

# Roster and Genealogy of Emigrants from China Settled in Chiloé (1800-1900)

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## Introduction

This article deals with the presence of two Chinese people in the southern island of Chiloé (Chile), where they are recorded in the late nineteenth century according to parish documents of the place. Thus these records establish the fact that there has been a Chinese presence in the island for over a hundred years. Chiloé is a secluded island in the South Pacific Ocean, ancient possession of the Spanish crown and now belonging to Chile.

Because of its physical and political isolation from the continent, Chiloé has developed a fully defined culture that dates to historical times, which can be approached from different angles, such as the language and the idiosyncrasies of its people, their mythology, traditions, and so on. Chiloé was also the southernmost territory that was managed by the Society of Jesus until their expulsion from the New World in 1767. After that it passed under the care of the Franciscans.

Also the loyalty of Chiloé for Spain had been strong since colonial times, and in fact it was to remain the last stronghold of the Spanish crown to join a South American republic.

Thus, the presence of two Chinese people in this remote border, bearing the surnames of Mais and Seto—and whose lineage is given at the end of this article—is especially noteworthy, as they are recorded as marrying local Catholics in the 1880s. The mixed origin of the wives with whom they marry is also worth noticing.

There could only have been one place of origin for these two migrants, that is, the famous settlement of Macau, “*a monument of Chinese toleration and of Portuguese tenacity*” in words of the merchant and writer on China, Alexander Michie (1833-1902).<sup>1</sup>

## Historical events and concepts

China was then under the oppressive Qing dynasty, and in conflict with foreign powers over disputes for commercial purposes. Population growth, environmental exhaustion, climate change and migration were the fundamental causes underlying the nineteenth-century rebellions. Peace, stability, and a period of warmer climate, all contributed to increasing agricultural production and a historically unprecedented population growth, from around two hundred million in 1700 to three hundred fifty million in 1800 and five hundred million by the years of 1900<sup>2</sup>. The port of Macau on the other side (the birthplace of one of the emigrants studied) was under Portuguese rule, and allowed trade with European nations.

In America the Chinese mass migration began in mid-nineteenth century with the discovery of California gold, but later there were other destinations: Brazil, Cuba, Perú, México, etc.<sup>3</sup> **There are however references about the presence of Chinese in the city of Guayaquil, for the early year of 1820.**<sup>4</sup> These Chinese migrations had various effects in the countries where these migrants arrived. In Cuba the Chinese presence was essential for the development of sugar plantations, in Panamá it was the most active labor for the building of the Panama Canal, in Canada and the United States it was active in the construction of railway lines allowing market expansion, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Chinese immigration began in Perú in 1849, while the country was living the *guano* boom (main export): the coastal estates urgently needed laborers, and loans granted to the State

grew enormously. China had recently fought and lost a bloody war with England (known as “Opium War” in which the Chilean officer Patricio Lynch participated on the English side). There were conditions of unemployment and poverty among the peasantry and the consequent proletarianization of uprooted crowds. The coolie trade to Perú lasted almost twenty-seven years since its inception in 1849 until its suspension in 1874, and it is considered that 90,000 Chinese people arrived during this period<sup>6</sup>. T. Robinson Warren was “very favorably impressed with this new system of labor” in Perú, where the demand of Chinese workers rivaled that of Cuba. After eight years of service under conditions “a thousand times superior to the greater part of the laboring portion of the community of England, Ireland, or of France”, he further insisted, the coolie was “free for life” and the widespread “misery and starvation” of his homeland was replaced by a “happy” and “far superior” position in Perú<sup>7</sup>. The truth is that the traffic to Latin America shifted to Macau, and the abuses, which already began from this colony, lasted until their arrival at El Callao. In an infernal journey, which took about 120 days, the coolies were transported in boats that did not meet the minimum appropriated conditions of hygiene, besides being overcrowded, and many died or committed suicide on the trip<sup>8</sup>. At the end of the Pacific War, the Chinese population was diversifying into urban and rural areas of the Peruvian coast, and part of it was in the then new territories of northern Chile<sup>9</sup>.

With such an extensive movement of Chinese to Perú, it might be expected that other Andean countries would also avail themselves of this seemingly abundant source of labor. But there is evidence to indicate that Ecuador, Bolivia or Chile, the latter with a much more developed economy than the former two, had a surplus of labor and exported upward of 25,000 laborers to Perú from 1868 to 1872 to help the American industrialist Henry Meiggs build his railroads<sup>10</sup>.

### In Chile and Chiloé

There is very little known about the Chinese who went to Chile, principally to the mines and nitrate fields of the northern sections of the country. Ten Chinese are recorded in the early 1850s on an *hacienda* near the place of Quillota<sup>11</sup>; and about the same time a party of some 100 Chinese were brought to work the copper mines of La Higuera (a small town near the coast twenty-eight miles north of La Serena), but they proved unsuitable to the task<sup>12</sup>.

While it is highly probable that merchant vessels that transported copper and silver from Chile to China in the 1850s did bring some Chinese immigrants to Chile, the numbers would not have been significant<sup>13</sup>. The last Chinese ship with contract laborers to Latin America sailed from Macau on March 27<sup>th</sup> 1874, the day before the decree banning emigration became effective<sup>14</sup>.

The island of Chiloé may have welcomed the two mentioned travelers more as a result of migratory processes, although their presence may most likely be explained by the Pacific War (1879-83), an armed conflict that generated the first large group of Oriental people that came to Chile, because they had heard of the campaigns of Patricio Lynch (Chilean head of territorial occupation) and had escape from their Peruvian employers<sup>15</sup>. There is background information on the number of people of Chinese origin present in Chile in the past, as in 1854 (seventy-two), 1865 (eighty-three), 1875 (122) and 1885 (1,164)<sup>16</sup>, the reduced numbers of which supports the quantum leap in people that occurred after 1883.

No Chinese has yet been recorded in Chiloé; but the fact is that since the late nineteenth century, these two people must have formed part of the vast assemblage of emigrants who went there, as well as of the select group of Asian immigrants who had chosen this southern latitude as a place to live.

## Studied lineages

### Mais

- I. Francisco Mais. Married to Dolores Baso.
- II. Enrique Mais. Native from China (Macau). Married within the Catholic rite, on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1886, in the parish chapel of Ancud<sup>17</sup> to María Leiva (native from the city of Ancud; legitimate daughter from Manuel Leiva and from Rosa Millapani).

### Seto

- I. Adriano Seto. Married to Rosario Aretó.
- II. Juan Seto. Native from China. Married within the Catholic rite, on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1880, in the cathedral of Ancud<sup>18</sup> to Andrea Muñoz (legitimate daughter from Andrés Muñoz and from Carmen Colchún).

## Documentation

LMA<sup>n1</sup>: Book without any front nor titles; that says in the back: “MATRIMO / NIO / L. / I / 1879 / a / 1888”. It has index, and covers the marriages from Ancud.

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- <sup>1</sup> Michie, Alexander. *The Englishman in China during the Victorian Era: as illustrated in the career of Sir Rutherford Alcock*, Volumen 1. Edinburgh (Great Britain), William Blackwood and Sons, 1900, p. 287.
- <sup>2</sup> Tanner, Harold Miles. *China: A History*, Indianapolis (U.S.A.), Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.-Sheridan Books, Inc., p. 387.
- <sup>3</sup> Díaz Zermeno, Héctor; Torres Medina, Javier. *México: del triunfo de la República al Porfiriato*, México (México), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1869, pp. 291ff.
- <sup>4</sup> Pérez, Pablo A. “Nómina y genealogía de extranjeros del Ecuador presentes en Chiloé (1700-1900)”. In: *Spondylus. Revista Cultural*, N° 31, Quito (Ecuador), Ediciones La Tierra, 2012; pp. 49-50.
- <sup>5</sup> Lin Chou, Diego. “Los chinos en Hispanoamérica”, in: *Cuaderno de Ciencias Sociales*, N° 124. Costa Rica, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Sede Académica Costa Rica, 2002, pp. 25ff, 45ff, 55ff, etc.
- <sup>6</sup> Lin Chou, *ibid.*, pp. 56, 59, 66.
- <sup>7</sup> Jung, Moon.Ho. *Coolies and cane: race, labor and sugar in the age of emancipation*. Baltimore (U.S.A.), The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 18.
- <sup>8</sup> Arnold Meagher, *The Coolie Trade.*, pp. 120, 296; Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, pp. 140, 258.
- <sup>9</sup> Orrego, Juan Luis. “La república oligárquica 1850–1950”. In: Teodoro Hampe Martínez, *Historia del Perú. Etapa republicana*, Barcelona (Spain), Lexus, 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> Meagher, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
- <sup>11</sup> Vicuña Mackenna, Benjamín. *Páginas de mi Diario Durante Tres Años de Viajes, 1853, 1854, 1855*. Santiago (Chile), Imprenta del Ferrocarril, 1856, p. 38.
- <sup>12</sup> Meagher, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
- <sup>13</sup> Meagher, *op. cit.*, pp. 242 and 243.
- <sup>14</sup> Meagher, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
- <sup>15</sup> Lin Chou 2004, pp. 129ff, 141ff.
- <sup>16</sup> United Nations, Consejo Económico y Social. “La inmigración en Chile” (E/CN.12/169/Add.2). Montevideo (Uruguay), Consejo Económico y Social, CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe). Document presented in the Third Period of Sessions from the CEPAL (Santiago de Chile (1<sup>st</sup> May, Santiago de Chile, 5-21 June 1950, Montevideo), 1950; Chart 62.C. “Extranjeros residentes”.
- <sup>17</sup> LMA n1, foja 231, N° 570.
- <sup>18</sup> LMA n1, foja 23, N° 65.

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