CHAPTER 8

Plantation Colonialism in Late Nineteenth-Century Hawai'i: The Case of Chinese Sugar Planters

Nicholas B. Miller

Introduction

A long-standing historiographical trope is that "King Cane" succeeded Hawai'i's indigenous monarchy as its sovereign during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Present first in planter travelogs and periodicals, this formulation became a commonplace in histories of Hawai'i after Vandercook chose "King Cane" as the title of his influential history of Hawai'i's sugar industry (Boyce 1914; Carpenter 1925: 298; Vandercook 1939).[1] This account welded an implicit historical materialism to

N. B. Miller (✉)
Department of Humanities, Flagler College, St. Augustine, FL, USA
e-mail: nbmiller@flagler.edu

Historisches Institut, Universität zu Köln, Köln, Germany

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how Hawai‘i came to be a U.S. possession, suggesting that sugar plantations, in their status as a modern, industrial, capitalist, and Western form of production, inevitably eroded the archaic customary authority of Native Hawaiian elites. The demise of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 thereby was attributed to the islands' integration into the global capitalist economy, wherein the roles of individual historical actors—including insurgent white residents who violently strove toward U.S. annexation, including through illegal maneuvers—were minimized.

After a boon of plantation labor histories in the 1980s (Takaki 1983; Beechert 1985), a primary tendency of scholarship on Hawai‘i around the turn of the century was to reprise individual political agency, particularly of Native Hawaiian actors contesting American overrule. Jonathan Osorio, Noelani Silva, and Tom Coffman advanced robust critiques of the neglected national and international politics that informed the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, joined by scholars working within the bourgeoning field of American empire studies, such as Eric Love, Daniel Immerwahr, and Christen T. Sasaki (Osorio 2002a; Silva 2004; Coffman 1998/2016; Love 2005; Immerwahr 2019; Sasaki 2022). Carol A. MacLennan's environmental history of "sovereign sugar" foregrounded the devastating transformations wrought by plantations upon Hawaiian natural and cultural ecologies, though likewise embraced an actor-focused account emphasizing the contingent character of the sugar industry that ultimately emerged in Hawai‘i (MacLennan 2014).

During the past decade, the paradigm of settler colonialism has come to dominate the field, leading to a sustained inquiry of white settler ideological formations in Hawai‘i (Chang 2016; Rohrer 2016; Schulz 2020; Lozano 2021). These works generally cast settler colonialism in Hawai‘i as American in nature and take settler colonialism as a self-sufficient category for understanding historical developments in Hawai‘i since the nineteenth century. As highlighted recently by Warrick Anderson, this has resulted in a tendency to leave unexamined "North American theoretical frameworks" that do not quite apply to the political, environmental, and contextual complexities of Hawai‘i's place in the imperial mid-Pacific (Anderson 2021: 2). Nancy Shoemaker's explicitly non-exhaustive delineation of twelve forms of colonialism is here instructive, which includes settler colonialism as a subvariant along with planter, extractive,

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trade, transport, legal, rogue, missionary, romantic, and even postcolonial forms (Shoemaker 2015). Pluralizing the forms of colonialism appraised as operative in nineteenth-century Hawai'i can yield new insights into its complex history, such as the spectrum of creative responses adopted by Native Hawaiian ruling elites, as Noelani Arista has recently examined in terms of law, writing, and authority during the 1820s (Arista 2018).

In view of the current state of scholarship on Hawai'i, this chapter suggests the utility of plantation colonialism as a prism to explicate the intertwined interactions between what this volume terms plantation ecologies and the sovereign-making power of plantation systems. I take my starting point from Lynn Hollen Lees' work on the relationship between plantations and the colonial state in nineteenth-century Malaya, drawing upon calls for applying transnational and Pacific World methodologies for the history of Hawai'i (Okihiro 2008; Chang 2016; Rosenthal 2018; Cook 2018; Dusinberre 2019). As defined by Lees, plantation colonialism was "a modern, global hybrid. Built with assumptions carried over from the Caribbean sugar growers, revised by colonial administrators who believed in an interventionist state, which for the most part neglected workers' needs, it brought together state and society in a harsh, hierarchical environment" (Lees 2017: 59).

Applying Lees' definition of plantation colonialism to Hawai'i requires certain caveats. The state administrators of nineteenth-century Hawai'i worked for an internationally-recognized independent Kingdom and a significant number were indigenous. Yet the effective outcome, as in other new sugar colonies across the nineteenth-century world, was the emergence of a plantation complex dependent upon global interconnections with pre-existing sugar-growing locations. Like Malaya, the incipient planter class was not merely European in character. Chinese sugar masters in both locales were in fact the first group to produce commercially viable sugar and maintained fluctuating and sophisticated relationships with indigenous and Western political elites throughout the century. Informed by the comparative example of colonial Malaya, this chapter recovers the experiences of three Chinese merchants turned sugar planters in late nineteenth-century Hawai'i.

Two persistently unexamined assumptions in much scholarship on Hawai'i are the notions that non-Westerners featured on plantations merely as laborers and were involved in sugar production as seeders rather than leaders. Native Hawaiians, or more precisely their seafaring ancestors, are credited with transplanting Southeast Asian cultivars prior to

first European contact with James Cook in 1778. Chinese sugar masters in turn are noted as the first to attempt commercial processing during the early nineteenth century (Cushing 1985: 17–34). Some work has also considered the role played by Chinese sugar planters on the small Hawaiian sugar scene preceding the Reciprocity Treaty of 1874, which prompted a sugar boom by permitting the duty-free export of sugar to the United States (Char 1974: 3–10; Kai 1974: 39–75; MacLennan 1997: 97–125). Between 1874 and 1898, the year in which the United States took control of the islands, monocultures of sugar and rice had supplanted diversified small-scale crop cultivation, Asian and European indentured laborers replaced Native Hawaiians as the majority population, and the lands given over to sugar grew more than tenfold, from 12,283 to 125,000 acres, output surged by 1767%, and the number of laborers in the fields increased nearly eightfold, from 3,786 to 28,579 (Beechert 1985: 87; MacLennan 2014: 285).

What has gone less noticed is how dozens of Chinese merchants and Native Hawaiian elites participated in this boom with optimism, hoping to derive personal fortune from saccharine sources. While most generally failed, two planters, John Adams Kuakini Cummins at Waimānalo, Oʻahu and Chun Afong at Pepeʻekeo, Hawaiʻi Island, achieved considerable success during the 1880s. The pursuit of saccharine fortune ultimately undermined the position of Native ruling elites in Hawaiʻi, though in a nuanced way. The claims of *haole* settler nativists to racial, cultural, and political ascendancy after 1887 were hardly hegemonic.[2] Besides being bitterly contested by Native Hawaiian actors, certain *haole* sugar producers—notably Charles F. Hart in Kohala—loudly denounced what they perceived as an imperial power play by resident Americans up to the moment of U.S. annexation. Settler colonialism assuredly configured a set of social expectations in the islands, but the institutionalization of Christianity, common law, universal primary education, and bonded plantation labor in the islands was only gradual, and involved many actors not racialized as *haole*, White, Anglo-Saxon, European, or American. In providing the first substantial basis for local capital accumulation since the

[2] By *haole* or white settler nativists, I mean White American and European settlers and their descendants who staked undemocratic claims to political ascendancy through two interlocking prerogatives: racial superiority as Anglo-Saxons and, for those born in Hawaiʻi, status by birthplace as natives of the islands. I take my distinction between native and settler nativist claims to sovereignty from Sharma (2020).

demise of whaling, the rising plantation economy occasioned collisions between multiple projects of sovereignty—native (indigenous), nativist (*haole* settler), and integrative—and diverse forms of colonialism delineated by Shoemaker—extractive, trade, missionary, legal, planter, rogue, and settler.

The core complexity of plantation Hawai'i as a context is that processes of plantation colonialism intersected with older patterns of defensive elite modernization and extractive, trade, missionary, legal, and settler colonialism. The configuration of plantation colonialism in Hawai'i thus encompassed endogenous and exogenous factors. If we ignore the questions of why and how individual non-*haole* actors participated in the emerging sugar economy in the late nineteenth century, we silence those who lived complex, consequential, and perhaps, from our perspective, counter-intuitive intersections of ethnic identity, religious conviction, and economic aspiration. To rectify this, the chapter begins by providing the political, legal, demographic, and economic background to the Reciprocity Treaty of 1874, namely the rise of Anglo-American property and labor law, the distinctive biopolitical concerns of the Kingdom polity, and the formation of migrant Chinese urban and rural communities. The second and third sections go on to describe how three Chinese merchants turned to sugar after 1874: first, the powerful mogul Chun Afong (陳芳, 1825–1906) and second, the upstart duo of Goo Tet Chin Akina (GOO Tet-Tsin, 1838–1913) and Luke Aseu (CHANG Young Seu, 1841–1918). These three preliminary sections foreground an extended analysis of Hawai'i's largest labor rebellion prior to the overthrow of the monarchy, which occurred at Akina and Aseu's plantation at Kohala, Island of Hawai'i, in 1891 (Takaki 1983: 147).

State Formation Processes and Chinese Migration Before 1874

Sugar attained the dominant place in the Hawaiian economy only after a century of social, political, and economic interactions between Native Hawaiian governing elites and foreign merchants, missionaries, military officials, adventurers, and other sojourners. The formation of a plantation complex was facilitated by a court system based on Anglo-American common law that had become firmly entrenched by the mid-nineteenth century and served as a primary vehicle for the institutionalization of fee-title property and contract labor (Merry 2000). That is, plantation

colonialism in Hawai‘i began in earnest only decades after legal and missionary forms had become well established. Early Chinese migration to Hawai‘i occurred in the backdrop of this state formation process. Among the effects of the distinctive social and political culture that emerged was greater space for Chinese settlement and economic activity than that found in classic settler colonies like Australia, Canada, and the United States, or in European-governed plantation colonies beyond Southeast Asia (McKeown 2001; MacLennan 2014: 103–144).

State building in early nineteenth-century Hawai‘i was driven by the ambition of ruling elites to maintain political ascendancy in the face of increasingly asymmetric relations with Westerners. American Congregationalist missionaries first arrived in 1823, over forty years after Kamehameha I had begun integrating individual Westerners within chiefly power structures. Arista has stressed how early missionary settlement was conditioned on the acceptance of native chiefs, who sought to extract power from missionary knowledge, particularly writing (Arista 2018). Great social and cultural upheaval went hand in hand with the decimation of the Native Hawaiian population due to newly introduced diseases. The population of the islands plummeted from at least 300,000 in 1778 to 57,985 by 1878 (MacLennan 2014: 22; Swanson 2020: 345–355).[3] By the 1830s, Native Hawaiian elites, like those across the Asia-Pacific, faced an increasingly thornier sovereign challenge: Western powers' claims to extraterritoriality, or the right to intercede in matters of justice relating to their citizens abroad (Kayaoğlu 2010). At the heart of many of these disputes was the gulf between customary Hawaiian land tenure—distributed through kingly favor, revocable, and governed by the reciprocal sharing of produce—and emerging liberal notions of fee-simple title, or the full and irrevocable ownership of land by a fixed proprietor (Chinen 1966: 5–6). While the establishment by the government

[3] Population estimates for Hawai‘i at the moment of encounter with James Cook (1778) vary considerably. Island-wide censuses were not carried out until 1823, decades after considerable population decline had been perceived. Estimates by nineteenth-century observers, including Native Hawaiian historian David Malo, ranged from 150,000 to 400,000. The long-standing consensus figure of 300,000 was challenged in an upward-direction by David Stannard in 1989 (1 million +) and more recently by David Swanson (ca. 683,000), both of whom relied principally on speculative population models based on date of original settlement of the islands by Polynesian seafarers in the first millennium C.E.

of Kamehameha I of a formal court system based largely on Anglo-American common law achieved international recognition of Hawaiian state sovereignty by major Western powers, it opened new vulnerabilities in the position of native elites.

A twin, revolutionary set of laws passed by the Kingdom's legislature in 1850 sowed the seeds of plantation labor and land relations by bringing both in conformity to Anglo-American forms. These laws intensified the effects of the comprehensive land redistribution known as the Great Māhele, which in 1848 legally dissolved customary relations between *aliʻi* (high chiefs) and *makaʻāinana* (commoners) by introducing fee-simple title and abolishing customary labor obligations (Coman 1903: 3–4; Chinen 1966: 15–24). Native Hawaiians were thereafter legally, if not immediately socially, subject to concepts of property and labor understood by contemporaries as doubly foreign (Anglo-Saxon) and modern (liberal) (Morgan 1948: 16–31, 205–206). Native elites and Westerners debated the merits of paternalist and pro-market responses to growing colonial intrusion. Over the opposition of two future kings, who were abroad on a political mission to the United States, the legislature of the Kingdom embraced a pointedly pro-market approach. The Masters and Servants Act of 21 Jun 1850, based on British and American precedents, formalized apprenticeship and indentured labor contracts, including provisions for their enforcement at the courts of the Kingdom (Hay and Craven 2014). While the Masters and Servants Act would constitute the legal basis of indentured labor migration after 1865, it was initially implemented with control of Native Hawaiian labor in mind (Rosenthal 2018). Less than a month later, the Alien Land Ownership Act of 10 July 1850 permitted property acquisition by foreigners. While some Native elites' position in the short term was enhanced through capital generated by land sales, the long-term effect was the alienation of most quality agricultural land to foreign ownership.

A legal structure capable of enforcing planter power thus preceded the transition of the Hawaiian economy to sugar by over two decades. After the exhaustion of sandalwood—a royal monopoly serving the Chinese market—through unsustainable extraction in the 1820s, Hawaiian exports of agricultural goods were modest, except when Hawaiʻi was geographically well placed to service fleeting market gaps at the Pacific borderlands of U.S. expansion, namely, the California Gold Rush of 1848 and the U.S. Civil War of 1861–1865 (MacLennan 2014: 23–25, 30–31). It was during this first boom that two nascent merchant communities—German

and Chinese—grew considerably at the port of Honolulu. Presented with the aspirational property and labor reforms of 1848–1850, many of these migrants, who originally arrived as merchants, tried their hand at agricultural cultivation (Glick 1980: 45–65).

Socially, nineteenth-century Chinese migration to Hawai'i was defined by marriage with Native Hawaiians. The limit of social power exerted by Christian missionaries is reflected by the toleration of polygamous unions between Chinese men and Native Hawaiian women up to the end of the century. The overwhelming majority of Chinese migrants were young men from Guangdong (the Pearl River delta region), which included the ports of Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangzhou (Canton). Many were previously married through arranged unions in China. Once in Hawai'i, some took Native Hawaiian second wives, who sometimes possessed substantial land holdings. In the early twentieth century, Romanzo Adams estimated that between 1,200 and 1,500 Chinese men had established Chinese-Hawaiian families before 1900 (Glick 1980: 162–163). The children raised in these families, like the mixed children of Native Hawaiian women and Westerner fathers, were seen as intercultural brokers whose loyalty usually defaulted to Native Hawaiians.

Economically, Chinese settlement in Hawai'i was characterized by business collaboration with Native Hawaiians and Westerners. The nascent sugar industry preceding 1850 typically combined Chinese processing techniques with Hawaiian labor (MacLennan 2014: 84). Kamehameha III and other governing elites oversaw sharecropping endeavors between Hawaiian cane growers and Chinese millers in the late 1830s, regulating their business through contracts made in the Hawaiian language (Kai 1974: 55–57; MacLennan 2014: 112–113). Early Western planters likewise made use of Chinese expertise at all levels of production (Char 1974: 3–7). Unlike Westerners, Chinese merchant planters tended not to pursue land acquisition through purchase. Instead, they usually farmed land obtained through marriage or rented land owned by Native Hawaiians. They tended to practice economical forms of production requiring little capital investment (Glick 1980: 47–48). Given the turbulent market for Hawaiian agriculture prior to 1874, this provided a competitive advantage.

As MacLennan has studied at length, a model of sugar production emerged in the 1850s and 1860s focused around five regional plantation centers, featuring the dominance of the sugar industry by

production units combining both cultivation and milling and the capital-intensive deployment of industrialized processing (MacLennan 2014: 123–145). The former aspect ran contrary to the general tendency of the industry in other global locations, such as Australia, Java, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, toward decentralized cane raising, ultimately pushing independent Chinese and Native Hawaiian planters out of the market (MacLennan 2014: 124–125). Despite this long-term tendency, exceptions are discernible, particularly on the Island of Hawai'i, where Chinese actors featured centrally in the emergence of the plantation centers at Hilo and Kohala.

Enduring elements of Hawaiian plantation life, such as the use of Hawaiian-language terms to refer to overseer (*luna*) or the end of work (*pau hana*), reflect how plantation agriculture in the islands first emerged with a dominant workforce of Native Hawaiians, and in a cultural sphere in which outsiders were expected to interact with Native Hawaiian commoners in their own language. Early Chinese planters hewed to this model and often utilized Native Hawaiians as their main source of labor (Merry 2000: 171). Native Hawaiian status hierarchies were reproduced through differentiated hiring of *lunas* and workers. While Native Hawaiian workers typically labored on one-year contracts, most Chinese workers left the contract labor system at their earliest possibility to pursue urban employment or to bond themselves to rural Chinese headmen, in a status often classified by governmental agencies as "day laborers" (Glick 1980: 39–41; MacLennan 2014: 133). This pattern was facilitated by the long-standing Chinese presence in the island, which was already firmly established in the 1830s (Morgan 1948: 189–190). As late as 1873, however, Hawaiian labor predominated. Seventy-nine percent of the 3,786 plantation laborers registered by the government that year were Native Hawaiian (Beechert 1985: 60).

The convergence of a declining Native Hawaiian population and hopes for increased agricultural production presented planters, whether Western, Chinese, or Hawaiian, with a challenge: to achieve any change of scale in Hawaiian agriculture, foreign labor migration was essential. During most of the second half of the nineteenth century, political discourse in Hawai'i featured a distinctive form of populationism, where planter preference had to contend with an electorate dominated by Native Hawaiians after the enactment of universal manhood suffrage in 1851 (Fuchs 1961: 26). Planter debate about the comparative merits of different

races of laborers—a defining component of politics in Western-led plantation colonies since the eighteenth century—was modulated in Hawai'i through a concern over which groups would best "amalgamate" with Native Hawaiians (Miller 2020: 260–277; Rosenthal 2018). Combining biopolitics and proto-eugenics, these discussions grew tenser during the 1870s, as the Chinese population multiplied amidst the backdrop of growing Sinophobia across the settler Pacific (McKeown 2008: 119–184). Despite much heated discussion, China remained the main source of migrant labor to Hawai'i until the enactment of Chinese exclusion legislation in the mid-1880s, as discussed below. Between 1852 and 1878, Chinese migrants constituted 92.3% of all those whose mobility was recorded by the Hawaiian Board of Immigration (Schmitt 1977: 197).

Non-Western Planters and the Sugar Boom After 1874

The Reciprocity Treaty of 1874 fulfilled the long-standing ambition among aspiring island planters to gain advantageous entry to the closest market for Hawaiian produce: the West Coast of the United States. Similar treaties had been proposed and negotiated in 1855 and 1867 but failed to pass the U.S. Senate, in part due to the vociferous opposition of sugar-producing Louisiana (La Croix and Grandy 1997: 165–166). What had changed was the U.S.'s growing geopolitical aspirations, namely the prospect of a mid-Pacific coaling station at Pearl Harbor (Morgan 1948: 210–212). Kalākaua refused an early demand for its cession, but assented to a stipulation that Hawai'i could not grant it to any other power (Osorio 2002a: 210–224). Certain U.S. statesmen shared fears of resident Americans that British influence could rise in the absence of a treaty. Reciprocity ultimately tied Hawai'i's fortunes so closely to the United States that a disentanglement by century's end became economically unfathomable. Kalākaua, under pressure from militant White Honolulu businessmen and lawyers, conceded to American demands for the port's cession when the treaty came up for renewal in 1887 (Osorio 2002a: 210–224; MacLennan 2014: 233).

The highly integrated sugar oligopoly of early twentieth-century Hawai'i, dominated by the so called Big Five producers, contrasted markedly with the disaggregated plantation economy prevailing up to the time of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. Even after Reciprocity, in 1881, an English observer claimed that planters in Hawai'i were unable

to co-operate with one another to promote their mutual interests, as done in other countries (Nicholson 1881: 158). This was due to the plurality of the aspirational planter class. In the wake of Reciprocity, a diverse set of Chinese merchants, Native Hawaiian small farmers, Part-Hawaiian elites, British judges, and German businessmen sought to enrich themselves through sugar planting, besides the well-known cases of American missionary descendants and the German-American Sugar-Baron Claus Spreckels (Fig. 8.1).

The principal non-European sugar producer, both before and after 1874, was Chun Fong (Afong), the most successful Chinese capitalist of nineteenth-century Hawai'i (Glick 1980: 3). Arriving in Hawai'i in 1849, he quickly rose to a position of great wealth by servicing the plantation trade. Like many Chinese merchants, he took a Native Hawaiian second wife after establishing himself in Hawai'i, with his first wife, Lee Hong, remaining in China. An unusual characteristic of his Hawai'i wife, Julia Fayerweather, was that she was of mixed Euro-American and Hawaiian descent. Estranged from her White American relatives, she was raised in the family of her *ali'i* kin. She provided Afong with familial and social

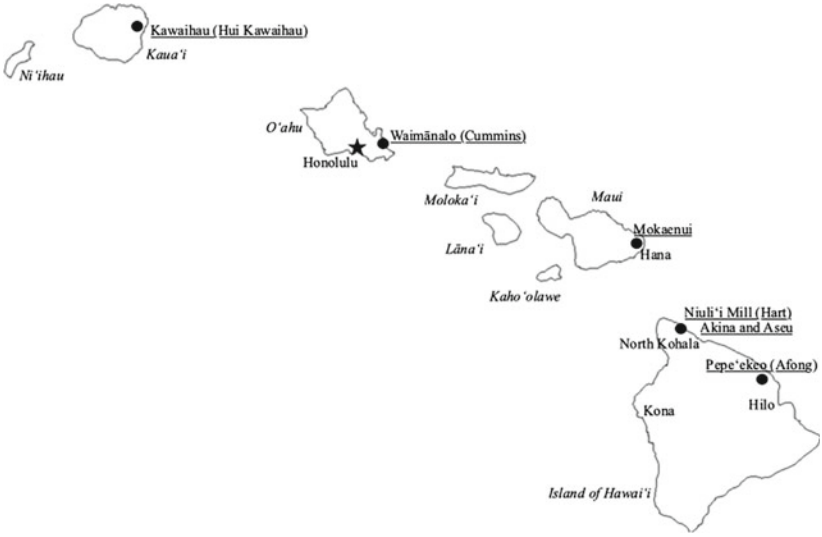

Fig. 8.1 Map of Hawai'i, with principal locations discussed indicated (Map by the author)

links to Hawaiian ruling elites. These ties helped Afong secure highly lucrative opium concessions in Hawai‘i at various points in the 1860s and 1870s, which, like contexts across Southeast Asia, serviced the addiction of migrant Chinese laborers (Dye 1997: 93, 119–120). A vocal proponent of reciprocity for its potential to stimulate Hawaiian agriculture, he acquired a 1,500-acre plantation in the Hilo District of the Island of Hawai‘i shortly before it took effect (Dye 1997: 126). In the 1880s, Pepe‘ekeo plantation would become the most significant Chinese-owned plantation in the islands. During this period, it was overseen by his eldest son, Chan Lung (alias Alung). Alung's management served to connect Chinese-owned and-operated sugar production in Hawai‘i with transnational projects by the Chinese imperial state to confront and adapt to Western encroachments of power. Alung graduated from Yale as part of the Chinese Educational Mission, a study-abroad program of Chinese elite youths sponsored by the Imperial government, and in 1874 served as a junior member of an Imperial commission into the abuse of Chinese indentured laborers in Cuba and Peru (Rimmer 2014: 344–364; Ng 2014: 39–62; Dye 1997: 107–109, 121, 144).

Through his ties by marriage to Julia Fayerweather, Afong was a close associate with the only Native Hawaiian owner of a major sugar plantation after 1880, John Adams Kuakini Cummins (1835–1913) at Waimānalo, on the Windward coast of O‘ahu (Dye 1997: 152–154). Three years after Reciprocity in 1874, Cummins decided to try sugar cultivation on the immense holdings his English-born father had previously used for ranching, drawing on capital secured through the German-dominated merchant firm Hackfeld & Co. Raised as an *ali‘i nui* (high chief) because of his mother's lineage, he had studied at the Royal School of Honolulu, also attended by all future Hawaiian monarchs after Kamehameha III. Like Afong, Cummins worked closely with Kalākaua to secure passage of the reciprocity treaty (Williams 1996: 160). Cummins has been praised for endorsing a type of paternalistic, royalist rule on his planation. The social building featured a reading room, a dance hall, Chinese and Japanese decorations on the ceiling, and prominent portraits of the Hawaiian royal family (Williams 1996: 154). Most higher-level positions, including those of *luna*, were staffed by Native Hawaiians, with a predominantly Chinese labor force. Unlike most other planters in Hawai‘i at the time, Cummins did not practice penally enforced contract labor, instead employing individuals as day laborers. In 1887, 95.6% percent of the workforce was described as Chinese, with no workers

subject to contract.[4] In 1892, the proportion of Japanese increased, but there were still no workers subject to contract. On the eve of the overthrow of the monarchy, it remained the third largest operation on the island of O'ahu.[5]

As much as Afong was exceptional in his success, he reflected general social processes of interracial elite formation in the mid-nineteenth century that were imbricated with the transition to a sugar-based economy. An obscure case profiled by Sally Engle Merry is emblematic: George Washington Akao Hapai, district court judge for Hilo from 1878 until 1908. Son of a Chinese sugar master named Hapai (Lau Fai) and Iheu, an *ali'i* from North Kohala, G.W. Hapai studied at an English-medium school run by Lucy Wetmore, wife of a missionary doctor. The school's student body in 1850 consisted of 17 children, 14 of whom had a Chinese father and a Hawaiian mother (Merry 2000: 175). He married Harriet Rebecca Kamakanoenoe Sniffen, a woman of mixed Hawaiian and *haole* ancestry, and his sisters married members of the *haole* Richardson family of planters as well as Native Hawaiian *ali'i* (Merry 2000: 175). While Hapai was fluent in both English and Hawaiian, he wrote most of his cases down in Hawaiian (Merry 2000: 179). It is unclear if he could speak a Chinese language. Hapai rose to the court as replacement for two *haole* planters, S.L. Austin and D.H. Hitchcock, who had alternated as judges for the district in the 1870s. During his three decade-long tenure as district court judge, he enforced violations of labor contracts under Kingdom, Republic, and Territorial governments, and navigated the transition from predominantly Hawaiian to migrant labor.

Co-operative Production and the Case of Kohala, Island of Hawai'i

A neglected component of the story of sugar in Hawai'i were experiments with co-operative production, which constituted a primary means Chinese merchant planters other than Afong pursued sugar production after 1874. In this model, *haole*-owned sugar mills sourced their supply from small producers and practiced a form of profit sharing. An

[4] "Report of CN Spencer, Inspector General of Immigrants," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 13 October 1887: 2.

[5] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 10, 29.

overview was provided in 1883 in *Planter's Monthly*, the publication vehicle of the recently founded Planters' Labor and Supply Company of Honolulu. It began by reassuring its planter readership that co-operation was opposed to "communism, socialism, and agrarianism."[6] It instead "fully recognized private or individual ownership" and aimed merely at "joint operation, laboring together to one end […] for mutual profit in the purchase and distribution of commodities for consumption, or in the borrowing and lending of capital among workmen."[7] While claiming that the approach was absent from the United States, the piece pointed to its success in France and ongoing implementation in Hawai'i. Native Hawaiian-led efforts included cane planting at Mokaenui, Maui; a co-operative store on O'ahu (the Kalihi and Moanalua Trading Association); the Hui Kawaihau on the island of Kaua'i, which featured the involvement of King Kalākaua; and the sugar plantation of John Adams Kuakini Cummins at Waimānalo, O'ahu (Dole 1929: 8–15). The example discussed as greatest length was however Niuli'i Mill at Kohala, Island of Hawai'i, which "due to the patient kindness of its chief manager and projector, Judge Hart," had successfully enabled a number of small Hawaiian and Chinese producers to emerge in the surrounding area. In that year, Niuli'i Mill was the largest sugar producer in North Kohala, processing 1,600 of a total 7,300 tons of cane (Hansen 1963: 6).

Reflecting Eurocentric blinders, the *Monthly* noted in passing that the co-operative model adopted at Charles F. Hart's mill closely resembled capital pooling practices amongst Chinese migrants in rice growing, business, and retail.[8] Hart was no doubt aware of this. He served as judge for the Hawai'i Island districts of Kona and later North Kohala from the 1860s until 1887, a period witnessing heavy Chinese merchant-planter activity in both areas (MacLennan 2014: 128–129). After the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, editorials written for English-language newspapers reveal a pointedly anti-American stance and deep familiarity with the role of Chinese migration in British colonialism in Singapore and

[6] "Co-Operation," *Planters Monthly* 1:11 (1883): 273–276.

[7] "Co-Operation": 273–276.

[8] "Co-Operation": 273–276.

Malaya.[9] While not challenging the basic rubrics of Western Civilization as the yardstick for progress, he took aim at annexationist ideologue William Alexander's claim that Chinese migrants were "unassimilable."[10] Contesting the rise of American imperialism and segregationist thinking, Hart remained wedded to mid-nineteenth-century social and business practices based on inter-ethnic collaboration and the local enrooting of migrant men—both Western and Chinese—through marriage to Native Hawaiian women.[11]

Complicating the common notion of American commercial ascendancy throughout Hawai'i after 1874, British interests prevailed in Kohala up to the end of the nineteenth century (MacLennan 2014: 128–129). H.S. Restarick, President of the Hawaiian Historical Society during the 1920s, recalled that "in the eighties of the last century, Kohala, Hawai'i, was sometimes called 'Little Britain' because many Britishers resided there, most of them engaged in planting cane."[12] Cane cultivation in Kohala during this time featured British collaboration with Chinese and Hawaiian small planters, within a policing and judicial apparatus staffed almost entirely by Native Hawaiians. British socialization centered at the Kohala Club, which emerged as a hotbed of royalist sentiment after the overthrow of the monarchy (Hall 1927: 13–14). In 1880, Hart co-owned Niuli'i Mill with Godfrey Rhodes, a prominent British merchant and member of government under Kalākaua, and used T.H. Davies & Co., the leading British firm in the islands, as his agent (MacLennan 2014: 72).[13] The region was transformed during the 1880s, becoming site to the first railway on the Island of Hawai'i in 1882.

With a distinctively complementary set of identity-crossing networks, Goo Tet Chin Akina and Luke Aseu were the most successful of the Chinese planters associated with Hart. Akina practiced the older model

[9] Charles F. Hart, Letter to the Editor, "British Rule at Singapore," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 27 June 1895: 5. Also see: Charles F. Hart, Letter to the Editor, *Hawaiian Star*, 7 December 1896, p. 1; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 14 January 1897: 3.

[10] *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 27 June 1895: 5.

[11] Hart's wife was an *ali'i* named Rebecca. "Ua haalele mai ikei ola ana o Mrs. Rebecca Hart," *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 1 December 1916: 3.

[12] H.S. Restarick, "Elections in Old Hawaii; Kohala Club and Other Reminiscences," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 28 April 1928: 6.

[13] Bowser, *The Hawaiian Kingdom, Statistical and Commercial Directory and Tourists' Guide, 1880–1881* (1880): 419.

of local integration and land accumulation via marriage with a Native Hawaiian woman, Harriet Maiaka Kalua Akina (1856–1893). Arriving in Kohala around 1870, he turned to cultivating rice and sugarcane in his wife's lands in the Waipio and Pololū valleys (Lothian 1983: 151). His later business partner Aseu by contrast was a fervent Christian convert who in 1882 married a Chinese woman educated at the Basel mission school in Guangdong.[14] While Akina and Harriet Maiaka Kalua were both Christians, they never held church leadership positions. Building on their prior collaboration as co-proprietors of general stores in North Kohala and Hilo, they established a joint sugar enterprise during the late 1870s. Akina was already referring to his "sugar plantation" at Kohala to a Chinese business partner in San Francisco in October 1880.[15] Expanding on the lands he had acquired through marriage, Akina would be formally granted a lease of 1,300 acres of crown lands on 7 January 1882 by King Kalākaua at Pololū, a valley at the eastern fringe of the district of North Kohala.[16] The size of this concession allowed Akina and Aseu to produce at a scale beyond those of other Chinese sugar planters in the region, such as Chulan Kee (Glick 1980: 57). By 1885, their plantation was the largest source of cane for Niuliʻi Mill, cultivating a sixth of the 1,200 acres processed at Hart's mill.[17]

Aseu's Christian commitments lay on one side of an emerging fault line in the Chinese community in Hawaiʻi, which added religious difference to long-standing ethnic tensions between Punti and Hakka people carried over from Guangdong.[18] Chinese converts to Christianity in

[14] *Hawaiian Star*, 31 December 1904: 6.

[15] Hawaiʻi State Archives, Records of the Judiciary, First Circuit and Supreme Court Series, Law Case Files of the First Circuit Court, Series 6, Box 35, Case File 1392, *Ging Kee & Co. vs. L. Aseu* (1882).

[16] "E na Lede a me na Keonimana! O ka makani apaapaa o Kohala," *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 22 May 1879: 3. *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, Miscellaneous Reports, Part III, Governor of Hawaiʻi* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904): 219.

[17] *Saturday Press*, 4 April 1885: 3.

[18] The two primary Han Chinese ethnic subgroups amongst migrants to Hawaiʻi were the Punti, a Cantonese people who staked indigenous claims to Guangdong, and the Hakka, who were viewed as foreign settlers. Clan wars between the two groups from 1855 to 1868 occasioned around a million deaths, the destruction of thousands of villages, and the mass migration of Hakka people outside the region, including Guangxi province, Southeast Asia, and to a much smaller extent, Hawaiʻi.

Hawai'i were predominantly Hakka, though a large proportion of Hakka sought community instead through Taoist clan-based brotherhoods, or "secret societies," whose "evils" were decried by Frank Damon in 1882 (Glick 1980: 192).[19] In 1886, the third brotherhood to be established in the archipelago, the Tung Wo Kung Si (Company of Harmonious Peace), was founded in Kohala, with a membership mainly of non-Christian Hakka (Chong 1983: 157). Conversely, Aseu contributed to efforts to found a distinctly Christian Chinese community in North Kohala, working together with influential American Congregationalists, including Frank Damon in Honolulu and Elias Bond, proprietor of the Kohala Plantation, the first *haole*-run sugar plantation in the region (Glick 1980: 159–160; MacLennan 2014: 128–129; Beechert 1985: 71–72). In 1878, Elias Bond had pursued the labor migration of around 100 Hakka converts from Guangdong, working with contacts to the Basel mission, including Rev. Rudolph Lechler (Char 1983: 99–100). Landing alongside the migrants was Rev. Kong Tet Yin, who had trained at the Basel Mission in Guangdong and served previously as a missionary in Australia (Soong 1997: 151–178; Glick 1980: 87). Furthering these earlier efforts, Aseu and his wife played key parts in missionary efforts in North Kohala during the 1880s, including the establishment of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1882 and a Chinese Christian private school in 1887 (Kastens 1978: 64; Lutz 2009: 145; Opsahl 1969).

Evidence relating to worker conditions on Akina and Aseu's plantations is scarce, limited to snippets from oral histories, scattered incidents involving the police force and court system, and occasional interactions with the government board of immigration. Two disturbances from the 1880s reveal that Akina and Aseu worked closely with the local police force, staffed entirely by Native Hawaiians. In July 1881, angry workers caused Akina to flee the plantation after a *luna* punished them for eating seed cane.[20] Later, on 24 November 1886, a riot followed an attempted opium bust by four Native Hawaiian policemen. After two unnamed officers deserted, Constables I.K. Kaohi and Nakanelua fought off 30 Chinese workers armed with "hoes and other weapons."[21] Kaohi was left

[19] F.W. Damon, "Tours among the Chinese, No. 2: The Island of Kauai," *The Friend*, Chinese Supplement, 7 July 1882: 80.

[20] *Saturday Press*, 30 July 1881: 3.

[21] *Daily Bulletin*, 29 November 1886: 3.

in a critical state with a skull wound, while Nakanelua broke his right arm. The police responded with greater force the following day, with Deputy Sheriff Charles H. Pulaa venturing out with the entire North Kohala police force and arresting six people. Pulaa and his crew stayed for two days, equipped with "two repeating rifles and a supply of ammunition."[22]

Akina and Aseu, like other non-Western plantation owners, continued to exclusively use Chinese and Native Hawaiian laborers throughout the 1880s. After the initiation of subsidized contract labor migration from Portugal in 1878, the Kingdom began including queries about preferred races of laborers in island-wide biannual inspections of plantations. The putative purpose was to provide data about planter demand for the consideration of legislators and the Board of Immigration. Akina and Aseu, Cummins at Waimānalo, and Afong at Pepe'ekeo all expressed preference for Chinese and Native Hawaiians during the late 1880s.[23] The only Europeans employed by Afong at Pepe'ekeo were British engineers and boilers.[24] In this sense, non-Western sugar operations did not participate in the transient Europeanization of Hawai'i's labor force from 1878–1886, nor its Nipponization thereafter (Miller 2020).

Amidst the turbulent three-year period preceding the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, all major Chinese sugar producers exited from the market. Political and economic factors were intertwined. A market crisis for Hawaiian sugar was set off in 1890 by the McKinley Tariff, which eradicated Hawai'i's competitive advantage by permitting all foreign sugar duty-free access to the United States. Hawaiian exports plummeted nearly 40%, from $13 million in 1890 to $8 million in 1892 (Schmitt 1977: 540). Further, incipient anti-Chinese legislation intensified in what has become known in the literature as the "Bayonet Constitution," promulgated in 1887 after a *haole*-led coup stripped King Kalākaua of most of his effective power. Suffrage thereafter was limited to a racially circumscribed "special electorate" of wealthy property owners of Hawaiian, European, or American descent, and business owners were prohibited from maintaining records in any non-European language besides Hawaiian (Dye

[22] *Daily Bulletin*, 29 November 1886: 3.

[23] "Report of CN Spencer, Inspector General of Immigrants," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 13 October 1887: 2. *Hoike a ka Peresidena o ka Papa Hoopae Limahana i ka Ahaolelo Kau Kanawai o 1888* (Honolulu: Gazette Publishing Co., 1888): 16.

[24] *Planters Monthly* 7, no. 7 (July 1888): 308.

1997: 217–218; MacLennan 2014: 74–75). The logic of both policies was distinctly anti-Chinese. Sensing that the winds of prejudice were to intensify, Afong sold Pepe'ekeo and returned to China in 1890 following the suspicious death of his son Alung in August 1889, while sailing between the plantation and Honolulu (Dye 1997: 220). His long-time friend Cummins hosted a farewell party in Waimānalo on 16 October 1890, and Afong reached the passenger steamer that would bring him back to China, on which he had booked first-class accommodation, aboard Waimānalo plantation's transporter (Dye 1997: 221–222). Once under *haole* management, the labor profile at Pepe'ekeo changed markedly, with all managers and *lunas* registered as European or American, and most workers described as Japanese. In Kohala, Chulan Kee, Aseu and Akina's main Chinese competitor, sold their small sugar plantation to an American firm (Glick 1980: 57; Chinese in Hawaii 1913: 27; 1929: 2). Aseu and Akina went on to sell their sugar business in late 1892 to Hart, though Akina retained his rice land.[25] This followed a fascinating incident whereby Aseu attempted in 1890 to mimic the successful labor brokering of Afong as well as Chulan Kee between the 1860s and 1880s (Dye 1997: 140). Aseu's experience reveals much about the fraught relationship between Chinese sugar planters and Chinese indentured laborers on the eve of American ascendancy in Hawai'i, wherein different status positions in relation to plantation sovereignty yielded co-ethnic antagonism and inter-ethnic elite solidarity.

The Kohala Rebellion of 1891

In 1891, just a year before selling his and Akina's plantation, Luke Aseu took on the unenviable role as public face of the Kingdom of Hawai'i's Chinese restriction acts. Inspired by motives of profit and proselytization, Aseu was the first person to attempt a return to labor brokering activities following the enactment of exclusion in 1884. The effort proved a disaster, occasioning the biggest worker rebellion prior to the overthrow of the monarchy. This complicated case has yet to be studied in depth. Here, I recast the Kohala Rebellion as a trial of contested and overlapping claims to sovereignty. At the heart of the revolt was laborers' frustration with the restrictive nature of their contracts, which mandated

[25] *Hawaiian Gazette*, 3 January 1893: 4.

the retention of one-fourth of their earned wages to be used as a bond to incentivize their departure from Hawai'i at the end of their contracts. Also imbricated in the uprising were Aseu's practice as labor broker, questions of citizenship and extraterritorial representation, a contest for political supremacy between the Legislature and Supreme Court of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, and above all, the question of just whose interests the punitive exercise of state sovereignty in Hawai'i actually served.

Bowing to the vociferous anti-Chinese sentiment of certain resident *haole* in Hawai'i, Kalākaua begrudgingly assented to the passage of the Kingdom's rendition of Chinese exclusion acts in 1884 (Osorio 2002a: 209). Occurring during the apex of nativist rule during the ministry of American adventurer Walter Murray Gibson, the policy was a compromise to long-standing opponents of Chinese migration. Kalākaua, like most Hawaiian ruling elites before him, was positively disposed to Chinese migrants, pointing to their willingness to live together with Hawaiians and, indirectly, serving as a reliable source of state revenue through opium and gambling tax farms (Glick 1980: 146). Earlier efforts by the government to blunt the demographic impact of Chinese migration included the apportionment of over $1 million to subsidize the indentured migration of other laboring populations, namely Portuguese, Japanese, Germans, Norwegians, and South Sea Islanders from 1878 to 1893 (Miller 2020: 260–277). Hawai'i's initial exclusion laws in 1884 were comparatively light, banning only the new migration of laborers (Lydon 1974). Kalākaua and Gibson's compromises ultimately did not placate the violent cohort of *haole* residents in Hawai'i stridently opposed to Chinese migration, who were obsessed with Yellow Peril anxieties of demographic and commercial eclipse (Glick 1980: 202).

Following the coup in 1887 by the Honolulu Rifles, a White American settler-dominated militia, Gibson's ministry was ended, Kalākaua was deprived of most of his constitutional power, and the Legislative Assembly attempted to institute stricter forms of Chinese exclusion legislation. These efforts were however blunted by Hawai'i's legal system. After 1887, the Supreme Court repeatedly intervened to overrule legislative attempts to ban all Chinese migrants regardless of class (Beechert 1985: 92). A system emerged wherein all Chinese migrants were required to obtain entry visas issued under the purview of the Kingdom's recently created Chinese Bureau. The central institution in this system was Hawai'i's consulate in Hong Kong, which throughout the second half of the nineteenth century was headed by British representatives of the powerful firm

Jardine, Matheson, and Co. (Miller 2020: 268, 273). Originally based in the tea and opium trade, the firm was a key factor in the British colonization of Hong Kong, becoming one of the colony's largest landowners and employers (Bennett 2021: 34). Laws requiring official licensing of Chinese brotherhoods were also passed during this period, taking as their basis the Dangerous Societies Suppression Ordinance in British Malaya in 1869 (Glick 1980: 193).

Since Japanese contract labor migration to Hawai'i initiated at this same time, it was expected that planters would not suffer for new laborers. However, patterns of racialized preference remained. This was particularly true for Chinese planters, who preferred the employ of co-ethnic migrants and Native Hawaiians with whom they had previously forged personal relationships. In view of the expressed preference by several planters for additional Chinese laborers, the legislature in 1890 amended the Chinese exclusion laws of 1887. This permitted the resumption of Chinese labor migration with a punitive twist, under a regime of "special residence permits." Laborers emigrating with these permits were bound to a contract of indenture of maximum five years in duration, at the expiration of which they were required to return to China. One-fourth of monthly earnings up to $75 were to be retained and paid out upon the migrant's departure from Hawai'i. Breaking the provisions of the contracts was deemed a criminal offense, subject to immediate deportation to China at the migrant's own expense (Kuykendall 1979: 183–184). This policy was modeled after practice across the British colonial world, where it often occasioned great resent amongst laborers (Stanziani 2013: 1218–1251). Hawai'i would prove no exception.

In early 1891, Luke Aseu would be the first broker to attempt labor migration through the remits of the amendment of 1890.[26] Aseu fielded inquires across plantations in North Kohala for Chinese labor migrants, in addition to calculating the number of labor migrants needed for his and Akina's plantation. He submitted an application to the Board of Immigration for 350 laborers, receiving approval on 24 Dec 1890.[27] Drawing on his missionary connections, he also intended to include a proportion

[26] Besides a small exception, he would be the only one.

[27] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 66.

of converts among his recruits, thus placating a plank of *haole* opposition to Chinese migration on religious grounds. During the virulent anti-Chinese politics prevailing after the Bayonet Constitution of 1887, Christian missionaries constituted a major plank of pro-Chinese support, heartened by examples of seemingly authentic converts like Aseu. In early 1891, Aseu ventured to Hong Kong and spent several months leading recruitment efforts.[28] An American ship, the *Pactolus*, was chartered in Hong Kong under Captain Beadle, and 436 migrants were engaged from the Guangdong region (290 men, 60 women, 86 children). The share of women and children among these migrants was higher than normally observed with Chinese migration to Hawai'i, reflecting a significant proportion of Christian converts among the cohort. One of the migrants, Ling Shee, in an interview with her son, recalled that she and her husband had agreed to the terms of indenture as "It was the only way out," given they held neither land nor work in their home village in Bao'an County, Guangdong (Zane and Soong 1983: 133–134). After sixty days in a barracoon in Macao with other Hakka migrants, they set sail in May 1891 for Hawai'i, arriving off the coast of Kohala on 15 July 1891.[29]

It is at this point in the story that the historical testimony, sourced through court records, immigration board reports, and newspaper articles, begins to diverge. Aseu had returned to Hawai'i aboard a different ship, awaiting arrival of the *Pactolus* in North Kohala together with a team of three set by the Board of Immigration.[30] Most importantly from a legal perspective, the migrants claimed to have only been informed about the withholding clause in their prospective contracts while docked off Māhukona, which served as the harbor for North Kohala. This violated the legal premise of indenture as a voluntary and consensual act of temporary bondage. As Aseu was overseeing the signing of 3-year labor contracts to individual plantations aboard the ship on 16 July 1891, a Native Hawaiian boatman brought a secret letter aboard the ship given to him by Pan Fong, *luna* at the American-owned Pūehuehu Plantation

[28] *Daily Bulletin*, 18 May 1891: 3.

[29] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 32, 66–68.

[30] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 68.

and, according to Aseu, headman at the local Taoist Chinese brotherhood, the Tung Wo Kung Si.[31] Undermining Aseu's authority, the letter promised those aboard that they were not required to accept his assignments or contract conditions, but rather could land freely and work as day laborers for better rates of pay and living conditions.[32] Indeed, in 1892, 83% of all Chinese male plantation workers were "day laborers," where, in the words of the Kingdom's Inspector General of Immigrants, they worked "under the control of Chinese contractors who work for a stipulated amount […] In some instances this proves satisfactory labor, but as a rule [sic] is expensive."[33] Further, there appear to have been some migrants aboard who had previously worked in Hawai'i, and who, in view of their prior experience as day laborers, advised their fellow passengers against committing to Aseu's terms, presumably unaware of the new restrictive legislation.[34]

Aseu struggled for days to convince the migrants to sign the contracts. After about 48 hours of resistance, Sheriff Hitchcock and Deputy Sheriff Charles H. Pulaa came aboard the ship with five policemen on the morning of 17 July 1891.[35] To those who refused to sign their indenture, Aseu threatened transshipment back to China without food or water supplies, thus facing a miserable death.[36] Aseu also sent several Chinese men aboard who the passengers later alleged applied further pressure upon them to sign.[37] It took four days to convince all the migrants to

[31] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 71.

[32] *Daily Bulletin*, 5 September 1891: 3.

[33] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 39.

[34] Hawai'i State Archives, Records of the Judiciary, First Circuit and Supreme Court Series, Law Case Files of the First Circuit Court, Series 6, Box 80, Case File 3068, *L. Aseu vs. C. Alee* (1892), Testimony of W.S. Akana (12 February 1892).

[35] *Daily Bulletin*, 8 September 1891: 2.

[36] *Chong Chum vs. Kohala Sugar Co*., in *Reports of Decisions Rendered by the Supreme Court of the Hawaiian Islands, Volume 8* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1893): 426.

[37] Hawai'i State Archives, Records of the Judiciary, First Circuit and Supreme Court Series, Law Case Files of the First Circuit Court, Series 6, Box 80, Case File 3068, *L. Aseu vs. C. Alee* (1892).

sign the contracts.[38] Migrants did not merely oppose the contractual provisions; they also "objected strongly" to having their thumb marks taken as part of the Immigration Board's new registry system for Chinese laborers.[39]

Scarcely a month later, on the evening of 23 August 1891, hundreds of the contracted workers assembled in front of Luke Aseu's plantation home at Pololū. Aseu had met earlier in the day with the workers but had not resolved their grievances to their satisfaction.[40] Returning in the afternoon from church, he locked himself and his family inside their home, beset with terror.[41] Aseu once again turned to Deputy Sheriff Pulaa.[42] Arriving around midnight, Deputy Sheriff Pulaa found a group of more than 20 Native Hawaiians guarding the dwelling, with Aseu's family sheltered in one room, lights-off, "in a terrible fright."[43] Pulaa decided to wait until the morning to investigate. In the meantime, the protesting workers took control of Aseu's house and installed themselves on the verandas. They were joined by additional protesters overnight, raising their total number to at least 200. Speaking through interpreters, who were longer-resident Chinese workers fluent in Hawaiian, Pulaa identified two core grievances. First, the workers objected to the practice of wage withholding, which they found unjust, and which they maintained Aseu had not explained prior to their migration. Second, they claimed to be "deceived" in having to labor at *haole*-led plantations. As Pulaa rendered it, "they don't want to work for the haoles but to go and work for Aseu,

[38] Hawai'i State Archives, Records of the Chinese Bureau, MFL 123, *SS Pactolus* Travel Bonds and Rejected Chinese Arrivals. *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 72.

[39] *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 73.

[40] *Daily Bulletin*, 5 September 1891: 3.

[41] Statement of Charles H. Pulaa, Deputy Sheriff of North Kohala, 14 September 1891, in *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 75.

[42] Statement of Charles H. Pulaa, Deputy Sheriff of North Kohala, 14 September 1891, in *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 75.

[43] Statement of Charles H. Pulaa, Deputy Sheriff of North Kohala, 14 September 1891, in *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 75.

they don't know the haoles."[44] Pulaa subsequently received rumors of a plan to murder Aseu aboard the newly established Kohala train line. Violence ensued, with shots fired from both Aseu's and Pulaa's pistols.[45] Overpowered, Pulaa agreed to arrest Aseu, but redirected the protesters' attention to the local courthouse.

Proceeding to Kapa'au that afternoon, the total number of Chinese protesting laborers grew to over 300.[46] Pulaa had instructed the aggrieved workers to formally state their complaints to the responsible judge for North Kohala. Their case was not formally heard, but they were met by representatives of their respective employers as well as the Deputy Sheriff of the Island of Hawai'i, George H. Williams. Aseu was not present. They were promised that the Chinese commercial agent would be called.[47] After being ordered back to their plantations, a riot broke out. A blanket order was "given to natives to arrest the Chinese." While some proceeded peacefully, others resisted. This was met with violent reprisals by the deputized officers, "a large number of plantation natives […] armed with bullock whips" who entered several laborer houses, where they "demolished every window, strewed the premises inside and out with stones, seized every Chinaman they came across, and yanked forty or more by their queues to the leper cells," where they imprisoned them.[48] At least 55 protesters were taken to the local jail and imprisoned overnight, charged with "battery on Government officials." Convictions ultimately were not pursued and they were returned to their plantations the next day.[49]

[44] Statement of Charles H. Pulaa, Deputy Sheriff of North Kohala, 14 September 1891, in *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 76–77.

[45] *Daily Bulletin*, 27 August 1891: 3.

[46] Statement of Charles H. Pulaa, Deputy Sheriff of North Kohala, 14 September 1891, in *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 77.

[47] *Daily Bulletin*, 5 September 1891: 3.

[48] *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 7 September 1891: 2.

[49] Statement of Charles H. Pulaa, Deputy Sheriff of North Kohala, 14 September 1891, in *Report of the President of the Bureau of Immigration to the Legislature of 1892* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1892): 78.

The mood remained tense for another week, and news of the incident reached the Honolulu press in less than 48 hours.[50] The Sinophobic *Daily Bulletin* used it to highlight the imperative of "restrictions for the protection of Caucasian and Hawaiian labor against Mongolian aggression."[51] Aseu, feeling misrepresented, fled back to his home in Honolulu's Chinatown on 5 September 1891 to provide his rendering of events.[52] Robert Wallace, manager of Pūehuehu Plantation in Kohala, interceded to defend Pan Fong, his *luna*.[53] A little more than three weeks later, Aseu was served with a warrant for his arrest ordered by the Chinese commercial agent in Hawai'i, Ching King Chun Alee, who had succeeded Afong in this capacity in 1882 (Dye 1997: 187–188; Glick 1980: 204–225, 296).[54] As the case proceeded through the courts of the Kingdom, Afong's advice from 1881 to Chen Lanbin, the Chinese Ambassador to the United States, Peru, and Spain, proved prescient: "The interests of all the Judges of the Islands are in Sugar Plantations; consequently, there is no possibility of [any] case being decided impartially" (Glick 1980: 225).

Charged with providing consular protection to Chinese subjects in Hawai'i, Alee accepted the protecting workers' accusations that Aseu misrepresented contractual conditions and engaging in labor trafficking. To learn more about the complaints of the *Pactolus* passengers, Alee had sent an agent, W.S. Akana, to North Kohala to conduct interviews. Meeting with over 60 contracted workers between 12–16 September 1891, Akana heard the constant complaint that the contractual statements made by Aseu in China were "very different to those made here."[55] The interviews were conducted at the small Chinese sugar plantation owned by Chulan and Company, Akina and Aseu's primary Chinese rivals. Revealing somewhat compromised interests, Alee was a partial investor. Chulan and Company were aligned with American business factors in the region and were also active in the Honolulu commercial circuit. They had

[50] *Daily Bulletin*, 26 August 1891: 2.

[51] *Daily Bulletin*, 16 September 1891: 2.

[52] *Daily Bulletin*, 8 September 1891: 2.

[53] *Daily Bulletin*, 16 September 1891: 2.

[54] *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 30 September 1891. "Hopuia o L. Aseu", *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 3 October 1891: 2.

[55] Hawai'i State Archives, Records of the Judiciary, First Circuit and Supreme Court Series, Law Case Files of the First Circuit Court, Series 6, Box 80, Case File 3068, *L. Aseu vs. C. Alee* (1892), Testimony of W.S. Akana (12 February 1892).

been active in Chinese labor migration during the 1870s. It is likely that Chulan and Company resented that the Board had had only granted Aseu permission to bring migrants within the provisions of the Amendment of 1890 (Dye 1997: 132; Glick 1980: 205). The resulting lawsuit thus cast two Chinese merchant actors against each other, drawing on competing sources of state sovereignty to buttress their case.

Aseu's labor brokering debacle was quickly politicized, with its sovereign implications brilliantly articulated in an English-language editorial in *Ka Leo o ka Lahui*, the organ for the opposition Hawaiian National Liberal Party, and the most widely circulating Hawaiian-language newspaper of the 1890s. It was likely written by John E. Bush (1842–1906), a Native Hawaiian politician who had attained prominence during the Gibson Ministry and a vocal opponent to the political order prevailing after the Bayonet Constitution. The piece argued that it was "Very natural" that the "Pactolus coolie slaves" should "have revolted and have entered a suit against "the A.B.C.F.M.'s Church protege, the Christian Aseu."[56] "Our satisfaction lies in the unearthing of the diabolical system practiced by the immigrant agents of the Sugar-Barons, and the part taken by a weak and imbecile [sic] government, representing the Hawaiian People. We have always claimed that the whole system is rotten." Queen Lili'uokalani's cabinet, in permitting "such a practice to be committed unrebuked, is likely to bring this teapot of a government into a typhoon of a tempest that will cause the wreck of sovereign and people." To blame were not "the people"—Native Hawaiian and other workingmen—who through "their representatives" during the 1880s—such as himself—had done "all they could to help the country in its labor difficulties." However, "the unscrupulous sugar planters and the capitalist [sic], assisted by a pair of sycophantic administrations […] have gone to work, and, with its [sic] usual custom, tried to obtain cheap labor by trying to deceive those whom they have engaged." Both "the planter and capitalist are smiling under their sleeves, and are even hoping to see the country involved in trouble, and in that way obtain a change of government better suited to their aristocratic tastes."

The incidents at Kohala gave rise to two cases at the Supreme Court of the Kingdom of Hawai'i with divergent outcomes. The first, heard between 9–14 October 1891, was decided in Aseu's favor. The plaintiffs

[56] "Suit by Chinese Laborers," *Ka Leo o ka Lahui*, 30 September 1891: 4.

were four of the contract laborers, with Aseu as individual defendant. On 16 October 1891, Supreme Court Justice Sanford Dole ruled that Aseu's conduct, though perhaps "wicked," could not "be made the foundation of a criminal prosecution under our statute of gross cheats."[57] "It does not seem to me that mere silence in regard to the restrictive conditions of the laws here would amount to a false pretense."[58] Alee's protests were rejected on grounds that Hawai'i had no formal treaty with China.

Merely a fortnight later, the Court, in *Chong Chum v. Kohala Sugar*, ruled in favor of one of the contract laborers. Crucially, Aseu had been replaced as defendant by the sugar plantation owned by his friend Reverend Bond (Beechert 1985: 92–93).[59] Now featured merely as an agent of Kohala Sugar, Aseu was absolved of potential criminal prosecution and public opprobrium, with his leading role in the disastrous contract labor migration shunted to the margins of history. In the majority decision read 26 Feb 1892, Dole struck down the withholding clause of the Amendment of 1890 as unconstitutional. He argued that the contractual wage retention was tantamount to an individual waiving, by contract, the "inalienable rights recognized by the Constitution as belong to "all men" (Art. 1)" and tending thus to "class legislation."[60] The junior Supreme Court justice, Charles J. Judd, contended that at issue was not "the right to impose such conditions and restrictions upon the entry of aliens (with whose nation this Kingdom has no treaty to the contrary) into the territory of this Kingdom as the Legislature deems essential to the welfare, peace, and safety of the state." The Legislature was entitled to "impose conditions as to length of residence and character of the employment in which the immigrant can engage." Rather, the unconstitutionality of the law lay in the wage retention, which was used to pay the cost of the laborer's deportation to China.[61] Through this decision, Chong Chum was released from his contract and free to pursue the occupation of his choice. The Amendment of 1890 was overturned,

[57] *Daily Bulletin*, 16 October 1891: 3.

[58] *Daily Bulletin*, 16 October 1891: 3.

[59] *Chong Chum vs. Kohala Sugar Co*., in *Reports of Decisions Rendered by the Supreme Court of the Hawaiian Islands, Volume 8* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1893): 425–433.

[60] *Chong Chum vs. Kohala Sugar Co*., in *Reports of Decisions Rendered by the Supreme Court of the Hawaiian Islands, Volume 8* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1893): 429–430.

[61] *Chong Chum vs. Kohala Sugar Co*., in *Reports of Decisions Rendered by the Supreme Court of the Hawaiian Islands, Volume 8* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette, 1893): 432–433.

and no further migration from China occurred until the overthrow of the monarchy.

The implications of the Kohala Rebellion and the court decisions that followed are plural. Co-ethnic rivalry was mediated by inter-ethnic collaboration committed to the legal preservation and perpetuation of planter power. In serial fashion, a Chinese sugar planter turned labor broker was defended by his Native Hawaiian employees, a Native Hawaiian Sheriff, and a *haole* missionary Supreme Court judge against challenges posed by his co-ethnic contracted laborers and the acting representative of the Chinese government. At Pololū as well as the Kohala courthouse, state and planter control was maintained only through the informal deputization of Native Hawaiians as a disciplinary force against rebellious Chinese laborers, who challenged terms of labor they found unjust. A Chinese face to restriction law did not reduce the extent to which laborers found its provisions repugnant; indeed, it may have only inflamed it.

Conclusion

In highlighting the role of Chinese merchants turned sugar planters in the formation of a sugar plantation complex in Hawai‘i, this chapter indicates the need for further study of plantation colonialism as a transnational force in nineteenth-century Hawai‘i. That individual Chinese and Native Hawaiians owned and directed sugar plantations up to the 1890s is a story almost entirely lost from local memory and at the margins of the voluminous archive of plantation Hawai‘i, reflecting in part the persisting legacy of early twentieth-century scholarship to racialize the figure of the planter as much as that of the laborer (Coman 1903: 1–61; Adams 1925; Adams 1937). As this chapter has shown, countervailing traces remain recoverable through scattered testimony—including government statistics, court depositions, contemporary newspapers, planter periodicals, and early twentieth-century oral histories. The analysis of these materials highlights historical developments that figure only awkwardly within settler colonial frameworks, including the concept of “Asian settler colonialism” (Fujikane and Okamura 2008). The agency of Chinese actors invested in Hawai‘i’s emergent sugar plantation complex cannot be reduced to a fixed embrace of white settler cultural ascendency, particularly prior to the twentieth century. In their attempts to derive profit through plantation production, nineteenth-century Chinese sugar planters navigated collision points between competing state claims of sovereignty, including

the Hawaiian government over the people and territory of Hawai'i, the Chinese Empire over its migrant subjects, and the British and U.S. governments over overseas migration in an age of imperial anti-trafficking regulation and Chinese exclusion legislation (McKeown 2008; Sharma 2020). Within Hawai'i, they likewise had to balance interlayered sources of power, including a government headed by an indigenous monarch, a firmly established court system of Anglo-American common law, a religious scene dominated by American Congregationalists, a plantation world increasingly directed by British, German, and American agents, and a financial and economic sector more and more tethered to San Francisco.

Amidst the political ascendancy of *haole* nativists during the 1880s and 1890s, the Chinese sugar planters studied in this chapter—Afong, Aseu, and Akina—faced an institutionalization of forms of exclusion that curtailed their scope for maneuver. Each reacted differently. Afong, the most successful of the three as an extractor of sweet fortune, voted with his feet shortly before the overthrow of the monarchy, retreating to Macau, where he pursued new business opportunities to greatly profitable effect. Conversely, Akina and Aseu remained in Hawai'i amidst the turbulent sovereign contests of the 1890s, obtaining sovereign privileges as old-timer migrants upon U.S. annexation in 1898. By dint of their prior naturalization as Hawaiian citizens, they were conferred U.S. citizenship, a status otherwise proscribed by the U.S. Congress from persons racialized as Chinese and of non-American birth since 1882. Akina, Aseu, and their descendants thereafter shaped life trajectories empowered by this fortuitous exceptionalism. Aseu returned with his wife, U.S. passports in hand, to China in the first decade of the twentieth century to advance renewed Christian missioning, this time in Shanghai; their children would settle on either coast of the U.S. mainland.[62] Surviving his wife Harriet Maiaka Kalua by almost two decades, Akina remained on his plantation in Kohala until his death in 1913. Their eldest son, Ernest A.K. Akina (1884–1956), born during the sugar days in Pololū, worked in office positions for *haole*-run sugar plantations across the Island of Hawai'i as a young man, before winning election as a Republican Senator for Kohala in the Territorial Legislature during the 1920s and the 1930s (Rosa 2014: 49; Tamura 1994: 135). Attaining a public prominence unthinkable for his father during the late nineteenth century, he continued his father's

[62] *The Hawaiian Star*, 31 December 1904: 6.

interactions with sugar production, now under a regime of American sovereignty. He was most assuredly not the type of future politician envisioned by many *haole* nativists of the 1880s and 1890s in their reveries of a future White Hawai'i. In the Territorial Hawai'i of the early twentieth century, what Ernest provided was a genealogical link between older projects of sovereignty and the continued economic primacy of sugar, embodying the continued localization of foreign sources of power integral to the configuration of sovereignty in modern Hawai'i.

Further study of plantation Hawai'i should recover additional experiences in the spectrum of actor responses to the intersection of state and carceral power, ethnic and national identity, religious conviction, and sugar-derived capital prior to American overrule. As suggested by the plurality of social and religious commitments held by the three Chinese sugar planters studied in this chapter, national and ethnic identities need not be the inevitable basis of this analysis. While racially based affinities certainly grew in importance during this period, they were not the only prism through which actors in fin-de-siècle Hawai'i co-operated with one another, as evidenced by Afong's alliance with John Adam Cummins, Akina and Aseu's partnership with the anti-American judge turned sugar mill operator Charles F. Hart, or Aseu's close ties with Congregationalist actors. The conjoined factors of exploitation and collaboration in the emergent Hawaiian sugar economy had long-term effects on mediating the character of plantations, colonialism, and sovereignty in the islands, cutting across the temporality which Josep A. Fradera has termed imperial transition (2018). During the 1870s and 1880s, there were hopes by many actors that a multicultural planter class might emerge in Hawai'i. There was also increasing criticism by an interracial coalition of observers of the fundamentally exploitative character of plantation colonialism in the islands. It was only during the 1890s, when militant *haole* nativists found common cause with a rising faction of U.S. imperialists, that the stakes of sovereignty in the islands became fundamentally reframed. The monarchy's embrace of plantation colonialism no longer served to invite inter-ethnic elite collaboration and to occasion political fissures among Native Hawaiian nationalist radicals like Robert William Wilcox and John E. Bush. Instead, support for the restoration of the monarchy came to represent the rejection of *haole* nativists' assertion of cultural and political primacy over Native Hawaiians. The violent seizing of state power by white settler nativists in the late 1880s acted to racialize Hawaiian politics in a newly acute way; contemporary scholars might exert more caution in

uncritically reproducing the frameworks and assumptions that followed in their wake.

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