ABSTRACT

Since their arrival in Peru 160 years ago, the Chinese have struggled to form a community. Faced with hard living conditions, scattered in haciendas, deprived of Chinese women and suffering from racism, mistreatment and restrictive immigration laws, the task of keeping alive seemed insurmountable. Paradoxically, the emergence and consolidation of the Chinese community came about through mestizaje and conversion to Catholicism. This mestizaje allowed them to rebuild the Chinese family structure, though an internal hierarchy appeared depending on the degree of mestizaje. The Catholic Church also played a role as artisan of Chinese identity by helping at the very beginning with the organization of associations and by strengthening the sense of belonging and recognition of the Tusans (tusheng in Mandarin) or “local born” as part of the Chinese community. However, the new immigrants from China, arriving since the 1980s, have contested the legitimacy of the Tusans and posed new challenges to the local Chinese community. How and to what extent has this new Chinese immigration changed the community life and reinforced/weakened the Tusan identity? This article describes the historical development of the old Chinese community and analyzes the interaction between the Tusans and the recently arrived Chinese.