

Chinese Plantation Workers and Social Conflict in Peru in the late Nineteenth Century*

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As the world capitalist system developed during the nineteenth century non-slave labour became a commodity that circulated around the globe and contributed to capital accumulation in metropolitan centres. The best examples are the emigration of millions of Asian indentured servants and European labourers to areas of European colonisation. Asians replaced emancipated African slaves on plantations in the Caribbean and South America, supplemented a declining slave population in Cuba, built railways in California, worked in mines in South Africa, laboured on sugarcane plantations in Mauritius and Fiji, and served on plantations in southeast Asia. Italian immigrants also replaced African slaves on coffee estates in Brazil, worked with Spaniards in the seasonal wheat harvest in Argentina, and, along with other Europeans, entered the growing labour market in the United States. From the perspective of capital, these workers were a cheap alternative to local wage labour and, as foreigners without the rights of citizens, they could be subjected to harsher methods of social control.¹

* Research for this article was funded by a Ford Foundation Fellowship in 1974–5 and by a Fulbright Fellowship in autumn 1987. I would like to thank the staffs of the Archivo del Fuero Agrario and the Archivo General de la Nación for granting me access to plantation records, and anonymous referees for their useful comments. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Congress of Americanists, Amsterdam, July, 1988.

¹ Among the many studies on this subject are: Shula Marks and Peter Richardson (eds.), *International Labour Migration: Historical Perspectives* (London, 1984); Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (London, 1974); Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Frank Moya Pons and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *Between Slavery and Free Labor: The Spanish-Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1985); Peter Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* (London, 1982); Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru* (Durham, 1951); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (Baltimore, 1981); Lucy M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1984); Thomas H. Holloway, *Immigrants on the Land: Coffee and Society in São Paulo, 1886–1934* (Chapel Hill, 1980); and James Scobie, *Revolution on the Pampa* (Austin, 1964).

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Map 1. Peru.

In the case of Peru, approximately 100,000 Chinese indentured servants entered the country between 1847 and 1874. They contributed to the expansion of the export economy by mining guano, building railroads, and, especially, working on cotton and sugarcane plantations. The end of the coolie trade in 1874 contributed to the decline of the Peruvian

economy in the 1870s and 1880s. The crisis was caused by falling guano revenues, mismanagement of public revenues, the worldwide crisis of 1873, and the collapse of financial institutions. Crisis subsequently turned to catastrophe with Peru's military defeat and occupation by Chile during the War of the Pacific (1879–83).²

This article concerns the history of Chinese plantation workers during this period of crisis. It focuses on labour recruitment and control by planters who attempted to maintain production under extremely difficult conditions. It provides a more comprehensive analysis than my earlier work on Chinese workers on the sugarcane plantation Cayalti³ by incorporating additional primary and secondary sources. Especially important are the records of the cotton plantation Palto, located near Pisco, and the 140-page report written by a special commission appointed in 1887 to study the condition of Chinese labourers on coastal plantations. By providing detailed analysis of labour conditions in the Condor and Saña Valleys the article also makes a contribution to regional history.

Peruvian planters had neither the capital nor the inclination to replace Chinese workers with local wage labourers. Instead, they sought to recontract Chinese labourers under terms similar to contracts of indentureship and to limit their mobility through debt peonage and corporal punishment. This worked for several years, but gradually a majority of Chinese completed their contracts and became wage labourers. Some of them continued to work on plantations on a daily basis as so-called *chinos libres*, while others migrated into the cities. During the Chilean invasion many Chinese fled from the plantations, only to return as members of work gangs organised by Chinese contractors. These recruiters supplied the majority of workers to large sugarcane plantations into the 1890s. Planters continued to subject Chinese workers to a harsh system of social control, regardless of their contractual status.

The Chinese resisted total domination through a variety of violent and non-violent tactics similar to those employed by African slaves and indentured servants elsewhere.⁴ Resistance was relatively more effective

² Stewart, *Chinese Bondage*; Cecilia Méndez, 'La otra historia del guano: Perú 1840–1879', *Revista Andina*, año 5, num. 1 (1er semestre 1987), pp. 7–46; Carlos Camprubi, *Historia de los bancos en el Perú (1860–1879)*, vol. 1 (Lima, 1957), pp. 169–211; Ernesto Yepes del Castillo, *Perú, 1820–1920: Un siglo de desarrollo capitalista* (Lima, 1972), p. 131.

³ *Plantation Agriculture and Social Control in Northern Peru, 1875–1933* (Austin, 1985), chs. 5 and 6; 'Economic Crisis, Chinese Workers and the Peruvian Sugar Planters 1875–1900: A Case Study of Labour and the National Elite', in Bill Albert and Adrian Graves (eds.), *Crisis and Change in the International Sugar Economy 1860–1914* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 181–99.

⁴ For the United States see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York, 1976). Also see Rodney, *Guyanese Working People*.

on small cotton estates than on large sugarcane plantations, as the latter had large staffs and Chinese contractors who enforced greater vigilance. Within the confines of plantations, the Chinese could steal, run away, fake illness, strike, or otherwise slow or disrupt production schedules. All of these acts of defiance infuriated planters and, on occasion, resulted in concessions to workers. Resistance also took on violent forms, including murder and rebellion, which were significant acts of vengeance and sometimes disrupted local plantation economies. However, these actions usually resulted in only minor or temporary victories as planters had the support of public officials, the army, and virtually all non-Chinese. Resistance was also undermined by economic competition and ethnic differences among Chinese and black workers, and by the emergence of Chinese contractors who exploited their countrymen and undercut ethnic solidarity.

On a more general level, this paper contributes to the debate over the initial transition to wage labour by documenting the relative effectiveness of debt peonage and extra-economic coercion as well as the significance of ethnic rivalries and class conflict. However, I also seek to define the limits of social control by analysing workers' resistance and the emergence of labour markets in coastal valleys which planters failed to manipulate to their satisfaction. These developments, coupled with the falling productivity of the ageing Chinese population, necessitated the switch to Peruvian labour and the eventual softening of traditional methods of social control.

The historical significance of Chinese labourers should also be seen in the context of class formation and survival. Without Chinese workers, Peruvian planters could never have survived the crisis of the 1870s and 1880s and emerged as wealthy businessmen and political leaders in the 1890s. And without Chinese labourers, Chinese labour contractors, opium traders, and others could never have accumulated capital during this period of crisis and emerged as members of the petite bourgeoisie.

Development of the Cotton and Sugar Industries, 1820–70

The history of Chinese workers should be placed in the context of the development of the sugar and cotton industries where most of them toiled. Since the colonial period, sugar has been cultivated primarily in the central and northern coastal regions, and cotton in Piura on the far northern coast and in the *Sur Chico* region south of Lima.⁵ The principal

⁵ Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1640* (Stanford, 1974); Susan E. Ramírez, *Provincial Patriarchs: Land Tenure and the Economics of Power in Colonial Peru* (Albuquerque, 1986); Nicholas P. Cushner, *Lords of the Land* (Albany, New York, 1980); W. S. Bell, *An Essay on the Peruvian Cotton Industry, 1825–1920* (Liverpool, 1985), pp. 8–13.

impetus for the expansion of plantation agriculture in the nineteenth century came from the guano boom which injected millions of pesos into the sagging export economy. The chief beneficiaries of the boom were British merchants, who signed consignment contracts with the state, and the Peruvian government. Nevertheless, Peruvian merchants also benefited as business associates of British traders and importers of luxury goods, and sugar and cotton planters profited from government programmes designed to help their industries.⁶

During the 1840s and 1850s the Peruvian state directly or indirectly aided planters by consolidating the internal debt, indemnifying slaveholders after the abolition of slavery, and paying premiums to planters for importing non-slave labourers into the country.

The consolidation of the internal debt benefited many Peruvians with political connections. Since independence, the Peruvian state had amassed a huge internal debt, and during the administration of José Echenique (1851–4) the decision was made to repay it in cash and bonds. As Alfonso Quiroz has shown, the principal beneficiaries of consolidation were the big merchant houses who purchased large blocks of *vales de consolidación* at below market value, and subsequently sold them for substantial gain. Many of these merchants were important creditors of coastal planters and some planters, as bondholders, received compensation directly from the government.⁷

Both cotton and sugar planters benefited enormously from the conjuncture of increased capital and favourable prices for their products on the world market. The price for sugar on the London market remained good until the 1880s, and demand for cotton increased significantly as a result of falling production during the US Civil War (1861–5). Sugar planters invested in mill modernisation⁸ and cotton producers greatly expanded acreage, especially in the Sur Chico region.⁹ The outlook for cotton appeared so good that Juan Norberto Casanova, who had studied

⁶ Jonathan V. Levin, *The Export Economies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); Heraclio Bonilla, *Guano y burguesía en el Perú* (Lima, 1974); W. M. Mathew, *The House of Gibbs and the Peruvian Guano Monopoly* (London, 1981). Some of the early consignment contracts were granted to Peruvians. The Peruvian government departed from the consignment system in 1869, when it signed an agreement with Dreyfus Brothers & Co. of Paris to sell two million tons of guano in Europe (see Levin, pp. 98–99).

⁷ Alfonso W. Quiroz, *La deuda defraudada: consolidación de 1850 y dominio económico en el Perú* (Lima, 1987).

⁸ Bell, *Peruvian Cotton Industry*, pp. 16–31; Antonio Raimondi, *El Perú* (Lima, 1965), vol. 1, p. 323; George R. Fitz-Roy Cole, *The Peruvians at Home* (London, 1884), p. 129; Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, p. 54.

⁹ Bell, *Peruvian Cotton Industry*, pp. 11–12; Juan Rolf Engelsen, 'Social Aspects of Agricultural Expansion in Coastal Peru, 1825–1878', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, U.C.L.A. (1977), pp. 96–104; 195–228.

the cotton industry in the United States, argued that Peru had all the necessary ingredients to develop a cotton textile industry.¹⁰

The chief impediment to continuing growth for both cotton and sugar, however, was labour shortages. Since the sixteenth century, the sugar industry, in particular, had relied on African slave labour. However, the slave population of Peru declined significantly during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of the wars for independence, Great Britain's severing of the slave trade to Peru in 1810, and the failure of slave families to reproduce in large numbers. Between 1792 and 1854 the number of slaves fell from 40,337 to 25,505.¹¹

In 1839 Congress addressed the problem of labour shortages by passing an immigration law subsidising the importation of contract labourers. The legislation authorised payment of 30 pesos per immigrant to anyone importing at least fifty workers between the ages of 10 and 40. Between 1839 and 1851 some 450,000 pesos were paid out under this programme. Planters also benefited financially from the abolition of slavery in 1854, as they received 300 pesos for each slave or *liberto*¹² freed. This sum, which exceeded the market value of most slaves, generated between 7,000,000 and 7,650,000 pesos in additional capital. These monies, added to those already in hand from the consolidation of the internal debt, allowed planters to establish contacts with merchants on the Portuguese colony of Macao and arrange for the systematic importation of Chinese indentured servants.¹³

China had suddenly emerged as an important labour source for the West as a result of a series of domestic tragedies, culminating in the Taiping Rebellion in which perhaps as many as 30 million people lost their lives and millions more became refugees. This situation was then exploited by Chinese warlords, local labour contractors and Portuguese merchants to funnel the desperate into labour markets abroad. The so-called coolie trade lasted for nearly thirty years, from 1847 to 1874, and involved over one million men.¹⁴ Of this total, over 90,000 were transported to Peru.

The coolie trade ended in 1874 primarily as a result of British and Chinese initiatives. The Imperial Chinese government had always opposed

¹⁰ *Ensayo económico-político sobre el porvenir de la industria algodonera fabril del Perú* (Lima, 1849).

¹¹ Nils P. Jacobsen, 'The Development of Peru's Slave Population and its Significance for Coastal Agriculture', unpublished MS. (1974), pp. 11–12, 20, 32–3, 82.

¹² *Libertos* were children of slaves born after 28 July 1821, who were technically free but had to work for their parents' masters up to the age of 20, if female, and 24, if male.

¹³ Jacobsen, 'Peru's Slave Population', pp. 49, 77–9; Pablo Macera, *Las plantaciones azucareras en el Perú, 1821–1875* (Lima, 1974), pp. lxx, xxii, and ch. 3.

¹⁴ Arnold J. Meagher, 'The Introduction of Chinese Laborers to Latin America: The 'Coolie' Trade, 1847–1874', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis (1975), pp. 50–5.

Table 1. Chinese emigration to Peru

Year	No. embarked at Macao	No. dead during voyage	% of total embarked	No. disembarked at Callao
1850	—	—	—	—
1860	15,000	2,000	13.33	13,000
1860	2,007	594	29.60	1,413
1861	1,860	420	22.58	1,440
1862	1,726	718	41.60	1,008
1863	2,301	673	29.25	1,628
1864	7,010	600	8.56	6,410
1865	4,794	254	5.30	4,540
1866	6,543	614	9.38	5,929
1867	2,400	216	9.00	2,184
1868	4,732	466	9.85	4,266
1869	3,006	75	2.50	2,931
1870	7,917	373	4.71	7,544
1871	12,526	741	5.92	11,785
1872	14,505	1,114	7.68	13,391
1873	7,303	732	10.02	6,571
1874	3,939	114	2.89	3,825
Total	97,529	9,704	9.91	87,825

Source: J. B. H. Martinet, *L'agriculture au Pérou. Résumé du mémoire présenté au Congrès International de l'agriculture* (Paris, 1878), p. 32.

the recruitment and shipment of indentured servants, but chaotic political conditions had prevented it from taking decisive action. By the 1870s, the government was stable enough to begin executing labour contractors and enforcing a blockade of Macao. The British government, which had extensive interests in China, incorporated the coolie trade into its long campaign to halt the slave trade to the West. London forbade merchants in Hong Kong to participate in the trade, instructed the Royal Navy to seize coolie ships on the high seas, and pressured Portugal, a traditional ally, to close down Macao as the principal way station. When Lisbon finally agreed to the last demand, it became impossible to continue shipping indentured servants abroad.¹⁵

British efforts to end the coolie trade, however, should not be attributed to humanitarian objections to indentured servitude. British merchants were simultaneously transporting hundreds of thousands of Indian indentured servants to British colonies in the Caribbean, South America, South Africa, and elsewhere,¹⁶ and they later shipped some 63,000 Chinese indentured servants to South Africa between 1904 and 1907.¹⁷ When

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 307–10; 324–6, 331; Robert L. Irick, *Ch'ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade, 1847–1878* (Taipei, 1982); Stewart, *Chinese Bondage*, chs. 6 and 7.

¹⁶ Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*.

¹⁷ Peter Richardson, 'Coolies, Peasants, and Proletarians: The Origins of Chinese Indentured Labour in South Africa, 1904–1907', in Marks and Richardson (eds.), *International Labour Migration*, pp. 167–86.

British economic interests were directly served, the policy was to encourage wholesale exploitation of indentured labour.

Coercion, the State and the Transition to Wage Labour

The end to the coolie trade caused severe labour shortages in the Peruvian sugar and cotton industries. Planters also suffered from the disappearance of credit, lower prices for their products, and the Chilean invasion.¹⁸ Many of them did not survive as the Chileans put their estates to the torch or they were forced to sell out after suffering recurring losses. Those planters who did survive signed on former Chinese indentured servants as contracted and wage labourers. This was the only short-term solution to labour shortages because planters failed to import more indentured labourers and they had neither the capital nor the desire to switch over to Peruvian wage labour.

There was a great deal of official and extra-official coercion involved in keeping the Chinese on the plantations. The Peruvian government was sympathetic to the interests of planters and it helped them limit the physical mobility of the Chinese. For example, legislation was passed that required all Chinese to carry a letter from their employer stating that they had completed their work contracts.¹⁹ All Chinese were also required to register with local authorities and to purchase a '*boleto de su ocupación*' for 2 paper soles.²⁰

If a Chinese labourer left an estate before his work contract was completed, planters could count on local officials, such as subprefects, governors, and police, to help them hunt down the offenders. It was also commonplace for planters, with the approval of local authorities, to punish runaways and to force them to work longer to repay the costs of their apprehension.²¹

By comparison, in Cuba the state apparently enforced even stricter

¹⁸ Camprubi, *Historia de los bancos*, vol. 1, pp. 169–211; Yepes del Castillo, *Perú, 1820–1920*, p. 131; and Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar*, vol. 2 (New York, 1949), p. 531.

¹⁹ This is discussed in Francisco Pérez Céspedes to Señores Aspíllaga Hermanos, 27 May 1877, Palto to Lima, Archivo del Fuero Agrario, Lima. Much of the information for this paper comes from the Aspíllaga family's private correspondence, which is now housed in the Archivo del Fuero Agrario in Lima. The names of the principal correspondents are referred to in the notes by their initials, except in those cases where they simply signed the title of the family firm, Aspíllaga Hermanos. The following is a list of all correspondents and titles that are abbreviated:

Antero Aspíllaga Barrera	AAB	Ismael Aspíllaga Barrera	IAB
Ramón Aspíllaga Barrera	RAB	Aspíllaga Hermanos	AH
Baldomero Aspíllaga Barrera	BAB	Archivo del Fuero Agrario	AFA

²⁰ 'Expediente sobre el reclamo formulado por varios asiáticos de la provincia', Ica, 4 Apr. 1884, Biblioteca Nacional, Lima, D11457; 'Expediente relativo sobre el reclamo formulado por la detención de varios asiáticos en los pueblos de Supe, Chancay y Barranca', Supe, 26 May 1886, Biblioteca Nacional, Lima, D5534.

²¹ See below, section on planter control.

controls over non-indentured Chinese. Many were confined in municipal *depósitos centrales*, similar to prisons, which prevented them from freely selling their labour. These depots also served as contracting agencies which hired out Chinese to planters under a system of rigid control.²²

Peruvian officials were generally unconcerned with the living and working conditions of the Chinese on coastal plantations. Nevertheless, according to the terms of the Treaty of Tien Tsing that ended the coolie trade to Peru, the Imperial Chinese government had the right to inspect conditions of Chinese subjects in Peru. In 1887 a special Chinese Commission was formed composed of Chinese and Peruvian officials who toured several coastal plantations. The Commissioners' report makes clear that they were only concerned with gross injustices, such as corporal punishment, illegal imprisonment in plantation jails, contract violations, and wages that fell below the subsistence level. Working in concert with local officials, Commissioners were empowered to find solutions to these problems. However, there is no mention that violators, no matter how grievous their offence, were ever prosecuted.²³

The situation of contracted workers resembled that of 'classic' debt peons. By definition, the length of their work contract was determined by the amount of their debt. Thus, if they were advanced the equivalent of one year's wage, then their work contract ran for one year. If they received additional loans during the year, additional time was added to their contract. Work missed because of illness or any other cause was also added onto their contracts. While under contract, Chinese were not permitted to leave estates without the special permission of planters. Some estates, like the large cotton and wine plantation Ocucaje in the Ica Valley, kept meticulous accounts of time completed and owed, including notations of absences. The Chinese Commission was pleased with such estates and expressed no concern over limited worker mobility and freedom.²⁴

Such estates were, however, exceptional cases. More commonly, contracted workers complained about a variety of abuses, especially unauthorised extensions of their contracts. Whenever this was definitively collaborated by estate records, contracted workers were freed. Several workers received their freedom in this fashion, including eleven from

²² Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, 1985), p. 100.

²³ 'Expediente sobre la averiguación practicada por la comisión china, asesorada por funcionarios del gobierno, respecto a la situación de sus connacionales que prestan sus servicios en las haciendas', Lima, 9 December, 1887, Biblioteca Nacional, Lima, D11416. Hereinafter cited as Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

²⁴ 'Oficio del Prefecto del Departamento de Lima al Director de Gobierno remitiéndole los cuadros y las actas de los acuerdos realizados por la comisión encargada de visitar los fundos donde existen asiáticos contratados', Ica, 15 June 1888, Biblioteca Nacional, Lima, D5347.

Table 2. *Chinese population distribution in coastal Peru, 1876*

Region	Province	Number of Chinese	Total Population	Percentage
Far Northern	Piura	74	135,615	0.001
	Lambayeque	4,087	86,738	4.7
Northern	Libertad	8,816	147,336	6.0
	Ancash	13,975	284,830	1.4
Central	Lima	24,290	225,800	10.8
	Ica	5,022	60,255	8.3
Total estimated population in coastal Peru		46,264	940,574	4.9
Total estimated population in Peru		51,186	2,699,106	1.9

Source: Perú, Dirección de Estadística, *Censo General 1876*, VII, Appendix, p. 6.

Table 3. *Partial census of Chinese plantation workers in several coastal provinces, 1887*

Province	Contracted labourers	Sharecroppers	Wage labourers ^a	Total
Chancay	25	470	1,917	2,412
Santa	15	255	864	1,134
Chiclayo	133	0	1,235	1,368
Pacasmayo	82	0	663	745
Trujillo	252	0	748	1,000 ^b
Cañete	0	0	500	500 ^c
Ica	15 ^d	0	1,206 ^d	1,221
Total	522	725	7,133	8,380

^a The Chinese Commission did not generally differentiate between wage labourers provided by Chinese contractors and wage labourers hired directly by the estates.

^b This figure grossly underestimates the number of Chinese workers in Trujillo province, because the Commission did not visit several large estates, including Casa Grande, Cartavio, and Roma.

^c This figure only includes Chinese on the plantations Santa Barbara, La Huaca, and La Quebrada.

^d Contracted workers are under-enumerated and wage labourers are over-enumerated because 400 wage and contracted workers were grouped together by the Commission and are represented here as wage labourers. The vast majority of these 400 workers, based on data from the Commission report and plantation records, were in all probability wage labourers.

Source: Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

Lurifico in the Jequetepeque Valley and six from La Puente in the Santa Valley. More frequently, however, plantation records were incomplete or in such disarray that the Commission could not reach a resolution. The two most important cases of this type involved the Chicama Valley estates of Facalá and Tulape.²⁵

²⁵ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

Table 4. *Plantations with the largest number of Chinese workers, 1887*

Province	Estate	Owner	Crop	Contracted labourers	Wage labourers	Total
Trujillo	Tulape	Larco Hnos.	Sugar	—	—	700*
Chiclayo	Pátapo	José Ramos	Sugar	78	522	600
Pacamayo	Lurifíco	Luisa Gonzales Vda. de Dreyfus	Sugar	82	418	500
Cañete	Santa Barbara, La Huaca, La Quebrada	Swayne	Sugar	—	500	500
Chancay	San Nicolás	Testamentaria de D. Laos	Sugar	—	500	500
Chancay	Huayto	Canevaro y Cia.	Sugar	25	275	300
Santa	San Jacinto	Swayne	Sugar	—	300	300
Santa	La Puente	T. Derteano	Sugar	15	285	300
Ica	Caucato	—	Sugar	—	300	300
Chiclayo	Cayaltí	Aspillaga	Sugar	—	300	300

Source: Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

* For the plantation Tulape, the Commissioners grouped together contracted and wage labourers.

Facalá was owned by the Pflücker y Madalengoitia family. It employed over 130 contracted labourers, the second largest number found by the Commission. The Chinese claimed that their contracts had expired and that Pflücker had forced them to remain on the plantation. The Commission discovered that the only standard contracts on file were the original contracts of indentureship, and that contract extensions were only documented by receipts for advances. The Commission considered this a highly irregular bookkeeping procedure that left the Chinese vulnerable to fraudulent practices. Nevertheless, there was no absolute proof that the Chinese were telling the truth and the Commission was forced to leave the dispute unresolved pending further instructions from the central government.²⁶

The plantation Tulape, owned by Larco Hermanos, presented a different problem. This estate numbered some 700 Chinese labourers, both contracted and free. The plantation records were kept in meticulous order and each contract extension was verified by a signature. The Chinese claimed, however, that their signatures had been forged. A majority of the Commissioners sided with Larco, but Mr Chen Fun chose to believe his countrymen. At that juncture, the Commission decided to suspend its inspection tour because a majority of the estates in the Chicama Valley presented similar problems.²⁷

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Contradictory evidence was only one reason why the Commission failed to resolve these and other disputes. Commissioners were dependent on local authorities, especially subprefects, for enforcement of their statutory authority. Local officials were generally reluctant to take any action against the interests of planters who were, perhaps without exception, the most important members of the local elite. Moreover, planters frequently advised the central government regarding the appointment of local officials and sometimes even held local office themselves.²⁸

Commissioners also heard a number of complaints from contracted workers regarding low wages. The Commission was charged with assuring that the Chinese earned a living wage and on several estates it forced planters to increase wages. For example, on the La Puente estate owned by Torcuato Derteano daily wages were increased to 2 paper soles, or an increase of 75 %.²⁹

By 1887 the majority of Chinese workers on plantations were either free wage labourers (*chinos libres*) or wage labourers controlled by Chinese labour contractors. The Commission's report shows that Chinese contractors supplied the majority of workers to the large sugarcane plantations, and that *chinos libres* were found in smaller numbers on both large and small estates. On several estates, *chinos libres* complained that they were owed back wages by planters. For example, Lucas Ansejo, a Chinese *hacendado* in the Huaura Valley, owed 25 workers on his estate San Ysidro 7,000 paper soles. This represented about 70 days' wages. Ansejo also owed 100 workers on his plantation Andahuasi between 3,000 and 4,000 paper soles. The most notable case, however, involved the Galpón estate in the Supe Valley where the owner, Alejandro Zuloaga, admitted owing his 45 Chinese workers 47,000 paper soles! This enormous sum had accumulated since the war, Zuloaga explained, because financial difficulties arising from the conflict had prevented him from meeting his payroll. In recent years, his estate had turned a profit and he had repaid his labourers between 4,000 and 5,000 paper soles. These episodes suggest that, despite their free status, *chinos libres* had limited mobility. It is difficult to imagine wage labourers remaining on estates where they were not paid, and one suspects that Zuloaga and Ansejo employed coercion to prevent them from leaving. On the other hand, it is also possible that workers were reluctant to leave because planters owned them so much money. From the *hacendados'* perspective, this would have constituted a more attractive model of debt peonage, especially in a country where it would have been extremely difficult for foreign workers to recover back wages through a lawsuit.³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*²⁹ *Ibid.*³⁰ *Ibid.*

Table 5. *Daily wages received by Chinese plantation workers in 1887 (in soles)*

Estate	Contracted workers	Free workers	Difference (%)
Huayto	3.33 paper, 1.5 lb rice	8-12 paper, 1.5 lb rice	58.4-72.25
La Puente	2.66-3.33 paper	50-60 silver centavos	?
Pátapo	13.33 silver centavos, 2 lb rice, 1 lb meat	40 silver centavos, 2 lb rice, 1 lb meat	66.75
Pomalca y Collud	2.88 paper, 1.5 lb rice, 1 lb meat	7 paper, 1.5 lb rice, 1 lb meat	58.86
Lurifico	25-42 silver centavos, 1.5 lb rice, 1 lb meat	70 silver centavos, 1.5 lb rice	40.00-64.29
Galindo	6 silver centavos, 1.5 lb rice	35-60 silver centavos, 1.5 lb rice	82.86-90.00
Barraza	2.31-3.01 paper, 2 lb rice	8 paper, 1 lb rice ^a	62.38-71.13
Laredo	16.60 silver centavos, 2 lb rice	8 paper, 1.5 lb rice ^a	51.82
Facalá	1.17-2.50 paper, 2 lb rice	8 paper, 1.5 lb rice ^a	68.75-85.38
Sausal	2.50 paper, 1.5 lb rice, 1 lb meat	7 paper, 1.5 lb rice ^a	64.25

^a Wage difference does not include the varying amounts of rations because the price of rice and meat is unknown.

Source: Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

The Palto and Cayaltí Estates

These episodes highlight the importance of coercion in the transition to wage labour as well as the ineffectiveness of the state in improving the plight of the Chinese. Plantation records allow us to present a more systematic and balanced analysis of the transition from contracted to wage labour. Despite the existence of coercion and debt peonage, *chinos libres* earned substantially higher wages than contracted workers and sometimes benefited from limited wage labour markets in coastal valleys. Planters attempted to control labour markets and to limit worker mobility, but they were not always successful. There were also significant differences in patterns of labour recruitment and control depending on the size and management of individual estates.

The following discussion will focus on the Palto plantation, a medium-sized (385 hectares) cotton estate near Pisco, and the Cayaltí plantation, a large (31,000 hectares) sugarcane estate near Saña. This perspective will provide a close-up look at the transition to wage labour under two representative systems of production.

Both Palto and Cayaltí were owned by the Aspíllaga family, former merchants who had made the transition to plantation agriculture in the late 1850s. Cayaltí was their major investment and the key to the family

fortune for three generations. Palto, like most cotton estates, was smaller and less profitable during the nineteenth century. Both estates relied almost exclusively on Chinese indentured servants after the abolition of black slavery.³¹

In 1875 Palto had 147 contracted Chinese labourers who periodically received cash advances which they discounted with their labour. The Chinese were given a daily task (*tarea*) which counted as a day's wage. If a worker did not complete his assignment, then he was not credited with a full day's wage.³²

With the end of the coolie trade it became increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain the size of the workforce. By 1877 the number of Chinese had decreased to 121, and two years later it was down to 87.³³ To hold onto these workers, the estate administrator routinely advanced them small sums of money, frequently on the eve of Chinese New Year when there was pressure from the Chinese community to contribute to the celebrations. As the administrator put it, '...their countrymen obligate them to pay, and they can only comply by taking out a contract...'.³⁴

Bookkeeping at Palto was not always precise and the Chinese sometimes had to demand their freedom upon the expiration of their contracts. For example, in September of 1877 five Chinese refused to work because their contracts had expired. The administrator checked his records and discovered that four had indeed completed their time, and they were given their letters of freedom. The records on the fifth were, however, unclear and he was forced to remain for another two months.³⁵ Later that year it was discovered that a Chinese had been forced to work for a year beyond the expiration of his contract. He was freed but apparently without additional compensation.³⁶

As the size of the workforce continued to decline, managers were forced to hire wage labourers. This meant hiring either free Chinese or local peasants, who were mostly black. Management was not pleased with either type of worker because they worked fewer hours and demanded higher wages than contracted workers. The Aspíllagas also felt cheated because wage labourers would not always work for long periods of time. The estate administrator registered the following complaint in 1879:

³¹ On the Aspíllaga family see Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, pp. 29–33.

³² Planilla de Trabajadores Chinos, Hacienda Palto, Aug. 1875–Dec. 1878, AFA.

³³ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 31 July 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 14 Nov. 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

³⁴ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 26 Nov. 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA.

³⁵ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 28 Sept. 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

³⁶ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 4 Dec. 1877, Palto to Cayaltí, AFA.

This week there have been five *chinos libres* and four *peones criollos* [blacks]; of the *criollos*, I had to expel two because their work was very bad, [and] of the five *chinos libres* two refused to accept today's assignment, alleging that it was too large... Such scoundrels are the *chinos libres* and the *peones criollos*. It is not possible to give them a smaller assignment than the one given to contracted Chinese.³⁷

The outbreak of the War of the Pacific in 1879 and the subsequent Chilean invasion of Peru had a dramatic impact on Palto. The Aspíllagas decided to transfer the majority of Palto's Chinese to Cayaltí as a means of maintaining production on their larger plantation. They also hoped to maintain production at Palto by finding a Chinese contractor with at least 80 workers.³⁸ However, this proved impossible, and from August 1880 to July 1882 Palto struggled along with only 26 to 67 men.³⁹

Several of these workers were under the control of the Chinese contractor Ayate. He first came to Palto as a contracted worker, became a *libre*, and later a foreman (*caporal*). By that point, he had been given access to a plot of land and separate living quarters.⁴⁰

Ayate first appeared as a labour contractor in 1881, shortly after the Chilean invasion. The timing of Ayate's career advance was not coincidental. Many Chinese fled from the plantations during the Chilean onslaught and were later recruited by fellow Chinese to work on plantations. Contractors generally received part of their workers' wages and ran stores on the estates where they sold food, clothing, and opium on credit. These conditions obviously created many opportunities for embezzlement and debt peonage.⁴¹

Despite the presence of the contractor Ayate, Palto continued to suffer from labour shortages. One reason was that most labour contractors preferred to do business with larger plantations that paid higher wages and provided more customers for their stores. On a couple of occasions Ayate failed to recruit additional workers in Pisco and Ica because rival

³⁷ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 21 Nov. 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

³⁸ AH to RAB, 31 Aug. 1880, Lima to Palto, AFA; AH to RAB, 7 Sept. 1880, Lima to Palto, AFA.

³⁹ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 7 Feb. 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 9 March 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; IAB to AH, 21 March 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA; Planilla No. 78 de pagos a los trabajadores, 16 July 1882, Manuel J. Brihuego, administrator, AFA.

⁴⁰ Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, 'Biografías de Chinos Culies', *Kuntur*, no. 6, July–Aug., 1987, pp. 11–17.

⁴¹ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N., and below. Although we know little about them, Chinese contractors also existed in Cuba. 'Chinese workers who had served out their terms, or had escaped from their masters, were often grouped together into *cuadrillas* by entrepreneurs, themselves Chinese, and hired out', Scott, p. 99.

Table 6. *Evolution of the Chinese work force on the plantation Palto, 1879–1882*

Date	Contracted Chinese	Free Chinese	Peruvian	Total
May 1879	94	0	0	94
Nov. 1879	87	5	4	96
May 1881	29	37	0	67
July 1882	2	36	0	38

Source: José Pérez y Albela to Señores Aspíllaga Hnos., 9 May 1879, Palto-Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to Señores Aspíllaga Hnos., 7 Nov. 1879, Palto-Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to Señores Aspíllaga Hnos., 14 Nov. 1879, Palto-Lima, AFA; Planilla No. 18 á los trabajadores de la Ha. Palto, 27 May 1881, Manuel J. Brihuego, Admor., AFA; Planilla No. 78 de pagos a los trabajadores, 16 July 1882, Manuel J. Brihuego, Admor., AFA.

contractors had already taken local Chinese to the nearby Chincha Valley.⁴²

Throughout 1882 and 1883 Palto had equal difficulty hiring non-contracted labourers. Managers blamed the problem on the inherent laziness of workers as well as political and social unrest. There was a great deal of banditry and looting by both Peruvians and Chileans in the region. However, planters' frustrations also stemmed from having to contend with a local wage labour market. For the first time, there was serious competition among growers for labourers and the Aspíllagas criticised both planters and workers for the resulting difficulties:

Here I have found that there is a profound shortage of labourers, [and] adding to the disorder among the peons is Don Julio Elías of the estate Urrutia, raising and lowering wages according to his own ideas and whim. Each week we have more or less 40 men – very few to attend to everything.... There are only a few *chinos libres* and the great majority of them are mere bags of bone (*unos buenos huesos*).⁴³

The Aspíllagas were upset because *chinos libres* sold their labour to the highest bidder and sometimes refused to work as hard as contracted workers. For example, Palto had difficulty hiring workers during local grape harvests when wages were at a premium on wine estates. Even though the Aspíllagas understood the economics of the situation, they preferred to blame labour shortages on social unrest and lazy labourers. This was a more convenient explanation that betrayed their prejudices as

⁴² Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 8 Sept. 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 12 Sept. 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 18 April 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 10 April 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁴³ IAB to AH, 24 July 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA.

well as their frustration over failure to control the local labour market. 'Although there are many idle people, labourers are very scarce here. Currently, because of the grape harvest in Pisco they pay 10 soles a day. Here the current wage is 3 *soles a tarea*...'.⁴⁴ Four months later, Ismael Aspíllaga Barrera added: 'The people here have so few necessities and are so lazy that they only work enough to have enough to eat.'⁴⁵

By 1883, management was forced to raise wages periodically to match those paid on neighbouring estates. Higher wages almost always resulted in more workers.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, management still sought ways of undermining the local labour market. For example, in October of 1883 the estate administrator attempted to lower wages to offset the rise in the value of paper currency. However, he bitterly lamented the lack of local political muscle to enforce such a measure.⁴⁷ This was clearly a serious problem in the Pisco region which had been devastated by the Chilean invasion and continued to be plagued by bandits, political chiefs in command of private armies (*montoneros*),⁴⁸ and incompetent local officials.⁴⁹

Unable to rely on public authority to hold down wages, planters struck an agreement among themselves.⁵⁰ This arrangement broke down almost immediately, however, because some planters were willing to pay competitive wages, while other growers, such as the Aspíllagas, had serious financial problems and sought to reduce their labour bills. The Aspíllagas also placed the future of their large sugar estate Cayaltí above that of Palto.⁵¹ The following comments from Palto's administration capture the essence of the problem:

Wages. This hacienda continues to comply with the agreement contracted among the *hacendados* of the valley, however there are two of them who have broken it [those from] Mencia and Urrutia.⁵²

In the three years that I have run this estate there has not been a year when some hacienda in the valley has not disrupted established wages. In San Jacinto there is a *hacendado* from Ayacucho who is burning and ploughing under grape vines in order to plant rice. He pays shovelmén 12 soles a day and it is to be expected that when I need day labourers I will have to pay the same.⁵³

⁴⁴ AH to AH, 21 Mar. 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁴⁵ IAB to AH, 24 July 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁴⁶ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 21 Jan. 1883, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 6 Feb. 1883, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁴⁷ Manuel Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 10 Oct. 1883, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁴⁸ Rolando Pachas Castillo, 'Impacto de la Guerra del Pacífico en las haciendas de Ica, Chinchá, Pisco y Cañete', in Wilson Reategui et al. (eds.), *La Guerra del Pacífico* (Lima, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 197–221.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*; IAB to AH, 12 May 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁵⁰ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 20 Jan. 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁵¹ On the Aspíllagas' financial problems see Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, p. 30.

⁵² Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 11 Feb. 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁵³ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 9 Jan. 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

... With respect to the cotton harvest, one still cannot declare a victory. I paid them 1 sol per *arroba* [harvested]; but the next week no one harvested. Working people in this valley are in the most complete state of insubordination. This is the result of the absurd wages that I have been paying [in comparison to] Urrutia, Mencia, and San Jacinto. Why should they come here and earn 6 soles when they can earn 12 elsewhere for the same work?⁵⁴

Throughout the remainder of the 1880s Palto had a core of approximately 30 Chinese workers. During the cotton harvest, however, 20–40 additional Chinese and Peruvian workers were always hired. Among these seasonal workers there were usually several Peruvian women who earned the same wage as men and worked just as hard. For example, in 1882 the average weekly pick per worker was 411.53 pounds. The four women harvesters picked the following amounts: 717 pounds, 474 pounds, 410 pounds, and 226 pounds. Out of 30 cotton harvesters, 717 pounds was the most picked, and five Chinese males harvested less than 226 pounds.⁵⁵

In order to find seasonal labour, however, the estate had to pay competitive wages. Failure to do so even caused labour unrest on the estate on two occasions. In 1885 cotton harvesters stopped work and demanded an increase in wages to offset the devaluation in paper currency. The administrator agreed to increase wages from S./1.50 paper per *arroba* to S./2.00 per *arroba*.⁵⁶ Three years later, ginners and packers complained that their counterparts on neighbouring estates received 10 silver centavos a day more. Once again, the manager consented and increased ginners' wages from 40–50 silver centavos a day, and packers' wages from 30–40 silver centavos a day.⁵⁷ Both of these incidents occurred during the harvest when management most feared a shutdown.

In 1892, the Aspíllagas lectured their manager on a variation of the labour theory of value:

As a general rule it suits our interests to have peons who work hard for the lowest possible salary...because it is clear that the less that is spent, not altering production, the more profit will accrue, that is the pragmatic goal of all businesses, well directed and administered. In this sense proceed because it conforms with our interests.⁵⁸

The results, however, were not forthcoming. In 1893 Palto had only 53

⁵⁴ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 2 Nov. 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁵⁵ Hacienda Palto, Planilla No. 60 de pagos á los trabajadores, 12 May 1882, Manuel J. Brihuego, administrator, AFA.

⁵⁶ Manuel J. Brihuego to AH, 15 Feb. 1885, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁵⁷ Manuel J. Brihuego to AH, 2 May 1888, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁵⁸ AH to José Velarde, 17 Feb. 1892, Lima to Palto, AFA.

workers,⁵⁹ and 9 of the 38 harvesters picked less than 100 pounds of cotton a week.⁶⁰ By this date, many Chinese workers were old and exhausted from years of plantation labour. Rather than pay competitive wages that might attract younger, more productive workers, the Aspíllagas and other cotton growers chose to eliminate wage labour in the mid-1890s in favour of cotton tenantry. This reduced their labour bills, circumvented local labour markets, and transferred much of the risk of production onto the black peasantry.

The transition from contracted to wage labour in the Aspíllagas' large sugarcane plantation Cayaltí followed a somewhat different course. Cayaltí's workforce numbered 445 in 1877 (see Table 7) and, despite the end to the coolie trade, the Aspíllagas attempted to avoid any significant reduction. They were initially successful at recontracting many of their Chinese workers and at contracting new recruits. To attract new workers, however, they had to advance them the equivalent of half a year's salary, or about 25 paper soles. These workers were required to remain on the estate until their debts had been paid.⁶¹ The Aspíllagas also hired several Chinese wage labourers, but did so reluctantly because *chinos libres* demanded higher wages. For example, in 1876 a *libre* earned 70 silver centavos per day plus meals, or the equivalent of several months' wages for a contracted worker.⁶²

As noted, during the Chilean invasion large numbers of Chinese fled from plantations into nearby cities and towns where they were mobilised into work gangs by Chinese contractors. An indication of how this was done comes from a representative of the Chinese community in Lima, Cheng Isao Ju, who accused ten Chinese contractors of 'kidnapping' between 3,000 and 4,000 Chinese during 1881 and 1882 and bringing them to the plantations. During 1883 and 1884, he claimed, many more Chinese were forced to work on plantations to recover debts owed to contractors.⁶³

⁵⁹ Planilla No. 636 de los pagos del 3 al 9 de abril, 1893, 9 April 1893, Nestor V. Cerdeña; Planilla del pago del recojo de algodón Egipto de la hacienda Palto a treinta centavos la arroba; Planilla del pago del recojo de algodón de Metafice de la hacienda Palto a treinta centavos la arroba, AFA.

⁶⁰ Planilla No. 636 de los pagos del 3 al 9 de abril, 1893, 9 April 1893, Nestor V. Cerdeña; Planilla del pago del recojo de algodón Egipto de la hacienda Palto a treinta centavos la arroba; Planilla del pago del recojo de algodón de Metafice de la hacienda Palto a treinta centavos la arroba, AFA.

⁶¹ RAB to AAB, 24 Dec. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 7 April 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 14 Nov. 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 18 Dec. 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 28 Aug. 1883, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁶² AH to AH, 7 April 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁶³ In Heraclio Bonilla, 'The War of the Pacific and the National and Colonial Problem in Peru', *Past and Present*, no. 81 (Nov. 1978), p. 110.

Table 7. *Composition of the work force at Cayalti, 1877–82*

Date	Total no. Chinese	% total work force	No. contracted Chinese	% total Chinese	No. <i>libres</i>	% total Chinese	No. Peruvians	% total work force	Total no. workers
September 1877	424	95.3	—	—	—	—	21	4.7	445
October 1879	413	91.6	375	90.8	38	9.2	38	8.4	451
September 1881	438	98.4	375	85.6	63	14.4	7	1.6	445
June 1882	407	91.7	342	84.0	65	16.0	37	8.3	444

Sources: AH to AH, 11 Sept. 1877, AFA; AH to AH, 14 Oct. 1879, AFA; AH to AH, 27 Sept. 1881, AFA; unsigned letter dated 8 June 1882, AFA.

Table 8. *Composition of the work force at Cayaltí, 1885-90*

Date	Free Chinese	% of total	Chinese contracted to contractors	% of total	Peruvians	% of total	Total no. of workers
September 1885	178	31.6	202	35.8	184	32.6	564
March 1888	78	14.3	215	39.4	252	46.2	545
November 1890	36	1.0	302	59.0	224	40.0	560

Sources: AH to AH, 25 Sept. 1886, AFA; AH to AH, 23 Mar. 1888, AFA; AH to AH, 12 Nov. 1890, AFA.

Chinese contractors first appeared at Cayaltí in 1884. They signed contracts with the Aspíllagas that stipulated working and living conditions for their workers and secured substantial benefits for themselves. Workers had to labour 10½ hours a day for 5 days a week and contractors had to post a bond worth the value of all farm tools issued by the estate. In return, recruiters received two substantial rewards: they were allowed to operate stores on the plantation, and they received workers' wages. The Aspíllagas also agreed to provide ill workers with medical care and to advance contractors money to find more labourers.⁶⁴

Such contracts guaranteed the Aspíllagas, and other sugar planters, stable work forces during a period of political and social instability. Planters were unconcerned with possible abuses that contractors might inflict on workers, such as embezzling wages, as long as production levels were maintained.

As time went on, however, planters grew concerned over falling worker productivity. This was a reflection of advancing age and the wear and tear of plantation labour. In 1891 the Aspíllagas characterised 50% of their Chinese workers as 'old and tired men'.⁶⁵ Only 300 of 420 workers regularly worked and absenteeism became so bad, especially on Mondays, that milling sometimes had to be halted. The following year Baldomero Aspíllaga Barrera threatened to shut down contractors' stores unless absenteeism rates were reduced. When this failed to bring results, the Aspíllagas ordered mayordomos to drive the Chinese into the fields with clubs and whips.⁶⁶

Compounding the problem of absenteeism was the inability of the Chinese to do heavy labour. By the end of the decade only the strongest

⁶⁴ For example, contract dated Oct. 1884, Cayaltí Archive, AFA.

⁶⁵ AH to AH, 9 June 1891, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁶⁶ AH to AH, 1 Nov. 1892, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

could complete a meagre half *tarea* in the field,⁶⁷ and the Aspíllagas began to expel the Chinese from Cayaltí.⁶⁸

As the Chinese were driven from Cayaltí and other large sugarcane plantations they were replaced with Peruvian wage labourers recruited from the highlands.⁶⁹ As in the case of Palto, the Aspíllagas found it impossible to dominate coastal labour markets, despite Cayaltí's huge size and the family's considerable political clout. Local peasants may have lost their land and economic independence but they still resisted total domination by individual plantations. Instead, they attempted to sell their labour to the highest bidder and to avoid the trap of debt peonage. In this fashion they maintained a degree of physical and economic freedom and frustrated local planters, as seen in this letter from the Aspíllagas written in 1889:

Those from the coast, or *zambos*, are scarce. The Sañeros, if you could round up one hundred or so of them, could not be acclimatised in any manner whatsoever, because the majority of them are lazy men who go around looking for a new *patrón* every week, that is to say looking for where they can do less. At present, with the rice harvest, the work force on the large [sugar] estates always diminishes because of the attraction that this work has for them, but happily this is already passing.⁷⁰

Planter Control and Worker Resistance

The system of social control imposed on Chinese workers by planters constituted an essential element of the system of production. The ability of planters to use extra-economic methods of coercion, such as corporal punishment, debt peonage, and drugs, helps to explain their success at retaining Chinese workers after the abolition of indentured servitude. It is, however, also important to recognise that the Chinese resisted limitations on their freedom and mobility. Forms of resistance resemble those found on plantations during the period of African slavery, and include non-violent tactics, such as avoiding work by feigning illness, stealing from planters, and running away, as well as violent tactics, such as suicide, murder and rebellion. Such behaviour cut into planters' profits and hastened the transition of Peruvian wage labour and tenantry.

⁶⁷ AH to AH, 12 Oct. 1889, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 15 Feb. 1890, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 7 June 1893, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 11 Nov. 1897, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁶⁸ AH to AH, 16 Nov. 1895, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 8 March 1897, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 24 Jan. 1899, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁶⁹ Michael J. Gonzales, 'Capitalist Agriculture and Labour Contracting in Northern Peru, 1880-1905', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 12, part II (Nov. 1980), pp. 291-315.

⁷⁰ AH to AH, 5 June 1899, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

Standard equipment on Peruvian plantations in the 1870s and 1880s included jails, shackles, stocks, chains, bullwhips, clubs, and firearms. These instruments were regularly used by planters and mayordomos to inflict punishment for offences and as symbols of repression and authority. The Peruvian state allowed planters to administer corporal punishment on their estates and seemingly took no interest in the civil and human rights of the Chinese, except superficially during the visit of the Chinese Commission. It should also be stressed that this was a period of political and social chaos when public authority was especially unreliable and sometimes non-existent. Under these circumstances, planters gained even greater control over workers.

The Chinese were routinely punished for offences that threatened the established social hierarchy and system of production. Such transgressions included insolent behaviour (e.g. talking back or questioning a work assignment), faking illness, running away, fighting, theft and murder. On the south-central coast there also existed considerable animosity between the Chinese and black communities. Both groups were marginalised members of coastal society who competed for jobs in agriculture and trade. Moreover, blacks sometimes worked as foremen on estates and gained the reputation of being harsh taskmasters. Violent confrontations between Chinese and blacks periodically erupted on plantations and caused grave concern among planters.

The Chinese Commission found several Chinese working in shackles on the plantations Tulape, Huayto, Barraza, Pampa, Facalá, Chongos and Laredo. In some cases, the chains had been removed shortly before the Commission arrived, but this ruse did not prevent workers from complaining to Commissioners. Most of these estates were large sugarcane plantations and many of them were located in the Chicama Valley, where labour conditions were especially oppressive at that time. Many shackled workers were being punished for running away and some planters were reluctant to free them for fear that they would immediately escape. On the plantation Chongos, owned by Juan José Pinillos, workers complained that they were chained for the slightest offence, and the Commission found one Chinese who had been shackled and imprisoned for six months.⁷¹

Shackled workers were freed by the Commission but they may have been reshackled as soon as the Commissioners departed. This problem is underscored by the reluctance of local officials to challenge planters, who sometimes occupied local offices themselves. For example, the owner of

⁷¹ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

Huayto, Octavio Canevaro, doubled as Comisario Rural. Canevaro explained that he had not shackled his workers in his capacity as 'patrón' but in his capacity as a public official. When the Commission refused to accept this explanation, Canevaro simply said that he would not do it again.⁷²

During this period workers were routinely shackled at Palto for unruly behaviour or running away. Frequently, offending Chinese were first placed in stocks and then forced to work in chains. On one occasion a shackled worker named Silvestre managed to escape while chained, but was captured not far from the estate.⁷³

Jails were also typically found on coastal estates. At Palto, Chinese were imprisoned for malingering, talking back, or minor crimes, while at Cayaltí jailing more commonly occurred for mistakes on the job.⁷⁴ Emilio Escobar y Bedoya, the head of the Chinese Commission and a planter himself, referred to prisons as an 'old custom' on Peruvian estates that could not be abolished until better disciplined workers were found.⁷⁵ His attitude helps to explain why the Commission had so little long-term impact on working and living conditions on plantations. In fact, jails remained fixtures on coastal estates long after the Chinese Commission had been disbanded. In 1893, officials discovered an extreme case of worker abuse on the La Viñita estate in the Chicama Valley. The owner, Jesús García y García, had imprisoned one Chinese for fifteen years and three others for nine years. García argued he was free to discipline his own workers and he would not release them from jail. Formal charges were brought against him, but the outcome of the case is unknown.⁷⁶

In addition to putting workers in jails or chains, planters subjected them to whippings and beatings. In 1877 the Aspílagas instructed their administrator at Palto to whip workers for 'grave cases', such as 'lack of

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 1 Nov. 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 9 Aug. 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA; Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 30 Oct. 1877, Palto to Cayaltí, AFA; E. Augusto to Geraldo Pérez, 12 March 1876, Palto to Cayaltí, AFA; Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 21 July 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 11 Oct. 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁷⁴ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 11 April 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA; Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 30 Oct. 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 9 July 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 16 July 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 28 March 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 19 Nov. 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 25 Nov. 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 10 Oct. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 7 Nov. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁷⁵ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

⁷⁶ *Informe*, Chinese consul Ten Ayan, subprefect of Trujillo Lizardo Lavalle, interpreter P. A. Ponky, Biblioteca Nacional; Jesús García y García to el ministro de gobierno, 21 Aug. 1893, Biblioteca Nacional.

respect', 'running away', or 'fighting'.⁷⁷ For running away, the Chinese were warned that they could receive 100 lashes.⁷⁸ At Cayaltí, the Chinese were routinely lashed or beaten for failure to work, running away, or serious crimes. Once the Aspíllagas ordered a suspected murderer lashed 150 times, a beating that could have resulted in his death.⁷⁹

The Aspíllagas were not the only planters to use the lash. On the estate Jagüey owned by Luis Albrecht, the Chinese Commission was approached by a worker named Lanquen who had been 'atrociously' whipped and horribly scarred. The commissioners were appalled and got the estate manager to indemnify Lanquen 40 paper soles and to release him from the estate. On the estate Huayto owned by Octavio Canevaro, the Commission also discovered a case of mutilation. The estate doctor had sliced off the ear of a Chinese for reasons of 'personal vengeance'. Canevaro, who earlier had punished several Chinese in his capacity as Rural Commissioner, had not disciplined the doctor. The latter fled the estate when the Commissioners arrived and his case was left in the hands of the subprefect.⁸⁰

Violence sometimes erupted among the Chinese themselves. This is not surprising considering their difficult living and working conditions. After work was completed, the Chinese were locked into dormitories (*galpones*) similar to those used to shelter black slaves. In *galpones*, the Chinese gambled, smoked opium, and some of them engaged in homosexual activities. Contractors also ran stores in the dormitories and sold food, liquor, and drugs on credit. They also lent money.⁸¹

In December 1879 a Chinese foreman at Palto named Achan was murdered in a *galpón*. The estate administrator, Pérez, was alerted of the crime and went to investigate. No one co-operated with him, but he soon discovered the badly mutilated body. He left the dormitory and returned with a revolver and several staff members. A roll call determined that two Chinese, Elías and Finloy, were missing and search parties were organised to capture them.⁸²

The Aspíllagas were especially concerned with determining the cause of the murder. They assumed that it was related to personal animosities

⁷⁷ 'Orden interior de la Hacienda de Palto', 12 March 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA. Fragment of document.

⁷⁸ AAB to AH, 30 April 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA. For examples of whippings at Palto, see: E. Augusto to AH, 7 March 1876, Palto to Lima, AFA; Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 19 June 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 11 Oct. 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁷⁹ AH to AH, 31 July 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 11 Nov. 1892, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁸⁰ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

⁸¹ Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, pp. 97–103.

⁸² José Pérez y Albela to AH, 12 Dec. 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

arising from gambling or homosexual activities, but they also feared that it arose from worker abuse. Excessive abuse could lead to further violence and disrupt production. They instructed Pérez to question the suspects and then to deliver them to public authorities.⁸³

When Elías and Finloy were captured they were severely beaten, tortured with knives, chained and thrown into the estate jail. They 'confessed' to the manager that they had been paid S./200 by fellow workers to murder the hated foreman, and they named nine Chinese who had contributed to their fee. Pérez refused to believe that there was any motive for the murder beyond moral depravity,⁸⁴ but Chinese on Manrique revealed that Achan was murdered because he forced workers to buy goods from him and because he harassed them in their work.⁸⁵

In the end, public authorities allowed the Aspíllagas to decide Elías's and Finloy's fates. They chose to have them whipped, chained and jailed. After their release, they would be forced to do difficult and unpleasant work while shackled. The Aspíllagas preferred this to a public trial, which might be embarrassing, and to private execution, which seemed justified but harsh.⁸⁶ This way Elías and Finloy would also continue to produce cotton without remuneration, presumably for the rest of their lives. Interestingly, Pérez also confiscated three horses owned by the two killers. This further benefited the estate and also shows that Elías and Finloy were better off than the average worker and may have engaged in petty trade in competition with the murdered foreman.⁸⁷

Several murders also occurred on the Aspíllagas' sugarcane plantation Cayaltí. In 1876 a Chinese worker nearly decapitated a Chinese foreman after his work assignment had been increased. Antero Aspíllaga Barrera, who was on the estate at the time, ordered mayordomos to capture and execute the man immediately. He explained that 'there is no other recourse so that he might serve as an example to these malicious labourers'.⁸⁸ The Aspíllagas described the foreman as a 'good and loyal servant' and were convinced that the murderer had acted alone.⁸⁹ After eighteen days the man was captured and experienced the Aspíllagas' private system of justice:

⁸³ AH to José Pérez y Albela, 10 Dec. 1879, Lima to Palto, AFA.

⁸⁴ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 19 Dec. 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁸⁵ AH to José Pérez y Albela, 25 Dec. 1879, Lima to Palto, AFA.

⁸⁶ AH to José Pérez y Albela, 15 Dec. 1879, Lima to Palto, AFA.

⁸⁷ José Pérez y Albela, to AH, 19 Dec. 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

⁸⁸ AH to AH, 14 Aug. 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁸⁹ AH to AH, 18 Aug. 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

The assassin Aijin rests in peace in the same site where Aun [the foreman] is buried. Thanks to God that the malicious person did not escape but, almost in a providential manner, was apprehended. We are closely watching things and we have in custody the Chinese who gave shelter to the assassin, the muleteer Alan.⁹⁰

A year later, quarrelling between two Chinese workers over a debt resulted in murder. The creditor had earlier beaten the debtor and the latter retaliated by clubbing the lender to death. The murderer fled from the estate but was quickly captured by mayordomos. This time, the Aspíllagas ordered that the man receive 150 lashes, instead of being shot. The milder punishment can be attributed to the difference in the victims' status within the plantation hierarchy.⁹¹

There were at least five additional murders on Cayaltí involving Chinese, including one where the victim was a Peruvian. Details are lacking about these cases, however one victim was a visiting Chinese merchant and the murdered Peruvian had lent money to his killer. One interesting development was that in 1888 the Aspíllagas began turning accused murderers over to public officials rather than punishing them on Cayaltí.⁹² This did not occur as a result of a re-evaluation of their moral and legal responsibilities. Rather, it reflects the growing political stability of Peru and the possibility that news of a private execution might cause a scandal and damage the rising political career of Antero Aspíllaga Barrera, who was then a cabinet minister.⁹³

Corporal punishment and imprisonment were the most visible methods of social control on coastal plantations. However, planters also controlled Chinese workers through the use of opium. The British cultivated opium poppies on plantations in India and supplied huge quantities of the drug to China.⁹⁴ British merchants, who had strong commercial ties with South America, soon realised that the opium market could be expanded to include Chinese in Peru.⁹⁵

The Peruvian government established an official monopoly over opium

⁹⁰ AH to AH, 1 Sept. 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁹¹ AH to AH, 31 July 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁹² AH to AH, 2 July 1886, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 12 Nov. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 12 Nov. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 7 Nov. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 20 Dec. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 1 Nov. 1892, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 21 Aug. 1895, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁹³ Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, pp. 32-3.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Spence, 'Opium Smoking in Ch'ing China', in Frederick Wakeman, Jr. and Caroline Grant (eds.), *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1975).

⁹⁵ According to Pablo Macera, between 1852 and 1879, 767, 401 pounds of opium were sold to Peru by Britain. See Macera, *Las plantaciones azucareras*, p. cxviii.

imports and sales. Merchants supplied public bids to the Minister of Trade and Commerce who accepted the most attractive offer. The amount of opium imported was limited to 50,000 kilograms, which was sold to retailers at 10% profit. Retailers were licensed by the government, and they were required to keep an accurate accounting of sales. Most retailers were planters or Chinese merchants. The Aspíllagas, for example, were the retailers for Cayaltí. Interestingly, in the late 1880s the Minister of Trade and Commerce was none other than Antero Aspíllaga Barrera. In addition to official imports, there was also a lively contraband trade in opium.⁹⁶

The Aspíllagas sold between 100 and 150 pounds of opium a month at Cayaltí which represented a profit of 200–400 silver soles.⁹⁷ The price of an ounce of opium at Cayaltí rose from 70 to 80 silver centavos in the 1870s to S./1.20–S./1.70 silver soles in the 1880s, and then fell slightly to around S./1.00 silver in the early 1890s.⁹⁸ I have already published a detailed calculation showing that Chinese labourers at Cayaltí could not have paid for opium with their meagre wages.⁹⁹ Instead, they had to borrow money from either planters or contractors to maintain their habits, and their indebtedness bound them to the estate. This was, of course, a considerable bonus to the Aspíllagas during a period of labour shortages.

It is likely that opium served a similar function on other coastal estates. At Palto administrators also used the drug to reward and punish addicted workers. For example, on several occasions managers threatened to withhold distribution of opium unless the Chinese completed their *tareas*. Thus, planters helped turn these men into drug addicts and then controlled them through supplying or denying them drugs.¹⁰⁰ It is, however, ironic that planters did not see the correlation between opium consumption and falling worker productivity and absenteeism, which were major preoccupations. It seems likely that planters were primarily

⁹⁶ 'Estanco del opio', *El Comercio*, 10 Jan. 1888; *El Comercio*, 27 Feb. 1888; *El Peruano*, 27 Sept. 1877; AH to AH, 19 May 1891, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁹⁷ AH to AH, 1 May 1885, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 12 May 1891, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 18 April 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 24 April 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 8 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 11 March 1879, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 3 Nov. 1891, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁹⁸ AH to AH, 7 April 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 18 April 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 8 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 11 March 1879, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 28 Oct. 1879, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 13 Jan. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 21 July, 1891, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 11 April 1893, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

⁹⁹ Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, pp. 102–3.

¹⁰⁰ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 4 April 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 21 March 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

concerned with having workers securely bound to estates, regardless of their physical condition.

Resistance

Considering the harshness of planters' methods of control, it seems unlikely that the Chinese could have mounted an effective resistance to total domination. However, the Chinese did resist and their defiance contributed to falling production and to the transition to alternative forms of labour.

Chinese resistance was more effective at Palto than at Cayaltí and this may suggest a pattern for similarly structured estates. Cayaltí was a big sugarcane plantation that was efficiently managed by a large staff led by one of the estate owners.¹⁰¹ Moreover, by the 1880s the responsibility for controlling Chinese workers was shared by Chinese labour contractors, who supplied the majority of workers. These characteristics were shared by other large sugarcane plantations.¹⁰² Palto, by contrast, was a medium-sized cotton estate. It was almost never managed by the owners, and hired administrators were less effective at social contact. A majority of Palto's workers were also non-contracted, which gave them more mobility.

Resistance took many forms. The most desperate act was suicide, usually by ingesting large amounts of opium. There were six recorded suicides at Cayaltí during the 1870s, and it seems likely that there were more.¹⁰³ In a setting where drug addiction and physical exhaustion were commonplace many Chinese may have contemplated taking their lives. We know that the 'final straw' came for one man after a whipping and for another because of his debts.¹⁰⁴ Suicides also occurred among Chinese on sugar estates in the Pativilca Valley¹⁰⁵ and on the guano islands. Living and working on huge mounds of bird manure was especially conducive to suicide as, over a two-year period, 60 Chinese took their lives out of a workforce of approximately 500.¹⁰⁶ High as these figures for Peru were, however, Juan Pérez de la Riva claims that the frequency of suicide among

¹⁰¹ Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, ch. 4.

¹⁰² Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

¹⁰³ AH to AH, 8 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 12 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 18 July 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 4 Jan. 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 25 Jan. 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 4 June 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA. This was also the most common way for Chinese to commit suicide in Cuba: Juan Pérez de la Riva, *El barracón: Esclavitud y capitalismo en Cuba* (Barcelona, 1975), p. 70.

¹⁰⁴ AH to AH, 8 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 4 Jan. 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁰⁵ Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, *La Rebelión de los Rostros Pintados* (Huancayo, Peru, 1979), p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Méndez, 'La otra historia', pp. 13, 45.

the Chinese in Cuba gave the Caribbean island the highest suicide rate in the world.¹⁰⁷

A more common form of resistance on Peruvian plantations was flight. The Chinese Commission argued that runaways were a serious problem for Peruvian agriculture and they visited several estates where workers had been shackled for fleeing. In the most extreme case, the plantation Lurifico claimed that over 270 Chinese had fled over the years.¹⁰⁸ Judging from the experiences of Cayaltí and Palto, runaways occurred on a fairly regular basis.¹⁰⁹ Between 1875 and 1882 there were 45 recorded runaways from Cayaltí, of whom only 14 could be captured and returned to the estate.¹¹⁰ Only a few Chinese managed to flee during the Chilean invasion, however, as the Aspíllagas paid their workers early and increased security.¹¹¹ Most runaways were contracted workers who were poorly paid and heavily indebted. A majority sought refuge among the Chinese community in nearby Chiclayo, although one fled to Lima and three others to Pisco. On other occasions, the Aspíllagas believed that runaways ended up working, either through choice or coercion, on neighbouring sugarcane plantations.¹¹²

Runaways were always vigorously pursued by mayordomos on horseback who sometimes rode as far as the *sierra* in search of Chinese. The Aspíllagas also offered rewards for information leading to the capture of Chinese, and this brought results on at least two occasions.¹¹³ When

¹⁰⁷ Pérez de la Riva, *El barracón*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

¹⁰⁹ Jorge Basadre, *Historia de la República del Perú*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Lima, 1949), vol. 2, p. 225.

¹¹⁰ RAB to AAB, 21 Sept. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 5 Oct. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 8 Oct. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 8 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 21 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AAB to AH, 19 June 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 18 July 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 21 Feb. 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 2 June 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 6 July 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 16 July 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 11 Sept. 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 14 Sept. 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 16 Oct. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AAB to IAB, 3 May 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; unsigned letter dated 8 June 1882, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹¹¹ RAB to IAB, 26 July 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 4 Oct. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 6 July 1889, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AAB to AH, 1 Nov. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹¹² AH to AH, 18 July 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 14 Sept. 1887, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to IAB, 26 July 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 5 Oct. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹¹³ AH to AH, 11 Sept. 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 18 Feb. 1879, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 21 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 8 Oct. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 2 June 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; RAB to AAB, 8 Oct. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 14 Sept. 1877, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

captured, runaways were severely punished and made to repay the cost of their apprehension. Ramón Aspillaga Barrera once interrogated some captured Chinese and demanded to know why they had fled. They answered, 'as they always did', that they 'were receiving insufficient wages for people'. Ramón refused to believe this, however, as he suspected that they had been forced or paid to leave Cayaltí. These runaways were badly beaten by mayordomos and imprisoned on the estate. Ramón later wrote to his brother Antero that he was certain that God would punish them even more.¹¹⁴

On the hacienda Palto, which had a work force about one-tenth the size of Cayaltí's, there were six recorded escapes from 1876 to 1881.¹¹⁵ We know some details about two of these cases. One worker owed 20 soles to fellow Chinese who were pressuring him to pay up. He had requested an advance of 10 paper soles from the administrator in return for renewing his contract. His request had been denied, however, because the administrator lacked authorisation from the Aspillagas. It is clear that this worker fled to avoid physical abuse from his creditors.¹¹⁶ Another case involved a determined worker named Silvestre. Within six months of his arrival at Palto he had run away. Nevertheless, he was captured and forced to work in chains for eight years. At the end of his contract, he signed on again in return for 64 soles paper,¹¹⁷ only to run off to Iquique with a female friend.¹¹⁸

Those Chinese who did not escape from plantations still found ways of resisting the social order. At Palto and Cayaltí, Chinese were responsible for several fires and thefts that resulted in serious losses for the Aspillagas. In the absence of testimony by the Chinese themselves it is difficult to know their motivations. Fires may have been accidents, but they were also a traditional form of protest by sugar workers. Thefts seemed designed to hurt planters as well as to make money. On the other hand, there is no indication that thievery was meant to extract additional income because planters had failed to comply with some reciprocal obligation.

There were two major fires at Cayaltí caused by Chinese workers. In 1878 the Aspillagas blamed fifteen Chinese for burning approximately 1,000 acres of sugarcane. This cost them a considerable amount of money

¹¹⁴ RAB to AAB, 5 Oct. 1875, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹¹⁵ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 19 July 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 10 Sept. 1880, Lima to Palto, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 24 July 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA; Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 17 April 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; E. Augusto to AH, 31 March 1876, Palto to Lima, AFA; Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 27 July 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹¹⁶ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 17 April 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹¹⁷ Rodríguez Pastor, 'Biografías de Chinos', p. 14.

¹¹⁸ E. Augusto to AH, 31 March 1876, Palto to Lima, AFA.

in potential sugar sales and in the cost of clearing and re-planting. These workers were forced to repay these losses with their labour.¹¹⁹ Ten years later, a fire destroyed some 55,000 pounds of sugar worth approximately 320 pounds sterling on the London market. The Aspíllagas blamed a Chinese watchman for the blaze, and he was imprisoned for an indefinite period of time.¹²⁰

Fire and thefts at Palto were more clearly attacks on the estate. In 1876 a Chinese was seen running from a fire that did considerable damage to the building where machinery was stored.¹²¹ The following year a Chinese stole all of the estate's chickens and, in the process, destroyed the chicken coop. This man was captured, placed in chains, and imprisoned.¹²² Four years later some Chinese disassembled a cotton gin and stole several key parts. The administrator offered workers a reward of 200 paper soles for naming the thieves, but they refused. Management strongly suspected some contracted Chinese but they were never able to recover the lost machinery.¹²³ The Aspíllagas had difficulty replacing the parts and efforts to keep the gin running through special rigging proved disappointing.¹²⁴

Additional forms of resistance occurred on coastal estates. Managers at Palto frequently accused Chinese of feigning illness in order to avoid work, which could be considered a form of resistance. The difficulty comes in differentiating between the truly ill and the resisters. Health conditions all along the coast were bad and the Chinese periodically fell seriously ill with malaria, influenza, typhus, typhoid, dysentery, and other diseases. Planters recognised this and took steps to prevent epidemics that could halt production. Especially noteworthy were the hiring of physicians and the distribution of medicines (notably quinine).¹²⁵ In addition to the truly ill, managers at Palto were convinced that some Chinese were clever fakers and, in fact, there was an unusually high percentage of ill Chinese at Palto in comparison with Cayaltí. For example, during 1876–7 an

¹¹⁹ AH to AH, 19 Nov. 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 25 Nov. 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹²⁰ AH to AH, 10 Oct. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 7 Nov. 1888, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹²¹ E. Augusto to AH, 31 March 1876, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹²² Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 30 Oct. 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹²³ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 30 June 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 7 July 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹²⁴ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 9 May 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹²⁵ See Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, pp. 103–6, for a discussion of health conditions at Cayaltí and along the coast. For Palto see Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, 'Salud y muerte en los trabajadores chinos de una hacienda costeña', in Humberto Rodríguez Pastor (ed.), *Chinos cultos: bibliografía y fuentes, documentos y ensayos* (Lima, 1984), pp. 150–75.

average of 20 of the 150 Chinese at Palto were sick, compared with 20 of the 420 Chinese at Cayaltí.¹²⁶

Palto's managers attempted to solve this problem with force. In 1877 the administrator took 24 suspected malingerers to Pisco where a doctor judged 9 of them to be healthy. They were placed in the custody of the subprefect who put them to work in the barracks.¹²⁷ Moreover, on at least two other occasions suspected fakers were either beaten or forced to spend the night in jail.¹²⁸ These tactics did not solve the problem, however, as management continued to complain about malingerers.¹²⁹

Some credence is given to managements' claim by the general tendency of the Chinese at Palto to resist total domination. For example, managers repeatedly complained that the Chinese were disobedient and talked back.¹³⁰ On one occasion a Chinese stole six sacks of cotton and, when caught, explained that he was only 'completing his *tarea* in harvesting'. The manager had him whipped and chained, and placed a 24-hour guard on harvested cotton.¹³¹ More significantly, the Chinese acted collectively to protect individuals and to protest low wages and excessive physical abuse. I have already noted that twice during the 1880s they stopped work and demanded higher wages,¹³² and similar protests occurred on four different occasions during the decade.¹³³ Moreover, in 1876 10–12 Chinese rioted after the administrator severely punished a Chinese for insolence. Firearms were used to force the rioters back into the *galpón* and behind locked doors.¹³⁴ The following year the administrator severely bludgeoned a Chinese who had run away for three days, and two others for malingering. The beatings occurred before the assembled workforce and were meant as a lesson for all. Instead, they produced a 'great

¹²⁶ Rodríguez Pastor, 'Salud y muerte', p. 166. Rodríguez puts the number of Chinese at Cayaltí at 800, but the true number is closer to 420.

¹²⁷ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 21 Sept. 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹²⁸ AAB to AH, 30 April 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; José Pérez y Albela to AH, 11 April 1879, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹²⁹ For example; '*Peones libres* have been employed in weeding because the contracted workers left over from ploughing all take turns going to the hospital. There are always 5 or 6 even 7, this game is played among them, because the truly ill the past two weeks are no more than Matos and Atac flaco.' Manuel J. Brihuego to Muy Señores Míos, 30 June 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³⁰ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 11 Oct. 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³¹ José Pérez y Albela to AH, 5 April 1878, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³² Cf. p. 18.

¹³³ Manuel J. Brihuego to Muy Señores Míos, 9 June 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost & Co., 16 Aug. 1881, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost y Co., 9 May 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA; Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost y Co., 24 Aug. 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³⁴ E. Augusto to AH, 7 March 1876, Palto to Lima, AFA.

disturbance' that forced the manager to retreat to the *casa hacienda*. He barricaded himself in the dining room and grabbed a rifle while the mayordomos gradually calmed down the workers. The Aspíllagas were sufficiently concerned to make a special trip to the estate. Antero judged that the malingerers should not have been beaten, but that the runaway should have received 100 lashes. He admonished the Chinese to respect their *patrones* and threatened to send 60 soldiers to Palto to enforce order.¹³⁵

This incident highlights a general problem in labour control at Palto. The Aspíllagas, as *patrones* and members of the elite, were more important authority figures than hired administrators. This was something that everyone recognised, but the owners were still reluctant to reside at Palto because it was not their major investment and had uncommodious living quarters.¹³⁶

The Chinese also demonstrated solidarity in defence of individuals. Two examples can be taken from their contentious relationship with the local black community. In 1876 a black came to Palto and accused a Chinese of stealing his horse. The entire Chinese workforce rallied behind their countryman and forced the manager to insist that the black identify the horse's brand and provide an exact description of the animal. When the black was unable to do so, he was forced to leave the estate. He soon returned, however, accompanied by several soldiers and with a letter from the governor demanding the return of the horse. The administrator now agreed to return the horse in exchange for 20 soles to repay the cost of boarding the animal. Although the Chinese were on the verge of rioting, the payment of the 20 soles calmed them down.¹³⁷

A year later a black worker from Urrutia accused one of Palto's Chinese of stealing his horse. When the Chinese denied it, the black threw him to the ground and took the horse. When news of the incident reached Palto 60–70 Chinese grabbed their farm tools and began searching for the black. The administrators of the two estates sought to calm down the workers and to solve the dispute. They determined that the black owed the Chinese 50 soles and that the Chinese had taken the horse when the black refused to pay. Ramón Aspíllaga Barrera finally intervened and had the horse returned in exchange for 40 soles.¹³⁸

In all probability, the Chinese moneylenders were contractors who could garner the support of workers. Horses were probably a black

¹³⁵ AAB to AH, 30 April 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³⁶ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 21 July 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³⁷ E. Augusto to AH, 11 April 1876, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹³⁸ Francisco Pérez Céspedes to AH, 10 July 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA; AH to Señor Representante del Propietario de la Hda. de 'Urrutia', 23 Aug. 1877, Palto to Lima, AFA.

peasant's most valuable possession, and by stealing a debtor's horse a moneylender could apply considerable leverage. The majority of the valley's peasantry was black and Chinese contractors and merchants were probably a major source of small, short-term loans. The *ad hoc* and violent nature of these transactions, which vaguely resemble how one might get a loan on a big city street corner, illustrate one reason why the two ethnic groups were at odds.

Other forms of violence also occurred on the plantations. We have already seen that two mayordomos were killed by the Chinese at Palto and Cayaltí.¹³⁹ Mayordomos were, in fact, frequently the objects of Chinese rage. The foreman's job was to push workers as hard as possible, and some of them were especially brutal. At Cayaltí, a mayordomo once administered 100 lashes to a Chinese simply because he did not like the man,¹⁴⁰ and at Palto a foreman named Gutiérrez was so violent that his mere presence made it difficult to recruit workers.¹⁴¹ According to the knowledgeable contemporary J. B. H. Martinet, black mayordomos were particularly cruel to the Chinese:

Black mayordomos, the majority reared under the lash of slavery, enjoy administering the blows, that before had caressed [*acariciado*] their backs, to others, like the Chinese, who are under their orders and who they view with supreme contempt [*soberano desprecio*].¹⁴²

There is, of course, an important psychological dimension to this contentious relationship which lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The most significant homicide committed by the Chinese was the murder of the owner of Pucalá, a large sugarcane plantation in Lambayeque. The contemporary British traveller George R. Fitz-Roy Cole described the incident:

The father of one of the writer's companions in this expedition [José María Izaga] was killed by his own Chinamen in an outburst of vindictive passion, when the coolies conspired together to revenge the harsh treatment they had received, and breaking into the house, beat their master to death with their farm tools. This was after long endurance; for one of the punishments this man had imposed on any coolie whom he had caught in the act of escaping was to hobble him with an iron chain, forcing him to work as usual with this heavy weight added, until he considered his punishment sufficient. For lighter offences he used to beat them unmercifully, and curtail their rations to the starvation point. This went on till even the long-suffering Chinaman's patience was exhausted, and, rousing himself one morning, he avenged himself in the summary fashion already related.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Cf. pp. 25–7.

¹⁴⁰ Aspíllagas y Cia. to Señores Zaracóndegui y Cia., 6 Sept. 1865, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁴¹ Manuel J. Brihuego to Señores Prevost Co., 11 July 1882, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹⁴² Quoted in Macera, *Las plantaciones azucareras*, p. cxxi.

¹⁴³ Cole, *Peruvians*, pp. 139–40, 200.

On two occasions the Chinese rose en masse and severely tested local authority. The first uprising occurred in 1870 when 1,200–1,500 Chinese overran the Pativilca Valley and attacked urban areas. The revolt began on the hacienda Araya where Chinese killed the estate administrator, his family, and all mayordomos. Rebels successfully overran several valley estates, killing administrators and mayordomos and sacking stores and houses. In the meantime, surviving property owners regrouped to defend the town of San Ildefonso de Barranca, and President José Balta sent troops from Lima under the command of Colonel Antonio Rodríguez Ramírez. The Peruvians defending Barranca were well armed and managed to repulse the Chinese, who had very few firearms. The rebels dispersed with the main group falling back on the plantation Upaca, which had been occupied by armed Peruvians from Supe. The Chinese suffered over 100 casualties at Upaca and the rebellion was crushed.¹⁴⁴

When troops arrived from Lima they hunted down Chinese and shot many on sight. The survivors were subsequently rounded up and distributed to planters. Three important growers were appointed governors of local districts and Lima was asked to establish a *comisario rural*. Local notables blamed the rebellion on *chinos libres*, who were considered agitators, and the Chinese's lust for opium. However, they presented no evidence to substantiate their interpretation.¹⁴⁵ *Chinos libres* were disliked because they demanded higher wages and were harder to control. Moreover, the Chinese did not have to steal to buy opium, they could buy it on credit from planters. The rebellion is best explained as a primitive outburst of anger directed at planters and mayordomos.

The Chilean invasion of Peru in 1880 was the second occasion for the Chinese to rebel. The war caused the temporary collapse of the oligarchic state and ushered in a period of political, military, and class conflict. The Chileans, led by General Patricio Lynch, 'the red prince', burned plantations, demanded ransom from survivors, and occupied Lima.¹⁴⁶ The Aspíllagas lost several head of livestock at Palto and Cayaltí to the invaders¹⁴⁷ but, on balance, suffered far less than other planters. They managed to transport the majority of Palto's workers to Cayaltí, and temporarily transferred ownership of their estates to one of their major creditors, Prevost & Co. of the United States. This ruse saved Cayaltí and

¹⁴⁴ Rodríguez Pastor, *La Rebelión*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–9.

¹⁴⁶ Basadre, *Historia*, vol. 2, p. 225; Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, pp. 31–2; Bonilla, 'The War of the Pacific', pp. 92–119.

¹⁴⁷ José Pérez y Albela, 'Razón de los animales perdidos y muertos de la Hda. Palto', 28 March 1881, AFA; RAB to IAB, 26 July 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 4 Oct 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA, AH to AH, 6 July 1889, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AAB to AH, 1 Nov. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

Palto from destruction.¹⁴⁸ Neither did the Aspíllagas suffer much damage at the hands of their workers. During the confusion surrounding the invasion, the Chinese at Palto stole some livestock and three workers managed to escape from Cayaltí,¹⁴⁹ but that was insignificant in relation to the losses suffered by others.

Many Chinese saw the Chilean invasion as an opportunity to avenge years of abuse by planters. In Pacasmayo 600–800 Chinese helped the Chileans sack sugar estates and *casas haciendas*, and this scene was repeated in the Chicama, Lambayeque and Cañete Valleys.¹⁵⁰ The Chinese also fought alongside the Chileans during the battles of San Juan and Miraflores,¹⁵¹ and there was also rioting and looting by non-Chinese workers in coastal cities. As Heraclio Bonilla has observed, oligarchs soon came to fear the popular classes more than the Chileans, and this was an important reason why they sued for peace.¹⁵²

Unfortunately for the Chinese, the Chilean invasion did not result in their liberation. Following the devastating defeats of the Peruvian army on the outskirts of the capital, the troops fell back on Lima and began looting the city. Among the victims were 70–80 Chinese merchants who lost their lives as well as their businesses.¹⁵³ For their part, the Chileans sent many Chinese to work in the occupied guano and nitrate fields and forced 2,000 more to bury fallen soldiers.¹⁵⁴ The Chinese in the Cañete Valley even fell victim to a massacre by black peasants in 1881. According to the British consul, anywhere from 700 to 1,500 Chinese were killed.¹⁵⁵ Pedro Paz Soldán y Unanue, writing shortly after the slaughter, has left us with a graphic description that depicts the deeply scarred hatred that divided the two marginalised ethnic groups:

The mob of armed and mounted blacks and cholos, with nobody to resist them – since they had always made up the entire population of the valley – went round one hacienda after another. The Chinese, taken by surprise, lacking any defence and sure of their innocence, were killed with clubs, knives, stones, machetes, in a thousand ways. Some subaltern estate dependents – the only men in charge of the abandoned properties at the time – locked the labourers into their quarters. The attackers burned these down, or broke down the doors to reach and kill the innocents within.

¹⁴⁸ RAB to IAB, 26 July 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 4 Oct. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 6 July 1889, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AAB to AH, 1 Nov. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁴⁹ José Pérez y Albela, 'Razón de los animales perdidos y muertos de la Hda. Palto', 28 March 1881, AFA; RAB to IAB, 26 July 1881, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 4 Oct. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 6 July 1889, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AAB to AH, 1 Nov. 1880, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁵⁰ Bonilla, 'The War of the Pacific', pp. 107–8.

¹⁵¹ Rodríguez Pastor, *Le Rebelión*, p. 95.

¹⁵² Bonilla, 'The War of the Pacific'.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Some sought safety in the sewers; but the blacks waited for them at the outlets and killed them as they came out. Other unfortunates, who still believed in what was traditionally sacred, sought asylum in the Casagrande school. ... There, they were also killed by the renegades, bent on vengeance and rapine. As they stormed through, they smashed furniture, windows, doors, destroying everything and making bonfires in the very heart of the homes of their former and apparently 'dear masters'.

The corpses of the Chinese were dragged out into the courtyards of the masters' houses. There, before being left to be torn to pieces by the birds, they were the subjects of savage profanation, as in some Bacchic carnival, by the women and the boys. The very black women who had once been the paid concubines of their victims, now mutilated their bodies, cutting off their bleeding and palpitating organs and placing them into their open mouths, as with a cigar. 'Leave this one for me!', the black women screamed, quarrelling over the victims, drunk with blood like the women who tore Pentheus limb for limb. ...¹⁵⁶

Conclusion: Chinese Labourers and the Grande and Petite Bourgeoisie

The deep-seated animosity that divided blacks and Chinese obviously hindered the ability of both groups to resist domination by the Peruvian bourgeoisie. The ability of the Chinese to rebel during the war was also hurt by the eagerness of the Chileans to exploit their labour. Class divisions among the Chinese themselves also undermined their ability to resist, and helped planters enormously. No group contributed more to planters' survival of the war than Chinese contractors who rounded up thousands of their countrymen and brought them back to the plantations. Contractors were members of an emerging Chinese petite bourgeoisie that also included merchants and landowners. Like Peruvian planters, they all profited from the labour of Chinese workers.

The Chinese Commission of 1887 reserved special criticism for contractors, whom they accused of undermining traditional patron-client relations on plantations. According to Commissioners, contractors collected Chinese and hauled them up and down the coast looking for the best deal for themselves. They also accused contractors of withholding workers' wages and keeping them submissive through allotments of opium. The Commission even cited a case in *La Libertad* where a contractor had shot two escaped workers in cold blood.¹⁵⁷

As dramatic as these examples of abuse are, many more could be mentioned involving Peruvian planters and mayordomos.¹⁵⁸ Moreover,

¹⁵⁶ Juan de Arona [Pedro Paz-Soldán y Unanue], *La inmigración en el Perú: Monografía histórico-crítica*, 2nd ed. (Lima, 1947), pp. 99–102. Also quoted in Bonilla, pp. 109–10. Translation is by Eric J. Hobsbawm.

¹⁵⁷ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

¹⁵⁸ See above, section on planter control.

the traditional patron–client relations idealised by the Commissioners existed under even more unequal systems of production, namely slavery and indentured servitude. Ultimately, it was the system of production that created opportunities for exploitation, and the lack of concern among the Peruvian bourgeoisie that allowed abuses (crimes) to go unpunished.

Chinese contractors had found an avenue of social mobility within a racially divided and repressive society. By the late 1880s, a few Chinese had even become planters. For example, the heirs of Pablo Ansejo owned three estates in the Huaura Valley, and Wing On Fay rented most of the huge sugar estate Pucalá.¹⁵⁹ It is also apparent that some Chinese had become established merchants by the 1880s. Wing On Ching & Cia. of Piura sold opium to planters,¹⁶⁰ a major wholesaler in Pisco was a Chinese named José Elías,¹⁶¹ and the Aspíllagas commented that Chinese were acquiring wholesale and retail businesses.¹⁶² More commonly, however, Chinese became petty capitalists in coastal towns and cities where they established small stores, restaurants, vegetable stands and artisanal trades.¹⁶³

Despite their success, these individuals were still vulnerable to abuse by Peruvians, as witnessed by the sacking of Chinese stores during the War of the Pacific. For the majority of Chinese, these years were spent labouring on the plantations. Their productivity allowed several planters to survive the crisis of the period and to develop their estates in the 1890s. The Aspíllagas acknowledged that they treated the Chinese as virtual slaves, but explained that it was common practice as well as necessary for their economic survival and glorious future:

It is not necessary to think of slavery since it exists for but short periods of time, besides we are not the only ones, although they say that to follow the bad example of several is to take the advice of fools, but some need others and this brings us forward as heroes who search for a sure death in order to live eternally in the pages of history.¹⁶⁴

The Aspíllagas also believed that the Chinese were racially inferior and therefore undeserving of better treatment. This was a common belief among Peruvians who were generally ignorant of Asian culture and history. The Aspíllagas frequently characterised Chinese workers as perverse, lazy, degenerate, and vice-ridden. They concluded that these

¹⁵⁹ Chinese Commission Report, 1887, B.N.

¹⁶⁰ AH to AH, 12 May 1876, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA; AH to AH, 12 May 1891, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁶¹ Gerardo Pérez to AH, 21 Oct. 1884, Palto to Lima, AFA.

¹⁶² AH to AH, 24 Jan. 1893, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁶³ Engelsens, 'Social Aspects', pp. 355–95.

¹⁶⁴ AH to AH, 28 May 1878, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

characteristics stemmed primarily from opium consumption and gambling. This analysis was not altogether flattering to the Aspíllagas, however, because they were opium retailers and racehorse owners.¹⁶⁵ The inherent contradiction in the Aspíllagas' view of the Chinese is perhaps captured best in this statement:

The Chinese not only trouble us as racial degenerates, but also because they can create with time very serious social problems, since they, be it because of their intelligence, or their habits, are absorbing all wholesale and retail businesses, even haciendas. They do so without leaving any permanent benefit for the country, since they, although they could be over eighty years old, once they have money they take it to their country.¹⁶⁶

For a Chinese to succeed in business during these troubled times required the skill and intelligence easily equal to that of a western capitalist.

In the end, Peruvian planters stayed in business because of their exploitation of Chinese labour. None of their contradictory justifications can avoid this conclusion. For the Aspíllagas, as ambitious sons of an emigré Chilean merchant, profits from Cayaltí and Palto bought them entrée into elite society and national politics. Other planters, some of them cited for horrendous abuses of Chinese workers by the Chinese Commission, also emerged as important members of the elitist Civilista party during this period. Victor Larco, José Ignacio Chopitea and Octavio Canevaro are examples. As for the Aspíllagas, all four brothers served as Civilista congressmen and Antero served as Minister of Trade and Commerce, four times as president of the Senate, and twice stood as Civilista candidate for president, both times losing in disputed elections.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ On opium, cf. pp. 27–9.

¹⁶⁶ AH to AH, 24 Jan. 1893, Cayaltí to Lima, AFA.

¹⁶⁷ Gonzales, *Plantation Agriculture*, ch. 2; Dennis Gilbert, *The Oligarchy and the Old Regime in Peru* (Ithaca, New York, 1977), pp. 170–1.