

Crossing Boundaries, Claiming a Homeland: The Mexican Chinese Transpacific Journey to Becoming Mexican, 1930s–1960s

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This article follows Mexican Chinese families from Mexico, across the Mexican-U.S. border, to China, and back to Mexico. Settling in northern Mexico in the nineteenth century, Chinese formed multiple ties with Mexicans. An anti-Chinese movement emerged during the Mexican Revolution and peaked during the Great Depression. The Mexican government deported several thousand Chinese men and their Mexican-origin families from Sonora and neighboring Sinaloa, some directly to China and others to the United States, whose immigration agents also deported the families to China. They arrived in Guangdong (Canton) Province but eventually congregated in Macau where they forged a coherent Mexican Chinese enclave. Developing a strategic Mexican nationalism, they appealed for repatriation. The Mexican Chinese “became Mexican” only after authorities compelled them to struggle for years from abroad for the inclusion of their mixed-race families in the nation. They became diasporic citizens and fashioned hybrid identities to survive in Mexico and China.

In 2004 Alfonso Wong Campoy, a Mexican Chinese man from the northern Mexican town of Navojoa in Sonora, reflected on his life, saying, “I love Mexico, I love Navojoa.”¹ His father, Alfonso Wong Fang, and his mother, Dolores Campoy Rivera, had traversed racial and cultural boundaries by marrying and forming a family during the 1920s. These cultural crossings eventually pushed the family across political borders. Expelled from Navojoa

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1. Oral history interview with Alfonso Wong Campoy, Oct. 10, 2004, Navojoa, Sonora, in author's possession. The oral history interviews conducted for this project will eventually be available to other researchers at the Oral History Institute of the University of Texas at El Paso. All translations from Spanish into English are by the author; the original recordings or copies of the archival documents and unpublished papers are available from her.

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by the Sonoran government during the early 1930s, they entered the United States, whose immigration agents then deported them to China. After living briefly in Guangdong (Canton) Province and nearly thirty years in the Portuguese colony of Macau, Alfonso Wong Campoy ultimately returned to Mexico, the homeland he had longed for since his childhood.²

This work is a journey. It follows the paths of Mexican Chinese families from northern Mexico, across the Mexican-U.S. border, to southeastern China, and back to Mexico. Chinese men increasingly arrived in Mexico after the United States passed a series of Chinese Exclusion Acts beginning in 1882. These men concentrated in northern Mexico because of its proximity to the United States and the existence of opportunities in the developing economy. Integrating into local society, Chinese men forged a variety of relationships with Mexicans, including romantic unions and marriages with Mexican women. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910, an anti-Chinese campaign emerged in Sonora. Although this movement spread across the nation during the 1920s and early 1930s, anti-Chinese organizing was strongest in the Mexican north, owing partially to its location near the United States and the circulation of anti-Chinese ideology in the border region.³ Only the states of Sonora and its coastal neighbor, Sinaloa, carried out mass expulsions of Chinese men and their families, including even those of Mexican origin, during the early 1930s. While some were deported directly from Mexican ports, others passed through the United States after Mexican officials literally pushed Chinese men and Mexican Chinese families through gaps in the international boundary fence. After taking their testimony and holding them in immigration jails in the Southwest, the United States deported them to China. Once in China, Mexican Chinese families confronted drastic changes. They formed local networks in Guangdong Province and, over time, an enclave in Portuguese Macau. Nevertheless, many Mexican Chinese sought to return to Mexico and appealed to Mexican authorities between the 1930s and 1960s. Two official Mexican repatriations took place, the first under the administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1937–1938 and the

2. *Ibid.*

3. See Erika Lee, "Orientalisms in the Americas: A Hemispheric Approach to Asian American History," *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 8 (2005), 235–256.

second under President Adolfo López Mateos in 1960. From the early 1930s until at least the 1980s, smaller groups also returned outside the two official repatriations.⁴

On the cultural and geographic fringes of the nation, these Mexican Chinese became “Mexican” only after they struggled from abroad for years with federal authorities for the official acknowledgment of the legitimacy of their racially mixed families. In the process, the identities they formed as Mexicans were both heartfelt and strategic, born in the context of conflict in mid-twentieth-century China. Confronting political and economic hardship, Mexican Chinese claimed Mexico as their homeland and argued that their families belonged in that nation because they wanted to leave China. Mexico became increasingly desirable as they were forced to compare their memories of it with their lives in China. The concept of a “Mexican homeland” became ever more salient among the Mexican Chinese as China experienced invasion by Japan, the Sino-Japanese War, World War II, the Communist Revolution, and the Cold War. Over the years, as they grew to love and miss Mexico, they romanticized the nation and developed a diasporic Mexican citizenship.⁵

In making a case for the *Mexicanness* of their families, the Mexican Chinese pushed the concept of *mestizaje*—the ideology of the nation’s heritage of racial and cultural mixture—to include them. *Mestizaje* is the centerpiece of Mexican nationalism but has historically excluded Chinese and other Asians. Following Mexican Chinese families across borders and oceans as they left northern Mexico, developed a Mexican national identity, and repatriated decades later, this article complicates the literature on

4. I address these movements in my as-yet unpublished book manuscript, Julia María Schiavone Camacho, “Becoming Mexican Across the Pacific: Expulsion, Gendered Citizenship, and Diasporic Imaginings, 1930s–1960s.”

5. It is difficult to estimate how much of their love for Mexico was heartfelt and how much was strategic. A seemingly genuine love for the homeland emerges in the many communications of the Mexican Chinese, as well as the oral history interviews I conducted. I explore this further in my book manuscript. Relations between China and Japan became increasingly hostile in the early 1930s as Japan seized control of parts of northern China, beginning with Manchuria in September 1931. Such actions eventually led to the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937–1945 (the First Sino-Japanese War was in 1894–1895). See Hsi-Sheng Ch’i, *Nationalist China at War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937–1945* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982), 27, 40, 42–43; Yun-han Li, “The Origins of the War: Background of the Lukouchiao Incident, July 7, 1937,” in Paul K. T. Sih, ed., *Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945* (Hicksville, N.Y., 1977), 3–5.

postrevolutionary and postwar Mexico by placing the nation in a larger transpacific context and addressing the understudied question of gendered citizenship. This article also contributes to scholarship on Borderlands history, moving beyond the U.S. Southwest and focusing instead on northern Mexico. Chinese concentrated in the Mexican north, and anti-Chinese campaigns were most successful on the northern border. Moreover, the expulsion of Chinese from Sonora and Sinaloa (1931–1934) partially coincided with the massive forced repatriation of Mexicans from the U.S. Southwest (1929–late 1930s). The return of Mexican workers, who had become scapegoats for the Great Depression in the United States, added momentum to anti-Chinese campaigns in Mexico that had called for the removal of Chinese residents since the 1910s.

The Mexican-U.S. border region is linked with the rest of the Pacific Rim not only by migration but also by transpacific ties and by the complex, hybrid, diasporic identities that Mexican Chinese individuals and families created and maintained over time. Mexican Chinese families developed a “diasporic citizenship,” imbued with a strong sense of Mexican nationalism and a longing for the homeland, which they cultivated across three decades. I use Lok C. D. Siu’s concept of “diasporic citizenship” to highlight the interstitial status of the Mexican Chinese in China and the loyalty they felt toward Mexico while they were abroad.⁶ Like other peoples on the fringes of nation-states who did not fit by virtue of their race, gender, class, language, culture, or affiliative ties, the Mexican Chinese sought to negotiate a place in the Mexican nation.

Chinese migration to Mexico and the anti-Chinese movement

This story begins in southeastern China during the mid-nineteenth century when Chinese men left their villages and towns and began to form overseas communities around the world.⁷ The

6. See Lok C. D. Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (Stanford, Calif., 2005); Jeffrey Lesser, ed., *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham, N.C., 2003); Lesser, *A Discontented Diaspora: Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy* (Durham, N.C., 2007); William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diasporas*, 1 (1991), 83–99; and James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (1984), 302–338.

7. Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore, 1991); Wang, “Sojourning: The Chinese Experience in Southeast Asia,” in Anthony Reid, ed., *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Honolulu, 1996), 1–14; Wang,

discovery of gold drew many Chinese, and others, to northern California. They began to arrive in northern Mexico after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 forbade the entry of Chinese laborers into the United States. On the U.S.-Mexican border, Sonora was among the Mexican states that attracted the highest numbers of Chinese.⁸ Some came with the intention of entering the United States illegally. Others had learned of local prospects and found commercial niches in the growing economy of northern Mexico.⁹

Among the Cantonese newcomers to Sonora was Wong Fang, Wong Campoy's father. Wong Fang left Guangdong Province with his brother and arrived in San Francisco in the early 1900s. While his brother remained in San Francisco, Wong Fang moved to Sonora where he worked and learned Spanish. Adapting to local society, Wong Fang became Alfonso Wong Fang by adding a familiar Mexican first name and using his Chinese names as surnames,

Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese (Singapore, 1981). The Chinese who traveled to the Americas emigrated largely from the city of Canton (today Guangzhou) and surrounding areas in Guangdong Province, not only because of population growth, economic transformation, political turmoil, religious persecution, and natural disaster in the region, but also owing to this region's key role in Chinese history, especially China's relationship with the external world. Chinese emigrated from Taishan County in particular. See Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston, 1991), 5–8; Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford, Calif., 2000), 1–5; and June Mei, "Economic Origins of Emigration: Guangdong to California, 1850–1882," *Modern China*, 5 (1979), 463–501. Until 1960 over half of all Chinese in the United States came from Taishan County. See Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 3, and Mei, "Economic Origins of Emigration," 465.

8. Sonora was the Mexican state with the highest numbers of Chinese in every census year between 1900 and 1930, with the exception of 1927, when the state had the second-highest Chinese population. The following are the numbers of Chinese men in Sonora listed for each census year: 1900: 850; 1910: 4,486; 1921: 3,639; 1927: 3,758; 1930: 3,571. See José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871–1934): Problemas del racismo y del nacionalismo durante la Revolución Mexicana* [The anti-Chinese movement in Mexico (1871–1934): problems of racism and nationalism during the Mexican Revolution] (Mexico City, 1991), 77, 78, 109, 127, 150, and Kif Augustine-Adams, "Making Mexico: Legal Nationality, Chinese Race, and the 1930 Population Census," *Law and History Review*, 27 (2009), at ssrn.com/abstract=1033061, accessed June 1, 2009.

9. Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003); Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "La comunidad china en el desarrollo de Sonora" [The Chinese community in the development of Sonora], in Cynthia Radding de Murrieta, ed., *Historia General de Sonora, Tomo IV, Sonora Moderno, 1880–1929* [General history of Sonora, Vol. 4, 1880–1929] (6 vols., Hermosillo, Mex., 1997), 4: 198–202; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers: The Chinese of Mexico and Peru (1849–1930)," *Amerasia*, 15 (1989), 91–116.

a common practice among Chinese in Latin America.¹⁰ He eventually became an associate of Ching Chong y Compañía and met Dolores Campoy Rivera, whose father worked in the local post office in Navojoa. They ultimately married and formed a family. Their eldest child, Alfonso Wong Campoy was born in Navojoa on October 12, 1928. In keeping with Mexican custom, the parents named their first-born son after his father and gave him one of his father's and one of his mother's surnames.¹¹

Other Chinese also integrated into Sonoran communities; they learned Spanish and became naturalized Mexicans. Individual Chinese and Mexicans—mainly from the working and middle classes—developed an array of everyday social, economic, and neighborly ties, including romantic unions and marriages. At times, Chinese men and Mexican women formed relationships without eliciting much reaction from their families or communities. They got to know one another in the businesses Chinese men established. Families also arranged marriages, and Mexican and indigenous fathers who worked for Chinese landowners sometimes encouraged their daughters to marry their Chinese bosses for economic stability. In other cases, however, women's families did not approve, and Chinese men and Mexican women had to maintain secret relationships.¹²

10. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "Latin America in Asia-Pacific Perspective," in Arif Dirlik, ed., *What is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (New York, 1998), 251–282; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers"; Siu, *Memories of a Future Home*; Isabelle Lausent-Herrera, "Mujeres olvidadas: Esposas, concubinas, e hijas de los inmigrantes chinos en el Perú republicano" [Forgotten women: wives, concubines, and daughters of Chinese immigrants to republican Peru], in Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy and Margarita Zegarra Florez, eds., *Mujeres, familias y sociedad en la historia de América Latina, siglos XVIII–XXI* [Women, family, and society in Latin American history, eighteenth to twenty-first centuries] (Lima, 2006), 287–312.

11. Wong Campoy interview.

12. Gerardo Rénique, "Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s–1930s," in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 219–226; Rénique, "Anti-Chinese Racism, Nationalism and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, 1920s–1930s," *Political Power and Social Theory*, 14 (2000), 95, 97, 102; Robert Chao Romero, "The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico, 1882–1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003); Chao Romero, "El destierro de los Chinos' [The exile of the Chinese]: Popular Perspectives on Chinese-Mexican Inter-marriage in the Early Twentieth Century," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 32 (2007), 113–144; Augustine-Adams, "Making Mexico." See also Julia María Schiavone Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries: Chinese, Mexicans, and Chinese Mexicans in the

Chinese played an important and visible role in the Sonoran economy and society despite their relatively small numbers. Although they comprised only between 1 and 2 percent of Sonora's overall population between 1910 and 1930, Chinese concentrated in particular towns and gained disproportionate attention because of their commercial activities.¹³ Fulfilling a variety of needs, they brought merchandise and services to towns throughout Sonora. They lived and labored on the haciendas, ranchos, and fields of Mexican as well as Chinese landowners. Chinese also created businesses, either individually or jointly with other countrymen. They often hired compatriots who had just arrived to work in their stores, but at times they also employed Mexican women. Initially, Chinese businessmen enjoyed the protection of municipal authorities because they brought revenue and necessary goods to local communities. While some were large-scale operations, most Chinese businesses were small, including street peddling. Selling goods house by house, street by street, they made frequent contact with their clientele. North American and European immigrants, many of whom were businessmen and possessed far larger sums of capital, were simply not a part of Sonoran working people's day-to-day lives. Chinese laborers, peddlers, and shopkeepers, on the other hand, were visible on a daily basis.¹⁴

Owing to their visible presence, Chinese had experienced prejudice since they first arrived in Sonora. Negative attitudes and jokes abounded, and some people perceived Chinese as different

Formation of Gender, Race, and Nation in the Twentieth-Century U.S.-Mexican Borderlands" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at El Paso, 2006).

13. When Chinese first migrated to Sonora during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they were concentrated in Guaymas, the port of entry, and in Hermosillo, the capital. They later moved to other areas. See Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers," 99; Hu-DeHart, "La comunidad china"; Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875-1932," *Journal of Arizona History*, 21 (1980), 275-312; Grace Peña Delgado, "In the Age of Exclusion: Race, Religion, and Chinese Identity in the Making of the Arizona-Sonora Borderlands, 1863-1943" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2000); Peña Delgado, "At Exclusion's Southern Gate: Changing Categories of Race and Class among Chinese Fronterizos," in Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham, N.C., 2004); and Schiavone Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries."

14. Rénique, "Race, Region, and Nation"; Rénique, "Anti-Chinese Racism"; Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Sonora, Mexico, 1876-1932," *Amerasia*, 9 (1982), 1-28; Chao Romero, "The Dragon in Big Lusong"; Chao Romero, "El destierro de los Chinos."

and foreign. North American and European immigrants were insulated from this pattern by the legacy of Spanish colonialism, which privileged the lighter skinned. Nevertheless, anti-Chinese sentiment was neither widespread nor organized in Sonora until the period between the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Great Depression.¹⁵ During this time, especially when Mexican workers began to return from the United States, Chinese ethnic distinctiveness generated Mexican scorn for Chinese as foreigners who took jobs from “real” Mexicans—a mirror of the treatment that Mexicans received in the United States.

The Mexican Revolution set notions of race, citizenship, and *mestizaje* in flux. Revolutionaries argued that the nation needed to embrace its indigenous character and repudiate the Porfirian tradition of privileging foreigners and light-skinned Mexicans. In this period, resentment of Chinese and perceptions of their purportedly undeserved economic success became increasingly pronounced among some working-class and middle-class Mexicans in Sonora. In 1916 about twenty people founded the Commercial Association of Businessmen in the small northern mining town Magdalena.¹⁶ Led by José María Arana, the group proposed to defend “Mexican” merchants and rid Sonora of Chinese business owners. This action signaled the beginning of an organized anti-Chinese movement in Mexico. It is significant that the movement began in Sonora, and more specifically Magdalena, which is very near the Mexican-U.S. border (see Figure 1). Many Mexican men had left Magdalena to fight in the revolution or work in the United States. Pointing to the “shortages” of Mexican men, some local people complained that Chinese men had filled the void, stealing both capital and women that rightfully belonged to Mexican men. Spreading quickly, anti-Chinese campaigns in Sonora, like those in California during the 1860s and 1870s, portrayed the Chinese as dangerous outsiders who infringed on the domain of the Mexican poor and working classes.¹⁷

15. *Ibid.*

16. The original name of the group was the Junta Comercial y de Hombres de Negocios de Magdalena. See Rénique, “Región, raza y nación en el antichinismo sonorense. Cultura regional y mestizaje en el México posrevolucionario” [Region, race, and nation in Sonoran anti-Chinese activism. Regional culture and mestizaje in post-revolutionary Mexico], unpublished paper, in author’s possession.

17. On anti-Chinese campaigns in California, see Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971);

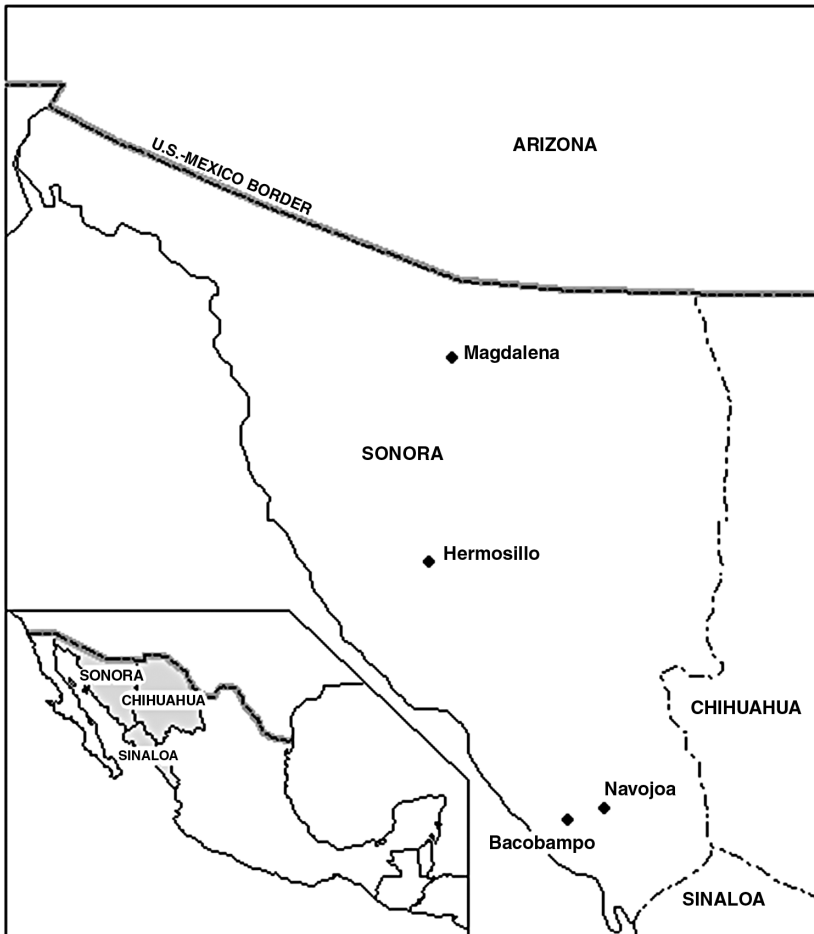


Figure 1. Map of Sonora, showing places mentioned in this article, the proximity of the U.S.-Mexican border, and the relative locations of the states of Sonora and Sinaloa. Map by Jacquelyn C. Ferry; used with permission.

The people who organized these campaigns—working-class and middle-class Mexicans—came from the same social and economic classes as those who had formed bonds with Chinese. *Antichinistas* (anti-Chinese activists) focused on Mexican Chinese relationships,

Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London, 1990).



Figure 2. Anti-Chinese Drawing. From 1917 Folder, Papers of José María Arana, Special Collections, University of Arizona, Tucson; used with permission.

and on romantic unions and marriages in particular, arguing that these threatened the integrity of the Mexican race and nation. They chastised Mexicans who maintained ties with or were friendly toward Chinese by labeling them “chineros” and “chineras.” The particularly hateful nature of the Sonoran movement against Chinese reverberated in their published propaganda (see Figure 2).¹⁸

Anti-Chinese ideology infiltrated state politics over time. The movement succeeded in passing several anti-Chinese laws, including one in 1923 that banned Mexican Chinese marriages or unions, which *antichinistas* called “illicit friendships.” In order to help enforce the law, anti-Chinese activists used sexual policing tactics. *Antichinista* newspapers such as *El Intruso* (The Intruder) printed the names and photographs of Mexican women who engaged

18. Papers of José María Arana, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson; Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation”; Rénique, “Anti-Chinese Racism.”

in sexual liaisons with Chinese men. Anti-Chinese activists targeted Mexican women with a special fervor, casting them as dangerous traitors to the race and nation.¹⁹

The movement peaked by the early 1930s. The Great Depression and the return of Mexican laborers from the United States provided the final impetus that anti-Chinese activists needed to rid Sonora of the vast majority of Chinese.²⁰ Some people had drawn connections between the situations of Chinese in Mexico and Mexicans in the United States before the expulsion of Chinese from Sonora and Sinaloa. For example, in 1926 Francisco Martínez wrote to President Plutarco Elías Calles from Nogales, Arizona, and attached a newspaper article entitled “Mexicans Will be Kicked out of California.” According to the piece, 75 percent of Mexicans in California had entered the United States illegally; a campaign to return them to Mexico was to begin immediately. Although the United States would not conduct a massive deportation of Mexicans until the depression years, U.S. newspapers reported on the formation of smaller deportation campaigns in California during this time. Using this anti-Mexican backlash to call for the expulsion

19. *Ibid.*; Schiavone Camacho, “Traversing Boundaries,” 83–84. Although I never saw a reference to La Malinche in the documents, it is possible that the popular Mexican discourse that sees women as potential traitors influenced anti-Chinese ideology and activity. See, for example, Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York, 1961); Cristina González Hernández, *Doña Marina, la Malinche y la formación de la identidad mexicana* [Doña Marina, la Malinche, and the formation of Mexican identity] (Madrid, 2002); and Rolando Romero and Amanda Nolacea Harris, eds., *Feminism, Nation, and Myth: La Malinche* (Houston, 2005).

20. On the expulsion of Chinese from Mexico, see Hu-DeHart, “Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution”; Hu-DeHart, “La comunidad china”; Chao Romero, “The Dragon in Big Lusong”; Chao Romero, “‘El destierro de los Chinos’”; Philip A. Dennis, “The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico,” *Ethnohistory*, 26 (1979), 65–80; Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México*; Patricia Irma Figueroa Barkow, “El movimiento antichino en México de 1916–1935: Un caso de ‘racismo económico’” [The anti-Chinese movement in Mexico of 1916–1935: a case of economic racism] (M.A. thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1976), 53–57; Alan Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910–1940,” in Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin, Tex., 1990); Moisés González Navarro, “Xenofobia y xenofilia en la Revolución Mexicana” [Xenophobia and xenophilia in the Mexican Revolution], in González Navarro, ed., *México: el capitalismo nacionalista* [Mexico: nationalist capitalism] (Guadalajara, Mex., 2003); Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 40 (1960), 191–211; Leo Michael Dambourges Jacques, “The Anti-Chinese Campaign in Sonora, Mexico, 1900–1931” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1974); and Schiavone Camacho, “Traversing Boundaries.”

of Chinese from Mexico, Martínez wrote, "If the Americans can do this to a neighboring country, to Mexicans, why don't we take advantage of this idea—using it against Chinese?" The Chinese "plague," he argued, "infested and threatened" Mexico.²¹

Martínez's wish was fulfilled a few years later when Sonora and Sinaloa haphazardly drove out Chinese and their families *en masse* through mob violence, arrests, deportations, and exit deadlines. Anti-Chinese proponents justified the expulsion by asserting that eradicating Chinese would facilitate the reintegration of Mexican workers who had returned from the United States.²² Several U.S. states forcibly "repatriated" approximately 1 million Mexicans, among them many U.S. citizens, between 1929 and the latter 1930s, but the majority arrived in Mexico between 1931 and 1933, precisely the years when Sonorans and Sinaloans evicted most of their Chinese residents.²³

Only Sonora and Sinaloa carried out mass expulsions; nevertheless, Chinese elsewhere in Mexico also were driven out or fled. As a result, the population of Chinese in Mexico fell drastically. In 1930 there had been close to 18,000 Chinese in Mexico. By 1940 fewer than 5,000 remained. Not surprisingly, population decline was most dramatic in the two northern states, where the numbers of Chinese were reduced from 3,571 to 92 in Sonora and from 2,123 to 165 in Sinaloa during the 1930s.²⁴

Mexican women, as well as Mexican Chinese children, accompanied Chinese men out of Sonora and Sinaloa for various reasons. Women chose to go out of love and to keep their families together. Fear that they would not be able to support their families without their spouses or that anti-Chinese hatred would be directed at their racially mixed children motivated women to leave as well. In

21. Exp. [folder] 104-CH-1, caja [box] 28, Fondo [collection] Obregón-Calles, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. This archive has collections divided by presidential administrations, and card catalogs describe the contents of folders in each collection.

22. Trueba Lara, *Los chinos en Sonora: Una historia olvidada* [The Chinese in Sonora: a forgotten history] (Hermosillo, Mex., 1990), 51–60.

23. Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque, 1995), 202. See also Mercedes Carreras de Velasco, *Los Mexicanos que devolvió la crisis, 1929–1932* [The Mexicans the crisis sent back, 1929–1932] (Mexico City, 1974).

24. Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México*, 150, 161; Rénique, "Race, Region, and Nation," 230.

some instances, local and state authorities or mobs simply rounded up entire Mexican Chinese families and drove them out.

Faced with a vicious anti-Chinese climate, Mexican Chinese families in Sonora and Sinaloa used a variety of tactics. Some hid and waited out the expulsion period with the support of complicit families, friends, and communities.²⁵ Others fled to the states of Baja California Norte or Chihuahua, where anti-Chinese movements were not as strong.²⁶ Mexican Chinese families also chose to leave Mexico altogether. They exited via Mexican ports such as Mazatlán in Sinaloa or crossed into the United States, often landing in the custody of U.S. immigration agents.

The passage of Chinese men and Mexican Chinese families through U.S. territory during the early 1930s complicated U.S.-Mexican relations. The United States accused the governor of Sonora and other officials of violating the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act by forcing Chinese to cross the border. Sonoran Governor Rodolfo Elías Calles repeatedly denied this charge. Attempting to prove it in court, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) tried Alcadío García, a police officer from Nogales, Sonora, and Alejandro Ungson, a “Chinese smuggler,” for bringing Chinese into the United States. Immigration agents held Chinese men and Mexican Chinese families in jails in the Southwest and took the men’s testimonies to try to establish that Sonoran officials’ accounts were deceitful.²⁷ U.S. immigration agents perceived the Chinese men and Mexican Chinese families whom they apprehended through the lens of racial exclusion that had framed border enforcement since 1882.²⁸ They created still another category, classifying even

25. For example, the fathers of Luis Chan Valenzuela and Marta Elia Lau de Salazar hid in Sonora. See Schiavone Camacho, “Traversing Boundaries”; oral history interview with Luis Chan Valenzuela, Oct. 11, 2004, Hermosillo, Sonora, in author’s possession; and oral history interview with Marta Elia Lau de Salazar by Berenice Barreras Ayala (for the author), Aug. 19, 2004, Bacabampo, Sonora, in author’s possession.

26. It is hard to quantify these movements. My book manuscript investigates them further.

27. File 55771, folders 718 A–D, boxes 514 and 515, Subject Correspondence, 1906–1932, Records of the Central Office, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Record Group 85 (RG 85), National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Case 6381, box 143, and Cases 6461–6462, box 145, Case Files, 1914–1947, District of Arizona, Tucson Division, Criminal, Records of the National Archives, Pacific Region, Laguna Niguel, Calif.

28. Lee, *At America’s Gates*; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J., 2004).

Mexican women and Mexican Chinese children as “Chinese Refugees from Mexico.” Handling 4,317 cases, the INS reported that it spent \$530,234.41 to maintain and deport the “refugees” between mid-1931 and early 1934. Included in these figures were at least 574 people who were members of 114 Mexican Chinese families traveling as units. Immigration agents kept itemized records that showed names, costs, and dates of train passage to San Francisco for ultimate deportation to China.²⁹

It is striking that Mexican women and Mexican Chinese children were deported to China rather than to Mexico, for the latter would have cost the agency less money; moreover, the United States already had a practice of deporting Mexicans within its borders. The United States even deported to China Mexican women who were not legally married to Chinese men. With few exceptions, U.S. immigration agents did not take Mexican women’s testimonies, even though they interviewed hundreds of Chinese men who had entered the United States from Mexico. The accepted wisdom of men’s control over women and gendered citizenship policies made it possible for the United States to send Mexican women, whether married or unmarried, to China along with their companions. The Wong Campoy family were among the Mexican Chinese families from Sonora who traveled through the United States. INS records listed them as a family group consisting of Wong Fang, Dolores C. [Campoy] Wong Fang, and their children, Alfonso Wong, Irma Wong, and Hector Manuel Wong. This family traveled to San Francisco to be deported with other refugees on April 3, 1933.³⁰

At least 500 families arrived in China either via the United States or directly from Mexico during the expulsion period. Since they included numerous children, these families numbered at least 2,000 people.³¹ These figures speak to the significance of

29. INS records set apart members of Mexican Chinese families by case numbers and naming patterns.

30. File 55771; Wong Campoy interview. Even though Alfonso Wong Campoy and his siblings used one of their father’s and one of their mother’s surnames, U.S. immigration agents recorded only their father’s name, imposing on the family the dominant U.S. naming practice. INS records reveal other biases, which I treat in my book manuscript.

31. These are conservative figures based on INS files and Mexican consular and government records. The numbers of Mexican Chinese families, and the individuals they comprised, were probably higher. Archival sources suggest that between 400 and 600 Mexican women arrived in China with Chinese men. The records consistently point

this history. Moreover, the experience of expulsion and the sense of displacement, loss, and pain that accompanied it, as well as the struggle to survive abroad and restore a space for their racially and culturally mixed families in the Mexican nation, make this a broader story about movement, identity, and humanity. The history of these Mexican Chinese tells us about the strategies that diasporic peoples have employed to claim a place for themselves where they did not fit in automatically.

Mexican Chinese families in China

Life in China led to new family arrangements. Mexican women often had trouble with gender norms in their companions' Cantonese and Taishanese communities. Some wrote to Mexican consuls and other authorities that their men had not told them they had already been married in China. Accustomed to being the only wives or the primary spouses in Mexico, they complained about being relegated to secondary wife or concubine status in China. In particular, women objected to having to live with or nearby Chinese wives and concubines. Although many Mexican men have historically maintained multiple households (gender customs in China and Mexico overlapped in some ways), it was not normative in Mexico for such households to be in close proximity. Owing to ruptures in gender expectations, some women separated from their companions, either temporarily or permanently. Chinese men occasionally kept one or more of their Mexican Chinese children with them and included them in their Chinese households. Sometimes parents or children moved back and forth between two households.

to the numerous children in these families. For example, those included in INS lists had an average of three to four children per family. Mauricio Fresco, a businessman and Honorary Mexican Vice Consul in Shanghai, noted in his reports that Dollar Line records accounted for at least 600 Mexican women and innumerable children who arrived in China on the steamship company's ships between 1931 and 1933 alone. The Mexican government later repatriated about 400 Mexican women and a high but unspecified number of their children in 1937–1938. Given the various figures, I have estimated that 500 families, which consisted of a minimum of 2,000 people, arrived in China. See file 55771; IV-341-13, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City; exp. 546/3, caja 899, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; exp. 546.2/1, caja 714, Fondo Adolfo López Mateos, in *ibid.*; OM-149-5, 1960 [this is the file number], Archivo de Concentraciones, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City; and Felipe Pardinas, *Relaciones diplomáticas entre China y México, 1898–1948, Caja 1* [Diplomatic relations between China and Mexico, 1898–1948, box 1] (Mexico City, 1982), 428–430, 461–465, 466–468, 471, 474, 475–476, 478–479.

Although many families separated, some Chinese men remained with their Mexican-origin families after leaving Mexico, and some even raised their Mexican Chinese children alone. For instance, Roberto M. Fu arrived in China a widower with seven children. He had married Ana María Domínguez in Sonora in 1919, but she died shortly after their youngest child was born in 1933, just before Sonoran authorities expelled the family. Roberto Fu, whose Chinese name was Fu Gui, and his children, Roberto Fu, Jr., Manuela Fu, Jacinto Fu, Tomás Fu, Ventura Fu, Amelia Fu, and Maximiliano Fu, passed through U.S. territory in October 1933.³² After their deportation to China, the family settled in Macau, where the father earned a meager income as a porter at the San José Seminary. In 1937 six of the children returned to Mexico as part of the official Cárdenas repatriation. Cárdenas had broken with his anti-Chinese predecessors and brought at least 400 Mexican women and countless Mexican Chinese children back to Mexico in 1937–1938.³³ Nevertheless, the Cárdenas administration also maintained a limited vision of who belonged in the nation-state; repatriation under Cárdenas denied entry to Chinese men who wanted to return with their families. Thus, Roberto Fu and his youngest child, Maximiliano Fu, who was too little to travel without his father, remained in Macau. Split apart during the Cárdenas repatriation, the Fu family formed new kinds of transpacific ties as they worked from both Macau and Mexico for at least two decades to be united again. The older children struggled for years to secure documents for their father and brother but met obstacle after obstacle. After the tragic death of his youngest son during the early 1950s, Roberto Fu waited in Macau even more anxiously to return to Mexico to reunite with his other children.³⁴

The Wong Campoy family was among those that remained united in China. They lived first in a Cantonese village but eventually settled in Macau. The eldest child, Alfonso Wong Campoy,

32. File 55771; exp. 546.2/1. INS records and Ramón Lay Mazo's letters included the identical names for the children, without discrepancy, except for Lay Mazo's spelling of "Bentura" and the INS listing "Ventura." In this case, the children apparently used only their father's surname.

33. The outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War during the summer of 1937 prompted Cárdenas to repatriate Mexicans from China. On Cárdenas and the Sino-Japanese conflict, see Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico Between Hitler and Roosevelt: Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940* (Albuquerque, 1998), 57, 94.

34. Exp. 546.2/1.

was four years old when his family was expelled from Sonora and then deported from the United States. In an interview, he remembered learning that his mother had decided to follow her husband to keep their family together. Once in China, however, she had a difficult time with the stark linguistic and cultural differences and was very unhappy. Another son, Antonio René Wong Campoy, was born in 1934, and the family left Guangdong Province for Macau by the mid-1930s. After they moved to Macau, Wong Fang conducted business and his wife did domestic service in people's homes where she was much more at ease. Their youngest child, Raquel Wong Campoy, was born in the Portuguese colony. The father died in the late 1930s. Forming friendships with other Mexican and Latin American women in Macau comforted Campoy Wong Fang after her husband died.³⁵

The Mexican Chinese community in Macau

Mexican Chinese in a variety of family situations forged a vibrant, coherent community in Macau between the 1930s and 1950s. They found Macau attractive for its distinct status as a colony with a cosmopolitan atmosphere, which offered them space to blend in as people with mixed racial and cultural identities. Founded by merchants in the sixteenth century, Macau was under the control of a Portuguese colonial administration in the 1930s (see Figure 3). Early in the twentieth century, many refugees from China resided in Macau, whose population doubled from about 75,000 in the early 1900s to 150,000 by the early 1930s. Among other groups, Peruvian women who had married Chinese men and traveled with them to China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a presence in the colony.³⁶ In an interview, Alfonso Wong Campoy recounted that ships constantly docked there, bringing people from all over the world. Exemplifying this cosmopolitanism, he became fluent not only in Spanish and Cantonese but also in Portuguese and Italian, having attended an Italian school in Macau.³⁷

35. Wong Campoy interview.

36. Lausent-Herrera, "Mujeres olvidadas."

37. Wong Campoy interview. Similar to the relationship between Britain and Hong Kong, Macau remained a Portuguese colony until 1976, when it became a Chinese territory with a Portuguese administration. At the end of 1999, Macau came

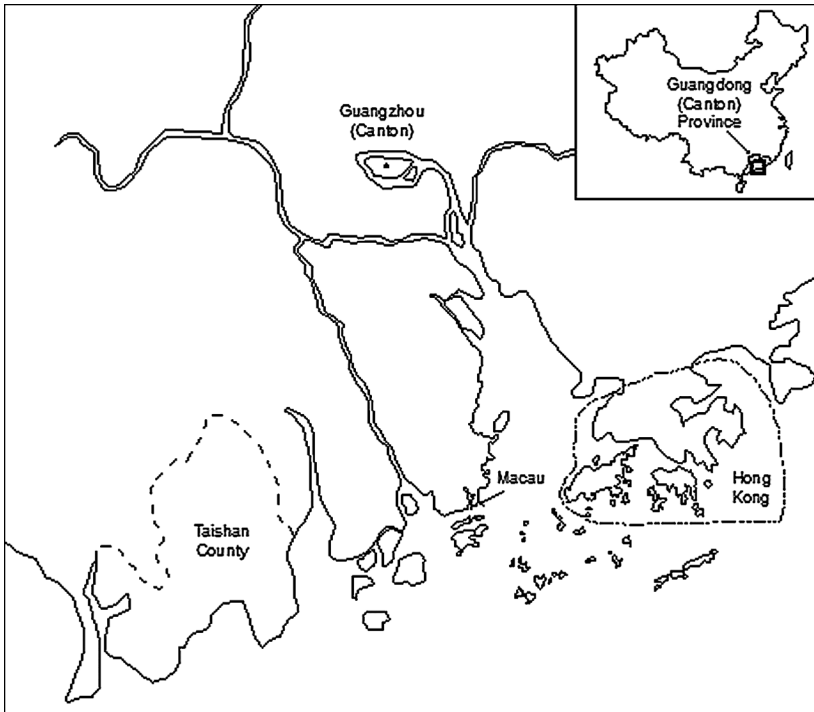


Figure 3. Detail of Guangdong (Canton) Province, the area from which most Chinese emigrated and to which the Mexican Chinese were deported. Map by Jacquelyn C. Ferry; used with permission.

The colony's Latin, Iberian, and Catholic traditions gave Mexican Chinese people a sense of familiarity. Catholic institutions, moreover, became critical to the community, for they offered places to meet, connections with Mexico through foreign clergy, emotional and spiritual support, economic assistance, and even jobs. Churches and other organizations were bases from which Mexican Chinese conducted the struggle for repatriation to Mexico. Catholic organizations also linked the Macanese enclave with Mexicans and other Latin Americans in British Hong Kong. People traveled between the two colonies to celebrate Catholic and Mexican (or Latin American) traditions and to strategize for the repatriation

under China's sovereign control. R. D. Cremer, ed., *Macau: City of Commerce and Culture* (Hong Kong, 1987), 1, 103, 115, 119–120, 125; Steve Shipp, *Macau, China: A Political History of the Portuguese Colony's Transition to Chinese Rule* (Jefferson, N.C., 1997), 78.



Figure 4. Shrine to the Virgen de Guadalupe at Santa Teresa Church in Kowloon, Hong Kong. Photographs by author.

effort. Revealing the significance of Catholic symbols, the Latin American Association of Hong Kong was known in Spanish as the *Asociación Hispano-Americana de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. People from Macau and Hong Kong gathered at Santa Teresa Church, which houses a shrine to the Virgen de Guadalupe, in Kowloon, Hong Kong (see Figure 4).³⁸ This name, *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Our Lady of Guadalupe), indicates the strong ties to Catholic traditions specific to the Americas, for this indigenous icon of the Virgin Mary had originated in colonial Mexico.³⁹

The size of the Mexican Chinese community in Macau fluctuated over the years, as some moved elsewhere in China and others returned to Mexico. In 1959 the enclave consisted of 24 households with 121 people in total. Sons and daughters born of Mexican Chinese unions formed their own families in Guangdong Province or Macau, at times choosing marital partners from within the

38. Exp. 546.2/1 and 546.2/12, caja 714, Fondo Adolfo López Mateos; oral history interview with José Serafín Anaya, Aug. 10, 2007, Kowloon, Hong Kong, in author's possession.

39. See, for example, D. A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Image and Tradition, 1531–2000* (New York, 2001).

Mexican Chinese community. Some Mexican and Mexican Chinese women such as Campoy Wong Fang performed domestic service in homes or religious institutions. Chinese and Mexican Chinese men were businessmen (Wong Fang and Alfonso Wong Campoy), held positions in the colonial government (the latter did this for a time as well), and worked as police officers, servants for the local captaincy, painters, mechanics, porters at the Catholic seminary (Fu), and scribes for the Ecclesiastic Chamber (Ramón Lay Mazo and his brother Francisco Lay Mazo). During this time, Mexican Chinese households ranged from three to nine people; most had several children. Some families were spread between Macau, Hong Kong, and villages in Guangdong Province. People in these situations often moved between these places. Travel to the mainland became more complicated after the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949, yet people continued to move back and forth. In doing so, the Mexican Chinese traversed various metaphoric and geographic borders; these areas were quite distinct political and cultural entities even though they were in close proximity.⁴⁰

Chinese and Mexican culture and language fused in interesting ways over the decades. Embodying such hybridity, Ramón Lay Mazo's complex Mexican Chinese identity emerged in his letters. Born in Mocerito, Sinaloa, he arrived in Taishan County in Guangdong Province with his family when he was four years old, around 1933, and moved to Macau after World War II.⁴¹ Writing

40. IV-352-28, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada; OM-149-5, 1960. China was in profound economic, social, political, and cultural transformation during most of the twentieth century. The changing dynamics of Macau, Hong Kong, and Guangdong Province during the Sino-Japanese War, World War II, the Communist Revolution, and the Cold War created complex boundaries for the Mexican Chinese to negotiate. According to Chen Jian, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong utilized "anti-foreign-imperialist propaganda . . . to mobilize the Chinese masses" in the 1940s. Many Chinese probably viewed Mexicans and Mexican Chinese as foreigners during this time. Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001), 13.

41. The populations of Macau and Hong Kong grew as refugees flooded into the colonies owing to war and revolution in the mid-twentieth century. When the Sino-Japanese War broke out in the summer of 1937, Macau in particular experienced an overwhelming influx of refugees, especially after the fall of Shanghai in late 1937. The colony's population increased from 150,000 in the early 1930s to 350,000 by 1940. These trends continued during World War II, as thousands more refugees descended upon Macau, bringing the population to 600,000 by 1945. Although Japan occupied Hong Kong, forcing the British colony to surrender in 1941, Japanese leaders decided not to do the same in Macau. Unlike Great Britain, Portugal took a neutral stance in the war. Nonetheless, Japanese soldiers maintained a presence in Macau, and Japan's

letter upon letter on behalf of the Mexican Chinese while he was employed as a scribe in Macau's Ecclesiastic Chamber, he became the leader of the repatriation movement. Associated with the church, he was an important figure in the community. His Spanish was formal and well-written, and he articulated a strong sense of Mexican nationalism.⁴²

Yet, Ramón Lay Mazo also invoked Chinese language and culture. In letters to compatriots in Mexico, he transliterated Chinese phrases into Spanish. A gesture of cross-cultural communication, his transliterations offered aspects of Chinese culture to people he hoped to enlist in the repatriation struggle. For example, in a letter to a sympathetic Mexican widow, Concepción Rodríguez Viuda de Aragón, he opened by stating that he had his hands in a fist over his chest, in the ancient Chinese fashion, in order to ask her "sek-pau-fan-mei-a?" ("¿ya está llena de arroz?" or "have you had your fill of rice?"). He reminded her that this phrase was a Chinese greeting as well as a wish for good health, since basic subsistence was always on people's minds in China. After sharing this cultural practice, however, he wrote that he would set aside the greeting, which to a Westerner might have seemed like a joke, and move on to the discussion they had begun when she visited Macau in 1960. Aware of the deep divisions between East and West, he exhibited his own Chineseness but then made light of it. He was careful not to paint himself or his compatriots in China as too Chinese, since their long-term goal was to return to Mexico. Renouncing or disregarding their Chineseness was part of the rhetoric of nationalism that Mexican Chinese individuals elaborated as they attempted to return to Mexico in the Cold War era. In a letter to President López Mateos in 1959, Ramón Lay Mazo wrote that, even though they had been in China so long, Mexicans living there knew neither the language nor the "exotic practices and customs of these people whose mentality is so opposite ours." He declared that his community, which he presented as

policy toward the colony became harsher as World War II progressed. During the Communist Revolution, refugees continued to enter the colony, which became a key sanctuary for people who wanted to escape communist rule. See Shipp, *Macau, China*, 81; John Hunter Boyle, *China and Japan at War, 1937–1945: The Politics of Collaboration* (Stanford, Calif., 1972), 54; Tsung-han Shen, "Food Production and Distribution for Civilian and Military Needs in Wartime China, 1937–1945," in Sih, ed., *Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War*, 168; and Chen, *Mao's China*, 17, 20, 26–34, 41.

42. OM-149-5, 1960.

Mexicans trapped in a foreign land, had the right to return to their homeland. Although he had a Chinese father, was fluent in Cantonese dialects, and had lived in Guangdong Province and Macau for most of his life, he emphasized his Mexicanness and separated himself and his compatriots from the Chinese.⁴³

While there were both real and imagined divisions between Mexicans and Chinese, mixed-race people participated in the local culture and challenged existing social and political borders. For instance, Ramón Lay Mazo's nephew, Antonio León Sosa Mazo, the son of his cousin Valeriana Sosa Mazo, became a respected dancer in Guangdong Province where he lived with his family through the 1950s.⁴⁴ The young man taught ballet and classic Chinese dances in Cantonese social and cultural centers and was recognized as one of the five best dancers and instructors in South China. After the Communist Revolution, however, his mixed-race status became a liability. León Sosa Mazo had wanted to study medicine at a university but was barred because his father was a "well-off property owner" who had arrived from foreign lands, and his mother was a "Mexican devil." After his rejection from the university, he wrote a controversial book, whose title his uncle transliterated as *Chau-t'in-lui-tek-tung-t'in* (and translated into Spanish as *El invierno de otoño* or "The Winter in the Fall"). The book described a student's experiences of the sudden changes in government and in private and public life, and how texts, materials, professors, and discipline at the university had been transformed. The book went through Communist Party censorship without incident, and the government published 50,000 copies. Nevertheless, during a campaign to purge intellectuals a few months later, authorities denounced the book as damaging to the mental health of the people because it espoused capitalist and bourgeois ideology. Communist officials condemned him as a traitor to the party and an agent of North American imperialists and their puppet Chiang Kai-shek.⁴⁵ Associating the

43. *Ibid.*; exp. 546.2/1.

44. Ramón Lay Mazo referred to León Sosa Mazo as his nephew in his letters. It is common in Mexico to consider the children of first cousins as nephews and nieces. Many Mexican Chinese upheld informal Mexican social and familial practices such as these in China, which is part of why I view them as diasporic citizens.

45. Chiang Kai-shek had come to power in China during the late 1920s. The Franklin D. Roosevelt administration had supported Chiang unilaterally during the period of Sino-American conflict in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Subsequent U.S. administrations would also support Chiang, against whose Nationalist forces

book with the imperialist-supported Nationalist regime in Taiwan, Communist Party authorities ordered all copies of the book to be burned and the author to be confined in a mental institution.⁴⁶

León Sosa Mazo escaped to Macau in April 1958 after his friends in the government informed him of the order for his arrest. After he fled, he told his uncle that communist authorities had written to him in Macau offering money and other material benefits if he returned to Guangdong Province, where people missed him at popular dance festivals and social worker centers. The government letters became threatening when he did not return. Concerned about his nephew's safety, Ramón Lay Mazo wrote to Ambassador Carlos Gutiérrez-Macías at the Mexican embassy in Manila during 1958 and 1959. He pled with authorities to allow his nephew to return to Sinaloa to live with his extended family. The Reverend Lancelote Miguel Rodríguez, the National Catholic Welfare Conference representative in Macau, offered to pay León Sosa Mazo's passage once he secured the proper documentation. Sadly, he was never able to obtain permission to enter Mexico and was killed in Macau sometime in 1959.⁴⁷

By the late 1950s the plight of the Mexican Chinese in the two foreign colonies had become so well known that it penetrated the local vernacular. A proverbial generalization in Cantonese as spoken in Macau and Hong Kong, the phrase "being like a Mexican" came to signify being poor and stateless. Calling this linguistic turn "a disgraceful ridicule of the sacrosanct name of our beloved Nation, of our adored Mexico," Ramón Lay Mazo argued that pride in their country should move Mexican authorities to rescue their compatriots in China so that neither Mexicans nor Mexico could be characterized in such degrading ways.⁴⁸ In their struggle to repatriate, the Mexican Chinese community in China played on Mexico's newfound concern for its image abroad during the Cold War.

Communists struggled during the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949). In 1949 the Communists defeated the Nationalists, who fled to Taiwan. This put the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang (GMD), or Nationalist Party, in constant conflict across the Taiwan Strait, as the CCP wanted to include Taiwan in its new Chinese Communist state. See Joseph A. Camilleri, *Chinese Foreign Policy: The Maoist Era and its Aftermath* (Seattle, 1980), 7–8, 12, 31–34, 41, 197; Chen, *Mao's China*, 17, 165; and Boyle, *China and Japan at War*, 9–10, 20–21.

46. OM-149-5, 1960; exp. 546.2/1.

47. *Ibid.*

48. OM-149-5, 1960.

Repatriation to Mexico

Many of the Mexican Chinese who had been drawn to Macau in the 1930s and 1940s were able to return to Mexico either during the Cárdenas repatriation or in small groups after World War II. Some of those who remained in Macau were unable to establish Mexican citizenship. They incessantly appealed to individuals, organizations, and governmental agencies in Mexico and abroad between the 1930s and 1950s to return to Mexico. Ramón Lay Mazo's work from Macau brought various actors into the struggle.⁴⁹

By the late 1950s the Lions Club in Mexico had become involved in the repatriation effort. In Mexico, this organization was historically conservative; indeed, between 1910 and 1930 it drew the bulk of its membership from middle-class professionals, businessmen, and local officials—the same segment of society that led the anti-Chinese campaigns.⁵⁰ By mid-century, however, conservatism in Mexico, as in many parts of the world, had become synonymous with anti-communism. Thus, it became possible for this traditional association to take on the project of “liberating” Mexican women, Mexican Chinese children, and even some Chinese men from Communist China. The Lions Club in Tampico, Tamaulipas, began the national campaign to help the Mexican Chinese return to Mexico. Officers and leading members of branches in various states, including Tamaulipas, Guerrero, Jalisco, Nayarit, Chihuahua, and Coahuila, wrote letters during late 1959 and early 1960 pressuring federal officials to document and repatriate Mexican citizens in China.⁵¹

The Lions Club used three tactics. The first appealed to Mexican patriotism. Invoking ideas of sameness, President Dr. Javier Elizondo Otañez and Secretary Antonio López Alatorre of the Lions Club in San Blas, Nayarit, wrote to President López Mateos on

49. Exp. 546.2/1.

50. On conservative organizations and the rise of reactionary movements in Mexico, see Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Estampas de nacionalismo popular mexicano: diez ensayos sobre cultura popular y nacionalismo* [Imprints of popular Mexican nationalism: ten essays on popular culture and nationalism] (Mexico City, 2003), and Brígida Von Mentz, Ricardo Pérez Montfort, and Verena Radkau, eds., *Fascismo y antifascismo en América Latina y México (apuntes históricos)* [Fascism and antifascism in Latin America and Mexico (historical notes)] (Mexico City, 1984).

51. Exp. 546.2/1; OM-149-5, 1960.

behalf of the Mexican “families that long to be in the Nation, who share our language and religion, and find themselves far away, sad, and bitter, but nevertheless continue to be our compatriots.” Utilizing concepts of Mexican citizenship embedded in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, Lions Club members argued that the women and their children, even if they were born in foreign lands, were Mexican and had the right to protection by their government. For instance, in their letter to the national leader, President Armando C. Flores Peña and Secretary Professor Alejo Carrillo Sánchez of the Lions Club in Monclova, Coahuila, cited Article 30, Section 2a of the Mexican Constitution that “Those who are born in foreign lands of a Mexican father and foreign mother or a Mexican mother and unknown father are Mexicans,” in order to persuade the Mexican government to grant citizens in China the proper documentation so that they might be able to return to their homeland.⁵²

The second strategy turned on Mexican gender norms and the importance of guarding Mexican women. For example, Dr. Luis G. López O. wrote to President López Mateos on behalf of the Lions Club in Hermoso, Tamaulipas, concerning the tragedy of the “abandoned Mexican women who live in China alone.” He called on the president to urge the appropriate government offices to open “the doors of our nation to those Mexican women.” Also writing to the Mexican president, Dr. Alfredo Ortega Rivera of the Lions Club in Pachuca, Hidalgo, argued that Mexican women had been “faithful to hearth and home” when they chose to accompany their husbands to China after they were expelled from Mexico. Alluding to the role of Mexican women in the nation to form families, Ortega Rivera pointed out that, when women chose to fulfill these duties with Chinese men, Mexican authorities had punished them by forcing them out of the country if they wanted to keep their families intact.⁵³

The third tactic evoked the poverty that Mexican compatriots faced in China and the fear of communism abroad. Dr. Ildefonso Lozano Bosque and Roberto Santos Ibarra of the Lions Club in Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, wrote to the president that the Mexican Chinese in Macau and Hong Kong lived in misery and worked in the worst jobs—an embarrassment to Mexico. Ortega Rivera used

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

the same line of reasoning, adding that the Mexican government should seek to save its citizens who lived in mainland China, along with those who had sought refuge in the colonies, from communism. Suggesting that Chinese men had contributed to the development of several Mexican states, Ortega Rivera included them in his vision of the nation-state as well. Because many of these men had been businessmen in Mexico, he contended, the communist regime persecuted and excluded them for their capitalist ideas. Jorge B. Cuellar Arocha and Leopoldo S. Villarreal Corona of the Lions Club in Sabinas, Coahuila, wrote to López Mateos on behalf of Mexican women in China, stating that, in Hong Kong and Macau, “they are disliked for being Mexican” and “persecuted by communism”: They needed to return to the homeland.⁵⁴

Despite their exclusion from the nation for so many years, the Mexican Chinese maintained a strong sense of Mexican nationalism and kept alive the hope that they would one day repatriate. Their unrelenting pleas, the work of their supporters (particularly the Lions Club campaign), and the internationalist politics of López Mateos together finally triggered the official Mexican repatriation of 1960. López Mateos, who came to power in 1958, sought to establish Mexico as a modern, democratic nation on the world scene. Not coincidentally, he was the first Mexican president to make a diplomatic trip to Asia.⁵⁵ Under López Mateos, the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores authorized the official in charge of business

54. *Ibid.*

55. Enrique Suárez Gaona, *¿Legitimación revolucionaria del poder en México? Los presidentes, 1910–1982* [Revolutionary legitimization of power in Mexico? The presidents, 1910–1982] (Mexico City, 1987), 75–77, 81–84; Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *A la sombra de la Revolución Mexicana: Un ensayo de historia contemporánea de México, 1910–1989* [In the shadow of the Mexican Revolution: an essay on contemporary Mexican history, 1910–1989] (Mexico City, 1989), 98–99, 102, 187–235; Agustín Yáñez, *Proyección universal de México; crónica del viaje realizado por el Presidente de México, ALM [Adolfo López Mateos], a India, Japón, Indonesia, y Filipinas, el año 1962* [Mexico’s universal projection; Chronicle of the trip realized by Mexican president, ALM (Adolfo López Mateos)], to India, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the year 1962] (Mexico City, 1963), 8; Yáñez, *Misión económica, política y social en el Oriente: Una gira de trabajo y buena voluntad en favor de la amistad y la solidaridad por la India, el Japon, Indonesia y Filipinas, con base en los principios de la democracia, de la cultura y de la paz/ALM [Adolfo López Mateos]* [Economic, political, and social mission in the Orient: a work and good relations tour in favor of friendship and solidarity in India, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, based on the principles of democracy, culture, and peace/ALM (Adolfo López Mateos)] (Mexico City, 1962); Jörg Faust and Uwe Franke, “Attempts at Diversification: Mexico and the Pacific Asia,” *Pacific Review*, 15 (2002), 299–324.

relations at the Mexican embassy in Manila to travel to Hong Kong and Macau by June 1959 to interview Mexican Chinese families who lived there. By early 1960 the Mexican government permitted Ambassador Gutiérrez-Macías to document people who could prove Mexican nationality. That spring Rodríguez Viuda de Aragón, whose husband had been a prominent citizen of Tampico, visited Macau and Hong Kong shortly after the Lions Club campaign began in her hometown. She had connections with Mexican government officials to whom she conveyed information about the Mexican Chinese community that she had gathered during her trip. A series of official communications on the matter ensued, and by May 1960 the government publicly announced that it would document and repatriate its citizens in China in one sweep.⁵⁶

News of the repatriation brought hope to families who had been split by the expulsion and stages of repatriation. For instance, on May 24, 1960, Juana Trujillo Viuda de Chiu wrote to the office of the president from Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, that she had heard López Mateos's repatriation order on the radio. She urged the government to consider her sons, Juan Chiu Trujillo, in Macau, and Emmanuel Chiu Trujillo, in Hong Kong, when the repatriation took place. They had been waiting to reunite with her for a long time. Similarly, on June 30, 1960, Lorenzo Alvarado and other family members in Pichucalco, Chiapas, appealed to the president on behalf of their elderly relative, Mercedes Alvarado Méndez, who had lived in Hong Kong for many years.⁵⁷

Publicity around the repatriation also elicited negative reactions. In Sonora, where anti-Chinese elements were still active, some people spoke out against the return of the Mexican Chinese. On June 28, 1960, Alfredo G. Echeverría, Professor Eduardo Reyes Díaz, and other members of the *Campana Nacionalista* (Nationalist Campaign) in Hermosillo, the capital, wrote to the office of the president about the "problem" that repatriating these families represented for the nation. Echeverría had been a leader in the anti-Chinese movement in Sonora as a young man during the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁸ He and the others sought to convince authorities to

56. OM-149-5, 1960.

57. Exp. 546.2/12.

58. Schiavone Camacho, "Traversing Boundaries," 63-111. See also, Juan Ramón Gutiérrez, "José María Arana y el comercio chino de Magdalena" [José María Arana and Magdalena's Chinese commerce], *Historia de Sonora*, 91 (1994), 2-3. Alfredo

confine the repatriates to La Isla del Tiburón, an island off the coast of Sonora traditionally occupied by the racially excluded and marginalized Seri, an indigenous people. They argued that there were economic possibilities within the *ejido* (community land and farming) system and the fishing industry on the island.⁵⁹ Perhaps these men feared that those who returned would become economically successful in Sonora, as their Chinese relatives had been prior to the expulsion. Continuing to define Mexican Chinese families as non-Mexican, the Campaña Nacionalista had kept alive anti-Chinese ideology for over four decades, and it outweighed, in this case, anti-communism. The influence of the Lions Club campaign and the larger repatriation effort, however, trumped the work of these Sonorans.⁶⁰

By the fall of 1960 the Mexican government had set up a special repatriation commission and appointed Dr. Bernardo Bátiz as its head commissioner. Bátiz arrived in Hong Kong to document and repatriate Mexican Chinese living in the two colonies. The government circulated a notice in Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and English advertising the repatriation. Stating that repatriation would occur “without intervention or contribution from anyone,” the flyer announced that this was the final opportunity for people who wished to repatriate to Mexico, vowing to “finish definitively the repatriation and naturalization problem of Mexicans residing in the

G. Echeverría's organization continued to exist well after the expulsion of Chinese in the early 1930s. Indeed, the Campaña Nacionalista celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 1955. A banner commemorating the event is housed at the Museo de la Universidad de Sonora in Hermosillo. See oral history interviews with Leo Sandoval, Nov. 14 and 17, 2003, Hermosillo, Sonora, in author's possession. Sandoval began the interviews by showing me the banner and discussing what it represented. See also Sandoval, *La Casa de Abelardo* [Abelard's house] (Hermosillo, Mex., 1990).

59. When I gave a paper on this topic in Hermosillo, Sonora, numerous persons in the audience laughed boisterously at the absurdity of the suggestion because of the island's limited resources and historic lack of good land. Schiavone Camacho, “Aunque vayamos a escarbar camotes amargos a la sierra, queremos México”: nacionalismo mexicano en China, 1930–1960, y la repatriación de la década de 1960” [‘Even if we have to scrape bitter sweet potatoes in the sierra, we want Mexico’: Mexican nationalism in China, 1930–1960, and repatriation during the 1960s], paper presented at the Simposio de Historia y Antropología de Sonora: Treinta años escribiendo la historia del noroeste de México [Sonoran history and anthropology symposium: thirty years writing the history of northwestern Mexico], Hermosillo, Sonora, Feb. 23–26, 2005. On La Isla del Tiburón, see Miguel Tinker Salas, *In the Shadow of the Eagles: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato* (Los Angeles, 1997), 61.

60. Exp. 546.2/12.

East.”⁶¹ Although various groups had appealed to the government on behalf of the Mexican Chinese community and the National Catholic Welfare Conference had offered to pay travel expenses, the Mexican government wanted sole responsibility for the return of its citizens in the effort to build Mexico’s international reputation.

During this time, Mexican and Mexican Chinese women appealed to Bátiz so that their Chinese husbands could also travel to Mexico. On October 3, 1960, Ramón Lay Mazo wrote to López Mateos that some women were very uneasy because Bátiz had responded that he was there to “repatriate Mexicans, not insert foreigners into the country.” If the case had involved Mexican men with Chinese spouses, there would not have been an issue, since foreign women married to Mexican men could be considered citizens under the law. Over the decades, however, gendered citizenship policies caused numerous challenges for women who formed romantic ties with Chinese men. Begging the president to allow Chinese husbands to enter Mexico with their wives, Lay Mazo noted that there were merely nine such men in Macau and a few more in Hong Kong. With the exception of two, the men in Macau were now over the age of sixty. To allay any fears that they would compete with Mexicans for jobs, he pointed out that the men were well above the normative working age. Drawing on Mexican family and gender norms, as well as those in China, he wrote that, if husbands were allowed to accompany their wives, families would not have to break up. There would be no need for the “painful and atrocious sacrifice of the wife, or a son, or perhaps the entire family, remaining in China, simply because a part of the family, or more accurately, the chief member, cannot go along.”⁶² Alfonso Wong Campoy remembered that some Chinese husbands and fathers were able to return to Mexico during this time, unlike the earlier repatriation that had separated families. He recalled that the Chinese men who traveled to Mexico as part of this repatriation lived the rest of their lives there and eventually died in Mexico.⁶³

Finally returning to Mexico, two groups repatriated in November 1960. On November 7, thirteen repatriates left Hong Kong. Their leader, A. Vargas, informed the newspaper *Excelsior* that they

61. OM-149-1 and OM-149-5, 1960; Exp. 546.2/1.

62. Exp. 546.2/1.

63. Wong Campoy interview.

were happy to return to Mexico and hoped to be well received. A group of 113 more repatriates, this time from Macau, arrived in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, via Hong Kong, on November 16.⁶⁴ Grateful to President López Mateos for facilitating their return, Lay Mazo told *Excelsior* that the repatriates “would work ‘to make the nation greater.’”⁶⁵ After all his labor, he was finally able to return to his homeland, along with the compatriots he had assisted. Among the repatriates, Dolores Campoy Wong Fang and her three sons returned to Sonora. Alfonso Wong Campoy relayed that he and his brothers, who by then were adults, chose to accompany their mother because they wanted to be in the country of their birth and become acquainted with their extended family.⁶⁶

Reintegrating into Mexican society

Life was not easy for those who returned to Mexico in 1960. They had to adapt to the changing society they had left, often abruptly in the expulsion, almost thirty years earlier. Children whose families had been expelled when they were very young, as well as those born in China, integrated into Mexican society for the first time. Among other trials, the repatriates had to contend with the ways Mexicans in their home states received them. Alfonso Wong Campoy described returning to Navjoa as “a little strange.” The family experienced difficulties readjusting, so Campoy Wong

64. Approximately 300 people repatriated in 1960. Alberto Antonio Loyola noted that 267 people repatriated in 1960 and 70 more remained in Communist China hoping to repatriate. Monica Cinco Basurto's father, Jorge Cinco, remembered that there were 365 repatriates in total. See Alberto Antonio Loyola, *Chinos-mexicanos cautivos del comunismo: su repatriación fue una gran proeza* [Mexican-Chinese captives of communism: their repatriation was a great exploit] (Mexico City, 1961); and Monica Cinco Basurto, “China in Mexico: Yesterday's Encounter and Today's Discovery,” in Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, ed., *Encounters: People of Asian Descent in the Americas* (New York, 1999), 13–18.

65. “De Hong Kong vuelven mexicanos en avión” [Mexicans return from Hong Kong by plane]; “Repatriación de chinomexicanos” [Mexican Chinese repatriation]; and “Más repatriados de China, regresaron” [More repatriates from China, returned], *Excelsior* (Mexico City), Nov. 8, 16, 17, 1960.

66. Exp. 546.2/1; Wong Campoy interview. Dolores Campoy Wong Fang's two daughters stayed in Macau, making their homes there and later moving away. Irma Wong Campoy married a Brazilian in Macau and currently lives in San Francisco. Raquel Wong Campoy also married in Macau and later moved to Lisbon, Portugal, where she lives with her husband. Having established their own families, the women considered Macau their home at the time of the repatriation and did not desire to travel to Mexico with their mother and brothers.

Fang wrote to the president requesting assistance on December 7, 1960. She told López Mateos that her sons, who were ages thirty-two, twenty-seven, and twenty-six, had been unable to find jobs, even though officials had promised the family support upon returning. She urged the government to help her sons secure employment or offer the family economic aid.⁶⁷

It was not the government that assisted the Wong Campoys after they repatriated, however. Rather, family members and Mexican Chinese compatriots provided them with the support they needed. Alfonso Wong Campoy recounted that they lived with their maternal uncle, Pedro Campoy, for nearly a month. Upon hearing of their repatriation, compatriots they had met in Macau went to visit Campoy Wong Fang (or “Lolita,” as they affectionately called her) and her sons. One such family was the Chons from Bacobampo, a small town near Navojoa, who had also been expelled in the early 1930s. They had returned to Mexico during the Cárdenas repatriation, and the Wong Campoys were delighted to see the Chons again. Having suffered the expulsion and been together in Macau, the two families formed strong, deep bonds. The Wong Campoys soon went to live with the Chons in Bacobampo where Campoy Wong Fang worked making *aguas* (water-based fruit drinks) at the Chons’ store. Things were easier for the family, her son remembered, after they reunited with their *paisanos* or compatriots.⁶⁸ His use of the term “paisanos” is significant. Both Mexican Chinese families had been expelled from Sonora and came to reside in Macau, where they met. They were compatriots in a profound sense of the word: Not wanted in Mexico but not fully Chinese either, they were mixed, in-between, without a country.⁶⁹ They had made each other *paisanos* in the new community they created abroad. Mexican Chinese families like the Wong Campoys and the Chons formed relationships that persisted over years and across oceans. Familiar only through a brief period in Macau in the 1930s, the two families renewed their close ties in Sonora in the 1960s after living far apart from each other for over twenty years. The assistance of the Chons was critical for the reintegration of the Wong Campoy family into Sonoran society. It was because

67. Wong Campoy interview; exp. 546.2/1.

68. Wong Campoy interview.

69. Cinco Basurto vividly described the feeling of being between cultures. See Basurto, “China in Mexico,” 13–18.

their compatriots treated them well, Alfonso Wong Campoy noted, that they stayed in Bacobampo for years, returning to Navojoa only later in the decade when it began to grow into a larger town.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Mexican Chinese families crossed borders and became diasporic in a number of ways. They traversed racial, gender, and cultural boundaries in Mexico, which pushed them across physical and symbolic lines to the United States and China. Chinese men were already diasporic citizens in Mexico, where they established links with their Chinese countrymen and maintained connections with the communities from which they had emigrated. They simultaneously became integral to local communities and formed myriad ties with Mexicans. Mexican women defied anti-Chinese attitudes by establishing romantic associations with Chinese men, even after the movement succeeded in making such unions illegal. Upon leaving Mexico with expelled Chinese husbands, companions, and fathers, Mexican women and Mexican Chinese children became diasporic citizens. In China, Mexican Chinese families, whether they remained unified or not, developed different relationships and adapted to their new contexts to survive. During their years abroad, they longed for the Mexican homeland and worked to reclaim a space for themselves in it. Some Chinese men who had been part of local Mexican communities also sought to be reincorporated into the nation. Mexican Chinese families, however, began to imagine a Mexican homeland only after they left Sonora, Sinaloa, and elsewhere. Before the expulsion, they were identified with particular local communities or regions, rather than the larger entity of Mexico. This new diasporic sense of a Mexican national homeland emerged as the Mexican Chinese experienced the tumult that characterized China during the mid-twentieth century.

Alfonso Wong Campoy, Dolores Campoy Wong Fang, Ramón Lay Mazo, Roberto Fu, members of the Asociación Hispano-Americana de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, and other Mexican Chinese sustained an ardent Mexican nationalism during their years in southeastern China. Upholding Mexican identity and culture

70. Wong Campoy interview.

for over three decades helped people like Alfonso Wong Campoy, who had left as a boy, become part of Mexican society as an adult. A businessman like his father, he has sold fruits, vegetables, salsas, honey, and nuts, among other goods, at his stand in the Navojoa Mercado (central market) for nearly fifty years. After living in Guangdong Province briefly and then Macau for almost thirty years, he always wanted to return to the land of his birth. He and his wife, Conchita Castañeda Wong, have taught their son, Alfonso Wong Castañeda, about his family's experiences and his father's love for Mexico. They plan to do the same for their young grandchildren. In so doing, they will help keep alive the history of the Mexican Chinese.⁷¹

71. *Ibid.*