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The Chinese in Northern Mexico:
Immigration, Integration, and Discrimination in Mexican Society, 1882-1940

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Introduction

The desire of Chinese immigrants to enter the United States was interrupted by the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Consequently, the Chinese saw Mexico as an acceptable alternative especially after both nations signed the Treaty of Amity, Navigation, and Commerce in 1899. This agreement gave the Chinese rights akin to those of Mexico's nationals and established a type of “most favored status” for emigrating Chinese. Mexico, in those early years, was under the control of Porfirio Diaz, a man who believed in progress and in bringing his country into a vanguard position in the world. Diaz encouraged immigration by foreigners, because he relished the influx of novel ideas that could help his people learn and improve themselves. Not surprisingly, Chinese men as well as a small percentage of women answered the call and made the journey to Mexico. Once there, they worked their way from the bottom of the social ladder until they became part of the wealthy coterie of Mexico's main cities, much like the vision Diaz had for the Mexican lower classes. The Chinese were seen as diligent workers, the type of people needed to energize a developing country. Their presence in Mexico coincided with the chaotic years of the Mexican Revolution and continued as the ideals of the revolution were implemented. The Chinese continued to arrive in the post-revolutionary years and spread throughout the country with such zeal that at least a few Chinese could be found in just about every Mexican state. Their presence in the country was met with opposition by poor Mexicans who viewed them as competitors for the few available jobs, by merchants and tradesmen whose clientele they catered to, and even by societal norms that frowned upon their intermarriage with
Mexican women. As a result of their successes, discrimination and various anti-Chinese measures followed suit. Although few remnants remain of the Chinese presence in Mexican history, their emigration and experience provides an interesting scope of study into how they coped with living outside of their native land. This study will focus on the Chinese inhabitants of the northern states of Baja California, Sinaloa, and Sonora where the majority of the Chinese lived and worked. Their daily lives, work patterns and ethic, and the cause of the growing resentment of their prosperity will be the undertone of the research. The division of the paper will consist of three main headings labeled immigration, integration, and discrimination. Subheadings will elaborate upon certain episodes of the Chinese experience and will demonstrate how Mexico’s attitude towards Chinese immigration changed over time.

Methodology

In order to discuss the Chinese presence and experience in Mexico newspaper articles, journal articles, books, census records, and propaganda images were consulted. The search parameters for articles in the New York Times were January 1, 1870 to January 1, 1940. For the search in the Los Angeles Times, the parameters were January 1, 1882 to January 1, 1940. The first articles mention how Mexico is calling out for Chinese immigration, but the mood quickly changes into a discriminatory one. Later the tone of the articles changes yet again as they talk about the expulsion of the Chinese and of how to round up and deport them. Journal articles compiled by historians in the field were also helpful and highly varied. The authors focused on different states, time periods, which led to an impressive body of work. In addition, a dissertation and various secondary sources also helped to close the gaps of questions on the life of the Chinese in Mexico. Since the research in this topic is limited to the work of a few select
individuals due to the fact that they utilized the same primary sources and quoted each other frequently a different approach had to be found. In order to differ from their research, articles published in the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times were examined for relevancy. The search provided a vast amount of articles and the information garnered from them was a welcome addition to the body of work. A source that would have proved helpful would be a diary from a female perspective, particularly that of a Mexican woman in an interracial relationship. No such documents exist, and most of the accounts come from wealthy Chinese merchants. The stories of the lower-level laborers were not documented, but had they been it would have provided for a greater wealth of information.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration to Mexico prior to and after the Treaty of 1899

The Chinese first came into contact with Mexico during the years of the Manila Galleon Trade. Roberto Chao Romero writes that these first immigrants referred to the country as “Big Lusong”, they worked in various trades, and lived in segregated housing.¹ Perhaps this is the main reason why these early immigrants were not discriminated against. Tolerance for them stemmed from the fact that they were worked in trades that did not give them high incomes and that they lived apart from the general population. As will be demonstrated later on, tensions began when the Chinese, a foreign group achieved a small amount of wealth and tried to integrate into their host society. China and Mexico signed the Treaty of Amity, Navigation, and Commerce on December

¹ Robert Chao Romero, The Dragon in Big Lusong: Chinese Immigration and Settlement in Mexico, 1882-1940 (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, 2003), 1.
27, 1899 according to an article published in the Los Angeles Times. The document was signed by the Mexican Ambassador Senor Aspiroz and Chinese Minister Wu Ting Fang and was drafted in Chinese, Spanish, and English for clarification. Interestingly, the article makes the assumption that the “latent resources of Mexico will developed by Chinese labor.” This statement would definitely come true in the later years of Chinese immigration. Clearly the idea of bringing Chinese to Mexico as laborers had already been set in motion by the rhetoric of the treaty.

Encouragement of Chinese Immigration

The first account in the New York Times that mentions the Chinese in Mexico explains how a mob stood near the port of Mazatlan, Sinaloa on April 6, 1886 and shouted “down with the Chinese” when they were incorrectly informed that Chinese immigrants would be arriving on the ship. Since no Chinese disembarked from the ship the mob then made their way to the home of a Chinese resident and “broke doors, windows, and furniture.” The unnamed resident fled the city and the ire of the Mexicans was assuaged for a time. This article contrasts with later ones in which Chinese immigration is heavily encouraged by the Mexican government and Chinese workers are desired in the country. In an article published on August 28, 1892 the blueprint for Chinese settlement in the Yucatan, where they could build their own homes, temples, and would be exempt from paying the local taxes. Although the area was abandoned because of

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2 “CHINESE-MEXICAN TREATY: PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED AND THE DOCUMENT SIGNED.” Los Angeles Times (December 27, 1899).


4 “Affairs in Mexico.” New York Times (August 28, 1892)
altercations with indigenous people from Belize and was a dangerous place to live, the mere idea of allowing foreigners to build their own enclave within another country's borders with explicit permission is worthy of mention. As yet more examples, an article published on November 7, 1903 proclaims that Mexico is interested in an unlimited number of Chinese immigrants to work in the mines and plantations of the country. Another article cited on December 13, 1903 explains how Eng Hok Fong, President of the China Commercial Steamship Company was given permission and free entrance to however many Chinese he could deliver to the Manzanillo, Colima port. He also boasted that the pay offered to the Chinese already in Manzanillo was so great that none of them was interested in entering the United States. The next surge in immigration came during the Porfiriato because President Diaz was interested in attracting white Europeans to Mexico. He believed that their intellectual, moral, religious, technological, and industrious qualities would speed up the development of the economy. Since Europeans showed no interest in settling down in Mexico, the country began to look elsewhere. Asians, particularly the Chinese were praised for their hardworking and docile nature. In fact, Diaz was quoted declaring the following statement, “the Chinese are among the best people that are coming to Mexico, and we heartily welcome them.” “They are workers, and their industry, frugality, and ability are valuable in building up the country,” he continued.


8 WHERE CHINESE ARE WELCOMED: PROGRESS MADE BY THE RACE IN MEXICO. Prominent in Business and Society and Dabbling a Little in Politics. Mongolians Cutting off Their Queues And Adopting Oriental Los Angeles Times (August 31, 1904).
The Smuggling of the Chinese into the United States

Although they were barred from entering the United States in a legal fashion, the Chinese saw the border along Mexico to be an impromptu entryway into their destination. “The isolated and unprotected character of the frontier of the United States and Mexico makes it a very easy manner for the Chinese to get across unobserved by the customs officers and other United States authorities”, Marshal George L. Seibrecht declared to the New York Times in an article published on November 2, 1902.⁹ This statement sums up just how alluring this illicit activity proved for desperate Chinese who were blocked by the Exclusion Act. The international border with the state of Sonora was quite lengthy which made it difficult for proper security to be established. Special Customs Collector William M. Hoey, monopolized on the lack of security to smuggle Chinese in via the Sonoran Pacific Railroad through Nogales, Arizona.¹⁰ Because the demand of the Chinese to enter the United States was so great, many officials gave in and began participating in illegal smuggling. Allegedly, Hoey and his deputies charged from between $50 to $250 for the trip. The Chinese were given certificates, and if the document bore the letter ‘A’ the person was admitted.¹¹ According to George E. Paulsen, railroad officials were paid off to allow the Chinese to travel concealed of course inside box cars and women were even smuggled in dressed in Mexican fashion. A story cited in the Los Angeles Times demonstrates just how gruesome the journey in a box car could be.¹² Six Chinese men placed their lives in the hands of

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⁹ “CHINAMEN EVADE EXCLUSION LAW: Constantly Smuggled Into This Country By an American with Headquarters in Mexico.” New York Times (November 2, 1902).


¹¹ “SMUGGLING OF CHINESE: COLLECTOR HOEY ARRESTED..” Los Angeles Times (August 27, 1901).

a Mexican trainman of the Mexican National Railway Company and they were concealed for seven days. Their food and water ran out and they suffered terribly from the heat in the box car. Finally, once the train stopped at Los Angeles, the men could take no more. Desperately, they began yelling and banging on the box car for their release. After enduring such a tough ordeal, the men were deported shortly after their rescue. One wonders if the trainman forgot about the Chinese or if he had only cared enough to pocket their money. It is likely that similar events occurred throughout the busy years of unlawful Chinese entry. Action from American courts was not sufficient to deter the ambitious Chinese, as this particular border remained an issue until the expulsion of the Chinese from Northern Mexico. Another popular method through which the Chinese entered California is described in an article in the Los Angeles Times, which is dated August 14, 1901. The source for this publication was a Los Angeles mining man who had traveled to Mazatlan, Mexico and was on his way home. He witnessed how thirty-four Chinese found a Mexican guide to lead them into the mountains and followed a forty mile long trail to reach the California State Line. The fact that the trail the Chinese and their Mexican guides followed into the United States was a well-known location and that the Mexican authorities did not do anything to stop the illegal crossings only serves as an example of complicity. The Mexican guides surely profited from what the Chinese migrants paid them, but what was the benefit to the Mexican nation? Perhaps, they felt that intervention in the issue in the early years would be a violation of the treaty signed in 1899. Furthermore, the Chinese allied themselves not only with Mexican guides, but also with fellow Chinese to make the passage. The Chinese Six Companies situated in San Francisco would take in the requests of local Chinese for relatives who wanted to be smuggled in via Mexico. The person in question would be delivered to Mexico

13 “SMUGGLING CHINESE IN FROM MEXICO.” Los Angeles Times (August 14, 1901).
from China and tutored in American customs, after some time they would cross the border, take a new name, and claim American citizenship. Another method utilized to gain entry into the United States was through the sale of false documents. Crafty agents in New York, San Francisco, New Orleans, Cuba, Mexico, and China falsified naturalization papers, immigration documents, and merchant certificates for Chinese immigrants.\textsuperscript{14} The vastness of the Mexican border with the United States made it difficult for government officials to prevent the illegal entry of the Chinese. The Chinese were lucky to find middlemen through which to enter the country. Mexican guides facilitated their navigation through the mountains, corrupt American officials turned the other cheek to their inclusion as long as they paid them off, and the Chinese Six Companies also helped to develop fraudulent documents to ease the emigrating process.

INTEGRATION

Compliance with Mexican Society

The \textit{Los Angeles Times} cites an article about the visit of Chinese Minister Chentung Liang-Cheng to Mexico where he was pleasantly surprised to see that his countrymen were prospering so well.\textsuperscript{15} President Diaz praised the Chinese and was proud of their contribution to his country's economy. The Minister reported that several Chinese were “adopting Mexican dress and habits and were becoming Mexicanized through intermarriage.” He then went on to state that “the Mexican people are not prejudiced against them and are inclined to receive them as equals.” He

\textsuperscript{14} See Robert Chao Romero \textit{The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940} (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 28.

\textsuperscript{15} “WHERE CHINESE ARE WELCOMED: PROGRESS MADE BY THE RACE IN MEXICO. Prominent in Business and Society and Dabbling a Little in Politics. Mongolians Cutting off Their Queues And Adopting Oriental Customs-- Talk With Chinese Minister. ENGAGING IN BUSINESS. ASKED TO BE MAYOR. SHOULD REMAIN IN MEXICO. CUTTING OFF QUEUES..” \textit{Los Angeles Times} (August 31, 1904).
pointed out how the Chinese “at first work on plantations for wages, but in time they acquire holdings of their own.” This is truly admirable because it speaks of the work ethic of the Chinese and of how they made their way upward through the economic ladder. That they were able to succeed in a foreign country, where they had to adapt to a different language, customs, and way of business is remarkable. In a photograph included in *Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California 1920-193*, Chinese men and women can be seen holding up the Mexican flag and participating in the Independence Day Parade in Ensenada.\(^{16}\) Their participation demonstrates a willingness to become part of society and an attempt to gain acceptance by their Mexican peers. Their incorporation of Chinese decorations and symbols in the parade was a fantastic way of displaying a bit of their culture. According to a *Los Angeles Times* article, two Chinese men in Tamaulipas, Juan King Yuen and Fook Chack, agreed to divide their haciendas and distribute it in shares to their peons.\(^{17}\) The workers would then work their own plot of land and make it prosper, or it would be returned to Yuen and Chack. As the article states, the generosity of the Chinese owners was a true representation of the Constitution of 1917, because it allowed the workers a chance to work their own land plot. This had been the goal of the revolutionary conflict, to give land to the landless. Yuen and Chack must have gained respect in the community for such a selfless act and for supporting the new laws that the Mexican Revolution had just cemented. Most importantly, this act certainly tackled the common stereotype that the Chinese were a greedy bunch of people, who only wanted to aggrandize their pockets.

\(^{16}\) See Appendix pg. 30 for photograph.

\(^{17}\) “CHINESE GIVE UP LAND IN MEXICO: Ranches Owned 25 Years to Go to 1000 Peons Valuable Hacienda Located in Tamaulipas State Donors to Teach Natives to Develop Property.” *Los Angeles Times* (September 25, 1927).
Life in the Northern States

As can be seen in Table Four, which samples a portion of Baja California's Chinese population, the Chinese worked in various industries. Chinese immigration to Baja California became widespread during the governorship of Colonel Esteban Cantu, which began in 1915. Cantu gave various concessions to the Colorado Land River Company to bring over Chinese to work as laborers, which hastened migration. The table describes the employment of Chinese in industries such as bakers, cantina owners, and waiters. The majority of Chinese however worked in agriculture and as seasonal workers. Another sampling from Chihuahua City and Hermosillo demonstrates that the Chinese were most frequently seen working in agriculture, commerce and that some were even underage or students. The partnership list of Pablo Chee’s Mexicali-based company illustrates the amount of capital that both he and his partners invested. Chee invested $75,000 in his company and eve had two associates that lived in California. The participation of these two Chinese men is an example of how some businessmen were able to triumph in California despite strict regulations on Chinese residents. It is not correct to assume that all of the Chinese that immigrated to Mexico became fabulously wealthy. Many of them worked in several industries and made their livelihood in everyday professions. Men like Chee, who possessed capital from their native China, were quick to take advantages of the opportunities that the proximity of California and Mexico offered. The Chinese did take up laundering, cooking, and washing in the early years of migration, but then learned how to move up by learning other

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18 See Table Three in the Appendix pgs. 39-40.

19 James R. Curtis “Mexicali’s Chinatown,” Geographical Review 85, no. 3 (July 1995): 338

20 See Table 5 in the Appendix p. 41.

21 See Table 2 in the Appendix p. 37.
trades. The Chinese lived in their own sections of the cities and in the cases of the upper class Chinese frequently became Mexican citizens.

DISCRIMINATION

The Chinese Experience in Sonora during the Mexican Revolution

The Chinese stayed on in Mexico during the most active years of the revolution, which saw the rise and fall of various generals. Since the revolution wanted to create a country in which the poor could also prosper by owning their own land and having better opportunities, the presence of a foreign group who dominated commerce and other industries was deemed unacceptable and many Chinese were even murdered. Consequently, the Chinese were viciously targeted and frequently had their stores looted. In *The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution*, George C. Cumberland makes the claim that “the local police and soldiery watched most of the proceedings without interference, but after part of the passions had been spent the cavalry dispersed the mob; the military took action because it was ordered to do so, not because it had a zest for the task”. The lackluster attitude of both the police and soldiers is an example of how much lawlessness was occurring during those decisive years. Cumberland mentions several key historical figures who held anti-Chinese attitudes. Plutarco Elias Calles, who was governor of the

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22 See Table Six on Appendix pg. 42.


state of Sonora from 1915 to 1919 and President of Mexico from 1924 to 1928, held an anti-Chinese attitude. During his tenure as Sonora governor he was “known for his hostility to foreigners and his contempt for their commercial rights under treaties.”25 Alejo Bay, was governor of Sonora from 1923 to 1927 when two laws that targeted the Chinese were passed.26 The first law forced segregation of the Chinese from the rest of the populace by confining them to their own ethnic enclave, the second stated that “marriage or concubinage between Chinese and Mexicans was prohibited under heavy penalties.”27 During the governorship of Francisco Elias, five pieces of legislature were passed to control the Chinese:28

1. No Chinese to marry or live in common union with a Mexican woman, even though the Chinese were naturalized Mexicans.
2. Every Chinese enterprise to employ eighty percent of its employees from the ranks of Mexican males.
3. Comestibles and non-comestibles not to be sold in the same establishment.
4. Meats to be sold to only by licensed and designated establishments, on premises not offering other goods for sale.
5. No premises to be used for both residence or sale of comestible items.

The Common Chinese Stereotype


26 Alejo Bay was the son of an Irish-American immigrant who went on to live in Mexico.


The Chinese were welcomed in the early stages of migration and only their best qualities were mentioned and praised. After their integration to society was underway, the Mexican public began to point out several deficiencies. The rise of Chinese involvement in the business world clearly provoked plenty of hatred in the hearts of Mexicans, who lived in poverty while they prospered. In El Ejemplo de Sonora, Jose Angel Espinoza provides a list of traits that were said to be unique to the Chinese:29

1. The Chinese is dirty and unhealthy.
2. He is a member of a gangster-like tong which is at incessant war with other such tongs.
3. He is an inveterate gambler.
4. Most of his commercial enterprises are fronts for opium dens, where the Chinese spend most of their time.
5. He is willing to subsist on a starvation diet.
6. He is grasping and avaricious.
7. He exploits Mexican women, and the progeny of any union display all the evil characteristics of the father and none of the beneficial ones from the mother.

The stereotype that became associated with the Chinese were that they were known for spreading diseases such as beri-beri and trachoma, that they were heavy drinkers, opium smokers, and gamblers.30 Their cultural mannerisms were also criticized because they “wrote from right to left, began books at the end, and ate their soups after dessert.”

The Problem with Intermarriage

29 See Jose Angel Espinoza, El ejemplo de Sonora (Mexico, D.F.; n.p., 1932), 56.
Chinese women seldom migrated to Mexico, and those that did traveled in the company of their husbands. Since the immigrant population was comprised of bachelors, it is understandable that they would seek wives from among the native population. The ability to bring a Chinese wife to Mexico was a luxury reserved only to wealthy Chinese men. Some men left their wives back in China, while others as previously stated, found Mexican women to be their romantic partners. Not all the immigrating Chinese could afford to marry a Chinese woman and bring her to live with them in Mexico. Thus, marriage to a local woman, who knew more about the society in which they lived, was an alluring alternative. The fact that there were no anti-miscegenation laws in place in Mexico in the early years of migration made these unions everyday events. These unions however, enjoyed a very low tolerance rate from the viewpoint of Mexican society. Women who married or lived in free union with Chinese men were labeled “lazy, unpatriotic, dirty, and shameless” by their compatriots. Mexican women who married Chinese men lost their Mexican nationality and were even counted as Chinese in the state census. A New York Times article published on August 7, 1933 bears the headline, “Water Cut Off From Houses in Which Reside Mexican Women Married to Asiatics.” The event described in the article took place in the city of Tampico in the northern state of Tamaulipas. According to the article, guards were placed in front of Chinese stores to prevent customers from entering them. Travelers in the state reported that Mexican women married to Chinese men did not have water in their homes.

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31 For photograph of a Mexican woman married to a Chinese man see Appendix pg. 31.

32 As the number of interracial couples increased, several states did step in to establish anti-miscegenation laws. Sonora for example, passed its first one on December 23, 1923.

33 Robert Chao Romero The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010),

another article printed in the New York Times, a former senator by the name of Guillermo Laveaga stated that “forty percent of children born in the State of Sinaloa are the children of Chinese fathers and Mexican mothers.” Children born from these unions were not granted Mexican citizenship via jus soli, instead just like their mothers they were stripped of their Mexican nationality and referred to as Chinese. Laveaga also proposed that a ban be instituted to prevent intermarriage. Various cartoon images, poems, speeches, and the like were created in an effort to show just how disgusted Mexicans felt about intermarriage. The appendix at the end of this study includes several of these propagandist pieces as well as an explanation of each.

However, the underlying context of the pieces was to discourage Mexican women from entering into a relationship with a Chinese man. According to general gossip, the women would be treated well in the beginning of the relationship only to suffer privations in the future. The description that was given to the children born of these marriages was also quite pejorative. In the caricatures, the children are drawn to resemble their father and are very stereotypically Chinese. It can be assumed that the creators of these drawings did not believe that the children were worthy of Mexican nationality. The mother of the children is depicted as a worn-down woman with no clue on how to raise her bizarre-looking offspring. Romero includes a section on the courtship habits of Chinese men, the following poem titled “Exile of the Chinese” is included:


36 See Appendix p. 33.

37 See Appendix p. 29.

They haven't made a discovery
Paying with Chinese money,
They've only come to ruin
The female kind.

But we must make an effort
To tolerate imprudence.
The ones who are to blame
Are the wicked women.

They know no shame.
They begin to cry
About how comfortably they have lived
And their eventual decline.

Those wretched families
Know now shame.
What's in it for them
Is pure convenience.

I tell you the truth,
Without fear of public outrage,
That she who lives with a Chinese man
Is a woman of pure convenience.

They don't like to work,
This shameless woman
She wants the Chinaman to support her
And keep her well dressed

And they like to boast
Without any brains
What they need
Is a little bit of shame

We hold the government responsible
Even though you may think me unwise
They should exile
Three types of people [Chinese men, Mexican women who marry them, and Arabs].

The first should be the women
Who make unions with Chinese men
They know no shame
Because they are straining the nation

And we should give them their due
Right quick
Burn them with hot oil
With firewood and tar.

The poem does not blame the Chinese men for inciting the Mexican women into illicit relations in any matter. Curiously enough, the poem blames the avaricious attitude of the women, who are so interested in leading a life of luxury that they would give into consorting with undesirables.
The fact that such words were penned only speaks of how disgraceful Mexicans believed these unions to be. The industriousness of the Chinese would certainly have allowed them to give their wives or consorts a comfortable lifestyle, something that many Mexican men would not have been able to do, especially during the hectic years of the revolution. Thus, the idea of marriage between Chinese and Mexicans can also be taken as a threat to the pride of Mexican men.  

Torreon, Coahuila: Massacre of 1911

The city of Torreon in the state of Coahuila was home to about six hundred to seven hundred Chinese during 1911 who worked in real estate, laundering, vegetable gardening, small-scale trade, as well as the operation of a bank and a hotel. Such was the outcry over their prosperity that many of the Mexican residents of the city united themselves with the Maderista revolutionary soldiers to viciously murder the Chinese inhabitants and pillage their belongings. The looming discontent with the Chinese was already in existence, but the words of Jesus C. Flores on May 5, 1911 further intensified the hatred of the citizens. Flores decried the Chinese for “replacing Mexican women in the laundering business, daring to compete with Mexican men for the affections of the local women, sending money back to China instead of investing it in the Mexican economy, and for their dominance over most of the commercial aspects of the city.” His words were just the excuse that Mexicans needed to take the matter into their own hands. The soldiers and the mob that formed behind them moved throughout the city on May 15 and looted Chinese homes and businesses. Unlucky Chinese who were caught by the mob had all of

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39 See photograph of an interracial family in Appendix pg. 35.
their belongings stolen and then were murdered without hesitation. An eyewitness described the horrors of the massacre as follows, “the town was searched for Chinese and all who were found were murdered in the most brutal and horrifying manner. In one instance the head of a Chinaman was severed from his body and thrown from the window onto the street. In another instance a soldier took a little boy by the heels and battered his brains out against a lamp post. In another instance a Chinaman was pulled to pieces in the street by the horses hitched to his arms and legs.”

After the chaos was quelled by Emilio Madero, three hundred and three Chinese were declared the victims of the massacre. Madero was then forced to place all survivors under close guard while they received food and additional aid from friendly Mexicans. The massacre produced a satisfactory event for the anti-Chinese supporters in the city; many of the survivors left Torreon for good. The Chinese who had been prospering in their business ventures up until May 15, incurred over $850,000 in losses. This episode is tragic and demonstrates that cruelty is not exclusive to any nation or group. The successes of the Chinese caused resentment to build up in the hearts of the working class Mexicans, who felt displaced in their economy.

Nonetheless, their actions have no justification and perhaps that is why this episode remains a hushed topic in the history of the country. The murder of the Chinese is also mentioned in the Los Angeles Times, in an article where the author makes the claim that the instability of the Mexican Revolution is a threat to all foreign nationals living in the country. A “number of defenseless Chinese” were killed by Francisco I. Madero's followers and with many more

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generals competing for power, the death toll could only hope to rise. According to the article, French, Spanish, German, and English nationals were advised to pack their belongings and return to their native countries to avoid the escalating violence.

Violent Acts Committed Against the Chinese

An article in the Los Angeles Times describes how three Chinese men by the names of Alfonso Yong, Jose Hule, and Idefonso Fong were lynched near Chihuahua City in 1933. They were accused of the murder of a thirteen-year-old girl. A mob formed outside of the jail and quickly captured the men and beat them to death. By the time the police took action, the men were already dead. As a consequence, Mexicans in Chihuahua City prevented Chinese ranchers from selling their wares in the city and picketed Chinese-owned stores. Tampico in the state of Tamaulipas enforced boycotts on Chinese-owned stores and went as far as placing guards at the doors to prevent customers from entering. Another episode occurred in

Chinese Legal Petitions

Robert Chao Romero mentions several cases in which Chinese stood up for their cause by filing legal petitions and appearing before the Mexican Supreme Court. Jim Lim was the owner of a restaurant called Tivoli in Mexicali, Baja California, and his relative Man Lim worked there. A public health inspector fined the restaurant 100 pesos because he saw a piece of rotting meat and

46 “CHINESE IN MEXICO LYNCHED: Chihuahua Mob Beats to Death Three Held in Murder of Girl.” Los Angeles Times (May 25, 1933).


48 “MEXICANS WORRIED BY CHINESE DEMAND: Diplomat Now Puts Indemnity at $16,800,000 and Says Cruiser is Under Order. SLAUGHTER DUE TO ERROR Chinese Blamed for Effects of Poisoned Brandy, a Court Exhibit-- Ten Killed in Durango Riot.” New York Times (June 11, 1911).
decomposing lettuce that were supposedly going to be sold to the public. As a result, Man Lim was arrested and the payment of the fine was ordered. The Lims claimed that the items were not going to be sold and challenged the arrest of Man. The decision of the Supreme Court was that the fine still had to be paid, but that Man Lim’s arrest was unnecessary because the Department of Public Health did not have the right to arrest and imprison anyone.\footnote{Robert Chao Romero \textit{The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940} (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010):167-168} The next case took place in Tijuana where Sam Tung, the owner of the Good Luck grocery store shot a Mexican man.\footnote{Robert Chao Romero \textit{The Chinese in Mexico 1882-1940} (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010):168-169} In 1930, Nicandro Alonso walked into Mr. Tung’s store and tried to order merchandise on credit, claiming he did not have the money necessary to feed his family. Mr. Tung refused and this prompted Alonso to walk out with the merchandise. Tung followed him and an altercation occurred. Tung shot Alonso and was jailed with the charge of criminal battery. He was sentenced to five years, but the Supreme Court overturned the decision, citing self-defense. Francisco Hing challenged the intermarriage prohibition of Sonora in September of 1930. He was married to a Mexican woman and due to the existence of the prohibition, his marriage was nullified. Hing fought for the validity of his marriage because he was a naturalized Mexican citizen. The Supreme Court followed Sonora law and upheld the invalidity of the marriage.\footnote{Robert Chao Romero \textit{The Chinese in Mexico 1882-1940} (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010):169}

Anti-Chinese Sentiments: “Mexico for Mexicans, China for the Chinese”

The phrase was the battle cry of Jose Maria Arana and his ilk. He was the ringleader of the Sonoran community and his dedication to spreading anti-Chinese propaganda survives in the
form of letters and speeches. Arana was a businessman and school teacher, and not exactly the type of man to teach his students about international unity or preach tolerance to his electors. He frequently stated that the Chinese were displacing lower class workers and degrading the Mexican race through their unions with Mexican women. In a letter addressed to him by Ramon Garcia the first line reads as follows “the contact between Chinese and Mexican women is dangerous.” Garcia then goes on to describe the opening of a cigarette factory owned by a man named Pancho Jip, where several Mexican women were taking jobs. He knew that the closeness of the women to a Chinese owner would result in “children with squinty eyes and a sickly composition” being seen in the store. Of course this statement clearly expresses a dislike for intermarriage and mixed children, a common belief in those days. Garcia goes on to remark upon the “sadness” he felt after visiting a Chinese store where “Mexicans and Chinese exchanged jokes, as if they were equal.” The exact date of this letter is not known and the reader is not informed about Mr. Garcia's age or occupation. Readers are left only with his reflections on the subject of amity between Chinese and Mexicans. The Chinese however, were not intimidated by Arana's racist rhetoric, as Francisco L. Yuen and Tomas Juan filed a defamation suit against him on March 22, 1917. They contested that Arana's publication in the local Nogales' paper desensitized the murder of a Chinese man by the hand of a Mexican woman. The woman, they stated, became the victim, while comprehension was given to the murderer. Yuen and Juan

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52 See The Papers of Jose Maria Arana, 1904-1921, the documents can be viewed online at the Special Collections of the University of Arizona.


54 The Papers of Jose Maria Arana, 1904-1921 Special Collections of the University of Arizona.

The letter can be found in the last folder labeled “Miscellaneous Items.”
wanted Arana and the newspaper La Palabra to publish a correct version of the events and not to sensationalize the events to spit out anti-Chinese propaganda. The men go as far as to sue Arana for 5,000 pesos as restitution for the hardships his words have caused them. Although, the decision is not revealed, this lawsuit serves as an example that the Chinese were not always silent victims to the ill treatment they were subjected to. In another example, Sonoran businessman Juan Lung Tain, “accused Arana of inciting the violence against the Chinese.”

Tain stated that the penal code of Mexico, the 1899 Treaty, as well as the Federal and State Constitutions gave the Chinese certain rights for their presence in Mexico. He continued by denouncing Arana’s promise of getting the Chinese expelled from the country as idyllic promises and added that he could not guarantee that the Sonoran government would close down Chinese stores. Arana’s agitation definitely incited the Sonoran populace and governing body, as the state moved to expel the Chinese. On September 8, 1919 Chinese merchants sent a cable dispatch to Peking urging that the government step in and help them because “the Mexicans are depriving us of every right and subjecting us to injustice and inhumanity.” That statement was only the beginning of the anti-Chinese attitude that developed in Mexico. Tolerance for the Chinese presence was threatened by the activism of Arana and other sources and would only escalate in the preceding years.

Expulsion from Mexico

The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times include several articles that mention the escalating anti-Chinese attitude that developed between the years of 1919 to 1933. If the articles

55 Leo M. Dambourges “Anti-Chinese Legislative and Press Campaigns in Sonora.” 172

56 Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES. “CHINESE IN MEXICO PROTEST: Cable Their Government That They Are Deprived of ‘Every Right.’” New York Times (September 9, 1919).
are closely observed, a trend as to when these sentiments rose and peaked is present. On October 24, 1925 the Chinese throughout the country were told that they had to prove that they had legally entered Mexico. In a *New York Times* article published on May 5, 1927, Chinese residents of Tamaulipas were asked to prove if they had entered Mexico in a legal fashion. The decision was made by President Ortiz Rubio to contract a steamer to “ship all Chinese back to their country in one trip.” For the year 1931, both newspapers produced a total of nine articles dealing with Chinese expulsion. Samuel C. Young, China’s minister to Mexico at the time, protested the treatment of his compatriots in Mexico, he asked to hold an audience with President Ortiz Rubio where he could address his concerns. He protested the law issued by Sonora’s governor to have all Chinese out of the state by September 5th. Sonora declared itself free of any Chinese merchants on September 22, 1931 the deputy in charge claimed that the merchants had moved to other states or left the country. By 1932, tensions had escalated as Mexico pushed with even more zeal to deport Chinese immigrants. The Chinese population of Sonora, which had numbered around 3,000 prior to expulsion was reduced to 1,000 on February 25, 1932. In order to prevent a violent expulsion from Sonora and Sinaloa many Chinese crossed over


59 “MEXICO WILL DEPORT SHILOAD OF CHINESE.” *Los Angeles Times* (September 4, 1930).


illegally into Arizona, where they asked to be deported to China in more peaceful conditions. The following year, saw a rise in deportations as one million Chinese were said to have been expelled from the country. The brisk manner in which the Chinese were rounded up, packed on steamers and returned to China did not sit well with many Mexicans. These kind-hearted people sent an appeal to President Rodriguez, so that the Chinese could be treated with a gentler hand during expulsion. The contributions of the Chinese and their willingness to obtain a place in Mexican society were shattered after Mexico forged ahead and processed their expulsion.

The Aftermath of the Chinese Presence in Mexico

Upon reading history books on Mexico, there is never a section devoted to the Chinese contribution during their peak immigration years. The history text consulted for this study El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico only mentions the Chinese twice, and only to talk about their astuteness for business. The violent episodes discussed above are not alluded to or remembered as tragedies. This exclusion could be due to the fact that the country's history is so vast and complex, that authors are ultimately left with the decision. In turn, they decide to focus on the large issues and leave out the miniscule details. Perhaps, the discrimination of old is still present and that is why Mexican historians have omitted the mention of the Chinese. Mexico expelled the Chinese in the 1930’s following a buildup of anti-Chinese sentiments in which Mexicans acted to take back their country from them. The prosperity enjoyed by the Chinese was


64 “1,000,000 Chinese Go Home..” New York Times (March 11, 1933).

65 “MEXICANS PROTEST CRUELTY TO CHINESE: Appeal is Sent to President Rodriguez Against Harshness in Expulsions..” New York Times (March 3, 1933).
disconcerting for poor Mexicans, because they saw their country struggle during the years of the revolution. A revolution which promised equality, land, and the right to vote for the landless, uneducated masses left them disgruntled and they vented their aggression on the Chinese. The Chinese tried to assimilate themselves into Mexican society by participating in local parades, marrying local women, and establishing businesses in the country. Unfortunately, their customs led Mexicans to ostracize them and to create stereotypes about them, since they did not take a chance and interact with them. The anti-Chinese propaganda preached by men like Jose Maria Arana implanted discriminatory attitudes in the minds of Mexicans and the culmination was a total disregard for Chinese rights in Mexico. The diversity that the Chinese contributed to the northern cities was a discovery that has since then been pioneered by notable historians and research is necessary to reconstruct other unexplored areas, such as the life of the Chinese in the Southern or Central States. The presence of the Chinese in Mexico is memorable due to their work ethic, legal participation, desire to incorporate themselves into Mexican society, and for the harsh violence perpetrated upon them.
APPENDIX

Figure 3.1. Number of Chinese foreign nationals living in Mexico, by region, 1910.

See Roberto Chao Romero, The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940 Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 58
The caption reads, “Oh, unhappy one, you thought you would have a life of leisure by giving yourself to a Chinese, but now you are a slave and the fruit of your error is a mistake of nature.”


Chinese residents of Mexicali, Baja California participating in the Mexican Independence Day Parade.

See Catalina Velazquez Morales, Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920-1937 (Mexicali: Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, 2001), 154.
An example of intermarriage, a Mexican woman married to a Chinese man. 

See Catalina Velazquez Morales, Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920-1937 (Mexicali: Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, 2001), 160.
Chinese members of the Chee Kung Tong (top), and Kuo Min Tang (bottom).

See Catalina Velazquez Morales, Los Inmigrantes Chinos en Baja California, 1920-1937 (Mexicali: Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, 2001), 162.
The caricature points out how dangerous a union with a Chinese man could be for a Mexican woman. The money that her husband would offer her would only last a short while, or as the first picture states “on the wedding night.” The next picture shows a changed woman “five years later,” who wears rags and is a mother to three children. Note that the children are drawn to resemble their father and have none of the features of their Mexican mother.


The caption on the picture reads, "Mexican women, if madness or ignorance leads you to become the wife or concubine of a Chinese man and he then plans to take you back to his homeland, you would do better to drink a dosage of poison or stab yourself with a knife in the heart." The caricature is a representation of what Mexicans believed would be the fate of their women in Chinese.


An interracial family.

The well-stocked interior of a Chinese store in Hermosillo. Chinese grocers carried a great variety of merchandise that appealed to urban consumers.

Chinese grocery store in Hermosillo, Sonora. Note the large inventory within the store.

### Tables

**Table 1: The Chinese Population in Mexico, 1895-1940.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>2,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>13,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>14,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>24,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>4,856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Partnership list of Pablo Chee and Company, Mexicali, Mexico (1924).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Amount of Interest</th>
<th>Date Acquired</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pablo Chee</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>May 1920</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Calexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chee Chung-Huey</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>May 1920</td>
<td>Asst. Manager</td>
<td>Mexicali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quan Yuet</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>January 1923</td>
<td>Mgr./Grocery Dept.</td>
<td>Mexicali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung Wee Cho</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>May 1923</td>
<td>Silent Partner</td>
<td>San Francisco, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung Puey</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>May 1923</td>
<td>Silent Partner</td>
<td>Oakland, California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Source: Laguna Niguel, National Archives, Pablo Chee, Chinese Exclusion Act Case File no. 2295/7.
Table 3: Geographic distribution of Chinese foreign nationals by region and state, 1926.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central States</th>
<th>Northern States</th>
<th>Gulf States</th>
<th>Pacific States and Territories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aguascalientes</td>
<td>Chihuahua</td>
<td>Campeche</td>
<td>Baja California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>5,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrito Federal</td>
<td>Coahuila</td>
<td>Quintana Roo</td>
<td>Chiapas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durango</td>
<td>Nuevo Leon</td>
<td>Tabasco</td>
<td>Colima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
<td>Sonora</td>
<td>Tamaulipas</td>
<td>Guerrero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>3,758</td>
<td>2,916</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>Veracruz</td>
<td>Jalisco</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>1,908</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Yucatan</td>
<td>Michoacan</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>1,726</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morelos</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puebla</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nayarit</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queretaro</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sinaloa</td>
<td>2,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis Potosi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tepic</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zacatecas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,936</td>
<td>5,718</td>
<td>6,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9,837</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4: Chinese Population in Baja California According to Their Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel worker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Helper</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Driver</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Employee</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal Worker</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washer</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiter</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant worker</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranch hand</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardener</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch maker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantina owner</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breeder</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information not registered</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineligible</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Catalina Velazques Morales, 47

Source: AGN, Galeria 2, Servicio de Migracion, Registro de Extranjeros, Tarjetas de migrantes chinos correspondientes a Baja California, caja 6 y 8.
Table 5: Chinese immigrant occupational distribution, Chihuahua City, Chihuahua; Hermosillo, Sonora, 1930.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational category</th>
<th>Total/Chihuahua and Hermosillo</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various industries</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic sphere:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewives, daughters, etc.</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid domestics, servants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial employees, clerks, mechanics</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minors, students</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled, low-skilled employees (cooks, barbers, etc.)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Source: Mexico, Direccion General de Estadistica, *Censo de población del municipio de Chihuahua, Chihuahua, 1930* (Salt Lake City: Filmado por la Sociedad Genealogica de Utah, 1987); *Censo de población del municipio del municipio de Hermosillo, Sonora,* (Salt Lake City: Filmado por la Sociedad Genealogica de Utah, 1988), Mormon Family History Center of West Covina.
Table 6: Documented Chinese murders during Mexican Revolution up to circa 1911

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers killed by soldiers:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Torreon</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonora</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower California</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaloa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahua</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>317</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assassinated or killed by unknown individuals:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonora</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durango</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaloa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of Chinese killed during revolution up to circa 1911**: 324


### Table 7: Documented Chinese Murders, 1911-1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterrey</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahua</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piedras Negras</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazatlan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico City</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>560</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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Unpublished Papers