

Chapter 7: Chinese Diasporic Networks

I am broke now and have no way to get the money. I hope that my nephew will send me some money to save me. I have suffered the trouble of cold. If you won't send me the money for board, I will some day be starved.

—Louie Fat Quon, Veracruz, Mexico, to Tang Horn,
Montreal, 19 August 1914

To the immigration bureaucrats, politicians, and anti-Chinese activists, Chinese migrants were illegal aliens. The alien label, however, does nothing to describe the communities and lived experience of Chinese who migrated through the Americas. They may have been strangers, sojourners, and aliens to outsiders, but they were enmeshed in transnational diasporic communities with deep bonds of solidarity. These networks remained largely invisible to state authorities because the networks' survival depended on their invisibility. Smugglers did not produce and preserve large archives to document their activities. Their goal was to remain undetected. Nonetheless, traces of these networks can be found in the archives of state agencies that tracked migration and arrested illegal migrants. So far, in this book, I have described these diasporic communities in terms of the interdiction efforts of immigration officials and anti-Chinese activists. This chapter will focus on

Chinese merchants, political leaders, labor recruiters, brokers, and smugglers who forged the political and social webs that allowed Chinese to find employment, communicate across vast distances, settle in new towns, and sneak clandestinely across borders.

Transpacific migratory and trading networks developed in tandem, extending from China to the Americas and splaying out in a thick web through the hemisphere. Hong Kong merchants in particular played a central role in moving goods and people from China to the Americas and elsewhere in the world.¹ In addition to merchant connections, family or surname associations based loosely on kinship and lineage also helped organize the movement of people to and fro across the oceans. Unlike in China, where clan and lineage associations requiring blood connections were dominant, in the Americas, surname associations created kinship ties among distant relatives. Typically an uncle or a cousin from a family association would meet new arrivals and help them find lodging, employment, and get settled. There were also several district associations or *huigan* depending on the region or the dialect that was spoken. In the United States, representatives from various *huigan* formed the Chinese Six Companies (Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association). The Six Companies resolved disputes in the community, fought anti-Chinese legislation, insured that debts were paid, helped return the bones of the dead to China, and represented the Chinese community in broader political campaigns for civil rights. Similar umbrella organizations existed in other countries. The secret Triad societies, known as “tongs” to outsiders, were associated with political rebellion in China and were linked to gambling, opium, prostitution, and

human smuggling in the Americas. Tongs were linked to particular political organizations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese in the Americas formed hundreds of chapters of the Baohuanghui (literally, the “Protect the Emperor Society”), better known as the Chinese Empire Reform Association. After the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT) was founded in 1912, Chinese began to join its affiliates as well. Although these associations and parties were crucial in defending the rights of Chinese in the Americas, they also competed with each other for political and economic power, and occasionally their conflicts broke out in violence.² Although merchants, hometown associations, Triad societies, and political leaders may have had different goals and interests, all of these groups helped move people in and out of China and the Americas, often clandestinely and illegally.

In Cuba, tongs, family associations, and political parties represented the Chinese community, as in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, but the dominant umbrella association there was the Casino Chung Wah.³ The Casino, established in 1893, was controlled by the Chinese legation in Havana, which managed the traffic of Chinese laborers, maintaining a registry of all Chinese who arrived and issuing certificates that permitted them to reside in the country legally. After 1926 the Casino lost its monopoly when the government took away its power to regulate migration. Other organizations competed with the Casino for control over the Chinese, and they grew in prominence in the 1920s as the Casino lost ground. Between 1900 and 1929, thirty-five different family or surname Chinese associations were registered with the Cuban government, twenty-six of them between 1921 and 1929. In 1913

importers formed the Chamber of Chinese Commerce of Cuba to represent the interests of Chinese merchants. The Chamber pushed unsuccessfully for broad reforms, like the elimination of Order 155 that restricted Chinese immigration to the island, but its membership dwindled in the mid-1920s after the sugar bust, and by 1930 it had only forty members.⁴

The Chinese political parties in Cuba had ties not only to China but also to affiliates throughout the Americas. The two parties, the nationalist KMT and the republican Chee Kung Tang (CKT, or Patriotic Rising Society), both advocated a republican form of government and the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these groups came together in Havana, California, New York, Texas, and London to form a political association, Republican Circle or Young China, to support the nationalist revolution in China. In 1909 Young China held a meeting in Texas of delegates from the Chinese diaspora, including one from Havana.⁵ Chinese political parties thus became an informal means to form transnational organizations that could also advocate for local change and provide fraternity and protection to overseas Chinese. After Sun Yat-sen came to power, the CKT felt sidelined by the KMT, and by the 1920s hostilities broke out between these two groups.

It is important to remember that these were transnational organizations linking family members, political comrades, and people from the same regions across national boundaries. Although scholars studying Chinese migration to the Americas often focus on the virulent anti-Chinese movements that saw all Chinese as a threat, and thereby lumped all Chinese together, Chinese spoke

different dialects, came from different hometowns, and had different class backgrounds and political sympathies. In short, there was no reason to expect all Chinese to act and think alike. To the extent that racism and discrimination in the Americas affected all Chinese, they could unify to fight for their rights, but as we have seen, some Chinese claimed U.S. or Mexican citizenship and others invoked their exempt status as merchants and students. The Chinese community in the Americas was shot through with conflicting class interests and political goals and had different local, regional, and familial affinities. Exploring both the cooperation among Chinese that is evident in their letters and the conflict among Chinese that can be seen in the so-called tong wars reveals a more complex picture of the Chinese transborder migrant community.

Kang Yu Wei, Wong Foon Chuck, and the Baohuanghui

Chinese political leaders looking for support took advantage of the transnational networks in the Americas that had been well developed by the early twentieth century. Chinese merchants in Hong Kong and other ports rose to prominence as trade and migration increased. By 1939 more than 6.3 million Chinese emigrants had embarked at Hong Kong for a foreign destination, and 7.7 million returned to China through Hong Kong. In the 1870s the British governor in Hong Kong enlisted the Chinese merchant directors of the Tung Wah hospital to inspect emigrants and curb the abuses in the coolie trade. Merchants therefore insinuated themselves into every part of the migratory process from inspections before

they departed, helping migrants gain entry, legal or illegal, to various countries, making sure they repaid debts, and overseeing the return of their bones when they died.⁶

Kang Yu Wei took advantage of these well-developed networks in the first decade of the twentieth century to form the Baohuanghui, or Chinese Empire Reform Association. The political organizing of Baohuanghui chapters and the business ventures of a Chinese businessman in Mexico, Wong Foon Chuck, intersected in 1906, revealing the fluid collaborations between businessmen and political leaders. Kang Yu Wei, a former tutor to the emperor, led a constitutional monarchy reform movement in China in the late nineteenth century. After being exiled from China in 1898, he established hundreds of chapters of his association throughout the Americas. Kang piggybacked on the merchants' trading and migratory networks to form a political organization focused on change in China. The first Baohuanghui in the Americas was founded on 20 July 1899 in Victoria, British Columbia. From 1899 through 1911, the Baohuanghui expanded rapidly throughout the Americas, especially along the Pacific coast; by 1911, there were thirteen chapters in Canada, close to eighty in the United States, nine in Mexico, five in Central America, one in Cuba, and three in South America.⁷ By the early part of the twentieth century, the Baohuanghui became the most extensive transnational Chinese organization in the Americas.⁸

A more common path than Kang's was that of a young Chinese boy, Wong Foon Chuck from Guandong province, who moved to San Francisco in the mid-1870s at age twelve. Wong attended a mission school and learned English. Over the years, Wong would

return to China several times to visit his parents, but each time he came back to the Americas. In the early 1880s he worked building the Southern Pacific Railway line from Los Angeles to San Antonio, and eventually he settled in the Texas-Mexico border town of Eagle Pass in the mid-1880s. There he became a successful businessman, taking advantage of railroad construction and a mining boom in the Mexican state of Coahuila. He bought the Hotel Central and started an adjacent restaurant and laundry. When the International Railroad Company line was being constructed from Eagle Pass to Torreón, Wong sold Japanese and Chinese goods at various stores along the route. In 1890 he returned to Eagle Pass and began working as a labor contractor for the Coahuila Coal Mining company. Within a couple of years Wong had 400 Chinese laborers under his supervision. By 1901 Wong owned six hotels along the International Railroad Line, including the Hotel del Ferrocarril in Torreón.⁹ Wong's multiple occupations as a railroad worker, hotel owner, merchant, and labor contractor complicates the notion of Chinese as either destitute manual laborers or wealthy merchants. The same person could occupy various social and class positions throughout his or her life.

In addition to his entrepreneurial activities, Wong developed close ties to Mexican politicians and integrated himself into Mexican border society by marrying a Mexican woman from Tampico, Cristina Vega Domínguez, in 1895. Wong eventually had ten children with her. After the birth of their first daughter, Wong moved his family across the river from Eagle Pass to Piedras Negras, which would serve as the base for his business enterprises. Wong's success in Mexico partly resulted from his ingratiating himself

with powerful figures in the borderlands, like Miguel Cárdenas, who would become Coahuila's long-standing governor (1894–1909).¹⁰ By the early 1890s Wong had become a naturalized Mexican citizen, had a Mexican wife, Mexican children, spoke Spanish, lived in Mexico, and had a thriving business there. His arrest in 1892 in San Antonio, and his forcible deportation from the United States for being Chinese, may have helped convince Wong that his future was brighter in Mexico. Although most Chinese headed north to the United States from Mexico, some Chinese, facing legal restrictions and discrimination in the United States, headed south to Mexico. For enterprising Chinese, northern Mexico offered opportunities to make money and start businesses in the rapidly developing mining towns and along the newly constructed railroad lines.

As Wong was developing his business in Mexico, Kang was seeking support from the diasporic Chinese communities in the Americas. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Kang traveled up and down the Pacific coast organizing chapters of the Baohuanghui. Pressed for financing for his movement to establish a constitutional monarchy in China, Kang formed the Commercial Corporation in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1902. In 1906 Kang visited Mexico City, staying at the home of Wong Foon Chuck, and then headed to Torreón, which was in the midst of an agricultural and industrial boom. Kang invested in land in an undeveloped part of the city, earning huge profits by selling the land back to Chinese and other foreigners.¹¹ One of the Chinese who bought this land was Wong Foon Chuck. The value of land in the Lagunera region, adjacent to Torreón, was skyrocketing, but so much of

it had been taken over by cotton that food was scarce. Wong acquired fourteen hectares of well-irrigated land in Torreón, renting parcels to other Chinese, who produced food and grew cotton. Wong's land was adjacent to the Metallurgic Company of Torreón, owned by the Madero family.¹² Francisco Madero would end up leading the 1910 Mexican Revolution and became the first revolutionary president of Mexico. The two nationalist movements, one in China advocating a constitutional monarchy and the other in Mexico to overthrow Porfirio Díaz, existed side-by-side but unconnected on the outskirts of Torreón.

Even though Kang was a noted political figure and Wong a wealthy businessman, both of them encountered difficulties crossing the border into the United States. In 1906 Kang sought to return to New York by way of Eagle Pass because it was a more direct route than going by boat through Veracruz. Wong sent a telegram to President Theodore Roosevelt asking that Kang be allowed to enter at Eagle Pass, which was not one of the five designated ports of entry for Chinese. The Chinese legation informed the Immigration Bureau that Kang was not a representative of the Chinese government and that they wanted nothing to do with him. Kang made overtures to the bureau's New Orleans office, armed with a letter from the city's mayor, but he was denied entry there as well. Wong had himself been denied entry through Eagle Pass in 1905. Kang eventually secured a letter from the U.S. consul in Tampico to facilitate his entry into New York. When Kang arrived in New York, immigration officers discovered that he had been issued an entry visa in Vancouver by U.S. officials in 1904, but the papers were never forwarded to the bureau. Kang was finally

allowed to enter the United States. The circuitous route he traveled and the obstacles he encountered along the way demonstrate the kinds of difficulties that even prominent Chinese had entering the United States.¹³ In 1906 Kang wrote to President Roosevelt, lauding him for his intervention on behalf of Chinese merchants, diplomats, and students during the 1905 boycott of U.S. goods but also criticizing the harsh enforcement of the exclusion act. As Kang put it, "The future historian will marvel why the enlightened American, who permits the free dumping of the riff-raff and the off-scouring of Europe, who welcomes the assisted emigration of European paupers and criminals—should single out the Chinese for exclusion."¹⁴ Kang pointedly condemned the United States not for excluding poor people and criminals but for lumping all Chinese together as an undesirable class.

Given the discrimination Chinese faced in the United States, Kang turned to Mexico for business opportunities. Kang had so much success in Torreón that in 1906 he established a bank there, the Compañía Bancaria Chino y México, and in 1907 formed a company to build a tramway in the city. He appointed Wong Foon Chuck as director of the bank and brought Lee Fook Kee from Vancouver as director of the Commercial Corporation to oversee operations in Torreón. Although building of the tram stalled after just seven miles had been constructed and land values began to fall precipitously, by 1908 the bank had amassed close to \$1 million in assets. The financial collapse of the Commercial Corporation resulted from an economic crisis in 1907 and Wong's refusal to release funds for the completion of the tramline.¹⁵ However, in addition to internecine fighting among Chinese, the local Mexi-

can elite feared a rising Chinese business class. Not only were the Madero family and Wong in the same vicinity, but the Chinese bank was a direct competitor of the Banco Mercantil de Monterrey in Torreón, in which the Madero family held a majority stake. The emerging Chinese business elite in Torreón posed a threat to Mexican capitalists like the Madero family. That antipathy, together with the populist racism against Chinese in Mexico, combined as a powerful force once the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1911.

In the 1911 massacre of Chinese in Torreón at the hands of Maderista forces, Wong lost forty-five men, four in his laundry, nine in his railroad hotel, and thirty-two on his hacienda.¹⁶ One of Kang's relatives was also among the 303 Chinese killed that day.¹⁷ Most of the remaining Chinese left the city fearing for their lives. Historian Leo M. Dambourges Jacques argues that the prosperity of the Chinese community in Torreón, combined with the latent anti-Chinese racism, created an explosive mix: "Mexicans resented the presence of the prosperous alien colony in their midst, and this helped set the stage for violence."¹⁸ Even after the massacre, Wong Foon Chuck continued to do business in Mexico and evidently used his hotels, restaurants, laundries, and dry goods stores as safe houses for Chinese being smuggled northward to the United States, but the Chinese community in Mexico would increasingly face hostility during the revolutionary period. For his part, Kang continued to organize the reformist movement in North America until 1909, when he returned to Asia for good. The importance of Kang's reformist movement diminished as Sun Yat-sen's nationalist revolution gained steam and finally succeeded in 1912.

Tong Wars in Mexico

Kang's reformist party and Sun Yat-sen's nationalist party vied to control the Chinese community in the Americas by tapping into preexisting organizations and networks. By 1911, Sun Yat-sen managed to unite the Hung League and the CKT for the purpose of overthrowing the Qing government.¹⁹ Tongs served as key sources of both political and material support for revolutionary movements in China. Sun Yat-sen received close to \$100,000 from tongs throughout North America in the lead-up to his nationalist revolution.²⁰ By the 1920s, however, dissension among tongs grew as Sun Yat-sen's KMT marginalized the CKT. Although secret societies in China had their origins in military and political organizations that opposed imperial authority, these groups became mutual-aid societies and criminal syndicates in the Americas. Rival tongs frequently fought each other, and occasionally these conflicts erupted into pitched battles.

In spite of the differences, however, tongs provided spaces for migrant Chinese men, who may have been cut off from their biological families, to reconstitute alternative family structures. In his article "Performing Exclusion and Resistance," Floyd Cheung analyzes the initiation ceremony of the CKT in Tucson, Arizona, in the 1860s and 1870s to show how Chinese used this martial ritual to reinforce their sense of manhood in the face of attacks by whites in the United States. The CKT was a nativist Chinese group that formed in 1647 to oppose foreign encroachers, to overthrow the Manchu rulers, and to return the deposed Ming dynasty. The

secret ceremony, Cheung argues, allowed tong members to “both speak softly and carry a sharp, if concealed or imaginary sword.” The tongs provided protection, but they also served as spaces for political organizing and psychological resistance as well as fraternity for emigrants who felt isolated and persecuted.²¹ The importance of this kind of psychological support and brotherhood should not be underestimated in a community of mostly men who had been separated from their families and thrust into a foreign and often hostile environment. While Chinese may not have held public rallies to protest discrimination, the CKT performed elaborate initiation rituals in the interior halls of their association in which members reenacted the history of the organization’s founders and transformed their marginal spaces into the center of the world for the descendants of the Middle Kingdom. Chinese emigrants were brothers, not aliens, inside the tongs.

Although the tongs and political parties provided psychic spaces for solidarity, they also created and reflected competition within the Chinese community. The violence that broke out in the Chinese Mexican community in the 1920s revealed transnational political conflicts. The Chinese in Mexico were more or less united prior to the nationalist revolution of Sun Yat-sen in China in 1911. After that point supporters of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) opposed those of the CKT. In the spring of 1922 gun battles and assassinations in northern Mexico broke out between supporters of the KMT and their secret society, Lung Sing Tong, and supporters of the CKT.²² According to the anti-Chinese activist José Angel Espinoza, the conflict between the two was over not merely politics but also control of opium trafficking and Chinese

laborers. Sonoran authorities rounded up 250 to 300 Chinese, put them in jail in Hermosillo without trial and began deportation proceedings; 60 to 70 percent of those detained were members of the CKT, and only 10 percent were in the KMT. Gun battles continued into the summer of 1922, with assassins from the CKT killing twelve nationalists. By the time it was over twenty-five Chinese had been killed.²³

Before the deportations could be carried out, however, President Alvaro Obregón intervened and halted them. Juan Lin Fu, interim president of the CKT, wrote to Obregón to complain that basic rights to a defense had not been granted to the incarcerated Chinese. He also blamed the seventeen members of the KMT who remained free for instigating the violence. Obregón condemned the violence and told Lin Fu that he planned to deport all of the Chinese in jail. Wealthy Chinese merchants from Sonora and Sinaloa appealed to Obregón to launch an investigation to find out who were the guilty parties. In the end Plutarco Elías Calles, then secretary of the interior, concluded that the KMT was largely responsible for the violence and that most of the jailed Chinese were innocent.²⁴ In July 1922 Francisco L. Yuen of the KMT wrote Obregón to thank him for rescinding the deportation order against him. The deportation order stemmed, he explained, from false charges made against him by his opponents in the CKT. This secret society referred to itself as a masonic lodge, but Yuen explained that they were “conservatives, traditionalists, monarchists, and rejected Western civilization and the harmony of human progress.”²⁵

The CKT had been founded two centuries earlier to overthrow

the Manchu government, but by the mid-nineteenth century, it was a global organization with branches from Singapore to San Francisco.²⁶ The CKT had formed in Arizona as early as the 1860s, and it had affiliates throughout North America in cities like Vancouver and San Francisco. The first branch in Mexico was founded in Cananea, Sonora, in 1903 by Wong Lan Sing, who came from San Francisco. Although the CKT had supported the nationalist revolution, its members felt betrayed by Sun Yat-sen and later broke with the Nationalist Party. A report by the Nationalist Chinese League in Mexico accused the CKT of involvement in smuggling Chinese across the border to the United States and in various assassination attempts on its members. Echoing anti-Chinese stereotypes, Yuen claimed that the CKT “had done nothing other than commit crimes, flout the law, and establish opium dens.” In contrast, Yuen portrayed the Nationalist League as an organization comprised of “sane elements, of serious culture, of real honorability and above all respectful of the laws of this country.” Yuen pleaded with the governor to deport members of the secret society using Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution, which allowed for the expulsion of undesirable foreigners.²⁷

In June 1922 massive protests broke out throughout Sonora demanding the expulsion of Chinese as pernicious foreigners. Telegrams flooded into the governor’s and president’s offices demanding that judges who prevented expulsion be removed, including one signed by the president of the Communist Party.²⁸ By December the immediate crisis ended with most Chinese being released from prison and Obregón ordering the deportation of forty-three tong members, mostly from the KMT.²⁹ The Mexican

anti-Chinese movement thus coincided with conflict among the Chinese themselves, with each side calling for the others to be expelled from the country. Although many Chinese were expelled from Mexico, especially in the early 1930s, a relatively small number were expelled using Article 33. Article 33 of the Mexican constitution provided for the expulsion of foreigners who interfered in domestic politics. According to a 1935 report by Gilberto Loyo of the National Revolutionary Party, no Chinese were expelled using Article 33 before 1927. In the period between 1921 and 1934, the report found that of a total of 850 expulsions, there were 256 Guatemalans, 140 U.S. citizens, 124 Spaniards, and only 106 Chinese. Almost half of these expulsions were for violations of the migration law rather than for political or criminal activities.³⁰ These figures suggest that although there was popular pressure to expel Chinese using Article 33, most Chinese were deported for other violations.

Although bloodshed between tongs stopped in September 1922, the conflict continued in the pages of Chinese-language newspapers published in the United States and Mexico, particularly *Chung Sai Yat Po*, a CKT paper in San Francisco, and *Sam Wa*, a KMT paper in Nogales, Sonora. Violence erupted once again in 1924 during a Cinco de Mayo celebration in Mexicali, when agents of the CKT assassinated a member of the nationalist Lung Sing Tong. This killing rekindled a cycle of assassinations and reprisals. The CKT sent out a notice to its members on 22 June 1924, saying that its patience in dealing with the KMT peacefully had come to an end and that it was preparing for war. "If these people try to abuse us and the moment arrives when we can't stand it any longer, then

surely there will be a terrible and dreadful war.”³¹ Finally, on 28 September 1924, Francisco Yuen, a prominent merchant of the Lung Sing Tong, was killed by a CKT assassin in a train station in Naco, Sonora, in front of crowds of people. In the wake of Yuen’s assassination and the international scandal it provoked, the governor of Baja California, Abelardo L. Rodríguez, convinced the president to expel fifty Chinese leaders of the CKT in 1924.³² Local authorities sympathetic to the CKT obstructed Obregón’s orders, however, and released many of the leaders, thus preventing their deportation. The federal government’s efforts to bring an end to the tong wars were thwarted by its limited power to impose its will in the north.³³ In 1929 the nationalist Lung Sing Tong was still active in Coahuila and apparently using its influence with the government to have its Chinese enemies expelled from the country.³⁴

The violence caused by the tongs and their ability to fight deportation further enraged *anti-chinistas* in Mexico’s north. José Angel Espinoza excoriated the tongs in his *El ejemplo de Sonora*, reproducing a series of Chinese letters (translated into Spanish) that supposedly demonstrated the corruption of the Chinese in Mexico. One letter from Juan A. Wong in Magdalena to his older brother José Wong in Guaymas stated that he had been jailed by the “diabolical party” (presumably the KMT) and was only released when his brother’s wife brought his naturalization card to the district judge. He recommended doing the same in Guaymas, where a number of men had been similarly jailed. Espinoza saw the use of naturalization papers to get released from jail as an opportunistic and strategic claim to rights as Mexican citizens when, in fact,

they continued to “belong to Tongs, [and] continued their clan-like activities with their compatriots.”³⁵ The letter, however, gave no indication that the author was using naturalization as a way to evade the law. Rather he was using his rights as a Mexican citizen to avoid being jailed and possibly deported as a foreigner. As Espinoza put it, “Each naturalization letter that our government extends to a Chinese citizen is a rattlesnake deposited in the breast of nation.”³⁶ At the height of the anti-Chinese pogroms in northern Mexico, the critique of Chinese naturalization became more than simply a question of opportunism, it was an issue of protecting the Mexican nation from racial degeneration. In 1930 General Norberto Rochin, president of the Unión Nacionalista Mexicana (Pro-Raza y Salud Pública) (Mexican Nationalist Union [Pro Race and Public Health]) wrote to the minister of foreign relations, asking him in the name of the Anti-Asian Nationalist League of Tijuana to reconsider the naturalization of Chinese “who are invading the Republic, displacing our compatriots from all of their activities and degenerating our race, with grave prejudice to our nationality.”³⁷

Although anti-Chinese activists saw the tongs and other Chinese defense groups as dangerous for the nation, the central government was not keen to follow through on the chorus of calls to deport the tong leaders. Tongs had the ability and the political connections to fight such deportations, and they were important political and economic forces in their localities. Deporting the leaders would have political costs too high for the central government.

Tong Fights in Cuba

In Cuba, competition between the KMT (Nationalists) and the CKT (Republicans) broke into violent conflict in the 1920s, around the same time as it did in Mexico. In 1923 the KMT was reorganized and began to cooperate with the Communist Party of China, while the CKT remained more open and democratic. The influx of new Chinese immigrants to Cuba in the 1920s unsettled the balance of power in the Chinese community, leading to sometimes violent disputes, increasing crime rates, public scandals, and a struggle to represent the new migrants. Meanwhile in the midst of an economic crisis (1924–26), the Casino and the Chinese legation lost their power to control Chinese migration as corrupt Cuban immigration officials began to allow thousands of illegal Chinese to enter the country. The government blamed the Chinese community for drug trafficking, gambling, and corruption. Criminal convictions for Chinese also skyrocketed from 99 in 1919 to 940 in 1925. In 1919 Chinese represented only 2 percent of all criminal convictions, but by 1925 this portion had grown to 20 percent. The increase in criminal convictions seems to have resulted from increased targeting of Chinese communities by the police, leading the Chinese minister in Cuba to write to the secretary of state lamenting the “true state of alarm that exists among the colony of Chinese residents in Cuba.”³⁸

The Cuban government responded to these internal conflicts much as the Mexican government had, by deporting the guilty parties. However, the infighting among the Chinese also led to a broader harassment campaign by the Cuban government that would affect the entire Chinese community, including wealthy

merchants. The interior minister proposed a series of measures designed to root out the supposed vice and criminality in the Chinese community in Havana, including closing all Chinese political parties and the Casino Chung Wah, posting more police in Chinatown, shutting down all Chinese-language newspapers, expelling Chinese with criminal records, and reinforcing immigration laws. In September 1926 public health officials issued fines to twenty-five overcrowded houses in Chinatown, and in that same year the police discovered 145 opium dens. Police action focused on enforcing public health codes and cracking down on drug use and trafficking in Chinese neighborhoods.³⁹

In Cuba and Mexico, conflicts between tongs gave the central government an excuse to exert executive authority through deportations, policing, and stricter enforcement of immigration laws. The Cuban central government was more successful in gaining the upper hand in managing Chinese migration, probably because it had greater influence in Havana, the center of the Chinese community, and because Cuba was an island where entry could more easily be controlled. The Mexican central government used deportation as a means to rid the country of the Chinese held responsible for tong violence, but the local and state authorities in the north were able to impede the government's deportation orders in some cases and to harass Chinese in others. In comparison to Cuba, the relative weakness of Mexico's central government rendered it ineffective in controlling Chinese migration and the violent anti-Chinese movements in the north.

Tongs as Conduits for Smugglers

American governments viewed tongs and other Chinese associations as troublesome criminal syndicates, but for the Chinese community they were vital institutions that facilitated entry and adaptation to a new country. Although labor recruiters were vilified in the press and government reports as unscrupulous exploiters, they were often revered and respected by the Chinese, who relied on them for survival. Businessmen like Wong Foon Chuck used their networks of connections in the borderlands to establish an underground railroad for Chinese seeking clandestine entry into the United States. Like Wong, other transnational smugglers were go-betweens and cultural brokers, men who had in many cases managed to integrate into the local culture by marrying native women and learning the local language. They used secret societies, political parties, business dealings, and family ties to help them establish transnational networks.

Some of the most successful smugglers of Chinese from Mexico worked for the Chinese Six Companies and often worked with corrupt U.S. officials. Yung Ham, who lived in Nogales, Sonora, had reportedly smuggled 3,000 Chinese from Mexico to the United States. In 1899 Harry K. Chenoweth, the head of customs at Nogales, was found to be colluding with Yung to traffic Chinese girls through Nogales dressed as Mexicans. The girls would then be sold to gambling and opium den operators for \$2,900 each. The Indiana man chosen to replace Chenoweth, William M. Hoey, became involved in his own Chinese smuggling operation within a year, in collaboration with Frank Ho, a Chinese resident of Nogales, Sonora, and Quong Wing of the Chinese Six Compa-

nies. In the course of their investigation, two U.S. customs agents, after being unable to gain Mexican cooperation to extradite two Chinese suspects, crossed the border illegally and seized the two Chinese to bring them back to the United States to testify against Hoey.⁴⁰ Controlling Chinese smuggling operations on the border was an uphill battle given corrupt U.S. officers and a lack of official Mexican cooperation. Under these circumstances, U.S. agents felt justified in transgressing Mexico's national sovereignty to secure U.S. borders against illegal entry by the Chinese.

As soon as the authorities began to investigate, smugglers from one region adeptly moved to another region or country. One such smuggler, Jim Bennett, moved his operations from British Columbia to the Arizona-Sonora border in 1901. He received migrants in the Sonoran port city of Guaymas and brought them up through Hermosillo, Cananea, Magdalena, and Naco. Two forgers, Louis Greenwaldt and B. C. Springstein, the first of whom had done time in San Quentin for Chinese smuggling, provided the Chinese with fake certificates of residency. Lee Quong and Frank How, who had been involved with Hoey in Nogales, helped load the Chinese in boxcars heading to northern Sonora. They had their Chinese clients "cut off their queues and dress . . . as Mexicans" so they could cross the border. After the ring was discovered Greenwaldt escaped to Vancouver and Bennett to Mexico, where he lived in a princely fashion and continued to smuggle Chinese.⁴¹ When smugglers ran into trouble with the law, they simply crossed the border to continue their operations in another country.

Cuba was another central node in the Chinese smuggling network run through the Chinese National League. One of the

ringleaders in both the labor and opium smuggling operations was a long-time resident of Havana named Lou Yat Sun who spoke Spanish fluently, had married a Cuban woman, and was reported to be a gambler and involved in other shady activities.⁴² Sun, president of the Chinese National League of Havana, tried to establish a new smuggling route to the United States through Gulfport, Mississippi. He sent a young emissary to meet with the president of the Chinese National League in New Orleans, Shou Min, known by locals as an opium dealer and Chinese smuggler.⁴³ It appears as if Shou Min was being groomed to be Sun's agent in New Orleans to oversee the smuggling operations from there. These efforts were frustrated, however, when immigration authorities arrested the young emissary and deported him to Cuba.⁴⁴

In addition to specific names of smugglers, the investigation revealed the important link between the Chinese National League operations in Havana and New Orleans. The Chinese National League emerged in China in 1912 as a political party and quickly established affiliates throughout the world wherever there was a sizable Chinese community. The fact that the National League branches in both Havana and New Orleans were involved in smuggling Chinese shows that this was not a marginal activity by lower-class criminals but an enterprise orchestrated by some of the most prominent and wealthy business and political leaders in the Chinese community.

In December 1920 John Williams, another key Havana smuggler, was identified by a ship captain, who was able to provide the smuggler's name and address in Havana. Williams had approached the captain in Havana to try to get him to transport

Chinese to the United States.⁴⁵ Immigration authorities had been keeping an eye out for Williams ever since he was named as a smuggler by a Jamaican stowaway on a United Fruit Company ship, the *SS Tipton*. The Jamaican stowaway, Leonard Spence, said he had boarded a ship in Havana along with two Chinese brought there by John Williams. According to Spence, Williams was born in China but was a Jamaican. He spoke English, Spanish, and Chinese. The transnational connections and identities of men like Williams and Lou Yat Sun equipped them for success in human smuggling.⁴⁶

Immigration service records are full of reports about Chinese being smuggled into the United States, but there are very few detailed descriptions of the experience of the journey itself. Inspectors were more interested in learning about who organized the smuggling than about the migrants' deprivations. However, Leonard Spence, the Jamaican stowaway, offered one such account, describing his ten-day journey to Tela, Honduras, and then to Mobile, Alabama. His story helps us appreciate the conditions on the treacherous journeys that so many Chinese took as they sought illegal entry into the United States. Spence was locked in a small carpenter's storeroom with the two Chinese. When they arrived in Honduras and the ship was inspected by a customs agent, the Chinese were hidden in a small compartment for the steering apparatus. During the journey, they were fed bread, potatoes, and sometimes meat, and they were forced to defecate on paper in the same room where they slept. One of the Chinese men spoke a little Spanish and was able to communicate with Spence, but for the most part, they spent days below decks, lying down in silence,

awaiting their arrival in the United States. When they landed in Mobile, the three men were brought to the railway depot, where they were eventually arrested waiting for a train to New York. Although the smugglers were supposed to pay for transport to New York, Spence explained that he and the two Chinese were just dumped in Mobile. At his hearing, Spence was asked if he was an anarchist or member of the IWW, neither of which brands of politics he seemed to know anything about. He was deported back to Cuba for illegally entering the United States without undergoing inspection.⁴⁷

The two Chinese men with Spence were able to identify two of the seamen who had been involved in the smuggling. The boatswain, a native of Finland, admitted to having been paid by the Chinese men, but he claimed that he was only paid to keep quiet about their presence on the boat. The carpenter, also Finnish, claimed to have only seen the Chinese onboard once they had landed in Mobile.⁴⁸ Imagine for a moment the polyglot storeroom on the United Fruit Company ship where a Jamaican, two Chinese migrants, and two Finnish sailors met and exchanged money and perhaps a few words in broken English or Spanish while the vessel sailed the Gulf from Cuba to Honduras to the United States. At least for the time they spent in the Gulf, they remained in a zone beyond the control of any nation. Once they landed in Mobile, however, they all quickly became enmeshed in the web of U.S. immigration law.

When the two Chinese men were interrogated, one of them concocted an elaborate story about having lived in New York and come to Mobile to buy a laundry. The fact that he still had with

him a Cuban registry document indicating that he had arrived in Cuba in 1918 made his story suspect. Inspector Vincent suspended his interrogation and began to question the other Chinese migrant. Law Ngou had a certificate of residence issued in Brooklyn in 1894. When the inspector pressed him, saying that the picture on the residency certificate did not look like him at all, the interpreter Fung Ming broke in and began to speak with Ngou in Chinese. "You are a countryman of mine," Fung explained to the "alien." "I do not want you to commit a crime you do not know anything about; it means very serious trouble for you; it might lead you to imprisonment; it would be better for you to discard that paper and tell the truth, though it is hard luck. I realize that, but once you are caught, you simply have to be a good fellow, and be brave and face the music." After that pep talk, the suspect Law Ngou admitted that the residency certificate was not his, and he identified the smuggler in Havana as Sen Kow of 107 Merced Street. The Jamaican stowaway had given the exact same address but indicated that the smuggler's name was John Williams. It is likely that the smuggler used the name John Williams with a U.S. ship captain and the Jamaican stowaway, and a Chinese name with the Chinese migrants. The use of various names, Chinese and Western, was common for Chinese migrants attempting either to fit in or to develop a second identity to elude detection by authorities. After Law Ngou admitted to having been smuggled in from Cuba, the first man also confessed. Inspector Vincent recommended that the Chinese be deported back to Cuba.⁴⁹

The smugglers were a polyglot multilingual and multiethnic group including Chinese, Mexican, Cuban, Jamaican, Italian,

Greek, and North Americans who relied on familial, business, and political networks to facilitate their trade. While some smugglers merely helped Chinese cross the border, other operations offered transportation to interior cities like New York or Chicago, job placement, and fraudulent papers. Much like the Italian, Greek, and Mexican padrones Gunther Peck described in *Reinventing Free Labor*, Chinese recruiters and smugglers were simultaneously paternalistic and exploitative.⁵⁰

Many smuggling rings seemed to be run as family enterprises like Mafia organizations. William Riley and his brother Jack led one particularly successful family ring in Buffalo. Riley, who had been an Immigration Bureau agent, was able to use his knowledge of the bureau's inner workings to help him set up his smuggling operation and evade capture.⁵¹ Riley's sister-in-law, Mrs. Carrick, lodged the Chinese in her barn in Fort Erie, just across the border from Buffalo, until they could be moved across the river. Then, Mr. Carrick, pretending he was a fisherman, brought the Chinese across the river, and Riley would transport them all the way to New York City.⁵² In 1908 Riley was caught after several loads of Chinese were intercepted and arrested by authorities in Buffalo. Within a couple of months, however, Riley was out of jail and back in business. Along with several other members of his ring, Riley moved to Canada, but he returned to the United States in March 1909 and gave himself up for arrest. This time the judge sentenced Riley to the maximum one year and one day in jail. When he got out, Riley returned to smuggling.⁵³ This family smuggling operation extended to the southern border with Mexico as well. In 1915 one inspector in Los Angeles noted that a Fred Carrick, possibly the

same Mr. Carrick from Fort Erie, displayed at a café a wad of \$215 in cash “which he claim[ed] he made hauling chinks.”⁵⁴ Although there were several high profile arrests of smugglers in the Niagara area in 1914, the Riley brothers continued their operations, and were even heard bragging that “they were too smooth” for the agents to catch them.⁵⁵

Merchants who had business in multiple countries were in a perfect position to orchestrate transnational smuggling. They had the contacts and could easily disguise their movements as part of their regular business operations. Since at least 1909 immigration agents had identified the New Orleans–based merchant Chin Bing as a business partner of one of the main smugglers in Havana, Chaw Lin Hong.⁵⁶ In May 1919 a New Orleans inspector reported that Chin Bing was a key smuggler in the area and that he had recently moved his family across Lake Pontchartrain to be close to rail lines on which he could distribute Chinese to Jackson and Memphis. The inspector had information that 10,000 Chinese “coolies” had been contracted in Cuba to work on sugar plantations; just the previous Sunday, 250 Chinese heading to Cuba had passed through New Orleans.⁵⁷ So when Chin Bing applied for a return certificate from the U.S. Immigration Bureau in 1919 to visit Tampico, Mexico, and Havana, Cuba, ostensibly to sell dried shrimp, he was denied permission because the bureau believed Bing’s purpose on the trip was to orchestrate smuggling from the Gulf. The immigration commissioner in New Orleans suspected that Bing might leave and return surreptitiously anyway, so he gave instructions to watch for him.⁵⁸ In addition to the Chinese, Cuban, Mexican, Jamaican, Italian, and North American traffick-

ers, at least one Japanese man in Havana reportedly tried to smuggle Chinese into the United States.⁵⁹

Smuggling was big business, and not just for the labor brokers. There was plenty of money to be made by people lower down the food chain who took their cut, including sailors. When the Norwegian ship *SS Nils* arrived in Progreso, Mexico, local Chinese residents lavished the crew with free beer and dinner and told them that they could earn \$300 a trip smuggling Chinese to the United States.⁶⁰ Another U.S. ship captain admitted to inspectors in New Orleans that members of his crew had arranged for four Chinese to sneak onto his ship in Cuba for \$500 each.⁶¹ Opium and liquor was often brought in with the Chinese, thus increasing potential profits exponentially. With incentives like this it was no wonder that sailors and others became accomplices in the smuggling trade.

Although there were many freelance Chinese smugglers, some of the most effective brokers were actually employed by the immigration bureaucracy. In her book *Brokering Belonging*, historian Lisa Mar describes the key roles that interpreters in the Immigration Branch of the Canadian Department of the Interior played in helping Chinese evade restriction legislation in Canada. Mar highlights the complicated role that such brokers played, helping enforce anti-Chinese restrictions, on the one hand, and enabling Chinese migrants to evade those same restrictions, on the other, all for a fee. Yip On, a merchant and immigration interpreter in Vancouver who helped found the Baohuanghui and manage its business holdings, including the Torreón tramway and a Shanghai newspaper, was exemplary of this dual role as immigration en-

forcer and sometime smuggler. Yip acted as a powerful broker in Vancouver in the first decade of the twentieth century, extorting large bribes from Chinese migrants in exchange for allowing their entry; he also had a secret deal to provide Canada's Liberal Party with a portion of the bribes. In 1910 another Chinese interpreter, David Lew, attempted to unseat Yip by exposing his corruption. The Royal Commission that investigated found Yip guilty, but it also questioned Lew's motives for exposing Yip. The commission recommended a series of reforms, including using fingerprints to avoid falsified documents, but this recommendation was never implemented. Photographs, however, began to be used in 1910 on exit certificates and in 1913 on entry documents to limit fraudulent entry. In spite of these measures, Mar argues that Canada's Immigration Branch largely ignored illegal entry until the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁶² With so much money to be made in the smuggling business, many powerful people made sure the migrants kept coming.

Tracing Clandestine Networks through the Mail

Clandestine migrants, like smugglers, have little interest in preserving documents that might incriminate them in illegal activities. However, they wrote letters to their relatives in various countries in the Americas to arrange border crossings, ask for money, and secure employment. These letters were occasionally intercepted by immigration officials, translated, and placed in state archives. They provide a rare window into the family networks throughout the Americas that facilitated Chinese cross-

border migration. On one occasion naval intelligence reported on a letter sent from Fun Nam Wu of Cincinnati to Hung Man Lew in Havana. "If you know of anybody who wants to go to New York," Fun wrote, "please let me know." Fun invited Hung to come and work with him in Cincinnati or to contact a friend in New York City if he wanted to go there. Unaware that his own letters were being intercepted, Fun warned Hung to be "careful what you write in your letters. . . . Everything must be kept secret, otherwise it will be a complete failure."⁶³ Whether through friendship or clan networks, Chinese in the United States and Cuba helped each other secure jobs and gain entry into the United States. One letter sent from Detroit to Havana in 1919 indicated that Mei Chung Tsing was going to try to come to the United States because of the lack of work in Havana. The letter writer, however, told his cousin that the smuggling operation from South America "has been practically dissolved, owing to the vigilance of the Customs house."⁶⁴

Chinese correspondence demonstrates intricate familial and business networks that extended throughout the Americas. One example of the extent of these networks is revealed in the letters that Louis Lit and Louie Fong had with them when they were arrested in 1914 in Philadelphia. These letters, translated by the Immigration Bureau, were all in an envelope addressed to George Yee in Philadelphia, bearing postmarks from Montreal or Ontario and a business stamp for Pong Wah Lee in Ontario. The letters demonstrate that Chinese corresponded regularly between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, telling their friends and relatives about job opportunities, communicating about debts, giving medical advice, and generally keeping each other up-to-

date about their lives. One letter from Montreal by Shey Loud complained about the large number of Chinese arriving every month and the lack of job opportunities, noting “everything in Canada is dull.” According to Shey Loud, five or six ships arrived there every month, each one overstuffed with hundreds of Chinese. Even when they did find work, as he and ten of his cousins had in a “western man’s building,” “the wages [were] small, just enough for living.”⁶⁵ The difficulties finding work in both Canada and Mexico help explain why so many Chinese chose to enter the United States clandestinely. One letter from Quock to his uncle Tang Horn thanked him for sending him five dollars, explaining that he was living in Veracruz but found no work. The costs associated with travel to the Americas and clandestine entry into the United States directly impacted Chinese families. Yee Fong sent his uncle Tang Horn money to distribute to his family, but at the same time he complained, “Now I have no money for Ah Foo’s marriage, if mother desires to have his ceremony performed she can mortgage the farm.”⁶⁶ Although most migrants were men, the ripple effects of migration directly impacted women who remained behind in China.

In some of the letters, the pleas for money were desperate. Louie Fat Quon wrote to his nephew Tang Horn letting him know that he had left from Hong Kong and arrived safely in Mexico but that he had no friends or cousins there. He explained that it was very hard to borrow money and living expenses were high, seventy-five cents a day: “I am broke now and have no way to get the money. I hope that my nephew will send me some money to save me. I have suffered the trouble of cold. If you won’t send me the money for

board, I will some day be starved.”⁶⁷ In another letter Quon told his nephew that it was hard to find a job in Mexico because of the Revolution and that there were several thousand Chinese in Mexico City who were unemployed.⁶⁸ Although the correspondence suggests a tight transnational network of Chinese, the threads in that network could at times be broken. In January 1914 Louie Quong Kee wrote to ask about one of his sons who had gone to Havana and had not been heard of for five months.⁶⁹

In addition to painting a picture of the difficulties faced by Chinese migrants, the letters also help us understand how the transnational smuggling rings worked. A family or friend would pay a portion of the fee to have a Chinese person smuggled into the United States and the rest would be paid on arrival. One letter addressed to three people, including Tang Horn, informed them that Louie Kim and Louie Jin were leaving from Canada and would arrive in the United States that weekend. Shu Gee wrote, “Get ready the money to pay the guide. If the two persons are arrived safely, please let me know immediately.”⁷⁰ Apparently there was some negotiation over the cost of smuggling a person to the United States, and when Louie Tang Horn balked at the price, Pong Shu Gee wrote to him explaining that \$260 was the price if they did not send a guide along, but it would be more because he will have a guide. Shu Gee insisted, “Please do not suspect and I will order him attend the matter earnestly and carefully.”⁷¹ Pong Shu Gee was at the nexus of a complex transcontinental smuggling scheme that brought Chinese into Vancouver, transferred them across Canada to Hamilton, Ontario, a border town near Buffalo, New York, and from there arranged for the migrants to cross clandestinely into

the United States. One letter from Yee Tung enumerated various expenses for the transfer of Ah You and Ah Bing, including fifty-three dollars each for passage, eight dollars for board, and four dollars for rent.⁷² Ah You wrote six days later to his uncle Tang Horn explaining how he had spent the \$160 that had been sent and requesting more money to pay from the passage to the United States: "Also send us money to buy Western dresses. Answer soon."⁷³

The commissioner of immigration at the Philadelphia station, E. E. Greenwalt, was extremely frustrated by the trial of Louie Lit and Louie Fong. In spite of all the letters that implicated the men in smuggling activities and an inspector from Buffalo who testified that he saw these two Chinese men on a train in Canada, he worried that "six or seven apparently respectable and reliable white witnesses have offset this valuable testimony as a matter of legal evidence by swearing that the Chinamen were in Philadelphia for years before the date the inspector saw them in Canada."⁷⁴ So either the inspector who testified in court lied or the Chinese smugglers were collaborating with prominent white people in Philadelphia who were willing to perjure themselves to protect the smuggling activities. Smuggling operations were profitable businesses that involved corrupt immigration officials, Chinese businessmen, political leaders, forgers, and prominent white men. The more the immigration authorities cracked down on illegal immigration, the more it cost to cross clandestinely, and therefore the more profitable the business became. Enforcement of immigration laws was like pumping oxygen into a smoldering fire. Rather than extinguishing the fire, enforcement fueled it.

Conclusion

Chinese communities in the Americas all suffered from discrimination, but different classes suffered differently. Elites like merchants, students, and travelers were sometimes subject to the same kind of humiliating treatment and Bertillon measurements at the U.S. border as Chinese laborers, but the law made important distinctions. Exempt classes were not supposed to be sent to Angel Island for rigorous exams and interrogations. Conditions in communities were also affected by political differences, as Chinese in the Americas began to participate actively in Chinese politics in the early twentieth century, joining the revolutionary movement and the Nationalist and Republican parties. Class tensions, political rivalries, and competition to control gambling, opium, and illegal Chinese smuggling all led to violence among the Chinese in the 1920s. Divisions over political questions in China illustrated the extent to which this diasporic community still maintained psychic and material links to its homeland. These well-publicized fights gave anti-Chinese activists more ammunition to push for tighter police surveillance of the Chinese community and stricter enforcement of immigration laws.

The networks and organizations that tied Chinese together across the Americas also provided them with the tools to survive in a new land and allowed them to come together to fight discriminatory legislation. Chinese businessmen, along with political, tong, and hometown association leaders, played key roles in facilitating clandestine entry in the Americas. The captured

letters of Chinese show how relatives helped prospective migrants with money, jobs, and information about how to cross borders clandestinely. There was a highly developed underground railroad and transportation network that not only moved Chinese across borders but helped them get settled when they reached their destinations. These associations run by merchants provided material support in the form of health benefits, burial expenses, legal resources, an alternative family structure, and, most important, a psychic space in which individuals thousands of miles from home could reproduce their social lives. No matter how much politicians and anti-Chinese activists tried to render Chinese socially dead by casting them as “perpetual aliens,” their ability to refashion family structures and bonds of solidarity allowed them to survive and forge new communities. Some made claims as Mexican, Cuban, Canadian, or U.S. citizens and some, often the same ones, became involved in nationalist politics in China, but it was their transnational diasporic networks that formed the foundation on which those communities were built.