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Grace Peña Delgado's Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

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MAKING THE CHINESE MEXICAN: GLOBAL MIGRATION, LOCALISM, AND EXCLUSION IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS. By Grace Peña Delgado. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012. 320 pp. ISBN: 9780804778145.

In her first book, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, historian Grace Peña Delgado builds upon her award winning articles and chapters on North American borderlands, transnationalism, immigration, Asian Americans, as well as gender and sexuality. Broadly, *Making the Chinese Mexican* follows the history of Chinese people in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, though the book gives particular attention to the Arizona-Sonora borderlands. Within this geographical scope, Delgado explores numerous, diverse stories of Chinese immigrants becoming *fronterizos* (border people or Chinese Mexicans) from the second half of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century. Importantly, Delgado ventures beyond American and Mexican state-centered narratives in recounting the lives of Chinese *fronterizos*. She builds a vivid transnational and trans-Pacific history of migration, trade, and communication networks that connected China to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Hence, the author concludes, “[t]he world of the Chinese *fronterizo* was shaped by the convergence of trans-Pacific networks and local borderlands arrangements” (p. 6). That is, empires, nation-states, and local societies all influenced the social fluidity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and therefore, all three social formations shaped the lives of Chinese *fronterizos*. Delgado further argues that “the U.S.-Mexico borderlands was a world of overlapping cultures and epochs of Chinese, native peoples, and Mexicans who” built friendships, kinship ties, and economic relations while at times clashing in rivalries (p. 12). Finally, Delgado asserts that while adapting to their geographic and cultural surroundings, Chinese *fronterizos* “countered exploitation and race hatred in multiple and contingent ways” (p. 12). Thus, Delgado takes several innovative approaches to uncover the history of Chinese origin *fronterizos* that has been largely hidden under ethnocentric, nationalist narratives in both Mexico and the United States.

Delgado opens the book by detailing the trans-Pacific human and economic networks that Chinese migrants used to reach the U.S.-Mexico border region. In the borderlands, “[j]ust as they brought their culture with them, the Chinese were equally transformed in turn by the culture they encountered. . . In the process, they became *fronterizos*” (p. 39). Kinship ties as well as social and business relations allowed Chinese *fronterizos* to survive and at times prosper in an often hostile and

xenophobic border region. Indeed, through personal and business networks, the U.S.–Mexico border remained largely traversable for Chinese *fronterizos*. However, draconian U.S. Chinese exclusion laws and subsequent mass deportations began closing the border for Chinese origin people. Subsequently, “smuggling emerged as a mechanism for challenging” the solidifying border where “whiteness” became the foundation for government authorized entry into the United States (p. 88).

In Mexico, anti-Chinese sentiment also emerged to the point of public hysteria. During the Mexican Revolution and into the 1920s, Chinese origin people suffered massacres, faced baseless accusations of carrying infectious diseases that endangered the larger Mexican public, and had their businesses suppressed. Individuals, like as José María Arana and José Ángel Espinoza, stimulated xenophobia through nativist publications, protests, as well as government lobbying that called for the deportation of Chinese Mexicans and the barring of interracial marriages between “racially ‘unfit’ ” Chinese men and Mexican women (p. 174). By 1923 Sonora banned judges and clergy from conducting such interracial marriages. In addition, throughout Mexico, Chinese origin people encountered the nationalist, exclusionary concept of *mestizaje*. Chinese Mexicans realized that *mestizaje* rested (rests) on an idealized racial mixing of Europeans and Mexico’s indigenous people—which ultimately sought to erase American Indian, African, and Asian cultures under a Europeanized mestizo identity. In response, “the Chinese began to . . . counter *mestizaje* . . . harnessing political and economic resources to challenge claims that they were not rightful Mexicans” (p. 161). Yet, by the 1930s most of northern Mexico’s Chinese population began to flee the region under popular and government persecution.

With great sympathy for the efforts and suffering of Chinese *fronterizos*, Delgado skillfully weaves together a transnational and trans-Pacific ethnohistory. She is able to construct this powerful narrative through outstanding archival research in the United States and Mexico, making use of over eighty newspapers, oral histories, and government records; although, it is notable that Delgado does not use sources from China. To fully document the trans-Pacific aspect of the human and economic networks (to which Delgado repeatedly refers but does not investigate as deeply as North American migration and trade) such sources would have served her well. Nevertheless, the book includes informative maps depicting Chinese migration routes at a global scale and within the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. Moreover, twenty-five seamlessly imbedded images and photographs aid the reader in imagining the everyday life of Chinese *fronterizos* along with the extraordinary circumstances they faced.

*Making the Chinese Mexican* is undoubtedly a groundbreaking history of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. Indeed, it is the first book-length study of the Chinese diaspora in the region. In her successful detailing of Chinese *fronterizos*' experiences, Delgado adds to the body of work of Erika Lee, Judy Yung, and other Chinese American historians but also to more recent scholarship on Chinese Mexicans, such as Julia María Schiavone Camacho's *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910–1960* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Perhaps more importantly, Delgado's detailing of Chinese people's similar and dissimilar experiences on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border interweaves the ethnic Chinese histories of the United States and Mexico. In short, Delgado's work opens new lines of conversation among various scholarly fields. Historians of northern Mexico and the Southwest, general historians of the United States and Mexico, ethnohistorians, borderlands scholars, as well as migration scholars should find this book of great interest.

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