PART III

OLD MIGRANTS, NEW IMMIGRATION
CHAPTER SIX

TUSANS (TUSHENG) AND THE CHANGING CHINESE COMMUNITY IN PERU

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The Beginnings

Plagued by political instability and the prospect of freeing the African slaves, the reconstruction of Peru after independence had been slow. It was only in 1846 that the opening of the guano and the increase of sugar exports to Europe brought in the necessary capital for modernization of the infrastructure of the young Republic. This new-found income also allowed the state in 1854 to free the slaves by compensating their owners. In order that production would not be adversely affected, Domingo Elias, hacendado, eminent liberal and progressive politician, had a law passed in 1848 to encourage immigration. This law, called Ley china, allowed the introduction of an indentured work force from China thanks to an extremely lucrative commercial enterprise which replaced the slave trade.

More than 100,000 coolies1 were thus brought to Peru between 1849 and 1874. This large group of immigrants was characterized by its masculinity, the almost total absence of women.2 During their contract,

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1 The 1876 census registered 49,956 Chinese — a figure slightly underestimated — out of a total population of 2,699,160 inhabitants. Between 1849 and 1876 nearly half of the Chinese brought into Peru (aged from 9 to 40, rarely older) died from exhaustion, suicide or ill treatment.

2 Women made up less than 1% of the Chinese recorded. In 1851, José Sevilla, importer of Chinese, presented to the Chamber of Senators a report on the problems posed by this imbalance and recommended, in vain, the bringing in of families and Chinese women (BNP, Miscelánea Zegarra.XZ.V,58: p.37). Some women were nevertheless brought in from 1860 when commerce with China increased and the first Chinese merchants from California settled in. Traces of them can be found particularly in the cemeteries — open to converted Chinese — from 1870. See Lausent-Herrera (1992 and 2006).