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# Chinese Immigrants in Porfirian Mexico: A Preliminary Study of Settlement, Economic Activity and Anti-Chinese Sentiment

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Chinese Immigrants in Porfirian Mexico:  
A Preliminary Study of Settlement,  
Economic Activity and Anti-Chinese Sentiment

Raymond B. Craib III

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Settlement, Economic Activity and Anti-Chinese Sentiment

by

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Master of Arts in Latin American Studies, 1994  
University of New Mexico



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*Chinese Immigrants in Porfirian Mexico: A Preliminary Study of Settlement,  
Economic Activity and Anti-Chinese Sentiment*

Raymond B. Craib III  
MA/LAS, Univ. of New Mexico, 1994<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction**

On May 14, 1911 the revolutionary forces of Francisco Madero attacked the northern city of Torreón in the state of Coahuila, México. The following morning, they victoriously entered the town. With the soldiers came about 4,000 individuals from towns and villages throughout the region. They and the soldiers soon began a plundering of the city that particularly targeted Chinese immigrants. By the end of the day, 303 Chinese and five Japanese lay dead; Chinese financial losses were estimated at over one million dollars.<sup>2</sup> While the magnitude of the attack may have been an anomaly, the targeting of the Chinese was not. Chinese immigrants were repeatedly persecuted and killed, their businesses ransacked, and communities threatened throughout the course of the Mexican revolution. Attacks against the Chinese continued even after the cessation of hostilities and end of the revolution in 1920. Legislation restricted Chinese immigration, prohibited marriages between Chinese and Mexicans, and segregated Chinese communities into ghettos. Extreme cases of persecution in the northern state of Sonora predicated their expulsion from that state in 1931.

The history of the Chinese in México is relatively unknown.<sup>3</sup> Attention to foreign immigrants and populations in México has focused primarily upon North American and European companies and diplomats, due in part to the economic nationalism that capped and followed the revolution. However, although the imperialist undertakings of North Americans and Europeans spurred resentment against foreign influence and calls to economic nationalism during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, they infrequently fell victim to the violence the Chinese experienced. Referring to the Mexican revolution, the Mexican historian Alan Knight recently wrote "historians... in search of the odd persecuted gringo, pick their unseeing way through piles of Spanish and Chinese corpses."<sup>4</sup> A number of short works have been written on the situation of the Chinese during the Mexican revolution, but the foundations of anti-Chinese feeling have usually been glossed over.<sup>5</sup> The following work attempts to redirect attention from the

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Linda B. Hall, Robert Himmerich y Valencia, Richard Coughlin, Jonathan Spence, Alfred Gruber, Elinore Barrett and the Latin American Institute at the University of New México. I would like to also acknowledge the extremely helpful comments and critiques of two anonymous reviewers at the University of New México.

<sup>2</sup> Dambourges Jacques, "The Chinese Massacre in Torreón," 239; Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese," 192.

<sup>3</sup> The pioneering work has been done by Evelyn Hu-DeHart in numerous articles.

<sup>4</sup> Knight, "Peasants into Patriots," 152.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese;" Hu-DeHart, "The Chinese of Baja California Norte;" Dennis, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns;" Puig, Entre el Río Perla y el Nazas. For the Chinese in pre-Revolutionary México, see Gómez Izquierdo, El Movimiento Antichino; Puig, Entre el Río Perla y el Nazas; Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society;" Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution;" Craib, "Ethnicity and Economy."

"odd gringo" to the Chinese by surveying Chinese immigration, settlement, and economic activity as well as official attitudes towards the Chinese in the period prior to the revolution.

### **Immigration and Identity in Porfirian México**

From the expulsion of the French in 1867 until the revolution in 1910, México entered into a period of extensive capitalist export-oriented economic development, and liberal, oligarchic state building and centralization.<sup>6</sup> In 1870 México suffered from a huge government debt, exported a small amount of some metals and agricultural stuffs, and enjoyed little regional infrastructural development. To remedy these problems and to prevent future invasions of the Mexican nation (the French had just recently been expelled and the United States had invaded and taken over half the nation's territory in 1848), Porfirio Díaz emphasized strength through modernization and economic development. Díaz and his *científicos* worked towards raising the economic level and infrastructure of the nation by courting foreign business and capital. The Porfirian political elite were united in their belief that México had the potential to be rich, but that the necessary prerequisites to fulfilling this potential were fourfold: establishing order and security, developing a transportation system, eliminating institutional obstacles to development, and successfully promoting immigration.<sup>7</sup> The issues of infrastructural development and immigration are what concern me here.

Immigration was perceived as the key to massing the labor force necessary for infrastructural development, particularly in the remote mining and agricultural regions of the northern sierras. The scarcity of native villagers and the resistance by peasants to proletarianization required alternatives be found and colonization was that alternative.<sup>8</sup> Francisco Pimentel, a liberal intellectual and highly esteemed philologist, had previously written in 1866:

En México, donde la población es tan escasa, entendemos por colonización no la *emigración*, sino la *inmigración*, y por lo tanto, el modo de tratar este punto debe ser inverso al que se ve en los libros europeos: comenzaremos por indicar los males que resultan a un país de hallarse despoblado.<sup>9</sup>

To encourage settlement in sparsely populated areas survey companies (*compañías deslindadoras*) were commissioned to survey, measure, divide, and appraise land for sale and development. First in 1875 and then again in 1883, statutes were drawn up by the Mexican government authorizing surveys of public land with the "principal objective [of] the 'colonization' of México's lightly populated hinterlands [i.e. the north]."<sup>10</sup> In a further attempt to attract immigrant colonists, the *Ley de Extranjería y Naturalización* (1886) guaranteed all foreigners, including immigrants, the same rights and privileges as Mexicans, although the government did retain the right to expel any "extranjero pernicioso."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo," 78.

<sup>7</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy," 64.

<sup>8</sup> For population figures for the period see the following works by García Cubas, *The Republic of México in 1876*; *Cuadro Geográfico de México*; *Trade and Industry*.

<sup>9</sup> Pimentel, *La Economía Política*, 172.

<sup>10</sup> Holden, *México and the Survey*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> González Navarro, *Población y Sociedad*, Tomo II, 35-36. The information on the Ley de

As well as assuming that European immigration would aid México in its economic development process, liberal intellectuals had hoped that Europeans would both settle and mix with the native population. As Pimentel went on to assert:

...mientras nuestra población no mejore, y se funda en una sola raza, México no puede aspirar al rango de nación propiamente dicha: nación es una reunión de hombres que profesan creencias comunes, que están dominados por una misma idea y que tiendan a un mismo fin. En México no hay analogía entre los blancos y los indios; todo es diferente, el aspecto físico, el idioma, las costumbres, el estado de civilización. En México hay dos pueblos diferentes en un mismo terreno, y lo que es peor, dos pueblos hasta cierto punto enemigos...la inmigración [de Europeos], en efecto, como lo hemos dicho, ha de mejorar nuestra raza, ha de ilustrarnos, ha de servirnos de estímulo, ha de acrecentar la producción...<sup>12</sup>

Colonization was thus promoted with a second objective in mind--to racially and culturally homogenize the nation and to ensure that this homogenizing process was also a Europeanizing process, imposing western legal, social, cultural and economic norms on a diverse population to "civilize" them. As Bonfil Batalla has succinctly noted, in México, to "civilize" has always meant to make less Indian.<sup>13</sup> However, Pimentel and others were not advocating a racist program of anti-Indian pogroms and annihilation, although such efforts were made. The problem, in elite eyes, was not one of biological or racial inferiority, although many espoused this view, but rather of supposedly cultural backwardness and ideological fragmentation.<sup>14</sup> Pimentel wrote:

Después de palpar todas estas dificultades e inconvenientes, y no siendo justo ni posible destruir a los indios, es preciso confesar que su único remedio, y con el de la nación toda, consiste en la *transformación* por medio de la inmigración europea....<sup>15</sup>

Such a transformation would not only incorporate the native into a more western identity and economy but also whiten the mestizo--considered the transitional race. As such, as white Europeans mixed with the native population, so would they mix with the mestizo population, eventually resulting in "una generación numerosa de blancos."<sup>16</sup> Similarly,

Extranjería y Naturalización comes from the *Manuel de Extranjero*, 193-201.

<sup>12</sup> Pimentel, *La Economía Política*, 186, 193.

<sup>13</sup> Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo*, 158.

<sup>14</sup> The assertion that this was a cultural rather than racial issue is debateable. While Alan Knight emphasizes the importance of Spencer and Social Darwinism on late nineteenth-century Mexican intellectual thought, Charles Hale emphasizes the importance and influence of Comte and scientific positivism. See Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo," *passim*; Hale, *Transformation of Liberalism*, *passim*. A commendable middle-ground is found by Benjamin Keen. Keen points out that although there were some conservative, racist proponents in the Porfirian intellectual community, the majority rejected such notions. See Keen, *The Aztec Image*, 411-62.

<sup>15</sup> Pimentel, *La Economía Política*, 183. Pimentel's writings, published in 1866, coincided with the creation by Maximilian, in December of 1865, of the Asian Colonization Company (for the purpose of importing Asian labor into México for the next ten years) and with the passing of a law which gave foreigners equal civil rights with Mexicans, for the explicit purpose of enticing foreign labor and immigration. See Pimentel, *La Economía Política*, 194-195.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 183. A similar emphasis on the "whitening" of the population can be found in other areas of Latin America during the same period. For example, in Venezuela, European immigration was thought to be the answer to whitening and coopting the African population. In Brazil, the whitening of the black population through miscegenation was advocated by abolitionists as a means to economic development and

Justo Sierra, although skeptical of theories popular at the time that saw miscegenation as debilitating, still asserted that white European immigrants were needed "so as to obtain a cross with the indigenous race, for only European blood can keep the level of civilization... from sinking, which would mean regression, not evolution."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, a newspaper editorial, responding directly to the possibility of bringing in Chinese laborers in 1871, stated that "México necesita la inmigración de las razas *occidentales*, gente de los *países cristianos*, que introduzcan la moral y las costumbres de la *civilización cristiana*, su capital."<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately Porfirian modernization and political stability required the formation of a conscious national identity in the minds of the Mexican citizenry, the creation of a homogenous Mexican identity; of a unique, unified Mexican ethnicity and race, or what Thongchai Winichakul has referred to as a "We-self."<sup>19</sup> The Díaz government attempted to unify the Mexican nation through a process of ethnicization--that is, through a mode of collective organization based upon ideas of common kinship, culture, history, race and language which was predominantly fictional--which included the formation of a national ideology which validated Díaz' development model and attempted to legitimate the coercive power of the Porfirian state.<sup>20</sup>

The emphasis upon the creation of a unified, uniquely Mexican identity, by limiting immigration to Europeans, excluded the non-European immigrant--in particular the Chinese immigrant. While native groups were at least publicly perceived by the government as a component of the Mexican nation (albeit one to be whitened, both culturally and racially) the Chinese were not natives but immigrants or, even worse, simply workers.<sup>21</sup> As such, they offended Porfirian sensibilities as non-European

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attracting European immigrants. The leading abolitionist politician of the late nineteenth century in Brazil, Joaquim Nabuco, vehemently opposed the importation of Chinese coolies in 1879 because Asian blood was supposedly "no better" than African blood. See Wright, *Cafe con Leche* and Skidmore, "Racial Ideas and Social Policy in Brazil."

<sup>17</sup> Sierra, *Political Evolution*, 368.

<sup>18</sup> *El Siglo XIX*, October 25, 1871. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>19</sup> Knight, "Peasants into Patriots", 150. I am using Knight's definition of ethnicity as identification through "language, dress, religion, social organization, culture and consciousness." Knight, "Racism, Revolution," 73. Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 11-12. Although the idea of what the "We-self" actually is will often be contentious and radically variable, the actual idea that there is a "We-self" or an essence is usually never questioned.

<sup>20</sup> Balibar defines ethnicization as the "representation in the past as if a group formed a natural community, possessing an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individuals." See Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class*, 96. As van den Berghe writes: "common nationhood, so long as *the fiction of common descent* retains the appearance of plausibility, remains a powerful rationale for state power." See van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, chapter 4. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>21</sup> In the *Contrato de la Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico* (1884), Article 27 stated that the company "recibirá sesenta y cinco pesos plata fuerte por cada *inmigrante europeo*, y treinta y cinco pesos plata fuerte por cada *trabajador asiático*." Valdés Lakowsky, *Vinculaciones Sino-Mexicanas*, 200. Emphasis is mine. In this case, the Chinese were "trabajadores" while Europeans garnered the more amiable title of "inmigrantes." As colonization by immigrants was perceived as beneficial and necessary in the late nineteenth century, the descriptive term "inmigrante" had a positive connotation. However, it was necessary to differentiate desired immigrants from undesirable ones; thus, undesirable immigrants were termed solely by the function they performed in the economy--"trabajadores." If we measured racial desirability in monetary terms, the Mexican government agreed to pay almost double for European immigrants what they would pay for Asian "workers."



immigrants who would not only *not* whiten the general population but would presumably add to the hindrance to development already posed by the native population.

The government's stance is better understood when recalling that the Porfiristas interest in modernization and development coincided with the dominance of Comtean and Social Darwinist theories on race and civilization, which viewed other, non-European cultures (including both the indigenous populations of México and the entire populations of Asia) to be in an earlier stage of development than that of western (i.e. European) civilization.<sup>22</sup> José Covarrubias wrote in 1904:

La teología no es sino una evolución transitoria entre el fetichismo primitivo y estado positivo. El primero y el último son estados completamente normales, susceptibles de duración y consistencia, mientras que la teología es esencialmente inestable y transitoria. El estado fetichista es el punto de partida de la razón humana y de toda sociabilidad, y el estado positivo es el punto de llegada o final.<sup>23</sup>

Newspaper editorials, particularly in those papers catering to business interests, mirrored such attitudes. *El Monitor Republicano*, in March of 1887, spoke out against Chinese immigration due to "la abyección, vicios y fealdad de esa raza."<sup>24</sup> In the same year, *El Siglo XIX* ran an editorial casting the Chinese people as "el más antiguo del mundo y a su vez el menos civilizado."<sup>25</sup>

Yet, if the Chinese were so antithetical to elite Mexican goals, why were they brought in? José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo summed up the reason perfectly when he wrote: "Sin embargo, los intereses económicos de las elites por contar con mano de obra barata y dócil fueron más fuertes que el temor y a la repulsa hacia los chinos."<sup>26</sup> Porfirian attempts to attract European immigrants were an overwhelming failure. Development Minister Vicente Riva Palacio, in his report to the Mexican Congress in 1876-77, attributed this failure partly to the Mexican government's lack of funds, lack of infrastructural development, and lack of civilization among the masses.<sup>27</sup> He stressed that potential immigrants from Europe "would not accept the lifestyle of the Mexican laborer. Furthermore, European immigrants wished to settle near population centers, where they were not needed."<sup>28</sup> What the Porfirian development schema required was a willing work force that would work under adverse conditions, separated from family and village life, and for minimal wages.<sup>29</sup> European immigrants could do far better than that in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay.

<sup>22</sup> Auguste Comte, the father of positivist thought, delineated human societies according to how they philosophized—he characterized Asian and indigenous societies as being based upon theological and superstitious ruminations while he lauded western societies for being rooted in objective, scientific philosophizing. See Comte, *The Positive Philosophy*, 26-28. In a similar vein, Francisco Bulnes, a Porfirian intellectual, categorized the human races according to the staple foods they consumed, with races of wheat dominating races of corn and rice. Justo Sierra asserted that even former President Benito Juárez, a Oaxacan Zapotec, saw that his "hermanos de origen" needed to be pulled from a state of mental abjection, ignorance, and superstition. Cited from Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo*, 153.

<sup>23</sup> Covarrubias, *Informes*, 153.

<sup>24</sup> Martínez Montiel and Reynoso Medina, "Inmigración Europea," 399.

<sup>25</sup> *El Siglo XIX*, October 24, 1871.

<sup>26</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El Movimiento antichino*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy," 64.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon V. Krutz, "Chinese Labor," 321. Krutz' hypothesis is that violence against immigrants, culminating in their expulsion, can be expected in developing countries where the immigrant represents

Matías Romero, a leading figure in the Mexican government from 1863 until his death in 1899, was one of the first to suggest the use of non-European, and especially Chinese, immigration as a means to acquiring the labor supply necessary for economic development:

Me parece que los únicos colonos que podrían venir a establecerse o a trabajar en nuestras costas, son los asiáticos, procedentes de climas semejantes a los nuestros, y principalmente de China. La numerosa población que hay en ese vastísimo imperio, la circunstancia de haber entre ella muchos agricultores, la de ser relativamente bajos los jornales que se les pagan y la misma proximidad al Asia de nuestras costas del Pacífico, harían que la inmigración china fuese la más fácil y al mismo tiempo la más conveniente para nuestro litoral de ambos mares.<sup>30</sup>

Romero called specifically for the Mexican government to actively solicit Chinese immigrants. In the same article, he wrote: "Para proceder con mayor acierto, me parece que convendría mandar un agente a la China, encargado especialmente de estudiar todo lo relativo a la emigración."<sup>31</sup> He was not the first to consider importing Chinese laborers to assist in the Mexican development process. Chinese laborers had actually been brought into México as early as 1864 to work on the *Ferrocarril Nacional Central* and one year later Maximilian established a Chinese Colonization Company to import Asian labor for a period of ten years.<sup>32</sup> Chinese expelled from Cuba began entering México through in Veracruz in 1871, the same year in which an editorial from a Mexican newspaper supported the importation of Chinese coolies, avering that "para la mecánica son muy aptos y tienen especial predilección por los ferrocarriles."<sup>33</sup>

By 1880, the Porfirian government had begun to establish contacts and commercial relations with China. That year the Mexican Ministry of Development wrote to Ignacio Mariscal, México's Foreign Minister: "with the concessions for railroads to the Pacific soon to be granted, this Ministry believes that the moment has arrived to establish commercial relations with the empires of China and Japan."<sup>34</sup> In 1884, the Secretaría de Fomento established the *Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico* for the explicit purpose of bringing in Asian workers, up to a thousand per voyage, to work on the railways, mines, and haciendas and in the following year the Compañía brought in nearly 2,500 Asiatics to work on the Ferrocarril de Tehuantepec.<sup>35</sup>

As well as assisting in general economic development (on railroad, haciendas, and in mines), the Chinese were valued as a labor force to develop areas that were either uninhabited or lacking a participatory work force. Romero had stressed that as well as

foreign capital to be used for development.

<sup>30</sup> Valdés Lakowsky, *Vinculaciones*, 182. Cott sums up Romero's career succinctly: "Romero was México's minister to the United States from 1863 to 1867 and finance minister from 1868 to 1872 and 1877 to 1879. In 1882, he returned to the Mexican Embassy in Washington, where he served for most of the remainder of his life." See Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy," 64-65. Romero was a well-known and well-respected figure in elite US circles. His death in 1899 garnered a full page obituary in *National Geographic*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 183-184. This citation and the previous one come from Romero's editorial in *Revista Universal*, Vol. X, num. 190, dated August 20, 1875.

<sup>32</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El Movimiento antichino*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>34</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy", 67.

<sup>35</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 56-57.

native populations being less inclined to work in economic development, there were areas where no possible work force was even available, in regions that were completely uninhabited. In an official letter to Romero in 1886, Ignacio Mariscal (México's Foreign Minister) concurred: "The Chinese arriving on the Pacific coast will be in completely undeveloped regions, whose unhealthfulness has made them heretofore uninhabitable, even to Indians."<sup>36</sup> It is primarily to these regions that the Chinese would immigrate and settle.<sup>37</sup>

### Chinese Settlement in Mexico

Although scattered throughout the country, the largest concentrations of Chinese immigrants were found in the geographical extremes of the northern frontier states and the Yucatán peninsula, as well as in the Distrito Federal. Geographical proximity to Cuba played a role in Chinese settlement in the Yucatán. In 1871 the Spanish government expelled the Chinese from Cuba (through non-renewal of work contracts) for their perceived participation in an 1868 uprising against Spanish colonial rule. With their expulsion from Cuba, many Chinese made the journey from Havana to México, entering through Veracruz or Tampico. Although some Chinese stayed in Tampico, working in the service industries for petroleum industries, most either moved north to the U.S. border or south to the Yucatán where work was readily available. Considering the proximity of Cuba it is also probable that many Chinese entered the Yucatán from Cuba illegally.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese immigration boom for the Yucatán, as with México in general, occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century. With only nineteen Chinese listed in the census for Yucatán in 1895, there were 153 by 1900 and 875 by 1910.<sup>39</sup> Chinese laborers worked for the government and private companies on road and railroad construction as well as on henequen plantations.<sup>40</sup> In 1904, the governor of the Yucatán, Olegario Molina, found "that henequen planters had formed a company for the purpose of securing 20,000 additional workers in China."<sup>41</sup> Those Chinese who emigrated to the Yucatán found themselves in a very similar situation to that in the Caribbean--a plantation economy (henequen) and slave-like conditions--often exchanging impoverished conditions in China (or the feudal, paternalist plantation of Cuba) for the same in México. Continual allegations of abuse and mistreatment of Chinese workers on the plantations in the Yucatán resulted in a visit to the plantations in 1905 by a Chinese diplomat in México City.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy," 73.

<sup>37</sup> For an insightful and comprehensive analysis of the situation in China during this period and Chinese relations in a global context, see Spence, The Search for Modern China, 137-268. On Chinese emigration see Yen, Coolies and Mandarins, Chapters 2 and 3. On the Chinese in Cuba see The Cuba Commission Report. On China's diplomatic relations and its impact upon emigration and protection see China: The Maritime Customs, vol. II; Valdés Lakowsky, Vinculaciones Sino-Mexicanas; Párdinas, Relaciones diplomáticas.

<sup>38</sup> Considering the numerous provisions drawn up by the Spanish government to deal with Chinese "deserters", it seems fair to speculate that many Chinese may have illegally fled Cuba to the Yucatán with the help of various smuggling organizations in Havana or elsewhere. For the regulations on deserters, see the Cuba Commission Report, 141-156.

<sup>39</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, El movimiento antichino, 76-78.

<sup>40</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy", 71.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 71 (fn 38).



The majority of Chinese immigrants settled in the northern sierras of México--the highest concentrations throughout the Porfiriato being in Sonora, Chihuahua, and the Baja California Norte peninsula.<sup>43</sup> Many settled in the north as a result of governmental policy and the need for labor in remote, northern regions. The north was also the practical option for those Chinese who were coerced into leaving or physically forced out of the United States. Work was readily available in mines, on haciendas, on railroads, and in the local manufacturing and merchant economy. In addition, many Chinese used the northern regions of México as a jumping off point for illegal entry into the United States, primarily through the border west of El Paso.<sup>44</sup> Particularly after the passage of the Exclusion Law in the United States in 1882, smuggling of Chinese into the U.S. became a big business and an organized, large-scale smuggling operation existed throughout México, the United States and the Caribbean.<sup>45</sup> By 1890 U.S. consular officials at a number of different locations in México were aware of the problem and had even uncovered a sophisticated system whereby Chinese from Havana would arrive in Tampico ("a principal port of entrance of Chinamen") "with through tickets to El Paso."<sup>46</sup> As with the Yucatán, both geographic and economic considerations affected the settlement patterns of Chinese in the north. Geographically, the Pacific northwest (Baja California, Sonora, Sonora) was the primary port of entry for most Chinese coming to México from China. Immigrants disembarked and settled in Mazatlán, Guaymas, Ensenada and Salina Cruz, or moved inland to Hermosillo, Torreón, and Chihuahua, working on the railroads and mines of the entire region. In Baja California Norte, Chinese found work in cotton fields, settling predominantly in Mexicali and Ensenada.<sup>47</sup> The majority of Chinese settled in the state of Sonora. Sonora's governor, Ramón Corral, estimated in 1890 that the Chinese population in his state to be 229, second only to North Americans among foreigners. The Chinese population in Sonora was nearly 300 in 1895, one-third of the entire Chinese population of México.<sup>48</sup> The population exploded over the

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>43</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 76-79. For this paper, the north is defined as those Mexican states north of the Tropic of Cancer - Baja California Norte, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo León.

<sup>44</sup> Perkins, "Reminiscences," 184.

<sup>45</sup> Consular officers characterized the smuggling of Chinese from México into the United States as "an organized business... carried on with the cognizance if not with the concealed co-operation of the local [Mexican] authorities." U.S. Consul Joseph Donnelly to Assistant Secretary of State William R. Day, May 20, 1897. *USCO Nuevo Laredo*. But Chinese and North American bureaucrats, agents, and private individuals were no less culpable. On Chinese smuggling see Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, esp. 290-91; Taylor, "Chinese Smuggling;" Perkins, "Reminiscences;" Jacques, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns;" Perkins, *Border Patrol*; Craib, "Ethnicity and Economy," chap. 1; Braun, "How can we enforce our Exclusion Laws?"; Fry, "Illegal Entry of Orientals;" Reynolds, "Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Law;" and the State Board of California, "California and the Oriental."

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Consul Warren P. Sutton to Assistant Secretary of State William Wharton, December 7, 1891; Donnelly to Assistant Secretary of State Edwin F. Uhl, December 6, 1895, Enclosure: U.S. Consul at Tampico, John Maguire to Donnelly. *USCO Nuevo Laredo*. The immigration inspector in El Paso stated in his annual report of 1905 that "during the past fiscal year 486 coolies are known to have arrived in Juarez... [and] approximately 320 coolies have disappeared near the international boundary line in the vicinity of El Paso, and doubtless gained unlawful entry... the handling (i.e. smuggling) of Chinese coolies is the sole occupation of perhaps one-third of the Chinese population in El Paso." Reynolds, "Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Law," 148.

<sup>47</sup> Hu-DeHart, "The Chinese of Baja California Norte," 16.

course of the next decade, with over 13,000 Chinese living in México by 1910.<sup>49</sup> The state of Sonora, by 1910, would have the largest Chinese population in all of México--more than four times that of the second largest concentration in the Distrito Federal.

Economically, northern regions of México offered unique opportunities to populations willing to settle in an underpopulated, often isolated and violent society. The north was a frontier region, a region in which economic niches were still to be had, providing possibilities for economic gain and success. The north was also a region of significant dynamism. Díaz's colonization programs and modernization agenda stimulated new settlements and a substantial increase in population in the north; railroads were extended from the furthest reaches of the frontier to México City; and Díaz' political control increased in the region. Even though it was a frontier region, there was also a very significant increase in the size and importance of the urban populations of the north; for example, Sonora grew by almost forty percent between 1895 and 1910.<sup>50</sup> This urbanization spurred the growth of a vibrant Mexican middle class, made up of teachers, professionals, merchants, and artisans in the cities. It also facilitated the development of successful Chinese ventures and it was in the north that the Chinese moved from positions of manual labor to small-scale commercial enterprises with a noticeable success rate.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Chinese in the Economy**

Supposedly it was once said "The Americans do all the big business, the Chinese do all the little business, and we Mexicans hold office and shout Viva!"<sup>52</sup> Although perhaps apocryphal, this aphorism is suggestive. Díaz relied almost exclusively on foreign capital for his development program. This xenophilia resulted in the quasi-monopolization of "big business" in México by European and North American capital, especially capital-intensive industries such as mining, manufacturing, marketing, and transportation. The French owned nearly 80 percent of the textile mill industry, railroads were predominantly North American-owned, and North American and British capital monopolized the mining and oil-drilling industries. The large companies worthy of mention in diplomatic documents of the Porfiriato were almost exclusively European or North American. In 1908 British officials in México noted that all mining companies were owned by British, Mexican, North American, or French interests while a British foreign service officer estimated foreign capital invested in mining and non-mining companies in México to be more than double that of Mexican capital.<sup>53</sup> By 1910, North Americans controlled the largest percentage of all foreign investment in México.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>50</sup> Carr, "Las peculiaridades," 328.

<sup>51</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the situation of the Chinese in the Yucatán, who were socially and economically constricted by the paternal, feudal structure of the henequen plantations.

<sup>52</sup> Dambourges Jacques, "Have Quick More Money than Mandarins," 205.

<sup>53</sup> Reginald Tower to Sir Edward Grey, January 1, 1909; *General Report on México for the year 1908*. BDFA, 262:73. Non-mining companies referred to industries such as manufacturing, telecommunications, transportations, and the like.

<sup>54</sup> Goldfrank, "World System, State Structure," 431-33.

Foreigners, employed by companies from their native land, usually occupied positions of higher responsibility, skill level, and wages than Mexican workers. Foremen and machinists in factories and mines, and conductors on railroads were usually foreigners, especially North Americans in North American-owned companies. A typical illustration is found in Torreón, where railroad workers from the US received the highest wages of any workers in the region.<sup>55</sup> A British Consular Official in México wrote in 1908:

One of the special instances may be found on Mexican railways. The Presidents of the different lines are Americans or British, while the personnel is very largely American. This American "invasion" is carried so far that the guards, sleeping-car attendants, engine-drivers, &c., on the through trains are almost without exception foreigners, Americans naturally preponderating.<sup>56</sup>

Mexican workers resented the preferential treatment foreign workers received, and in the first decade of the twentieth century they organized unions to protest foreign workers privileged positions. Although these discriminatory practices were predominantly part of European and North American business activities, the Chinese were frequently victims of the resentment they provoked.

Although most Chinese came to México as manual laborers in the 1870s, by the turn of the century many had become business owners and merchants.<sup>57</sup> The expanding urbanization and modernization of the north intensified the need for a developed infrastructure of goods and services and, while the North Americans and Europeans (and some Mexicans) concentrated their efforts on large-capital industries, the Chinese moved into lower levels of the economy, working in local trade and commerce and opening small stores and restaurants, laundries, and pawnbrokerages.<sup>58</sup> They quickly achieved particular success in the retail of drygoods and foodstuffs and as late as 1920 US consul Yost reported that "the trade in groceries, dry goods and general merchandise in Sonora is largely controlled by the Chinese."<sup>59</sup> However, such enterprises worked frequently in conjunction with shoe and clothing manufacturing, the selling groceries, or importation of goods. Indeed, Chinese achieved a particularly extraordinary level of success in shoe and clothing manufacturing. As early as 1873, two shoe and clothing factories had been established by Chinese in Guaymas, Sonora and in 1892 a 27 year-old Sonoran Chinese merchant had a shoe business valued at seven thousand dollars.<sup>60</sup> Prior to the revolution,

<sup>55</sup> William K. Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict," 180.

<sup>56</sup> Tower to Grey, *General Report on México for the year 1908*, BDFA, 262:3.

<sup>57</sup> Gómez Izquierdo posits the existence of a Chinese bourgeoisie in Sonora by the last decade of the nineteenth century. Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 58

<sup>58</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 276. The most prominent retail and wholesale merchants were Europeans, North Americans, and Mexicans. A British consular official noted that the Germans "have a practical monopoly of the hardware business throughout the republic... [and] have large commercial houses at Acapulco, Colima, Guaymas, &c., where they combine the hardware business with that of general commission and shipping agents and bankers" while the French devoted their energies to the "drapery trade." Tower to Grey, *General Report on México for the year 1908*, BDFA 262:70. A British consular official's report of 1905 listed Chinese immigrants to be "principally engaged in laundry work, or [as] proprietors, or cooks or waiters in cheap restaurants." *Report on the Political Situation and Principal Events of Interest during the Year 1905, with an Additional Chapter on the Reform of the Monetary System*, by W.G. Max Muller. BDFA, 258:VIII.

<sup>59</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 279, 296.

Chinese owned at least ten shoe factories producing over 100,000 dollars in aggregate sales per year. From 1907 to 1910 all but one shirt and overall factory in Sonora was owned by a Chinese and they owned nearly a third of the 37 shoe factories in the entire state.<sup>61</sup> Such enterprises even attracted Chinese from across the border. A Chinese merchant from Tucson, Arizona was stopped by the border patrol in Nogales in 1906. A resident of Tucson for over 25 years, he claimed that he was traveling to Guaymas to buy shoes to take back to Tucson and added: "I have been to Guaymas many times to buy cheap shoes to sell in Tucson."<sup>62</sup>

Chinese were successful in other ventures also. By 1904 a small Chinese colony of 150 in Agua Prieta had garnered significant influence in the agricultural and commercial sectors of the town's economy and, along with the Spanish, they dominated much of the commercial sector in the Laguna region.<sup>63</sup> Torreón had one of the most prosperous Chinese communities in México and was the site of the worst anti-Chinese outbreak during the revolution. The Chinese who came under attack in Torreón in 1911 occupied a variety of positions and owned an assortment of businesses, from laundries and restaurants to hotels and banks.<sup>64</sup> In Sonora, a poll conducted between 1905 and 1907 showed Chinese merchants accounting for fifty-two of the state's 968 most important businesses. By 1919, there were at least eleven Chinese commercial establishments in Sonora with more than \$10,000 in capital and the capital worth of Chinese businesses in Ensenada by 1913 was 208,000 pesos.<sup>65</sup>

Part of their success was due to the sophisticated organization of tight cooperatives linking Chinese in México with Chinese elsewhere, usually through business associations (such as the Asociación de Comercio Chino, established in 1912 in Chihuahua) and fraternal organizations (like the Unión Fraternal: Asociación China del Estado de Sonora, located in Nogales.)<sup>66</sup> In particular a significant link of credit and capital existed between a number of Chinese in México and Chinese in both the United States and China. As early as 1890 capital from Shanghai was invested in a mine in Sonora; in 1889 a group of Chinese merchants from San Francisco invested 328,000 dollars into a Baja California mine; a group of Chinese reportedly owned a financial house in the Distrito Federal worth one million dollars that had branches in both New York and Hong Kong.<sup>67</sup> The Sonoran commercial house of Quan, Gun, Lung y Cía. traded directly with various cities in the United States and as far away as Hamburg, Germany.<sup>68</sup> Tang Leung, a member of a Hong Kong firm, applied for a permit to enter the United States on business in 1898, along with three merchants representing a Chinese firm (with capital estimated at 40,000 to 50,000 dollars) doing business in three northern

<sup>60</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 278; Vice-Consul J. Stone to Assistant Secretary of State William Wharton, February 11, 1892, *USCO Nogales*.

<sup>61</sup> Dambourges Jacques, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns," 50-51; Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 278.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, "Los chinos en Arizona," 38. My translation.

<sup>63</sup> Krutz, "Chinese Labor," 327; Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict," 177.

<sup>64</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 92.

<sup>65</sup> Hu De-Hart, "La Comunidad China," 200; Hu-DeHart, "The Chinese of Baja California," 14.

<sup>66</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 95.

<sup>67</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy," 79.

<sup>68</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 281.



Mexican cities.<sup>69</sup> Wong Foon-Chuck, a Chinese immigrant who arrived Torreón in 1887, established himself as a leading importer and supplier of Chinese labor for the various industries of both México and the U.S. southwest.<sup>70</sup> Chinese political exile and head of the reformist movement, K'ang Yu-wei, helped create the Compañía Bancaria Chino y México with Foon-Chuck in 1906 in Torreón. The bank sold stock, purchased and sold real estate, and provided a common bank for Chinese funds from all over México.<sup>71</sup> The same bank constructed the first streetcar line with Mexican government concessions and had assets of over 900,000 dollars by 1908.<sup>72</sup>

### **Economic Bases for Anti-Chinese Sentiment**

As an ethnically foreign population that interacted with the local population on a daily basis, the Chinese had a significantly more visible presence in the popular space and the common appearance to many Mexicans was that the Chinese *did* monopolize many enterprises (particularly retail clothing, wholesale drygoods and vegetable industries, and laundries) driving Mexicans out of work, robbing Mexican women of laundering jobs, hoarding foodstuffs during bad harvest years, and generally exploiting the Mexican populace. Although the Chinese were accused of displacing Mexican workers in the North, more likely they were simply meeting the needs of the local populace in a rapidly developing society, providing necessary goods and services.

Attacks against the Chinese due to the economic competition they represented started soon after their arrival in 1871. In 1879 *La Libertad*, a newspaper published in the Distrito Federal, presented arguments against Chinese immigration. The editorial argued that the Chinese were not consumers since they spent little of what they earned, returned most of their earnings to China, and drove Mexicans out of work.<sup>73</sup> Four years later, the Secretary of the Treasury of the state of Sonora, in a letter to the Secretary of Development of the Distrito Federal, complained about Chinese immigrants taking Mexican jobs, although he did not specify exactly what jobs.<sup>74</sup> In 1891 *La Revista de Mérida* argued that the Chinese represented competition for the Mexican merchant because Chinese did not like to work in the fields, preferring to sell fruit and foods in the cities.<sup>75</sup>

When the economic situation worsened, as it did after 1893 (and especially in 1906/07) anti-Chinese sentiment among the general populace increased substantially. Real wages in both agriculture and industry fell after 1900 and the dispossession of communities enlarged the labor pool and lowered wages.<sup>76</sup> After the United States' depression of 1893, Mexican workers there were forced back across the border to their homeland where they found the situation no better. The Chinese were soon targeted not

<sup>69</sup> Consul J.F. Darnall to Acting Secretary of State J.B. Moore, May 12, 1898; Darnall to Moore, October 31, 1898. *USCO Nogales*.

<sup>70</sup> Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict," 186.

<sup>71</sup> Dambourges Jacques, "Chinese Massacre," 235.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>73</sup> Dambourges Jacques, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns," 52-53. This is the standard litany of complaints one finds in any society against so-called sojourners.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 168.

<sup>76</sup> Knight, "Peasant and Caudillo," 18.

only because of the commercial competition they represented but also because they displaced Mexican laborers. By 1890 there had been anti-Chinese protests in Sonora because Chinese laborers worked for lower wages and had replaced Mexican railroad workers.<sup>77</sup> The employment of Chinese in a lumber mill in Nogales provoked a wildcat strike in 1891 while in 1905 the Boleo Copper Mine of Baja California expressed its desire to avoid employing Asians due to increasing anti-Chinese violence.<sup>78</sup> In the same year the Partido Liberal Mexicano (a prohibited opposition, anarcho-syndicalist party under the leadership of Ricardo Flores Magón) called for an official ban on Chinese immigration. Article 16 of the PLM's program of 1906 simply stated: "Prohibit Chinese Immigration." The PLM soon elaborated on the program, declaring that such a ban was meant to eliminate the wage competition represented by Chinese workers who "accept the lowest wages":

Su [the Chinese] competencia es funesta y hay que evitarla en México.  
En general, la inmigración china no produce a México el menor  
beneficio.<sup>79</sup>

Chinese economic connections with North American companies--in particular the mining interests in Cananea--also increased anti-Chinese feeling. In June of 1906 Quong Sang Lung and Fong Fo Qui, both merchants in Sonora, appealed to the governor of Sonora for compensation for attacks upon their businesses by strikers of the Cananea Consolidated Copper Company. Both companies profited from the local North American industries and were perceived as catering to North American industries and interests. Quong claimed to have lost over 1,500 dollars in merchandise and Fong almost 300 dollars. Both of their claims were denied by the governor's office.<sup>80</sup> North American mine owners would also hire Chinese to run the local tienda de raya, at times forcing Mexican laborers to buy their goods there.<sup>81</sup>

Starting in 1899, *El Tráfico*, a Sonoran newspaper popular among the merchant and business classes and sympathetic to labor interests and rights and "la lucha obrera", published a series of editorials regarding Chinese immigration. The timing for these editorials was essential due to the increased discussions regarding a possible treaty between China and México:

Al ponerse en vigencia el tratado comercial entre México y el imperio  
chino, entrarán a nuestro país... más de diez mil celestiales y otros  
millares vendrán de seguida en los vapores correo...<sup>82</sup>

The editorials began as discussions of both the positive and negative aspects of Chinese immigration. For the business and industrial classes requiring new manual labor, Chinese immigration was essential. However, the editorials soon developed into "cries of alarm" over Chinese economic successes

<sup>77</sup> González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 168.

<sup>78</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy," 82.

<sup>79</sup> Cited from González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 169. For example, workers that worked inside the mines were paid as follows: U.S. workers - \$12.00; Mexican workers - \$5.50; Chinese workers - \$2.50. See Trueba Lara, *Los Chinos en Sonora*, 40.

<sup>80</sup> Monteón González, *Chinos y Antichinos*, 57-58.

<sup>81</sup> Hu-DeHart, "La Comunidad China," 196.

<sup>82</sup> Trueba Lara, *Los Chinos en Sonora*, 35. This is from *El Tráfico*, 8 de febrero, 1899 - the first of its series of editorials on Chinese immigration.

....no hay barrio donde no se encuentre un comercio de abarrotes chino, ni esquina ni lugar a proposito donde no haya sentado sus reales un hijo del cielo. Parece que se disponen a dar la gran batalla al comercio al menudeo y que quieren monopolizarlo por completo, habiéndole declarado una guerra a muerte a los abarroteros mexicanos al por menor. Todos los puntos estratégicos de Guaymas (díganos) están en manos de ellos y las consecuencias de esa invasión chinesca se verán muy pronto, pues si bien ahora los únicos perjudicados son los mexicanos que giran en pequeño, dentro de algunos años tendrán que resentirlas las del alto comercio... la ropa corriente y el calzado está en sus manos, nadie puede hacerles competencia, lavaderos y planchadores están haciendo una guerra sin cuartel a las pobres indias... comienzan ya a hacer la competencia a los panaderos con muy buen éxito; muchos restaurantes están en sus manos, y el comercio de pescados y mariscos...<sup>83</sup>

Editorials such as this one continued until the middle of June, moving from page two to page one by the middle of March. An editorial in *El País* in 1900 regarded the Chinese as more degenerate than the native and asserted that they ruined the Mexican worker, industrialist, and merchant with their competition.<sup>84</sup> A Sonoran Catholic daily, in 1907, wrote that the Chinese were already "hasta tamaleros y tortilleros, y cercano está el día en que no dejarán a la mujer otro medio lícito de ganar dinero que el de nodriza."<sup>85</sup> In 1910 Chinese merchants in Torreón had their businesses attacked and in May of 1911, a speech in Durango specifically emphasized economic grievances against Chinese--they replaced Mexican women in the laundry business, were economic and employment competitors, and dominated the grocery, vegetable, and gardening industries.<sup>86</sup> Along with a variety of negative ideas on the nature and actions of Chinese came the usual threats of Chinese/Mexican miscegenation, Chinese health conditions, and "bad" religious influences. The dominant aspect, however, of the arguments is that of the *commercial* threat of the Chinese.

The competitive argument was intensified and reinforced by a downturn in the economy of northern México. The combination of the shift to the gold standard in 1905 and the economic crisis on Wall Street in 1907/08 severely depressed the Mexican economy. By 1908 northern states were having to deal with the return of a large number of Mexican workers from the United States, leading to a saturation of labor in the market and high unemployment.<sup>87</sup> The United States increased the number of border guards to stifle smuggling operations and undertook the deportation of thousands of Mexican workers.<sup>88</sup> Another result of the depression was that the market for mining output slumped and prices for primary products worsened, severely impacting the mines of northern México.<sup>89</sup> In addition, two years of drought culminated in extremely bad

<sup>83</sup> Monteón González, *Chinos y Antichinos*, 39. The March 1, 1899 editorial was entitled "El comercio al por menor. Un grito de alarma." *El Tráfico*, p. 2. The general conclusion was that the Chinese were not desirable as a race but Chinese immigration should be tolerated in order to achieve as rapid a modernization as possible. As it could not be expected that white European immigrants would come to do the manual labor necessary, the entrance of the Chinese coolie would have to suffice.

<sup>84</sup> González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 169.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 169.

<sup>86</sup> Dambourges Jacques, "The Chinese Massacre," 237.

<sup>87</sup> Katz, "Labor Conditions," 35.

<sup>88</sup> Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict," 266. See also Perkins, "Reminiscences," *passim*.

harvests in 1908 and 1909. By 1908 food was very scarce in the Laguna region. Corn and beans, the staples of the populace, after having risen in price threefold in the course of a year were nowhere to be found.<sup>90</sup> A local paper, *El Nuevo Mundo*, blamed speculators and merchants for hoarding food and overcharging.<sup>91</sup> As the Chinese grew much of the local vegetable crops and owned many local foodstores, they were frequently the object of such attacks.<sup>92</sup>

Reactions to the depression included widespread strikes by workers, rural uprisings, and increased middle class discontent. High unemployment resulted in the exacerbation of class and ethnic conflicts resulting from the high foreign presence in México and the variations in pay, benefits, and general treatment between foreign and Mexican workers.<sup>93</sup> In light of the increasingly dire situation, the PLM stepped up its calls for the expulsion of foreigners and foreign interests in México. The depression also had a significant impact on the middle classes of northern México. Although a rural middle class had developed in the north prior to independence in 1810, it was after 1880 that the rise and growth of both an urban and rural Mexican middle class in the north was most pronounced.<sup>94</sup> This class was made up of merchants, professionals, artisans, and miners. The Mexican *petit bourgeois* was primarily mestizo, occupying positions in commerce, industry, and the local government, typically possessing energy and ambition but not capital, influence, or property.<sup>95</sup> Although speaking of the Laguna region in particular, the following assertion is applicable to the north as a whole: "as a class they [the Mexican middle class] seemed to have absorbed all the costs but few of the benefits of the region's development."<sup>96</sup> This new middle class endured major losses in the crash of 1907 (largely due to real estate ventures), suffered from economic insecurities, and were excluded from the circulation of political power. With such economic problems, this "prototypical petit bourgeois" became particularly sensitive to nationalist ideas and viewed Díaz' autocratic style and xenophilia as a major obstacle to economic success.<sup>97</sup>

In June of 1907, a group of Mexican merchants in Torreón created a Chamber of Commerce in an attempt to consolidate their power against foreign merchants. Their credo was published on the front page of *El Nuevo Mundo*:

Let's call attention to the fact that *we cannot compete against the foreigner in commercial ventures*; in fact, we cannot even come close. The sad and lamentable fact is that the prostration of our national commerce has created a situation in which Mexicans are replaced by foreign individuals and companies which *monopolize our commerce* and behave in the manner of conquerors in a conquered land.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Goldfrank, "World System," 434.

<sup>90</sup> Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict," 260-61.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 260-61. From *El Nuevo Mundo*, October, 1908.

<sup>92</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 286.

<sup>93</sup> This is certainly one reason why foreign diplomats seemed more keenly aware of the disparity of hiring practices among foreign enterprises and the resentment such practices provoked.

<sup>94</sup> Carr, "Las peculiaridades," 327.

<sup>95</sup> Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict", 185-6.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>97</sup> Carr, "Las peculiaridades", 329.

<sup>98</sup> Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict", 282. Emphasis is mine.



Although not specifically mentioning the Chinese, this editorial was most likely directed at both the Chinese and the Spanish--the most significant competitors in commercial industries.

All of this intensified the arguments against Chinese immigration and settlement and exacerbated anti-Chinese attitudes in the north, provoking a number of other responses. Both official and popular groups began to look for ways to reduce the influence and success of the Chinese in the country. New active assaults were initiated against the Chinese, focusing on health conditions as an excuse for segregating and ghettoizing the sector of the population and for limiting their immigration.

### Contagion and Isolation

Although questions of national identity and economic competition represent the major reasons for increasing anti-Chinese sentiment in Porfirian México, justifications for discrimination were also non-economic in nature. The most common non-economic portrayal of the Chinese was as unhygienic and dirty. Concerns over health and sanitation caused by epidemics became an excuse to justify discrimination against the Chinese and to limit their economic competition. In fact, the issue of health was probably the most widespread and intense non-economic issue concerning Chinese immigrants and represented a very effectual image for swaying the popular mind and became a focal point for arguments for the ghettoization of the Chinese population.

One historian, discussing the Chinese in Porfirian México, recently wrote that:

Los menos, generalmente los positivistas, vieron como virtudes lo que sus enemigos juzgaban vicios; eran industriuosos, económicos, sobrios y respetuosos, en suma, eficaces 'motores de sangre'.<sup>99</sup>

They were seen, like the Jewish population of Europe, "as both parasitic and idle, yet also industrious and overly successful."<sup>100</sup> The paradox of course proved ultimately devastating for the Chinese communities. Chinese were frequently accused of being morally corrupt, opium addicts, wife-beaters, and virtually evil incarnate. Alan Knight has recently written that "even today [1980], stories redolent of medieval anti-Semitism concerning the abduction and ritual murder of Mexican infants by Chinese are told in northern México."<sup>101</sup> The most common form of anti-Chinese prejudice, however, was to blame them for many of the various epidemics and illnesses which struck the Mexican populace, due in large part to what were considered the unsanitary living conditions of the Chinese.

Attacks against Chinese hygiene and sanitation expressed the increasing prejudice against both existing Chinese communities and newly arriving immigrants. These attacks revolved around a number of specific issues, most importantly the close (in western eyes "packed" and overcrowded) quarters within which the Chinese lived.<sup>102</sup> Overcrowded

<sup>99</sup> González Navarro, *Población*, 57.

<sup>100</sup> Knight, "Racism, Revolution", 96.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>102</sup> In San Francisco in the late 1870's, a health official blamed "unscrupulous, treacherous, lying Chinamen" for a smallpox outbreak. The official went on to allege that Chinese "poison" was contaminating "the atmosphere of the streets and houses of a populous, wealthy and intelligent community." Kraut, *Silent Travelers*, *passim*. Chinese in California were also attacked for living in allegedly unhealthy, overcrowded conditions. In an ironic twist, Chinese were arrested for supposedly breaking a newly established law, drawn up for the explicit purpose of breaking up Chinese communities, prohibiting overcrowdedness in

living situations were repugnant to Mexican elites and urban dwellers; mirroring social concerns of European life such attitudes provoked fears of epidemic, death, and moral corruption.<sup>103</sup> For example, it was a commonly held assumption that Chinese living quarters were "un foco de infección" and calls came for the ghettoization of the Chinese in a barrio "de los más distantes del centro [del pueblo]."<sup>104</sup> Chinese houses and shops were thought to be infected with most diseases known, and some unknown, to humankind. In Sonora, a Dr. Iglesias assured a patient that she had contracted leprosy from the shop of a Chinese immigrant and ghettoization soon became necessary as the Chinese constituted "un elemento nocivo por su baja condición y repugnantes costumbres."<sup>105</sup> *El País* stated that the Chinese brought the "mal asiático", trachoma, and "la sarna."<sup>106</sup>

Sickness and deprivation soon became certain signs of moral and racial degeneracy. As early as 1871 an editorial in *El Siglo XIX* characterized the Chinese as "medianamente higiénica" and suffering from a lack of moral fortitude.<sup>107</sup> *El Tráfico* (1899) justified regulation of Chinese communities by comparing their moral standards with prostitution and put out a call for the people to rise *en masse* against Chinese integration:

El pueblo en masa debería de protestar contra la presencia de los chinos confundidos con nosotros, y pedir su inmediata remoción a un barrio donde la niñez esté exenta del contagio de sus costumbres.<sup>108</sup>

In various newspaper editorials, Chinese were accused of having "pasiones de mal género," "perverse tendencies", bad habits, and corrupted morals.<sup>109</sup> In an editorial to the Sonoran Governor, *El Tráfico* listed a series of complaints against the Chinese of which the following was one:

Que estando la salubridad pública constantemente amezada por la desidia absoluta que observan con respeto a los más rudimentarios preceptos de la higiene, pues viven aglomerados en casas suficientes apenas para albergar a la cuarta parte de los que en ellas habitan y tienen la pésima y reprobable costumbre de arrojar inmundicias en el interior de dichas habitaciones.<sup>110</sup>

homes. The jailed Chinese, however, had to be released because their jail cell did not conform to the new law. See Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, 214-15 (fn 41).

<sup>103</sup> Hygiene and sanitation are also issues often invoked by the privileged to further legitimate their control. In an excellent work on domestic servants in nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro, Sandra Lauderdale Graham persuasively argued that Rio's elites invoked the concept of contagion (and the "containment" of it) in order to maintain social distinctions and class stratifications in a rapidly changing social structure. With the abolition of slavery, Brazilian elites created new rules and sets of definitions to keep and distinguish the separation between themselves and the "masses" by associating disease and epidemics with the lower classes, or more particularly, domestic servants. In doing so, elites shifted the blame from social conditions to social positions, effectively legitimating new forms of social control. As she writes: "Slum dwellers, not the slums, become the agents of disease." The outcome was the regulation of domestic servants in Rio during the period under discussion. See Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street*, *passim*.

<sup>104</sup> *El Tráfico*, 2 de marzo de 1899, p. 2; 6 de marzo de 1899, p. 1; 7 de marzo de 1899, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Cited from Trueba Lara, *Los Chinos en Sonora*, 37; Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*,

69.

<sup>106</sup> Cited from González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 170.

<sup>107</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 46.

<sup>108</sup> Cited from Trueba Lara, *Los Chinos en Sonora*, 37.

<sup>109</sup> Cited from Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 50-61; Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy", 81.

Allegations such as these continued throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. Attacks motivated by economic or political interests continuously used issues of health and hygiene to denigrate the Chinese. In November of 1911, the *Unión de Comerciantes al Menudeo* in Mazatlán distributed a small publication requesting official assistance in eradicating the alleged Chinese threat:

Muy pocos somos lo que conocemos en la intimidad a los chinos... hacinados, sudando a chorros y despidiendo olores mefíticos y cacoquinos... fijan sus ojos de felino en la figurita de una baraja o en el número de una diminuta pieza de dominó, en sus pocilgas... haremos campaña en su contra.<sup>111</sup>

While repugnant, the focus upon health conditions and hygiene is understandable; epidemics and disease harried the country, and in 1903 a sweeping outbreak of Bubonic Plague coursed through northwestern México. The plague outbreak was especially bad in Mazatlán, a significant port of entry for Chinese and goods arriving from San Francisco.

The Chinese were suspected as the carriers of the latest outbreak of plague and the investigation as to its origins centered entirely around the Chinese. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State H.D. Peirce, inquiring about how the plague reached Mazatlán, requested statistics on the number of Chinese vessels arriving from China or Panama with Chinese aboard. In response, the U.S. Consul Louis Kaiser telegraphed: "No vessels direct or [?] from China arrive here no Chinamen arrived from Panama here in conjunction of national sanitary am investigating origin of plague, no results."<sup>112</sup> Although Kaiser later reported that "no vessels, either directly or indirectly sailing from China or Japan called in this port" in 1900-1902, he jumped to the conclusion that there was no "doubt that rats [rats] among vegetables shipped direct from Chinatown in Frisco have brought plague here."<sup>113</sup>

The official reactions to Chinese culpability were immediate. In 1903 officials at the border were advised to quarantine all items coming from San Francisco to México, especially items in the care of the Chinese. A letter from Ramón Garay, a Mexican bureaucrat, requested that U.S. officials quarantine all merchandise arriving from San Francisco over land.

A cabo de saber que procedente de San Francisco California, vá para Guaymas carga consignada a casos o individuos de nacionalidad china, como esa carga pudiera llevar ratas o ratones infestados, del puerto de San Francisco, suplico a Ud. se sirva alquilar un cuarto donde se pueda hacer la desinfección por medio de azufre, de la carga que llegue por ferrocarril y examinar bulto por bulto para saber si no lleva ratas o ratones.<sup>114</sup>

Garay even went as far as to suggest exactly how the inspectors should go about killing those rats they possibly found: "Si se teme que esto pudiera suceder sirvase Ud. arreglar las cosas de manera que al saltar esos animales caigan en agua hirviendo."<sup>115</sup>

<sup>110</sup> *El Tráfico*, 11 de marzo de 1899, 2.

<sup>111</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino*, 92.

<sup>112</sup> Kaiser to Peirce, January 24, 1903. *USCO Mazatlán*.

<sup>113</sup> Kaiser to Peirce, March 26, 1903; Kaiser to State Department (Telegram), January 27, 1903. *USCO Mazatlán*.

<sup>114</sup> Consul Albert Morawetz to Assistant Secretary of State Francis B. Loomis, March 9, 1903; Enclosure in *USCO Nogales*. Emphasis is mine.

Within the year, an official, legal response was legislated. On October 10, 1903 a new law pertaining to Chinese immigration was passed specifically "relating to the landing of Chinese in México, and the sanitary regulations govern same."<sup>116</sup> The law, among other things, accorded the use of health inspections by Mexican authorities at the port of departure and the construction of a Barracks of Observation at the port of Manzanillo, where all future Chinese immigrants were to disembark.<sup>117</sup> The law did provide that "when the number of passengers or immigrants does not exceed ten, they may land at [the official ports of entry of] Acapulco, San Blas, Mazatlán, Guaymas, Tampico, Vera Cruz, or Coatzacoalcas."<sup>118</sup>

The entire investigative effort centered solely around the Chinese, even to the exclusion of the Japanese. Although "Asiatics" were generally considered uncivilized and unsanitary heathens, the Japanese were typically characterized as more "western", and therefore more civilized, than the Chinese. To cite one example, Francisco Bulnes wrote:

El hecho que es más sorprende es que China habiendo estado en contacto con la civilización europea muchísimo antes que el Japón, esa nación que asombra por su poder de asimilación, mientras que China asombra por su resistencia a la civilización moderna al grado de hace (sic) creer que es completamente refractaria.<sup>119</sup>

Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, who visited East Asia in 1875, markedly preferred Japan over China, in large part due to its attitudes towards modernization and the attempts it was making to "civilize" itself.<sup>120</sup> Finally, Díaz' immigration commission (1903) had itself recommended that Japanese immigration be favored over Chinese or Korean immigration.

The plague epidemic of 1903 and the enactment of the new law regarding Asian immigration is one of the dominant events that permanently established the Chinese community as more than simply an alleged economic threat to the Mexican populace--they also represented a *health* threat to society. The dominant response was to call for the ghettoization of the Chinese. The United States was used as a specific model for the ghettoization solution to the "Chinese problem." The United States was in many ways looked upon by Mexican elites as a model for Mexican development and modernization; it was supposedly politically unified, democratic, and liberal; and it was predominantly racially and culturally European (white and western). Hence, U.S. expulsion of the Chinese further legitimated, if not in practice at least in perception, prejudice and discrimination against Chinese communities in México. A front-page editorial in a newspaper in Guaymas (1899) read:

En los Estados Unidos, país liberal por excelencia y en cuya ley fundamental se dan a los extranjeros las mismas prerrogativas que les dan nuestras leyes se han hecho una excepción de los chinos sujetándolos primero a determinados cuarteles, despues prohibiendo su entrada al país y finalmente promulgando leyes que les quitan el derecho que tienen los demás extranjeros, de nacionalizarse y hasta el

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Kaiser to Peirce, March 17, 1904. *USCO Mazatlán*.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Enclosure to Consular report.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Valdés Lakowsky, *Vinculaciones*, 87.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 86-7.

de contraer matrimonio con otras mujeres que no sean las de su raza, ni siquiera con las indias.<sup>121</sup>

Local newspaper editors and business owners soon called for ghettoization and segregation along the lines of the Exclusion Act of the United States. One week after the above editorial, an editorial in *El Tráfico* appealed to state governor Corral to emulate the United States ("país eminentemente liberal y práctico") by isolating the existing Chinese population in certain areas "para aminorar... la perniciosa influencia que ejercen."<sup>122</sup> In a 1903 report to Díaz regarding the desirability of continued Asian immigration, Genaro Raigosa wrote: "if in other societies more vigorously constituted and more advanced in their evolution, Aso-European hybridization has proved unacceptable, in our country it would seem to assume positively pernicious characteristics...."<sup>123</sup> It is fairly obvious that Raigosa was referring to the United States. No official legislation was enacted in response to these calls, but they continued, until finally in 1916 the Mexican government enacted legislation creating Chinese ghettos and restricting Chinese commercial operations.<sup>124</sup>

Calls for Chinese segregation were ultimately part of a developing nationalism by political elites combined with growing economic fears on the part of the general populace. Chinese mixing and prosperity was unacceptable to the state and its goals, considering that the Chinese had originally been brought in as a labor source. Ghettoization and segregation were thought to be the answer to fulfilling the need to purify the national type (preserving the forming Mexican identity from mixing and further heterogeneity) and to limiting the economic threat the urban Chinese were perceived as exercising. At the same time, ghettoization could be justified as the result of vast cultural and linguistic differences--a process that was the result of the "nature" of the Chinese themselves rather than of any conscious decision by the state. Reporting for Díaz' Commission on Immigration (1903), José María Romero wrote:

La más grave y seria consideración que puede aducirse contra esta inmigración asiática es de orden social, y se funda en la comprobada experiencia de que la raza china no se amalgama con los pueblos modernos de origen europeo ni es asimilable a la civilización occidental... viven en grupos aislados y extraños a la población homogénea.<sup>125</sup>

Claims such as Romero's, casting the Chinese as non-assimilationist, were common.

Even more important, the structure of many Chinese communities led many to believe the Chinese had no desire to assimilate or participate. They occupied certain economic niches, "monopolized" industries such as laundries, groceries, and pawnbrokerages, lived in close quarters in Chinatowns, and maintained extensive business, familial, and ethnic ties with other Chinese both in and outside of México. All

<sup>121</sup> *El Tráfico*, 6 de Marzo, 1899, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> *El Tráfico*, marzo 11 de 1899, (Num. 530), p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Cited from Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy", 82-3.

<sup>124</sup> The immediate reason asserted was due to the participation of 528 Chinese in Pershing's punitive expedition against Villa. It is more likely that the legislation was passed due to increasing anti-Chinese sentiment, especially by northern, middle-class revolutionaries now victorious who stood to lose much if Chinese economic successes continued or increased. For a fuller discussion of the Chinese and Pershing's Punitive Expedition, see Linda Hall "El refugio: migración mexicana a los estados unidos, 1910-1920."

<sup>125</sup> Gómez Izquierdo, *El Movimiento antichino*, 69. This conclusion comes from Maria Romero's summation of the results of the *Comisión de Inmigración*.



of this, in a certain context, could be construed as non-assimilationist--indeed, even as Chinese (or foreign) exploitation of the Mexican people and nation.

Nonetheless, despite the views of the Mexican establishment that the Chinese were unassimilable, the Chinese were already integrated into society in many ways. The Chinese, more than any other foreign population in México, became naturalized citizens. In addition, Chinese frequently hispanicized their own names. The owner of Quan, Gun, Lung y Cia., a large commercial house with branches in Cananea, was a Chinese who hispanicized his name.<sup>126</sup> Successful business owner Juan Lung Tain, president Martin Wong of the Union Fraternal (a Chinese business association), and numerous other merchants and manufacturers likewise adopted Spanish first names.<sup>127</sup> Chinese also hispanicized the names of their businesses. Ton Tay, in Hermosillo, referred to his general merchandise shop as "La Barata"; a manufacturer of clothing and shoes adopted the business name "La Mariposa"; Quong Man Long y Cia. was also known as "El Globo"; Tac Fo Lung Y Cia, with three different stores in Guaymas, went under the name "La Estrella"; and the shoe and clothing business of Juan Wong Cun y co. was known as "El Sol."<sup>128</sup> Chinese also attempted to integrate by marrying Mexican women, particularly as very few Chinese women came to México prior to the turn of the century. Although not outlawed, miscegenation between Chinese and Mexicans was informally prohibited and officially frowned upon. A particularly virulent strain of anti-Chinese sentiment revolved around the supposed weakness of offspring produced by Chinese/Mexican parents. The paradox for the Chinese of course was that they were not permitted to mix with the local population, and yet if they did not they were accused of being non-assimilationist. By the outbreak of the revolution in 1911, marriage between Mexicans and Chinese (as well as Africans) was officially prohibited in the Plan de Jalisco.<sup>129</sup>

Ultimately, attempts at integration failed not because Chinese were isolationist, although this may certainly have been the case at times, but largely because what was really understood, in the nationalist context, by integration or amalgamation was conformity to Porfirian ideals of national ethnicity and the "face" of the nation. The Chinese were not "assimilable" because they did not conform to the mythical "national type" that was being created. Neither did they conform to the acceptable immigrant "type." The status group membership of *inmigrante* did not include the Chinese, being reserved solely for white Europeans.

Additionally, this difficult situation for the Chinese was often exacerbated precisely because they were "local" foreigners, partially integrated but still ethnically distinguishable, highly visible, and official pariahs. Chinese economic success did not

<sup>126</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society", 281.

<sup>127</sup> This information is based upon work I have done with envelopes from the Chinese in México, from the years 1906-1933. Over 50% of the Chinese businesses in the sample were owned or operated by Chinese with hispanicized first names. Craib, "The Uses of Philately in Historical Enquiry: Recovering the Chinese in México." Unpublished ms.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. There are numerous other examples in the sample.

<sup>129</sup> González Navarro, *Población*, 59.

have the impersonal, foreign personality of the mining industries owned by *estadounidenses*, British oil interests, and French textile factories. The Chinese, even more than the Spanish, were the largest *permanent* foreign population that lived, worked, and socialized within the common Mexican community. As such, they were easy, visible scapegoats, officially ostracized to the margins of the national community and antagonized as a threat to national stability and racial purity; unofficially, in the popular mind, they were economic threats--displacing Mexican workers, overcharging locals, monopolizing certain industries--and a visible reminder of the high foreign presence dominating the Porfirian state. They were also considered a threat to public health and safety as they allegedly carried and transmitted deadly diseases such as the Plague

By the turn of the century structures of discrimination and attempts at segregation became more overt. The institutional, "macroenvironmental" climate of Porfirian society began to formally assert itself, particularly in political and judicial attitudes.<sup>130</sup> The most visible place where this shift takes place is in the new measures sought and finally adopted regarding Chinese immigration into México, reflecting an increasing trend towards overt discrimination, "justifiable segregation", and removal from the national space. In 1903/04, Díaz established an immigration commission (*Comisión de Inmigración, encargada de estudiar la influencia social y económica de la inmigración asiática en México*) ostensibly to review Asian immigration and its legal, economic, social, and moral effects upon the Mexican nation.<sup>131</sup> The more likely reasons were probably increasing pressure from commercial interests in the northern states and the outbreak of Bubonic Plague in the northwestern port cities.<sup>132</sup> The commission's findings were presented to Interior Minister Corral (the former Governor of Sonora) in 1904. Among other things, the commission found that first, permanent Asian immigration was undesirable; second, that temporary immigration designed to meet the economic needs of the country should be permitted but should also be regulated according to certain conditions: that Japanese immigration be preferred over Chinese or Korean immigration; that distinctions be made between voluntary and contracted immigration, with voluntary immigration being subject only to health regulations while contract immigration being more tightly controlled; and finally that Mexican immigration companies should be responsible for repatriating Chinese after their contracts were completed.<sup>133</sup>

The restrictions suggested were not immediately adopted. Genaro Raigosa, the president of the commission, asserted that this was due to a decline in Chinese

<sup>130</sup> Bernard Wong has argued convincingly, in a comparison of Chinese assimilation in Lima, Peru and New York City, U.S.A., that the dominant factor in assimilation or non-assimilation was the "macroenvironmental" variable of the larger (or recipient) society, specifically the political/legal, social, and economic factors. Chinese assimilation in New York City was muted and has remained so up to today due to the combination of harsh immigration policies against Chinese immigrants, overt and often violent racism, and discriminatory laws (particularly those that prohibited intermarriage and miscegenation). In contrast, Chinese coming to Peru faced some subtle racism but no severe legal restrictions, discriminatory policies, or violent attacks. Chinese laborers on plantations suffered the same harsh mistreatment and abuse that was found in Cuba, the Yucatan peninsula, and in other plantation economies, but this was abuse directed at a "peon" or manual, slave/laborer rather than specifically at a Chinese because he was Chinese. Wong, "A Comparative Study of the Assimilation of the Chinese."

<sup>131</sup> Monteón González, *Chinos y Antichinos*, 25.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 25; González Navarro, *Población*, 36.

<sup>133</sup> Cott, "Mexican Diplomacy", 83.

immigration in the latter half of 1904 and the continual movement of Chinese immigrants from México into the United States.<sup>134</sup> Restriction was also opposed for economic reasons. The Porfirian positivists well understood that the country could not stand to lose the valuable source of labor it had acquired in the Chinese. José Covarrubias wrote in the *Revista Positivista* in 1904:

tenemos, pues, sencillamente, que pensar en asociarlos a nuestra actividad, puesto que *necesitamos de su cooperación como condición indispensable de desarrollo*. Que esa asociación nos es ventajosa económicamente, a pesar de la extracción de la parte de nuestro asociado fuera del país, es indudable, puesto que nosotros representaremos la parte del capital y los chinos la del trabajo, y es ya axiomático que esta última es desproporcionalmente menor que aquélla... su trabajo constituye una necesidad económica para nuestro país.<sup>135</sup>

Private employers also wanted to ensure the continued immigration of Chinese laborers. Although the Chinese had successfully moved into the *petit bourgeois* strata of Mexican society, many immigrants still worked as manual laborers on the railroads, in the mines, and on the plantations and haciendas. The owners of these industries still required large supplies of cheap labor that the Chinese could offer. In 1906 industries in the Laguna region actively sought Chinese and Japanese immigrants due to the exodus to the U.S. southwest by Mexican workers for better pay and working conditions. An editorial in *The Mexican Herald* in 1906 stated that "Chinese laborers are being brought to northern México as quickly as employment agencies can bring them", prompting the local newspaper *El Nuevo Mundo* to respond one month later: "The Republic is becoming full of Chinese, Japanese, Arabs, and Turks."<sup>136</sup> Until 1907 the situation remained unchanged. Although declared socially unsuitable, both private and official economic interests continued to dictate the course of immigration policies.

These policies changed drastically with the economic crisis of 1907. With the return of large numbers of Mexican workers from the United States, the labor shortage for industrialists and landowners in northern México was over. At the same time, resentment against foreigners (in particular the Chinese) justified the limiting of labor immigration. Within the year, the commission's recommendations had begun to be fully implemented and a legislative product was written and passed into law.

The law, the provisions of which had been under consideration for the better part of a year, was enacted in the Autumn session of the Mexican Congress of 1908 during the middle of México's most severe economic crisis in decades.<sup>137</sup> The act amended the Mexican Constitution's article on Immigration and Sanitary Laws to restrict the "free entry of foreigners into the republic."<sup>138</sup> In enacting the legislation, the official commission wrote in 1908:

[es] indiscutible que la prosperidad de México ha de basarse principalmente en la inmigración... pero lo que México necesita es la transfusión de sangre pura y vigorosa, la importación de hombres sanos

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 83-4.

<sup>135</sup> Covarrubias, "La inmigración china" en *Informes*, 209-10. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>136</sup> Meyers, "Interest Group Conflict", 257. The editorial from the *Mexican Herald* is from July 12, page 4. The editorial from *El Nuevo Mundo* is from August 29, page 1.

<sup>137</sup> Tower to Grey, *General Report on México for the year 1908*, BDFA 262:53(f).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 262:53(a).



de cuerpo y sanos de espíritu, y el gobierno tiene no sólo el derecho, sino también el deber de efectuar en los inmigrantes un selección prudente y sabia.<sup>139</sup>

Although the Mexican government denied that the bill was meant to hinder Asian (and particularly Chinese) immigration, the commission reasoned that the Bubonic Plague epidemic of 1903, attributed to the Chinese, had been a result of the fact that no "selective" measures concerning immigration had been in effective use at the time. The summation of a British consular official in 1908 flatly stated that the provisions of the bill had been "drawn up chiefly with a view to restricting the immigration of Chinese coolies and other Asiatics into México."<sup>140</sup> The official went on to write:

the [Mexican] Government especially disclaim all intention of discriminating against any country or any race and assert that the prohibitions contained in the Bill are only those absolutely indispensable to prevent the free entry of persons who are notoriously harmful from a moral or sanitary standpoint, and that in view of the scarcity of labour throughout the republic they have no wish to hinder the influx of foreign labourers... that the measure is primarily directed against Asiatic immigration is, however, proved by the fact that the Bill prohibits the entry into the country... of persons suffering from tuberculosis, leprosy, beri-beri, trachoma, the itch, &c., while persons suffering from bubonic plague, cholera, yellow fever, cerebrospinal meningitis, typhoid fever, exanthematic typhus, erysipelas, measles, scarlet fever, small-pox, or diphtheria are allowed to land and to remain under treatment in the lazaretto of the port of disembarkation until they are cured.<sup>141</sup>

The government wasted no time in applying the newly adopted law. Later that year, the China Commercial Steamship Company appealed to His Majesty's Legation for assistance due to the "wholesale rejection of Chinese immigrants by the Mexican Health Officer at Salina Cruz."<sup>142</sup> Four hundred and four (of five hundred and eighteen) Chinese were not permitted entry due to health reasons--specifically trachoma--although they had been cleared by the health official at Hong Kong. The British consular official went on to write that:

On arrival at Salina Cruz of the vessels to which I have referred, Dr. Valenzuela, the Mexican Health Officer there, rejected a very large number of the immigrants. Independent medical testimony conflicted with Dr. Valenzuela's decision, but the Mexican Government upheld their official.<sup>143</sup>

Subsequent Chinese arrivals were treated similarly.

In his Annual Report on México for 1909, the British consular officer in México reported that "there do not appear to have been any difficulties such as occurred in the preceding year in regard to the immigration of Japanese and Chinese coolies into México... [the] Chinese still arrive in large quantities and undoubtedly considerable numbers of them still succeed in making their way across the frontier into the United States."<sup>144</sup> However, the immigration bill of 1908 restricting Asiatic immigration

<sup>139</sup> González Navarro, *El Porfiriato*, 182.

<sup>140</sup> Tower to Grey. *General Report on México for the year 1908*. BDFA, 262:53(a).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 262:90.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 262:91.

<sup>144</sup> Ronald Macleay to Sir Edward Grey, *Annual Report on México for the year 1909*. BDFA, 264:17.

remained in force, reflecting the permanence of new ideas on what the role of the Chinese in the state was to be; if not ghettoized, immigration could at least be stemmed.

### Epilogue

Two years later, a combination of economic and ethnic nationalism and revolutionary opportunism proved ultimately devastating to the Chinese. During the revolutionary years they were repeatedly the subject of violent attacks in Hermosillo, Guaymas, Cananea, Nacozari, and other northern areas. Additionally, as middle class revolutionaries came to power, they enacted state legislation against Chinese communities. By 1915, Chinese were subject to a special head tax in Baja California and were ordered into ghettos by the municipal government of Mazatlán in the state of Sinaloa.<sup>145</sup> In 1917 the state of Sonora under the leadership of Plutarco Elías Calles segregated the Chinese into special zones "to reduce the radius of action of the [Chinese] colony."<sup>146</sup> To the revolutionary middle class of the north, the Chinese were the consummate foreign menace. The Chinese were both an immigrant population reflecting Díaz' xenophilia and "dirty", unhealthy foreigners. More importantly, Chinese immigrants were seen as a foreign *petit bourgeois* standing in the way of Mexican social and economic mobility. The norteros perceived the Chinese as a hinderance to the movement of the developing middle class into areas of commercial enterprise because of the economic niche they occupied. By the end of the revolution in 1920, a variety of anti-Chinese legislation in the north, particularly in Sonora, was adopted--prohibiting Chinese/Mexican marriages, limiting further immigration, and requiring Chinese to hire Mexican workers (the 80 percent law). Finally, in 1931, the Chinese were expelled from the state of Sonora, with most Chinese attempting to flee to the United States while some moved east to the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila.

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<sup>145</sup> Cumberland, "The Sonoran Chinese", 195.

<sup>146</sup> Cited from *ibid.*, 196.

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