Belonging to the Nation:  
Chinese Immigrants and the Politics of Race and Class in the Mexican Borderlands, 1882-1931

This thesis explores the history of Chinese immigrants in northern Mexico, and how national Mexican politics increasingly challenged their right to belong. Throughout the late 1800s, American exclusionary policy and Mexican labor recruitment helped to create the Chinese community in the Mexican borderlands. When compared to the US and its discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Mexico seemed initially tolerant in contrast, actively welcoming Chinese laborers in order to help modernize the country. As Chinese immigrants formed business, neighborly, and personal relationships, they assimilated into Mexican society, and introduced cultural hybridity into their food, languages, traditions, and Chinese Mexican families. However, as nativism in the 1920s responded violently to such cross-culturalism, Chinese Mexicans became targets of growing economic resentment and were increasingly racialized as Other. In the 1930s, they were expelled by the thousands from northern Mexican states like Sonora. This thesis examines the role of race and class to demonstrate how attitudes towards the Chinese transformed over time. In assessing why this drastic change took place, I argue that politics and the political setting are key to understanding why Mexican attitudes towards Chinese immigrants turned to such intolerance. The politics of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the economic modernization plans of President Porfirio Diaz, the Mexican Revolution, and the US-Mexico border all had a significant impact on the Chinese Mexican community in their creation, politicization, and ultimate expulsion from Mexico and erasure from Mexican history.

Sources Include:


Tratado de Amistad Comercio y Navegación entre los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y el Imperio Chino, June 30, 1900, Secretaria de Estado y del Despacho de Relaciones Exteriores (1899). https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044103159463