

Argentina's contemporary multiculturalism and its implications for  
Chinese identity in Buenos Aires

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## ABSTRACT

How has Chinese immigration to Buenos Aires challenged contemporary Argentine multiculturalism? This thesis examines the arrival and integration of Chinese immigrants through a qualitative discourse analysis of Chinese and Spanish-language sources relating to immigration to Argentina, Argentine perceptions of Chinese immigrants, and the Chinese community's self-representation in Argentine spaces. I answer three questions: 1) What is Argentina's new multiculturalism and how does it impact Chinese immigrants? 2) How has the Argentine public responded to new Chinese immigration? And 3) How has the Chinese community responded, establishing their own Sino-Argentine identity? I find that Chinese immigration to Argentina has placed the ethnic economy at the forefront of the Argentine government's multicultural rhetoric. In public discourse, Chinese people are stereotyped and presented as foreign due to the perceived economic and geopolitical threat of China, as well as lack of understanding of the community. Finally, the growing Sino-Argentine community is working to increase its connections with typical Argentine citizens through positive self-representation in Spanish media and organizations, resulting in a new cross-cultural dialogue that encourages mutual understanding and acceptance.

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## Chapter one:

### Introduction

Hundreds of people surround me, pushing me down the narrow street. Paper lanterns and large red characters wishing wealth and happiness in the New Year adorn the windows of restaurants and shops. I can smell the meat roasting on grills in the middle of the street, and can hear Mandarin and a mix of other languages as visitors and locals shout back and forth. This is what I observed walking into Buenos Aires' Chinatown in February 2016.

The presence of overseas Chinese communities has been highly publicized in Southeast Asia, North America, and Africa, but South America is no exception to the impact of Chinese immigration. Since the establishment of “reform and opening up” policies in China in 1979, many People's Republic of China citizens have migrated to Latin America, attracted to high economic mobility, low population density, and proximity to the United States (Mazza 2016: 4). It is estimated that Peru, Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, and Argentina are each individually home to over 100,000 people of Chinese descent.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the Sino-Latin American diaspora lives in capital cities and metropolitan areas. Chinatowns have been established in Mexico City, Havana, Lima, and Buenos Aires, among others, though many of these neighborhoods are tourist destinations rather than actual living neighborhoods. Chinese immigrants are well known for their success operating small supermarkets, known throughout Latin America as *chinos* (the Spanish word for a person of Chinese descent). Many also engage with the “ethnic economy” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2013) by operating Chinese restaurants and Chinese import shops. They generally have little to no formal connection with the PRC government after emigrating (Ellis 2014: 181).

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<sup>1</sup> The actual numbers are likely much higher due to illegal immigration.

While its citizens were emigrating outward, the People's Republic of China government was extending its reach as well. China's growing population and need for resources has spurred an increase in PRC government interest in Latin America. China's soft power push and geopolitical struggle with the United States and Europe for economic and social hegemony in developing countries also explains this trend. Chinese involvement in Latin America is most evident since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From 2003 to 2012, trade between Latin America, the Caribbean and the PRC increased from \$29 billion to \$270 billion (Ellis 2014: 3). This has prompted two visible changes to citizens of these nations. First, nationals have observed an increase in official state visits between China and Latin America. Secondly, more recently, Chinese companies have established a physical presence in the region, bringing Chinese businesses, as well as Chinese workers, into Latin American spaces (Ellis 2014: 3). These changes have not always been received positively, which has led to animosity towards the established ethnic Chinese communities in many Latin American countries, regardless of the immigrants' actual connection to the PRC government.

### **Research question**

Argentina, and Buenos Aires in particular, is an interesting case through which to examine the construction of Chinese identity in Latin America. In contrast to other South American countries, Argentine national identity has been historically tied to its 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century population base of white European immigrants. Because of its historic ties to immigration, Argentina considers itself a *crisol de razas* [melting pot], but also emphasizes its Europeaness and whiteness (Alberto and Elena 2016: 8). Argentina has historically ignored the existence of minorities in the country, including the disputed official statistic that Argentina is 97%

white (Gordillo 2016: 248). However, recent changes to immigration law show a governmental shift towards a new multiculturalism, one that attempts to encompass all of the ethnic and cultural identities that exist within Argentina. I define this shift as Argentina's "contemporary multiculturalism," or the government's increased emphasis on promoting a diverse Argentina since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Argentina's Chinese population officially numbers about 120,000 people, making it the fourth largest recent immigrant group (Buenos Aires Ciudad 2016).<sup>2</sup> This number might seem small compared to the large number of Peruvians, Bolivians, and Paraguayans that have also recently immigrated to Argentina, but the small size betrays the influence and visibility of this group. There are around 3,5000 Chinese-owned supermarkets in Buenos Aires, meaning while walking around the city one will come across one every couple of blocks (Denardi 2015: 86). Frequent news coverage of state visits, trade negotiations with China, and Chinese government-supported infrastructure projects also firmly place China in the average Argentine citizen's consciousness.

Physical and cultural differences between the ethnic Chinese and most Argentines also make the Chinese a highly visible and potentially stigmatized social group. Difficulties communicating (most recent Chinese immigrants struggle with Spanish) and different cultural norms have bred a frustration not experienced with other South American immigrants. These low-level frustrations add to larger feelings of resentment that many Argentines feel towards the Chinese, due to the success of their supermarkets and an overall feeling that the Chinese government is gaining too much control Latin America (Ellis 2014: 194).

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<sup>2</sup> Other sources estimate that there are 12,000 Taiwanese, 200,000 registered Chinese, and 100,000 unregistered Chinese (Denardi 2015: 84).

This research project examines Chinese immigration and integration in Argentina through the context of Argentina's new multicultural discourse. If the goal of multiculturalism is to navigate the "challenge of difference" in society (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005: 222), then I seek to identify the specifications and impact of the multicultural logic being used to incorporate the Chinese immigrants in Argentina. The research question guiding this thesis is: How has recent Chinese immigration challenged contemporary Argentine multiculturalism? I break down this question into the following subquestions: 1) What is Argentina's new multiculturalism and how does it impact Chinese immigrants? 2) How has the Argentine public responded to new Chinese immigration? And finally, 3) how has the Chinese community responded, establishing their own Sino-Argentine identity?

My research question is significant in terms of greater social and geopolitical shifts. China's influence in Argentina is growing, and ethnic conflict between Chinese and Argentines has consequences for the overall stability of the country and region. The answer to this question also provides new information for how communities and races are perceived, and how their identities are created through state-level, public, and self-produced discourse. Finally, it reveals the different types of multicultural logic at play in Argentina and the implications of these different attitudes on the Chinese immigrant experience.

## **Methodology**

This thesis is based on a qualitative discourse analysis of a vast array of Spanish and Chinese language sources related to the Sino-Argentine community. These sources include immigration laws, news articles, cultural and business organization webpages, videos, tweets, blog articles, and discussion board posts. I performed all translations that appear in the body of

the thesis. When applicable, I used Buenos Aires-specific sources, since the majority of the country's Chinese immigrants are concentrated in the capital city. I also rarely make a distinction between Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants in my sources and analysis. In Argentina the Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants are viewed collectively as the "*Chinos*," and the immigrants themselves often identify jointly as well. I divided these sources into three broad categories related to my research question.

My first category contains sources related to Chinese immigration to Argentina. Changing immigration laws in both Argentina and China show state-level attitudes surrounding nationalism, multiculturalism, and immigration. The conversations between those already immigrated and potential migrants in online discussion boards influence the flow of people. Government policies and initiatives seeking to engage with other cultures also impact a country's attractiveness as an immigrant destination.

My second group of sources involves the public discourses surrounding Chinese immigration to Argentina. I examined the depictions of the Chinese community in the nation's top two newspapers, *La Nación* and *Clarín*, by looking for themes and potential xenophobic representations in the top ten related articles in each source. I also analyze a top-grossing movie with a Chinese protagonist and a website that targets the Chinese people in Argentina. Online public message boards also provide unedited opinions of the Chinese collective.

My third category of sources relates to the Sino-Argentine collective's self-representation in Argentine spaces. These sources are Spanish language texts produced by Chinese Argentines, including the Summer 2017 edition of the Sino-Argentine cultural magazine *Dang Dai* and the website for the Chinese supermarket organization. The Sino-Argentine Cultural Association's website also shows how the Chinese collective engages with the greater Argentine society.

These sources together show how Chinese immigration has challenged the government, the Argentine public, and the Sino-Argentine community itself.

### **Thesis overview**

My thesis is made up of six chapters. The first chapter gives a recent background of Chinese influence in Latin America and the introduction of Argentina as a relevant and interesting case study. The second chapter contains the theoretical basis to my argument, including a review of pertinent studies and theories that provide space for me to make my own contribution. Chapter three examines the Argentine government's multicultural discourse and how it relates to Chinese immigration. The fourth chapter contains Argentine perceptions of the Chinese population as revealed through pop culture, news, and private reactions to the Chinese immigrants. In the fifth chapter, I analyze the media and organizations the Chinese community uses to present itself in Argentina. Finally, chapter six concludes my research and presents implications and possibilities for further study.

## Chapter two:

### Chinese immigration to Argentina literature review

#### **Introduction**

My research question is connected to Argentine and Chinese history as well as race, culture, and governance. I needed to understand the background of each of these countries and the relevance of nationality and immigration in each. Also relevant to my research are China and Argentina's current connecting forces, such as business and media. Theories of multiculturalism and immigrant identity guide my interpretations of the Chinese Argentine community. I have broken down the theoretical framework into five sections: 1) Argentine history, 2) Chinese immigration history, 3) Chinese-Argentine engagements, 4) Multicultural theory and 5) Immigrant identity.

In the first two topics I present a brief historical background to the countries and explain how migration is significant in each case. Recent immigration is most relevant to my research and I examine how it relates to historical trends as well as changing values in both countries. In the Chinese-Argentine engagement section I look at business and media ties between Argentina and China. For the fourth part of my research I attempt to define multiculturalism and how multiculturalism appears in Argentina. Finally, I examine immigrant identity, particularly Chinese identity in Argentina to determine its manifestations and values. Through an overview of these five topics I establish a basis for my research into Chinese immigration in the framework of Argentine multiculturalism.

## **Argentine history through the lens of race and nationalism**

In their collection of essays related to race in modern Argentina, Alberto and Elena (2016) delve into Argentina's controversial history of race-based exclusion. Gordillo (2016) says that Argentina's founding myth is that European immigration in the late 1800s was significant enough to remove and replace the indigenous population. European immigration during this time was accompanied by foundational texts that emphasized the need for the "right kind" of immigration (European and white), and an elimination of all things "savage" or "barbaric," referring to the indigenous societies outside of Buenos Aires. In the late 1800s, Army General Roca took on the "Conquest of the Desert" to forcefully claim the Patagonia region from its indigenous inhabitants and solidify ethnic European dominance.

These actions led to the establishment of "White Argentina," what Gordillo calls the physical and cultural manifestations of a long-held desire for a predominantly white Argentina. Aspects of society that do not comply with this imagined national landscape are ignored, in a kind of "hegemonic disposition." "The hegemony of the disposition in Argentina is to feel and desire that the national space is white, disregarding nonwhite places and bodies," he writes.

The "whitening" of Argentina in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was challenged in the mid-1900s when poor and working class indigenous and mestizo (mixed race) migrants moved from the interior of Argentina to Buenos Aires (Gordillo 2016). These migrants, pejoratively called *cabecitas negras*, led to an association between darker racial features and lower social class. During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, populism and Peronism mobilized the lower class and nonwhite groups. The augmented presence and power of these groups went against the domination of whiteness, prompting anger and fear from upper class Euro-Argentines. During the 1960s, more darkskinned Argentines moved from the interior to Buenos Aires and many settled in *villas*

*miserias* [shantytowns] outside of the city, continuing the racial/class divide. The 1970s saw a rise of leftist and revolutionary movements drawing on mestizo and pro-Latin America ideals, as well as a growth in indigenous activism, continuing to defy the idea of White Argentina.

Revolutionary fever was crushed by the 1976 coup d'état that overthrew President Isabel Peron (1974-1976) and established military rule. Gordillo calls the 1976-1983 dictatorship the "most violent embodiment yet" of White Argentina. The regime held celebrations and military parades to honor General Roca and the Conquest of the Desert, while officials held to the rhetoric that the military violence was a cleansing force, seeking to remove "elements alien to the national being." The state attempted to continue the project of White Argentina by destroying places perceived as "barbaric." For example, before the 1978 World Cup the acting mayor sought to demolish the city's *villas*.

The end of military rule in Argentina was accompanied by a worldwide growth in human rights discourse, and multiculturalism as a governing principle entered Argentine politics. Presidents Raul Alfonsin (1983-1989) and Carlos Menem (1989-1999) enacted the country's first Anti-Discrimination Law (1988) and created the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI). During the 2010 Bicentennial celebrations, Argentina's nonwhite component was celebrated for the first time, broadening the terms of national inclusion. Contemporary Argentina displays a new acceptance of diverse cultures and ethnicities in stark contrast to its divisive past. However, the profound influence of White Argentina means that in general society there is still a resistance to accepting people who do not look European as legitimate Argentine citizens, one reason why the Chinese immigrants have not achieved widespread acceptance.

In contemporary Argentina racism tends to be overlooked, but Sutton (2008) argues that it is a large social problem that has undermined democratic citizenship and social justice efforts. She points to racist discourse in state and government institutions and in the Argentine media. The state has fostered racist discourse through, for example, police harassment of the Bolivian community and discrimination against Afro-Argentines. An example of media's contribution to racist discourse is found in judgmental articles about indigenous groups. Sutton notes that the media does report instances of racism and sometimes disseminates useful information, but also often perpetuates stereotypes. In Argentina, incorrect identifications abound, such as calling all people of Arab origin "Turks" and all people of Asian descent "Chinese." Race is not commonly used for identification, except for when it is used in a derogatory way. There are many racialized categories of identification, such as *cabecita negra*, *bolita* for Bolivian, and *negro/a* for people who are of a lower social class or have indigenous ancestry. She acknowledges that the establishment of INADI and changes to the constitution and immigration laws are a step in the right direction, but argues that these initiatives lack large-scale visibility.

### **Tracing modern Chinese emigration and immigration to Argentina**

There are many different accounts of emigration from China, but Lintner (2012) presents one of the clearest descriptions. He claims three exoduses: first, after the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644, then after the Taiping Rebellion and fall of the Qing in the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and finally the current exodus starting from Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy in 1978. For this third wave, it is not poverty or persecution that drives Chinese citizens abroad; rather, it is the prospect of a better life. This is a perspective shared among analysts of recent Chinese immigration (Liang and Ye 2001, Lu 2013). As the standard of living in China increases and

family and friends compare their living situations, feelings of “relative deprivation” have motivated peasants to move to the cities and city dwellers to move abroad. The Chinese government views migration favorably because it eases population pressure and unemployment, while also creating remittance networks to sustain cities back home. Furthermore, Chinese communities abroad have given China “friendly footholds” where the migrants have established businesses and enclaves.

Trejos and Chiang (2012) and Denardi (2015) detail the arrival of Chinese immigrants in Argentina. Both articles present the Chinese population in Argentina as mainly Taiwanese and coastal-province Chinese who have settled around Buenos Aires. Trejos and Chiang discuss three waves of Chinese immigration to Argentina. The first two, from 1894-1949 and 1949 onward, were rather small and consisted of mostly poor men and political refugees. From 1894 to 1949 China experienced a period of instability, due to the fall of the Qing Dynasty leading up to the Chinese Civil War. It was during this time that the first Chinese single men made their way to Argentina, escaping the poverty and politics of their home country. From the establishment of the Communist government in 1949 onward, Trejos and Chiang observed that immigration consisted mainly of political refugees. From the 1970s-90s, however, there was a large increase in immigrants that arrived with their families and had capital to start businesses in Argentina. These immigrants were mainly from Fujian, a southern coastal province across from the island of Taiwan that is one of China’s largest immigrant-sending provinces. Fujianese migrants make up almost 18% of Chinese migrants worldwide, and contribute to large percentage of the Chinese immigrant populations in the US and Europe (Liang 2001). Argentina had experienced inflow of immigrants from Japan and Korea after World War II and the Korean War, but in the 1990s Chinese immigration overtook immigration from other Asian countries. The majority of the new

immigrants established their families and businesses in Buenos Aires and the surrounding areas. Since the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina, Chinese immigration has varied according to the economic state of Buenos Aires and the rest of the nation.

### **Sino-Argentine transnationalism in business and media**

Starting in the late 1970s by way of large-scale economic reforms, China opened its doors to new economic relationships with other countries, including countries in Latin America (Moneta and Cesarín 2012). The dissolution and privatization of many state owned enterprises led to a surge in the industrial sector in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. Chinese leaders saw technology and industry as a way to establish the country as a world power, and created international companies to compete with similar firms from the US, Europe, and Japan. Chinese companies have taken on a large role in the international economy, particularly in developing countries. In Latin America, companies supported by the Chinese state invest mainly in raw materials and natural resources. Latin America is China's second-largest target of foreign direct investment, only preceded by investment in Asia. In fact, Chinese investment in Latin America as of 2011 was about equal to investment in North America, Europe, and Africa combined (United Nations 2014).

In Argentina, diplomatic ties with China have been established fundamentally through economic agreements over the past 45 years (Denardi 2016). Most Chinese investments are related to public transport and other infrastructure projects, while Argentina sells agricultural products and mineral fuels, among other things, to China. China is Argentina's second largest trade partner, and the largest partner of Brazil and Chile.

Chinese immigrants who have established businesses or hold jobs in Argentina are not generally very connected to the Chinese state, Denardi (2016) says. Instead, they are connected to the other Chinese and/or Taiwanese migrants who live and work in their same area. The most common business venture is to open a supermarket, but many Chinese immigrants also engage with the Argentine economy by owning restaurants, laundromats, and photo development stores— businesses where they are not required to have a high level of Spanish. Some immigrants have also established wholesale stores of cheap Chinese imports. The immigrant population is highly interconnected in order to establish strategic business relationships. Denardi attributes this interconnectivity to the Chinese value of *guanxi* [relationships] that emphasizes granting favors with the expectation that eventually the favor will be repaid. Richer, more highly educated immigrants have also brought with them Chinese companies such as Sinopec, Axion Energy, Huawei, and ICBC, and established branches in the country. There are currently 60 Chinese companies in Argentina and 12 Argentine companies in China.

Argentina does not recognize Taiwanese autonomy, so relations with Taiwan are more complex. Taiwanese imports are more heavily taxed than Chinese imports, and some products are not accepted into the country at all. There are also feelings of mistrust between Taiwanese and Chinese populations in Argentina because some Taiwanese feel that their business niches were taken over by the later-arriving Chinese immigrants. However, the two groups generally unite when it comes to promoting mutual goals, such as greater protections for their supermarkets or the celebration of Chinese festivals (Denardi 2015).

Zhou and Cai (2002) and Sun and Sinclair (2006) study the impacts of Chinese-language media in the Chinese diaspora. Sun and Sinclair look at Chinese diaspora media in the context of China's recent soft power push. They find that the media and communication sector form the

backbone for China's soft power. The government has not only expanded its state media such as CCTV and Xinhua abroad, but also partnered with overseas media previously operated exclusively by Chinese immigrants. Zhou and Cai examine Chinese language media to determine whether it is an inhibiting or facilitating force for assimilation in the United States. They discover that Chinese media is complementary to the host society for three reasons. First, Chinese media allows immigrants to connect to the host society and stay informed through a familiar medium. Secondly, the media connects new immigrants to the host society by providing them information about housing, jobs, and so on. Chinese media also places special emphasis on issues pertinent to immigrants, like changes in immigration law. Finally, Chinese language media can assist immigrants in achieving their mobility goals, such as sending a child to a top college. The Chinese media promotes these goals by publishing business and educational opportunities. In immigrant communities, social as well as print media are a significant part of the daily lives of migrants because diaspora identities are formed in part through media production, content, and consumption.

### **Theorizing multiculturalism**

Anderson (1983) conceptualizes nationalism as belonging to a socially constructed group, which he calls an "imagined community." Nationality is not concrete, but rather created through perceptions of similarity among members. The idea of shared national characteristics was facilitated through the rise of "print capitalism" at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, when print media produced in a common vernacular allowed communities to form a common discourse. Nationalism provides the basis for multicultural theories, because it defines what is considered "national culture" which is then challenged and redefined through multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism in common usage is adherence to heterogeneity instead of homogeneity, which leads to diversity rather than uniformity. Hartmann and Gerteis (2005) reject this one-dimensional model that pits social cohesion and multiculturalism against each other. They view multiculturalism as “an exercise in cultivating new conceptions of solidarity in the context of dealing with the realities of pervasive and increasing diversity in contemporary societies.” Multiculturalism is a response to difference and diversity in a society. Hartmann and Gerteis present four different ways the “challenge of difference” can be managed: assimilationism, cosmopolitanism, interactive pluralism, and fragmented pluralism (see Diagram 1).

Assimilationism assumes that a society unites over universally shared core values, and that the individual relates directly with the social whole. In the assimilationist vision of multiculturalism, difference is dangerous and should be removed. In order to be accepted into society, individuals must disassociate themselves with any outsider identities. Assimilationism was the prevailing governing policy during Argentina’s 1976-1983 dictatorship, and is often considered the traditional theory of immigrant integration.

Cosmopolitanism allows diversity as a way to expand individual rights and freedoms, placing emphasis on individual choice of group membership. Membership in the social whole does not require adherence to particular values, just a “minimal commitment to mutual belonging.” Group differences exist in safe contexts, so adopting one identity does not conflict with the adoption of other group identities. In contrast to assimilationism, in cosmopolitanism both the macro-culture and the subnational groups have vague or weak boundaries. In Argentina, those of European ancestry can claim group differences without conflict (Italian-Argentine, Spanish-Argentine), but non-European identification rarely exists in a neutral context.

The fragmented pluralist vision considers distinct and self-contained groups a necessity and strength in society. This vision is the farthest from assimilationism because it describes a weak macro-social boundary but very strong internal groups. Group membership defines

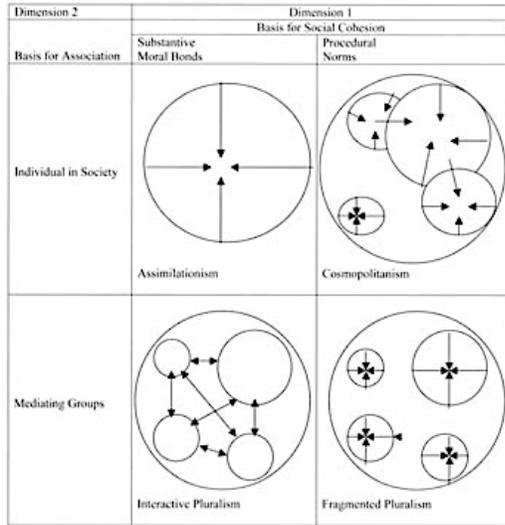


Diagram 1: Hartmann and Gerteis (2005)

individual identity and distinctive group cultures are maintained. The desire for group rights is a factor that unites these groups under the state. The state is a major player only in determining the rights of the groups, not in imposing any significant moral ideals. There is a clear conception of who fits into the groups and who does not. Portes and Zhou (1993) present a US case for how immigrants might assimilate into societal groups instead of into a national culture. They observed the

assimilation of recent immigrants into the white middle class, the African-American dominated urban underclass, and a third class combining rapid economic growth with “preservation of the immigrant community’s transported values and tight solidarity.” This third case particularly reflects the Chinese immigrant experience in Argentina.

Interactive pluralism recognizes the existence of distinct societal groups and stresses the need to promote common understanding across differences. Cross-cultural dialogue and exchange are valued in the interactive pluralist vision of multiculturalism. As opposed to fragmented pluralism, interactive pluralism emphasizes “groups in interaction with each other mutually constituting a substantive moral whole.” The macro-culture is not defined; rather it is constantly changing due to the interaction between diverse groups.

Multiculturalism in Argentina is trending towards interactive pluralism, but with a few unique challenges. The government attempts to support and celebrate diversity with new immigration policies and multicultural projects, but these are tied up their desire for economic and political gain. The Chinese community strives towards interactive pluralism, as seen in their efforts to reach out in Spanish language spheres to promote their culture and customs, but Argentina's complicated race history makes this vision difficult to promote in a pure form. For one, the assimilationist xenophobic public provides a counter discourse that promotes discrimination against the Chinese. Secondly, the fragmented pluralist tendency to place others in distinct groups is evident in Argentine conceptions of race and ethnicity, in naming people other than whites based on their ethnicity ("Chinos, Turkos, etc), and finding it difficult to accept nonwhites as "real" Argentines. In Argentina, out-group membership is hard to escape, hard to neutralize, and hard to communicate across because group boundaries are seen as impenetrable.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) study the commodification of culture and ethnicity around the world. From South African tribes to the country of Scotland, identity is being sold as a marketable product. In the "ethnic economy" all parts of a culture are for sale. The worldwide rise of the ethnic economy has led to the re-branding of ethnic populations under the demands of the market, as well as the appropriation of ethnic practices by corporations to capitalize on these cultural experiences. Cultures are therefore redefined through their expression in the market and through the eyes of outsiders who pay to experience them. A critical part of the commodification process is the homogenization of culture. A complex culture becomes *the* Chinese, for example, as if there were only one way to frame Chinese identity. This research project will show how Chinese identity in Buenos Aires has been adopted into the "ethnic economy."

Hale (2005) describes the impact of neoliberalism in Latin America on multicultural policies with the concept of “neoliberal multiculturalism.” He argues that neoliberalism stretches beyond economic reforms to the recognition of specific rights for groups based on cultural/ethnic identity. Neoliberal multiculturalism allows previously disadvantaged groups to organize and solicit new rights and protections from the state. These rights are supported by the state because it is believed that ethnic identities can be assets to market actors, and multicultural policies can therefore support successful market participation (Kymlicka 2012). Immigration, from a neoliberal perspective, creates transnational links that support international trade, so governments are motivated to value immigrant entrepreneurship, “strategic cosmopolitanism” and global commercial relationships, even while ignoring issues such as wealth disparity and racial inequality.

Said (1978) shows how historical and literary texts produced in the West interpret the East through the lens of “Orientalism,” which is a patronization and exoticization of Asian, North African, and Middle Eastern cultures. Implicit in Orientalism is the assumption that the West is in the best position to interpret the East, and that Western culture is more advanced. Said examines several Western texts, exposing romanticization and exaggeration of difference in depictions of non-western cultures. The Chinese community in Buenos Aires experiences “Orientalism” in media and popular discourse. Said’s view that Orientalism is a “psychological exercise in the self-affirmation of European identity” could explain why Argentines (who like to consider themselves largely European) tend to view Chinese people through this lens.

## **Conceptualizing overseas Chinese identity**

Global Chinese migrants attempt to represent their “Chineseness” in their new country in strategic ways while also working to maintain their culture and pass it on to their children. “New immigrants must both imagine appropriate versions of Chineseness but also be seen by local Chinese and by non-Chinese to be appropriately Chinese by performing some versions of Chineseness,” Wickberg (2007) writes. Many global Chinese join groups like alumni associations of their Chinese high schools in their new country for social and networking support, or use the internet to maintain connections to their country and culture. Globally, overseas Chinese are also often involved resistance efforts when they feel their compatriots have been threatened by discrimination, and fundraising efforts in the face of overseas natural disasters. Wickberg analyzes Vancouver as a previously white, European area that was greatly changed by Asian influence. Over the years, ways of “being Chinese” and performing Chineseness have changed along with global multicultural trends.

Ellis (2014) analyzes how the expanding presence of Chinese businesses and their workers in Latin America has impacted the already existing Chinese communities in the region. Although the ethnic Chinese groups’ role in trade expansion has been small, their social and political position has been heavily impacted by the change. A shopkeeper or restaurant owner is generally the main manifestation of “China” for the average citizen of a Latin American country, so these ethnic Chinese bear the burden of all opinions directed towards the country. In many places, these attitudes include a mix of respect for perceived work ethic and prejudice of perceived foreignness. The perceived otherness of the ethnic Chinese community from the rest of society contributes to feelings of mistrust and insecurity in many countries. When these feelings of mistrust are combined with visible growth and economic success, conflicts have been shown

to occur. Chinese communities in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Suriname, and Argentina have all faced protests regarding the expansion of Chinese stores in the country. These protests have led to looting and violence between the mobs and individuals of Chinese descent. This idea of a collective “Chinese threat” is compounded by fears that Chinese criminal activity is bringing crime and violence to the country. The Chinese mafia is acknowledged and reported on in Argentina, and human smuggling rings are also common, especially in Mexico, a country that Chinese immigrants use as a springboard to reach the United States. The expansion of the PRC into Latin America complicates and challenges the identities and perceptions of the ethnic Chinese communities.

Buenos Aires has several different neighborhoods that have been created along ethnic lines. Sassone and Mera (2006) analyze the Bolivian neighborhood *Barrio Charrua*, the Korean neighborhood *Baek-Ku*, and the *Barrio Chino* in terms of each neighborhood’s acknowledgement by its own community and the visibility and value it attains in the city as a whole. The migrant neighborhoods create a sense of belonging for their residents while conserving customs and increasing cultural cohesion. The Bolivian and Korean neighborhoods are seen as different from the Chinatown. The first two neighborhoods were established because networks of families found cheap housing and economic opportunities together. They are closed spaces that support their individual ethnic groups and maintain their cultural cohesion, but they do not greatly interact with Buenos Aires as a whole. The Chinatown, or *Barrio Chino*, is immediately different because the population of the city, not the residents themselves, named it. Furthermore, it is geared towards consumption by Argentines and tourists much more than the other neighborhoods. Overall, all three neighborhoods have established strategies to claim territories for their populations in the city, maintain social networks, and reinforce their ethnic

identity. But since the Chinese migrants are less likely to actually live in their established neighborhood, their space has become more intentionally outward-facing and economically driven than the neighborhoods of the Koreans and Bolivians.

Ko (2016) examines cultural discourses of Asian-Argentines. She writes that despite the perception that Asian Argentines are “too few” and “too foreign,” they have achieved a remarkable increase in visibility in contemporary culture. She analyzes three recent Argentine films with Asian protagonists: Sebastián Borensztein’s *Un Cuento Chino* about a young Chinese immigrant, Gaspar Scheuer’s *Samurai* about 19<sup>th</sup> century Japanese family in rural Argentina, and Veronica Chen’s *Mujer Conejo* about a second generation Chinese immigrant who clashes with the Chinese mafia in Buenos Aires. She argues that Asian Argentines in film represent a new national unity because they can bring together the competing forces of modernity and tradition, multiculturalism and monoculturalism. Because Asian Argentines are different from both Argentina’s predominant whiteness and its traditional minorities, they are a marker of the country’s emerging multiculturalism.

### **Contribution and hypothesis**

The existing scholarship around my topic provides descriptive and historical studies of Chinese immigration to Argentina and the current connections between the two countries. It provides potential historical reasons for exclusion of the ethnic Chinese in Argentina, and discusses identity politics of the Chinese diaspora. What is lacking in the existing scholarship is an analysis of the effect of Argentina’s contemporary multiculturalism on the Chinese community in Buenos Aires. I aim to show how the Chinese are perceived in Argentina through public discourse as well as how the Chinese community attempts to represent itself to the public.

Much of this interpretation will be done through online resources that have only come into existence over the past 20 or so years. Furthermore, as a proficient speaker of both Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, I am able to read and compare information directed at greater Argentina as well as sources that are meant to target only other Chinese Argentines. My contribution is a more precise, new media-informed representation of the Chinese collective in the “imagined community” that is Argentina.

I argue that Chinese immigration has promoted an “ethnic economy” model of national cultural contribution to contemporary Argentine multiculturalism that is resisted by a counter discourse of commercial and geopolitical threat. While the xenophobic public seeks to draw attention to conflicts and difference, Chinese Argentine citizens have instead advanced a more expansive notion of ethnic culture and economy that foreground different symbols, processes, and markers of “Sino-Argentine” identity.

## Chapter three:

### Chinese immigration to Argentina

#### **Introduction**

[China] is one of the most important actors in the world today, not only in commerce but also in culture. It is a giant that grows every day and Argentina wants to have a relationship like the one that it has had with Latin America and Europe. We want to be protagonists of a change with China and start giving confident signals so that, with time, all the barriers that exist today disappear. (Migraciones 2016)

The story of contemporary Chinese immigration to Argentina encompasses national laws and changing ideologies, multilingual policy briefs and migration resources, and informal sources of information. It is related to the policies of emigration from China and the policies of immigration into Argentina, as well as being connected to stories and stereotypes that Chinese people abroad pass on to those back home. The subquestion for this chapter is: What is Argentina's new multiculturalism and how does it impact Chinese immigration? This chapter will attempt to define the multicultural model promoted by the Argentine government. It will also demonstrate how this model has prompted recent Chinese migration to Argentina, what push and pull factors are involved, and how immigrants access information and adjust to the Sino-Argentine community.

I study the shift in Chinese attitudes towards leaving the country following Deng Xiaoping's 1978-1980 speeches. I then analyze the two most recent Argentine immigration laws through the context of Chinese immigration, delineating opportunities and challenges for potential immigrants. I also highlight phrases that emphasize openness and diversity, speaking to

the state's desire to promote a multicultural nation. I found online discussions among Chinese people talking about Argentina's immigration laws and the benefits of migrating, and use them as evidence that the government's multiculturalist rhetoric has been accepted. Further encouragement to Chinese immigrants is seen in my analysis of the Office of National Immigration website as well as the City of Buenos Aires website. Finally, I use the Buenos Aires Chinatown as a case study showing the government's attitude towards Chinese immigrants.

This chapter argues that the Argentine government's new multicultural discourse is rooted in the economic and political benefits of Chinese immigration. The recent liberalization of Argentina's immigration law promotes a cosmopolitanism that has contributed to an increase in Chinese immigration, but has not done more than symbolic work towards the social integration of the Chinese community in Buenos Aires.

## **China's Open Door Policy and Argentina's open door**

### *China's opening*

From 1949 to 1976, Communist leader Mao Zedong worked to establish a socialist, isolationist People's Republic of China. Under his model, allegiance to the Chinese state was a crucial part of forming a unified country, so all interactions with the rest of the world were restricted, and harsh controls were placed on the number of citizens allowed to leave the country. However, after the death of Mao and his replacement with Deng Xiaoping, China's strict attitudes towards emigration began to ease. Deng Xiaoping's 1979 speech on "reform and opening up" marked the beginning of a new era for China. This speech and others presented around the same time are crucial to China's modernization and growth of industrial power. These

speeches (and their accompanying political and economic reforms) laid the foundation for Chinese emigration to other parts of the world, including to Argentina.

Included in Deng's modernization program are several reforms relevant to international migration. One of his main themes is the rejection of Mao's isolationism and the importance of relating to and learning about other countries. A speech given October 10, 1978 is the first to specifically mention opening to the outside world:

China has made contributions to the world down through the ages, but for a long time conditions have been at a standstill in China and development has been slow. Now it is time for us to learn from the advanced countries. For a certain period of time, learning advanced science and technology from the developed countries was criticized as "blindly worshiping foreign things". We have come to understand how stupid this argument is. Therefore, we have sent many people abroad to familiarize themselves with the outside world. China cannot develop by closing its door, sticking to the beaten track and being self-complacent.<sup>3</sup> (Deng 1978)

These were radical statements after Mao's years of emphasis on nationalism and Chinese pride. Deng references this past attitude, which called interest in the outside world "blindly worshipping foreign things." Deng calls for a shift away from this nationalist worldview. He also voices support for diversity of ideologies and schools of thought, another stark adjustment from years past. He claims to accept new ideas from other places as well as criticism of the Chinese government. This call to action relates to the theme of creating new international connections. With the value of the outside world finally legitimized by the Chinese government, citizens who may have been interested in learning about other countries or moving abroad now had a greater

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<sup>3</sup> [https://archive.org/stream/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.1/Deng02\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.1/Deng02_djvu.txt)

chance to do so. Chinese leaders were actually encouraging this interest and helping to cultivate it, which caused a greater number of Chinese people to immigrate when they had that opportunity.

Deng Xiaoping's reform speeches also specifically mention immigration and overseas Chinese, making these ideas more accepted and well known among the general population. Deng supports the idea of Chinese citizens visiting other countries. He says, "we have sent many people abroad to familiarize themselves with the outside world" (Deng 1978). With this statement he was implicitly supporting migration, because not all Chinese people "sent abroad" were sure to return to China after experiencing what life was like in other places. Furthermore, when people decided to stay in another place then wrote home to their relatives and friends in China and encouraged them to move abroad as well, this led to an increase in non-state sponsored travel and migration. Deng also makes an interesting statement regarding overseas Chinese. In one speech, he states that foreign citizens with Chinese origins should have similar rights in China to Chinese citizens. This expanded ownership of Chinese nationality suggests that citizens who emigrate will still be considered Chinese and will retain privileges reserved to the Chinese, making emigration a less costly pursuit. Migrants are ensured that their status as Chinese will be preserved. As Deng says, "We should utilize Chinese people, both at home and abroad, as long as they are patriotic, devoted to work and capable" (Deng 1979).

Deng Xiaoping's speeches on "opening up" China encouraged Chinese migration because the speeches drew attention to the benefits of learning from other countries, they supported overseas travel, and lessened the restrictions on Chinese citizenship. Because of this, Deng's reform speeches coincide with an increase in Chinese emigration overall (Skeldon 1996). Chinese emigration has continued over the past 30 years, though a growing rate of middle and

upper class Chinese have emigrated while the rate of low-skilled emigration has been stagnant (Xiang 2016).

### *Argentina's political shifts*

The two policies most relevant to my discussion of Chinese immigration to Argentina are the 1981 Law of General Migration and Law 25.871 that took its place in 2003. The difference between these two policies highlights the benefits of Argentina's current policy for those interested in immigrating.

Prior to the 2003 reform, Argentina's immigration situation was regulated by a law established during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. An analysis of the full text of Law 22.439 shows the migration priorities of this time period, which were to protect the country from dangerous outsiders. Article 2 states that the government will promote the immigration of foreigners whose "cultural characteristics permit their adequate integration into the Argentine society."<sup>4</sup> This phrasing gives the government an open ability to decide exactly which "cultural characteristics" determine appropriate assimilation. The law later on supports this governmental overreach by giving the immigration authorities the right to detain and deport foreigners without going through the proper judicial process. Furthermore, the law does not provide the same health and education rights to foreigners as to Argentine citizens. The law sees immigrants as a danger and nuisance rather than as a benefit to the society. It would have been very different for Chinese people to immigrate legally to Argentina during the implementation of this law. There was an increase in Chinese immigration in the 1990s, but these immigrants likely were not legally established residents in the country. This could also explain why official data on numbers of Chinese people living in Argentina was unrealistically low until the past few years.

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<sup>4</sup> "Promoverá la inmigración de extranjeros cuyas características culturales permitan su adecuada integración en la sociedad argentina."

In 2003, Law 25.871 was passed to replace the closed attitude of the aforementioned policy; it remains in effect to this day. Law 25.871 is very different from the previous one, with the biggest difference being the renewed emphasis on basic rights for immigrants. In fact, the Argentine state believes that immigration is a human right:

ARTICLE 4: The right to migrate is essential and unalienable, and the Republic of Argentina guarantees it on the basis of the principles of equality and universality.<sup>5</sup>

While many countries around the world are recently tightening their immigration policies, Argentina reestablished a policy that ensures that immigration is open and accessible to all. Argentina's law is also unique in its emphasis on the social services that foreigners residing in Argentina are guaranteed. Articles 6 and 7 of the law refer specifically to health, education, justice, work, and social security for immigrants and their families, and says that in no case will a foreigner be denied admission to any public or private school, from primary school to university (Law 25.871). This law provides the ideal situation for someone looking to start a life in a new country, and is likely one reason why Argentina is one of the top immigrant destinations in South America. The law also goes in depth supporting state initiatives to help immigrants learn Spanish and adjust to Argentine society, while also "recognizing and valuing the cultural, recreational, social, economic, and religious expressions of the immigrants."<sup>6</sup> This part of the law was clearly written to voice support for immigrants from places outside of just Latin America. Chinese immigrants can read this document and feel that they will be supported but not forced to

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<sup>5</sup> "Artículo 4: El derecho a la migración es esencial e inalienable de la persona y la República Argentina lo garantiza sobre la base de los principios de igualdad y universalidad."

<sup>6</sup> "Al conocimiento y la valoración de las expresiones culturales, recreativas, sociales, económicas y religiosas de los inmigrantes."

assimilate. Under this law, immigrants are respected, protected, and assisted, at least officially. This law is at least partly responsible for recent Chinese immigration to Argentina.

The new emphasis on open citizenship and basic rights for all people residing in Argentina shows a fundamental shift from previous assimilationism to current cosmopolitanism. During the dictatorship difference in society was seen as a problem that needed to be minimized, but the new immigration law conveys a more expansive Argentine identity, one that accepts difference in order to maximize personal freedoms. Immigrants are free and encouraged to take part in the Argentine state with minimal commitment to a shared identity.

In this section I have examined the laws and policy shifts that have allowed Chinese people to immigrate to Argentina. I have also established why they might have left China and why they might have chosen Argentina as a destination. These are push and pull factors based on historical trends and research. However, with the rise of the Internet and online discussions, I can now look into exactly what information and discussion is fueling Chinese immigration to Argentina currently. I will shift from talking about the historical basis of the third wave to analyzing the factors influencing immigration now.

### **To stay or to go? How potential immigrants utilize internet resources**

When choosing whether to immigrate abroad, people tend to seek out as much information as they can about the place to which they are moving. They want to know about the immigration policies, the community of people from their country already living there, and how locals treat people of their nationality. Chinese people get this information about Argentina through Baidu (China's version of Google) searches regarding immigrating to Argentina, through online immigration and law documents translated to Chinese, and through online

discussions in Chinese forums. In this section, I examine the available online resources for Chinese nationals interested in moving to Argentina, including official sources like translations of laws and notices and informal sources of information like the top discussion thread in Chinese on immigrating to Argentina. These digital texts provide a view into the information about Argentina that is being passed on to potential immigrants.

Chinese people interested in traveling to Argentina can start getting information in their own language straight from the national migration homepage, which is a welcoming sign for potential migrants.<sup>7</sup> A banner on the front page reads, “Electronic Travel Authorization” in English, Chinese, and Spanish, accompanied by a picture of the Chinese flag (Image 1).



Image 1: “Electronic travel authorization” website banner

The Electronic Travel Authorization (AVE in Spanish) is a special exemption for Chinese citizens who wish to travel to Argentina for tourism purposes. The AVE allows Chinese people who already have a US or Schengen (EU) visa to travel to Argentina for up to 90 days without a visa. People who fit into this category only have to fill out an application and pay a fee. All of this information and required documents are available in Chinese, showing the Argentine government’s desire to reach out to Chinese tourists. The policy was implemented following increased cooperation efforts between Argentina and China. Though this travel authorization is for tourists, not for immigrants, it represents an increasingly welcoming attitude towards the ingress of Chinese citizens. This policy also makes it easier for Chinese people to arrive in

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.migraciones.gov.ar/accesible/indexP.php>

Argentina on a tourist visa and then overstay their visa and live illegally in the country. Overall, it is a sign to Chinese people researching Argentina that the immigration process will be facilitated in the country.

Another critical online source for the Chinese is the 51Argentina.com's translation of Law 25.871 with explanations and commentary.<sup>8</sup> The law is presented on the Sino-Argentine resource hub by Argentine attorney Sui Guowei. The article written in 2009 starts with the author stating that it is important to have a minimum understanding of some of the terms important to "our people."<sup>9</sup> The majority of the article is a straightforward translation of the immigration policy. This translation alone is significant because most incoming Chinese people do not speak Spanish and would not be able to understand the policy documents the Argentine government provides online. But Sui's notes are also revealing because they highlight the Chinese community's response to different parts of the policy. For example, Law 25.871 gives people from Mercosur countries (plus Chile and Bolivia) the right to stay in Argentina for two years with multiple entries and exits and then apply directly for permanent residence. This right is not afforded to Chinese immigrants, even though they are the 4<sup>th</sup> largest migrant group. Sui seeks to rationalize this policy to Chinese readers saying, "I deliberately elaborate on the content of this provision, the most important purpose being to let our people recognize why Chinese immigrants cannot receive the same treatment as South American citizens."<sup>10</sup> Sui writes that China does not have the same history and relations with Argentina that the other South American countries have, and therefore Chinese people should not view this as discriminatory. Another topic on which Sui provides extensive explanation is "reasons for deportation and loss of residence." Sui's

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.51argentina.com/article-2728-1.html>

<sup>9</sup>“有些条款值得吾等国人谨慎分析或对商榷之处，应有最起码的认识”

<sup>10</sup>“我刻意地详明此条文的内容，最主要的目的就是让吾等国人「认清」为何华人移民不能与南美诸等国家公民，享有公平性的移民优惠待遇的不争事实”

translation and commentary are important resources for Chinese people looking to move to Argentina, and has collected over 1840 views since it was posted. This document facilitates their understanding of the laws and responds to common concerns, aiding in the immigration process.

Laws and policies are important, but potential immigrants are also curious about daily life and treatment of immigrants in their target country. This is where Baidu comes in. I performed searches in Chinese and analyzed top hits to discover what the conversation is like in China about immigrating to Argentina. The top link for a search of “immigrate to Argentina” brings up a Baidu Forum with the title “I’ll tell you all a few true things about Argentina, and then you’ll want to immigrate.”<sup>11</sup> The thread was originally created in 2011 and is still active with over 360 responses. The original author wanted to share with Chinese people the benefits of living in Argentina. This ranges from “the sky is always blue, the clouds are always white,”<sup>12</sup> to “every Sunday you don’t go to work.”<sup>13</sup> This author also praises the health, education, and other benefits. “Here, you do not have to worry about income, the state will give you some subsidies every month, you will not starve to death.”<sup>14</sup> This writer presents an attractive image of a country whose government cares for its people and goes above and beyond to provide for them. The benefits of immigrating to Argentina are evident. “Here, as long as you know a few Chinese people, open the Chinese newspaper, you will find that there are Chinese bosses everywhere to recruit workers, and wages continue to soar,”<sup>15</sup> the post continues. This post is extremely encouraging and positive about life for Chinese people in Argentina, and shows how a potential

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<sup>11</sup> [https://tieba.baidu.com/p/967668567?pid=10836673019&see\\_lz=1](https://tieba.baidu.com/p/967668567?pid=10836673019&see_lz=1) “告诉你们一个真实的阿根廷，看后你们想移民”

<sup>12</sup>“这里的天永远是蓝的，云是白的。”

<sup>13</sup>“每个星期天不上班”

<sup>14</sup>“在这里，你没有收入不用担心，国家会每个月给你一些补贴，你不会饿死。”

<sup>15</sup>“在这里，只要你认识几个中文，翻开中文报纸，你会发现，华人老板到处招收不到工人，工资不断飞涨”

Chinese immigrant might perceive and expect life there. Since this is the top post in China's search engine, it has surely influenced Chinese migration to Argentina.

The Migration website banner, translation of Law 25.871, and Baidu Forum discussion are some of the few sources that exist in Chinese for a Chinese audience about immigrating to Argentina. Overall, they present a cosmopolitan view of acceptance of difference that encourages Chinese immigration. These policies, translations, and discussions emphasize the rights and services the Argentine government guarantees to all residents regardless of immigration status. It also appears that connections between Argentina and China are developing, since the Argentine government recently established a special travel policy for Chinese tourists, displayed prominently on the migration homepage. Finally, interested Chinese people can read online from others who have already migrated to learn what life is like in Argentina. These are all favorable signs for potential immigrants, signaling a nation grounded in a pro-immigrant cosmopolitanism.

However, it is critical to examine the government's open attitudes through the context of the economic and political benefits of Chinese immigration to Argentina. Cosmopolitanism is often perceived as the weakest form of multiculturalism, because it attempts to neutralize difference and explore it only in safe contexts. Cosmopolitanism in Argentina has achieved an outward appearance of multicultural unity, resulting in increased immigration, but the multicultural vision has encouraged cross-cultural dialogue only as far as it can be capitalized on by the government. Buenos Aires' Chinatown, investigated in the next section, illustrates this dynamic.

## The Barrio Chino and the ethnic economy

The growth of the Chinese community in Buenos Aires has not gone unnoticed. Chinese supermarkets have been a particular point of contention, since the Chinese immigrants more or less took over the entire sector of second-tier, family-owned markets. The competition this presents for other locally owned markets plus the misunderstandings that may occur in daily interactions in these markets have led to an intense stereotyping and labeling of this community. In its fashioning of a multiculturalist discourse, the government of Argentina does little more than symbolically incorporate the Chinese into the body politic, while taking advantage of the ethnic economy the Chinese community provides.

When the Taiwanese arrived in Argentina in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many settled in the northern part of Buenos Aires, in the neighborhood of Belgrano. Around 1990 they established a supermarket and one of the city's first Buddhist temples (Buenos Aires Ciudad



Image 2: Buenos Aires Chinatown arch

2016). Later a Chinese pharmacy and herbalist and restaurants followed, capitalizing on its growing recognition as an Asian area. The neighborhood was officially recognized in 2009 when the Argentine government added the arch, uniting it with Chinatowns around the world.

The “Barrio Chino” is an example of how the Argentine government uses multicultural dialogue to profit from Chinese immigration. The Chinatown was officially christened by the

government and was named in Spanish, unlike the Korean and Bolivian neighborhoods. It is also currently celebrated on the Buenos Aires city website as a tourist attraction. “We recommend that you visit the area to enjoy... many musical performances, activities, and a big market with food stalls, crafts, souvenirs, and all types of oriental objects” (Buenos Aires Ciudad).<sup>16</sup> This description reveals the Chinatown’s role as a space for Argentines and tourists, not as a community space for the Chinese population. However, while claiming the space as a tourist destination benefits the Argentine government, it also economically benefits the Chinese immigrants. When the government promotes visits to the Chinatown to buy “oriental objects,” the tourism bureau is also supporting Chinese immigrant gain in the ethnic economy.

The Argentine government’s economic multiculturalism is also demonstrated through the yearly celebration of Chinese New Year. The city partners with the Chinatown to put on a special presentation of Chinese culture for the New Year, and the event is open to all the citizens of Buenos Aires. The festival is well-known and well-attended throughout the city. The event is free, but the government and Chinese community profit from consumption at vendors and food stalls. At this celebration, Chinese restaurants, language schools, and art schools also receive a spotlight. The event has the effect of promoting more positive attitudes towards the Chinese in Argentina, but it is not likely that it would be promoted by the government if it were not for the potential tourism and economic gains.

These outward expressions of support for the Chinese community also benefit potential business and political relationships that the Argentine government seeks to establish with the PRC. In recent years, Argentina has increased its trade with China, as well as accepted direct investment and support for infrastructure projects. It is in the government’s best interest to

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<sup>16</sup> “Te recomendamos visitar la zona para disfrutar de...numerosos espectáculos musicales, actividades y una gran feria con puestos de comida, artesanías, souvenirs y todo tipo de objetos orientales.”

support the Chinese community in Buenos Aires so the country can continue to enjoy the benefits of a strong relationship with China. The Chinatown and Chinese New Year festival are easy, noncontroversial ways to show symbolic support for the Chinese Argentine community, all while also benefitting from tourism and the ethnic economy. The government can point to its engagement with Chinese culture through these tourist events and gain credibility with Chinese politicians and investors.

The Argentine government's support for the Chinatown and Chinese New Year festival reveals that governmental multiculturalism is rooted in capitalizing on the "ethnic economy" more than recognizing and supporting cultural expressions of minority groups. The Argentine government is willing to support the Chinese community, but only if this support also provides economic benefits for Argentina. The Barrio Chino and Año Nuevo festival could actually result in further distancing of the Chinese community, since both initiatives emphasize the foreignness of Chinese culture compared to Argentine culture. Promotion of these events is symbolically multicultural but not largely beneficial to the social integration of the Chinese community.

## **Conclusion**

The most recent wave of Chinese immigration to Argentina can be attributed to a few different factors. First of all, Deng Xiaoping's economic and social reforms encouraged citizens to look beyond China and explore other parts of the globe. This policy allowed Chinese people to travel and migrate more easily, and suggested to them that they would not be betraying their country by doing so. Argentina experienced a period of antagonism towards immigrants during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the situation was normalized in 2003 with a policy that promotes cosmopolitanism. The news of this new cosmopolitanism was spread widely on Chinese

language sites, making Argentina an attractive destination for Chinese immigrants. However, this is a shallow multicultural vision in Argentina that has led only to cultural and ethnic tourism rather than promoting a harmonic “Sino-Argentine” community. The next chapter will reveal the multicultural logic adopted by the Argentine public to interpret and incorporate the new Chinese immigrants.

## Chapter four:

### Argentine perceptions of Chinese immigrants

#### **Introduction**

After an event in Beijing with Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2015, Argentina's President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2015) tweeted, "Más de 1.000 asistentes al evento... ¿Serán todos de 'La Cámpola' y vinieron sólo por el aloy y el petlóleo?" In the tweet she replaces R's with L's in "Campora [Argentine political youth organization]," "arroz [rice]," and "petróleo [oil]," mocking a Chinese speaker's pronunciation of Spanish.

The insensitivity exposed in this tweet is emblematic of the Argentine public's attitudes towards the Chinese immigrants. Though immigrants are formally accepted and given rights, in public discourse the Chinese (as well as other immigrant groups) are treated with ignorance and are often stereotyped. One common stereotype is that the Chinese are cheap and unsanitary, and therefore supermarket owners turn off their refrigerators at night to save money (Opinión Sur 2017). People also speculate that the Chinese business owners are involved in illegal activity, whether by selling stolen merchandise or because of their involvement with the widely publicized "Chinese mafia" that is said to operate in Argentina.<sup>17</sup> According to a Pew Research study, in 2014 only 40% of Argentines viewed China favorably, which was down 21 percentage points from the previous year. Argentina also topped the list of Latin American and African countries surveyed regarding their level of dislike of Chinese ideas and customs in a 2013 Pew Research study. 68% of Argentines surveyed expressed dislike of Chinese music, movies, and television, while 55% think it is "bad" that Chinese ideas and customs are spreading to their

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<sup>17</sup> A note on the Chinese mafia— The presence of Chinese criminal groups in Argentina has been documented in news and crime reports, but it is difficult to determine whether these groups have any connection to specific Chinese immigrant groups in Argentina or to the supermarket monopoly.

country (Pew Research Center 2014). While the numbers of Chinese immigrants in Argentina increase, their overall favorability declines.

These statistics and rumors reveal the central challenge Chinese immigrants face in Argentina. While the Argentine government cultivates the ethnic economy and a cosmopolitan perspective towards overall Argentine identity, the general public feels threatened by both the Chinese economic success in the country and the encroaching hegemonic influence of China in Latin America.

The research question for this chapter is: How has the Argentine public responded to new Chinese immigration? I analyze national news coverage, a blockbuster film, public opinion forums, and a hate site to determine how the general Argentine public has worked (or not) to incorporate the Chinese immigrants in the imagined national community.

This chapter argues that media and popular culture during the last 15 years of new Chinese immigration demonstrate that the general public has adopted a fragmented pluralist vision of multiculturalism in which the Chinese immigrants are not openly discriminated against, but are viewed as foreign and an Orientalized “other.” There is also a competing discourse of xenophobic assimilationists who see the Chinese immigrants only as a threat to the country.

### **Narratives of difference in the media**

Argentine newspapers and reporters have been shown to display subtle discrimination and prejudice in their writing (Sutton 2008). I decided to analyze news coverage of the Chinese community in Buenos Aires to determine how Argentines both perceive the Chinese as well as the messages that are being spread about them through the media. I searched the most popular newspapers, *La Nación* and *Clarín*, for their depictions of Chinese immigrants. I used Google’s

advanced search function, searching the key words “comunidad china argentina [chinese community argentina]” and analyzed the ten articles on each site with the most views.

Through my analysis, I found two main groups of articles. The first group consists of articles related to the Chinatown and New Year festivities, which were a significant seven of twenty articles. The second group consists of articles directly related to “discovering” the lives of the Chinese people in Buenos Aires, referring to how they work, how they educate their children, how they arrived and adapted to Argentina, etc. These were nine of the twenty articles. Three of the articles I classified as “miscellaneous,” of which two referred to foreign policy with China and one to the Chinese mafia. I found that the Chinese community was almost always reported on with a level of distance from the reader and reporter, as if the reported subject was something foreign and utterly un-Argentine. Orientalizing tropes appeared around descriptions of the ethnic Chinese interviewees. Overall, the Chinese community is depicted as fundamentally different.

The Argentine government and media love the Chinatown and its festivals, which makes sense, because they are lively and fun in a way outsiders connect to, yet exotic enough to be intriguing. One article states that over 600,000 people attended the 2016 celebration (La Nación 2017).<sup>18</sup> The prevalence of these types of articles shows that Chinatown and Chinese New Year are synonymous with the Chinese community in the mind of the Argentine public. This is not surprising, considering the government has also chosen to emphasize these aspects of the Sino-Argentine experience. The articles mostly articulate the schedules of upcoming events, but they also provide some insight into the typical Argentine citizen’s interactions with these events. The Chinese New Year celebration has actually been adopted by many Argentines as their own. “The official Chinese New Year celebration has become one of the most well-attended activities on

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1980229-como-se-celebra-el-ano-nuevo-chino>

the Buenos Aires agenda,”<sup>19</sup> one article proposes.<sup>20</sup> This suggests a multicultural engagement with, but also appropriation of, the holiday in news coverage.

Feature articles of the Chinese community provide more in depth attention to individual stories, but also reveal Argentine perceptions of difference between Chinese and “typical” Argentines. For example, I observed a constant reference to the ethnic Chinese interviewees’ clothing, appearance, and manner of speaking. Describing the fact that a person was wearing Western clothing but had “almond shaped eyes”<sup>21</sup> suggests that it is surprising that a Chinese person might be wearing Western clothing, while also making a point to mention ethnic characteristics. This description promotes the perceived foreignness of the Chinese community. Quotations from Chinese sources also often include a description of that person’s Spanish ability. For example, a quotation was followed with, “said Wu, in perfect Spanish of Buenos Aires.”<sup>22</sup> Another example is, “says Ms. Chen- for a moment with a certain difficulty expressing herself.”<sup>23</sup> The constant commentary on Spanish ability also emphasizes the difference of the Chinese immigrants and plays into Argentine assumptions that Chinese immigrants cannot speak Spanish.

There also seems to be a sense of underlying camaraderie with the reader, as if together the reader and writer are discovering the exotic lives of the Chinese immigrants. Passages like this one present the Chinese people in a particularly foreign manner:

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<sup>19</sup> “La celebración oficial del Año Nuevo Chino se ha convertido en una de las actividades más concurridas de la agenda porteña.”

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1980229-como-se-celebra-el-ano-nuevo-chino>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/127912-miedo-recores-y-misterio-en-la-comunidad-china>

<sup>22</sup> “detalla Wu, en perfecto español porteñizado.” [http://www.clarin.com/ciudades/viven-chinos-Capital-GBA\\_0\\_HJOWtJl6DXg.html](http://www.clarin.com/ciudades/viven-chinos-Capital-GBA_0_HJOWtJl6DXg.html)

<sup>23</sup> “dice la señora Chen -por momentos con cierta dificultad para expresarse.” <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1413556-vivir-en-la-argentina-estudiar-en-china>

Here it's necessary to explain a few things. The Chinese community does not connect with the common individualistic values of the West. The concept of life is absolutely collective. Work and saving are the basis of the culture. The rest (fun, vacation) is not on the menu of a middle-class Chinese worker. Only the casino, from time to time, attracts them, and even there they also have their own codes. 6, 8 and 9 are their favorite numbers; But they will never bet on 4, whose pronunciation in Chinese coincides with the word "death".<sup>24</sup>

While these broad statements may have some cultural backing, their presentation is rather subjective. "Here I have to explain something" assumes that all the readers are foreign to Chinese culture. It also assumes that all Chinese in Buenos Aires adhere to these cultural norms- Chinese cultural norms- because they are really *Chinese* not Argentine. This passage shows how the Chinese population is seen in Argentina- more Chinese than Argentine, and all the same under one broad, Orientalizing umbrella.

Though the news coverage of the Sino-Argentine community is largely positive, it shows the fragment pluralist perspective of multiculturalism adopted by the general public to incorporate Chinese immigrants. The public is not outwardly rejecting the immigrant group, but tends to place them all in a distinct box of Chinese identity that cannot be incorporated into Argentine identity. The new coverage contains several assumptions and tendencies that show greater Argentina's distancing and Orientalizing of the group. Many parts of the articles play into already existing stereotypes about the Chinese, like mentioning their ability in Spanish or their

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<sup>24</sup> Aquí hay que explicar ciertas cosas. La comunidad china no comulga con los valores universales individuales de Occidente. La concepción de la vida es absolutamente colectiva. Trabajo y ahorro son la base cultural. El resto (diversión, vacaciones) no está en el menú de un trabajador chino medio. Sólo el casino, de a ratos, los congrega, y allí también tienen sus propios códigos. El 6, el 8 y el 9 son sus números predilectos; en cambio, jamás apostarán por el 4, cuya pronunciación en chino coincide con la palabra "muerte".

work ethic. Some articles take note of the stereotypes and attempt a “getting the real story” approach, but that just means that the articles come off as a story of discovery of an exotic creature. One article even references this feeling of a “cultural abyss.”<sup>25</sup> It is clear from the news coverage that Argentines perceive the Chinese immigrants as on the other side of a cultural abyss that is impossible to cross.

### **A simplified Chinese protagonist in *Un Cuento Chino***

The comedy *Un Cuento Chino* [Chinese Take-Out] starring Argentine Ricardo Darín and Taiwanese-Argentine Ignacio Huang was Argentina’s highest-grossing non-US film in 2011 (International Film Guide 2012). In the film, Roberto (Ricardo Darín) plays a solitary, orderly hardware store owner in Buenos Aires who crosses paths with Jun (Ignacion Huang), a recently arrived Chinese man in search of his uncle who immigrated years before. Roberto feels obligated to help Jun, who is lost, penniless, and does not speak a word of Spanish. Because Roberto cannot find anyone related to Jun in the city, he ends up allowing Jun to stay with him in his home, much to his dismay. The two are an odd pair, but following misunderstandings and conflicts Jun gains Roberto’s trust, and in the end, when Jun finally finds his uncle, Roberto is sad to see him go. Despite the comedic intent of the film, *Un Cuento Chino* provides insight into the general perceptions that Argentines hold of Chinese people. The movie presents Chinese people as extreme foreigners, difficult to even relate to or communicate with. This othering continues to promote a stereotyped, Orientalized version of Chinese identity.

The film has been praised for its inclusion of a Chinese character and the takeaway message of unification (Ko 2016), but Jun’s character embodies Argentine stereotypes of the Chinese. He is presented as a strange foreigner who represents many stereotypes of Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1235290-china-en-argentina>

people— funny-looking and funny-sounding, hardworking, and polite. This basic depiction does nothing to deepen how Argentines view Chinese immigrants, and it may have even served as justification for stereotyping. Jun’s extreme foreignness also demonstrates how Argentines sometimes Orientalize Chinese immigrants. In a dinner scene, the Argentines cannot stop staring at Jun, and one wonders aloud if he likes the food. Another responds that of course he does, because Chinese people will eat anything. “They are millions of millions, they eat whatever is there... they eat scorpions, snakes, ants,” she says (Borenzstein 2011). The other characters accept this Orientalist assertion without dispute, believing that Chinese people do, in fact, eat anything.

The film also depicts the average Argentine citizen’s confusion and ignorance of Chinese people. In one part of the movie, Ricardo takes Jun around Chinatown having him speak with all the different shopkeepers. Ricardo gets frustrated when one Chinese man says that he does not understand Jun. “He’s Chinese. You’re Chinese. He’s speaking Chinese. How do you not understand?” he says (Borenzstein 2011). The shopkeeper responds that he speaks Cantonese, while Jun is speaking Mandarin, and that the two languages are completely different. Ricardo’s frustration and bewilderment reveals how little he knows about China and Chinese languages. This scene likely resonates with Argentine viewers who similarly know very little about the people who live all around them.

*Un Cuento Chino* reveals Argentine perspectives and attitudes towards Chinese immigrants. The stark “foreignness” of the Chinese character means that cross-cultural understanding never strays far from orientalist stereotypes and ignorance. The movie is a comedy, so some characteristics of Jun’s representation were likely included simply for comedic effect. Nevertheless, it is curious that the jokes are still such a crude caricature in a country with such

large population of Chinese immigrants. Popular culture has been shown to not necessarily change opinions, but reinforce existing beliefs (Winick 1963). Therefore Argentines who already have stereotyped mental images of the Chinese immigrants (as many, including the past president do) may have their beliefs reaffirmed by this movie. Ignacio Huang recently played a Chinese immigrant again in the movie *La Salada* (2014), which presented a deeper understanding of immigration to Argentina. However, it did not become as popular as *Un Cuento Chino*, so cannot be said to have impacted Argentine views of Chinese people in the same way.

### **Discovering online dialogue**

The Chinese population in Argentina has been growing steadily since the 1990s and the sudden influx of a new, distinctive culture has prompted a great deal of questions and curiosity from many people in Argentina. I wanted to get an unfiltered view of the perceptions of Chinese people in Argentina, so I looked for online discussion boards where anyone can post and say just about anything. I searched the forums Taringa and Yahoo Answers with the key words “chinos en argentina” to see what kind of public discussion is taking place online.

In these forums, “Why are there so many Chinese in Argentina?”<sup>26</sup> is a popular question, going back to 2006. Many of the askers pose the questions with genuine curiosity, and they are met with a split between responses that seek to actually answer the question and responses that purely complain about the new foreign population. For example, the top-rated answer from a Yahoo Answers post<sup>27</sup> from 2013 says, “We’ve been invaded for years now by the Chinese, but they’re hard workers and have restaurants and small supermarkets, they don’t do anything bad to

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<sup>26</sup> Por qué hay tantos Chinos en Argentina?

<sup>27</sup> <https://ar.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20130207215533AAAdI80B>

anyone and they come to this country because here they can work comfortably.”<sup>28</sup> This respondent exemplifies the tone of many answers, first saying that the Chinese have “invaded” but then explaining his or her perception by saying that they simply come to work, and work without bothering anyone. That fact that this question has been asked and answered many times in recent years shows that Argentines are noticing the changing demographics of their country and are curious about it. Yet it shows a prejudiced tone, and continues the narrative of a “Chinese takeover” that is often joked about in Argentina.

Up to this point, the stereotypes directed at the Chinese that I have pointed out have been low-level offenses and misconceptions, similar to the stereotypes that abound for every culture in the world. However, in Buenos Aires there is also a group of xenophobic assimilationists who seeks to defame the Chinese immigrants by targeting their economic success. The Asociación Civil Vecinos de Belgrano regularly updates an online blog specifically aimed at the streets of the Belgrano neighborhood that is home to Chinatown (Image 3).<sup>29</sup> Under the pretense of “saving the neighborhood,” they post about “A den of corruption, forged powers, and mafia proceedings.”



Image 3: Neighborhood crime watch website heading

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<sup>28</sup> Estamos invadidos por Chinos desde hace años, pero son muy trabajadores y tienen casas de comidas y supermercaditos, no hacen mal a nadie y se vienen a este país por que aquí trabajan tranquilos.”

<sup>29</sup> <http://belgranodenuncia.blogspot.com.ar/>

The blog posts are mostly related to two themes— first, the violence the “Orientals” have brought to Buenos Aires due to their relationships with the Chinese mafia, and second, the lack of hygiene standards in Chinese restaurants and supermarkets. One blog post says that for years Argentines and Taiwanese lived together harmoniously, but in recent years new, corrupt groups have appeared.

These groups are very powerful and took control of the neighborhood in a very violent way. Neighbors who reported illicit activities were violently attacked more than once, in a systematic and organized manner.<sup>30</sup>

The post infers that recent Chinese immigrants, as opposed to the Taiwanese immigrants in the past, have caused an increase in violence in the neighborhood. Other posts call out Chinese supermarkets for storing fish in a trashcan, and selling rotten chicken and spoiled tofu. The neighborhood association does not name the specific supermarkets they are “investigating,” meaning the message it sends to Argentine consumers is that all Barrio Chino stores and restaurants are unsafe. Though the blog presents itself as a service to protect the Argentine public, it purposely and unfairly targets recent Chinese immigrants. Negative stereotypes of the Chinese are already common, even among Argentines that would likely not consider themselves xenophobic. This website therefore amplifies negative stereotypes about violence and hygiene, upholding an assimilationist attitude towards Chinese immigration and contributing to active discrimination against this population.

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<sup>30</sup> “Estos grupos son muy poderosos y tomaron cuenta del barrio de manera muchas veces violenta. Vecinos que denunciaron ilícitos fueron violentamente atacados en más de una oportunidad, de forma sistemática y organizada.”

## **Conclusion**

Chinese immigrants have not been able to integrate seamlessly into the city. Orientalizing stereotypes and assumptions of foreignness in public discourse have excluded them from membership in the greater Argentine community, showing the narrowly economic dimension of Argentina's multicultural ideals. From the president to the news to the movie theater, the message is enforced that Chinese people are too different to be Argentine. Unchecked stereotyping and lack of effort to engage and understand the Chinese population has led to the public's inability to include the Chinese Argentines in the Argentine national community. But because of this discrepancy, Sino-Argentines developed their own ways to represent themselves positively in the public eye. This trend will be explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter five:

### Chinese self-portrayal through Spanish-language media and organizations

#### **Introduction**

Wickberg speaks of the overseas Chinese attempt to achieve a certain level of “Chineseness” that is acceptable to immigrants themselves, to the local Chinese population, and to the locals of the country. “Immigration and settlement stimulate a need to redefine oneself and one’s family in ways that will adapt to the new environment yet be consistent with one’s values, if possible” (Wickberg 2007: 39). This narrative shaping is what the Chinese have done in Buenos Aires over the past 20 or so years. Chinese immigrants have been discursively excluded from full membership in Argentina, as we have seen through the representation of the Chinese in media and popular culture. However, in the face of these challenges, the Chinese community itself has taken on the role of integrating itself and becoming more greatly accepted by Argentina as a whole.

The subquestion for this chapter is: how has the Chinese community established their own Sino-Argentine identity? The Chinese collective recognizes that they are not understood in Argentina and that they are often seen as a threat to Argentine interests. For this reason, a whole sector of the community is working to combat these stereotypes and negative attitudes. They are doing so by producing their own media and messages and their own ways to engage with the Argentine public in Spanish, showing their adaptation and integration in the country. The Sino-Argentines leading these initiatives are almost all second generation Chinese Argentines, people who grew up in Argentina and thus feel connected to both cultures. They are now working so

that others also understand that being Argentine and being Chinese are not mutually exclusive terms.

This chapter argues that the insufficiency of state actions and the prevalence of negative information about Chinese immigrants prompted the establishment of Sino-Argentine organizations who promote an interactive pluralist vision of Argentine multiculturalism. The Sino-Argentine cultural magazine *Dangdai*, the Federation of Supermarkets, and the Sino-Argentine Cultural Association all emphasize the importance of cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. The organizations strive to connect the Chinese immigrant population with the general Argentine public, refuting stereotypes and simplicity, and inviting Argentines to educate themselves and form new opinions regarding the community.

### **Controlling media narratives**

In Buenos Aires there are two kinds of Chinese diaspora media. The first consists of Chinese-language sources, which connect the immigrant community and aid in their economic and social goals. These sources, such as the website [51argentina.com](http://51argentina.com) and the magazine 新阿根廷周刊 (also known as *Horizonte Chino*), are interesting representations of the immigrant community, but do not impact Argentine perceptions of Chinese people. The second group, however, is made up of Spanish-language sources, which connect Argentines to China and Chinese culture. The content of the magazine *Dang Dai* shows how Chinese people in Argentina use media to represent their community positively in the public eye.

The magazine and corresponding website *Dang Dai*, which means “contemporary” in Mandarin, calls itself the first magazine of Chinese-Argentine cultural exchange. The decision to use Chinese Romanization makes the magazine pronounceable in Spanish and thus less

intimidating to the target audience. Dang Dai was created in 2011 by Gustavo Ng, a second-generation Argentine who is half-Chinese, with the goal of giving Argentines a perspective on China. “We believe that Argentines are interested in China and that the information that they receive is lacking and influenced by other countries,” Ng said in an interview (China Files 2014). He took on the challenge of reporting on Chinese issues in Spanish to an Argentine audience in magazine that is published four times per year. The primary goal of Dang Dai is to increase cross-cultural understanding in Argentina, but Ng also hopes that the magazine will enable more information about Argentina to reach China and strengthen the connection between the two countries on an international level (China Files 2014). The content of the magazine shows its goal as a cultural mediator rather than a strict news source. The articles online and in print are focused around positive cooperation efforts between China and Argentina and interest pieces on Chinese culture. I analyzed the Summer 2017 issue to see how it portrays the China and the Chinese community in Argentina.

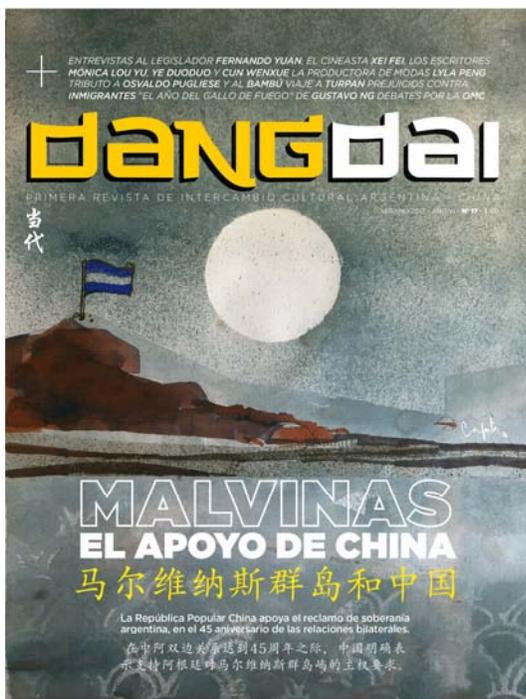


Image 4: Chinese-Argentine cultural magazine cover

The Summer 2017 issue’s front-page article shows its desire to connect with the average Argentine. The cover is about China’s support for the Falkland Islands (known as the Islas Malvinas in Argentina), which is a contentious territorial claim between Argentina and the United Kingdom (Image 4). The Falkland Islands are a particular sore spot for Argentines, so saying that China supports Argentina’s claim on them is a simple way to gain approval. “The People’s Republic of China supports the claim of

Argentine sovereignty, in the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bilateral relationship,”<sup>31</sup> the cover reads, pointing out China’s continued support and connection with Argentina (Dang Dai 2017). The mix of Chinese characters and Spanish catches the eye and makes Dang Dai seem intriguing for an Argentine who does not speak Chinese. Throughout the magazine, articles follow a similar theme. Political, cultural, and educational articles all emphasize the value and relevance of China for an Argentine audience.

Political articles, such as the cover story about the Falkland Islands, reference the benefits of foreign policy efforts between Argentina and China. The magazine takes extra care to emphasize the importance of positive relationships with China. “We are facing an extraordinary opportunity to build, together, the most fertile and relevant period in the history of bilateral relations. We have the responsibility to lay the foundations for a deep, mature, and long-term structural relationship”<sup>32</sup> (Dang Dai 2017: 14). Though officially a cultural magazine, Dang Dai also takes advantage of the opportunity to spread pro-China information to its readers. Connecting Chinese politics to issues Argentines care about, like the Falkland Islands dispute, is one way to achieve this.

Other articles in the magazine focus on cooperation and cultural exchange efforts. There are two articles in the Summer 2017 issue discussing literary exchanges. The first is about two Chinese writers who traveled to Argentina. The second describes the participation of Argentine writers in a seminar in China. Both articles accentuate the connections between these two geographically and culturally distinct places. Another goal of the magazine is to inform its readers about China, Chinese language, and the Chinese community in Buenos Aires. “How

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<sup>31</sup> “La Republica Popular China apoya el reclamo de soberania argentina, en el 45 aniversario de las relaciones bilaterales.”

<sup>32</sup> “Estamos ante una oportunidad extraordinaria para construir, juntos, el period mas fertile y relevante de la historia de las relaciones bilaterales. Tenemos la responsibilidad de sentar las bases para una relacionamiento estructural, profundo, maduro, y de largo plazo.”

many characters do we need to read and write in Mandarin?”<sup>33</sup> reads one of the headlines. This interest piece shows that the audience is made up of Argentines or second-generation Chinese immigrants who are not familiar with Chinese language. Another article speaks of the “Continuance of the stereotypes about Chinese immigrants,”<sup>34</sup> including all of those already mentioned in this thesis: the Chinese diaspora is an extension of the Chinese government; they exploit and scam the locals, taking everything without giving anything back; they don’t want to learn Spanish, they live in closed communities; they unplug their refrigerators, they sell expired food (Dang Dai 2017: 43). Interestingly, most of the article just focuses on rehashing the old stereotypes and their history, but the last sentence is rather telling: “When we’re able to identify how stereotypes function in our daily lives, we will have more tools to start understanding our Chinese neighbors”<sup>35</sup> (Dangdai 2017: 43). The ending of this article promotes the vision that drives the entire magazine. Dang Dai implores its readers to consider how they view Chinese people in Argentina and to start considering them not through the lens of stereotypes, but as neighbors with wisdom to share.

The existence of Dang Dai and its Sino-Argentine cultural articles show that the Chinese collective is working to establish an interactive pluralist vision of multiculturalism that actively combats stereotypes and discrimination through media. Writing articles about China in Spanish, promoting the similarities and cooperation efforts of the two countries, and providing information on Chinese events and language classes happening in the city engages Argentines to stimulate cross-cultural dialogue. Dang Dai is a major part of the Chinese mediascape in Buenos Aires because it is the central media source for Argentines focused on Chinese issues. The

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<sup>33</sup> “Cuantos caracteres necesitamos para leer y escribir en mandarín?”

<sup>34</sup> “Permanencia de los estereotipos sobre los chinos inmigrantes”

<sup>35</sup> “Cuando podamos indentificar la forma en que funcionan los estereotipos en nuestra vida cotidiana, tengamos mas herramientas para iniciar el conocimiento de nuestros vecinos chinos.”

magazine serves as a cultural bridge for Argentines so they can better understand China and Argentina's relationship with the country.

### **Balancing economics and politics, the role of FESACH**

Small supermarkets are the most visible representation of the Chinese immigrant population in Buenos Aires. It is likely that the population would not be as acknowledged or controversial without the existence of these stores. (For example, the Korean population of Buenos Aires is not significant in the eyes of the majority of Argentines, despite the existence of obvious characteristics like Baek-Ku, the Korean neighborhood.) After conflicts with the Argentine public, in 2013 an official organization was created to unify the Chinese stores across Argentina. The Federation of Supermarkets and Chinese Associations in the Republic of Argentina (FESACH) allows the Chinese supermarket owners to present a positive and unifying message of Chinese identity to greater Argentina.

The federation's description of itself shows its goal of positive self-representation:

“From 2013 onwards, the institution FESACH nurtures all Chinese supermarkets and associations at the country level, with the firm aim of achieving greater commercial interaction, progress and development of all local outlets and members of the Chinese community with a seat in Argentina, solving the problems that arise daily, consolidating the sustained growth of the sector and avoiding any type of discrimination or abuses against the

businesses of the community and its components.”<sup>36</sup> – (FESACH 2015)

The explanation for the federation reveals the dual purpose of the group: promoting development of the supermarkets and protecting their rights and the rights of the owners. FESACH is likely just a formalization of the family and geographic *guanxi* that already existed between Chinese supermarket owners, but to the Argentine public it follows the pattern of “chamber of commerce” types of business organizations common in Argentina. FESACH also allows for the potential for greater cooperation with the Argentine state and Argentine organizations. The second part of the federation’s description is a clear statement against discrimination and violence that Chinese supermarkets have experienced in Argentina. The federation clearly feels that their stores are targeted and actively discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic identity and they make this clear, in Spanish, on their website.

An analysis of the FESACH website and related news coverage shows that the Chinese supermarket community has made a concerted effort to present a unified public image in Argentina. For one, the director of the association, Miguel Calvete, is not ethnically Chinese. In a tight-knit, ethnically and linguistically based community this is a clear attempt at integration—or at least the perception of it. It also seems like the same members of the community are interviewed time and time again for any news article written about the Chinese markets (or the Chinese population in general). Calvete is always quoted in both Spanish and Chinese articles about Chinese stores, and another figure, Zheng Jicong (Oscar Zheng) seems to take on the “typical immigrant” role in news articles. News articles about Oscar Zheng state that he arrived from Fujian province in 1992, learned Spanish after two years of classes, opened his own supermarket after saving money he made in his family’s restaurant, and married a Peruvian

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.casrech.com.ar/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=102](http://www.casrech.com.ar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=102)

woman. He now sends his two children to a Jewish school in Buenos Aires (Varise 2011). Zheng's story of cultural amalgamation is probably why he is so often presented as an interview subject. He has a "model immigrant" narrative of incorporation that does not present threats to the general Argentine population. Furthermore, Zheng reports that his supermarket has been robbed five times (as of 2010) and that one of those times he ended up with a bullet in his stomach (Clarín 2010). He speaks of the pain and fear these assaults have caused his family, and laments that there are not any major action he can take to protect his store. Zheng's personal stories as a Chinese-Argentine supermarket owner provide a human face to the reality of Chinese immigrants' economic influence in the city. Zheng, as well as Calvete, are relatable public figures that present a specific image to the Argentine public.

FESACH and its controlled media narratives give the Chinese community an opportunity to present the controversial supermarket monopoly in a way that reaches out across cultural differences.

### **Encouraging cultural engagement and ethnic arts**

The final way in which the Argentine Chinese community has promoted positive public representation is through its cultural organizations. In 2005, the Asociación Cultural Chino-Argentino [Sino-Argentine Cultural Association] was formed in Buenos Aires to teach Mandarin Chinese as well as host cultural activities and events for the general Argentine public. The website says that after years of teaching Spanish to recent Chinese immigrants, the local population asked for Mandarin classes (Chino-Argentina 2012). Ana Kuo, one of the founders and a Taiwanese-Argentine who arrived in Argentina in her teens, said in a CCTV Americas

Now report that the association was formed under the idea of connecting the two communities.<sup>37</sup> She sees language instruction as one of the most important ways to achieve this goal.

Aside from Chinese classes, the association offers Tai Chi, Chinese dance, Kung Fu, Chinese painting, calligraphy, and cooking. Argentines are clearly interested in Chinese culture—the number of people that show up to celebrate the Chinese New Year proves as much—so the cultural association gives the Sino-Argentines the chance to encourage and direct this interest. Argentines who engage in Chinese cultural activities at the association are much less likely to later harbor negative feelings towards the Chinese immigrants in the city.

The association is another way the Chinese collective in Buenos Aires has actively promoted itself in a way that connects positively with the rest of Argentina. These community organizations strive towards interactive pluralism through increased interaction between the ethnic Argentine and Chinese communities.

## **Conclusion**

Buenos Aires has proved difficult for the integration of Chinese immigrants and the ethnic Chinese community. Though the government promotes open immigration, its multicultural ideology based in economic contribution has not helped the Chinese achieve widespread social acceptance. Moreover, media and public discourse hurt the Chinese population's image in the city and keep the group at a distance. However, the Chinese community itself has developed an interactive pluralist approach to connecting with the Argentine public to promote greater understanding and incorporation of difference. Dang Dai, FESRACH, and the Sino-Argentine Cultural Association are significant because they are performance of Chinese identity specifically for Argentina. They encourage an interactive

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<sup>37</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJtId\\_y0HfU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJtId_y0HfU)

pluralist vision of Argentine multiculturalism by operating in Argentina's dominant language and endeavoring to attract the attention of typical Argentines. Furthermore, the information they present represents the Sino-Argentines in a purely positive way, going against the stereotypes that many Argentines hold. Chinese self-representation in Argentine spaces disseminates positive narratives around Chinese immigration, helping the community eventually receive greater overall acceptance.

## Chapter six

### Conclusion

This thesis sought to answer the question, “How has recent Chinese immigration challenged contemporary Argentine multiculturalism?” I broke down this question into the following subquestions that I explored in three content chapters: 1) What is Argentina’s new multiculturalism and how does it impact Chinese immigrants? 2) How has the Argentine public responded to new Chinese immigration? And 3) how has the Chinese community responded, establishing their own Sino-Argentine identity? I found that the Argentine government promotes a mode of societal integration based in the economic benefits of Chinese immigration. The Argentine public views the Chinese community through a lens of difference, and oftentimes threat, but the Sino-Argentine community is working to combat this difference through more profound cross-cultural efforts.

I found that articulations of multiculturalism in Argentina (as seen through changes in immigration laws) plus China’s opening to the outside world and increased emphasis on international exploration coincided with increased Chinese immigration to Argentina. Rumors of Argentina’s openness to immigrants also influenced citizens’ desire to immigrate. State expressions of multiculturalism in Argentina are largely internationally focused and economically driven in terms of the Chinese population.

Negative attitudes towards Chinese immigrants in Argentina are also seen in media and public discussion spaces. In news and popular culture the Chinese are seen as foreign others—exotic and un-Argentine. Argentines often view the Chinese population through the lens of Orientalizing stereotypes, which inhibits the minority’s ability to achieve full integration.

Negative stereotypes have at times led to overt prejudice against the Chinese, distancing them further from overall acceptance.

Because of this resistance, the Chinese community has taken it upon themselves to engage the public with Chinese people and Chinese culture in a positive way. Chinese media and organizations produced in Spanish show a distinct effort to promote their group's integration. These cross-cultural groups show that they are not too foreign to be understood, nor that they are a threat to Argentina.

My research gives a much more recent and in-depth picture of Chinese identity in Buenos Aires than existing studies, such as Denardi (2015, 2016) and Sassone (2006). I identified new dynamics that impact the immigration and integration of the group in the city and analyzed online resources that had not previously entered into academia on this topic. I also provided insight into the current challenges of the Chinese community in Buenos Aires and presented emerging trends that could lead to future acceptance and greater cultural understanding.

Aided in part by the Chinese-Argentina Cultural Association, the number of Argentines who study Mandarin Chinese has risen drastically in recent years. One article states that since 2014 the number of Argentines studying Chinese has doubled. 2014 also saw the opening of a new public bilingual Argentine-Chinese school, which will teach Chinese as the students' first foreign language from kindergarten to 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The school is promoted on the Buenos Aires city website with many photos of current President Macri's attendance at the inauguration.

In 2015, Buenos Aires elected its first Chinese legislator to the Republican Proposal (PRO) caucus. Fernando Yuan was born in Fujian, but has lived in Argentina for over 30 years, where he met his wife, had two kids, and became a naturalized Argentine citizen. Since becoming a legislator he has enacted many initiatives related to the Chinese community.

However, he sustains that he works for the benefit of all of Argentina, not just the Chinese population. “I’m not the deputy of the Chinese who live in Buenos Aires, I’m deputy of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. However, because I’ve come from and belong to the Chinese community of course I’m working from a different place than the other deputies,”<sup>38</sup> he said (Dang Dai 2017: 53). Yuan is currently working to bring together the Chinese and greater Buenos Aires communities through multicultural projects.

With the growth of the Chinese immigrant population and increasing number of second generation Sino-Argentines in Buenos Aires, the topic of Chinese immigration is sure to retain relevance. Though the community currently struggles to gain recognition as legitimate member of the Argentine community, recent events show signs of progress. The emergence of new multicultural ideals like interactive pluralism in Sino-Argentine community efforts could lead to wider acceptance for the Chinese immigrants in the city of Buenos Aires.

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<sup>38</sup> “No soy diputado de los chinos que viven en Buenos Aires, soy diputado del pueblo de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Sin embargo, el hecho de haber surgido y pertenecer a la comunidad china, por supuesto me pone en un lugar diferente al de otros diputados.”

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