Cuba, China and El Barrio Chino

Lesson Summary:

In this lesson, students will understand the history and development behind Cuba's Barrio Chino neighborhood. To prepare for the lesson, students will be given a handout with a brief overview of migratory patterns of Chinese populations in Cuba. They will also be given a blank timeline to fill in with important dates and historical events while they read. In class, students will discuss this handout using the questions provided. They will also read about communism and its implications for the Barrio Chino neighborhood and discuss the impact that the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions had on the Chinese community with their peers. Finally, students will read information on the history of tourism with *El Barrio Chino* and practice making claims and constructing arguments through the guided notes activity.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the influence of human migrations on patterns of settlement and culture (SS-WH.9-12.13)
- Students will explain the formation of groups and the creation and development of social norms and values (SS-Soc.9-12.13)
- Students will construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims using evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses (SS.9-12.7)

Supplies:

- *Chinese Migration and Cuba* handout
- *Chinese Migration and Cuba* timeline worksheet
- *Chinese Migration and Cuba* discussion questions
- *The Impact of Communism on El Barrio Chino* handout
- *The Impact of Communism on El Barrio Chino* discussion questions
- *The History of Tourism in El Barrio Chino* handout
- *The History of Tourism in El Barrio Chino* worksheet

Chinese Migration and Cuba



Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. The Paifang archway to Chinatown, Havana, Cuba. Cuba Havana, 2010. [January] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2010638979/.

In 1857, the first large group of Chinese migrants arrived on the island of Cuba. They came seeking work on sugar plantations and were intended to fill the gap in the labor force caused by the end of the African slave trade ("Barrio Chino: Chinatown in the Caribbean"). These migrants were almost entirely men and worked in terrible conditions as indentured servants (Hearn 2016, 106). For the next two decades, anywhere from 50,000 to 130,000 of these Chinese laborers came and settled in Cuba on these plantations.

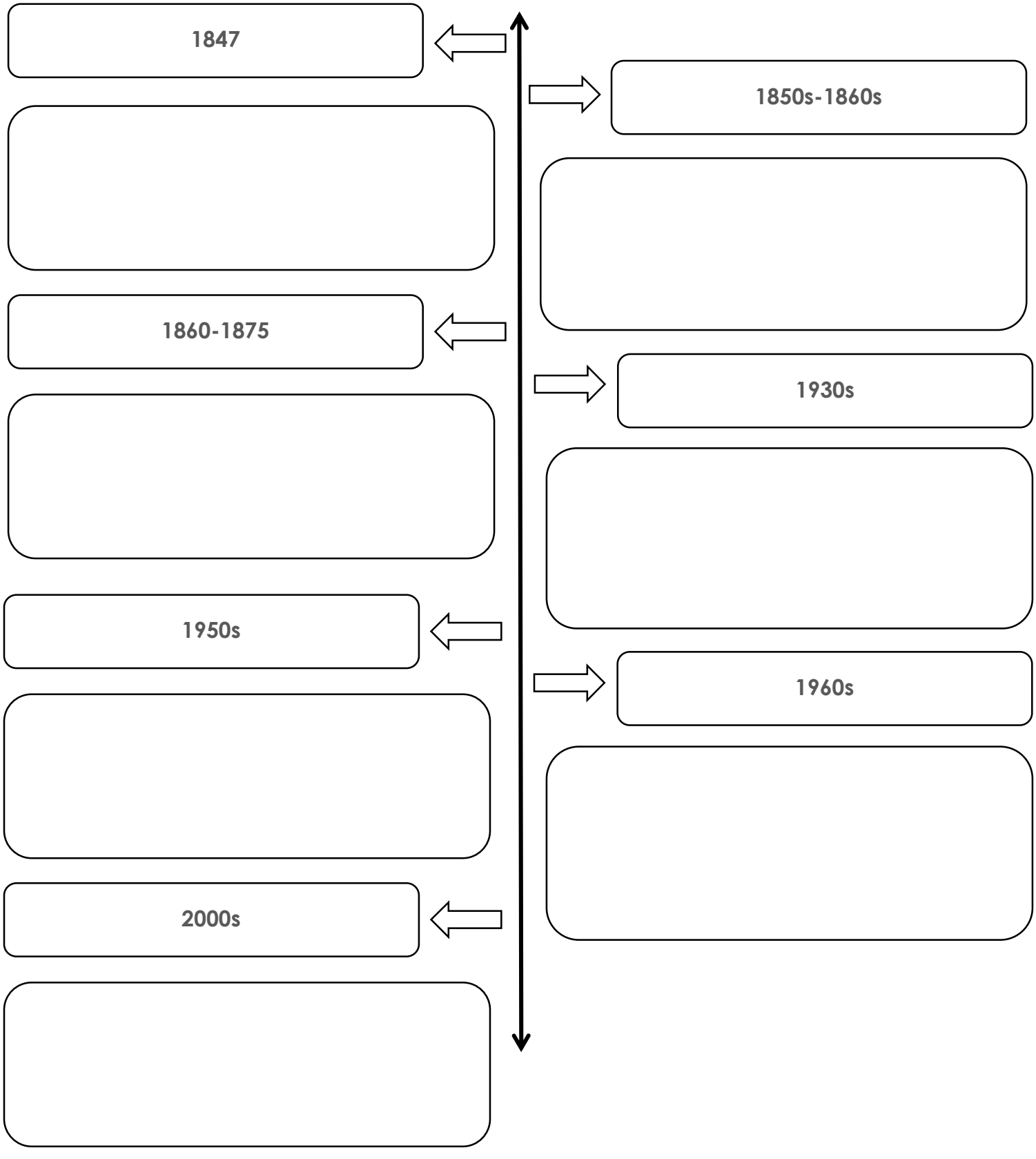
During this time a second group of Chinese immigrants came to Cuba: these individuals had previously settled in America yet were fleeing anti-Chinese legislation and sentiment. These 'Californians' came to Cuba with wealth and were able to start businesses that founded the *Barrio Chino* or Havana's Chinatown ("Barrio Chino: Chinatown in the Caribbean").

Another group of Chinese migrants came to Cuba in the 1910s to escape from the conditions of the 1912 establishment of Sun Yat Sen's Republic, and the Barrio Chino became the largest Latin American Chinatown ("Barrio Chino: Chinatown in the Caribbean"). This pattern happened again in 1949, when Chinese immigrants came fleeing the Communist Revolution (López 2013, 161).

However, conditions in Cuba began to change with the Cuban Revolution: when businesses were nationalized, many Chinese left for the United States as they tended to own their own businesses (López 2013, 161). This shift in Chinese Cuban migration led to a decline in the Chinese population that's still seen today. Only about 500 Chinese Cubans remain in the Barrio Chino ("Barrio Chino: Chinatown in the Caribbean"). The current population of Chinese is primarily composed of elderly men who arrived fleeing the 1949 Communist Revolution (López 2013, 161).

Chinese Migration and Cuba - Timeline

Name: _____.



Chinese Migration and Cuba - Timeline

Name: *Answer Key/Sample Copy* .

1847

- First group of immigrants arrived from China
- Worked on plantations in terrible conditions

1850s-1860s

- 50,000 – 130,000 migrants came from China and worked on sugar plantations
- Replaced African labor force

1860s-1870s

- Chinese migrants came from America and started businesses
- They were fleeing anti-Chinese discrimination

1910s

- More Chinese arrived due to unrest; Sun Yat Sen's republic is established

1949

- Chinese flee Communist Revolution in China and come to Cuba

1950s-1960s

- Businesses are nationalized under the communist government
- Chinese Cubans go to America to start businesses

2000s

- Only about 500 Chinese Cubans remain
- Population made up of men who immigrated in 1949.

Chinese Migration and Cuba – Discussion Questions



Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. Barrio Chino: Chinatown in the Caribbean, Havana, Cuba. Cuba Havana, 2010. [January] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2010638968/.

1. Why could conflict arise between the 'Californian' migrants and the migrants who arrived earlier? Why might there be solidarity between these groups?

2. Discuss why the Chinese 'Californians' decided to create the Barrio Chino rather than assimilate into Cuban culture.

3. What factors contributed most to the decline in the Chinese population? Why do you think the number of Chinese migrants arriving has slowed in recent years?

4. Briefly discuss the impact that each of these events had on Chinese Cubans and El Barrio Chino.

    a. Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807
    b. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
    c. The election of Sun Yat Sen as provisional president (1912)
    d. The start of the Cuban Revolution (1959)

The Impact of Communism on El Barrio Chino



Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. Awning detail in Chinatown, Havana, Cuba. Cuba Havana, 2010. [January] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2010638976/.

During the 1949 Chinese Revolution, Cuban Chinese leftists living in El Barrio Chino joined or started organizations such as the Alliance in Defense of Chinese Culture in support of their overseas brethren. However, many wealthy Chinese Cubans tended to lean more anti-communist, as their businesses benefited from Cuban anti-communist politicians (López 2013). Conflict between these groups rose, and the streets of El Barrio Chino became filled with riots and unrest.

Additionally, during this time many Chinese citizens fled the new Communist regime and migrated to Cuba (López 2013, 161). However, soon after this surge in immigration the Cuban Revolution began, and Chinese migrants faced similar conditions to the ones they were fleeing.

When the Revolution occurred, Cuban society underwent extreme changes. Businesses were nationalized, which meant that many Chinese businessowners decided to leave for Miami, New York, and Toronto (López 2013, 161). The formerly persecuted Communists reformed their support organizations, founded militias and attempted to radicalize other Chinese citizens (Manke 2018, 9). The Barrio Chino continued to be impacted by internal conflict between its citizens.

Additionally, communist leader Fidel Castro made life difficult for his Chinese citizens. Castro spoke publicly about his support of the Communists in China, yet also voiced his disapproval of the Communist's government's handling of the Tibetan rebellion (Manke 2018, 8). Due to this, members of El Barrio Chino worried about their place in the new government of Cuba.

The Impact of Communism on El Barrio Chino – Discussion Questions



Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. Awning detail in Chinatown, Havana, Cuba. Cuba Havana, 2010. [January] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2010638976/.

1. Discuss how you think attitudes about communism would differ between groups of Chinese Cubans. Why might a migrant who arrived from China in 1949 have a different opinion than a migrant whose relatives arrived in 1865? How might a small business owner's opinion differ from a factory laborer's opinion? It may be beneficial to refer to the previous handout on migration to answer this question.

2. What do you think motivated the Chinese Cubans to join groups in support of or against the 1949 Chinese Revolution? Why might conflict have arisen between these groups?

3. Discuss why Chinese Cubans may have felt uncertain about Fidel Castro's comments about China. What impact do you think his opinions had on the citizens of El Barrio Chino?

4. Describe the similarities and differences between the impact that the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions had on El Barrio Chino? Do you think one was more influential? Why or why not?

The History of Tourism in El Barrio Chino



Highsmith, Carol M, photographer. Zapata Street in Chinatown, Havana, Cuba. Cuba Havana, 2010. [January] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2010638975/.

Since the formation of El Barrio Chino, tourism has played a significant role in the economy and culture of the neighborhood. In the 1930s, many tourists visited from the United States seeking activities they couldn't participate in legally in their home country due to prohibition laws (Hearn 2016, 112). These tourists frequented opium dens, casinos, brothels, and cabarets. However, the neighborhood also boasted a culture of artistic innovation: many theater performances and opera companies toured the area (Hearn 2016, 114). Unfortunately, these performances garnered less popularity than their more disreputable counterparts, as the Barrio Chino was characterized by stereotypes of mystical and seedy opportunities for adventurous foreigners to discover. This reputation of the neighborhood as dangerous and sinful lasted until the Cuban Revolution (Hearn 2016, 115).

After Cuba lost relations with the Soviet Union, tourism became an extremely important source of revenue for the country. The Cuban government has been seeking to revitalize El Barrio Chino as a historic tourist location emphasizing the strong ties between the Cuban and Chinese people (Hearn et al. 2020, 600).

This push to revitalize El Barrio Chino through tourism is a multifaceted issue. On one hand, since tourism could bring so much revenue to the neighborhood, it could foster development and progress within a community that's slowly dwindling in population and resources. However, the community has historically struggled with negative stereotypes as an exotic and mysterious tourist location, and a resurgence in tourism could lead to more of these types of attitudes toward El Barrio Chino.

The History of Tourism in El Barrio Chino – Worksheet

1. Do you think the citizens of El Barrio Chino appreciated the surge in tourism in the 1930s? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think the Cuban government would have an interest in promoting Chinese tourism specifically? Draw on knowledge gained from previous activities in this lesson.

3. Imagine that you've been asked to serve on Havana's Board of Tourism. What arguments might you make in favor of promoting tourism in El Barrio Chino? What arguments might you make against it? Fill in the table below with facts that you have learned and opinions you have formed about tourism in El Barrio Chino.

Pro-Tourism	Anti-Tourism

References

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