ABSTRACT

For thirty years, from the Cuban Revolution of 1959 until the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Chinese community in Cuba was in decline. Despite their dwindling numbers, the story of the Chinese in Cuba is one that has recently resurfaced through a restoration project in Havana's Chinatown, renewed ties between Cuba and the PRC, and an engagement with the popular imagination. After a discussion of the historical context for Chinese migration to Cuba and the ways in which the mid-20th-century Chinese and Cuban revolutions altered Havana's Chinatown, this study interrogates the formation of a Chinese Cuban identity and the contradictions in the current revitalization efforts. Tensions are inherent within a project claiming to promote the interests of the Chinese community and an “authentic” Chinese culture, yet spearheaded by “mixed” descendants and driven by tourism. Despite these points of potential friction, state promotion of the Chinese in Cuba has provided openings in which Chinese Cubans and their descendants can make claims on identity, culture, and politics.