seats. When the ceremony was finished, the priest left the altar and the very fine Quintín Quintana appeared in front.<sup>36</sup>

These elaborate descriptions of Chinese religious practice are important in several ways. Their striking ethnographic contents suggest that Chileans paid close attention to the ceremony and made an effort to understand it from a Chinese point of view, despite their Christian translations. Commentators self-consciously adopted the position of cultural interpreters of Asian practice for Western readers, and they surely interviewed Spanish-speaking participants such as Quintana about specific aspects of the ceremony.

The Chilean texts provide details on Chinese gods that trace the cult of Guandi, the most widely revered deity in nineteenth-century China, who in southern provinces was known by the Cantonese name Kuan-ti or Kuongkong. The divinity of Guandi/Kuongkong is based on the historical life of Guan Yu, a third-century warrior who famously swore an oath of loyalty together with his sovereign and a third warrior in a peach orchard. Guan Yu went on to display such prowess in combat that he inspired other men to similar feats. His son, Guan Ping (Yong-long in the Chilean accounts), heroically died by his side. His fierce deputy, Zhou Cang (Affay in the Chilean accounts), originally fought for the enemy but switched sides and carried on Guan Yu's mission after he was captured and beheaded by his nemesis. According to historian Prasenjit Duara, Guandi was promoted as the imperial god of war by the Ming and Qing dynasties (earning the official sacred signifier, *di*); but he was revered in a deeper

36. Ibid.

register across China's popular classes as the embodiment of masculine loyalty in the face of treachery. Guandi's face was traditionally colored red to symbolize righteousness and power derived from unswerving male fidelity; the presence of his son and deputy at his side emphasized collective strength. The white face of Guan Ping denoted the purity and beauty of a loyal son; the black face of Zhou Cang underscored uncompromising justice.<sup>37</sup> Chilean descriptions of a rooster sacrifice in Lurín directly echoed accounts of animal offerings to Guandi in nineteenth-century China.<sup>38</sup>

Chilean emphasis on the parallels between Chinese blood rituals and Christian ceremony accorded a surprising parity between Chilean and Chinese men preparing for battle and possible death. Both groups called on divine favor and affirmed before God their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the nation. In Catholic Mass, Chileans "implored the blessings of the God of the Armies" that Chile's flag might wave over Peru. In the Chinese oath, participants beseeched aid from the "God of War" and swore mutual commitment under sign of Chinese flags. Chinese men affirmed common cause with Chile but pledged to lay down their lives for each other. Going a step further, they supplicated Chinese divine power on behalf of Chile, which needed all the help that it could get. As the *La Patria* journalist summarized, "By bellicose blood the Chinese swore on their desire and their votes that the guns of Chile would be victorious, and this they asked of Kuongkong."<sup>39</sup>

Chilean discussions of Chinese deities emphasized Chinese military prowess and masculine strength. Gone were images of Chinese men as skeletal or unpredictably violent. The Chinese trinity was composed of men with massive bodies and the uncommon strength to brandish 1,000-pound swords. Such men were ready for war but were hardly out of control: Kuongkong's weapon was drawn precisely halfway out of its sheath, his face "show[ing] him to be a man of intelligence" (despite its Asian features). Kuongkong was also a father who had raised his son, Yong-long, to be a warrior just as Chilean commanders were called to sacrifice their biological offspring and fictive sons, their soldiers. Kuongkong's deputy, Affay, was referred to as "a black man" (*un negro*) or a "massive black man" (*un macizo negro*), not "a man with a face colored black," as was the phrasing for Kuongkong's and Yong-long's respective red and white colors.<sup>40</sup> Likely unaware of Chinese associations of Affay's color with

37. Duara, "Superscribing Symbols"; Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*. On the importance of Guandi in southern China, see Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults*; Lun, "Religious Festivals in Northern Guangdong."

38. Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies*, 59–69.

39. "Batalla de Chorrillos," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 5:149.

40. *Ibid.*; Urquieta, *Recuerdos de la vida*, 160.

righteousness, Chileans may have understood Affay's potency as derived from African qualities. In any case, Urquieta called Affay "ugly as a storm" but was impressed with his size and reputation as "the bravest." Even mortal Chinese men exhibited strength and discipline. The priest commanded rapt attention and wielded a symbolic whip indicating virile power. Chinese congregants approached the altar and returned to their seats in orderly fashion before parading in front of Chilean commanders, just as Chilean soldiers had done after the Chilean flag ceremony. Urquieta went on to note that the "Chinese battalion" scrupulously adhered to military orders and "did not abandon the army as it followed in its march."<sup>41</sup> In short, Chinese proved honorable men who kept their word.

All Chilean accounts of the oath acknowledge that Chinese men allied with the Chilean army in order to liberate themselves from slavery and reclaim their status as free men. Here Chileans recognized Chinese honor in terms of labor and rejection of bondage. They pointed to Chinese agency and Chinese understandings of freedom, even if it was Chile who made liberation possible. The *La Patria* journalist began his narrative with Chinese understandings of the stakes: "They came together approaching the hour of a decisive battle, which for them surely had great transcendental meaning, as their very liberty depended on the result. The Chinamen, an enslaved race subjugated by old laws as the pariahs of Peru, saw in Chile's triumph their redemption, the recuperation of their lost rights to work as free men, established by universal law."<sup>42</sup> The journalist ended his account similarly, calling Quintín Quintana "the elected leader of the Chinese community [who] spoke about the reign of slavery in Peru and the coming liberty and kingdom of universal law."<sup>43</sup> Such phrasing positioned Chinese men as knowing subjects who claim the universal rights of man. At the decisive moment, Chinese men recognized that alliance with Chile was a chance to end enslavement by Peru's illegitimate "old laws" and enter the "kingdom of universal law." If it was Chile who offered the conditions for redemption, it was Chinese men who sought "recuperation of their lost rights to work as free men" and who were determined to recover their natural liberty.

Strikingly, Chileans also recognized Chinese men as capable of democratic governance: Quintana was elected, and Chinese men "swore on . . . their votes that . . . Chile would be victorious." Elías Casas C. reported that the Chinese formalized the oath in writing and sent representatives to Lima to persuade Chinese merchants in Peru's capital to support Chile's cause:

41. Urquieta, *Recuerdos de la vida*, 163.

42. "Batalla de Chorrillos," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 5:149.

43. *Ibid.*



To solemnize their vow, they agreed to make an agreement with the 10,000 Chinese of Lima, sending a parliamentarian with letters written in the Chinese language, so that they would protect the Chileans and do the maximum damage possible to the Peruvians. They proceeded to behead a rooster in a bowl of water, from which the leader took a cup of the mixture and wrote his name in a registry book. In this way, all drank to seal his oath, assuring each that others had done so as well.<sup>44</sup>

Elías Casas C. highlighted Chinese written accords. The “parliamentarian” sent to Lima may have been elected in addition to Quintín Quintana but in any case was a messenger of sufficient status to present “letters written in the Chinese language” to prominent Chinese merchants. Here the oath became a pact between plantation workers and urban merchants rather than about Chinese loyalty to Chile. It is unclear whether the letters to the Lima Chinese ever arrived or if the signed registry was part of these documents. But their very mention raises the surprising image of an assembly of plantation “slaves” instructing their more affluent countrymen in the capital to follow their lead.

In emphasizing procedural orthodoxy, Chileans cast Chinese men as citizen warriors similar to themselves. The oath was understood as a national action carried out by subjects of a foreign power with a sophisticated civic culture: Chinese men had national flags, written language, electoral protocol, and rites for sanctifying military acts. This made Chinese men different from Peruvians, who Chileans insisted were too backward and small-minded for patriotism, and more like civilized Chileans, who loved and sacrificed for the nation. As Riquelme pointedly noted, a Chinese oath was enacted “only on the most solemn occasions, in face of public danger, great hatred, for the fatherland or for love.” Like Chileans, Chinese men identified with a greater cause and were prepared to die for it. Chilean arguments about Chinese mimesis defended Chileans’ claims about the righteousness of their invasion of Peru. Extravagant odes to Chinese bravery and nationalism underscored the depths of Peruvian treachery and cowardice beyond the drumbeat of Chilean superiority. Chileans did not simply emancipate Chinese slaves; they entered into a spectacular international alliance with a foreign community that gave Chile’s march on Lima world-historical implications for universal law and human liberty. In this logic, honorable Chinese men with their own national flags constructed Chilean patriots as transpacific freedom fighters.

44. “Diario de la campaña a Lima,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 7:38.

### Chinese Agrarian Resistance

It is more challenging to interpret what the oath in Lurín meant to Chinese men given that all available Chinese words for the event are ventriloquized by Chileans. But if Chileans narrated Chinese men through ideas about themselves, they recognized that Chinese men had agendas of their own. Understanding those agendas requires going beyond Chilean texts and situating the oath within a wider history of Chinese agrarian resistance and experience with war. Chinese decisions to ally with Chile during the War of the Pacific were about ending coolie labor and increasing Chinese economic leverage. Uprisings by Chinese plantation workers had pushed these goals before the war, but Chile's invasion enabled more sustained forms of resistance that validated Chinese networks and leadership.

When Patricio Lynch marched across the Peruvian coast in 1880, he did not so much liberate coolies as escalate forms of Chinese rebellion already in motion. Since the arrival of the first coolies to Peru in the 1840s, Chinese men regularly challenged the brutal conditions of bondage. They sacked warehouses, torched fields, sabotaged machinery, and killed especially brutal supervisors. They also ran away from plantations in droves, forming maroon communities in the highlands or passing as free Chinese in other provinces. Some rebellions took dramatic form. In 1870, a coolie revolt north of Lima in the Pativilca Valley involved 1,500 Chinese men on a dozen plantations. Rebels torched fields, looted mansions, executed plantation administrators, and attacked police in local towns before being brutally repressed by national troops.<sup>45</sup> Between 1875 and 1880, more than a dozen smaller organized revolts by Chinese workers erupted on plantations in the departments of Ica, Lima, Libertad, and Lambayeque. African-descendant peons and subsistence farmers also staged violent uprisings and sometimes attacked Chinese men as symbols of the hated plantation system.<sup>46</sup> As war with Chile commenced, Peruvian landowners warned that the “banditry of *negros* and *cholos*” combined with the “revolt of *chinos*” was creating conditions akin to the Paris Commune.<sup>47</sup>

By the time that Lynch arrived in Peru, there were more Chinese than ever before, a situation that exacerbated labor and racial tensions. The coolie trade between the Portuguese colony of Macao and Peru formally ended in 1874 under Chinese and British pressure, but not before Peruvian landowners made

45. Rodríguez Pastor, *La rebelión de los rostros pintados*.

46. Pachas Castilla, “Impacto de la Guerra del Pacífico en el Sur Medio”; Pachas Castilla, “Impacto de la Guerra del Pacífico en las haciendas.”

47. Bonilla, “War of the Pacific,” 99. On the Peruvian coast, *cholo* referred to peons of mixed race and indigenous heritage.

one last push to shore up their workforce. Between 1870 and 1874, over 50,000 new coolies disembarked in Callao, equal to the total number of men trafficked to Peru during the previous two decades.<sup>48</sup> By 1880, Chinese men constituted over half the total population of rural districts with major sugar and cotton operations and up to 90 percent of workers on large plantations.<sup>49</sup> Coolie contracts bound a man's labor to an individual master for eight years in return for a monthly payment of four Peruvian soles, a third of what was earned by black and indigenous peons. Owners had near-absolute power over coolie bodies, including the ability to sell a coolie contract (and therefore the Chinese person pertaining to it) to another owner. Masters routinely used debt, fraud, and violence to add additional years to the original terms of bondage.

But however oppressive, coolie labor paid Chinese men monthly wages and by the late 1870s positioned them to negotiate wages higher than those of Peruvian peons. Technically, the coolie contracts of the last major shipment of Chinese to Peru were set to expire by 1883. With no new Chinese arriving, Peruvian landowners resorted to material incentives in addition to coercion to maintain a majority Chinese labor force rather than recruiting Peruvian workers. As historians Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, Michael Gonzales, and Vincent Peloso have shown, Chinese men who completed their original indenture contracts regularly recontracted for short periods (from six months to two years) in return for cash advances and weekly (rather than monthly) wages that were over triple their former pay. Many workers recontracted on multiple occasions (some as many as eight times), earning a cash advance for each new contract.<sup>50</sup> Such workers were designated free peons (*peones libres*) to distinguish them from contract peons (*peones contratados*) or coolies (*kulíes*). Free peonage also indebted Chinese workers to employers and involved systemic coercion but was usually less abusive than coolie contracts. Beyond earning higher wages, free peons did not live in locked barracks and were not sold to third parties.

Many Chinese peons did not even contract directly for a Peruvian landowner. By the early 1870s, Chinese free peons frequently contracted with Chinese labor bosses who provided workers to estates in a subcontracting system known as *enganche* (hook). *Enganche* arrangements involved cash advances on weekly (rather than monthly) wages that paid up to six times the amount earned by coolies.<sup>51</sup> Chinese labor bosses were usually former coolies turned

48. Meagher, *Coolie Trade*, 221–44.

49. Rodríguez Pastor, *Hijos del Celeste Imperio*, 292–93.

50. Peloso, *Peasants on Plantations*, 38–39; Rodríguez Pastor, *Hijos del Celeste Imperio*, 50; Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture and Social Control*, 117–46.

51. Gonzales, “Chinese Plantation Workers,” 397.

petty merchants who had previously worked on the estate to which they now provided subcontracted labor. Some bosses accumulated enough capital to operate shops in provincial towns; others were granted concessions by landowners to run plantation stores (*tambos*) that sold workers dry goods, liquor, and opium on credit. Many of the Chinese shopkeepers who so impressed Chileans during their 1880 invasion were likely also *enganche* bosses who provided Chinese workers to local estates. *Enganche* exacerbated racialized conflict between Chinese and Peruvians by perpetuating Chinese plantation workforces and marginalizing African-descendant communities within arrangements that financially benefited some Chinese men.

Coolie rebellion drove the transition to *enganche* subcontracting and Chinese free peonage. Revolt operated as leverage, not just revenge. Coolies who fled estates during uprisings frequently returned to work on the same estate on better terms. Known ringleaders were mercilessly punished, but even very violent rebellions such as the Pativilca revolt were followed by reforms in how coolies were treated and shifts to other forms of labor. This pattern spiraled with Chile's invasion. *Enganche* and free peonage spread most quickly in areas where the presence of Chilean troops fanned new Chinese uprisings and compelled Peruvian authorities to flee. For example, when Patricio Lynch landed in Pisco in November 1880, all 90 Chinese workers on Hacienda El Palto abandoned the estate after looting warehouses and stealing livestock, but within a year over a third of the men voluntarily returned and the owners resolved to hire more free peons despite the added expense. Another 26 of the original fugitives found work on neighboring plantations as peons, either subcontracting through a Chinese boss or signing directly with a landowner; the rest were presumed to have joined the Chileans.<sup>52</sup> During Lynch's northern expedition, the owners of Hacienda Cayaltí in Lambayeque enticed most of their 350 Chinese workers to stay put by raising wages by 50 cents. Chinese also found work with Chileans. In October 1880, some 500 Chinese left Chimbote on Chilean ships bound for Tarapacá to work in nitrate and guano mines where wages were rumored to be as high as two silver soles a day.<sup>53</sup> Although such rumors were probably an exaggeration, Chilean mining operations in the newly seized territory did favor wage labor systems that incentivized Chinese flight from plantations and pressured Peruvian landowners to make changes. After the war, an 1887 labor

52. Rodríguez Pastor, *Hijos del Celeste Imperio*, 177; Pachas Castilla, "Impacto de la Guerra del Pacífico en el Sur Medio," 193–95.

53. Kapsoli, "Lambayeque en la coyuntura," 94, 97.

survey found that whereas coolies still accounted for 14 percent of workers in key agricultural districts, Chinese *enganche* accounted for over 50 percent.<sup>54</sup>

If the demise of coolie labor in Peru was set in motion by the formal end of human trafficking from Macao, the spread of Chinese *enganche* and free peonage was never a preordained outcome: it resulted from Chinese resistance and negotiation in the context of a foreign invasion. The War of the Pacific enabled Chinese rebellion and leverage on an entirely different scale than earlier coolie revolts. Patricio Lynch's violent excursions against Peruvian landowners protected and legitimized acts of Chinese looting and arson. By the time that Chilean troops reached the outskirts of Lima, Chinese men were attached to an army whose mission was the unconditional surrender of Peru and that would occupy Peru's capital for three years. Although Chile's occupation was constantly challenged in both the Andean highlands and coastal districts, continued warfare further weakened Peruvian plantation owners.

Chinese men proved tenacious and independent fighters. If they strategically allied with Chilean troops, they were never really under Chilean control. When Chileans arrived in 1880, they found coolies already sacking and fleeing plantations. Lynch frequently ordered troops to suppress Chinese looting and restore order with all force.<sup>55</sup> In Lambayeque, Lynch offered to return fugitive coolies to Peruvian landowners who met his demands for money and supplies.<sup>56</sup> Not surprisingly, then, Chinese men did not always heed Chilean leadership. During Lynch's overland march to Lurín, Chinese workers in the Cañete Valley completely sacked and gutted the port of Cerro Azul before Lynch arrived, depriving him of the ability to extort war payments. When Lynch instructed soldiers to raze the town of San Antonio as punishment for sheltering guerrilla fighters, Chinese men set fire to buildings before getting orders and burned down the church in defiance of Lynch's instructions to spare it.<sup>57</sup> Chileans reported that Chinese men took great pleasure in wreaking maximum damage on Peruvians everywhere that they went. When Amunátegui's troops occupied Quintín Quintana's adopted hometown of Ica in November 1880, a Chinese camp follower who served as a guide from Pisco harshly criticized Chilean soldiers for being too lenient. According to the journalist for *La Patria*, "the

54. "Expediente sobre la averiguación practicada por la Comisión China, asesorada por funcionarios del gobierno, respecto a la situación de sus connacionales que prestan sus servicios en las haciendas," Lima, May 1887, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Lima, Sala de Investigadores, (BN-SI), D11416.

55. *Boletín de la Guerra*, 870-78.

56. Kapsoli, "Lambayeque en la coyuntura," 91.

57. "Descripción del viaje por tierra de la División Lynch," in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 4:262.

Chinaman was happy and chatty” on the trek over to Ica but suddenly became furious and complained, “Chileans wrong! No know how to make war. Need kill everyone, all women and children! Chileans wrong!”<sup>58</sup> If the story underscored Chinese savagery, it also acknowledged Chinese men’s open disagreement with Chile on military grounds.

In fact, most Chinese men trafficked to Peru as coolies were veterans of violent conflicts that had devastated nineteenth-century China and had created the conditions for the coolie trade in the first place. Some men were old enough to have fought against Patricio Lynch during the first Opium War that ravaged the greater Guangdong and Fujian provinces as Great Britain forced China to open to Western trade. Other men surely participated in the second Opium War (1856–60) when British efforts were joined by other foreign powers. But by far the most violent war affecting Chinese men who ended up in Peru was the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), a massive civil war led by ethnic Hakka against the Qing dynasty. The conflict killed a shocking 20 to 70 million people, embroiling all parts of southern and central China in waves of military and paramilitary fighting. All Chinese men in Peru would have been affected by the Taiping Rebellion. Many would have fought on its various sides, including in village militias and bandit gangs as well as in formal Taiping and Qing armies. During the War of the Pacific, Chileans frequently noted Chinese men’s expertise in working with dynamite, detonating land mines packed with gunpowder, and building pontoon bridges over rivers and gulches. These activities were central to village defense and warfare in China. Although Chilean reports of Chinese enthusiasm for killing women and children smack of racism and hypocrisy, historians of China have noted that the phenomenal carnage of the Taiping Rebellion involved regular massacres of entire extended families and villages as a tactic to wipe out rival lineages.<sup>59</sup> Whatever the truth of particular Chilean stories about Chinese violence, Chinese men in Peru were well acquainted with war.

### Sworn Brotherhood and Chinese Subcontracting

The oath in Lurín directly drew on Chinese men’s experience in imperial China. The ceremony enacted the ritual of a Chinese sworn brotherhood, an institution of male bonding common throughout China in which men pledged mutual loyalty and protection against common enemies and sealed their promise with blood. As China historians have discussed at length, sworn brotherhoods have

58. Vicuña Mackenna, *Historia de la campaña de Lima*, 740.

59. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*; Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*.

ancient roots but proliferated in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries amid wartime violence.<sup>60</sup> They operated as both a means of military action and a basis of economic leverage within the volatile market dynamics unleashed by the forced opening of trading ports. Many sworn brotherhoods were secret societies that challenged Manchu authority and that the Qing state sought to crush. Sworn brotherhoods could overlap with other all-male associations based on vocation, lineage, and village. But most often they united men who were outsiders or socially marginal: traveling merchants, war refugees, itinerant workers, peddlers, and the legions of poor men without families. Susan Mann has underscored the hierarchical logic of sworn brotherhoods as vertical fraternities that incorporated members through master-disciple relationships of ritually constituted elder and younger brothers.<sup>61</sup> According to David Ownby, the defining characteristics of sworn brotherhoods were men's collective vow to mutual aid and the enactment of a blood sacrifice. Ownby documents numerous cases in southern China of sworn brotherhoods inaugurated through practices identical to those mentioned in Lurín, including the slaughter of a rooster, communal drinking of blood, formal registry of member names, and dissemination of symbolic tokens.<sup>62</sup>

Asian American studies scholars have noted the importance of sworn brotherhoods to resisting racism and forging Chinese commercial and political networks across the Americas, especially in cities. Floyd Cheung's incisive discussion of Chee Kung Tong rites in nineteenth-century Tucson has highlighted how sworn brotherhoods allowed Chinese men to affirm symbolic warrior status by enacting clandestine military parades and plays.<sup>63</sup> But in nineteenth-century Peru, sworn brotherhoods were crucial to survival in rural areas and enabled plantation workers to become actual warriors. Coolies had no control over where or with whom they were distributed to work. Peruvian landowners purchased contracted men in batches that combined men of different ethnicities, regions, and dialects—Hakka, Han, Cantonese, Fujianese—making shared lineage or village a difficult basis for solidarity.<sup>64</sup> The association of sworn brotherhoods with secrecy, mutual protection, and armed struggle had obvious relevance for coolies and was central to organizing mass uprisings. The

60. Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies*.

61. Mann, "Male Bond in Chinese History."

62. Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies*, 59–69. On rooster sacrifice, see also Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 37–39.

63. Cheung, "Performing Exclusion and Resistance." See also Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*; McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks*.

64. Meagher, *Coolie Trade*, 70.

massive Pativilca revolt in 1870 bore many trappings of a sworn brotherhood. It was preplanned and coordinated by free Chinese who traveled between estates as small vendors. A cadre of armed leaders directed the insurrection on horseback; the rebels signaled their martial status as Chinese warriors by painting their faces blue and red, wrapping their heads in multicolored turbans, and brandishing machetes and handmade spears. Unfurling Chinese banners, they were accompanied by musicians playing Chinese flutes and cymbals.<sup>65</sup> These actions directly echoed practices by sworn brotherhoods and guerrilla militias on all sides of the Taiping Rebellion.<sup>66</sup>

In 1881, the blood oath in Lurín also united free Chinese merchants (most notably Quintín Quintana) and indentured workers as brothers and emphasized their martial status as warriors. Here the central place of the god of war, Guandi/Kuongkong, was key. Prasenjit Duara has noted that Guandi had multiple meanings that were often at odds with the Qing state's effort to tie his cult to imperial grandeur and obedience.<sup>67</sup> Among sworn brotherhoods, Guandi was revered in his outlaw capacity as a god of resistance to illegitimate power. Among sojourners and merchants, he was venerated as a god of prosperity and protection for strangers in distant lands. The epic story of Guan Yu swearing mutual loyalty with his fellow warriors in a peach orchard was the foundational logic of all Chinese brotherhoods.<sup>68</sup> In Lurín, all these different attributes were present. The numerous imperial Chinese flags surrounding Kuongkong's altar illustrated the men's identification with China. But the authority of the Qing state was never mentioned in the words attributed to Quintín Quintana, despite Chilean eagerness to represent Chinese men as subjects of a separate nation. Instead, Quintana was said to acknowledge his own prosperity in Peru and pledge to sacrifice it to free his brothers from slavery so that they too might prosper. The blood oath before Kuongkong mutually committed men in a distant land to a military struggle against the illegitimate authority of Peru. It invoked the nation of China as a basis of homosocial racial solidarity without legitimating the Chinese empire that the men had left behind. The Qing dynasty had only recently designated a flag to represent China as a nation and did so in direct response to the Taiping Rebellion and second Opium War. For Chinese men in Peru, many of whom had fought against or been victimized by Qing troops, the Chinese flag likely symbolized

65. Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru*, 121–22; Rodríguez Pastor, *La rebelión de los rostros pintados*, 53–91.

66. Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 37–38, 87–88, 127–30.

67. Duara, "Superscribing Symbols," 784–86.

68. McIsaac, "'Righteous Fraternities'"; Kutcher, "Fifth Relationship."



national and racial differentiation from Peruvians and Chileans rather than allegiance to the Manchu state.

The constitution of a sworn brotherhood in Lurín was also about labor. The rapid replacement of coolie labor on Peruvian plantations with Chinese *enganche* was fueled by the ways that Chinese alliance with Chile enabled Chinese merchants to exercise authority over Chinese men fleeing plantations. Quintín Quintana was a case in point. After Chile occupied Lima in January 1881, Quintana began recruiting Chinese men for *enganche* gangs out of Callao and sending them to labor on northern plantations. In September 1881, British ambassador Spencer St. John identified Quintana as a ringleader in a renewed “slave traffic” connected to Chinese gambling houses and opium dens. St. John saw no difference between *enganche* labor and coolie labor. A longtime critic of human traffic out of Macao, he evinced a zealous commitment to his nation’s current policy of suppressing Chinese indenture notwithstanding Great Britain’s foundational role in initiating the trade. St. John repeatedly pressured Patricio Lynch (now military governor of Peru) to close Chinese subcontracting operations in Callao and Lima, which St. John argued were kidnapping rackets. He also accused Chilean officers of being in on the game and taking bribes from thugs like Quintana.<sup>69</sup>

Chileans had a vested interest in Chinese workers returning to plantations. They needed Peruvian agriculture to resume production in order to feed Chilean troops and provide tax revenue for financing the occupation. Peruvian landowners proved willing to cooperate with Chile if its troops suppressed rural rebellions and guaranteed access to labor. Between July 1881 and March 1882, Patricio Lynch decreed three different policies on “Asian contracts” aimed at regulating Chinese *enganche* and other free peonage while eliminating the abuses of coolie labor.<sup>70</sup> Strikingly, these were Chile’s only military decrees on Peruvian labor relations during the three-year occupation. Lynch formally outlawed Chinese gaming and independently operated labor agencies, and he placed all Chinese contracts under the control of a single commission that reported to Chile’s military headquarters. But Lynch proved unable to enforce his own laws, as complaints about Chinese gambling houses and illicit labor agencies continued to soar. In Pisco, Chilean officers openly distributed Chinese workers to local haciendas in return for cooperation from

69. Spencer St. John to Patricio Lynch, 17 Sept. 1881, Public Record Office, Kew, Foreign Office, 177/154.

70. “P. Lynch, decreto, julio 18, 1881,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 5:492–93; “P. Lynch, contratos de asiáticos, setiembre 23, 1881,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 6:239; “P. Lynch, contratos de asiáticos, marzo 1, 1882,” in Ahumada Moreno, *Guerra del Pacífico*, 7:220–21.

landowners.<sup>71</sup> In Callao, Quintana's enganche operation was likely protected by the port's commanding officer, José Domingo Amunátegui, Chilean godfather to Quintana's son.

At first glance, the image of Quintín Quintana trafficking Chinese men to Peruvian plantations shortly after he solemnly pledged to liberate his brothers from slavery suggests profound betrayal. No doubt Quintana's service to the Chilean army positioned him to personally benefit during the occupation.<sup>72</sup> (After the war, Quintana ended up in Santiago working as a police investigator and was famous for his elegant clothing.) But Chinese enganche was not coolie labor. Enganche workers earned higher wages on much shorter contracts. Most importantly, enganche contracted men to a Chinese boss, not a Peruvian landowner. Enganche could be coercive, and bosses were especially ruthless with runaways. But even the most sensational reports of enganche abuse did not include the most hated institutions of coolie labor: locked barracks, cages, leg irons, floggings, and cutting queues. Enganche bosses negotiated higher payment for workers by moving work gangs from one plantation to another. They did advance men opium and gambling money, but recipients did not always view this in the negative light that British and Chinese authorities did; bosses also sold their men Chinese foodstuffs, musical instruments, and ceremonial clothing for Lunar New Year. As short-term arrangements, enganche promised men upward mobility: the chance to accumulate money through multiple successive contracts.<sup>73</sup>

Chinese enganche mirrored the mutualism and hierarchies of sworn brotherhoods, which in China had economic as well as military purposes. They protected markets, brokered commercial deals, and arranged marriages to unite member families. As vertical fraternities, they positioned masters / elder brothers to direct the lives and labor of disciples / younger brothers. China historians Lee McIsaac and Brian Martin have underscored the role of sworn brotherhoods in forming labor gangs and criminal networks.<sup>74</sup> In Peru, Chinese enganche workers promised loyalty to their boss. In turn, the boss pledged to provide a salary advance, regular work, food, shelter, and protection from abuse. The prosperity of both workers and bosses depended on collective effort and mutual obligation. Enganche bosses also had larger social roles. They built temples, officiated religious ceremonies, and arranged marriages for workers

71. Estanislao del Canto reported negotiating with "chinos jefes y caporales" for the "reparto" of some 3,000 Chinese workers to haciendas outside Pisco. Del Canto, *Memorias militares*, 1:153-54.

72. Chou, *Chile y China*, 152.

73. Peloso, *Peasants on Plantations*, 34-54.

74. McIsaac, "'Righteous Fraternities'"; Martin, *Shanghai Green Gang*.

with local Peruvian women. In one case, a Chinese boss from Chicama reportedly married 120 of his countrymen to highland indigenous women in a single day.<sup>75</sup> The link between *enganche* and marriage was especially important, since many Chinese men trafficked as coolies had been unable to marry in China because of war and economic upheaval. Failure to marry had cosmic, not just material, consequences, since men without wives could not fulfill Confucian obligations to produce legitimate heirs and care for ancestral altars.<sup>76</sup>

In January 1881 in Lurín, Quintín Quintana assumed leadership of a Chinese sworn brotherhood and functioned as an *enganche* boss to the Chilean army. Chilean sources are clear that it was Quintana who organized the various squads that served the army in different capacities. According to Daniel Riquelme's narration, participants pledged to obey Quintana's command "to kill . . . to burn . . . [or] to die," not that of a Chilean officer. Chinese men may also have pledged to work as Quintana directed in the future. In any case, Chinese participants in the ceremony would have been a logical starting point for Quintana's later recruitment of *enganche* workers in Callao since most of these men ended up in and around Lima after Chile's victory. It is unknown whether Quintana was considered a good boss by the Chinese workers whom he sent back to plantations, but in January 1881 he had plenty of support. Quintana's starring role in Lurín underscores how the Chinese oath to fight with Chileans against the common enemy of Peru was inseparable from Chinese men's pledge to labor as directed by a Chinese boss. In this context, Quintana's later *enganche* activities were less about betrayal than about making good on the promise in Lurín to end coolie labor and incorporate men into a Chinese network. The oath constituted a sworn brotherhood that affirmed homosocial bonds and internal hierarchies among Chinese men, between merchants as labor bosses and recently freed coolies who agreed to labor under Chinese authority.

## Conclusion

The War of the Pacific involved struggles over labor and masculinity that made social experience from China relevant to how national and racial difference were understood in Latin America. Chile's invasion of Peru enabled the most spectacular Chinese revolt against coolie labor in a broader tradition of Chinese agrarian resistance in Peru that had long drawn on military tactics and fraternal organizations from China. Coolie rebellion was crucial to Patricio Lynch's ability to destabilize the Peruvian coast in the months before Chile's attack on

75. Middendorf, *Perú*, 2:262–63.

76. Mann, "Male Bond in Chinese History."

Lima and enabled Chileans to cast themselves as liberators who confronted a grossly inferior Peruvian enemy. In Lurín, the creation of a Chinese sworn brotherhood under the authority of Quintín Quintana occasioned still more spectacular claims about Chilean superiority. Chilean stories about the Chinese oath affirmed Chileans' ideas about their own masculine honor and national commitment by casting Chinese men as citizen warriors worthy of joining Chile's cause because they too loved freedom and nation. Such celebratory tales did not annul Chilean revulsion to Chinese alterity or eagerness to put Chinese men back to work once Lima fell. Nonetheless, stories about the oath demonstrate Chileans' serious engagement with Chinese political meanings and a momentary recognition of Chinese as men like themselves.

For Chinese men, the oath had a different meaning. The creation of a sworn brotherhood in Lurín enacted a form of fraternity long associated with war in China to help Chinese men in Peru negotiate a strategic alliance with the Chilean army. Chinese men in Lurín did not pledge loyalty either to the Chilean army or to imperial China. Rather, they pledged mutual commitment to each other in a continuing struggle against coolie labor. The ceremony's expressions of Chinese nationalism affirmed Chinese racial solidarity and masculine hierarchy in the context of a Latin American war that defined nation in racial terms and a labor system that subjugated Chinese men based on race. Chinese brotherhoods helped transform Peruvian labor relations by creating pressure to replace coolie labor with Chinese subcontracting and free peonage overseen by a proliferating number of Chinese merchant labor bosses. From this angle, Chilean narrators of the 1881 oath in Lurín recognized a basic truth: Chinese men in the War of the Pacific organized to free themselves.

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