

Making the Chinese Mexican

GLOBAL MIGRATION, LOCALISM,
AND EXCLUSION IN THE
U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLANDS

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icans.²⁹ As southern Arizona Chinese differentiated themselves from Mexicans and as Sonoran Chinese steadied themselves from the 1931 expulsion decree, the modern conceptualization of the border began to crystallize. Nation-centered policies—and histories—were on the ascent.

The idea that some people belong to nations more easily than others is powerful, yet it is subject to the political construction and cultural imaginings of the nation-state. National borders arbitrate state control as much as they mediate identities. This book's Epilogue ponders the use of state power in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands after 1931, and the manner in and degree to which cross-border interaction persisted even as the American state limited immigration and Mexican officials sought to contain emigration. The expulsion of approximately 3,500 Sonoran Chinese to China and the repatriation of approximately 500,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans to Mexico marked the beginning of a regime of border control predicated on territorial sovereignty during the early years of the Great Depression. Despite some semblance of bilateralism, evidenced in the pan-Americanism of the Good Neighbor Policy (1933) and the Bracero Program (a series of initiatives between 1942 and 1964 to facilitate the importation of Mexican workers to the United States for agricultural labor), Mexico and the United States emerged as sole arbiters of the composition, communication, and enforcement of their shared border. The Epilogue meditates on the tension between late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century globalization forces by placing this present-day configuration in the *longue durée* of U.S.-Mexico borderlands history.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands was a world of overlapping cultures and epochs of Chinese, native peoples, and Mexicans who saw one another pragmatically: at various times as neighbors, as rivals, and as outsiders, but most often as intensely "in between." Chinese *fronterizos* reconciled the turbulence of a changing trans-Pacific-borderlands landscape while creating lives that corresponded at once with disparate spaces and times. Between transimperial and transnational movements, Chinese *fronterizos* countered exploitation and race hatred in multiple and contingent ways. Many adjusted on their own terms, coexisted, and built new communities that integrated all that was around them. What follows is a history that draws attention to movements, relationships, and tensions. In doing so, it places the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and Chinese *fronterizos* at the crossroads of imperial and national worlds.

1 From Global to Local

CHINESE MIGRATION NETWORKS INTO THE AMERICAS

There was nothing in the lofty diplomatic career of Matías Romero to suggest that he would become a tireless advocate of Chinese immigration to Mexico (see Figure 1.1). Romero, a lawyer by training, joined the Liberal Party of Benito Juárez during the War of the Reform (1857–1861), when the influence of military leaders and the power of the Roman Catholic Church were replaced with a constitution-based civil society. In this period, Romero quickly climbed Mexico's diplomatic ranks.¹ At twenty-five years of age, the Oaxaca native had already served as Mexico's *chargé d'affaires* and minister to the United States, where he tenaciously lobbied the Lincoln administration to arbitrate the French Intervention, in which France had invaded Mexico in 1862 under the leadership of Napoleon III. A dauntless proponent of liberalism, Romero facilitated U.S. investment in Mexico, earned the respect of Lincoln's secretary of state, William H. Seward, and engendered a close friendship with General Ulysses S. Grant. Romero proved equally effective as secretary of the treasury, offering, among many suggestions, that the United States assist Mexico in settling its debts with Britain, France, and Spain.²

Neither Romero's extensive diplomatic résumé nor his trust in free-market solutions inspired the young attaché to turn to Chinese labor. In fact, Romero's plan transpired from his own frustration with growing coffee in Soconusco, Chiapas, which he pursued after poor health steered him temporarily away from politics in 1872. In his estimation, the *tierra caliente*, Mexico's tropical hotlands abutting Guatemala and Belize, held immense potential, but the region lacked a steady workforce to make coffee profitable. After all, Romero's ambition was not to provide Mexicans with the rich, aromatic drink, but to supply Americans with high-quality coffee beans, produced from the drudgery of Chinese laborers.

When Romero returned to politics as senator of Chiapas in 1875, he conveyed his plans in two essays that were circulated in Mexico City-based

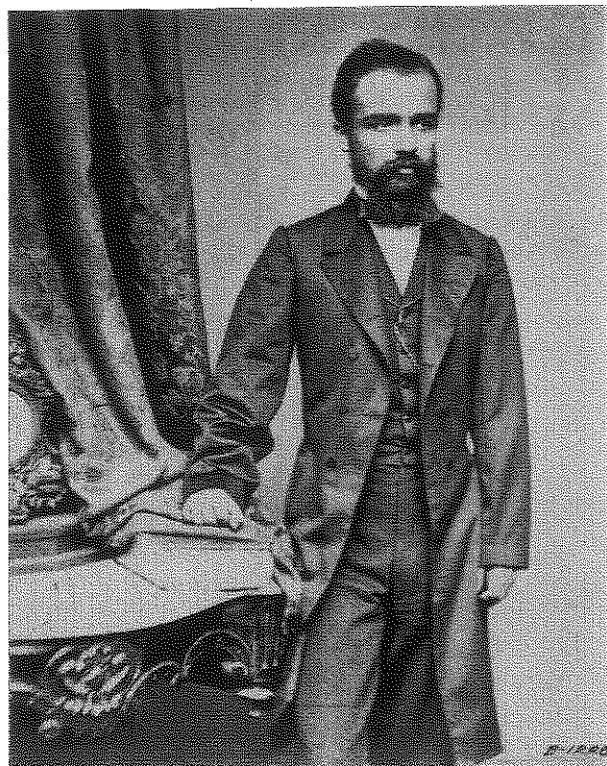


FIGURE 1.1 Portrait of Matías Romero, 1863. Image presented to the U.S. Government in 1863/Civil War Series. http://www.civil-war.net/cw_images/files/images/184.jpg

newspapers: *Revista Universal* and *El Correo del Comercio*. Romero's writings were consistently optimistic, appealing to the popular belief that where Chinese toiled in cane and cotton fields and filled mining and railroad camps, progress occurred. The former coffee grower stirred optimism that development was possible even in the most remote, most arid parts of the world. "It seems to me," he surmised, "that the only colonists who could establish themselves or work on our coasts are Asians, primarily from climates similar to ours, primarily China. . . . This is not an idle dream. Chinese immigration has been going on for years, and wherever it has occurred prudently, the results have been favorable."³ Enamored with China, Romero also added Japan to the mix of countries from which Mexico stood to benefit as a source for immigrant laborers.⁴

If Romero's vision represented one possible pathway to modernity, it did so within a global context, one rich in international migration amid

competing imperial and national worlds. Within this uncertain landscape, Romero pursued his conviction that the solution to Mexico's labor shortage lay across the Pacific Ocean. In 1882, an appointment as Mexico's minister plenipotentiary under the presidency of Porfirio Díaz finally afforded the physically fragile but politically stalwart public servant the influence to promote Chinese immigration.

Vigorous discussion ensued between Romero and a range of Qing Dynasty officials. Diplomats traded gifts: chocolate, rope from the fibers of the henequen plant, and Veracruz coffee beans in exchange for porcelain vases, tea, and cloth made from hemp.⁵ Eventually, Chinese laborers arrived in Mexico under official treaty protection, but not until 1899, twenty-four years after Romero first advocated for such immigration, and one year after the intrepid politician succumbed to an appendicitis attack.⁶ The delay in China-Mexico diplomacy was in no way due to a lack of effort or forethought on the part of Romero, who had distinguished himself as an astute observer of the mid-nineteenth-century world. The tireless immigration advocate could never, however, have anticipated the dynamic of overlapping empire-states and nation-states that would both produce and delay the very scope and manner of the arrival of Chinese into Mexico and its borderlands with the United States.

Opium Networks and Imperial Unrest

The complexities bearing on Romero's pursuit of opening up Mexico to Chinese immigration were a reaction to and emblematic of sweeping transformations occurring at the global, national, and local levels in the Pacific world at that time. Within South China and on its adjacent seas, the trading of British commodities and Spanish silver for South Asian opium established durable systems of illegal drug trafficking in the early nineteenth century. Decades later, these systems would evolve into trans-Pacific migration networks to facilitate the labor needs of transitioning imperial and national economies. After the 1820s, as Chinese, British, and American smugglers solidified mutually trusting relationships, the opium trade developed into a tightly organized cartel, the strength of which lay in the structure of its business alliances. To move the drug efficiently and into local and international markets, small, independent opium syndicates formed strong connections with experienced ship captains, who in turn hired large crews of men to help transship opium. The highly organized network also relied on the latest innovations in maritime communication and shipping technology, which made the smuggling of opium from India to South China and into Western markets remarkably efficient. Schooners arrived from Bengal at Kumsing Moon off the coast of Macao in May or June to transfer chests

of "black-earth," "white-skin," and "red-skin" opium to Chinese intermediaries.⁷ Opium merchants then made their way into South China's inner harbors by collaborating with local sailors, who transported opium to their customers through the meandrous and narrow Canton Delta region using agile sampan ships. By late October, the selling and distribution of opium was complete. Schooners anchored at the harbor of Lintin, an island just north of Hong Kong, until late spring of the following year, when merchants and smugglers followed the same seasonal routine to acquire and sell opium.

Heu Kew, a subcensor in the Qing Military Department, described in frustration the scheming of opium cartels, which he was powerless to break: "The traitorous natives who sell the opium cannot altogether carry on the traffic with the foreign ships in their own persons. To purchase wholesale, there are brokers. To arrange the transactions, there are the Hong merchants. To take money and give orders to be carried to the receiving ships, that from them the drug may be obtained, there are resident barbarians. . . . And to ply to and fro for its conveyance, there are boats called 'fast-crabs.'" Within the taut, highly efficient organization of the trade, annual importations in opium rose gradually from two thousand chests in 1800, five thousand in 1820, and sixteen thousand in 1830, to twenty thousand chests in 1838.⁹

The robust trading networks impressed many, especially those who were profiting from the cartel, but the durability and forcefulness came at a high cost. The strength of the opium networks sowed deep enmity between Chinese natives and British interlopers. Choo Tsun, a member of the council of the Board of Rites, expressed a common viewpoint: "The natives of this place were at first . . . active. . . . But the people called Hung-maou [red-haired], came thither and . . . in introducing opium into this country, their purpose has been to weaken and enfeeble the Central Empire."¹⁰ Repeated bans, the burning of pyres of opium, and harsh penalties for merchants, smugglers, and users failed to end the trade. Whereas the interests of opium smugglers demanded bonds of common trust, the Qing and British officials harbored deep misgivings for one another. For lack of a diplomatic tradition on which to draw and for want of a middle ground on which to meet, the far-reaching evils of opium led to war, and the status quo in China gave way to British imperialism.

The spoils of the First Opium War, as codified in the Treaty of Nanking (1842), bestowed British control over the ports of Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Fuzhou (Foochow), Ningbo, and Shanghai, and later eleven others, including Shantou (Swatow) and Qiongsan.¹¹ The dealings of the British Empire with the Qing Dynasty proceeded from the conviction that the so-called treaty ports were, and should remain, bastions of unencumbered global exchange in order to benefit the Crown directly and the United States, Portugal, the Netherlands, Russia, France, and China obliquely (see Map 1.1). After the First Opium War in 1842, the emer-



MAP 1.1 China Treaty Ports and South China. Drawn by Erin Greb.

gence of Hong Kong and Canton as British-controlled treaty ports shifted commerce firmly into South China. Markets gradually reoriented southward from Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Wenzhou, while contraband trade in opium continued unabated.¹²

Aside from a small number of merchants who applied their management skills from the opium trade to emigration brokering, few Chinese benefited from the new economic configuration. Dislocation and poverty caused by continuous war and village strife constrained the lives of most Chinese. Hong Kong, which was ceded to the British Crown in 1842, quickly acquired a reputation for unfettered commerce and as a hub for opium trafficking.¹³ The colony's 21,514 inhabitants—mostly native Chinese and British merchants and their families—seemed well equipped to handle the turbulence of legal and illegal market exchange, until British and Qing authorities called Hong Kong's status as a duty-free zone into question. With piracy going nearly unchecked in and around the colony, legal trade languished while illicit exchange in opium flourished.

In nearby Canton, the opposite blueprint emerged. Merchants from around the globe descended on the Guangdong capital city to trade and receive goods, paying duties on both imported and exported items. *Hongs*—Chinese franchised merchants licensed by the Qing emperor to trade with Westerners—mixed and competed with the thirteen European and American commercial houses on China Street. As foreigners and *hongs* prospered, Chinese boat merchants suffered the inequities of the new trade regime, and some fell into medicating themselves with “poisonous liquors” in the hovels of adjacent Hog Lane.¹⁴

The terms of trade positioned the British Empire quite favorably in South China. British envoys worked alongside Qing customs officials to collect duties on imports and exports and to tender fines on wayward merchants. But as relations among Qing and British imperial authorities edged tentatively toward conciliation, efforts at accommodating post-war labor demands brought to bear old tensions from within and introduced fresh problems from without. Overpopulation, the shift to commercial agriculture, and export manufacturing displaced subsistence farmers from traditional landholdings. Cheaper British textiles drove Chinese clothmakers out of business, while many porters and warehouse employees lost their jobs when new treaty ports opened to export exchange.¹⁵

Ethnic violence and civil war exacerbated the changing economic regime in South China. Commencing in 1851, the Taiping Rebellion claimed more than twenty million lives by 1864, when Qing forces quashed the advocates of the “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.”¹⁶ During the same period, the so-called Red Turban Rebellion divided loyalties between the Qing and anti-dynastic Triad organizations in the Canton region.¹⁷ More than one

million Chinese lost their lives in battle, while the Qing army executed an additional seventy thousand Red Turban sympathizers. To make matters worse, ethnic tensions between the Hakka minority and the Punti majority plagued the Guangdong districts of Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping, and Enping, known collectively as *Siyi* or the Four Districts. In 1855, Hakka claims to scarce arable lands set off a twelve-year clan war with *Siyi* residents, and thousands more Chinese died.¹⁸ British imperial control, ethnic violence, and the durability of the opium trade combined to create a national landscape in which migration became an ever-greater probability. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese would take up this path, voluntarily or not.

Between Slavery and Freedom: Migration Networks and Coolieism

The collision of the British Empire and the Qing Dynasty yielded to new arrangements of power that remade South China into a locus of transoceanic migration. The forces of rapidly shifting empire-states and nation-states and their transitioning economies configured transoceanic networks that were initially created from the early to mid-nineteenth century opium trade. In a little less than a decade, opium transportation networks matured to accommodate both the imperial appetite for semi-free labor and the demand for wage labor on the part of nation-states. After the British ended the African slave trade in 1807 and abolished the use of slavery in its colonies in 1833, plantation owners turned to Chinese and South Asian contract laborers.¹⁹ The switch to Chinese laborers supported the abolitionist claims of British authorities, and this strategy seemed to appease antislavery advocates. But the British commitment to rid its colonies of any form of slavery yielded to pressure from the Caribbean planter classes—mostly owners of large sugarcane plantations—to retain additional labor that was both cheap and tractable. Planters' profits fell precipitously after the so-called free-trade movement (1846–1849) equalized duties on foreign and colonial sugar. To restore the profitability of Caribbean sugar, British authorities turned to so-called coolie labor. The term *coolie* derived from the Urdu word *qulī*, meaning “day laborer.” By the eighteenth century, the term came to be synonymous with cheap South Asian and Chinese labor, whether imported or hired locally. However, by the mid- to late nineteenth century, *coolie* came to be understood as an indentured laborer, especially one who worked on a plantation.²⁰ Coolie labor squared the needs of planters for tractable, low-cost labor with the conflicting demands of the British public for the complete abolition of slavery. The Spanish branch of this planter class, compelled less by humani-

tarian dictates than by a desire for profits in sugar, cotton, and guano (fertilizer made from bird droppings), exploited the British coolie network by adding Chinese to their existing force of African slaves.²¹

Both the British system and the Spanish system worked in tandem with private individuals who held no national or imperial allegiances. The recruitment and transportation of coolies and the selling of contracts were in the hands of entrepreneurs or private firms operating within the logic of slave societies as French, American, Portuguese, Cuban, Peruvian, and British ship owners organized the coolie trade from both treaty and non-treaty ports.²² At Macao, Amoy, Swatow, Canton, and Hong Kong, migrant firms sold coolie contracts to Cuban and Peruvian planters at a far lower price than the cost of African slaves.²³

From the beginning of the coolie trade, Chinese migrants were left virtually unprotected. The Crown's first secretary of state for the Colonies, Lord Edward Stanley, sought to guard against possible abuses. He believed that "the apprehensions [of the coolie trade] may be removed by increased vigilance and new precautions."²⁴ These precautions included Qing regulation of emigration, but this was not a realistic possibility given the centuries-long ban on emigration from China. Qing authorities, and the Ming before them, steadfastly maintained the *hai jin*, a prohibition on overseas travel.²⁵ The Manchus, after their conquest of China in 1644, continued to guard against outside influences first by banning foreign trade, and later, by reinforcing their prohibition on emigration. Dynastic authorities perceived Chinese abroad as traitors (*hanjian*), deserters, rebels, and conspirators who had rejected their filial duties. When, after 1847, several thousand Chinese began departing for the Americas under dubious circumstances, the *hai jin* continued to be enforced, leaving émigrés vulnerable to abuse at points of procurement and transit and while under contract abroad.

Despite Lord Stanley's optimism, authorities paid no real attention to labor conditions or to the techniques of labor procurement.²⁶ At the same time, Qing officials refused to regulate emigration, because doing so would sanction it as permissible. When Lord Stanley authorized the coolie trade, the Qing approach to emigration did not figure into the new British scheme. This union of well-meaning but misplaced intentions and regulatory incompetence on the part of the British had disastrous results: the emergence of unfettered and privatized migration networks.

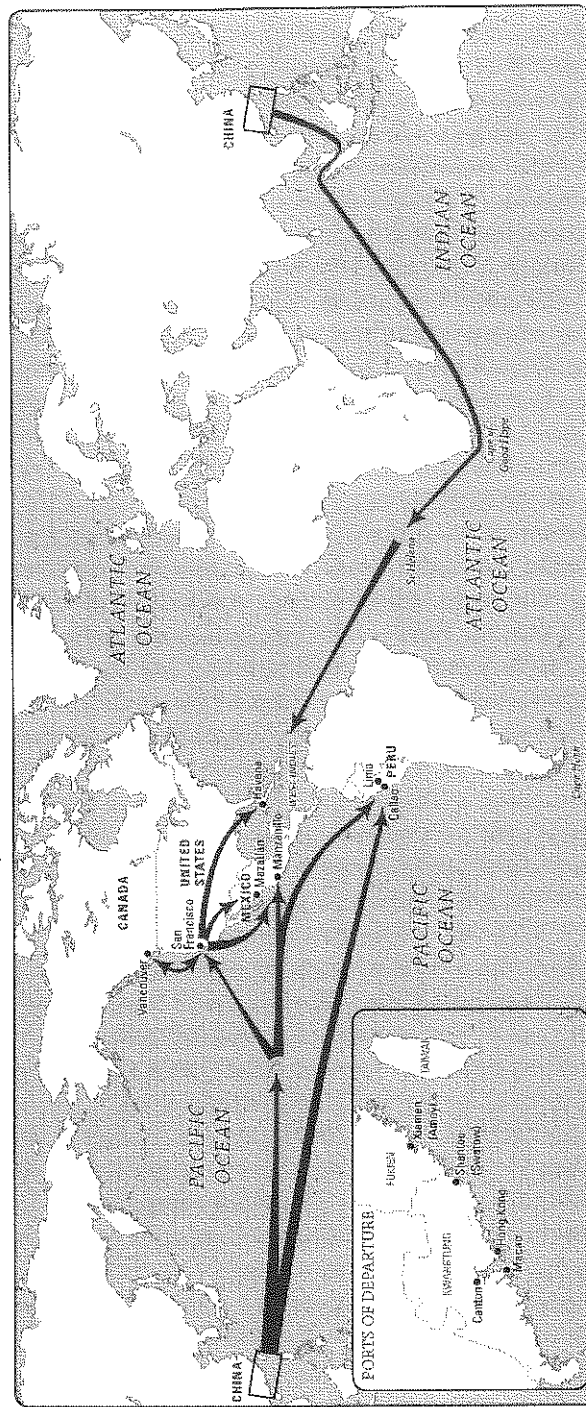
With neither the Qing nor the British as regulators of emigration, Chinese immigrants suffered from the whims and needs of empire-states accustomed to slavery. Immigrant brokers, unscrupulous imperial consuls, and Chinese migrant *hongs* emerged as a motley crew of emigration overseers. Planters, labor contractors, and recruiters composed the main links, creating new sorts of bonds. Within South China, private shipping firms from the United

States and Europe, along with Chinese migrant *hongs*, organized the recruitment and transportation of Chinese laborers, whether free wage workers or indentured servants. Operations stretched across the Pacific Ocean and were enmeshed with the enterprises of Spanish and British planters and American railroad and mining companies, or linked to the designs of smugglers' rings and kinship associations throughout the Americas (see Map 1.2).

When in need of laborers, British and Spanish planters, for example, drew on contractors who had the sea-faring experiences and financial wherewithal to transport thousands of Chinese migrants across the Pacific Ocean. Still, they needed help. On the ground in South China, labor contractors obtained the services of recruiters or coolie brokers, "men of the lowest possible character . . . to supply the wants of the merchants."²⁷ These brokers resorted to coercion, fraud, and trickery. When traffic was slow, coolie brokers often paid unemployed Chinese to deceive neighbors and acquaintances into the indenture.

Such deceptive practices also characterized the procurement of ostensibly free labor under the credit-ticket system, sometimes referred to as the bargain-ticket system. In this manner of labor procurement, emigrants who could not afford passage borrowed transportation expenses from sponsoring agents. Circulars portended in image and in scrawled Chinese the wealth to be had overseas, including opportunities in the United States and Mexico. "Laborers are wanted in the land of California," announced coolie broker Ah Lung. "Great works to be done there, good houses, plenty of food." Just as labor recruiters promoted California in 1868, so they boosted Mexico as early as 1870. Coolie broker Clang Wo wrote, "China colony for Mexico. All get rich there, have land. Make first year \$400; next year \$1,000. Have quick more money than mandarins. Plenty good rice and vegetables cheap. Nice ship, no sickness, plenty of room."²⁸ Once landed, emigrants repaid auxiliary overseers the cost of passage from wages earned, at least in theory. Villages in China also sponsored the emigration of their members. Under this system, a designated kinsman traveled with the emigrants and bore responsibility for collecting payments and interest for transportation expenses. By the 1870s, approximately 49,277 Chinese were listed as California residents. Ostensibly all were free wage laborers, and a few thousand more found their way to Idaho, Oregon, Utah, and Nevada.²⁹

Yet not all was as it appeared. In describing the procurement of laborers for California under the bargain-ticket system, W. Caine, the British lieutenant governor at Hong Kong, detailed similar features of the contract labor system. "A passage-broker (not unfrequently [sic] a man of straw who is not to be found a few hours after the vessel leaves) sends out his crimps to the mainland, and these on the payment of about five dollars as bargain money. [He] gives to each candidate for shipment a bargain-ticket,



MAP 1.2 Chinese Migration into the Americas, the Mid-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries. Drawn by Erin Greb.

sealed with the seal of the broker."³⁰ The expectation of quick wealth on the part of Chinese gold rush miners and railroad workers met the reality of hardship, exploitation, and increasing debt obligation, especially among those unable to repay transportation costs to migrant agents. In theory, coolies, who operated under the contract labor system, stood in contrast to wage laborers, who operated under the credit-ticket system. In practice, these distinctions were blurred.

The passage of both free and contract laborers into the Americas was organized by a system of networks employing coercive tactics at the level of acquiring workers. The networks, although seemingly structured for diametrically different types of labor—one operating under the calculus of free labor in nation-states and the other under the logic of slavery in colonies of empire-states—became conflated with one another, with the subsequent crucial consequence that the perception of Chinese labor in Mexico and the United States eventually became that of coolies, not free laborers. Regardless of the actual or intended status of any given group of Chinese workers in any given locale, unscrupulous actions served to tilt the balance and to shift public perceptions toward the notion that all such workers were coolies.

Under pressure from both Caribbean planters and American capitalists (and later, Mexican state-makers), the dualism of free and unfree was undermined in several early instances of deceptive and coercive labor procurement. The *Robert Bowne* incident constituted the first significant example. On March 21, 1852, the *Robert Bowne* left Amoy in South China, ostensibly bound for San Francisco. As it turned out, the four hundred Chinese migrants on board were not destined for San Francisco, nor had they been obtained for the purposes of wage work; rather, they were meant to toil as coolies in Peru's infamous guano islands. Outrage took hold after the news broke of the coolies' actual fate and after the ship's captain, Lesley Bryson, supposedly as a matter of public hygiene, "cut off the tails of a very large number of Chinese" and scrubbed down his human cargo with "hard brooms."³¹ After nine days of cruelty, the coolies rose up against their captors and killed Bryson, two officers, and four crew members. Similar accounts of deception and mutiny on the British vessels *Lady Montague*, *Victory*, and *Susannah* were registered.³²

Extreme abuses at the point of procurement served further to fix attention on Chinese workers as coolies rather than as free laborers. John Bowing, British consul and diplomat in China (1850–1857), reporting from Amoy, witnessed hundreds of coolies corralled in barracks, or barracoons, "stripped naked, and stamped or painted with the letter C (California), P (Peru), or S (Sandwich Islands) on their breasts, according to the destination for which they were intended."³³ The abduction of Chinese

men and boys was rampant practice throughout South China port cities, and the barracoons—operated by British, Spanish, Portuguese, and American coolie traders—were filled with the victims of kidnapping schemes.

Tseen-a-koon, a vegetable farmer, was among those tricked into the trade by coolie brokers working for an American shipping company. Assured by an acquaintance that a job was to be had in Canton, Tseen-a-koon embarked on a passage boat and then a sampan to Honam Island, a gateway to Canton. Instead of landing in Canton as promised, the sampan continued to the deep-sea anchorage at Whampoa, where Tseen-a-koon was forced aboard a coolie broker's boat. Threatened with murder if he did not consent to the contract, the vegetable farmer remained confined on the ship for nearly a month with 250 other coolies until Chinese officials uncovered the ploy.³⁴

Most who were coerced into the barracoons for transportation to the Americas were less fortunate than Tseen-a-koon. Once abroad, Chinese laborers under the contract system were at the mercy of their plantation overseers or beholden to migrant agents, and a variety of strategies of labor control took hold. Typically, contracts ran eight years and pay remained atrociously low—approximately four pesos a month in the Spanish indenture and two dollars a month in the British indenture.³⁵ In a push for profits in British Guiana, planters retained control over indentures by attaching criminal sanctions to work discipline and by instituting a pass law system—a means of social control that originated in South Africa in the eighteenth century—marking South Asian coolies (of which there were 429,623) and Chinese coolies (of which there were 10,022) as veritable chattel. The labor conditions were equally treacherous in Peru, especially after the abolition of slavery in 1854. The newly installed Peruvian regime greatly benefited from the new nation's diverse agricultural economy, especially on its coastal isles, where Chinese painstakingly scraped dried guano from rocky surfaces of the Chinchas, Ballestas, and Guañape islands.³⁶

Just as in Peru, Chinese labor in Cuba was reduced to slavelike conditions. In Cuba, approximately 142,000 Chinese worked the sugar cane plantations to supplement an increasingly contraband trade in African slaves, although the manumission of slaves in Cuba did not occur until 1886.³⁷ When compared with the costs of African slaves, Chinese coolies were cheaper.³⁸ As they worked alongside African slaves, Chinese coolies rarely received adequate food, recourse for mistreatment, or pay. Owners usually afforded the Chinese a three-day respite during the Chinese New Year, but Sunday rest was rare. After 1860, a royal Spanish decree reinforced the servile status of coolies by further limiting the options of the Chinese to leave the island after meeting the terms of their contracts. Because previous ordinances guaranteeing Chinese a free passage to South China were eliminated by this decree, few actually had the resources to return home.³⁹ In the

absence of official state supervision, and through overwork and the forced renewal of contracts, Chinese and African slaves made Cuba the world's foremost producer of sugar by the mid-nineteenth century, far outdistancing competition in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Brazil.⁴⁰

In free labor markets, controversies swirled over the use of coolie labor and its abuses. With rumors running rampant about the severity of the Spanish indenture system, British authorities prompted an imperial mission to investigate instances of abuse, murder, and suicide among Cuba's Chinese. The *Cuba Commission Report*, an 1871 testimony, detailed the viciousness of worker brutality in the sugar cane plantations in the Spanish colony. Knowing about these abuses, the British government attempted to rein in renegade coolie ships by passing the Merchant Shipping Act of 1872. The act forbade emigrant passenger ships from proceeding to sea until cleared and certified by surveyors of the British Board of Trade.⁴¹ The United States also guarded against the Chinese indenture. By outlawing coolies, American politicians took steps to protect the working classes from the Chinese indenture, and as historian Moon-Ho Jung argues, to extirpate slavery from the American South.⁴² A Republican-dominated Congress, acting at the behest of the Lincoln administration's report on the Chinese indenture that confirmed the perniciousness of the trade and the failure of government regulation, proposed legislation to end U.S. involvement in the trade.⁴³ In outlining the terms of the Anti-Coolie Act of 1862, Congress prohibited Americans and foreigners residing in the United States from engaging in the importation of "subjects of China, known as 'coolies.'"⁴⁴ On the other hand, immigration of Chinese wage laborers was consistent with American notions of universal inclusion and free labor ideology. To extend these ideals into the Pacific world, the United States signed the Burlingame Treaty with Qing dynasty officials in 1868, further emphasizing the requisite that all Chinese heading toward and entering into the United States were free and voluntary immigrants. Immunities, exemptions, and privileges "enjoyed by subjects of the most favored nation" were also extended to the Chinese living in the United States.⁴⁵

Yet protection ostensibly provided in the Burlingame Treaty was more rhetoric than reality. Throughout the United States, Chinese laborers confronted exploitation and racially motivated violence with few safeguards in place. In the United States, the Chinese could expect no official defense as politicians and the working classes joined to cast them as coolies.⁴⁶ At the same time, Qing government officials continued to regard Chinese abroad as traitors to the dynasty and therefore did not protect them. As international condemnation gathered strength, the coolie trade—despite all the profit it garnered for planters and capitalists—grew increasingly untenable. British and American officials identified Macao, a Portuguese-controlled

port city, as the largest supplier of coolie labor to the Americas and lobbied for its closure. In countering the criticism, the Portuguese charged that Chinese coolies embarking from Macao were no different from those laborers boarding American and British ships from Hong Kong and Canton: all were workers under the contract system, some involuntarily so. In 1874, due mostly to pressure exerted by British and American diplomats, Macao was closed and, later, Amoy, effectively ending the trade in unfree laborers into Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴⁷ Migration of Chinese into the Americas continued, and by 1877 new diplomatic conventions between China and Spain abolished contract labor in Cuba and declared free the emigration of Chinese to any Spanish colony, even as such labor was shadowed by the stigma of coolieism.⁴⁸

Contrasts and Commonalities:

Chinese Immigration into the United States and Mexico

Even as the coolie trade was abolished in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United States and Mexico struggled to reconcile the need for Chinese immigrant labor with working-class hostilities in the former and racial anxieties in the latter. As would be the case in many other facets of their immigration policies, the two nations shared perspectives on Chinese immigration even as they diverged greatly in certain practices. Both were poised for considerable development, the pace of which depended in part on the labor available to them. Both were also explicit regarding the preferred racial makeup of their growing populations, with Mexico preferring European descent but begrudgingly allowing for Middle Eastern and Chinese immigrants, and the United States enforcing its Chinese exclusion laws. One critical difference, however, was the presence of a post-emancipation American working class that was active and vocal in protecting its livelihood from the threat of Chinese labor, and from politicians who, by virtue of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and its subsequent 1892 expansion, were inclined to accommodate that demand. By contrast, Mexico's need for a cheap, tractable labor force ultimately clashed with the racial ideals of the Porfirian intelligentsia. The resolution of that clash—a liberal immigration policy that tacitly held to the expectation that Chinese would provide labor to but not intermarry with Mexicans—proved infeasible. A primary factor in Mexico's inability to attract immigrants was the intended destination of those immigrants. Mexican officials hoped that Chinese would settle and work in the most remote regions of the country—its coasts and jungles. But there were virtually no transportation systems by which to convey workers and products, and would-be immigrants balked at settling in the most inhospitable regions of Mexico. One plan

after another failed to lure Chinese immigrants in sufficient numbers to provide the desired labor, a failure that left the country outside the orbit of trans-Pacific migration networks and ultimately delayed widespread immigration from China until the mid-1890s. Mexico's development would suffer for the delay. By the mid-1880s, no more than one thousand Chinese had found their way into Mexico. Conversely, trans-Pacific migration networks reached well into the United States, especially the Pacific states, where most Chinese settled. By the late 1880s, more than 105,000 Chinese had arrived in the United States, 75,132 in California alone.⁴⁹

The differing approaches to immigration in the United States and Mexico unfolded in an era ostensibly dedicated to using free labor, a commitment that would have profound consequences for Chinese immigration into the two nations. Although African slavery had been abolished in the United States in 1863 and in Mexico in 1829, considerable fear remained among American and Mexican officials and the U.S. working class with regard to Chinese labor.⁵⁰ In the United States, far more than in Mexico at that time, Chinese immigrants posed considerable competition for menial jobs as a highly exploitable, if not semi-free, labor force that employers tended to prefer to their own citizens. Yet employers escaped public criticism for their decisions, and the stigma of coolieism followed Chinese laborers wherever they arrived. In 1869, approximately 400 Chinese coolies from South China and 145 Chinese indentures from Cuba arrived in New Orleans.⁵¹ The infamy of coolieism surrounded their presence. Even in St. Louis, Missouri, arguments to exclude Chinese from U.S. shores were based on the assumption that "not one . . . came in an 'entirely voluntary' manner and in every respect [was] the Cooly [sic] type."⁵² Just before the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 at Promontory Point in Utah, many Chinese remained in the United States, settling in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain regions of the country. In California they constituted one-twelfth of the state's population and one-fifth of the workforce, whereas in other areas of the American Southwest and in the Pacific mountain states far fewer had arrived. The cant of coolieism was most vociferous in San Francisco, where the Chinese population increased from 2,719 in 1860 to 12,022 in 1870.⁵³ Benjamin E. Lloyd was just one of many observers to comment on the city's reliance on coolie labor. Writing in the mid-1870s, he observed, "The slavery that exists—its propagators being in San Francisco—is the system of 'contract labor' practiced by both Americans and Chinese. It may be liberty to the Chinaman . . . but it is slavery when construed in the spirit of justice."⁵⁴ Lloyd's comments were no doubt influenced by a massive influx of Chinese workers who had landed in California to labor on the transcontinental railroad for the Central Pacific Railroad Company in the previous decade, and by contin-

ued suspicions that newly arriving Chinese were also coolies. Reports that Chinese women were slaves were also pervasive. According to this commentary—much of it true—Chinese emigrant agents, conspiring with prostitution rings, received reimbursement for travel from the owners of the prostitutes—either wealthy individuals or members of a Chinese guild.⁵⁵

As small groups of Chinese came to reside in the Arizona Territory during the 1860s and early 1870s, stories comparable to those of other cities, that they were akin to slaves, also followed. Local residents viewed the Chinese with skepticism, but also layered their anti-Chinese rhetoric with criticism of mining owners. When, in the late 1870s, a crew of one hundred Chinese laborers arrived in the adjacent mining towns of Clifton and Morenci, Henry Lesinsky, the mining proprietor, was condemned by locals for his decision to use Chinese labor: "That shows the true character of the man, putting Chinese against American labor. Let it be remembered as a matter of Arizona history that one Mr. Lesinsky made the first importation of Chinese cheap slave labor into Arizona."⁵⁶ To most white residents in early territorial Arizona, Chinese were coolies who accepted "slave wages." They were not coworkers, small-shop owners, and potential settlers.

Despite these distinctions, by the end of the 1870s the Chinese had become objects of suspicion and racially charged commentary. Their growing population in the Arizona Territory, often as unskilled workers and modestly capitalized merchants and farmers, generated controversy over immigration and colonization projects and policies. Territorial boosters, keen for European-origin immigrants and white Americans, painted the barren landscape of Arizona as a modern-day oasis and extolled the qualities of pastoral and mineral resources and the open-air comforts of rural living.⁵⁷ To encourage white immigration even more aggressively, Arizona legislators created the office of commissioner of immigration in 1885. Among carrying out other responsibilities, the commissioner provided maps of stage routes and "emigrant roads" to direct immigrants from eastern states and Canada into the Territory, and pamphlets and circulars to advertise mining, farming, and agricultural projects.⁵⁸

For a decade, the immigrant population met the hopes and expectations of territorial boosters to attract European and white Americans. Alongside a large percentage of settlers originating primarily from New York, Ohio, and Texas, the foreign-born population of the Arizona Territory comprised a growing number of Europeans amid a majority of Mexicans from Sonora; in 1870, of the 5,809 persons listed as foreign-born white, 4,368 were born in Mexico and the second largest white foreign-born population (686 people) originated from Great Britain and Ireland.⁵⁹ In ten years the Territory's population increased dramatically, from 9,658 in 1870 to 40,440 in 1880. The most dramatic increase in population during this time occurred among the Chinese—from 20 in 1870 to 1,630 in 1880.⁶⁰ Migra-

tion from China was virtually unimpeded in the Arizona Territory, despite the stigma of coolieism that adjoined Chinese laborers.

To be sure, opposition against the Chinese influx took hold. In the estimation of James Chester Worthington, a resident of Tucson, Arizona, the Chinese figured dubiously among those who stood to benefit from the celebrated vision of the Arizona Territory. While corresponding with his brother Dan in 1880, Worthington addressed possible solutions to the Chinese arrival at a time when, in his estimation, "the Anti-Chinese feeling is much stronger here [than in San Francisco]." Yet he considered, among many possibilities, as a response to the recent influx of Chinese that they be enfranchised, asserting:

I have come to believe in restricting immigration from China, or obliging the Chinese to become citizens . . . and then making them stay and keep there [sic] money they earn in the country as all other foreign emigrants. I believe that the Chinese are better for servants and laborers than natural Americans, or even any Europeans and they would not make very bad citizens—[they] would always vote with their employers as they ought to do and against Dennis [sic] Kearny [sic] and his ilk—and so counteract the "sand lot man" influence. . . . I can't see any other remedy than to enfranchise the Chinese. . . .⁶¹

Worthington's remarks about Denis Kearney, leader of the Workingman's Party of California, reflected a persistent tension between workers and capitalists that underscored anti-Chinese campaigns throughout the United States, including the Arizona Territory. During "sand lot" rallies, Kearney's fiery speeches and evocation of the Party's slogan, "The Chinese Must Go!" roused thousands of followers to demonize Chinese laborers, despite his own ambivalence toward the working class.⁶² Kearney, in keeping with his groundless reputation as the "workingman's friend," cried out for the expulsion of monopolists, industrialists, and Chinese alike, but never explicitly advocated a laborers' platform for the party.⁶³ Despite Kearney's faults and Worthington's considerable dislike for the Irish-born party leader, the Tucson resident eventually retreated from earlier consideration to enfranchise the Chinese. Worthington grew more skeptical about the benefits of Chinese naturalization, instead adopting a common view that the Chinese were, at best, competitive with white labor and, at worst, "slaves, sent over on speculation by contracts made between their masters and the 6 Cos."⁶⁴ By "6 Cos" Worthington meant the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, commonly known as the Six Companies, a San Francisco-based political organization formed by wealthy merchants from the Ning Yuen, Hop Wo, Kong Chow, Yeung Wo, Sam Yup, and Yan Wo *huigan* or district associations. The Six Companies assisted the Chinese community by arbitrating disputes among individuals and by representing the community's interests to both the U.S. and Chinese governments.

Worthington's approach was less rancorous than that of ardent exclusionists. Despite his views that the Chinese made for better servants than "natural" Americans or Europeans, Worthington initially preferred to grant them citizenship, whereas others advocated for a complete restrictionist platform. Regardless of one's place on the spectrum—to make Chinese U.S. citizens or exclude them altogether—Worthington's rhetoric of coolieism was a sign of the times in the United States. Such discourse underscored a virulent anti-Chinese perspective that culminated in the passage in 1882 of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred laborers from entering the United States for ten years.⁶⁵ For the first time, certain classes and races of immigrants were excluded by federal legislation. Although Chinese merchants, diplomats, teachers, travelers, and students were permitted entry, they would face considerably greater difficulty ten years later when the exclusion law was amended to add further restrictions. After the passage of the Geary Act in 1892, even those Chinese who held exemption status had to provide documentation from the Chinese government to certify that they were not laborers.

Yet as the United States enacted legislation to restrict the entry of Chinese, the need for tractable labor south of the U.S. border encouraged liberal immigration laws, although the international controversy over indentured servitude and free labor seemed not to instruct Mexican views on Chinese immigration directly. In objecting to Mexican officials'—mainly Romero's—original plan to attract Chinese into the country, nary a word was mentioned by the Mexico City press or by the general public about the cries of coolieism emanating from San Francisco and Louisiana, or about the brutal treatment of contract laborers in Peru or Cuba. Mexicans instead derived their objections to Chinese immigration from indirect experience with coolieism and couched these objections mostly in terms of miscegenation, the genetic mixing of races.⁶⁶ "[The Chinese] have perverse tendencies," warned the editors of the *Gaceta Internacional*, a Mexico City newspaper. "Any race mixture like those in Cuba and Peru will produce a generation [in Mexico] whose quality we will have to leave to the judgment of ethnographers."⁶⁷ Similar characterizations of the Chinese were to be found in *La Libertad* and *El Monitor Republicano*, also Mexico City newspapers. The latter newspaper claimed that because Chinese would come to Mexico as single men, miscegenation—and by extension, race contamination—would inevitably ensue. The editors of *La Libertad* extolled the unspoiled beauty of the Mexican Indian that stood to be blemished by degenerate Chinese.⁶⁸ Alberto Mertes, writing for *El Monitor Republicano*, was brutal. He cast the Chinese as "indolent, cruel, and arrogant" while asserting that Mexico did not stand to benefit from these "usurious immigrants."⁶⁹

The Mexican government was particularly interested in luring European immigrants from abroad, because the *científicos*, Porfirio Díaz's brain trust, believed that the Chinese were racially unfit for intermarriage and that the Mexican peasant was inherently incapable of building and participating in a modern, industrial society. The *científicos* saw European immigrants, especially those who practiced Roman Catholicism, as ideal.⁷⁰ Indigenous peoples, already identified as the bane of Mexico, could hardly be entrusted with such lofty aspirations. "For only European blood can keep the level of civilization . . . from sinking," exhorted Social Darwinist and leading *científico* Justo Sierra.⁷¹ In the view of the Mexican intelligentsia, nothing short of an influx of European immigrants could jump-start Mexico's stalled journey toward industrial development. While the *científicos* gushed over the preeminence of the European immigrant, Vicente Riva Palacio, Mexico's minister of development, kept prospects realistic, reminding Porfirian intellectuals that whereas most Mexicans remained unaccustomed to the lifestyles of people in advanced countries, Europeans knew well the living standards of most Mexicans—they were *peones* (landless ranch hands), laborers, and farmers. In Palacio's estimation, Europeans would inevitably reject the lifestyle of the Mexican, wanting instead to settle in urban areas amid transportation networks and cultural centers.⁷²

Racial anxieties, however, were not the sole factor holding Chinese immigration in check. Accompanying Mexico's fears about miscegenation were its failed colonization and immigration schemes of the mid-nineteenth century, which left the country outside trans-Pacific migration networks. The project of Jacob P. Leese of the San Francisco-based Lower California Company (LCC), for example, failed due to a lack of interested colonists. Baja California's vast potential in commercial fishing, mining, and agriculture seemed to offer an ideal opportunity for would-be colonists. In 1863, the Mexican government granted Leese more than 45,000 square miles of land on the peninsula, including the coastline, for \$100,000 in gold bullion and the promise that Leese would populate Baja California with colonists. Of particular value in Mexico's charter with Leese were the generous terms guaranteeing to the company's colonists, regardless of race, the same civil and political rights as those enjoyed by Mexicans. Leese and his colonists were granted autonomy from the Mexican government as the LCC was permitted "quasi-government powers" to establish and govern municipalities and to raise taxes.⁷³ Chinese settlers were at the center of Leese's scheme, but because the San Francisco-based businessman could not raise enough funds to charter steamers from China to Mexico, no Chinese arrived in Baja California under the LCC, and those few immigrants who did undertake the voyage had abandoned the operation by 1871. Over the next few years, only a few hundred Chinese immigrants trickled into

Mexico, certainly not enough to meet labor demands for agricultural and industrial projects. Other efforts to attract colonists to Mexico met with longstanding failure, and with the exception of colonies of Russians and European Jews in Baja California, greater opportunities pulled immigrants of European descent into the United States, even though Mexican immigration laws and colonization projects were much more generous than those of its northern neighbor.⁷⁴ More broadly speaking, refusal by most Arabs, Egyptians, African Americans, former confederate soldiers, Chinese, and Europeans to colonize Mexico's far-flung regions dampened even the most enthusiastic proponents of the Mexican liberal cause.⁷⁵

That few immigrants of the Porfirian ideal actually settled in Mexico sharply modified the nation's stance on immigration. In tacit recognition of Mexico's difficulty in attracting newcomers to its shores, some *científicos* became, out of necessity, less selective when it came to accepting menial laborers. By the late 1870s, according to historian Moisés González Navarro, "the positivists [*científicos*] had no preference when it came to peones. They were interested not in the origin but in the efficacy of the labor. . . . [They] omitted all racial and aesthetic considerations, and noted only economic criteria."⁷⁶ Taking advantage of the changing political winds among the Porfirian intelligentsia, Romero persuaded a reluctant Mexican Congress to accept Chinese immigration, but as would often be the case, these projects had few tangible results.

Without well-established migration networks that had otherwise channeled thousands of Chinese laborers into the Pacific Americas, Mexico's colonization and immigration projects stood to fail. But in 1874, Mexican officials took steps to place their country within the orbit of trans-Pacific migration networks even as they held deep apprehension about Chinese laborers. Under contract with the Mexican government, the New York-based Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC) established northward passage routes from Panama to San Francisco via Acapulco, and southward travel from San Francisco to Panama via Cabo San Lucas, Salina Cruz, Mazatlán, and Acapulco.⁷⁷ Despite these routes and Mexico's agreement with the PMSC, the pursuit of Chinese immigration did not begin in earnest until a decade later, in 1884, when PMSC steamers began making regular trips from Acapulco to Hong Kong via Honolulu and Yokohama, Japan. For each voyage, the PMSC received \$17,000 from the Mexican government (approximately \$62,900 in 2012 terms) to transport up to one thousand Chinese laborers into Mexico and to trade coffee, sugar, and tobacco for silks and tea. Potentially, the most lucrative aspect of the PMSC was procuring Chinese labor. After the PMSC received its official subsidy, the shipping company would collect additional compensation of thirty-five pesos per Chinese worker. At the same time, and under the same contract,

Mexico offered PMSC sixty-five pesos per European worker.⁷⁸ Although the contract did not specify where the new arrivals would toil, their most likely duty would have been to work on the Tehuantepec railroad line.

But this scheme for Chinese immigration never got off the ground. (The European scheme also failed.) In fact, the PMSC lost money. When *Mount Lebanon*, a PMSC-owned steamer tried to set off for Acapulco from Hong Kong with six hundred Chinese laborers on board, British officials did not permit the steamer to leave the harbor, in the belief that once the Chinese landed in Mexico, they would have no legal recourse in the slave-like conditions that awaited them. Ignacio Mariscal, who at the time was in London negotiating the resumption of diplomatic relations with Great Britain, reminded British officials that slavery had long been abolished in Mexico and, because of this, there would be no reason to prohibit the emigration of Chinese to Mexico. The British nonetheless refused the diplomat's appeal. Moreover, according to PMSC attorney Theodore Schneider, British government officials would continue to prohibit Chinese emigration until they were satisfied that Chinese migrants were protected from abuse.⁷⁹ At first Schneider thought that the order to block the landing of the *Mount Lebanon* was a simple mistake. When this proved not to be the case, it became clear to Schneider that British officials were unwilling to risk putting the welfare of Chinese laborers into the hands of a nation that did not enjoy diplomatic relations with Great Britain or China. Moreover, without an official treaty between China and Mexico, the British objected to Chinese emigration and would not support emigration to Mexico until such a treaty was accorded.⁸⁰

The British put forward a possible solution to the impasse. Spenser St. John, the British representative to Mexico, proposed to José Fernández of the Ministry of Foreign Relations (SRE) that the protection of Chinese laborers in Mexico should fall to the British. In making his recommendation, St. John avoided any direct reference to labor conditions that the Chinese could encounter in Mexico, and instead extolled the necessity of Chinese labor for Mexican development.⁸¹ St. John contended: "I cannot but think that it is of the very highest importance to the prosperity of the Mexican State . . . that Chinese immigrants should be encouraged to settle there, and that the acceptance of this . . . proposal made on behalf of China, will enable the Mexican Company to procure an excellent class of labourers. . . . No people can give a better revenue to a government than the Chinamen."⁸² But with equal significance, St. John also pointed to the necessity of having in place some diplomatic recourse for Chinese workers and the Qing government if abuses were to occur.⁸³

Mexican officials offered a counterproposal that China appoint representatives to oversee its subjects in Mexico rather than allow the British to represent them, an option that would not compromise Mexico's future dip-

lomatic relationship with Great Britain.⁸⁴ China turned down this proposition and insisted that the British stand as official overseers of Chinese in Mexico. The stalemate produced frustration among Mexican, Qing, and British diplomats. A compromise was finally reached when Schneider threatened to abandon his agreement with Mexico for lack of international cooperation. Mexico responded to the PMSC agent's latest gambit by accepting the "good offices of England," and rejected the absolute British protection of Chinese in Mexico.⁸⁵ After it was finally agreed that the British government would serve as the unofficial advocate of Chinese in Mexico, treaty talks began in earnest in July 1885. From the beginning, negotiations languished in miscommunication, misunderstanding, and frustration. Díaz accommodated China's request to negotiate a treaty through their only North American legation, which was located in Washington, DC, because appointing one for Mexico stood to delay the process further. But as it turned out, the negotiations would encounter seemingly innumerable obstacles anyway.

When Romero's diplomatic counterpart, Chinese Minister Cheng Tsao Ju, fell ill, he was replaced by Chang Yen Hoon, who was apparently not prepared to broker a treaty with Mexico. The sudden turnabout caught Romero off guard. Until a commission was convened to aid in the process, Chang contended that he could do very little to instigate negotiations.⁸⁶ Chinese and Mexican diplomats stalled talks for another year, only to be stymied yet again when talks resumed. Chang raised apprehensions that Romero believed had been resolved in reaching good-office protection for Chinese workers two years prior. Romero dealt steadily and patiently with each concern raised by Chang, reiterating that Chinese workers would receive protection against possible abuse and that the location of treaty talks in Washington, DC, favored no country over the other. Chang, after receiving Romero's correspondence in December 1887, was replaced by Tsui Kwo Yin, and for five more years the stalemate continued.⁸⁷

Some progress was made after China recommenced communication with Mexico in 1893, but it would take an additional six years for the two countries to come to an official agreement. Chinese migration, however, was not completely thwarted by the lack of an official treaty between Mexico and the Qing government or by the enforcement of U. S. exclusion laws beginning in 1882. Generous opportunities to naturalize as Mexican citizens and to own land fostered a small but continuous stream of migrants from China, despite the lack of official protection. In the three years leading up to official Mexico-Qing diplomacy, more than 4,100 Chinese arrived in Mexico, lured mostly by the Colonization Law of 1883 and the Law of Alienage and Naturalization (*Ley de extranjería y naturalización*) of 1886.⁸⁸ The new immigration laws structured the duties of the newly created Ministry of Development (*Ministerio de*

Fomento), in which Mexican officials supervised immigration and oversaw all modernization and development projects throughout the nation. Generous incentives were granted to immigrants seeking to colonize Mexico, and there were no limits on the location of settlements or the number of immigrants who could enter the country. The only restriction that the Colonization Law of 1883 made was for Mexico's island territories. There, settlers could not exceed 50 percent of the islands' population.⁸⁹ Foreigners residing in Mexico for more than six months became immigrants, and immigrants were eligible for naturalization if they remained for an additional two years.⁹⁰

These efforts worked well, and the Porfirian regime considered Chinese immigration a success. To foster progress, Díaz lured foreign investors with promises of profits, and immigrants with favorable circumstances of opportunity. The Mexican approach ran counter to the immigration policies of the United States, which had barred the entry of Chinese laborers. Furthermore, China, until 1893, continued to enforce the *hai jin*, even though many thousands had returned home from abroad, and in so doing risked their lives. Repatriation occurred only when imperial authorities realized the value to their nearly bankrupt regime of remittances from overseas Chinese.⁹¹ Mexico's open immigration policies were in direct contrast to those adopted in both China and the United States, a divergence that would yield considerable results for the Chinese in Mexico. There, civil law granted them Mexican citizenship, with rights equal to those of Mexicans.

In 1899, one year after the death of Romero, China and Mexico formalized relations with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation (*Tratado de Amistad, Comercio, y Navegación*) in Washington, DC, where the only Chinese legation in North America was instituted.⁹² The most vivid outcome of this diplomacy was its support for Chinese immigration to Mexico. Treaty provisions stipulated free and voluntary movement between nations, and assigned civil rights and privileges to émigrés.⁹³ China and Mexico also enjoyed most-favored-nation status and were accorded "perpetual, firm, and sincere friendship . . . between their respective citizens and subjects."⁹⁴ The treaty seemed agreeable enough, but Mexico tipped the political scales in its favor by negotiating protection for Mexican nationals charged with crimes in China. Mexicans in China suspected of criminal activity were to be held at the Mexican Consulate in Beijing, whereas justice for Chinese in Mexico was to be vetted in Mexican courts and among Mexican government officials.⁹⁵ But if the aim of the treaty, which China and Mexico took more than twenty-five years to ratify, was to equalize relations and secure equal political rights for Mexican and Chinese subjects, the actual outcome would later have dubious results.

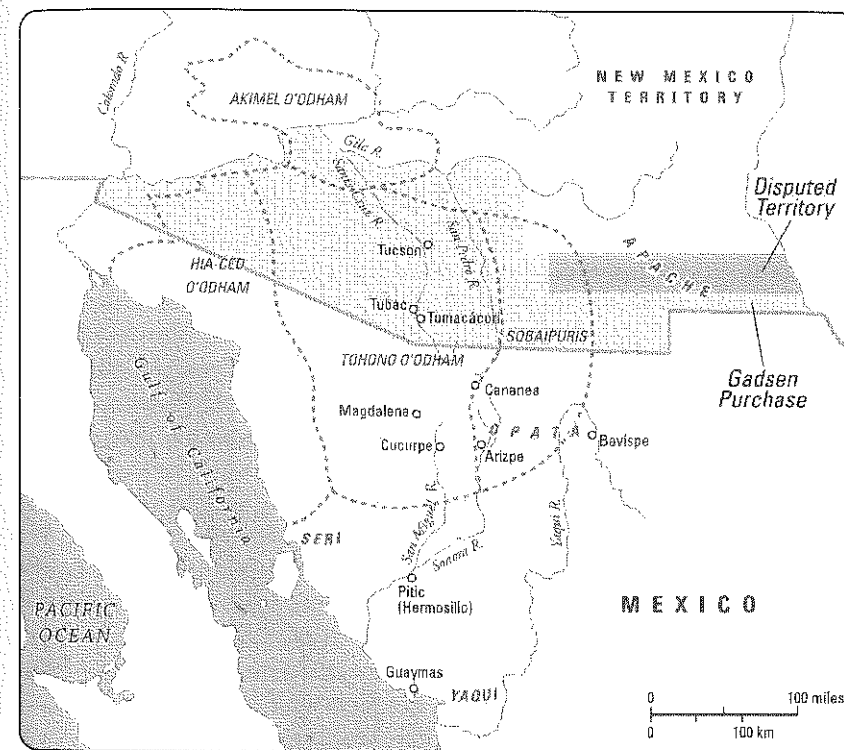
The treaty immediately paid off in terms of Mexico's immigration goals, but the agreement proved to be a rather flimsy safeguard against exploitation. Chinese in Tampico and Veracruz, try as they might to escape the trappings of coolieism, endured slavlike conditions, poor pay, and a lack of food while building railroads and harvesting henequen. Some Chinese laborers left the port of Hong Kong believing they would land in Victoria, British Columbia, to work in canneries or fisheries but instead found themselves working for the *Ferrocarril Nacional de Tehuantepec* (National Railroad of Tehuantepec) at the San Luis Potosí–Tampico line. Construction of the railroad, which would run from the Atlantic Ocean at Coatzacoalcas, Veracruz, to the Pacific coast at Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, was completed in 1907 at the expense of the Chinese. An official petition to Mexican government officials from 480 Chinese in Tampico revealed a conspiracy to kidnap laborers through deception, fraud, and physical coercion. Workers claimed that the On Wo Company was principally to blame for their condition by deducting twenty pesos from their monthly earnings of twenty-six pesos for food and clothing and exposing them to the quick whip of overseer Ma Chok. "We endured all types of hardship," a laborer revealed, "without raising our eyes."⁹⁶ Mexican officials responded that fines would be levied against the railroad company but if workers wanted further justice, they would have to adjudicate their cases in the Mexican court system. During the same period, the Chinese withstood harsh working conditions in the henequen fields of the Yucatán, spurring outrage from Chinese officials but almost no protective action from the Mexican government.

Despite numerous other complaints directed against planters and recruiters, and the cavalier responses of the Díaz regime, Chinese immigration into Mexico was deemed to be a plausible immigrant project. Chinese laborers, after all, conformed to Porfirian development goals of linking people to markets and once-distant places with the backing of foreign capital. If the Díaz regime measured success as Chinese laborers building railroads or harvesting crops and then departing for home, then what transpired in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands at the turn of the twentieth century would place the dictator's liberal immigration policies in doubt.

Destabilized Nations and the Chinese Diaspora at the Border

By the time China and Mexico formalized relations in 1899, Chinese migrants had already arrived in Mexico, mostly in the northern states. By 1900, Sonora was home to the largest Chinese population in Mexico, with more than 850 settlers. Contrary to what Mexican officials had antic-

ipated and desired, many Chinese came not to labor but to set up shop, cross into the United States, or both. In theory, the U.S. southern boundary may have been closed to Chinese immigration, but in actuality, the Chinese, occupying a range of positions between Mexican citizen, national, sojourner, and merchant-laborer, were uniquely poised to cross into the United States almost unfettered. The various statuses amassed by Chinese border crossers, however, were not the most significant outcomes of their experience, although the myriad of options helped them mediate immigration bureaucracies and combat the notion that they were coolies. Of greater impact was the trans-Pacific Chinese migration networks that converged with an existing borderlands society long defined as a place of fluid movement and political autonomy. Persistent movements of indigenous peoples in Sonora, in conjunction with the border crossings of Chinese migrants beginning in the late nineteenth century, destabilized national projects at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (see Map 1.3).



MAP 1.3 Arizona and Sonora Borderlands, Circa 1854. Drawn by Erin Greb.

The state-building projects of the Spanish Crown and, later, of the United States and Mexico, were not clear-cut undertakings in the sense that boundaries were drawn, sovereignty was recognized, and subjects were held in allegiance. From the earliest days of colonial intrusion to the last decades of the nineteenth century, the tempo of resistant adaptation—defined by physical mobility and the reconstitution of indigenous communities—allowed native peoples to preserve a strong sense of ethnic space even as confrontations with other frontier peoples over land, water, and labor continually challenged their survival. Physical mobility reworked customary patterns of territory and language, while bonds of marriage, lineage, and kinship unified native communities among the Eudeve, Opata, Tohono O'odham, Seris, Sobapuri, and Yaqui, the most common wandering peoples (*naciones errantes*) of the borderlands landscape.⁹⁷ Thus, when Spanish explorers initially confronted native peoples in the early 1600s, they witnessed a complicated cultural terrain of shifting ethnic and territorial boundaries that withstood some of the more exigent demands of colonialism. Under Spanish rule, the *naciones errantes* maintained access to communal plots by brokering compromises over labor availability and the use of land that sustained the needs of the Crown for surplus production. Simultaneously, these arrangements preserved native peoples' time-honored seasonal migrations to *aldeas* (compact semi-sedentary villages) or *rancherías* (scattered shifting settlements) in the Sonoran piedmont. By returning to geographies of origin, native peoples continued centuries-long customs while buffering mission settlements from Indian incursions. Such practices—a dual process that historian Cynthia Radding calls “fragmentation and nucleation”—sustained the birth and rebirth of indigenous cultures amid colossal restructurings of government bureaucracies and provincial and state boundaries.⁹⁸

The fluid movements of indigenous peoples persisted well into the mid-nineteenth century. Because of this, when Mexican and American state-builders sought to transform the Arizona and Sonora landscapes into national borderlands, they initially wielded faint power to do so. Indigenous peoples steadily undermined the nation-making project on both sides of the border, a trend that was also intensified by shifting political currents from without. Yaqui and Mayo collaboration with Sonoran centralist Manuel María Gándara in the 1830s and 1840s, and Opata and Yaqui cooperation with French magistrates in the 1850s and 1860s, made clear a deep enmity toward the liberalizing schemes of Sonoran federalists. Other efforts impeded state-building enterprises as well. The geographic dislocation and near bankruptcy caused by the Mexican American War (1846–1848) and by Apache raiding had further destabilized the state. A brief interlude of solidity and calm, achieved only because of Mexico's postwar

financial crisis, carved out Sonora's present-day boundaries with Arizona as south of the Gila and Mesilla Rivers.⁹⁹

After the Gadsden Purchase, if one discerned a sense of nationhood at the Arizona-Sonora borderlands, it was indeed an unstable fiction. Mexican and American efforts to reappropriate land and remake indigenous peoples into exemplars of the new social order produced dubious results, due in large part to the persistence of kinship networks held together by *indios* (indigenous peoples) and *mestizos*.¹⁰⁰ For indigenous peoples, kinship lines, whether matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral, structured familial relations and spiritual practices on both sides of the border. Mexican kinship networks served a similar purpose as native systems, with the exception that the basis of familial and community arrangements in Mexico was almost always patriarchal. Kinship networks elaborated cultural and economic exchange and were not severely weakened by market forces in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ Among indigenous peoples and Mexican *fronterizos*, kinship ties and the identities they engendered blurred a sense of national belonging even as European Americans came to reside in the region in greater numbers at the turn of the twentieth century. Society was constructed not from totalizing ethnic identities, but rather from interchangeable political, cultural, and kinship communities that had distinguished these borderlands from greater Mexico and the United States, as a more racially diverse, more politically fluid, and proportionately less settled region.

Within those cultures, Mexican and indigenous peoples had already rejected rigid and bounded concepts of nationhood. It would come as no surprise, then, that the existing fluidity of the borderlands, when combined with trans-Pacific migration networks, likewise sustained cross-national movements through Arizona and Sonora. The concept of the Chinese diaspora—already intricate by virtue of its multiple political and physical geographies—was rendered all the more complex by the myriad factors shaping its structure and development at the borderlands. Chinese diasporic communities, whether in Mexico or in the United States, embodied the experiences of individuals and families who left their homelands to settle in new regions where identities were both reaffirmed and remade. Just as they brought their culture with them, the Chinese were equally transformed in turn by the culture they encountered in the borderlands. In the process, they became *fronterizos*—Chinese Mexicans.

The interlacing movements and linkages that kept borders porous and identities fluid would also serve to complicate Matías Romero's vision for Chinese immigration into Mexico. The diplomat's foray into coffee farming in Chiapas, no less ambitious for its ultimate impossibility, offers some insight into Mexico's development aspirations and the limitations that

global realities imposed. No doubt Romero distinguished himself as a discerning observer of his country and his times, but he could not have foreseen that the arrival of Chinese into the Americas would bear so heavily in Mexico. Although silhouetted by its colonial past, the political machinery and orientation of the Mexican nation changed markedly after 1854. Throughout a forty-year period that witnessed social upheaval and ongoing movements from within and outside of Mexico, the need for Chinese labor was a constant one. Entrepreneurs, labor recruiters, corporations, and state-builders on both sides of the border and in China attempted to entice Chinese migrants into Mexico's most remote regions. Whereas Romero and his cohorts anticipated a Chinese labor force that would toil under the harshest conditions and for meager wages, far removed from the more urbane Mexican citizenry, the eventual reality would prove to be quite different: the persistence of vibrant Chinese *fronterizo* communities. For the Chinese, theirs was a world shaped by the quality and content of social relationships among neighbors, friends, and kin, revealing the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a historically constructed and contested crossroads of immigration, settlement, and fluidity.

2 Of Kith and Kin

CHINESE AND MEXICAN RELATIONSHIPS IN EVERYDAY MEANING

Don San Wo was well connected up and down southern Arizona. He had some firm attachments in Tucson, including friendship ties to Don Chun Wo,¹ who was considered the unofficial mayor of Tucson's Chinese community.² Connections aside, Don San Wo was in good spirits over what the near future held: the soon-to-be merchant was on the cusp of acquiring a new grocery store for himself and a new home for his family in Tucson. Before actually entering into a lease in mid-spring of 1902 with Dolores Serón, a Mexican resident of the Old Pueblo (another name for Tucson), Wo was careful to sketch out several provisos. The terms of the agreement would yield a store and a home for him, a four-hundred-dollar advance for Serón, and new neighbors for the residents of downtown Tucson. And the stakes were high. For all to go well, Serón had to deliver, in a little over a month, a newly constructed, adobe-style building suitable for selling groceries and housing Wo's family. Wo's demands of Serón did not stop there. Before Wo took possession of the Sixth Avenue property and assumed responsibility for the lease, Serón was to make sure the storefront had two glass doors through which customers could come and go, and that each room in the attached house had a window. The payoff for Serón was long-term. After the ten-year lease expired, the downtown building would be Serón's, to let again or to occupy as a resident. For Wo the payoff was both short-term and long-term. For three years he would not pay rent, in exchange for having advanced \$400 to Serón for the construction of the dwelling and for building materials. The arrangement at once secured for Wo and his family a place among neighbors and a modest standing as a grocery-store-owning family in a predominately Mexican *barrio*.³

At the turn of the twentieth century, the relationship between Don San Wo and Dolores Serón was an ordinary one. When Wo assumed the lease and moved into the new adobe dwelling in downtown Tucson, relation-