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Outsider Crossings:  
History, Culture, and Geography of Mexicali's Chinese Community

By

Jason Oliver Chang

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Ethnic Studies  
in the  
Graduate Division  
of the  
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy, Chair  
Professor Laura Perez  
Professor David Montejano  
Professor Margaret Chowning  
Professor Madeline Hsu

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Abstract

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Jason Oliver Chang

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy, Chair

Founded at the turn of the twentieth century, the irrigated colony at Mexicali, Baja California was established by Chinese farmers and merchants as a cotton-growing enclave. This dissertation recuperates the marginalized history of this community's development and uncovers why this historical narrative has been erased. I use a diverse array of U.S. and Mexican archival sources to examine the frontiers of U.S. imperialism, explore Mexican racial formations, and trace changes to a trans-national Chinese community.

Through different types of historical evidence I make four arguments. First, that a trans-Pacific conceptual framework helps to better understand the role that Chinese communities played in the formation of the U.S.-Mexico border. I details how the conquest of Mexico and imperial aggression in East Asia allowed the U.S. to usurp the colonial circuits of the trans-Pacific Spanish Galleon trade. Through the simultaneous assault in Asia and Mexico the Pacific became crossed with pathways that encouraged the Chinese to settle in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Second, that migrating Chinese merchants and farmers were central to the development of Mexicali. I illustrate how their expertise in China's cotton industry prepared them well to turn the desert border region into an irrigated colony. I trace their transnational geographies and social networks of this diasporic Chinese community in order to show how Mexicali became a Chinese place. Third, I contend that the racial boundaries of post-Revolutionary Mexican nationalism considered the Chinese community in Mexicali an immanent threat. I describe how definitions of what the one-time president, Abelardo Rodriguez, called "genuine Mexican colonization" racially segregated the economic development and political integration of Baja California. Lastly, I demonstrate how a series of racial programs of *Mexicanización* sought to undermine the Chinese community and expunge them from historical narratives of the region. Baja California historiography, Mexicali's public spaces, and a museum illustrate different modes of erasure and reconfiguration in narratives about the history of Mexicali's Chinese community.

## Acknowledgements

As I reflect on the countless individuals and organizations that have helped me along on this journey I am humbled by the generosity, patience, and support I can remember as well as all that I have neglected to honor with memory. I want to first thank the Ethnic Studies faculty at the University of California, Berkeley. Without their provocation, guidance and encouragement I would not have become the scholar that I am proud to be today.

In particular, I want to thank Prof. David Montejano for his candid advice and sharp criticism from my first day at Cal. I am grateful that he shared his passion for the history of *la frontera* with me and helped me think through an alternative Borderlands historiography. I want to thank the other members of my Oral Exam Prof. Katharya Um, Prof. Thomas Biolsi, and the late Prof. Jon Gjerde. Thanks to Katharya I was able to formulate my own ideas about the intellectual project of Comparative Ethnic Studies. Tom's exciting seminars and help with my Critical Theory reading list gave me the chance to explore early stages of my research and consider a broad range of theoretical models to examine Mexicali. It was under the direction of Jon Gjerde that I became passionate about archival research and historical studies. I never got a chance to share this research with him. Thank you all for helping to shape my experience at Berkeley.

On my dissertation committee I want to thank Prof. Margaret Chowning for stepping in to replace Jon and for helping me to critically engage with the questions of transnational history in Latin America. Her extensive knowledge of Mexican history dramatically improved later drafts of this work. Prof. Laura Perez has encouraged me to take intellectual risks and pursue unconventional methods. Thanks for helping me to expand my horizons and suggesting the Latino Museum Studies Program at the Smithsonian. Again, Prof. David Montejano thanks for being a constant presence throughout my dissertation research. Prof. Madeline Hsu has helped me to be a more careful historian of the Chinese diaspora and helped me to remain productive when I moved to Austin.

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*JOC*  
*Austin, TX*  
*8.30.10*

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
<b>Part I: Putting Mexicali on the Map: The Synchronic Frontiers of U.S. Imperialism.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Chapter 2: The Sino-Mexican Symbiosis and U.S. Interests in the Colonial Pacific.....	17
Chapter 3: The Emergence of Mexicali amidst Multiple Borders.....	33
<b>Part II: Borders are a Chinese Space.....</b>	<b>47</b>
Chapter 4: Leaving China, Seeking Strength.....	49
Chapter 5: Making Mexicali into a Chinese Place.....	64
<b>Part III: Making Baja California into a Mexican Place .....</b>	<b>81</b>
Chapter 6: The Reign of Abelardo Rodríguez.....	86
Chapter 7: Economic Decline and Racial Dimensions of Mexican Labor...	100
Chapter 8: President Cárdenas and the Problem of Territory.....	115
<b>Part IV: Belonging, Migration and the Politics of Silence.....</b>	<b>125</b>
Chapter 9: <i>Mexicanización</i> as History.....	128
Chapter 10: Configurations of Mexican Space.....	136
Chapter 11: Life in a State of Amnesia.....	162
<b>References.....</b>	<b>170</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*La Plaza de Amistad*, or the Plaza of Friendship, is nestled between the traffic of the Calexico-Mexicali port of entry at the U.S.-Mexico international border. The modest plaza is among the first sites visible as one enters Mexicali and the last site before encountering U.S. Customs agents. It is not a commemoration of the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Mexico, but a commemoration of Mexicali's relationship with China. The small plot features an ornate Chinese pavilion, which the accompanying plaque states, was built by Chinese and Mexican workers. The plaza was constructed in 1995 after Mexicali and Nanjing became sister cities and negotiated local trade agreements.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1 La Plaza de Amistad, Mexicali. Source: Author Photo, 2008**

In this photo the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol offices of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security are visible in the background with the Mexican Customs and Duty-Free Mall at the left of the plaza. While the pavilion has more to do with the border's incorporation into postmodern global capitalism, than the histories of Chinese residents in Mexicali this image provides a unique introduction to my dissertation because it captures the triangular set of relations between the U.S., China, and Mexico in the formation of this border. It is also a symbol of the repeated marginalization of the Chinese, because it had nothing to do with the history or contributions of the Chinese to Mexico and everything to do with attracting Asian corporate investments to bolster Mexican manufacturing jobs. Nevertheless, I read La Plaza de Amistad as a troubling reminder of the politics of telling the story of Mexicali's Chinese community.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Ramos Flores, "Nanjing and Mexicali will Fortify Their Fraternal Relationship," *La Cronica*, May 12 2002.

While this pavilion stands today as the most visible ethnically symbolic marker of the Chinese presence in Mexicali, its prominence in relation to the rest of the city reflects the violent ethnic cleansing that had removed any other indication that Mexicali was once a Chinese place. *Mexicanización* campaigns beginning in the late 1920s enacted state programs to undermine Mexicali's Chinese community. In the previous twenty years Mexicali grew to become a Chinese place, where thousands of Chinese farmers, merchants, and laborers brought their expertise in cotton cultivation and trans-Pacific trade to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Indeed, throughout the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century Chinese settlement and migration throughout the U.S.-Mexico border region was a critical feature of the frontier condition and an important legacy of the imperialist geographies that interlocked East Asia and the colonization of the settler-states of the U.S. and Mexico. This dissertation project uses the history of Mexicali's Chinese community to radically rethink the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a multi-sided spatial formation that triangulates the U.S. as an expansionist imperial state, East Asian colonization with its resultant migrations, and Mexico as a post-colonial state unsettled by nation-building and industrial capitalism.

Combining these social fields affords unique openings for inquiry. This transnational framework is helpful for unpacking the story of Mexicali's Chinese community and why their past has been erased. It is useful because it encompasses the transnational social structures that shaped Chinese immigrants' conditions of possibility and the racializations that simultaneously drew them to the border and made them pariahs. Furthermore, this framework is a valuable re-articulation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands which sees it as being structurally coupled with the colonial economies, imperial maps, and material circuits of the Pacific Rim. For too long the north/south binary of *la frontera* has limited our conception of the region and the identities of its residents. This simplified spatial construct has served scholars, critics, and journalists alike in their rush to portray the drama of colliding cultures, economic transformation, and communities in migration. The spatial limitations of this model of the border mask not only bi-national Chinese communities, but also the broader circuits of power that link Mexico to economies and peoples of the Pacific Rim. Mexicali's Chinese community provides the occasion to recast the geopolitical relations of this border with East Asia. This reformulation is not only helpful for understanding the Chinese in northern Mexico, but also for appreciating how Sino-Mexican trans-Pacific Spanish colonial commerce by U.S. imperialism. With this perspective, U.S. capitalist dominance and territorial acquisition in Mexico and the Asian Pacific in the mid-nineteenth century are intimately connected fixtures within the larger historical constellation of American hegemony in the capitalist world-system. Without such a perspective, La Plaza de Amistad is rendered as a strange feature of the border and the Chinese community there an anomalous enclave.

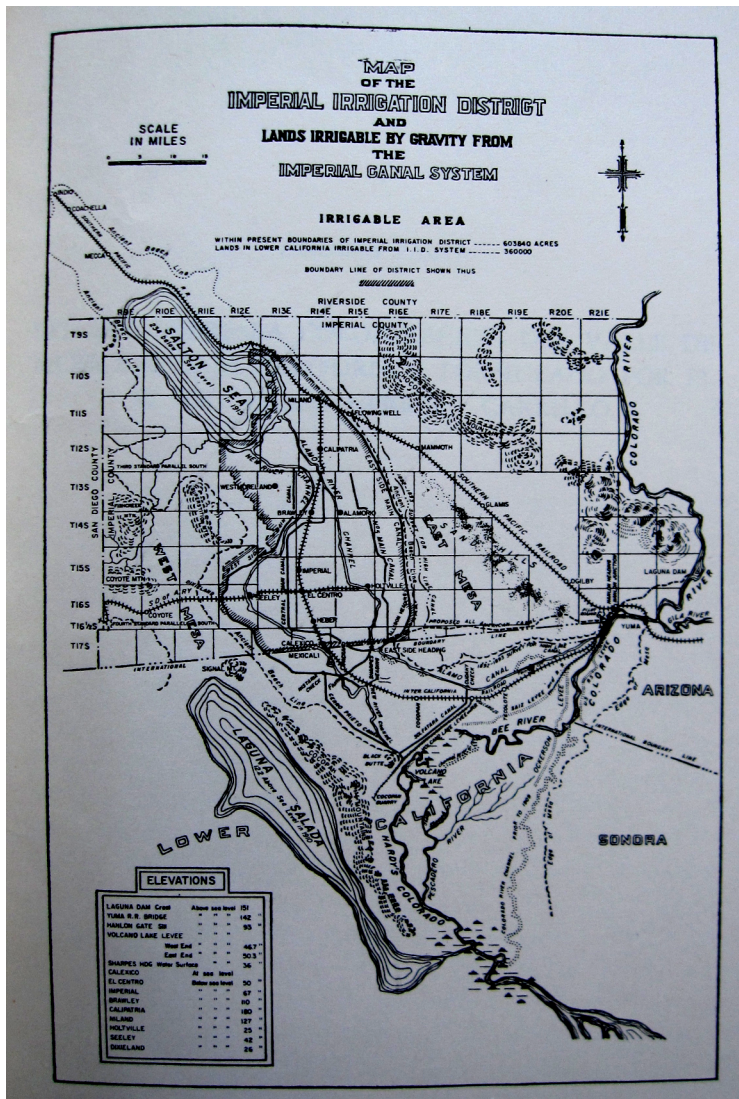
Because of the overlapping geographies of this framework, my dissertation contributes to the fields of Asian American History, Mexican History, and Chinese diaspora studies. By recovering the stories of Mexicali's Chinese community we not only come to understand the Mexican lives of some Chinese Americans, but also how Chinese exclusion from the U.S. shaped communities in Mexico. The experience of Mexicali's Chinese community adds to the study of power in post-Revolutionary Mexico by examining racial formations of a limited *mestizo* nation-building project. It also contributes to a broader understanding of the Mexican state's involvement in the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border. The consideration of this border community is more than a study of Chinese in unexpected places, but an examination of under-appreciated continuities and transnational social formations. As a study of the

Chinese diaspora in Latin America it sheds new light on the colonial continuities maintained by Mexican national independence as well as the ways that Spanish colonization and U.S. imperialism created pathways for the Chinese to settle in the Americas. In addition, Chinese migrations and settlement in the Western U.S. should not be divorced from the violent conquest of northern Mexico. I hope to contribute to these fields by illustrating the relational processes that describe a marginalized community as well as different ways to conceptualize transnational social formations.

*The Problem of Outsider Crossings*

East of San Diego and Tijuana, the Mexicali/Calexico corridor is the youngest pair of cities perched along the U.S.-Mexico border. At the turn of the twentieth century this segment of the border was developed as an enormous bi-national irrigation system that became one of the most important agricultural zones to both California and Baja California. The map below shows the major geographic features of the region and political boundaries at the turn of the century.

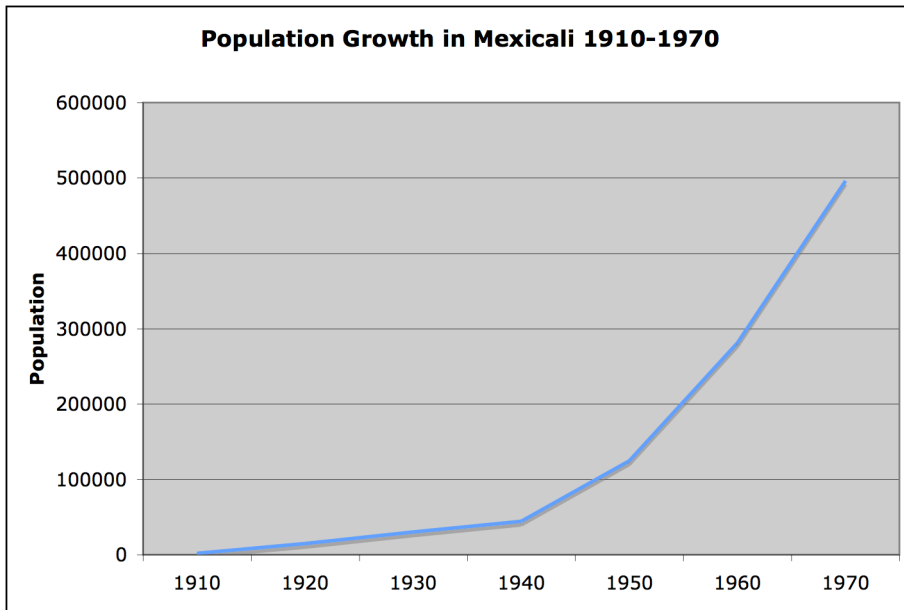




**Figure 2 Map of the Imperial Irrigation District and Mexican lands. Source: Villaseñor, Adalberto Saldaña. *Colonización del Valle de Mexicali, BC*. Mexico City: Union Grafica, 1958.**

North of the border the basin is called Imperial Valley, this area combined with Mexicali's agricultural landscape makes this region one of the most extensive and heavily irrigated places on the planet. Its lush fields are visible from space in contrast to the adjacent pale desert. Many attribute the historical circumstances of this region to its geography and aridity. At its founding in 1903 this was an isolated border region boasting a modest population until its explosive growth in the 1930s due to labor migrations and domestic relocation programs in Mexico. By the 1920s, Mexicali's population was a majority Chinese however, the relocation and migrations of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans quickly eclipsed this once remote desert colony. [See Figure 3] During these first decades Mexicali was a Chinese place plugged into global migration routes and engaged in direct trade with East Asia via the San Pedro port in Los Angeles. In this period Chinese farmers and merchants were the majority of the population growing to almost 20,000 in the 1920s. While their recorded population registers a smaller size, I suspect that their numbers were greater because many lived in hard to count

rural areas, the state bureaucracy was weak in that period, and many Chinese avoided government agents to evade prejudicial taxes and harassment. This dissertation tells their story as a history of global connections structured by different endemic hierarchies. In order for Chinese farmers, merchants and laborers to arrive in Mexicali they necessarily had to pilot through the social structures of coastal China, U.S. Empire, and the Mexican state. From the late Qing Empire in China to the post-Revolutionary Mexican state to the sprawling U.S. Empire across North America and into the Pacific these migrants successfully transformed a remote desert applying their expertise in irrigated cotton and seeking strength through enterprise.



**Figure 3 Population Growth of Mexicali. Source: Kimberly Collins, "Population Demographics for the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys," *California Center for Border and Regional Economic Studies Bulletin* 8 (March/April, 2007).**

By using pathways created by the expansion of U.S. capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century Chinese farmers and merchants flocked to Mexicali to establish the irrigated colonization of once peripheral Mexican territory. Today Mexicali is known as an uncharacteristically rural border town with an inordinate number of Chinese restaurants.<sup>2</sup> The novelty of Chinese-Mexican cuisine in Mexicali has largely served as a distraction from the history of brutal repression and segregation of the Chinese since their eviction from the valley's cotton ranches that relegated them to the niche food service market. Food studies are productive grounds for investigating identity formation, cultural exchange and ethnic economies. However, without a grounded historical understanding of the emergence of food practices they risk reproducing a political silence that masks stories of oppression with the

<sup>2</sup> Joe Cummings, "Mexicali's Chinatown: Shark Fin Tacos and Barbecued Chow Mein," (CPAMedia, 2001). Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993). Sarah Bak-Geller, "Chinese Cooks and Mexican Tastes: The Encounter of Two Culinary Practices in Mexico's Chinese Restaurants," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 1 (2005): 121-129, Kimberly Collins, "Population Demographics for the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys," *California Center for Border and Regional Economic Studies Bulletin* 8, no. 3 & 4 (2007): 2.

glorification of hybrid culture. The present work is not about origins, but resuscitating a past that shows how Mexicali became a Chinese place, and the violent rupture of that community. In other words, it recovers their lost stories of becoming and disappearing, broadening the contingency and contestation of the border's cultural history.<sup>3</sup> This project is less about issues of origin than it is of how local conditions structure the interpretation of transnational social formations.

This dissertation wrestles with Mexicali's Chinese restaurants indirectly, as one of the neglected stories of Chinese settlement in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. My work is an attempt to show how U.S. imperialism, the Chinese diaspora, and the Mexican nation-state converged in the formation of a modern inter-state border. For example, by the 1920s the U.S. had established an empire stretching from the Caribbean to Panama to the Philippines. This empire created conduits for Chinese farmers who by that time had become the majority of residents in Mexicali cultivating and trading cotton to East Asia. This cotton-growing enclave became the target of skillful politicians in Mexico that had usurped the momentum of the national rebellion and began to consolidate their power throughout the country. I trace the developments in these three areas and articulate their interactions to move beyond a binary north/south model of the border to one that embraces the simultaneity and multiplicity of global space.

In the following chapters I answer the question, what is the history of the Chinese community in Mexicali? I draw from diverse archival sources in the U.S. and Mexico to make sense of a subjugated past. The lack of historical knowledge about this enclave has created a gap between the past and the present, which obscures the ways that the Mexican state disenfranchised this population in a process of *Mexicanización*. Mexican state sponsored programs sought to racially exclude the Chinese from what, the one-time Mexican President and governor of Baja California, Abelardo Rodríguez referred to as "genuine Mexican colonization." In order to explain these stories I bring to light new evidence exploring comparative racial formations in modern Mexico. The racialization of the Chinese is not an isolated, individuated process but set in relation to the consolidation of Mexican citizens as homogeneous racial subjects of the post-Revolutionary state.

As a historical project, this dissertation draws from on-going discussions in the comparative study of race and ethnicity. I use racial formation theory as a foundation from which to explore the Chinese experience in Mexicali. The theory states that the meaning of race is found in the social structures that distribute resources and opportunities as well as the discourses that describe and explain apparent racial inequalities.<sup>4</sup> While developed to describe race in the late twentieth century U.S. the theory is appropriate to understand racialization in modern Mexico.<sup>5</sup> This theory also helps to explain how nation-states create race in order to intensify their power to dictate the conditions of life.<sup>6</sup> These theories of power serve to underscore how other categories of identity - such as gender, class, and

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Buck-Morss and Walter Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, ed. Jenny Pearce, *Critical Studies in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

sexuality - intersect with race as a matrix of powerful social structures with fluid and contested meanings. Because of the trans-Pacific reach of this project I explore some transnational dimensions of racial formations such as the challenges imposed by incorporating multiple frontier zones in the expansion of U.S. imperialism, the influence of being a member of a diaspora in responses to racialization, and the appropriation of international discourses of citizenship and race by the Mexican state in defining nationhood.<sup>7</sup> In this way I use racial formations to articulate different systems of race-making as well as different positions within a given racial hierarchy.

The Baja California project of ethnic cleansing also resulted in the *Mexicanización* of historical narratives, making it into an authentically Mexican place at the cost of erasing the Chinese from the past. This is why I also respond to questions derived from the relationships between history, culture, and ideology. Through my historical and cultural analysis I address the problem of why so little is known about the Chinese in Mexicali. I argue that the erasure of the Chinese community's struggle from historical knowledge is an essential component to dominant ideas that preserve the power of the government in Baja California. The "banalization" of the Chinese in Baja California serves to prop up positive narratives of *Mexicanización*, but more importantly reinforces the merits of state industrialization within the capitalist world-system.<sup>8</sup> By removing Mexicali's Chinese as a serious historical subject, narratives about the past serve to make history intelligible in ways that reproduce power relations.<sup>9</sup> I show how deliberate practices of erasure and denial parallel the previous acts of persecution and oppression.

Recovering histories of the Chinese in Mexicali not only provides openings into the study of Mexican nationalism and the post-Revolutionary state, but also illuminates the intersections between U.S. empire building and the Chinese diaspora. In popular versions of Baja California history, the presence of capitalist U.S. imperialism is ever present – embodied in the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC). This company was an extension of the Los Angeles-based land development syndicate of General Harrison Gray Otis and Harry Chandler, the LA Times newspaper moguls. At the turn of the twentieth century Otis acquired a contract with the Mexican government to establish an irrigated colony in the desert basin of the Colorado River along the U.S.-Mexico border. While the expansion of U.S. capitalism south of the border is a familiar historical process what is less familiar is that the CRLC attracted Chinese farmers and merchants to Mexicali in order to dig the canals, cultivate cotton, and broker it in the world market. CRLC efforts to hire Mexican workers failed because they sought better wages north of the border. My study challenges the common belief that the Chinese were merely the hired help of American capitalists, instead I argue that these immigrant farmers and merchants were well-equipped agents of commerce. While the CRLC is a typical example of U.S. colonization and white settlement in Mexican lands taken in conquest, the reliance upon individuals, institutions, and processes within the

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<sup>7</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Lok Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (San Jose: Stanford University Press, 2005). Erika Lee, "Orientalisms in the Americas," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8 (2005): 235-256.

<sup>8</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

Chinese diaspora demands a renewed perspective that incorporates the points of contact that made such connections possible.<sup>10</sup>

In the pursuit of my research I have encountered more than territorial borders, but also disciplinary borders and unstable categorizations of knowledge. The tendency to view the border in binary terms is not only too simplified but also reflects the continued success of *Mexicanización* campaigns to eradicate the “foreign” within Mexico. The title of the dissertation “outsider crossings” refers to the experiences of being an outsider to the nations on either side of the border and conceptualizing the boundary from that perspective. Mexican nation-building schemes in Baja California emphasize the need to expand the critical project of U.S.-Mexico Border Studies beyond the study of Mexican migration and racialization in the U.S. Also early twentieth-century Chinese migrations to Mexico ask us to consider how race and gender are articulated in trans-colonial contexts, requiring an analysis of systems of oppression found beyond (yet in relation to) the U.S. The history of Mexicali’s Chinese asks us to think of U.S. imperialism as simultaneously embarking on conquest in the Asian Pacific as well as Latin America in the middle of the nineteenth century. In these ways the triangular assemblage of the U.S.-China-Mexico is a more comprehensive framework for rethinking periodizations, categories of identity, and spatial constructs of these borderlands.

### *Contents and Contributions*

The dissertation chapters are organized in four parts that organize the material chronologically and thematically. Part I charts the trans-Pacific routes that created and sustain this region. In order to disentangle the diverse forces shaping Mexicali’s Chinese community Part II articulates the identities and practices within the Chinese diaspora. Part III investigates the politics of race, nation, and territory in post-Revolutionary Mexico. And Part IV examines the transformations imposed by programs of *Mexicanización* in the interpretation of Mexicali’s Chinese past. These four parts explore transnational dimensions of racial formations through different frames of comparativity.

Part I opens the work of the dissertation by presenting a trans-historical and transnational framework for understanding the historical antecedents that set the conditions of possibility for Mexicali’s Chinese community. Most historical narratives of the formation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands couch the territorial conquest of North America as a separate historical period from that of the expansion of U.S. imperialism into the Asian Pacific. Chapter 2 moves beyond this geographic bifurcation in order to accommodate the simultaneous intervention into the pre-existing trans-Pacific colonial circuits of commerce. I use newspapers, archival manuscripts, business records, and government documents to argue that U.S. empire-building in the nineteenth century struggled to appropriate the 300 year-old Spanish colonial trans-Pacific trade between Mexico and China that had been in operation since the seventeenth-century. These simultaneous fronts of expansion incorporated circuits of trade, migration, and ideas that shaped how both regions became interlocked through trans-Pacific corridors dominated by the U.S. Chapter 3 illustrates how these forces came to shape Mexicali. It follows the life and work of General Harrison Gray Otis who became an

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<sup>10</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1988). Gilbert. G. Gonzalez and Raul. A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

important figure in developing white settlements in Southern California and also a war hero in the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. His role in opening the Colorado River border region to large-scale irrigated colonization drew on the foundations of both the U.S. and Mexico as settler-states whose economies were still rooted in the circuits of colonial trade.

One of the legacies of these colonial trade circuits in the Pacific was the reliance upon Chinese merchants, or *compradores*, to broker international exchange and organize Chinese laborers. When Otis encountered labor problems in constructing the irrigated colony in Mexico he drew his solution from common and widespread practices throughout colonial Asia. Sparse and transient Mexican laborers in the early twentieth century made it necessary to import workers. Of the available alternatives at the time Chinese workers, were a staple throughout the nineteenth century colonial world and the U.S. settlement of California. They not only labored in commodity producing economies but also as merchants who facilitated the exchange of these commodities through commercial networks. The fact that Otis relied on Chinese workers in Mexico should not be surprising given the circumstances of the day. This work broadens the significance of others who have examined the structural position of the Chinese in colonial settler-states by describing the role that U.S. imperialism played by structuring corridors and capitalist markets that connected Asia and Latin America.<sup>11</sup> This framework also advances the field of Comparative Ethnic Studies by historicizing the multi-racial composition of the U.S. in a multi-sited geography of U.S. imperialism.

Part II explores more deeply the middleman role of Chinese merchants and traders by examining how imperialism structured the dispersal of the Chinese diaspora in the mid-nineteenth century. I argue that the disruption of the Qing dynasty by Euro-American imperialists set the stage for a crisis in economic development as well as identity formation. Chapter 4 argues that this political history pre-conditioned many Chinese male sojourners to seek a renovation of Chinese social norms through collective social practices in commercial enterprises. Because of the lack of source material on Mexicali's Chinese community, I have tried to glean insights from other histories of the Chinese diaspora, like the British Straits Settlements and the Spanish Philippines. I use this discussion to provide context for the encounters between the Chinese diaspora and agents of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century. I analyze the implementation of section 6 exemptions for merchants in the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Acts that barred Chinese laborers from immigrating to U.S. territory. The dependence upon Chinese farmers and merchants in Mexicali is grounded in these larger patterns of U.S. dependence upon the Chinese to transact business in East Asia. In this way, Chinese labor and market expertise enabled U.S. capitalist expansion in the early twentieth century, of which Mexicali is an important example of this process

Chapter 5 uses immigration and U.S. State Department records from the U.S. and Mexico along with company records from the CRLC offer an unprecedented view into the structure and dynamics of the Chinese community in Mexicali. I argue that because U.S. capitalists relied upon Chinese merchants to conduct international exchanges they helped

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<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society; The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932," *Journal of Arizona History* 21, no. Autumn (1980): 49-86. Arif Dirlik, "The Asia-Pacific in Asian American Perspective," in *What's in a Rim?: Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, ed. Arif Dirlik (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 283-308. M. A. Kim, "Immigrants, Workers, Pioneers: The Chinese and Mexican Colonization Efforts, 1890-1930" (Washington State University, 2000). Philip Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).



advocate for the opening of the U.S.-Mexico border to Chinese crossings and changing how the Chinese Exclusion Act was enforced. This revelation contributes to much of the work concerning the Chinese in northern Mexico because it illustrates how Mexicali's Chinese merchants established the precedence for legal crossing in 1924 when the border was opened to Chinese migrations.<sup>12</sup> This chapter also shows the sophisticated institutional arrangements Chinese farmers and merchants made to facilitate the expansion of cotton cultivation on CRLC plots in Mexicali. These new details challenge assumptions that the Chinese played a marginal role in the development of irrigated colonization.<sup>13</sup> The expanded understanding of this community contributes to Asian American Studies and Chinese Diaspora Studies by describing the Mexican lives of Chinese Americans in the early twentieth century and how Chinese migrants made the border into a Chinese place.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, my analysis of the intersections of race, gender, and migration contribute to socio-historical understandings of Chinese social norms in diaspora that have been largely explored through literature-based inquiries.<sup>15</sup>

Part II properly sets the stage for a history of ethnic cleansing and how the Mexican state fomented "genuine Mexican colonization." Part III tells the little known story of how the Chinese community in Mexicali was evicted and marginalized by massive population growth during the Great Depression. I draw from Mexican state and federal archives as well as U.S. State Department reports to piece together a story that has been repressed for the last fifty years in Mexican history. Chapter 6 describes how the reign of Abelardo Rodríguez as governor of the Baja California territory (1923-1930) and then as interim President of the Republic (1932-1934) destroyed the Chinese community through prejudicial racial taxes,

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Chao Romero, "Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916," *Amerasia Journal* 30, no. 3 (2004): 1-16. Grace Pena Delgado, "In the Age of Exclusion: Race, Religion and Chinese Identity in the Making of the Arizona-Sonora Borderlands, 1863--1943 (Mexico)" (University of California, 2000). Mee-Ae Kim, "Claiming the Desert: Mexico, the United States, and Chinese Immigrants in Mexicali, Baja California," (Albertson: College of Idaho, 2008). Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Ko-Lin Chin, *Smuggled Chinese: Clandestine Immigration to the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Dorothy Pierson Kerig, "Yankee Enclave: The Colorado River Land Company and the Mexican Agrarian Reform in Baja California" (University of California, 1988). Everardo Garduño, *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto Fértil* (Mexicali: UABC, 1991). Casey Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Sucheng Chan, *This Bitter-Sweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Eric Michael Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965" (Dissertation, UCLA, 2001). Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Gungwu Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints: Restoring Homosocial Normativity to Chinese American History," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 2 (2003): 229-253. K. Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Susan Brownell and Jeffery Wasserstrom, "Introduction: Theorizing Feminities and Masculinities," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. S. Brownell, J. Wasserstrom, and T. W. Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Martin Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

selective deportations, and negative publicity through casinos. Through these stories I illustrate how issues of race and nation at the border shaped national politics. Via the racial anxieties of political elites during the Great Depression, colonization campaigns brought thousands of repatriated and displaced Mexican workers to Mexicali. This population increase led to political demands that pitted Mexican politicians still dependent upon Chinese farmers against poor relocated Mexican workers. Chapter 7 shows how the labor politics of Mexican migrations became infused with intense racial meaning. Chapter 8 demonstrates how this condition set the stage for forced eviction of the Chinese known as *El Asalto a las Tierras* and the expropriation of CRLC lands and the realization of idealistic Mexican communal farms at the end of the 1930s. These Mexican farms, however, lacked the structural integration of the commercial networks possessed by the Chinese. These conditions sent many farms into bankruptcy only to be bailed out by American corporate agribusinesses. Nevertheless, this transformation was viewed as a success of “*Mexicanización*,” bringing this peripheral territory closer to integration and statehood in 1952.

Part III makes some important contributions to Mexican history and our understandings of the U.S.-Mexico border. First, it adds to the discussion of racial violence during the Mexican Revolution by clarifying that Mexicali was not exempt from anti-Chinese campaigns as well as by detailing how anti-Chinese organizations contributed to the consolidation of political power in the decades following the Revolution.<sup>16</sup> Second, Chapters 7 and 8 contribute to work that describes how the Mexican state structures the U.S.-Mexico border through economic programs and domestic population relocations in the early twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, my analysis of anti-Chinese politics advances research on the role of race in

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<sup>16</sup> Leo Jacques Dambourges, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1931" (University of Arizona, 1974). Leo Jacques Dambourges, "The Chinese Massacre in Torreón (Coahuila) in 1911," *Arizona and the West* 16, no. Autumn (1974): 233-46. Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "Voluntary Associations in a Predominantly Male Immigrant Community: The Chinese on the Northern Mexican Frontier, 1880-1930," in *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Khun Eng Kuah and Evelyn Hu-DeHart (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press., 2006), 141. Gerardo Renique, "Race, Region and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s," in *Race & Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy Appelbaum, Anne Macpherson, and Karin Roseblatt (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 211-236. Julia Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth-Century United States-Mexican Borderlands" (Dissertation, University of Texas, 2006). Moisés González Navarro and Delia Salazar Anaya, *Xenofobia y Xenofilia en la Historia de México, Siglos XIX y XX: Homenaje a Moisés González Navarro* (México: SEGOB Instituto Nacional de Migración Centro de Estudios Migratorios ; Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia ; DGE Ediciones SA de CV, 2006). Juan Puig, *Entre el Río Perla y el Nazas: La China Decimonónica y Sus Braceros Emigrantes, la Colonia China de Torreón y la Matanza de 1911* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1993). Jose Jorge Gomez Izquierdo, *El Movimiento Antichino en Mexico (1871-1934): Problemas del Racismo y del Nacionalismo Durante la Revolucion Mexicana* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología E Historia, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border*. Evan Ward, *Border Oasis: Water and the Political Ecology of the Colorado River Delta, 1940-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003). Gilbert Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999). Rudolfo Acuña, *Corridors of Migration: The Odyssey of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933* (Tempe: Univ of Arizona Press, 2007).



the construction of institutions in the Mexican state.<sup>18</sup> I continue these discussions in Part IV by exploring how socio-economic projects of racialization are paralleled by cultural practices of narrating authoritative histories.

Part IV takes on the aftermath of the Chinese eviction from their cotton ranches and the subsequent decades of *Mexicanización*, or the material and cultural projects that redesigned Baja California's history to reflect an "authentic" Mexican past. I use Mexican and U.S. archives along with the physical sites of cemeteries, a museum and public spaces to examine how Baja California's statehood was used as an opportunity to reconfigure historical narratives and the social space of the city. By tracing the programs that systematically marginalize and segregate the Chinese community. I also show how *Mexicanización* advanced industrial state capitalism in Baja California. Chapter 9 describes how statehood provided an occasion to re-present Baja California's past as a triumphant narrative of national integration and "genuine Mexican colonization." In order to demonstrate this process I examine the Mexican historiography of Baja California and commemorations of *El Asalto a las Tierras*. Chapter 10 traces the construction of nationalist monuments and the deliberate reconfigurations of Mexicali's urban space, including manipulated narratives of the state historical museum. Chapter 11 contributes to ongoing discussions about the social process of constructing historical memory and its importance in understanding politics in modern Mexico.<sup>19</sup> This chapter returns to the Chinese pavilion at *La Plaza de Amistad* to recount the contemporary reformulations of the trans-Pacific corridor between East Asia and Mexicali in order to address the challenges faced by the Chinese community today.

As a study of comparative racial formations, my examination of the Chinese experiences in Mexicali is not limited to understanding this minority population. Chapter 11 argues that the construction of racial differences in modern Mexico is intimately tied to the political consolidation of a national *mestizo* race. While this dissertation offers a critique of racial projects of exclusion it does so as a reflection of racial projects of inclusion. These forms of difference are formed in relation to each other as a constellation of identities managed by the Mexican state. In this way, the examination of Mexicali's Chinese community is also a meditation on the creation of Mexican communities in Baja California. The critique offered in the subsequent chapters serves to broaden and integrate an array of critical discourse about the borderlands.

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<sup>18</sup> Nicolás Cárdenas García and Enrique Guerra Manzo, *Integrados y Marginados en el México Posrevolucionario: Los Juegos de Poder Local y Sus Nexos con la Política Nacional* (México: UAM Unidad Xochimilco, 2009). Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. Helga Baitenmann, "Counting on State Subjects: State Formation and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Mexico," in *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Christian Krohn-Hansen and Knut Nustad (London: Pluto Press, 2005). Augustine-Adams, "Making Mexico: Legal Nationality, Chinese Race, and the 1930 Population Census," (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2006). Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Irene O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986). Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000). Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

In summary, this dissertation project explores the history of Mexicali's Chinese community and asks why has this story been erased. By answering these problems, I maintain that a broader geopolitical framework is necessary, one that conceptualizes a triangular set of historical relations involving the U.S., China, and Mexico. If we are to take on comparative racial formations and their transnational dimensions we must also have conceptual frameworks that allow us to historicize the simultaneity and multiplicity of diverse racisms. The study of Mexicali's Chinese community shifts the focus from periphery-to-center migration models toward one defined by periphery-to-periphery relations (via connections made possible by the imperial circuits of the center). It is not only a useful contextualization for this case study but more generally an attempt to rethink the sets of historical and spatial relations that we use to comprehend the global relations of U.S. Empire, the ubiquitous migration and settlement patterns of the Chinese diaspora in the Americas, and the legacy of Mexico's extraordinary integration in the relations of the Pacific Rim. These reformulations allow a wider spectrum of subjectivities from which to think through differences in historical memory. More than merely a catalog of difference, these alternative subject positions provide multiple perspectives to understand relational racial formations across transnational space.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," *Radical America* 23, no. 4 (1989): 19. George Lipsitz, "'To Tell the Truth and Not Get Trapped': Why Interethnic Antiracism Matters Now," in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian diaspora*, ed. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 296-310. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*.

**Part I:  
Putting Mexicali on the Map:  
The Synchronic Frontiers of U.S. Imperialism**

Historical evidence of the early formation of Mexicali as an irrigated colony defies conventional categorization. This place was the site of convergence of common interests bringing together Mexican elites eager to establish agricultural settlements, American capitalists seeking market expansion, and Chinese farmers, merchants, and workers in search of enterprise. These circumstances led Louie Geow, a second-generation Chinese merchant from Sacramento, to pace the dusty roads of Mexicali. Geow was the first labor contractor organizing workers to dig the canals.<sup>1</sup> These irrigation ditches brought water from the Colorado River to the Salton River Basin straddling the U.S.-Mexico border. Others like Geow provided the crucial linkages between innovative Chinese emigrants, expansionist American corporate capitalism, and nationalist Mexican colonization. These Chinese immigrants made Mexicali not only a town on the U.S.-Mexico border, but a place where the border became multi-sided against the edge of the North American west coast. I use this study as an occasion to remap Mexicali within the Pacific Rim. Illustrating the interconnections of the Pacific Rim helps to make sense of people like Louie Geow and places like Mexicali.

In order to capture the larger field of social and economic relations that Mexicali emerged from, Part I focuses on articulating the historical framework of the triangular relations of a U.S.-China-Mexico assemblage. Chapter 2 explores the legacy of Spanish colonial commerce between Mexico and China through the strategies and practices of U.S. empire building as it sought to acquire this unique set of geopolitical and economic relations. In other words, it demonstrates how the U.S. usurped the power and wealth of trans-Pacific colonial trade by inserting itself into its commodity circuits, currency markets and military relations. A clear indication of this pattern of development is found in the remarks of U.S. Commodore M.C. Perry in 1856 writing,

The treaty, which closed the war of the United States with Mexico, transferred to the former the territory of California. Its position on the Pacific could not but suggest the thought of an extended field for commercial enterprise...<sup>2</sup>

Perry's geographic imagination tied the invasion of Mexico and economic domination of Asia together in a U.S. bid for global power. His roles in the conquest of Mexico and the forcible opening of Japan to trade with the U.S. demonstrate the simultaneous frontiers of U.S. empire building. In this early period, the triangular relations between the U.S., Mexico and East Asia were directed at the acquisition of important trade routes and cornering the Spanish dominated

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<sup>1</sup> William Chadney, "Letter from Chinese Inspector to Inspector in Charge at San Diego," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1908).

<sup>2</sup> M. C. Perry et al., Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan: Performed in the Years 1852, 1853, and 1854, Under the Command of Commodore MC Perry, United States navy, By Order of the Government of the United States (AOP Nicholson, 1856).

market in silver specie. After the first waves of industrialization in the late nineteenth century cotton cultivation, trade, and weaving dictated the commercial relations of the Pacific as the U.S. positioned itself between cotton cultivation in the Americas and cotton consumption in East Asia. As early as 1905 more than half of Mexicali's exports to the U.S. were marked for re-export to China.<sup>3</sup> While American cotton cultivation and trade is usually bracketed by southern slavery and Atlantic commerce, Part I shows the important role that this cash crop played in continuing the historic ties that wove the Pacific Rim together. It is in this constellation of power that Mexicali emerged.

To explain the development of these relationships I emphasize the historical background to the encroachment of a nascent American empire into the pre-existing colonial trade of the Pacific. I argue that as the U.S. developed imperial strategies of empire building, the pre-existing Spanish trade between Mexico and China became the most immediate means to realize these territorial and financial aspirations. The geographic simultaneity of U.S. Empire building in Asia and the Americas elevates the significance of Mexicali's emergence. This site illustrates the intimate relationships forged between the Asian and Latin frontiers of U.S. imperial expansion. While many scholars have recognized the need to move beyond historical conventions that separate conquest in the American West from imperialism in the Asian Pacific, I make further advances by detailing the specific strategies and practices of U.S. Empire that linked these two territorial processes. By doing so I offer a view of the U.S.-Mexico border as emerging from inter-imperial competition (coming to a head with the Spanish-American War) and the preservation of Spanish colonial trade circuits that linked Latin America and East Asia. These sets of relations are an articulation of transnational social structures but also a demonstration of the relational nature of racial formations in global space. As I will show in the subsequent chapters the perception of Chinese merchants as colonial merchants in East Asia made them suitable agents for activating border commerce in Mexico; I will also show how the racialization of Mexican workers in the American West aided the expansion of U.S. dominated capitalist markets in Asia; as well as why *Mexicanización* campaigns in Baja California sought to eradicate the traces of a Chinese past.

I re-situate the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in the Pacific world. Others have underscored the centrality of the exchange of Latin American silver and Asian commodity markets in the consolidation of the capitalist-world system and the international division of labor.<sup>4</sup> However, by centering the Pacific I intend to put the U.S.-Mexico dynamic in relation to existing structures in the Pacific and changes in East Asia. Instead of characterizing Mexicali's Chinese as merely the labor power of American capitalism in Mexico, I want to emphasize the expansion of Chinese mercantile expertise at this frontier of the world-system.<sup>5</sup> When Chinese flocked to Mexicali in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century they were not just seeking out livelihoods, they were also participating in the restructuring of the Pacific's political economy. Previously dominated by the trade in Mexican silver and commodities produced in

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert A. George, "Letter to Collector of Customs at San Diego from the Deputy Collector and Inspector," in Records of the U.S. Customs (Laguna Niguel: National Archives and Records Administration, 1905).

<sup>4</sup> See Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Enrique Dussel, "World-System and "Trans"-Modernity," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3, no. 2 (2002): 221-44.

<sup>5</sup> Arif Dirlik, ed., *Chinese On The American Frontier* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001).

Asia, U.S. military and diplomatic intervention worked to disrupt these relationships, seeking to insert American businesses into these profitable commodity exchange circuits. However, Americans would quickly find out that this goal could not be achieved without the Chinese.

Chapter 2 prepares the discussion on the meteoric rise of the Mexicali cotton industry. It argues that this region's development can't be accounted for without considering trans-Pacific markets, the historical conditioning of Chinese merchants and farmers and the development of mass irrigation technology. I use late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century newspapers, government documents, and other printed material to reconnect the disparate contact zones of the Pacific Rim. This chapter connects American extraterritoriality in China to the conquest of Mexico and the cotton fields of the U.S.-Mexico border to the looms of Hong Kong and Tokyo. This evidence helps to illuminate the context in which Mexicali simultaneously became a destination for Chinese migration and a cotton boomtown. In order to better understand the Chinese community in Mexicali, it is necessary to examine the historical circumstances that led to its formation as a cotton growing region, as well as the expertise of these immigrants in cotton commodity-chains in East Asia. As cotton declined in the American south, irrigated colonization in the desert southwest grew to meet the growing demands of textile industrialization in East Asia. Mexicali emerged within this geographic nexus.

To put Mexicali's Chinese in the context of U.S. domination over its border with Mexico is to put U.S. Imperialism in the context of colonial empires of the Americas and the Asian Pacific. When Chinese crossed the Pacific, American imperialism was not the only territorial power they encountered. By the time migrants arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border they would have already crossed through several colonial boundaries in East Asia. The Chinese presence in the U.S.-Mexico border helps to reposition the geopolitical reading of the borderlands. If the American thrust into the Pacific was predicated on capturing Asian markets, then we must appreciate how the domestic U.S. economy was organized to achieve that goal. From this perspective the settler-colonialism of the American frontier was a crucial material process to building an empire across the Pacific. These simultaneous processes are illustrated in Chapter 3 in the life of U.S. General Harrison Gray Otis. The famous owner of the *Los Angeles Times* and land developer was also the financial interest behind the development of Mexicali's irrigation infrastructure. He played a significant role in expanding the settlement of Southern California, quelling freedom fighters in the Philippines, and recruiting Chinese, like Louie Geow, to work in Mexico.

Here, I begin with the development of the Spanish Galleons that linked Mexico and China through trade in silver and other commodities. I argue that U.S. empire building was directed at intervening in this trade and appropriating its benefits. Next I discuss the development of the cotton trade in the Pacific and the industrialization of irrigated cultivation in the U.S. and Mexico and manufacturing in East Asia. I trace the rise of Japan as a major American cotton importer in efforts to compete with Chinese textile industries. I then argue that Mexicali became a strategic choice in these relations because it combined the benefits of a U.S.-Mexico agricultural corridor and trade with Japan facilitated by Chinese merchants. This is all to say that Mexicali did not just appear as an accident, but was the direct result of individuals embedded in historical processes that linked the Americas and Asia in intimate ways.

## Chapter 2

### The Sino-Mexican Symbiosis and U.S. Interests in the Colonial Pacific

As early as 1852, American cotton growers would have pondered the potential of Chinese markets for export. Numerous British reports of “outlets for woolen and cotton goods” across China led many Americans to adopt the notion that “our government [ought] to direct our ships of war in the Eastern seas to make occasional visits to the chief ports of all the Oriental sovereigns with whom we vow or hereafter may have diplomatic and commercial relations”<sup>1</sup> However, before cotton could become a staple of trans-Pacific trade, the U.S. needed to restructure the pre-existing colonial economies of the Pacific. The most prominent and long lasting trade in the Pacific was the silver trade that linked China and New Spain (Mexico), via the Philippines. The trade’s decline since Mexican independence in 1821 provided an opening for the U.S. to increasingly subvert to its own interests beginning in the 1850s. American cotton trade with Asia followed after and was contingent upon the U.S. appropriation of the Pacific silver trade. Nineteenth-century imperialism paved the way for a more stable international monetary system and a U.S. dominated trade in cotton. This chapter details the history and strategies of U.S. encroachment into the Pacific’s legendary silver trade.

In sixteenth-century New Spain, Amerindians were coerced to extract silver and gold. Spanish traders used this plunder to build an empire. As Andre Gunderfrank and Enrique Dussel argue, the primary motivation was trade with Asia. When the merchants of New Spain discovered that New World silver could be sold to the Chinese for silks, porcelain and other Asian goods, their visions of wealth multiplied. The production and circulation of this precious metal served two capitalist interests: settling debts and cashing in on Asian commerce.<sup>2</sup> In essence, wealth was used to pay off debts and purchase commodities to be sold for profit in other parts of the world. These practices were the basic building blocks of the early colonial economy. The acquisition of the Philippines in the Spanish Empire was a Mexican enterprise from the beginning. It was the merchants of New Spain who stood to gain the most among the colonists.<sup>3</sup> While New Spain justified to the Crown that the Philippine colony as an outpost to Christianize Asia, its economic interests preceded all others and sustained the rule over archipelago by the Viceroy of New Spain.<sup>4</sup> The initiation of the Spanish Galleon Trade brought Mexican silver to the Spanish Philippines where Chinese merchants sold textiles, tea and ceramics to be traded in the Americas and shipped across the Atlantic. Mexican merchants eventually moved into direct trade with Chinese merchants in Manila, instead of making purchases in Acapulco, cutting out local traders in the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> China’s seemingly endless appetite for silver fueled the economy of Spain’s empire and

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<sup>1</sup> "Overland Trade with China [From Boston Courier]," *Daily Alta California*, July 19 1852.

<sup>2</sup> Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Dussel, "World-System and "Trans"-Modernity."

<sup>3</sup> Katharine Bjork, "The Link That Kept the Philippines Spanish: Mexican Merchant Interests and the Manila Trade, 1571-1815," *Journal of World History* 9, no. 1 (1998): 25-50.

<sup>4</sup> John M. Headley, "Spain's Asian Presence, 1565-1590: Structures and Aspirations," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (1995): 623-646.

<sup>5</sup> William Lytle Schurz, "Mexico, Peru, and the Manila Galleon," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 1, no. 4 (1918): 389-402.

offered stabilizing currency for centuries of Ming rulers. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, European and American interests increasingly preyed upon this economic system.

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, European economies relied upon the resiliency and innovation of Asian societies; first for the products of their economies and second for their consumption of European products. These material relationships underwrote violent struggles for power and the accumulation of wealth. The operations of these trade circuits were based on basic principles of exchange value.<sup>6</sup> In the development of capitalist economies, the accumulation of wealth was valued over all other economic relations. This concept put extremely high value on commodities with high exchange values, like gold and silver. In this way prices were expressed in terms of certain amounts of gold or silver.

Through this system the merchants of New Spain were able to accumulate wealth by extracting it through trade. The wealth of the Americas allowed Spanish merchants in New Spain to purchase goods in Asia, which were traded to others where higher consumer demand fetched a greater price. When goods are used in this process of exchange they become commodities; a temporary material manifestation of capital - through the process of exchange, capital is transformed into material goods to be traded and transformed back into greater sums of capital. Due to this function, European, and later American, imperialists were deeply concerned about the fluctuating exchange rate of silver and the security of their trade routes. A decline in the value of silver would lessen the value of their wealth and drive up the price of commodities. Threats to their trade routes would shut off the circuits of exchange and stall the process of wealth accumulation (merely as un-invested capital or unsold stockpiled commodities). Because of these threats to the economic process of exchange the Viceroy heavily regulated trade. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century the silver Galleon Trade was vulnerable in both China and New Spain because of competing merchants, pirating, and contraband.

In 1801 a Spanish agent in the Philippines wrote to King Charles IV requesting increased production of silver in Mexico to offset the losses of pirating and contraband. These losses were compounded by shifts in Peruvian production and weakened the Spanish administration of the islands he wrote, and he warned against further loss of the Chinese market for Mexican silver.<sup>7</sup> In order to increase security Spanish agents restricted the silver economy to only the ports of Manila and Acapulco.<sup>8</sup> Such measures signaled the struggling state of the Spanish Empire and the protection of one of New Spain's most important trade relationship. Stress on the Galleon Trade had a ripple effect throughout what one historian refers to as the "Sino-Mexican symbiosis."<sup>9</sup> Because the economies of both Spanish Mexico and China relied upon the trade in silver, any disruption of that system impacted both. Not only did shipments of silver need to be protected, but also the Asian goods stocked aboard the

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<sup>6</sup> At a conceptual level a certain quantity of one thing can be exchanged for a certain quantity of another without a loss of value. Marx argued that, "Value... becomes value in process, money in process, and as such, capital. It comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within its circuit, comes back out of it with expanded bulk, and begins the same round over afresh." K. Marx, *Capital: An Abridged Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Jacinto Sánchez Tirado, "Letter to King Charles IV," in *Philippine Commerce and the Manila Galleon Collection* (Berkeley: The Bancroft Library, 1801).

<sup>8</sup> Baltasar Doncel, "Letter to Unknown Recipient," in *Philippine Commerce and the Manila Galleon Collection* (Berkeley: The Bancroft Library, 1805).

<sup>9</sup> William Schell, Jr., "Silver Symbiosis: ReOrienting Mexican Economic History," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (2001): 89-134.

returning galleons.<sup>10</sup> Foreign merchants of Asian goods in the Americas threatened the Mexican economy, because it weakened the Spanish position in negotiating trade with merchants in Manila. Their material bonds were maintained by a naval military system as well as similar political systems in which elites chastised commerce while exploiting the domestic laborers and merchants who conducted the trans-Pacific trade.<sup>11</sup> Because silver acted as both currency and commodity it became extremely volatile to both economies.

Silver was subject to inflationary pressures, drifting exchange rates, and supply/demand fluctuations making the economic system quite volatile. This vulnerability was expressed on both sides of the Pacific. As Spain's power declined, its colonists became bolder and strove for independent rule over the colonies. Mexico's wars for independence beginning in 1810 stalled silver exports to the Philippines and starved Chinese treasuries. One Spanish agent in Manila wrote that the Mexican insurrection had "ruined" the silver trade.<sup>12</sup> He cited the accumulating inventories of Asian goods in Mexico, the stolen silver used to fund the independence movement and the encroachment of foreign traders in Asian markets. The slump in silver that made its way to China added to Chinese leaders' inability to ward off Euro-American military aggression (known as the Opium Wars) and contributed to a series of agreements known as the Unequal Treaties beginning in 1842. These negotiations created what became known as the Chinese treaty ports, exclusive trade zones like Hong Kong, Macao, and Shanghai where Chinese were forced to buy British opium and other foreign imports. The Chinese silver shortage was exacerbated by new trade imbalances: opium flowed into China while silver flowed out.<sup>13</sup> For hundreds of years the Spanish and Chinese had operated a profitable trade that sustained both, but this trade had begun to decline in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a new geopolitics was emerging with American power at the center.

While Atlantic commerce drove the early American economy, American strategists and captains of industry saw their future in the Pacific. Americans could not compete with European powers on the basis of Atlantic trade alone. The wealth of the Pacific trade set the stakes for global power. The expansion of British imperialism in coastal Asia showed American spectators the promised effect of imperialism on trade. Secretary of State John Clayton advocated for demonstrating U.S. military power in Asia in order to "compel immediate redress for any violations of their treaties with the United States, as well as to protect American citizens engaged in their lawful commercial pursuits."<sup>14</sup> The U.S. was well positioned to incorporate the pre-existing circuits of trans-Pacific trade. The most clear and present target was the Pacific silver commodity and currency market. Which had been dormant or in serious decline for 60-70 years by the time of the Mexican War. American businesses and U.S. officials saw the symbiosis as the material means to realize their ambition, especially in light of the loss of Spanish control. At first this process took the form of trade and monetary policy.

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<sup>10</sup> Baltasar Doncel, "Letter to Estaba Barea," in Philippine Commerce and the Manila Galleon Collection (Berkeley: The Bancroft Library, 1807).

<sup>11</sup> Schell, "Silver Symbiosis: ReOrienting Mexican Economic History."

<sup>12</sup> Consulado de Manila, "Letter to Unknown Recipient," in Philippine Commerce and the Manila Galleon Collection (Berkeley: The Bancroft Library, 1820).

<sup>13</sup> Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*.

<sup>14</sup> "Overland Trade with China [From Boston Courier]."



The centrality of the symbiosis to the development of American capitalism is symbolized in the evolution of the dollar sign from the Spanish notation for silver coinage from Mexico, a “piece of eight,” also known as the peso.<sup>15</sup> When Americans accepted the Mexican peso as the lawful tender in 1785, they were making a strategic decision for independence from British rule. From this point on, however, they strove to build a stronger influence in silver markets. By the late eighteenth century the American notation for pesos “P<sup>s</sup>” evolved into the familiar “\$”, though the U.S. dollar as we know it now didn’t come into existence until the twentieth century after the U.S. Gold Standard Act of 1900.<sup>16</sup> In terms of trade, U.S. ships replaced the Spanish fleet and used domestic supplies of silver to supplant that of Mexico’s during their struggle for independence from Spain in 1821.<sup>17</sup> American fiscal policy throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century was designed to gain control over the supply and value of the Mexican peso with treasury and monetary reforms. One economist at the turn of the century mused,

The general movement which we have been observing would seem destined to leave Mexico isolated as regards her currency and seriously crippled as regards the most important factor in her export trade.<sup>18</sup>

In 1857 the U.S. Treasury issued its own silver trade dollar into East Asia with higher silver content to compete with the Mexican peso.<sup>19</sup> By 1865 San Francisco business elites envisioned the future of the silver trade as being led by American ingenuity centered in California. The *Daily Alta California* reported,

Soon after our steamers begin to run, we shall probably see San Francisco become the center of exchange in the settlement of the accounts between Europe and China, with a considerable benefit to our mines as well as to this city.<sup>20</sup>

Cornering the Mexican silver market was one strategy among a host of others designed to encroach upon the Mexican and Chinese sides of the Pacific trade equation. An effective cooptation of these material flows required simultaneous action on both Latin and Asian fronts.

By the mid-nineteenth century this multi-sited strategy had consumed the imagination of Americans in the notion of Manifest Destiny. This expansionist ideology was not merely invented by greed and power, but generative of specific U.S. interests in the commerce of the Pacific world. The history of U.S. foreign relations in the mid-nineteenth century reveals many under-appreciated actors who synchronized the theatres of imperialism in Asia and Mexico. The conquest of northern Mexico and the China-U.S. Treaty of Wangxia (the second of the Unequal Treaties signed in 1844) were only two years apart. In 1844 U.S. diplomat Caleb Cushing sailed to China in the wake of the British Opium Wars to assert American

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<sup>15</sup> Florian Cajori, *A History of Mathematical Notations*, Volume II (Chicago: Open Court, 1929).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. A. Piatt Andrew, "The End of the Mexican Dollar," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 18, no. 3 (1904): 321-356.

<sup>17</sup> Schell, "Silver Symbiosis: ReOrienting Mexican Economic History."

<sup>18</sup> Andrew, "The End of the Mexican Dollar."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "The Stream of Silver Pouring into Asia," *Daily Alta California*, November 16 1865.

interests into the negotiations of the Unequal Treaties.<sup>21</sup> At Wangxia he negotiated favorable terms for U.S. trade and guaranteed rights for agents of American commerce. On his return trip to the U.S. he passed through Mexican territory taking notes that would be used in the assault of the Mexican American War two years later, when he served as a Brigadier General.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Cushing's experience with port blockades during the Opium Wars gave him critical insights into the possibility of enacting blockades on Mexican ports in the Gulf.<sup>23</sup> In geo-political terms, the Mexican-American War allowed the U.S. to assert itself as Mexico's successor in the symbiosis and become an emergent power in East Asia. Once more, the decisive landing at Vera Cruz (1848) during the war with Mexico by Commodore M.C. Perry had a "good influence" on his diplomatic-military mission to Japan in 1852.<sup>24</sup> As he perceived the geopolitics of the Pacific, it was not China that was the "Middle Kingdom" but America, because it was so uniquely positioned between Latin America, Europe and Asia.<sup>25</sup>

While the U.S. government embarked on aggressive military campaigns, American capitalists encountered severe obstacles in matching Europe's pace of geographic expansion. When the British forced opium onto Chinese markets, they did so through a series of treaties granting colonial sovereignty over designated ports along the Chinese coast like Hong Kong and Macao (known as the Unequal Treaties). While the Americans had a minuscule role in the Asian opium trade, they nevertheless took the opportunity to assert extraterritoriality over China as other European powers had done. The Treaty of Wangxia was the result of a U.S. strategy to put American merchants onto the same legal standing as British and German merchants already there. The U.S. envoy to China negotiated definitions of tariffs and the rights to trade in Ningpo, Amoy, Fuchow, and Shanghai.<sup>26</sup> The ports impacted by the Unequal Treaties became regional hubs of commerce linking interior China with global markets. However, this commercial interface operated through a complex three-tiered currency system composed of Chinese copper cash, regional trade dollars, and silver; each with their own fluctuations and regional exchange rates. Despite acquiring treaty rights, U.S. commerce with China remained stagnant until the turn of the century, primarily due to these complex currency relationships and reluctant Chinese merchants.

During this period of stagnant trade, human migration increased dramatically. Chinese migration to the U.S. became significant in the Gold Rush (1849) when thousands of Chinese sojourned to California and the American West. It was not until the negotiation of the Burlingame-Seward Treaty of 1868 that migratory rights were established between the U.S. and China, allowing for legal means of emigrating to the U.S. While the American Civil War had enormous consequences for the developments under discussion here, including the production of cotton, right now I want emphasize the war in the context of treaty negotiations

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<sup>21</sup> "Treaties with China," *Daily Alta California*, June 25 1888.

<sup>22</sup> Caleb Cushing, "Notes on Mexico," in *Papers of Caleb Cushing* (Washington D.C.: The Library of Congress, 1844).

<sup>23</sup> Caleb Cushing, "Blockade: Notes," in *The Caleb Cushing Papers* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1839).

<sup>24</sup> William Elliot Griffis, *Matthew Calbraith Perry: A Typical American Naval Officer* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1887).

<sup>25</sup> Perry et al., *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*.

<sup>26</sup> Ping Chia Kuo, "Caleb Cushing and the Treaty of Wanghia, 1844," *The Journal of Modern History* 5, no. 1 (1933): 34-54.

with China. Due to the Yankee triumph over the Confederate South and the formal end to slavery, the treaty with China was designed to ensure American industrialists access to cheap Asian labor since freed black labor was still expensive.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Chinese labor was vital to the process of settling land taken from Mexico and the development of critical infrastructure in the American West. Their migration continued to the U.S. unabated until the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 barring the immigration of laborers. These restrictions followed from the 1790 Nationality Act making non-whites ineligible for naturalization as U.S. citizens. Part II will address the particular articulations of this immigration system and the response by Chinese to these restrictions. One important response that Chinese migrants made was to slip into U.S. territory via Canada and Mexico. As will be made clearer later. However, the Chinese had more than just entry to the U.S. in mind when they immigrated to Mexico.

The turning point for U.S. intervention into trans-Pacific commerce was the global depression of the 1870s. This depression, basically, amounted to a worldwide price deflation caused by the accumulating inventories of industrial production. The increased supply of goods drove prices below profit margins and operating costs. Nowhere was this more evident than in the American West where the settlement boom flattened and caused widespread unemployment despite rising industrial productivity. This condition ushered in a series of aggressive new policy measures. In response to this crisis, American economists critiqued free market entrepreneurialism in favor of an imperialism headed by semi-regulated corporate monopolies.<sup>28</sup> In Mexico, the authoritarian reign of Porfirio Díaz stabilized the economy through massive foreign investment and increased silver exports to liberalize the economy.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the Chinese struggled through inflation and unemployment through the depression because of falling silver prices and the onslaught of cheap goods flowing in from treaty ports.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, the depression tied Mexico's economy firmly to the U.S. at the same time it increased China's dependency on the Pacific trade.

The U.S. response to the depression can be characterized by no other term than imperial. American economists placed their faith in large industrial corporations. The price fixing effect of monopolies was an attractive solution for policy makers because it did not call for a strong government hand. Economists came to argue for a theory of "oversavings" that essentially blamed unregulated competition and redundant investment in production capacity for the ballooning inventories and sinking prices.<sup>31</sup> Corporate monopolies were self-regulating and maintained high margins of profit while sustaining economies of scale. It was

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<sup>27</sup> See N. Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). and Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> C. Parrini and M. Sklar, "New Thinking About the Market, 1896-1904: Some American Economists on Investment and the Theory of Surplus Capital," *The Journal of Economic History* 43, no. 3 (1983): 559-578.

<sup>29</sup> In the northern border state of Chihuahua, silver exports to China were the staple of the economy and paved the way for local development of export agriculture. "Chihuahua to Mexico," *Daily Alta California*, June 19 1884.

<sup>30</sup> Akinobu Kuroda, "The Collapse of the Chinese Imperial Monetary System," in *Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy, 1850-1949*, ed. K. Sugihara (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 103-126.

<sup>31</sup> Parrini and Sklar, "New Thinking About the Market, 1896-1904: Some American Economists on Investment and the Theory of Surplus Capital."

thought that free capitalist markets tended towards overproduction because competition drove manufacturing beyond effective demand. Any investments that resulted in overproduction were considered redundant. American economists theorized that if surplus capital could be invested elsewhere, then the domestic economy could be rescued from its tendency towards overproduction. The corporate re-structuring of the U.S. economy would only be effective under two conditions: the globalization of an international investment system for surplus capital and protected terms of trade. These two conditions gave concrete meaning to the development of U.S. imperialism in the Pacific in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, both conditions were subject to the American grip on the Pacific silver trade.

The oversaving thesis found a close companion in the ideas of U.S. Naval officer, Alfred Mahan. His book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* combined with the economic program outlined above, gave the U.S. administration clear tactical policy prescriptions for saving the domestic economy, improving trade, and employing surplus capital. Mahan's naval history of long-distance colonial trade and inter-imperial competition detailed the strategic relationships between locations of production, shipping, and the functions of colonies. His analysis argued for the creation of a coal-powered navy complemented by island coaling stations littered throughout the world's oceans designed to protect trade routes. In many ways the "Sea Power" thesis and the oversaving thesis were mutually reinforcing. Acquiring control over islands like the Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii, and Guam would provide coaling stations, wider control over international monetary policy and new markets for American "surplus capital" and goods. Mahan wrote in 1897 that Hawaii would significantly improve the U.S. position in the Pacific silver trade.<sup>32</sup> By this time, popular public debates over the silver and gold currency intersected squarely with those of U.S. imperialism, especially in the 1896 and 1900 U.S. Presidential elections.<sup>33</sup> Harmonizing an international currency system to a U.S. controlled gold standard took precedence over all other economic policies, because it served as the basis for normalizing an international system for investment and exchange. The dual goals of territorial acquisition and globalized monetary uniformity in U.S. policy at the end of the nineteenth century were complementary.

While the story of territorial acquisition is better known through the battles of the Spanish-American War, the formation of an international monetary system is less appreciated. With strategic islands in Roosevelt's pocket, he formed the U.S. Commission on International Exchange (1901-1904) charged with bringing about a stable international finance system by globalizing the gold standard. The 1903 report to congress begins with this leading statement,

The gradual fall to a lower level of value and the serious fluctuations in the gold price of silver bullion for the past ten years have been *slowly but unceasingly undermining the commerce of the important silver-using countries* which do not have gold as a basis for their monetary systems. The fact that the importing merchants of such silver-using countries can not reckon upon the cost in their own local currencies of the remittances in gold, which they must use in making settlements for purchases made in gold-standard countries, has been slowly but surely *producing domestic commercial*

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<sup>32</sup> Alfred Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power: Present and Future* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1897).

<sup>33</sup> "The Newspapers and the Issue of "Imperialism", " in *The Literary Digest* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1898). Also see Angela Redish, *Bimetallism: An Economic and Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

*paralysis, checking foreign investments for the development of public and private enterprises, and hampering the importation of the products of the labor of the gold-standard countries.*<sup>34</sup>

The commission directly embodied theories of “oversaving” and immediately folded its recent territorial acquisitions into the emerging financial system. Not surprisingly, the commission’s primary currency market targets were China and Mexico, however the commission successfully transformed the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Panama and Nicaragua as well. Mexico’s conversion to the gold standard in 1905 was an uncertain process, primarily because so much of its system still functioned as a silver economy (as in the operation of vast silver mines, the stock of actual currency, and the importance of silver in the country’s trade balance). As Mexico’s officials navigated this shifting terrain American financiers gained greater control and ownership over the Mexican economy.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, in China British negotiators, who preferred the floating silver parity with gold in order to protect existing trade relations there, hampered the process of conversion. Needless to say, China did not convert to a fixed silver/gold exchange rate and trade with China increasingly became dependent upon Chinese merchants who could negotiate the domestic economy and provide access to various forms of credit, currency exchange, and price guarantees. In the end, the push for an international investment system (stable international currency and open lines of trade) played to the hand of Chinese merchants because they held a monopoly over the brokerage of East Asian coastal trade.<sup>36</sup> If Westerners wanted access to Chinese markets they were obliged to use Chinese merchants. Part II examines this issue in more depth by also covering the history and structure of the Chinese commercial diaspora.

Structuring a new geo-political order in the Pacific was an ad hoc and uncertain process for Americans. In order to realize their imperial ambitions, complex economic realities had to be confronted. Three areas were particularly formative for the structure of Mexico, China and US relations as Americans positioned themselves in the Pacific: the volatility of currency exchange, the logistics of industrial commodity production, and access to Asian markets. These three areas were mutually interactive at the turn of the twentieth century. The increased production of commodities as a result of settling the American west strengthened interest in exports to Asia. However, interest in trade with China was always thwarted by logistics and market access. The uncertainty and instability of exchange rates made trade with China risky. Furthermore, Chinese merchants were reluctant to take on new trade partners. These conditions played to the hand of the Chinese merchants because it meant Euro-American commodity traders necessarily relied upon them to exchange currency, provide credit and insurance, and broker deals between Chinese buyers and sellers. In this way, the Chinese were vital to maintaining the circulation of commodities. As I will show in Part II, this pattern was replicated at the U.S.-Mexico border in Mexicali.

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<sup>34</sup> H. H. Hanna, C. A. Conant, and J. W. Jenks, *Stability of International Exchange: Report on the Introduction of the Gold-Exchange Standard into China and Other Silver-Using Countries* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1903). emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew, "The End of the Mexican Dollar." Matias Romero, *The Silver Standard in Mexico* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1898).

<sup>36</sup> Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas*. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

When China and Japan began buying looms and cotton spinning machinery from Britain their demand for cotton skyrocketed. American speculators pushed for a tripling of production to meet their needs.<sup>37</sup> The U.S. already produced more than half of the world's cotton so they leveraged their position in the market to gain greater access to Asian buyers and manufacturers. In these ways, the older silver economy of the "Sino-Mexican symbiosis" began to evolve into a trans-Pacific cotton economy. The conversion to the gold standard for most American trading partners under Roosevelt's Commission on International Exchange provided the groundwork for expanding commercial enterprises and industrial capacity. By the turn of the century raw cotton, yarn, and cloth had become the most important commodities traded across the Pacific because they were basis of both industrialization and international competition. The following section explains how the conditions of supply and demand in global cotton markets wove the Pacific into increasingly tighter relations.

### **Weaving Cotton Across the Pacific Rim**

At the close of the nineteenth century Americans were scrambling to take positions in the emerging Pacific cotton trade. The expansion of Japan's military significantly bolstered its consumption of cotton and China's incorporation of new technology increased their capacity for textile manufacturing.<sup>38</sup> American Southerners demanded railroad tariff reductions to get their cotton to San Diego to be shipped across the Pacific while Californians were launching agricultural colonies to produce the precious fiber.<sup>39</sup> By 1905 most of the cotton from Texas was being shipped to Japan, all the while Mexicali's irrigation canals were being surveyed and dug.<sup>40</sup> Mexicali developed into an agro-industrial corridor situated between two poles of an emerging Pacific cotton trade. On the one hand, the U.S. was a global giant in cotton cultivation gradually incorporating Mexico into its patterns of production. On the other hand, China's manufacturing capacity and enormous consumer markets created vigorous competition for U.S. producers to service China's own enormous markets. Due to Japan's rapid state led industrialization, they were able to corner the Chinese cotton yarn import market, but only by becoming a net importer of raw cotton themselves. In the balance of these forces Mexicali was a result of American corporate expansion, Mexican colonization, and Asian cotton production and manufacturing: all at the same time.

Cotton was China's most important commodity. Cotton cultivation, spinning, weaving, and trade had been practiced since the fourteenth century as forms of everyday domestic commerce. As skilled cotton farmers and weavers, the Chinese remained self-sufficient for centuries consuming little foreign cotton.<sup>41</sup> Due to China's diverse geography, different regions began to specialize in cultivation or manufacturing in the domestic market in the eighteenth century. Guangdong, in particular, gave up cotton cultivation in favor of sugar cane in order to maximize their role as cotton spinners and weavers which required them to import cotton from other provinces. As productive capacity outpaced domestic raw cotton

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<sup>37</sup> "Cotton Goods Trade," *Daily Alta California*, September 14 1888.

<sup>38</sup> "Trade with China and Japan," *Daily Alta California*, May 16 1868. "China and Japan," *Daily Alta California*, November 25 1884. "The Trade of Japan," *Daily Alta California*, August 12 1889.

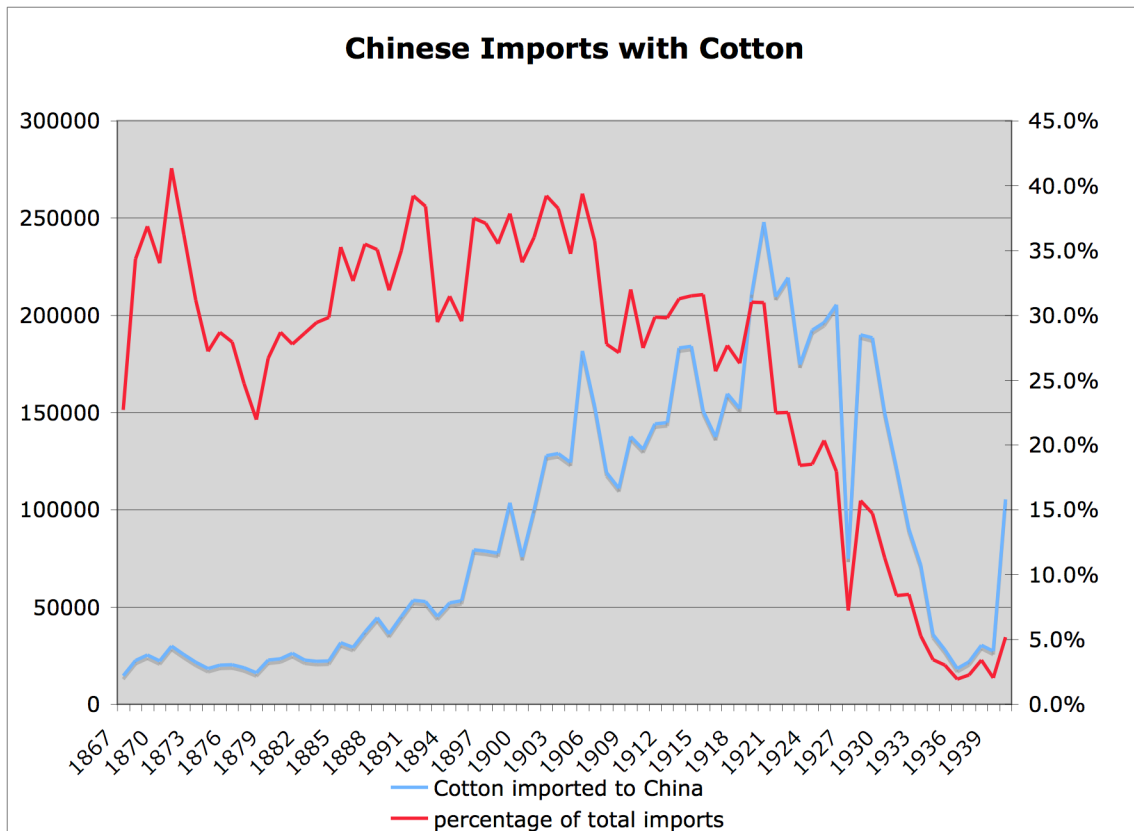
<sup>39</sup> "A Cry from the South," *Daily Alta California*, May 2 1889. "Baja California," *Daily Alta California*, June 16 1887.

<sup>40</sup> "Cotton Export From San Pedro," *Los Angeles Herald*, September 8 1905.

<sup>41</sup> Kang Chao, *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

supplies British traders aided Chinese domestic cotton commerce by introducing Bombay cotton in exchange for Cantonese sugar.<sup>42</sup> The restructuring of the Chinese economy was in part a result of policies to limit the negative influence of treaty ports and capitalize on access to global markets. These policies were called *zhiqiang*, or “self-strengthening” and will be explored more in chapter 5.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Chinese began consuming foreign cotton as self-strengthening policies encouraged the industrialization of weaving and further specialization. The soft fiber accounted for a third of all imports from 1870-1924. During this period the China trade ballooned with total imports tripling in the last decades of the nineteenth century, due to the integration of Chinese brokers and merchants into foreign trade practices. By the turn of the century, China’s cotton imports quadrupled.



**Figure 4 Chinese Cotton Imports with Cotton. Source: Hsiao, Liang-Lin. China's Foreign Trade Statistics, 1864-1949. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.**

In this graph cotton imports to China are measured against the percentage of total imports from 1867 to 1939.<sup>43</sup> Between 1900 and 1920 cotton imports were the most important commodity traded in China and accounted for more than a third of all imports since mid-century. By the time cotton cultivation was spreading into the American southwest the

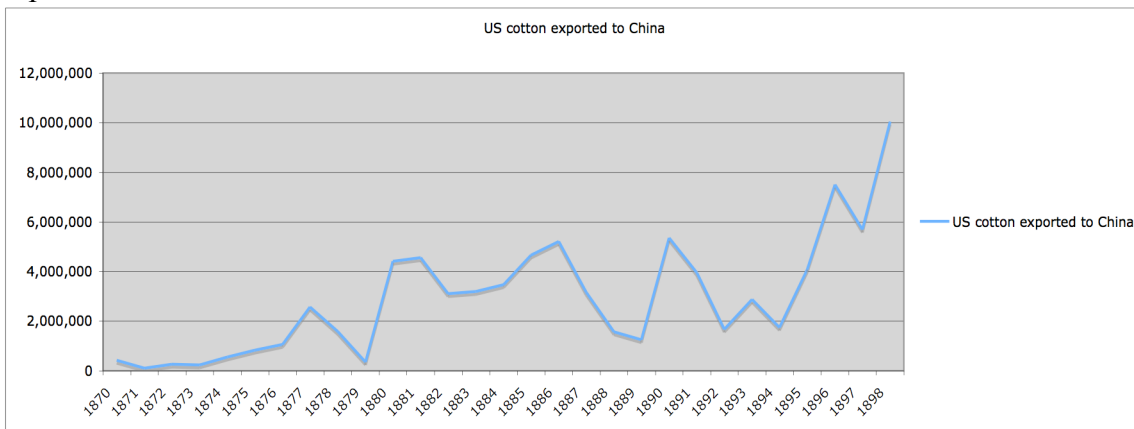
<sup>42</sup> Linda Grove, *A Chinese Economic Revolution: Rural Entrepreneurship in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Liang-Lin Hsiao, *China's Foreign Trade Statistics, 1864-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Chinese coastal economy was a highly functioning and specialized market. This period also corresponds with the height of Mexicali's peak cotton production in the 1920s. Chapter 5 explains how Chinese sustained cotton cultivation in Mexicali through intimate business partnerships with individuals situated throughout the cotton trade network.

Cotton cultivation in the U.S. was known around the world. Americans always grew more than their domestic manufacturing capacity because of the enormous global demand for the fiber. In the nineteenth century the U.S. produced more than half of the world's supply. If there were any doubt to U.S. dominance in the world cotton market, the American Civil War would have corrected that. During the war, Union blockades attempted to starve Confederates from proceeds derived from cotton trade. While contraband cotton still made it to market by going through Texas and by rushing the blockade, the global supply of cotton plummeted. This scarcity spawned a worldwide expansion of cotton growing capacity; mostly in the colonial holdings of European states (e.g. Egypt, India). The practice of smuggling Confederate cotton into Mexico demonstrated to Mexican elites the benefits of producing cotton.<sup>44</sup> By the 1880s cotton cultivation had become a global endeavor, incorporating more and more regions into the circuits of industrialization.<sup>45</sup> This increased competition worried American cotton interests, as they feared losing their position in the Pacific trade.<sup>46</sup>

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Americans foresaw China as the preeminent market for their cotton exports. While Sino-American trade was driven by China's demand for silver at first, American cotton became a staple of economic exchange in the twentieth century. Pacific cotton markets encouraged Americans to extend their imperial gaze to Asia. In popular discourse of the time Asia was considered a "neighbor" in need of "assistance" in developing textile industries.<sup>47</sup> As Chinese demand grew, American exports expanded.



**Figure 5 U.S. Cotton Exported to China. Source: Fisher, Ralph. "The United States Cotton Trade with China." University of California, 1903.**

<sup>44</sup> Romero, *The Silver Standard in Mexico*.

<sup>45</sup> Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border*. Schell, "Silver Symbiosis: ReOrienting Mexican Economic History."

<sup>46</sup> "Financial Effects of the Cotton Dearth," *Daily Alta California*, January 27 1864.

<sup>47</sup> "Our Trade with the Orient," *The San Francisco Call*, March 7 1900. "Our Asiatic Trade," *The San Francisco Call*, November 11 1905.



This graph shows the early growth of American cotton exports to China from 1870 to 1898.<sup>48</sup> In this way, silver paved the way for a more integrated Pacific economy based on cotton. Influenced by imperial theories of “oversaving” and policies of fostering international corporate expansion, the U.S. Treasury conducted a detailed report in 1899 about commerce with China. The widely read report stated,

The cotton industry and cotton demand in China are an especially important subject in considering that country from the standpoint of American commerce. Cotton and cotton goods now form the largest item of our exports to China, and reports of the British officials who control the customs service of China state that American cotton goods are gaining in the markets of that country, while those from Great Britain are falling off in importations.<sup>49</sup>

This report reflected a common sentiment that commerce with Asia was a right to be asserted, a duty to the growing U.S. economy and as aid to backward Oriental countries in their industrial pursuit of progress. The characterization of Asia as a laggard of modernity justified interventionist policies that imposed new standards upon the Orient as well as obligations of “White men” to implement such “improvements.”<sup>50</sup> This paternal foreign policy was nevertheless tied to the enhancement of military and economic strategies of U.S. empire. The sting of the 1870 Depression still lurked in the minds of American industrialists, those in the West propped up growth schemes with speculation on the benefits of trade with Asia. The *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, for example professed that,

[t]he real advantage to the American laborer will come in the upbuilding of demand for American products, which in turn brings better times and better wages... California, Oregon, and Washington are already benefiting decidedly.<sup>51</sup>

In this way, the settling of the American west was always intimately tied to the commercial expansion of U.S. imperialism in the Pacific.

By the turn of the century, the two poles of the Pacific cotton trade were developing distinct patterns. In the Americas, advancements in irrigation technology started a new wave of agro-industrial expansion with cotton cultivation leading the charge. The construction of extensive irrigation systems became vital components to both U.S. and Mexican domestic policy, because they satisfied demands for economic growth and claims to modernization. Meanwhile, state sponsored industrial support led to specialization in East Asia: China in cotton cultivation and weaving and Japan in spinning. After World War I Japan dominated the Chinese cotton yarn import market, but only by incorporating Chinese merchant networks into domestic Japanese commerce and importing U.S. cotton.

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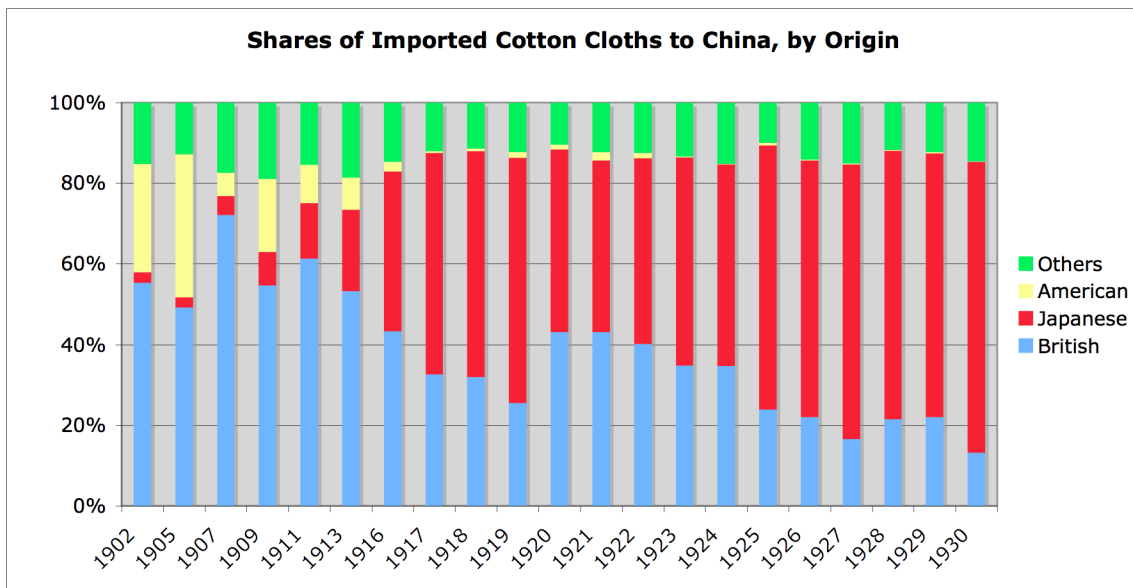
<sup>48</sup> Ralph Fisher, "The United States Cotton Trade with China" (University of California, 1903).

<sup>49</sup> United States Dept. of the Treasury, *Commercial China in 1899 : Area, Population, Production, Railways, Telegraphs, Transportation Routes, Foreign Commerce, and Commerce of the United States with China* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899).

<sup>50</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Expanded ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development the Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Albert Shaw, ed., *The American Monthly Review of Reviews: An International Magazine*, vol. 20 (New York: The Review of Reviews Co., 1899).

In East Asia, state-subsidized industrialization shaped the scale and allocation of emerging manufacturing sectors. However, overseas Chinese networks unified and integrated East Asian trade. They monopolized the role of brokers and moneychangers throughout the Asian Pacific providing critical services for regional exchange between colonial provinces. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, cotton products dominated East Asian economies as the opium trade declined due to domestic Chinese production. The industrialization of textile manufacturing in East Asia was a response to patterns of development in the West; namely technology, consumer demand, and foreign exchange. The Qing and Meiji governments tailored their domestic economies in complementary ways; Kobe and Tokyo heightened yarn production sold in the markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Leading up to China's revolution in 1911 textile production was organized by imperial policy coordinating the rural households, family workshops, cooperatives and factories for the export of woven textiles. In the wake of the revolution, Japan had firmly monopolized the Chinese market for spun cotton and factories located in China's treaty ports boosted productivity.



**Figure 6 Shares of Imported Cotton Cloths to China, By Origin. Source: Chao, Kang. *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977.**

This graph shows the composition of Chinese cotton imports from 1902 to 1930 and the growth of Japan's share of Chinese imports.<sup>52</sup> With the introduction of the gold standard in Japan, the government was able to make extensive foreign loans to finance its economic growth. These trends in industrialization repositioned Japan as a central fixture of East Asian geo-politics as exemplified by the Sino- and Russo-Japanese Wars.

East Asian competition guided American cotton exports across the Pacific. While some lamented the lack of growth in cotton exports to China others celebrated the voracious Japanese appetite for the American fiber.<sup>53</sup> Japan used American cotton to increase its

<sup>52</sup> Chao, *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China*.

<sup>53</sup> "Flowery Kingdom Cotton Imports Fall Off Heavily," *Los Angeles Herald*, January 12 1907. "American Trade with China," *The San Francisco Call*, August 10 1909.

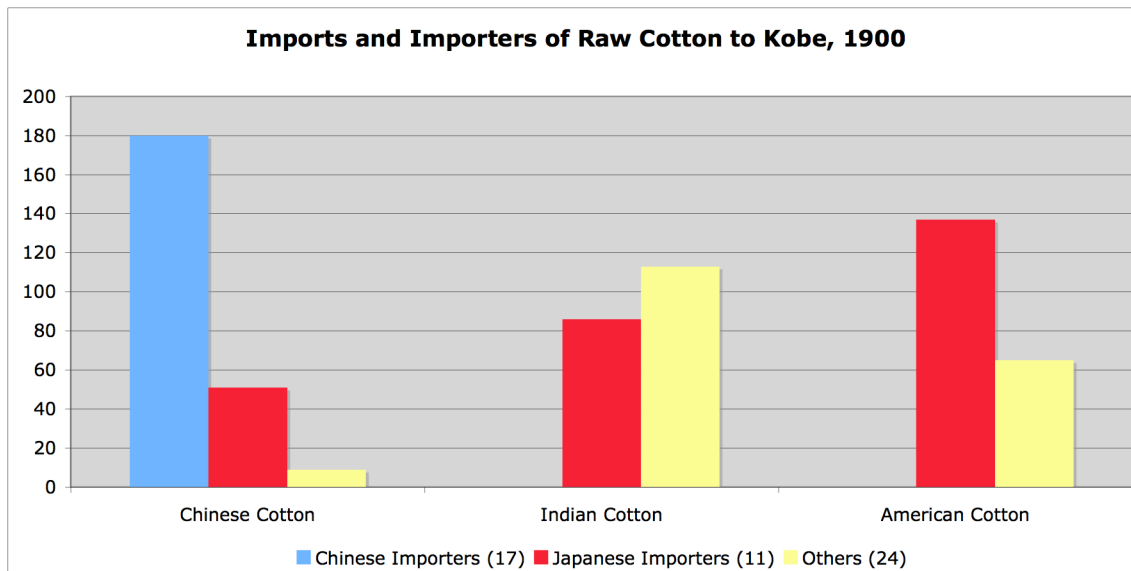
competitive edge over Chinese and British textile trades. American trade to Asia in the first and second decades of the twentieth century marked the triumph of efforts to restructure the political economy of the Pacific Rim. Cotton was an integral part of that expansion, forming a corridor of trade, migration, and finance. Only after the combined implementation of Mahan's naval strategy and the construction of an international investment system did U.S. trade with Asia expand. This trade represented successful currency manipulations, the acquisition of Pacific island colonies, and the incorporation of overseas Chinese merchants. It is in this environment that Mexicali emerges: strong East Asian demand for foreign cotton, driven by American cotton exports, supported by Mexican policies of economic development, and operated by enterprising Chinese cotton brokers. Mexicali remained at the forefront of irrigated cotton cultivation in the U.S. and Mexico because it did not suffer from expensive American labor, revolutionary unrest in Mexico, or the obstacles that foreigners encountered in conducting trade in Asia.

Chinese merchants, first and foremost, made the growth of cotton textile manufacturing in inter-East Asian trade possible. China's history of forced exchange with European traders in the treaty ports trained Chinese merchants to be savvy negotiators and provide the critical service of carrying business transactions through various currency exchanges, including the provincial Chinese copper cash. By the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese emigration had spread across the globe with the majority of Chinese emigrating to Southeast Asia. Through these migrations overseas Chinese expanded the commercial network of China's domestic economy by brokering Chinese imports and exports to their countrymen abroad. In this regard, the spread of cotton trade in Asia could not have occurred without the enterprising networks of Chinese merchants.

The dominance that Japan shows in the post-WWI era was based upon specific strategies to limit the power of these commercial networks.<sup>54</sup> The cotton yarn trade of the 1890s was directly tied to subverting these same Chinese merchants operating in Japan. The only hope for Japanese control over the cotton yarn market was to secure non-Chinese sources of raw cotton. In 1900 Japanese importers of American cotton competed with Chinese merchants importing cheap raw cotton from northern China.

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<sup>54</sup> K. Sugihara, ed., *Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy, 1850-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).



**Figure 7 Imports and Importers of Raw Cotton to Kobe, 1900. Source: Kagotani, Naoto. "The Chinese Merchant Community in Kobe and the Development of the Japanese Cotton Industry, 1890-1941." In Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy, 185**

This graph shows the origins of imported cotton to Kobe, Japan divided by the identity of the importing agent in 1900.<sup>55</sup> Here we can see that while the imports of Chinese cotton remain high, Japanese importers preferred American cotton imports. By ending its dependence on Chinese cotton, Japan increased its competitive edge over Chinese products. Japanese imports of American cotton skyrocketed from 1890 at a value of \$351,875 to 1897 at a value of \$7,273,221 creating a new dependency.<sup>56</sup> Despite Japan's virtual monopoly over East Asian cotton yarn in the 1920s total Chinese imports of cotton goods also expanded, doubling in five years beginning in 1900. [See graph 1] American imports also kept pace with growing Chinese demand. Furthermore, the portion of imported cotton to total imports remained high until the 1920s. These trends suggest that cotton was the most commonly traded commodity in East Asia and Chinese merchants and brokers were the lynchpin to its operation. It should not be lost that this insatiable demand for cotton in Asia gave continued encouragement for expansion of cotton cultivation on the other side of the Pacific.

On the American side of the Pacific technological advancements and increased industrial capacity in infrastructure development in the U.S. led to massive irrigation construction projects. In the late nineteenth century in California, these developments mixed with real estate speculation to produce enormous booms in agriculturally productive land. Just south of the border, President Díaz courted foreign investment and irrigation specialists from the U.S to begin projects in northern Mexico. With Mexico's decline in Pacific trade and the

<sup>55</sup> Naoto Kagotani, "The Chinese Merchant Community in Kobe and the Development of the Japanese Cotton Industry, 1890-1941," in *Japan, China, and the Growth of the Asian International Economy, 1850-1949*, ed. K. Sugihara (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 49-72. Grove, *A Chinese Economic Revolution: Rural Entrepreneurship in the Twentieth Century*. Ken Togo, "Japan's Cotton Spinning Industry: 1868-1897," in SSRN: Working Paper Series (Social Science Research Network, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> "Our Trade with Japan," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 8 1898, 6.

dominance of U.S. capitalists, politicians in Mexico City re-oriented their political compass to the American hegemon. The spread of large-scale irrigation technology throughout the U.S.-Mexico border region shared a settler ideology that wedded national identity with the establishment of modern colonies.<sup>57</sup> Part II argues that had it not been for the Chinese, Mexicali would not have become Mexico's most successful irrigated colony in the twentieth century. In both the U.S. and Mexico, state sponsored irrigated colonization was intended to provide the means for small-family farming. However, the unpredictability of harvests and lack of financing left irrigated lands in the hands of a few. In California, real estate development was founded on a boosterism in which cheap desert land was consolidated into enormous tracts and outfitted with irrigation technology and sold for a windfall profit. The increase in irrigated land lent credence to popular notions of conquest and fulfilling both national destinies of both the U.S. and Mexico.

The two poles of the Pacific cotton corridor formed not only material linkages but also human connections with well-worn routes of migration. Given Chinese expertise in cotton commerce and the cultivation of irrigated cotton it should be no surprise that the Chinese were drawn to this region. At the end of the nineteenth century Baja California was an unincorporated territory of Mexico and remained relatively isolated from the xenophobia that limited the growth of the Chinese community in other parts of Mexico. What's more, Mexicali being located on the border lent greater incentives to Mexican workers to continue further north for better wages. The transience of Mexican workers allowed the Chinese to establish an early foothold in the economy. Part II traces the development of irrigated colonization in the U.S. and Mexico in order to explain the forces that brought Chinese workers to Mexicali and what convinced them to stay.

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<sup>57</sup> Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border*.

### Chapter 3: The Emergence of Mexicali Amidst Multiple Borders

In preparation for Mexico's conversion to the gold standard the value of the peso was fixed in 1904. This stabilization prompted a \$400 million dollar American investment in irrigated cotton throughout northern Mexico. Industry advocates were convinced that strong demand for imports in Asian markets guaranteed a swift return on the invested capital.<sup>1</sup> Southern California mogul Harrison Gray Otis, owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, was of the same mind as he invested millions to acquire the rights to develop the Colorado River delta and the adjacent river basin in Baja California. Otis partnered with Baja California elites to form the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC) to carry out a contract to colonize the desolate western border region. This colonization contract granted para-statal privilege to the CRLC as it took the necessary steps to develop the irrigation infrastructure and administrative institutions to manage the work. The CRLC overcame obstacles that stopped others from developing the region through access to large sources of capital and the integration of transnational Chinese networks. Through the CRLC, Mexicali became an attractive place to grow cotton and an accessory to Chinese migration to Mexico. Otis invited Chinese, like Louie Geow (the labor contractor from Sacramento who was introduced at the beginning of the previous chapter) to work the Mexican lands. This chapter tells how the unfolding of these processes, led Mexicali to emerge as a nexus of Mexican nation-building, an outpost of East Asian industrialization, U.S. imperialism, and the Chinese diaspora.

The triangular relations between the U.S., China, and Mexico created material connections that shaped the values and meanings that people imparted on those places. The life and thoughts of Harrison Gray Otis demonstrate how the social structures of U.S. imperialism that stretched across the Pacific provided pathways for him to experience and become a part of numerous frontiers. I argue that this ideological triangulation of different U.S. colonial spaces informed his overall approach to developing the irrigated colonies of Mexicali late in his career. His diverse experiences gave shape to a racial imaginary that normatively ordered racialized people in the colonial space of the Pacific Rim. The emergence of Otis's personality and mental mapping is representative of the values and meanings that the triangular relations that the Pacific afforded. In this imaginary, Otis fully recognized the connections and opportunities between the frontiers of East Asian industrialization and irrigated colonization. Otis had many peers and in some ways this mentality may even be considered a popular world-view among business magnates and land developers in the American west.

One of the most influential voices in American settlement discourse at the turn of the century was William Smythe, a newspaper editor and irrigation visionary. He edited newspapers as well as the magazine *Irrigation Age* espousing the benefits of bringing water to the dry un-settled portions of the nation. In 1900 he wrote *Conquest of Arid America* laying out an ambitious domestic agenda in contrast to the flurry of attention to the new American possessions. He wrote,

Whatever may be the nation's ultimate policy in the Pacific - whether to rule or to emancipate - the new impulse now clearly apparent in the intellectual and industrial tide of that part of the world will materially assist the settlement of the Far West, and indefinitely widen the market

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<sup>1</sup> Butler Edward, "Fixed Value for the Peso," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27 1904.

for its products... *The true opportunity of American people lies not in the tropical islands of the Pacific and Caribbean, but in the vast unsettled regions of their own country... The advocates of colonial expansion abroad argue that hitherto we have been engaged in the conquest of this continent, and declare that this work is now done. But it is not done.*<sup>2</sup>

Smythe's text was widely read and virtually became policy after World War I when he was made Secretary of the Interior. For Smythe and many who agreed with him the technology of irrigated colonization created the opportunity to rehearse the popular romantic narratives of settling the Wild West. To be sure, White men were at the center of the drama of irrigated colonization and their efforts to reclaim the landscape. These sentiments resound with much of popular discourse about U.S. imperialism and the duties of the White man to "liberate" Spanish subjects in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines and promote "progress" in them as colonial possessions. Smythe's colonial vision of the American west was ambitious and persuasive. His work in the formulation of the Reclamation Act of 1902 directed public expenditures to increase irrigated colonization throughout the desert southwest. By 1925, 600 dams were built and 10 million acres had been irrigated as a result of the policy. The political posturing of what many have termed "the White man's burden" formed the foundation for the creation of an international investment system to facilitate Pacific trade and ultimately the globalization of American corporate power. According to Smythe, "colonial expansion" at the turn of the twentieth century meant prying open the consumer markets of Asia and irrigating American deserts at the same time.

The capital-intensive investments necessary to construct irrigation infrastructure made it the exclusive domain of large corporations and the federal government (most of the time resulting in partnership between the two). The growth of irrigated farmland increased the demand for seasonal migratory labor that began first with Chinese laborers and then shifted to Mexican laborers in the twentieth century. As irrigation increased the productive capacity of the land, exports to Asian markets became more important than ever before. The economic success of industrial scale irrigation reflected the types of solutions put in place after the depression of the 1870s. While irrigated colonization in the U.S. was colored with jingoist imperialism, in Mexico it was steeped in nationalist revolution.

In Mexico, if cotton and irrigated colonization went hand in hand, then so too did agriculture and revolution. The development of the Laguna District of northern Mexico illustrates how central these factors were to the processes of national formation and economic development. Beginning as a response to the glut of smuggled Confederate cotton, the Laguna District was established to produce Mexico's share of the world demand for cotton. Under Porfirio Díaz's rule, the Laguna district bustled with activity from new railroad lines and expanded cotton cultivation by 400% between 1880 and 1890. The largely foreign owned cotton fields became a centerpiece in the Mexican economy. The massive amounts of labor required to harvest the irrigated crops drew workers from preexisting migratory circuits in the mining belt across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As the scale of agriculture grew in the Laguna District so too did the stakes of each crop. Unpredictability in weather, the quantity of water, crop size, and the number of gathering workers regularly combined to form rebellions and labor disputes. Under Díaz's rule, foreign investment outpaced the supply of labor and stalled expansion and encouraged domestic labor migration.

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<sup>2</sup> William E. Smythe, *The Conquest of Arid America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900). emphasis added

In 1910 these conditions coalesced around Francisco Madero's call for change from the Díaz dictatorship. Madero, an owner of a large irrigated-cotton farm in the Laguna District, grew frustrated with the foreign ownership of the region and combined worker discontent with a xenophobic call for revolution.<sup>3</sup> Madero's revolutionary claims did not include land reform, only nationalization of the economy and the natural resources, thereby preserving the large class division in the structure of land ownership. The Mexican Revolution remained in tense fluctuation between the ideals of land reform and the national cooptation of foreign-owned extractive industries.<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, these tribulations defined the character of irrigated agriculture and cotton cultivation throughout Northern Mexico. U.S. engineers brought irrigation technology to Mexico but Mexican politics transformed irrigation into a central feature of the national economy and the centralization of state power.

It was under these conditions that Mexico and China reformulated a relationship in the new context of a U.S. dominated Pacific. China and Mexico negotiated treaties of trade and migration in 1893 and 1899 against the wishes of the U.S. These treaties established modest political rights for travelers, diplomats, and merchants from both nations as they sought to maintain their vital commerce links. This bi-national treaty upset American officials for two reasons; it permitted Chinese to migrate to territorial thresholds of the U.S. and it challenged the role of the U.S. as the mediator of Pacific trade, if only diplomatically. Furthermore, Díaz required more labor to achieve the industrial modernization he had envisioned for Mexico. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, thousands of Chinese found Mexico to be an attractive place to live, work, and conduct business. The gapping class divisions between wealthy Mexican and foreign landowners and numerous landless peasants created a familiar petite bourgeoisie niche, like those in southeast Asian venue societies.<sup>5</sup> Across Mexico Chinese immigrants opened up grocery and general merchandise stores.<sup>6</sup> The highest concentrations were in northern Mexico, however Chinese could be found in every state, except Tlaxcala. Using commercial connections with San Francisco and other large international ports, the Chinese contributed to the industrial expansion of the Mexican economy by bringing essential goods and services to new sites of production such as mining camps, railroad projects and exchange depots like border towns. Chinese immigrants, well aware of routes to the U.S. through Mexico, had become familiar with the possibilities of joining Mexican communities.

The Mexican state made calculated responses to increasing irrigation in the borderlands. Even in the post-Revolutionary period, the Irrigation with Federal Waters Law and the Federal Colonization Law determined the rights and capacity of the state to use irrigation as a comprehensive social and economic development strategy. Like the American ideology of White settlement in its irrigation programs, Mexican elites crafted irrigated

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<sup>3</sup> William Meyers, "Seasons of Rebellion: Nature, Organisation of Cotton Production and the Dynamics of Revolution in La Laguna, Mexico, 1910ñ1916," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 01 (1998): 63-94. Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border*.

<sup>4</sup> Cotter. *Troubled Harvest* Joseph Cotter, *Troubled Harvest: Agronomy and Revolution in Mexico, 1880-2002* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society; The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932."



colonization of northern Mexico as a conscious program of racial improvement and evolution as illustrated in Part III. By this time, theories of modernization in much of the world held thought that progress was paved by technical expertise in both industry and social reproduction in the form of eugenics. Despite the lackluster results of these policies, cotton cultivation continued in Mexico often becoming incorporated into larger patterns of American trade as re-exports.

What differentiated Mexicali's development from the rest of northern Mexico was the fact that it was still a territory and remained isolated from the rest of Mexico. The cost of building the irrigation infrastructure made settlement in Baja California's Colorado River valley prohibitive. Porfirio Díaz made the deliberate choice to grant a colonization contract to Harrison Gray Otis in hopes of establishing Mexican settlements in this peripheral territory. Where other Americans failed to build a successful irrigation system in the region, Otis had greater capital resources and no pre-determined antipathy to incorporating Asian labor. In order to appreciate the role Mexicali played as a node among the relations of the Pacific it is helped to explain Otis's life and what the development of Mexicali may have meant to him.

Otis was born in 1837 to Republican parents in Ohio. His family's strong advocacy for abolition influenced his decision to enlist in the Civil War. After his tour of duty, Otis moved back to Ohio to begin his life long career as a newspaper editor with the *Washington County News*.<sup>7</sup> Otis's work with everyday mid-nineteenth century media channels gave him exposure to many of the currents of national thought; especially news of the Wild West and efforts to settle newly acquired land.<sup>8</sup> It is through this exposure that he became familiar with discourse of settlement and the living conditions in the frontier. In 1874, he took his wife to explore southern California and Northern Mexico. Impressed by California and moved his family to Santa Barbara and took on an editorship of the *Santa Barbara Press*.<sup>9</sup>

Dissatisfied with his work in Santa Barbara he applied for Foreign Service in 1880 hoping his Civil War connections would lead to a favorable placement abroad. Otis must have been shocked to finally hear back from the State Department only to find he had been placed in Alaska's Sea Islands. The Bering Strait was far from any other place he hoped to fulfill the terms of duty. His placement in the Sea Islands represented a recent expansion of the American imperial state. In 1867, the U.S. bought Alaskan territory from the Russian Empire at two cents an acre. While Otis lamented his seemingly mundane tasks of monitoring the movements of native Alaskans, taking a census of the region and acting as a liaison for the State Department his presence constituted a personally formative exposure to the conditions of American colonialism.

During his years in the colonial contact zones of Alaska, Otis acquired stronger convictions. His major preoccupation there was with the Eskimos, Aleuts, and Inuit. Given his administrative role, he reported on their physical features and went to great lengths to speculate on their various intellectual capacities.<sup>10</sup> In 1882, he reflected on his experience in Alaska writing,

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<sup>7</sup> Dennis McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty* (Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty*.

<sup>10</sup> "About Alaska," *Los Angeles Times*, December 27 1881.

The Aleut has the physical appearance of having descended from an Asiatic origin, resembling more the Japanese than the Chinese... The “real Indians” of the interior [Ingaliks] struck me as the superior of the two races in natural abilities. With a century of more or less civilized training, which he has not had, but which the Aleut has had, the American Indian would probably have outstripped the descendent of Asia in the race of mental progress. [sic]<sup>11</sup>

According to Otis’s racial logic, Alaskan natives were not ready for the burdens of “all the rights, advantages, and immunities of citizenship” accorded under the 1867 treaty between Russia and the U.S. Instead, he recommended a colonial status strengthening the state’s administrative control of the Alaskan territory.<sup>12</sup>

Just before his transfer to the Samoan Islands in 1882, he submitted his resignation to the U.S. State Department and returned to California. Restless and eager to get back to “civilization” and his family in Santa Barbara, Otis was determined to make his name in California. Along with his Foreign Service post earnings he had amassed a small savings from the numerous presses he operated in the Mid-West and in California. Otis moved his family to the dusty town of Los Angeles and bought into the *Los Angeles Times* with a one-quarter interest in the company. Otis was among many others attracted to the real estate boom in California in the late nineteenth century. The growth of Los Angeles was fueled by the glorification of settlement and pioneers. Otis used the *Los Angeles Times* to communicate to a wider audience about life at the edge of the Pacific.

Otis was well known for his belligerent nationalism and high esteem for military service. However, these attitudes alone can’t explain Otis’s life story or his accomplishments. In many ways, his role in the social structures of U.S. imperialism enabled his numerous undertakings. It was through the expansion of the imperial state that, “the West... made the rest of the world available, in various ways, to its own citizens.”<sup>13</sup> Public service was one of the primary means by which Otis acquired an imperial vision and colonial mentality. These experiences combined to form one of Southern California’s most well known demagogues. His quarrelsome style of leadership was underscored by a colonial romanticism particular to Southern California.

Otis “wanted Southern Californians to see themselves as moral heirs of Spain. He encouraged them to internalize in an American way the aesthetic ancestry of the civilization which had prepared the way for their own.”<sup>14</sup> Fregoso argues that the Spanish colonial myth “entailed reinventing a romantic Spanish history for California – a fictionalized past exploited by Los Angeles “Boosters” bent on transforming the region into the cultural and economic capital of the West.”<sup>15</sup> The “fantasy heritage” of Southern California was “the selective appropriation of historical fact, the transformation of selected elements of history into a romantic, idyllic past that repressed the history of race and class relations” under Spanish

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty*. "About Alaska."

<sup>13</sup> Shari Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty*.

<sup>15</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

colonization and Mexican rule.<sup>16</sup> Even Smythe, the irrigation advocate, accepted parts of this fantasy, though ultimately he believed the success of irrigation in California was evidence of Anglo supremacy over the decadent if romantic Spanish. He wrote in *Conquest of Arid America*,

Its past is the dreamy memory of old mission days, of peaceful sheppards, of great haciendas, of a land dominated by Spanish folk and speech. The land was a desert of sagebrush and cactus, in which a few scattered mission gardens made charming oases... But it was apparently a country, which offered nothing to the stranger save climate and scenery. To this barren place came irrigation and the Anglo-Saxon, bringing a new era in their train. [sic]<sup>17</sup>

The fantasy heritage adopted by American settlers, such as Otis, helped them to legitimize their claim to power and authority. According to Spurr “colonial discourse takes over as it takes cover,” meaning that it “transfers the locus of desire onto the colonized object itself. It appropriates territory, while it also appropriates the means by which such acts of appropriation are to be understood.”<sup>18</sup> As a real estate developer and newspaper editor, Otis’s life embodied these mechanics of appropriation. His disdain for the Spanish was not limited to Southern California; the Asian Pacific also reflected the decadence of a declining European power.

For Otis, the two processes of California colonization and the imperial reach to Asia were indistinguishable; in his mind, one could only be realized through the other. He wanted Los Angeles to become the seat of power for the Pacific. He envisioned a “mightier Pacific Empire” and conducted himself as a disciple to this ideological position.<sup>19</sup> As a captain of industry and a jingoist patriarch, he found the outbreak of the Spanish-American War to be a personal call to action. Otis ardently volunteered to serve in the Philippine-American War. His service was even endorsed by the President, with whom he had served in the Civil War.

Otis’s business opponents in Los Angeles made their sentiments felt in the Senate by objecting to his confirmation due to his “advocacy of certain public improvements in Southern California.” His detractors argued that military service was a pretense to expanding his commercial stakes throughout California and the Pacific. While these accusations could be made of the Spanish-American War in general, it nevertheless flew in the face of the political rhetoric of a benevolent mission of liberating the colonized from Spanish rule. Not surprisingly, the *LA Times* dismissed these claims as irrelevant and continued to exalt Otis’s qualifications and natural temperament for this sort of expedition.<sup>20</sup> Despite the objections, Otis was confirmed as Brigadier-General, the *LA Times* spared no time in praising its Editor-in-Chief. One column in the paper speculated that, “no man who knows him for his sterling manliness and lion-like courage, will question [sic].”<sup>21</sup>

To many Americans at the turn of the century, a Pacific war was more than a national sentiment, the assembly of military forces on the west coast demonstrated the triumph of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Smythe, *The Conquest of Arid America*.

<sup>18</sup> David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty*.

<sup>20</sup> "Eighth California," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5 1898.

<sup>21</sup> "General Otis Confirmed," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7 1898.

American conquest, proof positive for the ideologues of Manifest Destiny. Coats argues that “[n]ot since the Mexican War, fought a half-century earlier, had the American military attempted to prepare a large force to move to a foreign land. No prewar plans existed to provide a blueprint for this endeavor in 1898.”<sup>22</sup> Being the largest settlement on the west coast, San Francisco was a logical location from which to launch the Philippine invasion. Its growth inspired by the 1849 Gold Rush, the completion of the Transcontinental railroad and establishment of steam ship lines connecting its port to the rest of the Pacific Rim.

In dispatches from the Philippines, Otis disparagingly referred to the remaining Spanish military as “Dons.” He also likened the experience in Philippine prisons to the tyranny of the “inflexible rancheros” of his familiar California.<sup>23</sup> The “fantasy heritage” was the predominate framework through which Otis, and others in his position, made sense of the world. Through these experiences Otis draws the geography of the American Empire from the Caribbean to Polynesia and former territory of northern Mexico. In an interesting stretch of ethnographic detail Otis uses his dispatch to the *LA Times* to sketch out a scene on the streets of Manila. It begins by describing the Spanish-dominant signage of buildings and streets but then focuses on the “delightful confusion” of Filipinos, Spanish soldiers, officers from Guam, the Red Cross, fruit and vegetable vendors, and Yankee soldiers in a variety of uniforms.<sup>24</sup> The passage ends with the phrase in quotes, “Such is life on the border.” In these letters from the frontiers of U.S. imperialism, Otis collapses the space between home and abroad.<sup>25</sup> While the “fantasy heritage” ideology informed U.S. colonization of California, it also propagated the image of the Philippines and other Pacific islands as uncomplicated commercial gateways to Asian markets. These ideas replicated the aspirations of New Spain’s colonial merchants centuries earlier. Americans carried these expectations with them as they expanded the frontiers of U.S. imperialism.

Throughout his tour of duty in the Philippines the Brigadier-General speculated on the economic development of the islands, the proper means of its administration, and the extent of duty implied by the prevailing discourse of the White-man’s burden. As evidenced by his occasional dispatches to the *LA Times*, these three subjects were interwoven. Otis reasoned that American occupation of the Philippines would not likely become a “revenue-producing proposition” simply because Filipinos were not ready for “our government, popular rights, and personal liberty.”<sup>26</sup> Two months later, Otis sent another dispatch abhorring the cruelty of Spanish colonial prison conditions and torture methods of its Filipino subjects. Otis went on to comment on the productive value of prison labor and the fine quality of Philippine wood carving techniques.<sup>27</sup> These juxtapositions reveal not a concern for the humanity of Filipinos but indeed the difference between the tactics of a Spanish colonial administration struggling to maintain hegemony and the emergence of a different hegemonic order with new forms of legitimacy and racialization. The end of this particular dispatch closes by outlining his vision for American colonization of the Philippines. While Otis mused over the future of the Philippines under American control, the Filipino independence movement was reorganizing

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Coats, *Gathering at the Golden Gate* (Fort Levanworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Harrison Gray Otis, "In Dewey Land," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24 1898.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*.

<sup>26</sup> Otis, "In Dewey Land."

<sup>27</sup> Harrison Gray Otis, "Cruel Spaniards," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21 1898.

under the Philippine Congress of Malolos with the guidance of the revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo. Up to this point, American forces had only engaged the Spanish colonial forces. During Otis's previous dispatches to the *L.A Times* the terms of transition were being negotiated between the Spanish and American governments with only conciliatory involvement of Aguinaldo and his incipient Philippine government. Armed conflict with Filipinos did not escalate until the U.S. contested Aguinaldo's claim to Philippine sovereignty in January of 1899.

As evidenced by Otis's previous dispatches, the announcement of Philippine independence would have sounded ludicrous to his ears; how could racially inferior people govern themselves? It was in these terms that the American command responded to the claims of the Philippine Republic. Otis did not volunteer in the Spanish-American war to oversee the spectacle of the changing of the guard, but to fight the decadent Spanish and bring "progress" to the Philippine Islands. The formation of the First Philippine Republic frustrated both of these expectations, as Otis saw them. The formal offensive against the "insurgent" Filipinos began on February 4<sup>th</sup> at the San Juan River Bridge at Caloocan, between Malolos and Manila.<sup>28</sup> Otis led his American soldiers into the first battle, vastly outnumbering the Filipino forces. In the decisive and quickly executed battle, Otis reported 199 Filipinos "killed, counted and buried."<sup>29</sup> These forms of conflict served to reinforce notions of race through the act of warfare whereby Filipinos were conceived of in terms of their extermination.<sup>30</sup>

On the other side of the Pacific, away from the bloodshed, the *LA Times* reprinted any mention of the Brigadier-General's actions publishing a daily digest of accolades. The *Oakland Inquirer* praised Otis as a "real fighter" in comparison with the "slumbers of politicians in Southern California."<sup>31</sup> The *San Diegan Sun* compared Otis's military maneuvers and his editorship of the *L.A. Times* by praising "the way he made paragraphs and single-line items of the Filipino columns and leaders, shows just what a man can do who is fairly familiar with the use of a breech-loading blue pencil."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Otis had edited Filipino humanity and independence out of American consciousness. The *Arizona Bulletin* went even further to suggest that other generals of the Philippine-American war get in touch with their "inner Otis."<sup>33</sup> This metonymic gesture underscores the interpretation that "the lone self-reliant cowboy on the frontier – has endured parasitically by feeding on new outposts of the American empire."<sup>34</sup> The Brigadier-General continued the campaign with the other battalions on to Malolos where his forces occupied the abandoned headquarters of the First Philippine Republic. Meanwhile, other American forces had continued in pursuit of Aguinaldo's "insurgents." Otis stayed on in combat duty for several more weeks before offering his resignation and returning to California with an honorable discharge.

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<sup>28</sup> Shaw, ed., *The American Monthly Review of Reviews: An International Magazine*.

<sup>29</sup> Elwell Stephen Otis, "Annual Report of the War Department: Report of the Major-General Commanding the Army," ed. War Department (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899).

<sup>30</sup> Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> "The Fight at Caloocan," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15 1899.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> "General Harrison Gray Otis," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3 1899.

<sup>34</sup> Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*.

He was met in Los Angeles with a patriotic spectacle of gratuitous praise for this brief episode of military service. The praise for this hefty man followed him to Chicago where he stopped in route for Washington, D.C. In Chicago he called for an additional 50,000 American troops to be sent to the Philippines. With his fighting behind him and the Philippines 7,000 miles away he became a strong advocate for U.S. annexation of the archipelago. Once in D.C. Otis reiterated his call for more troops to the Associated Press and sounded the call for annexation.<sup>35</sup> With his new military credentials he proved his detractors correct. As a director of the California Chambers of Commerce he co-signed a public letter to a Lieutenant-General Washington, D.C. proposing the establishment of a new military department in the Los Angeles area. The letter included three additional subsidiary proposals; the establishment of Los Angeles as a military port, its designation as a purchasing point and supply depot for army stores, and the creation of a military school. These proposals could have been anticipated since Otis's successful lobbying of the Southern Pacific to settle on the San Pedro harbor for its port terminal. These infrastructural proposals decisively elevated the economic profile of the once marginal coastal California town.<sup>36</sup>

The Brigadier-General became a symbol of this era in Southern California. In the formative stages of a "mightier Pacific Empire," perhaps Otis was the sort of hero envisioned by Smythe as well as the ideal beneficiary of the work of the Commission on International Exchange. Otis was among a new class of corporate industrialists embarking on a comprehensive development regime harnessing California's burgeoning population. They relied upon large-scale aggressive and systemic capital ventures driven by the business model of railroad companies, private monopolization of public services. In this way, profit was a function of population increases. Real estate development, municipal transportation, and irrigated colonization were a regional specialty. This class of Southern California industrialists based the region's prosperity upon the creation of "a territorial system of domination and exploitation" that wove the Pacific and the U.S.-Mexico border into an integrated whole.<sup>37</sup>

After submitting the Los Angeles military department proposal, Otis set his sights on the desert valley east of San Diego. For years, engineers and small-time entrepreneurs had attempted to irrigate what would become the Imperial/Mexicali Valley without much success. Otis succeeded because he operated on a large scale and had access to bigger sources of capital. Through partnerships with Mexican elites, Otis purchased rights to the southern portion of the valley on the Mexican side of the border, an enormous tract of land.

Due to the topography of the valley, the easiest way to irrigate the U.S. side of the valley was to begin the diversion of the Colorado River on the Mexican side and then direct the waters into the downward slope of the northern portion of the valley. The expertise required in this undertaking demonstrates how important experiments in irrigated colonization were to settling the frontier.

Charles Rockwood, the most important surveyor of the valley's irrigation system, was a respected authority for irrigation projects from Ireland to Puerto Rico.<sup>38</sup> Rockwood was

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<sup>35</sup> "At the Capital," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3 1899.

<sup>36</sup> John Norton et al., "Supplemental Action," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13 1902.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> "Second Annual Magazine Edition," *The Calexico Chronicle*, May 1909.

also the first to give Imperial Valley its name.<sup>39</sup> Next, George Chaffey, a California civil engineer, took over Rockwood's operations and established the California Development Company, a struggling firm designed to organize fees from water rights as a way of funding the construction of the future irrigation infrastructure. Chaffey drew from his previous successes in Australia's own irrigated colonization, while also successfully establishing the California settlements of Ontario and Etiwanda through irrigated colonization. However, the large scale of operations, in addition to the complicated bi-national nature of the irrigation infrastructure ultimately undermined Chaffey's construction efforts and ended in disaster. The annual floods of the Colorado River broke the banks of the shallow irrigation canals in 1906 resulting in massive flooding of the entire valley and the formation of the Salton Sea. The only entity capable of maneuvering between the U.S. and Mexican governments was the Southern Pacific railroad company. They were not only capable but also motivated by the flooding that threatened their own railroad lines.

The disaster and subsequent takeover by the Southern Pacific was presided over by the financial clout of Otis and his partners. Their purchase of the Mexican lands across the border and their vast holdings within the Imperial Valley virtually ensured that they would become the central power brokers for the valley and border region. The success of Otis and his son-in-law Harry Chandler is evidenced by their ability to coordinate legal, political, cultural, and economic affairs. Chandler was known for saying "It's not what you go into, it's whom you go into a venture with."<sup>40</sup> The recovery of Imperial Valley from this disaster is representative of three distinct trends; the transformation of the political economy of settlement into a corporate enterprise, the development of irrigation technology, and the intensification of U.S. market and military networks throughout the Pacific Rim. While Rockwood gave Imperial Valley its name, it was Otis and his son-in-law, Chandler, who made it "imperial."

When Rockwood and Chaffey had both failed to make their enterprise successful, it was the financial liquidity of the Otis brand of capitalization that brought the valley to productive scale. Finance capital was the key to day to day living; Imperial Valley's distance from major service centers made flexible lines of credit for the stocking of inventory a vital concern for the valley's residents.<sup>41</sup> The primary mode of production from which this phase of settlement stood upon was the industrialization of agriculture. Irrigation was the key to this economic process. With irrigated agriculture, California became the world's most productive fruit and vegetable region. As with most cycles of industrialization, California's agriculture operated on an enormous scale and became dependent upon finance capital in the form of purchases for essential technology or advances to pay for planting and harvesting. Otis and Chandler's investment syndicates provided the access to credit necessary to embark on irrigated agriculture. In addition, their payment schemes relied on payment in kind rather than cash, establishing a productive yet controlled sharecropper condition.

Otis's Mexican Ranch was part of an enormous real estate project straddling the U.S.-Mexico border. Within a decade of initiating the development of the bi-national valley, Otis owned or bought out competing interests in the valley. The industrial syndicates orchestrated the creation and development of the single largest irrigated colonization project on either side

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<sup>39</sup> M. Dowd, *History of Imperial Irrigation District and the Development of Imperial Valley* (El Centro: Imperial Irrigation District, 1956).

<sup>40</sup> McDougal, *Privileged Son: Otis Chandler and the Rise and Fall of the L.A. Times Dynasty*.

<sup>41</sup> Edgar Howe and Wilbur Hall, *The Story of the First Decade in Imperial Valley, California* (Imperial: E. F. Howe & Sons, 1910).

of the border. The irrigation system included more than 2,500 miles of canals. This vast project appropriated Smythe's notion of the conquest of arid America. In the nascent phases of the valley's development, Otis's *Los Angeles Times* published a booster pamphlet entitled, *An Album of the Imperial Settlements, San Diego County, California. Illustrating the Largest and Finest Irrigation System Now Working For the Conquest of Arid America*. The pamphlet proudly states that large corporate finance capital is the "power behind the throne that is giving direction to the work."<sup>42</sup> These booster pamphlets attracted farmers from across the country, most notably cotton farmers from the American South.<sup>43</sup>

In 1909 the San Francisco Call announced California's first large harvest of cotton. The Imperial Valley had just harvested 1,500 acres.<sup>44</sup> Cotton cultivation in Imperial Valley lasted until the 1920's when the San Joaquin Valley overshadowed it.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the Imperial Valley did become the nation's most productive fruit and vegetable region for decades. Because the Imperial/Mexicali Valley began as an irrigated colony in the desert it didn't have to contend with pre-existing modes of production. This condition created the opportunity for the Valley's producers to strategically enter global cotton commodity markets. The bi-national irrigation infrastructure of the Imperial/Mexicali Valley was a major engineering feat and was portrayed as a symbol of the power of American capitalism. This illustration celebrates twenty years of irrigated colonization and the industrial capacity of the engineered landscape. The image depicts a towering Uncle Sam peering out over the valley, contemplating the construction of additional infrastructure to avoid sharing water with Mexico. Images like these sought to portray the U.S. as a modern industrial power and justify the imperial ambitions of territorial domination.

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<sup>42</sup> Imperial Land Company, *The Imperial Settlement* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Times, 1900).

<sup>43</sup> Walsh, *Building the Borderlands: A Transnational History of Irrigated Cotton Along the Mexico-Texas Border*.

<sup>44</sup> "Picking the Cotton in Imperial Valley," *The San Francisco Call*, September 5 1909.

<sup>45</sup> John McLaughlin, "Nineteenth Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California," ed. Department of Labor (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1920).



A GREATER  
IMPERIAL VALLEY  
STRAIGHT AHEAD

# IMPERIAL VALLEY PRESS

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AND EL CENTRO PROGRESS  
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## The Accomplishments of Twenty-one Years

### BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE IMPERIAL WATER SYSTEM

Save this sketch for you are certain to want it sometime. Most people have a very hazy idea of the lay of the land in the Colorado Basin, and of the method by which water is brought into Imperial Valley and also the method by which it is kept out. The Press presents here a map which not only shows the system as it is today, but also gives a correct survey of the history of the great Imperial enterprise from the time that man first conceived the idea of compelling the Colorado to become the nation's greatest single productive agent.

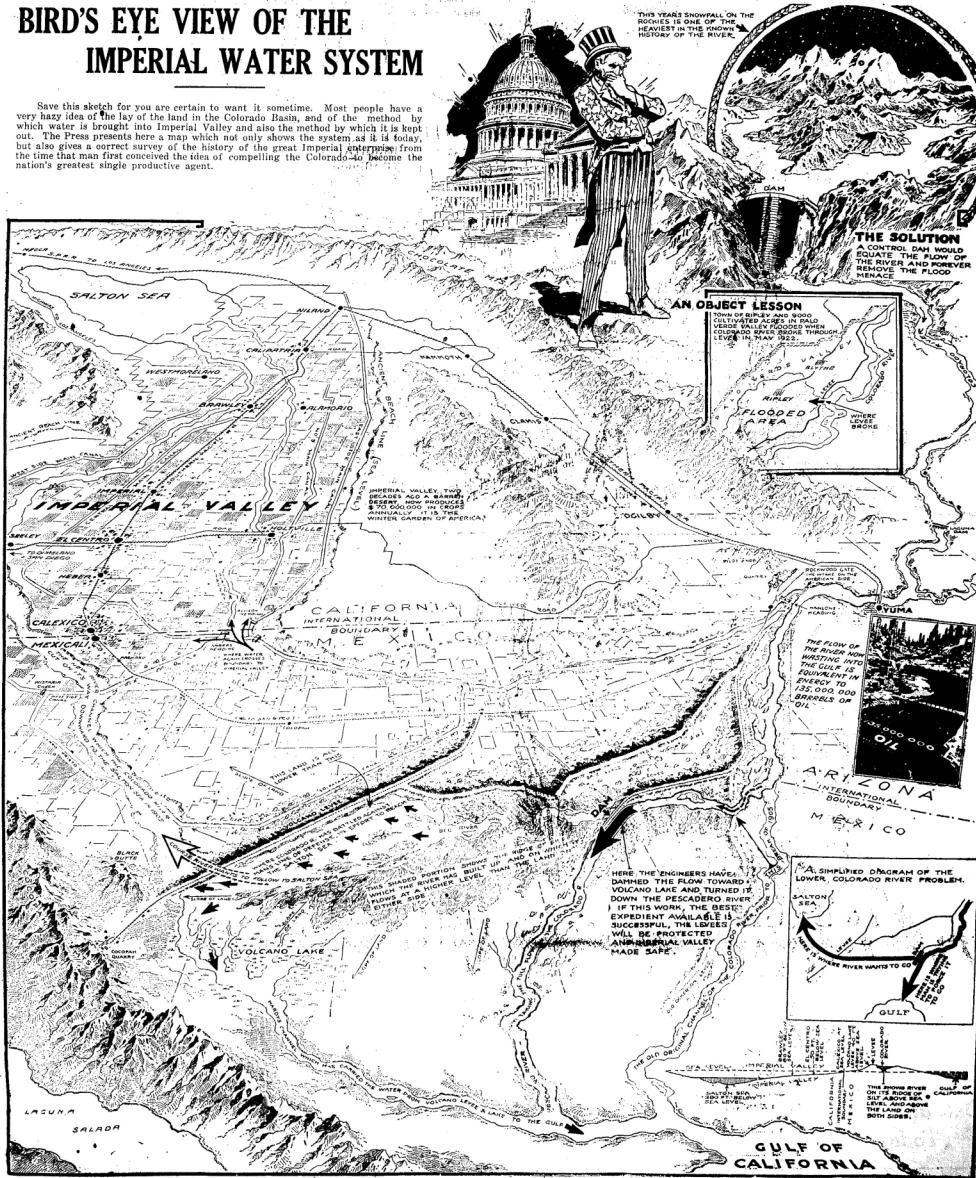


Figure 8 "The Accomplishments of Twenty-one Years" June 23. Imperial Valley Press. 1922.

At this point, no commodity market was more attractive than cotton exports to East Asia. Chinese and Japanese cotton demand spelled out big profits for American producers; their only problem was labor. The labor-intensive production of cotton relied on large docile populations that could be deployed at harvest and later dispersed. Labor in California had

become a sensitive issue coming to a head with the antagonism of white unionists against Chinese laborers and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. When Chinese laborers became scarce after immigration restrictions hundreds of thousands of acres of agricultural land in California went vacant. Nevertheless, Chinese laborers remained the foundation California agriculture until 1910. Asian immigrants were so central to the industrialization of California farming that Carey McWilliams, the famous California journalist and activist came to refer to it as “our Oriental agriculture.”<sup>46</sup> With the fall of Mexico’s dictator Porfirio Díaz, foreign investment in Mexico was risky, but Baja California remained a bastion of relative peace, in large part due to the military Governor, General Esteban Cantú. Otis leased land to Chinese farmers on Mexican land by allowing Mexican elites to charge fees for the importation of these laborers. The cotton products were then shipped north of the border to the Imperial Valley where they were processed and prepared for export in Los Angeles’ burgeoning San Pedro harbor slated for bids in Chinese and Japanese markets.

Efforts to relocate Mexican farmers to CRLC lands in Mexicali failed because better conditions existed on the northern side of the border. Frustrated with the lack of willing workers Otis and CRLC ranch managers turned to the Chinese. In the U.S. Chinese labor was unpopular and immigration law prohibited the entry of additional Chinese workers; but in Mexico the Díaz government had recently signed a treaty of commerce and migration with China. By the time of the recovery of the Imperial Valley from the Colorado River floods, Otis had begun recruiting his own Chinese laborers directly from China for work on his Mexican holdings. He wrote letters of introduction for his labor recruiter V.J. McLoughlin, to the Secretary of State, and the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong familiarizing them with his plans and specifying the slim margins of the legality of his operations.<sup>47</sup> In 1908, advertisements for Mexicali appeared in the streets of Canton and Hong Kong offering opportunities to work, rent or own land in the pursuit of cotton cultivation.<sup>48</sup> In three years, U.S. immigration officials reported an influx of Chinese migration to Mexicali, with more than 200 Chinese immigrants per East bound steamer.<sup>49</sup> The mass arrival of Chinese immigrants to Mexicali transformed this border region into a bustling agricultural depot: a site of cotton cultivation for the industrialization of cotton manufacturing in East Asia.

Part I has offered a historical narrative that dispenses with the “geographic bifurcation” in the historiography of U.S. Imperialism.<sup>50</sup> In this story the settling of the American West can’t be separated from expansion into the Pacific. The development of a

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<sup>46</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Publishers, 1971).

<sup>47</sup> Oscar Straus, "Letter from the Secretary of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization to the Secretary of State," in *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion, 1906-1913.* (Berkeley: Doe Library; Newspaper and Microfilm Collection, 1909).

<sup>48</sup> Stuart Fuller, "Letter from the Vice-Consul General in Hong Kong to the Assistant Secretary of State in Washington, D.C.," in *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion, 1906-1913.* (Berkeley: Doe Library; Newspaper and Microfilm Collection, 1909).

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Backus, "Letter from the Immigration Commissioner of Angel Island to the Commissioner-General of Immigration in Washington D.C.," in *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion, 1906-1913.* (Berkeley: Doe Library; Newspaper and Microfilm Collection, 1912).

<sup>50</sup> Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture.*

Pacific cotton corridor demonstrates how the Pacific Rim became essential to the development of the U.S.-Mexico border. The settlement of the American West not only set the cultural terms in which U.S. Imperialism in the Pacific was imagined, it was also dependent upon restructuring the geopolitics of the Pacific Rim and managing the flows of Asian bodies and commodities for the accumulation of capital. In the larger scope of the dissertation, Part I has illustrated the origins of what Depression Era Mexican programs of nationalization characterized as unpatriotic. The racially exclusive vision of a mestizo Mexican nation prevented Mexicali's Chinese from further contributing to the irrigated colonization of the peninsula. These nationalization campaigns ended the Chinese participation in the American side of the Pacific cotton corridor. However, in the aftermath of World War II American agribusinesses expanded to fulfill the role the Chinese played and cotton began to flow again to East Asia.

By examining the colonial economies of the Pacific, the development of Mexicali can be more deeply appreciated as an expression of the lasting relations between Mexico, China and the U.S. Not only did the Pacific become incorporated into the consolidation of the U.S.-Mexico border, but these borderlands became a part of the Chinese diaspora as well. In order to account for the circumstances of Mexicali's emergence it is necessary to understand the advancement of U.S. imperialism as intervening in the pre-existing colonial relations of the Spanish Galleon trade. Framing the formation of the border in this historical context provides a more complex and robust picture of geopolitical relations of the Pacific. More importantly, Part I has set the stage to examine the structure and organization of the Chinese community in Mexicali. The historical conditions and processes laid out in Part I will help to define the social structures that Chinese migrants invented, navigated, and appropriated to find their way to Mexicali and grow cotton to send back across the Pacific.

## **Part II: Borders are a Chinese Space**

When General Harrison Gray Otis and Harry Chandler of the Colorado River Land Company (CRLC) granted more flexibility for Chinese commercial organizations to carry out the construction and implementation of the Mexican colonization contract, they subscribed to a model of economic development commonly found throughout the Asian Pacific in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Experiences from the British Straits Settlements and the Spanish Philippines help to infer organizational strategies of diasporic Chinese commercial networks, where there are gaps in the historical documentation of Mexicali's Chinese community. The model of development employed in Mexicali appropriated not only Chinese labor but also the Chinese business operations and commercial networks. Chinese farming operations were the most numerous in the valley. Chinese agents and networks in diaspora populated the entire structure of agricultural cotton commodity production. This pattern of development in Mexico's remote northwestern territory resembles other agricultural colonies in the Asian Pacific because other colonial powers also provided suitable venues for enterprising Chinese emigrants to create circuits of agricultural commodity production.

It is not enough to merely recover descriptions of the organizational structure of Mexicali's Chinese cotton-growing operations. To do so would neglect the ways that Chinese emigrants invented and utilized transnational practices in diaspora. Part II presents a view of Mexicali as a node within the transcolonial and transnational circuits of the Chinese diaspora. Furthermore, while descriptions of their business operations help us understand how they organized cultivation and conducted trade, they can only hint at the subjectivity of Chinese cotton farmers and merchants in Mexicali. By analyzing their experience through the intersection of an emerging global racial order and its assault on Qing power and cultural norms in China a more insightful interpretation of these border residents' worldviews is possible. Especially helpful in this interpretation is a framework that analyzes immigrant integration and forging local social structures. I present evidence that migrants' efforts to recover Qing social norms gave meaning and structure to their sojourns. As chaos enveloped coastal China with the arrival of European imperialists, the expectations and coherence of classic Qing norms became unstable. In this period, respectability and male authority among the Chinese was not only expressed through cultural attainment and physical strength, but increasingly by commercial prowess. The Qing Court's policies of *zhiqiang*, or "self-strengthening," put emphasis on domestic economic development as a defensive strategy against European capitalist states in coastal ports and as a growth strategy to produce more tax revenue for the declining Empire. Thus, by interpreting the lives of Mexicali's Chinese through a social structural analysis it is possible to reconstruct a cultural logic structured by their efforts to restore a social norms imperiled in the decline of the Qing Empire. The emphasis here is on the ways that Mexicali was made into a Chinese place. As a part of the larger dissertation Part II helps to illustrate how the search for strength structured their migration and settlement in the borderlands.

To explain the background of the Chinese who made Mexicali into a center of cotton production, I examine the history of mercantile practices and the development of commercial networks in diaspora during the decline of the Qing empire in the late nineteenth century. The previous chapter described the political economic structure of the Pacific cotton corridor in

the expansion of U.S. imperialism. Part II sets out to illustrate the central role that migrating Chinese merchants played in the formation of this triangular assemblage. In several ways, Chinese migrants used the economic and institutional circuitry of U.S. empire-building in the Asian Pacific and territorial borderlands of Mexico to enable their movements. Through their organizations and collective labor, Mexicali emerged to meet the cotton demands of the Pacific cotton corridor at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chinese (and to a lesser degree Japanese and Mexican) farmers worked to make the Mexican desert a source of raw materials for budding textile industries in Asia, all the while carving out the desert borderlands as a significant node within the diaspora.

As I trace the development and geographic reach of diasporic Chinese merchants through the turn of the century I underscore two qualities. The first is the unique role they played in the colonial commerce of the global economy. The second is the cultural logic that they employed as they settled in the frontiers around the world. This logic incorporated migration strategies, business models, communication networks as well as aspirations of upward mobility, social norms, and Confucian family bonds. Part II argues that Chinese merchants used established business models and social organizations to navigate the troubled waters of the western border region as an act of redemption both for China and themselves. Travel literature, government reports, CRLC company records, Chinese Exclusion Act Case Files and correspondence between U.S. immigration officials paint an illuminating picture of how an interstate border came into being in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

## Chapter 4: Leaving China, Seeking Strength

The Chinese farmers and merchants who developed agricultural enterprises in Mexicali were well-equipped agents already familiar with the circumstances of international commerce and life amidst uneven power relations at state-enforced territorial boundaries. In order to justify this claim it is helpful to explore the antecedents to these economic practices among migrating Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is now well established that European imperialism in coastal China generated conditions that helped Chinese merchants to develop successful business practices and institutions. The most famous is that of the *comprador*, briefly introduced in the last chapter. Late nineteenth century social problems in China were exacerbated by the interventions of foreign merchants at treaty ports. These ports were constant reminders of China's inability to protect its people.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, these intrusions created dependencies on Chinese merchants, encouraging robust collaborative knowledge that connected global commodity markets and currency values on the one hand, with domestic labor contractors and local leasing terms on the other hand. The struggling Qing bureaucracy leveraged this dependency on *compradores* in state reforms that sought to restore China's image and redeem itself from the imperial onslaught; these programs were referred to as *zhiqiang* or "self-strengthening."<sup>2</sup> Because cotton was the most important commodity at the turn of the century it should come as no surprise that self-strengthening policies encouraged the growth and specialization of cotton processing, trade, and industrialization. By the time the CRLC began recruiting Chinese to develop Mexicali's irrigated cotton economy, specialist brokers and trained workers already existed.

The other side to these motivations was a system of cultural norms that gave meaning to an economic life. When these migrants sought opportunities abroad they often did so with the hope of a more prosperous home in China.<sup>3</sup> In several ways, migration derived from middle-class aspirations. Commercial and retail occupations offered social mobility amidst narrowing opportunities in the declining Qing bureaucracy. Furthermore, foreign disruptions to China's domestic economy not only made other types of work unpredictable but also elevated the demand and value of commercial brokers in Chinese society. By occupying the liminal social space between the Chinese gentry and peasantry on the one hand, and settler colonial environments on the other hand; complex cultural practices emerged that were both economic and moral. Due to the intricacy of international currency markets and commodity-chains at the turn of the century Chinese *compradores* leveraged their commercial occupation at home as well as abroad. This formal world of trade and commerce however, always skirted the edges of a vibrant informal and criminal underworld of human trafficking, drug smuggling, violence, vice, and betrayal. Illegal immigration, tax evasion, and contraband often became a necessary part of Chinese merchants' repertoire, always threatening to sully their middle-class ambitions.<sup>4</sup> In this environment, Chinese fraternal and partnership

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Spence, *The Search for Modern China*.

<sup>3</sup> Hsu Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *The Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (1974): 367-394. Nayan Shah, *Contagious*

associations helped organize social relations and respond to these challenges. The next chapter will show how vital these organizations were to the operation and success of Chinese businesses in Mexicali.

The Chinese *comprador* is an elite class of merchants that facilitates large-scale trade. These kinds of merchants date back to the fifteenth century coastal China. As regional traders, they facilitated the distribution of goods throughout Eastern Asia amidst strict controls on emigration, however they held no status or esteem.<sup>5</sup> In this period, merchants were susceptible to outside influence and could not be trusted politically. The prestige of the Chinese Imperial bureaucracy placed scholarly knowledge and cultural training at the apex of achievement. Studying for the state-exams and entry into the ranks of the bureaucratic system was the clearest path to power. Wealth accumulation and profit were looked down upon in Confucian doctrine.<sup>6</sup> In the late-eighteenth century another type of merchant emerged, the wholesale buyer and retailer. This occupation began to proliferate in China as urbanization intensified and more “people with varying degrees of classical education were forced to relinquish their dreams of official glory and embrace commerce to support their families.”<sup>7</sup> In this intermediate position, middle-class merchants defended themselves from criticism by elites, while at the same time maintaining an elevated status from the peasantry.<sup>8</sup> The flourishing trade at the treaty ports created fluid networks between *compradores*, wholesale buyers and sellers and the domestic retail Chinese markets. These groups of merchants were arguably the most dynamic group in late Imperial China not only for their domestic ingenuity but also for their emergent role in facilitating commerce and migration throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

Commercial occupations in Imperial China remained socially ambivalent until the previously discussed intercession by aggressive Euro-American capitalists. The expansion of European imperialism and the colonization of coastal Asia led to a great disruption in the occupations of prestige and social status. Those in power could not protect China from these external threats, thus weakening their claims to authority. A number of military losses, most exemplified by the Opium Wars, brought into question a whole set of cultural expectations in Chinese society. Not only were the scholars and bureaucrats defamed by submission to

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Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*.

<sup>6</sup> Louie Louie, *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*. Although some characterize this set of values as state endorsed ideology designed to suppress competition. See Brownell and Wasserstrom, "Introduction: Theorizing Femininities and Masculinities."

<sup>7</sup> Richard John Lufano, *Honorable Merchants Commerce and Self-Cultivation in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> In this chapter I use the terms *comprador*, merchant and broker. The term *comprador* is used to reflect the historical context in which Chinese merchants were understood at the time. While the role of the *comprador* encompasses a particular set of economic and social relations, the term was often used generically throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. However, I use the terms merchant and broker to describe early-twentieth century Chinese agents of commerce in order to capture the fluid role changes that Chinese emigrants underwent as they responded to the changing conditions of production and trade.

European imperialists, but also Europeans took the absence of Western cultural standards to mean that the Chinese were inferior.<sup>10</sup>

These inequities formed the basis of new cultural terms of engagement. The transformation of Chinese society occurred as a result of both inward reflection and outward engagement. Compliance to foreign demands weakened the strength of local power relations among Chinese (displacing the cultured bureaucrat). In this way, Orientalism was not only a Western ideology and set of practices but also an intervention into the cultural symbols by which Chinese constructed their self-image. By the 1800s Europeans and Americans explained their cultural difference to Asia in developmental terms, placing their own cultural epistemology at the height of human achievement. Despite these gross misunderstandings, Europeans and Americans universally respected one thing: commercial acumen. These changing conditions created the social environment in which merchants operated.

In cultural terms, the uncertainties of European colonialism disrupted the integrity of Chinese authority. Merchants were in a complicated position when scholarly knowledge and cultural training were the chief characteristics of the *yingxiong*, or hero.<sup>11</sup> The submission of *yingxiong* to European demands brought into question a whole set of social expectations. Not only were the *yingxiong* degraded by submission to European imperialists but also Europeans took the absence of Western standards of masculinity and authority to mean that Chinese men were entirely devoid of it.<sup>12</sup> These historical conditions led to the familiar racial trope of the feminine emasculated Oriental. As the *wenren*, or cultured man, lost the coherence of masculine authority, a different type of *yingxiong* began to emerge, the colonial merchant. In this imperial contact zone, the symbolic economy of Chinese social norms was warped by European observers – in the absence of their own reflection, they imagined inferior degenerates.

While Chinese merchants were often characterized as having racial qualities suitable for the role of *comprador*, I have shown that everyday life in China prepared them well for negotiating political hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> According to McKeown, colonial administrators around the world considered Chinese merchants ideal candidates for frontier settlement, because they diffused power relations and possessed regional knowledge.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the use of Chinese commercial networks in political and economic processes of European colonization deflected power relations in colonial rule by foregrounding the intermediary. The structural position of these merchants rested on uneasy relations and was dependent upon the granting authority's local hegemony and the usefulness of merchant activity to colonial aims.

The success of merchants both domestically (in China) and in colonies gave substance to the growing opinion in coastal China that the only way to succeed was through mastery of foreign languages and knowledge, the study of business management and the accumulation of wealth.<sup>15</sup> These traits became important identifications for migrating Chinese en route to colonial destinations. Cultural historians of the Chinese diaspora argue that late nineteenth-

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<sup>10</sup> Brownell and Wasserstrom, "Introduction: Theorizing Fемinities and Masculinities." Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*.

<sup>11</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*.

<sup>12</sup> Brownell and Wasserstrom, "Introduction: Theorizing Fемinities and Masculinities." Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*.

<sup>13</sup> Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*.

<sup>14</sup> McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian migration and the Globalization of Borders*.

<sup>15</sup> Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*.



century social norms put particularly strong value on the occupation of entrepreneur.<sup>16</sup> In economic terms, the Chinese *comprador* played at the edges of production and consumption by exercising knowledge of both arenas in order to interpret which trades converted exchange value into surplus value. By definition, merchants are liminal characters. However, their liminality existed on at least two different axes: the formation of a Chinese middle-class and the integration into settler-colonial states abroad.

While many have identified Chinese merchants as colonial *compradores*, or middlemen, it is also important to understand this stereotype in concert with the comportment of Chinese male authority. When Chinese sojourners dreamed of gold in California or cotton in Mexicali, they did so precisely because they had envisioned a more prosperous home in China. Delivering such proof at home was evidence of their sprawling manhood. In these ways Chinese sojourners collectively strengthened China's economic stance as they sought their own personal wealth. Their migrations were not merely to acquire business connections but an expression of authority according to social norms back home as well as among fellow sojourners. As we will see, this social dimension to Chinese merchant political subjectivities is an important element in understanding how Chinese merchants utilized Section 6 exemptions in the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Acts. For them, it created certain opportunities, however partial, amidst the dominant discourse and practice of restriction and exclusion.

By the 1900s the acquisition of Western science and technology in China was heavily emphasized. Qing *zhiqiang* policies helped to preserve and refine this social position, especially in merchants' apprenticeship systems. Apprentices learned through direct assistance as well as studying trade manuals. These manuals helped prospective merchants to acquire the technical, political and cultural skills to negotiate trade with foreigners.<sup>17</sup> In the shifting geopolitical environment, European imperialists required the services of Chinese traders, brokers, and distributors. In essence, the merchants became indispensable to foreign colonial interests.

Due to the fact that European commerce depended on them, Chinese merchants occupied intermediary positions within colonial society. They often acquired status distinctions above that of the colonized population but were nevertheless always subject to colonial authority. These hierarchical designations abroad came to reflect an individual merchant's elevated status at home in China in the form of remitted income. Their attempts to fashion a transnationally legible form of respectability (at home and abroad) always became tangled in the underworld. Merchant apprentice manuals devoted numerous chapters to steering clear of contrabanding, opium, prostitutes, and other moral pitfalls. However, such trappings were often inseparable from the social environments from which they conducted their business. These proximities were direct results of prohibitions and privileges that reflected the racial hierarchies of segregated economies.

The dependence upon Chinese intermediaries in the Asian Pacific spilled onto the American frontier as Otis sought to expand the irrigated colonization of the Colorado River basin. Reliance upon the Chinese for the growth of the western border region created ambivalent relationships for nation-states on either side. Their treatment can be characterized by both accommodation and discipline. From the U.S. perspective I emphasize the point that as interventions into the commercial circuits of the Pacific grew, so too did Americans' encounters with the Chinese *comprador*. These encounters revealed the ubiquitous

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<sup>16</sup> Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas*.

<sup>17</sup> Lufrano, *Honorable Merchants Commerce and Self-Cultivation in Late Imperial China*.

dependency upon Chinese merchants both domestically and abroad. The Mexicali experience demonstrates how race and class-conscious immigration officials negotiated a mix of restrictions and accommodations to the Chinese in Mexico. Conceding border-crossing privileges to Chinese merchants had the effect of attracting them to the international border, further exasperating U.S. authorities. The Chinese merchants of Mexicali were always suspected of financing opium dens, human trafficking, gambling, and a host of other vice and contraband trades. Indeed, Mexicali was both a vice district and commercial depot. From the Mexican perspective, the price elasticity of vice consumption made legalization and regulation of opium, gambling and prostitution a lucrative source of public funding if for only a short while.<sup>18</sup> Chinese partnership organizations provided useful ways to organize the Chinese community and negotiate the ambivalent circumstances of the border environment.

Two important examples of East Asian arenas in which Chinese merchants found social and economic niches as colonial merchants, the Spanish Philippines and the British Straits Settlements, are useful antecedents to the discussion of the Chinese in Mexicali. This background is helpful to build the case that over generations Chinese emigrants have used particular business models and social organizations to achieve success in diverse conditions around the globe. The Chinese in Mexicali are no different; their integration into the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is conditioned by these historical practices. The history of Chinese merchants in the Spanish Philippines is the backdrop not only for the development of Chinese merchant practices but also for the application of the Chinese Exclusion Act to the archipelago during U.S. occupation at the turn of the century. The experience of U.S. immigration bureau officials in the Philippines informed how Chinese merchants were treated at the U.S.-Mexico border. The case of the British Straits Settlements illustrates the long-lasting forms of social organization, economic strategies, and transnational practices of diasporic Chinese. The Philippine and Malay Chinese provide an instructive entrée to the merchants of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Understanding the cultural repertoire of commercially-oriented social organizations of the Chinese diaspora is one step toward better understanding the success of Mexicali's Chinese.

### *The Spanish Philippines*

As discussed in Part I, Mexican merchants in the Galleon trade brought New World silver to Manila and exchanged it for Chinese silk and porcelain. These exchanges took place through Chinese traders in the Philippines. The value and consistency of silver shipments to Manila created profitable but uneasy relations between Spanish authorities in Manila and the Chinese. The following section discusses the colonial legacy of the Philippines and the problems inherited by the U.S. during their occupation.

New Spain's conquest of the Philippines (1565) dramatically shifted the region's balance of power. Spanish commercial circuits generated new sources of wealth, which in turn created opportunities that were intensely scrutinized, debated and regulated. In the Philippine archipelago, the commercial system relied almost entirely on Chinese and Mexican merchants. Spanish colonization of the Philippines made the tradition of Chinese sojourning a much more profitable decision.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> According to Schantz Mexicali was arguably the forerunner of today's infamous characterizations of Mexican bordertowns. See Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965".

<sup>19</sup> Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas*.

Arguably, the most important role Chinese played was serving the demand for silver in China. Given that Spain possessed no access to Chinese ports, unlike the Portuguese, Chinese merchants were indispensable to the formation of the Galleon trade.<sup>20</sup> By the 1600's New Spain's steady supply of silver from the Americas met China's growing demand for capital through the acumen of Fukenesse merchants.<sup>21</sup> This intermediary role gave Chinese merchants the Spanish title of *comprador*, derived from the Spanish *comprar*, to buy. These *compradores* became ethnically diverse and found intermediary niches throughout the Philippine colonial economy. This dependency left both the Chinese and the Spanish dependency on *compradors* left both in an awkward balance. While the Chinese controlled commerce with Asia, the Spanish controlled exchange with the Americas, on each side of this trade relationship were envious merchants who wanted access to the other's markets. Having these Chinese merchants within Manila society was a balancing act between appeasing their interests and controlling their influence.

At the turn of the seventeenth-century these tensions boiled over and Spanish authorities in Manila feared a Chinese assault. Their anxieties led to the bloody massacre of 20,000 Chinese who had settled in the Philippines to engage in the Galleon trade. This incident cooled Chinese interests in displacing the Spanish and New Spain took new precautions.<sup>22</sup> In order to limit the power of Chinese merchants, the Spanish crown, in 1606, declared that no more than 6,000 Chinese could reside in the Philippine colony. While this decree was rarely enforced it provided for the threat of expulsion. During periods of political instability the Spanish removed a number of Chinese, however the Chinese population in the Philippines grew when they began to adopt Spanish customs. Regulation of Chinese migration resulted in segregated spaces in Manila however, conversion to Catholicism granted them wider mobility.<sup>23</sup> The Chinese merchant remained an essential element to the colonial economy as traders and settlers.

Their incorporation into the racial hierarchy facilitated the further stratification of economic rights and privileges. Under Spanish rule the racial hierarchy of the *casta* system determined one's standing among others and their economic roles. The rules of this system distinguished different castes in which marriage provided upward and downward mobility for the next generation.<sup>24</sup> These forms of categorization and regulation produced racialized and gendered conditions in which *compradores* formed their identities. Fukenesse *compradores* were granted special privileges unlike those who settled in the Philippines. Chinese settlers who married *Indias* or *Mestizas* became tied to the local economy and came to dominate the domestic marketplace.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Spanish Philippines were governed as a viceroyalty from Mexico City until Mexican independence (1821), at which point they came under direct rule from Madrid.

<sup>21</sup> Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Edgar Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Jose Eugenio Borao, "The Massacre of 1603: Chinese Perception of the Spanish in the Philippines," *Itinerario* 22 (1998): 22-39.

<sup>23</sup> Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898*.

<sup>24</sup> James LeRoy, *Our Asiatic Neighbors: Philippine Life in Town and Country* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1907).

<sup>25</sup> Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life, 1850-1898*. *India* and *Mestiza* are Spanish colonial terms to describe the racial position of individuals in the *casta* hierarchy. Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas*.

For generations, *compradores* negotiated and facilitated trade with the merchants of New Spain under uncertain terms. The constant circulation of entrepreneurial Chinese men through Manila required a delicate balance. On the one hand, the colonial economy relied upon the *comprador* system and the transcolonial mobility of the *compradors* themselves to lubricate commerce. On the other hand, the incorporation of new individuals threatened to upset the balance of power. The *compradores* and Chinese settlers danced around the thresholds of Spanish authority and leveraged their commercial monopolies to gain accommodations. The construction of the Philippines as a commercial depot for Asia was dependent upon the ability of colonial administrators to utilize Chinese merchants and control their influence; a lesson that Americans would learn anew at the turn of the twentieth century. While transcolonial migration was important it was facilitated and institutionalized through social networks, most clearly exemplified by the Chinese colonies in the British Straits Settlements. The chapter will later discuss how the U.S. inherited the dependence upon Chinese merchants in the Philippines later.

#### *The British Straits Settlements*

The Malay peninsula's Straits Settlements (1826-1946) became one of the most popular destinations for Chinese emigrants in the nineteenth century. It was popular because "only the British gave the Chinese an unqualified welcome in Southeast Asia."<sup>26</sup> Their colonial model rested on delegating much of the settlement's administration to the Chinese themselves; regulating labor, conducting trade, and collecting taxes all fell in the hands of powerful Chinese merchant groups.<sup>27</sup> The Chinese needed the British to secure their property rights, but Europeans "needed the Chinese economic infrastructure and Chinese labor if they were to make any money at all from their empire."<sup>28</sup> In 1875, a British travel writer wrote that Chinese *compradores* were, "the model trader of the East, and to such men as he, we owe much of our commercial success in these islands."<sup>29</sup> In the early phases of English domination, Chinese merchants served only as *compradores*, it was not until Chinese labor contractors became involved that Chinese immigrants became settlers, thus quickly becoming a majority in the urban centers, like Malacca.

Because the Straits' Settlements were governed so much by the Chinese the colonial hierarchy became tilted toward ethnic divisions within the Chinese community and between those divided communities and the native Malays. The Straits Settlements developed an ethnic hierarchy, distinguished in terms of their tenure in the Straits Settlement, their connection with China, and the province of origin. Chinese born in the Straits Settlements became known as *Babas* and dominated the local commerce of the settlements. Alternatively, Chinese from China were referred to *Sinkehs*. *Sinkehs* were further divided by province of origin: *Macaos* (from Canton), *Kehs* (from Kwantung), and the *Hokiens* (from Amoy). Each

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<sup>26</sup> Chiang Ding, *A History of Straits Settlements Foreign Trade, 1870-1915* (London: National Museum, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> Carl Trocki, "Boundaries and Transgressions: Chinese Enterprise in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia," in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, London: Routledge, ed. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (New York: Routledge, 1997), 61-85.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China, and China: Or, Ten Years' Travels, Adventures, and Residence Abroad* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875).

ethnic group controlled certain monopolies that connected the Straits Settlements to their home province.

Within their ethnic rivalries the Chinese appropriated distinctions in social status from the colonial society. For instance, it was common for *Babas* to use the British term, gentleman. It was also customary for *babas* to refer to themselves as *orang putih*, a colloquial term for a “white man.”<sup>30</sup> This perspective articulated the colonial difference between Europeans sense of themselves and the *Baba* identity. Furthermore, the popularity of the Straits Settlements as a destination within the Chinese diaspora likely speaks to the sense that Malay was thought of as a place of opportunity.

Let there be no mistake, the capitalist structure of the Straits Settlements certainly kept many Chinese poor and Malay even poorer, but it nevertheless is distinguished by the great commercial success of the Chinese there. This is nowhere more illustrated than in the *kongsi*, or shareholding partnerships of the *babas*. The structure and operation of these businesses took advantage of the colonial condition and facilitated the circulation of goods, capital, ideas, and people between the Straits and China. A British travel writer noted most succinctly,

The Chinaman out of his own country, enjoying the security and prosperity which a more liberal administration confers, seems to develop into something like a new being... But the love of combinations, of the guilds and unions in which all Chinamen delight, tempts them too far. They first combine among themselves to get as much out of each other as they possibly can, and when practicable to monopolize trade and rule the markets; and then, feeling the strength of their own organization, the societies set up laws for the rule and protection of their members, and in defiance of the local government. The congsee [kongsi], or guild, thus drifts from a purely commercial into a semi-mercantile semi-political league and more than once has menaced the power of petty states...<sup>31</sup>

Thompson demonstrates the ambivalence of the British administration’s attitude and the organizational character of Chinese businesses in the colonial environment. Tocki contends that these *kongsis* operated outside of the control of their own government and had established their own relationships with governing authorities, meaning such organizations were examples of self-governance in the sense that they were self-regulating; a precarious condition for colonial administrators. Indeed, the *kongsis* controlled the Settlement’s labor markets by regulating the recruitment and retention of Chinese laborers through unauthorized human trafficking.

The *kongsis* also provided unique opportunities for upward mobility by offering investment opportunities to poor *babas* and *sinkehs* alike. This meant that business ventures

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<sup>30</sup> An agent of the British Colonial government in the Straits Settlement was struck by the candor with which Straits Chinese saw themselves as equal to their British rulers noting in 1879. “Strange to say that although the *Babas* adhere so loyally to the customs of their progenitors they despise the real Chinaman and are exclusive fellows indeed; nothing they rejoice in more than being British subjects. The writer has seen *Babas* on being asked if the were Chinamen bristle up and say in an offended tone, “I am not a Chinaman, I am a British subject, an *Orang putih*,” literally, a white man; this term is invariably applied to an Englishman.” J. D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1879).

<sup>31</sup> Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China, and China: Or, Ten Years' Travels, Adventures, and Residence Abroad*.

could reduce risk by increasing shareholders and paying for the labor from new members with future dividends.<sup>32</sup> These strategies and practices are important ways that Chinese emigrants translated, adapted, and invented commercially oriented forms of organization, often becoming merchants in the process. While they undoubtedly contributed to the expansion of Euro-American power in Asia, a more subtle examination of Chinese merchant subjectivity points to another level of agency. Given the onslaught of European military power and the ineptitude of Chinese negotiations, the daily face-to-face interactions with foreign traders were the last line of defense. The essential role they played in trade at Chinese ports and the ports of European colonies in Asia gave them unique leverage. This mercantile position was situated at the intersection of both personal interest in and collective resistance to foreign intervention. In this way, Chinese merchants benefited from yet manipulated and contained the effects of European imperialism. The examples of the Philippines and the Straits Settlements are by no means an exhaustive survey of the colonial positionality of Chinese merchants in the late nineteenth century. It nevertheless provides historical comparison for U.S. efforts to regulate Chinese merchants through the Chinese Exclusion Acts.

This brief historical survey helps to illustrate how agricultural colonization of Mexicali would have been an attractive and somewhat familiar endeavor at the turn of the century. In order to understand how Chinese emigrants interpreted the boundary making practices at the U.S.-Mexico border it is useful to examine how U.S. bureaucrats dealt with *comprador* dependence through exemptions to the Chinese Exclusion Acts. This form of accommodation enabled and reinforced the power of the merchant at the border becoming a fixture of border policy, outlasting the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1942, an issue taken up in more detail in Part IV. This chapter now returns to the context of U.S. imperialism and the execution and enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Acts and the shifting disposition on granting exemptions.

### **Accommodations in U.S. Imperialism**

As the U.S. increasingly inserted itself into the pre-existing colonial symbiosis of Mexican-Chinese trade and commerce it gradually encountered the inconvenient reality that Chinese merchants monopolized international exchange in East Asia. Furthermore, colonial trade dollars, fluctuating silver values, and domestic Chinese currency created a bottleneck of transactions only served by the Chinese *comprador* class. When U.S. legislators drafted restrictive immigration policies to keep Chinese out of America, they did not anticipate their future predicament: they were dependent on people they were excluding racially. Accommodations for Chinese merchants in East Asia and the Philippines became the standard legal procedures in the domestic context. How the Chinese built Mexicali into an irrigated cotton-growing colony is exemplary of this pattern of consent.

The Chinese Exclusion Acts was set into motion in 1882 and became a dark center of American jurisprudence on immigration, naturalization, and citizenship. These laws were the first of their kind. Lee argues that they transformed the U.S. into a “gatekeeper nation.”<sup>33</sup> The laws sought to exclude Asian bodies from the American polity by regulating international migration and broadening racial barriers around both cultural and political citizenship.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>32</sup> Trocki, "Boundaries and Transgressions: Chinese Enterprise in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Southeast Asia."

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*.

<sup>34</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*.

Chinese Exclusion Acts prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers and prostitutes, however provided for the return migration of laborers already working in U.S. The Chinese Exclusion Acts created the first statutory conditions of “illegal” residency inscribing both bodies and territorial space with new meaning. These laws provided for the authority to regulate the movement of people in and through national space as well as the power to determine the racial composition of the population.<sup>35</sup>

Expanding the power of the national state at this time created a number of contradictions. For one, the Chinese Exclusion Acts went against earlier treaty negotiations and diplomatic dialog forcing the U.S. to reverse its open relationship with China. The new powers also challenged bureaucrats as they attempted to implement immigration restrictions at both seaports and the land borders with Canada and Mexico. When formal channels of migration were shut off, informal “illegal” routes took their place.

While the Chinese Exclusion Acts is written primarily as a means of closing off migration, Section 6 of the legislation provided exemption for Chinese diplomats, students, tourists, and merchants. To be sure, these exemptions did not constitute absolute freedoms; to the contrary, they were necessarily interrogative procedures with many layers of crosschecking and referencing that did not always end in a successful migration.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Section 6 exemptions from exclusion created enough maneuverable space to permit the migration of tens of thousands of Chinese migrants into the U.S. during the exclusion era. Section 6 of the Chinese Exclusion Acts provided the necessary flexibility to accommodate the mercantile predicament of East Asian trade and, as we shall see, the development of Mexicali’s cotton corridor.

The Chinese Exclusion Acts was the first immigration law to prohibit entrance to the nation based on racial grounds. The law provided for a moratorium on the immigration of Chinese laborers. The flow of thousands of Chinese sojourners to the U.S. was dramatically reduced to only a few hundred a year after the law. It was not until 1893 that Section 6 of the Chinese Exclusion Acts contained the legal category “merchant” defining them as a “person engaged in buying and selling merchandise at a fixed place of business and performing no manual labor.”<sup>37</sup> As American capitalists came to realize their commercial ambitions in the Pacific so too did they encounter their reliance on Chinese *compradores*. This change created an initial flurry of activity. On the one hand, the legal parameters of exemption had been widened to permit new forms of mobility, yet this category of exemption created criteria from which to scrutinize Chinese migration en masse.

The construction of the Section 6 merchant was an experimental process of administrative discovery and constant revision. U.S. officials established parameters for the merchant exemptions through extensive surveillance and investigation. For two years government agents toured Chinatowns mapping business districts and surveying merchant activity. These surveys led to the formation of baseline data for the U.S. Treasury Department’s 1894 instructions for keeping track of merchant applications for Section 6 exemption. At this point Chinese applying for merchant exemptions were required to provide

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian migration and the Globalization of Borders*.

<sup>36</sup> Adam McKeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842 to 1949," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 2 (1999): 306-337. Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*.

<sup>37</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*.

descriptions of their business activities, inventory of merchandise, photographs, and a list of all business partners and their financial stake in the enterprise.<sup>38</sup> In turn, these requirements initiated new forms of forgery, evasion, compliance, and negotiation. Federal regulations concerning Section 6 exemptions were under constant revision responding to migrants' tactics of evasion, the pro-business lobby, and the conditions of U.S. military occupation in East Asia. These different pressures produced contradictory outcomes and a complicated implementation of U.S. law.

With the range of historical accounts it is necessary to reconcile the varying accounts of Section 6 exemption procedures. This historical ambiguity leaves the administrative disposition on exemptions as a matter of debate. Lee documents how the process of determining exempt status became "a means to further disrupt the mobility of professional Chinese" throughout the exclusion era.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Hsu argues that "establishing status as a merchant required more resources but gave greater flexibility."<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, U.S. consulates abroad reported varying degrees of leniency and rigor in determining credentials and certifying visas. At the turn of the century, U.S. administrators acquired new attitudes towards merchants, such as this expressed by the 1905 Immigration Commissioner,

The purpose of the Chinese exclusion laws is to prevent the immigration of Chinese laborers and not to restrict the freedom of movement of Chinese persons belonging to the exempt classes; and in determining whether Chinese persons are laborers or members of the exempt classes officers charged with the enforcement of the laws are cautioned to act with discretion.<sup>41</sup>

Despite admissions such as these by top officials, the method of interrogation and certification was a demeaning process that often involved detention while officials double-checked the documentation. Nevertheless, new realities had come to bear on the question of administering Section 6 exemptions. The occupation of the Philippines had led to the extension of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1899 to the Philippine archipelago. The adaptation of the Chinese Exclusion Acts to the Philippine context demanded a change in policy.

While, the Chinese Exclusion Acts was a patriotic domestic policy, it was also an obstacle to the U.S.'s imperialist agenda in East Asia and to its relationship with Mexico. This reality became tangible in the U.S. occupation of the Philippines (1898) during the Spanish-American War. Government reports indicate that U.S. officials were confounded by the reliance upon Chinese *compradores* for much of the islands commercial activity. Americans administering U.S. policy in the Philippines claimed that, "[i]f the Chinese were to withdraw from the retail business the population would starve."<sup>42</sup> The application of the Chinese Exclusion Acts to the Philippines opened old wounds and created new conflicts. As

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*.

<sup>41</sup> V. H. Metcalf, "Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Laws - General Instructions," in *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913* (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1905).

<sup>42</sup> Charles Russell, *The Outlook for the Philippines* (New York: The Century Co., 1922).



U.S. officials closed down Chinese immigration to the islands, the Chinese ambassador to the U.S., wrote the Senate stating,

If you want to have a share of China's trade, a good deal depends on the kind of treatment you extend to my country, and especially in your new possessions... I should not be surprised if some of my countrymen, in view of the exclusion, should boycott some American goods, but I hope this may not occur.<sup>43</sup>

This statement signals that U.S-China relations hinged at least to some degree on the treatment of Chinese merchants by U.S. immigration officials. The politics of the merchant class were always embedded in larger international politics because these individuals linked local conditions to broader circuits of power. As U.S. officials made pragmatic concessions to Chinese merchants they sparked latent tensions developed during the Spanish administration of the Philippines when Chinese merchants were given preference over *mestizos* and Philippine *Indios*. Furthermore, Chinese exclusion raised the question of who in the Philippines were considered "Chinese."<sup>44</sup> Centuries of intermarriage blurred easy identifications. In order for occupying U.S. forces to gain favor with Filipino leaders, the U.S. military took control of the ports implementing strict immigration standards by directly regulating commercial trade.<sup>45</sup>

The application of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in the Philippines ignited concern across Southeast Asia. In 1908, Chinese merchants of Manila enlisted a Chinese prince to petition their rights of mobility in the islands. Members of the Chin Ch'uan Ho Company complained that the extension of Chinese exclusion measures dramatically altered the ability of Chinese colonists to conduct their business. The prince argued that excessive administrative protocols were disrupting trade relations and the settlement of Fukeneses in the Philippines; residents of Changchou and Ch'uan-chou in Fukien particularly felt these effects. According to the merchants of Chin Ch'uan Ho, thousands in this region depend upon trade and migration to the Philippines.<sup>46</sup> It is likely that the American consul in Amoy was under great pressure to advocate for increased migration to facilitate the Fukienese-Philippine trade after U.S. occupation. The American consulate in Amoy communicated to the American Minister at Peking that Section 6 regulations were the source of new uncertainties about Chinese emigration. He asked for the State Department's opinion on certain procedures asking,

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<sup>43</sup> Linda Pomerantz-Zhang, *Wu Tingfang (1842-1922): Reform and Modernization in Modern Chinese History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992). emphasis added

<sup>44</sup> Among the principles of independence stipulated by the Philippine Republic, number five was protection against the influx of Chinese. Rather than a gesture toward Whiteness, like other anti-Chinese attitudes of the time, this request was an effort to decolonize centuries of domination by the Spanish. Russell, *The Outlook for the Philippines*.

<sup>45</sup> The U.S. Philippine Commission passed two laws #1361 and #1405 officially handing over customs duties to the U.S. military and ordering the construction of a Registry of Chinese residents and careful recording of immigration and emigration. United States Philippine Commission, "Public Laws and Resolutions," (Manila: United States Philippine Commission, 1901).

<sup>46</sup> Wai-Wu Pu, "Letter to U.S. Board of Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce from the Prince of Ch'ing," in *Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913* (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1908).

What is to be the least amount of capital that will designate someone as a Merchant? Many use as little as \$2000 Mexican [silver peso]... Manila Immigration Authorities require "Landing Certificates" listing the individual as "person other than a laborer" [and] the offices in Amoy authorized the movement of as many as 40,000 emigrants to Manila from Amoy.<sup>47</sup>

From the Consul's perspective, it was easier to transform Fukenesse emigrants into merchants than to press for changes to the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Indeed, with few resources a Fukenesse laborer could pass as a *bona fide* merchant. The consulate later suggested a loose interpretation of emigration rules for those departing to the Philippines in order to facilitate the movement of Chinese.<sup>48</sup> By the 1920s, nearly 75% of commercial houses in the Philippines were run by Chinese *compradores* with the other 25% a mix of Spanish, Filipinos and Americans.<sup>49</sup>

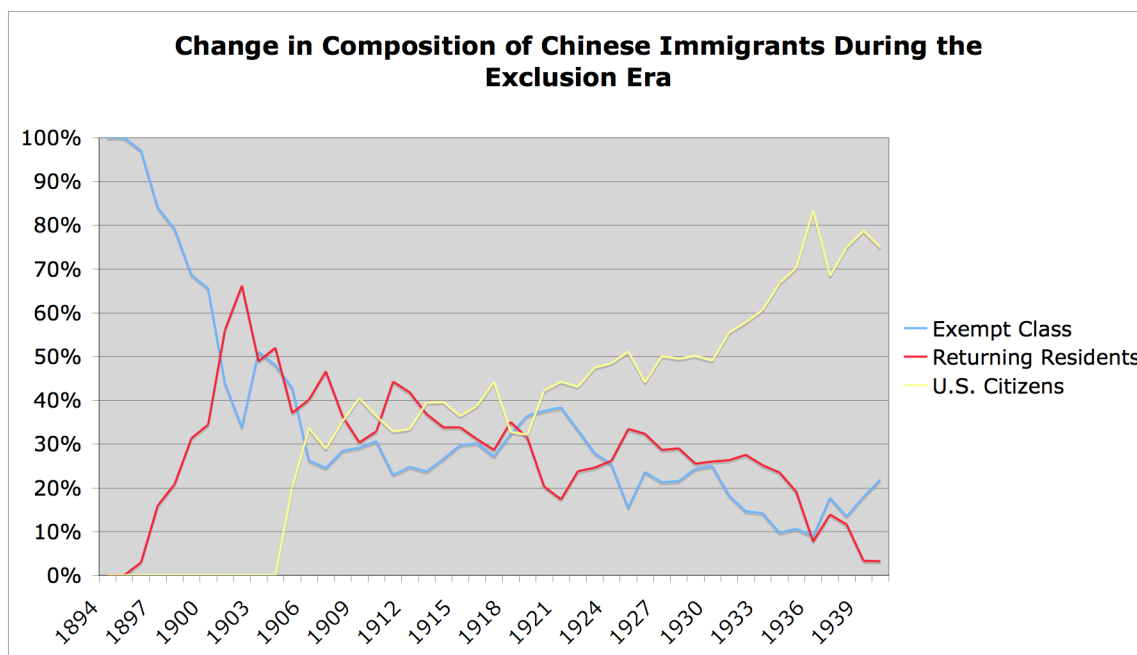
With the elevated prestige of acquiring a mercantile status in early-twentieth century China, it is not surprising that many Chinese emigrants preferred to travel as a merchant than petition for open migration. While it was certainly easier to utilize an existing loophole than to attempt new negotiations, the desire to achieve an elevated status as a merchant can't be underestimated when considering how Chinese migrants interpreted the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Since the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, Chinese migrants would have found no titles of prestige or status in American culture. The certificate of exemption in Section 6 merchant applications provided just the sort of social distinction legible to coastal Chinese measures of status. For many Chinese of this time, acquiring the status of a merchant was more important than making claims to citizenship abroad. Changes in the composition of Chinese immigrants during the exclusion era, however, demonstrates a gradual trend toward acquiring U.S. citizenship. These changes can be attributed to a combination of alternating preferences in migration strategies and legal/administrative reform.

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<sup>47</sup> Charles Bissel, "Letter from the American Consul in Amoy to the American Minister in Peking.," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1912).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> J. W. Sanger, "Advertising Methods in Japan, China, and the Philippines," ed. Commerce (Washington: GPO, 1921).



**Figure 9 Change in Composition of Chinese Immigrants During the Exclusion Era. Source: Lee, Erika. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.**

This graph shows the composition of legal Chinese immigration in the U.S. from 1894 to 1939. It shows that claiming U.S. citizenship was not common until after 1924 when U.S. Immigration laws changed putting more emphasis on acquiring this legal status rather than merely acquiring permission to cross borders.

When it came to U.S. trade with China and the Philippines, government officials and trade representatives remained preoccupied with their dependency upon Chinese *compradores*; designating them as significant obstacle to accessing direct consumer demand in Asia. A British economist lamented this fact claiming, “after centuries of trade and commerce, the West is still forced to employ an intermediary in its business relations with the East... The system to which we refer is known as the *comprador* system.”<sup>50</sup> Likewise, a special agent from the U.S. Department of Commerce stated, “the *comprador* combines the duties of a credit man with those of a general sales manager of the Chinese staff when he is working with an import firm... There is no denying the fact that a good *comprador* is a valuable asset.”<sup>51</sup> The Chinese *comprador* was, again, viewed with ambivalence. U.S. Department of Commerce investigators claimed, “*compradores* have been known to band together to control the market. Yet granting all this, the fact remains that this system will continue to be used in China until such a time as the foreign importer is as closely in touch with prospective buyers as the *comprador* can sell to them as effectively and has as complete credit information.” However, in the Department’s *Commercial Handbook of China* they

<sup>50</sup> William Fredrick Spalding, *Eastern Exchange, Currency and Finance* (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1918).

<sup>51</sup> Tom O. Jones, "Motor Vehicles in Japan, China, and Hawaii," ed. Commerce, Special Agents Series (Washington: GPO, 1918).

state, "It is doubtful whether there exists in any other country in the world such an excellent system for the dissemination of information and for the distribution of imports or the collection of goods for export as China has in the institution of the *compradores*."<sup>52</sup> U.S. officials and businessmen expressed a wide variety of opinions ranging from admiration, frustration, bewilderment and envy. U.S. government intelligence on Chinese ports, credit systems, marketing strategies, and accounting practices suggest a naïveté on behalf of American officials. Their lack of familiarity with the *comprador* system frustrated the goals of both the Commission on International Exchange and the occupation of the Philippine islands. The social relations of the Chinese *compradores* forced the U.S. to make accommodations through the use of Section 6 exemptions.

With economic conditions as they were, the Immigration Commissioner's request to treat Section 6 exempt merchants with due respect appears to be more self-serving than conciliatory. Between 1900 and 1920 American trade with China grew 7 fold.<sup>53</sup> There is little doubt that Chinese *compradores* made much of this trade possible. In this period of growth, the U.S. achieved a positive trade balance for the first time, exporting more than it imported. The explosion of trade with China was led first by demand for high quality American cotton for weaving fine cloth. In the midst of U.S. accommodations to the East Asian *comprador* system and the development of a Pacific cotton corridor Chinese migrants were attracted to the Mexicali irrigated colony. Their forms of entrepreneurial organization and commercial networks set the foundation for phenomenal growth in irrigated cotton production.

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<sup>52</sup> Julean Herbert Arnold, "Commercial Handbook of China," ed. Commerce, Miscellaneous Series (Washington: GPO, 1920).

<sup>53</sup> Hsiao, China's Foreign Trade Statistics, 1864-1949.(from ~48,000,000USD to ~336,000,000USD [converted from taels])

## Chapter 5: Making Mexicali into a Chinese Place

Before 1900 the Salton River Basin east of San Diego was a desolate borderlands speckled with failed irrigation projects. The political demands for colonization in Mexico's unsettled regions met with American aspirations for irrigating the American Southwest. Political elites of Baja California could scarcely afford to embark on such a project without the participation of American capital. However, neither could have implemented this plan without human labor. Americans resented the hard labor required to do the work of digging irrigation canals and Mexican laborers preferred to work north of the border for better wages. The circulation of Chinese migrants to this desert colony made this bleak river basin one of the most important agricultural zones in North America.

I will show that changes in the administrative disposition to Section 6 merchants became an important element to the prosperity of Mexicali's Chinese. Chinese businesses were limited by the initial rigidity of border crossing rules. With a growing dependency on the Chinese cotton growers, the associations leveraged their Section 6 status to open the Mexican border to Chinese crossings. When cotton producers in Imperial Valley shifted production to the San Joaquin Valley in the 1920s, the enormous processing facilities erected during boom times threatened to collapse. This threat produced a great demand for Mexicali's Chinese grown cotton. Granting privileges to Mexicali Chinese proved to be of great interest on both sides of the border.

Soon after Mexicali had secured crossing privileges, other Chinese in Mexico successfully petitioned for the opening of additional ports along the border (e.g. Nogales, AZ; El Paso, TX; and San Diego, CA). Despite the longevity of these border-crossing privileges their rights were in constant appeal. The vibrant vice and smuggling economy of the desert border town loomed over the public image of Mexicali's Chinese, much like other Chinese communities in the U.S. While politically inconvenient, the urban vice economy was closely tied to the formal rural agricultural economy from which Section 6 exemptions were derived. Many Chinese necessarily had to closely guard their social relations and business partners to maintain a "clean" image. A difficult prospect indeed when juxtaposed with the slander many received from Mexican politicians as Part III lays out in detail.

Communications between CRLC ranch managers and the L.A. office indicate a complete reliance upon the Chinese, not only for labor, but also in organizing the social relations of production.<sup>1</sup> The CRLC being primarily a real estate development venture, was ill equipped to facilitate international trade in commodities. The managers tried using the Chinese already in Baja California to establish links with other Chinese throughout Mexico. While these laborers proved effective the CRLC needed more. One particular letter illustrates the CRLC's position quite clearly. Here the CRLC's main attorney writes to an American friend with diplomatic connections in China.

[W]e are just as anxious as ever to secure coolies at a cheap rate and work them upon our Mexican property, but we have had so many disappointments that we have dropped the matter because we thought it was impossible to secure them. We have a very few on the ranch now who wander into the country by way of Ensenada, but they

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<sup>1</sup> W.K. Bowker, "Letter to Chandler from Bowker," in CRLC: Correspondence (Cornoa Del Mar: Sherman Library, 1908).

are costing too much money to justify us in having many... Or, if it would be possible to make an arrangement with some rich Chinese house to lease part of our land and bring their people over to work, I think possibly that would work out to a better advantage all around. It is quite a hard matter to get the Chinaman to stay south of the line at the small wages we are willing to pay, when the imaginary line on the north is the only thing between them and the high American wages if they can successfully cross and keep out of the clutches of the American officers. But if they were working for some of their own people it might be different.<sup>2</sup>

The attorney's coy plea for help straddled the difficult questions between bringing Chinese to Mexicali and getting them to stay. In the end, the CRLC found success in leasing out parcels to Chinese partnership associations. The informal and flexible terms of the leases allowed Chinese partnership associations to overcome the major obstacles to growth in Mexicali. Their advantages were that start-up costs were shared among partners, labor was organized through co-ethnic networks, and the international market integration was established with existing commercial networks. The CRLC colonization scheme did not result in productive enterprises until managers could solicit Chinese recruiters and *compradores* to organize the agricultural activities, not unlike those in the Straits Settlements.

The CRLC catered to the Chinese in two ways: direct recruitment and favorable leases. This arrangement was familiar to emigrants from China by this time. As early as 1908, Harrison Gray Otis was actively recruiting Chinese directly from Hong Kong. Within months, the American consul in Hong Kong reported to the Secretary of State in D.C. that Otis's representative had received the blessings of the Governor of California, the approval of the Mexican government and entered into contract with the Hong Kong labor recruiters of the Mi Wah Company. This Cantonese brokerage house furnished five-year contracts for Chinese laborers dictating the terms of work with the CRLC.<sup>3</sup> The Mi Wah contracts promised wages of \$24 per month with extra wages for "diligence" and the option to lease company lands.<sup>4</sup> Of the agricultural work available to Chinese immigrants throughout the Pacific, Mexicali stood out. The promised wages exceeded those paid to other Chinese already working in California fields to the north.<sup>5</sup> The possibility of working and leasing land for a cash crop booming in China was of immense interest to laborers, farmers, traders, and financiers throughout Hong Kong and Canton, especially as an element conducive to upward class mobility.

That same year, a U.S. health inspector at the port of Hong Kong signaled changing migration patterns to U.S. officials back home. He noted that of the hundred thousand migrants leaving Hong Kong in 1907, 80% were headed for the Straights Settlements with the

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<sup>2</sup> Brant, "Letter to Davis from Brant," in CRLC: Correspondence (Corona Del Mar: Sherman Library, 1908).

<sup>3</sup> the C-M Ranch was the Mexican subsidiary of the Colorado River Land Company. Mexican law stipulated no foreigner may own land in Mexico so the CRLC simply constructed a new company with a Mexican lawyer already under employment by the CRLC as a board member.

<sup>4</sup> Fuller, "Letter from the Vice-Consul General in Hong Kong to the Assistant Secretary of State in Washington, D.C.."

<sup>5</sup> Chan, *This Bitter-Sweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910*. A necessary step if the CRLC hoped to keep Chinese workers south of the border.

remaining 20% departing for Mexico and other Latin American ports.<sup>6</sup> These consular documents point to the beginning of Mexicali's emergence as a reliable destination for emigrating Chinese. Within a few years U.S. immigration officials noted sustained increases in Chinese migration to Mexicali.<sup>7</sup> Not only were Chinese from China interested in Mexicali but also Chinese throughout Mexico began to travel to this location. U.S. consular agents in Mexico became suspicious of Chinese migrants traveling close to the border. This anxiety was reflected in the hundreds of reports documenting the constant flow of Chinese along Mexico's west coast.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, this concentration of population accelerated as the escalation of hostilities in the Mexican Revolution pushed resident Chinese to find safer locations.

Throughout the late-nineteenth century tens of thousands of Chinese settled across northern Mexico as U.S. capital began to expand its exploitation of mineral and water resources. The rapid market expansion in northern Mexico created both labor shortages and new niche markets that the Chinese filled. As an early predecessor to Mexicali, Torreón, Coahuila was the heart of irrigated cotton production. Torreón's Chinese community might have developed to the size of Mexicali had it not been the site of the bloodiest massacre of Chinese in the Americas, it also marked one of the first anti-foreign demonstrations by Mexican Revolutionaries. In 1911 three Japanese and 303 Chinese immigrants were systematically butchered in their places of business and the town's streets by Madero's troops and a mob of local residents. The troops sacked every Chinese owned business in Torreón, doing millions of dollars in damage.<sup>9</sup> This rampage occurred after an incendiary speech by Jesus C. Flores, citing the Chinese as an obstacle to the ideals of the Revolution, and the taking of the city by Madero's troops. Chinese merchants and laborers were a small but significant minority in the Mexican controlled cotton economy of the neighboring Laguna district (roughly 600 Chinese residents). Small merchants and transnational magnates invested in the cities infrastructure by issuing bonds for improvements in both irrigation canals and a light-rail tram and they also operated restaurants, groceries, laundries and hotels.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the massacre, Torreón's Chinese demonstrated intense interest in financial investment and economic development in the area by pulling investment from around the globe. After the outbreak of violence many Chinese flocked to Mexicali.

Due to the raw conditions of much of CRLC's undeveloped land, the leases offered incredible deals. The ranch managers found the Chinese to be so enthusiastic and capable of delivering results that they charged no money down to open new leases. Furthermore, lease agreements in 1908 offered plots with no rent for the first year, but required significant

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<sup>6</sup> Amos Wilder, "Report from the American Consul in Hong Kong to the Secretary of State, D.C.," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1908).

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Backus, "Letter from the Immigration Commissioner in D.C. to the Immigration Commissioner in San Francisco," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1912).

<sup>8</sup> E. E. Bailey, "Reports from the American Consul in Ensenada, Baja California," in RG 85 (Washington D.C.: NARA I, 1906-15).

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Dambourges, "The Chinese Massacre in Torreón (Coahuila) in 1911."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

improvements of no less than \$2000 worth of fencing, irrigation canals, and clearing of the land.<sup>11</sup> These contract terms ensured that the CRLC would spend no money on land improvements while at the same time quickly populating its agricultural land. A mix of Chinese, Mexican, and American farmers signed these early leases. However, the Chinese became a clear majority when Mexican ranches failed and Americans subletted to other Chinese. As tenants became established, the lease terms changed to fulfill the rent-seeking aspirations of the CRLC. Still, lease agreements encouraged the growth of Mexicali's agriculture with graduated terms of payment in cash or in kind. By 1911 American leaseholders of CRLC lands began to subcontract to the Chinese using contracts of indenture.<sup>12</sup> American farmers held more than 50,000 acres of Mexicali farmland and went so far as to petition the federal government to allow the flow of Chinese laborers to their Mexican fields.<sup>13</sup>

Gradually, Chinese farmers from California joined the Mexican agricultural colony. Thousands in California had been engaged in similar agricultural pursuits since 1870.<sup>14</sup> Mexicali's Chinese, like northern and central California's Chinese farmers, "were intimately involved in every phase of land reclamation and farm-making... without them [central California] would have taken decades longer to develop into one of the richest agricultural areas in the world."<sup>15</sup> It should be no surprise that another stream of Chinese migration to the Mexicali Valley were from the ranks of California's "Oriental agriculture."<sup>16</sup> Protected by treaty, Chinese could freely migrate from the U.S. to Mexico. Furthermore, local authorities in Baja California welcomed the Chinese because their business activity boosted tax revenues. Nevertheless, trans-Pacific and trans-border crossings presented new trials for both the Chinese and U.S. immigration authorities.

The obstacles faced by Chinese migration challenged Mexicali's agricultural growth. To the north, Southern cotton farmers and industrialists eager to make up losses from the boll-weevil plagues of the previous decade led agricultural colonization in the Imperial Valley. Still Imperial Valley cotton growers suffered from labor shortages as few Mexicans stayed longer than one season often leaving for better paying jobs further north. In 1913 CRLC ranch managers complained,

The demand for Chinamen has reached such a proportion that there is no surplus at all in Mexicali... looks as though you had better have the steamship companies advertise the fact and have 1000 or 1500 come to lower California at once.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> C.T. Wardlaw, "Letter to Brant from Wardlaw," in CRLC: Correspondence (Corona Del Mar: Sherman Library, 1915).

<sup>12</sup> R.P. Davie, "Review of Indenture Contract," in CRLC: Anderson's Portfolio (Corona Del Mar: Sherman Library, 1911).

<sup>13</sup> "Letter from Commissioner General in D.C. to Commissioner in San Francisco," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1913).

<sup>14</sup> Chan, *This Bitter-Sweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Bowker, "Letter from Bowker to Chandler," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1912).



As more workers cashed in on new CRLC leases more land was cleared and irrigated for cotton, creating skyrocketing demand for cotton pickers. As the scale of Chinese migration to Mexicali increased, CRLC executives in Los Angeles encountered resistance by an anxious and xenophobic U.S. immigration bureaucracy. In order to satisfy the demand for Chinese workers in Mexicali, U.S. authorities struck a deal with the American operator, Pacific Mail Steamship Co. The company's general manager promised U.S. authorities that it would cover the cost of deportations if immigration officials would give exclusive rights to carry workers from China to San Francisco to be transported to Mexicali by rail. The British Hok Fong and Japanese Toyo Kisen Kaisha steamship companies competed for the growing demand for a direct route from China to Mexico.<sup>18</sup>

Once Mexicali became an established destination and Chinese migrants had sufficient reasons to stay another problem remained: the entry of Chinese into the U.S. was only permitted at designated seaports. While it was easier to get to Mexicali by simply crossing the border, returning to the U.S. required leaving Mexico by boat and landing at an officially designated port of entry for Chinese persons. Calexico was not a port of entry for Chinese persons nor was any other Mexican border port. These conditions slowed transactions and increased the cost of organizing commercial export. By 1914 Chinese farmers and merchants had organized more than half of Mexicali's exports for Chinese ports.<sup>19</sup> With greater mobility, the Chinese merchants could accelerate their transactions and lower their costs. U.S. immigration authorities had become accustomed to granting Section 6 exemptions to Chinese in the East Asian colonial context, but would they apply the same practice in the domestic space of the U.S.-Mexico border? In order to understand the value of border-crossing privileges to the Chinese farmers, merchants, and financiers it is necessary to examine the transnational structure of their organizations.

An incomplete collection of CRLC ranch manager notes (from 1925-1927) reconstructs the year-to-year turnover in leases and provides a unique glimpse into the structure of social relations among Mexicali's Chinese. The notes showed the number of years that the lease was good for, the percentage of harvested crop to be used as payment, the name of the leaser, the preceding tenant and lease renewal number or the succeeding tenant along with a notations about who underwrote the lease. This three-year span illustrates how a lease from one member in an association was handed down to an incoming member to facilitate a rotation of ownership. The level of organization provided by The Chinese Association of Mexicali, the Chinese Mexican Mercantile Association and various other firms like the Chang Lee Lung Store, Kwong Hing Lung Store and Chew Haw Tong Store allowed groups of Chinese to pool their resources and sponsor each member's leasing application.<sup>20</sup> These partnership associations would subsequently then lend support to the individual leaser throughout the cultivation and harvest process. The partnership also employed their own accountants and brokers to secure purchase orders in China for the cotton grown. One of these brokers explained to immigration officials in Los Angeles,

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<sup>18</sup> R. Schwerin, "Letter from Schwerin to the Commissioner Backus," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 1: Asian Immigration and Exclusion 1906-1913 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1913).

<sup>19</sup> "Statement of the Customs Business of the District of Southern California," in RG 36 (Laguna Niguel: NARA, 1914).

<sup>20</sup> "Unprocessed Card Catalog," in CRLC (Corona Del Mar: Sherman Library, 1925-27).

We are financing – I don't know exactly how many acres, as our company has a share in a great many ranches... I don't live on either of the ranches, and I am not employed by any of the ranches. I keep the books and all different accounts for our own store's interest in those ranches.

These partnerships organized, financed, and brokered a majority of the cotton grown in Mexicali. They were able to increase the scale of economic activity by pooling capital and sharing resources between leaseholders to prevent competition from within the partnership. The profits from each harvest were distributed among the partners as dividends according to the proportions of shareholders.<sup>21</sup>

Business records from the CRLC show a sophisticated arrangement of Chinese social relations during the peak production period of cotton cultivation (mid 1920s). These records matched with U.S. and Mexican immigration reports show two important facts: Chinese partnerships operated and financed a majority of the leases and each season provided the opportunity to hand off leases to different members in the partnership. The members of different partnerships constantly changed. Each partnership was organized to divide management, finance and brokerage from farming operations, cultivation and harvest. Managers, assistants, accountants, and brokers facilitated the partnership's operations, but these positions rotated between new members who were likely brothers, sons or nephews. Through this process individuals worked their way to higher levels of the partnership taking on new duties. Members participating directly in the partnership were known as active members while those who lent their money to the partnerships endeavors were known as silent members that still collected dividends. Both active and silent partners spanned the Pacific. These partnerships linked capital resources in China, the U.S. and other locations within Mexico (often other Mexican border towns). Sometimes individuals renewed their lease with the CRLC at other times they were handed down to an incoming partner.<sup>22</sup> From mainland China to overseas communities, it was quite common in these partnerships to purchase shares from partners that could not put up speculative capital and then allow them to buy back shares once the business had achieved stability. Another effective practice was to separate the management of finances from the management of business operations.<sup>23</sup> These forms of organization permitted poor and inexperienced individuals to contribute in meaningful ways to the partnership's enterprise.<sup>24</sup>

While CRLC leases were often backed by pooled partnership money it was not the only source of credit used by Mexicali's Chinese cotton growers. Chinese American bankers, white American farmers, and Southern California banks all made capital available to Chinese cotton growers to expand operations. These lucrative fiscal arrangements required frequent cross-border dialog. In order to manage these transactions Chinese *compradores* needed to provide re-assurance to creditors, monitor the progress of cultivation and harvest, and secure purchase orders for the processed cotton. The Chinese Exclusion Acts prohibited entry to the

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<sup>21</sup> Wong Jim Hong, "Testimony," in RG 85 (Washington D.C.: NARA I, 1919).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Madeline Zelin, *The Merchants of Zigong: industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. It also protected managers from suspicion of being unauthorized laborers, by U.S. immigration officials.

U.S. from any port not designated as a “port of entry for Chinese.” With millions of dollars of credit at stake in Mexicali’s irrigated cotton fields there were growing demands for designating Calexico as a port of entry for Chinese. By 1913 U.S. authorities were granting border-crossing privileges to Chinese interpreters working for the U.S. immigration service and the occasional permit for Chinese businessmen who qualified as returning U.S. citizens.

These *comprador* border crossers served vital interests to the border economy. As in California’s potato fields and fruit farms, Chinese cooks in Mexicali’s work camps negotiated the supply of labor, their wages, and managed the pace of work. Louie Geow, the son of a Sacramento merchant was the first Chinese employee of the CRLC. His official title was company cook, but the title served to veil his role a general manager. In 1908, the CRLC went to great lengths to secure permits for his cross-border transit, an unlikely privilege for a Chinese cook. The company also successfully defended Geow from accusations by U.S. authorities of being involved in human smuggling; serving as a labor contractor almost certainly made him an accessory to early Mexicali trafficking. As cross-border commerce with Chinese escalated so too did the need for Chinese interpreters at U.S. ports of entry along the border.<sup>25</sup> Several brokers moonlighted as immigration interpreters to not only take advantage of the increased mobility but to also gain better insight into the business dealings of Chinese along the border. Ng Gunn was one of the first interpreters employed at the Calexico port of entry. His border-crossing permit allowed him to cross and re-cross the border from Ciudad Juarez to San Diego. Gunn was a member in several partnership organizations in Mexicali and conducted some of their business in Calexico. In 1915, he served as a crucial mediator between Baja California’s Northern District governor and the Chinese farmers of Mexicali. Witnessing the lucrative growth of cotton cultivation, the governor proposed a heavy tax on the export of cotton bales. In response, the Chinese farmers threatened to turn themselves into U.S. authorities to be voluntarily deported back to China. Gunn reacted quickly to convince the Chinese farmers to remain in Mexicali and to trust that American agents would be able to convince the governor to rescind the tax, which they did with the help of the U.S. State Department.<sup>26</sup> This intermediary function became so essential that Chinese associations and American capitalists partnered together to secure Section 6 crossing privileges at Calexico.

In 1920 the Supervising Inspector at El Paso wrote a legal brief to the Commissioner in D.C. in regard to the contradictions of U.S. immigration policy. The brief underscored that if U.S. citizens could enter the U.S. through any port of entry then denying U.S. citizens “of the Chinese race” would expose the double standard existing in the law and upset the practice of regulating Chinese migration through certain ports.<sup>27</sup> Anxiety over the growing Chinese population in Mexicali was palpable; U.S. officials recommended ending the practice of granting any Mexican border crossing privileges for Chinese or designating certain border crossings as ports of entry for Chinese. American bureaucrats thought there was a distinction to be made between citizens of the Chinese race and aliens of the Chinese race in order to circumvent the racial contradiction. In the following weeks the bureau declared Calexico to

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<sup>25</sup> Chadney, "Letter from Chinese Inspector to Inspector in Charge at San Diego."

<sup>26</sup> Ng Gunn, "Testimony," in RG 85 (Washington D.C.: NARA I, 1920).

<sup>27</sup> F.W. Berkshire, "Report from Berkshire to Commissioner General of Immigration," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1920).

be a “port of exit and entry for Chinese who qualify for return certificates under provisions of Rule 16, *or who qualify for admission in the first instance as citizens.*”<sup>28</sup>

Within a year, however, Chinese merchants of western U.S.-Mexico borderlands had mobilized a grand legal assault on the Immigration Bureau’s rule change. The Chinese merchant associations hired prestigious legal counsels to present their case to the U.S. government. Their case argued for broadening the previous rule change to include *all* Chinese of the exempt classes no matter what their citizenship. Following the legal suit was a petition of more than 60 Chinese partnership associations and letters of support Southern California’s business elite.<sup>29</sup> Cornered between public opinion and legal statutes, The Department of Labor and the Immigration Bureau submitted to plaintiffs’ recommendations. It was suggested that the Bureau might rectify the federal code to afford Chinese merchants the mobility they and others desired. The letter provides legal precedence from the Treaty of 1880 for the free mobility of certain classes and the rights of the Secretary of Labor to designate new ports of entry for Chinese persons under Section 7 of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. The opening of Mexican ports was also juxtaposed with the opening of Canadian ports as examples of positive outcomes of such actions as well as of the Bureau’s legal capacity to act.<sup>30</sup>

Then, in 1921 the Department of Labor announced Calexico to be “a port of entry for Chinese other than laborer of the classes enumerated in the second article of the Treaty with China of 1880, commonly called the exempt classes.”<sup>31</sup> This rule change was the first significant legal concession for Chinese merchants in the borderlands and set the stage for further developments. In the wake of this decision, Mexican and American officials documented a wave of Section 6 merchants to Mexicali. In 1921, a cadre of 51 Section 6 merchants landed in San Francisco in route to Mexicali.<sup>32</sup> While U.S. officials folded on this issue two things were inevitable: the complications of implementing the rule change and the barrage of requests for other ports of entry to receive similar designations.<sup>33</sup> By 1925 three

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<sup>28</sup> F.W. Berkshire, "Report from Berkshire to Inspector in Charge at Calexico," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1921).

<sup>29</sup> Celement Bouve and A. Warner Parker, "Letter from Bouve and Parker to the Commissioner General of Immigration in D.C. June 15," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1921).

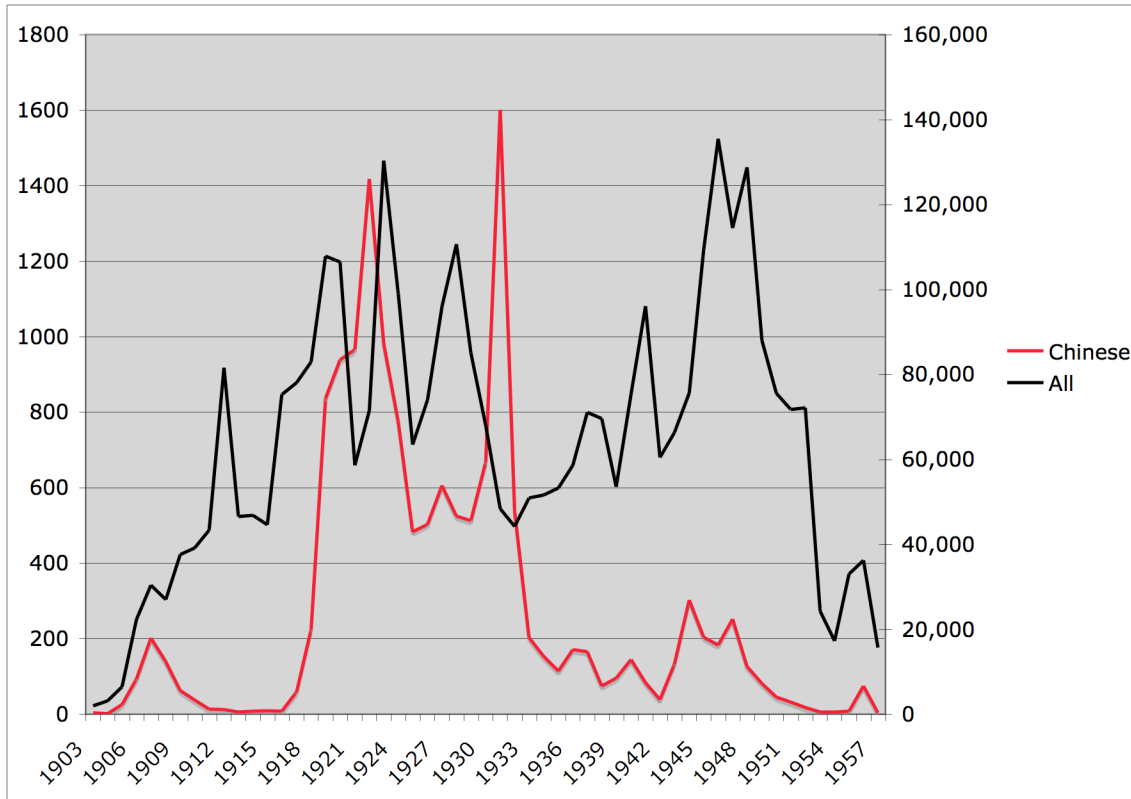
<sup>30</sup> Celement Bouve and A. Warner Parker, "Letter from Bouve and Parker to the Commissioner General of Immigration in D.C. June 22," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1921).

<sup>31</sup> S. Hampton, "Calexico is Designated as a Port of Entry for Chinese, November 8," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1921).

<sup>32</sup> M.R. C., "Letter from the Secretary of Foreign Relations to the Secretary of Government," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1921).

<sup>33</sup> Immediately following the Department’s rule change, the El Paso Chamber of Commerce petitioned for the rights of Chinese merchants, albeit without express coordination with Chinese merchants themselves. John Happer, "Letter from the El Paso Chamber of Commerce to the Secretary of Labor in D.C. December 5," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject

other major ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border were open to Chinese crossings.<sup>34</sup> In the same year, Mexico's nationalist xenophobia expanded under the Calles administration, leading to the termination of the China-Mexico treaty, closing off open Chinese migration to Mexico. As a result of these changes nearly half of all applications for naturalization in Mexico were from Chinese immigrants.<sup>35</sup> The Chinese used these border crossing privileges vigorously for two decades.



**Figure 10 Number of Border Crossing Records.** Source: National Archives and Records Administration, Ancestry.com Compiled Database from Various Sources

This graph shows the number of Chinese border crossing permits in relation to the total number of permits for each year from 1903 to 1957. It demonstrates that legal Chinese border crossing permits were widely used throughout the 1920s. The capacity to conduct trans-border business greatly enhanced the Chinese cotton-growing operations.

By the mid-1920s there were hundreds of merchants with Section 6 exemptions in Mexicali, representing different associations and brokerage houses. The flexible structure of shareholding partnerships and generous leasing arrangements with the CRLC made it relatively easy to acquire the necessities for Section 6 exemption applications. With major export markets to the north of the border and a booming agricultural economy, Chinese

Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1921).

<sup>34</sup> including Nogales, AZ; San Diego, CA; El Paso, TX

<sup>35</sup> Robert H. Duncan, "The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (1994): 615-647.

laborers could form mercantile establishments by pooling dozens of partners with as little as 50 pesos. Furthermore, shares in the partnership could be sold off or transferred to new members in the application process for Section 6 exemptions. At this time, the American Consul in Mexicali was inundated with Section 6 applications from sojourners who did not pursue Mexican naturalization.<sup>36</sup> It was quite common for Chinese emigrants to acquire merchant status for migration purposes. Hsu states,

Immigrants could also seek out business partnerships for immigration purposes... To gain the lesser privilege of permanent residency, the evidence required to prove merchant status was greater than that required to claim citizenship... Once proven, merchant status allowed Chinese men to travel back and forth between the United States and China and to bring over one wife and minor children.<sup>37</sup>

By 1925 a thousand border-crossing cards were being issued each month by the Calexico customs officers to Chinese in Mexicali.<sup>38</sup> The particular conditions of Mexicali sustained the upward mobility of Chinese workers, but also aided in their serial migrations vis-à-vis the acquisition of Section 6 exempt status. The records cited here point out that Chinese merchants occupied the legal space of Section 6 in the Chinese Exclusion Acts as both a function of their economic niche and the corresponding prestige in social status.

The social structures of Chinese organizations in Mexicali helps to explain why merchants were best positioned as leaders in the Chinese community. As the political and economic strength of overseas Chinese merchants grew so too did their sway over the Chinese community abroad. Securing their social position as privileged and respectable merchants among American and Mexican communities was tough to negotiate considering their racialization as agents of vice filled slums and Chinatown ghettos across California. Nevertheless, they served as liaisons for the community and advocated for victims of Mexican prejudice.

Mexicali's business district housed numerous shops, hotels and bunkhouses, a few banks, government buildings along with restaurants and the headquarters of Chinese partnership associations and numerous Chinese stores. Mexicali's Chinese merchants sustained their livelihoods by maintaining connections with other Chinese abroad and at home. They were often organized by families or more generally by hometown region. More than thirty different associations were active in Mexicali in the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> Individuals in the partnership coordinated transnational business activities and shifted investment capital geographically through the distribution of the individual partners. Based on business

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<sup>36</sup> "Letter from the Inspector in Charge at Calexico to the Supervising Inspector at El Paso, December 16," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1921).

<sup>37</sup> Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*.

<sup>38</sup> C.E. Markey, "Letter from the Justice of the Peace to the Assistant Secretary of Labor, April 14," in Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Series A: Subject Correspondence Files. Part 2: Mexican Immigration, 1906-1930 (Bethesda: Research Collections in American Immigration, 1925).

<sup>39</sup> Eduardo Auyón Gerardo, *El Dragón en el Desierto: Los Pioneros Chinos en Mexicali* (Mexicali: Insituto de Cultura de Baja California, 1991).

partnership files it was quite common to have numerous “silent” members who represented investors that received monthly dividends. Still others had Chinese partners in New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, Hong Kong, Mexico City and a number of other locations spread throughout the nations of the Pacific Rim.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 11 Source: Fotos Digitales. Archivo Historical de Municipio Mexicali**

Through these associations millions of dollars were invested each year in agriculture and the commercial infrastructure of the border town.<sup>41</sup> One of the most famous Chinese farmers, Lau Jin, had 50,000 acres of cotton and had made up to 2 million dollars in credit available to other Chinese farmers.<sup>42</sup> Not including Jin’s cotton farms, the 1921 Mexican census documents 32 distinct Chinese farming operations with more than 81,000 acres under cultivation. It was common for individual farms to introduce several thousand Chinese workers to pick cotton. All of these facts point to the idea that the Mexican census dramatically underestimated the number of Chinese residing in Mexicali. While official

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<sup>40</sup> Mexicali’s partnership associations were hierarchically organized according to the degree of transnationality represented in their members. The lower rung, and most numerous type of business partnership was the local or region partnership consisting of individuals with limited mobility and meager resources. The next type of partnership consisted of Chinese residing in the U.S. with Mexicali partners. The heights of the political economic structure of Chinese business associations were those highly capitalized with diverse partners in Mexico, the U.S. and China.

<sup>41</sup> Catalina Velazquez Morales, "Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920-1937," (Mexicali: UABC, 2001). Hu-Dehart, "Voluntary Associations in a Predominantly Male Immigrant Community: The Chinese on the Northern Mexican Frontier, 1880-1930."

<sup>42</sup> Morales, "Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920-1937."

numbers fluctuated between 2,000-5,000, based on the farming operations and requests for Chinese workers it is more likely that 10 to 15,000 lived and worked in the Mexicali area, nearly reaching 20,000 in the 1920s.<sup>43</sup>

Chinese merchant investors financed the immigration of a large number of Chinese workers to Mexicali in order to ensure the success of their agricultural enterprises. For example, Lew Hing had direct interest in a CRLC lease for 4,000 acres. He was the principle owner of the Chinese Mexican Mercantile Company. This business served as a general goods store and an incubator for aspiring Chinese partnership associations. Hundreds of CRLC leases were underwritten by the financial backing of the Chinese Mexican Mercantile Company. His farm, named Yick San Yuen, grew cotton for export through Los Angeles and was divided into 6 camps; 16-17 workers maintained each camp. During harvests he hired hundreds of new laborers from China to work his cotton fields.<sup>44</sup> In another case in 1921, the partnership of Lew Chun, Lee Wing and Wong Charm successfully petitioned the Mexican government to import 2,000 laborers from China to pick cotton on 30,000 acres of Mexicali's irrigated fields.<sup>45</sup> The ability to incorporate new labor into this mode of production created the conditions of possibility for the ascendancy to merchant-hood. The structure of Mexicali's cotton industry reflected the reliance on Chinese transnational networks and new Chinese immigrant labor.

The rapid expansion of cotton cultivation under Chinese shareholding partnerships was made possible by three strata within the industry. At the top were magnates like Lew Hing and Lau Jin who sponsored labor migration and financially underwrote agricultural expansion by smaller partnerships. These were the class of individuals that Chandler and CRLC ranch managers had hoped would be able to convince the Chinese to stay "this side of the imaginary line." The second tier was composed of individuals who served the industry as accountants, labor contractors, brokers or small to medium sized merchants. Individuals like Woo Soo made up this class; he started as an agricultural laborer in Los Angeles and worked his way up to a mid-level border merchant and financing small cotton operations.<sup>46</sup> The third tier was the most common composed of cotton pickers, who also dug canals. These workers sustained the expansion of the irrigation infrastructure and cultivation with their labor. After a few seasons these workers were able to open new leases however many sought clandestine immigration to the U.S. The pace of agricultural expansion created labor shortages that encouraged larger shareholding partnerships to share harvest labor. As they acquired more capital resources and legal title to CRLC leases, they were eligible to apply for Section 6 merchant status, allowing many of them to establish themselves in the second tier. The ability of Chinese commercial networks to broker Mexicali cotton to buyers in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Kobe, and Tokyo provided the confidence for Chinese magnates and the CRLC to finance this explosive growth. This is an important point that determined the failure of Mexican cotton operations that were not structurally integrated in the Pacific cotton trade.

The second tier of the industry provided crucial links that connected knowledge about local conditions, contacts with buyers in import markets, and the allocation of finance capital. Commercial houses such as La Nueva China were important sites where partnership

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, ed., *China en las Californias* (Tijuana: Centro Cultural Tijuana, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Lew Hing, "Testimony," in RG 85 (San Bruno: NARA, 1919).

<sup>45</sup> Lew Chun, Lee Wing, and Wong Charm, "Telegram from Chun et al. to President Obregon," in *Obregon-Calles* (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1923).

<sup>46</sup> Woo Soo, "Testimony," in RG 85 (Laguna Niguel: NARA, 1922).



associations, brokers and financiers could negotiate new leases as well as consolidating harvests in order to save on transportation and export costs. The associations aided in the organization of economic activity as well as supporting new migrants. Part III will show how Baja California administrators took aim at these vital structures within Chinese operations in order to undermine their success as an attempt to surgically remove the Chinese and keep the cotton economy alive.

While the associations helped to overcome logistical obstacles through cooperation they also managed divisions within the Chinese community. One of the ways that the Chinese community was hit the hardest was through state sponsorship of Chinese casinos. The more profitable cotton cultivation became the more income was funneled into casinos by workers. The vitality of the vice economy was supported by the leisure consumption activities of Chinese cotton workers. While merchants ran profitable businesses the workers they hired fueled the vice economy that tarnished their image. Mexicali's Chinese had an ambivalent relationship to the vice sector. It was a common form of entertainment for Chinese but it also became a liability. This ambivalence was shared in other Chinese communities, most notably in San Francisco.

The great 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco provided an opportunity for that city's Chinese merchants to change the image of the Chinese American community. The turn of the century marked a distinctive reform movement among middle and upper class Chinese-Americans. Mexicali was a beneficiary of these reforms but it was also a constant thorn in the side of Chinese émigré aspirations of respectability due to the vibrant tenacity of Mexicali's vice economy. After the earthquake in San Francisco Chinese merchants and storeowners launched a political offensive against the black market industries that at once materially supported the community and contributed to its bad reputation, and were thus an obstacle to doing "good" business.<sup>47</sup> The transformation from vice district to tourist destination was not only a moral reform but also a restructuring of the urban enclave economy. When San Francisco's Chinatown was rebuilt it resembled nothing like the previous ghetto, nor any other Chinese community. The aesthetic embellishments to Chinatown's modern structures were designed to provide the indication of spatial differentiation, an inviting commercial zone, and the projection of a sanitized and safe urban space. While San Francisco's white elites and Chinese merchants collaborated to force the vice economies further underground, Mexicali's Chinese community was beginning to thrive.

Through transnational shareholders, the transformation in San Francisco had a direct impact on the Chinese community in Mexicali. As a result of these reforms the Bank of Canton in San Francisco was a symbol of the upstanding businessmen of Chinatown. It was also created to serve the Chinatown community by providing loans to foster formal business growth. One of the founding members was Lew Hing a significant investor in Mexicali's cotton industry. Through these changes to the Chinese American community, new sources of capital were made available to enterprising Chinese farmers in Mexico. The 1906 earthquake had another effect, the complete destruction of Chinese immigration records. This disaster created a clean slate in which Chinese migrants could imaginatively reconstruct their families with well-paying Chinese sojourners. Once U.S. immigration authorities could certify that a Chinese man had been born in the territorial U.S. as a citizen, that individual could sponsor numerous fake sons from China. Coaching books and other training was offered to

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<sup>47</sup> Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940." Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*.

prospective “paper sons” in order to abide by an established family narrative and the expectations of immigration.<sup>48</sup> In the midst of moral campaigns in Chinese-American communities at the turn of the century, the immigration process was conversely developing increasingly sophisticated means of evading immigration enforcement. These contradictions imperiled the Chinese community’s search for respectability.

In Mexicali opium, gambling, prostitution, and trafficking were concomitant with the irrigated colonization of the desert borderlands. In the face of a weak presence of the Mexican government and the terminus of U.S. laws at the border, these vices were quickly established. Before cotton cultivation had reached an industrial scale in Mexicali gambling and prostitution were the main pillars of the Mexican border economy. Seventy-five percent of Mexicali’s businesses from 1902-1912 were American owned vice industries.<sup>49</sup> As California Progressives increased their moral attacks on vice, the Mexican border became an attractive place to relocate. It should be no surprise Mexicali came to resemble the red-light districts of California’s saloons and Chinatowns, because many of the proprietors relocated to Mexicali, especially after the Volstead Act.<sup>50</sup> Casinos, brothels, and opium were all made legal in Baja California’s northern district and they were highly regulated commodities in Mexicali up until the 1930s. Opium’s legality was short lived but nevertheless established Baja California as the preeminent hub of opium smuggling in the western hemisphere. Opium trade, refining, retail consumption and opium dens were all heavily taxed between 1915 and 1916. It was then summarily made illegal and pushed completely underground.

While Part III explores the history of the vice sector in more depth, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss here the ways that some vice activities bolstered Chinese men’s sense of community. While many of the first vice industries were American owned, Mexicans claimed American transgressions were giving Mexicali a bad name. As Chinese migrants came to Mexicali, casinos and opium dens emerged to serve them exclusively. In fact, Mexican officials granted exclusive rights to Chinese casinos and used them to develop the image of Chinese associations as mafias as the next chapter will show. With the Chinese vice sector, racial discourse shifted to the familiar Oriental vice discourse common in California through the late nineteenth century with the help of negative publicity in the local press. Mexicans began to blame the Chinese for the prevalence of the vice sector in Mexicali. However, political elites took a paternalistic approach to the good governance and regulation of the Chinese community was not only a symbol of their own moral achievement but also a benevolent mode of governing oriental depravity.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese casinos in Mexicali provided a venue for immigrant men to form intimate bonds through the social play of gambling.

Gambling was a popular activity among Chinese emigrants for two main reasons. The most accepted interpretation is that gambling always offered a potential short cut to upward mobility. Migration itself was a sort of gamble, so when things didn’t work out as

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<sup>48</sup> Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*. Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. Sucheng Chan, *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

<sup>49</sup> Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965".

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

planned (which happened most of the time) throwing a days wages away at the casino in an attempt to win big made sense to many frustrated migrants. In rural California, where low wages and a hostile social climate restricted opportunities, gambling became extremely popular among Filipino and Chinese agricultural workers.<sup>52</sup> Second gambling offered Chinese men the chance to test their luck in the company of other Chinese men. The games that Chinese men played like *fan-tan* and *mah jong* are not only games of chance; they were multi-player contests with incomplete information that involve strategy and wit.<sup>53</sup> Sitting down to play these games with other Chinese men in a public environment allowed them to challenge and wager against co-ethnic opponents in a parallel world to the cotton fields outside the doors. Perhaps the Chinese in Mexicali felt that the dreams of Gum Sam could be achieved either in cotton cultivation or at the table in a casino.

There were two characteristics that made Chinese gambling practices distinct from those of Anglos or Mexicans at this time. First, Chinese gaming traditions like that of *mah jong* date back to the tenth-century and are deeply rooted within Chinese culture. These games were seen as a normal part of socialization and mental strengthening, not an immoral activity or something to be avoided. However, the potential for excess was constant especially when sojourning dreams had lost their luster.<sup>54</sup> The government-sanctioned casinos in Mexicali exacerbated this potential danger by setting high taxes forcing game operators to encourage excessive wagers in order for the house to remain profitable. Second, Chinese migrants' social worlds were often quite restricted for lack of language skills and the spatial segregation of the city. This situation made places like restaurants and casinos into a place for Chinese to connect with each other without having to mediate a racially charged host culture. These social spaces afforded Chinese emigrants the relief and security of familiar social interaction with co-ethnics, many of whom came from the same localities in Canton, China. Shared leisure practices provided opportunities to establish corroborations with daily struggle and cultivate social capital.<sup>55</sup> In these ways individuals became accomplices and alibis to the quotidian drama of personal and business relationships that encompassed the social sphere of Chinese men in Mexicali.

The economic structure of the border town facilitated the enormous expansion of the gambling and vice sector of the economy. As illustrated earlier, taxing the cotton industry threatened the prosperous Chinese cotton ranchers. Taxing agriculture could scare away investors. This meant that the entire weight of public revenues rested on the regulation and taxation of the vice sector. In this way Mexicali specialized in cotton cultivation and all manner of vices. Without cotton, Mexicali would not have been able to sustain the vitality of its red-light district. But without the red-light district, Mexicali could not afford to maintain its state authority. These pressures, along with the lack of any pre-existing economic

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<sup>52</sup> Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Hiroyuki Iida et al., "An Application of Game-Refinement Theory," in *Entertainment Computing* (Berlin: Springer, 2004), 253-282.

<sup>54</sup> John Wong et al., "The Face of Chinese Migrants' Gambling: A Perspective from New Zealand," *The Electronic Journal of Gambling Issues* 9 (2003): 1-11.

<sup>55</sup> Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints: Restoring Homosocial Normativity to Chinese American History."

foundation made Mexicali into the borders preeminent vice playground.<sup>56</sup> As Mexicali grew it became harder and harder for the Chinese to separate the rural agricultural sector from the urban vice sector until both came under attack in the late 1930s.

As merchants acquired greater economic power and political leverage abroad, they were able to buttress their communities at home. The merchants of Mexicali were forging a sophisticated transnational strategy at the turn of the century; traveling to Mexico, growing cotton to send back across the Pacific in order to earn money and acquire a merchant's respectability. Success abroad, as seen in the establishment of shareholding partnerships in Mexicali's cotton industry, demanded cooperation. In this sense, sociality is an integral concept to examine emigrants in diaspora, because it combines the practical strategies of collective action with the opportunity to engage in the shared idiom of Chinese gender and culture norms. Here sociality is emphasized because men prove their authority in the eyes of other men.<sup>57</sup> In settler societies abroad only their countrymen could confer recognition of Chinese notions of integrity and authority. For those confronted with emasculated racializations receiving validation from other Chinese men contributed to their sense of integrity and solidarity. The social environment of collective enterprises granted a space for verification and assurance, in addition to providing the necessary support structures to fulfilling the merchant role (business partners, apprenticeships, etc).<sup>58</sup>

Conducting business and cooperating were not only a commercial practice but also engagements infused with thick meaning shared among émigré partners. Outsiders observed the cooperation of Chinese men as a "queer domesticity."<sup>59</sup> However, among their peers, they became alibis and accomplices to the masculine routines of a transnational cultural field. What I am arguing here is that Chinese men tried to become mobile entrepreneurs as a status of distinction and authority. Mobility is essential for two reasons: sojourning was viewed as a direct path toward improvement in material conditions and restrictions on mobility were a critical way that Chinese experienced racialization. In this way, evading immigration restrictions was one source of evidence of their masculinity and lent greater coherence to masculine integrity. The search for strength by Chinese emigrants may also be attributed to the sociality of fraternal Chinese bonds and the business models that enabled material benefits.

The growth of the Chinese community in Mexicali challenged prevailing policies in both the U.S. and Mexico. Mexicali was a highly productive, agricultural depot occupied by people foreign to either side. While they were foreigners, they were not naïve. When they crossed the Pacific they came with richly developed practices of self-organization, adaptation, and commercial know-how. Furthermore, Mexicali's Chinese combined experiences from operating tenant farms in California and international trade in Southern China by assembling diverse transnational partnerships. As this group faced adversity and prejudice their response

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<sup>56</sup> Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965".

<sup>57</sup> Michael Kimmel, *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> K. E. Kuah-Pearce and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, eds., *Voluntary Associations in the Chinese Diaspora* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints: Restoring Homosocial Normativity to Chinese American History."

to this social climate determined how agricultural development unfolded at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Part II has made three basic arguments. I first argue that U.S. imperialists needed to make significant accommodations to Chinese merchants as they encroached upon East Asian markets. Second, I argue that the Chinese partnership associations of Mexicali were central to the productivity of the border region and subsequently leveraged their position to open the border to Chinese cross-border commerce and transit. Lastly, I argue that Chinese merchant's of the time developed sophisticated forms of social organization to negotiate uncertainty guided first and foremost by late Qing social norms and the maintenance of transnational connections.

I have tried to show here how Mexicali became a Chinese place at the turn of the century. Mexicali's irrigated colonization was built with expertise from China's cotton and textile industrialization, the ranches were operated by collectives that drew from a tradition of shareholding partnerships, and taxes from Chinese leisure activities sustained the local government. The economic structure of the region's cotton industry rested on the ability to incorporate new workers and the advance purchase of Mexicali cotton by importers across the Pacific. Without this detailed look at Mexicali's Chinese community, they would appear to be hired help of the CRLC; however I have shown that the Chinese were instrumental in carrying out the irrigated colonization of the desert borderlands.

Part III covers another lost narrative in the history of the Chinese in Mexicali: the disintegration of the Chinese community and its subsequent marginalized integration with Mexican society. As economic conditions worsened in the Great Depression, the productivity of Mexicali's irrigated fields became an attractive target for nationalization. The land was owned by the CRLC, but the Chinese built the agricultural economy. Part III tells the story of how Mexicali became incorporated into the nation-state, ending the story of Mexicali as a Chinese place as it stood in the 1920s.

### **Part III: Making Baja California into a Mexican Place**

By the 1930s Chinese casinos, restaurants, businesses, and association lodges became the sites of worried deliberation as workers, farmers, and merchants witnessed the dismantling of their community by Mexican unions, politicians, and anti-Chinese leagues. The border town had become a thriving cotton-growing colony where Chinese men sought the strength of cooperative enterprise and trans-Pacific commerce. After decades of literally building Mexicali from the ground up they gradually encountered stronger resistance and intolerance. The steady pace of growth that Mexicali experienced in the first decades of the twentieth century was dwarfed by the massive influx of Mexican workers mid-century. The perception of Mexicali as a Chinese place did not become a problem until Mexican political elites hardened the racial boundaries of the nation. In Part III, Chapter 6 first illustrates how politicians and administrators integrated anti-Chinese prejudice into national politics and deployed an exclusive racial ideology for the unification of a centralized industrial capitalist state. Chapter 7 traces the development and spread of racial populism, or nationalist discourses that connected race and popular discontent. Chapter 8 discusses the build up of public support for state-led efforts to undermine established Chinese agriculturalists in the Mexicali Valley. Using archival materials from the U.S. and Mexico, I illustrate how regional questions of race on the border shaped ideas about the Mexican nation. Put another way, I tell the story of how Mexican political elites negotiated the racial otherness of the Chinese and their economic dependence upon them as they pursued the integration of peripheral national territory.

In a matter of a few years, the Mexican government inundated Mexicali with desperate workers and pitted their interests against those of the Chinese. As the Chinese were cut out of the cotton industry they built from the canals and fields to the customs house and harbor docks, Mexicali ceased to be a destination within the Chinese diaspora for a time. By 1938 the Chinese cotton-growing associations had all been evicted from Mexicali's irrigated agricultural colony. Their forced removal was the culmination of three distinct but inter-related processes in Mexico's development: the consolidation of state power after the revolution, the triumph of conservative pro-government organized labor over more radical elements within Mexico, and the formulation of modern racial nationalist ideology.

Part II described how Chinese merchants and farmers made Mexicali into a Chinese place. They made it into a locality situated globally among the economic and institutional relations of U.S. imperialism and East Asian industrialization as well as the serial routes of the Chinese diaspora. Part III continues their story from the perspective of Mexican political elites and their Mexican constituencies. Where Chinese farmers and merchants saw opportunity in agriculture, Mexican elites saw a cancerous growth of racial degenerates. The story presented here also illustrates how Baja California administrators put Chinese gambling houses at the center of a divisive public campaign to defame the cotton ranching partnership associations. It is a tale untold in Mexican historiography and offers a unique perspective on Mexican racial formations and state making practices in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

The excavation of Mexicali's past provides another way to explore the development of Mexican nationalism. The critical role of the Chinese in the formation and development of the Mexicali Valley presented unique contradictions for Mexican politicians and other political elites to negotiate. The position of this community along the border provoked not

only American anxiety of illegal immigration, but also a Mexican anxiety that the large presence of Chinese even threatened their sovereignty and legitimacy in negotiating international water rights with the U.S. Administrators of the Baja California territory struggled to balance two sets of contradictions as the region was integrated with the rest of the nation. First, between the dependence upon Chinese commercial networks in the production of cotton commodities and the political and cultural intolerance for the “sons of Confucius.”<sup>1</sup> This contradiction resulted in the exclusion of the Chinese from the American side of the Pacific cotton corridor – a racial segregation of national space in international commodity-chains. The second inconsistency existed between the state’s desire to inflate the Mexican population in the territory and the problem of controlling the political demands of those groups. This crisis demonstrates the value of racial populism in appeals to state power and in the application of state sovereignty. U.S. State Department and Mexican government records show that Mexican governors and presidents sought to overwhelm Mexicali’s Chinese with large influxes of repatriated Mexicans from the U.S. and the Mexican interior as discussed in Chapter 8. This population increase led to political demands that pitted Mexican politicians still dependent upon Chinese farmers against poor relocated Mexican workers. These circumstances set the conditions for the expropriation of Colorado River Land Company lands and the realization of idealistic Mexican communal farms at the end of the 1930s. These Mexican farms however, lacked the structural integration of the commercial networks possessed by the Chinese; the result was that many farms went into bankruptcy only to be bailed out by American corporate agribusinesses as Part IV describes in more detail. Nevertheless, this transformation was viewed as a success of “*Mexicanización*,” bringing this peripheral territory closer to integration and statehood in 1952.

Popular cries from labor unions, anti-Chinese leagues, poor agrarians, and repatriated Mexicans from the U.S. to “nationalize the land” went above and beyond merely expropriating land from the American owned colonization company; instead they were an affirmation of the racial boundaries of the ideal mestizo nation. Indeed, this episode of nationalization emphasizes how agrarian reform was conceptualized in terms of race. This territorialization of identity invented both Mexicans and Mexico through the consolidation of state power and the demonization of the Chinese.<sup>2</sup> While racial populism defined the political discourse of Baja California in the 1930s, it must be understood as an historical process articulated by political elites and agents from ideologically driven institutions like the national federation of organized labor. Part III sheds light on how notions of race in Mexico are not only regional but also socially stratified. For example, it is too simplistic to make the case that Baja California Mexicans passively adopted elite nationalist ideology with its exclusive racial identity. Instead, I argue that it was the racial designs of the architects of post-revolutionary agrarian Mexico that created the conditions that pitted *mestizo* Mexican rights to communal agrarian land in diametric opposition to the presence of Chinese ranching collectives. I want to underscore how the appropriation of the racial logic of political elites by Mexican protesters served the immediate interests of the redistribution of land under the perceived conditions of revolutionary nationalist authenticity. Demands to “nationalize the land” were at once a denial of the Chinese from becoming Mexican and a verification of ideal mestizo credentials legible to political elites.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberto Q. Martinez, *Vida y Obra de Abelardo Rodríguez Hasta 1934* (Mexico City: -, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

In order to understand why the Chinese had to be removed from Mexicali's irrigated fields, it is helpful to explore how concepts of race structured the political logic of post-revolutionary elites. Many of these political leaders were from northern states with large populations of Chinese, where they experimented with state authority exercising the institutional power of the revolution to manage the Chinese presence in Mexico.<sup>3</sup> As in the U.S., the meaning of Chinese racial characteristics was articulated through the capacity to inspect, segregate, and manage the population in relation to the economy. Mexican elites defined the racial otherness of the Chinese as a part of restructuring the economy; but also just as important in contradistinction to a supposedly coherent national *mestizo* race. Such political and cultural constructions provided contrasts to the alleged qualities of Mexican *mestizaje*, or racial mixing. This conception of a national identity was inspired by the cultural and intellectual upheaval of the Revolution. These social changes created the political problem of national unification, to which political elites responded with a racial logic of nation building.

Intellectuals and cultural critics improvised new ways of understanding Mexico's past and charted a path for a progressive national union. One of the most articulate voices to emerge from the throes of the revolution was Manuel Gamio, an anthropologist who believed that the Revolution was more than just a political contest. In 1916 he wrote *Forjando Patria* (Forging a Fatherland) in which he conceived of the revolution as a social movement that had fomented a national race capable of industrial modernization. According to Gamio, centuries of Spanish colonization had led to the formation of diverse Mexican nationalities composed of Europeans, Indians and *mestizos*, or individuals with mixed racial identities. By his account, the Mexican Revolution signaled the challenge of unifying diverse Mexican people through a *mestizo* national identity. He argued that this racially *mestizo* population could be cultivated through the coordination of a powerful centralized political state apparatus to enfranchise the indigenous population and nationalize white foreigners.<sup>4</sup> He argued for a nationalism that could provide for "the redemption of the indigenous class" by incorporating their cultural heritage into what he called "patriotic sentimentalism."<sup>5</sup> This redemption was, however, limited by a Euro-centrism that implicitly excluded Asians and Africans from both the national imaginary and the benefits of the revolution.<sup>6</sup> Gamio's ideas resonated with those of other public intellectuals and mavens that helped give form to a national discourse that aspired to a political consolidation of the fragmented country.

Some years later the philosopher and educator José Vasconcelos plotted a visionary path for the nation when he authored *La Raza Cósmica* (The Cosmic Race) in 1925. In contrast to Gamio, Vasconcelos interpreted the revolution as providing the ideal conditions

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<sup>3</sup> For example Alvaro Obregón, Plutarco Elías Calles, and Abelardo Rodríguez all held the office of the president and meanwhile they also participated in and fostered the growth of anti-Chinese politics throughout their political careers.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria* (México: Porrúa Hermanos, 1916).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> There is an interesting exception when it comes to the Japanese. Several times in *Forjando Patria*, Gamio exemplifies Japanese nationalism as a model for Mexico to aspire to. Also, throughout the early twentieth century Japanese immigrants were thought to be couriers of industrial modern culture as illustrated by the budding imperialism of the Japanese Empire. Nevertheless, Japanese immigrants were more often than not lumped together with the Chinese in anti-Asian campaigns throughout the 1920s and 1930s.



for the future emergence of a national *mestizo* race. This idea was controversial at the time because it exalted miscegenation with the indigenous; not as a rejection of biological notions of race, but as an appropriation of racial biology to produce a national population; perhaps best characterized as a liberal eugenics.<sup>7</sup> However, these prescriptions remained Euro-centric in their exclusion of Asians and Africans.<sup>8</sup> He concluded that national policy should protect the purity of this national race and harness its capacity for economic development through education.<sup>9</sup> These thoughts resonated with the political and cultural logic of post-Revolutionary politicians and bureaucrats. The intellectual thrust of these works rarely acknowledges the presence of the Chinese in Mexico, or any other foreigner besides Spaniards, other western Europeans, and white Americans. Nevertheless, political elites were guided by this pattern of thinking as they encountered and made sense of the Chinese presence in Mexico. For example, when the anti-Chinese movement gained momentum in the 1930s in the state of Sonora several books like, *El Problema Chino de Mexico* and *El Ejemplo de Sonora* spelled out the terrible consequences of incorporating the Chinese into the national project of *mestizaje*.<sup>10</sup> *El Ejemplo*, for example, argued that “Chinese mestizos do not yield even a drop of Indo-Latina blood” and *El Problema* called the anti-Chinese campaign an “urgent nationalism.”<sup>11</sup> These texts helped to shape the image of dire economic consequences of continued Chinese presence. Part III argues that Mexico’s political leadership was motivated by a nationalist racial logic that determined the character of federal and territorial policy, as well as how non-state actors gained their favor.

In the larger scope of the dissertation Part III is written as a hinge that bridges the establishment of the Chinese community in Mexicali at the turn of the century and their transformation into a minority population in contemporary Baja California. I conceptualize the eviction of Chinese farmers in the 1930s as a continuation of the Mexican Revolution beginning in 1910. The revolt set into motion a tumultuous process of internal political change as well as altering the country’s external relationship to the rest of the world. While the revolution was steeped in a justifiable xenophobia of foreign conquerors, Mexico’s revolutionary political discourse rejected the historic trans-pacific corridors that sustained Mexico’s economy for centuries and a denial of its legacy as a backwards relic of the colonial past. Since the growth of American imperialism at the turn of the century and the creation of an international financial system, Mexico’s direct relationship to Asia and the Pacific had diminished considerably, especially in the decline of the silver trade. Nevertheless, Mexico’s route of development intersected with a racial politics grounded in a fusion of Euro-centrism and indigenous idols that did not tolerate the incorporation of the Chinese in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

Mexicali’s early economy set the conditions for an exceptional form of governance. The dependence upon Chinese commercial networks as the engine of economic activity and the vice economy for tax revenues put Baja California’s administrators at odds with

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, "Mestizofilia, Biotipología y Eugenesia en el Mexico Posrevolucionario: Hacia Una Historia de la Ciencia y el Estado, 1920-1960," *Relaciones* 21, no. 81 (2000): 57-92.

<sup>8</sup> Jose Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cosmica*, trans. Dider. Tisdell Jaen (Los Angeles: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Jose Angel Espinoza, *El Problema Chino en Mexico* (Mexico City: Sonora, 1931). Jose Angel Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora* (Mexico City: Sonora, 1932).

<sup>11</sup> Espinoza, *El Problema Chino en Mexico*. Espinoza, *El Problema Chino en Mexico*.

nationwide mandates. Chapter 6 follows a historically neglected Mexican politician, Abelardo Rodríguez, as he devises strategies to undermine the Chinese community and establish, what he called, a “genuine Mexican colonization” of the peninsula.<sup>12</sup> His work as governor of the peninsula brought him into the national spotlight, as he became interim-president of the Republic. As president he bargained with the rise of labor union power and the need for economic reform. I end by recounting the national expropriation conducted by Rodríguez’s successor, Lázaro Cárdenas, and the eviction of Mexicali’s Chinese farmers.

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<sup>12</sup> Abelardo Rodríguez, *Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927* (Mexicali: 1928).

## Chapter 6: The Reign of Abelardo Rodríguez

The 1920s was a global boom in cotton trade as was evident in the trends of the Pacific cotton corridor. China imported more cotton in this period than ever before and irrigated colonization throughout North America accelerated. In this period Chinese cotton ranches grew to their greatest extent with record exports. In 1923 President Obregón wrote to the Secretary of Foreign Relations to reassure him that Chinese migration to Mexicali would still be permitted and desired for the productivity of the Baja California territory.<sup>1</sup> Mexicali had become an important and reliable destination for Chinese emigrants throughout the diaspora. As the Obregón administration demobilized the rebellious fervor of the Mexican Revolution, a new nationalism emerged that viewed the achievements of the Chinese in Mexicali as a threat to the nation. This political change occurred during Mexicali's first great cotton boom.

A year later, with the appointment of Plutarco Elías Calles as President of Mexico, the treaty with China was altered and disallowed new immigrants into the country. With one election, the political tide within Mexicali had shifted from the survival and maintenance of political institutions to the consolidation of the Mexican national state. In Baja California the Chinese community was the fulcrum on which this transformation hinged. At the head of the consolidation of state power was a new economic class of political elites, whose political and economic careers were made through the subordination of the Chinese. Of these new elites, Abelardo Rodríguez is the star example.

In order to understand how the displacement of the Chinese population unfolded it is first helpful to understand how economic conditions and political institutions became fixated on suppressing the Chinese community. The economic opportunities and relative isolation from the main fighting of the Mexican Revolution made Baja California an attractive place for Mexican Chinese in the 1910s and 20s. While Baja California did experience military skirmishes, the revolution was both tactically and ideologically different from the struggles for power in central and northern Mexico. Revolutionary anarchist, Ricardo Flores Magón, led the fighting as he directly challenged American imperialists and the CRLC's colonization contract. This position did not align Baja California's revolutionary forces with other political currents and remained isolated from the rest of the country. Nevertheless, the Magónistas made an impact north of the border in Southern California as they targeted the source of foreign influence in Mexico. However, the lack of financial support eventually led to their subordination by military forces loyal to Venustiano Carranza in 1914. Carranza's interests lied in the pragmatism of maintaining Mexican sovereignty over the peninsula and the CRLC contract not only reinforced that right, but also defended against American annexation of the peninsula.<sup>2</sup> At this point, both the peninsula and Mexico benefited from its isolation. In its remoteness from the revolution, Mexicali's dependence on Chinese commercial networks for

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. B, "Letter from the Office of the President to the Secretary of Foreign Relations," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1923).

<sup>2</sup> Lowell L. Blaisdell, *The Desert Revolution : Baja California, 1911* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). The CRLC's operations benefited from the laize-faire approach of Mexican administrators as well as their tacit acceptance of the Chinese presence. If the peninsula had been annexed by the U.S. it would jeopardize the profitability of the entire operation because the Chinese would be disallowed under the Chinese Exclusion Acts.

the cotton industry and on the taxes raised by the vice sector of the economy which were discussed in Part II were heightened.

Mexicali's isolation from the national revolution ended in 1920 when the *Norteños* took power with the assassination of Carranza. When Alvaro Obregón took over the presidency in 1920 he represented a cadre of wealthy Mexicans from northern states whose collaborative drive to capture and maintain the power of the revolutionary state gave them the name *Norteños*; people of the north. The Baja California governor, Cantú, had supported the Carranza regime and was dethroned by Obregón's claim to federal authority. The governor's six years in office (1914-1920) contributed to the development of Mexicali's economy by encouraging the growth of the Chinese community. The departure of Cantú in 1920 sparked anxiety among Mexicali's Chinese as they contemplated their fate under the new administration. In response, executives of the CRLC met with the Mexican consul-general in Los Angeles to gain reassurances that the Chinese would not be forced out of their leases. Through an interpreter, the CRLC wrote a letter in Chinese to the Agricultural Congress of Mexicali (a loose association of mostly Chinese cotton farmers) communicating the Mexican government's guarantee to protect their rights to conduct business.<sup>3</sup> This guarantee helped to foster the growth in migration described in Chapter 5.

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<sup>3</sup> Harry Chandler, "Letter to the Camara Agricola Nacional," in CRLC: Correspondence (Corona Del Mar: Sherman Library, 1920).

Emilio C. ...

亦將墨領事來信照譯唐文如下

華日人等可以安心矣。

亦因墨國內亂。謠言紛起。人之有自危之心。今本公司得接墨領事來信。力言保護。各華日人等可以安心矣。

加辦寬墨西哥田畜公司總理張利振自辦君鑒。敬啟者。亦因墨國內亂。謠言紛起。政府有仇視外藉僑民。兼害及其在墨之財產等情。本領事為救國代表。特為宣佈。凡在墨地之居民。不論內外。及其之財產。政府一律保護。至于貴公司之田畝。華日人等之財產物業。自必加意保護。為此佈告。願爾旅居墨國之農工商華日人等。務宜守法自重。勿被冒稱有權賞罰者之引誘。或恫嚇。以致生出非法所為。干礙政府法律。務宜謹守中立。崇慕和平。是為至盼。

卅年八月三日 墨西哥國領事 赫埃路布 上言

Cámara Agrícola Nacional

Figure 12 Source: CRLC: Correspondence. Sherman Library. Corona del Mar, CA.

The letter illustrates the importance of Chinese farming activities to CRLC operations. Nevertheless, the fact that Mexicali had become “overrun” by Chinese and was home to a vibrant vice economy was widely perceived as an indication of Cantú’s shameful handling of a fledgling territory in the emergent nation.<sup>4</sup> As Obregón's loyalists successively took the office of Baja California’s northern district governor, they came to realize that Cantú’s tolerance, indeed encouragement, of Chinese migration was actually a pragmatic approach to maintaining Mexican sovereignty at the nation’s distant borderlands.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1920s Mexicali remained outside of Mexico’s national trends, but this time as a matter of strategic exemption from federal policy. Mexico’s moral programs of

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodríguez* (UABC, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> The tenure of Baja California’s governors during the 1920s was dictated by how effectively they could manage these contradictions. Needless to say, many failed, often leaving office in less than a year.

prohibition, the struggle for power against the Catholic church and the anti-Chinese campaigns were all symptoms of a national state vying for power. If these reforms were to be applied to Baja California it would destroy the very foundation of Mexicali's existence: the Chinese community and the vice industry.<sup>6</sup> Instead of disrupting Mexicali's shameful existence, the *Norteños* used it to aggressively renovate the institutions of state power. In 1922, Obregón's legal counsel drafted a policy brief articulating the exemption of Baja California from national reforms because of its designation as a federal territory. It cited Article 115 of the Mexican constitution that designated the power of the federal government to create municipalities as the basis of territorial division and the administration of federal policies. The brief argued that Chinese casinos should be permitted so long as the taxes from these establishments provided vital funding for the constitution of federal power in that territory. Through this use of administrative law the territorial governor increased the power to "enact" and the capacity to "implement the laws issued by the Congress of the Union."<sup>7</sup>

Beginning in the 1920s Baja California's governors negotiated individual contracts with Chinese partners to setup casinos. Mexicans and Americans could not legally operate vice businesses in Mexicali. These laws created and reinforced the notion that Chinese depravity is a natural phenomenon that should merely be contained. The denigration of gambling gave Chinese games a bad image. As Mexicali grew it became harder and harder for the Chinese to separate the rural agricultural sector from the urban leisure sector. While many Chinese enjoyed the casinos, little did they know that the fees collected from their leisure activities would contribute to undermining the community? One of the first contracts was drawn up between Governor José Inocente Lugo and Ching Sing and Co. The five members from the Ching Sing partnership agreed to the dubious terms of the contract to open a casino in downtown Mexicali. Besides the exorbitant fees of \$25,000 in monthly operating fees and \$3,000 monthly inspection fees, the more debasing articles of the contract state that the casino must only be patronized by "the Yellow race" upon penalty of additional fines.<sup>8</sup> Chinese casinos such as these were established all along Baja's border with California. Through these contracts, casinos became a major a source of trouble for the Chinese community. Because these casinos were an enormous source of public revenue and ultimately tied to the productivity of the cotton harvests, Baja California's governors reluctantly adopted Cantú's practice of permitting Chinese immigration.<sup>9</sup> When Obregón's successor Plutarco Calles took office in 1924, he continued the practice of contracting casinos but shut off entry of new Chinese immigrants into Mexico.

American Prohibition and Baja California's exemption put Mexicali's red-light districts in a position of virtual monopoly in alcohol sales, gambling, and other vicious commodities and services. This economic activity propped up the local government through

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<sup>6</sup> Mexican politicians were willing to make such sacrifices in order to maintain control of the Baja Peninsula; several American's officially and unofficially called for the annexation of the Mexican territory. These politicians would not stand for loosing more land to the Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> P. V. Michel, "Informe del Abogado Consultor," in Dirección General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1922).

<sup>8</sup> José Inocente Lugo et al., "Contract between Ching Sing and Co. with the Governor of the Territory of Baja California," in Dirección General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1922).

<sup>9</sup> José Inocente Lugo, "Letter from the Governor of Baja California to the Office Chief of the Governorship," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1923). The CRLC was delighted by the governor's disposition towards the Chinese, because these period marks some of the most profitable years for cotton and the most rapid expansion of Chinese cotton growing operations.

the practice of open legalization and strict regulation and taxation. In 1922 Mexicali produced more than \$1 million in taxes and fees from the Chinese casinos; in the following year the amount collected more than doubled.<sup>10</sup> The rhetoric of anti-Chinese campaigns was not absent from Mexicali, but those in power saw no viable alternatives to removing the Chinese from the cotton fields or closing the casinos; both threatened to destroy the agricultural colony.<sup>11</sup> Situated between these circumstances Baja California's governors leaned on the casinos, bars and clubs and siphoned money from the Chinese community into subsidies for Mexican businesses as well as into line their own pockets. The political position of Baja California elites towards the Chinese community was self-serving because regulating Chinese casinos was a lucrative form of taxation.<sup>12</sup>

It was not until Abelardo Rodríguez took the office of Baja California's territorial governorship that state actors systematically eroded and displaced the foundations of the Chinese community there. Elsewhere in Mexico local elites rallied support for anti-Chinese campaigns, but in Baja California Mexican citizens were not yet a majority requiring different tactics.<sup>13</sup> Mexicans who grew up in Mexicali knew the Chinese as business partners, neighbors, and local storeowners.<sup>14</sup> While his predecessors acted as mediators between local conditions and the federal politics of Mexico City, Governor Rodríguez took incisive action to undermine the Chinese business community in an effort to build a racially Mexican working class as envisioned by President Calles and other public intellectuals like Vasconcelos and Gamio. Their vision of Mexican nationalism was rooted in an ideology of racial superiority achieved through centuries of *mestizaje*, or race mixing, under Spanish colonialism. Mexican independence and the Revolution were self-evident of the progress achieved by the results of this *mestizaje*. The condition of Baja California tried their commitment to this notion of a national race, transfixing their attention on the Chinese as a racial problem to be solved through forced removal.

Over the course of Governor Rodríguez's tenure he came to rely a three strategies to alter the racial composition of Baja California's economy and population. He used taxes and fees applied only to Chinese, the operation of Chinese contracted casinos, and selective detention and deportation of key individuals. In these acts Rodríguez reasoned that he could cultivate a new class of Mexican entrepreneurs and small business owners without destroying the regional economy. According to Rodríguez he had "taken all reasonable steps to rid this country of the tainted elements that sought refuge in the prosperity of the region, bringing

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<sup>10</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodríguez*. Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965".

<sup>11</sup> If the vice sectors were heavily taxed then the agricultural sector was only nominally taxed. Nevertheless, they were intrinsically linked. Taxing agriculture could scare away investors and farmers. Without cotton, Mexicali would not have been able to sustain the vitality of its red-light district. Without the red-light district, Mexicali could not afford to maintain its territorial authority

<sup>12</sup> Schantz, 185

<sup>13</sup> For more on punitive state action in other parts of Mexico in the 1920s see Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth-Century United States-Mexican Borderlands". Jacques Dambourges, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1931".

<sup>14</sup> Manuel Lee Mancilla and Maricela Gonzalez Felix, *Viaje al Corazon de la Peninsula: El Testimonio de Manuel Lee Mancilla* (Mexicali: Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 2000).

with them undesirable activities, promoting trouble and threatening public health.”<sup>15</sup> In this euphemistic rhetoric Rodríguez hid his racist malevolence behind his paternalistic nationalism. While openly despising the Chinese casinos, he privately owned, supported, and facilitated their expansion in Mexicali.

### *The Chinese Tax*

Abelardo Rodríguez’s reign produced an immediate dissonance with Chinese residents in Mexicali. In the place they built as home, they were regarded with suspicion and contempt. In 1924 Rodríguez issued a new tax of four pesos every three months from every male between the ages of twenty-one and fifty dedicated to funding a municipal public health care program. In practice the tax was only collected from the Chinese. While there is no record of them being denied access to the health care program, there is also no record that the program was ever implemented.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after the tax was advertised, Chinese residents frequently ended up in jail for refusing to pay.<sup>17</sup> This punitive tax targeted the Chinese causing humiliation to those who had to pay.<sup>18</sup> Racially discriminating taxes on the Chinese in Mexicali were not new, but what were new were the regularity of collections and the creation of “Special Municipal Collectors” who collected the payments, roughed them up and frequently hauled them off to jail when they refused to pay.<sup>19</sup> These municipal brutes began a new practice of strong-armed extortion that would continue for decades.<sup>20</sup> The tax made no distinction between Chinese nationals and naturalized Chinese Mexicans, reinforcing the racial boundaries of the Mexican nation. Even so, the Chinese protested this discriminatory treatment saying that the dubiously named Public Benefit tax, “in an exclusive way, by force - which translates into threats and imprisonment - is charged to our fellow Chinese. In fact, this tax, a tax on personal income, is rather special and unique to our Chinese countrymen.”<sup>21</sup> When pressed by his superiors Rodríguez argued that the tax was for the benefit of Mexicans. He warned that if the tax were repealed “you will be obliged to suspend public benefits... and provoke a notable malaise in addition to the general depression that the businesses in the region have suffered.”<sup>22</sup> The Special Collectors signaled a shift towards a combative administration operating with a siege mentality. The tax complicated border crossings from

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<sup>15</sup> Rodríguez, *Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927*.

<sup>16</sup> A. L. Rodríguez, "Letter from the Governor of Baja California to Confederation of Chambers of Commerce," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1925).

<sup>17</sup> José Inocente Lugo, "Letter from Lugo to the Secretary of Government," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1925).

<sup>18</sup> Yo-Tsao Yeu, "Letter from the Chinese Minister to the Secretary of External Relations," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1926). Yee Kim Chong and Juan Cheing, "Letter from the Chinese Association of Mexicali to the Secretary of State and the Government Release," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>19</sup> Chong and Cheing, "Letter from the Chinese Association of Mexicali to the Secretary of State and the Government Release."

<sup>20</sup> Horatio Mooers, "Settlement of Strike in Mexicali as Called by Commercial Clerks ("Empleados de Comercio")," in *Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records* (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1939).

<sup>21</sup> Yee Kim Chong and Juan Cheing, "Letter from the Chinese Association of Mexicali to the Secretary of Government," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>22</sup> A. L. Rodríguez, "Letter from the Governor of Baja California to the Secretary of Government," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1927).



Calexico to Mexicali, since Mexican immigration officials frequently detained the Chinese under suspicion of evading tax payments.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the municipality earned nearly \$100,000 a year from this tax.<sup>24</sup>

Governor Rodríguez's primary goal was increasing Baja California's Mexican population. The most effective means of doing so was to duplicate the model of irrigated colonization. The governor used much of the tax money collected from the Chinese to fund new irrigation projects, most notably the San Quentín Bay colony with the dam bearing his name. The ambitious project was slated to irrigate 70,000 acres of Baja California's west coast, growing cotton for export.<sup>25</sup> In his pursuit of economic development, Rodríguez was challenged most by remaining consistent to his political conviction that the peninsula's development derive from patriotic domestic sources.<sup>26</sup> The taxes collected from Mexicali's Chinese served as a substitute for foreign investment and further expenditures from the federal government.

With regularity the Chinese Association of Mexicali issued protests to both the Mexican government and Chinese Legation.<sup>27</sup> The Legation made numerous petitions to the Mexican Government citing the constitutionality of such punitive taxes and arrests. The strain of diplomacy was clear in a letter from the Chinese Minister to Mexico that opened with the line, "I have the honor to report to Your Excellency that the inequitable tax is not yet repealed."<sup>28</sup> In addition, the Association made calculated rebuttals to the Rodríguez administration. In 1925 the Association petitioned the Municipality with a litany of their merits asking to be exempt from the Chinese tax, citing a history of compliance with Mexican laws, their involvement with public health efforts and their personal contributions to the municipality.<sup>29</sup> They also hired Mexican lawyers and enlisted the sympathies of ex-Governor Lugo to build their case against Rodríguez.<sup>30</sup> Lugo pleaded with Rodríguez and President Calles to rescind the tax because it was hurting the local economy. He argued that the Chinese were not keeping Mexicans from working, but actually provided opportunities for economic growth to employ more Mexicans.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, under international pressure from the Chinese Legation the tax was revoked. Furthermore, the draconian treatment of Chinese throughout Mexico during the Revolution, especially the 1911 massacre at Torreón, had created a negative image of Mexico abroad.<sup>32</sup> The Legation's public outcries damaged the

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<sup>23</sup> Chong and Cheing, "Letter from the Chinese Association of Mexicali to the Secretary of Government."

<sup>24</sup> Yeu, "Letter from the Chinese Minister to the Secretary of External Relations." This amount of revenue collected also supports larger population estimates for the Chinese community.

<sup>25</sup> "Mexico Plans Huge Project," *Los Angeles Times*, 6/27 1925.

<sup>26</sup> Abelardo Rodríguez, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: Nueva Mundo, 1962).

<sup>27</sup> The official record on Rodríguez's Chinese tax program is rather slim, however the numerous complaints issued by the Chinese provide the gritty details of the dubious program.

<sup>28</sup> T. Y. Yo, "Letter from the Chinese Legation Aaron Saenz, the Secretary of State and Foreign Relations," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>29</sup> Francisco Palacios, "Telegram from the Mexicali, Municipal Counsel to the National Chamber of Commerce," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1925).

<sup>30</sup> Jose Elias Castro, "Letter from Castro to President Obregon," in *Obregon-Calles* (Tijuana: 1924). Lugo, "Letter from Lugo to the Secretary of Government."

<sup>31</sup> Lugo, "Letter from Lugo to the Secretary of Government." R. C. Villagrano, "Letter from Villagrano to Lugo," in *Dirección General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1925).

<sup>32</sup> Kim, "Immigrants, Workers, Pioneers: The Chinese and Mexican Colonization Efforts, 1890-1930".

efforts of Mexican politicians to advertise Mexico as a modern secure nation-state. In response, President Calles, in a very uncharacteristic manner, wrote a letter to the governors of eight states with sizable Chinese populations requesting them to stop harassing the Chinese and protect them from public mobs. Throughout the letter President Calles characterized the Chinese as dependents of the state, refusing to consider them as Mexican citizens. He wrote that steps should be taken "to stop the embarrassment of the Mexican Executive office."<sup>33</sup> This reluctant admission from President Calles did not materialize into action in Baja California for another year when Rodríguez repealed the tax. Numerous letters were written to the governor and president thanking them for their generosity and kind-heartedness.<sup>34</sup> In the wake of the tax repeal, the governor's legal counsel took notice that high taxes on the Chinese were not effective at encouraging them to leave, and that more direct action was needed.<sup>35</sup> Through the tribulations of the Chinese tax, Rodríguez increasingly searched out "legal" means to undermine the Chinese community. He remained in constant contact with high-level officials regarding the permissibility of certain actions and the limitations of particular charges against the Chinese.<sup>36</sup>

#### *The Chinese Casinos and Selective Deportation*

The Chinese contracted casinos served an important role during the reign of Abelardo Rodríguez. The cotton boom produced a parallel service sector boom that saw the expansion of state-sanctioned casinos. In essence, he used these businesses as a prop to politically and economically disenfranchise the Chinese community. For Rodríguez the casinos were an enormous source of public revenue and private profit. After leaving his post as governor he had amassed a huge fortune by investing his own money into the opening of casinos and gambling dens.<sup>37</sup> The casinos served to redistribute wealth from the Chinese gamblers to Chinese casino owners and municipal coffers. During this period Chinese-grown cotton accelerated due to increased global demand and increased merchant mobility across the border. The higher returns encouraged Chinese farmers to expand their operations. Chinese laborers formed their own farming cooperatives and opened new leases with the CRLC. The more Chinese farmers earned, the more they spent in Mexicali. Wealth from cotton cultivation and American tourism flowed into Mexicali's urban economy and fueled the growth of casinos, bars, and nightclubs. In this way, the contracted casinos drove a wedge into the Chinese community. On the one hand, there were enterprising Chinese who sought out the casinos in spite of the hefty taxes and fees. On the other hand, the commercial business partnerships resented the predatory casinos because they tempted members to take

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<sup>33</sup> Plutarco Elias Calles, "Letter from President Calles to the Governors of Yucaton, Chiapas, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Sinaloa, Sonora, Nayarit, and Baja California," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1925).

<sup>34</sup> Chong and Cheing, "Letter from the Chinese Association of Mexicali to the Secretary of Government." Yen Pen Lam and Juan Cheing, "Letter from the Chinese Association of Mexicali to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>35</sup> Juan R. Platt, "Memorandum about the Expulsion of a Group of Chinese in the Northern District of Baja California," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1928).

<sup>36</sup> "Memorandum," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1924). A. L. Rodriguez, "Letter from the Governor of the District of Baja California to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1925). A. L. Rodriguez, "Telegram from Rodriguez to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1928).

<sup>37</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodríguez*.

gambling risks with their shares of the partnership's capital. Furthermore, the negative publicity from the casinos created trouble for the clean image sought by aspiring merchants and transnational Chinese cotton brokers. The bad reputation of Mexicali's casinos threatened their rights as border crossers. Not only did Governor Rodríguez foster the growth of casinos but he also exploited this division among the Chinese.

In other parts of Mexico, Chinese associations with political affiliations often fought violently over political conditions unfolding during China's Civil War. In Sonora political differences between Chinese escalated to violent street encounters and shoot-outs.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, in Mexicali there is little recorded violence between the Chee Kung Tong (CKT), Kuo Ming Tang (KMT), and the Chinese Association in Mexicali. Nevertheless, the governor unfairly characterized all Chinese organizations according to the Sonoran experience referring to all Chinese organizations as "mafias" using the inevitable violent outburst at a casino to accuse a Chinese business association of "pernicious" behavior. The use of this term served Rodríguez's larger goals of undermining the Chinese community because it signified social, economic as well as racial degeneration. Rodríguez took every opportunity to point out the Chinese origins of every local calamity. For instance, the more the business faction despised the casino faction, the greater the case Rodríguez could make that these business organizations were dangerous, all the while propping up the casinos. In this way, Rodríguez used the casinos to turn Chinese partnership associations into "pernicious mafias." In his published reflections on his term as governor he wrote a section entitled *The Expulsion of Pernicious Individuals of Chinese Nationality*, "They grow in numbers," he wrote, "and develop secret associations, true "mafias," in their antagonistic tendency they promote deadly hate among their followers."<sup>39</sup> This characterization was important because it allowed Rodríguez to arrest, detain, and deport individuals according to article 33 of the Mexican Constitution. Article 33 states, "The Federal Executive shall have the exclusive power to compel any foreigner whose presence he may deem inexpedient to abandon the national territory immediately and without the necessity of previous legal action."<sup>40</sup> Rather than mass roundups, Rodríguez had devised a scheme to present the President with accused criminals awaiting an Article 33 authorization to deport them.

In 1927, seven Chinese residents of Mexicali sat in the municipal jail awaiting deportation. A prominent individual in the Chinese casino circle, Sam Lee Cinco, accused the apprehended Chinese of smuggling arms into Mexico from the U.S. with the intent of doing harm to the Chinese casino owners.<sup>41</sup> Five of the detained Chinese were members of the CKT association and were also cotton farmers; the non-CKT member was the President of the Chinese Association. Immediately after their arrest the CKT petitioned the office of the president and the Chinese Legation. The CKT petition pleaded to allow their brothers to

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<sup>38</sup> Hu-Dehart, "Voluntary Associations in a Predominantly Male Immigrant Community: The Chinese on the Northern Mexican Frontier, 1880-1930."

<sup>39</sup> Rodríguez, Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927.

<sup>40</sup> E. Victor Niemeyer, *Revolution at Querétaro: The Mexican Constitutional Convention of 1916-1917* (Austin: University of Texas, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> E. C. H, "Letter from the Chief of the Consultative Office to the Governor of the Northern District of Baja California," in Dirección General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

present a case against their accusers promising their innocence.<sup>42</sup> The Chinese Legation asked President Calles to rescind the deportation orders and requested a thorough investigation because they suspected that the accusers had bought off public officials.<sup>43</sup>

After several weeks of dialog, the Chinese Association of Mexicali submitted a report to a cabinet-level Secretary detailing an investigation of the alleged crime. The report attests to the innocence of the detained and the trouble that casinos make for the Chinese community. The report argued that the Chinese who ran the casinos partner with the local government to bring charges against those in the community that protest their business.<sup>44</sup> In support of the case six Mexican citizens offered testimony to the good character of the detained persons. They went on record stating, "they are honest people of good conduct and have always been dedicated to their work; they have only been victimized by slanderous reports submitted to the authorities by their enemies."<sup>45</sup> The Office of Migration submitted two further testimonies to the case: one from Ramon Wong, a restaurant owner and one from Sam Lee Cinco, the casino owner. Cinco was primary negotiator for Chinese contract casinos since their beginning in 1922.<sup>46</sup> Predictably, he blamed the accused of working with the mafia and smuggling guns. Meanwhile, Wong testified that the accused were innocent and were victims of the casino owner's political connections.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, the Secretary of Migration conducted their investigation and found no guns or ammunition to incriminate the accused.<sup>48</sup> Before an official determination could be made about the prisoners, Governor Rodríguez notified President Calles that they had been deported back to China.<sup>49</sup> These ordeals uncovered the governor's covert agenda, exposing public opinions that did not consider the Chinese a problem or a threat. These public moments only served to encourage more secretive tactics.

The governor executed a similar scheme the next year. In 1928 the murder of Francisco Chao was used to arrest, detain, and deport 33 residents of Mexicali, several of which were, again, prominent leaders of the Chinese community. The letter of protest from the Chee Kung Tong described to the president the cruel and arbitrary conditions of the arrest. According to the letter, just before New Years three police cars raced through the *colonia* China to arrive at a restaurant where the accused were sharing a meal. Sitting in one of the cars was the owner of Casino Chino, a local gambling hall. The armed police raided the

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<sup>42</sup> Guillermo Gay and Francisco Chiw, "Telegram from Pro-Logias Masicas Chinas de la Republica Mexicana to the Secretary of Government, Tejeda," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927). Chee Kung Tong, "Telegram from the Chee Kung Tong, Calexico to the Ministry of Government, D.F.," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>43</sup> Wong Pin Son et al., "Memorandum from the Chinese Legation to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>44</sup> Manuel Siu Chong, "Memorandum from Chong to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>45</sup> Luis Martinez and et al, "Letter from concerned citizens of Mexicali to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Palma, "Letter to the Secretary of Governace," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1922).

<sup>47</sup> Juan Cinco, "Memorandum from Cinco to the Office of Migration," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>48</sup> Adolfo Miranda, "Letter from the Secretary of Migration to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1927).

<sup>49</sup> A.L Rodriguez, "Letter from Governor Rodriguez to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicos, 1927).

restaurant and arrested everyone in the room, tearing the place up in the process. They then proceeded through the streets ransacking homes, businesses, commercial houses and the lodge of the Chee Kung Tong. The letter includes the following list of individuals arrested that night and their occupation.<sup>50</sup>

Name	Occupation
Luis Chong	Broker
Ug Yuen	Restaurant Employee
Luis Wong	Broker
Ho Song	Farmer
Lee Mee	Broker, Store Owner
Ug Wo	Farmer
José Wong	Restaurant Owner
Wong Chin Pan	Broker
José Lim Song	Tailor
Joaquin Marsuel	Farmer
Jesus Garcia Ng	Restaurant Owner, President of the Chinese Association of Mexicali
Jung Bing Yue	Broker, Accountant, Treasurer of the Chinese Association of Mexicali
Ignacio Leon	Restaurant Employee
Chee Chew	Broker
Ha Wing	Launder
Ramon Wong	Broker, President of Chee Kung Tong
Wong Hang	Laborer

From the list of prisoners it is clear that this police raid was an opportunistic and strategic strike against the Chinese community. Merely working at the restaurant, several were incidentally captured. However, many of the prisoners were important political leaders and liaisons for the Chinese community. The captured members the Chinese Association and the Chee Kung Tong played important political roles coordinating economic and social activity in Mexicali and maintained relationships with the CRLC and other Chinese abroad.<sup>51</sup> They were also uniquely positioned to sponsor and facilitate new immigration because they had access to both work opportunities and financing. While these political positions necessarily aided the business operations of Chinese cotton growers, many of the brokers and farmers were also directly involved in the production and trade of cotton. Several of the captured brokers were key individuals in La Nueva China, a large commercial cotton trading house, and Mae Mork Co. an important financing and brokerage partnership association. The Chinese Legation quickly responded to the Mexican government requesting an investigation of wrongful deportations and incarcerations at Mexicali.<sup>52</sup> The CKT and Chinese Association continued

<sup>50</sup> Y. Won Chee, "Letter from Won Chee to the President," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1929).

<sup>51</sup> Lee Mancilla and Gonzalez Felix, *Viaje al Corazon de la Peninsula: El Testimonio de Manuel Lee Mancilla*. Auyón Gerardo, *El Dragón en el Desierto: Los Pioneros Chinos en Mexicali*.

<sup>52</sup> Secretary of Foreign Relations, "Letter from the Secretary of Foreign Relations to the Secretary of Government," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1929).

their protest in the subsequent months claiming that in all the different chapters of this organization around the world, they have never experienced this kind of harassment.<sup>53</sup> However, these protests were to no avail. Governor Rodríguez refused to any form of intercession citing limitations concerning suspects of “violent crimes.”<sup>54</sup> After spending nearly four months in Mexicali’s municipal jail, the governor reported to President Gil’s cabinet that the Article 33 deportations had been successful.

It was not until the 1925 Calles address to his governors that Rodríguez used the casinos to prop up the mafia image of Chinese organizations in Mexicali. The restaurant incident marks the second time that the Governor and Chinese casino owners have targeted leaders of the CKT and the Chinese Association of Mexicali for deportation. However, these were not the only times that the governor used Article 33 to selectively deport individuals from the Chinese cotton growing business community. While the Chinese casino owners had an interest in silencing the protests against their operations, their well-being was ultimately subject to the governor’s larger plans to undermine the Chinese as an economic presence in Baja California. After first taking office, the governor took a swipe at the Chinese in 1924 without the help of Chinese casino owners.<sup>55</sup> In his first months as governor Rodríguez deported four members of the Chinese Association and Chee Kung Tong.<sup>56</sup> A telegram from President Obregón to the governor recognized the influential role that these individuals played and authorized Rodríguez to proceed, so long as there were no legal obstacles.<sup>57</sup>

Governor Rodríguez’s prejudice against the Chinese was more profound than merely seeking to replace them with *mestizo* Mexicans. The strategies employed by Governor Rodríguez (the Chinese tax, contract casinos, and selective deportation) were designed to increase the number of Mexican owned businesses in Mexicali. The policies he put in place transferred wealth from the Chinese cotton economy into subsidies for Mexican owned businesses. Meanwhile the deportations tried to destabilize the partnership operations and coordination in trade and brokerage. However, by the mid 1920s high-level federal officials developed the opinion that without a *mestizo* majority in Baja California, they stood to lose valuable water rights and possibly the territory itself. The Chief of the International Waters Committee of the Secretary of Foreign Relations wrote,

...[w]ithout fear of over-exaggeration, I think that without a prompt and forceful assessment of the problem of Asian immigration in the international river basins not only jeopardizes the success of the negotiations that Mexico will have to undertake to defend and define their rights to international rivers, but also, over time, we may fear the loss of ownership and nationality of the vast and rich lands affected.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tomas Poy, "Letter from Poy to President Gil," in Dirección General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1929).

Guillermo Gay, "Letter from Gay to President Gil," in Dirección General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1929).

<sup>54</sup> Ignacio Garcia Tellez, "Letter from the Department of Government to Governor Rodriguez," in Dirección General de Gobierno (Tijuana: 1929).

<sup>55</sup> A. L. Rodriguez, "Telegram from Rodriguez, Governor of Baja California to President Calles," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1924).

<sup>56</sup> Joaquin Nand, "Telegram from Nand to President Obregon," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1924).

<sup>57</sup> Alvaro Obregon, "Telegram from Obregon to Enrique Colunga," in Obregon-Calles (Tijuana: 1924).

<sup>58</sup> Rodriguez, Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927.

Governor Rodríguez adopted the belief that having a majority of Chinese in Baja California weakened Mexican claims to the waters of the Colorado River and put Mexico's sovereign claim to the territory into question. The diametric construction of a national *mestizo* Mexican race and a foreign degenerate Chinese race ruled out cultural and economic incorporation of the Chinese cotton ranches. The Chinese were so utterly foreign from the cultural vision of the nation that the large numbers of naturalized Chinese in Mexicali were of no consequence to this racial logic. Furthermore, in Chinese protests to the governor they framed the injustice of their treatment on claims to human decency and their hard work in helping to build a modern Mexico.<sup>59</sup> The construction of racial difference was crucial to the consolidation of the post-revolutionary state in Mexico. In national caricatures, this race drama was played by "the ominous threat of the Chinese dragon to the eagle of Anahuac."<sup>60</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century Northern Mexico was perceived as being settled by moral white Mexicans who had fostered the growth of industries in need of pliant *mestizo* labor, the presence of Chinese tarnished this self-image.<sup>61</sup> Northern Mexican politicians like Rodríguez considered Chinese immigration to be a "world danger" creating obstacles to modernization, despite the demonstrated growth of modern irrigated cotton cultivation and international trade.<sup>62</sup>

Since the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution and the collapse of global silver markets (the nation's most important export since the colonial period) the greatest objective of post-Revolutionary elites was the stabilization of the economy. Economic restructuring was not only a goal of the Revolution, but it also served to temper criticism and ward against further rebellion. In this respect agrarian reform became the most significant means to both appease revolutionary demands and organize national industrialization. Agrarian reform in Baja California through to the 1930s showed two important characteristics of the relationship between race, class, and nationality. Mexico's nationalist ideology elevated the significance of race for state officials and political elites in articulating domestic economic reforms. These notions squarely fixed race, nation, and territory into one objective, to prevent "the great yellow nucleus from colonizing the diverse regions of Mexico's international waters."<sup>63</sup> As governor, Rodríguez combined the geopolitics of international resources with the national discourse of racial progress as evidenced here,

It is well known that to deny water to Mexico in the Colorado River Delta is one of the most significant and direct impacts of the United States on Mexico, it has been forming and eventually will come to be developed, but the region is still an Asian empire. Until now, thankfully, this claim is exaggerated, but without taking some drastic measures it will likely become a reality. If Mexico does not seek to counter these elements with *genuinely Mexican colonization*, but rather facilitates the Chinese and Japanese and other similar breeds, there will come a time not far away in Mexico

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<sup>59</sup> Chee, "Letter from Won Chee to the President."

<sup>60</sup> Lee Mancilla and Gonzalez Felix, *Viaje al Corazon de la Peninsula: El Testimonio de Manuel Lee Mancilla*. 10

<sup>61</sup> Renique, "Race, Region and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s." Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> Rodríguez, *Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 17

when you will want to exercise sovereignty in this region and indeed that right will be too late to be achieved.<sup>64</sup>

This frame of mind effectively wrote the Chinese out of the definition of “genuine Mexican colonization.” According to this notion of development, the contracted casinos and head taxes were vital tools for financing subsidies for authentic Mexicans. In addition, Rodríguez’s nationalist reasoning blocked efforts by ex-governor José Inocente Lugo to cooperate with the Chinese Association of Mexicali to incorporate Mexican workers and farmers into standing regimes of cotton production.<sup>65</sup>

The elaborate racial designs of the architects of post-revolutionary agrarian Mexico could not ensure that the populace would adopt such racial and political logics to interpreting economic reform. The development of Mexicali’s irrigated colonization and the lead-up to federal expropriation demonstrates that anti-Chinese attitudes were not always popular. These somewhat amicable public relations with non-state actors during the early 1920s allowed some historians to conclude that, “Unlike Sonora, northern Baja did not see its remaining Chinese as a foreign threat to native interests but as an important part of the region's early development.”<sup>66</sup> This characterization was nevertheless fleeting. I will show how anti-Chinese politics did eventually become popular when the state defined access to resources in terms of race and pro-government unions gained more influence. This experience indicates that racial attitudes were not uniform but stratified among Mexicans in terms of region, ones location within the racial hierarchy, as well as class level. Chapter 7 examines the specific ways that revolutionary elites integrated anti-Chinese prejudice into national politics and manipulated racial ideology for the unification of a centralized capitalist state.<sup>67</sup>

The increasingly antagonistic relations between the territorial government and the Chinese in Mexicali were a direct outcome of state interventions. As governor Rodríguez fostered the growth of casinos, the concomitant service sector associated with the casinos flourished. As service sector employment swelled another important class was cultivated: labor unions. The next chapter discusses the rise of labor unions amidst the decline into the Great Depression and their attacks on the Chinese in Mexicali.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. emphasis added. 20-21

<sup>65</sup> Lugo, "Letter from the Governor of Baja California to the Office Chief of the Governorship.."  
Lugo, "Letter from Lugo to the Secretary of Government."

<sup>66</sup> Duncan, "The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929."

<sup>67</sup> Izquierdo, *El Movimiento Antichino en Mexico (1871-1934): Problemas del Racismo y del Nacionalismo Durante la Revolucion Mexicana*. Renique, "Race, Region and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s."



## Chapter 7: Economic Decline and Racial Dimensions of Mexican Labor

Unions were late to come to Mexicali, because Chinese partnership associations organized much of the labor. These organizations were governed by fluid capital/labor relations that did not mesh with the expansive capital/labor divide throughout Mexico. This fundamental difference in economic structure was explained through racial difference where obstinate Chinese only hired co-ethnics while Mexican unions represented the liberal interests of non-discrimination. Under Governor Rodríguez casinos, bars, restaurants, and other urban services greatly expanded. This growing economy became fertile grounds for organized labor. In this environment everyone had a union, including groups like bartenders, waiters, dishwashers, musicians, even boxers.<sup>1</sup> While there were numerous groups of organized workers they did not necessarily wield great power to negotiate the terms of their labor. Mexican labor was to be patriotic, industrious, and above all, docile in governor's vision for an authentic Mexican settlement. Just as post-revolutionary ideology romanticized a mestizo citizenry, it did so in relation to their willingness to be molded by the national state. This concept is aptly represented in the title to Manuel Gamio's foundational 1916 text, *Forjando Patria* – literally, forging a country. This chapter explains how the Mexican state influenced organized labor in Mexico and abroad to view their collective interests in opposition to the Chinese.

To achieve this end in 1925 Governor Rodríguez established the Local Council of Conciliation and Arbitration. It signaled the development of a new state institution to manage the political economy of Mexicali, supposedly safe guarding the rights of Mexican laborers. The council negotiated labor relations between Mexican agricultural workers and American cotton growers who did not submit to the Chinese. With Rodríguez at the head of the Council, labor grievances were conveniently negotiated and coordinated with his program of economic development. With this arbitration council Chinese businesses in the urban core found intense resistance. This form of intervention supported union activity, but also constrained it. Through the Council, Rodríguez set the standard workday at ten hours and maintained steady wages and salaries across the economy. In 1926 he jailed 150 union members for disrupting American business operations.<sup>2</sup> He had a pattern of blocking certain grievances if they threatened his business partners or contradicted federal policy; an important issue I will pursue further in Chapters 7 and 8 with the demands of agrarian unions and federal land reform in the 1930s.

As the ranks of Mexicali's unions swelled their political agendas were systematically structured in terms of racial grievances. The Council facilitated the reconciliation of these grievances in accordance with the larger designs of "genuine Mexican colonization."<sup>3</sup> By the

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Antonio Samaniego Lopez, "Formacion y Consolidacion de las Organizaciones Obreras en Baja California, 1920-1930," *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 14, no. 2 (1998): 329-362. In Baja California, the history of labor unions begins in the service sector not in industrial production like in other parts of Mexico. This structural difference is significant because it meant that industrial labor organizing tactics were deployed in more intimate situations; rather than factories, picket lines and protests became focused on individual stores, restaurants, and other urban sites.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Rodríguez, *Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927*.

late 1920's the Chinese had become a focused target of the labor unions. It was far easier to maintain this negative image of the Chinese with recent Mexican arrivals, than with those who had lived in Mexicali. As the American economy began to lose ground, Mexican immigrants there were being singled out in the U.S. on the basis of racial difference not unlike the Chinese in Mexico. All told, the U.S. repatriated hundreds of thousands of people back to Mexico during the Great Depression. With the passage in the U.S. of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1924 the immigration enforcement apparatus designed to police Chinese migration increasingly targeted Mexicans, as they became more widely integrated in American agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Just as the Chinese Exclusion Acts shaped Chinese communities in Mexico, U.S. immigration policy also shaped Mexican communities in Mexico. While both Chinese and Mexican communities were discriminated against in U.S. policy and served similar economic roles in the California economy, Mexican workers could not see eye-to-eye with the Chinese in Mexicali.

Mexicans being repatriated from California were drawn to Mexicali as the largest urban center in Baja California. Agricultural laborers deported from the U.S. would have found Mexicali to be similar to other rural depots in the western U.S. – especially with the central role of Asians in the rural sector.<sup>5</sup> The racial division of labor and the segregated social environment on both sides of the border fueled the notion that class issues were fundamentally racial in character. Repatriated Mexicans who were socially and economically excluded from whiteness in the U.S. encountered American casinos and bars in Mexicali that did not permit Mexicans and an agricultural sector predominantly run by Chinese associations – agitation from labor leaders helped to incense a rapidly growing constituency.<sup>6</sup>

The perception of victimization at home and in the U.S. illustrates how racial attitudes in Mexico were stratified. In this context, Mexican unions were able to bolster their claims to national privilege and racial superiority by arguing against American boundaries of whiteness while at the same erecting racial barriers in the face of the Chinese. It is, however, unlikely that Mexican unions exhibited prejudice against the Chinese as a tactic to gain acceptance by American standards of whiteness. Instead, working class Mexican racial superiority was thought to be more politically liberal than the arrogant supremacy of white American purity, because it was revolutionary, pro-indigenous (at least in rhetoric), and defiantly anti-American. However, political elites may have been more motivated to publicly adopt a national whiteness resembling American racial discourse as a political strategy in the global conversation amidst the modern community of nations. These different subject positions illuminate the differentiation in ways that racial discourse informed the political logic used by diverse audiences. This important argument will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 8.

One strong contributing factor to the development of anti-Chinese attitudes of residents in Mexicali is the expansion of the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*, CROM). While CROM developed out of local labor struggles in the northern states, it became a national federation supporting union demands and advocating for land reform. During the Calles administration, CROM became subservient to the programs of state-led modernization and the industrialization of agriculture. This national labor federation consolidated power by catering to conservative pro-government

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<sup>4</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*.

<sup>5</sup> Chan, *This Bitter-Sweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910*.

<sup>6</sup> Estrada, *Gobierno y Casinos: El Origen de la Riqueza de Abelardo L. Rodríguez*.

agendas and strong-arming more radical labor syndicates.<sup>7</sup> Because CROM members coordinated political action across state lines as a national federation and its leaders had been active in anti-Chinese campaigns in other states like Sonora, it is reasonable to assume that as CROM members sought out Mexicali's service sector unions, they brought with them virulent anti-Chinese propaganda and strategies of direct action against Chinese enclave economies exhibited in the past decade. In these formative years after the revolution, CROM received inspiration and consultation from high-level members of the American Federal of Labor (AFL) as they sought to strengthen their capacity to influence domestic and international conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Among these conflicts was the issue of Asian labor, particularly that of the Chinese. Samuel Gompers, founder and president of the AFL, was a most vocal opponent to the presence of the Chinese in America.<sup>9</sup> By 1929 most of Mexicali's unions had become affiliated with CROM, driving out other more radical unions. The most common strategies employed were boycotts and shutting down businesses for non-compliance of Mexican labor laws requiring fifty percent of employees to be Mexican nationals. As the world economy plunged into an economic depression at the end of the decade, Mexicali's urban economy hemorrhaged.

The bleak economic situation exacerbated racial tensions when CROM-affiliated unions lashed out at the Chinese. Many of the local unions went on strike boycotting Chinese businesses. Workers gathered at the front door, blocking and threatening patrons as they approached. These picketers were euphemistically referred to as the "White Guards."<sup>10</sup> While it was speculated that some of the picketers were hired by the CROM to protest, the demonstrations were nevertheless more popular than before. The bartender's union was very effective at inflicting economic damage on these businesses. Seizing the political opportunity, Governor Rodríguez raised the minimum level of Mexican employment in foreign owned businesses from fifty percent to eighty percent.<sup>11</sup> This policy change achieved two objectives: to exert more pressure on Chinese businesses and win favor with union leaders. The enforcement of this law was met with confusion and frustration from the urban Chinese business community because many of the business operations were partnership associations – there were no employees. In other words, the downtown Chinese partnerships were forced to take on Mexican workers that did not contribute capital to the shareholding association but nevertheless collected wages for labor as clerks, waiters, and other menial positions. This change in the relationship to capital and labor within the partnership associations probably had some effect on their capacity to do business amidst the economic depression. The associations' reluctance to take on Mexican workers was perceived as

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<sup>7</sup> John Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*, 10th anniversary ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Gregg Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?: The American Federation of Labor, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). This relationship will be discussed in more depth in the concluding section of the chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey Levenstein, "The AFL and Mexican Immigration in the 1920s: An Experiment in Labor Diplomacy," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (1968): 206-219. Gompers undoubtedly passed along the condemnation of the Chinese in his advisory role to the Mexican federation although more research is required to understand the extent.

<sup>10</sup> *La Opinion*, "News article: Another Version of the Ensenada Affair, a statement from the leaders of the anti-Chinese campaign (trans.)," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>11</sup> Lopez, "Formacion y Consolidacion de las Organizaciones Obreras en Baja California, 1920-1930."

prejudice against Mexican workers and defiance of a nationalist policy. The labor law created acidic relations between the Chinese business community and local labor leaders.

In the last weeks of Abelardo Rodríguez's term in 1930, he dealt a heavy blow to the Chinese business community. After news of dismal economic conditions, the governor closed down eleven commercial houses owned by Chinese partnership associations because they did not meet the minimum number of Mexican employees.<sup>12</sup> This surprise move was baffling to the Chinese cotton growers. These commercial houses had several Mexican partners and facilitated the flow of financing between members in the partnership, brought imports to Mexicali, organized cotton harvest and ginning operations, and brokered purchase orders from across the Pacific for export. While the commercial houses were not sites of actual production, they facilitated the networking necessary to coordinate the large scale of economic activity. The charge was merely cover for another strategic attack on the network of relations in Chinese cotton-ranching partnerships. The protests from the CKT, KMT, the Chinese Association of Mexicali, and the Chinese legation demonstrated how important these commercial houses were.<sup>13</sup> Tsey Foo and Fernando Chee of the Chinese Association pleaded for an appeal to "higher justice" to rectify the "unspeakable atrocities" brought against the peaceable, hardworking and solvent Chinese cotton growing collectives.<sup>14</sup> In the subsequent months, the new governor responded to protests with indifference, explaining to Cabinet officials that because the Chinese were not cooperative he would only devote resources to improving the employment of Mexican workers.<sup>15</sup> The obstinate stance of politicians played to popular anti-Chinese sentiments while refusing to acknowledge alternatives to undermining the Chinese cotton-growing cooperatives.

Pressure on Mexicali's rural Chinese operations did not materialize until the unions had established a strong urban foundation. Yet, Mexicali's rural economy functioned in unique ways that shaped how Mexican agrarians perceived Chinese leaseholders on American owned land in Mexico. The global decline in world cotton prices and the slumping American economy signaled a dramatic change for the Mexicali Valley. As American cotton became less profitable, the amount of land under cultivation decreased in the U.S.<sup>16</sup> The economic depression had similar effects in Mexico where the majority of the country grew cotton for domestic manufacturing operations, meaning that as manufacturing slowed so too did the domestic demand for cotton. Mexicali, was one of few exceptions to Mexico's domestically consumed cotton most of which was exported to China and Japan as discussed earlier. While many national economies retreated to protectionism during the Great Depression, Japan embarked on campaigns of territorial expansion in an effort to improve its access to raw materials. This build up of military forces maintained a high demand for cotton imports from

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<sup>12</sup> M. Z. Otalora, "Letter from the Secretary of External Relations to the Secretary of Government," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1930).

<sup>13</sup> Eduardo Vasconcelos, "Letter from the Secretary of Government to the Governor of the Northern District of Baja California," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1930). "Telegram from Chapultepec to Mexico City," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: 1931).

<sup>14</sup> "Telegram from Chapultepec to Mexico City."

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Trejo Lerdro de Tejada, "Letter from the Governor of the Northern Territory of Baja California to the Secretary of Government," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1931).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Snyder, *Cotton Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

the U.S., Mexicali being one of the principle sites of production.<sup>17</sup> The network of associations and business relationships of the Chinese sustained Mexicali's connection to Japan's voracious appetite for cotton. To Chinese observers and American industrialists, these market conditions were obvious, but Mexican observers were sidetracked by the anxieties of U.S. capitalism and domestic labor market concerns. So, as cotton farms declined in Mexico and Mexican workers in California cotton fields were repatriated, Chinese cotton growers sustained healthy levels of production in Mexicali. CRLC records confirm that throughout the 1920s and early 1930s the Chinese continued to lease lands *en masse* and were the principle borrowers of CRLC crop mortgages. The Chinese must have wondered why the Mexicans couldn't see them as a link to the lucrative Asian markets.

During Abelardo Rodríguez's term as governor in the 1920s he saw each year hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers migrate north to California to fill demand for labor created by urbanization and the expansion of irrigated colonization. Meanwhile, Rodríguez resented the success of Chinese cotton growing operations in Mexicali's cotton boom. By the Depression era more than two million Mexican migrants had settled in Southern California, circulating through the region's rural and urban economies; along with them, tens of thousands of Filipino workers replaced poor white and Japanese agricultural laborers. Certainly many of Rodríguez's development programs (funded by fees collected from the casinos and the Chinese tax) were designed to entice Mexican workers to return back to Mexico. Part of Rodríguez's interest, as President, in organized Mexican laborers abroad is the expectation that they would return with advanced training and valuable expertise in industrial agriculture to help the peninsula flourish. Later, Manuel Gamio even went so far as to argue that repatriated Mexican agricultural workers were the most valuable and advanced in the country, not just because of their experience in the U.S. but because they would bring modern industrial culture to bear on their *mestizo* and indigenous countrymen, facilitating their modernization.<sup>18</sup> These expectations shaped how the Mexican state intervened in unions in the U.S. as well as the reception of returnees in Mexico.

By the time Rodríguez took the office of president there was already a long tradition of cross-border political organizing. Some of which was based on anti-Chinese labor organizers.<sup>19</sup> Although, since the 1920's the post-revolutionary state took a greater interest in molding migrants' position in labor markets, structuring educational programs, and espousing nationalist ideology.<sup>20</sup> U.S. officials were tolerant of these interventions because they were ultimately of a conservative and anti-communist influence on the Mexican communities that consuls interacted with. Because Mexican workers in the U.S. had exhibited radical tendencies in the past with great impact, most notably the revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón, U.S. officials welcomed the soft hand of power in the form of intervention from consular officers. The Mexican state also contributed to the popularization of racialized images of Mexicans in the U.S. Efforts of the Mexican Consulate to calm dissent in Mexican communities in the U.S. helped promote the image of the conquered, docile, and simple-

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<sup>17</sup> "Orient Imports More U.S. Cotton," *Wall Street Journal*, 7/22 1931. "Editorial of the Day: Japan in Cotton," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4/8 1930. Drake Waldo, "Shipping News and Activities at Los Angeles Harbor," *Los Angeles Times*, 4/5 1930. "December Exports of Farm Products (Washington Bureau)," *Wall Street Journal*, 2/15 1930.

<sup>18</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Hacia un Mexico Nuevo: Problemas Sociales* (Mexico City: unregistered, 1935).

<sup>19</sup> Lee, "Orientalisms in the Americas."

<sup>20</sup> Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest*.

minded *peon* that was so attractive to American agribusiness. Ironically, the Mexican state idealized these same workers as idealized modern industrious *mestizo* citizens. Here I present evidence that the Rodríguez administration tried to use Mexican worker's relationship to Japanese growers in California to build animosity against Asians in an effort to popularize the displacement of Chinese and Japanese farmers in Mexicali.

Union organizing and labor disputes across California escalated in the late 1920s, however they became increasingly tempered by pro-government intervention. Agents of the Mexican government encouraged conservative pro-business views in Mexican communities in the U.S. as a means to train docile Mexican workers for an eventual return. In 1928 conservative Mexican labor leaders in Imperial Valley, just north of Mexicali, formed the United States *Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanos* (CUOM) modeled on CROM in Mexico. The union tried to balance legality and anti-communism with support and encouragement of the workers. In the union's founding charter it established the intention of coordinating with unions in Mexico and cooperating with the U.S. government to facilitate efficient repatriations. While they supported the renegotiation of contracts and organized strikes, the union lost membership until it was revived in the El Monte berry strike of 1933.<sup>21</sup> The vice consul in Los Angeles helped to reorganize the workers into the *Confederacion Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos* (CUCOM) as a means to block the influence of more radical elements. But just as important, I argue that the strike provided the opportunity for political elites in Mexico to agitate Mexican workers against Japanese growers. The spread of the El Monte berry strike to nearby areas drew the attention of Mexican elites and CROM leaders. Since the reorganization of CUCOM the leaders were in constant contact with CROM in Mexicali and the Rodríguez administration. Ex-President Calles even made personal monetary contributions to the El Monte strikers and met with CUCOM leaders in Baja California to provide "counsel and recommendations regarding the orientations that the strike should assume."<sup>22</sup> Calles' influence went beyond encouragement; he put deliberate emphasis on the exploitation of Mexican workers by Japanese growers. The new union became exclusive to Mexican nationals cutting out valuable white and Filipino allies. With this type of leadership, CUCOM injected racial meaning and national symbolism into Mexican workers' labor struggles.<sup>23</sup>

The El Monte strike in the spring of 1933 resulted in a new set of conditions that sustained tensions between Japanese growers and Mexican workers. The settlement of the strike produced a contract between the Japanese growers association and the broad based affiliations of Mexican Unions including CUCOM and CROM. These new contracts focused

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<sup>21</sup> Devra Anne Weber, "The Organizing of Mexicano Agricultural Workers: Imperial Valley, and Los Angeles 1928-34, An Oral History Approach," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 3, no. 2 (1972): 307-350.

<sup>22</sup> "\$600 Mas de Calles a Los Huelgistas" *La Opinion*. June 30, 1933. cited in Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Gonzalez goes on to state that, "Mexican government authorities apparently found it useful to invoke Japanese racial imagery in their communications. Even [Mexican Consuls] were inclined to place more responsibility for the strike on the Japanese as a looked-down-upon ethnic group than on the growers of white landowners. By playing on the distrust of the Japanese that existed, [Mexican Consuls] could undermine the credibility of the growers" pg. 107. Even with this evidence, Gonzalez downplays the significance of race in the El Monte strike and the intentions of Mexican state more broadly. I argue that Mexican state intervention was precisely to interpose racialized meaning, not the mere window dressing that Gonzalez attributes it to.

workers attention on tensions with Japanese growers not the larger structural forces that shaped the industrial conditions of California agricultural markets. Later that summer, CUCOM and CROM leaders succeeded in putting Japanese Growers Associations into contracts in San Gabriel, Venice-Palms, Gardena, Palos Verde, San Fernando, Norwalk, and Long Beach.<sup>24</sup> The following year Japanese growers in San Diego were put into contract. Records show that the CUCOM and CROM helped to renegotiate with the Japanese Growers Associations every season until late 1935.<sup>25</sup> It should be noted here that radicals like William Velarde and Lillian Monroe helped to steer the CUCOM away from Mexican consul influence to become more inclusive and effective labor unions.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1933 CUCOM negotiations the union petitioned the U.S. National Labor Relations Board in grievance against the Japanese Vegetable Growers Association. Because Mexicans were ninety percent of the agricultural labor force in Southern California, they found particular strength in claims against non-white agriculturalists. Grievances against the Japanese Association resonated with American farming interests who resented the Japanese in the social class of other white growers. The NRLB's report on Imperial Valley helped the Mexican Union secure new contract agreements from the Japanese growers in 1935. Had the growers been white, the Mexican unions would probably not have had the same kind of success in negotiations<sup>27</sup> nor the support from Mexican elites.

These campaigns coincided with the CROM's legal offensive against the Chinese and Japanese farmers in Mexicali. First they organized a petition bringing charges against a Mexican lawyer for providing council to the Chinese Association and members of the chamber of commerce.<sup>28</sup> Second, they naively requested that the federal government cancel the farming contracts with the Chinese. These claims demonstrated how little the Mexican unions understood of their situation – the government did not contract with the Chinese associations but through the CRLC colonization contract.<sup>29</sup> This lack of understanding also illustrates how easily the unions were motivated by racial discourse as an organizing principle for collective action. Third, they began a massive weekly newspaper service to spread anti-Chinese agitation.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, the CROM in Mexicali claimed that Chinese cotton farms violated the eighty percent law in the Mexican labor codes and the farms should be

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<sup>24</sup> Stuart Marshall Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*. Reprint of 1946 Edition. (Madison: Arno Press, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Confederacion de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos, "Cooperation," in RG 25 (Laguna Niguel: NARA, 1933). Confederacion de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos, "Petition to the Japanese Growers Association of L.A. County," in RG 25 (Laguna Niguel: NARA, 1935).

<sup>26</sup> "Vegetable Men Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, 4/18 1936, 2. "Few Celery Men Found on Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, 4/19 1936, 1. This research indicates that Mexican workers who escaped the manacles of the Mexican state adopted identities that were not racially exclusive. Indeed, it may be argued that Mexican nationals became Mexican Americans by shedding racial antipathy, perhaps through the experience of racialization in the U.S.

<sup>27</sup> Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest*.

<sup>28</sup> Anselmo Diaz, "Letter from the General Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Sindicato Social Revolucionario Obrero Campesino de Mexiclai to the Secretary of the Interior," in *Direcion General de Gobierno* (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1933).

<sup>29</sup> Heriberto Bolano, "Telegram to the Office of the President from the Confederation of Unions and Workers of the Territory of Baja California," in *Papers of Abelardo L. Rodriguez* (Tijuana: 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Austin Spurlock, "Letter from Austin Spurlock, Inspector in Charge, INS Calexico, CA, to the District Director, INS Los Angeles, CA," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

nationalized.<sup>31</sup> This change from an urban service sector focus towards a rural agricultural front coincided with the reorganization of CUCOM and increased CROM participation in Mexican agricultural labor in the U.S.

While there is scarce source material about how Mexicali's Chinese adapted to the deportation of key functionaries, the closure of all the major local commercial houses, and the constant pressure from CROM union organizers, it is reasonable to suspect that two particular conditions contributed to the continued functioning of their cotton operations: increased assistance from the CRLC and the adaptive structure of shareholding partnership associations. Because Chinese diasporic social networks founded Mexicali, they undoubtedly played a role in the persistence of the cotton growing operations well into the 1930s. Because the Chinese partnership associations shifted membership constantly, losing key individuals was disruptive but not devastating. Partnerships like Mae Mork Co. (the president of which was deported in 1929) shared administrative and operational responsibilities, meaning that the partnership never relied on any single individual for its over all functioning. Although no official record could be found of direct CRLC assistance to its Chinese farmers, its attorneys Arturo, Edmundo, and Leonel Guajardo served as legal council for the Chinese Association of Mexicali throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the transnational networks of shareholding partnerships were crucial to surmounting the obstacles of irrigated colonization in a remote desert as evidenced by Lew Hing's Canton Bank in San Francisco and San Diego Chinese assistance with lobbying, financing, and responding to economic restrictions.<sup>33</sup>

As xenophobic pressure on Chinese farming operations increased, the CRLC gradually became more acquiescent to demands from the Mexican government. Fearful of losing its profitable colonization contract, the CRLC adapted to Mexicali's changing political climate. In 1926 federal labor inspector Cayetano Pérez Ruiz took a special interest in Mexicali and negotiated a deal with the CRLC to open new leases for small Mexican colonies. More importantly, Chinese partnership associations openly hired Mexican cotton pickers to help with the region's unemployment. The new Mexican colonies supported anarchist separatists from the CROM, aligning themselves with the emerging General Confederation of Workers (Confederacion General de Trabajadores), a reform faction of the CROM. Governor Rodríguez also supported the formation of small Mexican colonies on CRLC land throughout his term.<sup>34</sup> However, without connections to Japan's imperial marketplace and Chinese treaty ports, these Mexican farms failed to secure financing. Furthermore Chinese cotton ranches benefited from the flexible investment patterns of shareholding partnerships drawing resources from other locations in the diaspora. The face value of Chinese cotton farms increased the frustrations of Mexican farmers. Unable to see how the Chinese were capable of prospering; their shareholding partnerships, export brokers, and the expertise in cultivation were invisible to Mexican observers.

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<sup>31</sup> Manuel Balderas, "Letter from the Sub-Secretary of Governance to the Workers Union of Agua Caliente," in Papers of Abelardo L. Rodriguez (Tijuana: 1934). Eduardo Vasconcelos, "Letter to the Department of Labor from the Secretary of Governance," in Papers of Abelardo L. Rodriguez (Tijuana: 1934).

<sup>32</sup> Auyón Gerardo, *El Dragón en el Desierto: Los Pioneros Chinos en Mexicali*.

<sup>33</sup> Hing, "Testimony." C.A. Perkins, "Letter from C.A. Perkins, Inspector in Charge, INS, San Ysidro, CA, to the District Director at INS, Los Angeles, CA," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>34</sup> Lopez, "Formacion y Consolidacion de las Organizaciones Obreras en Baja California, 1920-1930."



In the wake of the baffling closure of Chinese commercial houses and the worsening conditions of the Great Depression, Mexicali's unions focused their attention on the still functioning rural Chinese operations. In 1931, the "Alvaro Obregón" Agrarian Party called for federal intervention into Baja California's chamber of commerce. The letter characterized the chamber as being composed of "the yellow races" and that Mexican workers suffered "pure exploitation from the Asiatics." Furthermore, it stated that Chinese businesses made it impossible for Mexican farmers to prosper because they exploited Mexican workers and control local affairs, referring to the chamber as the "Chinese hall." The author argued that for dignity to be restored to Mexico, "strong NATIONALIST work" was required to end the "heinous concessions" made to the Asians. The letter pleaded, "[t]hat the nationalization of the territory must reach every aching wound in this region, the country deserves better."<sup>35</sup> This expression of desperation was only matched by the condemnation of Asian farmers, no less the source of such anguish.

Such pleas to federal authorities, however, exaggerated the extent to which the Chinese dominated life in Mexicali. Just months before the Agrarian Party's letter of protest, the chamber of commerce wrote to the governor explaining how the abandonment of a railroad project connecting Tijuana and Mexicali had paralyzed many businesses in Mexicali. The setback was worsened by the lack of financing from national banks. The letter included signatures from eighty-nine of the chambers members, with fifteen recognizable Chinese names.<sup>36</sup> Exchanges such as these demonstrate how protests from groups like the Agrarian Party used the exaggerations of racially charged language to capture the attention of political elites. These correspondences demonstrate how notions of a national Mexican race were used to bolster state sponsored discrimination against the Chinese.

This exclusion of Chinese from elite notions of "genuine Mexican colonization" created two illuminating contradictions. First, state officials and political elites had to contend with the scrutiny from numerous political factions for their revolutionary authenticity on the one hand, and on the other, the legitimacy of the benefits of industrial capitalism within the rubric of a nationalist ideology.<sup>37</sup> The governmental efforts to shift the demographic balance of the region illustrates their adherence to the prescriptive racial limits of a nationalist ideology to the exclusion of the reality of economic conditions and the transnational relations of production. The perceived success of state intervention and ultimately of the looming expropriation of CRLC lands, despite the deepening of the economic depression, shows how valuable such racial motivations were for garnering political legitimacy.

The second contradiction is that the political elite's ability to control the meaning of the revolution also rested on their management of class relations. During this period, the most influential labor federation, the CROM, helped to mediate these class relations by serving public endorsements of revolutionary authenticity to pro-government agendas. The racial

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<sup>35</sup> El Presidente Municipal, "Letter to the Secretary of Government from the President of the Partido Agrarista "Alvaro Obregon" in Ensenada," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1931).

<sup>36</sup> M. Z. Otalora, "Letter from Otalora to the Secretary of Government," in Direccion General de Gobierno (Tijuana: UABC - Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1930).

<sup>37</sup> Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*. Alonos Aguilar, Fernando Carmona, and Jorge Carrion, *Problemas del Capitalismo Mexicano* (Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1983). Daniel Cosío Villegas, *American Extremes*, trans. Americo Paredes (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964).

antipathy expressed by CROM members throughout campaigns across northern Mexico is linked in some way to the recognition of the racial logic that elites acted upon. As I will show, agrarian reform in Mexicali was intended to satisfy the demands of organized labor as well as adhere to the racial prohibition necessary to conceive full national integration of the peninsula.

These strategies were successful in Sonora and Sinaloa, but with dire consequences. From August 1931 to 1933, hundreds of Chinese were forcibly expelled from the state of Sonora. Chinese men and their Mexican wives and children were deported to the U.S., against the wishes of American officials, and directly to China.<sup>38</sup> With the son of ex-President Calles as governor of the state and many labor unions and nationalist groups advocating for the expulsion of the Chinese, calls for racial purity were put into terrible action. In all, thousands of individuals were displaced from Sonora; some fled to other places in Mexico, including Mexicali. The proponents of Chinese expulsion claimed that Mexican businesses would be allowed to flourish without Chinese monopolies and that Mexican workers would no longer suffer from exploitation. In the aftermath of the Chinese expulsion, the state of Sonora suffered greatly. While many Chinese businesses were taken over by Mexicans they possessed neither the working capital nor the connections to wholesale distributors creating an uninspiring image of economic recovery. Mexican substitute businesses generated only a third of the tax revenue produced by the Chinese predecessors, furthermore the Chinese withdrew much of the capital reserves in Sonoran banks as they fled the state, aggravating the economic depression. With these negative consequences, Governor Calles and other officials maintained that the expulsion was not a sanctioned policy, but the result of Chinese store owners fleeing from the consequences of resisting the eighty percent labor law.<sup>39</sup> The economic fallout from the Chinese expulsion in Sonora created a division among political elites; those fearful of worsening economic conditions and those who saw relief in the Chinese elimination. The question of national racial identity festered among Mexicali's administrators and federal officials as they contended with the growing influence of Mexican labor on national politics in the Depression era. From the Chinese perspective they saw Mexican politicians willing to destroy the livelihoods of other Mexicans in order to expel them from the country

### **The Forgotten Presidency of Abelardo Rodríguez**

The violent removal of the Chinese in Sonora signaled to many in Mexicali that their time in Baja California was limited. Their only security was the central role they played in the economy. Meanwhile the swelling Mexican population became increasingly hostile. New deliberations amongst the Chinese must have broken out when they discovered that Rodríguez might become the next President of the republic. Two years into Ortiz Rubio's presidency he announced his resignation in September of 1932. While publicly claiming health concerns, political rumors suggested that he fell out of favor with ex-President Plutarco Elías Calles who had held the reins of power since his term in office ((1924-28). To take Ortiz Rubio's place, Abelardo Rodríguez was quickly nominated and unanimously voted into office by the Mexican Senate to carry out a two-year term until another election could take place in January of 1933. In his meteoric rise to national power his term as governor was brought into the

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<sup>38</sup> Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth-Century United States-Mexican Borderlands".

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Dambourges, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1931".

national spotlight as evidence of his patriotism, dedication to the Revolution, and perseverance in cultivating a “genuine Mexican colonization.”<sup>40</sup> Decades of military service, firm rule over the federal territory and open misgivings about the settlement of Chinese and Japanese in Baja California’s northern district affirmed his revolutionary nationalist credentials. The American press speculated that his “enviable record” in Baja California put him ahead of his peers and their Mexican sources cited his “administration of the Mexican Agrarian laws... and the effort to advance his territory as proof that he is of the caliber Mexico needs in its highest executive position.”<sup>41</sup> In the opening days of his presidency he signaled a new national strategy to create national reserves of natural resources to be administered by the federal government.<sup>42</sup> He proclaimed a new Depression-era policy “Work! – and no politics,” however his brief administration was anything but apolitical.<sup>43</sup> Rodríguez’s tenure as president is often eclipsed by the iconic presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, his successor. However, Rodríguez paved the way for President Cárdenas by expanding the powers of the office of the presidency and setting into motion the nationalization of several industries that would later be expropriated by the future president. Rodríguez’s lost presidency is an important period of transition in Mexicali because it links the rise of racial populism in Mexican labor unions with the land expropriations that took place under the Cárdenas administration. The careers of these Mexican politicians are vital to understanding the forces that shaped the Chinese community in Baja California and throughout Mexico because they set the terms of intervention by the nationalist state.

At the federal level, President Rodríguez was under pressure to bring Mexico out of the Great Depression. Building upon his previous work in Baja California he focused national attention on the development of that federal territory as an engine of growth and opportunity for the nation. He provided funding for additional irrigated colonization and began directing internally displaced Mexicans to Baja California to find work.<sup>44</sup> These policies accelerated population growth along the border exposing more frustrated, disenfranchised, and displaced Mexicans to the budding anti-Chinese campaigns in Mexicali. These conditions created new pressures on both sides of the border as Mexican workers pitted their interests against those of Chinese and Japanese farmers.

While there is sufficient evidence to conclude that state and federal elites constructed programs to undermine the Chinese presence in Baja California, a transnational perspective is helpful in understanding how poor migratory Mexican labors were influenced by nationalist ideology and its racial populism. During Rodríguez’s brief presidency he and other political elites like, ex-president Calles, made strategic interventions in the labor organizing of Mexican workers in Southern California personally, as well as through Mexican consular offices in the U.S. Tracking state-sponsored anti-Asian labor organizing in circuits of migratory labor helps to explain why racial populism flared up so quickly and violently in northern Baja California in the early 1930s. Because much of the population growth at that time was of repatriated Mexican workers from southern California it is important to

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<sup>40</sup> Francisco Gaxiola, *El Presidente Rodriguez* (Mexico City: CVLTVRA, 1938). Rodríguez, *Memoria Administrativa del Gobierno del Distrito Norte de la Baja California, 1924-1927*.

<sup>41</sup> "Rodríguez May Be Named," *Los Angeles Times*, 9/10 1928.

<sup>42</sup> Dailey Charles, "Mexico Bars Orientals," *Los Angeles Time*, 11/1 1924. "Rodríguez to Push Land Distribution," *New York Times*, 9/29 1932.

<sup>43</sup> "Policy Voiced by Rodriguez," *Los Angeles Times*, 9/7 1932.

<sup>44</sup> "Rodríguez Outlines Mexican Program," *New York Times*, 1/1 1934.

understand the ways that the Mexican state prepared migrants in its labor relocation programs. Documenting patterns of outreach by the nationalist Mexican state, the workers experience in winning disputes against Asian growers in the U.S., and the transnational coordination of CROM labor agitation reinforces the historical narrative that racial populism aided in the eviction of Chinese farmers from Mexicali's cotton fields.<sup>45</sup> This segment is also helpful in illustrating how the perception of race relations were stratified among Mexicans and differentially articulated across the border.

In President Rodríguez's first address to the Mexican Congress in September of 1933 he congratulated the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Relations in the El Monte strike and blessed the growth of Baja California's agricultural colonies. His address placed the successful organization of Mexican workers in the U.S. in relation to the development of Baja California. The overall purpose of the address was to announce a five-point agenda for his two year administration; 1.) Finish colonization projects already underway, 2.) Use repatriated workers for colonization projects, 3.) Nationalize foreign owned land, 4.) Redistribute the population, and 5.) Incorporate marginal lands. According to this plan, repatriated workers were designed to be a part of the nationalization of northern Baja California. By implication, Rodríguez intended for Mexican workers from the U.S. to replace the Chinese associations "which constitute [a] dangerous and absurd dismembering of national territory."<sup>46</sup> While more research is still required on this subject, I think there is sufficient evidence to assert that the agitation of Mexican workers in the U.S. with racially charged discourse preconditioned potential repatriates with anti-Asian prejudice. Such a convenient political climate would be conducive to enacting the desired agrarian reforms: the eviction of Asian farmers, the expropriation of CRLC lands, and the allocation of cotton ranches to Mexican cooperatives. However, the Chinese partnership associations were the bedrock of Mexicali's economy, and evicting them without destroying the economy was a delusional goal of the Rodríguez administration.

Over the course of the following year union demands escalated and President Rodríguez became fearful that Baja California would suffer the same fate as Sonora if the anti-Chinese campaigns were successful. At the time, even the Governor of the territory believed that the Chinese helped to bring Mexican jobs to the valley citing more than 2,000 Mexicans who worked for various Chinese businesses.<sup>47</sup> These opinions enraged the CROM and the nationalist leagues, bringing the governor's patriotism into question. In addition, the U.S. began to exert pressure on President Rodríguez warning that Mexico would be held

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<sup>45</sup> While this argument is secondary to the larger thesis of this chapter and dissertation, it is nevertheless contributes to standing literature on the origins and development of Mexican American labor organizing and the role of the Mexican state. Even if many sources treat the involvement of the Mexican state as peripheral or even benevolent, Gilbert Gonzalez's excellent work on the subject illustrates how conservative domestic Mexican politics attempted to shape Mexican communities in the U.S. by curbing radicalism through the state's consular system. However, Gonzalez neglects both the racialized nationalism underpinning the Mexican state's outreach and the conditions in Mexico that shaped union leader's motivation to intervene in organized labor north of the border. See for discussion Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest*.

<sup>46</sup> "Mexican Chief States Policy," Los Angeles Times, 9/2 1933, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Agustín Olachea and Antonio Banuet, "Letter from the Governor of the Territory of Baja California to the General Secretary," in Papers of Abelardo L. Rodríguez (Tijuana: 1934).

responsible if Chinese fleeing Baja California illegally entered the U.S.<sup>48</sup> Fearing that the labor unions could no longer be controlled through the Council of Conciliation and Arbitration, the President ordered the governor to protect Chinese business operations from union activity.<sup>49</sup> President Rodríguez did not want to risk the certain collapse of the region's economy if the Chinese were removed, nor could he risk the political backlash for protecting a racial pariah of the nation. Furthermore, the subsidies to small Mexican businesses were derived from taxes and fees collected from Chinese businesses. An impasse was fast approaching.

While Rodríguez had fostered the growth of racial populism in Baja California, he was unable to control the monster he created. In the wake of round-ups and expulsions in Sonora and Sinaloa, strikes and boycotts against Chinese grocery stores and other shops broke out across the country with demonstrations in Mexico City where a small Chinese community existed.<sup>50</sup> During this period anti-Chinese campaigns spread to Ensenada and Tijuana. This phase of expansion was a sign that the labor unions and nationalist leagues were beyond the control of state actors. In 1934 violence flared up in these towns forcing the Chinese, CRLC, and the Mexican government to change course. That year CROM leaders from Mexicali met with Mexican businessmen from Tijuana to organize a campaign in Ensenada to compel the Chinese to leave the coastal town. They hired Mexicans to dress in workmen's clothes and picket Chinese stores posing as the White Guards.<sup>51</sup> The strategy was to stage a popular protest against the Chinese in order to garner wider support among the community for the usurpation of the Chinese. At first the public did not respond to these tactics; the White Guards hurt many Mexican families because they couldn't sell their goods in the Chinese owned stores. Furthermore, some argued that Mexican businessmen wanted to deport the Chinese because they were heavily indebted to them and wanted their position in the local market.<sup>52</sup> Shortly thereafter the nationalist leagues expanded their practices to Tijuana.<sup>53</sup> Without strong government actors, the leagues and labor unions became bolder. They proposed a plan to charter a special passenger boat to take the unwanted Chinese back to China or arrange for an isolated colony to segregate the territory's Chinese away from current population centers. Over the subsequent months the public campaigns in Ensenada gained support as the nationalist leagues persuaded both politicians and the general public that Mexicans would be better off without the Chinese. Posters and pamphlets taught Mexicans that Chinese businesses were designed to extract wealth from Mexicans and that race mixing would have disastrous results.<sup>54</sup> With the governor's racial allegiance hanging in the balance,

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<sup>48</sup> Daniels, "Letter from Daniels, Mexico City, to Secretary of State, Washington DC," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>49</sup> F. Gaxiola, "Telegram from F. Gaxiola, Private Secretary to President Rodriguez, to Edmundo Guajardo, Attorney for the Chinese," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>50</sup> "Strike Breaks Out in Mexico," Los Angeles Times, 12/9 1933, 1.

<sup>51</sup> La Opinion, "News article: Another Version of the Ensenada Affair, a statement from the leaders of the anti-Chinese campaign (trans.)."

<sup>52</sup> La Opinion, "News article: Editorial: Chinese and "White Guards"," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>53</sup> Perkins, "Letter from C.A. Perkins, Inspector in Charge, INS, San Ysidro, CA, to the District Director at INS, Los Angeles, CA."

<sup>54</sup> Nationalist Committee of Ensenada, "Translation of a circular distributed by the Nationalist Committee of Ensenada," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

he submitted his support for the campaign against the storeowners.<sup>55</sup> In a confidential letter with Guajardo, the legal counsel for the Chinese Association, the governor warned the Chinese to leave the coast, but offered protection for them in Mexicali. As the governor left for a trip to Mexico City, Ensenada erupted in violence.

In the governor's absence, three of the principal Chinese merchants at Ensenada were forced at gunpoint to sign an agreement to leave the area in 90 days. The attack resulted in several assaults, destroyed property and the stoning of several Chinese. Taking the outbreak of violence along the coast as a sign of things to come, leaders from the Chinese communities in Mexicali, Ensenada, Tijuana and San Diego called a meeting to discuss their future in the region. Among those present was Edmundo Guajardo. While Guajardo advocated for a direct appeal to President Rodríguez, many of the Chinese remained less convinced that conditions would improve.<sup>56</sup> In a stern letter to the president, Guajardo implored Rodríguez to replace the current governor with someone who would be able to offer real protection to the Chinese or risk a possible exodus.<sup>57</sup> Once news of the Ensenada incident reached U.S. immigration authorities they issued warnings through the U.S. consulate in Mexicali to both the Rodríguez administration and directly to CROM leaders. U.S. authorities threatened to revoke the border crossing cards of labor leaders if the Chinese fled across to the U.S. Increased American patrols along the border turned back the few Chinese who tried to travel north. In the ensuing weeks many Chinese storeowners and residents in Ensenada fled under the cover of night to Mexicali, as well as further south to the states of Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato.<sup>58</sup> Claiming the Ensenada incident as a victory, the nationalist leagues and labor unions were emboldened to escalate their actions in Mexicali. They posted public notices condemning the Chinese and praising Mexicans who followed their convictions to drive the Chinese out. They cited the earlier successes of their Sonoran brothers in the previous year, agricultural workers in California, and an earlier campaign driving out blacks from Mexicali.<sup>59</sup> In the governor's return to Baja California, the leagues tested his resolve by planning a large rally outside of Mexicali's Chinatown. To their surprise, the governor condemned the rally and sent troops to prevent any disturbances.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Austin Spurlock, "Memorandum by Austin Spurlock, Inspector in Charge at Calexico, CA, concerning a meeting of the Liga Nacionalista Mexicana," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>56</sup> Perkins, "Letter from C.A. Perkins, Inspector in Charge, INS, San Ysidro, CA, to the District Director at INS, Los Angeles, CA."

<sup>57</sup> Edmundo Guajardo, "Letter from Edmundo Guajardo, Attorney for the Chinese, to Mexican President Abelardo L. Rodríguez," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>58</sup> Stanley Hawks, "Letter from Stanley Hawks, Second Secretary of US Embassy, to Dr. Don Jose M. Puig Casaurano, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mexico," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934). Stanley Hawks, "Memorandum of conversation between Stanley Hawks, Second Secretary of US Embassy, and Dr. Puig Casaurano, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mexico," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934). El Mundo, "News article: Chinese Migrating Toward the Center (trans.)," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>59</sup> Mexico Executive Committee of the Federation of Syndicates and Labor Unions of the Northern District of the Territory of Lower California, "Notice to the Public in response to the National League (trans. )" in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934). Mexicali Newspaper El Nacionalista, "News article: The First Anti-Chinese Movement (trans.)," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

<sup>60</sup> El Nacional, "News article: Manifestation Which Is Prevented in Mexicali," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934). Hawks, "Letter from Stanley Hawks, Second Secretary of US Embassy, to Dr. Don Jose M. Puig Casaurano, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mexico."

In their frustration, the nationalist leagues organized several conferences resulting in a barrage of legal and political maneuvers. The most prominent were stricter sanitary regulations, prosecutions for labor law violations by the Chinese partnerships, and more direct collaboration with the CROM and members of the National Revolutionary Party. Amidst this emergent set of relations, President Rodríguez's term was coming to a close and Lázaro Cárdenas was awaiting inauguration as Mexico's next president. In an astute political gesture Cárdenas met with the chief organizers of the nationalist leagues and CROM promising action from his administration. Two months before his inauguration, Cárdenas came to an agreement with the leaders of the anti-Chinese campaigns in Mexicali and the governor of Sonora, promising support for the expulsion of the Chinese.<sup>61</sup>

The interim presidency of Abelardo Rodríguez probed the conditions of possibility for reform in the territory of Baja California. The Chinese question that plagued Rodríguez as governor and president would come to its final resolution under the Cárdenas administration. As Cárdenas pursued agrarian reform in Baja California he articulated the racial character of modern Mexican state intervention. Through national expropriation of Mexicali's agrarian lands he situated Chinese racial alterity outside of a national *mestizo* community. The racialization of the Chinese in Mexico reflects not only an ideology of racial hierarchy but also the racial character of Mexicans as well. The anti-Chinese campaigns of Baja California demonstrate that organized Mexican labor incorporated this racial logic as they sought support from state and federal actors. In his consolidation of power, Cárdenas transformed the Mexican state by elucidating the racial meaning of the revolutionary party and its relation to organized labor.

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<sup>61</sup> Spurlock, "Letter from Austin Spurlock, Inspector in Charge, INS Calexico, CA, to the District Director, INS Los Angeles, CA." Otto Matz, "Letter from Otto Matz, Immigrant Inspector, INS Calexico, CA, to Inspector in Charge, INS Calexico, CA," in RG85 (Washington: NARA, 1934).

## Chapter 8: Cárdenas and the Problem of Territory

Any hopes that Mexicali would still be a place that the Chinese could call home ended when Lázaro Cárdenas took office. In the year following his inauguration, he gave a public address entitled *The Problem of the Federal Territories*, outlining his administration's plans to incorporate the territories of Baja California and Quintana Roo in order to "fight against isolation ... to maintain this race of people, its cultural unity and economic relations."<sup>1</sup> It was not unlike Rodríguez's address three years earlier. One outcome of this pledge was the "New Project for Colonization of Landholdings of the Colorado River Land Company." It was a renewed effort by the Mexican government to transform the racial composition of Mexicali's cotton farmers. The new contract was designed to gradually displace the present farmers (Chinese, Japanese, and American) with disenfranchised Baja California residents and Mexican repatriates from the U.S. The plan was also designed to buy back the CRLC for the lands paid for with annual crop payments from new Mexican tenants. Cárdenas preferred this arrangement because the CRLC still propped up cotton gins and financed a significant share of Mexicali's cultivated land.<sup>2</sup> In essence, Cárdenas sought to replace the public image of the American company with that of the Mexican welfare state while keeping the capitalist relations intact. This chapter tells the lost story of how the Chinese were evicted from Mexicali's cotton fields by showing how race and national identity intersected in Mexican agrarian reform.

The re-negotiation of the colonization contract was the first legally binding agreement barring the Chinese from leasing land from the CRLC. Clauses 3 and 4 prohibited any new leases to non-Mexican colonists, implicitly excluding Chinese who had become naturalized.<sup>3</sup> Under this new agreement, the CRLC still held considerable power in structuring the allocation of parcels to Mexican farmers. The Americans saw the writing on the wall; the Mexican state would no longer tolerate their Chinese tenants. This new contract left the Chinese abandoned by the CRLC; while they continued to work out their old leases, conditions worsened.

These changes altered the relationships between Chinese, Mexicans, and Americans. On the one hand, American observers saw state expropriation coming and feared enormous losses not just in terms of the land lost, but also the decline in productivity after the expropriation. They harbored these opinions because the Mexican government's decisions were politically motivated by a shallow consideration of the transnational features of Mexicali's cotton production networks. Mexican federal officials attributed the success of Chinese cotton cultivation to the good growing conditions of the valley. However, it was the Chinese social networks and transnational players that made the cultivation of this commodity possible and profitable. The social relations of production in Mexicali's fields were not

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<sup>1</sup> Lazaro Cardenas, *El Problema de los Territorios Federales: Un Llamamiento al Patriotismo y al Sentido de Responsabilidad del Pueblo Mexicano* (Mexico: Talleres Graficos de la Nacion, 1936).

<sup>2</sup> Josephus Daniels, "Colonization of Lands Near Mexicali, Lower California, by the Government of Mexico," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1936).

<sup>3</sup> Josephus Daniels, "Letter from the American Ambassador in Mexico City, D.F. to the U.S. Consul in Mexicali, B.C.," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).



naturally occurring features but the result of a particular social and financial ecology. U.S. State Department officials knew that the removal of Chinese farmers and the change in the terms of colonization with the CRLC would diminish the flow of capital to farmers. Financing for cotton cultivation would be more difficult if American financiers were forced to loan to people they didn't know. The Mexican government's agrarian reforms attempted to engineer a process of substitution, Mexican farmers for Chinese.<sup>4</sup> Industry experts estimated that millions of dollars a year were being invested by American and Chinese capital to finance the present scale of cotton cultivation.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. State Department did not have confidence that the Mexican government would be able to sustain this level of capitalization.

The controlled agrarian transformation that the Cárdenas administration envisioned did not unfold as planned. The plan was destined to fail before it had even begun for two reasons; first the shallow consideration of the particular modes of cotton production in Mexicali; and second, the assumption that the federal government could control the allocation of resources to Mexican farmers. These two factors shaped how Baja California became Mexican in the mid-twentieth century.

The Cárdenas administration's desire to execute a swift transformation in Mexicali can be seen in the choice of Gildardo Magaña as the territorial governor of Baja California in 1934. He was a popular veteran of the revolution serving as a loyal general under Zapata, taking his position as military commander after his assassination. Throughout the 1920s he headed the National Agrarian Confederation that lobbied for land reform. While the organization remained unsuccessful and mired in scandals, Magaña maintained the reputation of being a "*gallo*" of agrarian reform, true to Zapata's ideals.<sup>6</sup> For Magaña, answering the call of duty in Baja California was a validation of his commitment to agrarian reform, an opportunity to bring the peripheral territory into the fold of national politics, and boost his own career. Magaña would combine his tactical experience with the nationalist ideology of agrarian reform.

In preparation for the "New Project for Colonization" he set an aggressive quota for settlement in Mexicali that would match three repatriated Mexicans for every foreigner. The Mexican state's channeling of racial populism involved the coordinated involvement in Mexican unions on both sides of the border and institutional methods of directing the settlement of a migrant citizenry. In 1936 Mexico repatriated 3,000 Mexican workers from California to occupy new leases on CRLC lands.<sup>7</sup> Governor Magaña attempted to manage discontent with the New Project by targeting non-CRLC lands leased to Chinese for expropriation.<sup>8</sup> This policy was a deliberate measure to escalate public hostility against the

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<sup>4</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Possible Expropriation of the Lands of the Colorado River Land Company by Mexican Agrarian Department," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>5</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Present Status of the Agrarian Project at Mexicali," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>6</sup> Linda Hall, "Alvaro Obregon and the Politics of Mexican Land Reform, 1920-1924," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 60, no. 2 (1980): 213-238. Veronica Oikion Solano, *Los Hombres del Poder en Michoacan, 1924-1962* (Zamora & Morelia: El Colegio de Michoacan, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 2004). A "*gallo*" or rooster refers to someone who is perceived as a strong masculine patriarch.

<sup>7</sup> Daniels, "Colonization of Lands Near Mexicali, Lower California, by the Government of Mexico."

<sup>8</sup> Garduño, *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto Fértil*.

Chinese.<sup>9</sup> In the shortsighted effort to inflate the Mexican resident population in Mexicali, the administration created volatile political conditions that would not be easily contained.

As the number of Mexican residents swelled with repatriates, colonists, and agrarians their interests began to diverge. Their interests divided them into two general camps: the colonists and the agrarians. Most if the repatriated people were agrarians. On the one hand, the colonists were already leasing farmlands and desired the security of private property rights. On the other hand, the agrarians, who were much poorer, favored government sponsored entitlements to communal property, known in Mexico as *ejidos*.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, the Cárdenas administration was made into an enemy of both groups. As both groups saw it the federal government was either going to displace current Mexican settlements or deny poor farmers the benefits of agrarian reform. To further complicate matters, the CROM offered support to the colonists and threatened a general strike if they were displaced from their land.

To make matters worse, the rate of population growth in Mexicali out paced that of new leases with the CRLC. While the new colonization contract was indeed putting Mexicans on vacant CRLC lands, many Mexicans who were not given new leases were angered at both the lack of government action and the continued presence of Chinese and Japanese cotton farmers. This frustration led to several Agrarian protests and revolts, all of which received harsh government repression from Magaña. This led to the growing opinion that the Cárdenas administration was restricting Mexican farmers with one hand, driving them to desperation, while with the other hand calling them criminals for taking matters into their own hands.<sup>11</sup> These divisions illustrate the contentious nature of “genuine Mexican colonization” and widespread dissatisfaction with industrial agriculture in general. The fate of Chinese cotton-growing partnerships hung in the balance. By 1936 the Chinese community in Mexicali was wedged between exclusion from the U.S., impending hostilities from Mexicans, and civil war in China. They had few alternatives. Their search for strength and enterprise had collided with the racial boundaries of a national economy.

The Cárdenas administration delivered the ultimate blow to Mexicali’s Chinese community. In an effort to control the political heat Cárdenas terminated CRLC’s colonization contract and forced it to sell its land directly to the Mexican government. The announcement to nationalize the land produced a violent rampage across the valley. The rush to resolve the impasse reached a tipping point in January of 1937. Chinese ranchers were caught off guard when, without provocation, hundreds of armed Agrarian farmers ransacked the remaining CRLC lands and forcibly displaced the existing Chinese and Japanese leaseholders. The assault was a clear message to the Chinese as well as Cárdenas himself. In response, the governor issued a military proclamation prohibiting squatting and “unauthorized” acquisitions of Mexican lands, claiming such actions went against the institution of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>12</sup> This time, whatever the government’s response, the Chinese would never again be able to farm Mexicali’s fields. The closure of the CRLC contract put the irrigated colony in the hands of government administrators. While there is

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<sup>9</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Political Review for March 1936," in Mexico. Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1936).

<sup>10</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Agrarian Disorders at Mexicali, B.C., Mexico," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>11</sup> Adolfo M. Wilhelmy, "La Opinion news clipping," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>12</sup> Bowman, "Agrarian Disorders at Mexicali, B.C., Mexico."

little written record of the immediate aftermath of the assault, it is likely that many Chinese fled to Tijuana while others took refuge in Mexicali's urban core. The governor's attempts to impose law and order further infuriated the Agrarian cause, confirming to many that the Mexican Revolution had accomplished nothing – the government still protected the rights of foreigners as Mexicans protested for land redistribution. This political image did not rest well in the Cárdenas administration for two reasons; it represented a failed policy in the re-negotiation of the colonization contract and a failure to maintain Cárdenas' image as a national hero. Nevertheless, the popular belief spread that Mexican farmers had successfully driven out the Chinese from the cotton-farms.

This event is famously known as "*El Asalto de las Tierras*" because it is perceived that through this event the Cárdenas administration was forced to perform the public spectacle of national expropriation. As CRLC plots were transformed into Mexican *ejidos* Cárdenas' image as a national hero was restored and faith in the Mexican Revolution was revived. Despite the widespread failure of Mexicali Valley *ejidos* through the 1940s this event is pregnant with meaning and functions as a crucial intersection for memorializing the past – the subject of Part IV. In the first two months of the official expropriation 40 *ejidos* had been created with 4,800 people covering more than 200,000 acres.<sup>13</sup>

Several weeks after the official proclamation of the expropriation, bands of armed Agrarians took up the familiar role of the Special Municipal Collectors and stormed through the countryside running Chinese and Japanese farmers from their lands.<sup>14</sup> Raids on Chinese farming operations continued throughout the year; while physical violence was a certain outcome of the attacks, no deaths were reported.<sup>15</sup> Local anti-Chinese CROM members patrolled the countryside to further agitate for the Agrarian's rural entitlements. In October of 1938 the last Chinese operated cotton farm was turned over to Mexican hands; *Rancho Tres de Lee* was transformed into *ejido* Quintana Roo, the name of Mexico's other unincorporated territory.<sup>16</sup> With this final eviction, the Chinese were removed from Baja California agriculture. The progress of the Agrarian movement in Mexicali reinforced racial antagonism in Mexicali's urban space as well. Racial populism had reached an all time high in Mexicali. They were publicly harassed and it was common for Mexican residents to throw stones at Chinese pedestrians.<sup>17</sup> Mexicali was no longer a Chinese place, only now could the border become Mexican.

While many of Mexicali's Chinese residents temporarily moved to other parts of Mexico some tried to cross the border into the U.S. This last strategy was not very successful because U.S. immigration officers anticipated the impending exodus. One Chinese man was picked up by U.S. authorities and sent to Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay for deportation. While there he wrote this poem,

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<sup>13</sup> Kerig, "Yankee Enclave: The Colorado River Land Company and the Mexican Agrarian Reform in Baja California".

<sup>14</sup> Bowman, "Present Status of the Agrarian Project at Mexicali."

<sup>15</sup> Union of Agrarian Communities of the Northern Territory of Lower California, "General Petition for the Territory," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>16</sup> Josephus Daniels, "Agrarian Cases: Colorado River Land Company," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1938).

<sup>17</sup> Lee Mancilla and Gonzalez Felix, *Viaje al Corazon de la Peninsula: El Testimonio de Manuel Lee Mancilla*.

Stay at home and lose opportunities;  
A hundred considerations lead me to sojourn in Mexico.  
Political parties are like wolves and tigers eliminating each other;  
Hatred and prejudice against foreigners take away our property and many lives.  
Unable to stay on -  
I sneak across the border to the American side,  
Bump into an immigration officer who sternly throws the book at me  
And orders my expulsion back to China.<sup>18</sup>

This poem eloquently captures some of the feelings of loss, frustration, and ambivalence felt by the Chinese after *El Asalto a las Tierras*. The hostilities that the author experienced on both sides of the border contribute to a sense of homelessness and being uprooted, not welcome in either country. The economic and personal losses from their eviction were enormous. The Chinese community would have been wracked by a feeling that coming to Mexicali was a mistake, a failed migration, with decades of difficult labor and little to show for it. In their search for strength and the redemption of China, they found hardship in Mexico as they watched their homeland succumb to brutal Japanese raids. The evictions from the cotton-ranches devastated the Chinese community with no compensation. For the Chinese farmers who had become naturalized citizens, their frustration would have been double. This feeling of loss was further amplified by the continued anti-Chinese political agitation.

In the months after *El Asalto a Las Tierras*, the CROM issued a general demand that all foreigners leave Mexicali within 60 days. The union had hoped to gain possession of key buildings and properties in the urban center left behind by the hoped-for Chinese exodus.<sup>19</sup> CROM affiliates in the neighboring state of Sonora had achieved similar ends against the Chinese six years earlier. The CROM posted flyers all over Mexicali blaming the Chinese for poor economic conditions using racial metaphors like; “these Asiatics have been a yellow octopus that sucks the blood of the Mexican people.” In this flyer, the CROM cite the revolutionary actions of the Torreón massacre, the more recent expulsion of Chinese from the state of Sonora, and the success of Mexican workers in the U.S. as practical precedents for their demands. Claiming the continuity of these events was the basis of political power in Baja California. The CROM further threatened to refer to any Mexican citizen who did not support their cause as a “Chinese-Mexican.”<sup>20</sup> The threat of such retribution illustrates the diametric construction of Chinese and Mexican – producing the oxymoron Chinese-Mexican. These changes were difficult for the Chinese to comprehend, this discourse de-legitimized their Mexican naturalization and the exclusions from the U.S. put them on the outside of either side of the border.

By the end of the year, the Cárdenas Administration declared victory over the CRLC with the expropriation of the final 42,000 acres of the original colonization contract.<sup>21</sup> In

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<sup>18</sup> Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980). 16

<sup>19</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Political Review for April 1937," in *Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records* (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>20</sup> Willys A. Myers, "Proposed Expulsion of All Foreigners from the Northern Territory of Baja California, Mexico," in *Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records* (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1937).

<sup>21</sup> Daniels, "Agrarian Cases: Colorado River Land Company."

sum, the Mexican government had taken a large colony of highly-organized associations that had had the technical expertise to establish and develop an enormous irrigated landscape over the course of 30 years, and turned their lands over to poorly trained, un-financed and loosely organized Mexican farmers. Because post-revolutionary political elites defined Mexican workers' and agrarian interests along racial as well as national lines, they were incapable of incorporating the Chinese into their political vision of the institutions of the Mexican Revolution. They paid for this myopia with a deepening of the economic depression. By 1942 half of the *ejidos* setup in the Mexicali Valley were either bankrupt or abandoned.<sup>22</sup>

Even after the creation of Mexican *ejidos* in the expropriation, the anti-Chinese CROM affiliates focused attention on local Chinese shopkeepers. They were able to shut down numerous stores by picketing and boycotting these establishments. Bands of organized workers systematically targeted Chinese stores forcing each one to close down. This tactic was used to transform nine Chinese bakeries into Mexican *panaderías* in 1940.<sup>23</sup> However, because some of these businesses served as crucial links for imported goods, a source of tax revenue, and supported other businesses the Chamber of Commerce and the Governor both assisted in the reopening of certain merchandise stores and placed a ban on picketing.<sup>24</sup>

By the spring of 1938, *Compañia Algodonera Mexicana*, a Torreón-based subsidiary of Kohn & Co. from Dallas, brokered what the little cotton that was grown and harvested in Mexicali. Without the Chinese brokers and purchase orders from China and Japan, Mexicali's cotton sat in bales at the Valley's gins. The *Compañia Algodonera Mexicana* brokered this cotton to Germany based upon business connections with Dallas.<sup>25</sup> Because the majority of Mexico's domestic cotton production was used in domestic manufacturing, Mexican importers and exporters lacked the trade partnerships to broker Mexicali's cotton abroad. Selling Mexicali cotton on the domestic market threatened other Mexican cotton producers and could damage the manufacturing industry as well. Cutting the Chinese out of Mexicali's cotton equation severed important linkages that facilitated the economic process of exchange. In this vacuum of expertise, American brokers quickly stepped in to facilitate this process. As Texas brokers became more involved in Mexicali's cotton trade, they gradually incorporated it into American expansion of trade in the Pacific. Previously, the Chinese had made such connections possible, however the changing power dynamics of the Pacific demonstrated the growing power of the Japanese state. The trans-Pacific cotton corridor was still operating; however Japanese and American brokers were replacing Chinese merchants in Asia and the Cantonese farmers in Baja California were replaced by struggling Mexican *ejidatarios*. To make matters worse, torrential floods hit the valley in 1939 destroying thousands of acres.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kerig, "Yankee Enclave: The Colorado River Land Company and the Mexican Agrarian Reform in Baja California".

<sup>23</sup> Horatio Mooers, "Political Review for February 1940," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Political Review for January, 1938," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1938).

<sup>25</sup> Howard A. Bowman, "Cotton Shipments From Mexicali, B.C., Mexico," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1938).

<sup>26</sup> Horatio Mooers, "Brief Survey of Commercial and Economic Conditions Prevailing in the Mexicali Consular District for September 1939," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; General Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1939).

These agrarian reforms not only changed the dynamics of the border's political economy, but they also had a profound impact on the structure of the Chinese community in Mexicali. The new project for colonization devastated the Chinese partnership associations cutting them off from their driving purpose: cultivating and exporting cotton. In addition, the casinos were also closed by presidential decree to "clean-up" Mexicali's image and deprive both the Chinese and local political rivals from the profits from vice. The rapid change of affairs revealed three types of responses by the Chinese community, depending upon class and cultural resources. Wealthy Chinese merchants and brokers, many of whom possessed Section 6 certificates of exemption from the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Acts, left Mexico, some permanently, others temporarily. Those involved in casinos and cross-border smuggling possessed capital, but no cultural resources other than the smuggling and gambling networks they operated. This led many casino Chinese to migrate to Tijuana where gambling was still permitted, but those involved in cross-border smuggling had little incentive to either leave or change their occupation. Lastly, poorer Chinese shop-owners and farm workers had few resources to leave the area so many stayed, finding permanent residence in Mexicali's burgeoning urban zone. Throughout the tumult of state interventions Chinese restaurants remained an important fixture of the social landscape. Many of these lower and middle class Chinese found refuge in the restaurants as will be discussed in Part IV.<sup>27</sup>

The racial designs of agrarian policy illustrate how Mexican politicians excluded Chinese residents as a calculated response to U.S.-Mexico diplomatic relations. Mexican officials discounted the large participation of Chinese in irrigated colonization along the northern border for two reasons. For one, as Mexican leaders pursued modernization they took queues from aggressive imperial nation-states such as Germany, Japan, and ambivalently from the U.S. In the diplomatic calculus of U.S.-Mexico relations many officials felt that Mexico should play up to U.S. standards. Up until the 1920's notions of state sovereignty and citizenship were based upon U.S. Chinese Exclusion Acts. Officials felt that excluding Asians from the nation-state aided in supporting the image of Mexico as a modern member of the western community of nations.<sup>28</sup> However, it would be too simplistic to characterize the behavior and decisions of Mexican officials of this period as mere mimicry. While the dominant position of the U.S. in Mexican domestic policy should not be dismissed, neither should the endemic evolution of Mexican nationalism. In other words, Mexican officials did not support the expulsion of the Chinese solely because the Americans did not consider them eligible for citizenship. While the racial designs of genuine Mexican colonization were clear, the political and economic realities of irrigated colonization remained unstable in Baja California.

The second and inter-related reason that Mexican officials discounted the Chinese in irrigated colonization along the northern border is that agrarian reform was a central fixture of national ideology. Land redistribution was perhaps the most important and persuasive feature

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<sup>27</sup> See these sources for more examples of adaptation through restaurants, Ernesto Martinez, "Border Chinese: Making Space and Forging Identity in Mexicali, Mexico" (PhD, Harvard University, 2008). Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth-Century United States-Mexican Borderlands". Schantz, "From the Mexicali Rose to the Tijuana Brass: Vice Tours of the United States-Mexico Border, 1910-1965".

<sup>28</sup> Lee, "Orientalisms in the Americas." Erika Lee, "Hemispheric Orientalism and the 1907 Pacific Coast Race Riots," *Amerasia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 19-48.

of the radical ideals of Mexican revolutionary agendas. While conservative forces succeeded eventually, in the 1940s, in co-opting the rebellion, they nevertheless did so by appropriating the meaning of economic reforms, especially those regarding land ownership. To this end, CROM leaders were instrumental in staking out the political boundaries of authentic revolutionary action. In the formulation of this ideology the racial identity of the nation became congruent with the issues of land and labor. The national discourse about the racial character of Mexican *mestizaje* was expressed through the expectation that economic progress would follow from the proper cultivation of the population. For instance, Manuel Gamio wrote in 1935 that the lack of statistical knowledge about the Mexican population made federal policy ineffective and “delayed the evolution of the *mestizo*.”<sup>29</sup> Agrarian reform by the Mexican state after the revolution created new ways of coordinating and mobilizing a previously fragmented national labor force. By defining beneficiaries of the Mexican Revolution as “agrarian-rights subjects”<sup>30</sup> state officials accomplished three alterations to the relationships between race, citizenship, and nationality. First, they transformed all rights to land, including indigenous rights, into mutable personal rights which defined their identity as political citizens of the nation-state. Meaning that rights to land could only be expressed and recognized as rights contained within agrarian reforms. This significantly crippled indigenous claims to territory within the nation, since indigenous people who had never been disposed of their land—mainly those in less coveted, less capitalist areas such as the jungles of Chiapas or the highlands of Oaxaca—had less claim to those lands than those who had been awarded land in the agrarian reform that had been cultivated in a capitalist mode. Enacting these policies forced Mexicans to trade their indigenous identity for access to state allocated resources. Second, and related, they defined the terms of citizenship on the utilization of agrarian rights. This meant that citizenship was most audibly expressed to authorities through the exercise of federally legislated agrarian rights. Third, they created new capacities to assess the biological and cultural traits of potential rights-bearing subjects to participate in the national economy. From this perspective Cárdenas’s expropriation of CRLC land and the eviction of Chinese cotton farmers not only installed a racially appropriate laboring population, but also created the opportunity to integrate more individuals into the state apparatus of rights-bearing political subjects. From the state’s perspective it was more advantageous to increase the population of economically dependent citizens whose political identity was tied to the state than to continue to permit a racially distinct population to autonomously develop the remote irrigated colony. In this manner, the eviction of the Chinese and the enfranchisement of Mexicans were two sides of the same coin: a relational nexus of race, citizenship, and nationality. Because of this inadequate consideration of economic consequences these policies plunged the entire region into a deeper economic depression and further strengthened the dependence on American corporate agribusiness, notably the Los Angeles interests of the CRLC and the cotton giant Anderson Clayton & Co.

This chapter recounts the untold history of how the Chinese were removed from the irrigated colonization of the Mexicali Valley. By beginning with the governorship of Abelardo Rodríguez I showed that anti-Chinese activity in the 1920’s was fostered by government action. Attacks on the Chinese cotton-growing partnership associations and urban businesses occurred without public approval and often were covert in nature. As the

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<sup>29</sup> Gamio, *Hacia un Mexico Nuevo: Problemas Sociales*. 25

<sup>30</sup> Baitenmann, “Counting on State Subjects: State Formation and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Mexico.”

service and leisure sectors of Mexicali's economy grew so too did the presence of organized labor. The CROM quickly infiltrated Baja California's local unions, incorporating them into the national federation, becoming the dominant voice of labor by the start of the Great Depression. The strong presence of the CROM during the onset of declining economic conditions provided state-sponsored attacks on the Chinese with a public advocate. CROM agitators were frustrated, however, by the inability to mobilize stronger public condemnation of the Chinese as in Sonora. Many of CROM's anti-Chinese rallies and demonstrations were performative in nature with hired participants, such as the "White Guards." The CROM's anti-Chinese campaigns didn't gain traction until convergence of two developments: the coordination of anti-Asian influence on Mexican unions on both sides of the border and the worsening of economic conditions. Repatriated Mexican workers interpreted their desperation in Mexicali according to the racial populism that defined their relationship to federal land entitlements. As worsening economic conditions reached deeper into the regional economy the exceptional productivity of Chinese operated cotton ranches became the target of frustrations from failed government programs to create Mexican agrarian colonies and from the idle anticipation from expectant Mexicans who had been brought to the Mexicali Valley to increase the demographic number of *mestizo* nationals. The federal protection of "foreign" commercial interests stank of Revolutionary provocations during the Porfiriato thirty years earlier. Nevertheless, the brazen expulsion of Chinese businessmen in Ensenada by CROM members and elsewhere in Mexico proved exemplary for agitators in Mexicali. The CROM's expansive network was able to interpret local conditions to newcomers with small newspapers, flyers, brochures, and public events. While the CROM's interests were not entirely served in Cárdenas' ultimate expropriation of CRLC lands, their publicity undoubtedly influenced the proliferation of anti-Chinese attitudes among Mexicali residents throughout the process of expropriation and issuance of the irrigated lands in the Mexicali Valley.

Up until now, this history has remained submerged under a more simplistic historical narrative that explains the transformation of Mexicali's irrigated colonization as a partial victory of the Cárdenas administration over the corporate interests of American imperialists. For instance, Ward argues that bi-national competition for rights to the waters of the Colorado River determined the Mexican strategy for development of the Colorado River Delta and the integration of the territory of Baja California into the nation.<sup>31</sup> However, Mexico's aggressive development of the region did not rest solely on a desire to expand the effective demand for the Colorado's water in fact, agricultural expansion in Mexicali did not take place until the technological innovations and the expansion of international investment of the 1950s. Instead, it was more important to occupy the territory with a racially appropriate population making Baja California a Mexican place. Similarly, Garduño celebrates the *Asalto de las Tierras* as a dual victory; in its influence on the Cárdenas administration to act and in the resultant expropriation of CRLC lands. Throughout Mexican scholarship on this subject, the term foreigner (*extranjero*) is used to imply Americans, however this history demonstrates that Americans were not the only foreigners, obscuring more nuanced understandings of the region's development. The erasure or downplaying of the significance of the Chinese in Mexicali's agriculture serves to reduce the complexity of relations in favor of a politically convenient bi-national dualism between white Anglo Americans and hardworking *mestizo* Mexicans. Nevertheless, the forced eviction of Chinese from Mexicali's agricultural

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<sup>31</sup> Ward, *Border Oasis: Water and the Political Ecology of the Colorado River Delta, 1940-1975*.



economy provides an illuminating point of reference for the wealth of historical scholarship regarding race, labor, migration, nationalism and transnationalism in this borderland.

Mass mobilizations against the Chinese in Mexico in the decades following the 1910 revolution produced new patterns of mobility and community integration. Many Chinese who had Section 6 exemptions continued to use their border-crossing privileges to evade persecution as well as provide crucial intermediary exchanges across the border. Besides direct campaigns to exclude the Chinese in Mexico, American capitalists had made advances in conducting trade in East Asia without the help of Chinese merchants. The entrance of the U.S. into World War II demonstrated American dominance in trans-Pacific trade. In comparison with anti-Chinese campaigns in the U.S., the Mexican episodes were more effective because they resulted in mass removals. U.S. campaigns succeeded in regional ethnic cleansing and generating legislative action to restrict migration, but never approached the scale and ferocity of Mexican campaigns. The critical role that Chinese played in the California economy could not be jeopardized by mass round-ups. Chinese labor and trade created too much wealth for whites to expel them completely. This is not to say that the hostility they did encounter in California and the American west was not brutal or violent. But the fact that American public policy did not evolve into massive removals and displacements of the scale exhibited in Mexico, illustrates the varying degrees of contradiction and tolerance amidst an unevenly organized inter-state capitalist world-system. In political economic terms, the wealth of the American economy could accommodate racially segmented and segregated sectors and classes while the poverty of the Mexican economy left little room to accommodate the Chinese in its racial stratifications.

The next chapter discusses the inauguration of Baja California's statehood and the cultural production of historical memory. With a clearer picture of how the Chinese were displaced a more critical perspective on contemporary representations of the past are possible. The work presented shows how the *Mexicanización* of the historical imagination of Baja California's past matched the economic *Mexicanización* of the territory. I explore how statehood served to sanitize Baja California's history and erase the Chinese from the cultural memory of the incorporation of Baja California into Mexico. With the revival of global finance capital in decades following the world-wide reconstruction after WWII, industrialization throughout the Pacific re-ignited trans-Pacific routes that had recently reconnected Mexicali to the Asian Pacific in interesting ways. Part IV searches for the connections between history, memory, and culture to understand the meaning of these contemporary developments and what it means to be Chinese in Mexicali today.

## Part IV: Belonging, Migration, and the Politics of Silence

*El Asalto a las Tierras* altered Mexicali and Baja California in profound ways. As a part of a decade long effort to eradicate the Chinese from the cotton industry it signaled an intensification of state sponsored “*Mexicanización*.” This process of incorporating new territory into the nation demonstrated the ways that race and nation structured the exclusion of the Chinese from “genuine Mexican colonization.” Despite the successful eviction of the Chinese cotton-growing cooperatives and the expropriation of lands from the Colorado River Land Company, the program to Mexicanize Baja California took twenty more years to achieve statehood. Part IV examines how Mexicali’s past has been celebrated, erased, and subjected to numerous reconfigurations as part of its formal incorporation as a political entity in the Mexican nation-state.

As others have argued, history has been one of Mexico’s most intense battlegrounds as competing interests vie for power and try to legitimize their reign. The invention of national traditions, the identities of the body politic, and historical narratives have all been central to Mexican political practice since independence from Spain.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, this cultural practice corresponds with the global practice of race thinking in the nation-building process since the decline of colonial administrations in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> From Independence, to Reformers, to Revolutionaries, political factions have drawn up different historical accounts to discredit their enemies and align themselves as the righteous harbingers of true revolutionary action.<sup>3</sup> However, as I conclude the historical narrative of the Chinese in Mexicali, I want to emphasize the ideological role that nationalist historical narratives have in the construction of *mestizo* Mexican nationals as well as the Chinese as people without a Mexican past. Here I argue that forgetting the Chinese past is an important part of becoming Mexican political subjects. That is to remember, recall, and reference the past is to experience race in Mexicali. An account of the successive efforts to re-present Mexicali’s past is necessary to understand how tales of the past serve the racial politics of nationality.

The purpose of the work thus far has not been to claim a more true description of the past but to underscore which pasts have been submerged, erased, or ignored as a function of producing a hegemonic and exclusive truth about the past. By asking how depictions of the past and the use of historical narratives grant power and shape social formations, we come closer to understanding the politics of the past and the cultural forms that memory takes. These questions target what others have called the anthropology of history or how social structures interact with our interpretation of the past. Sahlins argues that by “multiplying our conceptions of history by the diversity of structures” we are able to accommodate a host of historical regimes.<sup>4</sup> Through this framework I have provided three historical regimes that

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

<sup>2</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall Sahlins, "Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History," *American Anthropologist* 85, no. 3 (1983): 517-544.

address the major social structures to have influenced the development of the Mexicali border corridor: U.S. Imperialism, the Chinese diaspora, and the post-Revolutionary Mexican state. My narration of these historical regimes strives to capture a truth about how those social forces shaped the region. The interpretive challenge of Part IV is to grasp at the interaction of truth claims and to appreciate the ways that some truths become more powerful and convincing than others.<sup>5</sup>

Baja California's integration with the rest of Mexico illustrates the importance of social theories of the tensions between history and culture. The region's past was subjected to erasure and refinement not only out of political contest but also because of ethnic cleansing. Baja California's "official" history excludes the Chinese as a significant part of the region's past in order to more satisfactorily conclude that Baja California conforms to a narrow homogenous nationalist narrative of political unity. As iterated in previous chapters, the racialization of the Chinese in Mexicali is as much about being Chinese as it is about being Mexican. In the formal integration of the territory, Mexicans residing there increasingly became subjected to the political control of the Mexican state. Indeed, these racial projects co-exist together as Mexican political elites responded to the loss of direct Pacific trade and an encroaching U.S. imperialism. That is to say these racial formations are necessarily domestically cultivated, yet contingent upon the geopolitical arrangements that situate Mexico among the unequal relations of the world-system.

Part IV details the tactical manipulation of Mexicali's past through the formation of nationalist rituals of myth making. Chapter 9 first presents the programs of *Mexicanización* as a process of integrating Mexican political subjects into state programs of industrial capitalism. This history is an important story because it illustrates how the Chinese became incorporated as outsiders to the process of *Mexicanización*. It also describes the coronation of *El Asalto a las Tierras* as a national holiday that commemorates the success of these campaigns for statehood. Chapter 10 discusses the textual and place-making practices that were inaugurated by statehood to re-present Baja California's past as a Mexican place – erasing and submerging the Chinese past to enable a nationalist modernity. These tactics ideologically position Baja California as a late entry into the long unbroken chain of the Mexican Revolution's historic unfolding. This political and cultural integration of Baja California changed what it meant to be Chinese in Mexicali.

Lastly, Chapter 11 considers the legacy of Mexicali's Chinese community whose marginalization and historical erasure serve to camouflage their interests in passing as Mexicans across the border to circumvent the procedures that dictate direct China-U.S. immigration. In this way, the Chinese community of Mexicali has preserved the migratory function of Mexicali by building a food service industry that provides restaurant proprietors with border-crossing privileges as Mexicans. For those who stay in Mexico, many suffer from being forgotten before they have even left. In order to reflect on the contemporary conditions in Mexicali, I analyze the historical exhibits in El Museo Regional de Baja California to demonstrate the position of the Chinese in the Mexicalense cultural imagination. The curated public display of regional history glosses over the major events and processes of subordination covered in the previous chapters in order to achieve a respectable Mexican past. While not totally untruthful, this exhibit presents a narrative of how Chinese residents fit within a racially structured historical imagination.

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, "The archaeology of knowledge," *Social Science Information* 9, no. 1 (1970): 175.

While other studies of the racialization of the Chinese in Mexico focus on the treatment of the Chinese by state and non-state actors as isolated incidents, these analyses fail to provide a comprehensive critique of the broader racialized economy and political structures of discrimination and racial prejudice in Mexican society. Furthermore, the critical attention paid to the hegemony of American corporate capitalism in the borderlands has overshadowed the ways that the Mexican state has enacted racially configured programs of industrial restructuring. The use of a comparative racial formations framework in this research seeks to situate the racialization of Mexicali's Chinese in relation to other groups as a multi-dimensional social formation.

## Chapter 9: *Mexicanización as History*

The original authority to create the CRLC's colonization contract at the turn of the century created a pattern of development that carried Baja California into statehood. The powers to designate new political units from territories within the boundaries of the nation-state were derived from the Mexican constitution under article 73 of the powers of Congress. These regulations dictate the terms and conditions in which territories may be transformed into a self-governing state of the federal union. They are also derived from the same interests in settling national territory with Mexican nationals. The design of this power made internal colonization a virtual mandate given that the federal government could only create new federal territories in regions with a population of 80,000. In order to achieve statehood, the territories would have to reach 120,000. Achieving this magic number took until the late 1940s. Population growth and steady economic development to support that population increase was derailed by inadequate industrial financing, the desire of Mexican workers to migrate to the U.S. or participate in the Bracero Program, and the disruption in global markets during World War II. As illustrated in Part III, Baja California population growth was based on racial anxieties of nation building, and the geopolitical calculations of being located along the U.S.-Mexico border. The Chinese community in Mexicali made the larger designs of statehood possible by first building the irrigation infrastructure in which to support such population growth and secondly by facilitating the expansion of export cotton markets in the Pacific. My examination of the implementation of genuine Mexican colonization illuminates the crafted narratives that rushed to historicize the territory's statehood in the 1950s and 1960s.

The expropriation of CRLC lands, spurned by *El Asalto a las Tierras*, was a major branch of President Cárdenas' political and economic strategy to expand the power of the federal government and give shape to the nation's capitalist industrialization. The allocation of *ejido* lands to Mexican farmers was swift and widespread in the Mexicali Valley. However, as described in Chapter 8, the lack of effective cotton export brokers fulfilled the U.S. State Department's expectations that Mexican farmers would not be able to secure financing without the promise of future export sales to pay off the season's loan. Without the Chinese commercial networks, the Mexican *ejidos* could not match the anticipated economic growth. The frustration of thousands of Mexican farmers coincided with the massive labor migrations of the bi-national Bracero Program and the buildup of military defenses during the hostilities of World War II. These two events derailed the development of Mexicali's *ejidos* because it drained willing workers from hard-pressed *ejidos* and diverted attention to military development.

Mexican military buildup and the Bracero Program were both products of World War II and ultimately did contribute to the territory's bid for statehood, but local and federal officials were apprehensive of the region's stability. The Bracero Program was a joint effort by the Mexican and U.S. governments to match Mexican workers with the labor needs of American industrial agriculture through seasonal contracts. During this program, from 1942 to 1964, more than four million Mexican workers left Mexico to work in the fields of the U.S. The initial surge of workers to the border region in search of Bracero contracts as well as workers returning from expired contracts were a sign of caution to Mexicali's administrators and federal officials who were under pressure to ensure that the agricultural colony thrived.

These officials were nervous of both population surges and shortages. The last twenty years of focused efforts to implant Mexican farmers in Mexicali had failed because they lacked the commercial integration and low-cost business models of Chinese cotton-growing partnerships in addition to the draw of U.S. labor markets to the north.<sup>1</sup> The Bracero Program encouraged workers to choose migration instead of working on the valley's ranches because the worker contracts hedged against the uncertainty of *ejido* financing and fluctuating market prices – the two obstacles to the success of Mexicali's *ejidos*.

Mexican officials were faced with the difficulty of managing the contradiction of a restless pool of unorganized labor and the attrition of *ejido* farmers. At the beginning of the Bracero Program, the territorial governor of Baja California pleaded with U.S. officials to not establish cotton picking recruitment centers in the Imperial Valley north of Mexicali.<sup>2</sup> Ambivalent U.S. officials saw no interest in complying with these requests and drew heavily from the pool of laborers congregating in Mexicali. The large demands for Bracero contracts drew hundreds of thousands of workers to the Mexicali Valley in the 1940s in hopes of getting to the U.S. with or without a contract.



**Figure 13 Source: Los Angeles Times. "Mexican Workers Await Legal Employment in the United States, Mexicali (Mexico)." In Special Collections. Los Angeles: Charles E. Young Research Library, 1954.**

This pattern of migration upset U.S. officials who felt the Mexican government was not doing their part to provide more orderly procedures of recruiting Braceros. While the loss of Mexican workers was detrimental to the government's efforts to implant nationals in Mexicali *ejidos*, officials were also made anxious over the accumulation of repatriated workers from the U.S. These conditions mirrored the repatriations that took place in a decade earlier in the

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Writers' Project, "Monographs prepared for A Documentary history of migratory farm labor, 1938 " in California Cultures (Berkeley: The Bancroft Library, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Orray Taft, "Attitude of Local Officials Towards Migration of Mexican Agricultural Workers," in RG 85, ed. Department of State (Washington: NARA College Park, 1942).

lead up to *El Asalto a las Tierras*. Officials knew that they could no more control the outflow of migrating laborers nor the political consequences of repatriated workers. Again, the ambivalence of U.S. officials chided Mexican administrators who requested repatriates to be sent to Nogales, Sonora instead of Mexicali or Tijuana, Baja California.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 1940s the Bracero Program sidelined the government's efforts to facilitate and protect the growth of Mexicali's industrial agriculture.

The political image of *Mexicanización* programs in Baja California suffered from a lack of material progress. The meager development of the *ejido* economy signaled an ineffective government or worse, abandonment. These feelings were symbolized in cotton ginning machinery bought by the Mexican government lying unassembled in the industrial zone.<sup>4</sup> Images such as these undermined the authority of the federal government and threatened the perceived advances made since the expropriation in 1937.

The escalation of hostilities during World War II brought President Lázaro Cárdenas back to Baja California, but this time as a military general. From 1941 to 1945 General Lázaro Cárdenas served as the West Coast Commander in Baja California. He used this position to protect and advance the *Mexicanización* of the territory in spite of the difficulties created by the Bracero Program. Since the *El Asalto a las Tierras*, it was vital to protect this important agricultural region from returning back to foreign ownership or worse, the loss of the territory. Japanese war plans contained intentions of using Baja California as both a launching site to assault North America and a site of extraction for raw materials. Because of these plans, Mexico also feared that the U.S. would preemptively annex Baja California if Mexican forces could not be sufficiently mobilized to project the peninsula from Axis control. Nevertheless, Cárdenas being an astute politician flirted with these volatile international interests. As general of the West Coast Command he bargained with Japanese interests as a counterbalance to the power imposed by the U.S. military. In the end, General Cárdenas was able to secured greater investments from Americans to out compete Japanese bids for the development of export-oriented industries.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Cárdenas was able to effectively deny the presence of U.S. troops in Mexico. Instead of allowing U.S. soldiers to carryout ordinary tasks inside Mexico, Cárdenas tried to "get the most out of the war experience" by arming Mexican soldiers with American training and equipment.<sup>6</sup> These military interests aided in the construction and success of permanent military establishments in Baja California. Naval and Army outposts not only boosted the presence of the federal government but also aided in the economic development of the region and provided an alternative to entering the industrial workforce. In this way, the military buildup in Baja California aided in augmenting

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<sup>3</sup> Francis C. Jordon, "Proposed Closing of the Ports of Tijuana and Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico to Mexican Deportations," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; Confidential Records (College Park, MD: National Archives II, 1947). William A. Smale, "Temporary Admission of Farm Laborers Under Contract, as Proof for the United States Mexican Agreement of March 12, 1947," in Mexico, Mexicali Consulate; Confidential Records (College Park, MD: National Archives, 1947).

<sup>4</sup> Peritus, "La Llamada "Mexicanizacion" de Baja California," in Pablo Martinez (Mexicali: Archivo Historical del Estado de Baja California, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Maria Emilia Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the US as Allies in World War II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the territory's population with stationed soldiers. The establishment of military bases also boosted the effective demand for local products aiding the local economy.<sup>7</sup>

Because Japan remained seriously interested in the Mexicali's cotton, Cárdenas was able to convince the American cotton giant Anderson Clayton & Co. to more seriously invest in Mexicali's cotton-growing *ejidos*. While the company was already invested in Mexicali's cotton ginning, the export of Mexican cotton was not prioritized because it competed with U.S. grown cotton exports. Nevertheless, Mexican interests in increasing the financing of Mexicali's *ejidos* coincided with the corporate interests of the Anderson Clayton & Co. as they became more entrenched in the commercialization of Mexicali's cotton production. After the expropriation of the CRLC's lands, the Chandler syndicate had reinvested in the financing of *ejidos* and ginning operations. However, the Chandler syndicate drifted to the background because Clayton Anderson & Co. was the only firm capable of replacing the trans-national merchant role that the Chinese had previously played.

In the aftermath of World War II global markets began to re-open with old patterns and new players. In 1945 Chinese markets commenced open international trade and one of the first companies to reinstate trade relations was Anderson Clayton & Co. With unstable currencies and no sponsoring merchant in Shanghai to facilitate the purchase of traded goods, the company took a gamble to reignite the cotton trade that made Mexicali thrive decades earlier.<sup>8</sup> In this gamble, Anderson Clayton reinstated the Pacific cotton corridor. It was reopened not only through the operation of trans-Pacific shipping liners but also with Anderson Clayton serving as the international broker. By taking on this role, Anderson Clayton formed the linkages once served by Mexicali's Chinese merchants and it became easier to secure financing for the expansion of Mexicali's agriculture. The Mexican government took this opportunity to restructure the distribution of lands and promote the installation of repatriated Braceros in newly formed and financed *ejidos* with the formation of the *Compañía Mexicana de Terrenos del Rio Colorado* (CMTRC). By 1947 Anderson Clayton & Co. had aggressively sought out the post-war reconstruction of global cotton markets organizing its vast assemblage of cotton producers from around the world. One advantage that Anderson Clayton & Co possessed above other brokerage firms was its ability to shift production from raw cotton to related cotton products like cottonseed oil. This allowed the company to maintain high levels of financing throughout its agencies by selectively mobilizing production to take advantage of regional turns in price and aggregate global demand.<sup>9</sup> In Mexicali, this corporate strategy translated into an expansion of the state sponsored colonization project further south along the Colorado River delta. Cheap capital goods from Anderson Clayton allowed the Mexican state to renew commercial linkages to Asia's cotton markets and expand the irrigated colonization of the river delta. The CMTRC created a federal veneer for Anderson Clayton & Co. in order for the government to take credit for reversing the attrition in Mexicali's *ejidos* and implanting repatriated Bracero workers in new lands.

The expansion of agrarian reform in Mexicali was viewed as effective *Mexicanización* and genuine Mexican colonization. However, the triumph of this program signals the

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen, "La Transformacion de Baja California en Estado, 1931-1952," *Estudios Fronterizos* 1, no. 1 (2000): 40.

<sup>8</sup> John Walker, "Foreign Trade: The Sun Comes Out," *Time & Life*, December 24 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen Clayton Garwood, Will Clayton, A Short Biography (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).



successful organization of workers under a regime of state capitalism financed by U.S. corporate interests. As one critic claims, these newly integrated *ejido* farmers were

...called to act as guardians of the political order in exchange for land reform, credit, irrigation works, roads, etcetera. They are not farmers who organize themselves. They are coordinated from the outside, by the state; in this way they are given shape by programs of social and technical organization of productive activities. In fact, peasant organizations and directives are properly rejected, reformulated or absorbed into the structures and directives of the state apparatus and managed by the government.<sup>10</sup>

This description aptly fits the expansion U.S. agribusiness in Mexican agrarian reforms in the irrigated colonies of northern Baja California. Likewise, the state appropriation of *El Asalto a las Tierras*, as discussed below, reflects the state's interest in reformulating and absorbing peasant protests. My analysis and discussion of the racialization of the Chinese in Mexicali intersects with this critique of Mexican state capitalism because it is necessary to conceptualize both the incorporation of individuals into a state structured economy and the structural integration of those excluded from such programs. In this way, the Chinese in Mexicali experienced racial difference as more than eviction and exclusion from the benefits of state controlled agrarian reform but also in their incorporation as a racialized ornament to the border economy. The result of domestic economic policy that leaves the Chinese out of national reforms is the racial segregation of the economy. Because economic development was equated with nationalist agendas of revolutionary reform and progress, the Chinese were systematically ignored in national policy over and over again. Nevertheless, the border economy remained dependent upon the transnationalism of Chinese merchants.

Despite domestic economic policies in Mexico, the war preparations by the U.S. state underscored their economic dominance and ability to dictate the terms of border crossing. The functional role played by Chinese merchants in Mexican border towns coincided with interpretations of U.S. interests by State Department officials and immigration bureaucrats at the U.S.-Mexico border. As foreign attacks, espionage, and spy activity dominated national security concerns, border policy came to reflect these changes. In 1940, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8430 setting new regulations for the use of documents by aliens entering the U.S. This change disallowed previous procedures of granting border-crossing privileges. However, Chinese merchants preserved the Section 6 rights to cross and re-cross the border as a matter of conducting business. During World War II Chinese merchants maintained their rights to conduct business about the border despite numerous reforms, revisions, and emergency wartime policies. In the led up to the U.S. entrance in World War II, the Axis powers used the negative image of America as a racist, oppressive state and imperialist power as propaganda against cooperation with the Allied powers. The Chinese Exclusion Acts were clear targets for pointing out the racial bias of U.S. "democracy" creating new diplomatic pressures on critical U.S. relations with East Asia. Many argue that this situation prepared the way for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1943, however the maintenance of border-crossing rights for Chinese merchants in Mexican border towns seems to be less related to the international image of U.S.-Asia relations than it does with the development of border economies and capitalist expansion. Not only were the number of

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<sup>10</sup> Octavio Ianni, *El Estado Capitalista en la Época de Cardenas*, vol. 51, Serie Popular Era (Mexico City: DR, 1977).

Chinese in Mexico relatively small but also they already had these rights before the escalation of hostilities. The Chinese who benefited from the preservation of these rights had won them twenty years earlier, as covered in Part II; removing this privilege would not have helped the image of the U.S. with this relatively small Chinese community.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the preservation of these border-crossing privileges signals how integral Chinese merchant operations had become for the capitalist integration of a transborder economy.

As the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts became more immanent, State and Justice Department officials and immigration bureaucrats produced a flurry of discussion about how Mexican nationals of the Chinese race will be dealt with. The repeal was floated in Congress in 1943; Section 6 privileges for Chinese merchants along the U.S.-Mexico border were reformulated under existing laws in the Alien Registration Act of 1940. These changes preserved Chinese merchant mobility along the border even as the larger legal apparatus of Chinese Exclusion was being dismantled.<sup>12</sup> The maintenance of this privilege allowed Chinese merchants in Mexicali to continue to be economically competitive agents of commerce when their Mexican counterparts suffered from a denial of border crossing privileges and a lack of distribution channels from suppliers in the rest of Mexico. The privilege of Chinese merchants to cross the border to conduct business made them better able to respond to the large population growth occurring in Mexicali. After the buildup of military forces in Southern California following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Mexicans were eventually granted border-crossing privileges as new document standards were met and the U.S. demand for Mexican labor grew. The period between 1940 and 1944 allowed Chinese merchants in Mexicali to briefly re-emerge as a commercial presence in the rapidly expanding urban border zone.

Despite the expansion of the wartime economy and border crossing privileges, Mexicali's commercial Chinese could not compete with Mexican domestic economic policy. Their comparative advantage of importing cheap wholesale goods from suppliers in southern California as well as directly from China was ultimately undercut by Mexican trade policies. High protective tariffs on imported goods were designed to bolster national programs of Import Substitution Industrialization, not unlike the *zhiqiang* policies of late Qing China mentioned in Chapter 4. These policies subsidized the expansion of domestic manufacturing capacity in order to create jobs and normalize Mexico's balance of payments. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s these policies gradually shut out a majority of the small and medium sized Chinese businesses in Mexicali. Import taxes made these commercial avenues untenable leading to the eventual transition to restaurants in the 1950s and 1960s. Then, even the cheapest imported goods were made more expensive than the domestically produced goods. The only merchandise that Chinese storekeepers were able to maintain a grip on was groceries and photographic film. This was primarily due to the fact that Mexican's could not compete with the technical production of American Kodak imports and Chinese groceries had long held exclusive distribution rights to popular brands of packaged food. In this way national economic policy became a local solution to the persistence of competitive Chinese owned

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<sup>11</sup> Horatio Mooers, "Letter from American Consul in Mexicali to the Secretary of State, Washington," in RG 85 (Washington D.C.: NARA I, 1941).

<sup>12</sup> Albert Del Guerico, "Letter from Del Guerico, LA District Director of the Department of Justice, to Assistant Commissioner for Adjudications," in RG 85 (Washington D.C.: NARA I, 1943). Lenuel Schofield, "Letter from the Assistant Attorney General to the Seattle District Director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.," in RG 85 (Washington D.C.: NARA I, 1942).

stores. The effect of protectionist trade policies in Mexicali was the transformation of a large number businesses into Chinese restaurants. It was relatively easy for Chinese store owners to convert their commercial space into a restaurant and their mediocre cooking skills were sufficient for Mexican tastes. One of the legacies of Abelardo Rodríguez's term as governor was the flourishing of the service sector in Mexicali. Chinese restaurants were a mainstay of that sector and remained unaffected by the changes in national trade policy. Furthermore, the local Mexicali clientele had exhibited a high demand for Chinese food since their proliferation in the 1920s. However, their tastes were not very selective so Chinese restaurants in Mexicali could produce cheap low-quality food at a profit. The collective transition to restaurant businesses in the Chinese community is representative of the ways that national reforms excluded the Chinese, anti-Chinese boycotts closed out other businesses and incorporated them as outsiders within the process of *Mexicanización*.

While the Mexican government raised tariffs on consumer goods, it dramatically lowered barriers to capital goods, meaning foreign loans and investment capital. This supplement to Import Substitution Industrialization programs essentially masked the advancement and entrenchment of foreign capital in Mexico's economy as federal economic stimulus. This situation was exemplified in the launching of CMTRC by the central government with Anderson Clayton & Co. serving as the primary financier and broker for the region's cotton products. These economic policies meant that Baja California's *Mexicanización* was underwritten by U.S. corporate agribusiness and the marginalization of the Chinese. Nevertheless, the CMTRC was lauded as the realization of Revolutionary principles and the genuine *Mexicanización* of the territory. The para-statal company took credit for a 475% increase in Baja California's population and the allocation of more than 220,000 acres of *ejido* lands that occurred in the late 1940s.<sup>13</sup> Nearly two decades after Abelardo Rodríguez's rule in Baja California the large presence of Chinese had either become a myth to most newcomers or a reminder of the importance of *Mexicanización*.

The anxieties about the Chinese being a liability in water negotiations during the 1920s and 30s were replaced with the implications of the construction of the All-American Canal in the 1930s, because the U.S. no longer depended upon the irrigation system in Mexico to deliver Imperial Valley's water. These structural conditions have plagued Baja California's agricultural development even still today.<sup>14</sup> The *Mexicanización* of Baja California has made it the most heavily irrigated and agriculturally intensive region in Mexico, making agricultural employment and water politics extremely volatile subjects. It also ties the economic well being of the peninsula to the capacity of the Mexican state to provide the necessary water resources.<sup>15</sup> These dire conditions have dictated the terms in which the past has been interpreted. Meaning that as Mexicali's water conditions worsen, historical narratives that emphasize the inequality between the U.S. and Mexico will be more popular.

By the end of World War II Baja California was poised for statehood and Mexicali had been entirely transformed. The Chinese community went from being a majority of the

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<sup>13</sup> Adalberto Saldaña Villaseñor, *Colonización del Valle de Mexicali, BC* (Mexico City: Union Grafica, 1958).

<sup>14</sup> Ward, *Border Oasis: Water and the Political Ecology of the Colorado River Delta, 1940-1975*.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Scott, Sandy Dallierba, and Rolando Caravantes, "Groundwater Rights in Mexican Agriculture: Spatial Distribution and Demographic Determinants," *The Professional Geographer* 62, no. 1 (2010): 1-15.

population working and building the agricultural foundations of the region to a small minority isolated in the ethnic food service sector. The marginalization of the Chinese and the expansion of state organized agricultural development and massive population relocation to the peninsula signaled to many a genuine Mexican colonization. The history of the relationship of the Chinese in Mexicali and the Mexican State has wavered between economic dependence, deliberate exclusion, and political omission. Statehood was not only a culmination of these processes but as we will see a cultural process of re-writing Baja California's history as a Mexican place.

## Chapter 10: Configurations of Mexican Space

The bid for statehood in the early 1950s brought renewed attention to the internal development of the peripheral territory. The political process of considering the Northern Territory of Baja California for statehood invited scrutiny and evaluation of the residents, the region's economic development and how genuine their claim to *Mexicanidad* had become. Among the qualities of territory, the most visible and valuable were the vast irrigated *ejidos* of the Mexicali agricultural colony. This economic system had grown to be able to support the bulk of the territory's population. Thirteen years after the *Asalto a las Tierras*, the eviction and displacement of the Chinese remained the most significant event in the region's integration with the rest of the nation. It held this position because it referred to peasant rebellions, revolutionary reform, and ethnic cleansing. This chapter discusses how Mexicali's past was taken up and worked upon in the process of defining Baja California as Mexico's 29<sup>th</sup> state.

On the September 12<sup>th</sup> inauguration of the territory's statehood in 1952 the newspaper *Siempre!* published an anonymous editorial.

The history of this region, of our country, is also the story of a heroic effort to fight against the inclemency of the environment and the voracious foreigner. Generations, for whom this country often forgot and neglected, persisted through an admirable Mexican spirit and succeeded, sometimes with weapons in hand, to preserve the homeland... Where Lázaro Cárdenas Mexicanized the lands with farmers brought in from all directions in Mexico to own land and where labor was liberating. With sweat, with sacrifice and nobility Mexicali, and Ensenada later, with its busy fishing and fresh climate, Mexicans came to think of the Baja California as a promise, an oasis, a center of joyful, fruitful efforts. Today that promise has been fulfilled with the achievement of a higher status; Baja California can be assured that their place is not to embellish the center, but to conquer it.<sup>1</sup>

Statehood provided a political discourse in which to stage the history of Baja California as a Mexican place. As in other periods of Mexico's post-Revolutionary fanfare, the subsequent ceremonies and dedications to the new state were a deliberate process of selecting specific aspects of Baja California's history that correspond to a formulaic lineage of post-Revolutionary succession.<sup>2</sup> As I examined in Part III, the control of state power rested on the political elite's capacity to manipulate the meaning of the Mexican Revolution. In this way, *El Asalto a las Tierras* was made into an "event" of the Mexican Revolution and Lázaro Cárdenas a hero of that Revolution. In order to accomplish this interpolation of nationalist ideology political elites sponsored three strategies to Mexicanize the past. First, through a flurry of compendiums, biographies, and all manner of historical narratives that situate Baja California as a preordained Mexican state realized through the patriotic passions of Revolutionary *mestizo* nationalists, including the celebration of *El Asalto a las Tierras*. Second, local and federal elites installed a cadre of statues, monuments, and memorials throughout Mexicali grafting nationalist historical narratives into the urban landscape of the capitol city. Third, the urban fabric of the city was also reconfigured to manipulate the

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous in Muñoz. Mexicali. 41

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*.

historical presence of the Chinese and their image within the contemporary border community.

*Preparing Baja California's Back-story*

Much of the literature on Baja California's journey towards statehood characterizes the process as largely being top-down with little involvement of Baja Californios. Hansen provides a useful account of the internal motivations towards statehood within the northern territory.<sup>3</sup> While he makes many references to the formation of political groups and their aspirations for Baja California's statehood, there is little information for why they were motivated to organize such political campaigns. Aside from the generalities of the desire for self-governance, I would argue that the political campaigns described in Hansen's account link anti-Chinese politics to the process of acquiring statehood. It was not only about the infusion of genuine Mexican settlers but more importantly, the early bids for statehood sought to control the distribution of resources expropriated from the Chinese and the CRLC. Baja California's incipient political groups and institutions were based on organizing and lobbying for these material interests. Those who held the official offices controlled the distribution of resources from the process of nationalizing the land. From this perspective Hansen leaves out crucial motivations for organizing campaigns for statehood. Nevertheless, the larger story remains true: Baja California's statehood was largely a process constituted and controlled by the federal government.

The textual revolution of Baja California's Mexican historiography after statehood exhibits two discernable qualities. First, the Chinese are referred to less and less explicitly until they are completely left out. The most common form of erasure is to refer to Mexicali's Chinese only with the term "foreigner," masking historical Chinese actors as white American agents of the CRLC. The earlier the monograph was written the more directly the Chinese were referred to. In subsequent decades, the Chinese begin to disappear from the historical account all together. This trend in the historiography suggests that referring to the triumph of *Mexicanización* as victoriously subduing the Chinese community carried less and less political currency, at least in part because no one could refute that the *Mexicanización* of Baja California had not been successful.

After statehood, the argument was undisputable – the Chinese were hardly worth mentioning, but the drama of *mestizo* Revolutionaries ejecting white imperialist Americans would remain a poignant national allegory.<sup>4</sup> This erasure re-writes the politics of the U.S.-Mexico border in more simplistic terms in order to sustain a homogeneous national discourse of inter-state power relations. The maintenance of this discourse reflects the persistence of the racial anxieties expressed by Abelardo Rodríguez, that domestic racial pariahs damage the image of Mexico in its relationship with the U.S. because of its own racial hierarchy. Others have referred to this as a "hemispheric orientalism" or an appropriation of American racial formations in an effort to achieve recognition and compliance with the expectations of a U.S. driven global racial order.<sup>5</sup> This argument however should not overshadow the importance of Mexican racial formations as a project of increasing state power by creating political subjects

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<sup>3</sup> Hansen, "La Transformacion de Baja California en Estado, 1931-1952."

<sup>4</sup> The drama of contemporary international water rights has strengthened the popularity of such historical understandings.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, "Hemispheric Orientalism and the 1907 Pacific Coast Race Riots." Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

with economic programs that tune them into industrial circuits of production and consumption.<sup>6</sup> The veneer of the Revolution has served to circumscribe a racially exclusive vision of the nation as well as a deeper integration into global capitalism.

The second related quality of this historiography is the glorification of the Mexican state in the process of *Mexicanización* of Baja California. The manicured historical image of the post-Revolutionary state is accomplished by masking the intensification of capitalist industrialization with nationalist discourse. For instance, even in narratives that leave out the Chinese, direct foreign investment of the CRLC is demonized as imperialist, while the agricultural financing of Anderson Clayton & Co. through the CMTRC was widely applauded. The demonization of foreign capital also serves as an umbrella condemnation for the Chinese as foreign degenerates or accomplices to foreign imperialism. The image of the state becomes aggrandized with the beneficiaries of Agrarian Reform. The entitlement to foreign capital, via state disbursement, effectively transforms recipients into political and economic subjects of the capitalist state. These benefits are contingent upon their conformity to pro-government positions. This political discourse invents the subjects of *Mexicanización* as the ingratiated heirs of the Revolution, rescued from peril in the perpetual fight against the ravages of imperialist U.S. capitalism. The contradictions of this political subjectivity are consistent with the historiography of *Mexicanización* in Baja California. Peripheral territory is uplifted through the rapture of federal reform and political recognition is granted by a central state's regimes of subjectification. In this way the historiography of *Mexicanización* serves to reproduce nationalist sentimental relationships to the economic and political projects of national integration.

These two trends in Baja California's historiography are inter-related. The racialization and erasure of Mexicali's Chinese is concomitant with the political conformity that guarantees state entitlements during the era of *Mexicanización*. After statehood this political agenda was *fait accompli*. In other words, Baja Californios bought their integration into the Mexican nation and incorporation into state capitalism through their compliance with the disenfranchisement of the Chinese community. Part III showed how Mexican workers were rewarded by the state for their racial prejudice against the Chinese. They are rewarded again for forgetting them. In this way, remembering the past in Mexicali is to experience the meaning of race.

In the decade following Baja California's statehood several important works were published that established the narrative formula for post-statehood Baja California historiography: the narrative account of the CMTRC in 1958, *The History of Lower California* by Pablo Martinez in 1960 and Abelardo Rodríguez's *Autobiografía* in 1962. Reading these texts is an effort to historicize the political act of recording the past. Through these works dominant tropes, or narrative conventions, emerge that dictate the treatment of historical subjects. The *Colonización del Valle de Mexicali, B.C.* was funded by the CMTRC as propaganda for the mobilization of Baja California ejidos with Anderson Clayton & Co. financing and brokerage. The importance of this work is the narrative of colonization as a sequence of projects led by foreigners with whom the Mexican government was forced to bargain with until *El Asalto a las Tierras*, at which point foreigners disappear and *Mexicanización* is accomplished. This text makes specific reference to the despicable

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<sup>6</sup> Gareth Williams, *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution*.

circumstance that more than 15,000 Chinese operated most of Mexicali's fields and after *Mexicanización* there were only patriotic mestizos.<sup>7</sup> While few histories of the region mention the size of the Chinese community, here it is used to emphasize the success of genuine Mexican colonization. Furthermore, the text explains the "exodus" trope or disappearance of the Chinese on the Great Depression and the "panic produced in the Chinese masses of Baja California by the merciless expulsion of their compatriots in the neighboring state of Sonora."<sup>8</sup> The text closes by claiming the CMTRC turned "night into day" in Baja California to complete the exaltation of state capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

Pablo Martínez's *The History of Lower California* is a massive tome covering 400 years that fails to mention the Chinese of Baja California once. The author was a dedicated historian of Baja California whose personal papers were included in the state archives in their permanent collection. Works like this draw on the romantic vision of the Spanish missionary past, similar to the "fantasy heritage" referred to in Chapter 3. The importance of this text is that it provides a narrative of Baja Californios who fought to keep the territory as a part of Mexico despite being socially and politically isolated from the rest of the country. It depicts Agrarian Reform and *Mexicanización* as the just fruits of their patriotic dedication to Mexican nationalism. The image of Baja Californios here is that of pioneering defenders of the threatened margins of the nation. The clear antagonist in Martínez's text is the Americans whether imperialist filibusters or agricultural capitalists, Mexican protagonists succeeded in keeping Baja California a Mexican place. The emphasis on the patriotism of key individuals minimizes references to Mexican state intervention in order to attribute the progress of history to the motivations and aspirations of key Baja Californios.<sup>10</sup> There are many examples of Martínez's narrative trope of Baja California history. Most resemble a chronological assemblage of biographical and ethnographic historical details about Spanish Missionaries, Mexican pioneers and revolutionaries, and enterprising American imperialists as if to overwhelm the reader with evidence as in Bernal's 1966 *Compendio Histórico-Biográfico de Mexicali*. Another published in 1964, *¡Alerta, Baja California!*, is a compilation of pro-Mexico statements made by Baja Californios in an effort to demonstrate the Revolutionary sentimentality of political actors so far removed from the political center of the nation.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, Abelardo Rodríguez's *Autobiografía*, published in 1962 is largely an expansion of his previous work, *Memoria Administrativa*, written during his term as governor of the territory. While the text is autobiographical and not dedicated to narrating the history of Baja California, it is important for Baja California historiography because of his inclusion of Mexicali's Chinese in its pages. His characterization of the Chinese as deeply problematic racial characters serves to substantiate his disdain for them. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, Rodríguez's public condemnation of Mexicali's Chinese as uncooperative, violent, drug addicted, gambling, cutthroat business men established the narrative of inclusion as a racial problem. When historians adopt this trope the Chinese are referred to by the "mafia" image that Rodríguez helped to propagandize in the 1920s. In this characterization, the state is depicted as the heroic and moral reformer protecting the purity of Mexicans from the resident

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<sup>7</sup> Villaseñor, Colonización del Valle de Mexicali, BC.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Pablo Martínez, *A History of Lower California: The Only Complete and Reliable One* (Mexico City: Editorial Baja California, 1960).

<sup>11</sup> María Luisa Melo de Remes, *¡Alerta, Baja California!* (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1964).



Chinese and therefore facilitating the *Mexicanización* of the territory. The tropes of exodus, exclusion, and racial inclusion describe how post-statehood narratives of Baja California history treat the subject of Chinese migration and settlement in the region.

#### *Managing the Assault*

The turning point for all Mexican histories of Baja California is *El Asalto a las Tierras*; it is the narrative device that integrates Baja California into the nation. The elevated significance of this occurrence to an event is in part a necessary component to affixing the temporal location of the Chinese in the historic past of cultural memory, as well as, aggrandizing the state's *Mexicanización* of the peripheral territory. Shortly after the government's expropriation of CRLC lands, one author begins the memorialization of *El Asalto a las Tierras* as a regional fixture of nationalist ideology. He writes,

The first task in protecting the Mexican population... is that the youth know the painful history of the Mexican struggle for freedom and progress, and look lovingly and refer to the grand work of the Mexican Revolution, not to release the mystification of ambitions for power and wealth, but of longing, sentimental yearning and a throbbing heart for a race that is the sublime exaltation of the supreme ideal of the country.<sup>12</sup>

This passage illustrates how instrumental history is to the creation of Mexican political consciousness and the hegemony of post-Revolutionary political elites.<sup>13</sup> Fifteen years after *El Asalto a las Tierras*, it was used as a commemorative symbol of the inauguration of the territory's turn toward what Abelardo Rodríguez called, genuine Mexican colonization – a Baja California without Chinese.

In 1952, President Miguel Aleman recognized that the territory had achieved the critical population threshold as described in the previous chapter. After this condition had been reached, the Territory required a more convincing cultural and political articulation of how this peripheral region fit into the national fabric. It was not until the following year that Braulio Maldonado Sandez was elected as the state's first governor. In this role he took lasting steps to articulate state's identity to the rest of the nation. In 1957, he published a decree establishing the annual commemoration of the "initial act of movement that led to the primary application of Agrarian Reform in the State" – *El Asalto a las Tierras*.<sup>14</sup> A statement setting out the political rationality for memorializing this event preceded the decree. First, he cited the desire to recognize political acts by Baja Californios that added to the civic life of the state. This commemoration constructs armed raids on Chinese farmers as civic participation. This sentiment mirrors calls for the expulsion of Chinese from Sonora as a form of "urgent nationalism".<sup>15</sup> Second, he recognized the *El Asalto a las Tierras*, as the most influential civic act in Baja California's history. Lastly, he draws on the prevailing historical understanding of *El Asalto a las Tierras* writing,

The importance of this event highlights the entire region's history, since the monopoly of the peninsular lands caused long stagnation of the Baja Californian society in all

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<sup>12</sup> Carlos Meza Leon, *Baja California: Reseña Historico-Geografica*. (Mexico City: DAPP, 1937).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*.

<sup>14</sup> Various, "Día del Ejido, y lo Relativo," in *Gobierno del Estado* (Mexicali: Archivo Historical del Estado de Baja California, 1957).

<sup>15</sup> Espinoza, *El Problema Chino en Mexico*.

aspects, with the consequences of depopulation, stunted economic development, social instability. All of them, anomalies that were corrected at their root with the application of agrarian reform.<sup>16</sup>

Through the political logic of a nationalist historical imagination the first three decades of the territory's development were backwards periods of mismanagement ultimately rectified by the purification of "revolutionary" action embodied by agrarian reform. This decree legislates the erasure of the Chinese from the political history of the state and at the same time resurrects the Mexican revolution through *El Asalto* to accomplish the territory's redemption and cleansing. Furthermore, the statement situates the final act of Revolutionary achievement, not in the people, but in the federal government's capacity to enact Agrarian Reform.



**Figure 14 Source: 1937. Manifestacion de Agricultores Frente al Antiguo Palacio de Gobierno. Fotografias Historicas, Album 2. Archivo Historical del Estado de Baja California**

The official decree illustrates both an official recognition and strategic effort to manage the message of the celebrations as the politics of industrial agriculture began to change. Before the official commemoration of *El Asalto a las Tierras* in 1957 informal celebrations of remembrance on the January 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary were very common. The celebrations were both pageantry and political lobbying. Public gatherings at the downtown municipal palace re-enacted the congregation of forces that committed the original assault in 1937. In their celebrations the representatives of the *ejidos* brought banners with the name of the *ejido* and political slogans. The downward trend of the postwar price of cotton and the rapid expansion of irrigated lands put strain on Mexicali's *ejidos* because the price drop reduced the farmers' ability to pay off pre-season loans and the increased demand for water

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<sup>16</sup> Braulio Maldonado Sandez, "Decreto: Dia del Ejido," ed. Periodico Oficial (Mexico City: 1957), 11.

created competition among *ejidos*. The problems of industrial agriculture in Mexicali eventually became part of the annual celebration as a plea for reform. Once more, the federal government could not control the political attitudes that resulted from state programs of population increase. Widespread discontent in agrarian Baja California led to a mass alignment with a Communist platform across Latin America called the Movement of National Liberation (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-MLN) inspired by the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and taken up by a retired Lázaro Cárdenas in 1961. The political message of the MLN took the form of the *Central Campesina Independiente* (CCI) a communist-controlled Mexican political party. The CCI became widely popular throughout Mexicali Valley *ejidos* with the help of Governor Maldonado, one of the lead organizers of the budding political party.<sup>17</sup> The formation of this oppositional party was viewed as a threat to the federal government's authority and even began to receive pressure from the U.S. government to control this communist element.<sup>18</sup> Whereas an examination of the politics of the popular agrarian communist party in Baja California is certainly a worthwhile endeavor it is beyond the scope of this project. The reason for approaching this subject however is to illustrate the politics of popular memory in the commemoration of *El Asalto a las Tierras*. In 1964 the annual *El Asalto a las Tierras* celebration became an enormous CCI rally provoking the interests of the federal government.

CCI political leaders, farmers from the Liga Agraria Estatal and agents of the federal Dirección General de Seguridad attended that year's remembrance. Capitan Moises Maislin reported on the day's activities in a confidential report to Mexico City describing the celebration. His report contained detailed records of the signage displayed at the rally as well as transcripts of the speeches given. Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) had held unbroken power since the political consolidation of Obregón and Calles presidencies in the 1920s. The CCI's criticism of the government's handling of the postwar agrarian economy was a definite threat to the party's authority. Political power in Mexico was wielded as a function of the ability to produce credentials of Revolutionary authenticity – even for those out of office. The federal government was understandably concerned about this challenge to their position. Alfonso Garzon, one of the CCI's principle organizers was introduced to the crowd as the “new Pancho Villa.”<sup>19</sup> In his speech he described the long struggle of Mexican farmers in Baja California and the economic conversion of the region's communal *ejidos* into *latifundios*, or foreign owned plantations, referring to the dominance of Anderson Clayton & Co. However, in an appeal to the Liga Agraria Estatal's historical experience Garzon emphasizes the travesty of their time that the government had handed the land, fought from the Chinese farmers and the CRLC, to American imperialists.

A select group of people managed with the strength of their bodies to take the immense lands of the Mexicali Valley that were covered by the Colorado River Land Company and especially from the foreign Chinese and Japanese. But the necessities

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<sup>17</sup> Cuna, "Department of State Telegram," in RG 59 (Washington DC: NARA II, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> Garduño, *Voces y Ecos de un Desierto Fértil*. Kate Doyle, "After the Revolution: Lázaro Cárdenas and the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," in National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book (Washington D.C.: The National Security Archive, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Moises Maislin, "Confidencial: Informe Actividades de la Liga Agraria Estatal," in Pablo Martínez, ed. Dirección General de Seguridad (Mexicali: Archivo Histórico del Estado de Baja California, 1964).

of the country emerged, the farmers began to organize and everywhere in the valley the valiant groups began to feel the principle that the borderlands at the boundary of this great country would be delivered and distributed to the farmers.<sup>20</sup>

He continued to use the triumph over Chinese and Japanese farmers as a signifier for the entitlement to sufficient resources, as well as the failure of the Mexican government to safeguard the *Mexicanización* of the last thirty years. I use this example of *El Asalto a las Tierras* commemoration and CCI political rally, because it illustrates the strength of racial discourse in communicating progressive Revolutionary ideals in Baja California. Eventually government repression diffused the CCIs radical political strain ultimately forcing the *ejidos* to lease their lands to transnational agribusinesses in the 1970s that recruited their workers from indigenous populations in southern Mexico. Since the episodes of CCI government repression commemorations of *El Asalto a las Tierras* were stripped of their radicalism, instead serving as a ceremony of the application of Agrarian Reform and the moment when Baja California became Mexican.<sup>21</sup> This practice of remembrance has buried the contributions of Chinese settlers under the weight of nationalist discourse and the event's political appropriation over the past decades.

#### *Configured Mexican Space*

At the turn of the twentieth century Mexicali's urban space reflected the global connections of the Pacific cotton corridor. Since these early days Mexicali has grown exponentially through programs of *Mexicanización*. These fits of expansion and reorganization illustrate how the arrangement of urban features and the overall spatial context of the city became a conscious element in the broader program of *Mexicanización*. Coming to terms with the history of the Chinese in Mexicali, requires a commitment to their bitter experiences, as well as, the apathy and denial written into historical texts and the urban spaces of the city.<sup>22</sup> The built environment and its public and private spaces provide important clues about the relationship of the Chinese community to Mexico broadly, and how that relationship dictates the construction of the past. The built urban environment is an important lens from which to interpret this relationship because the subversion of the Chinese community in Mexicali was, literally, built upon rapid population increase since the 1930s. As the urban space of Mexicali grew in response to these population increases city leaders used the opportunities created by infrastructure demands, economic development, and other public works to reconfigure public spaces, like street corners, cemeteries and the port of entry, to make the urban space reflect the triumph and perpetuity of *Mexicanización*.

After statehood, and the destabilization of the postwar agricultural economy, the federal government embarked on an aggressive campaign to also populate Mexicali with monuments of national history. An undated guide to Mexicali's statues and monuments begins with a political logic pervasive in Mexico and sums up the desire to install these cultural markers. It reads,

The monuments that man raises in his cities and fields are a testimony to his history; it is a symbol of thanks for those who gave the best of themselves to build a freer nation

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Doyle, "After the Revolution: Lázaro Cárdenas and the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional."

<sup>22</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997).

and better distribute its resources that it makes possible the strength of a people or a nation or even an empire. Also, the monuments are graphic traces of the feelings that encourage people to remember their heroes and if it strikes them continue their example of nobility and sacrifice.<sup>23</sup>

This guide to Mexicali's monuments speaks to the necessity to replicate the generic national image that political elites felt Baja California lacked.<sup>24</sup> Programs to incorporate Mexicali into the national pattern of reiterated iconic figures emphasizes the larger efforts to repackage Baja California history as a national allegory and to refer back to the federal state as the embodiment of the revolution.

Baja California's administrators have built monuments in Mexicali from time to time emphasizing the continuity of their authority from heroic revolutionaries to their appointment to political office. This practice extends back into Baja California's history when political elites took an interest in memorializing the Revolution. For instance, during the intense period of turmoil during the Great Depression governor Rodríguez erected a statue of Obregón in Mexicali's urban center. This act reflected the post-Revolutionary consolidation of power and reaffirmation of the sovereign authority of Obregón's presidency. Paradoxically, Obregón's policy for Baja California during his presidency (1920-1924) was the endorsement of the CRLC's original colonization contract and the open immigration of Chinese to Mexico. Nevertheless, this monument labels him as a father of the Revolution, an awkward claim to make in Baja California, but an early effort to re-package the state as a Mexican place.

In 1933, President Abelardo Rodríguez and Ex-President Plutarco Calles embarked on a campaign to build a monument to the Mexican Revolution in Mexico City. The construction of the building began in 1897 under Porfirio Díaz to house the national legislature. Owing to the collapse of the Mexican government during the Revolution, the structure remained unfinished. The Monument to the Revolution, finished in 1938, now stands as an important icon in the symbolic landscape of the capitol city. It is a monument to the institutionalization of post-revolutionary political elites, as well as a tomb for several Presidents and a museum for the revolution. While in office Calles and Rodríguez sought to transform that structure into a site that commemorates the Mexican Revolution in perpetuity. Calles took great interest in this project, as did Rodríguez. In order to fund the construction of the monument, bonds were sold to anyone who donated money to the cause. In return, citizens would receive a commemorative diploma documenting their national subscription for the construction of the monument. Political groups in Baja California became interested in supporting the construction of the monument as evidence of their good nationalist credentials. Among the most vocal supporters in Mexicali was Governor Olachea who had been under fire from the CROM for following President Rodríguez's orders to protect the Chinese from boycotts and other protests for fear of plunging the economy into greater depths. By sponsoring the construction of this monument, he was able to redeem some political capital.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Monumentos Historicos de Mexicali, B.C. (Estatuas)," in Pablo Martinez (Mexicali: Archivo Historical del Estado de Baja California).

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin, *La Revolución Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History*.

<sup>25</sup> Agustín Olachea, "Construc. De Monumentos a la Revolucion y al General Alvaro Obregon," in Gobierno del Estado (Mexicali: Archivo Historical del Estado de Baja California, 1933).

Statues and monuments in Mexicali have been aesthetic compliments to structural reform. In the fanfare of the CMTRC and statehood, busts of José Maria Morelos, Benito Juárez, Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata proliferated throughout the city. Some local figures were also enshrined in these projects. In 1955 a statue of General Rodolfo Sanchez Taboada was erected to commemorate his role in the resolution of *El Asalto a las Tierras*. However, it was not until the 1970s that major urban development schemes were put into action. Some of these referred back to *El Asalto a las Tierras* to re-establish the ideological continuity of the territory's "founding revolutionary action" with the restructuring of the economy. These aesthetic projects coincided with new economic policies that tried to take advantage of surplus labor and border proximity. Federal programs like the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (PRONAF) in 1961 and the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in 1965 encouraged the growth of assembly plants, known as *maquiladoras*, to employ idle workers and expand trade with the U.S., including shopping centers in Mexico to lure American consumers and their dollars south of the border. These policies intensified cross-border commerce, attracting Mexicans in search of work and better wages.<sup>26</sup> In Mexicali, these federal programs brought industrial manufacturing, shopping malls, and an aggrandizement of Baja California state government. In this process, city leaders repeatedly made choices that undermined traces of the Chinese presence and further marginalize their role in Mexicali's future.

In 1977 two symbolic transformations were undertaken in Mexicali as a part of these national programs: the establishment of a new shopping center and the construction of an enormous civic center. These two projects contributed to the further erasure of the Chinese from Mexicali's urban spaces, primarily through the exhumation of Chinese graves and the repeated denial of a Chinese past in the commemorations of *El Asalto a las Tierras*. The construction of the civic center created grandiose new buildings for the state congress, the courts, and municipality in raw brutalist architecture. To accompany these structures a gigantic thirty-foot tall bronze statue of Lázaro Cárdenas was constructed south of the city. Smaller busts of him were built in the centers of surrounding ejidos as well. These projects had the added effect of also observing the fortieth anniversary of *El Asalto a las Tierras*.<sup>27</sup> This cultural blitz to commemorate these historical events attempts to reiterate a lineage of *Mexicanización* from *El Asalto a las Tierras*, the expropriation of CRLC lands, the CMTRC in the late 1940s, statehood, through to the programs for industrialization along the border.

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<sup>26</sup> David E. Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth-Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999). The termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 created concerns about the unemployment of repatriated workers.

<sup>27</sup> "Monumentos Historicos de Mexicali, B.C. (Estatuas)."



**Figure 15 Source: "Monumentos Historicos de Mexicali, B.C. (Estatuas)." In Pablo Martinez. Mexicali: Archivo Historical del Estado de Baja California.**

In concert with industrial production, Mexican economic policies also supported mass consumption. Since the postwar era, Mexicans demanded both jobs and access to material prosperity – no less a symbol of modernity and success enabled by the “Revolution.”<sup>28</sup> Increasing consumer demand by encouraging American tourism south of the border was designed to augment domestic purchases. While Mexicans were experiencing massive inflation, Americans with U.S. dollars took advantage of the disparity created by the 1976 peso devaluation. In Mexicali, these broader transformations reordered the city when the dilapidated cotton refinery known as La Jabonera del Pacifico [See Figure 16] was bulldozed to make room for a massive indoor shopping mall called La Plaza Cachanilla. As the Jabonera was transformed into a popular shopping center and transportation depot for city buses, the oldest cemetery across the street was also renovated and renamed from El Cementerio Municipal, Numero 1 to El Cementerio de los Pioneros, also in line with the fortieth anniversary of *El Asalto a las Tierras*.

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<sup>28</sup> Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).





**Figure 16 Fotos Digitales. Archivo Historico Municipal de Mexicali**

In order to understand the significance of these renovations a bit of background is helpful. When Mexicali was established as an agricultural colony by the CRLC, it provided few public services. Among those it neglected was what to do with the remains of the workers who died laboring in the desert. The first cemetery in Mexicali was an informal site located near the main canal in what is now downtown Mexicali. It remained this way until 1919 when the municipality created the Panteon Municipal Numero 1 on land opposite the CRLC's cotton processing facility, La Jabonera del Pacifico. Many of the first workers and settlers were buried there. During this period the Chinese were segregated to the south section. By 1944 the municipality had to expand its cemetery and build the Panteon Municipal Numero 2 east of the city center. This cemetery never segregated the dead. In 1954, after the massive population increases from *Mexicanización*, the municipality devoted more space for the burial of Mexicali's residents by building the Jardin Descanso several kilometers to the south of the city. This public cemetery also houses a Chinese section. Private cemeteries did not appear until the 1960s when Jardines del Desierto was established. This privately managed cemetery houses a large section of segregated Chinese burials with several hundred individuals. The municipal cemetery acreage expanded again in 1977 when El Centinela was created on the far outskirts of the west end of the city.<sup>29</sup>

The municipal registry of burials at the Panteon Municipal Numero 1 contains records of people no longer buried there. One of them, Lim Sing died as a cotton worker at the height of the turmoil before *El Asalto a las Tierras*. At the age of forty he widowed a wife in Canton; no local familial relations were recorded. He was buried in 1936 on February 24<sup>th</sup> in the Chinese portion of the cemetery.<sup>30</sup> This part of the cemetery became *Unidad Deportiva Lopez Mateos*, a municipal park and pool to accommodate the exercise and leisure of La Plaza

<sup>29</sup> Carmen Becerra, "Historia de los Panteones de Mexicali," in Pablo Martinez (Mexicali: Archivo Historico del Estado de Baja California, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Various, "Municipal Cemetery No. 1, 3rd Class Registry," ed. Municipal Cemetery (Mexicali: 1924-1944).



Cachanilla consumers. In 1977, Lim Sing's remains along with an unknown number of other Chinese were exhumed and transported to El Centinela. The remains of Mexicali's Chinese residents were consolidated according to their membership in the 17 remaining fraternal and hometown associations. The Chinese Association of Mexicali took responsibility for the unknown and unclaimed remains during their removal to El Centinela. For those that stayed in Mexicali despite the Mexicanización campaigns and harassment from unions, their burial in Mexicali's cemeteries is one of the last traces of their intentions to belong to Baja California. The deteriorating registry of municipal burials is the only record that Lim Sing and the other exhumed Chinese residents made Mexicali their final resting place.

This event is one episode in a series of systematic manipulations and reconfigurations of Mexicali's urban space; designed to erase the Chinese past in order to realize an ideal Mexican present. When the old site of the Jabonera was made into a popular consumer destination, the cemetery's proximity dictated that it also reflect a past imaged by *Mexicanización*. The municipal park's construction accomplished the cultural work of resignifying that location. In the eyes of city leaders, the alteration to the burial grounds enabled the renaming of the cemetery. In physical and symbolic terms, the cemetery could only become "El Cementerio de los Pioneros" after the Chinese section was erased from the grounds.<sup>31</sup> These choices reflect the importance of anti-Chinese sentiments in the legacies of *Mexicanización*.

Adding insult to injury, the head stones from the Chinese section of the renamed cemetery were demolished and used as backfill to reinforce a retaining wall on the western flank of the cemetery. Behind a rubble heap of smashed grave markers Chan Sewo's head stone was carefully placed in the corner of the retaining wall to support a metal fence post along with poured concrete. Sewo was buried in the cemetery in 1938 just after Cárdenas' expropriation. In this sense, *El Asalto a las Tierras* evicted Sewo twice, once from the cotton ranches for agrarian reform and a second time from the cemetery to erase the trace of the first eviction.



**Figure 17 Author Photo**

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<sup>31</sup> Becerra, "Historia de los Panteones de Mexicali."

Among the monuments and memorials built throughout Mexicali, none of them commemorated or recognized the Chinese contribution to building the foundations of the agricultural colony. It was not until 1994 that the municipality constructed a direct acknowledgement of the Chinese in its repertoire of symbolic structures, as mentioned in the opening of the manuscript. In the exuberance of the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the political leaders of the capitol reached out to Nanjing, China an industrial zone in the northeast of the country in a gesture of diplomatic goodwill to bolster trade between these two localities.



**Figure 18 Fotos Digitales. Archivo Historico Municipal de Mexicali.**

The structure was to be placed at the intersection of cross-border traffic in the newly renovated U.S.-Mexico port of entry. The design of the commemorative structure was to be a Chinese styled pavilion in a small patio to be called La Plaza de Amistad. It was built with Chinese workers from Nanjing and Mexican workers from Mexicali. While the pavilion does indeed establish a visible and poignant symbol denoting some type of Chinese presence, it did nothing to acknowledge the local Chinese population in Mexicali or their history. Instead, the pavilion's association with Nanjing did more to mask the local Chinese community than to incorporate them into an inclusive vision of Mexicali. It is through this type of recognition that stereotypical images of the Chinese as perpetual foreigners are disseminated – local residents are ignored while Chinese from China are positioned in the spotlight. Furthermore, the historical presence of Chinese in Mexicali is merely a generic reference point to a naked public relations strategy to attract investment capital. In this way, the Chinese in Mexicali are

only as useful as their ability to bring investment capital and talent from China. The pavilion is a two-faced symbol of recognition and disavowal, another example of the racial inclusion trope – the Chinese may be recognized so long as it emphasizes the Chinese in China.

The pavilion capitalizes on the image of Mexicali as a place with a Chinese past, albeit never articulated. In the currency of symbols in a global economy, the erection of the Chinese pavilion seeks to cash in on the historical presence of the Chinese without incorporating or acknowledging the discrimination that previously took place. To many Chinese residents of Mexicali, the Pavilion holds little meaning. It even becomes an annoyance when curious Mexicans question the appropriateness of the structure at the port of entry when there was little involvement of the Chinese community to begin with. What's more is that the majority of the previous and contemporary migrations of Chinese to Mexicali have come from the rural outskirts of Guangdong (Canton) in southeast China. However, many Mexicans point to the pavilion as a reminder that the Chinese have been in Mexicali for a long time.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the pavilion stands at the port of entry visible from the U.S. through the border fence. Perhaps it is more a symbol of the triangular geopolitical relations between the U.S., China, and Mexico. While NAFTA increased the intensity of economic globalization along the border, it mirrored Chinese state-organized development schemes that clustered industrialization in Nanjing.<sup>33</sup> In this way, the expansion of American corporate capitalism in the 1990s encouraged political elites in China and Mexico to coordinate their responses to the U.S. dominated trans-Pacific trade. The pavilion is a local symbol of this transnational political logic.

The ambivalent readings of the pavilion speak to the mixed interpretations that result from inter-relations of the U.S., China, and Mexico. In the late 1990s Mexican economists began to speak of the “dragon effect,” described as falling exports to the U.S. as the Chinese share of U.S. imports grew.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, China and Mexico remain the top countries in which the U.S. conducts trade with. The persistent dominance of the U.S. in the trans-Pacific corridor has been a centerpiece of the Pacific Rim's drive towards, what many now refer to as, the global postmodern economy.<sup>35</sup> Critics describe the developments of capitalism in the late twentieth century as postmodern because new strategies to accumulate capital have emerged to constitute a dominant shift in the structure of the global economy. These shifts are briefly summarized in the following table showing different generalized characteristics.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jason Oliver Chang, "Interview with Esteban Leon," (Mexicali: 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Y. H. Dennis Wei, Jun Luo, and Qiang Zhou, "Location Decisions and Network Configurations of Foreign Investment in Urban China," *The Professional Geographer* 62, no. 2 (2010): 264-283.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy Diaz, "Ecos de Asia en la Region Occidente de Mexico," *Mexico y La Cuenca Del Pacifico* 1, no. 2 (1998): 13-14.

<sup>35</sup> David Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003). Fredrick Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Adapted from Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity*.

<b>Social Field</b>	<b>Modern</b>	<b>Postmodern</b>
Production Process	Nation-based resource driven	Decentralized demand driven
Labor	Fixed and specialized, large middle class	Mobile and generalized, no middle class
State	Centralized regulating hierarchy with homogeneous territory	Flexible, open, market participant with heterogeneous territory

Just as the “oversavings thesis” was employed at the turn of the century (discussed in Chapter 2) to economically justify the imperialist growth of U.S. capitalism into Latin America and the Asian Pacific; U.S. led postwar industrialization shifted the trans-Pacific corridor towards flexible dispersed modes of production that use geographically dispersed supply-chains (i.e. the Anderson Clayton & Co. brokerage strategy and the invention of border *maquiladoras*). This strategy facilitated the acceleration of the accumulation of capital because it allowed more precise, temporary, time-sensitive investments to be made without expensive state regulation or infrastructure investments. This model of industrialized development along the border effectively integrated the Mexican economy into broader circuits of postmodern modes of production, most notably with that of Asia and the U.S. Indeed, much of Mexico’s international commerce with China and Japan is conducted as a material supply-chain for commodities sold in the U.S.<sup>37</sup> The resurgence of trans-Pacific trade circuits in postmodern global capitalism underscores the significance of the triangulated historical framework presented in this dissertation.

The broader patterns of postmodern structural change described here are constitutive of the maintenance of a U.S. dominated trans-Pacific corridor. These structural changes have also generated the economic displacement of workers in Canton, China’s urban-rural interface leading to renewed flows of informal migration. After a century of change Chinese still come to Mexicali looking for opportunity. However, the only thing they will find is work in one of the more than three hundred Chinese restaurants. Mexicali began to attract new migrants when these changes reached the hometowns of the city’s Chinese residents in the 1970s. When relatives in China called looking for opportunities, Mexicali once again became a destination. A vast majority of the new migrants legal and illegal come to Mexicali because of family connections. The Mexicali that these new migrants experience is alienating and isolated because decades of *Mexicanización* have segregated most Chinese to restaurant work and ignored the needs of this community. The Chinese in Mexicali now live between shadows. This is the life lived under the legacies of *Mexicanización* in Baja California – the state of amnesia

### **El Museo Regional del Estado de Baja California**

If the reorganization of urban space provides an interpretive framework to understand the cultural politics of history in the region, then the El Museo Regional del Estado at the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California offers insights into how questions of identity structure representations of the past. This museum is free, open to the public and visited primarily by schools to give students a museum experience and an encounter with regional historical narratives. The exhibition spaces discussed below were created in 2006. The

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<sup>37</sup> Roberto Hernandez, "El Comercio Exterior de China y Su Relacion con Mexico. Una Perspectiva Historica," Mexico y La Cuenca Del Pacifico 8, no. 26 (2005): 117-129.

curated assemblage of material culture, combined with textual explanation, creates a visual environment where a Baja California past is presented.

Using this museum as a site for inquiry allows us to approach the question of how the identity-projecting role of the constructed space reveals an “unconscious code” through a “dialectics of seeing.”<sup>38</sup> This code refers to the invented taxonomies and classification schemes used to organize the contents and script of the museum exhibit. This code is made legible through these decisions of selection, arrangement, and presentation. I interpret these patterns of inclusion and exclusion as being embodied in traditions of privilege and power.<sup>39</sup> The interpretation is advanced by a dialectical analysis of the image environment produced by the exhibit space. The displays provide evidence of ongoing plays of power by practicing authoritative conceptions of historical sequence and propagating normative positions from which history is narrated.<sup>40</sup> In this way, the museum space asks/answers the question “who are we?” by drawing on conventions of oppression and advantage practiced by the Mexican state. The following description of the museum illustrates how nationalist ideology and *Mexicanización* produce claims about the racial identity of the nation and how people should relate to each other based on this identity.

The museum features a main gallery lobby that displays temporary exhibits and traveling collections. The permanent features of the museum are divided into two historical exhibition spaces. The first exhibition space illustrates the “Prehistory and Archeology of Baja California.” The large panels describe the indigenous inhabitants who left artifacts such as arrowheads and pottery in various regions throughout the Baja California peninsula illustrating their craftsmanship. A general description of their way of life is matched with descriptions of the environmental conditions of the peninsula during the mid and late Holocene. Large inset paintings show people at work and at play in these environments with native dress. The visual displays place an emphasis on human morphology illustrating the changes in the shape of the skull and facial features. These material representations and physical separation of this pre-history exhibit space from that of the adjacent pre-modern and contemporary one helps to achieve the “monumentalization” of indigenous peoples through “historical and anthropological ritualization.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, the containment and adoration of pre-history in nationalist discourse attempts to appropriate an indigenous identity for the nation-state.

The second and larger permanent exhibition space constructs a synthesis of the peninsula’s population by spatially distributing different racial and ethnic groups according to three phases of migration to the region. The colorful floor-to-ceiling displays are organized in concentric circles that are secondarily categorized according to topographic region. [See Appendix 1] The blending of topographic and social categories in the organization of the exhibition space creates a mixed metaphor in which the social categories appear to exist as naturally as the coast is distinct from the mountains. This combination of natural and social

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Artistic Taste and Cultural Capital,” *Culture and Society* (1990): 205-215. Buck-Morss and Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.

<sup>39</sup> Also see Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Also see Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

characteristics helps to forge a regional identity within the context of a broader national character. The numerous maps that connect Baja California to the rest of Mexico aid this process of self-identification.

First, the “Early Migration” of indigenous peoples who settled the deserts, rivers, coasts and mountains of the peninsula is located in the center of the exhibition space. Encircling that centerpiece is a second series of four arching displays labeled “Colonial Migration” which portray Spanish colonization in four themes: maritime navigation and the Galleon trade; the Spanish discovery and exploration of the peninsula’s coasts and rivers; the conquistadores and missionaries; and the establishment of Spanish settlements and missions. The third series of exhibition panels is labeled “Contemporary Migration” depicting the various groups to have migrated to Baja California since 1900.

This third grouping lines the walls of this large exhibit space and includes a series that I will first describe as a whole then examine some individual panels. The following panels are arranged in order from right to left as you enter the exhibition space; Japanese fishermen with a stand alone display depicting Japanese culture, Mexican fishermen, American tourists, Chinese immigrants, Russian immigrants, Mexicans from central and southern Mexico, followed by a stand alone display depicting *El Asalto a las Tierras*, then continuing along the inside wall with scenes portraying early settlement life as cowboys and miners, and lastly a large display describing the desert environment and images of people practicing Catholic ceremonies in the open desert. These exhibition panels complete the visual package offered to visitors of the museum.

While there are many interesting aspects to explore in the analysis of this exhibition space, my discussion will focus on the overall layout of the larger exhibition space and the panels depicting Chinese immigrants, domestic internal Mexican migration to Baja California and *El Asalto a las Tierras*. I will argue that the physical layout displays a nationalist interpretation of the regional composition of racialized bodies in the spatial arrangement of the exhibition panels. Furthermore, the individual panels demonstrate how the museum packages the history of this border region as a national allegory. These curatorial techniques create an historical imagination structured by ideologies of race and nation while making the manipulations of the state invisible. This affect offers an historical explanation for what visitors encounter outside of the museum in their daily lives around Mexicali. Not only does it help them to think about Baja California as a Mexican place, but it also reinforces national discourses of race and hierarchy as a part of leading a Mexican life.

The overall layout and design of the large exhibition space corresponds with a nationalist ideology of race and *mestizaje* described in Part III. The racial ideology of Mexican *mestizaje* idealizes the racial combination of indigenous peoples with Spanish settlers as a distinctive national *mestizo* race. The representation of indigenous Kumai peoples here is consistent with their social marginalization and symbolic exaltation within the evolutionary rubric of the national *mestizo*. The exhibit places native indigenous groups in the center of the room while casting them as pre-modern inhabitants. In this way they are given a privileged position in the visual environment but temporally segregated to the distant past, portraying them literally as the vanishing antiquated core of modern society. Furthermore, the categorization of indigenous peoples as early migrants depicts them as the “first Mexicans,” and not as a distinctive nation with divergent interests from both the Spanish colonial state and the Mexican settler-state. The text of the display describes the Kumai tribe’s territorial boundaries and encounter with the Spanish settlers. It goes on to describe



the trouble that Kumai have because of the harsh boundary dividing the U.S. and Mexico and the decline of traditional maritime resources. This textual compliment to the visual display provides the details of the Kumai's threatened presence as a political eulogy.

The four arching panels of "Colonial Migration" symbolically corral that of "Early Migration," giving representations of the Spanish a greater degree of complexity because they lack a backdrop. The 360-degree viewing experience of the Spanish settler depictions provides more representational real estate to endow with textual information and imaginative detail. The portrayal of Spanish settlers here shows them as benign bearers of culture and technology. The sanitized image of the Spanish friars and conquistadors reflects the use of colonial history to produce credentials of Euro-centric modernity. The absence of portrayals of Baja California "*mestizos*" alludes to the delicate politics of identity and the ambivalence about race mixing as a racial purity and the result of *mestizaje*.

The Chinese immigrant display has three interesting characteristics worth discussing at length here; the textual description of anti-Chinese campaigns, their depiction as opium addicts, and the representation of a Chinese-owned grocery store. This panel is composed of four separate elements that convey a narrative image of the Chinese in northern Baja California.



**Figure 19 Author Photo**

The first panel element displays six photographs with a map backdrop and a showcase of objects from Chinese immigrants. The photographs are labeled telling the viewer that the images depict Chinese workers digging irrigation canals, a building used by the Chinese Association, a Chinese boat bringing imports to Mexico, a Chinese cotton farmer, a Chinese family, and a family with a Chinese father and a Mexican mother. The map backdrop illustrates the various migration routes that Chinese immigrants took on their way to Mexicali; showing routes via Canada, the U.S. and throughout Mexico. This mapping of migration

routes gives the impression that Mexico's Chinese have been consolidated in Mexicali. The showcase of objects includes iconic symbols of material Chinese culture including a fan, a plate with decorative embellishments, and an abacus. The showcase also displays opened postal letters written in Chinese. The lack of translations for the letters or explanation of the objects acquaints the viewer with signifiers of Chinese culture without an interpretation of their meaning, rather allowing them to signify a mysterious otherness. It should be noted that no other showcase in the exhibition is displayed without a textual explanation.<sup>42</sup>

The second element of the panel is a life-size model of a worker picking cotton with the backdrop of an empty open cotton field. This model is accompanied by a brief textual description. The text begins by describing how British, Japanese, and German steam ships brought Chinese to Latin America to replace black slaves. It then tells the reader that Chinese immigrant networks allowed them to expand their work on farms and ranches by sending for their countrymen. It goes on to say that between 1923 and 1930 the Chinese began to diversify their businesses in downtown Mexicali opening hotels, laundries, small workshops, bars and restaurants describing them as distinctive qualities of the urban landscape. Lastly, this textual description provides an explanation for the prejudice of anti-Chinese campaigns in the labor demands during the Great Depression. It states the racism decreased when many Chinese chose to cross the border to the U.S.

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<sup>42</sup> For contrast, a stand alone display of Japanese cooking tools is accompanied by a textual description of the celebration of the Japanese New Year and the use of the displayed tools to make mochi treats out of rice flour. No such explanation exists for the objects displayed in the first panel element of the Chinese immigrants.





**Figure 20 Author Photo**

The third element of the Chinese immigrant panel is a showcase of an opium pipe and scale accompanied by a picture of a Chinese man we are told is smoking opium sitting at the foot of an open door. This montage is supplemented with an original document from 1915 describing the regulations for importing, purifying, selling, and taxing opium in Mexicali. This element of the panel also contains no description beyond the information provided in the original document. The panel does little to prevent the viewer from drawing strong associations of the Chinese with drug addiction. There is no background or context provided to explain how the British forced opium into Chinese markets in the middle of the nineteenth century, nor how Mexicans and Americans aided the trafficking of opium into the U.S. where white consumer demand increased the value of such contraband. Furthermore, without any context the text of the historical document gives the impression that Chinese immigrants were primarily interested in establishing a drug economy. However, the larger context of the letter, referred to in Part III, demonstrates that it was the military governor of Baja California that legalized opium in order to bolster territorial tax revenues.



**Figure 21 Author Photo**

The fourth element of the panel is a mock grocery store. It is set into what appears to have been a small closet. Foreshortened images and floor to ceiling enlargements of photographs of an actual store provide the impression that the doorway is a real entrance that opens into a large store stocked with goods and merchandise. The doorway to the store is lined with photographs labeled as street scenes in Mexicali where signage denoting a Chinese owned store is visible. Again, no explanation is provided for this element of the panel. This composition shows seemingly amicable relations between Chinese proprietors and Mexican customers. To prevent museumgoers from tampering with the three-dimensional arrangement of mock grocery store a chain is draped across the doorway.



**Figure 22 Author Photo**

With these four elements taken together, the panel hides more than it reveals conforming to dominant contemporary stereotypes of Mexicali's Chinese as drug addicts or traffickers, self-interested petite-bourgeois proprietors, and continuously in motion, as in being disinterested in settling or more explicitly, resistant to becoming Mexican. This image invokes the familiar stereotype in the U.S. of Asians being a "perpetual foreigner" to the national community.<sup>43</sup> The text of the panel accomplishes several significant erasures worth pointing out here. The generalization achieved by the text removes the agency of Chinese immigrants as both migrants and businessmen, masking the enormous influence that the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Acts had on shaping patterns of migration. Its characterization of foreign owned steamships as the primary influence of Chinese migration to Mexico makes them into pawns of foreign capital without private motivations. In addition, the characterization of the transformation of Chinese businesses from agriculture to urban service industries as merely "diversification," creates a two-sided problem of interpretation. On the one hand it hides the ways that Mexicans shaped the types of business opportunities available through informal prohibition and boycotts. On the other hand it obscures the exclusive privileges accorded to the Chinese during the reign of Abelardo Rodríguez as governor, as in the casinos. Lastly,

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<sup>43</sup> Frank H. Wu, "Where Are You Really from? Asian Americans and the Perpetual Foreigner Syndrome," *Civil Rights Journal* 6 (2002). Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*.

while it is admirable that text recognizes the existence of racial prejudice in Mexican culture it accomplishes a strategic containment and de-escalation of political tension. It does this first by isolating anti-Chinese attitudes and violence to the years 1929 to 1933 as it is stated in the text. It also isolates the extent of racial attitudes as limited to small local groups and not as something emanating from the federal government. It de-escalates the political tension of anti-Chinese politics and violence by placing it in contrast to the victimization of Mexican workers during the Great Depression. This characterization conveys the notion that the Chinese were unwilling to help destitute Mexican workers, a common misperception established by official discourse in the expulsion of the Chinese in Sonora.<sup>44</sup> The de-escalation of racial politics is further advanced by the notion created in the text that tensions eased when scores of Chinese left Mexicali. Such depictions hide the way that threats of violence shaped the migration decisions of Mexicali's Chinese. Many of Mexicali's Chinese residents today know about the Torreón massacre, the Sonoran expulsion, and the evictions during *El Asalto a las Tierras*. They hold this historical knowledge as a reminder that they should not "rock the boat" and that when times get tough they may be blamed for the plight of Mexicans.<sup>45</sup> This panel advances racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants and elides the historical experiences that have shaped their lives. Baja Californios achieved national integration literally and symbolically on the backs of Mexicali's Chinese. Their erasure serves as a symbolic sacrifice for the structural integration into modern state industrialization.

This portrayal of the Chinese in the museum is a necessary supplement to the central public discourse of the incorporation of Mexicans into industrial capitalism and their construction as *mestizo* subjects of the national state. The *El Asalto a las Tierras* and domestic internal Mexican migration panels firmly establish the Mexican worker as Baja California's historical protagonist. It celebrates their recognition as political subjects by their incorporation into the state apparatus. In political terms, this narrative of incorporation is achieved and advanced by the exclusion of the Chinese from these programs as well as from the historical discourse about it. Furthermore, this narrative illustrates the power of the state to use the discourse of the Mexican Revolution to shape racial identities.

These last two panels create an interesting juxtaposition. On the one hand, the domestic internal Mexican migration panel describes the failure of federal labor laws to protect indigenous agricultural laborers in Baja California; and on the other hand, the *El Asalto a las Tierras* panel praises the Agrarian Reforms in Baja California that created the same agricultural zones in which these indigenous workers now suffer. The contradiction between these two adjacent panels highlights the elevated status of *El Asalto a las Tierras* from an event to that of a fable or myth, disconnected from the present. As discussed earlier, the use of *El Asalto a las Tierras* as a national allegory for the incorporation into mainstream Mexican political discourse is a mechanism for the consolidation of power. The critique of *El Asalto a las Tierras* is not only part of deconstructing the racialization of Chinese immigrants but more broadly the hegemony of the Mexican state in which other racialized subjects become incorporated into the state apparatus and capitalist economy.

The domestic internal Mexican migration panel focuses on the incorporation and *Mexicanización* of indigenous peoples from the state of Oaxaca. Their large presence in Baja California's agriculture is a mixed symbol of the successes of state sponsored industrial expansion and the victimization and poverty of indigenous workers. This panel is composed

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<sup>44</sup> Espinoza, *El Problema Chino en Mexico*.

<sup>45</sup> Chang, "Interview with Esteban Leon."



of three elements; a series of photographs and text, a life-size portrayal of an indigenous women cooking in what we are told is a field workers' camp, and another series of photographs showing people working in agricultural fields with props used by workers like handkerchiefs and a portable stereo.

The text of the panel describes the plight of Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui workers as they labor in Baja California's fields without the protections of the federal labor laws. The text then describes how traditional cultural practices of these groups serve to augment their industrial agricultural lifestyle through the use of botanicals and gardening to supplement healthcare and diets dictated by poverty. The text closes by describing these indigenous groups as being inherently migratory, discussing their previous routes of circulation and their contemporary routes through the U.S. Ultimately, the text romanticizes the adaptations used by the workers to make up the difference of their exclusion from Mexican modernity. This critique brings attention to the low position of indigenous peoples in modern Mexican political subjectivity. The panel congratulates the workers represented in this migration pattern for participating in the agricultural success of the region, obscuring the ways that the Mexican state continuously disrupted life in Oaxaca and made exaggerated promises to workers to entice them to migrate to Baja California as unskilled laborers.<sup>46</sup> I include the analysis of this exhibition panel to demonstrate that the critique of Baja California's *Mexicanización* is not limited only to understanding the historical experience and the politics of memory regarding the Chinese but also to understanding other marginalized groups.

Lastly, the *El Asalto a las Tierras* panel is a standalone structure symbolizing its significance as the single most important component to Baja California's Mexican identity as a state of the federal union. The panel is composed of three elements; a life-size representation of a Depression era Mexican worker accompanied by text, a set of two historical documents, and a grouping of four photographs. Above the representation of the worker is a replica of a handmade banner used by the Agrarians during the celebrations of *El Asalto a las Tierras* to advertise the *ejido*'s presence. The *ejido* represented in this banner is the same whose celebration was monitored by the Secretary of Security in the previous chapter – Ejido Michoacan De Ocampo.

The first panel element with the life-size worker is the only aspect of the entire exhibition space that refers to the Mexican Revolution, reiterating the State's appropriation of *El Asalto a las Tierras* as a political movement and as a nationalist discourse of conformity and allegiance to the post-Revolutionary order. The text first explains that Mexican immigrants from other parts of Mexico and repatriates from the U.S. gathered in Baja California to escape the devastation of the economy during the Revolution. It also explains that they experienced Baja California as a "foreigner" because it had not yet undergone the process of *Mexicanización* and was still under the control of the CRLC. The following section of text describes *El Asalto a las Tierras* as a peasant uprising against the CRLC, forcing the application of agrarian reforms. The reforms are explained as the main reason for the continued migration of people from across the country. It then symbolically refers to the fact that all of Mexico's states are represented in 400,000 acres of *ejidos* in the Mexicali Valley – connoting the *Mexicanización* of the region. The text then explains the raise of xenophobia in Baja California in terms of local pride and regionalism amongst long-time residents of Mexicali against other recently arriving Mexicans. It finally notes that incoming Mexican immigrants had the backing of Lázaro Cárdenas.

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<sup>46</sup> Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon*.

The second element of this panel consists of two historical documents providing further evidence of the gifts bestowed on Baja Californios as a result of the government's response to *El Asalto a las Tierras*. The first is a document from 1937 just after *El Asalto a las Tierras* from the Federation of Agrarian Communities in the Mexicali Valley describing the difficulties confronted by agrarians from building schools, to alcoholism, and the persecution from other Mexican groups. The second document is a settlement from 1938 written by Lázaro Cárdenas as an articulation of the Federal Law of Colonization. The entente re-articulates the regulations of the colonization law, which deal directly with the grievances voiced in the first document.

The third element consists of four photographs depicting images that are labeled from the time of *El Asalto a las Tierras*. The photographs show a truck with people loaded in the back, a group of people waiting in line, another group of people posing as a group huddled in a semi-circle, and the last image shows a procession of people and horse-drawn wagons with a banner reading "*La Tierra Es De Que Vaya Trabaja*," translated to "the land is for those that work it." A slogan made famous by Emiliano Zapata's reform agenda. There is however no indication in the images that any of the photographs were taken in Mexicali. Through this imagery *El Asalto a las Tierras* is absorbed into nationalist ideology.

The exhibits described here illustrate the practices of exclusion and inclusion of the Mexican state through the processes of *Mexicanización* of the last eighty years. It is in cultural institutions like this museum that historical narratives become popularized and understood as knowledge of the past. The museum attempts to create a totalizing environment to assist in the construction of a historical imagination. The *Mexicanización* of the last half-century in Baja California has put a premium on telling Mexican stories about the region's past. In 1993 a Mexicali fiction writer reflected on this tradition writing,

Baja California is, in the body of the nation, a state whose cities stand with the realization of one hundred years. I mention this fact to give an idea of the antiquity of our cultural traditions, which in fact are only beginning to be significant in the balance of national history. In other words, we may point to a legacy of regional historiography that in a broad sense does not exist as such. Yet there is history and historians that disagree in their interpretation of places and events in local history. The history of Baja California in this regard is only beginning to be treated with analytical rigor, and many of these scattered texts by empirical authors, will certainly be a key source for the future elaboration of our past.<sup>47</sup>

In this passage the author sketches out the ongoing struggle to reconcile the specificities of the region's history and the cultural procedures of *Mexicanización* that mark the peninsula as a Mexican place. It is a regime of historicity unable to distinguish between *Mexicanización* and history.

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<sup>47</sup> Jose Manuel Di Bella, *Diario* 29, Mayo 5 1993. In Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, *Mexicali: Un Siglo de Vida Artística y Cultural. 1903-2003* (Mexicali: Editorial de Baja California, 2003).

## Chapter 12: Life in the State of Amnesia

It is quite common for new immigrants from China to arrive in Mexicali. Today the city is thoroughly Mexican and they exist as outsiders. Some estimate the first-generation population to be around 5-7,000 individuals at the time of this research.<sup>1</sup> Since the turn of the twentieth century Chinese have made Mexicali home and used it as a staging ground to facilitate upward mobility and continued migration. In the face of systematic discrimination and exclusion from economic modes of belonging to the Mexican community, what can explain the perseverance of the Chinese community and the continued migration of new individuals to Mexicali? Decades of *Mexicanización* and repeated marginalization have ceased their role in primary production and facilitating commerce as brokers. Their segregation to niche food service is less a sign of rootedness, but more of adaptation in order to preserve the migratory function that Mexico serves in the contemporary Chinese diaspora. Decades ago the Chinese community in Mexicali acquired immigration privileges by forcefully lobbying power brokers to open new routes of Chinese migration through the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. At that time the Chinese community succeeded in making use of Mexicali as an immigration depot. Since the establishment of the Mexicali as an irrigated colony it has served the interests of transborder migrations. The Chinese community continues this tradition by remaining offstage from Mexicali's political and cultural venues. Through political acquiescence the community is able to transform the business of niche ethnic food service into an institution that facilitates migration. Chinese immigrants acquire legal standing in Mexico through participation in the restaurant industry in order to facilitate continued immigration to the U.S. The political and cultural success of *Mexicanización* in Baja California has served to mask the identity of Mexicali's Chinese migrants seeking entry to the U.S.

While the restaurants have become the last refuge of the Chinese community in Mexicali, they serve their purpose of establishing residency and class status to acquire border-crossing privileges. This function of Mexicali as an immigration "trampoline" has sustained the vitality of the Chinese community when all other motivations to stay in Mexicali had been stripped by the procedures of *Mexicanización*. The transformation of the Chinese into a minority in Mexicali has coincided with the racialization of Mexicans in the U.S. As Mexican federal policy sought to increase Baja California's *mestizo* population, their immigration to the U.S. also increased. The growth of the Mexican population in the southwestern U.S., since the end of WWII, has been shaped by the labor demands of U.S. employers and the denial of legal immigration status. Now Mexican migration to the U.S. constitutes the great majority of all immigration to the U.S. In this process border-crossing from Mexico to the U.S. has been so thoroughly racialized as Mexican, that recent Chinese immigrants to Mexico can acquire a legal residency in five years and apply for a border crossing card as a Mexican business owner. In other words, Mexicali's Chinese who seek immigration to the U.S. utilize the simplified racial logic of U.S. immigration policy that ascribes a single categorization of Mexican residents. The bureaucratization of border crossing has allowed the Chinese to pass as legal Mexicans to avoid the separate bureaucratization of direct China-U.S. immigration, a political procedure dominated by elite individuals who facilitate the flow of finance and

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<sup>1</sup> Auyón Gerardo, *El Dragón en el Desierto: Los Pioneros Chinos en Mexicali*.

commerce in the postmodern trans-Pacific economy.<sup>2</sup> Under the cover of historical and political silence, the Chinese in Mexicali have been able to preserve this “trampoline” function of the desert outpost. With the price tag of \$40,000 to be smuggled from China to the U.S., Mexico is a more attractive alternative at a quarter of the cost. While new Chinese immigrants arrive in Mexicali regularly, their route is a hundred years old.

The patterns of Chinese migration through the U.S.-Mexico border challenge binary constructions of the boundaries social space. The racialized cover of Chinese border crossers as Mexican in Baja California was dramatized in the film *Born in East L.A.* in 1987, written and directed by Cheech Marin. This film incorporated Chinese migration through Mexico to the U.S. as a commonplace feature of the border environment. In the film Marin plays Rudy, a Mexican American U.S. citizen from the East side of Los Angeles, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood in the coastal metropolis. The plot of the film encompasses Rudy’s efforts to return to the U.S. from Mexico when U.S. immigration authorities deported him during a raid on undocumented workers in a Los Angeles factory. While in Tijuana Rudy meets up with Jimmy (played by Daniel Stern), an American fleeing criminal charges in the U.S. and skilled at navigating and exploiting the informal economies of the border town. Jimmy helps Rudy find informal work in Tijuana so that he can make enough money to get smuggled back into the U.S. The passage below tells how Rudy’s next job brings him into contact with Chinese border crossers.

Rudy: Hello Jimmy, you got another job for me. I ran out of business.

Jimmy: Uh, yeah, you know as a matter of fact I do. Seein’ as you’re from East L.A. and all. Yeah, I got something that’s right up your sidewalk. Yeah, those boys out there, you see those boys out there?

Rudy: Yeah.

Jimmy: Those boys got jobs up in East L.A. as soon as they get there. The problem is that last time they were up there they got popped because they don’t speak no English. You see?

Now, what I want you to do is to teach them to kinda, you know, blend in and stuff.

Rudy: All they got to do in East L.A. to blend in is be brown.

...

Jimmy: Oh yeah, by the way, these guys here they don’t speak Spanish either. No, these are OTMs here.

Rudy: OTMs?

Jimmy: Yeah, well the Border Patrol only has two classifications: Mexicans and Other Than Mexican.

Rudy: Oh, OTM!

Jimmy: That’s right, now you’re catchin’ on. Now these boys here, I think they’re Chinese or Indian or somethin’? But don’t worry about it. It’ll be a piece of cake.<sup>3</sup>

Rudy then proceeds to teach the OTMs, Chinese and indigenous workers, the street slang, gestures, and clothing styles used by Mexican American youth in Los Angeles; they were played by Ted Lin, Jason Scott Lee, Jee Teo, Sal Lopez, and Del Zamora. Their deportation to Mexico from Los Angeles implies that they had arrived via Mexico in the first place.

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<sup>2</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>Cheech Marin, "Born in East L.A.," (USA: Clear Type, 1987).





**Figure 23 Rudy teaches Chinese and indigenous border crossers how to pass as Mexican American youth. Source: "Born in East L.A." 1987**

At the end of the film this cohort of border crossers emerges from a manhole in East Los Angeles in the middle of a *Cinco de Mayo* parade equipped with appropriate clothing, key phrases, and gestures. As the Chinese and indigenous border crossers emerge onto the street scene the migrant played by Ted Lin professes in Mandarin, “Coming here was hard, but once here, the people are really nice.”<sup>4</sup> The other migrant played by Jee Teo responds with “*si’mon*,” a Mexican American slang term derived from *si*, for yes, and *mon* as an adaptation of the colloquial pronoun “man” to produce a phrase similar to the Spanish pronunciation of the name Simon (see-mon). The cheering parade spectators provide the welcoming backdrop to their clandestine entry to the U.S. The next scene shows the indigenous workers encountering an Anglo police officer and their successful passage as racialized Mexican American youth. Fregoso argues that these components of the film accomplish “an internationalism among people of color” as what she describes as a fictional device invented by Marin to complicate binary constructions of race and national belonging.<sup>5</sup> However, the history of the Chinese in Mexico invites a different reading. Here, I emphasize the film’s quotidian illustration of Chinese border crossing under the guise of Mexican racializations in the U.S. While, the Chinese migrants are marginal characters of the film, it nevertheless captures some of the political and strategic interests of passing as Mexican for immigration purposes. This reading of the film draws viewers’ attention to the simplicity of popular representations of the border in U.S. culture. The history of Mexicali’s Chinese community

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Dr. Madeline Y. Hsu for helping me with the translation.

<sup>5</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Born in East L.A. and the Politics of Representation," *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (1990): 264-280.

also illustrates how U.S. culture abides by expectations produced from Baja California's *Mexicanización*.

Today's Chinese community in Mexicali is centered on the restaurant. They are islands of urban space that have been incorporated into the city as cultural outliers. The more than 300 Chinese restaurants in Mexicali are vital links for the serial migrations of Chinese in diaspora. Restaurants can incorporate new workers with little training, loan capital to other restaurateurs, and serve as a legal anchor in applications for Mexican legal residency and U.S. border-crossing cards. The Chinese Association of Mexicali, established in 1919, has always been the guardian and advocate for Chinese business interests. Today it defines its interests in maintaining a respectable image of the Chinese community among the broader Mexican society and supporting the maintenance of the niche food service sector. The Association also acts as a liaison with the local, state, and federal bureaucracy to facilitate various types of migration (China to Mexico and Mexico to U.S.). There is little investment by the Chinese community to shift resources towards helping individuals and families adapt to living conditions in Mexicali. For instance, learning Spanish is only occasionally emphasized. There is little aid in helping families to integrate; also many families are reluctant to pursue integration because they intend to leave. Which is not to say that many second- and third-generation Chinese Mexicans do not wish to stay in Mexico.

The migration motive can serve to maintain the sense of isolation that many Chinese in Mexicali feel. In other words, when new Chinese migrants prioritize mobility, they end up discounting alternatives that lead to integration. This is not to say that Chinese migrants willingly turn down invitations to integrate, but that there is a general lack of invitation. In the face of slim economic opportunities (restaurant work) and exclusive notions of Mexican nationalism the cost of struggling for cultural, political, and economic inclusion could be too great. Others have argued that a romantic characterization of Asian diaspora transnationalism, as postnationalism, jeopardizes the political project of struggling for inclusion in national domestic spaces.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, this argument should not prevent us from trying to understand the political logics of transnational Chinese migrants whether they are invested in national belonging or not.

The restaurant provides one of the only spaces where the Chinese community interacts with the Mexican public. Others have written that Mexicali's Chinese community illustrates an interesting border community that has successfully forged a hybridized identity.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Martínez argues that Mexicali's Chinese use these restaurants to make social space that allows them to establish a Chinese-Mexican identity. However, I would argue that the Chinese survive and make use of Mexicali, not through "making space" but by abiding by the *Mexicanización* of the city. The great number of Chinese restaurants signals both the pragmatic utility for immigration purposes as well as the compliance with norms and expectations of racial segregation. In this respect the Chinese in Mexicali live lives shaped by their own interests but contained by the cultural and political thresholds of a racialized identity. The perceived consequence of struggling for political inclusion in Mexico is the loss of the convenient, quite cover for authorized and unauthorized migration between the U.S.,

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<sup>6</sup> Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," *Amerasia Journal* 21, no. 1 & 2 (1995): 1-27.

<sup>7</sup> Martínez, "Border Chinese: Making Space and Forging Identity in Mexicali, Mexico". Ximena Alba Villalvera, "Fronteras de Mercancia - El Chinatown de Mexicali: Fachada de un Barrio Transnacional" (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa, 2008).

China, and Mexico. In the last decades Mexicali's Chinese have preserved their position as outsiders within the border community. Belonging to neither side, yet maintaining their marginalized presence in order to preserve access to channels of migration.

History for the Chinese in Mexicali serves one function – keeping up good relations with Mexican clients. While the older generation of Chinese who have lived in Mexicali their whole lives remember the violent hostilities between the Chinese and Mexican community in the past, new immigrants do not care to know more beyond a generic narrative of Mexicali's Chinese past. Nevertheless, Chinese restaurants in Mexicali always have at least 50% of their employees as Mexicans. This practice carries over from the CROM protests in the 1920s and Ley de Trabajo that stipulated an 80% Mexican employment in foreign owned businesses discussed in Part III. Today the Ley de Trabajo is only 10%, but Chinese restaurant operators illustrate their “good-will” by hiring more than the minimum number of Mexican employees. While there is little interest among recent first and second-generation immigrants to recuperate the painful past in Mexicali's Chinese community, their lives are nonetheless set in the currents of an historical process. In the cultural logic of serial migrations the usable past should serve the interests of continued mobility. From this perspective maintaining respectable narratives of *Mexicanización* serves the utilitarian interests of Chinese who wish to continue migrating.

The Chinese community may not be the only potential beneficiary of this recovered past. I have shown throughout the dissertation that the insights offered by examining the racial projects of Chinese alterity in Mexicali are not limited to understanding only this minority population. Indeed, the relational nature of racial identities means that all projects of difference and patterns of exclusion are about our shared social world and the political constitution of identities. That is to say that, perhaps this painful past is more useful to Baja Californian Mexicans as part of a larger critique of the Mexican state's complicity in U.S. dominated post-modern capitalist industrialization. The influence of geopolitical relations on racial formations is different in the periphery of the capitalist world-system because peripheral elites benefit from the conformity of their respective populations. In this sense, the dissertation has offered a parallel story to the racial projects of evicting and forgetting the Chinese in Mexicali: a critique of the allure of progress in the racial formations of a limited *mestizo* racial identity. This criticism is derived from a more complex reading of the U.S.-Mexico border and the demonstrated intimacies of the Pacific Rim and East Asia in its social configuration. I have offered a triangulated conceptual framework linking U.S. imperialism, Asian diasporas, and Mexican nation building to better understand the transnational dimensions of the racial formation of Mexicali's Chinese, but it also holds promise for broader applications and relevance to these related fields of inquiry.

As a closing reflection I refer to a poem written by a recent immigrant restaurant worker in Mexicali that reflects the social and cultural climate faced by many Chinese there. He writes,

At night I encountered my reflection in a mirror and paused to discover that I was a  
ghost!  
When I woke up the next morning, I had no choice but to put on the clothes of a  
man and go to work at the restaurant.  
When at work, I must wear an ugly clown mask.

When I return home, I am a ghost again...  
...I am a ghost!<sup>8</sup>

This poem speaks to the psychological toll incurred by the legacies of *Mexicanización*. The author of the poem fled the rural hinterlands of China to become positioned at the margins of Mexican industrialization, in itself a subset of responses to the global designs of U.S. imperialism in the capitalist-world system. These nested systems of power are compounded in the constitution of an outsider identity in Mexicali's Chinese community. However, the damaging consequences of *Mexicanización* are not lost to *mestizo* Mexicans either. In a related fashion Juana Oretaga, a *maquiladora* factory worker in San Luis (east of Mexicali), explains that,

This job is a terror. The noise. The monotony. The constant danger of the machine... In the factory, the [assembly] line is the worst. It crushes your fingers and in the end your mind as well.<sup>9</sup>

The restaurant and the *maquiladora* are illustrations of the failures of *Mexicanización* and structurally link these parallel experiences of alienation. When we understand the U.S.-Mexico dynamic as situated among the geopolitical relations of the Pacific Rim and East Asia, a more expansive and inclusive criticism is possible. Both conditioned by post-modern relations of production and structured by racial formations of the Mexican state and U.S. imperialism. In this way, triumphant narratives of *Mexicanización* not only serve to mask U.S. industrial capitalism, but they also end up obscuring the shared interests between the Chinese community and other Mexican border residents. These interests also underscore the important role that the Mexican state plays in shaping social formations at the U.S.-Mexico border.

In all, this dissertation has pushed at the thresholds of nationally bound historical narratives to describe a community hidden in plain-view. In order to better understand the Chinese community in Mexicali I have offered a conceptual framework and historical narrative that accommodates numerous transnationalisms. More than an eclectic narrative of minority residents of the U.S.-Mexico border, this Chinese community represents the lasting legacies of the material circuits of the Spanish Pacific, the cultural continuities within the Chinese diaspora, the peripheral routes between the synchronic frontiers of U.S. imperialism, and the racial boundaries of Mexican nation building. The history, culture, and geography of the Chinese in Mexicali challenge simplistic binary constructions of the boundary's social space. This study has shown the value of incorporating the Pacific and East Asia into critical understandings of the formation and maintenance of the U.S.-Mexico border. Through my research I have tried to provide a useful example of expanding and enriching our understanding of transnational and comparative dimensions of racial formations as well as of models of multi-sited histories.

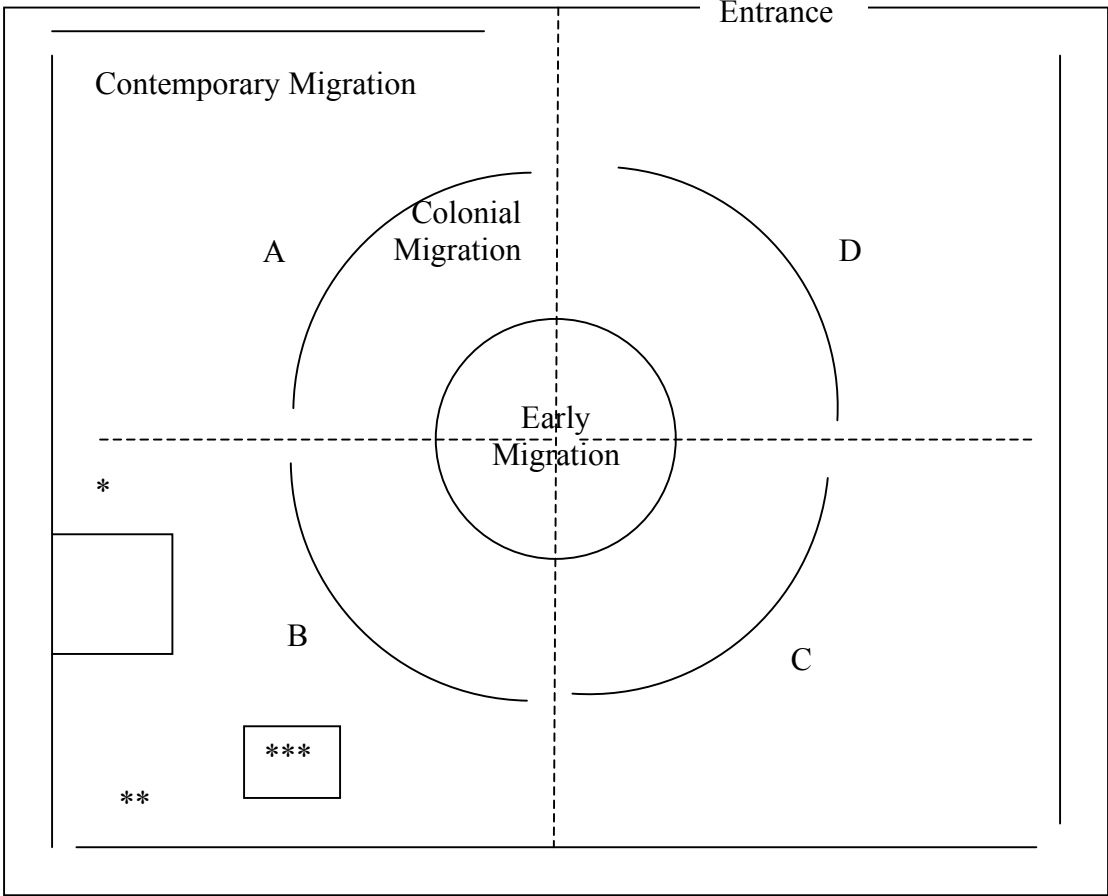
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<sup>8</sup> Esteban Leon, "To Change Your State of Mind, Bravely Face Adversity (translated from Chinese)," *Newsletter of the Chinese Association of Mexicali*, February 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Devon Gerardo Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1997). 6



Appendix 1



**Legend**

- A – Coastal Section
- B – River and Delta Section
- C – Desert Section
- D – Mountain Section
- \* – Chinese Immigration
- \*\* – Domestic Internal Mexican Migration
- \*\*\* – El Asalto a las Tierras

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