

# Mexico for the Mexicans, China for the Chinese

*Political Upheaval and  
the Anti-Chinese Campaigns in  
Postrevolutionary Sonora and Sinaloa*

After arriving in Mexico, Cantonese immigrants underwent two processes that tied them more closely to political activities in China and encouraged them to identify as Chinese. The first was the formation of Chinese social and political associations. Tension between Mexico's two largest Chinese associations, the Guomindang and the Chee Kung Tong, led to open violence in the 1920s and lasting enmity throughout the twentieth century. The second was the anti-Chinese campaigns. Between 1931 and 1934, anti-Chinese associations in the northwestern states of Sonora and Sinaloa (see map 1), sheltered by the support of the state and federal government, increased pressure on Chinese immigrants until ultimately carrying out their expulsion from those states. While wealthy Chinese fled to other parts of the country or paid for their own passage to China, those without means were forced to cross into the United States, from where immigration authorities deported them to China. Both processes, which occurred in the context of the Chinese and Mexican revolutions, led to appeals to Chinese officials and continued engagement with Chinese politics.

A new wave of studies has uncovered the history of Mexico's Chinese immigrant population and the anti-Chinese movement that drove the vast majority from the country. This chapter will emphasize the role of politics both in organizing the community and in fostering postrevolutionary xenophobia. Few Chinese could escape the political upheaval of the early twentieth century, whether it was the anarchy of the Mexican



MAP I. Northwestern Mexico, including the states of Sonora and Sinaloa.

Revolution, the internecine chaos of the Tong Wars, or the xenophobic violence of the anti-Chinese campaigns. The sober analyses contained in Chinese-language sources demonstrate that diplomats and associations had a sophisticated understanding of each, including the political and economic causes behind the anti-Chinese campaigns. Moreover, they show that migrants tried to appeal both to Mexico and to China to end xenophobic attacks, yet ultimately found that appealing to domestic officials was not an effective strategy. The anti-Chinese campaigns thus proved the utility of transnational ties to China.

Although the anti-Chinese campaigns were organized and backed by lower- and middle-class anti-Chinese activists around the country, crucial was the role of the Mexican government, particularly during the Maxi-

mato (1928–34). That period saw former president Plutarco Elías Calles wield more power behind the scenes than the three presidents he had helped bring into power. Indeed, crucial was the relative weakness of the office of the presidency during the Maximato, particularly during the presidency of Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–32), the peak of Calles's political power during this six-year period. The Maximato also witnessed the creation of a national political party that incorporated anti-Chinese activists and supported their message. The partnership between anti-Chinese associations and Mexico's emerging one-party state thus illustrates the crucial role of xenophobia in Mexican postrevolutionary state formation.

The support the Mexican government accorded to anti-Chinese activists led not only to new legislation primarily targeting the Chinese, but also to anti-Chinese associations being granted a wide latitude to go beyond the law in persecuting the Chinese. In turn, the anti-Chinese campaigns distracted from a grueling depression and served to increase popular support for the government. Government support for anti-Chinese campaigns was most notable in the areas in which Calles had the most control, particularly in Sonora and Sinaloa, the two states in northwestern Mexico where the expulsion of Chinese was most successful. In all, the anti-Chinese campaigns conducted during this three-year period saw the departure of three-quarters of the Chinese population of the country. Even for those who remained, the expulsion of Chinese from the state of Sonora represented a lasting trauma and a reference point for the community through the rest of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will begin by examining the arrival of Chinese migrants in the country and the economic activities that brought them success. Whereas earlier scholarship has examined the emergence of violence among Chinese migrants and the role of such violence in spurring the anti-Chinese campaigns, this chapter will link such violence to Chinese political associations tied to mainland Chinese political currents. After examining the tactics employed by anti-Chinese activists to help encourage Chinese migrants to leave the country, it will examine the expulsion of Chinese migrants from the states of Sonora and Sinaloa, dispossessing Chinese migrants of the fruits of decades of hard work.

#### EARLY CHINESE IMMIGRATION TO MEXICO

Chinese immigrants to Mexico, almost all of whom came from the Pearl River delta of Guangdong Province, formed part of a large wave of Cantonese immigration to the Americas.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese of the Americas

made a small but rapidly growing fraction of the eight million Chinese who had settled outside of mainland China by 1922. Coming from the same province and speaking similar dialects, these Chinese migrants could organize for mutual aid as well as respond to the anti-Chinese immigration restrictions and xenophobia that swept the Americas. For example, after the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States in 1882, networks involving Chinese migrants residing along several points of the Pacific Rim collaborated to help overcome exclusion laws and smuggle Chinese migrants to the United States. These networks first brought Chinese migrants to Mexico and soon after smuggled them across the U.S.–Mexico border, “invent[ing] undocumented emigration from Latin America.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite the initial impulse to find a circuitous path to the United States, many migrants chose to remain in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Though small groups of Chinese settled during the nineteenth century, the vast majority arrived after the 1899 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the Mexican and Chinese governments.<sup>5</sup> Chinese immigrants arrived in a Mexico that had just begun to exercise control over its borders, and found that the migration service was understaffed, underpaid, and easily corruptible. As a result, foreigners like the Chinese often paid bribes to enter Mexico without proper authorization.<sup>6</sup> From 1915 to 1920, the governor of Baja California, Esteban Cantú, alone brought in thousands of Chinese migrants to help develop the lands of the Mexicali Valley. Many of the migrants entered without documentation, and, according to the U.S. consul, paid up to \$140 to enter the territory to work.<sup>7</sup> After arriving, Chinese migrants were welcomed by representatives of Chinese organizations, “taught . . . basic Spanish, and familiarized . . . with the fundamentals of Mexican culture.”<sup>8</sup>

Chinese migrants took part in a variety of industries around the country. For example, many Chinese settled in the Mexicali Valley of northwestern Mexico and worked the lands of the Colorado River Land Company. Their toil helped irrigate the arid territory and turned the valley into a bountiful area for Mexican agriculture, particularly cotton.<sup>9</sup> In Torreón, in the northeastern state of Coahuila, Chinese arrivals worked in the mines and on the railroad. In Monterrey, the earliest migrants worked in the construction of municipal public-works projects.<sup>10</sup> On the Yucatán Peninsula, Chinese and other migrants worked the henequen plantations before moving on to the cities.<sup>11</sup> By the 1920s, many migrants had remained in the country after the termination of their labor contracts and become small-business owners, largely divided among general

stores, laundries, and cafés.<sup>12</sup> The transition to small businesses was relatively easy, since they required little start-up capital. Moreover, because there was a need for their services, Chinese quickly found an eager clientele.<sup>13</sup> Once they found success, some migrants began to send for family members to join them.

One of the most notable Chinese settlements in the first decade of the twentieth century was the city of Torreón, Coahuila—a city Chinese immigrants called “cai yuan,” or vegetable garden. Chinese formed the largest foreign group in Torreón at the beginning of the twentieth century, with over five hundred residents. In addition to establishing grocery stores and laundries, wealthy Chinese residents bought large tracts of land for agricultural work (giving the town its Chinese name). Torreón’s wealthiest resident was Wong Foon Chuck, who owned the Hotel del Ferrocarril in the city and five other hotels nearby, and who served as director of the Mexico-China Banking Company.<sup>14</sup> Chinese reformer Kang Youwei took an interest and visited the city, which had formed a chapter of the reformist organization the Baohuanghui.

Much of the city’s economic and political life was devastated during the Torreón massacre of 1911. After forces loyal to Mexican revolutionary Francisco Madero took control of Torreón, the city was sacked and over three hundred Chinese men and five Japanese were killed. The men had been “stripped, robbed, and mutilated while their homes and stores were ransacked and burned.”<sup>15</sup> The destruction of Torreón represented the worst act of violence ever committed against the Chinese in North America.<sup>16</sup> Even after the Torreón massacre, a reduced Chinese community remained in the city for much of the twentieth century, and many worked the surrounding Chinese farms until the 1930s. But sophisticated Chinese commercial, social, and political activities would take decades to recover.

Even during the chaos of the Mexican Revolution, when Chinese and other foreigners were targeted for robbery or worse, Chinese continued to arrive in the country. Whereas there were only 1,023 Chinese in the country in 1895—before the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the Mexican and Chinese governments—by 1910 the number had grown more than tenfold, to 13,000. About one-third of the population lived in Sonora, where they formed the largest group of foreign residents in the state.<sup>17</sup> During the Mexican Revolution, the number of Chinese migrants in the country would almost double, reaching 24,000 by 1926, “the second-largest immigrant group in all of Mexico.”<sup>18</sup>

Chinese migrants to Mexico were mostly men, a fact that partially explains the prevalence of Chinese-Mexican interracial romantic

relationships. Of 15,976 Chinese recorded by the Mexican census in 1930, only 412 were women—a figure that would have included Mexican spouses of Chinese men.<sup>19</sup> Reasons to explain these unions are numerous, and of course include romantic affection. Frequent interaction between Chinese business owners and female customers and employees often led to courtship and marriage.<sup>20</sup> For Chinese laborers unable to return to China to marry, seeking a spouse in Mexico may have been a more feasible option.<sup>21</sup> Others may have been attracted by the possibility of “claim[ing] a place in [Mexican] society.” Having opened businesses and started families, many Chinese migrants before the anti-Chinese campaigns acquired Mexican citizenship.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE FORMATION OF CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS: THE GUOMINDANG AND THE CHEE KUNG TONG

Following the example set by Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia and the United States, as well as that of other communities of foreigners in Mexico, Chinese migrants established associations for mutual aid and assistance, facilitating the arrival and settlement of new migrants and advocating for their interests.<sup>23</sup> Native-place associations, including the Haiyan Gongsuo, Zhongshan Huiguan, and Sanyi Huiguan, linked Chinese migrants from the same towns; surname and clan associations brought together Chinese of similar family backgrounds; and general associations served as umbrella organizations for Chinese migrants.<sup>24</sup> These latter organizations were frequently named Zhonghua Huiguan, Zhonghua Shanghui, or Huaqiao Tuantihui and often called, in Spanish, *asociaciones chinas* (“Chinese associations”) or *cámaras de comercio chinas* (“Chinese chambers of commerce”).<sup>25</sup> The functions of these associations were numerous: they provided migrants a place to sleep once they arrived in the country; they collected funds to remit to migrants’ sending regions; they arbitrated disputes between migrants; they took care of elderly Chinese; and they helped negotiate conflicts between Chinese and native Mexican residents. More important, they also provided a vehicle for Chinese migrants to resist anti-Chinese racism, particularly during the anti-Chinese campaigns.<sup>26</sup>

One of the largest organizations to precede the advent of the Republic of China was a fraternal organization known as the Chee Kung Tong (CKT), colloquially known as the Chinese Freemasons. Before the 1911 Xinhai revolution, it advocated the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and the restoration of the Ming dynasty (*fanqing fuming*), by which it meant

a return to a Han Chinese monarchy. Although their visions for the future of China were different, the Guomindang and societies like the Chee Kung Tong were, before the 1911 revolution, allies in the struggle against the Qing dynasty. In much of northern Mexico, CKT branches were founded well before branches of the Guomindang. In the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, Tampico and Torreón both established CKT branches, and a branch was established in Mexicali in 1914.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, the Chee Kung Tong would establish a headquarters in Mexico City, which coordinated the activities of its branches around the country.<sup>28</sup> In Spanish-language correspondence and publications, the CKT identified itself as a Masonic order and used Masonic symbols, but it was not strictly speaking a secret society, nor was it affiliated with other Masonic groups.<sup>29</sup>

The formation of these Chinese associations took place in the context of increased contact between Chinese around the Pacific Rim and the Chinese government. Chinese migration to the region was a crucial factor behind the establishment of Chinese–Mexican relations in 1899, and the treaty the two countries signed promised Chinese subjects “free and voluntary” migration to Mexico.<sup>30</sup> In the aftermath of the Xinhai revolution, the Chinese Republican government would strengthen its links with Chinese communities around the world. Seeing the Chinese communities of Southeast Asia and the Americas as instrumental to the revolution, the Republic of China established a government body, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, to keep Chinese overseas firmly tied to the government—representing Chinese migrants in times of trouble, asking them for contributions, and even claiming a responsibility for their education. In Mexico, the Republic of China opened consulates in areas with large Chinese populations far from Mexico City. By the mid-1920s, Nogales, Tampico, and Mexicali all had Chinese consulates, and Mazatlán and Tapachula had opened vice consulates by the following decade.<sup>31</sup>

After the foundation of the Republic of China, cities across Mexico established chapters of the Guomindang (the Chinese Nationalist Party), the party established by Sun Yat-sen and the ruling party in China for much of the first half of the twentieth century. Cananea, Sonora, which had earlier established a branch of the Tongmenghui, opened Mexico’s first Guomindang chapter. From there, the party spread to Mazatlán and Tampico during the 1910s, with a branch following in Tapachula in 1924 and Mérida in 1927.<sup>32</sup> A national headquarters in Nogales, Sonora, organized the different party branches until the anti-Chinese

movement; afterward, five main branches around the country coordinated party activities.<sup>33</sup>

Even as, years later, anti-Chinese activists would describe the two organizations as secretive “*maffias*” that primarily engaged in illicit activities, during the 1920s both maintained regular contact with Mexican society as well as with local and national government officials. Both, for example, registered their associations in compliance with Mexican law. In different cities around the country, the Guomindang shared with Mexican officials the names of its officials and even agendas for high-level meetings.<sup>34</sup> When, in 1928, Plutarco Elías Calles announced his refusal to extend his presidential term after the assassination of president-elect Álvaro Obregón, among the organizations to send their congratulations were two chapters of the CKT.<sup>35</sup> In their openness and active participation in Mexican society, they resembled other kinds of Mexican civic associations, even those composed of foreigners.

Tensions between the Guomindang and the Chee Kung Tong began to emerge after the 1911 Xinhai revolution, particularly during the 1920s. These tensions had Mexican domestic as well as transpacific causes. As both organizations expanded, they began to struggle for members and control of illicit activities.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, the CKT had more members than the GMD; this consistently unnerved the latter organization, whose members tended to be wealthier and thought of themselves as better educated and more civilized.<sup>37</sup> Both groups also competed for control over illicit activities such as opium and gambling. Robert Chao Romero notes that “both Chinese and Mexican observers of the early twentieth century depict the Chee Kung Tong as a source of various forms of vice, including opium and gambling.” Although GMD members denounced the activities of the CKT, its members also engaged in the same activities, especially members of the Lung Sing Tong, a subgroup of the GMD “allegedly founded by members of the Mexican Guomindang to counteract the financial power of their Chee Kung Tong rivals through organized participation in the trafficking of opium and the management of casinos.”<sup>38</sup>

The causes of their growing antagonism were not merely local. The Tong Wars also took place as the government of mainland China was beginning to consolidate control following the 1911 revolution. Members of the Mexican Guomindang supported its counterpart established in southern China, which was fighting to wrest control of much of the rest of the country. Members of the Chee Kung Tong, in contrast, supported the Beiyang government in northern China.<sup>39</sup> As Lisa Rose Mar

and Elliott Young point out, this political transformation divided not only Chinese Mexicans, but also Chinese around the world. Skirmishes between the Guomindang and Chinese Freemason organizations like the Chee Kung Tong also took place in the United States, Canada, and Cuba during the 1920s. Mexican president Álvaro Obregón, for example, received a newspaper clipping in which the World Order of Chinese Freemasons expressed its resolute opposition to the Guomindang, which it considered to be “bolshevist.”<sup>40</sup> Among Chinese Mexicans, these differences manifested themselves just before the outbreak of violence in 1922. While the CKT raised funds for the construction of a new consulate in Nogales, Sonora, the GMD, conscious of the fact that the Chinese diplomatic corps during the 1920s was biased against them, tried to stymie the project. At the same time, the GMD raised funds for its counterpart in mainland China.<sup>41</sup>

Initially, disagreements between the two groups were limited to print. The early GMD in Mexico published the *Xinghua Zazhi* (“Revive China Journal”), while the CKT published a monthly periodical called the *Gongbao* (“Bulletin”). Each periodical was a propaganda instrument of each faction, spreading its political ideology among its members. The *Xinghua Zazhi*, for example, frequently criticized the anti-Guomindang Chinese diplomatic corps, which unnerved CKT members.<sup>42</sup> Eventually, differences between the newspapers escalated to the point where they were directly antagonizing one another. Finally, the CKT offered a reward of 10,000 Chinese Yuan for the death of the leader of the GMD, Francisco Yuen, causing Yuen to flee to the United States. One Guomindang member later remarked that the organization felt it had to respond with violence, lest the Chinese community in Mexico consider it weak.<sup>43</sup> Thus began the Tong Wars of the mid-1920s. During the first period of violence in the summer of 1922, twenty-five Chinese were killed, including the leaders of the local GMD and CKT.<sup>44</sup> The second Tong War began in July 1924 as shots were fired toward the Mexicali CKT branch, the war then expanding beyond Baja California to the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Chiapas, and Tampico. During the course of the war, national Guomindang leader Yuen was assassinated “in broad daylight on a railroad platform.”<sup>45</sup>

The episodes of violence were what Evelyn Hu-Dehart refers to as “self-inflicted wounds,” not only for the Chinese who were deported for taking part, but also for the larger community.<sup>46</sup> The violence made headlines across the country and added to perceptions that Chinese were pernicious foreigners, a threat to postrevolutionary Mexican stability and, because of

the presence of opium and gambling among Chinese, a corrupting force in Mexican society.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, since most Mexicans were unaware of the political and economic differences among Chinese, many chose to understand these conflicts as clashes between Chinese groups over the opium trade.<sup>48</sup> Marches and petitions demanded that the president deport all Chinese involved in the Tong Wars.<sup>49</sup> President Obregón, who was biased in favor of the Guomindang and generally more sanguine about the Chinese presence in the country, initially modified the order to deport only CKT members, and eventually set all of the detained free. Obregón's perceived lenience toward the Chinese even after the Tong Wars incensed anti-Chinese activists in Sonora, who "denounced the central state authorities and their failure to respect the wishes of the Sonoran people."<sup>50</sup> Much of the violence of the second Tong War occurred during the presidential campaign of Plutarco Elías Calles, and the future president may have been influenced by the violence to oppose the Chinese presence in the country and thus differentiate himself from Obregón.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the Tong Wars served as ammunition for those who advocated restrictions against Chinese immigration in the country, and were a motivating factor in the growth of anti-Chinese organizations in northern Mexico.

#### THE RISE OF MEXICAN ANTI-CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS

Despite the fact that early episodes of anti-Chinese activity had already demonstrated considerable resentment toward Chinese success—the massacre of Torreón in 1911 is the most salient example—such resentment did not crystallize into an organized network until 1916.<sup>52</sup> The ideological leader of these campaigns was José Ángel Espinoza, whose volumes *El problema chino en México* and *El ejemplo de Sonora* combined a strong economic nationalism with concerns that the Chinese would lead to the degeneration of the Mexican mestizo nation, inspiring anti-Chinese activists across the country. The two books argued that Chinese merchants succeeded only because they engaged in deceitful business practices that allowed them to undersell Mexican merchants. Their success didn't benefit Mexicans, since they repatriated their profits to China. As a result, they argued, the Mexican government needed to expel Chinese immigrants from the country to allow Mexicans to regain control over the country's commerce.

Anti-Chinese intellectuals like Espinoza were certainly influenced by Mexican postrevolutionary notions of *mestizaje*—the idea that the racial mixture of Europeans, indigenous Mexicans, and Africans would pro-

duce a new, vibrant race. Such notions allowed them to argue that the Chinese, by intermixing with Mexicans, were weakening the country's racial stock. The fact that the Chinese had settled in cities and towns across the republic for decades, married Mexican women, and had native-born children alarmed nativists, who accused them of changing the ethnic makeup of the mestizo nation—for the worse. But they also liberally borrowed their rhetoric from the mid-nineteenth-century anti-Chinese labor movement in the United States, which had no such racial ideology.<sup>53</sup> From their point of view, the anti-Chinese campaigns were their attempt to change the makeup of the Mexican periphery on their own terms, and to alter the elements of the mestizo nation through violence. Where they could not obtain the support of federal government officials, they deeply resented any federal government attempts to restrain their actions.<sup>54</sup>

Anti-Chinese activists often pointed to the conflict between the Guomindang and the Chee Kung Tong to illustrate the danger that Chinese migrants represented to Mexican society. Espinoza derided these organizations as “*maffias*” and repeated the accusation that the Tong Wars were merely fought over the control of immigrant smuggling, gambling, and the opium trade—accusations that ignored Chinese political divisions. In this view, the Tong Wars demonstrated “Asian ferocity, slyness, and perfidy,” a viewpoint that was widely reproduced in the Mexican press. The conflicts between the GMD and the CKT, then, confirmed anti-Chinese activists’ stereotyped assumptions and fears about the Chinese, and allowed them to portray the Chinese not only as an abstract threat to Mexican mestizo nationalism, but also as an immediate threat to Mexican bystanders.<sup>55</sup>

Instead of physically attacking Chinese migrants, anti-Chinese activists tried to persuade Mexican officials to deport Chinese migrants as well as encourage Chinese migrants to deport themselves.<sup>56</sup> Their campaigns attacked the rights that the Chinese were entitled to as foreign nationals or naturalized citizens in Mexico—in particular, their right to settle, manage their businesses, and marry freely. The goal of anti-Chinese activists was to increase restrictions on the Chinese community until residency became so burdensome that they would leave. Although the tactics had changed, the effects were similar: anti-Chinese activists “in effect resort[ed] to a different kind of violence” to remove Chinese from the country.<sup>57</sup>

An early priority was removing the legal protections that shielded Chinese migrants from the activist associations’ attacks, in particular the 1899 Treaty of Amity and Commerce. As Sonora proposed discriminatory legislation against Chinese immigrants and proposed barring Chinese

immigrants from entering the country, Chinese consuls and ministers frequently reminded the executive that Chinese had the “right to travel and conduct business in all parts of Mexico under the same conditions as nationals from all other nations.”<sup>58</sup> Anti-Chinese organizations made abrogating the treaty with China a priority, believing it would enable them to enact harsher legislation against the Chinese. As governor of Sonora, Adolfo de la Huerta supported abrogating the treaty as early as 1919, and by 1921 President Obregón sought to amend the treaty to prohibit Chinese workers, similar to the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States.<sup>59</sup> Calles would finally abrogate the treaty in July 1927.<sup>60</sup> Although the two countries maintained diplomatic relations, they would not conclude another treaty until 1943. The abrogation of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was a harbinger of coming anti-Chinese violence, an indication that the federal government would be more permissive toward anti-Chinese legislation and extralegal attacks.

Anti-Chinese activity specifically targeted naturalized Mexicans in addition to Chinese nationals.<sup>61</sup> Although the constitution of 1917 and subsequent legislation theoretically differentiated the rights of natural-born Mexicans from naturalized citizens, how their rights were different in practice was still unclear.<sup>62</sup> Xenophobic activists complained that the Chinese had no interest in forming part of the Mexican nation and naturalized only so that they would be exempt from Mexican legislation targeting foreigners. José Ángel Espinoza doubted that any Chinese sincerely wished to become part of the nation. He contrasted naturalized Europeans and Americans, who “know how to be[come] Mexican,” with the Chinese—who, he argued, did not obtain Mexican nationality “in response to an intimate sense of gratitude to our hospitality. . . . [W]hen nationalizing they only look for advantages under our laws offered to Mexican citizens.” Even if a Chinese obtained Mexican nationality, argued Espinoza, he would never become truly Mexican: “the government may judge him as Mexican, the Secretaría of Foreign Relations may judge him as Mexican, but to the people he continues to be Chinese; a doubly dangerous Chinese exploiter,” a wolf in sheep’s clothing.<sup>63</sup> Instead of encouraging Chinese to nationalize and assimilate to Mexican ways, the federal government should, Espinoza recommended, prevent them from nationalizing altogether.

Anti-Chinese activists commonly advocated for the deportation of Chinese immigrants regardless of immigration and naturalization status. Most frequently, they called for the use of Article 33 under the Mexican Constitution of 1917 to remove undesirable Chinese from the

country. Article 33 empowered the president to remove any foreigner without trial “whose presence is considered to be inconvenient.” Because of the ambiguity of the word “inconvenient,” anti-Chinese activists seized upon Article 33 a quick and easy solution to the Chinese problem. During a march in Gusave, Sonora, one protester displayed a placard simply reading “33,” which, the caption from Espinoza clarified, was intended for “the infamous traders from Asia.”<sup>64</sup>

Anti-Chinese associations accused Chinese of many different violations in order to argue for their deportation under Article 33. Probably the most egregious request for the application of Article 33 came from the city of Durango, Durango, in 1930. Authorities stumbled upon a gambling house where 23 Chinese were allegedly discovered “smoking opium and gambling.” The governor of the state, José Ramón Valdez, suggested to the Secretary of Gobernación that they be deported as “pernicious foreigners.”<sup>65</sup> Once he had gotten the attention of the Secretaría, the governor added another 76 Chinese, none of whom had been accused of any crime but whom Valdez described as “in their majority pernicious elements, because of which it would benefit the state to expel as many as possible.” The 99 Chinese, probably the entire Chinese male population of the state capital, were apprehended, photographed, fingerprinted, and investigated the following month. Ultimately, the Secretaría declined to expel all of the Chinese from Durango, sending away only those with prior criminal records.<sup>66</sup> Anti-Chinese activists’ call for the use of Article 33 was not often successful; Pablo Yankelevich notes that between 1911 and 1940, only 149 Chinese were expelled and very few naturalized Mexicans were deported. However, the threat of Article 33 must have proved very unsettling to Chinese migrants in Mexico, whose shops could be closed and who could be transferred to distant jails while awaiting deportation proceedings.<sup>67</sup>

When anti-Chinese activists could not deport Chinese immigrants outright, they tried to increase restrictions on Chinese migrants in hopes of encouraging them to leave on their own. Some of the restrictions proposed included special ghettos for Chinese; preventing Chinese from living at their place of business; preventing Chinese from obtaining Mexican citizenship; and outlawing relationships between Chinese men and Mexican women. These restrictions would target all Chinese in the country regardless of how long they had been there or whether they had Mexican wives and children.

One of the recurring restrictions on Chinese was legislation prohibiting marriages or free unions between Chinese men and Mexican women,

which were common throughout northern Mexico. Large numbers of Chinese men had married or cohabited with Mexican women, and fathered many Mexican-born children.<sup>68</sup> The state of Sonora passed such legislation in December 1923; a second piece of legislation, signed in October 1930, specifically mentioned naturalized Mexicans.<sup>69</sup> Francisco Gin, a naturalized Mexican in Naco, Sonora, sued to overturn this racist legislation. Gin had been fined 200 pesos for living with and attempting to marry a Mexican woman. His appeal, which eventually went before the Mexican Supreme Court, was based partially on the fact that the fine violated his rights as a Mexican citizen. Gin's lawsuit, if successful, could have set a precedent that reaffirmed basic civil rights for naturalized Mexicans. But this entailed "a redefinition of who the Chinese were . . . from a state of existence so immutable that neither naturalization nor birth in Mexico could alter that identity." In deciding Gin's case on procedural grounds, the supreme court declined to rule on the constitutionality of the Sonora law, which presented "'complex issues' about race that they could not then consider."<sup>70</sup> Anti-Chinese activists could not but feel encouraged that the highest levels of the Mexican judiciary declined to uphold the basic rights of naturalized Mexican citizens, and the ruling likely pushed them to seek more restrictions on naturalized Chinese.

#### ANTI-CHINESE ACTIVISTS, THE MAXIMATO, AND THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The anti-Chinese campaigns took place just as Mexico was emerging from the Mexican Revolution, a large social and political upheaval initially sparked in reaction to the long presidency of Porfirio Díaz. During the subsequent decade, Mexican military leaders—some of whom merely advocated political change, others of whom sought deeper reforms that would address the plight of Mexico's dispossessed masses—fought each other for control of the country. During the 1910s, roughly 10 percent of the population died, either directly from the violence or due to hunger and disease. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans sought refuge from the revolution in the United States.

The year 1920 witnessed the rise to power of a group of political leaders, hailing from the northwestern state of Sonora and known as the Sonoran Triangle, who would implement reforms that brought political stability to the country. The Sonoran Triangle incorporated Adolfo de la Huerta (interim president, 1920), Álvaro Obregón (president, 1920–

24), and Plutarco Elías Calles (president, 1924–28). Through the 1920s, these three political figures would make their mark on Mexican politics by centralizing power, obtaining the diplomatic recognition of the United States, and creating a political party that governed the country through the rest of the twentieth century. They also took advantage of the idea of racial mixing, or *mestizaje*, as a political project to paper over substantial differences among Mexicans and help build the one-party state.<sup>71</sup>

The rise of the Sonoran triangle coincided with the rise in anti-Chinese organized activity, which Obregón discouraged but de la Huerta and Calles backed. As governor of Sonora, Calles had rolled back aggressive measures against the Chinese.<sup>72</sup> Obregón, needing the diplomatic backing of the United States, judged the campaigns and legislation spawned by anti-Chinese activists to be potentially harmful for Mexico's relationship with its northern neighbor. Calles, however, enacted a much more populist agenda, and gave explicit approval to anti-Chinese campaigns. Although Calles's presidential term expired in 1928, his influence would be magnified by events outside of his control. In 1928, Obregón won reelection, but was assassinated by a Catholic activist before taking office. During the ensuing political crisis, which threatened the stability that the Sonoran Triangle brought to national politics, Calles declined to remain in the presidency but nevertheless dominated Mexican politics in a period known as the Maximato (1928–34). Although three presidents were installed during the six-year period, Calles was considered to be the country's strongman.

During the Maximato, anti-Chinese activists often wrote to or quoted Calles to legitimize their message. During an interview in Villa Juárez, as the Calles family attempted to evict Chinese residents from that town, Calles expressed his belief “that the anti-Chinese campaign should intensify” and that judges should stop protecting Chinese from their inevitable expulsion. The quote was printed in Espinoza's anti-Chinese work *El problema chino en México*.<sup>73</sup> In the midst of the Chinese expulsion in Sonora, the cover of Espinoza's second book, *El ejemplo de Sonora*, appears to show Calles, clutching the anti-Chinese labor law, kicking out a Chinese immigrant carrying gold and opium.<sup>74</sup> Calles never led an anti-Chinese campaign on his own, but his vocal support led anti-Chinese activists to believe that they would not be hindered, and it encouraged more locals to participate in aggression against the Chinese.

In addition to obtaining the approval of Calles himself, anti-Chinese activists were an important element of Calles's nascent political party,

the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). The PNR brought together competing political factions, military leaders, and political bosses under the umbrella of one party. Designed to foster political stability at such a turbulent time, it gave local party branches a wide amount of latitude to run their own affairs, while national affairs were dominated by Calles. Under this system, the president was reduced to merely being an administrator; political insiders and even foreign observers understood that Calles dominated the political affairs of the country and that regional and local officials often governed without federal government intervention. Local strongmen in turn were crucial in lending their support to the anti-Chinese campaigns.<sup>75</sup> The party, which in 1946 would be renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), governed Mexico from 1929 to 2000, and made Calles an extraordinary force in national politics, even without holding political office, from 1929 until his exile from the country in 1936.<sup>76</sup>

The precursor of the PNR, northwest Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Sonorense, had made an early calculation to ally itself with anti-Chinese associations. When Adolfo de la Huerta campaigned for governor of the state of Sonora in 1919, he endorsed many of the hateful demands of the anti-Chinese associations, including the abrogation of Mexico's Treaty of Amity and Commerce with China, "and the expulsion of Chinese nationals and their descendants from Sonoran territory." After de la Huerta's victory, the anti-Chinese associations were incorporated into the Partido Revolucionario Sonorense, and the Sonoran government provided financial support for their activities. Moreover, de la Huerta lent his support to passing the 1919 Labor Law, including an 80 percent labor provision targeting Chinese business owners.<sup>77</sup> Once in power nationally, the PNR understood the political uses of anti-Chinese activity. Luis L. León, one of the party's founders, argued that anti-Chinese and other xenophobic activity "will . . . give us strong sympathy in all of the republic."<sup>78</sup> In the years after the formation of the National Revolutionary Party, Chinese diplomats saw anti-Chinese activists as an important part of the party's membership; the party even provided them with office space.<sup>79</sup> This incorporation into the official state party caused them to radicalize further and spread throughout the country.

With a political leader and a national party committed to *antichinismo*, it was no accident that the anti-Chinese campaigns were most intense during the Maximato, particularly during the presidency of Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–32), who was politically weak and worked with

a congress that was largely loyal to Calles and the PNR instead of the president.<sup>80</sup> Chinese diplomats and residents were in agreement. Not only did federal officials disapprove of anti-Chinese activities, but the president was also deeply concerned about how the anti-Chinese campaigns would hurt Mexico's reputation abroad. But ultimately they saw Ortiz Rubio as such a weak political figure that negotiating with him was useless.<sup>81</sup> Ma Jixiu, a Chinese who had lived in the country for twenty years before being deported, noted that since "Calles dominated the congress, orders from the president [to protect Chinese] would not work."<sup>82</sup>

Sonora had some of the fiercest anti-Chinese associations in the country, but it also had some of Calles's strongest political allies. Two of his relatives served as governor during the anti-Chinese campaigns: his uncle, Francisco S. Elías; and his son, Rodolfo Elías Calles.<sup>83</sup> As anti-Chinese activists intensified their activities in the summer of 1931, both Francisco Elías and Rodolfo Elías Calles (who took office on September 1, 1931) pledged their support. Francisco Elías gave his reasons for supporting the anti-Chinese campaigns in a telegram to the Mexican Subsecretary of Foreign Relations. The governor made mention of the Tong Wars to help justify the campaign: "the existing rivalries between their mafias has been a constant threat in our cities . . . on various occasions there have been true gunfights in the [streets] harming peaceful citizens." But the expulsion of the Chinese, argued Elías, also presented opportunities for Mexican workers to obtain employment. "If you keep in mind that in this entity [state] there exist around nine hundred Chinese businesses and if you calculate an average of three employees each, you will see that there would be two thousand seven hundred Mexican employees who would be consumers and breadwinners."<sup>84</sup> Rodolfo Elías Calles in turn was reported to have said several times "that he would not tolerate the existence of a single Chinese in the whole state."<sup>85</sup> The open support of government officials helped anti-Chinese activists obtain what they had worked for since 1916: the expulsion of Chinese migrants from Sonora.

#### THE ANTI-CHINESE EXPULSION IN SONORA AND SINALOA

Chinese minister to Mexico Samuel Sung Young (Xiong Chongzhi) and consul in Sonora Yao-Hsiang Peng (Peng Yaoxiang) were well aware that the advent of the Great Depression in 1929 provided anti-Chinese activists with a crucial pretext to intensify their anti-Chinese activities, to argue for preventing future Chinese immigration, and to expel those

who were already in the country. In Mexico the impact of the Great Depression fell primarily on the working class. Moreover, it provoked a crisis for the government, as revenues fell by 34 percent.<sup>86</sup> Mexican economic woes were further compounded when U.S. officials deported or encouraged the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the southwestern United States to Mexico.<sup>87</sup> Once they arrived, they joined the swelling ranks of the unemployed in Mexico. Indeed, anti-Chinese activists often mentioned “the Great Repatriation,” both to compare the status of repatriated Mexican migrants with that of Chinese merchants and to give their petitions a sense of urgency. “Day by day deported [Mexicans] arrive in our Mexico,” read a petition from one anti-Chinese association, “and this makes our situation even more difficult.”<sup>88</sup> Chinese immigrants, especially those who naturalized as Mexicans, represented an unwanted competition for Mexican unemployed workers, especially those who were pouring south of the U.S.–Mexico border. Thus, allowing the Chinese to remain “discards the element which is truly national.”<sup>89</sup>

With the advent of the depression, anti-Chinese activists moved from more overtly racist measures against the Chinese, such as banning intermarriage with Mexicans and proposing special ghettos for Asian residents, to primarily enacting economic restrictions, in particular the 80 percent labor provision. The provision specified that 80 percent of the workforce of foreign-owned businesses was to be supplied by Mexican labor. In practice, this meant that, for every Chinese worker a Chinese business employed, it would have to hire at least four Mexican workers to be in compliance. Just like other restrictions against the Chinese, it specifically included naturalized Chinese Mexicans.<sup>90</sup> The 80 percent labor provision provided a way for anti-Chinese activists and the Mexican government to curry favor with unemployed Mexicans by promising them future employment. Although initially passed by the Sonoran legislature in 1919, it was largely unenforced until 1931, when a strengthened 80 percent provision was enacted. The provision was also incorporated into the Federal Labor Law the same year.<sup>91</sup> From 1931 to 1933, this provision, along with increased taxes on Chinese businesses and a new registry of foreigners in the state, was used for future repression against the Chinese, and in particular as the justification for the expulsion of Chinese from the state of Sonora.<sup>92</sup>

Anti-Chinese associations made use of legislation like the 80 percent labor provision to encourage Mexicans to declare boycotts of Chinese businesses that were not in compliance. Just one month after the passage

of the new state law, anti-Chinese activists began to give speeches, spread leaflets, and discourage Mexicans from patronizing Chinese businesses. Eventually, they would surround Chinese businesses to prevent Mexican customers from entering them. Their boycotts were extralegal actions. Anti-Chinese associations were not empowered under Sonoran labor legislation to determine whether Chinese businesses were in compliance with the law, nor were they allowed sanction them for noncompliance. None of these actions were officially condoned by local authorities, who preferred the deniability of having anti-Chinese campaigns organized by nongovernmental organizations. Anti-Chinese associations carried out boycotts anyway, carrying weapons to enforce their mandates. As local and federal government officials refused to intervene, anti-Chinese associations began to act with impunity. In Sonora, where anti-Chinese associations used these tactics most frequently, Chinese residents and diplomats were stymied in their attempts to intervene and rescue the livelihoods of Chinese residents.

In practice, anti-Chinese associations cared little about the 80 percent labor provision. Many Chinese business owners did try to comply with Sonoran labor legislation, even though it had disastrous effects for Chinese workers. Because the law stipulated that Chinese hire four Mexicans for each Chinese worker, those who complied were forced to fire almost their entire Chinese staff. Ching Chong y Compañía, a large business in Navojoa valued at over 500,000 pesos, complained that it complied with the demands of anti-Chinese activists to implement the 80 percent labor provision by firing its Chinese employees and hiring Mexican workers, only to face increased taxes and a new boycott from anti-Chinese activists three months later. Ultimately the owners saw themselves compelled to sign a contract stipulating that they would sell their goods and leave the region.<sup>93</sup> As this tactic became rapidly replicated, then, it led to the unemployment of thousands of Chinese workers. A letter from a Chinese group in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, illustrates what happened to them. After they were fired, Chinese workers were unable to sleep or eat at their former businesses and were forced to find a living elsewhere. As anti-Chinese campaigns became more numerous, “newly and previously unemployed overseas Chinese are everywhere.” Chinese associations tried to support them temporarily, but once their resources ran out after one or two months, the only alternative would be for the workers to try to migrate to a tertiary country or return to China.<sup>94</sup> Despite this displacement of Chinese workers for Mexican labor—the stated goal of anti-Chinese associations—activists nevertheless

continued to boycott Chinese businesses. Although occasionally Chinese migrants would negotiate a peaceful end to the boycott, far too often the stated goals of anti-Chinese associations were simply a pretext to close Chinese businesses.

Not simply relying on the Chinese diplomatic corps to protect them, Chinese migrants in Sonora and other states tried to organize themselves for their own protection. When Chinese migrants were detained, they attempted to meet with local officials to secure their freedom, and sent representatives to Mexican jails to ensure that Chinese prisoners were well taken care of. Migrants also often sought protection from the Mexican court system.<sup>95</sup> In addition to appealing extensively before Mexican officials, they also met extensively with Minister Sung Young and Consul Peng. The Mexican branch of the Guomindang sent appeals to the central party leadership in mainland China, while other organizations wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Executive Yuan. Migrant appeals before both Mexican and Chinese officials suggest the use of strategic nationalism, appealing to officials on both sides of the Pacific Ocean in an attempt to remain in Mexico.<sup>96</sup>

Chinese organizations also stressed unity to face the threat against them. The central committee of the Guomindang in Nogales, Sonora, sent a message addressed not only to all its party branches but to the Chinese Mexican world in general. It called specifically for Chinese to put the division forged during the Tong Wars behind them: “No matter what faction of overseas Chinese, [all] must do away with all dividing lines [and] unite as one in order to seek realistic protection, in order to be the rearguard of the diplomatic corps” or risk a disastrous future. It ended with a sober warning: “[We] wish our compatriots in Mexico will quickly wake up to the truth.”<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, the two factions did not heed the advice of the national GMD headquarters.

As the summer of 1931 wore on, what was initially called a boycott of Chinese businesses became more and more brazen. A visit by legation secretary Zhang Tianyuan and consul Peng Yaoxiang illustrated the dire conditions of Chinese merchants in the state. In the state capital of Hermosillo, the anti-Chinese association marched on the evening of July 5. Two days later, the association “dispatched people to stand in front of the doors of businesses it believed were not following the law, prohibited other people from entering to buy.” Mexicans who tried to enter Chinese businesses anyway “were prevented through force of arms.” One Chinese business operated solely by the proprietor, and thus exempt from the 80 percent provision, was nonetheless boycotted by the anti-

Chinese association, who argued that the business needed to employ Mexicans before it could reopen.

The result was the rapid closure of Chinese businesses across Sonora. In Navojoa, only two Chinese businesses continued to operate by early July, both of which employed Mexican workers. Nevertheless, on July 10 anti-Chinese activists surrounded one of these shops and, using megaphones, tried to persuade Mexicans not to purchase from the Chinese. In Ciudad Obregón, seven large-scale Chinese businesses had not only complied with the law but even obtained a certificate from local authorities as proof of their compliance. Anti-Chinese activists, however, refused to recognize the document and, declaring the businesses in violation of the labor law, demanded that each pay a fine of 30 pesos before it be allowed to reopen. All seven closed by July 1. The same situation was repeated in Nogales as well as the smaller towns of Huatabampo, Cócorit, and Esperanza. The Chinese legation alleged that Calles had telegrammed civil officials around the state and encouraged them to support the campaigns.<sup>98</sup> Emboldened, anti-Chinese associations began fining Chinese businesses that had already gone out of business several hundred to over a thousand pesos, and confiscating merchandise from those who were unable to pay. Eventually, anti-Chinese activists began stealing Chinese property without even the pretense of a fine.<sup>99</sup>

At the same time, anti-Chinese activists were also aggressively forcing Chinese farmers off of the state's farmlands. In Santa Bárbara, for example, anti-Chinese activists robbed Chinese farmers, damaged their homes, and pillaged their farmlands.<sup>100</sup> Soon after, the landowner canceled the Chinese farmers' lease and evicted them from their lands. In Ciudad Obregón and Bacanuchi, hacendados also forced Chinese off their farmlands, suggesting that it was due to pressure from authorities.<sup>101</sup>

In early August, anti-Chinese associations declared a deadline for Chinese businesses to settle their affairs and leave the state. This deadline is notable, as nowhere in the labor law or anywhere in the Mexican constitution were foreigners subject to deportation for failing to comply with labor legislation. Yet as the state and federal government turned a blind eye, anti-Chinese associations felt empowered to do just that. Were Chinese to ignore the order to abandon Sonora, anti-Chinese associations warned, they "would not be responsible for protecting them."<sup>102</sup> Zhang Tianyuan and Peng Yaoxiang met with state civil and military officials, who promised the Chinese diplomatic officials that they would work to protect local Chinese businesses but in practice did nothing.<sup>103</sup> President Ortiz Rubio, while meeting with the Chinese

minister, asserted that Chinese businesses should ignore the unconstitutional order, but the legation feared that since “the president has no real power,” he would be unable to protect the Chinese.<sup>104</sup>

The deadline for Chinese to leave was pushed back several times. On August 30 and 31, despite the fact that the deadline had been postponed, the towns of Huatabampo and Arizpe began detaining and deporting Chinese migrants on their own. In Huatabampo, anti-Chinese activists robbed and beat Chinese before forcing them to take the train out of town or even to flee on foot. Some hid in their rooms for days, helped by their neighbors, who provided them with loaves of bread so that they would survive. In Arizpe, Chinese farmers were stripped of their farming tools and other property and pushed off of the lands they were planting. Chinese from those two towns fled to Cananea and as far as Los Mochis, Sinaloa.<sup>105</sup>

The pressures on Chinese migrants in the state only intensified. Under pressure from the governor and the state’s Secretary of Gobernación, Mexican landowners were abruptly canceling their leases with Chinese business owners and farmers, meaning that “Chinese businessmen have no place to rent, Chinese farmers have no land to plant.”<sup>106</sup> In October, following a new decree allowing for the detention of Chinese who still ran their businesses in the state, Chinese in Nogales and Navojoa were thrown in prison without explanation.<sup>107</sup> The following month consular officials reported soberly that the Chinese “have no hope of reopening their businesses.”<sup>108</sup> By then, Chinese diplomats, instead of protesting, pleaded with state officials to at least allow Chinese businessmen time to sell their goods and farmers to harvest their produce before deporting them, but Rodolfo Elías Calles refused to meet with Chinese officials or even return their telegrams. Consul Peng feared “that there will be no more trace left of the Chinese in this state.”<sup>109</sup>

The success of the anti-Chinese campaigns in Sonora encouraged anti-Chinese organizations in the neighboring state of Sinaloa to conduct aggressive actions against the Chinese. The inauguration of an anti-Chinese governor convinced anti-Chinese associations in Sinaloa that they would not be punished. Following the example of government officials in Sonora, officials in Sinaloa increased business taxes on the Chinese several times over in 1932, hoping to force them to close their businesses and leave the state.<sup>110</sup> On February 10, 1933, local authorities in Los Mochis, Sinaloa, rounded up approximately one hundred Chinese residents and loaded them onto trucks for removal to the state of Nayarit. Anti-Chinese associations conducted similar detentions in Sinaloa’s other major cities, including Mazatlán and Culiacán. The Chi-

nese loaded onto trucks were not allowed to take any possessions with them, and shortly after they were taken away, anti-Chinese associations sacked their homes and businesses. On their journey south to Nayarit, the migrants were given neither food nor water nor any protection from the cold. “Criminals and prisoners of war are treated with more consideration and humanity,” protested Minister Sung Young.<sup>111</sup> Other Chinese immigrants in the state of Sinaloa were also expelled northward, toward the U.S.–Mexico border, where they would be detained by INS agents and deported to China.<sup>112</sup> The governor of Sinaloa agreed to suspend the extrajudicial detentions of Chinese only if the Chinese community agreed to leave the state within a specified period of time.

Chinese diplomats watched helplessly as extrajudicial detentions of Chinese migrants only intensified. In February 1932, Rodolfo Elías Calles gave an order to local authorities “for the arrest and subsequent deportation from Sonora of all Chinese residents.”<sup>113</sup> Chinese in Cuppas reported being detained and given fifteen days to leave the state. As they were taken into custody their personal possessions were taken away, and while they languished in jail their homes were sacked. Chinese residents in the small towns around Agua Prieta, Sonora, reported that authorities were detaining them and forcing them to cross the U.S.–Mexico border into the United States. Local authorities in Nogales reportedly took twenty-seven detained Chinese to the border and, when the Chinese hesitated crossing the border, beat them with clubs and threatened to shoot them until they crossed.<sup>114</sup> Officials in Sonora, in spite of incontrovertible proof that anti-Chinese associations and local officials were forcing the Chinese out, continued to dispute the accusations levied against them, and Rodolfo Elías Calles continued to assert that Chinese were fleeing the state “of their own free will.”<sup>115</sup>

Just as pressing as cataloging and protesting the abuses against Chinese migrants was dealing with the increasing refugee crisis. Chinese were pouring out of the state, many toward the United States. Long-standing residents, even those who were Mexican citizens, left Sonora and Sinaloa; some had to abandon businesses valued at close to a million dollars. “Those who have assets either return to China or move to other states,” noted Minister Sung Young, while “poor overseas Chinese . . . sneak into the United States and . . . have the U.S. government spend the money to send them back to China.” An estimated nine hundred had already been deported in this fashion—a number that would swell to over four thousand by the end of the anti-Chinese campaigns. Those who remained in Sonora either sought desperately to sell their

real estate or, being “utterly destitute, have no way of moving [and] sit and wait to be rescued.”<sup>116</sup>

The expulsion of Chinese from the state of Sonora made headlines around the world and led to protests in China against the Mexican government. Articles on the Chinese expulsion in Sonora were printed in the United States, China, and Japan.<sup>117</sup> After arriving in Shanghai, expelled Chinese reported on the extralegal detentions and deportations committed against them between 1931 and 1933.<sup>118</sup> The honorary consul in Shanghai, Mauricio Fresco, following the growing condemnation in the Chinese media of the Mexican actions, denied that the anti-Chinese campaigns were even taking place. “Some Chinese left Mexico,” admitted Fresco, “[but] they are the ones who would not submit to the laws of our country, but the majority of Chinese are well in Mexico and are under the protection of the authorities.”<sup>119</sup> Fresco noted that Chinese media outlets were not convinced. According to the French-language *Journal de Shanghai*, Chinese newspapers condemned the expulsion as barbaric and rejected the idea that Chinese migrants were emigrating of their own free will.<sup>120</sup> Even journalists in the United States, a country that carried out a similar repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrants, similarly condemned the Mexican expulsion of Chinese. The *St. Louis Daily Globe Democrat* tried to distance the two repatriations in an editorial on March 8, 1933, entitled “There Is a Difference,” that condemned the “heartless treatment” and compared it “with our sympathetic and helpful repatriation of our excess Mexicans.”<sup>121</sup>

The two governors of Sonora during the anti-Chinese campaigns, Francisco S. Elías and Rodolfo Elías Calles, kept former president Calles informed about developments regarding the Chinese question. Francisco Elías, for example, boasted prematurely that by the end of his term “there would not be a single Chinese business in this [state].”<sup>122</sup> Plutarco Elías Calles was aware of the crisis caused by the mass deportations of Chinese but believed them to be a necessary solution to what he considered “the Chinese problem.” The former president, writing to his son Rodolfo, encouraged him not to “become alarmed at the situation,” especially at the flight of capital from the state, since soon Mexican capital would fill the void.<sup>123</sup>

Not content with expelling the Chinese, xenophobic organizations in Mexico turned their attention to other economic competitors, especially Jewish and Arab merchants. A xenophobic organization in San Luis Potosí pledged to organize for a law “that will restrain the immigration

of Turkish, Syrian-Lebanese, Czechoslovakians, Poles, and Jews, or of any nationalities of the many that are invading the markets with serious injury to the National commerce.”<sup>124</sup> The Workers Union Chamber of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, petitioned that Jews, Arabs, and Japanese be prohibited from “selling fruit and other articles” because it would create “unfair competition for Mexican merchants.”<sup>125</sup> Unlike the Chinese, other immigrants were not expelled from the country. However, nationalist groups continued to hound foreign merchants during the late 1920s and 1930s. These protests had an impact on Mexico’s 1934 immigration law, which prohibited not only workers from entering the country, but also businessmen wishing to work in commerce.<sup>126</sup>

The anti-Chinese campaign began to wane only during the presidency of Abelardo Rodríguez (1932–34), a period when the influence and prestige of Plutarco Elías Calles began to dim. Although Rodríguez never publicly broke with Calles, he “increasingly found space to oppose the influence of the *jefe máximo*.”<sup>127</sup> In regard to the anti-Chinese campaigns, whereas Ortiz Rubio was much more hesitant to push back in light of Calles’s endorsement, Rodríguez expressed his displeasure more freely. On May 15, 1933, the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations, José Manuel Puig Casauranc, wrote the governors of Sonora and Sinaloa at the behest of the president. The notes to the two governors appear to have been prompted by an earlier conversation between the secretary and the governor of Sinaloa, Manuel Páez. Pressed for an explanation of the anti-Chinese campaigns in Sinaloa, Páez reassured the central government that the state had reached an agreement with the Chinese consul to effect the departure of all remaining Chinese. The explanation was a lie, and in the interim anti-Chinese associations continued to carry out extrajudicial detentions of Chinese residents.

Rodríguez, who had been governor of Baja California, was no friend of the Chinese; in 1933, the Secretaría of Gobernación under his administration issued another secret circular banning the Chinese, along with other undesirable races, from immigrating to Mexico.<sup>128</sup> But as governor, asserted Puig Casauranc, Rodríguez had “attacked the problem in a very different way.” Robbing the Chinese of their possessions, placing them on trucks, and carrying them out of the state, he asserted, had done grave harm to Mexico’s international standing. Because the federal government understood that another deadline had come for the Chinese to evacuate Sinaloa, the president wished for the governor to put an end to the anti-Chinese campaign before the federal government

took the blame for actions “in which it does not take the most remote participation and does not authorize.”<sup>129</sup>

Given the fact that the governor of Sonora, Rodolfo Calles, was the son of the *jefe máximo*, Puig Casauranc’s letter to him was more cordial but equally forceful. Puig Casauranc argued that although expelling the Chinese might be in the best interest of the wider Mexican nation, how it was effected created grave problems for the federal government. At the time Puig Casauranc wrote Calles, the U.S. government had incontrovertible proof that Chinese who entered the United States in the month of March had been forced to do so by Sonoran authorities. Although the embarrassed Mexican government considered paying for the cost of deporting those migrants to China, it worried about opening itself up to the responsibility of paying for the deportation costs of all Chinese Mexicans detained by the United States. Moreover, the risk of angering the United States by deporting the Chinese was too great to run. “The President and I, I insist, well understand the special difficulties [of] such a serious problem [the Chinese question],” wrote Puig Casauranc, “but having been resolved in a general sense, we hope that the naked presentation of the dangers that come from these questions could improve things and avoid similar incidents in the future.”<sup>130</sup>

Chinese diplomats in Mexico saw Calles’s downfall—the former president would board a plane for exile in the United States in 1936—as the definitive end to the anti-Chinese campaigns. Yet the note of displeasure indicates that as early as May 1933 the administration of Abelardo Rodríguez was committed to ending the abuses that drove Chinese migrants from the country. Activists in Sonora and Sinaloa had gone too far, by deporting Chinese migrants without justification and deporting them from the state. The federal government made clear that it would no longer be able to hide behind the misrepresentations of the anti-Chinese campaigns made by anti-Chinese organizations and instead would take direct responsibility over the actions committed by local associations and authorities. It needed to take greater control because anti-Chinese associations, in expelling the Chinese, had caused problems not only with the Chinese government but, more important, with the United States. After May 1933, the federal government discouraged use of the methods utilized by anti-Chinese associations. Although anti-Chinese associations in other states tried similarly to expel the Chinese, they found that the federal government was more committed to protecting, and better able to protect, the Chinese still in the country.

## CONCLUSION

Sonora was the center of Chinese organizational activity in Mexico, was the center of a national network of anti-Chinese activists, and was the home state of the national politicians who would support the anti-Chinese campaigns from 1931 to 1933. Chinese associations, poorly understood by local observers, helped new migrants arrive and settle in Mexico, served as interlocutors between Chinese communities, Mexican neighbors, and Mexican authorities, and increased ties between Chinese Mexicans and their sending communities in southern China. The organizations Chinese migrants founded around the country demonstrated that their interests went much further than illicit activities or even mutual aid. The divisions among Chinese associations in the country, which regrettably crystallized into the Tong Wars of the mid-1920s, demonstrated that Chinese immigrants had different visions of a consolidated Chinese government. These divisions would last for the rest of the twentieth century. Although violence never recurred between the Guomindang and the Chee Kung Tong, they never again trusted each other and found it difficult to cooperate on matters relating to Chinese politics.

Violence between the two organizations provided ammunition to anti-Chinese associations, which wanted nothing more than to rid themselves of the Chinese. Having already argued against the Chinese presence as a threat to Mexican commerce and mestizo nationalism, they pointed to the Tong Wars as evidence that the Chinese presence was dangerous to everyday Mexicans. The Great Depression provided another justification. As local Mexican workers suffered from unemployment and as Mexican repatriates arrived from the United States, anti-Chinese activists argued that Chinese jobs should belong to Mexican workers.

As Mexico began to embark on a project of political stability and consolidation after the Mexican Revolution, prominent government officials supported the anti-Chinese campaigns and incorporated anti-Chinese associations into the structure of Mexico's new ruling party. Plutarco Elías Calles's support was crucial to the success of anti-Chinese campaigns. Also crucial was the support of Calles's local and state political allies, particularly in Sonora and Sinaloa. Once anti-Chinese activists had unofficial government backing, they radicalized to the point that they implemented crippling boycotts against Chinese businesses and the expulsion of Chinese migrants from the state of Sonora. Although Chinese migrants tried to resist the anti-Chinese campaigns,

appealing to both Mexican and Chinese officials to safeguard their lives and businesses, the political strength of the anti-Chinese associations and the emerging Mexican state prevented them from finding relief. The result was the exodus of Chinese migrants from the state, and the destruction of Chinese organizations throughout much of northwestern Mexico.

All around the country, anti-Chinese activists tried to replicate the success of the Sonora expulsion, but outside of Sonora and Sinaloa, they would find greater resistance. Chapter 2 turns to the effort to expel Chinese from the states of Tamaulipas, Baja California, and Chiapas. In these areas, anti-Chinese associations lacked both the popular and government support that made the Sonoran anti-Chinese campaign so successful.