

Chinese Emigration to Mexico and the Sino-Mexico Relations Before 1910

Dong Jingsheng

The emigration of Chinese to Mexico began with the trade of the «Manila galleon» between the Philippines and New Spain (Mexico) during the colonial period of Mexico, increased in great numbers in the late 19th century along with the rapid economic development of Mexico during the Porfirio Diaz regime, and led to the establishment of diplomatic relation between China and Mexico. However at the end of Diaz period, the increasing economic strength of Chinese immigrants, gave rise to the anti-Chinese movement.

In the past years, along with the development of Pacific cooperation, the history of relations between China and Latin America, including those between China and Mexico, have been subject to academic research both in China and in the Western World¹. However, as for the development of relations between China and Mexico, up to now most studies have focused on anti-Chinese movements in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s². It should be noted that the anti-

¹ Many books and articles about the Sino-Latin America relations were published both in Chinese and in the Western countries, for example, In Chinese, Sha Ding, Yang Dianqiu *et al.*, *The Concise History of the Relations between China and Latin America*, Henan People's Press, Zhengzhou, 1986; Luo Rongqu, *Essays on the Historical Relations between China and America*, Chongqing Press, Chongqing, 1988; Li Chunhui and Yangshengmao, eds., *The History of Overseas Chinese in America*, Oriental Press, Beijing, 1990. In Mexico, Marisela Comelly y Romer Cornejo Bustamente, *China- America Latina: Genesis y Desarrollo de sus Relaciones*, El Colegio de Mexico, 1992. Felipe Pardinás, *Relaciones diplomáticas entre Mexico y China, 1898-1948*, Mexico: Secretaria de relaciones exteriores, 1982. In the United States, Cecil Johnson, *Communist China and Latin America, 1959-1967*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970. Frank O. Mora, «Sino-Latin American Relations: Sources and Consequences, 1977-1997», in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 41:2 1999, pp.91-116.

² For example, see Charles C.Cumberland, «The Sonoran Chinese and the Mexican Revolution», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 40:2 (May1960), pp.191-211; Phillip A. Dennis, «The Anti-

Chinese sentiments and the anti-Chinese movements arose before the Mexican revolution, i.e. in the late period of the Porfirio Diaz regime. This article will pay attention to the period before 1910, and will attempt to illuminate the origin and development of Chinese emigration to Mexico, the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the rise of anti-Chinese movements before the Mexican Revolution, that have not been subject of research by most scholars. It will show that the emigration of Chinese to Mexico began with the trade of the «Manila galleon» between the Philippines and New Spain (Mexico) during

the colonial period of Mexico, increased in great numbers in the late 19th century, along with the rapid economic development of Mexico during the Porfirio Diaz regime, and led to the establishment of diplomatic relation between China and Mexico. However, towards the end of the Diaz period, the increasing economic strength of Chinese immigrants, gave rise to an anti-Chinese movement. The article is based on documents of the *Qing* dynasty in Chinese, as well as on studies carried out by other scholars both in China and in the Western World.

Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico», *Ethnohistory*, 26:1 (1979), pp.65-80; Leo M.D. Jaques Dambourges, «The Anti-Chinese Campaign in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1931», Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1974; Leo M.D. Jaques Dambourges, «The Chinese Massacre in Torreon (Coahuila) in 1911», *Arizona and the West*, 16 (Autum 1974), pp.233-246; Jaques Dambourges, «Chinese Merchants in Sonora, 1900-1931», in Luz M. Martinez Montiel, *Asiatic Migrations in Latin America*, El Colegio de Mexico, 1981, pp.13-20; Jaques Dambourges, «The Anti-Chinese Legislative and Press Campaign in Sonora, Mexico, 1916-1921», *Immigrant and Minorities*, 5 (July 1986), pp.167-180; Humberto Monteón González, *Chinos y antichino en Mexico: documentos y su estudio*, Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco, Secretaria General, Unidad Editorial, 1988; Jose Luis Trueba Lara, *Los chinos en Sonora: una historia olvidada*, Sonora, Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Histricas, Universidad de Sonora, 1990; José Joege Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México 1871-1934: problemas del racismo y del nacionalismo durante la Revolucion Mexicana*, México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991; Raymond B. Craib, *Chinese immigrants in Porfirian Mexico: Preliminary Study of Settlement, Economic Activity, and Anti-Chinese Sentiment*, Albuquerque: Latin American Institute, University of New Mexico, 1996; Kenneth S. Cott, «Mexican Diplomatic and the Chinese Issue, 876-1910», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67 (February 1987), pp.63-85; Lawrence Douglas Taylor, «El contrabando de chinos al largo de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, 1882-1931», *Frontera Norte* 6, no.11 (Jan-June 1994), pp. 41-57; Eduardo Ayuon Gerardo, *El dragon en el desierto: los pioneros chinos en Mexicali*, Instituto de Cultura de Baja California, 1991; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, «The Chinese of Baja California Notre, 1910-1934», *Proceedings of the Pacific Ocean Coast Council on Latin American Studies*, 12 (1985-6), pp.9-30; Robert Duncan, «The Chinese and the Economic Development of Northern Baja California, 1889-1929», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 74:4 (Nov. 1994), pp.615-647. No special articles focused on the Sino-Mexico relations during the late 19th century and the early 20th century has been published in Chinese by now. However, many useful documents on this issue were collected and published, see Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol.1, Chinese Book Store Press, Beijing, 1985; and He Fenggjiao, *Collections of Historical Materials about Anti-Chinese Movements, Mexico*, Taipei, 1991, 1993.

Some scholars claimed that the Olmec people came from China.

EARLY CHINESE EMIGRATION TO MEXICO

During the last two centuries, scholars both in China and in the Western World have attempted to delve into the subject of early Chinese migration to Mexico. In 1940, a Chinese scholar, *Chen Zhiliang*, argued that over 2,000 years ago, after their defeat by *Zhou*³, a number of citizens of *Yin*, led by *Qizi*, one of his leaders who had been jailed for a period of time by *Zhouwang*, emperor of *Yin*, sailed across the Pacific and arrived in Mexico⁴. It should be noted that this happened around 1200 B.C., when the Olmec civilization appeared in Mexico. Accordingly, some scholars speculated that the Olmec people came from China⁵. Although this has not been confirmed, scholars have noted that there existed «fascinating and extensively unknown connections be-

tween Olmecs and Orientals, particularly some very strong Chinese features»⁶.

According to another Chinese scholar and reporter, *Lian Yunshan*, in 412 A.D., a Chinese monk named *Fa Xian*, sailing back to China from Sri Lanka, ended up in *Yepoti*. He thought that *Yepoti* was the southwest coast of Mexico, and not Java, as most scholars believe by now. According to him, after staying there for 105 days, *Fa xian* sailed back to China in May, 413. *Lian Yunshan* believes that *Fa Xian* was the first Chinese to reach Mexico⁷. But other scholars do not agree with him and point out that this argument is only a guess, and cannot be proved by historical documents⁸.

In 1761, a French sinologist, J. de Guignes, submitted a report to the French History College, wherein he states that in the 5th century a Chinese Buddhist monk, *Hui Shen*, visited *Fusang* between 452 and 459 A. D., thinking that it was Mexico. Scholars, such as Chinese *Zhu Qianzhi*⁹; and Mexican *Gustavo Vargas Martinez*¹⁰, shared J. de Guignes' impression while

³ *Yin* was the second dynasty in Chinese history, which was overthrown by *Zhou*.

⁴ Chen Zhiliang, «It was Chinese who first come to America», *Language Monthly*, Vol., 1, 1940, in Chinese.

⁵ Dong Jingsheng, «The Problem of the Discovery of America by Chinese,» in edited by Zhou Nanjing, *Encyclopedia of Oversea Chinese, Vol., History*, The Oversea Chinese Press, 2002, pp. 610-611, in Chinese.

⁶ Eugenio Anguiano-Roch, «Mexico's Diplomacy towards China», in edited by Graciela de la Lama, *China, Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico*, 1982, p.147.

⁷ Lian Yunshan, *Who first reach America*, Chinese Social Science Press, Beijing, 1992, in Chinese.

⁸ Wang Bangwei, «Faxian and the Bibliology of Faxin: a Review of Historiography», in *The Research of World Religion*, 4, 2003, in Chinese.

⁹ Zhu Qianzhi, *Textual Research about Fusang*, Business Press, Hong Kong, 1940, in Chinese.

¹⁰ Gustavo Vargas Martinez, «Fusang. Chinos en America antes de Colon, quoted from Diego L. Chou, Los chinos en hispanoamerica», *Cuaderno de Ciencias Sociales*, 124, Sede Academica, Costa Rica, FLACSO, San Jose, 2002, pp.10-11.

others, such as *Luo Rongqu*, another Chinese scholar, disagreed¹¹.

Contacts and relations between China and Mexico was the result of the rise of Western colonialism.

Because of the lack of concrete evidence, the abovementioned viewpoints are not widely accepted by historians. What can now be certain is that the establishment of contacts and relations between China and Mexico was the result of the rise of Western colonialism. Spanish colonists conquered Mexico in the early 16th century. Between 1521 and 1522, they sailed over the Pacific and landed in the Philippines. In 1571, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi started an expedition from Acapulco, and reached Manila. Subsequently, the Spanish successfully established colonies in the Philippines.

In the 10th century, long before the Spanish arrived in the Philippines, Chinese had traded with Filipinos. By 1635, there were more than 20,000 Chinese in Parian, a suburb of Manila set aside for them. The Spanish came to depend upon these Chinese for food and personal service. In 1628, Governor Nino de Tavora confessed that «there is no Spaniard, secular or religious, who obtains his food, clothing, or shoes, except through them»¹². Because

the sea route on the Indian Ocean was controlled by the Portuguese, in order to establish a connection between Europe, Asia and the American colonies, the Spanish Crown then set up a shipping route between Manila and Acapulco in the 1570s¹³. Through this channel, Chinese merchandise, especially silk, and culture, flowed to Mexico in considerable amounts and, in turn, Mexican silver and other secondary items reached the southern coast of China. While sailing back to Mexico, the Spanish merchants usually took their servants or slaves with them, many of whom were Chinese, and left them in Mexico. They were the earliest Chinese immigrants in Mexico. According to historical records, in 16th century, there were many Asian, including Chinese, living in Acapulco. In Mexico City, there were also Chinese, and there was even a Chinese town. For example, on June 22, 1635, the municipal council (*cabildo*) of Mexico City examined a petition which had been submitted to the viceroy by the Spanish barbers in the capital. The latter protested against the «excesses» and «inconveniences» to the «Republic» resulting from the practices of Chinese barbers. The viceroy asked the advice of the city government. The city recommended limiting the number of Chinese barber shops to twelve, that should be located in the suburbs, «as is done in Spain», in order to eliminate the

¹¹ Luo Rongqu, «Guess about Fusang and the Discovery of America», *Historical Research*, 2, 1983, in Chinese.

¹² E. H. Blair & J.A. Robertson, *The Philippines Islands, 1493-1898, 1905-1919*, vol.22, Cleveland, p.250.

¹³ Jorg Faust- Uwe Franke, *Attempts of Diversification: Mexico and the Pacific Asia*, Working Paper No.1, University of Maiaz, Germany, November 2000, see <www.asiayargentina.com>.

unfair competition of Chinese for the best sites in the heart of the city¹⁴. In the 17th century, there were Chinese working in the silver mines and textile factories in Mexico. There were also a number of Chinese mariners who had arrived in Acapulco and other Mexican ports to make a living¹⁵. But we know little about the situation of Chinese in Mexico during the colonial period because of the lack of historical records.

**After the Independence many
Mexican leaders pursued the revival
of Chinese trade.**

CHINESE EMIGRATION AND THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
BETWEEN CHINA AND MEXICO

In the early 19th century, an independent movement took place in Latin America. Acapulco was destroyed in the war in 1813. In 1815, the last Manila galleon sailed back to Manila from Mexico, as a result of which commercial relations between China and Mexico via Manila came to an end. But after the independence, many Mexican leaders sought to

revive Chinese trade as a means of stimulating the country's stagnant economy and tried to attract Chinese to immigrate to Mexico¹⁶. Mexico's political elites agreed that immigration would not only expand the labor force and create markets, but would deepen territorial and economic sovereignty over areas distant from the capital. Of course, the ideal colonist would be a free, white, preferably Catholic European, possessing the industriousness and skills needed to exploit the vast untapped «wealth» of Mexico's frontier, partly because Diaz, like the contemporary elites in Argentina and Brazil, viewed immigration as a way of «whitening» a heavily miscegenated population. But at that time, with great opportunities in the United States and elsewhere, few European emigrants willingly chose Mexico, especially the barren, intemperate regions. For those who did arrive in the frontier, the allure of urban centers and higher wages often limited their stay¹⁷. For example, in 1865/80 families arrived in the hacienda of Buenavista, but soon returned to the United States¹⁸. In lieu of Europeans, Chinese immigrants seemed a viable alternative. In the early 1870s, the Mexico City press launched a heated debate over the advantages of admitting Chinese workers. Maias Romero, diplomat and

¹⁴ Homer H. Dubs & Robert S. Smith, «Chinese in Mexico City in 1635», *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 1, No. 4, Aug, 1942, p. 387.

¹⁵ Diego L. Chou, *Los chinos en hispanoamerica*, p.12.

¹⁶ Kennett Cott, «Mexico Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67:1, 1987, p. 63.

¹⁷ Robert H. Duncan, «The Chinese and the Economic Development of North Baja California, 1889-1929», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 74:4, 1994, p.616.

¹⁸ Moises Gonzalez Navarro, *Los extranjeros en Mexico y los Mexicanos en el extranjeros, 1821-1970*, Volumen 1, El Colegio de Mexico, 1993, p. 506.

coffee grower in Soconusco, reasoned that Chinese labor would be ideal for railroad construction, as well as for ventures in tropical agricultural exports. The Chinese, the argument went, could be paid low salaries and acclimatized easily to tropical America. Their politically powerless country, furthermore, posed little threat of direct intervention on their behalf¹⁹.

The growing anti- Chinese movement in the United States led some Chinese to take refuge in Mexico.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the 19th century, many Chinese emigrated to the west coast of the Pacific in the United States, some of whom crossed the U.S.-Mexico border and entered Mexico to work on northern construction projects and mines. Several colonial companies also drew up plans to import cheap Chinese labor to Mexico, although they never materialized. In addition, after the conclusion of commercial treaties between China and Peru in 1874, as well as between China and Spain in 1878, a number of Chinese laborers in Peru and Cuba who had been relieved of their contractual obligations in plantations went to Mexico. With the growing anti-Chinese movement in the

United States since 1876, not a few of the Chinese that had settled in that country also took refuge in Mexico²⁰. For example, in the middle of the 19th century, 250 foreigners lived in Mazatlan (2% of the total population), including 20 Chinese²¹.

After Porfirio Diaz came to power, Chinese began to emigrate to Mexico in great numbers. During his regime (1877-1911), the political stability brought about by the authoritarian rule and the growing need of raw materials in the industrialized world, the problem of labor shortage became severe. The Mexican government attempted to bolster its economic development by encouraging immigration. In 1883, the Mexican government passed legislation allowing foreigners the right to own land and subsoil resources. The infamous «Law of Fallow Land» permitted private investors to appropriate property declared «public», much of it land held by indigenous communities. In 1886, the government of Porfirio Diaz declared *la ley de Extranjeria y Naturalizacion* to attract foreigners to immigrate or invest in Mexico²². This law established *ius sanguinis* as a guiding principle of Mexican citizenship for the children of foreign nationals. Although the Mexican Constitution of 1857 espoused the principle of *ius soli*, according to which nationality is de-

¹⁹ Robert H. Duncan, «The Chinese and the Economic Development of North Baja California, 1889-1929», p.617.

²⁰ Wu Paak-shing, «China's Diplomatic Relations with Mexico», *China Quarterly*, 4, Summer, 1939, p.441.

²¹ Moises Gonzalez Navarro, *Los extranjeros en Mexico y los Mexicanos en el extranjero, 1821-1970*, Volumen 1, p. 307.

²² Francisco A. Romero Estrada, «Factores que provocaron las migraciones de chinos, japoneses y coreanos hacia Mexico: siglos 19 y 20», see <http://www.gknl.net/history_resources>.

terminated by the place of birth, the 1896 law allowed Mexican-born children of foreigners to retain their father's citizenship²³. Foreign technology, capital and labor were considered necessities for the rapid development of mines, railroads, and agriculture²⁴.

**A diplomatic controversy arose
regarding voyages to the Orient by a
Mexican navigation company.**

In order to encourage Chinese to immigrate to Mexico, the Mexican government tried to establish contacts with China. In March 1884, the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company signed a contract with the Development Ministry to conduct regular voyages between Mexico and the Orient. The company was guaranteed a subsidy for each completed voyage and an additional subsidy for each Asian worker imported. From the beginning, the company's profits depended on the transportation of Chinese workers²⁵. The activities of the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company resulted in a complex diplomatic controversy between Mexico, Great Britain, and China. Efforts of a company ship to board Chinese passengers in Hong Kong in late 1884 were blocked by British officials. The company appealed to the Mexican Foreign Ministry to intercede on

the company's behalf. But the effort of the Mexican Foreign Ministry failed, in part because the Chinese government worried about the conditions of its citizens in a country where it had no diplomatic or consular representation. Apart from the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company, other companies, such as Win Woo Company, which was interested in exporting laborers to Mexico, also asked the Mexican Foreign Ministry to establish diplomatic relations with China. Under these pressures, the Mexican Foreign Ministry attempted to establish ties with China²⁶.

In March 1884, the Mexican Foreign Ministry appointed a commercial agent in Hong Kong. In August, it instructed Romero, then Mexican ambassador to the United States, to approach the Chinese ambassador to the United States, *Zheng Zaoru*, in Washington. In November 1885, Romero had been authorized to negotiate a treaty using as a model the one recently signed between Brazil and China. *Zheng* reported to the *Zongli Yamen* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China), and said, «Mexico is a country that does not have diplomatic relations with China. Unless diplomatic relations are established for will be at a disadvantage for the protection of Chinese laborers in that country». He also said, «It will be difficult if the Chinese laborers are injured, and it is best to establish regulations before they leave for

²³ Jurgen Buchenau, «Small Numbers, Great Impacts: Mexico and Its Immigrants, 1821-1973», in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Spring 2001, p. 34.

²⁴ Leo M. Jacques, «Chinese Merchants in Sonora, 1900-1931», in edited by Luz M. Martinez Montiel, *Asian Migrations in Latin America*, El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico, 1981, p. 13.

²⁵ Kennett Cott, «Mexico Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910», p. 67.

²⁶ Kennett Cott, «Mexico Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910», pp. 67-68.

Mexico»²⁷. However, at that time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China did not want to establish diplomatic relations with Mexico, so it instructed *Zheng* to decline Romero's suggestion, in part because the Chinese were taking part in a campaign against the kidnapping and abuse of Chinese laborers by western countries, and it was not easy to protect Chinese laborers abroad. Romero continued to pursue the matter, with no success. *Zhang Yinhuan*, Chinese minister to the United States, Spain and Peru, said in a letter to China, «Romero, a Mexican envoy, came to visit me and tried to discuss about the commercial treaty between two countries. I replied that without the instruction from the government, I was not able to discuss with him about this..... I know that the intention of Mexico is to import Chinese laborers to work there». *Zhang* agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China and believed that «the people in that country hate Chinese very much. I am afraid that we should be careful from the beginning, in order not to let the tragedies which had happened in the United States and Spain occur again»²⁸.

However, at the end of the 19th century, the attitude of Chinese government began to change. On one hand, with the prohibition of further Chinese immigration into the United States by the enforcement of Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1882, throngs

of Chinese chose to migrate into Mexico. Thus the question of diplomatic protection and related problems of immigration into Mexico became more pressing, and the Chinese Government was constrained to reconsider its attitude. On the other hand, when the *Yi He Tuan* movement (peasant uprising from 1898 to 1900 in China) broke out, the government of the *Qing* dynasty decided to «open the road for the Chinese emigration» with the aim of «finding more sources of living and avoiding the disaster.» According to a memorandum to the crown by *Zongli Yamen*, «In recent years, because the United States have been prohibiting the immigration of Chinese, other ways must be opened up for the emigration. There are less population and more mines and lands (in Mexico). That country wants to employ Chinese laborers to work there and to have trade with us, as well as to let Chinese acquire lands there, which is different from the cases in Cuba and Peru»²⁹.

**Many Chinese migrated
into Mexico as a result of the
enforcement of the Chinese
Exclusion Acts in the United States.**

So in 1894, negotiations between China and Mexico were started. Pursuant to in-

²⁷ Sha Ding & Yang Dianqiu, «The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and some Latin American Countries in the Late Qing Dynasty», in *Essays on the History of Latin America*, Oriental Press, Beijing, 1986, p. 342, in Chinese.

²⁸ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol.1, Chinese Book Store Press, Beijing, p. 1239, in Chinese.

²⁹ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol.1, Beijing, p. 1240.

structions from *Zongli Yamen*, *Yang Yue*, Chinese minister to the United States, Spain and Peru, commissioned *Lai Yung-yau* and *Zia Yin-ye* to examine the conditions of Chinese emigrants in Mexico³⁰. *Yang Yue* reported the results of his investigation to *Zongli Yamen*, and indicated that the «Mexican government is hoping to have trade with China urgently». Towards the end of 1894, a draft treaty which had been agreed upon between *Yang Yue* and the Mexican Ambassador to the U. S was forwarded to their respective governments for consideration. Unfortunately, in 1895 both countries were unable to proceed with the subject, as Mexico was involved in a serious boundary dispute with Guatemala and China confronted the more urgent problems deriving from the armistice of the Sino-Japanese War. In 1896, negotiations were resumed by *Wu Tingfang*, who had succeeded *Yang Yue* as Chinese Minister, and Romero, Mexican ambassador to the United States, and the text of the treaty was finally adopted. However, the following year, when the treaty was to be signed, Romero died suddenly. In the summer of 1899, Manuel de Azpiroz, the new Mexican ambassador to the United States, and *Wu Tingfang* reestablished contacts and completed the text of the treaty. On 14 December, the treaty of friendship, commerce and navigation was concluded and signed at Washington³¹.

According to the treaty, nationals of each country were entirely free to leave, travel, reside and engage in commerce in the other country. They were granted the most-favored-nation treatment. Both countries were to appoint diplomatic and consular officials who would be accorded the usual prerogatives, exemptions, immunities and privileges. Merchant vessels of one country would be free to frequent the ports of the other, open to foreign trade. Provisions were set forth regarding coastal trade as well as revenue charges, fees and duties of merchant vessels in each other's ports³².

A Treaty of friendship, commerce and navigation between China and Mexico was signed on 14 December 1899.

As for the protection of Chinese laborers in Mexico, Article 5 of the treaty stated that «the two High Contracting Parties... condemn any act of violence or deceit committed in the ports or other parts of China for the purpose of expatriating Chinese subjects against their will.» Engagement by contract of laborers and servants in plantations, mills, shops, business establishments or private families would be subject to rules to be adopted by mutual agreement. According to *Wu Tingfang*, «Knowing the negotiations between

³⁰ Wu Paak-shing, «China's Diplomatic Relations with Mexico», p. 442.

³¹ Marsela Connelly, Romer Bustamente Cornejo, *China-America Latina*, El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico D.F. 1992, pp. 40-47.

³² Wu Paak-shing, China's Diplomatic Relations with Mexico, p. 442. Harley Farnsworth Macnair, *The Chinese Abroad: Their Position and Protection, A Study in International Law and Relations*, The Commercial Press, Limited, Shanghai, China, 1925, p. 93.

China and Mexico, thousands of Chinese have gone to Mexico. We are afraid that they will be ill-treated, especially be tricked. The purpose of this treaty is to prevent this kind of crimes»³³. Articles 13 to 15 established the procedures to be adopted in solving complaints and conflicts between citizens and subjects of both countries. Article 17 stated that the Chinese in Mexico would have «free access to the judicial tribunals of the countries for the defense of their legitimate rights», and would enjoy the same rights and concessions as those given to Mexicans by nationals of the most-favored-nation³⁴. This ten-year treaty offered the possibility of amendment by common consent, and made possible some important exchanges, particularly on the issue of Chinese immigration to Mexico³⁵.

Chinese emigration to Mexico had been under way before the establishment of diplomatic relations.

In 1900, China appointed *Lee Jien Shu* as deputy representative in Mexico. However, it was not until 1905 that the Chinese embassy in Mexico was established. Mexico also set up consulates in *Shanghai*, *Canton*, *Fuzhou* and *Xi men* in 1904 and 1905³⁶.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN MEXICO AND THE RISE OF THE ANTI-CHINESE MOVEMENT

Actually, the emigration of Chinese to Mexico had been under way in increasing numbers, before the establishment of diplomatic relations. By 1895, there were about 1,000 Chinese living in Mexico. Most Chinese came from *Guangdong* Province near the southern coast of China, where hunger and violence led peasants to cross the Pacific to make a living, instead of settling in the interior frontier, because according to Confucian tradition education here was relatively limited³⁷. Since 1899 when the treaty was signed, emigration had been increasing considerably. In 1902, *Wu Xuehuang* and *Huang Xingguo*, founded the *Maoli* and Steamship Company for transporting Chinese to Mexico. In addition, British, Portuguese and French were also active in transporting Chinese to Mexico. From 1902 to 1921, when the treaty was terminated, thirty to forty thousand Chinese had emigrated to Mexico. Although there were regulations for preventing activities in violation of the 1899 treaty, many Chinese continued to be deceived by foreign traffickers. In 1906, cases of kidnapping Chinese to work in Mexican mineral companies by British and French merchants were discovered in sev-

³³ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol. 1, p. 1240.

³⁴ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol. 1, p. 1241.

³⁵ Eugenio Anguiano-Roch, «Mexico's Diplomacy towards China», p. 148.

³⁶ Diego L. Chou, *Los chinos en hispanoamerica*, p. 15.

³⁷ Francisco A. Romero Estrada, «Factores que provocaron las migraciones de chinos, japoneses y coreanos hacia Mexico: siglos 19 y 20», see <http://www.gknla.net/history_resources>.

eral Chinese ports, such as *Sanduaao*, *Fuzou* and *Shanghai*³⁸.

Chinese laborers greatly contributed to Mexico's economic development.

Most Chinese were brought to Mexico by Chinese or foreign companies specializing in smuggling Chinese into the United States. They were generally transported from Hong Kong by one of several non-Mexican steamship companies. Disembarked at Mexico's Pacific ports, they were then conducted to labor sites, where they were forced to remain for the period specified in their contracts, customarily two years. Wages seldom exceeded one *peso* per day. Workers were employed in railroad construction and in agriculture throughout the *tierra caliente* and in mining in northern Mexico³⁹. According to *Chen Kuangmin*, a Chinese scholar, the distribution of Chinese laborers in Mexico was as follows,

1. Three thousand worked in railroad construction in Coxaca,
2. Fourteen thousand worked in copper mining and railroad construction in Sonora,
3. Six thousand e worked in maguey plantations in Merida,
4. Seven thousand worked in cotton plantations in Mexicali B. C.
5. An undetermined number went from the U. S. to other parts of Mexico⁴⁰.

Conditions of Chinese laborers in Mexico were often notoriously bad. However, they made great contributions to Mexico's economic development. Although they carried little capital or modern technologies, they did provide an abundant source of labor and mercantile skills. At the same time, they also brought some problems to Mexican society. For example, although the rate of crime committed by the Chinese was lower than the average crime rate in Mexico, some Chinese did take part in gambling, and others engaged in shops for the sale of opium. In 1903, *Liang Cheng*, Chinese minister to the United States, in a letter to Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that «by now there are several tens of thousands thousands of Chinese living in Mexico, and it is impossible to be absent of every kinds of bad habits». He said, «the most prominent are as follows, 1) men and women go together to suck opium, 2) open casinos and make great noisy day and night, 3) open law court privately and often tussle for little matters, 4) do not care about the sanitation and cause many diseases, 5) do not pay attention to their behavior and corrupt public morale»⁴¹ (*sic*).

However, the main reason which led Mexicans and the Mexican government to be hostile to Chinese was the competition between Chinese and Mexicans in the economic field. Most Chinese came to

³⁸ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol. 6, Chinese book Store Press, Beijing, p. 269, in Chinese.

³⁹ Kennett Cott, *Mexico Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910*, p.70.

⁴⁰ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol. 6, p.289.

⁴¹ Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol. 1, p.1245.

Mexico initially as laborers, for example, many immigrants were employed in cotton plantations in Mexicali, in sisal plantations in Yucatan, but when they had accumulated an adequate amount of capital they began to carry out other economic activities. In cities such as Torreon, Mazatlan, Mexicali, Tampico and Chihuahua, they engaged in several economic activities, for example, they opened restaurants, cultivated vegetables, established laundries, shoe and clothing factories and grocery stores⁴². Although they had limited capital, thanks to their industriousness, frugality, and extensive credit ties with the United States, they achieved great economic success in several states in Mexico. For example, according to an 1899 commercial survey, one of the ten most prominent businessmen in northern Baja California was *Yun Kui*, who had opened a general store six years earlier. Besides stocking Chinese goods, *Yun Kui* manufactured low-cost canvas shoes and carried a full line of dry goods, groceries, and hardware⁴³. In Sonora, some of the more aggressive firms, such as *Fon Qui* and *Juan Lung Tain*, moved into the wholesale grocery and dry goods business. These two had branches in dozens of

Sonora towns, with assets totaling approximately \$ 100,000 each⁴⁴. Chinese played a pivotal role in Sonora, where they came to dominate the retail and money lending sectors. Estimated at 4,486 individuals in 1910, they became the largest foreign colony in that state⁴⁵. According to Evelyn Hu-DeHart, at the end of the Porfiriato, the Chinese had distinguished themselves as the basis of a new social class, the petite bourgeoisie, in the flourishing, rapidly urbanizing, export-oriented economy of Mexico's northwest⁴⁶.

The Chinese were the basis of a new social class in the rapidly urbanizing economy of Mexico's northwest.

It should be noted that although the Chinese had achieved success in some industrial and commercial fields, they were not a serious threat to other foreign and native Mexican businessmen. For example, in 1897, a commercial survey conducted by John R. Southworth in Sonora, ranks only one Chinese company, *Siu Fo Chon* shoe factory. According to Southworth, Chinese were only good at low level economic activities, such as small, grocery, sewing, laundry, and kitchen shops⁴⁷. How-

⁴² Francisco A. Romero Estrada, «Factores que provocaron las migraciones de chinos, japoneses y coreanos hacia Mexico: siglos 19 y 20», see <http://www.gknla.net/history_resources>.

⁴³ Robert H. Duncan, *The Chinese and the Economic Development of North Baja California, 1889-1929*, p. 616.

⁴⁴ Leo M. Jacques, *Chinese Merchants in Sonora, 1900-1931*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Jurgen Buchenau, «Small Numbers, Great Impacts: Mexico and Its Immigrants, 1821-1973», p. 35.

⁴⁶ Evelyn Hu-DeHart, «Sonora: Indians and Immigrants on a Developing Frontier», in edited by Thomas Benjamin and William McNellie, *Other Mexicos: Essays on Regional Mexican History*, Albuquerque, N M: University of New Mexico Press, 1984, p. 195.

⁴⁷ Evelyn Hu-Dehart, «Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico», in *The Overseas Chinese Research*, vol. 4, 1988, p. 44, in Chinese.

ever, it was only because Chinese had not invested in capital-intensive enterprises, as businessmen from the United States and Europe had done and which Mexican people were unable to do, and had principally engaged in low or middle level economic activities, which Mexicans trusted, that they caused the envy and protest of natives. As a result, when the Chinese ceased to be laborers and began to turn to commerce and business activities, they were opposed by natives. Chinese were often accused of being criminals, lazy, brutal, drug addicts, gamblers, and suffered from dermatophytosis or trachoma. In 1905, a newspaper called *La Evolucion*, launched a campaign against Chinese immigration. Although the editor stressed cultural and racial antagonism, his most important arguments were economic. He charged that the Chinese were not consumers, since they spent only a quarter of what they earned and sent the rest to China. He also complained that they competed with Mexicans and forced them out of jobs by accepting lower salaries and selling produce at lower prices⁴⁸. This kind of feelings soon led to violence. There was an anti-Chinese riot in Mazatlan in 1886, and several unprovoked attacks on Chinese occurred in Mexico City in the same year. Employment of Chinese in a Nogales lumber mill provoked a wildcat strike in 1891, and there was anti-Chinese violence in Monterrey in 1894. By 1900, such occurrences were not uncommon⁴⁹.

The main argument against Chinese immigration was neither cultural nor racial, but economic.

In accordance with anti-Chinese feelings, the Mexican government tried to take steps to limit Chinese immigration. In 1902, the *Consejo Superior de Salubridad* was established in Mexico City, and agencies in the Pacific ports began to examine and isolate people and luggage coming from Asian countries, especially from China. In 1903, the Interior Ministry passed the epidemic prevention bill⁵⁰. According to this bill, before boarding the ship, all emigrants bound for Mexico had to be examined and given a medical certificate by a doctor. The certificate then had to be attested by the Mexican consulate. In the absence of a Mexican consulate, the certificate had to be attested by the consulate of the United States. This certificate had to be obtained 2 months before boarding the ship. The ship had to be equipped with epidemic prevention equipment, so that passengers, as well as their clothes and luggage, did not spread diseases. An antiseptis machine had to be ready to clean the ship with sulfur water as well as to kill mice. When arriving at the ports of Mexico, before landing all luggage and cargo had to be checked to prevent epidemics, passengers also had to be examined carefully according to the statute of

⁴⁸ Leo M. Jacques, «Chinese Merchants in Sonora, 1900-1931», p. 15.

⁴⁹ Kennett Cott, *Mexico Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910*, p. 82.

⁵⁰ Diego L. Chou, *Los chinos en hispanoamerica*, p. 19.

epidemic prevention. All expenses had to be covered by the shipping company. Shipping companies had to build living quarters for passengers at ports. The Board of health could implement other measures to prevent spreading of disease. Officers assigned by the Board of Health could detain ships at port temporarily⁵¹.

In 1903, the Interior Ministry appointed a commission headed by Gonaro Raigosa to study the issue of Chinese and Japanese immigration. However, after submitting a report, the commission was instructed to suspend its activities. In 1906,

it resumed its work. However, until the collapse of the Diaz regime, the commission had neither submitted reports nor made any suggestions⁵². In other words, the Diaz government did not solve the Chinese problem. Apart from the growing inertia of the government, perhaps the main reason was that though Mexican officials found Chinese immigrants undesirable, they also admitted that Chinese labor was beneficial and necessary⁵³. As a result, along with the turbulence of the Mexican revolution, anti-Chinese violence broke out, and reached a climax during the 1930s.

⁵¹ The full text of this bill can be found in Chen Hansheng ed., *Historical Documents about the Chinese Laborers Abroad*, vol.1, pp. 1243-1244.

⁵² Kennett Cott, *Mexico Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910*, pp. 82-85.

⁵³ Erika Lee, «Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882-1924», in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No.1, June 2002, p.12.