ABSTRACT

The highly visible Fuidung' on Hakka group has dominated the Surinamese retail sector as an urban trader minority for more than a century (since the days of indenture), and yet has never comprised more than two percent of the total Surinamese population of not quite half a million. Since the early 1990s, however, the worldwide trend of New Chinese Migrants/xin yimin has become plainly visible to the Surinamese public. Ethnic Chinese in Suriname are now no longer exclusively Hakka from the Fuidung'on region in Guangdong Province, but from almost every coastal region in the People's Republic, from Hainan to the Northeastern (Dongbei) Provinces. Despite a certain continuity, these latest migrants quickly have become controversial and Chinese are said to be flooding Suriname. The issue of “Chinesenes” has eventually become important enough to influence foreign policy, migration policy, citizenship discourse, and multiculturalist thinking. Chinese ethnic identity is renegotiated in the face of a growing anti-Chinese public discourse in which Chinese symbolize everything that is perceived as wrong about immigration and the Surinamese political system. The re-articulation of deep-seated anti-Chinese stereotypes might initially seem a response to immigration, but may also be primarily a form of popular dissatisfaction with or even resistance to the government. Chinese identity is renegotiated within Surinamese ethnic discourse; a category of “New Chinese” is added to the existing categories of assimilated Chinese (laiap) and established Fuidung'on Hakka migrants, while laiap Hakka redefine themselves as “real Chinese” in the local context i.e. Surinamese-Chinese.