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Chinese Immigrants in the Guanacastecan Peninsula Lowlands of Costa Rica: Chronicles of Social Integration and Kinship of some Family Clans of Puntarenas, Abangares and Nicoya¹

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Key words: Chinese migration; kinship; family clans; Guanacaste (Costa Rica).	Chinese Immigrants in the Guanacastecan Peninsula Lowlands of Costa Rica: Chronicles of Social Integration and Kinship of some Family Clans of Puntarenas, Abangares and Nicoya Abstract: The purpose of this article is to describe the degree of kinship between several families of Chinese origin who settled in Nicoya and analyze how it influenced their contributions to the socio-economic development of the city and their mobility patterns throughout the Costa Rican Pacific since the late 19th century until the mid-20th century. The study participants are descendants of immigrants who settled in Nicoya from 1880 to 1950 and had two distinctive features: they belonged to the same family clans despite the different surnames with which they were registered or came from the same geographical area and sometimes even from the same village, which developed affinity ties as strong as consanguineous ties. This allowed them to support each other to achieve the collective development of the Chinese immigrant group in Nicoya.
Palabras clave: Migración china; parentesco; clanes familiares; Guanacaste (Costa Rica).	Inmigrantes chinos en la bajura guanacasteca de Costa Rica: Historias de inserción social y parentesco de algunos clanes familiares de Puntarenas, Abangares y Nicoya Resumen: El propósito de este artículo es describir el grado de parentesco que existió entre varias familias de origen chino que se asentaron en Nicoya y analizar como incidió éste en sus aportes al desarrollo socioeconómico de la ciudad y sus patrones de movilidad a lo largo del Pacífico costarricense desde finales del siglo XIX hasta mediados del siglo XX. Los participantes del estudio son descendientes de inmigrantes que se arraigaron en Nicoya entre 1880 y 1950, los cuales tenían dos particularidades: pertenecían a los mismos clanes familiares pese a los diversos apellidos con los que fueron registrados o provenían de la misma área geográfica y a veces hasta de la misma aldea, con lo cual se desarrollaron lazos de afinidad tan fuertes como los lazos consanguíneos. Esto permitió que se apoyaran mutuamente para lograr el desarrollo colectivo del grupo inmigrante chino en Nicoya.
Palavras-chave: Migração chinesa; parentesco; clãs familiares; Guanacaste (Costa Rica).	Imigrantes chineses nas terras baixas da península de Guanacaste, na Costa Rica: Crônicas de integração social e parentesco de alguns clãs familiares de Puntarenas, Abangares e Nicoya Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é descrever o grau de parentesco existente entre várias famílias de origem chinesa que se estabeleceram em Nicoya e analisar como isso influenciou suas contribuições para o desenvolvimento socioeconômico da cidade e seus padrões de mobilidade em todo o Pacífico da Costa Rica desde final do século XIX até meados do século XX. Os participantes do estudo são descendentes de imigrantes que se enraizaram em Nicoya entre 1880 e 1950, que possuíam duas peculiaridades: pertenciam aos mesmos clãs familiares, apesar dos diferentes sobrenomes com os quais estavam registrados ou eram da mesma área geográfica e, às vezes, até da mesma aldea, que desenvolveu laços de afinidade tão fortes quanto laços consanguíneos. Isso lhes permitiu apoiar-se mutuamente para alcançar o desenvolvimento coletivo do grupo de imigrantes chineses em Nicoya.
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¹ This study is part of the research carried out by the members of PREMEHCHI, a project to recover the memory of Chinese immigrants to Costa Rica. To learn more about this project refer to the website www.premehchi.ucr.ac.cr

Introduction

In a previous study, it had been concluded that the Chinese immigrants established in Puntarenas had begun to expand the reach of the Circle of Merchants of the Celestial Empire to the Gulf of Nicoya and to Guanacaste from the first decades of the twentieth century (ACÓN CHAN, 2018, p. 443-456). Indeed, the families of Chinese origin in the city of Nicoya descend from Chinese immigrants who entered through the port of Puntarenas but had explored other towns before settling in the former colonial city. On the other hand, it can be noted that unlike the groups who settled in the vicinity of the Chinese Club in Puntarenas, other groups displayed higher geographic mobility rates, resulting in the emergence of a network of extended families in diverse communities throughout the Costa Rican Pacific region.

In this light, it is important to analyze primary sources and personal testimonies of some descendants of these families, in order to reconstruct the stories of Chinese migration that contributed to the socioeconomic rise of different communities in Costa Rica, particularly of Nicoya. However, it is necessary to begin with a brief history of this settlement to understand the particular conditions that characterize Chinese migrations to this territory. Then, we delve into some definitions of the Chinese traditional family. Later we track the arrival of the first Chinese immigrant to Nicoya, as indicated by archival records, and the birth of several lineages that spread through a part of the Costa Rican Pacific region. We continue with stories about the arrival of other Chinese immigrants who were pivotal to the socioeconomic development of Nicoya and an analysis of the blood and affinity ties among several local Chinese families.

Historical background of the settlement of Nicoya

Nicoya is located in the coastal province of Guanacaste, in the plains of the Tempisque Valley or Guanacaste lowlands, so named because of the tectonic depression that emerged south of the Tempisque River, on the Nicoya Peninsula. The current territory of Nicoya became important for the Spaniards after the conquest of Nicaragua from the territory of Castilla de Oro² because of the former's strategic location. Due to the strong winds that blew across the Pacific from the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua, it was safer to disembark at Nicoya and continue the journey northward on horseback (SIBAJA; ZELAYA, 2015, p.13).

After almost 300 years of maintaining a close geographic and economic relationship, the *Partido de Nicoya*, integrated by its political center, Nicoya, and the villages of Guanacaste -

² This jurisdiction of the Spanish Crown in the New World extended through the North Sea, from the Lagartos or Chagres River (present-day Panama) in the west, to Cape Vela in the east, at the eastern end of what is now Colombia. See: (SIBAJA CHACON; ZELAYA GOODMAN, 2015, p. 5).

currently Liberia- and Santa Cruz, dissociated itself from Nicaragua and expressed its desire to join the State of Costa Rica on July 25, 1824. According to Hermógenes Hernández, throughout the nineteenth century the administrative territorial division of Costa Rica was restructured several times. In this way, the former *Partido* became the third department of Costa Rica in 1835, then, the fifth department in 1841, and later became the fifth province of the country in 1848, its current status (HERNÁNDEZ, 1985). When the Department of Guanacaste emerged, the villages of Cañas and Bagaces were added, but the seat of power of the department was transferred to modern-day Liberia as it was the middle point between the lowlands and the new territories. Thus, Nicoya was demoted to the second most important city of the province of Guanacaste in 1848. In 1837 it was granted the status of *Villa*, and as the population rose, it became a City in 1918.

Since pre-Hispanic times, the site where the city of Nicoya was established served as a space of pluricultural confluence (IBARRA, 2014, p. 29), a contact zone or multicultural and multiethnic frontier (BUSKA, 2006, p. 23) or a “‘passage zone’ or socio-cultural meeting point.” (CABRERA, 1989, p. 34, 42, my translation). All the “Great Nicoya” played the role of a borderzone between “the highly developed civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Central Andean zone.” (CABRERA, 1989, p. 4; IBARRA, 2014, p. 26, my translation). It was the resting place and supply zone for merchants and troops: its market offered varied local products such as baskets, hammocks, blankets, sandals and beans (IBARRA, 2001, p. 67). In turn, exchanges of goods from the Island of Chiriquí were made, such as shells, salt, corn, pearls, cocoa, black ceramics, wax and honey. Ferrero (1983) claims that in the modern-day province of Guanacaste there were Mesoamerican influences such as corn tortillas, the use of cocoa beans as currency, and languages such as Nahuatl and Chorotega among others (CABRERA, 1989, p. 47). After the conquest of Nicaragua and Nicoya in 1524, the latter acquired relevance because of its strategic position as a bridge between Panama and Nicaragua, especially between November and February, when the trade winds in the Gulf of Papagayo made it hard to travel safely by sea (SIBAJA; ZELAYA, 1980, p. 26). Up until colonial times, Nicoya became a transit zone for travelers sojourning from Panama to Guatemala. In the eighteenth century, by royal mandate, some families from Nicoya provided services of lodging, food and transportation on horseback for the hordes of travelers and merchants who, in exchange for a tribute to the crown, received those services (FONSECA; ALVARENGA; SOLÓRZANO, 2001, p. 198-199).

Regarding the demographics of the Nicoya area, it is estimated that upon arrival of the Spaniards, the population was between 62,692 and 125,385 indigenous people who dwelled in present-day La Cruz, Liberia, Carrillo, Santa Cruz, Nicoya, Nandayure and the peninsula (BUSKA, 2006, p. 23). As a result of the commercial and cultural exchanges typical of a contact zone, as early as 1636, the year that the Irish priest Thomas Gage visited the settlement of Nicoya, the population

consisted of Indians, Spaniards, blacks and mulattos (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 59). By the end of the eighteenth century, between 77% and 94% of the parochial records of baptism were issued to mulattos. On the other hand, the Nicoya census of 1801 conducted by Bishop Augusto Thiel indicated that about 85% of the population was of mulatto-*zambo-pardo* origin, 13% were of indigenous origin, about 1% were of Spanish origin and less than 1% , of *mestizo-ladino* origin (BUSKA, 2006, p. 40-41). According to different censuses, at the beginning of the nineteenth century there were 3,420 people, 2,250 people in 1844, 4,597 in 1897, and 7,827 in 1910 (HERNÁNDEZ, 1985). In fact, in the span of 109 years, the population of Nicoya increased by approximately 229%.

The *encomienda* and, especially new industries, transformed the forms of social, political, and economic life that had coexisted for several centuries in Nicoya. Large forests gave way to pastures and bushes (BUSKA, 2006, p. 26) to accommodate cattle and horses, poultry and other domestic animals introduced by the Spanish explorers. In a matter of decades, Nicoya had become ingrained in a growing maritime economy based on shipyards and exports. A letter by Juan Dávila-son of conquistador Gil González Dávila, dating from 1566, refers to Nicoya as a nodal point where Spaniards waited to board ships that would take them to other destinations (BUSKA, 2006, p. 26). The strategic location of the Nicoya Peninsula enabled the establishment of an important hub for the construction of ships. Sibaja and Zelaya (2015) argue that from the late sixteenth century until the early seventeenth century, there were at least three shipyards: two of them on the eastern shore of the gulf and the other one on Nandayure (p.45). In addition to some foodstuffs such as wheat, honey, salt, corn, from Nicoya, textiles made with a purple dye that was extracted from seashells were exported to Panama (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 61). Also, according to the research of historian León Fernández Bonilla, tobacco was exported to Nicaragua from both Bagaces and Barba de Heredia, and from Costa Rica, sugar cane, tobacco, wheat flour, and sugar were imported (FALLAS, 1972, p. 31).

Towards the end of the colonial era, Nicoya continued to be the access route to Nicaragua and other provinces of the General Captaincy of Guatemala, but it also caught the attention of the Nicaraguan elites who exported cattle to San Salvador and Guatemala City (BUSKA, 2006, p. 34-35). All these industries would give the region a demographic boost and would cause the rise of large estates. After the Spaniards introduced farm animals in the sixteenth century, an industry based on the export of livestock and by-products such as tallow and leather began, which in the mid-eighteenth century displaced the Nicoya region as an economic center and gave rise to the foundation of other population centers in the Tempisque Valley: in particular Guanacaste -present-day Liberia- in 1769, and Santa Cruz, in 1814 (SIBAJA; ZELAYA, 2015, p.43-44; CABRERA, 1989, p. 58).

Stories compiled by Carlos Meléndez in his work *Viajeros por Guanacaste* illustrate life from the last decades of the colonial era to the beginning of the twentieth century. Pedro Agustín de Morel and Santa Cruz, Bishop of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, offers a description of the Vicariate of Nicoya in 1751: “It is located on a plain, which is cut off from the north and south by hills, and bathed by two streams that supply the water. It is seven leagues from the South Sea, and the mouth of a mighty river called Alvarado serves as Port.” (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 104, my translation). In his story he also mentioned a stone and tile church, a Mayor and several other officials, one hundred and twenty straw shacks, of which one hundred were the houses of Indians and the rest, of ladinos, who were not particularly appreciated by the Indians. In 1881, John Francis Bransford, an official at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, became the first foreigner who visited the region for scientific purposes. He wrote a meticulous account of the time it took to travel from Puntarenas to Nicoya: by sea from the early hours of the morning until 6:30 p.m. to get to Puerto Bolsón and from the latter to Nicoya, about 7 hours on horseback. According to Bransford, it was “the same Spanish town he had seen in 1877. A large church on one side of the square and rectangular streets, with seven or nine hundred inhabitants of all classes, from pure Spanish to pure Indian.” (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 244, my translation).

Fifteen years later, Henry Pittier joined Bishop Thiel’s on his trip to Guanacaste. They disembarked at Puerto Humo, several kilometers before reaching Bolsón, at 11:30 a.m., and travelled to Nicoya, where 4,577 people lived in 15 neighborhoods where cocoa, corn, beans, rice, bananas and sugarcane were grown (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 299-326). Pittier lamented the mistreatment and exploitation of the Nicoya Indians by the Spaniards. But at the same time, he praised the pleasant climate, the variety of fruit trees, and the beautiful church with its paintings and rich sacred chalices. On the way back to Puntarenas, they travelled from Puerto Jesús, which Pittier describes more as an estuary or “arm of the sea that penetrates with sinuosities of the river” with hardly a house in it.

The Spanish travelers José Segarra and Joaquín Juliá visited Guanacaste in 1906 and published a story about Nicoya (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 346-347). According to them, it was located in the southern part of the Peninsula and had a great wealth of soil. It had forests rich in precious woods such as mahogany, cedar and many others. They agree with Pittier in the variety of exquisite fruits such as mango, *zapote*, cashew, *zapotillo*, *mamey* and *nísperos*. They also describe it through the lens of their companions as a land of beautiful women, history, and popular traditions. Phillip Calvert, an American entomologist visiting Guanacaste with the Qualifying Commission four years after the Spaniards, pointed out the differences between this region and the central plateau. He claimed that according to Carl Sapper, “botanically Guanacaste is like Nicaragua and the North of Central America, while the rest of the flora of Costa Rica has a South American character.” (my

translation). Regarding the physiognomy of the Guanacastecans, Calvert adds that they differ from the rest of Costa Rica in several aspects: the indigenous element, the mixture of Indian and black, idiomatic phrases, the cattle ranches, the marimba and regional dances such as the *Punto Guanacasteco* (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 440-441).

In 1913, the Count Maurice de Périgny wrote a rather epicurean and poetic account, opposed in style to the objective reporting of scientists or explorers. According to him, “twenty-five kilometers separate Nicoya from Santa Cruz. The good and wide highway. . . invites you to relish under the moonlight to avoid the suffocating heat of the day and walk through these beautiful summer nights, serene and silent. . .” (my translation). He then described Nicoya’s “beautiful white church and some old, spacious, and solidly built houses” (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 463, my translation). To him, it was the great loyalty of its inhabitants during the Nicaraguan invasion that granted them the official status of *Villa* in 1837. At the time of his account he estimated a population of about 1800 people leading an indolent and easy life among fragrant gardens of *jiquilijoches* and orchards ripe with unique fruits and sipping chicheme, a “special drink, very refreshing and pleasant.” Perigny also referred to the local industry of beef tallow candles and a tannery in which *nance* bark, another locally produced material, was used. Finally, he mentioned Puerto Humo, the natural port of Nicoya and Puerto Jesús, which he said “did not deserve to be neglected” (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 465, my translation), thus echoing Pittier’s vision about the latter twenty years earlier.

Despite the geopolitical annexation of the Partido de Nicoya to the State of Costa Rica back in 1824, the region was historically isolated from the central plateau due to deficient road infrastructure and poor communications. On the one hand, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the northern section of the Inter-American Highway was completed, finally communicating Nicoya with the rest of the country. But back in the nineteenth century the inhabitants of the Guanacaste lowland had to rely on slower means of transport, such as the oxcart to travel from the villages to Bolsón, Puerto Humo, Vigía or Puerto Jesús, where they took a boat to cruise, first, the river and, then, the sea to finally reach Puntarenas at best (verbal communication)³. In the latter they would take another oxcart to reach the inlands. On the other hand, fast communications with the central valley heavily depended on the telegraph as the lack of paved roads made it difficult to distribute the mail. However, in the rainy season telegraph lines often fell due to heavy downpours, collapsing the already intermittent communications. Although in the twentieth century there were more modern means of transport such as the train, buses or planes to cross long distances, popular

³ An oxcart from Filadelfia to Bolsón could take about 7 hours. Personal information collected by means of an interview with Salvador Rivas on March 9, 2018.

perceptions of the allegedly long distance between the capital city and the province always affected its development and progress.

The traditional family in China: theoretical considerations

The ideals of the traditional Chinese family that existed prior to the communist regime of Mao Zedong remained intact due to the universality of Confucian precepts, according to which a close relationship between family and individual is mandatory. This relationship was also projected in other social strata permeating the interactions between individual and society and individual and state. Botton and Cornejo (1993) argue that “the success of the family system was the consequence of a symbiosis of state and family, where the former provided the ideological basis and the means to make it penetrate all layers of society, and the latter constituted the bastion that kept the social order for the state’s sake” (p. 17, my translation). It was in the fold of the family that each individual obtained an education –through family or village schools– with which he developed skills necessary to ensure his economic future and social stability. Thus, state and family took care of the individual and in return the individual remained loyal.

Within the Confucian canon there was room for etiquette, that is, the rules for conducting family rites and ceremonies but also for regulating social behaviors. Filial piety, for example, was anchored in the cult of ancestors, respect for family hierarchy, and unconditional obedience to father and mother. Filial piety also extended beyond the domestic sphere, being understood in some cases as service to the sovereign or harmonious interactions with peers for the achievement of the common good. In this way, the traditional family system contributed to social stability, historical continuity, and individual well-being (BOTTON; CORNEJO, 1993, p. 17).

The traditional family ideal dates back to the Song dynasty and is based on the classics of Master Confucius (BOTTON; CORNEJO, 1993, p. 18-24). There are several references to the extended family as a group encompassing several patrilineal generations living under one roof. It is also characterized by a complex kinship system in which each member has a position and a name according to their hierarchy and a complex social life within the family. On the other hand, the ideal was reproduced in groups with some kind of bonding or affinity, but which exceeded the limits of the extended family. One case is that of clans, large groups of human beings with an agnatic ancestor from which they descend and share a surname. Another case is exemplified by lineages, less numerous groups into which the clans were subdivided. They usually possessed common property, a group income, an ancestral temple to which they should constantly give maintenance, rituals, and written genealogies; they also swore fealty and obedience to the male of greater hierarchy. The properties generally referred to communal lands but also included industries,

commercial enterprises, income, or pawn shops. The surpluses were distributed among the members of the group or were invested on education, the improvement of promising youngsters, or solving group needs. In some cases, the proverbial roof that joins the character signifying “pig” to compose the word family in Chinese, extended to accommodate individuals who did not necessarily possess consanguinity ties.

Due to the patrilineal and patriarchal nature of the traditional Chinese family and their compliance with the Confucian doctrine, the male was the source of authority. As head of the family, the man possessed power over the other members of the family, but he also served as the socially-sanctioned leader of the group (BOTTON; CORNEJO, 1993, p. 37-41). As such, he had duties and responsibilities such as managing family assets, ensuring that the family exhibited socially and politically sanctioned conducts, contributing to the treasury, and providing assistance to the needy. With regard to the family economy, the patriarch had the power to collect the income produced by the members and was the one who made the distribution of wealth. The profits resulting from trading activities were also included in the family budget, so those individuals who kept part of the earnings were frowned upon (YANG, 1948, p. 82; BOTTON; CORNEJO, 1993, p. 41).

Some of these principles were addressed in the organizational structure of the first Chinese associations in Costa Rica. The older male generally presided and, together with other senior members, watched over the commercial interests of the group, took action to protect them from threats from the new environment, collected donations to feed a mutual relief fund, managed and distributed it among not only new members, but also needy people who did not necessarily belong to the Chinese community.

On the other hand, Jia (2006, p. 49) refers to 5 concepts of Confucianism fundamental to understanding the links between the traditional Chinese family and the practice of associanism among overseas Chinese: *wei* (位), *ming* (名), *lianmian* (脸面), *guanxi* (关系) y *renqing* (人情). *Wei* is the positioning of a person with respect to their value, to their being. In Western terms it is an ontological category that answers the questions “who or what am I?” and “what is my reason for being in the universe?” The naming practice, *ming*, is the agent that produces that personal positioning. That is, not having a name is equivalent to being nothing and no one in particular. Jia argues that naming is a rhetorical instrument that enables the exercise of *wei* as naming gives meaning to being. *Lianmian* is the mask we show to the outside world, literally the face, and as such it expresses the value granted by such positioning. In Confucian philosophy it is described as a social and moral construction that represents the value granted by personal positioning or *wei*. On the other hand, *guanxi* is a social network that connects people with different ontological positions and enables the establishment of relationships. Finally, *renqing* is the complex of symbolic and

material exchanges aimed at establishing or strengthening satisfactory relationships among all members of the network, resulting in the development and evolution of the mask or face we show to others. It is the moral or the values that are acquired in society.

Jia (2006, p. 50) argues that there is a very close relationship between naming practices, positioning, and the image that we project through the mask. While positioning as an individual is of paramount importance for the human being who must adapt and reinvent himself according to the avatars of destiny, receiving a name is essential to distinguish oneself from other individuals. This is why the Chinese conceived a rather complex naming system, in order to address the hierarchical positioning of each member of the intra group, not only at the vertical level but also at the horizontal level. This is especially true of family clans and sometimes of artificially formed clans, such as mercantile societies.

In the case of the Chinese associations that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in Costa Rica, some traits should be highlighted. The associations were established by immigrants who had entered Costa Rican territory since the 1870s and who, by dint of tenacity and perseverance, managed to position themselves as a mercantile force in the communities they populated. Although each member had their own individuality and positioning due to circumstances as dissimilar as allegiance to different family clans, villages, dialects and ethnic origin, they set aside these differences to facilitate connections that overcame ethnic, linguistic and family barriers. That is, they created *guanxi*, which Jia explains, is context, medium and motivation for social and individual positioning (JIA, 2006, p. 52). In a way, they redefined the boundaries of the traditional Chinese family to accommodate unrelated individuals under the same proverbial roof in the Chinese character (家).

Chinese immigration to Nicoya

Although displaced as an economic hub by Santa Cruz and Liberia during the colonial era, the increasing commercial exchanges between Guanacaste and the central plateau through maritime and land routes during the twentieth century revamped Nicoya and reinforced its status as a contact area, thus luring several Chinese immigrants who had witnessed the prosperity of Puntarenas as a free port and the boom of the mines of Abangares and Miramar. Among the pioneering Chinese families of Nicoya is Andrés Sanchún's family line. Others who later settled there are the Yong, the Chan Achiu, the Yockchen, the Ajoy, the Atan, the Quirós Shi, and the Chong Kang families.

The lineage of the Sanchún Chen

Allegedly, Andrés Sanchún is one of the first Chinese settlers in the city of Nicoya according to several testimonies and archival sources. Family stories indicate that his arrival in Costa Rica dates from the late nineteenth century (verbal communication)⁴, two years before the decree of prohibition of Chinese entry into Costa Rica was issued in 1897. However, the first official records traced him back to 1882⁵, when he acquired a property owned by Ramón Bonilla Chon in the city of Puntarenas. Two years later, he was recorded as “Managing Partner of the Sanchun Lan Lin Trade House” along with Benjamin Lu Koon Chank. At that time, he went by the name Andrés Chen San Chun⁶. In 1892 and 1893 he appeared in deeds registered in the City Hall of Nicoya, deeds in which his signature was authenticated. Once again, his first surname was registered, but his second surname, formerly made up of two words, had become a single word: Sanchún⁷. In 1903, as managing partner of the trading company Le Chin from Puntarenas, he filed a declaration of bankruptcy, but this time, he was registered as merely Andrés Sanchún as the surname Chen was dropped⁸.

None of the descendants of Sanchún has offered an accurate explanation of the origin of the surname yet, probably because of his advanced age when he began to father his children and his early death in 1927⁹. In the same way, none of his grandchildren has personal memories of him, while some still retain memories of close experiences with their grandmother Isabel Chen de Sanchún. Some family friends propose that the surname resulted from the combination of his proper name and surname. Others think it is an inversion of the syllables that make up the name of the region where Sanchún came from: Zhongshan (中山)¹⁰. However, the evidence kept in the National Archive of Costa Rica clarifies that the last name adopted in Costa Rica comes from the omission, intentional or unintentional, of the original surname in Chinese and the use of the proper names of this pioneer as the new surname. A recent interview did indeed confirm that his Chinese surname was Cheng (鄭) (verbal communication)¹¹.

⁴ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Ligia Quirós Sanchún on March 7, 2018.

⁵ Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica, hereinafter referred to as ANCR, Protocolos Lara y Chamorro 823, volume 3, folio 1.

⁶ ANCR, Protocolos Lara y Chamorro 269, volume 1, folio 171.

⁷ ANCR, Protocolos Notariales, volume, tomo 2, folio 4, 53 and 54.

⁸ ANCR, Expedientes Judiciales 1565.

⁹ He was 46 years old and his wife Isabel, 21

¹⁰ The transliteration of the toponyms to refer to regions in China does not follow the notation or phonetic systems that are traditionally used (Wade-Giles, Yale, Hanyu pinyin) because they are complex systems that require familiarity with the codes. Following the custom that was implanted in Costa Rica to register Chinese immigrants and their businesses, the toponyms used in the Spanish version of the article are transliterated following an approximate pronunciation in Spanish, but to dispel possible ambiguities they are accompanied by the corresponding characters in Chinese. In the English version, the toponyms were transliterated to English.

¹¹ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Cheng Zhi on August 8, 2019.

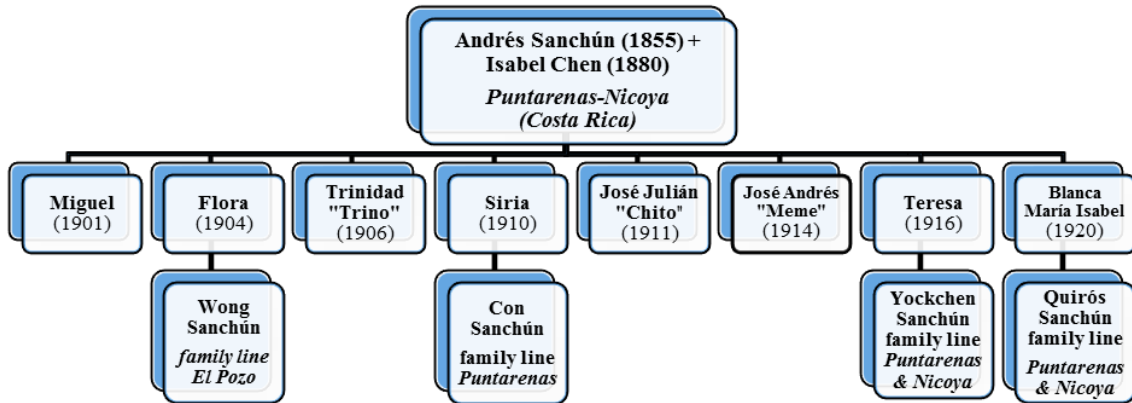
The case of Sanchún seems to be the typical story of the Chinese immigrant who arrived in Costa Rica in the 1870s or 1880s as part of a mass migration movement (MURILLO CHAVERRI, 1995, p. 76; LORÍA CHAVES; RODRÍGUEZ CHAVES, 2001, p. 180). The original surname seems to imply that he came from a Cantonese village populated by males of the same family clan who might have immigrated to Costa Rica to seek better living conditions, but who did not preserve their Chinese surnames, at least not in the official records preserved by the Costa Rican government. Before acquiring his first property in 1882, he probably worked several years to settle the debt incurred for intercontinental travel expenses. After several years, he brought a young wife from China and became the forefather of a large family, but instead of perpetuating the surname Chen, he started a new lineage with the surname Sanchún. It is remarkable that, just as it happened with several immigrants who settled in Costa Rica since the 1870s, Chen San Chun adopted a surname that in a certain way disguised his Chinese origins. Such were the cases of immigrants with the surnames Achay Romero, Allí, Pelón, Mata, Pinto, and Quirós who were registered in 1911 and spoke Spanish fluently (ACÓN CHAN, 2019, p. 62-63). That same year, Andrés Sanchún, his wife Isabel Chen, and the oldest children were registered in the Chinese census of Puntarenas¹². They owned a butcher shop and dwelled in that city some years before moving to Nicoya. The records show a gap between the year 1911 and the time when the Sanchún Chen emerged, according to the oral accounts, as owners of large estates in Nicoya. The birth records of his children José Julián Alfonso, born in Puntarenas in 1911, and José Andrés, born in 1914, indicate that it was between those years that the family moved to Nicoya, since the latter had been born there along with two more daughters, Teresa de Jesús and Blanca María Isabel (REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA, 1922-1934, folios 177-180).

According to oral interviews, the family owned a large expanse of land in what is now downtown and northern tip of the town of Nicoya. They had acquired a house built by the Pozuelos, a family of Spanish immigrants, dating back to the 1920s. Subsequently, the house underwent several renovations to accommodate several family businesses, including a cinema and several shops. Previously, they founded their general store in front of the park, where they sold nearly everything from groceries to basic goods. The vast estate, managed by the eldest son, Miguel, was extensive. Unfortunately, a strong water current caused his demise in the prime of life, during an outing to bring cattle for the farm. The matriarch of the family was, according to her granddaughter Ligia Quirós Sanchún, a gallant and stout woman, cheerful, very kind and beloved by the community, and extremely adaptable to the gastronomy of Guanacaste because she not only liked but also knew how to prepare regional dishes such as the *frito* or the *moronga* (verbal

¹² ANCR, Censo y Estadísticas 155.

communication)¹³. The Sanchún Chen had a large family of nine offspring. While the surviving males –Trinidad or Trino (born in 1906), José Andrés or Meme (born in 1911) and José Julián Alfonso or Chito (born in 1914)– engaged in trade, the four daughters married Chinese immigrants who ventured into business in places like Puntarenas, Abangares, La Mansión and El Pozo.

Figure 1: The family line of the Sanchún Chen



Source: Self-elaboration.

The making of Nicoyan lineages: Sanchún Wong, Yockchen Sanchún and Quirós Sanchún

With the arrival of more Chinese immigrants to Nicoya and Puntarenas - from where the Sanchún never cut off their former ties - marriages uniting several blood lines of the Chongsan (中山), or Heongsan (香山) region as it was called before 1925, took place, thus linking not only different family clans but also different regions of the Costa Rican Pacific. The daughters of Andrés Sanchún were pivotal in the emergence of a web of social relationships in the Chinese community of Nicoya.

Maria Flores or Flora (born in 1904), the second child of Andrés Sanchún and Isabel Chen, was founder of the lineage of the Wong Sanchún along with Benjamín Wong Chen (born in 1895), whom he met at the general store of his brother Juan Rafael. According to the written records of several descendants of Wong Kon Wai, the patriarch of the Wong Chen of Puntarenas, Benjamin was the fourth son and had emigrated to Nicaragua before settling in Costa Rica. Presumably, he had learned the merchant trade with a countryman in Bluefields. After a year he had moved to Managua and two years later, he had relocated to Costa Rica¹⁴, where his brothers José, Juan Rafael, and Joaquín -all appearing in the Registry of Chinese Residents of Puntarenas, Volume II-

¹³ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Ligia Quirós Sanchún on March 7, 2018.

¹⁴ The history of the Wong Sanchún comes from the “El crisol de los Wong (黃)”, an unpublished biography about the Wong Chen brothers and their descendants. The biography was written with the contribution of several family members, including Luis Enrique Wong Sánchez.

had settled down. The oldest brother, Juan Rafael Wong Chen, was in particular a well-established merchant in Puntarenas, where he owned a grocery store, a bakery, a coffee roasting company, a terrace to dry rice grain, and several adjacent properties. He also served as president of the Board of Wasi6n - the Chinese Association of Puntarenas - and such was his influence, that his countrymen would spend hours at the bakery, not only to do their shopping, but also to socialize while they had tea or tasted the dishes prepared by the Wong's Chinese cook¹⁵. When some relatives or acquaintances arrived in Puntarenas to stock up on merchandise, they usually spent the night on the second floor of the bakery (verbal communication)¹⁶.

Benjamin Wong Chen and Flora Sanch6n Chen were destined to meet as he was at the store when she stepped in to purchase an old hot coal iron. They fell in love, and in 1924, he asked her to marry him. They lived in Mansi6n de Guanacaste, where they owned a candle factory and a grocery store. There were born their children Aurora, Franklin, Betty, Isabel, Virginia and Jos6 Andr6s, who were also given a name in Chinese: Miu Sin, Yoc Fi, Miu Kin, Miu Sion, Miu Cam and Yoc San, respectively. According to some of his grandchildren, Benjamin Wong selected the Chinese names of his children and of several grandchildren, including the children of his first-born Aurora with Emilio Chan Taisin (verbal communication)¹⁷.

The prosperity in their businesses propelled them to make an intercontinental trip to China in 1933, along with Isabel de Sanch6n and her four youngest children. For Benjamin it was the return to the mother country, but for Flora, Costa Rican by birth, it was an opportunity to visit her parents' homeland. In the village of the Wong Chen, they built a two-story house as the seventh daughter, Flory (Miu Kam), was begotten. However, the political upheavals caused by the disputes between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party precipitated the family's return to Costa Rica in 1935. Upon arrival, Benjamin learned from his older brother of the great potential of the villages newly founded in the southern side of the country after the transfer of the Standard Fruit Company from Puerto Lim6n. In this way, the Wong Sanch6n settled in El Pozo, modern-day Ciudad Cort6s. There they met with several of Benjamin's brothers - Jos6, Salvador, Agust6n, William and Eladio - and many other countrymen who had moved to the south. It was in this region where the rest of the 12 children of the couple's were born: Zeidy (Miu Lin), Lidiette (Miu Lan), Gladys (Miu Chan), Miguel Angel (Yoc Si) and Benjamin (Yoc Chin).

¹⁵ Siumi Mar6a Tam quotes Kan (1985) to refer to an old eating practice associated with merchants in the province of Canton. Known as *Dim Sum* or Chinese breakfast, it was very common when the workload slowed down in merchant establishments or during business negotiations or information exchanges (TAM, 1997, p. 295). It seems that this old custom was transplanted to Costa Rica as well and that Wong Bakery served as a kind of informal tearoom for immigrants who made business there.

¹⁶ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Luis Enrique Wong S6nchez on February 17, 2017.

¹⁷ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Hilda, Sonia, Doris, and Javier Chan Wong on July 14, 2018.

Life in El Pozo was anything but easy back then. It had been a place to lock up criminals, and later it had been named Puerto Cortés after the President of the Republic of Costa Rica who had decreed the new name of the town¹⁸. In 1936 there was only one humble medical facility, a wooden church, a rice mill, two drinking establishments, a bakery and a grocery store. The dock had not been built yet and there was neither water nor electricity (MINISTERIO DE CULTURA, JUVENTUD Y DEPORTES, p. 28). Despite the adversity, the Wong Sanchún established their trading activities and built the first wooden house in the place. Gradually they prospered, so they became the owners of two cinemas, two bus lines, a grocery store, a diner, a bakery and two farms. However, as their descendants report, they also sought the welfare of the community through charity work. Flora in particular, was a member of the Board of the Catholic Church, the Board of Education of the elementary school, and the Board of the Community Development Committee. When the banana company withdrew from the area and business declined, the Wong Sanchún moved to Villa Neily where they opened a general store.

The second to last daughter of Andrés Sanchún's, Teresa de Jesús (born in 1916) married Luis Antonio Yockchen Chacón. It is said that Luis Yockchen arrived in Las Juntas de Abangares at the behest of his uncle Manuel Chan Lí, who, attracted by the mining boom, had had great commercial success. His older brother, José Chan Lí, arrived in Las Juntas sometime between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, when the district was geopolitically attached to Cañas. He witnessed the accelerated growth of the mining district, from the time it was made up of a street with a dozen scattered huts until it boomed with shops owned by immigrants of various nationalities such as the Chinese and the Lebanese¹⁹. At the time of his arrival, there was already a telegraph, a sugar mill, booze joints, groceries, and stores.

The *Commercial Census of 1907* attests to the great economic influence of Chan Lí: his quarterly taxes amounted to 414.25 *colones*, most of which came from the sale of liquors in two of his four commercial establishments: a *taquilla*, where cheap high-proof distilled spirits were sold, and a *vinateria*, where mostly wine was sold (REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA, 1908, p. 47-48). By 1915, his quarterly taxes had quadrupled to 1650 *colones* mostly raised from the sale of liquor (REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA, 1917, p. 88-89). This high consumption of liquor was common in the mining district due to labor exploitation, the constant brawls, and the loneliness of those who worked for the different mining companies (ARAYA, 1977-1978, p. 90). The constant sense of insecurity and constriction forced José Chan Lí to send his family to Puntarenas while the threats of a major mining strike were lifted. In this way they maintained ties with the Chinese community of Puntarenas.

¹⁸ President León Cortés Castro (1936-1940).

¹⁹ See the periodical *Costa Rica Ayer y Hoy*, No. 39, p. 17.

On the other hand, two members of the Yokchien family, Rafael and Benjamín are registered in the 1915 Commercial Census with stores, moonshine joints, and wine shops (REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA, 1917, p. 89). In the 1907 census, only Benjamin appears but with the surname Yokim (REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA, 1908, p. 47-48), and despite Luis Antonio Yockchen's adopted surname, he was not related to either Rafael or Benjamin, but had apparently entered Costa Rica with legal documents of their relatives' and was, therefore, registered as a Yockchen. Nevertheless, his real surname was Chan (verbal communication)²⁰.

His uncle Manuel Chan was ill and wished to return to his hometown to spend his last years of life, which a fortune teller in China had predicted would occur at the age of 60 (verbal communication)²¹. Upon his nephew's arrival to Abangares, he took his whole family, his wife Angela Achiu and their children Miguel, Juana Paula, Esperanza, Leonidas, Jerónimo and Rosa and left his business to Luis, who eventually owned a large fortune but most likely due to the waning of the mining activity, ended up moving to Puntarenas and opened the store Para Tí. His great wealth allowed his children to study in the capital city, San José, and even in México, but when it was lost in gambling, the oldest son Edwin had to return to Puntarenas to provide for the family. Later, the family relocated to Nicoya for good when Edwin started working at the local National Bank. The family moved there because it was Teresa Sanchún's birthplace and several of the brothers were outstanding members of the Chinese merchant community. Trino, in particular, was instrumental for her return and for the relocation of the store (verbal communication)²² on Route 150 (verbal communication)²³. It was renamed "Novedades Para Tí."

The youngest daughter, Blanca (1920), married Luis Quirós Shi, an immigrant who had arrived in Puntarenas from Sekkei (石岐), Guangdong province, at age 17. He was allegedly related to his employer, Pedro Quirós, a Chinese merchant who is registered in the 1911 census of Chinese in Puntarenas, at the age of 29. By the time that Luis and Blanca met and fell in love, there was a Chinese community made up of many families living around the headquarters of the Chinese Association, also known as the Chinese Club of Puntarenas. During the first half of the twentieth century, with the arrival of more immigrants to Puntarenas and in particular of Chinese wives, a smaller scale Chinatown began to shape up around the club. The 1911 census recorded several Chinese families living nearby.

By 1957, the year in which Luis Enrique Wong Sánchez dates his unpublished story about the Chinese community of Puntarenas, most of the Chinese merchants had their businesses or living

²⁰ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Danilo Chong Kang Chan on March 8, 2018.

²¹ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Danilo Chong Kang Chan on March 8, 2018.

²² Personal information collected by means of an interview with Tatiana Yockchen Mora on July 23, 2019.

²³ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Danilo Chong Kang Chan on August 8, 2019. Route 150 runs parallel to the main street of Nicoya; First Street.

quarters in a perimeter of five blocks around the club²⁴. Many of them had lived or developed their commercial activities in that area for decades. Thus, in the same neighborhood was the mythical Bola de Oro, a grocery store that had belonged to one of the great leaders of Nicoya, Rafael Ajoy, the grocery store of José Chong Kang, forefather of the Chong Kang Chan family of Nicoya, the warehouse of José Con²⁵, the husband of yet another daughter of Andrés Sanchún', Siria, and the shops of her sisters Blanca and Teresa. In fact, several members of the Chinese community of Puntarenas who moved to Nicoya later or came from there, had consanguineous or affinity ties. They were old acquaintances and even members of the same family clans.

Regarding the employer of Luis Quirós Shi, Pedro Quirós, he was the owner of the Hotel Pacifico and the Taicaré Tavern and brothel, which was located east of the central market of Puntarenas. Luis Quirós possibly adopted his Western surname when he began working for him in one of the businesses afore mentioned, but retained his Chinese surname Shi(徐), which was transliterated from the national language and not from the Cantonese dialect. Hence, instead of Choi he went by the surname in Mandarin. Isabel Chen de Sanchún bought a shop adjacent to that of Melisandro Cusing Acón. He was a friend of Luis' father, and convinced the youngster to travel to Puntarenas on the account that he could easily go from the proverbial rags to riches (verbal communication)²⁶. As neighbors and acquaintances, Luis and Blanca met and fell in love. So, when they got married, they started running her mother's shop. They had two children, Edgar and Ligia. Later the family moved to Blanca's place of birth, Nicoya. In the 1940s, a big fire in Puntarenas burned to ashes all the businesses on the block where once stood their own. They started over with the ABC fabric shop. However, news about the prosperity of the Yockchen Sanchún in Nicoya lured the Quirós Sanchún to the birth place of the sisters, who were very close. Upon their arrival, Luis was sponsored by his friend Adán Yong.

The growth and integration of the Costa Rican Chinese community of Nicoya

It is noteworthy that the communities of overseas Chinese in Costa Rica operated like networks of extended families in the sense that the oldest members of the group served as the unspoken leaders, thus making decisions about the distribution of wealth, developing guidelines to take actions for the welfare of the group, and implementing policies to ensure the stability of the group. The proverbial roof encapsulating the ideal of family in the Chinese character was extended

²⁴ Luis Enrique Wong Sánchez, "La colonia china de Puntarenas", unpublished manuscript.

²⁵ His Chinese surname was Ng (吳).

²⁶ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Ligia Quirós Sanchún y Natalia Pérez Quirós on September 1, 2019.

to accommodate individuals sharing a common immigration experience and families not necessarily belonging to the same clans.

The testimonies of some members of modern-day Board of Directors of the Chinese Association of Nicoya evince that by the 1930s the most powerful Chinese merchants in the city were the Sanchúns (鄭) and the Yongs (楊), who had a large commercial influence in downtown Nicoya and served as the unspoken leaders of their community. In various communities of Chinese immigrants there was a solidarity fund called “the Chinese lottery.” When new immigrants arrived to town, the established businessmen collected money to contribute to the commercial establishment of one immigrant to be favored with the jackpot system, which consisted in randomly drawing a number from a bag. The person who drew the lowest number was granted the credit, a credit to which the already established merchants of Nicoya contributed money at the behest of the community leaders. The latter also talked to the winner to exact his promise to timely return the money to keep on feeding the Chinese lottery. The evidence preserved in the National Archive of Costa Rica reveals that in 1931 the “Mutual Savings and Relief Society” was established by several immigrants from Puntarenas²⁷, probably with the same altruistic purpose that has, to this day, guided the various Chinese associations of Costa Rica. In the period between 1902 and 1933 we found 13 acts of incorporation of societies involving people of Chinese origin, 11 of which seemingly had commercial purposes²⁸.

Leonardo Yong was not inscribed in either the census or the registry of Chinese immigrants, and neither was his son Adán. Yet, they became well-to-do and respected members of the Chinese community of Nicoya. Frequent advertisements of Adán's shop in the magazine *Costa Rica Ayer y Hoy*²⁹ point to the business' notoriety. In the 1950s, Adán Yong owned the bar, grocery store and shop La Victoria, which offered fine goods, clothing, general merchandise, and liquor. According to family testimonies, he arrived in Costa Rica in 1927 from Sekkei (verbal communication)³⁰. The Civil Registry of Costa Rica recorded him as the son of Fernando Yong and Rosa Apuy, born in Guangdong, China in 1910, and Costa Rican by naturalization. In other words, he seemingly immigrated to Costa Rica illegally, just as his brother Rafael Chin Lam, who was about 30 years old at the time of his arrival around 1948. Rafael's shop La Revancha was located half a block from the park, right next to La Victoria, on the avenue between First Street and Route 150. Leonardo Yong is

²⁷ ANCR, Protocolos Notariales 2154, volume 6, folio 56.

²⁸ ANCR, Protocolos notariales 1636, volume 11, folio 21; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 2211, volume 3, folio 87; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 1752, volume 8, folio 9; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 1746, volume 2, folio 82; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 1748, volume 4, folio 36; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 2155, volume folio 16, 79; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 2159, volume 20, folio 35; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 3750, volume 28, folio 63; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 2154, volume 6, folio 56; ANCR, Protocolos notariales 280, volume 3, folio 14.

²⁹ *Costa Rica Ayer y Hoy*, No. 37, p. 11.

³⁰ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Cheng Zhi on August 8, 2019.

said to have left Nicoya to emigrate to Ecuador or Peru (verbal communication)³¹. On the other hand, Adam had been in Liberia before finally settling down in Nicoya (verbal communication)³².

The case of the family of Danilo Chong Kang Chan alludes to the fact that some families of Chinese immigrants ended up in Nicoya because of the great mobility that characterized them. His grandfather on his mother's side, Manuel Chan Lí, settled in the Juntas de Abangares at a time when he belonged to Cañas (verbal communication)³³. That is why he was recorded in the Chinese Register of the Political Headquarters of Cañas on April 9, 1912, under the number 32 (REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA, 1922-1934, folio 199). There his six children were born. Later, they were taken to China in 1934, the same year they were recorded in Volume II of the Register of Chinese in Puntarenas. He also had two older children who had been born in China and whom upon their arrival had been registered with the surname Chan Masís after their father's last name and their mother's first name, Ma Ci. According to Chong Kang, his grandfather Manuel was very sick and did not want to die in Costa Rica. He had lived in the country for more than two decades, had prospered due to the mining boom and wished to see his town for the last time. Back in China, he purchased some land that he rented out to farmers.

José Chong Kang was Danilo's grandfather on the father's side. Like his in-law, he appears in one of the many Chinese written records of the early twentieth century. In 1923 he was recorded in the Registry of Chinese Immigrants of Puntarenas, Volume II, folio 61, at the age of 25. He is also registered in official documents as José Chong Kan³⁴ and as Jose Chong Kam³⁵. About Chong Kang's business, in his unpublished story about the Chinese immigrants of Puntarenas, Enrique Wong Sanchez reminisces that "Most of the shops were located on *Avenida del Comercio*, also known as Fourth Avenue. My account starts with the ones on First Street, that is, the street that led straight to the market, and the first shop on that street was the grocery store of José Chon Kan," which was in the same block as the warehouse of José Con Sánchez and Siria Sanchún Chen, one of the daughters of the first Chinese immigrant in Nicoya according to official records. Chong Kang, whose Chinese surname was 簡 (verbal communication)³⁶ and transliterated as Kan o Jian, had also returned to China but his aim was to start a family. Years later he returned to Puntarenas to make more money. His son Antonio was only 7 years old when he left some lands to his wife Lo Si to make a living.

The families arranged a marriage between their children Antonio Chon Kang Losi and Juana Paula Chan Achiu. Following the time honored-tradition among the males of his village, after a few

³¹ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Cheng Zhi on September 8, 2019.

³² Personal information collected by means of an interview with Danilo Chong Kang Chan on September 8, 2019.

³³ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Danilo Chong Kang Chan on September 8, 2019.

³⁴ ANCR, Protocolos Notariales 2852, volume 3, folio 1; ANCR, Protocolos Notariales 2153, volume 5, folio 100.

³⁵ ANCR, Protocolos Notariales 2154, volume 6, folio 17.

³⁶ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Chin Chi Cheng Lee on August 8, 2019.

years he travelled to Puntarenas, leaving mother and wife behind. After the communists took the family properties, Lo Si committed suicide, thus leaving her daughter-in-law destitute. In 1956 she returned to Costa Rica with her brothers Miguel and Jerónimo. Upon their arrival, the Chan Achiu siblings settled in Nicoya at the behest of their cousin Luis Yockchen, the founder of the Yockchen Sanchún lineage.

Rafael Ajoy Chacón is another Chinese pioneer who greatly influenced the development of the city of Nicoya (verbal communication)³⁷. He was also one of the founders of the Circle of Immigrants of the Celestial Empire or Chinese Club of Puntarenas, as shown on the plaque that, along with a pair of red columns, auspicious couplets, and a traditional roof, welcomes visitors to the club. Ajoy was the first-born of his family and fled Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong province, in the late nineteenth century due to social and political upheavals. His plan was to settle in Cuba as suggested by a friend of the family's, known in Costa Rica as Atico Pelón, but upon reaching Esparza his professional services as a traditional Chinese healer brought him an unexpected reward. This turn of events persuaded him to settle in the province of Puntarenas. He first ventured into business at a general grocery store in Miramar de Montes de Oro with other Chinese immigrants with whom he established a mercantile society: José Pino, Santiago Ruphuy Chan, Manuel Apuy and Santiago Chan³⁸. He continued to practice traditional Chinese medicine and imported medicines and supplies to meet the needs of the Miramar mining enclave.

According to his grandchildren Enrique and Emanuel, the insertion of the family into the new community was not easy at first (verbal communication)³⁹. Possibly the members of the group did not welcome the presence of more Chinese merchants. According to Buska (2006, p. 174-176), from 1915 to the decade of the 1930s, the Costa Rican congress and the written press tarnished the public image of the Chinese in the province of Guanacaste. In 1915, the Guanacastecan congressman Leonidas Briceño lobbied for the prohibition of interracial marriage, in particular with black people, Asians or degenerate individuals, thus promoting sinophobia and racism⁴⁰. In the following decades, various media such as the newspapers *La Nueva Prensa*, *El Guanacaste* and *Diario de Costa Rica* blamed the Chinese for various issues such as illegal immigration, the apparent degeneration of the race, and even the economic crisis that Guanacastecan people suffered due to the Great Depression⁴¹. Regarding this latter issue, the columnist “Indoespañol,” author of

³⁷ Personal information collected by means of interviews with Enrique and Emanuel Ajoy Chan, and Alfredo Ajoy Arnáez on March 8, 2018.

³⁸ ANCR, Protocolos Notariales 2155, volume 79, folio 128.

³⁹ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Enrique and Emanuel Ajoy Chan on March 8, 2018.

⁴⁰ *La Prensa Libre*, 17 of June, 1915, p. 2.

⁴¹ *La Nueva Prensa*, 10 of May, 1924, p. 4; *La Nueva Prensa*, 16 of May, 1924, p. 2; *La Nueva Prensa*, 29 of May, 1924, p. 4; *La Nueva Prensa*, 18 of June, 1924, p. 1; *Diario de Costa Rica* CR 18 of October, 1933, p. 2; *Diario de Costa Rica* 8 of September, 1934, p. 6; *El Guanacaste* 15 of July, 1936, p. 1 and 5; *El Guanacaste* 20 of November, 1935, p. 1.

several diatribes against the Chinese, was just one of many journalists and intellectuals who criticized, not the true exploiters of the small farmers of Guanacaste - the owners of large haciendas, but the “ubiquitous Chinese merchants”⁴² who received grains in exchange for seeds and basic merchandise in a time before the establishment of banks or credit unions (verbal communication)⁴³.

Rafael Ajoy, whose surname in Chinese was Hau (侯), adopted the surname Ajoy because of his nickname back in China. In Chinese society it is common for men to adopt different names throughout their lives (ACÓN CHAN, 2019, p. 58). In the case of Hau Puy Ying, he was known as Hau Joy or Ah-Joy and after he arrived in Costa Rica that was the name with which he was known, but due to the Western practice of using the proper name before the surname, his first name became his last name upon registry. That's how the surname Ajoy was created. His second surname was Chacón because it was the surname of the owner of the guesthouse where he lived upon arriving to Puntarenas. According to his nephew Rogelio Chin, her tenants called her mom, so when Rafael was inquired about his second surname, the mother's last name, he gave the landlady's surname (verbal communication)⁴⁴. Later he founded the establishment La Bola de Oro in Puntarenas, near the Chinese Club. After World War II, he suffered a financial reversal when the bank where he kept his savings went bankrupt. Then, he sold his business to his son-in-law, Alfredo Lee Cruz, deputy to the constituent assembly of 1949, and to a relative of his wife Aurora -Paulino Delgado- and moved to Cangel, where he lived on a farm adjoining the estates of Rafael Ajú, one of the Chinese pioneers of the peninsula along with Edgar Acón. The Ajoy family would resume its commercial activities first in Jicaral and then in the city of Nicoya, with the eldest son Digno at the forefront.

Digno Ajoy not only stood out as a great merchant in Nicoya, but he also became a community leader from the time the family dwelled in Jicaral. He had inherited the revolutionary ideas of his father Rafael. So he led civil rights movements, for example during the so-called Strike of the Fallen Arms of 1947, and in the process he met his brother-in-law, Arnulfo Lee. According to his children, Digno's fate was to occupy the post of deputy of the constituent assembly because of all his contributions, but in the end Arnulfo was the one elected. In 1949, the family moved to the city of Nicoya where they established their businesses: a clothing store, a cinema, a general grocery store, and a hardware store. In addition, they raised livestock and farmed the land. Among Rafael Ajoy's achievements is his strong community spirit. He was not only one of the founders of the mythical Chinese Club, but also one of the founders of the Fire Department of Puntarenas⁴⁵. So when he relocated to Nicoya and upon noticing the aloofness of the Nicoyan people towards the

⁴² Philip P. Calvert, an American scientist who accompanied the Qualifying Commission in 1910, observed the presence of several Chinese merchants in Philadelphia, Liberia and Bolson (MELÉNDEZ, 1974, p. 380).

⁴³ Personal information collected by means of interviews with Juan Chan Rojas and Carlos Luis Sánchez Yong on March 9, 2018.

⁴⁴ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Rogelio Chin Fong on August 30, 2018.

⁴⁵ *Costa Rica Ayer y Hoy*, No. 6, p. 6.

Chinese community, he became involved in social welfare through the Lions Club, the Board of Education, the Fire Department, the Administrative Board of the local high school, and the Hospital. These attempts to get closer to the community earned him and his son the affection of the new community, as highlighted by the magazine *Costa Rica Ayer y Hoy*. Rafael Ajoy was exalted as a person "whose public spirit is notorious, and which runs parallel to his love for the things that are of interest to the Nicoyan people and the country in general".⁴⁶ His son Digno distinguished himself, according to the publication, by his great spirit of service and willingness to support the best initiatives, such as being part of the Administrative Board that made the High School of Nicoya a dream come true⁴⁷.

Other merchants of Chinese origin began to stand out in the city of Nicoya. On the one hand, generations born in Costa Rica began working in family businesses, injecting continuing vitality and updating the commercial concept of their forefathers. On the other hand, new families moved to Nicoya, either because of the call of their countrymen and relatives or because of the potential for development of the Guanacastean lowlands. Pablo Atán Chen, as he was recorded in the Civil Registry of Costa Rica, travelled from Sam Heong (三鄉鎮) when he was about 20 years old along with two more Chinese immigrants (verbal communication)⁴⁸. One of them settled in Santa Bárbara de Santa Cruz and his name was Feliciano Lí. They all began working at José Con's warehouse in Puntarenas, which is consistent with the solidarity practices implemented by the Merchants' Circle: attracting members of their family or close friends to train them in business skills and then assisting them in the establishment of their own businesses (ACÓN CHAN, 2018a, p. 168), expanding the reach of a Chinese merchants' network nationwide, and diversifying the goods and services provided (ACÓN CHAN, 2018b, p. 451-452, 455).

Pablo Atán found an opportunity to immigrate to the country when an acquaintance who had lived in Costa Rica but longed for his homeland, managed to return to China with the help of a politician. It was then that he made the decision to occupy his place in Costa Rica and even adopted his surname to facilitate his entry, which should have occurred in the 1950s. When he became an independent worker, Atán went to the Nicoya Peninsula because he had been a sales representative of José Con's warehouse and knew well the social and economic potential of the area. He ventured into Sardinal, San Blas and Bagaces. He returned to Sardinal and finally settled in Nicoya. In an address book kept at the *Asociación China Puntarenense*, he was registered as Paulo Atán Chong in Spanish, along with his name in Chinese characters. His original surname according to this register is Chan (陳), which is quite revealing because just as the Yockchen and the Chan Achiu, the Atán

⁴⁶ En Nicoya, don Rafael Ajoy, nos dice. *Costa Rica de Ayer y Hoy* No. 11, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Espíritus positivos: Entrevista a Digno Ajoy Chavarría. *Costa Rica de Ayer y Hoy* [Second Period] No. 1, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Personal information collected by means of an interview with José Gerardo Atán Chacón on March 8, 2018.

belong to the same family clan, the Chan clan. It should be noted that in the Min dialect of southern and southeastern China (Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan provinces and in Taiwan), the surname Chan is pronounced Tan.

Later his cousin Alfredo Atán Chen followed suit and settled in Nicoya, where he married one of the daughters of Jorge Chan. Jorge Chan was the son of allegedly one of the first Chinese immigrants who entered Nicoya, Jaime Chan (verbal communication)⁴⁹. The latter is said to have arrived by 1913 and returned to China during the next decade. His son Jorge arrived at Nicoya at age 16 in the 1920s from Sam Heong as well. After Adán Yong settled in Nicoya, strong ties developed between Jorge and Adán, so that they shared meals in the house of the former. Interestingly enough, Adán had also developed great affinity with Luis Quirós Shi, as they were both from the same village. On account of their friendship, the former convinced the latter to move from Puntarenas as the business was not going well (verbal communication)⁵⁰. To start over, he rented a space with commercial permits for a shop for a low fee.

Conclusions

The stories of kinship relationships and social insertion of some family lineages to the former colonial city of Nicoya reveal some survival strategies of the overseas Chinese of Costa Rica as subjects displaced by a very convoluted Chinese history, on the one hand, and as bodies threatened by strict immigration controls in a Costa Rica that, following the example of other countries of the American continent, strove to close its borders to the so-called "yellow peril" since the mid nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. In both cases, Chinese immigrants lived on the margins of the Costa Rican nation as subjects questioned on grounds of their illegal status and otherness.

In an earlier study of our authorship, the naming practices of Chinese immigrants in Costa Rica from 1870 to 1934 had been analyzed as tactics to evade ethnic restrictions and achieve a more successful socio-economic insertion. In this study we noticed the same strategy since the inevitable otherness of these immigrants, far from discouraging them, prompted them to reinterpret, often even reimagining their names, their stories, and their destinies. Thus, in this study on Chinese immigration in Nicoya, we highlighted other aspects of the same phenomenon of insertion: on the one hand, (1) family lineages of the same clan (Hau, Yong, Chan) who adopted different last names to enter Costa Rica, (2) a more active mobility pattern than in other Chinese immigrant communities in the country, and (3) evidence that supports the premise that integration with the

⁴⁹ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Danilo Chong Kang Chan on September 8, 2019.

⁵⁰ Personal information collected by means of an interview with Cheng Zhi on September 8, 2019.

community should be achieved through actions for the common wellbeing. That is, in order to evade restrictive decrees and immigration controls, the Chinese used yet more stratagems to reach social and economic improvement.

Regarding the first aspect, we noticed that several immigrants seem to have bought the legal documents of acquaintances that had already obtained residence and did not intend to re-enter Costa Rica. Before the rise to power of the Chinese communist party in 1949, the sense of belonging to the homeland was deeply rooted among Chinese immigrants. We notice this attachment to varying degrees in the case of the immigrant who, consumed by nostalgia, returned to his village and transferred his documents to the Atán cousins, the case of José Chong Kang, who returned to his hometown to fulfill his filial duty to take a wife and conceive Chinese children, the case of Manuel Chan Li, who wished to return to his homeland to die, and the case of Benjamin Wong, who wanted to offer his Western-born offspring a childhood in China.

Some returned to China for good, others never broke ties with Costa Rica because they had developed the ability to move between both worlds, at least until the closed-door policy of the People's Republic of China curtailed any attempt to return. Some examples of this practice of entering with a surname different from the family surname, which we found among Nicoyan immigrants, are Rafael Chin Lam and Adán Yong, sons both of Leonardo Yong's, Rafael Ajoy's brother, Felipe Chin, and Luis Yockchen, who was not related to the Yockchien of Abangares, but to the Chan Lí of Abangares. Adán's case is unique because although he entered Costa Rica for the first time in the 1920s, his birth certificate says he is Costa Rican by birth. His case is one of the typical cases of "paper sons"⁵¹.

Another insertion strategy is the mobility that characterized many of these immigrants. Some began trying their luck in Puntarenas, where they soon discovered that there was too much competition from their own countrymen. This situation prompted some to very remote villages such as El Pozo or Jicaral, or villages with an oppressive atmosphere to raise a family like Las Juntas de Abangares. Others explored several Guanacastecan communities while analyzing the prospects of economic growth before settling down in one of them. In the case of Nicoya, its status as an area of social and economic convergence since pre-Columbian times seems to be what attracted some of those Chinese immigrants. It should be noted that there was great willingness to reinvent the self when there was a reversal of fortune caused by fires, gambling, social movements, world events that put a strain on the economy, or the urge to feed a large extended family.

Finally, true to their Confucian ideals, immigrants developed forms of organization in order to seek the common good. As in other cities of the Costa Rican Chinese imaginary map such as

⁵¹ It was in the United States where this practice was first implemented. Chinese immigrants who obtained legal status were entitled to apply for their children's entrance to the country. This benefit was used in many cases to legalize the entry of people without ties of consanguinity to their sponsors. See: (KIM; 1982, p. 297).

Puntarenas, Cañas, Santa Cruz, Abangares, Ciudad Cortés, Limón, Siquirres and Turrialba, to name only the main ones, Nicoya's Chinese immigrants concentrated their business activities in centers of population, offering essential services and eventually blending with the communities through their daily interactions.

Branches of the clans of the Chengs, the Chans, the Yongs, and the Haus that came from the Zhongsan region fed that altruistic spirit. Because some lineages migrated from the same geographical region, in many cases even from the same villages or towns, coexistence between them was enabled and encouraged the close ties proper of the traditional Chinese family anchored in Confucian precepts. These connections gave rise to organized forms of sociability such as Chinese associations. In the case of those that emerged in Costa Rica at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, some peculiarities should be noted.

The associations were established by immigrants who had travelled to Costa Rica since the 1870s, who by dint of tenacity and perseverance managed to position themselves as a mercantile force in the communities where they settled. Although each member had their own individuality and positioning due to circumstances as dissimilar as belonging to different family clans or different towns of origin, dialects, and ethnic origin, they set aside these differences to facilitate connections that overcame ethnic, linguistic and family barriers. That is, they created *guanxi*, which as Jia explains (2006, p. 52), is context, medium and motivation for social and individual positioning.

In the same spirit of the auspicious couplets at the entrance of the Chinese Club of Puntarenas, in Nicoya they established an enclave of Chinese immigrants where they evoked the family practices of their hometown, built a social protection network, and made a living to support their families:

Although a foreigner in a strange country, I feel at home;
Gathering with my countrymen in this club, we spend time as a family.

Just as in their hometowns, many of them became very close or developed affinity ties as reaffirming and strong as the bonds of consanguinity. In fact, it is common among the Chinese to consider their neighbors as members of their extended family, even if they do not share the same last name. And by extension, in-laws also become members of that large extended family. In this spirit, the Chinese immigrants of Nicoya constituted a close-knit group, a large family with the same values and interests in a foreign land that eventually became home.

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