

ABSTRACT

This paper serves as an introduction to the study of the Chinese community, in Trinidad. To this end, the paper investigates the reasons for renewed Chinese immigration into Trinidad and the mechanics by which it took place. Also, it examines the systems that the Chinese immigrants used to establish themselves in the Trinidad economy and analyses the extent to which these immigrants became assimilated into the society of their adoption and the process by which this was achieved.

In the course of this study some definite linkages between earlier mid-nineteenth century immigrants and this new wave of Chinese immigrants of the first half of the twentieth century were identified. Former emigrants visited or returned to China and there was correspondence between earlier immigrants and their relatives in China. It was because of these linkages that the recent immigrants were able to establish themselves in the Trinidad economy for they were frequently sponsored and employed by countrymen already established in Trinidad who, in their own unique way, helped later immigrants to carve a niche for themselves in the fledgling Trinidad economy. But, with renewed Chinese immigration, there was some cause for concern among the settled Chinese community as old allegiances to ethnic groupings, language and regionality which had been in

decline began to gain strength once more; and this involved some conflict between local-born and home-born Chinese. This tended to polarise groups of Chinese from each other as they sought refuge in their various ethnic associations and to isolate themselves from the wider Trinidad society. This was a drastic reversal of the earlier trend among their mid-nineteenth century counterparts who tended to go the way of creolisation. By the middle of the twentieth century however, this trend to separation was breaking down and growing integration was once more to be observed.