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Being Chinese in Mexican Literature

Introduction

Chinese presence in Mexico can be dated back to the colonial era, when Matías Romero, senator of Chiapas from 1875, noticed that Mexican tropical hotlands held immense potential but the region lacked a steady workforce to make coffee beans profitable. For this reason, Romero realized the possibility for cheap Chinese laborers to work in the remote area or coasts, to supply America with high-quality coffee beans.

In search of better economic opportunities, bigger immigration waves began to emerge in the late nineteenth century. By 1910, Chinese immigrants and their settlements in became visible in almost every state and territory of Mexico, with the single exception of Tlaxcala (Romero 57). Along with the people came Chinese culture and its commercial habits, which all contribute to the image of the Chinese in the eyes of Mexicans. The cultural collision led to identity conflicts and complexity, while the commercial success of Chinese immigrants generated envy and hatred. Their presence in society and economic status has influenced the representation of Chinese people and culture in contemporary Mexican literature, which often seems inconsistent and superficial. In general, Mexican “Orientalism” is applied differently to males and females, evolves through time, and is represented mostly by Western stereotypes of Chinese exoticism. In

this way, “Orientalism” in Mexican literature is more of a fusion of Western interpretations of the Chinese and Oriental culture.

The borderline cities of Mexico have witnessed most of the major racial conflicts between Chinese and Mexicans, therefore, the literature with a setting in these places would provide perfect examples on the racial issues from the Mexican perspectives. I will attempt to decipher the transnational representation of Chinese immigrants in Mexican literature, such as how they are represented, the intention of this representation within both historical and fictional context. In this thesis, I will examine some contemporary Mexican literature and conduct analyses on Chinese immigrants’ images of two poems, one song and a Comedy made during the Anti-Chinese movement, as well as individual analysis of male and female characters and other cultural elements that appear in the short story, “*El silbido*” by Juan Villoro from his book *Los culpables*, and the novel, *Sangre de familia* by Juan José Rodríguez, both contemporary fiction writers.

Being Chinese during the Anti-Chinese Campaign in Poems, a Song and Comedy Play

To meet the increasing agricultural and industrial demands, the Mexican government started to lure laborers from China in middle of the nineteenth century to come to Mexico to work in mining as well as agriculture. Besides that, the biggest motivation for Chinese immigration to Mexico was to cross border to the United States, therefore, “during the earlier years of this movement, Chinese immigrants concentrated their settlement in northern Mexico” (Romero 57). Northern provinces such as Sonora, Chihuahua and Baja California, according to Robert Chao

Romero, “maximized both accessibility to the United States for purposes of illegal immigration smuggling network and economic opportunity as sites of incipient capitalist development” (Romero 59). Among this concentration on the borderline, a significant number of Chinese immigrants succeeded in their entrepreneurships as dry good traders, owners of restaurants, convenience stores, laundries, etc.

Romero observes that the cause of Anti Chinese Campaign as “Chinese mercantile success engendered deep resentment on the part of the Mexican middle classes of northern Mexico and led to the Anti-Chinese campaigns of the early twentieth century” (Romero 129). In this era, Chinese merchants were blamed for the country’s economic downturn and commercial exploitation of the local Mexicans. But Romero overlooks the role played by “mestizaje” (racial mixture), the core ideology of Mexican nationalist revolutions as well as of the Anti-Chinese campaign from 1910s to 1930s launched by revolutionary activists. Mexican nationalism upheld the view that “national identities were forged from racial mixture of European criollos (creoles) and indigenous people”, which offered “the post-revolutionary Mexican elites a foundation for national unity and racial homogeneity based on the triumph of the Europeanized mestizo” (Delgado 5). It asserted the contribution of European immigrants in the development of America, with the acknowledgement that the Indians of Mexico contributed significantly to the society by providing many admirable qualities, including “strict morality, great sobriety, obedience, military prowess, and courage” (Romero 182) to the national development with their participation as laborers in government infrastructure projects, such as railway, road construction, and other public works. For this reason, Mexican society and government started to believe that the improvement of Mexican society lay essentially in the improvement of its indigenous

community, thus, it was believed that government should shift their attitude towards Chinese laborer immigrants from being welcomed to being exiled.

The idea of mestizaje pushed the Chinese immigrants to the opposite side of socioeconomic advancement and integration of the indigenous population. At the time, Chinese laborers posed unfair economic competition for indigenous laborers by willing to work for lower wages and represented a negative cultural influence by not being assimilated into the Mexican mainstream culture. Embracing the concept of mestizaje, Mexican society showed its willingness to assimilate its Native population into the social mainstream while excluding blacks from the national image and expelling most of Chinese from Mexico (Delgado 5). The new Mexican nationalism not only cast Chinese as foreign and dangerous, but also as racial contaminations.

However, envy and xenophobia had existed long before the popularization of “mestizaje”: ridicules and abuses had been going ever since the Chinese set foot in the country. Just from 1911 to 1919, there were at least 814 murdered Chinese in various states throughout Mexico, and the hostility towards Chinese merchants was also expressed in the forms of consistent robberies and lootings (Romero 147). With the ideology of “mestizaje” pushing the process of Anti-Chinese movement forward, which turned the unorganized anti-Chinese reactions into organized racial oppressions, the situation for Chinese immigrants only worsened, and eventually leading to their exile.

The following anonymous poem written around 1910s and titled “El destierro de los chinos”, was a popular broadside which illustrated the popular perspective on Chinese immigrants in Mexico

If the government let them,

They will swamp our nation...

It is urgent to take steps
So that Arabs and Chinese
Don't overrun our country....
Gentlemen, in your own homes,
Which of your household products come
From these two races?
They haven't made a discovery
Paying with Chinese money.
They've only come to ruin
The female kind.
That is the best thing they have done,
The dog-faced Chinese,
And that's why we ask
For the exile of the Chinese.
Don't breed in our nation....
The women that make a union with the Chinese...
Know no shame
Because they are staining the nation....
Pray to God, man from China,
With all your heart
That they don't come and lynch you
If the revolution comes. (Romero 90)

Julia María Schiavone Camacho notes in her book, *Chinese Mexicans*, that negative attitudes and jokes regarding the Chinese abounded, and one anti-Chinese newspaper circulated for more than fifteen years, but even so, the anti-Chinese sentiment was neither widespread nor organized in Sonora until the revolutionary era (Camacho 40). This poem reflects Mexican revolutionary opinions on Chinese immigrants, and with the intention of rallying the “real” Mexicans into the racial war against Chinese.

It is clear that this poem was written by a self-proclaimed “real” Mexican who addressed Mexico as “our nation”, at the mean time singling out its Chinese and even Arabs population as the biggest national enemy. With the attempt to render the Chinese immigration ugly to the extreme as well as provoking the nation into a riot against the Chinese, the author put himself in the position of a victim of Chinese presence in Mexico like every other Mexican, reminding Mexicans the ill intention of the Chinese, by saying “they come to swamp our nation” and “to stain the nation”; accuse Chinese for committing multiple crimes such as economic exploitation of Mexican society by dividing the household products markets with the Arabs; and even “ruining the female kind” by luring Mexican women into marriage with the ill-gotten profits made from Mexicans; The author also denied all the contributions Chinese made to the society, by saying that they made no contribution with their Chinese money. To bring out a sense of unity of all Mexicans and to against the Chinese, the author was clearly speaking as a Mexican for all the Mexicans, and to all the Mexicans. In the end of the poem, the author, once again characterizes the Chinese as the enemies of the Mexican Revolution. Rather than warning the Chinese, the author was most likely threatening all the Chinese that the revolutionaries would come to lynch them. In all, the author considered that the Chinese should be punished, lynched and exiled as a solution to Mexican problems.

The image of Chinese immigrants is distorted in this poem by neglecting the Chinese contribution to the construction and welfare of the society, by the directly insulting remarks about Chinese facial features, as well as by the misreading of interracial marriages. In this sense, the arguments posed by this anti-Chinese poem may seem rather absurd. In terms of their social contribution, Chinese immigrants were contracted laborers from overseas in order to make up for the Mexican labor shortage, and according to Delgado's book, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, the popular belief of Chinese immigrants changed dramatically over few decades. In the late nineteenth century, people in Mexico were "appealing to the popular belief that where Chinese toiled in cane and cotton fields and filled mining and railroad camps, progress occurred" (Delgado 14). However, around 1910s, the perspective on Chinese laborers had slid to the opposite side, and instead, they were almost suddenly seen as the source of all Mexican socioeconomic problems.

After the completion of basic construction in the most remote area of Mexican territories, Chinese immigrants started to practice in other occupations as well as in a larger variety of self-owned businesses, such as general storekeepers, restaurant owners, etc. However, a lot of Chinese stayed in the agricultural business as both commercial farmers and traditional farmers to meet regional demand for agricultural products. In Tucson, for example, "as Tucsonans gradually left their subsistence farms for more urbanized areas, they relied increasingly on Chinese commercial and traditional farmers to provide much-needed produce" (Delgado 52). This type of dependence makes outcasting Chinese immigrants for the benefits of Mexicans a real hypocrisy, Delgado notes that "Magdalena's municipal president, Eduardo Arias, nonetheless did acknowledge that without Chinese merchants, local residents would have to go without vegetables, and city coffers would greatly suffer from the loss of tax revenue" (Delgado 162). All

these facts counter the argument “they haven’t made a discovery, paying with Chinese money” in the poem.

The perspective on interracial marriage and the negative sentiment against Chinese merchants didn’t change very much shortly after the anti-Chinese campaign. Picked from a spoken dialogue recording of a comedy drama set in Texas, titled “El chino”, which was commercially released by the Brunswick Record Corporation in 1937, Romero provides another literal example made during the campaign. The play features the common conception of how Chinese men would lure innocent Mexican women into interracial unions by promising a life of material comfort.

Ching(C): Maria, tomorrow I am going to give praise [go to church] and I want to take a nice virgin,

Maria(M): Great, but this virgin already has a boyfriend Besides who are you? I don’t know you. I don’t even know your name.

C: My name is Ching Choman

M: Ching what? Well, what do you know, this guy just cussed at me [To Maria “Ching” sounds like “chingar” in Spanish]

C: Don’t get angry, Maria. I want to tell you that your boyfriend is no good, no good.

M: What do you mean, no good?

C: A Texan never works. The poor woman always works to support him... A pretty girl like you always wants nice dresses, many pairs of shoes. And this Chinese guy is very rich and will make a good husband. The one you have is useless.

M: So what.

C: Maria, I promise you eternal love. You will be the queen of my house, and I will buy you whatever you desire. As long as you give me... the heart of a divine and charming woman.

M: Hey, hey, you're going too far. If you keep it up, I'll give you a slap on the cheek.

C: Give me whatever you want as long as you give me something.

M: Listen, you, I am an honorable young lady. (Romero 77)

This short conversation between Ching and Maria, to its readers and audience, is sufficient to capture the message sent by the playwright. Ching is portrayed as a shameless, wealthy Chinese man, who insists on pursuing Maria by promising her a rich material life, despite the anger and disgust she has shown to him and the fact that she already has a boyfriend. Ching furthermore starts to insult her Mexican boyfriend, by saying "he is no good" and "a Texan never works, a poor woman always works to support him." Criticized by a Chinese that all the Tajenos are lazy and dependent upon their wives, this comedy record shows how the Mexican "macho" was challenged and insulted by interracial marriages. It reveals the Mexican male's gender insecurities in terms of their economic disadvantage compared with the Chinese, and likely sexual threat due to the male shortage in Sonora in the early twentieth century (Romero 84).

On the other hand, Maria, as an honorable Mexican lady, a virgin, clearly detested Ching, her Chinese suitor. She, more than once, showed this emotion in this short dialogue, her disgust is shown by words like "so what", "I'll give you a slap on the cheek", and the fact that she was angered by a foreign name "Ching", whose sound doesn't even resemble 50% of the word "chinga", because letter "g" at the end of Chinese words only adds a heavy nasal sound to the previous syllable, and wouldn't be articulated as an individual consonant.

The absurdity of insulting and attacking them can be easily transferred into the absurdity of insulting and attacking anything related to them. With the images of despicable Chinese men and

honorable women established, the shameful image of Mexican women would simply be, the women who associate with Chinese men in a marriage union. A song from this era, titled “Los chinos”, composed by Eduardo Tavo in the traditional ballad style of a Mexican corrido, was released by Columbia Records in 1913. This corrido describes women's lives after their interracial unions with Chinese. Its lyrics read in part:

There goes the angry mob

So pay close attention

Only God knows what will happen

Here comes the big news

I don't know what will happen

But there will be no more silk outfits [in reference to the clothing of Chinese]

I am saying this in reference to many young women

Young women in Mazatlán.

Go look for your way out

Because soon there will be none of them left

It started with a few Chinese

That had their stores closed down

And all of the women who did business with them

Cried all night

Many say I am lying

Because I am telling the truth

They will fall in love with a Mexican

Only on rare occasions
Many Mexican women love the Chinese
Because they have no shame
And they aren't ashamed to make a Chinese bun in their hair
They both make the braid together
Then they go to the mirror
With their Chinese at their side
And one asks the other
Who did a better job fixing their hair

All Mexican women that love a Chinese man
Should be ashamed
And without hesitation
Should be shunned by all people of Mexico
I say this because many women of Mexico
Dirty women
For the love of money
They make of themselves less than a woman of China... (Romero 81)

The lyrics of the song reflect the violence had been perpetrated and foreshadows the violence that would be perpetrated against Chinese immigrants in Mazatlán during the Revolution.¹ The Chinese stores closed down because of the constant harassments from the Mazatlán mob, however, the mob would not be satisfied with the result. Greater violence

¹ See Romero, page 147-154

targeting the Chinese people continued and wouldn't stop until "there w[ould] be no more silk outfits". Furthermore Mexican women, instead of getting married to the Chinese, are described by Tavo as "d[oing] business with Chinese." A "just" warning was given by the author to the Mexican wives of Chinese immigrants. In the song, Tavo suggest that they "go look for [their] way out," at the same time calling them "dirty" and "shameless." In order to poke fun at this interracial marriage, Tavo also indulges his imagination about the choice of Asian hairstyles: Mexican wives would make a "Chinese bun in their hair" and then, both husbands and wives "make their braid together" and compare "who did a better job fixing their hair" in front of the mirror.

It is a fact that before Qing Dynasty was overthrown by Xinhai Revolution in 1911, "queue" the traditional Manchurian hairstyle, the braid of man, was forced on all Chinese citizens as a symbol of social and cultural uniformity. In fact, Chinese men started to adopt Western hairstyle only in 1904, and being the object of foreign derision, around the same time, some people advocated that all Chinese likely to come into frequent contact with foreigners should be allowed to 'modernize', in other words, to remove their queue (Godley). Given this context, we can almost certainly say that the social ridicules and oppressions made it easier for Chinese people to remove their queue in Mexico. In fact, a photo of Chan Tin Wo (Delgado 56), a Chinese merchant in Mexico, shows that some Chinese immigrants in Mexico did adopt Western hairstyles even before 1900s. Tavo noticed the cultural norm of Chinese men growing a braid, and used it to attack Chinese manhood in order to defend the Mexican macho. However, by disregarding the fact that the queue was not practical for Chinese men in Mexico and ignoring its cultural connotations, he simply created the image of Chinese men and their Mexican wives

competing for their hair braiding skill to imply a feminine attribute of Chinese men a trait not desirable in “real” man.

Moreover, like other propaganda that circulated at the time, Tavo attacked Chinese polygamy. By saying that by marrying a Chinese, Mexican women “make of themselves less than a woman of China.” Tavo suggests that Mexican wives hold a status below that of their Chinese counterparts as concubines of Chinese people in Mexico (Romero 86), because it might be possible that Chinese men who engaged in unions with Mexican wives also remained married to Chinese women left behind in China. However, judging from the fact that there is no study or account that could prove this polygamous acts, it is unfair to assume its certainty and to announce that Mexican women in such a union would be “less than a woman of China.”

Unlike the comedy dialogue between Chang and Maria, which depicted the Chinese as shameless and despicable, one can note in “Los chinos” the blame and condemnations Mexican women in interracial union were subjected to. “El destierro de los Chinos”, in a harsher fashion, also condemned Mexican women who chose to marry Chinese men. The poem reads in part:

They haven't made a discovery

Paying with Chinese money,

They've only come to ruin

The female kind...

But we must make an effort

To tolerate imprudence.

The ones who are to blame

Are the wicked women.

They know no shame.

They begin to cry

About how comfortably they have lived

And their eventual decline.

Those wretched females,

Know no shame.

What's in it for them

Is pure convenience.

I tell you the truth,

Without fear of public outrage,

That she who lives with a Chinese man

Is a woman of pure convenience.

They don't like to work,

This shameless woman

She wants the Chinaman to support her

And keep her well dressed

And they like to boast

Without any brains

What they need

Is a little bit of shame

We hold the government responsible

Even though you man think me unwise

They should exile

Three types of people [Chinese, Mexican women who marry them, and Arabs].

The first should be women

Who make unions with Chinese men

They know no shame

Because they are staining the nation

And we should give them their due

Right quick

Burn them with hot oil

With firewood and tar. (Romero 79)

Regarding the Chinese men's image, two stanzas shall be emphasized. During the Anti-Chinese campaign, the interracial marriage was constantly described as a Chinese scheme to lure them into a polygamous family, to ruin Mexican women, to make them into sex slaves but never grant them with the material promises made before their marriage. In the poem, the author more than once mentions that "they've only come to ruin the female kind...", and also implied that because of their ill intention to trick Mexican women, Mexican women would begin to cry about loss of their comfortable life before the marital unions.

Romero points out, "Mexican women who married Chinese suitors were shunned and scolded as "dirty," "lazy," "unpatriotic" and "shameless." Chinese- Mexican marital unions were condemned as marriages of convenience in which lazy Mexican women avoided work, thanks to financial support from their Chinese husbands" (Romero 78). "El destierro de los chinos" takes a

turn from blaming Chinese men from luring innocent Mexican women into the direct and strong hatred targeting Mexican women in this kind of marital union. Unlike Maria, who is depicted as the honorable Mexican virgin who refused and ridiculed a Chinese man, women in unions with Chinese become the counterexample of being honorable, and for this reason they were deemed deserving of harsh punishment.

Judging from what the author has written, we can say that from the revolutionary point of view, Mexican women who married Chinese men were shameless, brainless, wicked, lazy, women driven by interest, and women who were staining the nation. For these reasons they should be exiled from the nation together with all the Chinese, and be punished, be given their due, be boiled and burnt with hot oil, firewood and tar. The horrifying language makes clear the fierce anger and hatred Mexican women married with Chinese men endured in society. It is even fair to say that it was not by marrying a Chinese that a Mexican woman made herself less than a woman in China. More accurately speaking, it was society that made Mexican woman in an interracial union less than a human being.

During the revolutionary era, this social brutality towards women in a Mexican-Chinese marital union was not only carried out by the angry mobs that condemned the Chinese for ruining the economy, their women, their Mexican manhood, but also expressed through the government policies regarding their citizenship status. Romero noted in his book several different kinds of citizenship classification of Mexican women in an interracial marriage. Mexican women married to Chinese immigrants who had become naturalized Mexican citizens would retain their status as Mexican nationals in the census materials. Female Mexicans involved in a marital unions with Chinese who had not become a Mexican citizen would be categorized as Chinese. In short, other than in an extramarital union, in which a female would retain her status

anyhow, the Mexican wives' nationalities were entirely based on with their Chinese husbands' nationalities (Romero 69). This same categorization of Chinese nationals was also extended to the offsprings of the interracial unions.

Rather than saying that the policy reflects the political male dominance, it makes more sense to say that during the Mexican Revolution, anything associated with Chinese immigrants was be devalued, condemned, and classified as "being Chinese" by the value of society and government. It is for certain that, in the Anti-chinista movement, women who formed bonds with Chinese were seen as agents in the deterioration of the race and traitors to the nation. And for this reason, a lot of Mexican women were also exiled with their Chinese husbands.

Camacho noted in his book the origin of exile of Chinese immigrants as following. In 1926, a newspaper article titled "Mexicans Will Be Kicked Out of California" was presented to President Plutarco Elías Calles together with a proposal to deal with Chinese immigrants. The news piece reported that 75% of Mexicans entered California illegally and a campaign to return them to Mexico was to begin immediately. Although a national massive deportation of Mexican immigrants would not begin until the Great Depression, California was undertaking its smaller deportation campaigns. The proposal reads, "If Americans can do this to a neighboring country, to Mexicans, why don't we take advantage of this idea- using it against Chinese" (Camacho 65). In 1929, Mexican workers, as scapegoats for the Great Depression, returned to Mexico en masse. Shortly after, likewise, being blamed for Mexico's economic and social problems, Chinese men were evicted from Sonora and Sinaloa through mob violence, arrest and deportation processes, and exit deadlines in the ways described by poems cited by Camacho.² Some of them were pushed across the United States borderline by force, but a significant number of them returned to China together with their Mexican wives and offspring, fearing the Antichinista sentiment would

² See Camacho, page 67-69

direct the hatred and torment to their wives and children. As a result of Anti-Chinese campaign, the entire Chinese population of Sonora was expelled in 1931.

Sadly, under intense pressure from families, and due to economic and social persecution, many Chinese-Mexican couples divorced from the 1910s to 1930s. In 1930, the Sonora state government banned Chinese-Mexican unions, and prohibited Chinese men and Mexican women from marrying or living together *in amasiato* (Camacho 66). Some of the Chinese-Mexican couples divorced as soon as possible so that the wives would regain Mexican status. Later on, in the 30s, many Chinese-Mexican families divorced in China, and more than 400 Mexican women together with their offspring were repatriated to Mexico from 1937 to 1939 (Romero 87).

The Mexican revolution was set to pursue vast social changes as to transform politics and society. Even though it was aiming to be in favor of lighter skin and to promote *mestizaje* as the national identity, out of its revolutionary agenda, the Mexican Revolution also brought challenges to the traditional gender norms. Despite the fact that interracial marriages were denounced and condemned as marriages of convenience, in the process of social transformations due to Mexican Revolution, “as all members of the society- men, women, and children- mobilized in support of the struggle, people become freer to forge new types of relationships” (Camacho 40). People started to question sexuality more, engaging more on the personal level of conflicts over social norms. The Mexican revolution always seemed to create paradox, regarding how “mestizaje” was trying to assimilate indigenous people into mainstream society, since it also attempted to erase to indigenous identity. And regarding Chinese-Mexican marital unions, despite the harsh situation and struggles the revolution brought to the unions of Chinese men and Mexican women, it also made the interracial free union more possible.

Being Chinese in Mexican Novels of the Twenty-first Century

Decades have passed since the nationwide Anti-Chinese campaign in Mexico. However, in places like Sonora and Baja California, where the most interactions occurred between Mexicans and Chinese immigrants in the past, the legacy of this history is still strong enough to stir the emotions of their people. It is fair to say that the old unjust sentiments about this immigration group still linger, while new historical perspectives on the horrifying deeds forced on the Chinese in Mexico in the past have also emerged and have increasingly been adopted by the residents. And this coexistence of the old and the new inspires authors like Juan Villoro and Juan José Rodríguez in their creations of literature.

Grace Peña Delgado, author of *Making the Chinese Mexican*, mentions in the beginning of his book that no matter how much emphasis was placed on the distinct histories, cultures, and languages of Southeast Asia and China, some Mexican students still believed that all Asians were Chinese, and that all Chinese deserved ridicule and humiliation (Delgado 4). Delgado's book was published in 2012, a new era in which racism is condemned like never before. However, in literature or real life, racism has never ceased to exist. Literature always serves as a reflection of cultural norms, in which the application of stereotypes can be prominent, no matter how the forms and approaches may have evolved and changed. In general, as the misrepresentation of different cultures, stereotypes evolved from viciously attacking a certain race to generalizing its traits in a superficial manner. Overall, representations of the Chinese have progressed from demonization to Orientalist depictions, and have showed the tendency to finally become more realistic portrayals of the Chinese and their experiences. Regarding the Chinese figures appear in western hemisphere and its literature, the representation of Orientalism, more accurately speaking, becomes a stereotypical westernized Orientalism.

In the year 2007, Juan Villoro published the collection *Los culpables*, in which a short story titled *El silbido* fictionalized the stereotypes against Chinese. In this story, three very short men are the members of a Taiwanese criminal cartel in Mexicali. The weird part is that their ownership of the soccer team of Mexicali- Los Tucanes was just a disguise to launder the money they made from their illicit business. Lola, another Chinese figure in the story, who, to a certain extent, is responsible for the romantic interaction between a Mexican soccer player and a Chinese of Mexicali.

Juan José Rodríguez starts his novel, *Sangre de familia*, with bloodshed and murders in a Chinese laundry. A phone call and a mysterious death are the trigger for series of gunfires and explosions in the port of Mazatlán, a world that remains unknown to most of the people outside. In Mazatlán, drug deals happen in night clubs and at the hotel Iguana Azul. Lisandro, a descendent of the first Chinese immigrants of the port who is also involved in the cocaine trade, always knows that murder haunts the family. Because of a betrayal of the criminal brotherhood that happened many years ago in the Chinatown of San Francisco, a vengeance is fermenting in him. However, his problems will only be thicker, because Lisandro and his men are not only members of the Chinese mafia, they are also vampires. Alejandro Medina, the protagonist of the story, finds out that his life is endangered and intertwined with the conflicts between Chinese vampire mafias and a villain named Carlos Goldoni. In the novel, Rodríguez applied many popular practices of the genre of vampire stories. In the novel, Rodríguez explored other stereotypes about Chinese immigrants, and sometimes left the readers puzzled regarding the identity of the characters – whether they are more like Chinese mafia or more like vampires.

In his story, Juan Villoro created several Chinese characters. There are three mafia members, whose names were simply ignored, and who are only referred to as el Trillizo A, el

Trillizo B and el Trillizo C. He also created a female character named Lola, who has several dates with the protagonist. In *Sangre de familia*, Juan José Rodríguez created Wang Fong, a Chinese gang member, Lisandro, another Chinese gang member, and Yolanda, a Chinese girl who falls in love with protagonist. In terms of creating characters and some plot development of the story, the two stories share many things in common: all Chinese men are mafias and all Chinese women would, to some extent, have some romantic interactions with the protagonists.

Other than the resemblance between the characters of two sides, other Chinese cultural aspects are also heavily featured. However, these cultural aspects of the two stories suggest two different views on the Chinese borderline population of the Mexico-US border. “El silbido”, as a comic tale, is intended to mock the Chinese population by their appearances, and for this reason, when describing physical features of Lola and los Trillizos, the author sometimes applies mild insults. Rodríguez shows his sympathy by describing the horror that Chinese immigrants faced in Mazatlán during their expulsion, however, he is also not able to escape the traditional perspectives through which Westerners have been interpreting Chinese culture. In his novel, stereotypes and other misrepresentations are still rather noticeable. For instance, male characters would share the traits that female characters don’t possess, while female characters would demonstrate their own special characteristics. For instance, Chinese men are always dangerous and Chinese women are benevolent and subjected to exotic romantic purposes. Therefore, the misrepresentations of the two stories can be categorized into stereotypes of Chinese men, of Chinese women and of Chinese cultural aspects.

The plot of “El silbido”, starts to unravel after an explosion that almost takes the protagonist's life. After being rescued, the first person narrator, in his flash back, begins to tell what has happened in Mexicali, claiming that he knew nothing about Mexicali until los Trillizos

came to his home in Mexico City. The protagonist starts to make fun of Chinese physical appearances from the very beginning of the story. When los Trillizos appear at protagonist's door, they are described as sweaty, fat and with funny goatees. And from that moment on, the sweaty faces of los Trillizos started to haunt the protagonist's memory of Mexicali, until the end of story, he decided to retire from soccer, " todo se detuvo: el agua de la cascada eléctrica, el sudor en las mejillas de los Trillizos..." (Villoro 56) Also during their first meeting, the protagonist described los Trillizos as "gordísimos, como luchadores de sumo. Sus camisetas dejaban ver tatuajes en varios colores, Los tres llevaban un barbita de chivo, muy cuidada" (Villoro 43). He later on gave this description of obesity a boost that made it into a racist joke by saying, "la obesidad los hacía verse como bebés radiactivos de una película de ciencia ficción china" (Villoro 45). Other than this obesity appearance, he holds the impression that los Trillizos are "raros" and "tal vez eran locos" (Villoro 43) as the managers of a soccer team, Los Tucanes, in Mexicali.

From the author's description, we can see that for the protagonist, it was not hard to distinguish the Chinese, because he finds out that los Trillizos have Chinese blood running through their veins for simple reasons, "me pareció que tenían sangre china. Podía distinguirlos como se distingue a los chinos tatuados: el del dragón, el del puñal, el del corazón sangrante" (Villoro 43). And this thought is later on confirmed in a conversation in which their gangster and ethnicity background is clarified by Lola, "su mafia es de Taiwán" (Villoro 48).

It is true that Chinese dragon might be the most popular icon of Chinese culture, however, it is not the only unique icon a Chinese would choose. In fact, known by almost all the Chinese as common sense that Chinese dragon is actually among the four symbols in the Chinese constellation. Each symbol is a mythological creature unique to Chinese culture, which includes

the Azure Dragon of the North, the Vermilion Bird of the South, the White Tiger of the West, and the Black Warrior Turtle of the East. Other than these four, it is also common for Chinese to use Qilin and Pixiu as symbols of culture and representation for Chinese identity. However, the three tattoo symbols presented by Villoro, could be argued, and are more likely associated with Chinese gangster culture in Mexicali than Chinese culture in Mexico. Because Chinese culture is comparatively less open, and in its traditional view, despite the content of tattoos, the sole existence of tattoo itself is often viewed as a delinquency. And it would be worse for symbols such as a dagger and a bleeding heart, which are very often associated with violence, danger, bloodshed and even death.

Los Trillizos are depicted by Villoro as highly ranked gangster members who succeeded in power and wealth, whose success would allow them to ignore mutual respect in the conversation and become arbitrary and dominant. In the story, the representations of their arbitrary and wealth are incredible and sometimes even absurd. For instance, instead of negotiating with the protagonist about playing for their team, they simply come to his place with the contract, and without giving him few days to think it over, they allow him only to ask a question instead. Their wealth is depicted in an absurdly comic manner. As when the protagonist asks los Trillizos if they would sign Argentinian players to the team, one answers “Ni madre” with a smile. The protagonist describes this moment as “vi su sonrisa y me pareció detectar el brillo de un diamante en su colmillo” (Villoro 45). However, a diamond in the canine is not the most unbelievable thing the Trillizos do to show off their wealth. The narrator mentions, “uno de los trillizos tenía un tigre blanco. Su comida valía más que mi sueldo” and for this reason, he asked the Trillizos to increase his wage to the same as the tiger. But the Trillizo’s reply is unexpected, “También tengo una orca-me dijo-: ¿Qué prefieres: sueldo de tigre o de orca? - estiró sus ojos de

chino misterioso” (Villoro 47). Comments of Chinese people’s eyes have been abundant in Western culture, even being described as mysterious is just one of the oldest stereotypes circulates among the Westerners. This direct description contributes to the absurdity of los Trillizos’ wealth and characteristics, while their power and influence are depicted in a different manner.

After Tere, the protagonist’s wife, cheated on him as a way of expressing her dissatisfaction about him moving his career to Mexicali, they eventually divorced. “ Nos divorciamos por correo, gracias a un abogado con cinco anillos de oro que me consiguieron los Trillizos” (Villoro 46). The details of the letters are omitted while the author lays emphasis on the lawyer’s five gold rings, which are more the traits of a gangster than that of a lawyer. However, this arrangement of text leaves the reader, in suspense regarding things such as what the relationship between the lawyer and los Trillizos is like, and whether there was a threat in the mail, or if the lawyer was just extremely good. But without a doubt, the lawyer represents the influence los Trillizos have over the legal system, in other words, a symbol of their power.

Ignacio López-Calvo argues that beginning with Marco Polo’s accounts of Kublai Khan’s luxury, excesses, and centralized power, westerners have been seeing the Eastern through an Orientalist lens; that is, as a place where rulers would live in lavish luxury while their subjects suffered from starvation (López-Calvo 63). In a different form, *El silbido* continues this Orientalism, in which los Trillizos resemble the Eastern rulers seen through an Oriental lens, who are extremely wealthy, with highly centralized power, and their player (subject) gets paid less than the cost of a pet tiger’s food.

Ironically, even as a vampire novel, male Chinese characters in Rodríguez’s novel are more human like than the male Chinese characters presented by Villoro. Chinese characters in

Rodríguez's novel actually have personality traits other than just being "Chinese." Wang Fong, for instance, is "el amable cuidador de la hortaliza, escuchaba sus propuestas de negocio con la sonrisa que tienen los chinos al hablar de su cosecha de repollos o planear un asesinato," and was "un hombre sencillo y honrado" and "un hombre sin malicia" (Rodríguez 23). The author also created a reckless killer, Rafael Yeng, described as "un joven ojos de dragón quien ya había matado a dos de su misma raza y se rumoraba que también a un marino español..." (Rodríguez 23). In fact, these characters show their complexity as human beings, but with the specific description of this complexity, these Chinese characters are mystified by the combination of their kindness and danger, how they mysteriously plan assassinations with kind smiles.

The plot later on introduces Lisandro, who is a Chinese mafia member born and raised in Mexico and who does cocaine instead of opium, described also as "mostrando un cuerpo firme, capaz de romper un cuello de un solo tirón" (Rodríguez 39). Lisandro is another self-contradictory characters in the story other than Wong Feng, who shows great politeness and kindness while talking about murdering people. Lisandro's self-contradiction always involves his sister, Yolanda. The following words of Yolanda and Lisandro could reveal to us the character's inner contradiction-

"--No puedo decirte yo nada de eso por ser mujer. Si acaso, nada más mi hermano podía explicarte de qué se trata todo este asunto. Tampoco lo juzgues tan mal. Es un verdadero hombre de otro tiempo y ha vivido años tan duros que sólo con la violencia puede expresarse. Él me ha golpeado porque en las últimas semanas ha tenido demasiadas responsabilidades, yo no lo he obedecido, además de que su vida está en juego. Y también la mía por ser su hermana" (Rodríguez 52).

-“Me lo pidió Yolanda cuando le hablé de mi idea y yo no haré nada en lo que ella no esté de acuerdo” (Rodríguez 74).

Like many other countries, China has been a patriarchal society for thousands of years, and Chinese women endured conditions of semi-slavery during this time. One traditional doctrine, which was widely practiced by people and therefore demonstrated the extreme social inequality between males and females, stipulates that once the husband is dead or gone from the family, the eldest son will be the head to take charge (López-Calvo73). From the two statements we know that Lisandro, as the oldest male in the family is clearly in charge of everything, and he would punish Yolanda by using violence for disobeying him. As the mean time, Lisandro shows his respect and love for his sister, and thus would not do anything her sister disagrees with. Shown in the book that as a Mexican Chinese, born and raised in Mexico, Lisandro adopts a hybrid lifestyle and follows both traditions, for this reason, it is hard to determine whether the self-contradiction is because of his Chinese or his Mexican nature. However, similar to Villoro, all the Chinese males appear in the story are violent gangsters, and therefore can be associated with crimes such as domestic violence, drug abuse, drug trafficking, and murder.

Different from how Villoro who portrays his Chinese male characters as just Chinese and one-dimensional gangster types, Rodríguez does mention Chinese benevolency and other good qualities, which are the opposite from what the Anti-Chinese Campaign promoted. He describes the Chinese as industrious and “gente sencilla, entregada a oficios honrados...” (Rodríguez 22). Unlike the male characters depicted by the authors, the female characters often depicted to present the benevolent Orientalism or to be fantasized sexually about, therefore, they will either show their caring personalities or exotic beauty. However, because the intention of Villoro is to

make fun of Chinese people, the author finds another way to disgrace Lola, the only Chinese girl in the story.

Lola is depicted as innocent or even stupid to a certain extent, at least, it is true to the protagonist. For this reason, Lola is always secretly made fun of by the protagonist. During their first meet in a Chinese restaurant, the protagonist already starts to make fun of her accent, thinking to himself, “Era hija de chinos y pronunciaba: 《Lo-l-a.》 ” (Villoro 48). The ridicule of her accent continues later on when they start to talk about a popular Chinese song, which is just a creation of the author, titled “Yellow River”-

“Lola me contó que una vez un chino se hipnotizó con el cuadro. Sólo después cuando le pusieron un celular en el oído, con la canción 《Río amarillo》

-¿Has oído 《Río amarillo》 ? -me preguntó Lola.

Dije que no.

Música chida. Música china - a veces hablaba así. No sabía si decía dos cosas distintas o si las palabras que venían después cancelaban las que había dicho antes” (Villoro 48).

From the conversation and the protagonist's attitude towards Lola's pronunciation, it can be noted that Spanish is not Lola's first language, but she is capable of forming complex Spanish stances rather than fragments of sentence components. Regarding immigrants, their pidgin is always targeted by hostility, however, in Lola's case, racism about accent makes a strong appearance regardless of her language proficiency. Lola's stupidity is depicted when she talks about los Trillizos as well as when she expresses her superstitions towards a pet parrot, the text following is seemingly sending out a message that the only reason the protagonist wants to date Lola is that he would have more opportunities to unleash his undisguised racism-

“No son narcos del Pacífico. Trabajan para el otro Pacífico. Su mafia es de Taiwán- dijo esto último como si fuera algo muy bueno” (Villoro 48).

“Se lo ofrecí a Lola pero ella me dijo: “Los loros traen mala suerte.”

Una tarde rompí una galleta de la fortuna en el restorán de Lola. El mensaje decía:“Sigue tu estrella”. Así y nada más. Esta tarde, uno de los trillizos salió de la cocina del restorán, seguido de mucho vapor. Vio el mensaje de la galleta y adivinó: “Vas a volver al Estrella Azul.” Luego salió del restorán, muy despacio, como si nosotros alucináramos sus movimientos: una sombra gorda que flota. Me pareció terrible regresar al Estrella Azul. Tal vez por eso pensé que seguir mi estrella era estar con Lola. Vi su cara de china joven, ni guapa ni fea, sólo joven y china. Olía a te. Le propuse que nos viéramos en otro sitio. No quiso. “Tu loro da mala suerte”, repitió, como si el animal fuera una parte de mi cuerpo o como si estuviéramos atrapados en una leyenda y el loro fuera el espíritu de su abuelo chino (Villoro 51).

Lola is seen by the protagonist as being proud of the Taiwanese mafia, and because of this reason the protagonist once again shows disinterest in her. By describing her face as young and Chinese, not pretty or ugly, just young and Chinese, her face becomes the teasing object in the matter, which is “ni guapa ni fea”, it seems to the protagonist that being Chinese is not on a beauty scale, but it is just outside of the notion of being beautiful or being ugly. Lola in this story repeats several times that the parrots bring bad luck. We can see the author’s effort and intention of making the Chinese identity into a superstitious identity, which is evidenced in this passage.

First of all, as Chinese, los Trillizos believe in fortune cookies and would even commend the protagonist to go home based on what they read in the fortune cookie note. Despite the fact that fortune cookies are a Japanese invention that have been popularized in North America, and

Western Chinese restaurants that distribute them are not because they believe it, but merely for the commercial reasons. And fortune cookies are, as a matter of fact, absent in any part of China³. Secondly, traditional Chinese culture encompasses a lot of superstitions, however, parrots have never been considered as bad luck. According to Zhaoliang Li's study on China and its global relation, parrots, as exotic birds, were introduced to China in Tang dynasty and have been commercially bred and adored by both the emperors and common people ever since, and they have never been related to any negative cognition but as symbols of wealth and good fortune⁴. It can be argued that the author goes entirely against these ideas for comic reasons or for his unwillingness of understanding the culture. But no matter what the reason is, the author shows the Western arbitrary of interpreting its Chinese emergence.

Other than her superstition, Lola's benevolence is also briefly mentioned after the previous passage, however, it is encoded with Chinese exoticism when Lola offers the protagonist a cultural specific gift-

Con el cambio me dio una bolsita con un signo chino.

-Significa "mucho viento"- explicó (Villoro 51)

This small bags with Chinese characters on it actually includes all the good wishes a Chinese can offer anyone, its literal meaning is "favorable winds will be in all the journeys". However, Lola, the Chinese character, does not show any further comprehension of her own culture, she simply refers to it as "mucho viento", a phrase that does not provide any explanation of her gift. By omitting the explanation, the author makes Lola's nice intension

³ See Jennifer 8. Lee, The fortune cookie's origin: Solving a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside a cookie

⁴ See 李兆良 《坤輿萬國全圖解密：明代測繪世界》 page 161-192

incomprehensible and confusing to the Western readers, thus furthermore alienate the Chinese from being accepted by the mainstream society.

Ignacio López-Calvo argues in his book, *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture*, that in most Orientalist passages produced in Cuba, Chinese women are always fetishized and turned into objects of desire (López-Calvo 71). Despite the full-scale racist story “El silbido,” the image of Yolanda in *Sangre de familia* makes Ignacio’s observation applicable in Mexican literature as well. And her persona actually distinguished the Chinese female benevolence from the Chinese male delinquency in Mexican literature. Alejandro, the protagonist, describes Yolanda as following-

“El rostro sigue siendo bello y a plena luz sus rasgos orientales se pierden como si la sombra le diera esa timidez, sonrisa eterna de princesa de Pekín tras del abanico”(Rodríguez 52).

“No piense mal de Yolanda por tener un hermano que trabaja en un antro de estos y medra entre delincuentes y demás aves nocturnas. Ella es distinta” (Rodríguez 64)

“Yolanda es un higo maduro reflejado en la acequia” (Rodríguez 79)

Besides Lisandro erotic thoughts about Yolanda, sex scenes of Lisandro and Yolanda are also heavily featured in the story. Together with her obedience to the brother, Yolanda, the only female character in the book, is portrayed as an honorable, beautiful, sexy, and kind young lady.

To write about Chinese immigrants and their culture in literature, it is essential to understand the immigration history and have an impartial view on Chinese culture and the unique philosophical ideologies. In fact, both authors have noticed the contribution of the Chinese community in the construction of Mexican cities. Through the description of character’s thought, such as “este lugar sólo existía porque los chinos habían sobrevivido al calor”(Villoro

49) and “Nadie podía vivir ahí. Hasta que llegaron los chinos. Les dieron permiso de quedarse porque pensaron que morirían. ¿Quién resiste temperatura de cincuenta grados bajo el nivel del mar? Los chinos,” Villoro gives credit to the Chinese for the construction of Mexicali. Similar as Villoro, Rodríguez also mentions that the industrious Chinese made an unpopulated place in Mazatlán into the centre of the City and has shown his competition {??} for the Chinese expulsion.

However, misrepresentation of Chinese culture and people abounds in both of the stories. This misrepresentation always encompass two factors: the insufficiency or imbalanced focus of cultural elements and the false and made-up cultural elements. In “El silbido,” other than the forged Chinese musical phenomenon “Yellow River”, the forged Chinese superstition about parrots, the false Chinese belief in fortune cookies, the representation of Chinese food is also extremely Westernized. The protagonist mentions Chinese food in Mexicali as following- “Me gusta Mexicali, sobre todo por la comida: pato laqueado, won-tong, costillas de cerdo agridulce, lo típico de ahí” (Villoro 47). It is a common misconception for Westerners to think Chinese food is just Chow-mein, Sweet and Soor Pork, Orange Chicken or Ginger Beef, actually, other than wong-tong, none of the mentioned above is typical or traditional Chinese food. They are dishes only made typical by Westerners as the westernized Chinese food. By saying “lo típico de ahí”, the protagonist showed his imbalanced view on Chinese food, but also demonstrates that these foods have become the local fare, “de ahí.”

The same happens in Rodríguez's story. Two absurd statements by Lisandro about the Chinese people are probably aiming to mystify the group, which are “los chinos pueden ver la hora en los ojos de los gatos” (Rodríguez 65)” and “los chinos pueden ver el futuro en los ojos de

los muertos” (Rodríguez 75). {Comment on these...}Other than these, the religious concepts are evident, but they are all from Buddhist belief.

Lopés-Calvo argues “it would be a mistake to assume that there was only one religion in China. Along with Buddhism, a major world religion, Taoism (both a philosophy and a system of religion) and Confucianism (which has never been an established religion with a church and priesthood)”, together, these three are known as “Three Ways” (Lopés-Calvo 93). In *Sangre de familia*, the expression of religious belief is entirely Buddhist-based, and this belief in fact served as the production base of the whole plot. Incarnation, reincarnation and karma appear to the readers as beliefs everyone in the story shares, as Mexicans or as Chinese. Thus the story poses an odd combination of Buddhism and Vampirism. In the story, Alejandro and Yolanda’s love is believed to have occurred in China at the time before time, and in the end Yolanda tragically dies in Alejandro’s arms:

Algo me dice que nos encontramos en China y el sueño ocurre varios siglos atrás, quizás hace un milenio, quizás en un tiempo anterior al tiempo (Rodríguez 89)...

And the story ends with “todo presente tienen su futuro en el pasado. Todo comenzó con un asesinato en una lavandería china” (Rodríguez 123), which refers to the association happened to Alejandro’s father’s generation.

Conclusion

Chinese immigrants and Mexican society have formed a strong and unbreakable bond. Chinese immigrants’ presence has influenced Mexican culture and society in many aspects, including its social construction, its history and its literature. Over time, with the evolution of society, Mexican literature has developed, and the significance of Chinese presence has also

shifted to a general direction, which is from using stereotypes and made-up ethical traits to vicious attacks on and disgrace of certain ethnicity to justify their contributions as well as more accurate descriptions of their nature and experiences. As time goes by, racism will have less and less room to thrive, however, stereotypes of certain races will continue in various forms and situations.

The misrepresentation of people and their culture also shows a tendency to become more realistic, and the application of stereotypes of Chinese people in Mexican literature becomes more on the symbolic level. Specifically speaking, most of the actions involving a Chinese character would occur in either a Chinese restaurant or a Chinese laundry. Chinese men are often portrayed as dangerous gangsters, while Chinese women very likely to be desired sexually or to express the Chinese female benevolence. Chinese delinquency and Chinese exoticism seem to be ubiquitous in modern Mexican literature, in which Chinese are always refined, mystified as well as simplified to a metaphorical and symbolical level. This inaccuracy makes Mexican Chinese in “El silbido” more like mafia members than Chinese people, and the Mexican Chinese in *Sangre de familia* sometimes more vampire-like than Chinese-like. The literature injustice often reflects the social injustice. From literatures made in the Anti-Chinese campaign period to modern literatures featuring the borderline Chinese, significant change of social views towards Chinese immigrants in Mexico can be noted. However, the misreading of Chinese people and culture still lingers.

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