

***ANTICHINISMO* AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN MEXICO**

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction and Historiographical Review.....pg. 3-12.

CHAPTER I: 19th Century China, Mexico, and the First Migrations.....pg. 13-28.

CHAPTER II: Porfirian Collapse, the Mexican Revolution, and the Torreón  
Massacre.....pg. 29-53.

CHAPTER III: The Sonoran Dynasty, Mestizaje, and the Intensification of the  
Anti-Chinese Campaigns.....pg. 54-79.

CHAPTER IV: Expulsion from Sonora, Racial Purification, and the Construction  
of Modern Mexico.....pg. 80-99.

Acknowledgments.....pg. 100.

Bibliography.....pg. 101-104.

## Introduction and Historiographical Review

### Becoming “Alfonso”

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a young man named Wong Fang traveled from Guangdong Province to San Francisco with his uncle. His uncle settled in California, but Wong Fang opted to press on across the southern border to Mexico, eventually taking up root in Pueblo Viejo, Sonora. Upon arrival, Wong Fang became “Alfonso Wong Fang,” taking a Mexican first name and using his full Chinese name as a surname. Taking a local first name was a common adaptive practice among Chinese migrants to Latin America; as “Alfonso,” he would begin the process of acculturation, learning Spanish, attending school, and working alongside locals in town.<sup>1</sup> Alfonso’s uncle had made inroads with the owners of Ching Chong y Compañía, a sprawling Chinese-operated retail business in Nogales, a larger city near Pueblo Viejo. Through his uncle’s connections, Wong Fang became an associate with the small commerce giant, often traveling to the neighboring state of Sinaloa for business. Later, Wong Fang opened an ice cream and candy shop in Nogales. He would go on to marry one of his employees, a Nogales local named Dolores Campoy Rivera. They named their first child Alfonso Wong Campoy; in traditional Mexican fashion, he took his father’s first name, followed by his father’s surname, followed by his mother’s paternal surname.<sup>2</sup> In the subsequent years, the couple had two more children: María del Carmen Irma Wong Campoy, born in Hermosillo, Sonora, and Héctor Manuel Wong Campoy, born in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Wong Fang flourished in Mexico, eagerly adopting the local language and customs, making the transition from laborer to businessman,

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<sup>1</sup> Camacho, Julia María Schiavone. *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Pg. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Camacho, *Search for a Homeland*, 21.

marrying a Mexican wife, and fathering three children whose names and citizenships testify to his successful assimilation.

Alfonso Wong Fang's journey is emblematic of the broader Chinese experience in Mexico in several ways. Like Wong Fang, tens of thousands of Chinese made their way to Mexico in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, many of them from Guangdong Province and other southeastern sending regions. Most of these migrants settled in northwestern Mexico, in states like Sonora, Sinaloa, and Baja California.<sup>3</sup> Once in Mexico, migrants made use of kinship networks that spanned continents to find work, shelter, and community, as Wong Fang had. Like Wong Fang, Chinese migrants took Mexican names, learned Spanish, and worked alongside Mexicans; some made similar transitions from wage labor to retail commerce. Like Wong Fang, Chinese men married Mexican wives and fathered Chinese-Mexican children.

In many ways, Wong Fang's story is that of a model migrant, eager to make a place for himself in Sonoran society through cultural assimilation, success in business, and marriage to a Mexican woman. Unfortunately, many Mexican nativists resented the latter two points as hostile foreign incursions and considered the first an impossibility. The Mexican Revolution made economic nationalism the issue of the day and centered the mixed Indigenous-European "mestizo" as Mexico's national-racial destiny. Revolutionary economic nationalism served as a reaction against decades of foreign exploitation, stagnancy in domestic wages, and poor quality of life, while the emergent *mestizaje* ideology ran counter to earlier notions of European supremacy and considered racial homogenization through intermixing the path to forging a unified Mexico. Both these ideologies promised a new, revitalized "Mexico for the Mexicans,"

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<sup>3</sup> Young, Elliot. *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era through World War II*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Pg. 110.

and both would be co-opted by anti-Chinese opportunists who sought to mobilize the revolutionary state against their Chinese Mexican neighbors.

In the early 1930s, Ching Chong y Compañía, the enterprise that had facilitated Alfonso Wong Fang's transition into small commerce, was forced to close under the combined pressure of vigilante protest and state-led campaign of repression. In the following years, Sonoran *antichinos* (anti-Chinese activists) worked to ethnically cleanse Chinese from the state, using discriminatory laws, regulations, and local proclamations as legal pretenses for the patently illegal mass deportation. Originating in Sonora in the 1910s, *antichinismo* had grown from a local fixation to a national political issue; the anti-Chinese movement made deep institutional connections with the so-called "Sonoran Triangle" of Adolfo de la Huerta, Álvaro Obregón Salido, and Plutarco Elías Calles, leading consolidators of the period following the revolution. Working steadily, against opposition from American and Chinese diplomats, local Chinese community organizations, and federal and state officials, the anti-Chinese campaigns adapted Euro-American caricatures of Chinese for the Mexican context, co-opted the language of social revolution, and harangued their allies in government in a decades-long effort to expel migrants like Alfonso Wong Fang and their families.

Subsequent chapters chart the course of Mexican *antichinismo*, from its earliest articulations at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until its summit three decades later, the expulsion of Sonora's Chinese population. Drawing on the wealth of the existing literature on the subject, in concert with postcards, anti-Chinese texts and drawings, communications from Chinese community organizations, legal proceedings, and a variety of other sources, this work strives to present the story of the Chinese community in Mexico as dynamic, contingent, and transnational, a record of the individuals and groups destroyed in the construction of the modern Mexican

nation-state. *Antichinismo* was inextricably linked to Mexico's founding, the less-discussed xenophobic foil of the Mexican Revolution's social promise; Chinese frequently were the others against which notions of economic and racial nationalism were constructed, sacrificed at the twin altars of racial purity and hygienic modernity.

### **Historiographical Review**

Despite occupying such a central place in the formation of Mexican political and cultural institutions, the experience of the Chinese population in Mexico has been largely absent from the Mexican national historiography. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies of Chinese Mexicans reached many of the same conclusions as the *antichinos*: Chinese migrants were economic interlopers with little interest in or capacity for integration into the Mexican nation. Alternatively, the Chinese were cast as tragic victims of overflowing revolutionary passions, with little attention paid to organizational cooperation between the emergent Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) and anti-Chinese organizations, or the utility of *antichinismo* in the popular consolidation of *mestizaje* ideology.<sup>4</sup> Jason Oliver Chang, a contemporary scholar of Chinese Mexicans, writes that Mexico has maintained a “pervasive ethos of racial innocence.” According to many works published in the last decade, the story and significance of *antichinismo* had been hidden in plain sight.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the post-revolutionary period, Mexican historians worked to expand the conceptual scope of *mestizaje*, highlighting Afro-Mexican contributions to the nation.<sup>6</sup> Scholars such as Alfonso Toro, Germán LaTorre, and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán published works

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<sup>4</sup> Delgado, Grace. *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Stanford University Press, 2012. Pg. 7., and Chang, *Chino*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 5-6.

celebrating Afro-Mexicans as “colonial missionaries, early abolitionists, and rightful citizens of Mexico.”<sup>7</sup> These interventions shifted the character of *mestizaje* away from its mystical and Lamarckian origins toward a more inclusive ideology of national unity. Historical interventions of this type on behalf of Mexico’s Chinese population wouldn’t emerge until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with works published by Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Charles C. Cumberland, and Leo M. Jacques, among others.

Cumberland’s “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” published in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* in 1960, serves as an example of an early break with the traditional historiography of Chinese Mexicans. In it, Cumberland links the progress of *antichinismo* to rebel army campaigns in the north; in his formulation, economic nationalism made foreigners into targets, and absent any substantial diplomatic intervention, Mexico’s Chinese were victimized while European and North American migrants remained largely untouched.<sup>8</sup> In his 1976 article, “Have Quick More Money than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora,” Jacques goes beyond Cumberland to suggest a direct linkage between anti-Chinese bigotry and the construction and consolidation of Mexican nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Jacques’ work highlights the centrality of Sonoran Triangle politicians in cultivating and providing cover for the anti-Chinese movement nationally. Published in 1980 and 1982 respectively, Hu-DeHart’s “Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932” and “Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Sonora, Mexico, 1876-1932” seek to contextualize the historical development of *antichinismo* and argue for an intimate connection between the movement and modern Mexico’s founding personalities. Hu-DeHart’s work is generally in

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<sup>7</sup> Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Cumberland, Charles C. “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution.” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (1960): 191–211. Pg. 210.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques, Leo M. “Have Quick More Money Than Mandarins: The Chinese in Sonora.” *The Journal of Arizona History* 17, no. 2 (1976): 201–18. Pg. 202.

agreement with her predecessor Cumberland's, with both arguing that Mexico's emergent economic nationalism marked the Sonoran Chinese for persecution. Hu-DeHart provides additional coverage of the "tong wars" between the Chee Kung Tong and the Mexican branch of the Guomindang, arguing these limited gun battles were crucial in fueling anti-Chinese discrimination across northern Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

In the decades following these pioneering studies of Chinese Mexicans, scholars like José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo and Gerardo Rénique made massive contributions to the field. Gómez Izquierdo's 1991 book, titled *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934): Problemas del racismo y del nacionalismo durante la Revolución Mexicana*, echoes the earlier work of Jacques, arguing *antichinismo* played a key role in the construction of *mestizaje* and the consolidation of the postrevolutionary Mexican state. Gómez Izquierdo compiles quotations from prominent anti-Chinese organizations and activists to depict Sonoran Triangle figures and their henchmen at the local and regional level as thoroughly bigoted, committed to a pseudo-eugenic policy of deliberate and constrained race-mixing. In an article published in 2019, "El Holocausto Chino: Biopolítica y Racismo de Estado en México (1896-1934)," Gómez Izquierdo argues for the role of biopolitics, racialization, and state intervention in the repression of Mexico's Chinese, making use of the concept developed by Foucault in his lectures on modern statecraft in the early 1970s. Rénique's article "Anti-Chinese Racism, Nationalism, and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s and 1930s," published in 2000, argues that *antichinismo* was central in the consolidation of the Mexican state. Hybridizing the contributions of the preexisting literature, Rénique explores how anti-Chinese bigotry became an indispensable tool of the Mexican political elite for resolving economic and cultural tensions, particularly under Calles.

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<sup>10</sup> Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. "Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875–1932." *The Journal of Arizona History* 21, no. 3 (October 1, 1980): 275-312. Pg. 285.



Rénique's work traces the historical antecedents of *antichinismo* to highlight its intimate connection to Mexico's cultural revolution and the construction of *mestizaje*.<sup>11</sup>

The 2010s saw a dramatic uptick in scholarship concerning Chinese Mexicans, with many authors seeking to offer revisions to the existing historiography drawn from transnational insights. Jason Oliver Chang, Julia María Schiavone Camacho, Grace Delgado, Fredy González, Julian Lim, and Elliot Young, among others, have authored studies in the last fifteen years examining the persecution of Mexico's Chinese communities. Chang's book, *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940*, places *antichinismo* center-stage in the story of Mexico's post-revolutionary period. Spanning the Porfirian importation of Chinese labor to the easing of racial tensions in the 1940s, Chang's work argues for the transnational character of *antichinismo* as well as its crucial function in the construction of *mestizaje* and broader Mexican racial nationalism.

Lim and Delgado both highlight the U.S.-Mexico border region as a point of transnational exchange in their analyses of the Chinese experience in Mexico. Lim's *Porous Borders* explores how the movement of people, commodities, and ideas across the border influenced the development of communities and legal systems on both sides; Delgado's analysis aims to decouple the racialization of Chinese Mexicans from its nationalist particularities by emphasizing the transnational roots of anti-Chinese bigotry. Additionally, Delgado's work seeks to situate Chinese migration in a broader story of global integration, population movements, and intellectual sharing across borders. Similarly, Elliot Young's *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era through World War II* situates migrant outflows from southeastern China to Southeast Asia and the Americas in the context of an increasingly

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<sup>11</sup> Rénique, Gerardo. "Anti-Chinese Racism, Nationalism, and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s and 1930s." *Political Power and Social Theory* 14 (2000): 91-140. Pg. 91-93.

integrated and industrialized global economy. Young's work draws on news reports, census records, and personal letters from across Southeast Asia and the Americas to reconstruct the transnational unfolding of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese emigration. Erika Lee and Phillip Kuhn have both authored informative studies of the Chinese diaspora in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; their insights are critical to elucidating the connection between political developments in China and the fate of Chinese subjects abroad.

González uses a transnational approach in his book *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. González affords Chinese Mexicans more agency than many scholars, using the records and communications of Chinese community organizations, Chinese diplomatic records, and legal accounts from Chinese who sought protection from persecution or eventual restitution in Mexico's judicial system. González uses these sources and others to advance the case that the Chinese in Mexico constructed community organizations and political alliances that first allowed them to weather the storm of the 1930s and later allowed them to assert influence over Mexico's diplomatic relationships with both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China. González's use of Chinese and Mexican sources tells a more nuanced story than most, demonstrating how Chinese migrants constructed broadly effective strategies to combat their repression while still acknowledging the role of anti-Chinese racism and violence in contributing to the consolidation of the modern Mexican state.

Camacho, in her book *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960*, focuses on the complex individual identities constructed by Chinese living in Sonora. Tracing the journey of individual families from China to Sonora, and then back and forth again across the U.S-Mexico border, Camacho illustrates the myriad transnational influences on the process of identity formation. Additionally, Camacho's analysis of the hostility

against Chinese-Mexican marriages calls specific attention to the role of women on both sides of the anti-Chinese campaigns.

Recent works on Chinese Mexicans make use of a variety of methodological approaches but fundamentally agree that the community's experience has been underemphasized, if not outright absent, from the Mexican national historiography. Additionally, these scholars almost universally acknowledge the highly transnational experience of Chinese Mexicans. In concert with a growing interest in transnational histories across academic subfields, Chinese Mexicans and other Chinese diasporic communities have attracted greater scholarly attention in recent years due, in part, to their centrality in the unfolding processes of globalization, their cosmopolitanism and cultural hybridity, and their experiences of de-facto statelessness that are unfortunately common for many modern migrant communities.

From the field's earliest articulations in works by Cumberland, Jacques, and Hu-DeHart, to the foundational scholarship of Gómez Izquierdo and Rénique, until the field's considerable expansion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholars have made increasingly robust interventions in the Mexican national historiography on behalf of the Chinese Mexican community. Recent works broaden the depth and scope of the field, highlighting the role of *antichinismo* in Mexico's cultural and political-institutional revolutions and drawing on the experiences of Chinese Mexicans to illustrate the effects of globalization on individual identity formation, family and community structure, racial politics, and articulations of nationalism. Chinese Mexicans deserve a privileged position in the historiography of globalization as subjects of brutal and often hostile modernity, intermittently stateless subjects of an emergent global system responsible for generating constructions of race and nationality, state behaviors, and the identities and experiences of individuals across the world in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Like many recent studies of Chinese Mexicans, this work aims to elucidate the transnational influences driving the interconnected processes of Chinese migration, the anti-Chinese campaigns, and the consolidation of the modern Mexican state. China and Mexico both struggled against foreign incursions throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, international shipping conglomerates facilitated Chinese migration to Mexico, anti-Chinese activists adopted foreign caricatures of Chinese constructed by Europeans and Americans, and in the expulsion from Sonora, state officials instrumentalized the United States's Chinese Exclusion Act to force their northern neighbors to bear the costs of transporting refugees back to China. International notions of hygienic modernity and racial purity were critical to the ideological edification of the anti-Chinese campaigns; common elements in the consolidation of modern racial nation-states across the world, these tenets of emergent nationalism served as bludgeons against Chinese Mexicans. Clearly, the Chinese Mexican story cannot be neatly compartmentalized into any single national historiography. The Chinese experience in Mexico is much more easily situated in a broader history of modernity; through careful study of these intrepid migrants, the impulses, anxieties, relationships, and syntheses that generated the modern world are brought to light. Their story coincides with the emergence of a modern world dotted by racial nation-states, separated by borders and migration regimes, but bound together by the increasingly integrated global economy.

## CHAPTER I: 19<sup>th</sup> Century China, Mexico, and the First Migrations

### Introduction

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, parallel developments on both sides of the Pacific brought the first Chinese migrants to Mexico. China and Mexico were two very different societies experiencing similar growing pains: both suffered destabilizing civil wars, incursions from multiple imperial powers, territorial disintegration, and deep social strife on their marches into modernity. In China, successive foreign invasions along the southeastern seaboard created domestic upheaval and facilitated unprecedented levels of sustained emigration; fleeing the Qing Dynasty's violent unraveling, Chinese migrants set out for the Americas in search of opportunity and stability. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, Mexican leaders became increasingly committed to a policy of cultivating national strength through immigration. Immigration would allow Mexico to tap into its vast natural wealth, facilitating economic growth that would allow the young nation to secure itself against foreign invasions. Barred from the United States after the 1882 Exclusion Act, many Chinese seeking a better future made their way to Mexico to lend a hand in the country's modernization.

### Chinese Emigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Foreign Incursion and Domestic Unraveling

In *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*, Phillip Kuhn argues regional commercial hubs, concentrated along China's southeastern seaboard, served as an early modern "school" for emigres.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the early seventeenth century, soaring population figures gave rise to dynamic patterns of internal migration that directed excess sons to leave rural agricultural plots to seek wage labor in nearby towns and cities. The entrenchment of circular

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<sup>12</sup> Kuhn, Philip A. *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008. Pg. 51-52.

migration throughout early modern China as a response to land shortages, for Kuhn, facilitated the broad development of “migrant skills,” particularly familiarity with debt, credit, risk, wage labor, and the construction of migrant corridors supported by same-place networks and kinship groups.<sup>13</sup> This broad acculturation to commerce and moving labor occurred across social classes, particularly in the “core” sending macroregions of Lingnan and the Southeast Coast, where commerce in the towns had long existed as sinks for excess labor from their rural, agrarian surroundings. In the mid-nineteenth century, the incursion of foreign powers into China redirected these migrant flows outward, challenging the existing domestic migration networks with new systems of contracting, transportation, and employment dominated by foreigners.<sup>14</sup> These foreign incursions, in concert with the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) that claimed an estimated twenty to thirty million Chinese, contributed to increasingly dire conditions along China’s southeastern seaboard, dislocating labor, and facilitating the rise of increasingly foreigner-dominated migration networks. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, imperialist powers created both the mechanisms for moving migrants and the conditions that would drive so many to migrate in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, western powers had been forced to engage in the “China trade” under the Qing-directed Canton System. The Canton System, a complex and flexible administrative apparatus that employed a system of checks and balances, allowed the Qing court to control foreigners and trade, increasing contact with foreigners largely on Beijing’s terms.<sup>16</sup> Though it delivered substantial revenue to Beijing for a period, the system’s emphasis on local administration and competitive decentralization hampered its ability to respond to

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<sup>13</sup> Kuhn, *Emigration*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Kuhn, *Emigration*, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Kuhn, *Emigration*, 111.

<sup>16</sup> Van Dyke, Paul Arthur. *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845*. Hong Kong University Press, 2005. Pg. 2.

increasing foreign incursions throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; revenue was siphoned away from central control structures and coastal defense, facilitating rampant corruption and smuggling.<sup>17</sup>

This slow unraveling of the Canton System progressed until 1840 when the First Opium War began the two-decade process of “opening China.” The British went to war in protest of the Qing campaign to eradicate the opium trade and intended to force China to accept the principles of free trade and Western-style diplomatic relations.<sup>18</sup> In 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing concluded the First Opium War; China was forced to cede the island of Hong Kong to the British and to create several foreign concessions wherein foreigners enjoyed extraterritoriality. These concession zones created a legal framework for recruiting and exporting labor from China entirely under Western control, facilitating the movement of millions of Chinese laborers to far-reaching corners of the globe.<sup>19</sup> While the Opium Wars created the legal framework for redirecting migrant flows abroad, these incursions, in concert with the opium trade itself, also severely disrupted life in coastal China. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, this paradigm was maintained by the military supremacy of the Western imperial powers, with increasing social dislocation and conflict driving scores of young Chinese men to emigrate as an escape from the mounting violence and poverty of coastal China.

The jurisdictional gray zones created by the foreign treaty ports dotting China’s coastline also allowed for the development of the “coolie trade,” a system often compared, in its own time and ours, to slavery. Coolies were indentured workers, contracted by foreigners to work on projects overseas in return for often dismal pay. Some of these workers entered contracts

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<sup>17</sup> Van Dyke, *Canton Trade*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Kuhn, *Emigration*, 110-111.

<sup>19</sup> Kunn, *Emigration*, 111.

voluntarily, others were either deceived into signing documents or outright kidnapped. The coolie trade sprung into existence roughly concurrently with the abolition of slavery in the Americas; oftentimes, coolies replaced slave labor on plantations and in mines, transported across the Pacific on former slave ships by captains formerly employed in the slave trade.<sup>20</sup> Coolies were routinely mistreated and subjected to grueling labor, provided they arrived at their destination; conditions on the transport ships were so poor that laborers often died at sea. The average mortality rate on ships transporting coolies from 1847 to 1874 was twelve percent, though it could reach as high as seventy.<sup>21</sup> Ships bound for Cuba recorded mortality rates of twenty percent, and those headed for Peru fluctuated between 22% and 42%.<sup>22</sup>

The Qing government fiercely opposed the coolie trade, both for its facilitation of emigration, officially discouraged as per a 1728 edict, and for its flagrant abuses of their subjects. Emigration remained officially prohibited through the first half of the nineteenth century, but foreign control of treaty ports made the enforcement of legal restrictions on recruiters nearly impossible.<sup>23</sup> In 1859, the governor-general of Guangdong province attempted to legalize emigration and collaborate with the British to regulate and control the coolie trade. Initially, the governor-general enjoyed some success raiding ships, freeing captive coolies, and executing kidnappers, but was undermined by the Imperial Court, which was fundamentally opposed to any policy that might legitimize or promote emigration.<sup>24</sup> In 1861, the Zongli Yamen, the imperial foreign office, was created and tasked with overseeing the coolie trade. The new government body moved to pass a blanket ban on the trade, barring foreigners from the interior of the country and preventing the construction of new recruiting centers. This policy tack had the

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<sup>20</sup> Young, *Alien*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Young, *Alien*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Young, *Alien*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Young, *Alien*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Young, *Alien*, 35.



unintended effect of promoting the Portuguese territory of Macao as a hub for the increasingly illegal and unregulated coolie trade; between 1856 and 1872, Macao's five coolie "barracoons" expanded to over two hundred and the annual rate of emigration out of China via Macao grew to 20,000.<sup>25</sup> Despite the hostility of both local and imperial officials to the coolie trade, jurisdictional issues continually impeded enforcement and allowed the trade to skirt both Qing and foreign regulations.

Given the conditions on many coolie ships and the persistent inability of the Qing government to protect its subjects from the trade, it's unsurprising that many Chinese organized grassroots resistance efforts. At the smallest scale, some enterprising Chinese would attempt to extract payment from recruiters without intending to work, capitalizing on the trade's practice of enticing workers with advance payments. In some cases, organized bands of pirates pretended to be coolies to get on board transport ships, before mutinying, killing the crew, and turning the boats back around to China.<sup>26</sup> Local flare-ups of resistance in response to particularly egregious abuses were common throughout the coolie era; riots, petitions, and demonstrations in Amoy (Xiamen), Canton (Guangzhou), and Shanghai forced the trade to move to Hong Kong and Macao. In Amoy, Chinese merchants and intellectuals issued a series of proclamations condemning the coolie trade for its deception and poor treatment of laborers. One such proclamation read:

"The barbarians are ungovernable in the extreme, and their only motive of action is desire for gain. We the people of the eighteen wards (the town of Amoy) have now agreed that we will have no dispute with the barbarians but will concert measures for the regulation of our conduct amongst ourselves. From this time, if any persons transact business with

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<sup>25</sup> Young, *Alien*, 36.

<sup>26</sup> Young, *Alien*, 29.

the Te-ki and Ho-ki hongts (Tait and Co., and Syme Muir, and Co.), they shall be put to death, their property seized and their houses destroyed without mercy. None shall be permitted to establish firms for foreign trade. Any brokers who are caught shall not be carried before the authorities, but shall be at once killed.”<sup>27</sup>

For the three days following the proclamation, the coolie trade in Amoy was completely halted. Demonstrations outside Syme Muir, and Co.’s warehouse escalated when British troops arrived to put the protest down; the crowd attacked the soldiers with rocks and bats, and the soldiers responded by opening fire. Eleven or twelve Chinese were killed, and about a dozen more wounded. Among the bystanders struck by stray bullets was a baby girl; she was shot while her mother was breastfeeding her.<sup>28</sup> The British soldiers responsible were exonerated by a subsequent inquiry citing “the fury of the mob.”<sup>29</sup> This instance of violence in service of the coolie trade was all too typical of a migration regime managed militarily and jurisdictionally by exploitative foreigners.

By 1877, the coolie trade had been banned internationally, either by foreign treaties with the Qing or by unilateral bans on coolie labor.<sup>30</sup> Mexican officials had abstained from the coolie trade throughout the period, in keeping with the 1857 Constitution’s prohibition on human slavery. However, it must be noted that this high-minded aversion to human bondage was quite out of step with the practices of debt peonage in Yucatán, the use of “recruited work gangs” on infrastructure projects, and the persistence of the indigenous slave trade in the north.<sup>31</sup> As such, Chinese migrants to Mexico overwhelmingly arrived voluntarily, as free laborers. While they

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<sup>27</sup> Young, *Alien*, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Young, *Alien*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Young, *Alien*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Chang, Jason Oliver. *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940*. University of Illinois Press, 2017. Pg. 41-42.

<sup>31</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 42.

were not coolies, criticisms of the coolie trade informed many of the early expressions of *antichinismo* these migrants would face. As Elliot Young posits, “the distinction between a coolie and a free laborer was ideological”; “coolie” simply meant “cheap exploitable labor that was almost inextricably linked to Asians.” Chinese migrants in Mexico were often treated as though they were “coolies,” and reports of disease and death on coolie transport ships were transmuted into racist stereotypes characterizing the Chinese as unhygienic and blaming them for outbreaks of illness.<sup>32</sup> Irrespective of the simple fact that they were not themselves coolies, the trade colored early Mexican impressions of Chinese and cast a long shadow over the experiences of migrants to northern Mexico in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Forging a Country: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Liberals and Construction of a New Mexico**

In 1848, six years after the Qing government was forced to sign the first of many unequal treaties, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and compelled Mexico to surrender roughly half of its national territory.<sup>33</sup> Mexico, freshly independent and chronically chaotic, was not given time to resolve the deep cleavages between the federalists, centralists, republicans, liberals, conservatives, monarchists, Church leaders, and regional caudillos that dominated political life in Mexico’s first decades of independence.<sup>34</sup> Confrontations between these factions continually destabilized the young republic and prevented the consolidation of a strong national government. Sorely lacking in consensus, plagued by French and Spanish foreign interventions, and on the near-constant verge of bankruptcy,

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<sup>32</sup> Young, *Alien*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Buchenau, Jürgen and Joseph, Gilbert M. *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century*. Duke University Press, 2013. Pg. 16.

<sup>34</sup> Chávez, Alicia Hernández. *Mexico: A Brief History*. University of California Press, 2006. Pg. 145.

Mexico's proximity to the expansionist United States left no time for internal resolution of the country's growing pains; between 1846 and 1867, Mexico was only "at peace" for three years.<sup>35</sup>

The national humiliation of the Mexican-American War spurred a group of reform-minded liberals to make a bid for power; in 1854, following Santa-Anna's sale of northern Sonora to the United States, these liberals pronounced the Plan de Ayutla.<sup>36</sup> Santa-Anna was defeated and driven into exile; Juan Alvarez, the general who led the rebellion, quickly faded into the background as Benito Juárez, "Mexico's Abraham Lincoln," and a group of civilian liberals led the formulation of the 1857 constitution.<sup>37</sup> The liberal reform period (1855-1857) saw Juárez and his associates, most notably his successor Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, work to transform political and economic life in Mexico. The 1856 "Lerdo law" aimed to disrupt both Church and indigenous collective ownership of the land, priming Mexico for the "orderly capitalist transition that was a prerequisite for the flow of foreign investment."<sup>38</sup> This foreign investment would allow Mexico to develop the requisite infrastructure to exploit its massive natural resource deposits: a rich Mexico might conceivably defend itself against its imperialist neighbor.

The Constitution of 1857 doubled down on the Lerdo law's assault on corporate ownership; Article 27 gave the government the authority to expropriate and sell both Church and corporately held land.<sup>39</sup> The liberals aimed to completely restructure Mexico, literally from the ground up. The new constitution offered several progressive reforms, including the abolition of debt servitude, and the death penalty. Crucially for subsequent migrants to Mexico, Article 11 of

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<sup>35</sup> Chávez, *Mexico*, 145.

<sup>36</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 16.

the 1857 Constitution guaranteed “the right of entering and leaving the Republic, of traveling through its territory, and of changing their residence without the necessity of letters of security, passports, *salvo-conducto*, or other similar requisite.”<sup>40</sup> Article 27 and other reforms provided for in the constitution proved a bridge too far for Mexico’s still vital conservative movement, and their most enthusiastic backers, the Church. In 1858 they threw Mexico back into chaos, initiating the War of the Reform (1858-1861), another bloody episode in Mexico’s long 19th-century march through foreign intervention and civil war. After three years of fighting and tens of thousands of dead, Juárez and the liberal faction claimed a pyrrhic victory; the liberals were back in the driver’s seat, but Mexico was once again weak, splintered, and in dire economic straits.<sup>41</sup> The liberal reformers aimed to enrich and therefore strengthen the young Mexican republic, but the war left the country vulnerable to foreign intervention and in massive debt.

Just as the liberals began to consolidate their victory in the War of the Reform, France, Spain, and Great Britain entered a pact to collect on the foreign debt Mexico had accrued during the war. In 1862, France, supported by its European partners and Mexico’s defeated conservatives, launched an invasion of Mexico intending to establish a full-scale military occupation.<sup>42</sup> Two years later, the coalition successfully installed Maximilian I, Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I’s younger brother, as Emperor of Mexico. Ironically, Maximilian, like the government he supplanted, was a liberal-minded reformer. His regime intended to modernize Mexico, which alienated his conservative backers. During his brief reign, Maximilian made the first moves to draw Chinese labor to Mexico. He formed the Asian Colonization Company,

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<sup>40</sup> Young, *Alien*, 100.

<sup>41</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 17.

which sought to repurpose Atlantic slave ships to transport Chinese coolies to Mexico.<sup>43</sup> In 1865, Maximilian gave Manuel B. da Cunha Reis, who was notorious for his involvement in the illegal African slave trade, exclusive rights to import Chinese labor for his plantations in Veracruz for a term of ten years.<sup>44</sup> Maximilian's efforts to tap into the midcentury flow of Chinese emigrants were cut short by his defeat at the hands of Juárez's government-in-exile, which received crucial support from the United States. The United States was a rising imperial power and seized on the opportunity to enforce the Monroe doctrine; in his sclerotic attempts to modernize Mexico, Maximilian had only succeeded in angering his conservative supporters and driving Mexico's liberals into a powerful alliance with their neighbors to the north.<sup>45</sup> In June of 1867, Maximilian's government fell; Juárez sentenced him and a number of his generals to death to send a signal to both foreign powers and the majority of remaining conservatives who were spared immediate reprisal for their collaboration with the occupiers.<sup>46</sup>

Mexican conservatives' support for the occupiers thoroughly degraded their political appeal; the stage was finally set for Mexico's embattled liberals to go about their work of building a strong, modern Mexico. Porfirio Díaz, a young brigadier general in the Juarista army and a political rising star, would go on to lead Mexico through the next stage of its development; his government would oversee the first large-scale importations of Chinese migrants to address labor and population shortages along Mexico's northwestern frontier.

### **Chinese Exclusion in the United States**

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<sup>43</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 52.

<sup>44</sup> Young, *Alien*, 106, and Chang, *Chino*, 52.

<sup>45</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 18-19.

The Mexican-American War was another national humiliation in a series of foreign interventions and civil conflicts that kept the young Mexican republic constantly off balance. For the United States, however, the war was celebrated as another triumph in a century marked by expansion and development. California, seized by the United States as per the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, began to draw scores of Chinese migrants in the gold rush; these migrants settled throughout the American West, contributing vital labor to mining, agriculture, and railroad construction projects.<sup>47</sup> In 1850, twenty thousand Chinese migrants made their way to the United States. By 1870, Chinese migrants to the American West numbered beyond fifty thousand.<sup>48</sup>

U.S. immigration policy, through much of the nineteenth century, generally encouraged migration and offered few restrictions beyond basic safety constraints on the transport of passengers, as in the case of the 1819 Passenger Act.<sup>49</sup> This changed in 1862 with the passage of the Anti-Coolie Act, barring Americans and foreigners from transporting migrants “known as ‘coolies,’” as indentured laborers.<sup>50</sup> Historian Moon-Ho Jung claims the act was simultaneously “the last antislavery law and the first immigration law.”<sup>51</sup> Erika Lee argues that the Anti-Coolie Act defined, for the first time, the United States’s conception of immigration as a force to be controlled and bureaucratically constrained by the state. The act also provided the impetus for the development and refinement of the enforcement mechanisms required to maintain the new immigration regime.<sup>52</sup> Despite the extant ban on coolie labor and the fact that the majority of Chinese migrants to North America came as voluntary, free laborers, white Americans tended to

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<sup>47</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Young, *Alien*, 100-101.

<sup>49</sup> Young, *Alien*, 101.

<sup>50</sup> Young, *Alien*, 102.

<sup>51</sup> Young, *Alien*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Lee, Erika. “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (2002): 36–62. Pg. 37.

regard Chinese men as “innately willing to indenture themselves” and Chinese women as “slavishly prone to prostitution.”<sup>53</sup> The latter concern was integral to the passage of the Page Act in 1875, which created gender-based restrictions on Chinese immigration in an attempt to prevent unattended women, “likely to become public charges,” from entering the United States and becoming prostitutes. The role of morality in immigrant “gatekeeping” was expanded again in 1903, with the passage of an act barring all prostitutes, regardless of national origin, from entering the U.S.<sup>54</sup> As anti-Chinese tensions mounted throughout the 1870s due to economic depression, these novel legal restrictions on immigration would culminate in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, a complete prohibition on migration from China to the United States.

In 1876, in a hearing before a California State Senate Committee, San Francisco lawyer H.N. Clement argued that Chinese immigration constituted an “unarmed invasion” with the capacity to completely overrun the United States. His testimony was intended to nationalize the issue of Chinese exclusion, a rising nativist tendency that had mostly been previously contained to California. As Young posits, the drumbeat of anti-Chinese bigotry in California and the passage of increasingly restrictive state-level legislation foreshadowed the jump to the national level with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1878, the Federal Circuit Court in San Francisco held that Chinese were not eligible to become naturalized citizens because they were “of the Mongolian race.”<sup>55</sup> Naturalization, according to the court, was only possible for a “free white person” or persons “of African descent.”<sup>56</sup> In May of 1879, California adopted a radical new constitution. Alongside its wholesale restructuring of California’s justice system, the new

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<sup>53</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Lee, “Chinese Exclusion,” 42.

<sup>55</sup> Young, *Alien*, 102.

<sup>56</sup> Young, *Alien*, 102.



constitution stripped the Chinese of the right to vote in state elections and gave localities the authority to either expel or ghettoize their Chinese populations.<sup>57</sup> Some of California's more overtly discriminatory legislature was struck down in the federal courts given their flagrant violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause, however, additional local and federal rulings in favor of anti-Chinese discrimination through the course of the late 1870s paved the legal and political path toward national exclusion.<sup>58</sup>

The steady beat of anti-Chinese legislation in California and the eventual nationalization of the Chinese immigration issue were driven, fundamentally, by the perceived economic and sexual threat of Chinese migrants. Chinese men competed with white Americans on the labor market and were popularly understood to be predisposed to indenture and willing to work for paltry wages. Additionally, these men presented a sexual or bio-national threat, as evidenced by the passage of anti-miscegenation laws specifically targeting Chinese.<sup>59</sup> As evidenced by the content of the Page Act, these moral and hygienic concerns were extended to Chinese women as well.

The sexual character of the anti-Chinese movement points to the greater significance of Chinese exclusion as a catalyst through which modern states developed a notion of their subjects as a biomass to be controlled and developed. This new understanding directed the state, in the late nineteenth-century United States and decades later in Mexico, to control and direct human reproduction, concern themselves with personal and communal hygiene, and engage in state-directed disease prevention. *Antichinismo* in Mexico was a homegrown phenomenon, and it is reductive to simply assert that Mexican anti-Chinese bigotry was inspired by and copied

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<sup>57</sup> Young, *Alien*, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Young, *Alien*, 102-103.

<sup>59</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 43.

wholesale from their neighbors to the north. Nonetheless, Mexican anti-Chinese crusaders made use of caricatures, fears, and methods that originated during the coolie era and U.S. exclusion.

### **Order, Progress, and *Motores de Sangre*: Immigration and Development under the Porfiriato**

In 1876, General Porfirio Díaz successfully deposed Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada and assumed control of the Mexican presidency, a position he would not relinquish for over three decades. From 1880 to 1910, the Porfirian regime centralized political authority to an unprecedented degree, directed resources toward developing infrastructure, and oversaw Mexico's integration as a primary commodity producer in the increasingly interconnected Atlantic industrial economy.<sup>60</sup> Under the Restored Republic (1867-1876), the Liberal's motto had been "liberty, order, and progress." Díaz dropped "liberty" for the snappier "order and progress"; his rule would be defined by the triumph of economic development and political stability over individual rights or political freedom.<sup>61</sup>

Land reform and national colonization remained primary concerns of the Mexican state throughout the nineteenth century, from the earliest days of the republic through Díaz's presidency. Throughout Mexico's first century, the problem of politically incorporating and subsequently exploiting the mineral-rich north confounded the Mexican elite. In the final years of Lerdo's presidency, the Mexican government established diplomatic ties with the Qing government with the aim of recruiting Chinese migrants to work on vital infrastructure projects and to help settle the northwestern frontier.<sup>62</sup> The 1883 colonization law laid out the rights of "*colonos blancos*," or white settlers, and allowed the indigenous population to participate only if

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<sup>60</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> Young, *Alien*, 107.

they renounced communal ownership of the land.<sup>63</sup> National colonization, Jason Chang argues, was inextricably linked to the formation of the Mexican racial state; colonization was both the process of expanding the capacity of the Mexican center to exploit the riches of its periphery and the process of absorbing the country's myriad indigenous communities into a modern, cohesive, racial nation-state. Euro-American colonists, therefore, were the most desirable to Mexican liberals, both for their perceived "modernity" and for the prospect of their whitening Mexico's predominately indigenous population.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century and well afterward, the notion that Mexico needed only to become larger and whiter to realize its limitless national potential held sway.

When the government had more trouble than expected recruiting white European settlers, they turned to Chinese migrants as a second choice. Chinese migrants were an undesirable means to an end; by the 1870s, Mexican industrial periodicals had begun referring to them as "*motores de sangre*," blood engines. Structurally, Chinese Mexicans were instrumental in the national colonization effort, working in mining and infrastructure projects in the labor-scarce north. Ideologically, however, they offered no solution to the problem of constructing a modern racial nation-state; if anything, their increasing presence in the country was perceived as a distinct threat to the construction of a healthy, hygienic, racially superior body politic. As the number of Chinese migrants to Mexico swelled in the wake of the 1899 Treaty of Amity and Commerce concluded between the Porfirian government and the Qing, some Mexicans began to echo the alarmist rhetoric of figures like H.N. Clement. The Porfirian regime did not grant much, if any, consideration to popular complaint. Díaz's rule was both authoritarian and technocratic; his *científicos* agreed that "an imported class of animal-like disposable workers" would do more

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<sup>63</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 43.

good than harm for Mexico's development.<sup>65</sup> By 1910, there were over 13,000 Chinese living in Mexico, settling primarily in the northwestern frontier states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa.<sup>66</sup> The following year, the Mexican Revolution washed away the *científicos* and their regime, in the process expanding notions of Mexican citizenship and national-racial identity. The revolution promised to expand the Mexican political system, extending participation in politics to the previously excluded peasant masses, the emergent *mestizo* nationalism that edified this expansion held no place for the thousands of Chinese who had come to Mexico as *motores de sangre* and remained as citizens.

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<sup>65</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Young, *Alien*, 110.

## **CHAPTER II: Porfirian Collapse, the Mexican Revolution, and the Torreón Massacre**

### **Introduction**

Porfirian technocrats recruited Chinese labor to power Mexico's transition into modernity. Working in mining, agriculture, infrastructure development, and manufacturing, Chinese migrants developed the sparsely populated northwestern frontier and helped to link Mexico to the increasingly integrated world market. A select number of Mexico's elite amassed spectacular riches in three decades of Porfirian rule; most Mexicans enjoyed little change at all in their circumstances and were made to suffer intense political repression. Thirty years of this unequal development came to a head in 1910 with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. The ensuing decade of civil conflict selected the next generation of Mexican leadership and defined the terms of the revolutionary state's founding. From the beginning of the revolt in 1910 until stabilization in 1920, Mexican political life would expand to include several groups previously excluded from the national conversation; Mexico's indigenous population, labor leaders, agrarian reformers, and radicals of all stripes left indelible marks on the future state's formative period. The revolution twisted and turned, a decade-long march through coups and countercoups; out of this crucible, a clique of Sonoran politicians emerged as the definitive leadership of a renewed Mexico. Liberals of a new breed, intent on remedying Mexico's social ills and true believers in emergent mestizo racial nationalism, these Sonoran dynasty politicians also came to be close allies of the nascent anti-Chinese movement. In 1911, during the campaign against the Porfiriato, a combined force of rebel troops and vigilante mobs perpetrated the massacre of over 300 Chinese in Torreón. The slaughter, conducted in the service of revolutionary ideals, presaged coming efforts to expel the Chinese population from Mexico in its entirety.

## Mass Chinese Migration to Mexico and the Origins of *Antichinismo*

As discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese migrants were recruited by the Porfirian government to supply labor for the regime's vital mining, agriculture, and infrastructure projects. The Porfirian elite would certainly have preferred European settlers, at least in theory, as they would possess the "intellectual, moral, religious, technological, and industrious qualities necessary for rapid economic development."<sup>67</sup> But European settlers were hard to come by; they found manual labor in Mexico's hot and humid climate extremely harrowing, and often demanded wages that made turning a profit difficult for industrialists. Instead, Mexico's technocratic leadership turned to Chinese migrants, so-called "*motores de sangre*," to address a preeminent nineteenth-century policy aim: attracting migrants to settle the sparsely populated and resource-rich northern frontier, constructing the infrastructure and supplying the labor that would allow Mexico to tap into its vast natural wealth.<sup>68</sup>

The first diplomatic contact between Mexican officials and the Qing government in China occurred in 1875, a year before the coup that elevated General Porfirio Díaz to power. From the earliest days of the Porfiriato, the Mexican government pushed to establish direct steamer lines from China; this need became especially dire in the wake of U.S. exclusion, which precluded the possibility of importing migrants through the United States. In 1884, the Porfirian Development Ministry signed a contract with the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company (MPNC), promising a subsidy of sixty-five pesos for each European "immigrant" and thirty-five pesos for each Asian "laborer."<sup>69</sup> The contract's verbiage highlights the difference in how European and Asian migrants were perceived; Porfirian technocrats hoped that Europeans might

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<sup>67</sup> Jacques, "More Money," 202.

<sup>68</sup> Jacques, "More Money," 202-203.

<sup>69</sup> Young, *Alien*, 108.

stay in Mexico as permanent settlers, while Asian migrants were to be used instrumentally in areas of extreme labor scarcity before returning to their home countries. Ambitious as they were, the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company's efforts were stymied by the Zongli Yamen's refusal to allow for shipments of migrants without formal diplomatic relations between the two states. The following year, the Zongli Yamen allowed the company to carry a single group of migrants from Hong Kong but British officials refused to grant permission for the migrants to leave. The British had just concluded a decades-long struggle against the Iberian imperial powers to stamp out the coolie trade and considered the MPNC's ambitions to be similar enough to warrant obstruction.<sup>70</sup>

In 1890, another abortive attempt at establishing a direct steamer line, the *Compañía Marítima Asiática Mexicana* (Asian Mexican Maritime Company), managed to transfer roughly 500 migrants from Macao to Salina Cruz before collapsing like its predecessors.<sup>71</sup> Similar efforts would be largely unsuccessful until the end of the decade, with the long-awaited establishment of diplomatic relations between Imperial China and Porfirian Mexico. It should be noted, however, that several Chinese colonies in Mexico predate the critical 1899 treaty, concentrated almost exclusively in the northwestern frontier states.<sup>72</sup> In 1899, the two governments concluded a Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation; at last, Mexico could tap into the stream of assumedly cheap, hyper-exploitable Chinese labor their competitors across the Americas had employed for decades. Chinese immigration would facilitate, in large part, Mexico's entrance into the Atlantic industrial economy as a primary commodity producer; Chinese were imported to work in mining and agriculture and to construct the railroads that would deliver goods to

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<sup>70</sup> Young, *Alien*, 108.

<sup>71</sup> Young, *Alien*, 108-109.

<sup>72</sup> Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. "Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932." *The Journal of Arizona History* 21, no. 3 (1980): 275-312. Pg. 277.

northern markets. In 1895, according to census records, only 900 Chinese were residing in Mexico. In the decade following the establishment of diplomatic relations, however, some 35,000 Chinese migrants made their way to Mexico.<sup>73</sup> Only about half of these migrants settled permanently in Mexico, a good number attempted to enter the United States, in contravention of the 1882 Exclusion Act, and others moved on to secondary destinations across Latin America. All told, by 1910, roughly 13,200 Chinese were residing in Mexico.<sup>74</sup>

The earliest articulations of Mexican *antichinismo* coincided with the arrival of the first waves of large-scale Chinese migration. In 1899, the same year the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation was signed, *El Tráfico*, a newspaper from Guaymas, Sonora, published a series of virulently anti-Chinese articles. The first, entitled “*Los chinos en México*,” trepidatiously asserted that “the commercial talent of the sons of the celestial empire is superior to that of the Jews,” and that “the Chinese... is a gambler, a fatalist, a smoker of opium... devoid of patriotism.”<sup>75</sup> The editorial reflected growing concern that Chinese migrants were not mere *motores de sangre*, easily exploited and suited to hard labor, but were in actuality remarkably talented small businessmen. This “commercial talent” was evidenced by their increasing domination of small commerce throughout northern Mexico in the final years of the Porfiriato. While domestic oligarchs and wealthy Euro-American foreigners were granted preferential treatment in the Porfirian push to develop large-scale industry, enterprising Chinese moved in to supply the newfound demand for retail grocery, sewing, and laundry services in the boomtowns cropping up across northern Mexico.<sup>76</sup> These migrants were extraordinarily adept as petit-bourgeois engines of settlement and development in the Mexican north, but their failure to serve

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<sup>73</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 283.

<sup>74</sup> Jacques, “More Money,” 203.

<sup>75</sup> “*Los chinos en México*” *El Tráfico*, Guaymas, Sonora 8 de febrero de 1899, n. 501 p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 278.



as cheap, temporary, expendable workhorses constituted the principal disappointment that would give rise to decades of anti-Chinese bigotry.

As Evelyn Hu-DeHart posits in her early work on Chinese Mexicans, migrants were quick to abandon manual labor for retail commerce. In an 1890 report by American Consul Alexander Willard, seventy percent of Chinese living in Sonora self-reported as laborers, working in mining, construction, and manufacturing. Only twenty declared themselves to be “merchants.” By 1900, however, the portion of Chinese identifying themselves as small businessmen had increased dramatically.<sup>77</sup> Two different transnational business practices were integral to the Chinese community’s rapid success: transnational capital investment and transnational wholesaling.<sup>78</sup> Transnational capital investment, in this context, made use of same-place organizations and kinship networks to pool money for corporate ventures. Chinese ex-pats living in cities across the United States, Mexico, Southeast Asia, and China were connected by financial networks and institutions that allowed them to create what were, in comparison to many of their local competitors, remarkably well-capitalized firms. Chinese merchants in the north sourced most of their dry goods wholesale from both Chinese and Anglo-American distributors in the United States. This practice, which Robert Romero Chao terms “transnational wholesaling,” often involved merchants or other middlemen making regular trips across the border into the United States to secure lower prices than were available in Mexico.<sup>79</sup> These business strategies, common across different migrant communities in an era defined by the emergence and increasing interconnectivity of the global economy, helped some Chinese businessmen accrue impressive fortunes in record times.

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<sup>77</sup> Jacques, “More Money,” 204.

<sup>78</sup> Romero, Robert Chao. *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940*. University of Arizona Press, 2011. Pg. 143.

<sup>79</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 143-144.

In towns across Baja California, Sonora, and Sinaloa, “paying a visit to *el chino* on the corner” became a regional colloquialism for grocery shopping.<sup>80</sup> This Chinese predominance in petty commerce was bemoaned in another article in *El Tráfico*. Published February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1899, “*A propósito de los Chinos*” stated:

“We’ve proposed in days past a prompt and effective remedy to finish the celestials that are monopolizing the businesses of retail grocery and other small industries... Now, we will tell you it consists of what the yankees (who are very practical) call ‘boycotting.’ Here, this procedure will have magnificent results.”<sup>81</sup>

A full decade before the collapse of the Porfiriato, before the majority of Chinese migrants had even arrived in Mexico, nativist *antichinos* agitated for an adoption of American tactics against the “celestial” threat.

*El Tráfico* continued its campaign against Chinese migration throughout the spring of 1899. “*Los chinos*,” published March 8<sup>th</sup>, claims that Chinese migrants constituted a “disruptive element... a constant menace hanging over our heads.” The article argues that the Chinese are “unscrupulous of morals,” with no reservations about selling alcohol and drugs to Mexico’s vulnerable youth, condemning the latter to a “career in vice.”<sup>82</sup> *El Tráfico*’s claims reflect widespread Mexican beliefs regarding European moral superiority and enlightenment, suggesting that Chinese businesspeople, in their relentless pursuit of riches, could present a threat to the moral and physical health of the nation. “*Los Chinos*” was an early articulation of Chinese migration’s supposed biological threat, a racist characterization that would continue to serve as a

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<sup>80</sup> González, Fredy. *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. University of California Press, 2017. Pg. 30.

<sup>81</sup> “*A propósito de los chinos*,” *El Tráfico*, Guaymas, Sonora 11 de febrero de 1899, n. 508, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> “*Los chinos*,” *El Tráfico*, Guaymas, Sonora 2 de marzo de 1899, n. 522, p.2.

potent propaganda device for decades to come. The article describes Chinese dwellings as overcrowded and dirty “loci of infection,” suggesting the ghettoization of Chinese Mexicans as a possible solution. The article begins by citing Euro-American policies concerning their Chinese populations, stating that:

“With the establishment of a Chinese canton, as has been done in the United States and in the parts of Europe where the sons of heaven abound, we will resolve our problem of small commerce enervated by taxes, and designated it seems to receive the *coup de grace* from the foreigners that, once our doors were opened to them, flooded in like bees soaking up our hospitable honeycomb.”<sup>83</sup>

Beyond its explicit references to anti-Chinese policies in the United States and Europe as aspirational, the article’s use of animal metaphors in its description of Chinese people became increasingly common as the anti-Chinese campaigns continued. It was argued, in text and cartoon form, that Chinese people were, alternatingly, bees, birds of prey, dragons, and octopuses, among other creatures. The article continues to advocate for ghettoization, declaring, with characteristic animal allegory, that:

“We are going to start with the idea of designating them a neighborhood where they will form their canton, then we will gradually demonstrate the possibilities of carrying out this course of action, for with it will come the restoration of our retail trade, enervated today, almost killed by that immense octopus that extends its tentacles everywhere, sowing the ruin of the citizens of our country.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *El Tráfico* “Los chinos,” 2.

<sup>84</sup> *El Tráfico*, “Los chinos,” 2.

Under the strongman Porfirian regime, these sorts of nativist tirades were well-insulated from policymaking, as virtually all political complaints were. In 1910, however, the revolution cast the Porfiriato aside in favor of a “Mexico for the Mexicans,” and anti-Chinese bigotry would first come to inform mob violence and later official policy.

### **Porfirian Unraveling and the Coming of a New Mexico**

In the three decades of his rule, General Porfirio Díaz pursued policies of national market integration and infrastructure development, facilitating economic growth that had been impossible through decades of civil war and foreign intervention. This growth was far from evenly distributed, however: the greatest beneficiaries of the Porfiriato were foreign investors and the small clique of oligarchs and technocrats loyal to “Don Perpetuo,” as the “elected” autocrat came to be called. The explosive growth in mining and manufacturing was counterbalanced by stagnancy in the agriculture sector, which was responsible for employing the vast majority of Mexicans. Porfirian technocratic positivism and an increasing concentration of agricultural land holdings had eroded centuries of paternalistic social relations, contributing to nightmarish conditions for hacienda workers. In the final years of the Porfiriato, real agricultural wages were a quarter of what they had been a century prior while commodity prices were higher than ever.<sup>85</sup> Another statistic helps to elucidate the highly uneven nature of Porfirian development: in 1910, life expectancy for the average Mexican was just 30 years, kept low by the country’s near 30 percent infant mortality rate.<sup>86</sup> The Mexican masses saw decades pass with little change at all in their living standards, all while foreigners and oligarchs accumulated vast fortunes from Mexico’s belated integration into the world economy. The poorest peasants,

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<sup>85</sup> Buchenau et. al, *Once and Future*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 25.

laboring on large plantations in Yucatán, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, were likened to slaves by American journalists such as John Kenneth Turner.<sup>87</sup>

Impoverished peasants were far from the regime's only discontents; by 1910, an increasingly small circle of Porfirian elites had alienated the anxious middle classes by denying them political agency and satisfactory employment, as well as the lower echelons of the landed elite, who felt neglected in favor of foreigners and oligarchs. Francisco I. Madero, leader of the anti-reelectionist movement that would oust Díaz, was the heir to some of the largest land holdings in the northern states of Coahuila, Chihuahua, and Durango—his family had amassed an impressive fortune profiting from agricultural exports bound for the United States and elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> Madero, and other wealthy malcontents like him, were able to maneuver against the Porfiriato in ways unimaginable to their poorer countrymen, and as Jurgen Buchenau aptly notes, their defection from the Porfirian old regime deprived it of a critical source of its legitimacy.<sup>89</sup> Venustiano Carranza, another leading revolutionary, hailed from a very wealthy and politically influential family in Coahuila; he was recruited to the anti-reelectionist cause as his family fell out of favor with the increasingly narrow oligarchic elite. In 1908, Madero published *The Presidential Succession in 1910*, a relatively conservative critique of Porfirian autocracy. The book detonated a “chain reaction,” however, and in the years between its publication and the outbreak of the revolution, Madero became an icon of resistance for disparate sections of Mexican society, from embittered landowners, merchants, and middle-class professionals to peasant and proletarian radicals.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Buchenau et. al, *Once and Future*, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 93.

<sup>89</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 27.

<sup>90</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 27-28.

As the economic depression in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century put a damper on decades of explosive but uneven economic growth, prevailing conditions deprived the Porfiriato of its remaining supporters and worsened the alienation of its discontents. It was a series of political disappointments, however, in concert with rampant social inequality and economic stagnation, that served as the immediate cause of the 1910 revolution. In 1908, a nearly eighty-year-old President Díaz gave an interview to James Creelman, an American journalist, wherein the dictator announced he intended to finally retire from politics in 1910.<sup>91</sup> According to the General, the Mexican people had been suitably prepared for democracy under his direction. Díaz's promise sent reverberations through Mexican society; for the first time in decades, alternatives to technocratic authoritarianism appeared possible. Some cynics presumed that Don Perpetuo simply intended to smoke out his opposition: this view was bolstered by the transfer of General Bernardo Reyes, governor of Nuevo Leon and a political rising star, to a diplomatic post in Europe, removing the man who promised a *Porfirismo* without Díaz and his technocrats from the political arena.<sup>92</sup> In April of 1910, with many anti-Porfirians' first choice successor stuck on a military fact-finding mission in Prussia, an anti-reelectionist congress nominated Madero as their candidate. The disparate segments of Mexican society arrayed against the old regime coalesced behind Madero; his campaign attracted "embittered Reyistas, old-time Liberals who resented the loss of traditional individual freedoms and civil liberties, local leaders excluded from power by the Porfirian system, disfranchised landowners and merchants, cramped middle-class intellectuals, leaders of repressed labor syndicates and embattled peasant communities, and even some socialists and anarchosyndicalists," as reported by historian Jürgen Buchenau. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, just weeks before the election, Díaz arrested Madero at a campaign stop in Monterrey. Don

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<sup>91</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 32-33.

<sup>92</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 33.

Perpetuo claimed victory in the 1910 elections by an unbelievable margin, and as he organized celebrations for the centennial of Miguel Hidalgo's famous "Grito de Dolores," Madero began to plot a large-scale armed insurrection from his prison cell.

In October of 1910, Porfirian officials allowed Madero to be released from prison on bail; the soon-to-be insurrectionist promptly boarded a train north, and under the protective umbrella of the United States began making the immediate preparations for a civil war against the old regime. In the final years of his rule, Díaz had lamented Mexico's increasing capital dependency on the United States and had sought to hedge against his northern neighbor by pivoting to greater cooperation with European partners, principally British oil interests.<sup>93</sup> Don Porfirio's attempts to assert Mexico's economic independence made him increasingly expendable to his wealthy American backers, who happily harbored Madero as Díaz's increasingly gerontocratic regime could "no longer guarantee 'Order' or 'Progress.'"<sup>94</sup> In November, with the support of American politicians, businesspeople, and virtually all segments of Mexican society, Madero's anti-re-electionist forces fired the first shots of the Mexican Revolution. In just six months, the Porfirian old regime would be swept away; for the next decade, a rotating cast of regional Caudillos, landowners, and peasant revolutionaries would struggle to lead Mexico into a new era. As Adolfo Gilly writes in his epilogue to *The Mexican Revolution*, "all the previously active customs, conquests, upheavals, and dreams poured into the great flux; the tendencies and determinations of all subsequent years flowed away from it along countless channels."<sup>95</sup>

### **The First Maderista Coalition: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Liberals, Agrarians, and Bandits**

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<sup>93</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 36.

<sup>94</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 36.

<sup>95</sup> Gilly, Adolfo. *The Mexican Revolution*. Tr. Patrick Camiller, The New Press, 2006. Pg. 327.

The Maderista coalition that struggled against the Porfiriato from November 1910 until May 1911 was comprised of several distinct factions, each drawing from different socioeconomic and regional contingencies and all dissatisfied with Porfirian rule. Initially junior partners in the movement, a dynamic clique of Sonoran revolutionaries would consolidate more and more influence as the revolutionary struggle raged on.

Madero, Carranza, José María Maytorena, the scion of a wealthy Sonoran family aligned against the Porfiriato, and other disaffected elites occupied the moderate-conservative wing of the revolution. They were nineteenth-century liberals, intent on realizing the promises of the 1857 Constitution and striking back against a political order they felt had maligned them. Many of these men had seen themselves in General Reyes and believed that his mistreatment by Don Porfirio mirrored their own; when Madero was similarly repressed, these resentful elites defected to the revolutionary camp, robbing the Porfirian regime of its legitimacy and deploying their vast resources against it. By and large, these men had less issue with the structure of the Porfiriato than their families' particular positions in it and, by their wealth, were generally insulated from the socioeconomic pressures motivating the majority of Mexicans to pledge themselves to the revolutionary cause.<sup>96</sup>

On the opposite wing of the original revolutionary coalition were the socially-driven *campesino* revolts in the south, led by Emiliano Zapata, and the northern "bandit" armies, led by Pascual Orozco and Doroteo Arango, the latter better known as Pancho Villa. From its breakout in December of 1910, the agrarian revolution was diverse and isolated primarily to the rural corridors of southern Mexico.<sup>97</sup> In the indigenous heartland states of México, Morelos, Puebla, and Tlaxcala, *campesinos* rose against the extractive haciendas that had, empowered by liberal

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<sup>96</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 33.

<sup>97</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 40.



land reform policies, encroached on communal land holdings and dislocated peasant life. The northern social bandits, for their part, were “a floating group of predominantly mestizo miners, cowboys, and mule-skinners, men who might work on a ranch for part of the year and in a mine or factory the rest of the time.”<sup>98</sup> Embittered by the economic woes of the late Porfirian era, these men had been given a taste of social mobility only to have their hopes dashed by official repression, often through the old regime’s protection of foreign business interests. These bandits were the most opportunistic and mobile of the revolutionary forces and among the most disorganized.

Both Villa and Zapata, representing the social revolutionaries, were initially allied with the Maderista faction against the Mexican old regime. Villa served under Orozco in Chihuahua during the Maderista phase of the revolution; the latter has been credited with the capture of Ciudad Juárez, arguably the most significant military victory of the initial revolt against the Porfiriato.<sup>99</sup> In March 1912, after Orozco was denied a governorship by the victorious Madero, the wily opportunist declared himself, and his band of six thousand troops, to be once more in rebellion against the Mexican state; Pancho Villa remained loyal to Madero, hostile to the notion of aligning himself with some of Orozco’s more cynical, wealthy backers, such as Luis Terrazas. Zapata, for his part, declared himself in opposition to the Madero government just weeks after it took office; in the famous *Plan de Ayala*, published in November 1911, Zapata condemned Madero’s government for its betrayal of the agrarian movement and its failure to pursue a satisfactory land reform policy.<sup>100</sup> The *Plan de Ayala* named Orozco as a suitable successor to Madero; Orozco himself had not asked for the position, and the document suggests that Zapata

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<sup>98</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 42.

<sup>99</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 43.

<sup>100</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 49.

himself would assume the presidency if General Orozco declined it. To fend off the twin threats presented by Zapata and Orozco, Madero would turn to a specter from the old regime, General Victoriano Huerta.<sup>101</sup> Initially, the Orozco rebellion trounced Madero's *federales*; when the revolt threatened to spill over into Sonora, then-governor Maytorena scrapped together several militias to defend the state. One such militia was led by Alvaro Obregón Salido, an ambitious military man who would go on to form one leg of the so-called "Sonoran triangle," a political dynasty of dynamic northerners who would determine the course of the revolution through the 1920s. Obregón and Huerta successfully put down the Orozco revolt, but when in early 1913 Don Porfirio's nephew led another revolt against the fledgling Maderista state, Huerta defected, replacing Madero in a coup-de-état backed by both the United States and powerful holdover elements from the Porfirian state.<sup>102</sup>

### **Huerta's Counterrevolution and the Rise of the Sonoran Clique**

Huerta's overthrow of the revolutionary government called the Maderista coalition back into action; the war against Huerta's coup government would substantially elevate Sonora's political profile. What was once a sparsely populated frontier state was now a dynamic hub of industrialization and immigration, supplying many politicians who would go on to lead Mexico through its coming transformation. Crucially, these revolutionaries became increasingly associated with the revolutionary ideologies of economic self-determination and mestizo nationalism. These new founding ideals spelled trouble for Chinese Mexicans; leaders staked their political careers on these issues and increasingly turned to *antichinismo* as a solution to Mexico's racial and economic issues.

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<sup>101</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 52.

<sup>102</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 53.

On February 18, 1913, Victoriano Huerta's troops arrested Madero and his Vice President, José María Pino Suárez. That day, three different men would technically hold the office of president as the coup plotters played out the processes necessary for Huerta to become commander-in-chief. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Huerta's men executed Madero and Pino Suárez; this would prove to be a crucial mistake, as the assassination of the revolution's first standard-bearer, imperfect as he was, served to rally opponents of the Huerta regime against it from its inception.<sup>103</sup> Huerta was a Porfirian through and through; his regime sought to emulate Don Porfirio with a governing ideology many opponents decried as "absolutist."<sup>104</sup> As the diffuse elements that had comprised the Maderista coalition renewed their assault on Mexico's central government, the country was once again plunged into civil strife. The next period of the revolution would be its most violent, dubbed a "fiesta of bullets" by some historians.<sup>105</sup>

The loose Maderista coalition reorganized itself against Huerta, rallying behind Carranza and declaring themselves to be "constitutionalists." Zapata's agrarian revolution raged on in the countryside, uninterrupted as their demand for land reform remained unmet. Villa and his northern bandit army, the "Division of the North," joined forces with Carranza; other co-sponsors of Carranza's *Plan de Guadalupe* included the emergent clique of Sonoran reformers, principally Obregón, who commanded the "Division of the Northwest."<sup>106</sup> The Constitutionalists could, like Huerta before them, count on the United States for financial, military, and political support; the election of Woodrow Wilson had led to a reversal in U.S. policy toward Mexico, facilitating the creation of an alliance between the Constitutionalist forces and the new American president. Wilson refused to recognize the Huerta government, depriving it of a degree of

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<sup>103</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 53-54.

<sup>104</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 55.

<sup>105</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 56.

<sup>106</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 56.

legitimacy and providing Carranza's rebels with an opportunity to replace the dictator.<sup>107</sup> Huerta also received foreign support; France, Great Britain, and Germany all provided "significant material assistance" to the coup government in a race to curry favor in Mexico as World War One drew closer.<sup>108</sup>

By September of 1913, after six months of difficult fighting, Obregón's Division of the Northwest had captured virtually all of Sonora. His forces had the financial and political backing of state officials; having been chased out of Coahuila, Carranza made his way to Hermosillo, Sonora, and proclaimed the city as the Constitutionalists' provisional capital.<sup>109</sup> The Constitutionalist forces continued to make their way south until April of 1914 when President Wilson staged an invasion of Veracruz on shallow pretenses. The invasion triggered a wave of nationalist resentment; included among its detractors were Huerta, Carranza, and most of Mexican society.<sup>110</sup> The move was calculated to force the Huerta government to fight on two fronts, however, and as the coup government moved forces north to expel the Americans, rebel forces made massive strides southward, toward Mexico City. This counteroffensive continued into the summer of 1914; in June, Villa's forces captured Zacatecas, and Zapata's army took Morelos. The following month, Huerta resigned as Obregón led his army into Mexico City.

The Constitutionalists would soon find themselves, once again, struggling to overcome their political and social differences to establish a consensus government. In October 1914, the Constitutionalist armies met in Aguascalientes to found a new government; instead, the convention triggered the next, violent phase of Mexico's revolution, a conflict between Carranza's Constitutionalist faction and the "Conventionalist" alliance of Villa and Zapata

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<sup>107</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 57.

<sup>108</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 57.

<sup>109</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 59.

<sup>110</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 58.

known as “*la Bola*.”<sup>111</sup> Delegates to the convention were allocated according to the size of each of the revolutionary armies, as such, the Villa-Zapata alliance held a voting majority. The Conventionalists voted to remove Carranza as “first chief”; Carranza protested, retreating with Obregón to Veracruz where the Constitutionalist established a base of operations from which they would reconquer Mexico.<sup>112</sup> Veracruz proved a wise strategic choice, as Carranza’s forces were able to export oil and henequen to the United States for use by the World War One allies in exchange for financing and weaponry. While the Conventionalists held the initial military advantage, Villa and Zapata struggled to coordinate strategically. The better-organized Constitutionalist forces, under the direction of Obregón and using tactics informed by ongoing developments in European trench warfare, tore a path through Villa’s army.<sup>113</sup> By 1916, after years of fighting and hundreds of thousands of dead, Carranza had defeated the Conventionalist opposition and set about the task of consolidating the new regime.

In the march southward against Huerta, the original Constitutionalist armies became more regionally and socially diverse. Obregón and others in the victorious faction became more attuned to the social ills facing many Mexicans; while they refused to allow Villa and Zapata’s ragtag forces to knock Mexico off what they believed was the track to modernity, the triumphant liberals approached the period of postrevolutionary consolidation with greater attention to popular grievances and social reform.<sup>114</sup> This consensus-driven synthesis was best articulated by the Sonoran politicians, like Obregón and his fellow Sonoran-triangle power broker Plutarco Elías Calles; these were liberals of a different breed, and in the coming years, they would make quick work of their anachronistic Maderista predecessors. Hybridizing the technocratic

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<sup>111</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 63-64.

<sup>112</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 64.

<sup>113</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 73.

<sup>114</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 65.

pragmatism of the Porfiriato with Madero's idealistic defenses of Mexican sovereignty, the Sonoran dynasty politicians sought to establish a unified nation where their predecessors could not.

### **Anti-Chinese Revolutionary Violence: the Torreón Massacre**

Chinese migrants were indispensable instruments of Porfirian modernization, settling along the northern frontier and contributing their labor to mining, agriculture, and infrastructure projects. As boomtowns sprung up throughout Sonora and other northern states, Chinese merchants moved into small commerce, with some amassing fortunes that drew the ire of their Mexican neighbors. As such, Mexico's Chinese population came to be associated with Porfirian rule; the anarchist "Liberal Party" newspaper *Revolución* decried Chinese merchants as "Porfirian lackeys."<sup>115</sup> Popularly constructed as holdovers of the old regime, there was no place for Chinese Mexicans in the anti-reelectionist camp. Throughout the revolutionary period, the Chinese would try in vain to maintain their neutrality.<sup>116</sup> While Madero himself never explicitly articulated an anti-Chinese platform, his coalition certainly included those who did. The Chinese population in southern Mexico was sparse and had little occasion to come into violent conflict with Zapata's forces. In the north, however, Pancho Villa promised to kill any Chinese his armies encountered.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, forces controlled by Emilio Madero, Francisco Madero's younger brother, were responsible for such atrocities as the infamous Torreón massacre, which resulted in over 300 innocent Chinese dead.

As Jason Chang skillfully demonstrates in his analysis of Torreón and other examples, for many, perpetrating violence against one's Chinese neighbors became a means, materially and

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<sup>115</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 91.

<sup>116</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 283.

<sup>117</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 91.

ideologically, for the redefinition of their relationship to the social order.<sup>118</sup> Chinese survival and success suggested, to some, the persistence of Porfirian social forms. In their pursuit of social revolution, many participants in the anti-reelectionist offensive directed their frustration at the old regime's inequality and backwardness toward innocent Chinese populations, who had themselves been tools of that same repressive regime.<sup>119</sup> Chinese made convenient targets for anti-foreign violence; China was unraveling as the 1911 Revolution drew closer, and the Qing government could do little to protect its subjects abroad.<sup>120</sup> Ironically, the only body that could provide some sort of protective umbrella for northern Mexico's Chinese population was the United States diplomatic corps, representatives of a country with racist, anti-Chinese legislation still on the books.<sup>121</sup> Hu-Dehart notes that in situations of demonstrable emergency, some Chinese were able to seek asylum in the United States in spite of the Exclusion Act. As the revolution progressed, however, the increasing closeness between Americans and Chinese drew the attention of xenophobic mobs; the Americans were protected by their wealth and their government however, Chinese settlers could only sometimes boast the former.

In the years leading up to the infamous massacre, Torreón was a vibrant hub of Chinese commerce. In 1906, Kang Youwei, a renowned Chinese reformer, visited the city.<sup>122</sup> Kang had been outside China for eight years, collecting donations for the Baohuang Hui (Chinese Empire Reform Association) after the Empress Dowager Cixi effectively deposed the Guangxu Emperor, halting efforts at reform and forcing Kang to flee. Since 1902, the Baohuang Hui had operated the Commercial Corporation, a venture that invested in Chinese-owned enterprises around the

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<sup>118</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 92.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques, "More Money," 205.

<sup>120</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 283.

<sup>121</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 283.

<sup>122</sup> Jacques, Leo M. "The Chinese Massacre in Torreón (Coahuila) in 1911." *Arizona and the West* 16, no. 3 (1974): 233-46. Pg. 235.

world and provided funding for the Reform Association with its profits.<sup>123</sup> Kang was conducting a worldwide tour, selling stock in the Corporation in Chinese expat colonies; Kang's fundraising efforts took him through the United States, Canada, Japan, and Southeast Asia, and in Torreón, he was responsible for creating one of the wealthiest Chinese communities in all of Mexico. Kang personally bought several blocks of undeveloped land in the boomtown, selling it at a considerable profit to predominately Chinese and other foreign buyers. His success led him to ask the Commercial Corporation to establish a bank in the city; the *Compañía Bancaria Chino [sic] y México* received its charter in late 1906 and would go on to provide banking services to Chinese merchants in the United States and Mexico, accumulating assets valued at \$937,268 by 1908.<sup>124</sup> Torreón's Chinese population, numbering about 600 by 1910, was hugely influential in the city's early development, investing in land, buildings, and a new streetcar line; their ventures were even successful enough for them to transfer surplus assets to branches of the Commercial Corporation in Hong Kong and New York.<sup>125</sup>

The prosperity of the Torreón Chinese was quick to draw the ire of their Mexican neighbors; in September 1910, before the outbreak of the revolution, Independence Day speeches were charged with anti-Chinese rhetoric.<sup>126</sup> In the weeks following the celebrations, multiple Chinese merchants and their businesses were targeted. Tensions mounted through the early months of the revolution; by May 1911, Maderista forces had surrounded Torreón and were eager to secure the vital railroad hub as they attempted to force the federal government out of the north.<sup>127</sup> On May 13<sup>th</sup>, Emilio Madero's troops attacked Torreón from positions around the city; they outnumbered the *federales* defending the town by 4,500 to 800, and by the evening of the

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<sup>123</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 235.

<sup>124</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 235-236.

<sup>125</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 236.

<sup>126</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 237.

<sup>127</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 93.



14<sup>th</sup>, Porfirista General Emiliano Lojero's federal troops were making preparations to evacuate.<sup>128</sup> Lojero's men crept out of Torreón under cover of darkness, saving their remaining munitions to deter a pursuit.<sup>129</sup> At the outset of the Maderista assault on Torreón, forces commanded by Lieutenant Sixto Ugalde stormed a farmhouse owned by Lim Ching, robbed its eleven residents, killing one of them, before proceeding to execute seven Chinese farmworkers in the field outside as they left.<sup>130</sup> Wong Foon-Chuck, a prominent Torreón businessman who had been recruited by Kang Youwei to manage the *Compañía Bancaria Chino y México* years before the revolution, saw his farm on the outskirts of the city become one of the main flashpoints of fighting between *federales* and Maderistas.<sup>131</sup> After Ugalde's troops secured the farm, they forced Foon-Chuck's 38 Chinese employees to serve them food. Amid the slaughter that would unfold upon Lojero's retreat the following day, bands of soldiers would return to the farm to execute the men who had fed them the night before.<sup>132</sup>

On the morning of Monday the 15<sup>th</sup>, Madero's troops entered the city; they were soon to be joined by a civilian mob numbering approximately 4,000.<sup>133</sup> The mob had made its way across Durango and Coahuila alongside the Maderista rebels, looting and destroying the property of foreigners and freeing prisoners from jails.<sup>134</sup> When they entered Torreón, the mob made its way to the Chinese business district; initially, they simply robbed and destroyed small stores, but as their numbers grew, they went about the systematic eradication of the city's Chinese population. Around noon, the crowd entered the *Compañía Bancaria Chino y México* building and killed seventeen employees with knives and hatchets, tossing their severed limbs into the

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<sup>128</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 238.

<sup>129</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 95.

<sup>130</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 94-95.

<sup>131</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 95 and Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 236.

<sup>132</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 95-96.

<sup>133</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 238.

<sup>134</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 238.

street outside.<sup>135</sup> The attackers emptied the bank vaults, which contained \$30,000, and proceeded to renew their assault on neighboring businesses.<sup>136</sup> Chinese men, women, and children were systematically slaughtered by the combined forces of Maderista troops and civilian rioters; uniformed troops marched in formation through the streets of Torreón, protecting the crowds. During the massacre, 303 Chinese were killed, including 10 minors, along with 5 Japanese.<sup>137</sup> A British diplomat in Durango theorized in a subsequent report that the Japanese were likely killed for their “similarity of features” to the Chinese.<sup>138</sup> When Emilio Madero entered the city later that day, he detained the remaining 180 to 200 Chinese who were not either killed or in hiding and ordered the cleanup of the massacre. Bodies were swept off the streets and dropped in mass grave trenches outside the city or dumped into open wells; that night, Madero’s troops threw a party on the second floor of a Chinese laundry.<sup>139</sup>

As Chang reports, a small number of Torreón’s Mexican residents mobilized to save their Chinese neighbors. In one instance, a young boy climbed the roof of a Chinese restaurant to inform the crowd gathered outside that its employees had already fled. His lie directed the mob southward, toward the rail lines, saving the workers and owner trapped inside. The Cadena family, who lived next to the laundromat that was appropriated for the Maderista celebration, hid twenty-two Chinese in their home. In total, 137 Chinese men, women, and children were saved by a collection of just eight brave individuals. While the vast majority of civilians either engaged in the riot or did nothing to prevent it, some residents of Torreón recognized the horrors being perpetrated around them in the name of a new Mexico and moved to rescue their Chinese neighbors.

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<sup>135</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 95.

<sup>136</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 95.

<sup>137</sup> Jacques, “Massacre in Torreón,” 239.

<sup>138</sup> Jacques, “Massacre in Torreón,” 239.

<sup>139</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 96.

News of the massacre shocked international audiences and prompted a furious diplomatic response from the flailing Qing government. Just days after the attacks, General Madero commissioned a report to determine whether his soldiers were complicit in the massacre.<sup>140</sup> The Porfirian government conducted a review of its own to determine whether Lojero bore any culpability. A third report was pursued by Huerta's coup government in 1913, in response to a report filed by American third-party investigators who calculated indemnities at \$1,137,227.04.<sup>141</sup> The Huerta government report parroted the earlier two Mexican reports, which pinned the blame for the massacre on the Torreón Chinese. Madero's soldiers asserted that the Chinese had been firing at them with rifles; Lerdo provided a signed statement from Lim Ching testifying that he and other prominent Chinese had received weapons from the federal troops for use against the Maderistas.<sup>142</sup> Ching later told an American diplomat that he had been coerced into providing the statement; American and Chinese investigations could not produce a single witness corroborating the Mexican reports' claims.<sup>143</sup> In November 1912, Mexico agreed to pay 3 million pesos in indemnities to China but denied the Mexican government's responsibility for the tragedy.<sup>144</sup> When Huerta overthrew Madero's government, the process of payment was disrupted; Dutch Ambassador to Mexico Paul Kosidowski warned Chinese officials that the Mexican state was functionally insolvent and would likely not be able to make good on the number of complex bond schemes the Mexican senate had proposed. The payment was never authorized and China never received the promised indemnities.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 241.

<sup>141</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 97-98.

<sup>142</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 97.

<sup>143</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 97.

<sup>144</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 244.

<sup>145</sup> Jacques, "Massacre in Torreón," 245.

While the revolutionary period would not see other massacres at the scale of Torreón, Chinese merchants, workers, and their families would face sporadic murder and looting until the fighting's conclusion.<sup>146</sup> Given their predominance in retail grocery markets across northern Mexico, Chinese businesses were targeted throughout the revolutionary period by war parties, bandit gangs, and roving bands of civilians alike. Anti-Chinese violence had a multifaceted class component throughout the revolutionary period; on one hand, popular violence against Chinese merchants can be construed as a response to an extractive foreign bourgeoisie by the repressed Mexican underclasses.<sup>147</sup> Many prominent anti-Chinese agitators were bourgeois themselves, however, and often opportunistically rallied popular xenophobia against their Chinese competitors. Years after the Torreón massacre, Mexico City newspapers were abuzz with rumors that the Madero brothers had, before 1911, aimed to buy out the *Compañía Bancaria Chino y México*.<sup>148</sup> José María Arana, who would go on to spearhead the Sonoran anti-Chinese campaigns of the 1920s, was a prominent businessman, presumably in competition with the Chinese merchants he agitated against. Arana, and others of his ilk, synthesized their economic self-interest with the rising tide of mestizo nationalism, stirring up popular resentment of Chinese merchants and swooping in to reap the spoils. Symbolically, anti-Chinese violence became a way to assert a new social order, striking back at a vulnerable segment of the foreign bourgeois who were considered unwelcome holdovers of the Porfirian regime. Materially, however, it often served to advance the business and political interests of a small clique of wealthy northern landowners, industrialists, and caciques.

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<sup>146</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 286.

<sup>147</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 99.

<sup>148</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 100.

As this clique of northern elites rocketed to the heights of power in the 1920s, they did not leave their anti-Chinese prejudices behind. Calles, Obregón, and Adolfo de la Huerta, the so-called Sonoran dynasty, would oversee the intensification of the anti-Chinese campaign in their home state; no longer the provenance of spontaneous mob violence, *antichinismo* became the law of the land in Sonora. Forced into ghettos, taxed, fined, and subjected to discriminatory legislation that regulated both their businesses and their bodies, Sonoran Chinese would flee the state in increasing numbers throughout the 20s. At the outset of the revolutionary period, Sonora contained, by far, the greatest concentration of Chinese in Mexico. By the mid-1930s, the community would be forced to leave, almost in its entirety.

## **CHAPTER III: The Sonoran Dynasty, *Mestizaje*, and the Intensification of the Anti-Chinese Campaigns**

### **Introduction**

The final years of the Mexican revolutionary period were marked by the emergence and consolidation of a new order, founded on the principles of economic and mestizo nationalism. The Constitution of 1917 presaged a new Mexico, crystallizing the social radicalism of the revolution in a text that would form the basis of the Sonoran challenge to the old Maderista faction, represented by Carranza. Undisputed victors of the ensuing power struggle, the Sonoran Triangle politicians embarked on a campaign of consolidation and reform through the 1920s. While these northern *caudillos* worked feverishly to build a cohesive, powerful Mexico, the anti-Chinese campaign in their home state increasingly took on the appearance of a modern special interest lobby with professional activists, formal organizational charters, periodicals, and institutional connections to the Sonoran political movement. Legitimated by the rising tide of mestizo nationalism and sporadic street violence between Chinese community organizations, the freshly politicized Sonoran anti-Chinese movement grew rapidly through the early years of the 1920s, paving the road to full-on expulsion in the subsequent decade.

### **Consolidation under Carranza, the 1917 Constitution, and The Plan of Agua Prieta**

By late 1916, Carranza and his Constitutionalist allies were relatively secure in their rule of Mexico; while in some regions fighting persisted, the Constitutionlists controlled most major cities and began making moves to consolidate their rule. In November 1916, a fresh set of delegates from the victorious Constitutionalist faction convened in Querétaro. While the delegates at Aguascalientes were drawn predominately from the armies of the then-

Constitutionalist alliance, revolutionary combatants comprised less than a third of the Querétaro convention.<sup>149</sup> These university-educated civilians set about creating a new constitution, one that would hopefully capture the spirit of social revolution that had emerged in the years following the collapse of the Porfiriato. Buchenau theorizes that “left to his own devices,” Carranza would have likely preferred a document more conservative than the final draft of the February 1917 Constitution; he was a 19th-century liberal through and through, but the clique of “Jacobins,” which included Luis Cabrera, Pastor Rouaix, and Francisco Múgica, prevailed in pushing through a strikingly progressive founding document.<sup>150</sup> Enforcing the constitution and solidifying the authority of the central government it provided for would take years of violent struggle and backdoor dealing as Obregón and Calles attempted to bring regional *caciques* into a functional national governing apparatus.

The 1917 Constitution presaged a new, modern Mexico, free from the fetters of foreign domination, the Church, plutocratic *hacendados*, and regional fragmentation. The constitution's anti-clerical provisions sparked a feud between the nascent post-revolutionary state and the Catholic church; the secularization of education, registration requirements and quotas for priests, and bans on public worship were too much for some Christians to bear. From 1926 to 1929, these religious disputes would tear Mexico's breadbasket apart in the bloody Cristero War.<sup>151</sup> Article 27 of the new constitution, among the most radical proposals for the new nation, reflects the influence of agrarian resistance on the revolutionary process. It vested ownership of “all land and water” in “the Nation” and affirmed that “private property is a privilege created by the Nation.” Article 27 granted “the Nation” the right to impose restrictions on private property “for social

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<sup>149</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 79.

<sup>150</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 79-80.

<sup>151</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 81.

benefit.”<sup>152</sup> The article provided a legal basis for assaults on foreign, church, and corporate land holdings while reaffirming the revolutionary axiom of “Mexico for the Mexicans” by establishing Mexican citizenship, by birth or naturalization, as a prerequisite for ownership of land. Foreigners could still acquire property, but only after appearing before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to declare their intention to “consider themselves as Mexicans regarding such property” and to promise not to “not to invoke the protection of their governments in reference to said property.”<sup>153</sup> By the 1920s many Chinese, especially merchants and businessmen, had become full, naturalized Mexican citizens through their participation in national colonization; Constitutional provisions against foreign ownership of land and property would nonetheless be invoked throughout the anti-Chinese campaigns as a means of justifying discriminatory taxation on Chinese businesses as well as illegal expropriations.

Article 30 of the 1917 Constitution affirms that anyone born in “the Mexican territory,” regardless of their parents’ nationality, was a Mexican citizen by birth. Additionally, those born outside Mexico to at least one Mexican parent (by birth or naturalization) were considered birth citizens. Foreigners could become naturalized either by “obtaining a nationalization card” or by marrying a Mexican citizen and establishing residence in the country.<sup>154</sup> In keeping with the “Mexico for the Mexicans” thrust of the document, Article 32 declares that “Mexicans shall have priority over foreigners, under equal circumstances, for all kind of concessions, employments, positions or commissions of the government in which the status of citizenship is not indispensable.”<sup>155</sup> Article 33 prohibits foreigners from participating in Mexican politics and

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<sup>152</sup> Article 27, Mexican Constitution of 1917.

<sup>153</sup> Article 27, Mexican Constitution of 1917.

<sup>154</sup> Article 30, Mexican Constitution of 1917.

<sup>155</sup> Article 32, Mexican Constitution of 1917.



grants the government the authority to forcibly expel any foreigner who violates the terms of their stay in Mexico.<sup>156</sup>

Among the Jacobin group's greatest triumphs was the inclusion of Article 123, which established labor regulations among the most progressive on the planet. Workers were given the right to organize, collectively bargain, and strike; also included were the 8-hour workday, a six-day work week, minimum wages, “equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex or nationality,” twelve weeks of maternity leave, and a ban on child labor.<sup>157</sup> All told, the 1917 Constitution laid out a framework for a progressive, orderly transition into modernity, centered on capitalist development but with particular attention to the social grievances that had come to the fore during the revolutionary period. Interpretation of the new constitution’s text would remain a contested issue for decades; the land reform outlined in Article 27 wouldn’t begin in earnest until Calles’s presidency (1924-28) and wouldn’t reach its apogee until the *sexenio* of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). As the Mexican state worked to institutionalize the gains of the revolution and perpetuate its rule through the 1920s, the 1917 Constitution consistently served as a touchpoint for debates concerning citizenship, the rights of “foreigners,” and property rights, as well as social and agrarian reform.<sup>158</sup>

For Carranza’s government, the 1917 Constitution was a triumph; with it, the Constitutionlists appointed themselves directors of a newer, more prosperous “Mexico for the Mexicans.” Lofty as these ambitions may have been, Carranza’s administration struggled through economic depression, the Spanish Flu, U.S. meddling, and attacks from within and

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<sup>156</sup> Article 33, Mexican Constitution of 1917.

<sup>157</sup> Article 123, Mexican Constitution of 1917. Note: “Child” was defined as a “minor under fifteen years of age”; children aged 15-16 could legally work, with some restrictions on their hours and the types of labor they could perform. Of course, enforcement, especially in the late 1910s and 1920s, was difficult and often incomplete.

<sup>158</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 83.

without. Through the early months of 1919, Carranza moved to eliminate threats to his rule, beginning with the still-active Zapatista rebellion in the state of Morelos; on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1919, an officer of the federal army lured Zapata into an abandoned hacienda building where he was ambushed and assassinated by federal soldiers. Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama, a leading radical intellectual, had placed Zapata on his list of the greatest heroes of mankind; seated beside Zapata in Díaz Soto y Gama's pantheon were Jesus Christ, the Buddha, and Karl Marx.<sup>159</sup> Carranza's cowardly assassination of the revolutionary hero only further alienated the agraristas, and in June 1919, when Carranza moved to quash Obregón's bid for the presidency, he pushed the remaining Zapatista forces into an alliance of convenience with the ambitious Sonorans. Obregón had, earlier in the revolutionary period, aligned himself with Carranza against the agraristas; ever the shrewd tactician, in 1919, Obregón changed tack, promising the Zapatistas he would support their land claims in exchange for their support in the coming campaign against Carranza.<sup>160</sup>

In April 1920, Obregón, Calles, who served as Sonora's governor from 1915 to 1919, and Adolfo de la Huerta, who had been elected as the governor of Sonora in 1919, declared the *Plan de Agua Prieta* and entered open rebellion against the Carranza government. The rebels made quick work of Carranza; in May, the president fled Mexico City but was caught in Tlaxcalantongo by assassins most likely in Obregón's employ.<sup>161</sup> With Carranza out of the way, de la Huerta assumed the presidency for a brief stint bridging May and November of 1920. The United States refused to recognize the new government, and multiple domestic insurgencies, led by Villa, Félix Díaz, and incensed Carranza supporters continued to threaten the *Plan de Agua Prieta* regime. Crucially, de la Huerta convinced Villa to surrender to the government in

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<sup>159</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 94.

<sup>160</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 95.

<sup>161</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 85.

exchange for a large ranch in Durango; Obregón and Calles feared the alliance between Villa and de la Huerta presaged a plot against them, opening a rift in the Sonoran triangle that would come to a violent head three years later. While de la Huerta enjoyed considerable success in consolidating the federal government's authority, he could not secure U.S. diplomatic recognition during his short stint in power. American businessmen and politicians were incensed by the 1917 Constitution, with particular attention to Article 27 and the threat it presented to foreign oil interests. The Soviet Union had just been founded, and the Americans were terrified that a Bolshevik takeover across their southern border was imminent. It would take them several years to disabuse themselves of this notion, and the task of securing diplomatic recognition and further consolidating the new government would fall to de la Huerta's successor, Obregón, elected by a considerable margin in the July 1920 elections.<sup>162</sup>

### **Start of a Dynasty: Reform, Centralization, and the Anti-Chinese Movement under Obregón and Calles**

Obregón set about reestablishing diplomatic relations with Mexico's primary creditor nations; without recognition, his government had no hope of procuring the capital necessary to rebuild and expand Mexico's devastated infrastructure. In the summer of 1923, after years of haggling over Article 27 and other Mexican reforms, recognition finally became feasible. American oil lobbyists, the principal opponents of recognition, were reeling in the wake of the Teapot Dome scandal and U.S. creditors were anxious for the reestablishment of relations so they could collect on prior debts. Obregón, who was by this point clearly committed to capitalist development, offered guarantees that Mexico would make good on its preexisting debts and that

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<sup>162</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 92.

Article 27 would not be applied retroactively; vital interests secured, the Americans recognized Obregón's government in August 1923.<sup>163</sup>

Obregón also conducted a sophisticated campaign of domestic consolidation, cutting down rogue generals with “cannon shots of fifty thousand pesos” and pursuing a limited land reform program to mollify the agraristas.<sup>164</sup> Obregón wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty in his pursuit of centralized authority; on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1923, Pancho Villa was assassinated in Parral, Chihuahua. The assassins claimed they weren't acting on orders, but it was easy for the Mexican public to connect the dots. Recent historical research has demonstrated that Calles and Obregón almost certainly orchestrated the killing.<sup>165</sup> Calles was poised to succeed Obregón, and Villa, through his alliance with de la Huerta, could have posed a threat to his rise. The last major challenge to the Sonorans' authority came from one of their own: in December 1923, under the *Plan de Veracruz*, de la Huerta and a loose coalition of rebels launched a revolt against Obregón. Their bid for power was at least six months too late, as Obregón handily defeated the rebels with weapons and financial support from the United States. In February of 1924, after dealing the Delahuertistas the death blow in Ocotlán, Jalisco, Obregón purged the army of malcontent officers and generals, bringing an end to Mexico's century of periodic military revolt and ushering in a new, more centralized era of political rule.<sup>166</sup>

Calles was the “administrative brains” of the Sonoran triangle, adept at making inroads with agrarian and labor contingencies as well as the rising Mexican middle classes.<sup>167</sup> Calles was born in 1877 to an absent, alcoholic father and a poor mother. His father came from an important

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<sup>163</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 95.

<sup>164</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 96.

<sup>165</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 95.

<sup>166</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 97.

<sup>167</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 90.

Sonoran family but had drunk his way into destitution; with his maternal uncle serving as a substitute parent, Calles would spend his life trying, often successfully, to regain the prominence his father had let slip.<sup>168</sup> After trying his hand at hotel administration, mill operation, teaching, and farming, in 1911 Calles was promoted to police chief of Agua Prieta by Governor Maytorena.<sup>169</sup> Calles played a vital role in the campaign against Huerta's coup government, financing the rebel armies by smuggling confiscated cattle into the United States. In 1915, Carranza rewarded him for his efforts by making him governor of Sonora; his tenure would be marked by political innovation, experimental reform, and the emergence of a more organized, influential, and virulently racist anti-Chinese movement.<sup>170</sup>

Calles and Obregón were personally sympathetic to the anti-Chinese movement, having learned to appreciate its political utility in the Sonoran context. Obregón was less thorough in his embrace of *antichinismo* and considered its more radical expressions a threat to Mexico's relationship with the United States. Calles, on the other hand, styled himself as a populist, committing to the anti-Chinese movement's economic and racial-hygienic messaging.<sup>171</sup> Throughout his governorship, Calles embraced *antichinismo* to defuse tensions with labor unions. From 1915 until 1919, Calles experimented with different measures aimed against the state's Chinese population, with policies ranging from discriminatory taxes on Chinese businesses to wholesale segregation and expulsion. Calles was forced to retreat on many of these initiatives, for both diplomatic, legal, and economic reasons, and gradually learned to walk the

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<sup>168</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 90.

<sup>169</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 90.

<sup>170</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 90-91.

<sup>171</sup> González, Fredy. *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. University of California Press, 2017. Pg. 29.

tightrope between the then-fantasy of exclusion and the continued material necessity of Chinese commerce for the state.<sup>172</sup>

Obregón and Calles were both longtime advocates for abrogating the 1899 Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation between Mexico and China; renegotiating the treaty became a top priority for Obregón when he took office in 1921. Obregón publicly declared his intention to limit Chinese immigration, but privately he and Calles, who was at that time Secretary of the Interior, exchanged letters outlining a plan to utilize migrants to develop agricultural regions while barring them from competing with Mexican laborers in manufacturing and retail. These private communications reveal the complexity, from the perspective of Mexican state-builders, of addressing the Chinese issue: exclusion and expulsion earned political cache with labor unions and business leaders alike but amounted to a renunciation of what had been an integral tool for economic development.<sup>173</sup> Resolved to stem Chinese migration but not to stop it, in 1921 Obregón invited the Chinese nationalist government to Mexico to amend the treaty.

The 1911 Xinhai Revolution began on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October with an uprising against the Qing government in Hebei province. In December, Sun Yat-sen, a leading revolutionary, returned from exile and was promptly voted in as the founding president of Republican China. Sun, at his inauguration on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1912, pledged to overthrow the still extant Qing; to summon the military force necessary, however, Sun was forced to cut a deal with Yuan Shikai, an exiled general of the old Chinese regime. Yuan was the commander of the Beiyang Army, created as an experimental Western-style military force by the Qing in the first Sino-Japanese War. Yuan had maintained and expanded the Beiyang Army in the years since and agreed to oust the Manchu government in exchange for the presidency. Yuan quickly betrayed the democratic principles of

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<sup>172</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 119.

<sup>173</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 121.

the revolution, however, waging a campaign of political repression and centralization that culminated in 1915, when he declared himself Emperor of China. Many provinces declared their independence after Yuan's dictatorial turn, turning to local military men for protection and ushering in what has become known as China's "Warlord Era." Yuan's death by natural causes in 1916 only exacerbated China's disintegration, and the former empire was carved up between a variety of competing governments and warlord states. After fleeing to Guangdong, a primary sending region for migrants to Mexico, Sun reconstituted the Nationalist Party in 1917 and declared himself in opposition to both the warlords and the Beiyang Government in the north.<sup>174</sup> It was amidst this context of revolutionary instability and fragmented rule, not dissimilar from contemporaneous developments across the Pacific in Mexico, that the Kuomintang government became the first body to recognize Obregón's government as the legitimate victors of the Mexican revolution in a bid to obtain similar recognition for their movement. In 1921, the GMD dispatched Chancellor Quang Ki-Teng to Mexico City to save the 1899 treaty and to score their party a diplomatic victory that might shore up their domestic position.<sup>175</sup>

Obregón aimed to limit immigration while maintaining trade ties between the nations; Quang wanted to preserve both trade and immigration but was content to settle for just one if it meant the preservation of the overall 1899 framework. Quang agreed to some limitations on immigration and to postpone renegotiations of the remainder of the treaty in what was a diplomatic victory for Obregón's Mexico and an act of diplomatic survival for the GMD.<sup>176</sup> The anti-Chinese movement celebrated a major, early victory, but in realizing its political influence it also broadened its ambitions. The limitations on migration did little to dislodge the already

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<sup>174</sup> Note: Yuan Shikai, amidst disputes with the GMD in China's senate, banned the party and sent it underground.

<sup>175</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 122.

<sup>176</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 122.

present Chinese community in Sonora and neighboring states, and demands for wholesale expulsion increased as the community continued to prosper through the early postrevolutionary period. Years later, from the office of president, Calles would finally deal the 1899 treaty the death blow. In 1927, Calles formally abrogated the Treaty of Amity, Navigation, and Commerce, depriving Chinese Mexicans of diplomatic protection and bringing the anti-Chinese dream of expulsion, cultivated on his watch in Sonora, into the realm of possibility.

Calles was a formidable political operator who left an indelible mark on the postrevolutionary state; an ambitious man from an early age, Calles synthesized the despotic, technocratic tendencies of the Mexican old guard with the reformist outlook of the rising Sonoran generation. As president, Calles pursued a dynamic, reformist agenda, seeking to fulfill the social promises of the 1917 Constitution and the renewed Mexico it presaged. In his first years in office, Calles distributed over 8 million acres of land to indigenous villages.<sup>177</sup> Calles also moved to co-opt the growing Mexican labor movement that had become dissatisfied with Obregón's plodding reform; Obregón had removed threats to his rule with his signature 50,000-peso cannon shots, and Calles took much the same approach in his dealings with the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM). CROM was a large, federated trade union, representing industrial and agricultural workers alike. Luis Napoleón Morones Negrete, CROM's Secretary General, had been a prominent ally of Obregón but saw his profile rise to new heights under Calles. As Calles's Secretary of Economy, Morones became "fat, bejeweled in diamonds, and clad in expensive clothes"; the organized labor he commanded accommodated a negotiated capitalist development rather than struggling against it.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 99.

<sup>178</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 99-100.



Calles was an institutional politician: maintaining contacts in different social spheres throughout his career, he managed to weave together Mexico's disparate web of interests into an organizationally cohesive proto-party-state, with his personalistic influence and patronage networks serving as its binding agents. Calles embraced popular grievances where they suited him, as in the case of the anti-Chinese campaigns that flourished during his tenure as governor of Sonora. In other cases, Calles stood firm against public opinion; his experiments in alcohol prohibition as governor and his 1926 "Calles Law," which constituted an all-out assault on the Catholic Church and served as a proximal cause of the bloody Cristero War, stand out as examples.<sup>179</sup> Equal parts anxious, striving, Machiavellian, socially conscious, and ruthless, Calles cast a long shadow over Mexico's postrevolutionary consolidation; his embrace of anti-Chinese politics inextricably tied *antichinismo* to the formation of the modern Mexican state.

### **The Anti-Chinese Campaign in Sonora: Institutional Origins and Safeguarding *Mestizaje***

A Chinese Mexican woman who lived through the anti-Chinese campaigns, in an interview given to Phillip A. Dennis, described Calles as a villain and singled him out as the primary architect of the anti-Chinese campaigns.<sup>180</sup> Calles certainly expressed his support for anti-Chinese organizing, but he never led a campaign himself, instead delegating the dirty work to local activists and his political subordinates in Sonora. The principal ideologues of the anti-Chinese movement were José María Arana, a Sonoran schoolteacher and businessman, and José Ángel Espinoza, a notable propagandist who worked with both the written word and his hand-drawn imagery. In 1916, in Magdalena, Sonora, Arana founded the *Junta Comercial y de Hombres de Negocio* (Commercial and Businessman's Junta), an anti-Chinese organization that

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<sup>179</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 98.

<sup>180</sup> Dennis, Philip A. "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico." *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (1979): 65–80. Pg. 71.

published *Pro-Patria*, a weekly tabloid. In case their readership harbored doubts about the organizations' commitment to Sinophobic activism, *Pro-Patria* printed the following statement on every issue:

Improvement of the race is the supreme ideal of all civilized nations, if the Chinese are corrupting our race, we ought to restrict them. The Chinese produce on the towns the same effect that the locust has on the crops: they destroy them. The Mexican that defends the Chinese with detriment to the national good, is a traitor to the country.<sup>181</sup>

Arana's organizational mission statement highlights the biological dimension of anti-Chinese racism, both through the allegation that the Chinese are "corrupting" the Mexican race and through its use of animal metaphors in describing the supposed Chinese threat. Arana took his allegations of treachery against the nation seriously: the University of Arizona's collection of his papers contains a draft of a fiery tract condemning a "Sr. López Alvarado" for his defense of Chinese Mexicans.<sup>182</sup>

By 1917, Arana bragged that he had founded seventeen similar "juntas" in cities throughout Sonora and its neighboring states, with a combined membership of approximately 5,000.<sup>183</sup> Espinoza, notable for his later works, *El problema chino en México*, and *El ejemplo de Sonora*, depicted Arana speaking at an anti-Chinese rally in this drawing:

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<sup>181</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 294.

<sup>182</sup> "Miscellaneous Document," page 1 and reverse side. *Papers of José María Arana*, Special Collections, University of Arizona, Tucson.

<sup>183</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 292.



Arana gestures toward the Mexican flag, speaking from behind a podium bearing the text “Mexicans: for every peso you give a Chinaman, fifty cents go to Shanghai, and the other fifty cents finances your enslavement and the prostitution of the women of your race!”<sup>184</sup> As the movement's leading intellectuals, Arana and Espinoza facilitated the anti-Chinese campaign's evolution from an economic issue to a full-blown racial panic. Espinoza's drawing captures a movement in transition; the Chinese are no longer just portrayed as a drain on the Mexican economy or an obstacle to the emergence of a thriving Mexican business class, they are constructed as a distinctly biological and moral threat.

Allegations that the Chinese were degrading Mexican racial stock were particularly salient given the predominance of *mestizaje* ideology in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary

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<sup>184</sup> Dennis, “Anti-Chinese Campaigns,” 69.

eras. Mestizo nationalism was consciously constructed to consolidate Mexico's ethnically and regionally diverse population into the cohesive, homogenous national community posited by the modern nation-state.<sup>185</sup> Many historians point to anthropologist Manuel Gamio as the founding father of mestizo nationalism; in 1916, he published *Forjando Patria: Pro-Nacionalismo*, a partial rehabilitation of Mexico's indigenous community and a call for a new nationalism to unite a fractious Mexico. Through state-directed recruitment of European migration and years of these migrants intermixing with the indigenous population, Gamio argued for an expansion of the northern *blanco-criollo* to serve as the founding racial category for the new revolutionary state.<sup>186</sup>

While 19th-century liberals had broadly dismissed Mexico's indigenous population as racially inferior and incompatible with modern European civilization, Gamio, echoing the contributions of Franz Boas, his mentor at Columbia University, boldly posited that "the innate inferiority that is ascribed to some groups does not exist." Gamio continues, arguing that:

"The Indian has the same aptitude for progress as the white; he is neither inferior nor superior. It happens that certain historical antecedents and very specific social, biological, and geographic conditions have made him unable to assimilate culture of European origin. If the overwhelming weight of these historical antecedents were to disappear, if the Indian were to forget three centuries of colonial oppressions and the hundred years of 'independentist' oppressions, if he were no longer considered zoologically inferior to the white, if his nutrition, clothing, education, and living conditions were improved, the

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<sup>185</sup> Rénique, Gerardo. "Anti-Chinese Racism, Nationalism, and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s and 1930s." *Political Power and Social Theory* 14 (2000): 91-140. Pg. 92.

<sup>186</sup> Rénique, Gerardo. "Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s." Chapter in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Anne S. Macpherson, Nancy P. Applebaum, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, 211-36. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003. Pg. 218.

Indian would embrace contemporary culture in the same way as any individual of any other race.”<sup>187</sup>

In his comments on art, Gamio theorizes that the passage of time and an improvement in the material conditions of indigenous Mexicans “will contribute to the ethnic fusion of the population and will also contribute to the fusion of the cultural forms and aesthetic sensibilities of the two principal classes.” For Gamio, this cultural synthesis, driven in part by ethnic homogenization, was a prerequisite for establishing a “national art form” as a pillar of the emerging modern nationalism.<sup>188</sup> Chinese migrants, and other foreigners, in Gamio’s formulation, existed outside of Mexico’s “cultural destiny.” Gamio argues that upon becoming prosperous, Chinese migrants “form a medieval Masonic organization,” perhaps in allusion to the Chee Kung Tong, a leading Chinese community organization, and reinforcing stereotypes that cast Chinese as insular and unassimilable. Gamio continues, writing that “when they are poor, it is sad to say they are an embarrassing and useless mass,” echoing portrayals of poor Chinese as unhygienic, and immoral.<sup>189</sup> Gamio posited that the heterogeneity foreigners introduced to Mexico constituted an obstacle to “true intellectual production” and the establishment of an authentic nation-state. While Gamio never explicitly named the Chinese as a pernicious element, later promoters of *mestizaje* ideology imitated his construction of foreigners as hazardous to effective racial consolidation in calls for the persecution and expulsion of Chinese. Gamio tasked the emergent revolutionary state with promoting cultural synthesis and a

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<sup>187</sup> Gamio, Manuel. *Forjando Patria: Pro-Nacionalismo*. Tr. Fernando Armstrong-Fumero. University Press of Colorado, 2010. Pg. 39.

<sup>188</sup> Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, 50.

<sup>189</sup> Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, 101.

unifying nationalism, and the Sonoran leadership eagerly accepted, launching Mexico into a period of “cultural revolution from above.”<sup>190</sup>

To effectively disseminate a new, revolutionary national culture, Obregón and Calles understood that they had to first embark on a monumental literacy campaign. To this end, in 1921 Obregón created the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Secretariat of Public Education) and placed José Vasconcelos, a prominent Oaxacan intellectual, in charge.<sup>191</sup> Vasconcelos sent cultural missions to all corners of Mexico, bringing teachers, textbooks, primary education, and the new government’s interpretation of Mexican history and nationhood to the masses.<sup>192</sup> Obregón supported the SEP’s mission but despised Vasconcelos, considering him out of touch and esoteric; the Sonoran general reportedly ridiculed Vasconcelos for the latter’s insistence that the Greek and Roman classics were vital for Mexicans to understand and appreciate the Mediterranean component of their heritage.<sup>193</sup> The feeling was mutual: Vasconcelos regarded Obregón, and Sonorans more broadly, as culturally deficient, barbaric, and woefully Americanized, though he did profess an admiration for their racial composition. Vasconcelos attributed Obregón’s political achievements, with his typical attention to aesthetics, to the general’s “robust appearance, high forehead, white complexion, light-colored eyes and above average height” that indicated he was a “Creole type of Spanish descent.”<sup>194</sup> Vasconcelos was even less fond of Calles, whom he asserted was of “Syrian-Lebanese type,” making him violent and unpredictable.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 107.

<sup>191</sup> Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation,” 219.

<sup>192</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 108.

<sup>193</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 108.

<sup>194</sup> Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation,” 219.

<sup>195</sup> Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation,” 233.

Vasconcelos is best known for his 1925 book, *La raza cósmica*, in which he predicts the coming of the “fifth race of man,” which would “fill the planet with the triumphs of the first truly universal, truly cosmic culture.”<sup>196</sup> In his formulation, the Hispanic race possessed the historical responsibility of facilitating *mestizaje*, owing to its spiritual superiority and its specific territorial circumstances. To create the “fifth race,” “the Nordic man,” on the rise but unremarkable in previous eras, “the Indian,” descendants of a lost “Atlantean” heritage, “the black man,” who supposedly hailed from Lemuria, another mythical sunken civilization, and the pioneering Hispanic race had to be intermixed. With the creation of this fifth race, Vasconcelos argued humanity would enter its third stage; this union of five and three, that is, eight, represented the cosmic, universal equality of all men “in the Pythagorean gnosis.”<sup>197</sup> Notably absent from the formula were Asians, who Vasconcelos asserted were “exhausted” and lacking “in the necessary boldness for new enterprises.”<sup>198</sup> Vasconcelos rails against Chinese migration in another passage, writing:

“it is not fair that people like the Chinese, who, under the saintly guidance of Confucian morality multiply like mice, should come to degrade the human condition precisely at the moment when we begin to understand that intelligence serves to refrain and regulate the lower zoological instincts, which are contrary to a truly religious conception of life. If we reject the Chinese, it is because man, as he progresses, multiplies less, and feels the horror of numbers, for the same reason that he has come to value quality.”<sup>199</sup>

Vasconcelos derided the Chinese as irreverent, animalistic, and aesthetically undesirable; their integration into Mexican society would ruin the process of *mestizaje*, which promised to usher

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<sup>196</sup> Vasconcelos, José. *La raza cósmica*. Herederos de José Vasconcelos, 1925. Pg. 38.

<sup>197</sup> Vasconcelos, *raza cósmica*, 39.

<sup>198</sup> Vasconcelos, *raza cósmica*, 38.

<sup>199</sup> Vasconcelos, *raza cósmica*, 19-20.

humanity into its next, higher phase. Furthermore, Vasconcelos asserted that the protection of the process of racial mixture was the state's responsibility.<sup>200</sup>

Vasconcelos was not the first to task the state with biological protectionism; that line was pioneered in Sonora, by Arana, Espinoza, and other anti-Chinese innovators. Histories of *antichinismo*, as Chang posits, have traditionally overemphasized the roles Gamio and Vasconcelos played in the ideological edification of anti-Chinese bigotry. Vasconcelos, owing to his poor relationships with Obregón and Calles, was out of the Mexican government by 1924; he wrote *La raza cósmica* in the United States. Gamio, also citing discontent with Calles, left the country in 1925. Gamio and Vasconcelos were integral to the construction of *mestizaje*, but *mestizaje* was a parallel stream, often intersecting with but compositionally distinct from *antichinismo*. Mestizo nationalism was not the sole cause of the anti-Chinese campaigns, it was merely instrumentalized by activists like Arana and Espinoza to present their objectives as being in line with those of the revolutionary state. Economic protectionism, simple racial hatred, and hygienic concern served as ideological pillars of *antichinismo* well before the publications of either *Forjando Patria* or *La raza cósmica*.

Years before revolutionary mestizophilia was given its earliest expression in the works of Gamio and Vasconcelos, anti-Chinese bigotry enjoyed an independent political life in Sonora under the protective aegis of Calles, a staunch personal and political opponent of Vasconcelos.<sup>201</sup> Through their "crude emotional appeals," anti-Chinese activists like Arana breathed new life into

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<sup>200</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 118.

<sup>201</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 119.



old stereotypes, adapting Euro-American racializations of the Chinese for use in a Mexican context.<sup>202</sup>



In this image, drawn by Espinoza, a “twelve-year-old Indian-European Mestizo,” pictured on the left, is compared to “a fourteen-year-old product of a Mexican-Chinese marriage.”<sup>203</sup> The twin notions that Chinese intermarriage would degrade Mexican racial stock and that the mestizo was Mexico’s racial destiny are visible in Espinoza’s work, well before the re-articulation of these ideas in Vasconcelos’s *raza cósmica*. Additionally, Espinoza’s caricature of the Chinese-Mexican child takes inspiration from earlier racist cartoons produced in the United States and Europe depicting Chinese as small, effeminate, malformed, and diseased. Racial gatekeeping against Chinese proved to be an effective but somewhat abstract philosophical tool of the *antichino* movement; in concert with economic nationalism, sexual panic, and condemnations of

<sup>202</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 204.

<sup>203</sup> Dennis, “Anti-Chinese Campaigns,” 74.

Chinese violence in the sporadic tong wars of the early 1920s, however, it substantially raised the salience of the so-called “Chinese issue.”

Anti-Chinese organizations often purported to represent the interests of either businessmen or laborers, edifying the movement’s economic dimension. Competition between Chinese and Mexican labor certainly existed, as evidenced by the subsequent passage of laws requiring Chinese businesses to employ primarily Mexican workers, but it was often competition between the Chinese merchant class and discontented local Mexican bourgeois that provided the impetus for anti-Chinese organizing. Adolfo de la Huerta allied with Sonora’s network of *antichinos* during his 1919 gubernatorial campaign, giving some activists positions of prominence in the institutional structures of his Partido Revolucionario Sonorense. That organization was the political precursor to Calles’s Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), the juggernaut party that would govern Mexico for seven uninterrupted decades following its founding in 1929.<sup>204</sup> Anti-Chinese activists rode the coattails of Sonoran politicians throughout the 1920s as they rose to new heights of power and influence. These organizations were cultivated in Calles’ “laboratory of revolution,” and as they became increasingly integrated into PNR structures, they were able to move beyond simple populist appeals and begin directly lobbying officials at the highest levels of Mexican authority. They created a racial imperative for government action, restrained in the early Obregón years before it was unleashed under Calles.

### **Chinese Community Organizations, the Tong Wars, and the Revival of the anti-Chinese Movement**

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<sup>204</sup> González, Fredy. *Paisanos Chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico*. University of California Press, 2017. Pg. 30.

As anti-Chinese organizations sprouted up across northern Mexico, *asociaciones chinas* (Chinese associations) and other fraternal groups proved a powerful weapon in the struggle against repression. Much like previous Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia and the United States, Chinese Mexicans constructed these “same-place networks” to provide housing for migrants upon arrival, facilitate remittances, and help resolve disputes within the Chinese community and between Chinese and native-born Mexicans.<sup>205</sup> Many of these associations were secret societies, or “tongs,” some with links to larger Masonic orders, like the Chee Kung Tong (CKT) that spanned the American continent.<sup>206</sup> The CKT was a successor organization of the Tiandihui (Heaven and Earth Society), a legendary centuries-old tong that had long advocated an overthrow of the Qing dynasty and the reimposition of a Han Chinese monarchy.<sup>207</sup> The Tiandihui was forced to operate in absolute secrecy in China but began morphing into a more public-facing organization after its members migrated to California in the 1850s. Headquartered in San Francisco, the CKT expanded rapidly throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, becoming the largest Chinese organization on the continent.<sup>208</sup> In the Porfirian era, CKT branches were established in cities across northern Mexico, including Tampico and Torreón; in the revolutionary period, they were headquartered in Mexico City.

Following the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, the Nationalist Party, or Guomindang (GMD), moved to establish contacts with overseas Chinese. The recruitment of these expats was crucial to the Republican cause: they could provide much-needed financial support through remittances and contributions and were positioned to pressure their adoptive governments to back the

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<sup>205</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 20.

<sup>206</sup> Ho, Chuimei, and Bronson, Bennet. "The Chee Kung Tong: A Chinese Secret Society in Tucson, 1880–1940." *Journal of Arizona History* 59, no. 1 (2018): 1-29. Pg. 1-2.

<sup>207</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 136.

<sup>208</sup> Ho et. al, “Chee Kung Tong,” 1.

Nationalist faction in its push to reunite China.<sup>209</sup> The first Mexican GMD branch was established in Cananea, Sonora, and subsequently, more branches cropped up across northern Mexico throughout the 1910s. The party headquarters in Nogales, Sonora would manage the GMD's national-level affairs until it was forced to leave in the early 1930s because of the expulsion. Before 1911, the CKT and the GMD were more or less united in their goal of overthrowing the Qing dynasty, but their relationship became increasingly fraught as mainland China fragmented in the warlord period. The Mexican GMD supported their counterparts, the reconstituted Nationalist Party with its seat of power in southern China, while the Mexican CKT was affiliated with the Beiyang Government in the north. The ongoing civil strife in China was reenacted by proxy organizations in Mexico, with transnational pressures and the struggle to reunite China driving the Mexican CKT and GMD to compete for members, funds, and control of illegal revenue streams like drug running and gambling.

Nativist charges that both the CKT and GMD were “mafia organizations” were largely unfounded, particularly in the case of the Nationalists, who were generally wealthier than their CKT counterparts and considered themselves more sophisticated and modern than the embarrassing “Chinese freemasons.” While competition over resources, influence, and the mainland's future did spark episodes of violence known as “tong wars,” the CKT and GMD generally resolved to settle their differences in print. The Chee Kung Tong published a monthly periodical, *Gongbao* (Bulletin), and the Guomindang made its positions known in *Xinghua Zazhi* (Revive China Journal). In their writings, Guomindang members denounced the CKT for opium smuggling and running gambling rings, but some members secretly established the “Lung Sing

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<sup>209</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 21.

Tong” to compete with the CKT for control of these illegal revenue streams.<sup>210</sup> One such denunciation read: “In the United States, China, Japan, Mexico, and in general in every country in which you have a member of the Chee Kung Tong, there will be opium, gambling, and immorality.” Unfortunately for the GMD, Mexican *antichinos* didn’t care much to delineate between the activities of one Chinese association or another, considering them all “mafias” with no place in Mexican civil society. When tensions between the CKT and the GMD came to a violent head in the summer of 1922, the anti-Chinese campaigns received a shot in the arm; previously, they had been cautioned by Obregón for fear of spoiling negotiations with the United States but were once again emboldened by what they viewed as a perfect excuse to rid themselves of the Chinese for good.

In the spring of 1922, the CKT threw caution to the wind and published a 10,000-yuan reward for the death of Francisco Yuen, the leader of the Mexican GMD. Yuen was forced to flee to the United States; for fear of appearing weak, the Guomindang hired gunmen and took the fight to the CKT in street battles across northern Mexico. In April, the CKT seized control of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Cananea. The Guomindang retaliated, sending “troops” to Cananea carrying “a considerable part of their war arsenal.” The 1922 tong war began in earnest on April 25<sup>th</sup>, when CKT members assassinated GMD leaders Manuel Juan and Federico Juan Qui. For two months, the leadership of the Chee Kung Tong and Guomindang alike were targeted for assassination; Hoi Ping, in a letter to his CKT comrades, ordered the assassination of “*el Diablo Hau*,” a prominent GMD functionary.<sup>211</sup> The violence of these tong wars was greatly exaggerated by anti-Chinese activists: roughly twenty Chinese were killed in the early months of

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<sup>210</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 136.

<sup>211</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 139-140.

fighting in 1922, and not a single Mexican was harmed.<sup>212</sup> Between 1922 and 1924, in a series of subsequent skirmishes, twenty-five Chinese were killed and nine more were wounded, and the violence continued to remain firmly within the bounds of the Chinese community. Nonetheless, *antichinos* seized on the opportunity to characterize the Chinese as a violent, unassimilable group; activists sent letters and telegrams to the Sonoran Governor Francisco Elías Suárez, asking him to appeal on their behalf to President Obregón. One such telegram, sent from Magdalena, invoked the 1917 Constitution's Article 33, arguing that the Chinese were "troublesome foreigners" interfering in Mexican political life and promoting vice and disorder.<sup>213</sup>

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1922, in response to Sonorans' pleas, Obregón ordered the expulsion of anyone involved, passively or actively, in the string of murders. Considering the CKT suffered substantially more casualties than the GMD, it's somewhat curious that almost all of the nearly 300 Chinese deported months later were members of the Masonic order, and none were members of the GMD. Robert Chao Romero theorizes that the Guomindang, using its established diplomatic relationship with the Mexican government, colluded with Mexican authorities to get their rivals expelled from the country. That summer, Obregón received an "anonymous list" of those involved in directing the tong violence; the document was constructed, most likely by GMD operatives, to present the CKT as solely responsible for the skirmishes. The list was used to charge and deport the 300 individuals who were expelled via Mazatlán to China in August.

Juan Lin Fu, the CKT's provisional president, wrote Obregón to beg that he grant the 300 detainees a fair trial. Lin Fu asserted that many of those arrested were not affiliated with either the CKT or the GMD and were not notified of their charges before being imprisoned. Obregón, undeterred, responded to Lin Fu the next day:

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<sup>212</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 298.

<sup>213</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 139.

“Those responsible for such deplorable events do not appreciate the hospitality of Mexico, I will therefore apply to them Article 33, as quarrelsome foreigners to see if the frenzied fighting occurring among the Chinese can be contained, because otherwise, more severe measures will take place, and therefore decrees for larger expulsions.”<sup>214</sup>

The Guomindang were the ascendant political force in China and leveraged their organization’s diplomatic ties to the Mexican government to deal their rivals, the CKT, a lethal blow. In doing so, however, they helped to reinforce characterizations of Chinese as dangerous and immoral *mafiosos*; when Calles broke off diplomatic relations between Mexico and China in 1927, the GMD saw their leverage evaporate. Like the CKT before them, the Mexican Guomindang would be run out of Sonora by an increasingly aggressive campaign of legal repression carried out by Calles and his subordinates at the state level, many of whom were his immediate relatives. Obregón’s forecasted “severe measures” would arrive under the auspices of Francisco Elías, Calles’s uncle, Rodolfo Elías Calles, the president’s son, and others as economic conditions worsened throughout Mexico in the late 1920s, culminating in the violent purging of Chinese Mexicans and their families from the state in the early 1930s.

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<sup>214</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 140.

## CHAPTER IV: Expulsion from Sonora, Racial Purification, and the Construction of Modern Mexico

### Introduction

In the first years of the Obregón administration, Sonoran anti-Chinese activists struggled to secure federal backing. Calles, a longtime ally of the *antichinos*, reinvigorated the movement, offering public support and directing grants to anti-Chinese organizers. In the late 1920s, amid the dire social conditions caused by the collapse of Mexico's export economy and the Great Depression, the anti-Chinese campaign in Sonora achieved new heights of persecution. Construing *antichinismo* as pro-worker and pro-race, Sonoran nativists revived previously unenforceable discriminatory laws in a push to drive the Chinese community out of the state in its entirety. Between 1930 and 1932, Sonora's racial purification was carried out by an alliance of local officials and violent mobs. The purge was opposed by foreign diplomats and federal officials alike, but President Calles gave the movement political cover as Mexico's powerbroker in chief. The expulsion, the first of its kind in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked the violent culmination of decades of anti-Chinese agitating.

### Disappointment, Rejuvenation, and the "Grand Anti-Chinese Convention" of 1925

Throughout Calles's term as Governor of Sonora (1915-1919) the anti-Chinese movement had been on the rise. Folded into de la Huerta's victorious 1919 gubernatorial coalition, *antichinos* became institutionally ingrained in the Partido Revolucionario Sonorense (PRS). When de la Huerta, Calles, and Obregón overthrew Carranza under the *Plan de Agua Prieta*, the anti-Chinese movement cheered on the ascension of its allies; with friends in high places, the *antichinos* could begin to agitate for more ambitious discriminatory policies. In 1921,



anti-Chinese activists successfully pressured Obregón into renegotiating the 1899 treaty between Mexico and China, inaugurating a decade-long legal struggle that would culminate in the semi-state-directed expulsion of Chinese from Sonora.

The campaign was not content, however: they had failed to achieve either segregation or expulsion, demands propagated by Arana and other agitators. These more overtly discriminatory policies remained out of reach for several reasons. Firstly, Obregón was eagerly seeking recognition of his government from the United States, and U.S. diplomatic officials warned that federal cooperation with the Sonoran anti-Chinese activists could endanger negotiations. Chinese merchants, by the early 1920s, were the largest clients of American businesses exporting goods to northwestern Mexico.<sup>215</sup> These business ties, in part, facilitated U.S. diplomatic intervention on behalf of the Chinese. Secondly, while the anti-Chinese movement was allied with the governing PRS, many Sonoran officials were not moved by the Aranistas' incendiary rhetoric; one such politician, Cesario Soriano, condemned *Pro Patria* as chauvinistic, parochial, vulgar, and shrill.<sup>216</sup> Naturally, Arana and his ilk responded to detractors like Soriano with accusations of treason, scolding noncompliant officials for accepting “*el oro chino*” (Chinese gold). Hu-DeHart notes that “such charges were difficult to substantiate, but... were entirely possible.” The Chinese merchant class continued to accumulate impressive wealth despite sporadic raiding during the revolutionary period and had means of establishing contact with local and national officials through community organizations like the Chee Kung Tong and the Nationalist Party. Chinese businessmen and laborers appealed to state and federal officials to intervene on their behalf, often successfully. The Guomindang enjoyed a reasonably close relationship with Obregón, even colluding with him against their CKT rivals. Unwilling to accept discriminatory

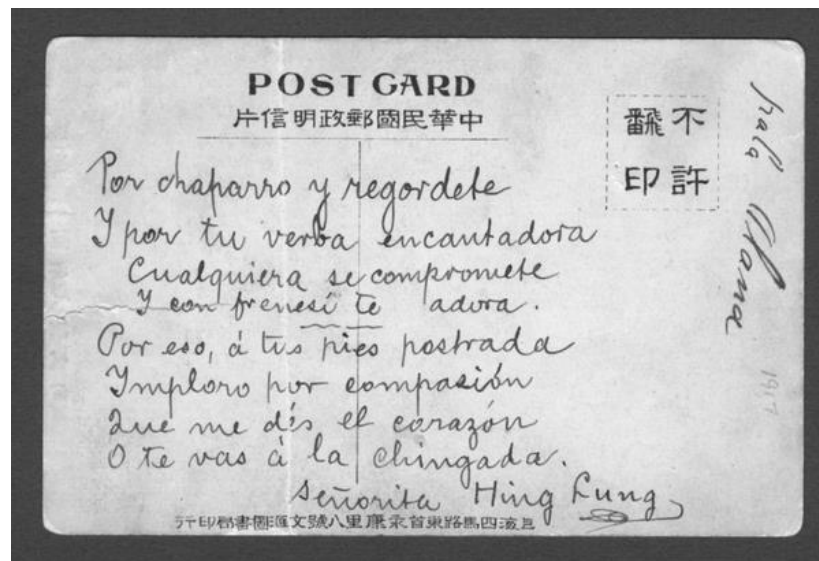
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<sup>215</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 298.

<sup>216</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 294.

treatment and operating from a position of increased political and commercial strength, Chinese Mexicans in Sonora forced the anti-Chinese movement to retreat from their more aggressive demands in the first years of Obregón's term.

Owing to these factors, in many ways, 1921 can be considered a lull in the steady march of the anti-Chinese campaigns. While facing staunch resistance from Sonoran Chinese, American diplomats, and federal officials, the movement lost its leader, Arana. Rumors abounded that Arana had been poisoned, probably by Chinese assassins.<sup>217</sup> Whether or not the Sonoran Chinese were behind Arana's mysterious death, there was certainly no love lost between the two. Gabriel Arana, in his 2023 article for the *Texas Observer* magazine entitled "My Great-Grandfather Was a Racist," shares a postcard written to his great-grandfather by one Señorita Hing Lung:



The poem, which unfortunately does not retain its clever rhyme scheme in translation, describes Arana as “short and fat,” and tells him to “go to fucking hell.”<sup>218</sup> Deprived of their leader, and

<sup>217</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 295.

<sup>218</sup> Arana, Gabriel. “My Great-Grandfather Was a Racist.” *Texas Observer*, September/October Issue 2023.

with six thousand new migrants arriving in the years between 1919 and 1921, the anti-Chinese movement was in rough shape.<sup>219</sup>

In 1922, however, the tong wars breathed new life into the anti-Chinese struggle. Espinoza, carrying on the work of Arana, described the tong wars in simple terms: Chinese mafias were fighting over control of the opium trade, evidence of both their degenerate nature and the threat they posed to innocent Mexicans.<sup>220</sup> In 1923, amid continued street violence between the CKT and the GMD, Sonoran Congressman Alejandro Villaseñor delivered two proposals to the Sonoran legislature. Beyond his condemnations of tong violence, Villaseñor accused the Chinese of spreading “beri-beri, trachoma, leprosy, smallpox, and Asiatic bubonic plague.”<sup>221</sup> This charge resonated with Sonorans, who had faced frequent outbreaks of smallpox, influenza, and measles from 1915 to 1922, though there was no evidence that the state’s Chinese population had caused them.<sup>222</sup> In December 1923, the Sonoran legislature passed state laws 27 and 31 with unanimous support. Law 27 gave Sonoran municipalities the right to segregate their Chinese populations by forcing them into ghettos. Law 31 prohibited Chinese-Mexican intermarriage.<sup>223</sup> Beyond its theoretical quarantining of tong violence, law 27’s call for Chinese ghettoization reflected racist notions that Chinese were unhygienic and carriers of disease. These stereotypes, adapted in part from Euro-American characterizations of Chinese, and articulated in Sonora as early as 1899 in *El Tráfico*, were reinforced by the work of Arana and Espinoza through the 1910s and 1920s. Law 31’s ban on marriage between Chinese and Mexicans highlights the growing popular salience of mestizo nationalism and the notion that Chinese intermixing would degrade the nation’s racial stock.

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<sup>219</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 296.

<sup>220</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 25.

<sup>221</sup> Rénique, “Anti-Chinese Racism,” 112.

<sup>222</sup> Rénique, “Anti-Chinese Racism,” 112.

<sup>223</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 129-130.

Enforcement of these measures varied greatly by municipality, and federal authorities and courts often acted in opposition to them. Additionally, Governor Alejo Bay, a stalwart *obregonista*, bluntly refused to enforce the laws at the president's direction. By the end of March 1924, Bay had mostly succeeded in convincing local officials to pause their decrees against the Chinese. Chinese Mexicans were quick to challenge these discriminatory laws, and Mexico's Supreme Court ruled the laws unconstitutional just months after their passage. Governor Bay demanded that the laws be repealed following the Supreme Court decisions, but they remained on the books, albeit mostly unenforced.<sup>224</sup> Anti-Chinese activists bemoaned the *obregonistas'* non-cooperation but saw their fortunes change for the better with Calles's ascension in December of 1924. Calles was their man; while he inherited a political system predicated on negotiation and in the process of consolidation, his influence would prove essential to advancing the *antichino* cause in the subsequent years.

In February 1925, two months after taking office, Calles directed 30,000 pesos to the Sonoran Liga Nacionalista Anti-Chino to fund their "Grand Anti-Chinese Convention." Espinoza served as the convention's coordinator; he had been elected to state office and contributed new insight into parliamentary procedure and political strategy.<sup>225</sup> The convention was attended by more than thirty different anti-Chinese organizations from Sonora and neighboring states, facilitating a new level of interstate coordination for the movement, and providing many down-and-out politicians with an opportunity to revive their careers. One such politician was Alejandro Lacy Jr.; he had run as a Constitutionalist in the 1911 gubernatorial elections, denouncing the Porfiriato for being controlled by "Científico Jews."<sup>226</sup> Lacy Jr. missed his chance to get in on the

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<sup>224</sup> Rénique, "Anti-Chinese Racism," 113.

<sup>225</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 130.

<sup>226</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 130.

Sonoran system during the revolution but managed to regain his spot in the limelight through a tactical pivot to anti-Chinese racism. Espinoza, Lacy Jr., and other anti-Chinese activists and legislators coordinated across state lines for the first time and set about plotting a comprehensive political path forward. The convention's delegates produced estimations of Chinese wealth, set inter-organizational bylaws, established means of future cooperation between groups, discussed ways to "redirect the desires of Chinese-loving Mexican women," and agreed that legal force had to be brought to bear on Chinese community organizations.<sup>227</sup> The convention presaged a broad, grassroots movement with legislative backing that would undermine Chinese economic power while shaming and punishing Mexican women who married Chinese men. To achieve the second aim, anti-Chinese organizations increasingly encouraged Mexican women to participate in their movement, creating parallel women's organizations to broaden their social base.

### ***Antichinas y Chineras: Women in the Sonoran anti-Chinese Campaigns***

Throughout 1925, the Comité Pro-Raza Femenino Sonorense (Sonoran Women's Pro-Race Committee) conducted an interstate tour, visiting destinations across Mexico and imploring local officials to enact bans on Chinese-Mexican intermarriage.<sup>228</sup> Women had long been construed as guardians of *mestizaje*; Gamio's *Forjando Patria* includes chapters devoted to the role of women in the forging of a more homogenous Mexico, and Vasconcelos considered Mexican women's aesthetic sensibilities and sexual preferences assets in the construction of the fifth race. In Nogales, Hermosillo, Cananea, and other cities across Sonora, local anti-Chinese organizations began recruiting "female subcommittees."<sup>229</sup> Activists believed women were often more efficient vehicles for *antichinismo* than men; these *antichinistas* would serve as a powerful

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<sup>227</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 131.

<sup>228</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 131.

<sup>229</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 131.

counterweight to the thoroughly despised Mexican women who married Chinese men, known pejoratively as *chineras* (Chinese lovers).

*Chinera* became an increasingly charged insult, even leading to legal disputes as in the case of Josefina Sánchez de Sam Lee, a Mexican woman married to Manuel Sam Lee. Manuel Sam Lee was a naturalized Mexican citizen and the owner of a successful produce wholesaling business; in 1926, his wife was forced to bring a suit against her neighbor, Rafaela A. Viuda de Ochoa, for the latter's incessant verbal harassment of her and her younger sister Carolina Sánchez.<sup>230</sup> In the inciting event, Viuda de Ochoa shouted that Josefina and Carolina were "rotten *hijas de la chingada*," and dubbed Manuel a "pimp who has to step aside so that other men can come and sleep with his wife and her sister." Elena Anaya, a neighbor, testified that she had heard Viuda de Ochoa call Sánchez de Sam Lee, on multiple occasions, "a *chinera*, a slut, who has a brothel that accepts the Chinese."<sup>231</sup> Sánchez de Sam Lee's suit, and others like it, illustrate the nature and impact of the *antichinos*' grassroots assault on Chinese-Mexican relationships, as well as the widening gap between the supporters and detractors of the anti-Chinese campaign.<sup>232</sup>

In Sonora, *chinera* was directed against more than just "Chinese-loving women," becoming roughly synonymous with the invective "*quitamaridos*" (husband-thief or homewrecker).<sup>233</sup> In 1929, Valverde Viuda de Salazar charged her neighbor Josefina Bustillo de Woolfolk with defamation and public offense to her honor after the latter accused her of being "a public woman, a shameless *chinera* who wants to steal my husband." Local witnesses testified

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<sup>230</sup> Camacho, Julia María Schiavone. *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910-1960*. University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Pg. 53-54.

<sup>231</sup> Camacho, *Search for a Homeland*, 54.

<sup>232</sup> Camacho, *Search for a Homeland*, 54.

<sup>233</sup> Camacho, *Search for a Homeland*, 55.

that Bustillo de Woolfolk had claimed Viuda de Salazar did not know her father and had a madam for a mother; Bustillo de Woolfolk was sentenced to eight months in prison and ordered to pay a fine of 300 pesos, which she immediately appealed.<sup>234</sup> These cases demonstrate, in part, that women's sexual anxieties, as well as men's, contributed to the proliferation and the content of the anti-Chinese campaigns. In Sonora, owing to the prevalence of anti-Chinese organizing, gender disputes were increasingly fought using racialized language, cementing in the popular imaginary negative stereotypes about Chinese. Notably, both disputes occurred between neighbors, evidencing the immediate strain placed on communities across the state by intensifying anti-Chinese campaigns.<sup>235</sup>

### **Crisis in Mexico and the Road to Expulsion**

The first years of Calles' presidency saw the *caudillo* embark on an ambitious campaign of reform and political centralization, drawing disparate social forces into a stable alliance structure. In the final years of his term, however, multiple compounding crises threatened to undo all his careful work. Between 1926 and 1927, prices of silver, copper, and other precious metals fell by twenty percent, taking the wind out of the sails of Mexico's budding export economy.<sup>236</sup> Additionally, foreign oil companies, still anxious about Article 27 and erroneously viewing Calles as some kind of crypto-Bolshevik, began to direct their investments toward more "politically compliant" nations, like Venezuela. Owing to this disinvestment, oil production dropped by nearly two-thirds between 1924 and 1928.<sup>237</sup> These blows to the export sector sent Mexico into a downward economic spiral nearly two years before the Great Depression of 1929.

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<sup>234</sup> Camacho, *Search for a Homeland*, 55.

<sup>235</sup> Camacho, *Search for a Homeland*, 55-56.

<sup>236</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 103.

<sup>237</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 103.

Mexico's situation only became more dire when Calles moved to redouble his assault on the Catholic Church in 1926. The "Calles Law" required priests to enter a government register, allowed states to set priest quotas of one per ten thousand residents, and expressed a commitment to enforce the Constitution's anti-clerical provision, which included bans on public worship and religious education. Catholics across the country voiced their opposition to the law, with resistance concentrated in Mexico's deeply religious breadbasket region, including the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán.<sup>238</sup> Calles arrogantly dismissed the initial protests, including the religious strike declared by Archbishop Mora y del Río on July 31<sup>st</sup>. Within six weeks of the strike's beginning, Catholic protest had escalated to direct armed conflict between the so-called Cristero rebels and the government; the bloody Cristero War would rage on for three years, claiming an estimated 250,000 lives, until U.S. diplomats helped broker a treaty between the government and the Archbishop.<sup>239</sup> Beyond destroying the relationship between Church and state for decades to come, the Cristero War devastated Mexican agricultural production. With fighting concentrated in many grain-producing regions, harvests fell by as much as 40% for three years.<sup>240</sup> Just as crisis and deprivation had powered anti-Chinese looting and murder in the revolutionary era, the return of economic depression heralded a renewal in the anti-Chinese campaigns, particularly in Sonora.

The mounting crisis called Obregón back onto the political scene; the *caudillo* had been enjoying a Diocletian-style retirement on a Sonoran farm when the Mexican congress amended the constitution to allow him to serve a second, non-consecutive term. Generals Arnulfo Gómez and Francisco R. Serrano submitted candidacies against Obregón but were both killed by

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<sup>238</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 102.

<sup>239</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 102-103.

<sup>240</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 102.



government forces in late 1927, allowing the Sonoran strongman to once again cruise to victory.<sup>241</sup> Two weeks after winning the July 1928 elections, however, Obregón was shot and killed by José de León Toral, a young man who claimed he was compelled by his Catholic faith to execute the *caudillo*; Toral's confession enjoyed considerable scrutiny at the time, as it had been Calles, not Obregón, who had been the principal opponent of the Church. Decades later, historians have been unable to solve Obregón's mysterious death, though records do not indicate the involvement of Calles or other high-level figures in the assassination.<sup>242</sup> In any event, Obregón's death provided Calles with an opportunity to push for even greater political consolidation under the umbrella of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR).

Described by some scholars as "a confederation of *caciques*," the PNR was formed in 1929 to serve as an institutional space for the resolution of differences between a diverse array of regional and sectoral interests.<sup>243</sup> From the outset, anti-Chinese organizations were incorporated into the vast PNR system, owing to their previous affiliations with Calles and the Partido Revolucionario Sonorense. Calles stepped back from the presidency, opting to rule instead as *el jefe máximo*, a sort of shadow-president, asserting his influence through the mechanisms of the new party over the three different presidents who served what would have been Obregón's second six-year term.<sup>244</sup> With the inauguration of Emilio Portes Gil, a close ally of Calles, the period known as the "Maximato" began. Histories of the period spanning 1928 to 1934 have tended to portray Calles as the all-powerful *jefe máximo*, neglecting how the boss's political power rose and fell as political circumstances shifted. Portes Gil enjoyed a greater degree of political autonomy than his successor, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, owing to his independent bases of

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<sup>241</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 101-102.

<sup>242</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 103-104.

<sup>243</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 105.

<sup>244</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 29.

power in the agrarista movement and in his home state of Tamaulipas, where he had previously served as governor.<sup>245</sup> The anti-Chinese campaigns reached their height under the comparatively weak Ortiz Rubio; his congress was loyal to Calles, who distrusted the new president because of his association with a rival PNR faction seated in Michoacán.<sup>246</sup> Ortiz Rubio didn't approve of the anti-Chinese campaigns and worried they would damage Mexico's image abroad, but was ultimately powerless to stop them.<sup>247</sup> The campaigns were most effective in Sonora, in part, because the governors of the state from 1930-1932 were, successively, Calles's uncle, Francisco Elías Suárez, and his son, Rodolfo Elías Calles. Their fierce loyalty to Calles and commitment to the anti-Chinese movement gave *antichinismo* a weight of political consensus it hadn't previously been able to muster; federal authorities, at least the authorities on paper, were functionally powerless to intervene. With every level of the Sonoran government captured, the federal authorities immobilized by Calles, and the 1899 treaty abrogated, Chinese expulsion had, after decades of campaigning, become a political possibility.

### **Chinese Expulsion from Sonora**

Another driving force of the redoubled anti-Chinese push was the massive influx of Mexican workers repatriated from the United States. The Great Depression prompted U.S. officials to deport hundreds of thousands of Mexican laborers, including many who had become naturalized American citizens. U.S. officials did not care to ask where these deportees had come from, often giving them only enough train fare to reach northern cities just across the border.<sup>248</sup> Consequently, these cities, which were already reeling from the effects of the Mexican economic

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<sup>245</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 105.

<sup>246</sup> Buchenau et. al., *Once and Future*, 106

<sup>247</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 30-31.

<sup>248</sup> Gutiérrez, Laura D. "'Trains of Misery': Repatriate Voices and Responses in Northern Mexico during the Great Depression." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 39, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 13–26. Pg. 15.

collapse, became flooded with repatriated workers. Mexican federal authorities offered little help for migrants seeking to return to their homes further south, and many became stranded.<sup>249</sup> These floating populations were generally regarded as unwanted by local populations and suffered intense discrimination throughout the years of the depression, but this did not stop anti-Chinese activists from invoking the plight of the repatriates to raise the political profile of *antichinismo*.<sup>250</sup> Espinoza argued that by expelling Sonora's Chinese population the state would create more than 5,000 new jobs for struggling Mexican workers. This figure, however, was predicated on there being roughly 11,000 Chinese living in Sonora; records indicate there were never more than 4,000. While his figures were erroneous, either consciously exaggerated or simply a poor estimate, Espinoza's message resonated in the depressed, overcrowded cities across Sonora.<sup>251</sup> Increasingly, the anti-Chinese movement became committed to wholesale expulsion pursued through legal and extralegal harassment intended to force the Chinese to leave of their own accord. For those who refused to leave, forced deportations would soon follow.

In organizing their final push against the state's Chinese population, Sonoran anti-Chinese campaigners realized all the legislation they would need was already in place. State-level anti-Chinese laws, such as law 27, law 31, and the 1919 de la Huerta labor law mandating Chinese-owned businesses to employ at least 80% native Mexican workers, remained on the books, simply waiting to be enforced.<sup>252</sup> Additionally, the *Código Sanitario*, an old law restricting Chinese businesses on the basis of concern for public hygiene, was made enforceable under the auspices of the new General Public Health Agency created by Elías in 1930.<sup>253</sup> Among Elías's first moves against the Sonoran Chinese was the revival of the "80% law." On October

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<sup>249</sup> Gutiérrez, "Trains of Misery," 15-16.

<sup>250</sup> Gutiérrez, "Trains of Misery," 15 and Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 301.

<sup>251</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 300-301.

<sup>252</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 301.

<sup>253</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 302.

7<sup>th</sup>, 1930, Elías ordered the negation of current and future marriages between Chinese and Mexicans.<sup>254</sup> The realization of law 31's ban on intermarriage was due, in part, to a desire to protect and cultivate Mexican racial strength in a moment of deep social crisis. Mexico's dire economic situation drove many into the arms of the hostile mestizo nationalism articulated years earlier by figures like Vasconcelos, and the anti-Chinese movement had by that point become quite adept at coopting the language of *mestizaje* to attract supporters.<sup>255</sup>

In the months following the resurrection of the 80% law, anti-Chinese activists charged Chinese businesses with noncompliance and organized boycotts. Some of these accusations were correct; some Chinese merchants adopted the practice of labeling their Chinese employees "partners," a loophole that was closed by an amendment to the law in May 1931.<sup>256</sup> Other businesses attempted to adhere to the new regulations, as in the case of Ching Chong y Compañía, a Navojoa company valued at roughly 500,000 pesos. There was no reward for following the law: the owners fired their Chinese staff and hired Mexican workers but continued to be subjected to boycotts and fines.<sup>257</sup> The stated goals of the anti-Chinese movement, namely improving public hygiene and protecting Mexican labor, were often just pretenses for the organizations' real objective: closing Chinese-owned businesses. In carrying out their "boycotts," armed *antichinos* frequently surrounded Chinese stores, barring their entrances.<sup>258</sup> One such demonstration is depicted in this drawing, from Espinoza's triumphant *El ejemplo de Sonora*:

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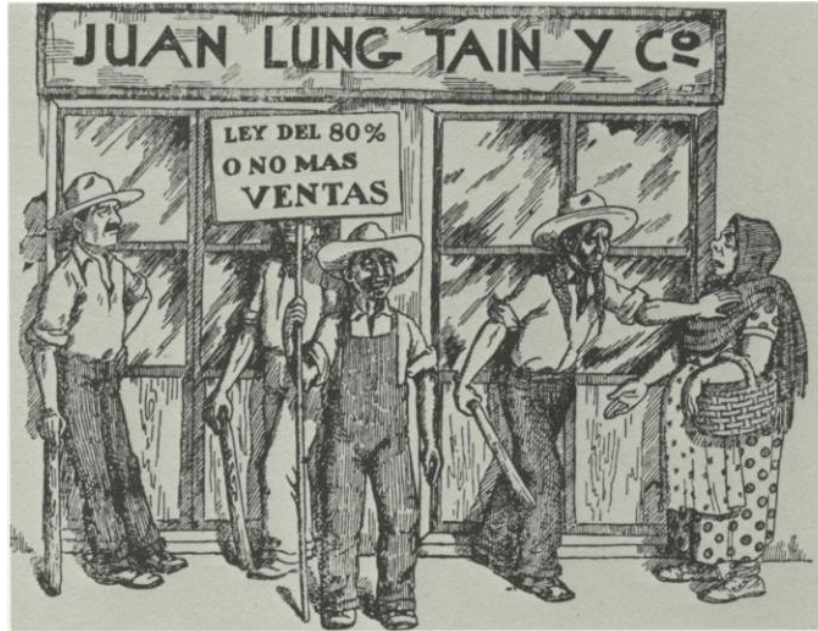
<sup>254</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 163.

<sup>255</sup> Chang, *Chino*, 163.

<sup>256</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 302.

<sup>257</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 33.

<sup>258</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 33.



The illustration depicts anti-Chinese protestors blocking the entrance of a store, holding a sign that reads “80% law or no more sales.”<sup>259</sup> These “protests” were illegal and officially unsanctioned, as the anti-Chinese organizations had no legal authority to determine whether businesses were following labor laws and certainly no authority to close stores by force of arms. State and federal officials did nothing to intervene, however, emboldening anti-Chinese organizations to continue to act with impunity.<sup>260</sup>

The Sonoran General Public Health Agency openly admitted that its major function was to render Chinese businesses inoperable. Their regulations, almost exclusively enforced against Chinese businesses, required general stores to sell only a single item. Chinese businesses often sold groceries, bread, meats, and medicines: these new restrictions made it impossible for many merchants to sell most of their merchandise.<sup>261</sup> Construed as public health measures, these regulations, in practice, had little to do with the actual maintenance of public hygiene. Instead, as

<sup>259</sup> Drawing by Espinoza, José Ángel. *El ejemplo de Sonora*. 1932.

<sup>260</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 33.

<sup>261</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 302.

in the case of the 80% law, the *Código Sanitario* simply gave the all-out assault on Chinese commerce a thin veneer of legality. As conditions became increasingly intolerable through the spring and summer of 1931, most of the Chinese businesses across the state were forced to close; still, the anti-Chinese campaigns carried on.<sup>262</sup> Navojoa had been a bustling hub of Chinese commerce; by early July, only two Chinese stores remained open. On July 10<sup>th</sup>, a mob of *antichinos* surrounded one of the stores with megaphones, pleading with residents to not give the Chinese their business.<sup>263</sup> Most of the state's Chinese population fled the persecution by the end of the month.

Not contented, on August 25<sup>th</sup>, Governor Elías circulated an executive order that made the longstanding anti-Chinese dream of state-directed expulsion possible. The order gave municipalities the authority to order the remaining Chinese scattered across the state to vacate their businesses for non-compliance with the 80% labor law.<sup>264</sup> Additionally, anti-Chinese organizations circulated pronouncements giving Chinese and their families until the end of August to leave the state.<sup>265</sup> Elías's order was plainly unconstitutional, and the anti-Chinese organizations had no legal authority to order an entire ethnicity to vacate Sonora within weeks. President Ortiz Rubio said as much in a meeting with Peng Yaoxiang and Zhang Tianyuan, two Chinese diplomats on emergency deployments in Mexico, and suggested that Chinese should do their best to defy the illegal orders. The diplomats correctly worried that Ortiz Rubio and the federal authorities would be powerless to intervene.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 34-35.

<sup>263</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 35.

<sup>264</sup> Romero, *Chinese in Mexico*, 194-195.

<sup>265</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 35.

<sup>266</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 35-36.

On August 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, the small towns of Huatabampo and Arizpe ignored an extension of the vacation deadline and proceeded to forcefully expel their Chinese populations. In Huatabampo, Chinese Mexicans were robbed, beaten, and forced onto northbound trains or otherwise made to flee on foot. Others went into hiding, receiving invaluable assistance from Mexican neighbors who did not support the campaigns.<sup>267</sup> In Arizpe, Chinese farmers were similarly robbed, stripped of their equipment and land, and forced to flee northward. To expedite the expulsion, Mexican landowners across the state began abruptly canceling leases to Chinese tenants, forcing them out of their stores and off their farmlands.<sup>268</sup> Chinese diplomats, seeing that the Sonorans were committed to wholesale expulsion, pleaded with the authorities to at least allow the merchants and farmers to sell off their stocks before leaving the state. Through the fall of 1931, Rodolfo Elías Calles, the freshly inaugurated governor of Sonora, refused meetings and declined to answer a single telegram.<sup>269</sup> State officials directed Chinese merchants to sell their goods wholesale, below market prices. The sudden availability of cheap wholesale goods, which Chinese merchants had previously cornered the market on by courting American distributors, facilitated the Mexican petit bourgeois' move into the vacuum of small commerce created by expulsion.<sup>270</sup>

By October 1931, with most of the state's Chinese population driven out, Governor Calles declared the anti-Chinese campaigns a success.<sup>271</sup> Expulsion, for some *antichinos*, had yet to be completed. Vigilante mobs hunted Chinese Mexicans and their families, rounding them up and driving them by the truckload to be left on the border with the United States. They were soon joined by state authorities: in February, Rodolfo Elías Calles ordered "the arrest and subsequent

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<sup>267</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 36.

<sup>268</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 36.

<sup>269</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 36.

<sup>270</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 303, 307.

<sup>271</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 305.

deportation from Sonora of all Chinese residents.”<sup>272</sup> In towns and cities across Sonora, Chinese were arrested, dispossessed, and sent to the United States for deportation to China. In Nogales, police reportedly marched twenty-seven detainees to the United States border, beating them with clubs and threatening them with guns until they crossed it. As Chinese community organizations, American and Chinese diplomats, and federal officials presented Sonoran leaders with incontrovertible evidence that local authorities were illegally deporting hundreds of Mexican citizens, Governor Calles would maintain that Chinese were vacating the state “of their own free will.”<sup>273</sup>

Because the United States still prohibited Chinese immigration under the 1882 Exclusion Act, Chinese Mexicans forced over the border were arrested, detained in U.S. jails, and deported to China.<sup>274</sup> Others were able to receive temporary visas to travel from the border to San Francisco as refugees, before leaving for China. U.S. officials expressed their stern disapproval of the expulsions, principally because they had been forced to bear the heavy cost of transporting migrants across the Pacific.<sup>275</sup> Still, in diplomatic communication with the United States, anti-Chinese politicians denied that the Sonoran Chinese had been forced to leave.<sup>276</sup> Through the collaboration of local authorities and anti-Chinese vigilantes, in just two short years the dream of racial purification in Sonora had been achieved; internationally, it was the first expulsion of a Chinese diasporic community in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Because the deportations were illegal under Mexican law, officials were incentivized to not leave a paper trail that could get them in diplomatic trouble. The Calles family was

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<sup>272</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 37.

<sup>273</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 37.

<sup>274</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 305.

<sup>275</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Immigrants,” 305.

<sup>276</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 37.



significantly less discerning in their private communications with each other: Francisco Elías bragged to his nephew that by the end of his term, there would not be a single Chinese business still open in the state, a goal he nearly realized.<sup>277</sup> When rapid expulsion led to local economic crises across the state, which frequently saw townspeople adopting systems of trade and barter due to the scarcity of goods in the immediate aftermath of Chinese mercantile flight, *el jefe máximo* reassured his son, Rodolfo, that Mexican capital would soon flock in to replace the Chinese and encouraged the governor to stay the course.<sup>278</sup>

While incriminating communications between members of the Calles clan abound, records indicating the exact paths taken by many migrants simply do not exist. As such, histories of their scattering from Sonora have typically relied on the testimony of individuals, often delivered to friends, family, community organizations, and officials upon returning to China.<sup>279</sup> As stated previously, many Chinese Mexicans returned to China via the United States, sometimes bringing their Mexican wives and Sonoran-born children with them. Counter to the anti-Chinese stereotype, many Chinese Mexicans had fully adopted Mexican culture and customs; after arriving in China, some repatriates settled in Mexican-style barrios established on the outskirts of southern Chinese cities and towns.<sup>280</sup> Others fled to different regions of Mexico; while anti-Chinese organizations existed wherever Chinese did, *antichinismo* held little political sway outside of the northern states.<sup>281</sup>

With Sonora as a proof of concept, anti-Chinese activists attempted to coordinate similar campaigns across Mexico. Organizers in Baja California and Sinaloa mounted the most

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<sup>277</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 38.

<sup>278</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 305-307, and González, *Paisanos*, 38.

<sup>279</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 305.

<sup>280</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants," 305.

<sup>281</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 42.

sprawling of these imitation crusades but were ultimately unsuccessful in repeating the Sonoran expulsion: efforts made outside a select few northern states were generally non-starters.<sup>282</sup> Still, given the intense repression and horrific rhetoric directed against them and their countrymen, many Chinese in other parts of Mexico decided to voluntarily repatriate. In just three years, more than three-quarters of Mexico's Chinese population had left the country. Their commercial losses were subsequently estimated at 10,000,000 yuan.<sup>283</sup>

### **Conclusion: *Antichinismo* and the Birth of Modern Mexico**

The Mexican Revolution had made economic nationalism and the emergent “cult of the mestizo” pillars of political life. The Sonoran Chinese, despite many of them becoming fully naturalized citizens, had always been popularly regarded as foreigners, unwelcome holdovers of a Porfirian regime that ignored the needs of Mexicans. Expelling them, therefore, became a revolutionary act, justified by the stated social goals of leading luminaries; hostile takeovers of Chinese businesses were construed as nationalizing small commerce and anti-miscegenation laws were understood to safeguard and develop Mexican racial strength. *Antichinismo*, therefore, was intimately connected to modern Mexico's ideological consolidation. With messaging grounded in the ethos of the new state and with deep institutional connections to the PNR, the country's leading consolidating force, the anti-Chinese campaigns were inextricably connected to the founding of modern Mexico. To construct a modern nation-state with control of its territory and its destiny, some Mexicans found it necessary to purge their Chinese neighbors, driving a community from their country that had been invited there just decades earlier to aid in its construction.

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<sup>282</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 45-47.

<sup>283</sup> González, *Paisanos*, 45.

Modernist notions of racial stock, biomass, public hygiene, and the role of the state in addressing the social conditions of its subjects were all integral to the emergence and eventual success of Sonoran *antichinismo*. The Chinese experience in Mexico, in addition to being distinctly transnational, illustrates how modern state consolidation elevates marriage, sex, cleanliness, and other biological relations to matters of state policy, volatile elements to be contained and directed for the good of a given nation. Owing to the international characters of both Chinese migration and ideological *antichinismo*, the story of Mexico's Chinese population ought not be relegated to a single national historiography—to do so is to ignore the actual business practices that built Chinese mercantile wealth, the ideological exchanges that provided activists like Arana and Espinoza with ammunition against their Chinese targets, and the role of China's own violent and chaotic march into modernity in the treatment of its subjects abroad. The notion of modernity itself, as well as its concomitant attention to hygiene, was a self-consciously universal aspiration transmitted across borders. While some Chinese Mexicans were effectively stripped of their adopted citizenship, they remain, in histories of globalization and modernity, exemplary subjects of a global modernity defined, somewhat paradoxically, by increasing attention to national and racial differences and the emergence of an unprecedentedly integrated world market.

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