2 SIDES: CHINESE GIRLS IN THE 90S

This Zine was created by Cristina Zavala Portugal and includes a reflection written by James Scorer

# Zine Transcript

COVER

CHICXSCHINXSENLOS90S

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BACKCOVER

*Chinese girls in the 90s*

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Vignette 1

*At the beginning of the nineties in Peru there was still fear... Terrorism was still present in the streets*

*-Did you do the homework?*

*-Nooo, there was a blackout*

*-In my house too, but I did it by candlelight*

Vignette 2

*Blackouts, car bomb attacks, threats from Shining Path, the terrorist group*

Vignette 3

(Image: TV showing Dragon Ball)

*And our main means of entertainment TV indoors.*

Vignette 2

(Image: Room 202)

*-You saw the end of cobra?*

*-Yes, what a shame, it's over*

Vignette 5 television

(Image: TV showing JIBAN)

Vignette 6

*- What's that about Cobra?*

*-It's something the Chinese watch*

Vignette 7

(Image: TV showing President Fujimori, 3 characters talk)

*In the nineties we had a president of Japanese origin, but people called him Chinese because in Peru the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, etc. "all look the same"*

*-My dad is upset he lost his job because of the Chinese man*

*-But he's not Chinese he’s Japanese*

*-All because of that shitty Chinese*

Vignette 8

(Image: Chifa Amigo)

*In the nineties we had a chifa on every corner*

*-Ich creamsh*

Vignette 9

(Image: Bodega la Esquinita)

*And the classic Chinese stores*

*-Brother calm down, you're smoking like a bankrupt Chinese man*

PAGE BREAK

Vignette 1

(Image: magazine stand. Advertising gum Chiclets Adams)

*Many kids of my generation grew up with Japanese comics. In the newsstands it was easier to get magazines and manga than comics.*

*-Sir, please give me the last issue of sugoi*

Vignette 2

(Image: 3 characters talk)

*-Look the Chinese only hang out with the Chinese*

*-Let’s eat at your house and then we can go to the screening*

*-Today they are showing evangelion*

Vignette 3

*It was the anime boom and for many it was the first introduction to drawing.*

*Fun fact: many of today's cartoonists attended the Sugoi club*

Vignette 4

(Image: cinema, 3 characters speak)

*-Friend you are from China?*

*-No, I am Peruvian*

*-I'm Nikkei*

Vignette 5

(Image: projection)

Vignette 6

*Orientalism became a common, everyday label. The term "Chinese" became a verb, chinear*

*-With the people from school we are going to go to a punk concert*

*-If you want, you can take your friends, the chinitos*

Vignette 7

*-But we are not Chinese, our families are of Japanese origin*

*-We are always made into Chinese*

Vignette 8

(Image: concert)

*-the band 6 voltios is already on stage*

*-I'm going to the pogo*

Vignette 9

(Image: pogo)

*-little chinita leave the pogo, you’re going to get hit*

*-thinking: Chinita? I don't even know you*

Vignette 10

*- What?*

*-They took me out of the pogo!*

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Vignette 1

(Image: 3 characters talk)

*Over time we started to attend the underground scene in the not well regarded centre of Lima*

*-I had to lie at home and say we were going to the movies*

*-That Combi leaves us right in Quilca*

*-Chinese, run for the bus!*

Vignette 2

*There we discovered the first fanzines, books, records, movies and all kinds of pirated goods*

*-Poetry 1 sol*

*-singing: Provincial nostalgia in search of opportunity, no time has not passed, now we are many more, the hard urban life and that of being marginal*

Vignette 3

(Image: 3 characters talk)

*-I'm hungry, but I only have 3 soles*

*-With that you can buy a wantan soup*

*-In that dirty chifa they’re only going to serve dog soup*

Vignette 4

(Image: Independent Publishing Fair)

*Many cartoonists met in art schools, universities and design institutes*

*- And what’s it about?*

*- It’s a Fanzine, drawings and poetry*

Vignette 5

(Image: 4 characters)

*We published our first fanzines together at fairs and festivals, so we got to know more and more cartoonists*

*-This drawing reminds me of the demon from the movie Princess Mononoke*

*-mmm something like that*

*-Yes, it's true, I remember I saw it when it premiered in Sugoi*

*- I was there too!*

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Vignette 1

*The life of the comic artist is difficult, especially when looking for work... Everything seemed to go against us*

*-Let's see, leave your CVs on the desk*

Vignette 2

*-Mm not this one, a woman*

*-Nor these two because we don’t want manga artists*

*-I think that guy is the designer of the competition*

Vignette 3

(Image: 4 characters talk)

-Did they call you from the magazine?

-No, nothing

-Hi!

- Speak, Chinese, what’s up?

Four 4

(Image: local drawing festival, 3 characters talk)

*No matter how much time passes, friends stay, and we continue to consume Asian culture.*

*-Don't forget to send me that junji ito link*

*-What did you buy?*

*-A CHI FAN ZIN. It’s a fanzine with stories about chifas*

Vignette 5

*-mmm, I don't know what to do, you?*

*-The silhouette of a horse riding on a ghost planet*

Vignette 6

(sales stand with manga)

*-How much?*

*-200. It’s a special edition with 10 extra minutes*

Vignette 7

(kachina comics)

-The originals cost 100, the prints 20

-Ah thanks!

Vignette 8

(notes)

*Chinear: calling a person with slanted eyes Chinese*

*Chifa: Peruvian Chinese restaurant*

*Wan tan: noodle pasta*

*Pogo: a kind of dance with jumps and pushes during concerts*

*Speak: greeting between hello and what’s up*

The End

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# Text written by James Scorer

La gente no se da cuenta que camina sobre ruinas  
 La ciudad se me echa encima, toda esta mierda me asfixia

* Narcosis, ‘Destuir’

Se acerca un trago con un amigo,

destino justo, venir aquí.

Se brinda en pos de un futuro en sincro

con bombo en negras y amor sin fin. Yahoo!

* Catupecu Machu, ‘Eso vive’

As the last millennium ended, the Latin American city encouraged foreign investment by promoting itself with imaginaries built around polished veneers. New financial skyscraper districts, new interurban train lines, new residential tower blocks and gated communities all promised a new beginning, an embrace of foreign capital and the promise of the free market that would finally put to bed discourses of dependency, cultural neo-imperialism, and civil unrest. This politics of superficiality was built around an eternal present, stripped of history, memory, and contested futures. The past was only permissible as a site of consumption, an object to be consumed. The future was only conceivable in terms of market-led citizenship-as-consumption. It didn’t matter, the market implied, whether you’re black or white: you matter because you consume, you consume because you are matter. Latin America gazed into the soporific possibilities of big horizons, open skies that in the absence of depth became eternal nothingness.

Except, of course, the neoliberal era was never so pristine white. Beyond the sheen of the metropolis’s urban veneer was an increasingly marginalised underclass, to be found not just in the rural peripheries but also in the urban interstices in the heart of the city. And that underclass was based around discourses, ideologies, and practices of racial exclusion.

As the millennium ended, the promise of shopping centres and the polished surfaces of foreign investment in Argentina were based on simultaneous exclusions of the very racialised working classes and immigrants from neighbouring countries that underpinned the service economy. Urban growth and the era of ‘pizza y champagne’ was built on live-in maids, construction workers, chefs and waiters, and gardeners, not to mention an increasingly disaffected youth, all of whom were depicted as an unwelcome ‘darkening’ of the city. Argentine cities, particularly Buenos Aires, were becoming too ‘Latin American’, many lamented. But racial discrimination also structured life in Argentina’s provincial cities, spaces all too often ignored by a culture industry beholden to the towering domination of the capital city. Argentine economic crises, not least the crash of 2001, are nearly always felt in the provinces before they are in the capital – it’s just those in Buenos Aires fail to notice.

In Peru during the same decade a president with a radically different Japanese racial heritage was elected, appealing to the (racially) marginalised. Following the Latin American propensity for collapsing Asian identities into one, he was known as ‘El Chino’. And yet even such indifference to difference – it doesn’t matter if you’re Chinese or Japanese since they look all the same, don’t they? – is itself a discourse of exclusion: it matters that I don’t recognise you for what you are, it matters that you’re not me. Moreover, the threat of armed struggle, an internal armed conflict so confusing in its racial politics – was this a rebellion of the backlands? of the racially excluded? if so, why so many violent indigenous deaths? – was a reminder of the limitations of the white neoliberal promise. In the end Fujimori’s neoliberal restructuring was deep and brutal, exacerbating an already racially structured labour market and its underbelly of unemployment.

This zine looks back at these intense days of racialised neoliberalism, a world of full of contradictions, flipsides, precarious dichotomies, racial structures out of sync with the language and visualities of the urban imagination. Their impact on lived experience was all too real, all too brutal. For if neoliberalism promised a horizon full of possibilities, it offered no protection for those left behind by market-driven reforms. For that reason, you can read this zine front to back and back to front, an invitation to break with the unidirectionality of neoliberal whiteness. And this double structure, this mirroring, is a reminder of the shared exclusions of Latin American neoliberalism – Argentina and Peru both suffered the impact of unemployment and underemployment, of structural racism, and of a cultural industry largely cut adrift at the expense of other, more visible forms of state investment. And both, for all their diverse cultural histories, shared a similar turn to zines and subsequently comics as a way of processing division, fragmentation, exclusion. Zines and comics, like other forms of cultural production, particularly music, whose beats and riffs recur in both the comics included here, appropriated the imported technologies of neoliberalism – photocopiers, digital screen printers, pirated copies, illegal downloads – to enable them to occupy the margins and spaces of exclusion as a productively unstable platform to foment visual and written discourses of presence, cries of ‘we are still here’ if you only you/they took the trouble to look.

So the comics zine is the ideal cultural form to address the contradictions and crises that laid bare the brutalities of neoliberal at the turn of the new millennium. The zine is the underbelly to the neoliberal drive and its multinational publishing houses. The zine is rough around the edges, lays a claim to engaged immediacy, political impermanence, profitless inconsequentiality. And these comics disrupt the superficialities of the neoliberal era, its imaginaries of market-driven equalities, modernisation, and flow. Comics restore a visuality of fragmentation, of temporal multi-directionality, and an awareness of shared visualities of exclusion that are not indifferent to difference.