Abstract

During the nineteenth century, the transpacific world underwent profound transformation, part of the transition from sail to steam navigation that was accompanied by a concomitant reconfiguration of power. This dissertation explores the ways in which Mexican elite interests participated in this transformation, particularly during the Porfiriato (the period between 1876 and 1911), when general Porfirio Díaz was president. It argues that the travels, discussions, and exchanges across the ocean promoted by Porfirian elites—and generated in the context of these new geographies of power—contributed to the formation not only of a transpacific region but also to refashioning the Mexican national imaginary. These transformations took place between the 1860s, when regular transpacific steam passenger services started, and the 1910s, the moment when the transpacific steam system—at least when it comes to Mexico’s participation in it—begins to be dismantled in the context of a series of revolutionary changes which include the World War and the Mexican Revolution, the opening of the Panama Canal, and the introduction of a new maritime technology: vessels run by oil. With transnationalism, global and migration studies as its main framework, this dissertation utilizes varied and multiple primary sources found in over twenty personal, municipal, provincial and federal archives and libraries from San Francisco, Mazatlan, Manzanillo, Colima, Mexico City, and Oaxaca, in the Americas, to London and Hong Kong, other administrative poles of these transpacific circuits.
Preface

Parts of Chapters One and Three have been published in the following academic publications:
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Dedication

To Marty

To my mother and father

¡Goya, goya, cachun cachun ra ra, cachun cachun ra ra, goya, universidad!
Introduction

On October 3, 1884, *Mount Lebanon*, the inaugural steamship of the *Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico* (CMNP), berthed at dock 4c in Hong Kong harbour. For weeks, the CMNP had advertised in the *China Mail*, Hong Kong’s most prominent English newspaper, that it would run monthly steamers from Hong Kong to Yokohama and then directly to Mazatlan, San Blas, and Manzanillo.\(^1\) The company was the first Mexican steamship venture ever created to run a direct service between Mexico and Asia in order to import Asian labourers, and sought to break the monopoly of San Francisco-based companies in northern transpacific runs. Upon docking, however, the CMNP would have to temper expectations. Lord Ferguson, Hong Kong’s governor, would not permit locals to travel to a country that had no relations with China or England.\(^2\) Months of negotiations among Mexican, British and Chinese diplomats and businessmen ensued. These reveal the numerous variables involved in the reconfiguration of maritime relations in the Pacific after the introduction of steam and the consolidation of Anglo imperialism that accompanied it.\(^3\)

Cases like that of the *Mount Lebanon*, that highlight the role played by Mexican maritime interests, have generally been overlooked in the historiographies of both Mexico and the Pacific in the nineteenth century. In the case of the former, there is a relatively extensive literature on the transpacific links of colonial Mexico, particularly after the establishment of the Manila Galleon run between Acapulco and Manila in 1565. Yet scholars have tended to

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\(^1\) "Shipping/Arrivals", *The China Mail*, October 4, 1884, 2; “Merchant Vessels in Hong Kong Harbour,” *The China Mail*, October 4, 1884, 4; *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1881); The National Archives, Foreign Office (FO) 50/451, 1884-1885, 142.

\(^2\) Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada-Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (AHGE-SRE), 44-6-35, 1884-1888, 1, 102-103.

\(^3\) The case will be amply treated in Chapter Three.
conclude their studies in the 1810s, when the route officially ended in the context of the Mexican War of Independence.\textsuperscript{4} One of the premises supporting this has been that with the extinction of the galleons, Acapulco (and therefore Mexico) lost its centrality in the transpacific world, making its subsequent transpacific exchanges supposedly irrelevant. The study of these exchanges, some have claimed, would contribute little to an understanding of the country’s or the region’s history.\textsuperscript{5} Others have simply ignored the subject, even when it comes to well-researched essays that focus on the historiographical gaps that they see as in need of being addressed for the period.\textsuperscript{6} The Pacific literature has had its own preoccupations; until recently, it has been dominated by Euro-U.S.-centric concerns. Whether celebrating or criticizing imperial actions, authors have written mostly about European exploration and the ensuing colonial policies and geopolitics without devoting much attention to how imperialism was experienced by the colonized or the emerging nations.\textsuperscript{7}


\textsuperscript{7}Among an immense list concerning the English, Spanish and French, the author to begin with is O.H.K. Spate, an Australian geographer who is widely acknowledged as one of the “founding fathers” of contemporary Pacific Studies. His trilogy \textit{The Pacific since Magellan}, comprising \textit{The Spanish Lake} (1979), \textit{Monopolists and Freebooters} (1983) and \textit{Paradise Found and Lost} (1988), deals extensively with Europe’s presence in the Pacific; the third volume is particularly critical of their interventions. The most comprehensive and celebratory examination of his work is J.N. Jennings and G.J.R. Linge (eds.), \textit{Of Time and Place: Essays in Honour of O.H.K. Spate} (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980). On exploration, see J.C. Beaglehole, \textit{The Exploration of the Pacific} (London: A. & C. Black, 1934), where he details every major exploration from Nuñez de Balboa until Cook’s last voyage. For Cook’s voyages, see M.K. Beddie (comp.), \textit{Bibliography of Captain James Cook, R.N., F.R.S.} (Sydney: The Library of New South Wales, 1970). For praise of the Spanish achievements, see Carlos
Nevertheless, over the past two decades a few historians have begun to swim against this historiographical tide and are beginning to see that the country’s nineteenth-century Pacific maritime links were more significant than previously thought. This work has been particularly influenced by the pioneering studies of Vera Valdés Lakowsky and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, who, as early as the 1980s, highlighted the participation of Mexico in transpacific exchanges, the former with her study of silver flows and early Chinese-Mexican diplomatic relations and the latter through her examination of Chinese merchants in northern Mexico. In regard to Mexican mercantile maritime relations, the early surveys by Juan de Dios Bonilla and Enrique Cárdenas de la Peña provided this study with the basic general information from which to depart, but it was the recent work of Karina Busto Ibarra that offered some of its argumentative and even methodological foundations. Using archival sources found in Mexico and the United States, 


10 Before Busto, almost no researchers working with the Mexican Pacific had made a wide use of sources found outside Mexican archives.
Busto proved that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Mexican Pacific ports were being incorporated into a new international system of navigation spanning from San Francisco to Panama, created in the context of the Gold Rush. In a sense, this study is an expansion of her work in two ways: on the one hand, it departs from her spatial scope—which she labelled the San Francisco-Panama Axis—to include the transpacific maritime region\(^\text{11}\) and, on the other hand, it situates the changes experienced by the Mexican coastline as part of a larger set of transformations experienced throughout the Pacific due to the introduction of steam technologies.

During the nineteenth century, the transpacific world underwent profound transformations as part of the transition from sail to steam navigation and the reconfiguration of power that came with it. In effect, Spanish dominance in transoceanic sailings was replaced by the hegemony of Great Britain and the United States, joined much later by Japan, the only three countries economically and technologically capable of sponsoring a strong steam merchant fleet. This meant that their ports, routes, and often conflictive interests shaped the region’s reconfiguration. Yet the following chapters will prove that the personal and group interests of Mexican elites also contributed to the reshaping of this shifting space, particularly after president Porfirio Díaz and his entourage managed to create a more or less national consensus around their centralized power, ending decades of coup d’états, foreign military invasions and civil wars. Moreover, this work argues that the travels, discussions, and exchanges across the ocean promoted by Porfirian elites—and generated in the context of these new geographies of power—contributed to the formation not only of a transpacific region but also of the Mexican national imaginary. In other words, this study aims to prove that our understanding of the

\(^{11}\) Busto herself deemed this a relevant topic in need of exploration. Busto, 453.
transpacific maritime region created by means of the introduction of steamers is enhanced by studying the Mexican participation in it. In turn, our comprehension of the formation of the Mexican nation benefits from studying its transpacific relations. These statements will be proven by concentrating on the study of transpacific merchant steamers between the 1860s and the 1910s. The initial date coincides with the beginning of regular transpacific steam passenger services and the latter refers to the moment when the transpacific steam system—at least when it comes to Mexico’s participation in it—begins to be dismantled in the context of a series of revolutions which included the introduction of a new maritime technology: vessels run by oil.

Transnationalism is one of the theoretical frameworks that has influenced this study. Over time transnationalism has acquired many definitions and orientations. Yet one common idea has been that “populations [have] developed multiple social, economic, and political ties that extend across [national] borders,”12 making it insufficient to study any topic—including the formation of the nation-state—within the realm of a single bounded national territory. While most transnational research has focused—or claimed to do so—on non-institutional actors, I have found this central premise useful for the study of Mexican elites and their interactions with other transpacific actors. Doing so helps us avoid the temptation (often seen in previous work) of studying the elites’ “imaginings”13 of the Mexican nation as if only local disputes, interests and concerns mattered. One additional reason is that by focusing solely on the migrants’ mobility, transnational studies could unintentionally lead to the conclusion that governing elites are rooted to a territory and this could inadvertently legitimize their claims to national belonging over those from the people who are “always on the move.” The main contribution that this


13 This term will be discussed later in this introduction.
study intends to offer to transnational debates is to show that elites are on the move as well and that their group definitions and imaginings, no different than those of non-institutional actors, are formed in the interstice of contending national and imperial projects—at least for the case of the transpacific world at the turn of the century. In this sense, Eiichiro Azuma’s concept of the “inter-National” is of particular use. Azuma employed the term to “stress the interstitial nature of [Issei] lives between two nation-states... the United States and Japan...each of which promoted its respective project of nation-building, racial supremacy, and colonial expansion.”

As this study will show, Mexican elites’ transpacific imaginings were also situated in this inter-National interstice which not only included the national (and imperial) projects of Japan and the U.S., but also those of Britain, China, and of course, of Mexico.

From global and migration studies, at least three authors have provided the background for this work. In *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium*, a study of human migrations throughout the last millennium, Dirk Hoerder criticizes the Atlanto-centric approach to global history which has focused on white history alone. Instead, he suggests incorporating an actual global vision that does not preconceive the Atlantic as the avant-garde of what happens in the rest of the world. With this in mind, he identifies five periods of global migration, the third of which frames the exchanges discussed in this work: in the nineteenth century, intercontinental migration systems formed when people moved in response to the demands for labour and the need for jobs created in the context of industrialization. He establishes that between the 1830s and the 1920s, what remained at the heart of transpacific movement was the Asian Contract Labour system, because once slavery was abolished, the

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14 Issei refers to the first generation of Japanese that migrated to the United States as of the late nineteenth century.

imperial powers found in Asian indentured servitude the cheap labour needed to industrialize their Pacific colonial domains. Adam McKeown refined this argument by suggesting that “a global perspective... provides insight not only into the global reaches of an expanding industrial economy, but also into how this integrative economy grew concurrently with political and cultural forces that favoured fragmentation into nations, races, and perceptions of distinct cultural regions.” He coincides with Hoerder in arguing that industrial transformations were at the heart of human migrations in the nineteenth century but criticizes him for considering mostly the industrial necessities of European empires; whereas, when considering Asian factors, Hoerder simply gives localist explanations, such as the decay of the Qing dynasty, overpopulation, etc. McKeown instead argues that industrialization in Asia beyond European concerns also explained human movements because, after all, “non-Europeans were very much involved in the expansion and integration of the world economy.” The present work adds to this discussion by arguing that Mexican industrial needs and interests were factors that encouraged transpacific mobility. It also takes from McKeown—and others—the idea that developments in transportation technologies run by steam—such as steamships and railways—contributed to shape exchanges. Finally, the work of Robert Romero Chao provides a third important contribution that helps frame this study. In his recent work, The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940, he argues that, as of the 1880s, “Chinese created a transnational commercial orbit in resistance, and adaptation, to the Chinese exclusion laws,” of which Mexico was part. This


18 McKeown, 171.

orbit “was shaped by entrepreneurial Chinese who pursued commercial opportunities not only in human smuggling but also in labour contracting, wholesale merchandising and small scale trade.” Romero adequately suggests that the U.S. exclusion laws against Chinese coincided with “efforts of the Mexican government to attract [these] immigrants as labourers for its developing economy..., [therefore] Mexican businessmen developed an organized system of Chinese contract labour recruitment in direct collaboration with prominent Chinese merchants of San Francisco.”

Just like Romero, my work shows that Mexico formed part of a transnational space across the north Pacific, where the transportation of Asian labourers played a central role; however, it expands on two topics that Romero touched on only in passing: first, the discourses and actions of the Mexican elites and, second, their relations with the Chinese businessmen from Hong Kong who created the first direct regular steamship service between Mexico and Asia. Additionally, it incorporates the study of Japanese-Mexican interactions which, as will be shown, also form part of a transpacific orbit linking Mexico with Asia.

Methodologically, this study also begins from the premise of trasnationalism that sustains that researchers have to be as mobile as the subjects and flows they study. In that sense, this research has sought to include archival sources from as many places as mentioned in the work—or at least those that were possible to visit. As a consequence, the materials used to write this dissertation come from over twenty personal, municipal, provincial and federal archives and libraries from the following locations: San Francisco, Mazatlan, Manzanillo, Colima, Mexico City, Oaxaca, London, and Hong Kong. Archival sources range from the mid-

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20 Romero, 4.

21 The terms “labourer” and “immigrant” were employed by Mexican authorities to refer to all Asian passengers traveling to Mexico in steerage. When employing this term we do not mean to flatten the Chinese experience in Mexico to that of a labourer (as many of those traveling in steerage were not necessarily meant to work as labourers). Instead we are using these terms to depict the way that Mexican authorities viewed those Asians—particularly Chinese—traveling in steerage.
1850s to the 1920s and include personal memoirs and letters, diplomatic correspondence, maps, newspapers and other periodicals, journals, censuses, books, and brochures. One additional methodological consideration comes from the discussions that have arisen on the relationship between literature and history. In his most recent book, John Lukacs argues that history writing is literary because “the emphasis is on letters and words.” From this perspective, he sustains that some of the best history works have been written by non-professional historians, partly because they are “often more literary than are their academic competitors” who “spend their lives in vanquished archives and write in an inhuman, ugly, wooden, bureaucratic language from which all poetry’s been driven, a language flat as a wood louse and petty as the daily paper...” Lukacs thus exhorts historians to “get into...literature... [not to] fear engagement and emotion, but...care nonetheless about... [the] story’s truthfulness.” In a modest way this work has taken his advice and, in order to favour a more literary flow, all academic references—excepting in this introduction—have been taken away from the main text and put into the footnotes. One additional element taken into consideration from Lukacs was his urge to “consider—or at least keep in mind—the unavoidable existence of potentialities.” He explains this notion by alluding to the eyes of novelists who are “especially attracted to significant matters (acts, words, even gestures, even silences) within their stories. They were significant: because of their potentiality... The modern historian, too, cannot exclude the contemplation of possibilities...”


23 Lukacs, 92.

24 Lukacs, 89.

25 Lukacs, 89-90.

26 Lukacs, 123.

27 Lukacs, 124.
From my perspective, potentiality is best enhanced when readers are not explicitly predisposed to see only what the author thinks, but rather have the possibility to come up with their own conclusions based on the elements presented in the story. This is why in the introductory segments of each chapter, rather than presenting an overt thesis statement, I will instead offer a general enunciation of the case-study and the overall objectives for the chapter. At the end, after the readers have had the chance to come up with their own interpretation of the material, they are finally exposed to the author’s explicit conclusions and, therefore, have the possibility to compare (and hopefully enrich) their own understandings.

Conceptually, Jerry H. Bentley’s notion of maritime region, Steven Vertovec’s definition of social networks and Bruno Latour’s actor network theory inform this study’s definition of space. Jerry H. Bentley’s work has been the pillar for the idea of a Pacific region for numerous historians. According to Bentley, sea and ocean basins become useful categories once “human societies engage in interactions across bodies of water and they become a less useful focus as societies pursue their interests through other spaces.” For Bentley, integration, defined as a “historical process that unfolds when cross-cultural interactions bring about a division of labour between and among interacting societies or when they facilitate commercial, biological, or cultural exchanges between and among interacting societies on a regular and systematic basis,” is a necessary element for a maritime region to exist. Bentley admits that there are never absolute and fixed boundaries. Rather, it is the particular circumstances of each case that determine the limits of a maritime region. This study will show that through their efforts to initiate regular direct contact with Asia, Mexican elites and their allies integrated the Mexican

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28 Jerry H. Bentley, “Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis,” Geographical Review 89, no. 2 (1999), 217. Bentley recognizes Fernand Braudel’s La Mediterranee et le monde mediterraneen a l’époque de Philippe II as the foundational study that worked with a maritime region.

29 Bentley, 218. Emphasis is mine.
ports of Manzanillo and Salina Cruz into a transpacific maritime region, at least while the direct regular routes lasted until the mid-1910s. Before direct routes existed, Mexican ports had been incorporated into a steam-powered transpacific region through the intermediation of San Francisco since at least 1867, when the first direct regular steam transpacific service opened between that port and Hong Kong. Steven Vertovek, for his part, talks about space in terms of social networks, that is, each person is seen as a node linked with others in order to form a network.\(^{30}\) Bruno Latour expanded this concept to include non-human and non-individual actors—or actants—because they also participate in the functioning of a certain social order.\(^{31}\)

The transpacific network that this work studies is formed by people—notably the Porfirian bureaucracy (as individuals and as institutions), businessmen from Hong Kong, Chinese and Japanese diplomats, and Asian labourers; commodities—mainly Asian contract labour; ports—in particular the network formed by the following nodes: Hong Kong, Yokohama, San Francisco, Manzanillo, Salina Cruz, and Panama—and technological devices—the most important of which is the steamer.

Historiographically this work takes from at least two sets of influences, besides the pioneer works mentioned at the beginning. The first is composed by the current Porfirian and the so-called nineteenth-century new cultural Mexican histories.\(^{32}\) In terms of Porfirian historiography, Paul Garner summarized best at what the “re-evaluation of the Díaz era by a

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\(^{30}\) Networks are characterized by its size, defined by the number of participants; density or the extent to which every one of the nodes contact each other; multiplexity or degree to which relations between participants include overlapping institutional spheres; clusters or cliques or the specific area of a wider network with higher density than that of the network as a whole; durability or length; and frequency or the regularity of contacts within the network. Steven Vertovec, “Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization.” *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (Fall, 2003): 646-647.


new generation of Mexican historians” 33 is aiming. Rather than falling into the simplistic dichotomies posed by the Porfirista literature, which uncritically exalted the longevity and stability of the regime, and the anti-Porfirismo, which portrayed the regime simply as the “supreme example of tyranny, dictatorship and oppression,” 34 historians are now re-examining the period with a critical lens. His work suggests that situating the regime within a global context, as this study does, is one of the ways to escape the previous ambivalences. Yet, the global vision employed by those studying the Porfiriato’s international relations has overwhelmingly concentrated on the relations with the United States, Europe, and Latin America (in that order) and has had little to say of the importance that the Pacific played. In addition, the study of the country’s land-connections—particularly the railroads—have been privileged over maritime relations and, within the latter, the Caribbean and the Atlantic have received much more attention. In this sense, this study’s contribution to Porfirian historiography is to prove that the transpacific maritime connections helped the regime consolidate its international strategy in at least two senses: from an economic perspective, they helped bring foreign capital and labour and, from a political perspective, maritime relations with Asia helped consolidate the notion of Mexico as a progressive, sovereign and modern nation. The latter was particularly related to the circulation of steamers as their technological innovations were often associated with modernity. Those participating in the new cultural history of Mexico, for their part, are interested in “‘imaginings.’ That is, they seek to understand how the nation has been imagined, how subjectivity has been imagined...” 35

According to William French, they have “a growing interest in the discursive construction of

33 Garner, 13.
34 Garner, 2.
35 French, 249.
space and in space generally... Likewise, [for them] a reified notion of the state is giving way to the idea of the state as itself imagined.”³⁶ While this study does not aim to be part of the discussion on subjectivity, it is interested in the dynamic and sometimes contradictory ways in which Porfírian elites envisioned—or imagined—a Mexican nation and also in how their imaginings met with other imaginings to help form a transpacific space. This last point is perhaps this work’s most notable contribution to a central limitation set by the cultural historians of Mexico in regard to space: in their efforts to avoid and question “metanarratives” that “see history as having overall coherence, direction, and meaning,”³⁷ they have narrowed their scope to the most specific locales and therefore created a sort of “metanarrative of the local.” With counted exceptions, the large majority of the so-called new cultural historians have taken for granted that the nation-state is the unquestioned unit of analysis for history. This work instead suggests that there is value in situating the Mexican imaginings within a wider network of ideas, people, and objects in flux.

The second set of historiographical discussions that have influenced this study come from the Pacific historians who have concentrated on the study of merchant fleets and companies, such as John Haskell Kemble and William Kooiman, who focused on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and others circulating between San Francisco and Panama, and particularly, E. Mowbray Tate. Tate’s book, *Transpacific Steam: The Story of Steam Navigation from the Pacific Coast of North America to the Far East and the Antipodes, 1867-1941*, has been a central resource for this study.³⁸ By tracing the history of a specific company

³⁶ French, 266.
³⁷ French, 266.
and their steamers, these historians succeeded in showing the dynamism and mobility that has characterized the Pacific and pointed to the centrality of vessels in the construction of a maritime region; while this statement seems evident, few outside the realm of maritime history have seriously considered steamers (or other steam-powered devices) as actants in networks. However, their focus on San Francisco’s routes impeded them from incorporating other places in North and Central America that did not use San Francisco as their primary node of articulation. In this sense, this work’s contribution is to incorporate a discussion of the companies, the vessels, the commodities, and the passengers circulating across the Pacific that shaped each other’s existence alongside those of the San Francisco-based companies. Overall, this work is relevant because it is the first systematic study ever made of Mexico’s transpacific relations and their repercussions that centers on a maritime component.

In order to develop the ideas discussed above, this work has been divided into six chapters, each of which centers around the study of a transpacific steamer. Chapter One examines the antecedents and repercussions of the transpacific steam service inaugurated by Colorado in 1867, particularly in regard to the relations between Mexican and Asian ports. Chapter Two centers on the travels aboard Vasco de Gama made in 1874 by the first official Mexican delegation visiting Asia. The impressions and the experiences of the five Mexican scientists who comprised it will allow us to discuss the Mexicans’ imaginaries of Japan and China and the way they shaped their imaginaries of the Mexican nation as well. The section also exposes the limited land and maritime Pacific connections existing prior to the arrival of
Porfirio Díaz to the presidency. Chapter Three studies *Mount Lebanon* and the formation of the first Mexican steamship venture ever created to establish direct maritime routes between Mexico and Asia in 1884. The case-study will reveal the difficulties encountered in Porfirian circles as they challenged the British and Chinese interests. Chapter Four explains the Japanese and Mexican coinciding interests that led to the arrival of the first Japanese colonists in Latin America aboard the *Gaelic* in 1897. Chapter Five centers on the first successful regular direct service between Mexican and Asian ports, created by the China Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC) during the first decade of the twentieth century. It will expose the contradictory positioning of Porfirian elites vis-a-vis the arrival of Asian labourers aboard CCSC’s steamers as well as their negotiations with Chinese businessmen from Hong Kong and British diplomats in order to first promote the labourers’ arrival and later to deter it. Finally, Chapter Six explains how the Porfirian Pacific maritime system began decaying in the 1910s in the context of a series of transformations which included the beginnings of the Mexican Revolution and the First World War, the opening of the Panama Canal, and the replacement of steam by oil as the vessels’ main fuel.
Colorado, 1867: San Francisco, Full Steam Ahead

San Franciscans woke to a street festival on the first day of the year in 1867. On that Tuesday, politicians, businessmen, beggars, adults, children, tourists, and neighbors gathered at the foot of the city’s main wharf beginning early in the morning. Together, they formed a colorful and bustling crowd extending to the surrounding docks and hillsides. The epicenter of the excitement was Colorado, a fine 3,728-ton steamer that was about to embark on a transpacific journey taking her to the “Orient.” At noon, Colorado blew her whistles and the crowd burst into shouts of euphoria. As four cannon salutes responded to her call, Colorado set off for Asia, making her the first Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSS) vessel—and the first regular steamer passenger liner ever—to attempt to cross the world’s largest ocean along its northern axis.  

At the time, crossing the Pacific propelled by steam was by no means a simple task. While transoceanic steamers had plied the Atlantic since the 1820s, it was not until the mid-century that the Pacific saw the first warships travel from the Americas to Asia using the combined force of steam and sails. The reasons for this delay were multiple. The first was a question of size: the Pacific is twice as wide as the Atlantic. The task, therefore, required double the amount of coal. With no supplies available along the way, the odds for success were substantially lowered. Additionally, the shortest route crossed through the heart of one of the ocean’s stormiest sections, particularly during the winter season. Inclement weather could delay a trip for days, exhausting crucial fuel supplies. Needless to say, if an engine broke down, there were no safe harbours along the way to do the repairs. Furthermore, establishing a regular

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steamship service required substantial capital investment. Before the late 1860s, neither government nor private enterprise had amassed enough economic, political and technological clout to establish a regular transpacific run.\textsuperscript{40}

After 22 days at sea, Colorado arrived safely at Yokohama. Once again, a cheerful crowd offered her a remarkable welcome. “Whistles blew, cannons boomed, and the band on the French frigate La Guerrière played ‘The Star Spangled Banner.’”\textsuperscript{41} Cargo and passengers disembarked throughout the night. The next morning, Colorado continued her trip towards Hong Kong. This time, she was not alone, as British and French steamers from the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) and the Messageries Maritimes regularly navigated the China Sea. She received a more discreet welcome upon her arrival in Hong Kong, with some 42 gun shots exchanged with the authorities on shore. On the night of January 30, 1867, Colorado finally completed her 6,000-mile journey from San Francisco to Hong Kong, successfully inaugurating the first regular passenger and cargo service across the North Pacific.\textsuperscript{42}

The main objective of this chapter is to examine the antecedents and repercussions of the transpacific steam service inaugurated by Colorado, particularly in regard to the relations between Mexican and Asian ports. Both areas had had a long tradition of regular maritime contacts dating back to the sixteenth century, when the Spanish started the Manila Galleon run between the Philippines and Acapulco. When this regular service ended in 1815, in the context of the Mexican War of Independence against Spanish authorities, the exchanges between both areas continued by way of irregular transpacific sailings as well as via the Atlantic and Indian

\textsuperscript{40}Tate, 21-24; Will Lawson, Pacific Steamers (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, Ltd., 1927), xiii, xix.

\textsuperscript{41}Tate, 25.

\textsuperscript{42}Tate, 25-26.
oceans, dominated by British liners. In this context, the primary role played by Mexican ports in transpacific exchanges faded. Instead, since the foundation of the PMSS in 1848 and particularly after the company opened its transpacific run with the sailing of *Colorado*, San Francisco consolidated as a primary node for transpacific ventures and became the intermediary between Mexico and Asia.

1.1 Transpacific Contacts Prior to Steam: Spanish Imperialism and the Manila Galleon

Despite the large dimensions of the Pacific Ocean—it’s size is equivalent to a third of the Earth’s surface—, the peoples living in its opposing coasts have managed to bridge the space separating them for centuries. While studies have shown that prior to the sixteenth-century European arrival, the local populations—particularly in the southern hemisphere—had already established regular maritime contacts, it was the consolidation of Spanish imperialism that marked the beginning of systematic transpacific exchanges between what we know today as Mexico and the Asian continent. In effect, with the June 1565 arrival of the galleon *San Pablo* to Acapulco, after over three months of sailing from the Philippines, the Spanish inaugurated one of the most long-lasting trading routes in history, that of the Manila Galleon.

Between 1565 and 1815, Acapulco in the Americas and Manila in Asia became the most transited ports for transpacific trade. The Spanish authorities chose them as ending points for

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the Manila Galleon run due to their favorable geographic as well as geopolitical conditions. Both possessed sheltering bays that protected vessels from external winds and currents. Their bays were also deep, facilitating the loading of passengers and merchandise and preventing Spaniards from having to invest in infrastructure. From a geopolitical perspective, Manila was located at the center of an arch that included Japan, China, India, Malacca, and the Moluccas islands, all of which produced highly prized commodities for the Spanish markets.45 In the case of Acapulco, it was chosen as it was the closest port to New Spain’s capital, Mexico City.46

Metals, particularly silver and gold, became the most traded commodities in the history of transpacific connections. Their presence in large quantities along the Pacific shores is due to the ocean’s geological formation, as the tectonic forces endowed smoldering mountains around the Pacific’s edge—the so-called “ring of fire”—with vast holdings of metals.47 During the times of the Galleon, the silver produced in the mines of the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru, in the mountains close to the Pacific Ocean, became the main product exported to Asia and other parts of the world.

While the Spanish merchants monopolized the administration of the Manila Galleon, the Chinese also played a key role in the transpacific flux. On the one hand, their market, containing a quarter of the world’s population, became the main receptor of silver produced in the Spanish American colonies.48 This continued well into the twentieth century, long after the galleon had stopped running and the American territories had acquired their independence from

45 Schurz, 66-67.
46 Schurz, 315.
48 Flynn, 2.
Spain. On the other hand, the Chinese were the main suppliers of the merchandise transported to America. Every year between 20 to 60 Chinese junks arrived from the Fujianese ports of Amoy and Ch’üan-chou with the purpose of selling mainly silks as well as porcelains and all sorts of manufactured goods not only for the Galleon trade but also for the Spanish colony living in the Philippines. Once the galleons returned from Acapulco, Chinese junk traders received their payments in silver coins. By the seventeenth century, a Chinatown known as *Parian* had formed outside the city walls of Manila and some 20,000 Chinese had settled in the country—in contrast to around 1,000 Spaniards. A few Asians regularly traveled to the Americas in the galleons. Once in Mexico they were legally classified as Indians. Records show that by the 1630s Chinese had successfully established as barbers and bakers in Mexico City. The impact of the Chinese was such that the galleon was often referred to as the *Nao de China*.

During the first two centuries of colonial administration, the Spanish established a rigid mercantilist system that discouraged trade and communication amongst the colonies in order to protect the businesses of the peninsular merchants. As a consequence, barely a handful of ports and maritime routes flourished in Spanish territories. New Spain was at the heart of them, as shown in the following map.

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51 Schurz, 98; Anthony Reid, ed., *The Chinese Diaspora in the Pacific* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Variorum, 2008), xxi-xxiii. For the role played by Chinese in the Philippines during the Galleon times see Wickberg, 3-43.
Figure 1.1   New Spain’s Transoceanic Links

© Mapoteca Manuel Orozco y Berra, 2012, by permission

Mapoteca Manuel Orozco y Berra, “Croquis que manifiesta la ruta que seguían las flotas que salían de España para América y la Nao de América para China,” January, 1879, Internacionales, Varilla OYBINT03, 484-OYB-7278-A, Mexico City. The map depicts the transoceanic colonial routes, but it does not date from colonial times but from 1879. It was signed by Vicente E. Manero, who at the time worked in the Ministry of Development or Public Works (Ministerio de Fomento). That is, the map was created under the auspice of Porfirio Diaz’s government (1876-1880, 1884-1911). If, following J. B. Harley, we assume that maps do not only depict a certain geography but instead contribute to construct space, then the centrality given to the Mexican territory and its transoceanic connections in the map in a way reflect the political objectives of Porfirio Diaz’s government. In effect, as it will be discussed in the following chapters, Diaz wanted to unify the country under his leadership and position it in a central place within the “concert of nations,” with tight links to both the transatlantic and the transpacific worlds. The study of the construction of the Mexican nation through cartography, at least for the case of the Porfiriato, is definitively one of the pending historiographical tasks. For an interesting discussion on cartography see J. B. Harley, The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
In the Atlantic there were two fleets circulating every year. They would leave together from
Seville or Cadiz and separate while reaching the Caribbean. One fleet would continue west
towards Veracruz, dispatching to a few island ports and Yucatan on its way. The other would
do stops in Venezuelan ports, Cartagena and finally Portobelo, in the Panamanian isthmus. On
the way back, both fleets would meet at Havana and sail back together to Spain. In the
Pacific, there was only one officially sanctioned transoceanic route, that of the Manila Galleons,
which circulated once or twice per year. Merchandise was either sold locally in the Acapulco
fair, which gathered thousands of people every year, or transferred by land to major cities. The
merchandises that were not sold were taken to Veracruz and from there to Spain. At the end of
the sixteenth century, the merchants in Callao, Peru, tried to establish a direct run to Manila.
After a few successful sails, the Crown banned the service. Since then, the only vessels
authorized to circulate in South America were those carrying the silver produced in Peruvian
mines. They would travel to Panama, where the load would get transferred by land to
Portobelo, on the Caribbean side of the isthmus, and from there to Spain. All these fleets
included a policing force in charge of defending the cargo from pirates.

While only a few ports were authorized to trade, several others were used to move
products around locally, for contraband, or as pirate bases. For instance, in 1604 the Crown
prohibited the circulation of vessels between its two American viceroyalties, Peru and New
Spain, as well as any contact with Asia apart from the Manila Galleon. Yet, the so-called naos
de Lima continued to circulate between Callao and Puerto Marqués, a few miles north of
Acapulco. They would make several stops along their way. Even though there were more
active Pacific ports than those legally sanctioned by the Crown, none of them became a large

53 Schurz, 335-336.
54 Schurz, 312-3.
hub precisely because of their clandestine nature. Even Acapulco, the largest of them all, never materialized into a great city. One of the main reasons is that the Europeans preferred to live in cooler places. Only when the galleon arrived did Acapulco come to life. When Humboldt visited the port in the early 1800s, he calculated a regular population of some 4,000 people, doubling during the time of the commercial *feria*.\(^{55}\)

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Crown abolished many of the trade restrictions, as part of the series of measures commonly known as the Bourbon reforms—in reference to the Spanish royal dynasty governing Spain since 1713. In an effort to regulate and tax the excessive contraband taking place in the empire, Charles III signed the *Reglamento de Comercio Libre*, in October 1778. It allowed for inter-provincial exchanges and opened twenty two American ports to trade.\(^{56}\) In the Pacific, those benefiting by the measure were Valparaíso and Concepción in Chile, and Arica, Callao, and Guayaquil in the viceroyalty of Peru.\(^{57}\) San Blas, north of Acapulco, also grew as it became the base of support for the Spanish coastal explorations as well as for the missionaries sent to colonize and catechize the northern provinces of Sonora and the Californias.\(^{58}\)

The Spanish living in the Philippines also diversified their maritime relations during the Bourbon Reforms. This process began in 1785, after the Spanish king decreed the foundation of

\(^{55}\) Schurz, 313-317.

\(^{56}\) Schurz, 333.


the Royal Philippine Company (RPC) in order to establish direct trade with Asia, Spain, and South America. The company’s first vessel sailed in October from Cadiz to Manila by way of Cape Horn, with a stop in Lima. Soon, two other ships followed by way of Cape of Good Hope. Between its foundation and 1813, the RPC sent over 60 vessels to different ports in Asia and Spanish America.\(^{59}\) In addition, the authorization for all European vessels carrying goods to and from Asian ports to enter Manila in 1789 also contributed to the archipelago’s commercial opening.\(^{60}\) This liberalization of commerce as well as the diversification of Fujianese interests to varied parts of South East Asia caused the junk trade to decrease substantially during the eighteenth century. In effect, between 1797 and 1812 there was an average of only eight junks arriving annually at Manila. Just as Philippines’ Fujianese links began fading, the ties with Canton increased as the RPC vessels were only allowed to trade there. The maritime connections between Philippines and Cantonese ports—notably Canton and Hong Kong after the British colonial government started in 1842—would only augment in the following decades.\(^{61}\)

In the Americas, the Bourbon reforms did little to stop the decaying influence of the Spanish crown. At the turn of the century and particularly after Napoleon’s invasion of Spain, a series of revolts spread throughout the kingdom. In 1811, the galleon *Magallanes* arrived to Acapulco only to find its cargo seized by local rebels in the context of the revolution of Independence against the Spanish authorities. Unable to guarantee the safety of the galleon and with little control over Acapulco—and New Spain in general—the Spanish crown decreed the suppression of the line in October 1813. Two years later *Magallanes* sailed for Manila for the

\(^{59}\) Nicholas P. Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines: From Conquest to Revolution* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1971), 190-191.

\(^{60}\) Prior to this only Spanish galleons and Chinese junks were legally allowed to dock and trade in the Philippines.

\(^{61}\) Wickberg, 21-22. See his chapter on Foreign Trade to read about the increasing connections with Canton.
last time, ending to a 250-year-long transpacific route and symbolizing the decline of Spanish supremacy over transpacific exchanges.

1.2 The Steam Revolution and the Pacific imperial projects of Great Britain and the United States

Just as the history of transpacific sailing vessels remains linked to the role played by Spanish imperialism between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the development of steam navigation in the Pacific came hand in hand with the preeminence of British imperialism in the nineteenth century. Situated at the vanguard of the Industrial Revolution, the British were the first to conceive, finance, and/or patent many of the inventions related to steam-powered navigation. To begin with, the steam engine, developed by the Scottish engineer James Watt between 1769 and 1782, became the basis for steamers. At the time, the Forth and Clyde Canal, which crosses Scotland, turned into the trial zone for a series of steamboats invented at the turn of the nineteenth century, culminating in the building of the Charlotte Dundas, the first practical steamboat, developed by William Symington, as well as Henry Bell’s Comet, the first satisfactory paddle steamer offering local regular services as of 1812. The shipyards at London, Liverpool and Glasgow were the most prolific at fabricating paddle-wheelers and screw steamers with wooden hulls, and later, in the 1860s, the first to change over to iron vessels, better suited to endure the strain caused by the pitching and consequent racing of the engines of a screw steamship.63

62 Schurz, 60. There were a few more galleons that circulated until 1821, most of them landing in the port of San Blas. Yet the last one to do so officially was Magallanes. Vera Valdés Lakowsky, Vinculaciones sino-mexicanas: albores y testimonios, 1874-1899 (Mexico City: UNAM, 1981), 62.

63 A screw steamship—as opposed to a paddle wheeler—transported itself by means of a propeller. Lawson, xiii-xv, 20-1; Roland E. Duncan, “William Wheelright and Early Steam Navigation in the Pacific 1820-1840,” The
Within this context, the British introduced the first ocean steamers into the Pacific as early as the 1820s. All were short-lived ventures but they set the precedent for the first liners that would emerge a few decades later. *Rising Star*, the first of them all, arrived in Valparaiso, Chile, in May 1822. Even though she barely used her steam engines, she became a symbol of power and prestige when compared to the sailing vessels around her, as we can see by the remarks of Lady Calcott, one of her British passengers: “it was no small delight that I set my foot on the deck of the first steam-vessel that ever navigated the Pacific…our stately vessel glided smoothly and swiftly through them [sailing vessels] without a sail, against wind and waves, carrying on her deck a stronger artillery than Almagro ever commanded.”

*Rising Star* soon returned to England as the Chilean government was unable to pay for her. *Telica* arrived next from Liverpool to Guayaquil, Gran Colombia, in August 1825, with the intention of running regularly to and from Callao. She nevertheless ended her ventures soon after an on-board explosion destroyed her. The third steamer and first in North America, *Beaver*, operated around Victoria, British Columbia, in the late 1830s.

The first steamship company offering regular cargo and passenger services in the Pacific was also British. Formed at Liverpool, with a starting capital of 250,000 pounds composed

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64 Diego de Almagro was a Spanish conquistador that participated in the military conquest of Peru in the early sixteenth century and led the first European expedition through the territories that we know today as Chile.

65 Cited in Duncan, 259.

66 Duncan, 261.

67 Duncan, 270.
partially by governmental subsidies, the Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSN) was granted a royal charter by Queen Victoria in February 1840. London’s Curling, Young & Co. was assigned to build the two brand new paddle steamers for the run, Chile and Peru, which had cabin accommodations for one hundred and fifty passengers and a freight capacity of about three hundred tons. In October, the South American service between Valparaiso and Callao was inaugurated “with a worthy reception, composed of the military bands of Valparaiso […]. Both steamers criss-crossed the bay in different directions, receiving the salutations of the multitude attracted by the novel spectacle, and anchored near the shore.” Around the same time, other British companies also started local services on the Australian and Chinese coasts. By the early 1850s, the British had established a regular service between England, Australia, and China by way of the Indian Ocean.

Two other factors that contributed to the acceleration of steam navigation in the mid-century were the discovery of large deposits of gold in different coastal areas as well as the United States’ expansionism to the Pacific. In the case of the former, starting in 1848, a series of so-called gold rushes in California, Australia, north-western Canada, New Zealand, and Alaska sparked off the movement of large quantities of people. The fastest way to move them around was by sea. With such a large demand for maritime transportation, regular passenger service with steamers opened and an increased urbanizing trend in the ports closer to the gold rushes began. In the case of the latter factor, in the 1840s, the United States government secured

68 Duncan, 276-281; Lawson, 2-4.
69 Cited in Duncan, 281 from the Mercurio, a Chilean newspaper. The celebration was memorable enough to be reenacted on the centennial in 1940.
70 Lawson, 5, 13.
71 Lawson, 18.
a large Pacific coastline through diplomacy and war. Diplomacy was used to settle a border dispute with the British over the so-called Oregon territory. In June 1846, after close to three decades of joint administration, both governments agreed to respect the 49th parallel as the legitimate border between the two countries. This granted the United States the exclusive administration of the coastline north of Mexico, against which the U.S. Congress had declared war barely a month earlier. After two years of military confrontation, the Mexican authorities capitulated. In February 1848, representatives of both countries signed the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaties which stipulated that the provinces of Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo México would form part of the United States. With this, in only two years, the United States gained control of some 1,500 miles of Pacific coastline.72

In order to establish contact with the newly acquired territories, on March 1847, Congress requested the Secretary of the Navy to call for bids for a mail service between New York and Chagres, Panama, and another between Panama City and Astoria, Oregon.73 William H. Aspinwall, a New York businessman, won the bid and the subsidy for the Pacific route and created the PMSS in April 1848. It became the first company from the United States offering a regular service in the Pacific coast. Oregon, California, and Panama, the three new vessels from New England’s shipyards, were ready to sail by the fall of 1848. They were 1,000-ton side-wheelers with accommodations for 75 passengers including cabin and steerage. As per usual at the time, they also possessed sails. California left New York for Panama via Cape Horn on October 6, 1848.74


74 Kemble, 406-407.
While the contract specified that the carriage of mail would be the PMSS’ priority in exchange for governmental subsidies, it soon became evident that the transportation of gold-seekers would also become a central concern. When the California reached Panama on January 17, 1849, over 1,500 people wanted to board. But the California was already full with a group of Peruvians picked up previously at the port of Callao. The chaos took days to settle. In the end, company officials gave preference to those who had purchased tickets directly from the New York branch. The Peruvians ended up in improvised standee berths and a total of 365 passengers—in a vessel that had accommodations for only 75—left for California. It took California twenty eight days to get to her destination. Within the next two decades, vessels would lower the time down to thirteen days and San Francisco became the terminal for the route. With this chaotic beginning, the monthly and later semi-monthly run between Panama and Oregon was inaugurated.75

At mid-century, the first transpacific steamers also appeared. Here again, the gold-frenzy was a central motivation. For instance, Monumental City and New Orleans, the first two transpacific steamships, left San Francisco for Sydney, both gold rush destinations, in February and March 1853 respectively. They took nine weeks to make the traverse and brought hundreds of gold-seekers to the coast of Australia. The third steamship crossing the Pacific came from the opposite direction. The suitably named Golden Age originally left New York for London in September 1853. She then traveled to Melbourne via the Indian Ocean, where she did a few local runs. Finally on May 11, 1854, she took passengers, cargo and mail for Panama, being the first steamer crossing the Pacific on a proposed regular service basis. In the end, regular service linking Sydney and Panama didn’t materialize until 1863, when the Panama, New Zealand &

75 Kemble, 412, 417.
Australian Royal Mail Company was formed, subsidized by the New Zealand and the British governments.\textsuperscript{76} Other transpacific steamers traveling between San Francisco and Hong Kong between 1862 and 1864 were Prussia’s Scotland, Britain’s Robert Low and Oriflamme from the United States.\textsuperscript{77}

The acquisition of California and Oregon by the United States did not only imply the consolidation of a coast-to-coast national project, as suggested above, but also the beginning of the United States imperial strategy in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{78} This gave an incentive to transpacific naval expeditions, which soon incorporated the use of steamers. For instance, the 1853 and 1854 fleets led by Commodore Matthew Perry to Japan in order to obtain concessions for the United States included at least three steamers—Mississippi, Susquehanna, and Powhatan—of around 2,000 tons.\textsuperscript{79} They not only served Perry for rapid transportation but also as a display of power and technological advancement. In effect, while steamships were known to a few Japanese sailors and fishermen, no one had yet seen a steamer navigate the Uraga and Edo bays, so close to the empire’s capital. Many locals were surprised by the smoke and the noises coming out of Perry’s ships as well as by their capacity to run fast against the wind. Additionally, steamers played a central role in the demands posed by the United States government to Japan, as shown in the letter sent by U.S. president Millard Fillmore via commodore Perry in March 1853: “…we understand there is a great abundance of coal and provisions in the Empire of Japan. Our steamships, in crossing the great ocean, burn a great deal of coal, and it is not convenient to

\textsuperscript{76}Lawson, 7-9.

\textsuperscript{77}Tate, 23.


bring it all the way from America. We wish that our steamships and other vessels should be
allowed to stop in Japan and supply themselves with coal, provisions, and water.”

This demand was met on March, 1854, when Perry finally obtained the Emperor’s permission for the
United States’ vessels to land, trade and replenish coal and other supplies in Japanese ports.

Right after this, *Susquehanna* and *Mississippi* went back to Honolulu and then continued around
South America to become the first United States’ steam warships to circumnavigate the globe,
an impressive display of the nation’s maritime power.

The Japanese government, on its part, quickly learned how to develop its own steam
technology. In 1860, only seven years after Perry’s arrival, *Karin Maru*, a small 292-ton vessel,
became the first Japanese steamship to cross the ocean. It took her 37 days. *Karin Maru* had
Dutch engines and the local commanders, Kimura Yoshitake and Katsu Rintaro, were advised
by a group of United States naval officers. On her return trip, the Japanese crew did not kowtow
to any foreign advisor and made it home safely. This marked the beginning of a successful
steam maritime tradition that would make the Japanese leaders in the construction of steamships
as well as the first Asian country sponsoring transpacific liners in the late nineteenth century.

80 “Letter of Millard Fillmore, President of the United States of America, to his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of
Japan,” in Walworth, 250.

Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Feb., 1943): 229; Louise P. Kellogg, “The United States and Japan,” *The Wisconsin Magazine
of History* 4, no. 3 (Mar., 1921): 347-349; Arthur J. Marder, “From Jimmu Tennô to Perry: Sea Power in Early
Japan: Commodore Perry, Lord Abe, and American Imperialism in 1853* (New York: Smithsonian/HarperCollins,
2006): 4-6. For a detailed account on Perry’s expeditions to Japan see Walworth and Feifer.

82 Tate, 21. According to Tate, the other warships from the United States that crossed the ocean westward before
1865 were *Saginaw* in 1860 and *Wyoming* two years later.

83 Tate, 22; Dana B. Young, “The Voyage of the Kanrin Maru to San Francisco, 1860,” *California History* 61, no. 4

84 See more on this topic, particularly on the creation of the Japanese transpacific company *Toyo Kisen Kaisha*, on
Chapter Six.
Around this time, the British and French navies had also used steamers to take part in imperialist ventures in Asia. For instance, between 1854 and 1855, both countries had sent two joint expeditionary forces to Siberia in the context of the Crimean War. Each squadron had a steam-assisted vessel, *Virago* in the case of 1854 and *Brisk* a year later. Their transpacific journey started in the port of Callao, in Peru. Beginning a few decades earlier, after the first Opium War of 1839-42, the British navy had also introduced several steamers to the coasts of China, but they had not traversed the Pacific and rather arrived by way of the Indian Ocean.85

By the 1860s, steam had become a technology regularly used in Pacific navigation, although always in conjunction with sails. While several steamers—both war and merchant ships—had crossed the ocean, there were only two regular transpacific services offered, that of the PMSS, between San Francisco and Hong Kong, started in 1867 with the *Colorado* venture, and the one of the Panama, New Zealand & Australian Royal Mail Company, between Panama and Sydney, initiated in 1863. The central role played by Acapulco and Manila in transpacific services during Spanish supremacy was now replaced by San Francisco and Panama in the Americas, and Sydney, Hong Kong and Yokohama in the opposite coast. With the exception of the latter, all others were directly or indirectly dominated by British and United States’ interests. British investors also controlled local and regional steamship routes on both sides of the Pacific, particularly on the coasts of Australia, China, and South America. In North America, the most important route became the one between Panama and San Francisco. Mexico’s location in between both influenced the way its ports became incorporated into the dynamics of the Pacific steamship services, as we will see in the following section.

85 Tate, 21.
1.3 The Mexican Ports and the San Francisco-Panama Axis

In the mid-nineteenth century, Panama and San Francisco became the two main international Pacific ports of the Americas. San Francisco had been used by the Spaniards since the late eighteenth century, but it had remained a relatively small port used for local transportation and for the replenishment of sailing vessels participating in the traffic of animal skins, particularly of sea otters. Yet, after the first big announcement of the existence of gold in California, in January 1848, it grew enormously as its large protected bay, capable of sheltering hundreds of ships at a time, soon became the preferred option for docking. The rapid construction of wharfs as well as the arrival of increasing numbers of ships exemplify the fast pace at which the port grew during those years. For instance, the first private stone pier was built in 1847, while the first public one was constructed in September 1848. Within a few years, every single street ended in a pier and Yerba Buena Cove got filled with land in order to create space to build more wharves. In terms of the quantity of ships docking, in July 1849 some 500 vessels anchored in the bay. Two years later, the number had increased to 800.

Panama, on the other hand, had a much longer international maritime tradition dating at least to the sixteenth century. Yet, since the eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms, the port’s traffic had diminished considerably as the recently founded RPC inaugurated routes along the Cape of Horn—around South America—in order to traverse from the Pacific to the Atlantic. However, it was in the gold-rush context that Panama consolidated as the most transited port of the area as it offered the shortest journey across the American continent as well as an adequate

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87 Tate, 17-19.

land and maritime infrastructure, sponsored by British and United States’ investors. In 1850, the Panamanian route surpassed that of Cape Horn as the preferred way to travel from the Atlantic coast of the United States to California. Since then and until 1869—the date of the completion of the transcontinental railroad in the United States—between 15,000 to 20,000 people used the Panamanian isthmus to cross from the Atlantic to San Francisco every year. The completion of the Panamanian transcontinental railroad, the first in the Americas, in 1855, helped position Panama as the favoured route for gold-seekers and travelers coming from the east coast of the United States and from the Atlantic in general.\(^89\)

With the technology of the 1850s, steamers could not make the three to four week-long journey between Panama and San Francisco without stops. They did not possess enough space on board to carry all the supplies needed for the entire trip, particularly of coal. The Mexican coastline offered a midway point where the PMSS vessels and other freighters could reload food, water, and coal. The Mexican Pacific coast also produced enough provisions not only for the travelers but for the booming population of San Francisco. Indeed, during the first years of the gold rush, San Francisco imported all sorts of foods, clothes, cigars, and alcohol from Mexico.\(^90\) In this context, the regular PMSS maritime flow made several Mexican ports prosperous, particularly Acapulco and Mazatlán, incorporating them into the international steamship circuit of Pacific exchanges as stopovers in the San Francisco-Panama run, as we can see in the following map.

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Both San Benito and San Blas’s flourishing was linked to the export crops produced in nearby haciendas. For the case of the latter, since the late eighteenth century it had become an important port of trade with California in the context of the Bourbon reforms, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.
As mentioned earlier, Acapulco had become a central hub for transpacific exchanges between 1565 and 1815, when the Manila galleon run ended in the context of the Mexican War of Independence. Acapulco then lost its transpacific preeminence and became a port used mainly for local voyages and irregular longer trips. Yet, during the Gold Rush, numerous sailing vessels and steamships stopped there in order to get food and drink supplies and some passengers even spent a night or two in the various private homes and hotels that offered lodging. Additionally, the mail and travelers coming by land from different parts of the country, notably Mexico City and Veracruz, used Acapulco as a stopover where they would easily get transportation to other Pacific ports. Furthermore, the PMSS established a coal station and permanent offices in Acapulco as early as 1849. Until 1872, when the Mexican government granted a subsidy to the PMSS so that its steamers would stop at various other Mexican ports, Acapulco remained the main Mexican harbor visited by every single one of its vessels.92

In contrast to Acapulco, Mazatlán boomed after Independence. In an effort to regulate illegal maritime traffic, in 1822 it became one of the ports that the Mexican government opened to international trade.93 During colonial times, Mazatlán had remained a small village whose sheltering bay was used for local exchanges and by pirates and merchants involved in the contraband of pearls and precious metals. But after 1822, French, British, and especially Germans began to settle and open businesses in order to profit from the port’s proximity to several gold and silver mining centers.94 These businessmen were part of a diaspora of


93 In 1820, still during the War of Independence, the Spanish government decreed the opening of Mazatlán to international trade, yet, in reality, it was until the war ended and the new Mexican government took over, that the authorities finally opened a customs office. Rigoberto Arturo Román Alarcón, El comercio en Sinaloa, siglo XIX (Mexico: DIFOCUR/FOECA/CONACULTA, 1998), 16-17.
Europeans looking for places to invest the capital surpluses generated in the context of their hometowns’ booming industrialization. By 1845, these foreigners owned thirteen major commercial houses dedicated to the import of textiles, wines and liquors, furniture, industrial machinery, and hardware. They also exported gold and silver, followed by brazil-wood, animal skins, sugar, and pearls. With this flurry of economic activity, Mazatlán briefly emerged as the most prosperous port in the North American coast until the California gold-rush jump started in San Francisco. When in 1848 the PMSS started its regular service between Panama and Oregon, Mazatlán became an obvious stopover as it already possessed the infrastructure needed for its ships to get supplies.

With time, not only Acapulco and Mazatlán, but also San Benito, Salina Cruz, Manzanillo, and San Blas—from South to North—became stopovers for the PMSS vessels, as shown in map 1.2. Of these, Manzanillo and Salina Cruz, as we will see later, would turn into

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94 It was closer for Europeans to settle in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean coasts, yet, the fact that the custom duties were lower in the Pacific coast offered an additional incentive for foreigners to settle and invest their money in the Pacific coast. Roman, 19.

95 Six Germans, three French, one Swiss-Spanish, one French-Spanish, one Anglo-Philippine, and one from the United States. Román, 19.

96 Román, 18, 44-46.

97 Since the early sixteenth century, the Spanish conquistadores, travelers, and pirates regularly used Manzanillo’s twin bays—then baptized as Salagua and Santiago de Buena Esperanza. Indigenous locals had been using them for decades. In the following two centuries, the galleons visited them regularly in order to get food supplies from the nearby haciendas specialized in the production of citrics, salt, coconut trees, and cattle. After Independence, the Mexican government opened the port to foreign trade in 1825. But the Mazatlán merchants, seeing this as a threat to their power, lobbied with the federal government in order to revoke the order. As a consequence, in 1837, Manzanillo was only allowed to deal with internal maritime traffic and five years later its port was closed down. When the United States’ troops invaded Mazatlán in 1847, the maritime traffic deviated partly to Manzanillo and it slowly transformed into a larger seaport, particularly after the construction of the railroad linking it to Colima, the state capital, in 1889. See Héctor Porfirio Ochoa Rodríguez, “Manzanillo: el intrincado despertar de un puerto,” in Los puertos noroccidentales de México, coord. Jaime Olveda and Juan Carlos Reyes (Zapopan, Jal.: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1994): 113-119; Pablo Serrano Álvarez, “Comentario,” in Los puertos noroccidentales, 66-70. See Chapter Five for the history of the port of Salina Cruz.
international maritime hubs after they became railway terminals in 1889 and 1907 respectively.\(^{98}\)

### 1.4 Colorado, 1867

In many ways, the San Francisco-Panama steamers mentioned above set the precedent for the new transpacific route inaugurated by \textit{Colorado} in January 1867. In effect, the San Francisco-Panama route helped the PMSS accumulate enough capital, prestige, and experience so that a second route could open twenty years later. And just as the PMSS had been largely subsidized to start its service from Panama to Oregon, two decades later it obtained once again a yearly subsidy—this time of around half a million dollars—for transporting mail to/from Yokohama and Hong Kong. Finally, \textit{Colorado} herself had been serving the San Francisco-Panama run for years. She was only separated from it in February, 1866, in order to make the necessary arrangements for the tougher journey across the ocean. \textit{Colorado} then served the transpacific run for a decade, until she was deemed too old to continue sailing.\(^{99}\)

Taking a closer look at \textit{Colorado}’s first trip in January, 1867, allows us to get a grasp of the types of passengers that traveled across the ocean, some of whom will be the focus of subsequent chapters. In first class there was a small group of businessmen, headed by the president of the New York Chamber of Commerce, A. A. Low. There were also a few missionaries, militaries, and bureaucrats from the United States. In contrast, over 200 Chinese were traveling in steerage. Most of them were male labourers who returned to China after years of work in the U.S. railroads, farms, and mines. This class and nationality hierarchy was also

\(^{98}\) See Chapter Five to learn more about this process.

\(^{99}\) Tate, 24.
observed amongst the crew members: the captain and high ranking officials were from the United States while the lower echelons were Chinese. On the return voyage, started in Hong Kong on February 17 and ended in San Francisco on March 20, *Colorado* carried a similar distribution of passengers, making the Chinese the most numerous nationality on board.¹⁰⁰ This pattern, as we will later see, would continue over the years.

With the beginning of the PMSS transpacific runs inaugurated by *Colorado*, San Francisco consolidated as the largest North American maritime hub and became the obligatory transit point for the passengers and merchandise traveling between the Asian and Mexican coasts. As mentioned earlier, there was a long tradition of contacts between both areas, characterized mainly by the exchange of Mexican silver for Chinese silks during the Spanish colonial rule. While the end of the Manila Galleon run in 1815 interrupted the direct regular service between both areas, these exchanges continued. In effect, until 1850 Mexico imported around 100,000 pounds of Chinese raw silk every year as it remained too expensive to produce it at home.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as of the mid-nineteenth century these imports began to decay and eventually disappeared. This decline was related to Chinese sociopolitical turmoil, to the increasing use of United States’ cotton instead of silk for the fabrication of cloth, and to the competition of the European silk manufacturers established in Mexico.¹⁰² In the case of Mexican silver, it remained a valuable export to Eastern Asia until mid-century, and to China until well into the twentieth century. While these exchanges continued after the end of the Manila galleons, the routes diversified and traffic became irregular. Before the Gold Rush, Mazatlán concentrated most of the intermittent traffic of sailing vessels going to Asia,

¹⁰⁰ Tate, 24-7.


¹⁰² Schell, 114-5.
particularly to Hong Kong after 1842—the year the British took over its administration—and from there to the Chinese ports of Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai, opened to foreign trade in the same year. Another popular route from Mexico to Asia after the end of the Manila galleons departed from the other coast. Ships went from Veracruz to New York and from there to London and then Asia via the British sailing fleet and later the steamships navigating the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Yet, once the PMSS opened its Panama-Oregon route in 1848, all the exchanges between Mexico and Asia began to transfer in San Francisco. After inaugurating its transpacific route in 1867, the PMSS consolidated as the indispensable intermediary between the coasts of Mexico and Japan and China.

In the following decades, the history of transpacific exchanges amongst these three countries would involve a series of attempts by Mexican, Japanese, and Chinese diplomats, bureaucrats, and businessmen to break the monopoly of San Francisco and the PMSS. This is the story that the following chapters will tell.

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103 Schell, 108-117. See the entire article in order to understand the cycles of silver exchanges.
On October 19, 1874, a group of five Mexican scientists set sail from San Francisco aboard the steamer *Vasco de Gama*. They were bound for Japan with a unique task: arrive on time to observe and measure the transit of Venus. The astral event happened every century, so there was no second chance for them. If they could only get to shore on time, they would go down as the first successful official scientific mission sent abroad by a Mexican government. However, the dreadful weather conditions threatened to tamper with the group’s success, as the following account by Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, head of the team, written in his nineteenth night of transpacific sailing, suggests:

“…the clouds obscured the sun’s rise, making it impossible to determine the vessel’s position in the deserted Ocean.... The rain poured heavily and enormous storm waves swept across the bridge, flooding the entire deck. There weren’t enough pumps to bail the water swamping the “Vasco,” and the clamour produced [by the pumps]... added to the pitch of the roaring winds in such a way that not even by shouting was it possible to make oneself heard...”

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104 Unless otherwise noted, the description of the Mexican Astronomic Commission’s transpacific journey comes from the following memoirs by two of the Commission’s members: Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, *Viaje de la Comisión Astronómica Mexicana al Japón para observar el tránsito del planeta Venus por el disco del Sol el 8 de diciembre de 1874* (Mexico City: Políglota, 1876) and Francisco Bulnes, *Sobre el Hemisferio Norte, once mil leguas: impresiones de viaje a Cuba, los Estados Unidos, el Japón, China, Conchina, Egipto y Europa* (Mexico City: Revista Universal, 1875). The editions consulted by the author were the following: Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, *Viaje al Japón*, comp. Hugo Diego (Mexico City: Ediciones de Educación y Cultura, 2008) and Francisco Bulnes, *Once mil leguas sobre el Hemisferio Norte* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1998). The author translated all quotes into English. Díaz Covarrubias, 161.


106 Díaz Covarrubias, 187.
The scientists’ journey had started a month and a half earlier in Mexico City. President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada had authorized funds to set up an astronomical station in the so-called Far East, the area where the astral event was thought to be most visible. By sending the commission, Mexico would join an exclusive group of nations that could afford to send costly delegations to observe the rare celestial phenomenon. The Europeans and the United States had planned their trips for years and had settled into their stations months in advance. The Mexicans, on the other hand, battered by decades of civil wars and foreign invasions, had left everything to the last minute. Their scientific mission, beleaguered by time constraints, a lack of funds, and even foul weather, operated like a living metaphor of the role played by Mexico in the concert of nations. Furthermore, their failure would discredit the country abroad and at home, where the untimely and costly expedition had been highly criticized by the opposition.

The detailed and evocative descriptions left by two of the traveling scientists as well as the vicissitudes of their journey will serve to explore the ways in which the interrelated notions of imperialism, nation, urbanization, science, class, and race framed the experiences of transpacific voyagers at the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, the case will expose how a group of educated, wealthy, and government-connected Mexicans viewed themselves and their relationship to other peoples—or races, as they would often say at the time—within the transpacific world. It will also serve to determine the land and maritime routes and the nodes that formed the network that linked the Mexican territory with the rest of the northern Pacific rim, just before the steam-powered technologies broadened their presence in Mexico. For this purpose the chapter is divided into two parts. The first recounts the story of the journey, drawing extensively from the scientists’ accounts in order to recreate and evoke the atmosphere of a transpacific voyage as experienced at the time. The second will contextualize their experiences and narratives in order to understand the importance that the notions described
above played in the transpacific world during the second half of the nineteenth century.

2.1 A Transpacific Odyssey

As of 1867, a heterogeneous group of self-proclaimed liberal politicians began to dominate the Mexican political scene. Under the leadership of Benito Juárez, the president of the Republic from 1858 until his death in 1872, the Liberals first managed to defeat a coalition of Mexican conservative forces in a civil war that lasted from 1858 to 1861. Afterwards came a conservative-backed French intervention, which ended with the military triumph of the Liberal army and the execution by firing squad of the French-imposed monarch, Maximilian of Habsburg, in the summer of 1867. At the heart of both wars had been the conservative opposition to the liberal Constitution of 1857 and the so-called Reform Laws that preceded it. In general terms, these legal documents promoted the secularization of society, the promotion of individual rights, a republican form of government, and equality under the law for all citizens. These measures had upset the legal, political, and economic privileges of traditional corporate entities such as the army, the guilds, the Indian communities, and particularly, the Catholic Church. While all these institutions had the support of ample sectors of the population, the pact made by some of their elite members with a foreign monarch and their subsequent military defeat eroded their strength and legitimacy and propelled the success of the liberals.¹⁰⁷

One of the first measures implemented by the triumphant liberal government was a profound educational reform meant to secularize and, in the words of those who headed it, ¹⁰⁷ On the subjects of Mexican Liberalism, the Reform Laws and Civil War, and the 1860s French Intervention in Mexico see Colin M. MacLachlan and William H. Beezley, Mexico’s Crucial Century, 1810-1910: an introduction (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 75-103; Konrad Ratz, Tras las huellas de un desconocido: nuevos datos y aspectos de Maximiliano de Habsburgo (Mexico City: Conaculta/Siglo XXI, 2008); Josefina Zoraida Vázquez et al., Interpretaciones del periodo de Reforma y Segundo Imperio (Mexico City: Patria, 2007); Charles Hale, The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
“regenerate” Mexican society. The main product of this reform was the law of December 2, 1867, which created the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (ENP, National Preparatory School), that is, a five-year-long uniform preparatory curriculum that followed primary studies and would prepare students for a professional education. The commission in charge of evaluating and implementing the changes was formed by a group of scientists who held administrative posts in the Juárez administration and were also linked to each other by family ties. The most prominent of them were the brothers José and Francisco Díaz Covarrubias—the latter would become the head of the Mexican Astronomical Commission that traveled to Asia in 1874—, Pedro Contreras Elizalde, and Gabino Barreda, who acted as the president of the commission.¹⁰⁸ Both Contreras and Barreda had studied medicine in Paris, where they had met and become influenced by the positivist philosopher Auguste Comte. According to the positivists, man’s only way of knowing was through the scientific method, composed first by observation and experiment, and second by a search for the laws of phenomena or the relations between them. From their point of view, science would inevitably make humanity progress and reach a positive era where scientific thought would prevail over supposedly inferior forms of thought such as theology and metaphysics, characteristic of earlier stages of mental development. As a consequence, the ENP had a positivist curriculum where sciences, taught from the simpler to the more complex, were at its core, supplemented by the learning of languages—mainly so that students could understand scientific and philosophical texts in their original languages—and a few humanities.¹⁰⁹ Besides teaching a new generation of students the proper methods of

¹⁰⁸ Pedro Contreras Elizalde was married to one of Juárez’s daughters; Gabino Barreda married José’s and Francisco’s sister. Hale, 141.

¹⁰⁹ The ENP initial curriculum was as follows: on the first and second years, students took mathematics, beginning with arithmetic and ending with calculus, as well as English and French. On the third year they took mechanics, elementary astronomy (called cosmography), Greek, and Spanish grammar. The last two years included the
science, this intellectual education would serve future leaders to lead the reconstruction of society by spreading knowledge over the so-called ignorant masses. Since anarchy or independent thought from the curriculum was seen not only as fundamentally wrong but also as an obstacle for progress, the ENP had strict principles. One of its first and most distinguished students, doctor Porfirio Parra, described this time as an “‘epoch of general scientific culture’ in Mexico, when “specialization” or isolated scientific work by lone investigators gave way to “synthesis” or a bringing together of “science and philosophy.””

The importance given to science in Mexican governing circles was part of a global understanding by multiple ruling elites who equated desirable progress with scientific and technological advancements. In this context, observing and measuring the transit of Venus was not a mere intellectual hobby for the international scientific community. Rather, it was the only means to obtain an essential measurement that, according to the experts of the time, would significantly advance scientific knowledge: the Astronomical Unit, that is, the distance between the Earth and the Sun. Since Nicholas Copernicus published *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* in 1543, making the Sun and not the Earth the center of the Solar System, scientists had been trying, without success, to measure the distance between the Sun and its planets. In 1716 British astronomer Edmond Halley came up with a possible solution. In *A New Method of Determining the Parallax of the Sun, or His Distance from the Earth*, he suggested that the Astronomical Unit could be obtained by measuring the beginning and the end of the transit of Venus across the sun from at least two different places on Earth. However easy it sounds, his method was difficult to test, as Venus orbits between the Earth and the Sun in subsequent

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following courses: chemistry, natural history (which comprised botany and zoology), logic, Latin, geography, history, and literature. Hale, 143.

110 Cited in Hale, 153.
intervals of eight and then 122 years, giving a generation of scientists only two chances to succeed. Astronomers put Halley’s method into practice after his death, in 1761 and 1769, but they never achieved consensus on their measurements. The subsequent transit, happening in December 1874, represented a renewed opportunity to test Halley’s method, one that might lead to the ability to determine the correct dimensions of the entire solar system.\textsuperscript{111}

With this in mind, several countries had prepared their astronomical commissions well in advance. For instance, in 1872, the French had destined some 400,000 francs in order to install stations in six different areas of Asia. The United States, on their part, spent over 200,000 dollars and took three years to organize their eight commissions. Germany sent five groups to Asia and Africa, and Russia set up 25 commissions throughout its Asian territory. The British Crown financed five groups while Lord Lindsey funded his own private expedition. And finally, a group of Italians also installed an observation post in northern India.\textsuperscript{112}

In Mexico, the Chamber of Deputies had commenced a tepid discussion on the subject in 1871. But as the country’s finances had not recovered from the war against the French occupation—ending only four years earlier—the project was soon abandoned. Mexican scientists, on their part, had tried to raise public awareness as to the importance of sending a commission through the publication of academic and informational articles. They argued that the mission was relevant not only for its possible contribution to science and humankind, but also for creating international prestige for the country. Their attempts remained unnoticed until September 8, 1874, that is, barely three months before the deadline. During the celebrations of the 27th anniversary of the defence against the United States’ intervention in Mexico, Deputy

\textsuperscript{111} Moreno, 11-16.

\textsuperscript{112} Moreno, 17.
Juan José Baz brought the topic to the attention of President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. Days later Lerdo conferred with Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, one of the country’s most renowned astronomers and certainly the one with better connections in the government. While the latter showed confidence in local scientists’ capacity to perform, he was concerned about the time available to mount the expedition and travel to Peking, his ideal point of observation. According to his calculations, it would take at least 45 days to travel from Mexico City to Yokohama, plus an additional 10 days to get to Peking, arriving just days before the event.

On September 14, Díaz Covarrubias and President Lerdo agreed upon sending a five-member astronomical commission to Asia. This number would allow for the group to split and make two separate measurements in order to test Halley’s method without depending on foreign results. Díaz Covarrubias chose three of the country’s finest and most experienced engineers to accompany him: Francisco Jiménez, Manuel Fernández Leal and Agustín Barroso. They had all performed astronomical observations in the past and the latter was also a distinguished photographer. President Lerdo added one last member, Francisco Bulnes, a young engineer and talented writer who would be in charge of recording the memoirs of the trip. Besides their governmental posts and personal scientific projects, all but Francisco Jiménez taught mathematics in the ENP by the time they left for Asia.

At that time, the closest port with direct transpacific connections was San Francisco. To get there from Mexico City, there were two main options. The shortest way was to travel by land to the nearest western port—Acapulco or Manzanillo—and then take a steamer to San Francisco. But as there were no railroads linking Mexico City with the Pacific coast and the

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113 Díaz Covarrubias, 12.

114 Díaz Covarrubias also served as the ENP’s assistant director. Francisco Jiménez also taught math but, due to his military formation, he did so in the army’s school (Colegio Militar). Moreno, 34-43.
roads remained in terrible shape from the rainy season, this option had to be discarded. Díaz Covarrubias thus opted for a longer but safer route. He would take the only existing railroad in the country—inaugurated by president Lerdo only a year earlier—towards the port of Veracruz, on the opposite coast, and then sail to New York in order to take the transcontinental railroad across the United States all the way to San Francisco. According to Díaz Covarrubias’s calculations, this would take around 20 days. So on September 18 at midnight, after rapidly gathering and carefully packing all the delicate equipment, the scientists left Mexico City with the hopes of reaching Asia on time to do the observation.

The first obstacle for the mission came in the form of viruses: the port of Veracruz was infested with an epidemic of yellow fever. If any of the commission’s members fell sick, their success would be compromised. Díaz Covarrubias therefore decided to wait for the steamer in the highlands, halfway between Mexico City and Veracruz. On September 22, he finally received a telegram stating that Caravelle, a small 800-ton French steamer, had docked. Unfortunately for him, Caravelle was leaving two days later for Havana, and not for the United States. But with so many days already wasted, Díaz Covarrubias decided to embark for Cuba, where he had better chances to catch a boat for New York.

Caravelle took the commissioners from Veracruz to Havana in less than five days. She traveled at eight miles per hour and was “really modest: its small size made it intolerable to stay on deck due to the proximity of the heat coming from the chimney.... Nevertheless most passengers, even if seasick, remained atop, as the temperature inside the narrow chambers was [even more] unbearable.”115 The heat made it impossible for Díaz Covarrubias to “do anything productive... but to read at times, [so] this first part of the journey was truly tedious as the

115 Díaz Covarrubias, 90.
Caravelle had no piano, no chess, nor any other means of distraction.”

On September 28 the vessel reached Havana.

The Mexicans had to spend two days in Havana with no other task than to wait for the next steamship to depart. This gave them time to wander around and record their detailed observations of one of the busiest Caribbean ports. Díaz Covarrubias found the city “notably decayed, compared to 14 years earlier. The effects of the civil war devouring this wealthy [Spanish] colony are now visible in the Capital, [although] it still remains full of movement and active trade [with] multiple vessels from all European and American maritime nations crowding the large piers.”

Both Díaz Covarrubias and Bulnes highlighted the racial heterogeneity and antagonism in their notes. The “population [is] composed... of a third of whites...and two thirds of Africans and their varied racial mixtures; antipathy is deeply rooted one against the other.”

Bulnes was shocked by how “blacks flaunt their filthy misery and wander around the city with the heavy step of prisoners.” They both predicted that after the Cuban revolution of independence triumphed, the country would be hampered by the existing racial inequality, although Díaz Covarrubias saw a long term remedy in “the education of the masses... which is the only element capable of establishing, up to a certain point, equality amongst men.”

His observations were deeply influenced by his own diagnosis of the Mexican situation, a country whose main obstacle for progress was, in his point of view, the heterogeneity and disparity of

116 Díaz Covarrubias, 92-93.
117 Díaz Covarrubias, 95-96.
118 Díaz Covarrubias, 98.
119 Bulnes, 168.
120 Díaz Covarrubias, 98-99.
For both Mexico and Cuba’s problems he blamed Spanish colonialism, with its “terrible mixture of authoritarian zeal and religious fanaticism, inquisition, and dominion…Our conquerors, not cruel enough to destroy the subjugated race, nor generous enough to assimilate… [and] elevate it to their stature by civilizing it, [rather] opted for the worst of the middle grounds, that is, to morally annihilate it.”

On September 30, after stamping their passports with both the Cuban delegate and the Mexican consul, the five Mexicans, along with a German, two Cubans, and one passenger from the United States, set sail for Philadelphia in the 1,400-ton United States’ steamer Yazoo. The drop in temperature, the wide space and the tranquil waters made this a more pleasant voyage. On October 5, as everyone was getting ready to disembark, a sanitary officer came aboard and announced quarantine for the vessel, as it was coming from plague-infested ports. Already behind schedule, the Mexican commissioners could certainly not afford this additional delay. Captain Barret, the only one allowed off board, offered to contact the Mexican consulate and to persuade the port authorities to revoke the order, since no passenger presented any symptoms.

After sunset, the Captain returned with positive news for the Mexicans. Everyone was allowed to leave.

On October 6, the troop took the train for New York. Bulnes described the city as a “temple for enormity, [which is] the dominant religion in the United States.” He saw every construction identical to the other: boxy, square, efficient, with people moving up and down in routinely schedules like “machines without a steering wheel... Without a doubt... the people here love civilization the most; but having invented the mysticism of mass production, [they] love it

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121 Díaz Covarrubias, 53.
122 Bulnes, 171.
in blocks, without even remembering that refinement exists.…”¹²³ Díaz Covarrubias and second astronomer Francisco Jiménez spent their hours in New York getting the supplies needed for the remaining part of the trip. The younger members of the team had free time to wander around the streets.

The next day at 8pm, the five Mexicans boarded the transcontinental railroad which would take seven days to cross the 5,300 kilometres separating New York from San Francisco. “The first thing that called my attention, said Bulnes, was the luxury...of the Pullman palace sleeping car.”¹²⁴ Díaz Covarrubias also remarked on the “many comforts” that made this train “superior to everything we saw in Europe.”¹²⁵ He found the rapidity with which the salon transformed into a dormitory fascinating. But what impressed him the most was the number of “young and beautiful ladies who would... get naked, separated from unknown men only by a curtain, in the middle of the desert.”¹²⁶ While he judged this gender equity as a positive sign of civilization, he also found this consideration towards women “so exaggerated that it turns some of the individuals of this beautiful half of humankind into true demanding and malicious tyrants… who aspire to occupations, positions, and rights that are fully incompatible with the obligations imposed by their sex.”¹²⁷

The speedy train ran at 36 kilometres per hour and made regular meal stops, which allowed the Mexicans to look around and make remarks about the people surrounding them. Díaz Covarrubias often complained about the poor quality of the service during these stops.

¹²³ Bulnes, 171.
¹²⁴ Bulnes, 171.
¹²⁵ Díaz Covarrubias, 133.
¹²⁶ Díaz Covarrubias, 135.
¹²⁷ Díaz Covarrubias, 137.
Waiters were few and rude and had very little time to serve a large and hungry crowd. “We were [thus] forced to eat really quickly, badly and very little or to incur into the disgusting Anglo-American habit of grabbing a piece of ham, cheese or bread and eat it while standing or sitting inside the cars.”

In one of the most remote stops, where he was not in a rush to eat, he wandered around and fell attracted to a “savage of athletic height, [with] very pronounced and not disagreeable factions…, a meditative attitude, [and an] arrogant and sad look over the crowd [that] revealed the most absolute indifference and lack of curiosity.”

Díaz Covarrubias tried to approach the man and engage into a conversation by giving him some coins. To this the man replied with a hostile look that the Mexican interpreted as a “deep aversion to civilized men.”

This incident served him to reflect on what he labelled the raza americana:

“Science will one day explain the physiological causes that determine the degree of perfection of each race and that, at present, we can only appreciate by its effects…. None of the aboriginal peoples of the Americas have learnt not even to emancipate and to put themselves on a par with other nations, but also to at least learn something of the civilization of their oppressors.”

As usual, his opinions of others prompted him to reflect about Mexico. With the majority of its population pertaining to this “race [which] today is one of the most useless for the progress of humanity” and with education being only a long term solution, Díaz Covarrubias was convinced that “one of our most urgent necessities is to promote an abundant immigration.” For this purpose, he favoured some races more than others, such as the “laborious immigrants from Piamonte, from France, from Southern Germany and Spain, especially now that…”

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128 Díaz Covarrubias, 141.
129 Díaz Covarrubias, 149-150.
130 Díaz Covarrubias, 151-152.
131 Díaz Covarrubias, 152.
or fear of war has caused unrest and dissatisfaction amongst the working people.”

Nature and its alleged relation to progress also left a strong impression on Díaz Covarrubias, who was favourably surprised by the “abundance of navigable rivers... [which explained why] our sister Republic had prospered so quickly.... If we could only exchange all the gold and silver mines that make Mexicans so proud for all these extensive rivers and lakes that incite the population... to movement, trade, and to be in contact with the most remote peoples.” Nevertheless, his perspective turned sour once the train reached the Rockies, where Díaz Covarrubias noticed how the abundant snow made it necessary to build numerous snow sheds to protect the tracks. These costly structures would often burn with the heat created by the locomotives, making the whole train operation expensive and inefficient. “All these inconveniences, along with the decisive factor of the enormous distance” made Mexico’s narrow Tehuantepec isthmus a far superior option for transcontinental trips if authorities ever managed to construct a railroad.

The transcontinental journey came to an end on October 14. By 7 p.m. the train reached Oakland and a ferry boat took all passengers and cargo across the bay to San Francisco. Bulnes found the city indistinguishable from New York: “all American cities look alike, the houses are identical and the society is the same.” This for him explained the country’s increasing wealth. “It’s not like with us... [where] social diversity... causes an unconscious fight that impedes the... prosperity that we must envy from our neighbours.”

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132 Díaz Covarrubias, 78-79.
133 Díaz Covarrubias, 139.
134 Díaz Covarrubias, 145.
135 Bulnes, 172.
San Francisco had grown rapidly from a settlement of a couple of thousand in the 1840s to a huge port with “close to 180,000 inhabitants. Its magnificent bay, its increasing trade with Asia, ... the gold discovered nearby, and the frenzy of activity of the Anglo-American race perfectly explain its rapid growth.” But all this also made the city expensive. “In the purchase of a few small objects I had to invest a sum four or five times larger than the amount I would have invested in Mexico or even in New York.”

The Mexicans suffered a new delay in San Francisco. The next boat for Asia would not leave until the 19th, forcing the Commission to remain ashore for another five days. Díaz Covarrubias had originally calculated twenty days to get to San Francisco. So far, they had spent twenty seven. With this additional delay they were already twelve days behind schedule. Díaz Covarrubias used the forced wait as a chance to review the remaining details of the expedition. The most important decision still to be made was the location of the observation. After interviewing the Japanese and Mexican consuls and the engineers at the Coast Survey, one of the agencies participating with the U.S.’ astronomical commission, Díaz Covarrubias opted for Japan.

For Díaz Covarrubias, Japan presented a series of advantages over China. Firstly, the war against China for the possession of the Liu Chiu islands seemed imminent and Díaz Covarrubias felt safer in Japan due to its stronger maritime and military capacities. Secondly, “the frank hospitality that the current enlightened government of Japan affords to foreigners” as opposed to the Chinese’s “intolerant and even hostile [ways] to everything that comes from

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136 Bulnes, 172.
137 Díaz Covarrubias, 161-162.
138 Díaz Covarrubias, 163.
139 Díaz Covarrubias, 160.
abroad,”

Díaz Covarrubias the confidence to get the official permissions faster in the former. Thirdly, the weather near Yokohama seemed favourable for Díaz Covarrubias’s observations as clouds and storms were infrequent during winter. And finally, staying in Yokohama saved at least a week of travel so that the Commission could recover some lost time.

On October 19, the Mexican commissioners set sail for Yokohama aboard the Vasco de Gama, a 3,000-ton British steamer operated by the PMSS. Only months before Vasco had inaugurated the regular transpacific journeys of a new company, the China Transpacific Co. (CTPC), created by a group of British merchants living in Hong Kong with the help of imperial subsidies. This was the first direct competition for the PMSS’ transpacific runs. The CTPC made a trial voyage in 1873, in a chartered British steamer, Galley of Lorne, which carried 691 Chinese passengers in steerage and set a record of twenty-six days of travel between Hong Kong and San Francisco. With this success, the company decided to begin regular operations with two brand-new British manufactured steamers, Vasco de Gama and Vancouver, “built especially for the Oriental trade, [and] fitted up most luxuriously with all the latest improvements for the comfort and safety of passengers.”

The company was short-lived as it could not compete with a new transpacific venture created in San Francisco by the transcontinental railroad owners—the Oriental and Occidental—nor with PMSS’s reduced prices. As a consequence, by the time the Mexican scientists boarded Vasco, she had already been chartered and was operated by the PMSS. With the strong winds, Vasco was able to travel fast, at an average of

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140 Díaz Covarrubias, 160.


142 See Chapter Four for a brief description of the Oriental & Occidental Company.

143 Bulnes, 173; Tate, 29.
18 kilometers per hour, using both steam and sails to speed the journey. While this was encouraging for the Mexican commissioners, who had such tight time constraints, the winds made the trip a “painful journey [with] only two days [of] calm sea; in the remaining 18 a strong Northern wind forced us to port sending us night and day the bitter water of the waves.”

The *Vasco* was carrying some fifty first-class passengers in the stern compartments. Most of them were English-speaking doctors who were establishing enterprises in China or Japan “to distribute amongst these [Asian] peoples the benefits of Western scientific progress, almost unknown to them,” as Díaz Covarrubias would put it. There were also four or five Europeans. Amongst them was a German hat trader about to settle in Japan and who soon after landing went into bankruptcy simply because locals did not wear hats. There was also a peculiar Belgian specialized in the gun powder trade that saw in the Sino-Japanese confrontation a good opportunity for profit.

During the few episodes of calm sea, the passengers amused themselves by walking on deck, “guiding the ladies by the arm,” although frequently “a treacherous wave would interrupt the pleasant conversation, spilling over the talkers a deluge soaking them from tip to toe, and forcing them to run to their cabins to change clothes.” The piano and singing recitals also kept them busy. That is, until the pianist was launched to the floor by the ship’s sudden encounter with large waves. And much more entertaining than listening to the choir sing was observing their awkward positions while trying to stand still: “more than musicians, they looked like fencers in a fight…”

Peeking into the bow’s steerage compartments became another

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144 Bulnes, 173.
145 Díaz Covarrubias, 172.
146 Díaz Covarrubias, 175.
form of entertainment. There were

“countless Chinese [...] piled into those cabins... they must have been extremely uncomfortable during the storms; but they never did stop playing that game with dice and some sort of dominoes. Even though many of them were coming back to their country to enjoy their earnings after having worked in America for years, their clothing was the same than those worn by the poorest of them.”  

On the night of November 7, after 18 days of painful trajectory, they reached the outskirts of Yokohama. Yet “the threats of the ocean were felt more than ever.” Some passengers suggested deviating to calmer southern waters in order to avoid entering Yokohama in the middle of a storm in the dark, risking a possible crash. But the Vasco did not alter her course. “Around midnight we finally saw [the lighthouse of Cape Kii]... peering through the mist on the horizon, and it was saluted with a general hooray! We were in Asia. ...Before sunrise the Vasco had dropped anchor in the bay of Yokohama, some 250 metres from the city’s piers.”

Just like San Francisco, Yokohama had grown from a relatively small fishing village into a large international port in barely a decade. It comprised two sections. The four to five thousand foreigners—mostly diplomats from Europe, the United States and Peru—lived in luxurious mansions in a hill known as the Bluff. The Japanese lived to the north, in the sister city of Kanagawa. While the two sectors got along, the twenty one shots fired by every military vessel arriving to Yokohama and the equal response given by the Japanese authorities made Bulnes remark that “the relationship between the Asian and European civilizations gets

147 Díaz Covarrubias, 175.
149 Bulnes, 173.
150 Díaz Covarrubias, 191.
activated by the cannon."\textsuperscript{151} The Mexicans found the city noisy at night. Besides the gunshots, the tam tams of the police patrolling the city or the firemen responding to a call,\textsuperscript{152} as well as the whistles of the blind men who wandered the streets giving massages and telling the news of the day, woke them regularly.

With the mediation of Mr. Bingham, the United States’ ambassador to Japan, Díaz Covarrubias was able to meet with Mr. Terashima, the Emperor’s prime minister. He rapidly granted the necessary permissions to establish an observatory in each of the city’s two districts emphasizing that “the emperor is decided to take in the emissaries of science as they deserve it.”\textsuperscript{153} The Mexicans hired a Chinese carpenter, Mow Cheong, to build the wooden structures needed to install the two observatories. By November 30, a Mexican flag was raised in each of them and the Mexican Commission was ready for the transit of Venus.

What they did not count on were the clouds. Despite the references given by locals concerning Yokohama’s fair weather, one day before the event, the city remained overcast. One hundred and twenty two years earlier, French astronomer Le Gentil had faced a similar obstacle. After spending all his money and reputation to get to Pondicherry, India, in time for the 1769 transit, he could not make any measurements because the clouds blocked the entire event. It ruined his reputation and his career forever.\textsuperscript{154} Fearing a similar fate, none of the five engineers dared to speak a word in the last meal they shared before the astral event.

\textsuperscript{151} Bulnes, 174.

\textsuperscript{152} Lionel Frost argues that during the rapid urbanization of major Pacific ports during the second half of the nineteenth century, the port cities experienced regular fires as buildings were made of wood and the rapidity of the construction was done at the expense of safety measures. See Lionel Frost, “Rim of Fire: Pacific Rim Cities and the Problem of Fires,” in \textit{Studies in Pacific history; economics, politics, and migration}, ed. Dennis O. Flynn, Arturo Giráldez, and James Sobredo (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 108-122.

\textsuperscript{153} Cited in Bulnes, 183.

\textsuperscript{154} Díaz Covarrubias, 40-43.
They were fortunate enough to wake up to a clear sky on the morning of December 9. Just past 11 a.m., Venus became visible in Díaz Covarrubias’s observatory. Minutes later, in the opposite part of town, astronomers Francisco Jiménez and Manuel Fernández saw it too. The event lasted close to four hours. Both teams were successful in their measurements and thirteen out of the seventeen pictures taken by Agustín Barroso came through. The results of the mission were rapidly transmitted to President Lerdo with the following telegram: “To D. Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada, President of the Mexican Republic. Mexico. Complete success in the observations. Please receive my most sincere congratulations.
F. Díaz Covarrubias C. Yokohama, Dec. 9th 1874.”

The Mexicans remained in Yokohama until the end of January, so they had close to two months to go round the city and register their impressions. They spent most of their time attending diplomatic parties and personal meetings, participating in academic conferences, giving lectures in scientific institutions, and finishing their astronomic calculations. But they also had time to visit the neighbouring premises and get to talk to the people in the streets. Bulnes found them courteous and hard-working, although in excess, to the point that “another Flood might come and all the snow of the poles might fall and the Japanese would not stay still at home.” Díaz Covarrubias, on his part, described the common people as “poor and laborious…sober, provided by [their] education with a spirit of order and respect for the law, accustomed to look for subsistence through work…” To his point of view, these traits made them an adequate asset if they immigrated to Mexico because they “would provide our landlords with a great number of cheap, active, and intelligent labourers; at the same time a Japanese

155 Cited in Moreno, 93. The telegram was originally sent in English.
156 Bulnes, 181.
157 Díaz Covarrubias, 226.
colony would offer a healthy example to our people of everything that can be achieved with perseverance, hard work, and economy, even in the most unfavourable conditions.” 

On the night of February 2 the Commission left Yokohama in the French steamer Tanais, which took nine days to arrive in Hong Kong. In his usual sarcastic tone, Bulnes described it as “a sterile rock where 700,000 human beings live and 300 million of opium get sold annually.” He noticed a mixed population: “the Chinese, filthy as the conscience of a demon, occupy the lower part; the English, taken to those regions by the hurricane of speculation, have taken the elevated part of the mountain and have declared Hong Kong the first port of Asia.” Despite—or because of—the fact that both groups shared a certain “national pride and the intelligence for trade,” they got along quite badly as “the Chinese ferocity and the subsequent reprisals of the foreigners [against them] maintain the social relations between both races in a state of permanent hostility.” For him, Chinese customs were notably inferior to those of the Japanese: everything from food to entertainment and customs were of considerable lower quality. Díaz Covarrubias shared the same disdain for the Chinese, whom he defined as

“sly, distrustful, and full of instinctive aversion towards everything but their motherland. They perform the work just for the love of profit... [and] execute the labour assigned to [them] as a machine, without becoming fond of it... In the meantime they cherish the

158 Díaz Covarrubias, 226.
159 Bulnes, 194. According to Moreno, 107, only Bulnes left aboard the Tanais. The other astronomers left in the British steamer Volga. They all met again in Hong Kong.
160 Bulnes, 194.
161 Bulnes, 194.
162 Bulnes, 195.
163 Bulnes, 198.
dollars that they hide perhaps under the folds of their tunic, patiently waiting for the moment to enjoy them back in their homeland…”

Despite having a positive experience with the only Chinese he actually dealt with—the carpenter who built the two observatories in Yokohama and whom he described as clever and hard-working—, Díaz Covarrubias wrote of Chinese as being “essentially stationary,” in opposition to the “progressive nature” of the Japanese people.

The commissioners stayed in Hong Kong only for 48 hours as it was simply a stop-over on their long way back to Mexico. Díaz Covarrubias had decided to publish the Commission’s astronomical measurements in Europe first, rather than in Mexico, to gain a wider international audience and to avoid any possible confrontation with the oppositional press that could await them at home. That is why he decided to take an even longer route to return, going first to Hong Kong, where they took the Tigre, a French steamer that did the long run between Shanghai and Marseille, via the Suez Canal. The scientists disembarked in Naples and slowly made their way to Paris by train. Once there, in the summer of 1875, the Mexicans became the first team to publish their results on the observation of the transit of Venus.

2.2 Contextualizing the Journey: Mexico and the Transpacific World in the 1870s

Díaz Covarrubias and Bulnes’s memoirs on their trip from Mexico City to Yokohama and Hong Kong allow us a glimpse at the situations, historical processes, and discourses that shaped the transpacific flow of peoples, objects and ideas at the end of the nineteenth century. While their

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164 Díaz Covarrubias, 148-149.
165 Díaz Covarrubias, 220.
166 Bulnes, 203.
167 All but Francisco Jiménez, who returned earlier, arrived to Mexico City on November 19, 1875. They were greeted at the railway station by a crowd and were received with honours in the ENP. Moreno, 118-122.
opinions and experiences are obviously personal, they are also representative of the time and bring about a series of debates, anecdotes, and opinions related to imperialism, race, class, nation-making, urbanization, the role of science, amongst others, that ended up framing the experiences of travelers between Mexico and Asia, including those referred to later in this work.

To begin with, the journey of the Mexican Astronomical Commission took place in a world of nations in the making. While this could be said for so many periods and places, it was particularly evident for the transpacific world at the time. In effect, all Pacific American nations were born in the nineteenth century. Even the United States, whose war of independence preceded all other American countries, did not consolidate its state presence in the Pacific until the mid-century. While throughout the continent all the national advocates had colonial antecedents that framed their imaginings, most discussions on nationhood took off after the 1800s and national borders began to be enforced more or less until the lifespan of Díaz Covarrubias and his team. In fact, two of the Commission’s members, Francisco Jiménez and Manuel Fernández Leal, participated in the geographic demarcation of the Mexico-U.S. border between 1849 and 1856. In this context, the scientists and politicians behind the Astronomical Commission justified it in terms of the prestige to be gained for Mexico in the international arena and for their political group within the country. The need for consolidating the government’s prestige abroad and at home was particularly urgent taking into account the dissidence faced by the government of president Lerdo de Tejada as well as the country’s long history of civil wars and foreign invasions—the most recent of which had been defeated only seven years before the scientists’ trip to Asia. In this sense, it is no surprise that Díaz Covarrubias’ and Bulnes’ narratives were permeated with constant references and comparisons.

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168 Moreno, 36-40.
to the Mexican case. It is also more than symbolic that the interest in sponsoring a commission emerged during the anniversary celebrations of the Mexican cadets that fought against the 1840s U.S.-occupation, that Díaz Covarrubias insisted on raising a Mexican flag outside both of his observatories in Japanese soil, and that his first action after the successful observation was to send a telegram of congratulation to Lerdo de Tejada.

Empire-making also framed the Commission’s experiences. In effect, as noted by Díaz Covarrubias and Bulnes, all three Pacific coastal cities they visited—San Francisco, Yokohama and Hong Kong—had rapidly and recently transformed from smaller towns into large international ports, which monopolized the transpacific steam traffic at the time. This rapid urbanization was partly related to the ports’ strategic value for both national and imperial projects. As discussed in the previous chapter, only three decades before the Commission’s voyage, San Francisco had passed from Mexican to U.S. hands. This, combined with the discovery of gold a few months later, triggered a sudden growth that catapulted San Francisco into a bastion for exploration and incorporation of the surrounding areas into the national project of the United States. It also turned it into the launching pad for the U.S. imperial project in the Pacific. In the case of Yokohama, it had been barely a decade since the Japanese government had opened to foreign trade, forced by a combination of local reforms and foreign pressures. In this sense, Bulnes’ statement that the “relationship between Asia and Europe gets activated by the cannon” after hearing so many cannon exchanges between Japanese port authorities and foreign vessels proves an adequate description not only for Yokohama but also for Hong Kong. In the case of the latter, it was British occupation since 1842 that triggered its sudden expansion as it became a base for British imperial interests in the region.

These imperial designs affected transpacific exchanges in many other different ways. For instance, the passengers traveling with the Mexicans in first class were almost entirely from
Europe and the United States. To the contrary, Chinese, who comprised the largest nationality moving across the Pacific at the time, were traveling in third class. A similar hierarchy was observed for the crew members, with the highest posts reserved for citizens of the imperial powers, as exemplified by Captain Barret from the *Yazoo* and Captain Rice from the *Vasco*.

The monopoly of transpacific maritime routes and steam technologies was also related to the power structure in the Pacific. Only the two Anglo empires were capable of subsidizing their businessmen in order to establish a transpacific service—the U.S. government backed the PMSS and the British the CTPC—and consolidate their steamship-manufacturing industries, as all the steamships boarded by the Mexican Astronomical Commission on their way to Asia were built either in U.S. or British shipyards.

Within this imperial mapping and considering the political and economic instability that had characterized Mexico’s independent history up to the 1870s, the country’s territory remained quite disintegrated—at least when considering the Pacific coast’s links. In effect, the Mexican Pacific ports had actually more contact with their peers along the U.S.-dominated maritime system spanning between San Francisco and Panama\(^{169}\) than with the country’s central and eastern lands. This was a consequence, partly, of the proliferation of steam technologies for maritime communications and the absence of them by land—the country’s only railroad went from Mexico City to Veracruz, on the opposite coast. In this context, the transcontinental railroad along the Tehuantepec isthmus—the narrowest part of the Mexican territory—already appeared as a much desired solution in Díaz Covarrubias’s narrative.\(^{170}\) This limited land connectivity between the country’s central and Pacific areas was evident in the long route

\(^{169}\) See Chapter One for an explanation of the San Francisco-Panama axis and the incorporation of Mexican ports into it.

\(^{170}\) The role played by the Tehuantepec railroad in inserting Mexico into a transpacific maritime region will be discussed extensively in Chapter Five.
chosen by Díaz Covarrubias to get from Mexico City to Asia: rather than traveling directly to the west, it turned out to be faster to get to the east coast of the United States and then across by train to San Francisco, a far longer route. The mediation of the United States in the relations between Mexico and Asia is also observable in terms of diplomatic contacts, as exemplified by the key role played by the U.S. ambassador in Japan, Mr. Bingham, in order for Díaz Covarrubias to get his permits on time. It is not a coincidence then that the negotiations between Mexican and Japanese and later also with Chinese authorities in order to establish diplomatic ties, as chapters four and five will show, would eventually take place in the United States.

The fact that a group of scientists became the first Mexican state-sponsored travelers to Asia points at the importance given to science and its close relationship to nation-building. If president Lerdo spent a large amount of public funds and risked his personal and governmental reputation by sending a last minute astronomical commission to Asia, it was because science played a legitimizing role in his political project. As mentioned earlier, secularization was a key component of the nineteenth-century liberal and positivist creed. According to it, the role of the educated elite, of which the Mexican astronomers formed an integral part as functionaries as well as teachers, was to lead the supposedly ignorant masses from an inferior state where theological and/or metaphysical thinking (often associated with Spanish colonialism, monarchism, and Catholicism) to a higher level where rational scientific thought, considered to be the basis of an independent republican nation, would prevail and help the country attain material progress. Therefore, references to the importance of science and education and a disdain for those who did not embrace those principles populated Bulnes and Díaz Covarrubias texts who, as mentioned earlier, had participated in the creation and execution of the new positivist preparatory school curriculum.
Together with science, *race* was another important component of nation-building in the nineteenth century. In the context of the abolition of slavery and slave trade and the expansion of imperial colonialism into Asia and Africa, “theories began to emerge that could justify the continued dominance of... [the so-called inferior races] in terms of supposedly innate and permanent inferiority...”  

Adapting ideas of evolutionary change from the primitive to the superior, prevalent since the seventeenth century, European scientists divided humanity into a hierarchy of racial types, each of which supposedly had innate qualities that were passed on to the next generations. At the top were whites, the most rational and civilized who, according to the utilitarian principle of common good, had the right—and even the obligation—to govern those deemed as inferior. While the exact hierarchy could vary, most situated blacks at the bottom and saw the so-called mix-bloods as degenerates. In general, Mexican—and Latin American—scientists situated themselves rather ambivalently within this paradigm. On the one hand, they accepted the premise of the existence of a hierarchy of races. On the other, they rejected the notion of racial determinism and instead advocated for the possibility of “improvement” of racial traits. After all, if they accepted that mix-bloods were degenerate and that “Indians” were innately inferior, then there would be no promising future for the so-called Mexican nation, where the large majority of the population were deemed indigenous or *mestizos*. If social conditions were favourable, Latin American scientists sustained, an inferior race could improve its qualities throughout time.  


172 Social Darwinism arrived to Mexico until after the Commission’s trip, so its influence will be discussed until the next chapter.  

The previous ideas serve to explain Díaz Covarrubias and Bulnes’s often contradictory opinions on the various populations—or races—they encountered along their way. When it came to what they called “Aboriginals,” Díaz Covarrubias had an ambiguous stand. On the one hand, he suggested a kind of inherent malfunctioning with them, when he wishfully predicted that “science w[ould] one day explain the physiological causes that determine the degree of [im]perfection of each race…. None of the aboriginal peoples of the Americas have...learned anything of the civilization of their oppressors.”

On the other hand, he believed that through scientific education, in the long term, and adequate immigration policies, in the short term, they could be integrated into “civilization.” For the case of Mexico, he favoured the arrival of “laborious immigrants from Piamonte, from France, from Southern Germany and Spain,” as well as Japanese. All could serve as “healthy examples” for “Aboriginals” to follow and the Europeans could hopefully even “mix” with the locals so that future generations could inherit the qualities of the most “rational and civilized” part of the equation. This mixture could also serve to create a supposedly more homogenous “Mexican race” or Mestizo as the alleged racial heterogeneity present in the country was viewed as an obstacle to progress and a potential source of conflict. While in this example, the Spanish served as a positive influence, in other parts of his text, Díaz Covarrubias blamed them, due to their colonial “authoritarian zeal and religious fanaticism,” for the backwardness of the Mexican aboriginals. On the one hand, as part of their efforts to build upon the idea of a Mexican independent and progressive nation, the Mexican scientists associated Spanish colonialism with religiosity and authoritarianism and situated these values in opposition to their efforts to construct a modern nation based on rational

174 Covarrubias, 151-152.

175 Covarrubias, 78-79.

176 More on Mexican mestizaje in the next chapter.
scientific progress and education. On the other hand, they could not completely deny the affiliation with Spain because, after all, it was through the Spanish colonialism that Mexico had been supposedly launched along the path of the much-praised “Western civilization.” This ambivalent attitude was also present when addressing the white population of the United States, who Díaz Covarrubias admired for their prosperity and rapid progress, but also disdained for their overly mechanized routines and lack of refinement and taste. The other two races that merited contempt from both Díaz Covarrubias and Bulnes were the “filthy” and “miserable” Blacks as well as the Chinese, defined as stationary, sly, distrustful, and greedy. In contrast, Japanese were defined as courteous, hard-working, obedient, and progressive. Díaz Covarrubias constantly praised the Japanese embracement of Western scientific progress, which in a way was something he desired for Mexico. The differentiation made between the Chinese and Japanese and the association with the latter’s impetus for progress would be a recurrent trope used by the Mexican elites examined in subsequent chapters.

The racialized hierarchies mentioned above often coexisted with other constructed asymmetries related to the notions of class and gender. While Díaz Covarrubias saw in the expansion of equal rights a sign of progress, he spoke of women, the “poor,” and of racialized inferiors with condescending paternalism at best. In effect, he often referred to anecdotes where he would protect women from harm and was shocked and highly critical of those independent enough to feel they could travel on their own. The “poor,” on their part, had a space in his national imaginary as long as they were obedient, hard working, and subservient to the elites’ designs. These constructed hierarchies found themselves naturalized and emphasized with the railways’ and steamers’ division into classes. The first class travelers had privileged services and separate spaces, which made equal interaction with the steerage passengers difficult, even if attempted. Only once did Díaz Covarrubias mention an effort to engage in a conversation with
someone he considered inferior, but his condescension—met with justified annoyance on the part of his interlocutor—impeded any possible dialogue. For the most part, his interactions with the “lower classes” were limited to a sort of voyeurism, where he and his companions amused themselves by peeking into the steerage compartments and by lucubrating about their “miserable” lives.

In sum, the experiences of the Mexican scientists who traversed the Pacific in 1874 in order to observe and measure the transit of Venus were framed by the complex interrelation of notions such as imperialism, nation-making, science, urbanization, class, race, and gender. The exchanges between Mexican and Asian ports that we will revisit in subsequent chapters will be shaped by similar—although dynamic—ideas, concerns, and tropes as the ones discussed in regard to this pioneering experience.

Overall, the Mexican Astronomical Commission’s journey around the world succeeded in its scientific and political objectives, enhancing the prestige of the government of president Lerdo de Tejada. Time would eventually show, however, that Lerdo would need much more than the help of Venus to remain in power. Two years after the Commission’s journey, Lerdo de Tejada was living in exile in New York, as in December, 1876, a military coup led by General Porfirio Díaz Mori had ousted him from the presidency. The repercussions for Mexican transpacific relations of this change of power are the subject of the next chapter.
On the morning of October 6, 1884, José Fernández, Mexican Foreign Minister, received an urgent note in his Mexico City office. It stated that “the [British] Governor of Hong Kong [was] not willing to allow [Chinese labourers] to emigrate to this Republic.” The signers were Salvador Malo, Guillermo Vogel and Luis Larraza, owners of the Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico (CMNP), with whom the Mexican government had recently signed a contract to “establish maritime routes between Mexico and Asia” in order to bring “Asian workers and European immigrants.” The company’s inaugural transpacific steamer had arrived in Hong Kong a few days earlier and was ready to depart for Mexico. Rather than do so without their desired cargo, the owners requested the minister’s immediate intervention to solve the conundrum.

The note could not have arrived at a more delicate time. At that precise moment, the Mexican Senate and the British Parliament were examining the Preliminary Agreement for the renewal of bilateral relations, broken off since 1862 at the height of strain between Mexico and Europe over the French intervention. The Secretary was conscious that a faux pas could compromise negotiations at a time when the Mexican government was particularly eager to re-establish diplomatic ties. The presidential succession was but three months away and those

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177 Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (AHGE-SRE), 44-6-35, 1.
178 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 102-103.
179 As mentioned in the previous chapter, the French invaded Mexico in 1862. With the support of a coalition of local conservatives, they installed Maximilian of Habsburg as emperor of Mexico. The liberal government of president Benito Juárez had to flee Mexico City and govern from the north until its army defeated the French-Mexican conservative coalition in the summer of 1867. Juárez broke relations with all European countries that recognized Maximilian’s government as legitimate, including England. Official bilateral relations had not renewed since then. On the subject, see Konrad Ratz, Tras las huellas de un desconocido: nuevos datos y aspectos de Maximiliano de Habsburgo (Mexico City: Conaculta/Siglo XXI, 2008); Josefina Zoraida Vázquez et al., Interpretaciones del periodo de Reforma y Segundo Imperio (Mexico City: Patria, 2007).
involved in the transition wanted to gain foreign credibility and financial support for their modernizing projects.  

In their respective offices in London and Washington, the Mexican representatives Ignacio Mariscal and Matías Romero found themselves quickly involved in the matter. Mexico had no diplomatic relations with China, so the only way to have direct contact with its officials was through its representatives in London and Washington, Marquis Tseng Chi-tse and Cheng Tsao Ju respectively. Mariscal also spoke to the Early of Derby, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies. Although everyone replied courteously, no immediate action was taken.

Mount Lebanon, on her part, had had fine weather throughout her 20-day crossing from Australian waters to Hong Kong. The 1555-ton iron steamer had been built in the Glasgow yards of A. Stephen & Sons three years earlier and she was now the CMNP’s first and only vessel, chartered to another British company, Smith & Service. For weeks, the company had advertised in The China Mail—Hong Kong’s most prominent English newspaper—that it would “run steamers monthly… from Hong Kong to Yokohama and Honolulu; thence to Mazatlan (direct), and from Mazatlan to San Blas, and Manzanillo.” However, when they had tried to embark Chinese labourers for Mexico, the British Governor of Hong Kong refused to allow them depart to a country that had no relations with either England or China.

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180 See Further Correspondence respecting the Renewal of Diplomatic Relations with Mexico (London: Foreign Office, 1885), 1-50.


182 The China Mail, October 3, 1884, 4-5.

183 Lloyd’s Register of British and Foreign Shipping (London: Wyman and Sons, 1881), MOU.

184 The China Mail, October 3, 1884, 5.

185 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 1.
Months of negotiations among Mexican, British and Chinese diplomats and businessmen ensued. Their analysis, as we will see, reveals the numerous variables involved in the reconfiguration of maritime relations in the Pacific after the introduction of steam technologies and the participation that Mexican interests had in this process. The case’s contextualization will also expose the importance that Asian immigration played in the Porfirian economic and philosophic programme and its close relation to the notions of race, nation, and material progress.

3.1 Porfirian Modernization in Mexico: Economic Development, Race and the Need for Immigration

The year of 1876 marked the beginning of the longest presidency ever held by a single person in the history of Mexico. The period is known in Mexican historiography as the Porfiriato, in allusion to General Porfirio Díaz Mori, who governed the country until 1911, with the exception of a four-year lapse between 1880 and 1884 when his long-time friend and collaborator, General Manuel González, ruled. Díaz initiated his political and military career as a close associate of president Benito Juárez and his liberal project. He was one of the successful generals who had fought against the French intervention and, as such, he was well-known and had the support of a

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186 The Porfiriato has been the subject of multiple analyses. In order to get introduced to the main historiographical debates on the subject see chapter one in Paul Garner, *Porfirio Díaz* (London: Pearson, 2001), 1-17, and chapter one in Mauricio Tenorio Trillo and Aurora Gómez Galvarriato, *El Porfiriato* (Mexico City: CIDE/FCE, 2006), 23-95.

187 Most researchers have treated the presidency of general Manuel González as part of the Porfiriato, due to his close connections to Díaz—Díaz even formed part of González Cabinet as minister for Development and President of the Supreme Court which, according the Constitution, gave him the presidential succession. Yet Paul Garner and other researchers have been cautious to suggest that González was merely a puppet of Díaz. Garner, 90-94. For the purpose of this chapter, it makes sense to treat González’s presidency as part of the Porfiriato because there were no major disruptions when it came to the policies discussed here.
large sector of war veterans. He contended against Juárez and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada in the 1870 presidential elections. He lost to both, but disqualified the process. Alluding fraud, he initiated an armed revolt that was ultimately suppressed by Juarista forces. Juárez won the elections, but died in 1872, leaving Lerdo de Tejada, next in the line of succession, in the presidency. Lerdo was accused of manipulating various state elections in order to place his close associates in power. The opposition against him grew, even within the liberal ranks, when he announced his candidacy to re-election in 1876. Alluding to the violation of the Constitutional principle of popular sovereignty and the concentration of illegal powers (charges of which Díaz would eventually be accused as well), Díaz initiated a new armed revolt against Lerdo’s re-election, which was ultimately successful. He legitimized his access to the presidential post by calling elections, which he won, at the beginning of 1877.

Porfirio Díaz’s governments managed to achieve the first period of sustained macro-economic growth in the country’s history—although at the expense of political liberties and social equality—which was a product of domestic and global conditions. During its first half-century of independent life, Mexico had experienced a continuous recession due to a combination of civil war, foreign invasions, lack of infrastructure and markets, failure of domestic policies, as well as a decline in mining, a pillar of the country’s economy. This situation took a remarkable turn in the last decades of the century, particularly after the 1880s, when the macroeconomic performance of Mexico improved markedly, to the point that, in 1896,

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188 See Chapter Two for more information on the French Intervention.

189 On Díaz’s early political career, his confrontations with Juárez and Lerdo and his arrival to the presidency see Garner, 48-67.

the country obtained its first surplus ever.\textsuperscript{191} On the one hand, the Mexican macroeconomic growth was part of a worldwide economic expansion related to industrialization. In effect, between 1853 and 1872, world trade grew at an unprecedented rate of 4.3\% per annum and then at a still outstanding annual rate of 3\% between 1872 and 1913.\textsuperscript{192} Within this context, Latin American economies became incorporated into global markets as suppliers of raw materials and/or agricultural commodities and as importers of foreign capital, technology, and, in some cases, labour.\textsuperscript{193} On the other hand, in the domestic sphere, the regime’s longevity, stability, centralized power, and strong arm allowed for what its predecessors had been unable to guarantee: the continuity of federal policies. Among those that permitted such outstanding macroeconomic growth were the expansion in domestic and overseas trade, especially in mining and later in oil; the enlargement and diversification of industrial production, mainly in iron, steel, textiles, paper, glass, tobacco, and beer; the expansion of commercial agriculture, especially that of henequen; and an increase in infrastructure, particularly related to transportation.\textsuperscript{194}

The export sector became the “engine of growth” of the Porfirian economy. While the government tried to promote a variety of agricultural and industrial products, such as those mentioned above, metals—and silver in particular—remained the most valuable export commodity throughout the Porfiriato.\textsuperscript{195} As stated in Chapter One, silver had been central to the

\textsuperscript{191} Garner, 171.


\textsuperscript{193} See Glade, 1-56.

\textsuperscript{194} Garner, 173-174.

\textsuperscript{195} Garner, 180-181.
colonial economy, but since the Mexican war of independence, its production had plummeted, mainly due to the loss of capital investment. But the Porfirian elites, both at a federal and state level, implemented a series of measures in order to stimulate the production of minerals. Amongst these were the exemption and/or decrease in taxes to mining companies and their production supplies, the proliferation of mining concessions to foreigners, the decline on export duties and the reduction of transportation costs inside the country. Additionally, various mining chambers emerged, which, together with new government-sponsored associations, unified to lobby in favour of the industry holders. As a consequence, numerous mining centres flourished, particularly in the north and silver exports increased from 607,000 kilograms in 1877-8 to 2.3 million kilograms by the end of the Porfiriato in 1910-11. By then, silver accounted for a third of Mexico’s exports.

In order to transport these export commodities, the country expanded its infrastructure. For that purpose, the government resorted to steam technologies, particularly that of railroads and, to a lesser extent, steamships. Throughout his presidency, Díaz devoted the largest proportion of public investment to the construction of railroads. As a consequence, by the time he left office in 1911, Mexico had close to 20,000 kilometres of track, making it, after

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198 See the map “Mining centres and railroads, 1880-1910” in Velasco, 256-257. For a study of one such region during the Porfiriato, see William E. French, *A peaceful and working people: manners, morals, and class formation in northern Mexico* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico, 1996).

199 Glade, 16.

Argentina, the second largest national railway system in Latin America.\textsuperscript{201} In contrast, when Díaz took the presidency, the country had only 660 kilometres of track, with only one complete line between Mexico City and Veracruz, owned by the British.\textsuperscript{202} Like the rest of the world, with the exception of England, Mexico was unable to start building a railroad system with its own resources.\textsuperscript{203} After a series of concessions to Mexican state governments proved a failure,\textsuperscript{204} Díaz’s administration resorted to foreign capital. It first granted subsidies in cash, paying an average of 9,500 pesos per kilometre built.\textsuperscript{205} Other strategies included land grants, the exemption from import duties on construction materials, and the hiring of foreign contractors.\textsuperscript{206} By the time the \textit{Mount Lebanon} controversy erupted in 1884, Mexico had just inaugurated its second railroad line, linking Mexico City with Ciudad Juárez, on the border with Texas—built with U.S. capital. The country now claimed 4,658 kilometres of new track.\textsuperscript{207}


\textsuperscript{203} Paolo Riguzzi, “Propiedad, propietarios y recursos nacionales en los ferrocarriles mexicanos, 1870-1905,” in \textit{Memorias del Tercer Encuentro de Investigadores del Ferrocarril} (Puebla: Museo Nacional de los Ferrocarriles, 1996), 211.

\textsuperscript{204} The first railroad concession was granted by the Mexican government in 1837. Between 1850 and 1876, it granted some 50 more concessions, out of which 93% produced no results. The first line, linking Mexico City with Veracruz, was finally finished in 1873. Riguzzi, “Los caminos…” 55. To understand the reasons behind these failures see pages 31-97.

\textsuperscript{205} If one excludes the large subsidy of 44 million for the 309 kilometres of the Tehuantepec railroad, then the average reduces to 6,500 pesos per kilometre built. Riguzzi, “Los caminos…” 74.


Just like in the case of railroads, the Mexican government was also unable to sponsor the manufacturing of its own steam fleet. Times had changed. During the colonial era, ships were fabricated in New Spain and sailed regularly to Europe and Asia. Yet, in the transition from sail to steam technologies—and from colonial to independent life—Mexico lost its capacity to build large ships. Steam was a costly new technology that the Mexican yards did not know much about. Additionally, most of its international connections were controlled by foreigners. The first steamers arrived in the Gulf of Mexico at the beginning of the 1840s and to the Pacific coast less than a decade later. They all did so without government intervention. Yet, with the 1867 grant to Alexander and Sons for a route linking New York with Veracruz and Sisal, in Yucatan, the government started regulating the sector through a policy of

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208 According to *El Economista Mexicano*, the first steamer entirely built in Mexico dates from the early twentieth century and was assembled in Frontera, a port in the Gulf of Mexico, by the U.S.-owned “The Tabasco, Chiapas Trading and Transportation Company.” It was a small vessel destined to river navigation. Some years earlier, a yard was established in Veracruz and later moved to Campeche, but workers there could only repair, not fabricate steamers. “Nuestra construcción naviera,” *El Economista Mexicano* XXXIV (April-Sept., 1902), 451. In the Pacific, prominent businessman Joaquín Redo—who already operated a small maritime company, amongst other businesses—obtained a concession to open a yard in Mazatlán in 1888, in order to repair Mexican war vessels, steam engines and boilers. The yard, called *Arsenal del Pacífico*, opened instead in Guaymas, in 1891, but there is no evidence that entire steamers were ever fabricated there. Miguel Ángel Avilés, “A todo vapor: mechanization in Porfirian Mexico. Steam power and Machine Building, 1862-1906” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2010), 146-147. See the entire work for a pioneering study of steam technologies in Mexico, particularly in Sinaloa.


210 Some of the pioneer companies were the Hamburger American, the Royal West India Mail Steam Packet, and the British Royal Mail. On the subject see Mario Trujillo Bolio, *El Golfo de México en la centurión decimonónica. Entornos geográficos, formación portuaria y configuración marítima* (Mexico: Porrúa/CIESAS/Cámara de Diputados LIX Legislatura, 2005).

211 As mentioned in earlier chapters, the PMSS vessels were the first to touch Mexican ports regularly on their way from Panama to San Francisco, but there were also those from the Nicaragua Line, which docked at Mazatlán and Acapulco and those from the Colorado Steam Navigation Company, stopping in various places of the Gulf of California. Karina Busto Ibarra, “El espacio del Pacífico mexicano: puertos, rutas, navegación y redes comerciales, 1848-1927” (PhD diss., El Colegio de México, 2008), 55.

212 The contract stipulated that the company would receive 2,000 pesos per trip as well as up to 7,000 pesos of tax exemptions per year as long as its vessels made at least 18 trips per year to Veracruz and Sisal. Roberto García
subventions. In the Pacific, the first companies to be subsidized were the Pacific Mail (PMSS) and the Panama Railroad Co. in 1872, followed by the Pacific Steamship Co. in 1875, the California and Mexico Steamship Co., and the Accelerated of the Gulf of Cortes in 1877. All were owned by U.S. investors and circulated along the San Francisco-Panama axis.

Both the resurgence of mining and the construction of infrastructure required enormous amounts of foreign capital. Fortunately for Díaz, money was abundant amongst industrialized business circles in the United States and Europe. The problem was the country’s political isolation from the international community. As Díaz assumed power by a coup d’état, the government of Rutherford Hayes refused to recognize it. Nevertheless even after Díaz won the 1877 elections, Hayes continued this posture, hoping to obtain more concessions in exchange for recognition. With regard to Europe, the Mexican government had broken all ties since the last French invasion, because Europeans had recognized the monarchical government of Maximilian of Habsburg that had followed it. By 1876, only Spain and Belgium had resumed ties. In this context, Porfrian diplomacy made it a priority to normalize

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213 According to the contract, the PMSS would receive 2,500 pesos per month and several tax exemptions if its steamers stopped twice a month in Acapulco, Manzanillo, Mazatlan, and San Blas (Mexican Line) and in San Benito, Tonalá, Salina Cruz and Puerto Ángel (Central American Line). Busto, 65. The Panama Railroad Co., on its part, would receive 27,500 pesos per year for twelve trips covering Mexican southern ports, as well as various tax exemptions. Nevertheless, this contract was never effective. García Benavides, 176.

214 Busto, 60, 63.

215 There were foreign businessmen who invested in Mexico, even though their country held no bilateral relations. Yet, foreign investment notably increased after Mexico started diplomatic ties with the diverse countries.


217 Duarte, 20; Silvio Zavala, Apuntes de historia nacional, 1808-1974 (Mexico City: FCE, 1990), 120.

218 For the history of the relations between Spain and Mexico see Adriana Gutiérrez Hernández, “Juárez, las relaciones diplomáticas con España y los españoles en México,” Estudios de historia moderna y contemporánea de
relations with the industrialized world. In 1878 it finally obtained White House recognition. Two years later it resumed ties with France and then Germany. By 1884, when the Mount Lebanon controversy erupted, it was very close to finalizing a treaty with Great Britain, the only major economic power missing.

At the center of this wide economic programme were the principles of productivity and economic progress. These notions were put forward as the philosophical pillars that guided the Porfirian policies by a group of self-proclaimed “conservative-liberal” intellectuals (later known as the “Científicos”), composed by a younger generation of pragmatic liberals of which Francisco Bulnes—the youngest member of the Mexican Astronomical Commission—became a prominent figure. Influenced by the positivist notions divulged by Gabino Barreda and his disciples from the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, the “conservative-liberals” believed that just as with nature, society should also be studied and ruled by scientific principles, that is, laws that emanated directly from empirical observation. They also advocated the notion of progressive stages of thought that started with the theological or imaginary, then advanced to the metaphysical or abstract, and finally culminated with the scientific or positive. They saw the liberal Constitution of 1857 as having advanced Mexican politics from the

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219 Duarte, 20 and Garner, 177.

220 The term “conservative-liberals” was coined in May, 1878 in the newspaper La Libertad, edited by members of this new generation of intellectuals amongst whom was Justo Sierra, whose contributions will be discussed later in this chapter. Charles Hale, The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 35.

221 The term “Científicos” (Scientists) entered the Mexican political jargon in 1893. It was given to the group of deputies and high ranked officials linked to the notion of “scientific politics” discussed in this paragraph. During 1893, this group of politicians advocated for Constitutional reform in order to, among others, support the re-election of president Porfirio Díaz.

222 See Chapter Two.
theological—represented by monarchical and imperial forms of government—to the metaphysical, as it contained a series of abstract principles, such as the long list of universal individual rights and principles. Yet they regarded those rights as exaggerated, arbitrary and based more on faith in humanity rather than on experience and science. It was thus time to move the political thought a stage forward by creating laws that emanated from the observable needs of the Mexican society. After decades of anarchy, wars, and subsequent generalized poverty, what the country most needed, according to them, was not abstract principles but material wealth. “We are tired of principles that do not represent the economic conscience of society,” synthesized Bulnes. Instead he advocated for a government “that develops the public wealth as quickly as possible.”\textsuperscript{223} Such a government should be obviously led by those sectors of society that were the most productive, that is, the “industrialists,”\textsuperscript{224} those that had capital and made it multiply through commercial, industrial, and agricultural ventures; those that instead of armed revolutions, supposedly advocated for peace so that they could work and produce more. Contrary to the liberal principles of the Juárez generation, the Bulnes generation did not appeal to the principle of private property in order to create a nation of small holders but rather to create a strong elite that could generate peace, order, and material progress, an elite of which, of course, the conservative-liberals themselves formed part.

While most elites agreed on the importance of the industrialists as leading social forces, some regretted that the large majority of the Mexican population, defined in positivist racialized terms, was composed of Indians who were not seen as the industrialist prototype. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the conservative-liberal Mexican elites supported the much-spread idea


\textsuperscript{224} The term was coined by French positivist Henri de Saint-Simon and was sometimes used within Mexican positivist circles.
within global scientific discussions of a human population composed by different races ordered hierarchically, where those considered superior shared the associated values of civilization, scientific rationality, and material progress. Yet the Mexicans differed from most of their European counterparts who advocated the premise of fixed races, that is, the idea that positive or negative traits were biologically transmitted to the new generations and that the more races mixed, the more degenerated their members would become. Instead, Mexicans favoured the possibility of racial improvement if conditions were favourable. Within this framework, the so-called Indians occupied an ambivalent place. Most elites agreed upon their alleged current inferiority, explained by some—such as astronomer Díaz Covarrubias, discussed in the last chapter—as the product of three centuries of colonial oppression characterized by religious zeal. Yet with time, the idea grew within Porfirian intellectual circles—interested in reconciling the country’s turbulent past in order to create a unified national identity and generate the conditions for peace and material progress—to vindicate both, the European and Indian pasts. They did so by fusing both into what was supposed to be the epitome of the Mexican nationality, the Mestizo race, formed by the synthesis of Spanish and Indians. Drawing on the social Darwinian principle of “survival of the fittest” and the positivist notion of successive stages leading towards progress, intellectuals championed by Vicente Riva Palacio, minister of Development in Díaz’s first term, envisioned each of the Mexican historical stages as a necessary step towards its inevitable culmination, the liberal republic of Mexico, with its unique racial composition, product of its specific historical circumstances but that could legitimately claim an equal status amongst the concert of nations. This notion was first elaborated in an extensive way in the largest historical synthesis ever made up to then, *Mexico a través de los siglos* (Mexico throughout the Centuries). The project, coordinated by Riva Palacio himself—and which began to be published a year before the Mount Lebanon controversy erupted—consisted of five
different tomes, each devoted to a different historical period starting with the “History of Antiquity and Conquest,” followed by the “History of the Viceroyalty,” the “War of Independence,” “Independent Mexico,” and “The [Liberal] Reform,” which ended in 1867, the year of the defeat of the French monarchist intervention. The reasoning defended in this work was not without its contradictions as the Spanish “white” part of the equation was valorized more and while the intellectuals idealized the pre-Hispanic Indian, they often dismissed the present Indian, due to its alleged incapacity for material progress, measured in positivist terms. Yet they tended to coincide in the possibility of its “redemption.”

Porfirian elites saw two main conditions that would contribute to the improvement of the Indigenous race: (scientific) education and immigration. Many thought that the former should be made free and accessible to the general population so that they learned the principles for contributing to the improvement of the nation. The latter implied that by bringing the supposedly most productive of races, the new arrivals could make vacant lands work, teach Indians by becoming an example for them to follow and, for the case of Europeans, “mix” with the Indians in order to accelerate the Mestizaje process. Justo Sierra, a prominent member of the generation of “conservative-liberals” referred to earlier, became one of the main advocates of both measures. From his post in the Congress, in the early 1880s, he launched an initiative for a Constitutional amendment that declared primary school to be state-funded, obligatory, and

free for all Mexicans. The idea was not new as since the 1867 reform education—discussed in the last chapter—the law provided for a state-controlled, publicly funded, free for “the poor” primary education in Mexico City. Yet the measure had not been adequately enforced and it was only accessible for those living in the capital. Sierra’s proposal became law in 1888. He also suggested the creation of a public National University founded on scientific principles in 1881. This took longer to materialize and did not become a reality until 1910. With regards to immigration, Sierra, along with many other politicians and journalists at the time, advocated for the arrival of white European immigrants “so as to obtain a cross with the indigenous race, for only European blood can keep the level of civilization... from sinking, which would mean regression, not evolution.” Francisco Bulnes, the youngest member of the Mexican Astronomical Commission discussed in the previous chapter, also supported the idea of the superiority of Europeans and, therefore, the need to encourage their immigration to Mexico. In effect, in his 1899 book, The Future of the Latin American Nations, he suggested a racial division of humanity into three groups, based on each one’s dietary traditions: the wheat, the corn, and the rice eaters. Supposedly basing himself in recent scientific studies, he argued that the wheat diet was richer in nutritional value, which explained the moral and intellectual

226 Hale, 225-231.

227 Justo Sierra, Evolución política del pueblo mexicano (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1985), xv. This work, originally published in 1902, synthesizes Sierra’s view on the historical evolution of the Mexican peoples in a similar vein to that of México a través de los siglos.

superiority of Europeans.\textsuperscript{229} Throughout the Porfiriato discussions on the best “races” that should immigrate to Mexico proliferated in Mexican newspapers.\textsuperscript{230}

While Mexican Porfirian elites idealized European immigration, in practical terms this settlement presented numerous inconveniences. For instance, in 1877, then Development Secretary Vicente Riva Palacio, in his report to the Congress, recognized that “the government’s lack of funds and the nation’s lack of a transportation network” hampered European immigration to Mexico. “Europeans would not accept the lifestyle of the Mexican labourer… [and] wished to settle near population centres, where they are not needed.”\textsuperscript{231} Two years earlier, Matías Romero, then Senator for the state of Chiapas, had preceded him in these views. Speaking from his own experience while trying to grow coffee for export in his plantation near the Guatemalan border, he concluded that “where we most urgently need immigrants is on our coasts, both because they are the least populated and because they produce the agricultural products which bring the best prices abroad […] Also because being so close to the sea it is easier to export without paying high charter fees.” Since both Europeans and Indians refused to work under the harsh coastal conditions, “the only colonists who could establish themselves or work there are Asians, coming from climates similar to ours, primarily China.”\textsuperscript{232}

\textsuperscript{229} Francisco Bulnes, \textit{El porvenir de las naciones latinoamericanas ante las recientes conquistas de Europa y Norteamérica. Estructura y evolución de un continente} (Mexico City: El pensamiento vivo de América, 1899).

\textsuperscript{230} On the subject see Moisés González Navarro, \textit{Los extranjeros en México y los mexicanos en el extranjero, 1821-1970} (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1993) and all other works by him cited in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{231} Cited in Kenneth Cott, “Mexican Diplomacy and the Chinese Issue, 1876-1910,” \textit{The Hispanic American Historical Review} 67, no. 1 (February 1987): 64.

3.2 Mexican Elite Views on Chinese Immigration

Chinese presence in what we know today as Mexico has long-standing roots, dating at least as far back as the sixteenth century. In effect, as mentioned in Chapter One, Chinese peoples and commodities arrived in Acapulco with the Manila Galleons. Many were crewmen who came and went with the ships but there were also some who settled in New Spanish territories. By the early seventeenth century there are registers of groups of Chinese living in Acapulco and nearby ports, in mining centers close to Tepic and Zacatecas, and in Mexico City. Nevertheless, the largest settlement in colonial New Spain around this time was by far that of Manila, in the Philippines, where some 20,000 Chinese lived.

Despite the frequent contacts and settlements, the Spanish colonial records tended to portray Chinese as aliens and often assigned them negative stereotypes. One of the earliest examples is that of the Augustinian bishop of Chiapas, Juan González de Mendoza, who, in a 1585 history treatise, described Chinese as lacking “the clear light of the true Christian religion without which the most subtle and delicate understandings get lost.” Similarly, in his *Historia de las guerras civiles de la China y de la conquista de aquel dilatado Imperio por el Tártaro*, Archbishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, who briefly served as New Spanish viceroy in 1642, found an explanation for the Tartar conquest of Chinese territories in the latter’s...

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“coward,” “effeminate,” and “servile” personality. Around the same period, in 1635, a group of Spanish barbers from Mexico City complained about their Chinese peers, accusing them of taking clients away from them. They petitioned the authorities to remove them to the outskirts so that they would not have to face what they considered as illegitimate competition from outsiders.

After independence, some of the prejudices against Chinese prevailed and often made their way to the press. One of the earliest documented examples dates from the 1870s, when a widespread debate concerning the viability of Chinese immigration to Mexico arose, following the arrival of a large group in Veracruz from Havana in October 1871. Cuba, then still a Spanish colony, was one of the American territories where Chinese contract labourers had had a widespread presence since the mid-century. In effect, in the context of a booming sugar industry, the pillar of the island’s economy, Spanish planters brought Chinese farmers in order to supplement their African slave labour, whose trade was then on the verge of extinction.

Between 1847 and 1874, the years that the so-called coolie trade officially existed, 347 vessels brought some 125,000 male contract workers to Cuba. While, in theory, they traveled according to their free will with a signed contract that stipulated a payment in exchange for their work, in reality many were forced or misled with false promises and lived in slave-like conditions.

On the other hand, there were many who, after fulfilling their contracts and

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236 Gómez, 19-20.

237 Hu-DeHart, “Mexico,” 256.

238 Cuba and Brazil were the two last American territories to abolish slavery in the 1880s. Walton Look Lai, “The Caribbean,” in The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas, 248.

239 The term most probably came from an Indian term meaning servant and then was used to refer to the Chinese labourers that traveled abroad with a fixed three to eight-year contract. Gómez, 29.
joining their savings with those of friends and family, were able to become prosperous independent businessmen. The contingent that left Cuba for Mexico in 1871 was part of this trend. They had to depart after the Spanish authorities enacted a Royal Order that suspended Chinese immigration to the island and expelled those whose contracts had expired. This was done in the context of a Cuban insurrection seeking independence which was gaining increasing support from the local Chinese population.  

After their arrival in Veracruz, on October 12, 1871, the federal government’s Diario Oficial summoned the media to reflect upon the repercussions of attracting the 20 to 30,000 Chinese who could be expelled from Cuba. Without taking into consideration that most of the new arrivals were retail businessmen, the Diario suggested that they could contribute to boosting the Mexican economy by providing cheap, hardworking and submissive labour for those areas with harsh geographic conditions as well as for the construction of the railroads. This opinion was shared, for instance, by the newspaper El Federalista. In an article entitled “The Chinese Immigration”, its director, Alfredo Bablot, distinguished three types of immigrants: the capitalist, the hombre de genio (creative genius) and the labourer. While the first two had enough material and intellectual talent to start successful economic ventures, Bablot thought they would merely increase their own individual profits without much regard for the national interests. The latter category—of which Chinese formed part according to him—on the other hand, was composed by simpleminded, hardworking, and submissive individuals who,  

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240 They normally signed (or were forced to) eight-year contracts which stipulated a one-peso weekly salary. The workers were supposed to be provided with sufficient food, clothing, medical services, housing, and one free day per week, plus three days off during New Year. They normally received between eight and fourteen pesos at time of departure to pay for their passages. These were owed to their bosses and paid by deductions from their salaries at the rate of one peso per month. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as Huagong (Laborers) and Huashang (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean,” in ed. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 85.  

241 Gómez, 44-45.  

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therefore, could be manipulated to “serve as an instrument for the material exploitation of any of
the industries [that create] public wealth.”\textsuperscript{242} The opposition diary, \textit{El Siglo XIX}, had a rather
different perspective. The article by federal deputy Jesús Castañeda summarized the main
objections given by all those who opposed Chinese immigration in the press. He claimed that
Chinese were

\textit{“the least civilized people: used to misery and dominated by greed, they deny their body
of the advantages of a comfortable and hygienic life...their favourite vices [are] gaming
and intoxication... their small and unfurnished rooms accommodate a considerable number
of guests of both sexes, turning those smoky and greasy houses into disgusting pigsties,
where all that can be repugnant in their unbridled customs nest...”}\textsuperscript{243}

What both seemingly opposing perspectives shared was a view of Chinese as an external “low-
class” element. No one in the press ever discussed their integration into society in different
terms nor highlighted the ancestral roots that linked Chinese peoples with Mexico.

Within Porfirian government circles, the pioneer figure who suggested the immigration
of Chinese to Mexico was Matías Romero. He held different posts in the Liberal
administrations of Juárez, Lerdo, Díaz, and González and became the Mexican representative in
Washington in 1882,\textsuperscript{244} the year that the United States implemented the so-called Chinese
Exclusion Act, which barred the legal immigration of Chinese male labourers for a period of 10
years.\textsuperscript{245} Romero saw an opportunity in attracting to Mexico all those labourers who would be

\textsuperscript{242} Gómez, 48; \textit{El Federalista}, October 24 & 31, 1871.

\textsuperscript{243} Gómez, 46; \textit{El siglo XIX}, October 24, 1871.

\textsuperscript{244} Romero was the Mexican representative in Washington between 1859-1867, 1882-1892 and 1893-1898. “Matías
Romero (1837-1898),” in \textit{Instituto Matías Romero, XXV Aniversario} (Mexico: SRE, 1999), 107-40. To get
acquainted with his central role in promoting Chinese immigration to Mexico see his personal archive in the library
of Instituto Mora, particularly the years between 1890 and 1898. See also files L-E-1983, L-E-1984, L-E-1985, and

\textsuperscript{245} The restrictions on Chinese immigration to the United States were extended in 1892 and 1904 and it was not
until 1943 that the bar was entirely lifted. Robert Romero Chao, \textit{The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940} (Tucson: The
University of Arizona Press, 2010), 1.
refused entrance into the United States because he interpreted the mid-nineteenth century *coolie* experience in Cuba, Peru and California in a positive (and positivist) light. For him, it represented an example for Mexico because the advanced agricultural skills possessed by many Chinese workers, their adaptability to harsh nature and labour conditions, their willingness to accept low wages and to work hard on the railroads and steamers had helped all those regions attain economic development quickly.

Romero’s views were disputed by various intellectuals and diplomats. For instance, as seen in Chapter Two, after having visited China, astronomer Díaz Covarrubias thought of its inhabitants as “essentially stationary,” as well as “sly, distrustful, and full of instinctive aversion towards everything but their motherland. They perform the work just for the love of profit... [and] execute labour... like a machine, without becoming fond of it ... [and] waiting for the moment to enjoy their profits back in their homeland...”

The renowned Mexican historian, geographer and jurist, Manuel Orozco y Berra, expressed a similar opinion when addressing the issue of attracting to Mexico those Chinese expelled from the United States:

“...opening the doors...to the left over elements, expelled from other nations, [...would imply] receiving the least enlightened people, and receive them as they are: with all their vices, with all their ignorance, with all their inconveniences. The determining reasons for the Chinese expulsion [from the U.S.]... are well-known: their dominating vices, their shrewd, indolent and distrustful character, their repulsion to good, their hate to everything that is not from their country, their sordid greed, and many other incompetences that might be even unknown to our race.”

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247 AHGE-SRE, AEMEUA, Leg. 67, exp. 22, 1879-81, 51-59.
The Mexican consuls in San Diego and San Francisco, who had closely followed the debate on the Chinese Exclusion Act in California, where the anti-Chinese rhetoric was the most virulent, were also unsupportive of Romero’s idea to bring them to Mexico.248

In the middle ground of this debate were those, such as Manuel Zapata Vera, author of an 1882 report on the Chinese experiences in the American continent, who saw Chinese as a “necessary evil.” Despite their supposedly multiple vices, Zapata acknowledged that Mexico needed them to make tropical lands productive. But in order to avoid “the problems [of the] nations that opened their doors [to Chinese] indiscriminately,” he proposed a “discrete and prudent system” consisting of two simple steps: “1) choose the more adequate zones, that is, those that need more foreign hands, and 2) at first limit the numbers of immigrants and…examine the results, without prejudices and with the purpose of taking advantage of this new element if it proves to be useful for the development of our agriculture.”249 In 1884, this pragmatic view seemed to have prevailed within the Mexican administration when the federal government granted its first concession to the CMNP in order to bring Chinese labourers to Mexico.250

248 See AHGE-SRE, file 15-2-69.

249 Parts of the report are reproduced in Manuel Zapata Vera, “Chinese Immigration to Mexico,” El Economista Mexicano 1 (Feb.-July, 1886): 139-140.

3.3 The Controversial Ship

Unable to fabricate its own steam fleet at home, the Mexican government resorted to high subsidies as a means of regulating and expanding the country’s international maritime connections once steamers began to be the norm. As seen above, the government started awarding subventions to foreign companies as early as 1867. After Porfirio Díaz and his team got to power, they began financing Mexican firms in order to create a national merchant navy moved by steam. In effect, in 1882 the federal government granted its first two concessions to Mexican companies traveling abroad in the Gulf of Mexico: the *Trasatlántica Mexicana* and the *Mexicana Continental*. While until then the government had generally accorded foreign companies around 2,000 pesos per round trip, the former was to receive ten times more for its transatlantic lines. The latter maintained the usual 2,000-peso subsidy for its New York-Havana-Progreso-Veracruz route.251

The Pacific was equally considered within this policy of maritime subventions. The *Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico* (CMNP) became its first beneficiary.252 The contract, signed in March, 1884, between the federal government and businessmen Salvador Malo, Guillermo Vogel and Luis Larraza, established that the CMNP would have two lines. The first would link various Mexican ports from Guaymas in the north to the Soconusco in the south, with the possibility of extending this route to the United States and Central America. There was no subvention granted to this line, only tax exemptions. The second would travel from a Mexican Pacific port—any of those between San Blas and Acapulco—to Yokohama, Hong Kong and Manila. Besides tax exemptions, the government would reimburse 19,000 pesos per round trip—or 18,000 if the vessel did not stop at Manila. The company would also receive 65

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251 García Benavides, 283.

252 García Benavides, 282-284 and Busto, 60.
pesos per European immigrant and 35 pesos per Asian labourer over seven years of age. Women could not exceed half of the total migrants brought. Each vessel was entitled to bring up to 1,000 passengers and the company would be fined if it did not bring at least 1,200 labourers every half-year. Operations had to start within 15 months of signing. While the contract did not specify the place where the labourers would work, the first destination for most would be the Tehuantepec railroad, of which Salvador Malo was a subcontractor. It is worth mentioning that, if successful, this line would be in direct competition with the PMSS as well as with various British and French steamers running between Yokohama and Hong Kong.

While there was no specification in the contract as to what the CMNP vessels were supposed to take to Asia in return for Chinese labourers, silver was thought to be the main exchange commodity. As stated in Chapter One, the use of Mexican silver coins was common in Asia. In 1874, after corroborating this while visiting Yokohama, Hong Kong and Indochina, astronomer Díaz Covarrubias suggested the inauguration of direct routes between Mexico and Asia in order to avoid San Francisco as an intermediary. This opinion was shared years later by both the Foreign Secretary and the Senior Development Official Manuel Fernández Leal—one of the five scientists that had traveled to Asia in 1874. In their view, inaugurating maritime and commercial relations with China and Japan was beneficial because Mexicans “could send pesos… before the governments of England, the United States and other empires managed to make other coins circulate.” This was particularly important “now that the [Mexican] coin value has diminished so much in European markets.” Regardless of the practicability of this

\[253\] AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 102-104.


\[255\] See Chapter Two for a detailed account of the scientists’ trip to Asia.
measure—after all, the value of the Mexican coin was then dictated in European stock markets—the discursive weight of silver as an exchange commodity with Asia certainly played an important role in transpacific voyages.

The owners of the CMNP inaugurated their transpacific service with the steamer Mount Lebanon. She landed on October 3, 1884 at dock 4c of the Hong Kong harbour.257 When the shipmaster asked for a passengers’ license in order to embark Chinese labourers for Mexico, the governor of Hong Kong, Lord Ferguson, immediately refused permission. Since 1855, the British authorities had enacted a series of laws in order to regulate the much chaotic, abusive, and highly profitable traffic of Chinese labourers within and outside of their territories. While mistreatment often continued, the laws served as a foundational framework that migrants, merchants, and authorities could turn to in order to solve disputes.258 Lord Ferguson argued that based on these laws he could not allow Chinese people to travel as slaves to a country—Mexico—that had no relations with China or England.259

The British authorities became more flexible after the Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Derby, received a letter from Theodor Schneider, a representative of the British firm Jardine, Matheson & Co., in his London office. It stated that the CMNP had requested the services of Jardine, Matheson & Co. in order to manage their business in Hong Kong. As the firm’s representative for the case, Schneider defended the interests of the CMNP using an argument that the British diplomats were not going to dismiss that easily: “I may

256 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-47, 1-2.

257 The China Mail, October 4, 1884, 2, 4.

258 For a study on the evolution of the laws as well as the abuses on Chinese labourers in the nineteenth century, see Persia Crawford Campbell, Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire (London: BiblioLife, 2009), 86-160. The original version dates from 1923.

259 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 1.
mention that the trade will be carried on in British owned vessels [from Smith & Service] & under the British Flag, and the opinion of the principal merchants is that the establishment of the line in question will largely benefit the Colony of Victoria, as it has been proved in all similar cases that a large trade has been the result of such emigration.”

To the request of the CMNP owners, the Mexican authorities also responded to Lord Ferguson’s refusal. On October 8, Ignacio Mariscal—the Mexican envoy to London who was negotiating the renewal of relations with Britain—explained personally to Lord Edmond Fitsmaurice, the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that the country’s liberal laws forbid slavery. Additionally, according to the contract, all Chinese labourers would travel on their free will and would be informed in their own language of the conditions of the agreement. Throughout the traverse, the company would provide all passengers with clean lodging and sufficient food. In order to supervise this, the government would appoint at least one inspector per trip. Lord Edmond Fitsmaurice agreed to submit the Mexican plea to the Earl of Derby. On October 31, the British replied that they would request the authorization of the Chinese government to send labourers to Mexico.

For the Chinese authorities, the troubles of Mount Lebanon were simply not a priority. Faced with a war with France over the control of Tonkin, the Emperor did not have the time to deal with a Mexican ship. It also did not want to compromise the security of its subjects,

260 The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 4-5.
261 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 103.
262 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 9.
263 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 21.
264 Since the beginning of the decade, China and France had engaged in military confrontations for the control of Tonkin (present northern Vietnam). During the fall of 1884 several battles were taking place and the Chinese were facing considerable losses. On this war and Chinese international relations at the time see L. M. Chere, The
especially after the mistreatment they had been receiving in various places in the world where they had previously migrated. The fact that Mexico and China held no bilateral relations made things more complicated as it would be even more difficult to defend the interests of the labourers. This is what Marquis Tseng, the Chinese representative in London, explained to Mariscal during an early November meeting. Tseng therefore suggested that Mount Lebanon load whatever it could and then leave, for the official answer from the Chinese authorities was going to take some time.  

Matías Romero, the Mexican representative in Washington, faced a similar disdain from Cheng Tsao Ju, the Chinese ambassador, not only over the issue of Mount Lebanon, but also when Romero approached him in order to discuss a possible treaty between the two countries. Cheng had enough complaints to deal with from the overseas Chinese—he was assigned all subjects living in the United States, Peru, and Cuba—and was therefore not interested in dealing with more problems.  

Meanwhile, the British representative in Peking, H. Parker, received a telegram from London, urging him “to press for the consent of the Yamen at all events for this [Mount Lebanon] voyage.” At once, he personally presented his petition to the Prince and his ministers, highlighting that “great expense was incurred by delay” in the CMNP case. “I pointed out that as the conditions under which this emigration was conducted were declared to be satisfactory by Her Majesty’s Government, and as the immigrants when in Mexico would receive British

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265 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 27-32.

266 These were the places with more Chinese population in the Americas and with which China had bilateral relations (Cuba was then still a colony of Spain). Since China had no permanent representative head in Cuba and Peru, Mr. Cheng had to often travel and stay there for months. See file L-E-1983 in AHGE-SRE to see the exchanges between Romero and Cheng Tsao Ju.
protection, the Chinese government might feel confidently assured that they [the Chinese labourers] would be well treated…”\textsuperscript{267} He also “thought it not out of place…to remind His Highness and Their Excellencies that Your Lordship’s desire to obtain their consent was an evidence of good feeling and friendly consideration, as it was within the power of Her Majesty’s government to sanction emigration from Hong Kong to any part of the world…”\textsuperscript{268} After much hesitation, the Chinese approved the emigration of Chinese aboard \textit{Mount Lebanon}, but confined it to a single voyage, adding that in the future the prohibition should be renewed. They remarked that this was “given in deference to Your Lordship’s special request and to their regard for the existing friendly relations with Great Britain.”\textsuperscript{269} The Yamen then telegraphed its response in early December to Foreign Secretary José Fernández in Mexico City. It stated that the Emperor did not approve the emigration to Mexico because there was no bilateral treaty. Yet, considering that \textit{Mount Lebanon} was already in Hong Kong, the company could embark Chinese labourers for this time only, provided that they were accorded British protection in the Mexican territory.\textsuperscript{270}

What the Chinese and the British authorities did not count on was the Mexican government’s answer: it refused the requested British protection for the immigrants. For the Mexican government, accepting British jurisdiction inside Mexican territory was out of the question. After so many foreign military interventions in Mexico and the long tradition of European expansionism, Porfrian diplomacy was cautious when it came to comprising the

\textsuperscript{267} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 74-75. The Yamen was the English term used in the late Qing dynasty to refer to the Chinese office of foreign affairs.

\textsuperscript{268} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 75-76.

\textsuperscript{269} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 76-77.

\textsuperscript{270} AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 23.
country’s political sovereignty. Even though Porfirian diplomats were eager to resume ties with England and end this controversy, by principle they could not compromise the right to treat foreigners in accordance with Mexican legislation, as it would set a dangerous precedent. Mariscal had been negotiating the resumption of ties with London under the premise of a reciprocal renunciation of previous claims. This meant that Mexico would not demand any compensation related to the English support of Maximilian’s French invasion in the 1860s in exchange for the British withdrawal to defend the interests of the so-called London bondholders, a group of British investors that claimed a debt of over 10 million pounds dating back to the 1820s. This also included an understanding that both countries were to consider each other’s legislation in equal and reciprocal terms. This meant that the Chinese did not need British protection as they would be treated according to the Mexican laws. Mariscal also questioned, in private, the British alleged concern for the wellbeing of the Chinese workers and saw the refusal of the Hong Kong governor as “an excuse… as with its monopolizing tendencies, the British government must not like the establishment of a direct traffic that could flourish… [between Mexican] and Asian ports.” The owners of the CMNP would eventually share this mistrust as, according to them, the “Hong Kong governor allows the Chinese emigration to various other countries, even though they have no [bilateral] treaty.” After the insistence of the CMNP owners though, on December 14, Mariscal ended up accepting the Chinese proposal, but under


272 Silvestre Villegas Revueltas, “La deuda inglesa: el componente de la relación anglo-mexicana,” in *En busca de una nación*..., 197. See the entire article to understand the evolution of the negotiations between Mexican and British diplomats in order to re-establish bilateral relations.

273 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 21.

274 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, document from April 4, 1888 (no page number).
two conditions: the British would provide good offices instead of full protection to the Chinese immigrants and this would have a one-year limit. The Chinese responded that they wanted full protection rather than merely good offices and thought that one year was too short “considering the distance and the time taken in all negotiations.”

On January, 1885, Porfirio Díaz resumed the presidency and made the resumption of ties with England a priority. Upon taking office, Díaz immediately summoned Mariscal to Mexico City. After over a year and a half in Europe negotiating with British authorities, Mariscal took a transatlantic steamship and sailed back to Veracruz, then took the train to Mexico City, and on January 19th he became the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, a post he would not leave until his death in April, 1910. With his ample knowledge on the subject and with the process already quite advanced, he was soon able to officially resume ties with London. In order not to compromise this achievement, the case of the Mount Lebanon was put aside and negotiations did not advance for months. In April, after a desperate plea from Malo, Vogel, and Larraza, Mariscal finally agreed to take out the limit of one year but refused to change the term of good offices. Yet he guaranteed that the term would imply full protection for the immigrants. As a consequence, on May 1, 1885, Lionel Carden, the representative of Great Britain in Mexico, wrote a favourable note to Mariscal: “I have the honour to inform your Excellency that today I have received a telegram from Earl Granville, informing me that the

275 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 39.
276 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 41.
277 Diaz’s first presidential period lasted between 1876 and 1880. In December, 1884, he reassumed the Presidency for a second term.
279 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 48, 50, 58.
Chinese have agreed to the emigration of their subjects to Mexico, but only for one voyage, and that the Governor of Hong Kong has been instructed accordingly.”\textsuperscript{280} By then, \textit{Mount Lebanon} had already left Hong Kong for Saigon. Her British owners, Smith & Service, had assigned her to a more profitable business since March. Even though she returned to Hong Kong in May, she was not assigned for a transpacific trip, but rather sent back to Saigon.\textsuperscript{281}

Smith & Service introduced a new element into the dispute, precisely when negotiations seemed to have reached a near end. In a letter to the Whitehall, the British firm complained that the CMNP had refused to pay its dues:

“…there have been various communications from the London Brokers of the Mexicana Company [Jardine, Matheson & Co.] but neither any payments of our claim or proposal to pay even a part of it. In this morning’s letter they threaten to charter another steamer for the Emigration permitted by your Lordship, leaving ‘\textit{Mount Lebanon}’ out of the business altogether… [Will] the Mexican company… be permitted to send Emigrants by another steamer, after having kept ‘\textit{Mount Lebanon}’ without any remuneration for over six months?”\textsuperscript{282}

Even though the contract signed by both parties established an advanced payment, Smith & Service claimed they had not received a penny from the CMNP. Furthermore, the Mexican government had enacted “the delay caused by Prohibition of Emigration by the British government be considered “Force Majeure” and the [CMNP] company exonerated from their contract.”\textsuperscript{283} Smith & Service therefore proposed that:

“your Lordship should still prohibit any Chinese emigration from Hong Kong [to Mexico], and ask the Chinese Government to issue a similar prohibition as to other Chinese ports… we who are British subjects have suffered a loss of not less than £8,000 sterling and…it

\textsuperscript{280} AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35, 81.

\textsuperscript{281} See \textit{The China Mail} from March 5 to May 15, 1885.

\textsuperscript{282} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 269.

\textsuperscript{283} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 187-188.
does seem hard upon us to be relegated to the remedy of the very Laws of Mexico\textsuperscript{284} which your Lordship has evidently considered insufficient to protect the rights of Chinamen.”\textsuperscript{285}

The Whitehall thus found itself in a dilemma: if it supported Smith & Service—a British firm after all—then it would have to cancel the deal achieved with the Chinese and the Mexicans for a one-voyage solution, which had taken months of negotiations. What the British government came up with then was a practical solution that would in a way please everyone concerned: the permission for the single voyage was extended \textit{specifically} to \textit{Mount Lebanon}.\textsuperscript{286} With this decision the interests of Smith & Service were protected, because it guaranteed that the CMNP would be forced to use \textit{Mount Lebanon}—and not any other steamer—if it wanted to be entitled to run one voyage from Hong Kong to Mexico. At the same time, the British would be able to keep their word with the Mexican and Chinese diplomats by maintaining the one-voyage deal. The British diplomats did not request the Chinese authorities to forbid emigration to Mexico from other ports, as Smith & Service also demanded. After all, the Chinese were themselves against such emigration.

The CMNP never recovered from the \textit{Mount Lebanon}’s failure. On August 11, 1885, a Hong Kong officer informed the Whitehall that “the Chinese Agent [hired by the CMNP to recruit labourers for Mexico] has, for the present at least, abandoned the scheme and the emigration license granted to him has lapsed.”\textsuperscript{287} This seems to indicate \textit{Mount Lebanon} did not even do the one voyage she was entitled to. The CMNP tried to restart operations several times

\textsuperscript{284} Since the CMNP had no offices in England, then Smith & Service could not sue them in a British tribunal but rather in a Mexican one.

\textsuperscript{285} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 283.

\textsuperscript{286} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 313, 315, 317.

\textsuperscript{287} The National Archives, Foreign Office, FO50/451, 319-320.
until 1888, but, at every attempt, the British refused their permission alleging that Mexico had no treaty with China and that it was therefore impossible for them to let Chinese labourers depart. In November 1889, Salvador Malo signed a new contract with the Mexican government. He created a new company, the Compañía Marítima Asiática Mexicana (CMAM), for the purpose of establishing direct transpacific routes and bringing labourers to Mexico. The terms of the contract were similar to those given to the CMNP—its fate would prove similar too. Malo sent a representative to Asia. He traveled to San Francisco and then sailed on to Yokohama on August 22 in one of PMSS’ largest vessels, the 5,080-ton City of Peking. He was unsuccessful in dealing with the Japanese, but managed to start operations in Macao, a less regulated port administered by the Portuguese. On September 29, 1890, El Amigo left Macao for the Mexican port of Salina Cruz with some 500 Chinese on board. They were destined to work in the construction of the remaining 180 kilometres left to finish the Tehuantepec railroad. The company claimed it had another steamship ready to sail on October 27, but there are no records that show that this, or any other steamer from the CMAM, ever crossed the ocean again. Salvador Malo died in 1901 and, with him, so too did attempts to create a Mexican steamship company that would traverse the Pacific.

288 See the last documents in AHGE-SRE, 44-6-35 as well as El Economista Mexicano 9 (Feb.-Aug., 1890): 7.

289 AHGE-SRE, L-E-1515, vol. 4, 1.

290 See El Tiempo, September 6, 1890 and December 7, 1890, as well as E. Mowbray Tate, Transpacific Steam: The Story of Steam Navigation from the Pacific Coast of North America to the Far East and the Antipodes, 1867-1941 (New York: Cornwall Books, 1986), 28-29.

291 Cortés, 52-53. See AHGE-SRE, L-E-1515, vol. 4, 1-65 to learn about the exchanges between Malo and the Japanese authorities.

292 AHGE-SRE, L-E-1515, 21-29.

293 El Tiempo, October 14, 1890.

294 Cortés, 55.
3.4 Porfirian Elites and the Transpacific World in the 1880s

In the 1880s, General Porfirio Díaz and the heterogeneous groups that supported him had managed to establish a relatively strong federal government—at least in comparison to those that had preceded it. Tailoring liberal and positivist notions towards their pragmatic needs, the Porfirian circles legitimized their authoritarian and elitist practices as the necessary means to achieve what they believed the country most urgently needed: material progress. Within this project, steamers played the vital role of transporting what the country produced to the international markets and bringing back the commodities needed to accelerate production. The government thus resorted to a policy of subventions in order to regulate and encourage international steam traffic. Both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts were considered equally, as the subventions granted for the creation of Mexican-owned lines in both areas were signed within two years of each other and had analogous conditions and objectives: in both cases the idea was to create two lines, one along the coast and one transoceanic and the funds destined for each were comparable.

One of the most cherished commodities sought abroad, and which steamers were supposed to import, was cheap, productive labour. Giving often contradictory racialized and positivist explanations, Porfirian elites found local working forces, composed mainly of “unproductive Indians,” either insufficient, incapable or unwilling to participate in the modernizing ventures the country supposedly needed. They therefore sought hard-working “white industrialist” immigrants, mostly from Europe, who would serve not only as economic forces but also as vehicles to accelerate the “mixing” process that would eventually lead to a generalized Mexican race, the Mestizo, pillar of a unifying national identity. Unable to attract
the much desired *whites*, the idea then came to bring instead Chinese, who had proved industrious in other American countries as well as Cuba—then a Spanish colony. The idea polarized opinions with those in favour alluding to the cheapness and productivity of Chinese workers and those against enumerating a long list of negative attributes supposedly inherent to their *race*. Even those who defended Chinese failed to acknowledge their long historical presence since colonial times, nor their role as “industrialists,” and therefore categorized them simply in terms of alien, cheap, productive labour force. After much heated debate, the pragmatic view of sponsoring a limited and state-regulated Chinese immigration prevailed within Porfirian circles and the decision was made to award a subvention to the CMNP in order to inaugurate direct steam-powered maritime routes with Asia and bring Chinese labourers to Mexico.

Just as it had happened on the Atlantic coast, the efforts to create a national steam-powered merchant navy that could link Mexico to the international markets (in this case by exporting silver and importing labourers) failed in the Pacific, notably due to the clash with British geopolitical interests. In effect, for British authorities, the administration of Hong Kong, the largest international maritime hub in the area, enabled them to exert control over the transit of people, particularly of Chinese labourers. Additionally, its businessmen also dominated the industry of chartered steamers, which the Mexicans had no option but to resort to since they could not fabricate steamers at home. The Mexican diplomats and businessmen proved incapable of negotiating their way through the British interests to start their maritime-immigration venture, especially at a time where the Porfirian diplomats were just beginning to

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295 In the Gulf of Mexico, the subventions granted in 1882 to the *Trasatlántica Mexicana* and the *Mexicana Continental* proved insufficient to sustain the companies. The first declared bankruptcy in 1886 and the second a few years later. See “Nuestra Marina Mercante,” *El Economista Mexicano* 10 (Aug. 1890-Jan. 1891): 43 and García Benavides, 283.
reopen offices outside the Americas and had not yet reached Asia. In effect, in the absence of bilateral relations, Mexican authorities could not get rid of the intermediation of British diplomats—and their interests—to solve controversies directly with China.

For Chinese authorities, exchanges with Mexico did not represent a priority. Facing European imperialism within their territory, they opted to concentrate their energy against this threat. Besides, recent experiences of mistreatment of Chinese overseas made them hesitant to send labourers to a country with which no bilateral relations existed. There was also no interest on the part of the Chinese in initiating them. When the Mexican representative in Washington made the first move, his Chinese peer, faced with innumerable complaints to deal with in the large territory he had to cover, gave the subject little importance. This attitude contrasted substantially with the Japanese posture. As we will see in the next chapter, the Japanese authorities saw Mexico, rather than an annoyance, as an opportunity to get more equitable treatment from imperial powers.
On March 24, 1897, a distinctive group of 34 young Japanese men boarded the *Gaelic*, a 4,000-ton British steamer from the Occidental & Oriental Company (O&O), in the port of Yokohama. All were workers between 18 and 34 years of age who, for the most part, came from the central prefecture of Aichi. While there seemed to be nothing unusual about them—after all, the average transpacific crowd bound for San Francisco always included hundreds of Asian workers traveling in steerage—these men were atypical in one sense: they were the first state-sponsored Japanese colonizers headed for Latin America.

Their voyage lasted some 50 days. In San Francisco, the group transferred to a steamer on a milk run to Panama. On May 10, 1897, the Japanese disembarked in the port of San Benito, located just north of the newly formed Mexican-Guatemalan border. They were greeted by Kuraji Tono and later by Ryukichi Enomoto, two advance envoys who had prepared for the group’s establishment in Mexico. After a twelve-hour trek, they arrived in Tapachula, the closest and largest city, where they spent three days buying provisions. They then walked for another three days. On May 16, they reached their final destination, a 65,000-hectare parcel in Escuintla, Chiapas.

The episode had been problem-ridden since the moment they left Yokohama. Firstly, the workers had had to bargain for better contractual conditions for their colonization once


aboard ship. Furthermore, at sea, one of the members fell terminally ill. Once in Mexico, it became apparent that the survivors knew little about their new land; conditions were tougher than expected. While Kuraji and Enomoto were supposed to have everything ready, they arrived at a terrain with no infrastructure in the middle of a hot, humid jungle. And while they were contracted to grow coffee for export, their seeds and tools would take weeks to arrive. When it seemed that things couldn’t get any worse, they did: the settlers lost their entire first food crop to scavenging animals. In short, the initial experience of the first Japanese colonos in Mexico was disastrous.299

While the trip may have seemed poorly planned from the start, nothing could be further from the truth. The Mexican and Japanese governments had spent the past decade negotiating everything from the beginning of bilateral political and commercial relations to the establishment of these settlers. During the course of these relations, Mexico became the first non-Asian country to sign an equal-terms treaty with Japan and the first in Latin America to establish a Japanese state-sponsored colony.

The contextualization of the Japanese colonization in Chiapas will make evident how Japanese and Mexican elites’ national imaginaries coincided in the interstices of Pacific imperial geopolitics at the end of the nineteenth century. In effect, contrary to the case of China, discussed in the previous chapter, Japanese and Mexican diplomats saw each other’s countries as areas where they could defend their transpacific and national elite interests in the face of common contending imperial challenges. In this context, Gaelic and all the transpacific steamers that brought dozens of Japanese diplomats, businessmen, and colonists to Mexico, as

well as the few Mexicans who traveled the opposite way, serve as a metaphor for the idea that nations and empires are constructed through movement, that is, that state bureaucracies do not remain static but rather move around as a means to negotiate their interests and implement their projects.

4.1 The Beginnings of Transpacific Relations between Mexico and Japan

The documented exchanges between what we know today as Mexico and Japan date to as far back as the sixteenth century. They began in the context of the Manila galleon sailings, started in 1565. The route followed by the galleons on their way from Manila to Acapulco and back circulated near the coasts of Cipango—the name the Spaniards originally gave to present-day Japan. As a consequence, the galleons often stopped there when in danger. The most famous of them was San Francisco. She shipwrecked off the coast of Kazusa in the south of Japan on September 1609 en route to Acapulco. Amongst her 300 passengers was former governor of Manila, Rodrigo de Vivero. During his brief interim government in 1608, he had had epistolary contact with the shogun and had favoured the maritime and commercial exchanges between both territories. When he shipwrecked in Japan, the local authorities warmly welcomed him. They offered him a new ship—renamed later as San Buenaventura—and a loan to cover his unforeseen expenses. After several months in Japan, Vivero departed for Acapulco in the San Buenaventura, bringing along with him 23 Japanese merchants. This episode has long been regarded by both Mexican and Japanese governments as the symbolic beginning of relations between the two countries.

300 See the first section in Chapter One for a contextualization of the Manila Galleon trade.
While the first official exchanges between the Spanish and the Japanese had been mostly courteous, by the 1630s they ended in the context of increasing mutual mistrust. On the one hand, Spanish merchants in Manila did not want to face possible competition from Japanese traders so they urged that relations be confined to a minimum. On the other hand, Japanese authorities had become suspicious of the European influence within their territories—particularly that of the Spanish missionaries—and began restricting exchanges with the exterior world.\textsuperscript{303} As a consequence, the contact between Japan and the Spanish territories in the Americas in the following two and a half centuries remained limited and fortuitous, even accidental, comprised mostly of shipwrecks on both coasts.\textsuperscript{304}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century, in the period known as the \textit{Porfiriato}, when Mexican authorities sought to reactivate relations with China and Japan. The reasons for this were clearly explained by Manuel Fernández Leal, subsecretary of Fomento—and one of the members of the Mexican Astronomical Commission that traveled to Asia in 1874\textsuperscript{305}—in a letter sent to Ignacio Mariscal, then Secretary of Foreign Affairs, in March 1881:

“…now that our [silver] coin has considerably lowered its value in European markets…and before the governments of England, the United States and other empires manage to impose another coin, we could send our pesos [to Japan and China] in exchange for the varied products from those nations…which, due to their cheapness and our advantageous geographical location,…we could resell in other countries… Also… the [increasing]
population density of those [Asian] empires could provide us, in the near future, with a secure market for our Pacific coastal products…”

An additional reason for establishing ties with Japan, as pointed out by astronomer Díaz Covarrubias—the first Mexican to visit and publish his impressions on Asia in the nineteenth century—was the alleged docility and hard-working nature of the Japanese, which made them ideal for migrating to Mexico as workers.

Washington served as the mediating arena where Mexican and Japanese authorities negotiated the establishment of relations. In this process, Matías Romero, the Mexican representative in the United States during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, became a key figure. Since his arrival in Washington in 1882, he had been sending letters to Mexico City requesting governmental permission to start a rapprochement with the Japanese. After securing official backing, he contacted Takahira Kogoro, the Japanese representative in Washington, to express Mexico’s interest in having formal relations. Romero visited Takahira and his successor Jishii Terashima Munenori several times that year. He offered them literature and presents from Mexico in order to increase their interest. Romero also kept in contact with

306 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-47, 1-2. Translations into English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

307 See Chapter Two for a contextualization of Díaz Covarrubias’s expedition to Asia.

308 Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, Viaje de la Comisión Astronómica Mexicana al Japón para observar el tránsito del planeta Venus por el disco del Sol el 8 de diciembre de 1874 (México: Políglota, 1876). The following edition was used in this work: Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, Viaje al Japón, comp. Hugo Diego (Mexico City: Ediciones de Educación y Cultura, 2008), 55.

309 Romero was the Mexican representative in Washington between 1859-1867, 1882-1892, and 1893-1898. “Matías Romero (1837-1898),” in Instituto Matías Romero. XXV Aniversario (Mexico City: SRE, 1999), 107-140.

310 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-47, 19-20.
potential mediators from the United States, such as former President Ulysses Grant, who had visited and maintained a network of acquaintances in both countries.  

The Japanese responded with courtesy, yet they remained hesitant towards Romero’s proposal. They argued they did not want to sign another unequal treaty, such as the ones they had previously been forced to accept. In effect, between 1854 and 1874, Japan had signed a series of asymmetrical international conventions with the United States, Peru, Hawaii and thirteen European nations—the so-called Treaty Powers. They all contained eight distinctive features which made them different from the reciprocal conventions signed amongst these countries. First, they were unilateral, that is, the privileges granted to foreigners in Japan were not offered to Japanese abroad. Second, they forced Japan to open two cities and five ports—the so-called Treaty Ports—for trade and residence to foreigners. Third, foreigners living in them could create their own set of laws and regulations. Fourth, diplomats were the only ones allowed to travel into Japan’s interior. Fifth, the treaties had no expiration date. Sixth, custom duties were fixed at a low 5% rate. Seventh, the most favoured nation clause forced Japan to grant the same concessions to all Treaty Powers. Eighth, foreigners enjoyed extraterritorial privileges, that is, they were ruled by their own legislations and were immune to Japanese justice. Under these circumstances, it was Japan’s priority first to renegotiate the unequal treaties before signing any others.

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311 AHGE-SRE, 44-6-47, 12-14, 33-38, 76, 85-96, 100-102.

312 Besides Peru, Hawaii, and the United States, the thirteen European nations that were known as Treaty Powers for having signed unequal treaties with Japan were Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, and Switzerland. Louis G. Perez, *Japan comes at Age, Mutsu Munemitsu and the Revision of the Unequal Treaties* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 188.

313 They were Hakodate in the northern island of Hokkaido, Nagasaki in southern Kyushu, and Niigata, Edo (renamed Tokyo in 1869), Yokohama, Shimoda, and Hyogo (present Kobe) in central Honshu. J.E. Hoare, *Japan’s Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements. The Uninvited Guests, 1858-1899* (Kent, CT: Japan Library, 1994): vi, 6.
Six years later, the Japanese authorities changed their mind with regard to Mexico. In 1888 a new foreign affairs cabinet, led by Okuma Shigenobu, came to power following a governmental crisis regarding treaty revision.\(^{315}\) After years of failed attempts to renegotiate the unequal treaties, Japanese diplomacy under Okuma decided instead to concentrate on negotiations with Mexico in order to set a precedent of equal treatment with a so-called Western country, as, up to then, only China had signed a treaty on equal terms with Japan, some fifteen years earlier. On June 23, Mutsu Munemitsu, the new Japanese representative in the United States, met with Romero in the Mexican Legation in order to start negotiations for a treaty. Mutsu demanded that the Mexican authorities renounce the principle of extraterritorial jurisdiction. This would make Mexico “the first civilized nation to do justice to Japan.”\(^{316}\) Mutsu sustained that Japan was ready to offer foreigners fair legal treatment after having renovated its justice system according to European principles. There was therefore no more need for the extraterritorial jurisdiction demanded of the country in the past.\(^{317}\)

Mexicans responded with caution. Ignacio Mariscal, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, wrote Romero that

“Mexico could not take the initiative in recognizing [Japan’s right to refuse extraterritoriality] …because it is not yet a powerful trading nation and, by taking that initiative, it could offend the powers that today have treaties with Japan. For that matter, Mexico would reserve the right to take that step until another nation of greater mercantile importance took it first...Meanwhile the treaty could be celebrated in more general terms...”\(^{318}\)

\(^{314}\) Pérez, 47.

\(^{315}\) To read about this crisis and the path followed for treaty revision see chapter three of Pérez’s book.

\(^{316}\) SRE-AHGE, 7-18-18, part 1, 78-85.

\(^{317}\) SRE-AHGE, 7-18-18, part 1, 87-88.

\(^{318}\) SRE-AHGE, 7-18-18, part 1, 86-87.
After the Japanese refused to eliminate the subject from the treaty, Romero was instructed to consult with Thomas Bayard, the U. S. Secretary of State, on the matter. Even though the treaty with Japan was important for the Porfirian economic and international project, the relationship with the United States, the country’s first trading partner, remained a higher priority.319

At this point, the treaty system in Japan had become unfavourable for the United States’ interests. They had been the first country to force Japan to sign an unequal treaty in March, 1854. Yet, with time, they had lost their economic primacy to Britain, as illustrated by the following statement by General Alexander C. Jones, the U.S. consul in Nagasaki in 1881: “the United States opened the country [Japan] to the commerce of the world. Yet England and France have reaped the fruits… while the United States, her nearest neighbour and best friend… virtually does nothing.”320 In effect, by 1883, of the 208 foreign firms established in Japan, 98 were British and only 39 belonged to United States’ investors. The British also surpassed every other country in shipping tonnage with 724,355 tons compared to 374, 617 tons of all others combined. In terms of cotton textiles, the Japanese imported over five million dollars from Britain, some $133,000 from France and only $73,000 from the United States. The U.S. figures for yarn and woollen textiles were even more unflattering.321 Therefore, in order to counteract British trading supremacy, many diplomats from the United States favoured a revision of the treaty system. This would allow them to demand that Japan open the totality of its market—instead of the limited seven cities that foreigners had up to then access to—in exchange for accepting Japanese jurisdiction. Yet previous attempts to do so had been blocked by other

319 SRE-AHGE, 7-18-18, part 1, 172-173. See Chapter Three for an overview on Porfirian policies.


Treaty Powers’ representatives. As a consequence, when Romero requested Bayard’s opinion on the subject, on October 26, 1888, he responded that he

“personally wished…to recognize the autonomy of Japan and to treat her under absolute equality; …[Based on these principles, the United States] had celebrated an extradition treaty with the [Japanese] Empire, the first of its genre, and another one of friendship, trade, and navigation, yet the latter cannot be executed until the European nations recognize the same principles…in order not to leave the [U.S.] citizens in an inferior condition to the subjects of the European nations.”

On November 2, Romero finally obtained from G.L. Rives, the acting Secretary of State, the much sought declaration that “the interests of the United States would not be affected at all if Mexico conceded Japan the reciprocity that she wants in regards to the [extraterritorial] jurisdiction.”

After the approval of the U.S. Secretary of State, negotiations between Mexican and Japanese diplomats sped up. By the end of the month, on November 30, in Washington, Mutsu and Romero signed the Treaty of Friendship, Trade, and Navigation between Mexico and the Empire of Japan. It was ratified by both countries’ legislative powers six months later, marking the beginning of official relations between the two countries. The treaty contained eleven articles, of which the fourth and the eighth became the first of their kind. The latter recognized Japanese jurisdiction over Mexicans living there, and vice versa. In exchange for this concession, article eight stipulated that Mexicans could establish themselves and trade in the entire country. This extraordinary concession did not, in fact, ever have concrete repercussions

323 SRE-AHGE, 7-18-18, part 1, 234-235.
324 SRE-AHGE, 7-18-18, part 1, 244-249.
for Mexicans as they did not have enough economic power to actually take advantage of the opening of these new Japanese markets.\textsuperscript{325}

In the following years, the Japanese authorities finally managed to renegotiate the unequal treaties. Mutsu Munemitsu, who returned to Japan and became foreign minister in August 1892, would be in charge of this process. He decided to concentrate first on Great Britain, the strongest of the Treaty Powers. Knowledgeable of Britain’s desire to access more markets and her antagonism towards Russia, Mutsu offered to open the interior and to become a strong ally against Russian expansionism in Asia in exchange for a reciprocal treaty. Negotiations started in the Foreign Office of the Whitehall on September 1893. Japan was represented by Aoki Shuzo, minister in Germany and England and Mutsu’s close friend. At Mutsu’s request, Hugh Fraser became the head of the British team. He was the minister to Tokyo, but was then on leave in London and, more importantly for Mutsu, he was friends with Aoki and sympathetic to treaty revision.\textsuperscript{326} After close to a year of talks, on July 1894, the revised treaty was signed. For the first time, a European power recognized reciprocal jurisdictional rights in an Asian nation. The United States rapidly followed suit. By January 1897 Japan had renegotiated all her unequal treaties and, according to its diplomats, had achieved an equal stature in the world of nations,\textsuperscript{327} as suggested by Aoki’s comment to Mutsu: “…we were able to get a more or less convenient treaty. With this success, we can suppress the disgrace that lasted more than 30 years and were able to join the fellowship of nations, which is

\textsuperscript{325} Carlos Uscanga, “Hacia una contextualización histórica de las relaciones diplomáticas de México y Japón,” Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior 86 (June, 2009), 72.

\textsuperscript{326} Perez, 101, 107.

\textsuperscript{327} See the whole process in Perez, 137-188.
a great happiness for us.” As a consequence, Japanese authorities had become strong enough to begin consolidating not only a national but also an imperial project across the Pacific.

### 4.2 Mexico and the Japanese Pacific Imperial Project

At the end of the nineteenth century, in the context of European and U.S. imperialism in Asia, Japanese elites began delineating an expansionist project in which emigration played a central role. While emigration was highly restricted before the signing of the unequal treaties, after Perry’s expedition forced the Japanese to open their ports, the country began to form part of an international network of labour, capital and transportation that facilitated the movement of peoples. Foreign businessmen who, over the past few decades, had been profiting from Chinese contracted labour—the so-called *coolie* trade, explained in the last chapter—attempted to reproduce the scheme with Japanese workers. In effect, starting in 1868, U.S. merchants hired Japanese to work in overseas sugar plantations, particularly in Guam and Hawaii. After numerous migrants’ complaints, the Japanese authorities restricted emigration via private contractors. Instead, the government fostered the colonization of northern Hokkaido and, in 1885, signed a convention with Hawaiian authorities in order to provide labourers for sugar plantations. Between 1885 and 1894, the year the agreement ended, over 29,000 Japanese farmers traveled to Hawaii under three-year contracts. Around the same time, hundreds of Japanese began migrating to Australia and the western provinces of Canada and the United States. In the case of the former, they were pearl fishermen and farmers hired by English

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328 Misawa, 105.

contractors to work in Queensland’s sugar plantations.\textsuperscript{330} In the case of the latter, they were mostly student-labourers, that is, young men with limited resources who traveled abroad to study (and escape conscription) but had to work in order to pay their expenses. Between 1882 and 1890, they accounted for close to half of the passports issued by the Japanese government to travel to the United States.\textsuperscript{331} The remaining half was composed of labourers, free emigrants, prostitutes, and students with governmental scholarships.\textsuperscript{332} In regards to Canada, the early Japanese immigrants worked mostly in the sawmills and the fishing and canning industries in and around Vancouver and in the Cumberland mines on Vancouver Island.\textsuperscript{333}

For Japanese authorities, emigration not only served as a safety valve for landless peasants or as a way for their youth to become educated and send remittances, it also formed part of a larger expansionist project throughout the Pacific Rim. At the end of the nineteenth century, some Japanese elites justified expansionism not only in terms of an alleged manifest destiny that the “civilized” nations of the world shared, but also as a way to defend Japan from the other imperial powers. Within this logic, the stronger the Japanese looked in the international arena and the larger the territory they controlled, the less vulnerable they would look to European and U.S elites, who were actively seeking new Asian territories to colonize and new markets to dominate.\textsuperscript{334} In this context, Enomoto Takeaki, minister of Foreign Affairs between 1891 and 1892, sponsored a series of explorations along the Pacific Rim in order to

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\textsuperscript{330} Misawa, 82-83.
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\textsuperscript{331} Of the 3,475 passports issued, 1,519 were for private students. Ichioka, 8.
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\textsuperscript{332} See chapter two in Ichioka.
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evaluate the possibility of establishing state-sponsored colonies abroad. Contrary to the Hawaii experiment, this project meant to encourage permanent settlers rather than temporary workers. This type of settlement would be useful for Japanese authorities for various reasons. Firstly, it would allow them to create and control Japanese outposts in various areas of the Pacific which could eventually be useful in geopolitical terms. Secondly, authorities would remain in control of the entire emigration process. This way, the government would avoid the mistreatment of its citizens by foreigners and would benefit from the profits generated by the colonists established abroad. Thirdly, this process promised an outlet for the increasing number of discontented landless peasants who could not find jobs within Japanese cities. Fourthly, since the xenophobic reactions against Japanese had begun to emerge in Western Canada and the United States, the government was eager to find new territories where Japanese would be welcome.

After quitting his post, Enomoto continued to promote emigration with the foundation of the Colonization Society, in March 1893. Composed of members of Tokyo’s economic and political elites, the Society’s main objective was to promote colonization by generating and divulging information and facilitating the conditions for migrants to depart. Since its inception, the Society considered Mexico as a potential place to begin operations, as suggested in

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335 He sent emissaries to the Philippines, the Malay Peninsula, New Hebrides and Mexico. Cortés, 73; Misawa, 120-123.

336 It is true that many of the Japanese who went to work to Hawaii never returned, yet the Japanese authorities originally conceived the programme as destined only for temporary sojourners.

337 Azuma, “Historical Overview of Japanese Emigration, 1868-2000,” 32. Azuma also mentions that with the development of modern medicine and public hygiene, there was an exponential growth of Japanese population at the time.

338 It is true that the first public event against Japanese in the United States happened until the spring of 1900, yet, the Japanese arrived to the west coast of English-speaking North America in the context of anti-Chinese movements, which often translated into hostility or mistrust against “Orientals” in general. Ichioka, 52-53.
Enomoto’s inaugural speech: “…if you ask me which plan should be executed first, I would like to respond that…I have the idea to organize the first colony in [the territory of] our eastern neighbour, in the Pacific coast of the Mexican nation.”

In this context, Mexico began to gain presence in Japanese public opinion as a possible destination for colonists. The Japanese media greeted Mexico as the first non-Asian nation to sign a treaty with Japan on equal terms. Yet some questioned the viability of the Mexican territory for establishing Japanese colonies due to its proximity to a strong imperial power, the United States. For instance, in August 1890, the Japan Weekly Mail suggested that “the United States will never tolerate a foreign country setting foot in Mexico.” It therefore proposed Oceania and Korea as more suitable areas for colonization. Other newspapers were more favourable to the idea, as suggested by the Keizai Zasshi—a newspaper from Tokyo—in an article in November, 1891. After describing the promising qualities of the Mexican geography, climate, and soil, it advocated for Japanese immigration since Mexico had demonstrated “friendship and justice to Japan when signing a treaty under the base of equality. Besides, Mexico invited Japanese to establish themselves within her territory.”

In Mexico, the media also celebrated Mexico’s rapprochement with Japan. In the summer of 1889, most Mexico City newspapers rejoiced with the establishment of bilateral relations. El Economista Mexicano, a prestigious economic journal, even reproduced the entire treaty and presented a compilation of various newspaper articles from the United States that congratulated Mexicans for their diplomatic achievement. In the following years, the journal

339 Cited in Misawa, 104.
340 Cited in Cortés, 73.
341 Cortés, 74.
342 “México y el Japón,” El Economista Mexicano VII (Feb.-July, 1889), 244 and 282.
continued to publish pieces favourable to Japan, particularly regarding trade, maritime routes and immigration to Mexico.\textsuperscript{343} \textit{El Correo de la Tarde}, a newspaper from Mazatlan, one of Mexico’s most important Pacific ports, also published favourable notes on Japanese colonists to the area. For instance, in the spring of 1892, it declared that “their presence would teach many…how to live well with little and how to work to obtain a reasonable remuneration…We celebrate [their arrival] because we find in it a secure and practical way to augment the population and, as a consequence, the country’s productive forces, without any of the inconveniences offered by [other races]…”\textsuperscript{344}

In both countries, public opinion also resorted to racialized arguments to support the Japanese immigration to Mexico. The earliest recorded antecedent in this regard dates from the late 1850s, when two Mexican functionaries, the then Minister of Development Manuel Siliceo and the Mexican representative in Washington Matías Romero, suggested a possible racial affinity between Mexican Indians and Japanese populations. Both based their assumption on their alleged similarity of racial features, such as their intensely black hair and eye colour, their brown or yellow skin colour, their short height, and their eyes’ oblique shape. They concluded that this racial affinity would translate into an easier assimilation to the Mexican society for possible Japanese immigrants.\textsuperscript{345} The Japanese, on their part, also resorted to the same


\textsuperscript{344} Article reproduced in its integrity in \textit{El Economista Mexicano} XIII (Feb.-July, 1892), 86. See also the article reproduced in vol. XV (Feb.-July 1893), 5.

\textsuperscript{345} Moisés González Navarro, \textit{Los extranjeros en México y los mexicanos en el extranjero, 1821-1970}, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1993-1994), 178. Matías Romero, who was a strong advocate of Chinese immigration as well—as seen in the last chapter—also saw a racial affinity between the Mexican Indian and the Chinese, but he was one of the few—if not the only one—that sustained this publicly. See, for instance, Matías Romero, “Inmigración china en México,” \textit{Revista Universal} (August 1875). Reproduced in Josefina MacGregor, \textit{Matías Romero. Textos escogidos} (Mexico: CNCA, 1992), 474.
argument. For instance, a November, 1891 article by the Tokyo newspaper Keizai Zasshi supported emigration to Mexico based on the friendly diplomatic relations and the racial affinity between the peoples of both countries, which would contribute to the immigrants’ rapid acclimatization. In the same year, the Japanese minister in Washington, after visiting the Mexico City Belén jail, did not only find racial similarities between Japanese workers and Mexican Indians but also linguistic. He put as example the term “huarache,” which meant “rustic leather sandal” in both places and was worn by the working classes in both countries. The allusions to racial commonalities continued to be present in subsequent reports from Japanese functionaries.

One additional argument in favour of Japanese immigration was the supposedly positive traits of the Japanese race, which led many within Porfriean circles to support their presence not only as temporary contract workers—as was the case of the Chinese, discussed in the last chapter—but also as more permanent colonos (colonizers) and industrialists. The pioneer in this idea, as discussed in Chapter Two, was the head of the Mexican Astronomical Commission, Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, who linked Japanese advancement to their rapid embracement of Western manners and scientific and technological advances:

“[the Japanese] show a true eagerness to instruct themselves and a strong determination to introduce in their country all the big social reforms and material improvements that emanate from the Western nations’ science and culture. Steam [technologies] and electricity have already planted their routes in the Japanese Empire, while in the Chinese, 

346 Cortés, 74.

347 Huarache is a Spanish word used in central Mexico, but its origins come from Purépecha, an indigenous language still widely spoken in the central-western part of the country. Francisco Díaz Covarrubias also remarked on the similarity between Japanese workers’ and Mexican Indians’ footwear in his account of his 1874-trip to Japan. See Francisco Díaz Covarrubias, Viaje al Japón, comp. Hugo Diego (Mexico City: Ediciones de Educación y Cultura, 2008), 216.

348 González Navarro, 180, 183.
force will probably be necessary to achieve the same objective, due to their aversion to all the elements of civilization.”

This led him to suggest that “a Japanese colony would offer our people a healthy example of everything that can be achieved with perseverance, laboriousness, and economy, even in the most unfavourable conditions.” He also stated that Japanese could help introduce many industries to Mexico that they were masters at, such as the production of silk, porcelain, lacquer, as well as cabinet making. Matías Romero would later concur with these views by suggesting that, due to the rapid modernization process started in Japan, which he desired for Mexico, their inhabitants would not only be welcomed as labourers, but also as “colonists, farmers, and respectable people.” These ideas were present in the early 1890s media debate on Japanese immigration to Mexico as the newspaper *El Tiempo* reproduced large sections of Díaz Covarrubias’ 1874 account in various editions during the summer of 1889.

The media’s increasing support for Japanese emigration to Mexico coincided with the appearance of various reports on the subject, written by Japanese and Mexican diplomats who visited each other’s countries after formal relations began in 1889. Mexico’s first representative to Japan, José Martín Rascón, arrived in 1891. While he remained in the post for fourteen months, his poor health impeded his carrying out a more active role in promoting relations between the two countries. In this sense, it was Mauricio Wollheim, a Mexican

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349 Díaz Covarrubias, 220-221.

350 Díaz Covarrubias, 226.

351 Díaz Covarrubias, 226.


353 See, for instance, the following editions: July 9, 10, 11, and 19, 1899. See also Cortés, 72.

354 Cortés, 74.
diplomat of German origins, who became the most dynamic promoter of emigration to Mexico. Wollheim joined the diplomatic corps in 1883. He later requested a leave of absence in order to travel around the world. When he first arrived in Japan, in 1889, he became convinced that “it would…be of mutual benefit to Mexico and Japan, if a portion of the labourers who continually are engaged… for the cultivation of lands in other countries was diverted to” Mexico. From his point of view, Japan and Mexico had complementary projects, as the former possessed “an ever increasing population, which… renders emigration necessary. Mexico, on the contrary, could easily support ten times the actual number of her inhabitants,” who could work in the lands that remain “still without cultivation, because of the scarcity of manual labour.” In 1891, he was appointed to the legation in Japan as first secretary and over the following seven years he occupied the posts of business attaché, general consul and minister. He traveled back and forth to Mexico at least on four occasions in order to research and report on possible areas of settlement, and spoke with businessmen and authorities from both countries. One of them was Enomoto Takeaki, with whom he “agreed…in every respect.” Therefore, when Enomoto decided to bring to fruition his dream of a colony in Mexico, Wollheim rapidly joined him not only as project consultant but also as an investor.

355 Cortés, 103.

356 Archivo Matías Romero, reel 69, f. 48781, 1.

357 Archivo Matías Romero, reel 69, f. 48781, 1-2.

358 Cortés, 66.

359 Cortés, 66. The route followed was the usual one, from Yokohama to San Francisco with a PMSS vessel and from there either by train towards Sonora or by steamer to any of the Mexican Pacific ports, notably Salina Cruz. See, for instance, AHGE-SRE, L-E-1856, 159, 257.

360 Archivo Matías Romero, reel 69, f. 48781, 1.

361 Cortés, 66.
The Japanese foreign corps was even more active at promoting trade and emigration to Mexico. The first Japanese diplomat who visited Mexico was Chinda Sutemi, in 1890. Then Foreign Minister Aoki Shuzo ordered Chinda, who was serving as the Japanese consul in San Francisco, to visit Mexico and report on the possibility of commercial exchanges. In this way, he inaugurated a tendency for Japanese diplomats appointed to Mexico to have served previously in the United States. Chinda arrived in Mexico City in December and met with various officials, including Foreign Secretary Ignacio Mariscal, the Secretary of Development Carlos Pacheco, as well as diplomat Mauricio Wollheim, who had not yet been appointed to Japan. Chinda gathered official information from these meetings and sent it later to the Gaimusho—that is, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\(^{362}\)

Months after this visit, the Japanese legation’s translator, D. W. Jones, would produce one of the most complete reports on Mexico that the Japanese authorities had yet sponsored. Jones had become the official translator of the newly established Japanese legation in Mexico City, inaugurated when Tateno Gozo traveled from Washington to Mexico City, in order to become the first accredited Japanese envoy in the country. After presenting his credentials to president Porfirio Díaz on June 16, 1891, Gozo commissioned Jones to come up with a complete report on the country, particularly on its Pacific coast. Jones was well acquainted with both Japan and Mexico, as he had lived in the former for six years and in the latter for ten.\(^ {363}\) In his reports, Jones underscored the economic potential of the Mexican Pacific between Mazatlan, Sinaloa, in the north and San Benito, Chiapas, in the south, right at the border with Guatemala. The region possessed fertile soil where export crops such as cotton, coffee, sugarcane, tobacco,

\(^ {362}\) “El tratado con el Japón,” *El Tiempo*, December 9, 1890, 2; Cortés, 64.

\(^ {363}\) Cortés, 76.
and rubber could easily grow. Additionally, he calculated that trade in the area would increase with the inauguration of the Tehuantepec transcontinental railroad, expected to open within three years. As population on the coast was scarce, Japanese migrants would be welcome. Jones suggested that Japanese, and not foreign capital, should organize immigration to Mexico. From his point of view, an entirely Japanese colony could produce what the country needed. Additionally, immigrants would not need to learn Spanish nor mix and compete with Mexican workers. This way, xenophobic reactions would be avoided and Japanese culture would prevail abroad. According to Jones, the success of this venture depended simply on choosing the right piece of land and bringing healthy workers who could best cope with tropical diseases.364

Fujita Toshiro was another great source of information on Mexico. He was called to open a permanent consulate in Mexico City in order to cover for Gozo’s constant absences (as Gozo was simultaneously the minister in Washington and in Mexico City).365 Just like Chinda, Fujita also came from San Francisco’s consulate, arriving in Mexico City in October 1891 and remaining in his post for 26 months.366 In April 1892, Foreign Minister Enomoto Takeaki sent a commission to evaluate the Pacific coastline described in Jones’s reports. It was comprised of four businessmen who were interested in participating in a possible colonization project in Mexico. In early April, Shiguejiro Morio, Moriyuki Tsuneya, Shozo Takano, and Ryukuchi Enomoto left Yokohama for San Francisco. Fujita and Jones were assigned to serve them as guides.367 By late April, the group gathered in Benson, Arizona, and crossed the border at

364 Cortés, 64, 74-76.

365 Cortés, 110.

366 Cortés, 64.

367 Cortés, 65, 76.
Nogales. They then took the train to the port of Guaymas, Sonora, where they embarked on the small 600-ton steamer *Alejandro*, which by then was making semi-monthly voyages between Guaymas and Manzanillo, stopping at all ports. The group arrived at Mazatlan, Sinaloa, in early May. A local newspaper described Fujita as “a pleasant and intelligent young man recommended to the Governor [of Sinaloa] by the President of the Republic.” Tsuneya, on his part, was referred to as “a well-known writer in his country…he lately published a very important treatise on emigration.” The newspaper “welcomed everyone… [for their] gathered efforts to give prosperity to Sinaloa. …Even though for the moment [their investments] are only speculations, they will undoubtedly prosper tomorrow.” The Japanese continued their trip south towards the coastal states of Nayarit, Colima, Jalisco, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. Their itinerary involved meeting with local authorities, inspecting export-crop haciendas, mines, and waste lands, as well as gathering information concerning foreign trade and farming. Once back in Mexico City in early October, Fujita declared to the Mexican press that he was “delighted with his trip” and believed that “soon Mexico would count on a large number of Japanese immigrants.” Before returning home, the group visited president Díaz to thank him for his support. They gave him an ancient Japanese dagger as a present and, in return, Díaz gave them a tour of his private collection of arms. Jones and Fujita stayed in Mexico City, but

368 Misawa, 144.

369 *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries during the Years 1885 and 1886, vol. 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 877. The Mexican government gave a $1,200 monthly subsidy to *Alejandro* for carrying mail from all ports between Guaymas and Manzanillo.


they sent samples of Mexican products with the four returning members. By early December, 1892, Morio, Tsuneya, Takano, and Enomoto crossed the ocean and were back in Japan. The Mexican newspapers congratulated them on their safe arrival and celebrated that “their report will be entirely favourable towards Mexico.”

Only six months later the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored a new research expedition. This time it was Nemoto Tadashi, secretary of the Colonization Society, who traversed the Pacific in order to gather more specific information about Mexico’s southern coast. He left Yokohama in July, 1893, and arrived in Mexico City in August, staying for several weeks in order to interview various officials. In October, he arrived by steamer to the port of San Benito, close to the Guatemalan border. For a month and a half he traveled across the state of Chiapas, particularly within the Soconusco, a coffee-export area. He then visited the lands and the railroad construction in the Tehuantepec isthmus. Back in Mexico City, he declared to the press that he found “Chiapas [to be] the richest state” and assured that “the first Japanese colony in Mexico will probably be established there.” Manuel Fernández Leal, secretary of Development, urged him to buy land in Chiapas for the foundation of a Japanese colony before land prices went up. In February, 1894, Nemoto returned to Japan to give his report. A few months later he was back again at sea, this time to explore the Central American countries.

In early 1894, two other prominent Japanese arrived in Mexico City. The first was Jisashi Shinamura. He left his diplomatic post in New York in order to replace Fujita as the

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373 Cortés, 111.


375 “La colonización japonesa,” El Monitor Republicano, December 4, 1893, 3:1. See also Ota, 36.

376 Misawa, 149.

377 Ota, 37.
general consul in Mexico City. Contrary to Fujita, who traveled around the country and actively participated in the projects for establishing Japanese colonies, Jisashi mostly stayed in the capital and ten months later he was transferred out. Chiyosaburo Watanabe, on his part, arrived in March as a representative of Tokyo’s Nippon Guinko (Bank of Japan)’s Council of Administration. He only stayed for a few weeks in order to study the fluctuations of Mexican silver coins, which still circulated in Japan.

In August 1894, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored a new expedition to Mexico. This time Hashigushi Bunzo, an agricultural specialist, was sent to examine the properties in Chiapas that Nemoto had suggested in his report. Hashigushi had specialized in farming in the University of Boston, in Massachusetts, and by then was the director of the Agricultural University in Tokyo. He left Japan in August 22, 1894. His route was the usual one: from Yokohama to San Francisco and then a milk run towards Panama. He arrived to the port of San Benito on October 5. Within the next forty days, he visited various properties in the Soconusco area. He then took a steamer towards Salina Cruz, the terminus for Tehuantepec’s transcontinental railroad, inaugurated in September 1894. There, he took the train towards its other extreme, the port of Coatzacoalcos. He continued towards the city of Veracruz, where he connected with the train to Mexico City, arriving in November. On the 24th he interviewed with Secretary Fernández Leal, and a week later he met with president Díaz. By January, 1895 he had returned to Japan. In his final report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hashigushi

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378 Cortés, 111.
380 He is also referred to as Fushitoshi Hashigushi in some sources.
381 For information on this transcontinental railroad, see the next chapter.
382 Ota, 37-38.
concluded that of all the examined lands, a 116-hectare terrain in Escuintla, Chiapas, was the best suited for a Japanese colony. Its topography allowed for cultivating coffee in the highlands and grains in the lowlands. There was ample space for cattle and its proximity to a river and the sea would foster the fishing industry. Additionally, the terrain’s proximity to the Tehuantepec railroad and other local lines, which were already under construction, made it well connected. He suggested that the Japanese authorities act quickly in order not to miss a good opportunity—he was informed that a British colonization company was also interested in the area and land prices were rapidly increasing.  

One more land inspection would take place. Kusakado Toraji and Nemoto Tadashi arrived to Mexico City in August 1896, with the purpose of formalizing the Japanese intentions of buying land in Chiapas and examining the parcels suggested by Hashigushi one last time. Nemoto already knew the area well as he had traveled around southern Mexico and Central America two years earlier. From Mexico City the two traveled by train to Veracruz, where they took a steamer towards Coatzacoalcos. They then transferred to the Tehuantepec transcontinental railroad, which took them to Salina Cruz, where they embarked towards San Benito. After their visit to Chiapas, they separated, with Kusakado returning to Japan and Nemoto embarking for Peru. While still in Chiapas, they hired the services of local engineers who helped them inspect the terrain in Escuintla. They corroborated on a few measurements and took soil samples for examination, confirming the Japanese desire to establish their first colony in Escuintla.

383 Cortés, 77; Misawa, 149-150; Ota, 38.


385 Misawa, 153.
4.3 The Enomoto Colony in Chiapas

The negotiations to buy a 65,000-hectare terrain in Escuintla started in the summer of 1896 between Murota Yoshibuni, the new Japanese minister in Mexico City, who represented count Enomoto, and secretary of Development, Fernández Leal. Both parties signed the final version of the contract on January 29, 1897. It stipulated that Enomoto Takeaki had bought a “national terrain…in Escuintla, located in the Soconusco department in the state of Chiapas… destined for colonization.” For this purpose, Enomoto had to bring at least one Japanese family of farmers per every 2,000 hectares. In exchange, he obtained a discounted price of 1.55 cents per hectare, payable in fifteen yearly installments. Additionally, all sorts of tax exemptions applied as long as Enomoto brought the proposed number of colonizers.

Enomoto and the Colonization Society wanted to start the colony immediately. For this purpose, they put Kusakado Toraji, who had just returned from Chiapas, in charge of the project. Since the logistics for gathering families was going to take time, Kusakado decided instead to rely on young men from his hometown, Mikawa, in the Aichi prefecture. He convinced twenty one of them and complemented the group with eight men from Hyogo, three from Miyagui and two from Iwate. They were all males between 19 and 34 years of age. Six of them, Kiyono Saburo, Muramatsu Ishimatsu, Ota Renji, Sugawara Kotoku, Takahashi Kumataro, and Terui Ryojiro, were to travel as free emigrants; the rest as colonists. According to their contract, the Colonization Society would pay for their transportation and a monthly salary of $12. It would also provide them with medical insurance, lodging, and tools for

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386 Murota remained the Japanese minister in Mexico between 1895 and 1900, when he requested to be removed from his post due to health problems. Cortés, 111-112.

working the land. In exchange, the men committed to work for ten hours a day from Monday to Saturday.\(^\text{388}\)

The group left Yokohama on March 24, 1897, aboard the \textit{Gaelic}. She was a brand new British vessel of over 4,000 tons when she joined the Occidental & Oriental’s (O&O) transpacific service in 1885. Back in 1874, O&O had become the second company to challenge the Pacific Mail’s (PMSS) monopoly in the San Francisco-Yokohama run, just after the China Transpacific Co. (CTPC)—created a year earlier by a group of British merchants living in Hong Kong with the help of imperial subsidies.\(^\text{389}\) And just like it had happened with its British counterpart, O&O’s defiance did not last long. The company was created by the owners of the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads, which controlled all the railroads west of the Missouri river, after the PMSS announced that it would no longer transship its Asian cargo to the east via the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads because their fares were too expensive. Instead, the PMSS vessels would now unload in Panama and transfer via the local—and cheaper—transcontinental railroad. The United States railroad companies reacted promptly: they joined forces and created their own transpacific firm, the O&O. They chartered three British steamers and successfully started operations in 1874. However, the challenge did not last long. The PMSS soon reversed its decision after coming to an agreement with the railroad companies. By the end of the century, the PMSS had successfully co-opted O&O and both worked under the same management, offering weekly sailings between San Francisco and

\(^{388}\) Ota, 40-42.

\(^{389}\) See Chapter Two for a brief description of the CTPC. The PMSS is amply addressed in Chapter One.
Yokohama. *Gaelic* became one of the most active members of this combined transpacific fleet.\(^{390}\)

The group arrived at the port of San Benito, in Chiapas, on May 10, after having transferred in San Francisco to a PMSS vessel doing the milk run to Panama. They were greeted by Tono Kuraji and Enomoto Ryukichi, envoys from the Society, who were sent in advance to prepare the ground for them. Yet, the immigrants felt nothing was properly planned. To begin with, after close to fifty days at sea, they had to walk for twelve hours under the heat in order to arrive at Tapachula, the nearest city. After only two days of rest, they started their 100-kilometre walk towards Escuintla—a three-day hike through the jungle. They arrived at the onset of the rainy season, which meant they were too late to prepare the fields. Sparked by the first showers, the weeds had grown beyond control. The group’s inexperience with tropical agriculture showed when no one was able to plant coffee, the colony’s supposed main export crop. The men were also unsuccessful with the crops destined for personal consumption, which ended up being eaten by neighbouring cattle and birds. Additionally, they were attacked by local ailments for which they were not prepared, such as malaria, heat exhaustion, insect and snake bites. On top of that, Kusakado ran out of money and could not pay the men their promised salaries.\(^{391}\)

The situation became rapidly unsustainable. In June, the six free emigrants separated from the group and formed their own company, Teiyu Gaisha. They bought 222 hectares from Kusakado and began planting corn, beans, and sugarcane as well as raising cattle. In the long


\(^{391}\) Cortés, 78; Chizuko Watanabe, “The Japanese Immigrant Community in Mexico: its history and present” (M.A. Thesis, California State University, 1983), 17; Ota, 43.
run, these youngsters became the most successful of the group because as free emigrants they had access to more capital and overseas support networks than colonists. Additionally, most had university degrees, which meant that they had been exposed to the intricacies of traveling abroad. In effect, at the time, it was not uncommon that Japanese academic settings were imbued with ideas of striving and success abroad in order to increase personal and national wealth and prestige. Therefore, at the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of young, educated, middle-class Japanese left their country with certain know-how on how to become successful abroad. As for the colonists, ten of them fled Escuintla in July. Five of them arrived at the Japanese legation in Mexico City and demanded that consul Murota arrange for their immediate repatriation. In early August, Kusakado traveled to Japan in order to inform Enomoto of the situation. He requested his own dismissal and proposed to continue the venture only with free emigrants, who were the ones prospering in Escuintla. After hearing him, Enomoto decided to put an end to the Escuintla disaster. He sent Kawamura Naoyoshi and Kobayashi Naotaro to Chiapas with the purpose of repatriating the colonists. They left Yokohama in December. Kusakado, on his part, never returned to Mexico. He committed suicide after handing his report in to Enomoto.

392 Free emigrants differed from contract labourers or colonists in that the former did not sign employment agreements before leaving Japan. Instead, they usually received financial help to go overseas from innkeepers, emigration companies or personal contacts. Ichioka, 54.

393 Francis David Peddie Robson, “La colonia japonesa de México y la Segunda Guerra Mundial” (M.A. Thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2005), 58; Watanabe, 19.

394 Azuma, Between Two Empires…, 20-25. Hisashi Ueno, in his 1994 book Mekishiko Enomoto Shokumin arrives at the following conclusions on the subject: the most successful of the Enomoto colony’s members were those with higher educational levels, as they assumed leadership positions since the beginning. Even though they were idealists, they conducted businesses from a realistic perspective. They were self-reliant and married with locals, all of which helped them to succeed in Chiapas. Cited in Kikumura-Yano, 222.

395 Ota, 43-44; Watanabe, 17.
When Kobayashi and Kawamura arrived in Chiapas, the situation in the colony had improved. Some crops had started to prosper and not all men wanted to leave. At the end of January, only nine immigrants returned to Japan.\textsuperscript{396} The rest stayed in Escuintla. Supported by consul Murota, who also traveled to Chiapas to evaluate the situation, they decided to rebuild the colony. In May 1898, Kobayashi wrote Enomoto that some 404 hectares of land had been successfully planted with corn, cacao, and coffee.\textsuperscript{397} Two months later, diplomat Mauricio Wollheim spoke at the General Meeting of the Colonization Society, in Tokyo, and reassured investors of the viability of Escuintla’s project. He announced that he was so confident of the new Kobayashi management that he “offered to defray the expenses at Escuintla, which are estimated at $645 per month, during the second half of this year.” In exchange, he only demanded the corresponding number of shares to be transferred to him once the half-year had passed and had proven successful. His proposition was accepted.\textsuperscript{398} Two years later, a report from the Mexican government stipulated that in the Enomoto colony

“the sugarcane crops had rendered positive results…they provide the colony with 100 tons of sugar per hectare… The colonists have also started with the cultivation of rice, but they have not planted coffee, because they have not yet found the appropriate terrain. Corn and bean sowing have been minimal, but there are projects to expand them. At the same time, the number of cacao and rubber trees has increased…”\textsuperscript{399}

In 1901, Enomoto ceded his rights on the Escuintla terrain to businessman Fujino Tatsuijro. Some administrative changes followed suit. Fuse Tsunematsu, an agronomist from the University of Komaba, replaced Kobayashi as the administrator of the colony. Misumi

\textsuperscript{396} Watanabe, 18.
\textsuperscript{397} Ota, 45.
\textsuperscript{398} Archivo Matías Romero, reel 69, f. 48781, 7.
\textsuperscript{399} Cited in Ota, 45.
Sutezo became Fujino’s representative to the Mexican government. Concerned with the health of the colonists, Misumi hired his close friend Tsuneki Horita as resident doctor. He arrived together with Fuse in 1902. Doctor Horita returned to Japan in 1904, only to come back to Escuintla two years later. This time he brought his new wife and a close friend of his, Naraki, who became the local pharmacist. After three years, he left for Germany and never returned. Fujino himself decided to move to Chiapas too. For a decade, he worked with a reduced number of colonists and was moderately successful at producing rubber and coffee as well as raising cattle. After his death, the colony’s decline began. In 1914 it was finally dissolved when the Mexican government declared the contract void.

While the Enomoto project in Escuintla failed at creating a successful state-sponsored colony, it succeeded at triggering a prosperous and growing migration of Japanese to southern Mexico. For instance, Fuse Tsunematsu, the colony’s administrator for several years, bought a farm for himself and invited young Japanese to immigrate and work with him. He was successful at producing coffee, cacao, and beans as well as raising cattle. Fuse stayed in the area until 1932, when he traveled back to Japan and died. The founders of Teiyu Gaisha, for their part, also became successful businessmen who encouraged Japanese to migrate to Mexico and work for them. In 1901 they joined with other fellow countrymen and formed San-O, a business association that moved from farming to retail as its main source of income. Its initial capital, $500, served to start retail stores in the neighbouring towns of Acocayagua, Pueblo Nuevo, Escuintla and Tajuco. In 1905, its capital increased to $11,348. New members joined

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400 Relación de la visita oficial a la zona de la colonia Enomoto de La Chiapas, sur de México, 61.

401 Ota, 45.

402 Cortés, 81. Most of the businesses described in this paragraph suffered serious damages during the Mexican Revolution. See Chapter Six to understand the impact of this war.
and San-O was renamed Mexican-Japanese Company, Cooperative Society-Nichiboku Kyodo Gaisha. Three years later, the Society had 83 members, including twelve Mexican women married to Japanese men and twenty one of their children. In 1916, its capital ascended to $200,000 and its list of businesses included: two farms, Tajuco and Permuta; a vegetable field, a pharmacy, and an ice cream parlor in Tapachula; a mill, two stores, a pharmacy and an electric company in Escuintla; two pharmacies in Huixtla and Tuxtla Chico; and a clock shop in Tonalá. The Society’s prosperity attracted a growing number of Japanese who arrived to Chiapas to work for its various businesses. They came not only from Japan, but also from the United States, Guatemala, and Peru. Their stay in Chiapas allowed them to earn money and start their own businesses in the surroundings or in the neighbouring states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. The Society also brought teachers from Japan and opened a school for the children of Japanese-Mexican unions. They were also responsible for the first Japanese-Spanish dictionary edited in Mexico. In 1923 the Society dissolved, but its members remained in the area and continued working independently.\footnote{Ota, 46-49; Cortés, 80-81; Relación, 56-61. In 1958 a group of Japanese researchers visited Chiapas with the purpose of interviewing with all the Japanese descendants living there. The result of this was a report available in Japanese and Spanish, the Relación de la visita oficial a la zona de la colonia Enomoto de la Chiapas, sur de México.}

4.4 Mexico and Japan in the 1890s

At the end of the nineteenth century, Mexican and Japanese elites coincided in their aspirations and used each other in order to consolidate a favourable Pacific project in the midst of imperial challenges. Both countries were emerging nations that, at the time, did not pose major geopolitical threats to the other, making it possible for them to work as allies in the face of stronger imperial actors in the region. In effect, Japanese elites used Mexico as the country
where they could set a precedent of equal treatment that might help them mitigate the effects of the uneven treaties previously signed with the United States, Peru, Hawaii and the European powers. Additionally, Mexico embodied a space where the still fragile dream of imperial expansion in the Pacific through Japanese colonies and maritime routes could flourish. For Mexican officials, relations with Japan represented an opportunity to make the cherished dream of establishing prosperous maritime and commercial links with Asia come true, after all previous attempts—discussed in the last chapter—had failed due to the need to resort to the intermediation of Pacific imperial powers in their relations with Asia. This intermediation finally became less necessary once the Porfírian diplomacy managed to established official relations with an Asian country for the first time in the country’s independent history.

As a consequence, both governments promoted the movement of peoples across the Pacific in order to consolidate their national and, in the case of Japan, imperial projects. Both sent their diplomatic corps as a vanguard and, by the early 1890s, opened offices in each other’s territories, so that their officials could deal directly with each other, instead of resorting to the use of British and U.S. intermediaries, as it had happened up to then. Japan also dispatched numerous emissaries in order to explore the terrain for the establishment of colonies. The constant flux across the ocean described in the chapter thus serves to suggest that nations and empires are formed through movement. And, more specifically, that transpacific movement related to Mexico was important to the construction of Pacific nations and empires at the time.

Just as it had happened with the Chinese, Japanese immigration to Mexico was also explained in terms of racialized and positivist arguments; yet the difference was that those arguments served to support the Japanese presence in more favourable terms than it did with the Chinese. In effect, as seen in the last chapter, Porfírian elites either completely dismissed the Chinese by assigning negative qualities to their “race” or, in the best case, found a place for
them in their national imaginaries only as alien, cheap, hard working labourers. In contrast, Japanese were sometimes given the role of industrialists, that is, leading forces in the country’s economic development, because Porfirian circles identified with the rapid modernization process put in place by Japanese elites. As a consequence, the Mexicans saw a place for Japanese immigrants not only as temporary contract workers, but also as more permanent colonos. And in order to further stress the incorporation of Japanese to the Porfirian national imaginary, some even suggested a supposed racial affinity between the Mexican Indians and the Japanese populations. By linking Japanese to the ancestral roots of the Mexican nationality, the Porfirian elites created a historical tie that gave legitimacy to the Japanese presence in Mexico, despite the fact that records show that Japanese far had less contact with colonial Mexico than the Chinese did.

Finally, the evidence discussed in this chapter also shows that once the colonization project in Mexico left the desk of the Japanese and Mexican bureaucrats and became a reality, it took on a life of its own. While the first colonizers arrived to Chiapas as part of a governmental plan—from both countries—to populate the area with hard-working farmers who could produce crops for export, the plan did not materialize as either government had envisioned it. The Japanese colonists ended up following their own paths without the strict state regulation. Many prospered, especially those who moved from farming to retail, married locals, and formed families. Around the same time, hundreds of Chinese began migrating to the Mexican Pacific coast as well. Yet, in the absence of governmental backing and facing increasing racial/class discrimination, they had a harder bargain when entering Mexico, as the next chapter will show.
Suisang arrived at the shores of southern Mexico’s Salina Cruz bay on the morning of May 14th, 1908. She had left Hong Kong the previous month and was carrying some twenty first and second class passengers and over 500 in steerage. Suisang was one of a handful of chartered steamers from the China Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC), a Chinese venture conceived in Hong Kong in 1903 in order to establish direct routes between Asia and Mexico.

A day after landing, Dr. Valenzuela, the port’s health delegate, came aboard to perform his routine check up and found close to 400 men—ten from second class and the rest from steerage—affecting what he believed to be trachoma, a chronic, contagious eye-disease. He refused landing to the infected passengers and sent a telegram to his superior, Dr. Liceaga, a member of Mexico City’s Board of Health, who eventually ordered the release of all second-class passengers while refusing entrance to those travelling in steerage.\textsuperscript{404} The CCSC’s authorities protested at once.\textsuperscript{405} They claimed that Dr. Valenzuela’s diagnose was flawed. It was true that according to the affidavits of the Captain and the ship’s surgeon, in the last week of sailing some 110 passengers had shown symptoms of an eye disease, but they were signs of a “simple conjunctivitis... which [had] disappeared after treatment some time after arrival”.\textsuperscript{406}

A month later, the dispute not only continued but had turned into a diplomatic battle, once again involving—like in the case of the Mount Lebanon discussed in Chapter Three—Mexican, Chinese, and British authorities. Meanwhile, some 400 Chinese men remained aboard the Suisang in the worst possible circumstances. The poor sanitary conditions combined with

\textsuperscript{404} Public Records Office-Hong Kong (PRO-HK), C.O.129/352, 342-343 and C.O.129/378, 102.

\textsuperscript{405} PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 106.

\textsuperscript{406} PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 105.
the intense tropical heat had taken a disastrous toll amongst them: mumps, beri beri, and tuberculosis began to spread and their eye disease—whether trachoma or “simple” conjunctivitis—had exacerbated.\(^{407}\) The ship’s captain feared a mutiny and the Mexican authorities were apprehensive that “if this should unfortunately occur it would be a serious matter as the armed forces at disposal in this Port would be insufficient to cope with such a rising.”\(^{408}\)

The contextualization of the Suisang case will reveal that the presence of Chinese labourers on the Mexican Pacific coast was at the heart of a disputed debate where race, class, science, and nation intersected in order to determine who had the right to be part of the Porfirian project and under what terms. The case will also illustrate the evolution of the first steamship company that finally managed to establish direct routes between Asia and Mexico—after so many aborted attempts discussed in earlier chapters—as well as the kinds of problems faced by the Chinese steerage travelers whose fares comprised the bulk of the company’s income. Finally it will expose the importance of Salina Cruz in the Porfirian Pacific strategy as well as in the transpacific port network once it became the terminal of the country’s first—and the continent’s fourth\(^{409}\)—transcontinental railroad and as such, developed into a locus for international disputes such as the one we will examine here.


\(^{408}\) PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 349.

\(^{409}\) The transcontinental railroads in Panama (then part of Colombia), the United States, and Canada were inaugurated in 1855, 1869, and 1885 respectively. The Mexican, as we will see, opened in 1894.
5.1 The Establishment of Sino-Mexican Relations and the Beginnings of the Chinese Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC)

The first diplomatic contacts between Mexico and China occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, during the imperial rule of Maximilian of Habsburg, which began in 1864 following Napoleon III’s invasion of Mexico and ended with his execution by the republican armies in 1867. Since his government was the product of a foreign intervention and ran parallel to the liberal government of Benito Juárez –recognized by the Mexican official history as the only legitimate president during this period– this episode has never received public acknowledgment.\(^{410}\) In 1864, right after assuming power, emperor Maximilian requested that D. G. Overbeck, then Austrian consul in Hong Kong, act as the representative for Mexico as well. He immediately accepted, but the British authorities took a long time to process his appointment due to the absence of a treaty between Mexico and China. By the time official approval arrived in the summer of 1866, Overbeck had decided to leave Hong Kong for Shanghai and, therefore, left his credentials for Adalf Eimbcke, a personal friend who had spent time in Mexico and who was one of the partners of the local firm Caslovitz & Co.\(^{411}\) By this time, Maximilian’s government in Mexico City had been severely weakened due to the gradual repatriation of Napoleon III’s French troops, his main military backing, the loss of many of his local supporters, and the increasing attacks of the liberal armies. It is, therefore, doubtful that this

\(^{410}\) So far only the Mexican economist Francisco Haro, who was preparing a history of Sino-Mexican relations at the time of the writing of this thesis, seemed interested in including this data in his work, which was published just as this dissertation was in its final edits. See Mercedes de Vega (coord.), *Historia de las relaciones internacionales de México, 1821-2010, vol. 6: Asia* (Mexico City: SRE, 2011), 65. For more on Maximilian’s government, see Konrad Ratz, *Tras las huellas de un desconocido: nuevos datos y aspectos de Maximiliano de Habsburgo* (Mexico City: Conaculta/Siglo XXI, 2008) and *Maximiliano de Habsburgo* (Mexico City: Planeta, 2002).

appointment ever materialized. Yet, a pioneer group of Chinese labourers from Hong Kong managed to arrive in Mexico during this time in order to work on the construction of the *Ferrocarril Nacional Central*, in the northern state of Chihuahua, as part of the activities of the newly established Chinese Colonization Company. This venture was supposed to continue bringing labourers for ten more years. Yet no records show that this project ever materialized.412

The officially acknowledged negotiations for the establishment of relations between the republic of Mexico and the Chinese empire began two decades later. Once again—like the negotiations with the Japanese examined in the previous chapter—Washington served as the mediating arena and it was Matías Romero, the Mexican representative, who initiated the first informal exchanges with Cheng Tsao Ju, his Chinese peer.413 This process began with informal contacts in 1882, the year of the signature of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred the legal immigration of Chinese male labourers to the United States for a period of ten years.414 A formal petition by Romero arrived in August, 1884, in the context of the establishment of the *Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico* (CMNP), the first steamship company created in Mexico with the purpose of opening direct maritime routes with Asia in order to import Chinese labourers.415 Cheng responded with courtesy, but the matter was clearly not a priority.


414 The restrictions on Chinese immigrations to the United States were extended in 1892 and 1904 and it was not until 1943 that the bar was entirely lifted. Robert Romero Chao, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010), 1.

415 See Chapter Three.
Back in Asia, the empire was about to engage in military confrontations with France, and that situation occupied most of the diplomats’ attention there. Meanwhile, in the Americas, Cheng had multiple complaints to attend to from the hundreds of thousands of Chinese living in the United States, Peru, and Cuba, which together comprised the large territory for which he was responsible. In his words, as transcribed by Romero, “the Emperor’s government believed that, since there was no traffic nor important official relations between both countries, and not being easy for him to accredit a minister in Mexico, it would be preferable to defer the celebration of a treaty for later, when the increase in trade and relations made it necessary...”

In November, Cheng left for Peru and talks halted. Once back, the minister fell sick and left his post. When the new representative, Chang Yen Huan, arrived in Washington, he also gave priority to the Chinese complaints throughout his territory. As a consequence, talks between him and Romero were constantly interrupted.

With the entering of the new decade, the Chinese diplomats changed their posture towards Mexico: rather than seeing the negotiations as an annoying predicament that distracted

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416 Since the beginning of the decade, China and France had engaged in military confrontations for the control of Tonkin (present northern Vietnam). During the fall of 1884 several battles were taking place and the Chinese were facing considerable losses. On this war and Chinese international relations at the time see Chere, L. M., The Diplomacy of the Sino-French War (1883–1885): Global Complications of an Undeclared War (Notre Dame: Cross Cultural Publications, 1988); Eastman, L., Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy during the Sino-French Controversy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); Elleman, B., Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795–1989 (London: Routledge 2001).


419 Valdés, 100-104.
them from more pressing issues, such as the defence of Chinese abroad, they began seeing Mexico as a possible solution to such problems. In effect, in 1892 the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was originally intended to last only for ten years, had been extended for another decade.420 Since the Chinese diplomats had failed at lobbying the U.S. authorities in order to cancel the Act, they then opted for creating favourable conditions for the Chinese to settle in neighbouring Mexico.421 In fact, various groups of Chinese contract workers had already arrived in Mexico in the previous decade, mostly from California (see next section), but without a treaty in place, they could hardly receive assistance from the Chinese representatives. Therefore, in 1893, a newly appointed and quite enthusiastic Yang Ju contacted Romero in order to accelerate negotiations. The next summer, a Chinese commission visited Mexico for the purpose of analyzing the conditions for immigration. In the following years, negotiations in Washington advanced at a slower pace due to several factors, notably the discussions on extraterritoriality, Yang Ju’s transfer to Moscow in 1896, and Matías Romero’s death in 1898. Finally on December 14, 1899, Manuel Aspiroz and Wu Ting Fang signed the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation between Mexico and China, with article five stipulating that Chinese could freely immigrate to the Mexican territory.422

420 The Chinese Exclusion Act got extended indefinitely in 1902. It was repealed in 1943.

421 This process was also triggered by pressures from Chinese businessmen living in the United States who were interested in expanding into Mexico, such as San Francisco-based Win Won, Yee Shoon and Wee Pack, Fung Lond and Co. as well as the Mexican banking firm Samuel Hnos de Mexico and Arthur C. Reeves, who owned a coffee plantation in Mexico. Valdés, 107-108. See also Vera Valdés Lakowsky, “México y China: del Galeón de Manila al primer tratado de 1899,” Estudios de historia moderna y contemporánea de México 9 (1983): 9-19; Jingsheng Dong, “Chinese Emigration to Mexico and the Sino-Mexico Relations before 1910,” Estudios Internacionales (Chile) 38 (Jan-Mar, 2006): 82.

422 Valdés, Vinculaciones sino-mexicanas, 100-120. All the primary documents created by the Mexican diplomats during the entire process of negotiations for the treaty with China are found in AHGE-SRE, L-E-1983, L-E-1984, L-E-1985.
The absence of formal relations between Mexico and China had been the main impediment to regularly importing Chinese workers from Hong Kong. In the 1880s, both the CMNP and the CMAM, the two Mexican companies that had previously attempted to bring labourers, had failed to obtain permission to import labourers from the British governor of Hong Kong, who alluded to the lack of relations as one of the main legal obstacles. Many other Chinese businessmen had also tried to partake in similar ventures, particularly after the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and its subsequent ratification in 1892, but most had not been able to do so with regularity. That is the case, for instance, of San Francisco-based Win Won, Yee Shoon, and Wee Pack and Mexican-based firms Samuel Hermanos, Fung Long & Co., as well as Arthur C. Reeves. Therefore, after the ratification of the treaty, Wu Ting Fang received requests from several merchants who wanted to be assured they would be allowed to legally take labourers from Hong Kong to Mexico. They pointed out that there was a big market for a direct maritime route between Hong Kong and Mexico because up to then

“all the Chinese proceeding by steamer from Hong Kong... have to cross in the United States in order to arrive to Mexico. This being very inconvenient,” they requested that “the Wai Wu Pu [the Chinese Department of Foreign Affairs] might be asked to notify His Excellency the British Minister for communication to His Excellency the Governor of Hongkong, that China and Mexico are now under Treaty relations and that therefore in the future there would be nothing to prevent Chinese travelling by Steamers running between the two countries.”

The British answer came in October, 1902, when the Under Secretary of State, Francis Bertie, confirmed that “there appears to be no objection to permitting such emigration in future.”

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423 See Chapter Three.

424 Valdés, 107-108.


The first group of businessmen who successfully managed to start a transpacific maritime operation between Mexico and Asia was comprised of Chinese living in Hong Kong. This was no surprise as the island offered all the conditions needed for such a venture to prosper. In effect, since the mid-century crushing of the Taiping rebellion had devastated large areas of southern China, many local businessmen had fled to Hong Kong, where they received the support of a British government that needed their money and knowhow to make their enclave thrive. At the same time, these capitalists maintained ties with their hometowns, which allowed them to continue doing businesses with the people and resources from mainland China.\footnote{John M. Carroll, \textit{Edge of Empires. Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 37-57.}

In this context, a group of twenty Chinese businessmen from Hong Kong formed the China Commercial Steamship Company Ltd. (CCSC) on November 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1902, with the purpose of inaugurating a monthly service between Hong Kong and Mexico that would bring labourers from southern China to Mexico. Their initial capital amounted to $1,000,000, allotted in 9,980 shares of $100 each. Eng Hok Fong became the first president and J. S. Van Buren, who had been working with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, became the appointed agent.\footnote{“A new shipping line in Hong Kong,” \textit{The Hong Kong Daily Press}, December 4, 1902, 2.}

Eng Hok Fong traveled immediately to Mexico and on January 28, 1903, he signed a contract with the Mexican government in order to establish “a shipping steamship service between Hong Kong or other ports from China, Japan and the United States and the port of Manzanillo and, if the company’s interests allow it, to Mazatlan as well...making at least eleven round trips per year.”\footnote{“Contrato,” \textit{Diario Oficial}, February, 1903, 677.} In exchange for the free transportation of the government’s mail, the company received various tax exemptions. Unlike the CMNP and the CMAM, the CCSC was
not to receive any subventions for bringing Chinese labourers, as passengers would be treated as free emigrants in order to avoid any objections from Hong Kong’s British authorities. Yet, in reality, steerage passengers more often than not were contracted labourers and their import would represent the main source of revenue for the company. Another possible source of income would be the transportation of import/export commodities as suggested by article nine, which encouraged the CCSC to sign agreements with railroad and other steamship companies in order to facilitate and increase trade. The contract was to be effective immediately and had a five-year duration, extendable indefinitely every five years until either of the signing parties objected.

The company began operations in the summer of 1903. In effect, the Official Guide for Mexican Railways and Steamships, which offered a monthly schedule of all trains and steamers circulating in the country, listed the CCSC beginning in June, 1903. It stipulated that the company would run monthly steamers from Manzanillo to San Francisco, Yokohama, and Hong Kong—the upcoming ones leaving on June 10, July 7, August 2 and 25. The publication listed the following agents: Elliot and Lange in Manzanillo, J. V. C. Comfort in San Francisco, and J. S. Van Buren in Hong Kong. The Office of the Postmaster General, in its monthly bulletin on steamship itineraries, complemented the above information. In its August 1903 issue it affirmed that the CCSC’s steamer Clavering would dock in Manzanillo on August 2, arriving from Hong Kong, Moji, Kobe, and Yokohama. It would then leave on August 21 for San Francisco,

430 Since 1853 the British government forbid the emigration of Chinese contract workers to countries outside the British Empire. Gómez, 31.

431 PRO-HK, C.O. 129/352, 412-413.

432 “Contrato,” 677.

433 Dirección General de Correos in Spanish.
Yokohama, Kobe, Moji, and Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{434} The same itinerary is listed in subsequent months for other company steamers.\textsuperscript{435} As we can see, on their way eastwards the CCSC vessels traveled directly from Asian ports to Manzanillo and, on the way back, they made a stop at San Francisco. This way the company offered its Chinese steerage passengers a direct service to Mexico without the hassle of a stopover in San Francisco—which was the itinerary followed by the Pacific Mail and all other transpacific carriers\textsuperscript{436}—where, due to the Exclusion Act, they would not be allowed to disembark. Yet, on the way back to Asia, its steamers made a stop in San Francisco in order to benefit from the large number of Asian passengers who were returning to their places of origin, whether voluntarily or after being expelled from the United States. During these first months of operation, most of the steerage passengers brought by the CCSC were hired to work in the construction of the Central Mexican Railroad, particularly in the stretch linking the port of Manzanillo—where they had disembarked—with the city of Guadalajara.\textsuperscript{437}

\textsuperscript{434} Dirección General de Correos, \textit{Movimiento probable de vapores}, August, 1903, 8.

\textsuperscript{435} See the remaining 1903 and 1904 volumes of the Dirección General de Correos, \textit{Movimiento probable de vapores}.

\textsuperscript{436} At that point, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSS), the Oriental & Occidental and the Toyo Kisen Kaisha were the companies that offered transpacific trips on a regular service between Asia and North America and they all stopped at San Francisco. See add in \textit{The Hong Kong Telegraph}, January 13, 1904, 2.

\textsuperscript{437} \textit{Guía oficial de los ferrocarriles y vapores mexicanos}, August, 1903, Vol. III, no. 9, 10.
5.2  The “Chinese Problem” in Mexico

While the establishment of the CCSC triggered a massive influx of Chinese, some contingents of workers had been arriving irregularly to Mexico since at least the 1860s. One pioneering group had arrived from Hong Kong in the mid-1860s to work on the construction of the Ferrocarril Nacional Central, near the border with the United States. In the following years, a few other contingents arrived from California to work in Baja California’s gold mines and cotton plantations and to continue working on the area’s railroads. After the 1882 Exclusion Act in the United States, the arrivals multiplied. By the beginning of the 1890s, there were already various communities of Chinese living in the northern states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, and Sinaloa as well as in the southern states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Yucatan. Official documents from 1895 and 1900—that is, prior to the establishment of the CCSC—list the population of Chinese living in Mexico in 1,023 and 2,835 people respectively. In Sonora alone, the state with the highest ratio of Chinese in the entire country, they would eventually become the second largest foreign group, only outnumbered by U.S. citizens. While many of them were contracted labourers working mostly in mines, agricultural haciendas, and railroads, there were others who had succeeded at establishing all sorts of small businesses, notably in retail.

As seen in Chapter Three, Chinese had been the subject of negative stereotypes and prejudices since colonial times, but discrimination in the Mexican press increased in the


439 In 1910, the registered Chinese population in Mexico had increased to 13,203. Romero, 56.

northern states as the Chinese multiplied and flourished as independent businessmen, often marrying local women.\textsuperscript{441} There were three main arguments the media repeated. The first was economic and suggested that they displaced the local workforce and, therefore, increased local unemployment or, at the very least, contributed to decrease salary levels. The second argued that they were inassimilable, too different from the Mexican ideal prototype and in cases where they attempted to integrate by marrying local women, they would only degenerate the Mexican race with their inferior traits and mores. The third labeled them as polluting agents as they often carried contagious diseases due to the unsanitary conditions they lived in and therefore represented a serious threat to public health and hygiene.\textsuperscript{442} For the purpose of this case-study, we will concentrate on the examples that illustrate the latter bias.

The first comes from Mazatlan, Sinaloa, where public opinion was among the most virulently anti-Chinese in the nation, often citing Chinese residents as a source for epidemics in the city. As one of the main commercial hubs and maritime terminals for the prosperous northern states, Mazatlan served as an arrival port for many Chinese labourers, particularly those coming from the nearby port of San Francisco. It was also the destination chosen by dozens of Chinese merchants who wanted to benefit from its booming economy. The registers in Mazatlan show Chinese established there as early as 1841.\textsuperscript{443} For decades they lived in relative harmony until the San Francisco-based Wing Wo Company began operations in 1886 with Mazatlan as its base for the import of Chinese labourers into Mexico. One of the first contingents arrived in April, which was immediately labeled a plague by a Catholic

\textsuperscript{441} See Chapter Three for a revision on Chinese discrimination in Mexico since colonial times up to the 1880s.

\textsuperscript{442} Gómez, 65.

\textsuperscript{443} Archivo Municipal de Mazatlán (AMM), Independiente, Presidencia, caja 10, expediente 2, July 29, 1841.
newspaper. By June, there were some 220 Chinese lodged in two large houses on Mazatlan’s main avenue, while waiting to be transported to their intended final destinations in Salina Cruz and the interior of Sinaloa. A group of neighbors complained to the town council about the unsanitary conditions they lived in and requested their eviction to a remote location in order to prevent a potential health hazard. A health commission formed by doctors Zúñiga and Valadés was appointed. After a visit to the premises, they filed a report full of Eurocentric scientific jargon in order to support the argument that the Chinese posed a sanitary threat. For instance, they suggested that out of the 56.25 cubic meters of air than an individual required to live healthily according to recent European standards, the Chinese only had 18 per person. This, combined with several other unhealthy factors, made them conclude that: “1. The houses absolutely lack the necessary hygienic conditions…2. The immigrants’ permanence in those houses is an imminent danger for the development of infectious and contagious diseases in the city. 3. This danger [would be] even more impending in the following rainy season…” The municipality then ordered the police to evict the Chinese, but the prefect responded that this was not possible for two main reasons. Firstly, there existed no law that specified the right amount of people to live in one private home. Secondly, he had received a letter from Gee Shoon, Wing Wo’s representative, in which he promised to take any extraordinary measures required by the government. In order to force the eviction, the municipality responded by enacting a decree in June 22 which forbid “the agglomeration of inhabitants in one single building [based on the

444 “Los chinos en Mexico,” El Tiempo, April 3, 1886, 3.

445 AMM, “Inmigrantes chinos. Se consulta si su aglomeración en las casas que ocupan son nocivas a la salubridad pública,” Presidencia, caja 38, expediente 1, documento 10, May, 1886, 8.
The case ended six months later when Ramón Ortiz, one of the 150 Chinese labourers left by then in the area, showed up in the police quarters to accuse Wing Wo’s agent of not fulfilling the contract that stipulated a payment of a peso per day worked. He claimed that they were instead left on their own with no work, no money, and no way to get by as they did not speak Spanish. They offered the municipality their working force in exchange for enough money to cover their basic necessities while they waited for help from the Chinese authorities. The municipality accepted to pay their 30-peso rent and 12 daily cents for food and sent the bill to the Chinese consulate in San Francisco. The consul responded within three weeks by sending a 400-dollar cheque and a compromise by the Wing Wo Company to never again commit such a violation.

Just like Mazatlán, Guaymas, in the state of Sonora, was another port that served as a base for many Chinese labourers and merchants as well as a place where disputes over health conditions took place. For instance, in 1899, in the context of the signature of the treaty between Mexico and China, the local newspaper *El Tráfico* wrote a series of articles criticizing the presence of Chinese in the city and objecting to the potential arrival of more immigrants that the establishment of formal relations promised to trigger. The source of contention was once again the barracks destined for the labourers as well as the commercial establishments owned by Chinese. After the newspaper targeted them as the source for an epidemic of leprosy that affected the city, the municipality appointed a health commission in order to examine all the

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446 AMM, “Inmigrantes chinos. Se consulta si su aglomeración en las casas que ocupan son nocivas a la salubridad pública,” Presidencia, caja 38, expediente 1, documento 10, June 24, 1886, s/f.

447 Many Chinese immigrants would get Mexican names (either willingly or forced by their employers or the Mexican authorities, who could not pronounce their Chinese names) when arriving to the country.

448 It is not clear if the Chinese were put to work for the Municipality in exchange for those 12 cents.

449 AMM, “Inmigrantes chinos. Se consulta si su aglomeración en las casas que ocupan son nocivas a la salubridad pública,” Presidencia, caja 38, expediente 1, documento 10, 1886, s/f.
Chinese establishments. Contrary to the case in Mazatlan, here the commission found no evidence against them.\footnote{El Tráfico newscaps from February to June, 1899 reproduced in Humberto Monteón González and José Luis Trueba Lara, Chinos y antichinos en México. Documentos para su estudio (Guadalajara: Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco, 1988), 38-53.}

With this type of experience as antecedent, it is not surprising that once the CCSC started operations, it was also accused of bringing aliens who could become potential health hazards for the country, especially as the labourers’ conditions were poor upon disembarking. In May, 1903, just after the first 500 Chinese brought by the company had arrived in Manzanillo, Colima, a Mexico City newspaper described the event in the following terms:

“The contractors threw them on shore and abandoned them. Our government has enacted very firm dispositions for the construction of barracks on the coast in order to lodge the immigrants; [for their] meticulous disinfection and [for] the establishment of quarantines...The arrival of the Chinese caused great curiosity in Colima [city] and from there more than 1,000 people went to witness the disembarking of the Asians.” The Chihuahua newspaper that reproduced this article made the following addendum: “we join those who demand that, were it not possible to stop the inrush of the people of the queue, let’s at least have the greatest precautions and procure the greatest isolation of the yellow flesh.”\footnote{“La inmigracion china,” El correo de Chihuahua, May 31, 1903, 2, 4.}

The dispositions mentioned by the newspaper article were apparently suggested by the CCSC after seeing the anxiety produced by the disembarking of immigrants in such poor conditions.\footnote{AHGE-SRE, 15-10-6, 1903-4, “Inmigración japonesa. Medidas dictadas por la Secretaria de Gobernación,” 34.}

Four months later, after the emergence of a bubonic plague in Mazatlan was blamed on the Chinese, the federal secretary of the Interior temporarily banned their entrance. He later substituted this measure with a sanitary decree regulating Asian immigration. The September 29 decree stipulated that:
“1… each immigrant or passenger,\textsuperscript{453} before embarking [for Mexico]… [must have] a health certificate… legalized by the Mexican consul…[issued] no longer than two months prior to arrival. 2… each vessel [must have] a disinfecting stove for clothes and luggage… as well as a Clayton machine to produce sulphuric acid to disinfect the ship and kill rats… 3. … in the port of disembarking, the vessel, the load and the luggage will be disinfected… passengers and immigrants will be subject to surveillance, isolation, quarantine… 4. Disembarking will happen in the port of Manzanillo [unless the number of immigrants is less than 10], where the CCSC will build a pest house… 5… additional caution measures by the Health Council should be observed… 6. The Health Council and its delegates will be able to detain the vessels for as long as it is necessary in order to carry through with the previous measures. These measures will be observed by the Chinese and Japanese immigrants coming from the ports of China and Japan.”\textsuperscript{454}

The Japanese government immediately complained, finding it discriminatory to explicitly target only the two Asian nationalities. After a few epistolary exchanges, the Mexican government opted for eliminating the last phrase of the decree so that no specific mention to any nationality was made. The decree expired after a few months, once the government considered there was no more “threat.”\textsuperscript{455}

Three weeks after the decree was published, in October, 17, 1903 president Díaz formed a federal commission in order to inquire into the repercussions of bringing Chinese labourers to Mexico. It had five members, all part of the Porfirian elite: Eduardo Liceaga, Rafael Rebollar, José María Romero, José Covarrubias, and Genaro Raigosa. The latter was president. Two publications came out of it:\textsuperscript{456} “The Chinese immigration from an intellectual and moral point of view,” published by Covarrubias in the Revista Positiva and a text written by senator Romero. Both attributed a series of negative qualities to the Chinese: xenophobic, fanatic, cruel,

\textsuperscript{453} “Immigrants” was the term used for the labourers destined to work in Mexico. First and second-class passengers were usually referred to as “passengers” while those in steerage were referred to as “immigrants.”

\textsuperscript{454} AHGE-SRE, 15-10-6, 1903-4, “Inmigración japonesa. Medidas dictadas por la Secretaría de Gobernación,” 40.

\textsuperscript{455} AHGE-SRE, 15-10-6, 1903-4, “Inmigración japonesa. Medidas dictadas por la Secretaría de Gobernación,” 28-54.

\textsuperscript{456} There could have been more publications, but those are the only ones known today. Gómez, 67.
uncivilized. They argued that in the alleged quest for a strong homogeneous Mexican race, Chinese were not the right element to bring as they were too different from the idealized Christian Western civilization and, as such, could not assimilate. For José María Romero, they could become a dangerous influence on the indigenous peoples in Mexico as “due to the state of ignorance and misery in which they find themselves, the contact with the Chinese could produce a serious degeneration, as to avert their danger, the masses do not possess the moral strength [that characterize those with] economic wealth and intellectual culture.”

Covarrubias, on his part, did not see any danger of degeneration because to his view, the Chinese and the Mexicans were so different that they would always stay apart. Yet both coincided in the idea that the benefit of the immigration was economic: in order to continue with its necessary industrializing progress, Mexico needed cheap labour that could adapt to harsh conditions, and the Chinese were perfect for that. In this sense, Covarrubias suggested the government not systematically exclude them but “direct this immigration to the places that need it, reduce it to the most convenient terms and always keep in the hands of the government the direction of its movement.”

In the state of Oaxaca, where many of the labourers were destined (and the state where Salina Cruz is located), the inquiries of the commission triggered a careful study of the Chinese presence. Local authorities reported some 200 Chinese living permanently in various municipalities, notably in Juchitán and Tehuantepec, close to the coast. Most were engaged in retail, but there were several working as cooks, farmers as well as in the laundry and hotel businesses. With the exception of Tehuantepec, where the authority labelled them as lazy, dirty,
and prone to stealing, all districts with Chinese presence reported good or even impeccable behaviour and not a single offense committed by them.\textsuperscript{459} The Chinese presence in the state boomed with the establishment of the CCSC trips. In effect, by the end of 1904, the CCSC had brought some 5,000 Chinese labourers to the Mexican coast, most of them precisely to the state of Oaxaca. \textsuperscript{460} In agreement with the opinions versed by the commissioners mentioned in the above paragraph, they were there as the cheap labour needed in order to build a key project for the national strategy of the Porfirian regime: the Tehuantepec transcontinental railroad and its adjacent international ports of Coatzacoalcos and Salina Cruz.

\subsection*{5.3 The Tehuantepec Railroad\textsuperscript{461} and the Porfírian National Project}

Building a canal or a railroad across the Tehuantepec isthmus—the narrowest stretch in the Mexican territory, measuring some 150 miles—had been an old, even though unachievable, dream for local elites. While the first survey project dated from 1774, during colonial Spanish rule, the first concession was not granted until 1842 by president Antonio López de Santa Anna to Mexican businessman José de Garay.\textsuperscript{462} Yet the unstable political climate made it impossible

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\footnote{459}{Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (AGEO), Secretaría de Gobierno (Porfiriato), 120-12-73, 1903, Oaxaca, “Informes pedidos a los distritos acerca de los inmigrantes chinos.”}
\footnote{460}{“Inmigración china,” \textit{El Correo de Chihuahua}, November 15, 1904, no page number. See also “La inmigración asiática,” \textit{El Economista Mexicano} LIII (Oct. 1911-Mar. 1912), 1-2.}
\footnote{461}{The Tehuantepec railroad has been the subject of multiple studies. In order to get introduced to the main historiographical debates around it see chapter four of Paul Garner, \textit{British Lions and Mexican Eagles: Business, Politics, and Empire in the Career of Weetman Pearson in Mexico, 1889-1919} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 94-137.}
\footnote{462}{While the decree called for a canal to be built, article two stipulated that in the section where it was impossible to build it, one could recur instead to a railroad and/or steam carriages. José de Garay, \textit{An Account of the isthmus of Tehuantepec in the Republic of Mexico; with proposals for establishing a communication between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, based upon the surveys and reports of a scientific commission, appointed by the projector, Don José de Garay} (London: J.D. Smith & Co., 1848), 28, 105. The geopolitical and economic importance of this transcontinental route dates from pre-Columbian times. Nemesio J. Rodríguez, \textit{Istmo de Tehuantepec: de lo regional a la globalización} (Oaxaca: Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca, 2003), 2.}
\end{footnotesize}
for the project to take off.\textsuperscript{463} In fact, the construction of the route did not start until the 1880s despite the fact that the Mexican Congress had granted over thirty different concessions throughout these decades. The reasons for this failure were geographical, including the harsh topography; political, including civil wars, political instability, and foreign invasions; as well as economic, as the project required large sums of capital that neither the government nor private investors were able to provide.\textsuperscript{464}

Not only the Mexican elites but also diverse foreign companies and governments, notably from the United States and Great Britain, were also interested in the project for geopolitical and economic reasons. Since Spain had lost her American territories, both nations, together with France, had been trying to secure an interoceanic route in the former Spanish colonies, in the narrowest part of the American continent—the stretch between Tehuantepec and Panama. This would grant them control of a strategic outpost with direct access to both the Pacific and the Atlantic via the Caribbean Sea and/or the Gulf of Mexico, as well as a way to shorten the transit of navies and commodities between both waterways. Additionally there were the high profits to earn by those who operated the route.

In the case of the Tehuantepec isthmus, the original concession owned by Garay was sold to the British firm Manning, Makintosh & Schneider in 1847. Makintosh was a lumber trafficker who served as the British consul in the area. Around the same time, the U.S. government also offered money for Tehuantepec. The Mexican army had just capitulated against the United States and as part of the final war negotiations that would lead to the appropriation of half of the Mexican northern territory, president Polk offered to double the war

\textsuperscript{463} Enrique Sodi Álvarez, \textit{Istmo de Tehuantepec} (México: 1967), 94.

\textsuperscript{464} Garner, 97.
compensations in exchange for the exclusive rights of transit along the Tehuantepec route, a condition that the Mexicans did not accept. Nevertheless, some months later the concession ended up passing to U.S. hands, when a group of New York bankers led by P. A. Hargous bought it from the British. In 1852 the Mexican government cancelled it, but five years later another U.S. company, the Louisiana Tehuantepec Co., obtained it again. In 1859, the Mexican government of Benito Juárez signed a treaty with the United States granting it the exclusive and perpetual rights of transit in Tehuantepec. This was offered in the so-called McLane-Ocampo treaty, in exchange for four million dollars, an amount that would finance the Mexican liberal army against the conservative forces in the midst of a civil war. The treaty did not come into effect as it was never ratified by the U.S. Senate, in the context of a polarized political debate that would eventually lead that country to a civil war as well.\textsuperscript{465}

As discussed in Chapter Three, the expansion of the railway system became an essential component of Porfirio Díaz’s economic strategy. Within it, the construction of the Tehuantepec railroad occupied a central space. Díaz himself labelled it “a development of great importance and transcendence for the economic future of the country.”\textsuperscript{466} His government therefore invested the large sum of 22.4 million pesos in subsidies to complete it, making it the most costly in terms of public subsidy per kilometre of the entire railroad system\textsuperscript{467} and the most expensive engineering project undertaken in Porfirian Mexico.\textsuperscript{468} The reasons for building a transoceanic route across Mexico had been explicitly signalled since the first concession granted by Santa Anna in 1842. In his words, the most:

\textsuperscript{465} Sodi, 95-98, Rodríguez, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{466} Cited in Garner, 101.

\textsuperscript{467} The average subsidy per railroad kilometer paid by the Díaz government was between 8,000 and 9,000 pesos. The Tehuantepec railroad received over 25,000 pesos per kilometer. Garner, 102.

\textsuperscript{468} Garner, 96.
“sure and effectual [means] for promoting the national prosperity... [is by] making the Republic the centre of the commerce and navigation for all countries; ...this must be the consequence of the establishment of an easy and short communication from one ocean to the other...by this enterprise in particular the nation will obtain revenues with which it cannot reckon at present, derivable from foreign trade, and immediately reap the advantages which must result from universal intercourse, when its soil shall become the emporium of commerce, and consequently teem with wealth and abundance, when its various products shall become articles of exportation...”

In addition to the economic benefits brought by the increase in international trade, the possibility of a Mexican transoceanic route was also embedded in a nationalist rhetoric already visible in the words of Santa Anna. For Porfirian elites, it represented the possibility of joining Colombia, the United States, and later Canada as the only countries with a transcontinental railroad in the nineteenth century.

For all these reasons, the Porfirian authorities channelled their energies into accomplishing this task. In fact, the first loan raised in international financial markets went to subsidize the construction of the line, which was finally opened in 1894, but with multiple defects, as evidenced by an internal report made a few months after the inauguration: “the embankment is absolutely eroded, and none of it is adequately ballasted...[and]...the rolling stock is in truly dreadful condition.”

British passenger Alfred Tischendorf described Tehuantepec as

“one of the worst railways in the world. It was impossible to carry heavy loads on unballasted track or over wooden bridges that rotted under the stifling heat and torrential rains. The passengers who were willing to ignore the record of derailments and to brave

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469 Garay, 104-105.

470 The transcontinental railroads in Panama (then part of Colombia), the United States, and Canada were inaugurated in 1855, 1869, and 1885 respectively.

471 Garner, 104.
the chances of contracting smallpox and yellow fever at the port cities, puttered along in
swaying cars that occasionally reached a speed of thirteen to fifteen miles an hour.”472

The Mexican government thus launched a new bid to fix the deficiencies once and for all.
British contractor Weetman Pearson beat all tenders, amongst which was C. P. Huntingdon,
owner of the powerful PMSS. Pearson’s bid was favoured not only for economic reasons but
because of his close ties with Díaz’s inner circle and his ability to drive the government’s
nationalist stance in his favour, claiming that he guaranteed “freedom from American
control...and the certainty that English trade and English ships would be predisposed to use a
route controlled by Englishmen.”473 Members of the U.S. government would resent the
exclusion of their nationals from the project for years. In 1899, they asked for a copy of the
Pearson contract as well as the nomination of one of their citizens as Consulting Engineer. Both
requests were denied. In 1902 they requested an explanation as to why “the United States and
its citizens should be so odiously excluded...”474 And right before the railroad’s re-inauguration
they even threatened to ban U.S. merchandise from traveling along the Tehuantepec route.475

The initial contract between the Mexican government and Pearson and Son Ltd. was
signed in 1898 and subsequently modified in 1899, 1900, and 1902. In accordance with the
nationalist rhetoric that had surrounded the project since its earliest conception, it stipulated that
it was a government venture and not a subsidy to a private enterprise. Yet both parties would be
equal partners—each supplying half of the capital investment—and Pearson would be
responsible for managing the Tehuantepec Railway Company (TRC) once it restarted

473 Garner, 105.
474 Garner, 108.
475 Garner, 108.
operations. The partnership would last 51 years: during the first 35, the Mexican government would receive 65% of the profits; after that it would progressively increase its share until it received the totality of the earnings. A special clause prevented Pearson from selling any of his shares to U.S. businessmen.\footnote{Sodi, 128; Garner, 107; María Paulo, Origen de Salina Cruz (Oaxaca: Familia Moreno Paulo, 1977), 67.}

An important aspect of the partnership concerned the development of adequate port facilities at both ends of the line: Salina Cruz in the Pacific and Coatzacoalcos—renamed Puerto Mexico in 1907 to make it easier for foreigners to pronounce the name—in the Gulf of Mexico. After all, part of the failure of the first railroad had to do with the poor harbour conditions. One of the main obstacles for the rapid progression of the project was the lack of workers. The area’s low population density combined with the reluctance of local inhabitants to work for the TRC made it necessary to bring foreign workers. Many came from China aboard the vessels of the CCSC. Others came from Japan, Korea, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. Conditions were tough, with heavy rainfall, intense humidity and heat, and the proliferation of tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. The construction in Salina Cruz posed more problems than Coatzacoalcos as the former was located in an open bay, making it necessary for the workers to erect a huge breakwater. They also built a one-kilometre-long dock and created a small urban settlement. Within ten years, what used to be a fishermen’s village with barely a few huts turned into an international port with a stable population of some 6,000 inhabitants. The approximate cost of both harbours was Mx$15,000,000.\footnote{Paulo, 62-71; Garner, 107.}

On January 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1907, General Porfirio Díaz himself officially inaugurated the port of Salina Cruz and the Tehuantepec railroad by operating a crane that transferred the sugar brought
from Hawaii by the steamer Arizona into a railroad wagon. The arrival of the president and the party that ensued was described by newspaper *El Tiempo Ilustrado* in the following terms:

“...the military rhythms of the bands, the cries and ‘vivas’ of the crowd, the whistle of the engines and the steamships in the port combined in deafening concert and brought joy and celebration to the hearts of all those present... All the sacrifices that have been made seem to us today to have been amply rewarded with the satisfaction of having provided the world with a route across our territory which represents now and forever one of the major triumphs of the current President.”478

The celebrations lasted for a week and invitations were extended to the representatives of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Russia, Belgium, Japan, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Cuba.479

5.4 Suisang, 1908

Once the Tehuantepec railroad and the Salina Cruz facilities opened for international carriers, many steamship companies moved their operations to this port, as it possessed the largest and most modern infrastructure between San Francisco and Panama as well as the most direct connection to the Atlantic. This was the case, for instance, of Arizona’s owner, the American Hawaiian Steamship Company (AHSC), a company that specialized in transporting sugar from Honolulu to the eastern coast of the United States and with which Pearson himself had entered into relations in order to secure for the TRC, the large bulk of transcontinental operations they managed.480 Another company was the one that concerns this chapter, the CCSC, which since

478 Garner, 116.

479 Garner 115; Paulo, 73-4.

1904 had begun to send steamers to Salina Cruz and by 1908 had turned it into its main port of call.

In 1908, the CCSC’s fleet of chartered steamers included Marie, Daphne, Suisang, Glenesk, and Landkerscheiff—most of them of British manufacture. With them, the company made a monthly voyage from Hong Kong to Salina Cruz with stopovers at Kobe and Yokohama, which took approximately five to six weeks to complete. The return trip went from Salina Cruz to San Francisco, Yokohama, Kobe, Moji, and finally Hong Kong, with occasional stopovers in other Mexican or Asian ports, if there was sufficient demand.\(^481\) Their central business was the transportation of passengers, the large majority traveling in steerage destined to work as labourers in Mexico—although often this route was also used to smuggle Chinese into the United States.\(^482\) Between 1907 and 1908, each CCSC steamer brought an average of 480 passengers from Asia to Salina Cruz, which coincided with the standard for transpacific carriers of their size. Yet sometimes they hugely exceeded these figures, as did Suisang in early 1907, when she brought 737 passengers, or Glenesk, with 700 a few months later. Upon arrival, each traveler was subject to medical inspection which often resulted in a few steerage passengers being denied entry for suffering from contagious diseases. Before Suisang’s May, 1908 arrival, the largest number of CCSC’s passengers rejected at Salina Cruz had been 48.\(^483\)

_Suisang_ left Hong Kong on April 2\(^{nd}\), 1908, and arrived to Salina Cruz on May 14\(^{th}\), at 10:35am, carrying five cabin, 24 second-class and 518 steerage passengers on board. As part of


\(^{482}\) On the subject see Robert Chao Romero, _The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940_ (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010).

\(^{483}\) PRO-HK, C.O.129/349, 312. While I found no records of the Chinese population in Mexico in 1908, but in 1910 it was listed at 13,203 in Mexican federal government records. Compared to the 2,835 registered for 1900, then the CCSC contributed to increasing the Chinese presence in Mexico by over four times its size in only a decade. Romero, 56.
the usual procedures, the next morning she received the visit of Dr. F. Valenzuela, the port’s first health delegate. Upon conclusion Dr. Valenzuela immediately sent a telegram to Dr. E. Liceaga, from the Superior Board of Health, to inform that he had found “341 [steerage passengers] affected with trachoma and 7 [others remained] under observation...nine [second-class] suffering from trachoma and one from inguinal hernia, and five first class passengers in good health.”\(^{484}\) Dr. Liceaga ordered a new inspection to verify the initial diagnosis, which was performed two days later. This time Valenzuela found “three hundred and seventy cases of trachoma [amongst steerage]...and 20 more remain under observation...Of the 11 second class passengers, ten are suffering from trachoma in a serious form.” The latter were detained in the company’s barracks “until they have decided to what place they are going in order that they may be duly kept under observation.”\(^{485}\) In the meantime all first-class and 13 healthy second-class passengers had been permitted to land. The 125 steerage passengers deemed in good health had been “lodged in the barracks, [had] been made to take baths, and their luggage [had] been disinfected; 121 pieces of luggage were fumigated and 132 treated with bi-chloride.” On May 23\(^{rd}\) and 25\(^{th}\), Valenzuela performed two more inspections aboard the *Suisang*, and confirmed the existence of 371 cases of trachoma, “the majority... being serious ones. Amongst them were also discovered two cases of mumps. Recommending to the ship’s doctor the advisability of isolating the latter, he informed that there was no available place on board [for that]. The immigrants housed in the barracks were also isolated, and 19 of those...were found to be suffering from trachoma. Further 7 cases of mumps have appeared in the barracks. These are being isolated and the barracks in which they were housed are being disinfected.”\(^{486}\)

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\(^{484}\) PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 342-343.

\(^{485}\) PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 343.

\(^{486}\) PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 344-345.
After the usual 10-day period of quarantine for steerage passengers, Valenzuela proceeded to set in liberty 111 of them who were in good health and re-embarked 28, leaving on board the Suisang “399 definitively rejected immigrants suffering from trachoma, and 14 more who were rejected from the Steamship Marie.”

In terms of the sick second class passengers, Dr. Liceaga had ordered that officials “suggest to them that they enter the barracks, but do not force them... as we have no authority for taking this step, and advise us of the places to which they are going in order that they may be watched.” Only one suffering from mumps remained isolated for a few more days and then was released on June 1st. The only special measure taken with them was to record their names and destinations, which listed as follows: Wohn Foo Wan, Durango, Railway Hotel; Wong Pun, Salina Cruz, house of Win Ong Wo; Ug Tye, Durango, house of Chang Lee; Leung Hoo, Mexico City; Jam Cherk Wang, Mexico City, house of Huong Fum Hai; Jam Took, Torreon, Railway Hotel; Chang Loing, Ciudad Juarez, house of Chong Kee; Woo Chang, Mexico City, house of Hog Huing; Lan Kee Char, Mexico City, house of Wach Chuc; Lam Ying Pang, Guaymas, house of Chin Cahn; Kwong Wung, Salina Cruz, house of Chin Ong Woo.

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487 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 345.
488 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 344.
489 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 345.
490 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 347.
Meanwhile, the CCSC’s General Manager, Mr. Leung Kam Ming, then stationed in Mexico City, the company’s agent at Salina Cruz, Mr. Jesús M. Rabago, and the ship’s surgeon, Dr. S. O. Netherton, protested to the Mexican Board of Health.\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 106.} They claimed to have taken the necessary precautions required by the law to prevent trachoma and other diseases from spreading on board. For instance, back in Hong Kong, right before departure, Dr. Grone, Health Officer of the Port, Dr. Paul, the company’s resident doctor, and Dr. Netherton had examined all prospective passengers, and as “evidence that such examinations were minute, careful and conscientious, out of 851 so presented for the Suisang 518 were accepted and 333 (about 40\%) refused.” Those accepted were sent to the Disinfecting Hulk,

“fitted with the latest appliances for a thorough disinfection and to which all passengers and native crew... took a disinfecting bath and their clothes and personal effects were submitted to steam sterilization. After the bath they (still stripped) were again examined, their temperature taken and their physical condition noted especially as regards signs of skin eruptions, enlarged glands, deformities, etc. ... [then] each passenger received a ticket marked “disinfected” and then proceeded direct to the ship in a launch and once on board they were not allowed to go ashore again. On the morning of the sailing all passengers were again passed, examined and counted by the Medical Officer of the Port, the Ship’s Surgeon and the Boarding Officer in the presence of the Captain and the Co’s Representative.”\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 104-105.}

Moreover, in compliance with article 49 of the Mexican Sanitary Code, right before departure each examined passenger received a bill of health signed by the Medical Officer of the Port and the Mexican Consul.\footnote{Article 49 read as follows: “Those persons who may desire to settle in the Republic or to be taken there in the character of immigrants, will only be allowed to enter the same, when they hold a certificate to prove their perfect state of health, issued by the Authorities of the place they come from and countersigned by the Mexican Consul. The certificates that may be issued two months previously to the date of arrival…will be of no value whatsoever.” PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 105.} According to the company, with all these measures taken, it was impossible that a contagious disease such as trachoma had spread on board. The ship’s surgeon,
a 39 year-old graduate of the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, claimed that “all the passengers were in good health and so remained till the last week of the voyage when 110 showed signs of simple conjunctivitis, and which disappeared after treatment some time after arrival.”

After the Board supported Dr. Valenzuela’s diagnosis, the company’s representative laid a new set of proposals to the Board and the Mexican Minister of the Interior.

“In view of the great divergence in the results of the diagnoses of the Ship’s Surgeon and of the Health Delegates of the Port, the Government be asked to consent to an expert oculist being sent to Salina Cruz...to be named by the Government but at the Company’s expense, that all passengers be landed into the Co.’s barracks...[and] that the said expert’s examination be conclusively accepted by both parties...” According to this plan, those deemed healthy or with “simple conjunctivitis” would be allowed to disembark while those diagnosed with trachoma would be “detained at the Co’s barracks for treatment at the Co’s expenses.”

The Mexican government did not accept the proposal arguing that chronic diseases such as trachoma could take months to cure and it was therefore “practically out of the question to establish quarantine stations...If, then, this is impossible, our only means of safeguarding the health of the Republic is to turn away all immigrants affected with this disease...” Additionally, Dr. Valenzuela was described as the country’s expert on trachoma, after having spent two years in the Far East studying the disease. There was therefore no need to bring another doctor. The company thus tried lobbying the Minister of the Interior with the help of acquainted Senators Carvajal and Castellot, but to no avail.

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496 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 370.
497 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 200.
The CCSC’s representatives therefore concentrated on refuting Valenzuela’s credentials and diagnosis. They deemed his first visit to the *Suisang* as a “perfunctory examination, almost amounting to a farce,” the results of which were suspicious as he kept increasing the number of diseased passengers every time he came aboard.\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 106.} They accused him of being predisposed against the CCSC and, in a private exchange with Mr. Tower, the British Consul in Mexico City, they suggested that the adverse attitude of the Mexican Government was attributable to the influence of the American Hawaiian Steamship Company, which “desired to wrest from the CCSC the coolie traffic.”\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 252-253} In order to challenge Valenzuela’s medical opinion, the company sent two Mexican doctors from Mexico City to Salina Cruz, Luis Buhot and Angel Vallarino, the former “being graduate from the Institute of Ophthalmology and assistant to its Director Dr. Toussaint, and frequently called in for assistance by Dr. Chávez, one of the first oculists of this country, while the latter [was] professor of the School of Medicine in Mexico.”\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 209.} On June 9\textsuperscript{th}, after examining “412 individuals of Chinese nationality” inside the *Suisang*, they reported “127... with diverse ocular sufferings among which trachoma may be encountered, while of the [remaining] 285 we found to be free of all signs of trachoma.”\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 109.} A few days later, after making “microscopic and pathological examination[s]” of the tests made to the 127 aforementioned ill Chinese they reported “that only about nine [were actually] suffering from trachoma.”\footnote{PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 210.} Anticipating a similar problem happening with the next steamer about to land in Salina Cruz, the company ordered the two doctors to stay there.
Landratschieff, the next CCSC steamer to arrive, anchored in Salina Cruz on Friday, June 12th, at 7am. She had left Hong Kong on May 2nd with twelve cabin and 550 steerage passengers on board. Dr. Valenzuela came the next day to perform his examination. The company would later complain that Dr. Valenzuela purposely once again took an additional day to perform his inspection, “in contravention of the Contract between the Government and the Co., which provided for an immediate boarding except on National Holidays or on account of stress of weather, and on these two occasions no such reason could be advanced.” Valenzuela apologized and explained that this was due to the problems he had with the tug boat. To this the company’s representative, Mr. Camden, replied that he “could easily have visited the “Landratschieff” in a small boat (as provided him by the Board of Health for such very purpose), his object being to delay the ship the next day being Saturday and he refused to work on Sunday.”

Although Valenzuela performed his visit on Saturday, June 13th, permission to disembark was given until the 16th. On that day, all the cabin and 263 steerage passengers were allowed to land. The latter were detained in the barracks for the usual 10-day quarantine. After that, 122 were found free of diseases and, therefore, set free, while 136 were sent back to the vessel for having trachoma, making the total of passengers rejected from the Landratschieff some 423. Once again there was a discrepancy between Valenzuela’s diagnosis and the opinion of the ship’s surgeon, Dr. Francis A. McOstrich, a graduate from the Royal University of Ireland. He argued that, in Hong Kong, all steerage passengers as well as the Chinese crew had undergone

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504 PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 133.
505 PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 110.
506 PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 111.
“three separate and distinct medical examinations by the port authorities on three separate days. In Salina Cruz [he contrasted] the examination occupied less than half a day. Just before the ship left the passengers received their passports signed by the Mexican Consul and [the] Port Doctor, stating that the passengers were free from all traces of infectious disease[s] when leaving Hong Kong.”

There was, therefore, no possibility of trachoma spreading on his ship. To the contrary, he stated that “the health of [the] ship during voyage was excellent... In my three years’ experience of Indian and Chinese emigration I have never seen a more healthy crowd.” The only problems he treated during the 41-day traverse, he claimed, were a dislocated shoulder, a carbuncle on leg, one case of gonorrhoea and bubo, one of cirrhosis, one of conjunctivitis, and one more of acute parotitis as well as several minor cuts and injuries. Doctors Buhot and Vallarino, on their part, situated themselves somewhere in between McOstrich’s and Valenzuela’s diagnosis, finding a “similar percentage of sick and healthy” as in the Suisang, that is, they found some 30% suffering from an eye disease and the rest healthy.

The confrontation became even tenser as five Chinese escaped their confinement. After the CCSC requested a new examination, Dr. Liceaga ordered Valenzuela to return to the Suisang. He did so on June 15th and found five fewer passengers. The next day, after confirming that “the five missing persons [had] absconded,” he ordered “the said vessel to anchor two miles off the Port until her departure has been decided upon, and ... prohibited all communication with her to avoid further desertions.” He also instructed that “no communication be permitted with the “Landratschieff” until a proper watch be assured in respect to that vessel.” The company then appealed to the British authorities for help. The

510 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 348.
captain protested to the consul in Salina Cruz “claiming that it was impossible to leave immediately as the ship needed water and provisions.” The consul thus asked the Mexican authorities for an additional 24 hours, which were granted. Once the period expired, the captain continued to refuse to leave claiming that the decision was “arbitrary and unreasonable.” Mr. Rabago, one of the CCSC’s representatives, requested the cancelation of the order promising that the company would “establish a strict watch over the passengers... to prevent their escape, and in case any escapes should take place the Company [would] accept full responsibility.” He also requested the government to allow the “transfer of the Chinese immigrants from the “Suisang” to the “Landratschieff”... because the former vessel having to call at Manzanillo to take on board 300 repatriated Chinese for Che Foo, [has not got] enough room to receive them.” Valenzuela told his superiors that he saw no point on maintaining a vessel “with 412 persons sick with a contagious disease on board, amongst whom symptoms of mutiny have been observed, and some of whom have already escaped.” To his view, it would be best if the Suisang left Salina Cruz for good, without transferring any sick passengers to the Landratschieff. And the same could be said for the latter. He also warned that if a mutiny occurred, a possibility suggested to him by the Suisang’s captain, “it would be a serious matter as the armed forces at our disposal in this Port would be insufficient to cope with such a rising,” in addition to the fact that “the 412 immigrants on board would [make] their escape,

511 PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 111.

512 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 350.

513 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 348-349. These men were contract workers from El Boleo, a French mining company established in Southern Baja California, which had agreed with the CCSC for the pickup of its workers at Manzanillo, in order to transport them to their homeland in Northern China. PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 111-112.

514 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 350.

515 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 349.
and... eventually disseminate in all parts of the Republic the disease against which we are labouring to protect it.”\textsuperscript{516} As a consequence the Board of Health replied that the \textit{Suisang} and the \textit{Landratschieff} could leave Salina Cruz. The message further explained that “the Nation is not concerned with them, nor consequently have the Sanitary Authorities anything to do with them. Treat them as if they were on high seas.”\textsuperscript{517}

Yet, the company once again did not accept the government’s decision and left the vessels in Salina Cruz. On June 18\textsuperscript{th}, the Ministry of the Interior seconded Valenzuela and the Board of Health in obliging the \textit{Suisang} to lie two miles off the port, so two days later the captain anchored the vessel in what he deemed “a most insecure and dangerous place, being virtually the open ocean.”\textsuperscript{518} As for the request to transfer the passengers to the \textit{Landratschieff}, the permission was granted provided that it was done outside the harbour limits to prevent further desertions that “would disseminate th[e] disease throughout the country, inasmuch as it was not possible to ascertain the destinations of the fugitives.”\textsuperscript{519} The company replied that this kind of transfer was impracticable and dangerous unless it was done inside the breakwater. The permission came after much pressing and on July 8\textsuperscript{th}, 129 men got transferred from the \textit{Suisang} to the \textit{Landratschieff}. The former left for Manzanillo to pick up the passengers waiting there and came back to Salina Cruz on July 20\textsuperscript{th} to try to force the disembarkation of the Chinese that had come from Asia in May.\textsuperscript{520}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{516} PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 361-362.
\item \textsuperscript{517} PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 349.
\item \textsuperscript{518} PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{519} PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 361.
\item \textsuperscript{520} PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 112.
\end{footnotes}
Throughout this time the poor sanitary conditions inside the vessels combined with the intense tropical heat had taken a disastrous toll amongst the health of the Chinese passengers.

On June 30th, after one of his renewed examinations to the *Suisang*, Valenzuela reported to have “found her in exceedingly bad sanitary condition, there being 21 persons suffering from beri-beri and one from tuberculosis amongst the 409 trachomatous passengers on board. Three persons have died there within the last ten days from intestinal diseases and one from beri-beri. If the vessel does not sail soon, [he warned,] I fear there will be a considerable mortality on board.”

He wasn’t wrong. The cases of beri beri continued to increase and nine more people ended up dying in Salina Cruz and over 100 more on the return trip to Hong Kong.  

The company sought a stronger intervention from the British and Chinese authorities in Mexico. On July 17th, after both the British ambassador and the Chinese Charge d’Affairs got an unsatisfactory reply for the CCSC, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs laid out a new proposal. It consisted on “appointing a Commission of medical experts, one to be nominated by the Government, one by the Company and the third by the two nominees, to examine and report on the passengers and to land those that were not suffering from trachoma.” This time the Mexican government offered to form a commission with its own doctors, but this was rejected. The CCSC’s general manager then sought an interview with President Díaz himself. In it, Díaz affirmed that “under no circumstances would he change the Government’s determination in refusing the men a landing, preferring rather to pay damages instead.” The Mexican government claimed it was a priority to prevent that “the Chinese immigrants penetrate[d] into all parts of the Republic, [as] they would spread the contagion everywhere, so that the disease

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521 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 354.
would at length become as prevalent in this country as it now is in China, in Japan and in Syria.”

Therefore, according to the experts of Mexico City’s Academy of Medicine, the best possible course of action

“suggested in these circumstances by hygienic requirements [leaned] rather to the rejection of persons unaffected with trachoma, than to the acceptance of those in whom the disease may be yet latent... [As a consequence,] all persons believed to be suffering from trachoma, whether the disease be unmistakeably developed, or its existence merely suspected, [were] to be refused admittance to the country.”

Convinced that there was nothing more to do, the company decided to dispatch the steamers back to Hong Kong in August, after having spent close to two and a half months anchored in Salina Cruz. But it did so under protest. On October 22nd, the company sent a statement of claim to president Porfirio Díaz of “expenses and damages incurred on account of the detention of its steamers... through the rejection of its passengers” amounting to $3,076,184.87—which was later increased to $3,386,273.19. These included the extra expenses the company incurred for having Suisang, Landratschieff, and later Marie detained in Salina Cruz; the passages paid from Hong Kong to Salina Cruz and back by the “926 passengers that had been rejected and returned on board the three ships;” the profits that the company lost during the three months that the steamers did not circulate back and forth; the claims for the “130 passengers that died on board of the ships, compensation to be paid for their lives to their

525 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 369.

526 Suisang arrived to Salina Cruz on May 14 and left for Hong Kong on August 1. Between these dates, it left Salina Cruz for nine days, from July 11 to 20, to pick the 300 northern Chinese that were waiting for her in Manzanillo. Landratschieff arrived on June 12 and left on August 15. Taking into consideration that the trip from Hong Kong to Salina Cruz lasted approximately 40 days, the rejected passengers from the Suisang that made it back alive to Hong Kong had spent some 160 days inside a crammed vessel in the heat of the tropic, most of them suffering from an eye disease—whether trachoma or conjunctivitis—and later other contagious ailments. Those inside the Landratschieff spent two weeks less.
families, at $10,000 each;” all the passengers’ loss of time and work; and finally an indemnity for rescission of contract. The main arguments to support this claim were the following:

“A. That the 938 men refused landing by the Government did not have Trachoma... B. That the examinations made, although repeatedly, by the Health Delegates, were in a perfunctory manner... C. That the attitude of the First Delegate, Dr. Valenzuela, was one of the extreme antagonism towards the Company... D. That in not consenting to the proposals of the Co. re the despatch of an independent expert oculist to Salina Cruz to examine the men, nor to that proposed by the British Minister for the appointment of a Commission of experts, the Government denied the Company justice and fair-play... E. That the Delegate in deporting the men already landed into the Co’s barracks... exceeded his authority and usurped the authority of the Chief Executive, and such action virtually amounted to “expulsion”, an action only within the province of the Executive... F. That the individual bill of health... was signed by Dr. Grone in his capacity as Delegate of the Mexican Government. This appointment was made by the Mexican Consul of Hong Kong on the departure of Dr. Valenzuela, who had been acting in that capacity... G. That each and every one of the rejected passengers possessed the individual bill of health as prescribed for by Art. 49 of the Sanitary Code... Excepting this, there is no other article,... nor even in any of the laws of the country, that authorizes the refusal of a landing to any immigrant... H. That the action of the Government was against their very Constitution promulgated 1857 [concerning the freedom of travel in the Republic and the right of the country to expel those foreigners considered “pernicious”]... Trachomatous persons cannot be considered as “pernicious.”... I...that the action of the Government is contrary to the Treaty between that Government and Great Britain... [and] the Treaty of 1899 between China and Mexico.”

To support all this the company included the following documents: the contract between the CCSC and the Mexican Government, the sanitary preventions in force relative to immigrants from China and Japan, the instructions “which are to govern the Delegate of the Supreme Board of Health in Hong Kong”, and the affidavits of the Suisang’s and the Landratschieff’s surgeons.

The Mexican government responded to the accusations related to issues of health by extolling the credentials of Dr. Valenzuela as an eye specialist and dismissing everyone else’s.

In effect, according to the Mexicans, Dr. Valenzuela,

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“after having studied trachoma here in Mexico, with a specialist in the disease, went to Europe with the object of perfecting his studies of all diseases with which Chinese immigrants are likely to be affected, and subsequently continued the same in many places where Asiatic immigration is rife, such as Colombo, Singapore, Malacca, Hong Kong, Canton, Macao, Shanghai, Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama. In these places collectively he had the opportunity of studying trachoma in about ten thousand different cases. These studies have enabled him to write a treatise on the subject, in which he has described with great exactitude the various stages of the disease.”

All this experience made him “exceptionally competent in the diagnosis of trachoma.” In contrast, neither of the two Mexican doctors hired by the CCSC, Dr. Buhot and Dr. Vallarino, could be “recognized as specialists in diseases of the Eye, and their competence as authorities on these diseases is neither attested by any Diploma nor recognized by the public at large.”

Moreover, Dr. Buhot, presented by the company as a graduate from the Institute of Ophthalmology and assistant to its Director, could not have studied nor worked there “because there [was] no such institute in Mexico.” In the case of Dr. Grone, assistant to the Medical Officer of the port of Hong Kong and responsible for signing the individual bills of health approved by the Mexican consul, the Mexican government accused him of making “himself to be appointed Delegate of the (Mexican) Superior Board of Health in Hong Kong by our consul at that place, in order... to exploit the Chinese immigrants, from whom he was in the habit of collecting a fee of ten dollars for the issue of a Health Certificate.” Moreover, the Mexican consul had no authority to appoint Medical Delegates, which was an attribution only of the President himself. Therefore, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs would “doubtless hold this

529 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 364.
530 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 365.
531 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 366.
532 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 366.
533 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 365.
Consul responsible for having overstepped the limits of his powers.” The Mexicans added that “the CCSC must have been perfectly well aware [of this], through their Representative in Mexico...if he omitted to [know this], he and the Company are to blame for the Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong having accepted Dr. Grone as the accredited Delegate of the Board.”

This triggered a series of mutual dismissals and accusations that brought to light a possible network of corruption in the transportation of Chinese labourers to Mexico. It turned out that in October, 1907, Dr. Valenzuela was appointed Delegate of the Superior Board of Health in Hong Kong and therefore became responsible for approving the bill of health of the workers wanting to immigrate to Mexico in the CCSC steamers. Since his arrival, the examinations became more severe and the company faced an increasing percentage of rejections. The CCSC found Valenzuela’s objections exaggerated and, as proof, it offered a comparison between his percentage of rejections and that of Dr. Hough, in charge of examining the Chinese passengers bound for the United States. While the latter had a rate of 63% approval, the former only accepted 17% of all the men he examined. As a consequence, in the words of the British consul in Mexico, “Dr. Valenzuela and the CCSC in Hong Kong had differences of opinion, and these seem to have prejudiced the Doctor against the Company.”

There seemed to be more than simple “differences of opinion,” as Dr. Valenzuela had told Dr. Liceaga that “persons in Hong Kong, connected with the CCSC, attempted to suborn [him], and... failing this, an attempt was made to poison him,” after which, in January, he decided to quit and leave for Mexico. Once returned, he was appointed the First Health Delegate at Salina

534 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 366.
535 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 251.
Cruz. When his post in Hong Kong became vacant, Dr. Grone took it in order to obtain illegal profits of up to $10 per immigrant he accepted, regardless of his actual good health, something that also indirectly benefited the CCSC, or such were the conclusions made by the Mexican authorities. For them, an example that proved that his examinations were “not so scrupulously exhaustive as the complainants appear to imagine” was the fact that even the doctors hired by the CCSC in Salina Cruz, Drs. Buhot and Vallarino, had admitted that there were some passengers with trachoma inside the *Suisang* and “they could not have contracted the disease except by contagion [of someone already sick aboard the vessel].” To this Dr. Grone responded that he only charged the usual $2 fee per immigrant and the company added a letter from the Mexican consul in Hong Kong, F. D. Barretto, dating from November, 1908, where he stated that he had informed the Mexican government of Dr. Grone’s appointment as a temporary replacement for Dr. Valenzuela in a despatch dated from January 20, without it being repudiated.

The CCSC added that the Mexican authorities were inflating Dr. Valenzuela’s credentials as the list of places where he supposedly studied trachoma were “simply the places at which [he] called on his way out.”

As for the CCSC’s accusations that the Mexican government had violated its own laws and international treaties by scrutinizing and expelling the Chinese immigrants arriving to Salina Cruz even though they possessed a Health Certificate signed at the port of departure, the government responded that:

“This assertion is unsustainable, for it is an axiom of [the] International Sanitary Police in all countries, that Health Officers have the right to examine not only immigrants, but also all passengers and crews...when there is reason to suspect that they are carriers of

537 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 367.
539 PRO-HK, C.O.129/349, 304.
infectious diseases...after so long a voyage...persons who started in good health might easily have developed some disease en route.”

Moreover, “no expulsion of Chinese subjects from Mexican territory took place, but merely a re-embarkation of immigrants who had been placed under observation in the barracks, after confirmation of the existence of suspected disease.” It was extremely important to prohibit the entrance of people suffering from trachoma because the disease “is especially liable to spread rapidly amongst the poorer classes, who live huddled together and disregard the most elementary principles of hygiene. Seeing that a large proportion of our population consists of such people it was necessary to adopt special measures to prevent a hitherto almost unknown disease from becoming endemic in Mexico.”

Additionally the Mexican government could not be held responsible for the loss of time and lives of various Chinese passengers because the “Suisang should have left the Port as soon as the separation of the healthy passengers from those who were to be rejected on account of disease, had taken place.” If this vessel as well as the other two remained in Salina Cruz for so long, it was “not for the purposes of the Sanitary Authorities, but because it was convenient for the interests of the CCSC...” which kept on requesting renewed health inspections.

The CCSC’s claim followed a long bureaucratic process that met no end during the remaining years of the Díaz administration. Under the advice of the British consul in Mexico, it was interposed as a private claim on October 22nd, 1908. On April 27, 1909, the CCSC presented a corrected statement and added a series of vouchers and proofs addressed to the Ministry of Finance. On December 27 and once again on April, 25, 1910, the company wrote

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540 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 367.
541 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 364.
542 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 368.
the Mexican government demanding a settlement, but obtained no official response. Rather, the authorities privately informed them that “the Government would resolve on the matter as soon as the election was over and the President re-inaugurated.”

What neither Díaz nor the CCSC were expecting was a set of popular uprisings that ended up undermining the Porfírian administration and forcing Díaz to resign and leave for exile. On May, 1911, just as Díaz was preparing his departure for Europe aboard the steamer “Ypiranga,” the company’s representative in Mexico sent the following telegram to headquarters in Hong Kong: “Claim cannot be settled in a friendly manner, the reason is revolution. Have left the matter in the hands of Minister (British). You must do it immediately, make application to the Governor of Hong Kong to telegraph London to telegraph instructions direct to Minister here for diplomatic action...”

The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Frederick Lugard, agreed with the petition and cabled the Foreign Office (F.O.), which inferred that the Revolution offered “an opportunity of reopening and pressing a claim which was previously incapable of settlement.” After examining the case, the F.O. considered the CCSC’s claim to be “no doubt exaggerated” and deemed the company “foolish (or clever) enough to allow the [rejected coolies] to disperse at Hong Kong without being again medically examined although it was stated that they would be so examined;” yet it gave its support to it by suggesting the Mexican government “the advisability of appointing a representative to discuss... the amount of compensation which it would be reasonable for the Government to pay.”

This was rejected in September, 1912. On

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January 9, 1913, Francis Stronge, the British representative in Mexico, sent a note to the Mexican subsecretary of Foreign Affairs stating that “His Majesty’s government...instructed me to urge your Excellency to submit the dispute with the CCSC to arbitration.” No further documentation suggests that this procedure ever took place.

5.5 Mexico and the Transpacific World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

The contextualization of the Suisang case helps to illustrate the kinds of debates surrounding the arrival of thousands of Chinese immigrants to the Mexican Pacific coast at the beginning of the twentieth century. As seen from previous chapters, for many within the Porfirian elites, the Chinese came to occupy a place in the Mexican national project as the cheap, submissive, and hard-working labour allegedly needed for the economic modernization of the country. For them, the Chinese would help build railroads and ports, and make agricultural fields and mines productive; all for very little cost. This was, therefore, one of the central motivations that triggered the negotiations for the beginning of diplomatic relations with China at the end of the nineteenth century.

The aspirations of these elite Mexicans ended up coinciding with those of Chinese diplomats and businessmen who, for different reasons, also found incentives in promoting the arrival of labourers. For the former, Mexico served as an escape valve for the southern Chinese seeking to emigrate abroad in search for better economic opportunities that were not available at home. After having failed at bringing down the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the entrance of Chinese labourers to the United States, these Chinese diplomats embraced the idea of Mexico as a possible destination for their subjects. They, therefore, transformed their initial

549 PRO-HK, C.O.129/377, 146-147.
disdain of a treaty with Mexico—based on the idea that there were other priorities to concentrate on—to approval, which finally led to the signature of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation between Mexico and China in 1899. In the case of Chinese businessmen, they anticipated greater profits by introducing labourers to this new market. While several attempts had been made to bring contracted workers into the country since at least the 1860s, the business flourished after the treaty ended the diplomatic obstacles that had obstructed the flow in the past.

Within this context, it was a Chinese venture from Hong Kong, the China Commercial Steamship Company, which finally managed to inaugurate direct maritime routes between Asia and Mexico, with the transportation of labourers as its central business. In order to succeed, a transpacific venture like this one required the combination of at least three factors: the support of a powerful diplomacy, access to sufficient capital, and a profitable business to engage in. In this sense, the port of Hong Kong provided all these conditions with its British economic and political backing and its easy access to the lucrative market of cheap Chinese labour.

Consent among Mexican elites on the need for bringing Chinese labourers was, nevertheless, not unanimous. Mexican newspapers, particularly in the north-west, often included articles by local congressmen, journalists, and businessmen who railed against the federal government for favouring this immigration. From an economic standpoint, they argued that the Chinese ended up displacing the local workforce and subsequently increased local unemployment. Additionally the low wages they accepted contributed to decreased salary levels for locals. In terms of the national racialized prototype they envisioned for the country, the Chinese element was also undesirable. They were supposedly too different and inassimilable; and even in the case where they attempted to integrate by marrying local women, they would only degenerate the so-called Mexican race with their allegedly inferior traits and mores. Finally, a vigorous country needed healthy populations. But within Mexican scientific
medical circles—and the media that reproduced their ideas—Chinese were often depicted as carriers of contagious diseases that would infect the body of the nation due to the unsanitary conditions in which they allegedly lived.

All these conflicting discursive tropes permeated the attitudes and actions of the Mexican authorities once the *Suisang* debate erupted. In effect, the controversy and its contextualization exposed a fundamental contradiction held by Porfirian elites who, on the one hand, saw Chinese as a cheap, exploitable labour force useful in achieving the kind of economic prosperity that they had envisioned. On the other hand, they complained about the poor and unsanitary conditions in which the steerage passengers arrived, without reflecting on the fact that this was partly the consequence of the precarious salaries that Mexicans were willing to pay for them. This double vision served these elites to support the arrival of Chinese at some moments and then to deter it at others, using arguments that linked the notions of nation, class, race, science and sanitation. For instance, while defending their right to refuse the entrance of several hundreds of Chinese labourers into the country, the government officials, based on their medical evidence, often referred to them as “contagious or polluting agents” that would “contaminate” the “body and health of the Republic.” The authorities also clearly made a distinction in terms of class by allowing the ill second-class passengers to enter the country, while rejecting those from steerage under the easily dismissible argument that it was easier to keep track of the former and not of the latter. The authorities also seemed to associate poverty as well as the lack of hygiene and morals with the steerage Chinese, whose bodies and luggage were submitted to rigorous sanitation measures at both the ports of departure and arrival—something that second and first class passengers did not have to endure. This was also true for poor Mexicans, who were defined as people who “live huddled together and disregard the most
elementary principles of hygiene.” Race also became an issue as the strict sanitary measures were enforced only in regards to Asians and, particularly, those coming from China.

The internationalization of the conflict is one last element to highlight. With the inauguration of the renovated transcontinental Tehuantepec railroad and the port facilities at its two ends, the Porfirian regime managed to incorporate Salina Cruz into the transpacific port network and, in general, the whole route became one of the most transited across the Americas. As such, it developed into the locus where different international actors negotiated and disputed their interests, just as Hong Kong proved to be in the nineteenth century for the case discussed in Chapter Three. In comparison to that case, Porfirian bureaucracies had a much stronger bargaining position in order to defend their personal interests and their right to determine who formed part of their national project and under which terms. In this case, the actors that challenged Porfirian interests included the CCSC’s owners and their local agents, who were interested in increasing profits by reducing the costs of transporting Chinese labourers to Mexico; British diplomats, who tried to defend the interests of imperial businessmen without compromising their ties with the Porfirian elites; Chinese diplomats who timidly defended their subjects but were unable or uninterested in getting deeply involved; Chinese first and second-hand passengers who, simply due to their class status, managed to enter the country, despite some of them being infected with the contagious disease; and Chinese labourers who were attempting to forge a better future for themselves and their families and who were the most affected in this case, with only five of them managing to escape the seclusion and make their way into Mexico.  

550 PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 368.  

551 The varied experiences of the thousands of Chinese who managed to establish themselves in Mexico during the first decade of the twentieth century will be discussed in the next chapter.
The uncertain trajectory of the CCSC claim, which could not get settled due to the decline of the Díaz government and the emergence of a civil war, is representative of the times that would come for the Pacific strategy put in place during the Porfirian regime. As we will see in the following chapter, the emergence of the Mexican Revolution as well as the First World War, combined with the transcendental inauguration of the Panama Canal and the appearance of new technologies, would again transform the relationship of the Mexican coast with the transpacific world.
In the early morning of Saturday, August 15, 1914, hundreds of people gathered in the port of Cristobal, Panama, to witness the departure of *Ancon*, a 9332-ton Panama Railroad Company steamer. While she usually transported construction materials, today she carried a long list of prominent local personalities, including Belisario Porras, the president of Panama, his wife, ministers in his cabinet, as well as dozens of diplomats, particularly from the United States. They had all gathered in celebration of the official inauguration of the Panama Canal, the watercourse that made it possible for people and merchandise to travel directly between the Atlantic and the Pacific without having either to use the long and dangerous route along Cape Horn or to transfer to any transcontinental railroad. *Ancon’s* navigation from Cristobal in the Caribbean to Balboa in the Pacific lasted nine hours and forty minutes. Her traverse was widely covered by the Panamanian press and cheered throughout by hundreds of bystanders.\(^{552}\)

The inauguration of the Panama Canal was not met with the same widespread enthusiasm in other parts of the world, however. In Europe, the news was overshadowed by the coverage of the World War, which had started only two weeks earlier. In Mexico, many saw the opening of the canal as a serious challenge to the success of the transcontinental Tehuantepec railroad and its adjacent ports of Salina Cruz and Puerto Mexico, which had been capturing an increasing amount of transoceanic traffic since 1907. Even more threatening for Mexican interests was that the country was in the midst of a civil war that had followed the deposition and exile of Porfirio Díaz in 1911. Given this context, the Panama Canal not only offered a safe transoceanic passage without the need to transfer cargo and passengers from ships to trains, but

would also become the route mandated for use by U.S. steamers and companies, which comprised the bulk of Tehuantepec’s users, as the owner and operator of the canal was the U.S. government.

This chapter explains how a series of military, social, and technological revolutions occurring during the 1910s—the Mexican civil war, World War One, the opening of the Panama Canal, and the introduction of oil technologies in navigation—transformed Mexico’s transpacific connections as they had been conceived during Porfirián times. It begins by giving an overview of the way the country’s Pacific coastline had developed by the end of the Porfiriato and then continues to explain how and why this scenario began to change. With her participation in the construction and inauguration of the canal and later in the U.S. war efforts, the Ancon works here merely as a symbolic device that signalled the beginning of the end of Mexico’s transpacific world as had evolved during the three and a half decades of Porfirián administration.

6.1 Mexico’s Pacific Connections at the End of the Porfiriato

By 1910 Porfirián elites had aged while in power but still remained in firm control of the government. While several long-time key cabinet members had died, decision-making continued to be centralized in the hands of Díaz even after three decades of heading the regime. That summer, Díaz won the presidential elections for the eighth time and did not seem overly concerned with the allegations of fraud spread by the opposition. Instead, he was preparing

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553 The two that have been regularly mentioned in this work are Matías Romero, who, during the Díaz governments, served as Treasury Secretary from 1876-1880, 1892-3 and Mexican representative in Washington from 1884-92, 1893-8. He died in Washington in December, 1898. The second is Ignacio Mariscal, Díaz’s Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1885 until his death in April, 1910. For a recent discussion of the marking of their deaths and the importance of state funerals to Porfirián rule, see: Matthew D. Esposito, *Funerals, Festivals, and Cultural Politics in Porfirián Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).
an ostentatious set of festivities to celebrate both his 80th birthday as well as the country’s centennial, which, by a mixture of chance and nepotism, happened to land on exactly the same date, September 15th.\textsuperscript{555}

As Mexico was preparing to celebrate its first centennial, its Pacific links had significantly grown and diversified compared to when Porfirio Díaz had seized power for the first time, in 1876. Facing the sea, those living along the Mexican coastline had passed from relying on sailing vessels and a handful of steamers that transited often at irregular schedules, to having daily regular steamship connections amongst Mexican ports and several weekly services to and from the United States, notably to San Francisco, as well as to Central America, extending all the way to Panama. There were also regular trips to Hawaii as well as a monthly sailing to Asia. Nor does this list include the fact that a Japanese company, the Toyo Kisen Kaisha (TKK), was in talks with the government to start a second direct transpacific service.\textsuperscript{556} Facing the interior, those living along the Mexican Pacific coastline passed from relying only on stagecoaches circulating irregularly on dirt roads—often impeded by the weather and the topography to get to the coast in 1876—to having four major ports served by railroads, Guaymas, Mazatlan, Manzanillo, and Salina Cruz, and a fifth one, San Benito, on the border with Guatemala, with a train circulating only some 30 kilometres away, as well as a regular system of diligences.\textsuperscript{557} Additionally, the Tehuantepec railroad connected both coasts with up to 16 daily trains, making it one of the shortest and fastest ways to cross the continent.\textsuperscript{558}

\textsuperscript{554} This topic will be discussed in the following section.

\textsuperscript{555} Mexico’s war of Independence was supposed to have started in the early morning of September 16, yet, since Porfirio Díaz’s birthday was on September 15, he moved the commemoration to the previous night so that both dates coincided.

\textsuperscript{556} The case of the TKK will get further explained later in this section.
In terms of its maritime policy, the Porfirian government had passed from relying, in the 1870s and 1880s, on subventions in order to foster its international communications, to depend mostly on tax reductions and exemptions to accomplish national aims. These could include a decrease of 20 to 60% on tonnage and sanitary dues as well as up to a 100% exemption from municipal and other federal taxes. By 1910, there were four companies linking the Mexican Pacific coast with ports abroad that received these types of benefits. The first was the locally-owned Compañía de Vapores de la Costa del Pacífico, circulating between San Francisco, California and the northern Mexican ports of Ensenada, San José del Cabo, La Paz, Guaymas, Mazatlán, Altata, Santa Rosalía, and Bahía Magdalena. The second was the China Commercial Steamship Co. (CCSC), which, as we have seen, linked Hong Kong with Manzanillo or Salina Cruz in a monthly trip. The third was the German Kosmos, whose vessels departed from Hamburg and touched several European and South and Central American ports before reaching the Mexican coast—notably Salina Cruz, Acapulco, Manzanillo, and Mazatlan—and then continued on to San Francisco. The last was the Pacific Mail Steamship


558 The following sources sustain that there were up to 60 daily trains in Tehuantepec by the end of Porfiriato: Nemesio Rodríguez, *Itsmo de Tehuantepec: de lo regional a la globalización* (o apuntes para pensar un quehacer), 2003, 3 and Melesio Ortega Martínez, *Salina Cruz, monografía*, Oaxaca: 2006, 31. Roxana Arce Ibarra, *Los transportes en el istmo de Tehuantepec*, Mexico City: UNAM, 1949, 147 finds that number exaggerated and rather talks about 16 trains.


560 Sometimes referred to as the Eng Hok Fok Co., in reference to the first president of the company.

561 Kosmos circulated in the Mexican coast since 1899. It had a monthly route stopping at dozens of ports between Hamburg and San Francisco, so its vessels often ran late. They carried mainly cargo, but they always had room for at least 50 passengers. “Nueva línea de vapores,” *El Economista Mexicano* 28 (Aug., 1899-Jan., 1900), 123. By the end of 1910, Kosmos announced its withdrawal from docking at Salina Cruz due to the higher priority given to larger vessels from other companies, but it continued with its other stops in the Mexican Pacific. “La línea Kosmos,” *Diario del Pacífico*, October 20, 1910, 2.
Co. (PMSS), from the United States, which transited between San Francisco and Panama, stopping at San Blas, Manzanillo, Acapulco, and other Central American ports. All these companies could also dock at additional Mexican ports were there to be sufficient demand.\(^{562}\)

In 1910, only in exceptional cases, when the Mexican authorities believed that a specific region with enough economic potential could benefit from having additional international maritime connections, would they fall back on a policy of subventions.\(^{563}\) At the time of the centennial, three companies in the Pacific received this kind of support. These were the Compañía Naviera del Pacífico, which received $2,333.33 per round trip between San Diego, California and Bahía Magdalena and Ensenada, in Baja California;\(^{564}\) the M. Jebsen Line, which circulated between Seattle, Washington, and Corinto, Nicaragua, and received a $5,000 monthly stipend for stopping at Manzanillo and Salina Cruz; and the Compañía Oriental de Navegación or Toyo Kisen Kaisha, which, as we will see below, negotiated $10,000 in subsidies per round trip between Yokohama or Kobe and Manzanillo and Salina Cruz—with a limit of $120,000 per year.\(^{565}\)

During the first decade of the twentieth century, there were also other companies that connected the Mexican Pacific ports with others abroad, but that did not receive a specific set of

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\(^{564}\) This company had several other national routes, which are not mentioned here because our focus is the maritime links with ports situated outside Mexico.

\(^{565}\) AHGE-SRE, L-E-187, 55. In the early 1900s, the Pacific companies that received subventions from the Mexican government were the PMSS, the Compañía de Vapores de la Costa del Pacífico and the Compañía del Desarrollo de Baja California, “Establecimiento de líneas de vapores que favorezcan el tráfico mercantil,” El Economista Mexicano 33 (Oct., 1901-Mar., 1902), 196.
benefits from the Mexican government. These were the Compañía del Desarrollo de Baja California, which made two monthly trips between San Diego, California and several of Baja California’s ports, including Ensenada, San Quintín, and Isla de Cedros; the Canadian Mexican Pacific Steamship Line, which circulated between Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia, and Guaymas, Mazatlan, San Blas, Manzanillo, Acapulco, and Salina Cruz; the New Fast Steamer, renamed the Salvador Railway Company Steamship Service, traveling between El Salvador and Salina Cruz; and the American-Hawaiian, circulating between Hawaii and Salina Cruz.

The expansion of Mexico’s maritime connections was undertaken hand in hand with the improvement of the port infrastructure, which, in turn, was highly influenced by the development of the country’s railroad network. Not surprisingly, in 1910, the four largest international Pacific ports in the Mexican coast were the only ones with train stations. Guaymas,

566 The exact dates when these companies circulated are uncertain, since they either did not sign a contract with the government or the contract was not found. It is also possible that some of these companies received some governmental aid before 1910. Yet none of them were mentioned in the official document on maritime communications in the Pacific, presented by the Mexican government in the Fourth Pan-American Conference: AHGE-SRE, L-E-187.

567 Sergio Armando Gallegos López, “Los fletes marítimos: factor de desarrollo en el comercio exterior de México” (B.A. thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/FCPyS, 1972), 11. This source also mentions two more companies that traveled abroad, those belonging to Juan B. Abaroa and Luis H. Martínez. Yet the following primary sources cite them as traveling only within Baja California: Dirección General de Correos, Noticia del Movimiento Probable de Vapores, 1909; “Las Compañías Navieras y sus obligaciones según contratos,” El Correo de Chihuahua, February 14, 1907, 2. The latter added that the Compañía del Desarrollo de Baja California had a contract with the government in 1907 in order to transport military and governmental employees as well as colonizers brought by the Ministry of Public Works for half the normal price.

568 “Algo de las costas mexicanas”, El Correo de Chihuahua, February, 17, 1908, 1. The company is also listed in the 1909 issues of the Dirección General de Correos’s Movimiento Probable de Vapores and of the Guía Oficial de Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos.

569 The first name appears only in the 1912 issues of the Guía Oficial de Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos. Then it gets substituted by the second name as of January, 1913 issue of the Guía Oficial de Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos.

570 Guía Oficial de Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos, February, 1913. The case of the American-Hawaiian is quite peculiar, in the sense that at the height of the Tehuantepec railroad, a third of its actions were owned by the railroad proprietors, that is, the Mexican government and Weetman Pearson.
in the state of Sonora, was the first to get one, in 1882, linking it with the border town of Nogales, where the line joined with the United States’ railway system. Guaymas, therefore, remained as the area’s main port, highly influenced by the transactions made in the border zone.\textsuperscript{571} The second in getting a rail station was Manzanillo, in 1889. The original line, financed by the U.S.-owned \textit{Compañía Constructora Nacional Mexicana}, simply linked it with the state’s capital city, Colima. But in 1908, the section uniting Colima with Guadalajara—the largest city in the west—was inaugurated by Porfirio Díaz himself. In between these two dates, Manzanillo experienced an urbanization process that provided it with an adequate central plaza and cobblestone streets, banks, electricity and health services—yet the port remained one of the most unsanitary locations during the rainy season due to the proximity of a large lagoon that attracted all sorts of insects, many known to be carriers of infectious diseases. In 1899 a contract with U.S. businessman Edgar K. Smoot triggered the expansion of the port, with the building of a seafront, a jetty, a series of piers, a breakwater, amongst other infrastructure. The original length for the project was four years, but it was still going on at the time of the Centennial.\textsuperscript{572} The third Pacific port connected to the railway system was Salina Cruz, in 1894, when the Tehuantepec transcontinental railroad was inaugurated. From then on, the port and the whole line all the way to the Gulf of Mexico experienced a series of improvements—described in the previous chapter—that made them the most modern communication facilities in the country as of 1907. Mazatlan, the last of the Pacific ports to obtain a railway station during

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\footnote{\textsuperscript{571} See Juan José Gracida Romo, “Guaymas, notas para la historia comercial del puerto, 1820-1910,” in \textit{Los puertos noroccidentales de México}, \textit{coords. Jaime Olveda and Juan Carlos Reyes} (Zapopan, Jalisco: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1994), 199-212.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{572} Blanca Estela Gutiérrez Grageda and Héctor P. Ochoa Rodríguez, \textit{Las caras del poder: conflicto y sociedad en Colima, 1893-1950} (Colima: \textit{Universidad de Colima/Gobierno del Estado de Colima/Conaculta}, 1995), 15-18, 35; Héctor P. Ochoa Rodríguez, “Manzanillo, el intrincado despertar de un puerto,” in Olveda and Reyes, 116-122. See also Busto, 446-449.}
\end{footnotes}
Porfiriato, did not do so until 1909. The reasons for the delay had mostly to do with the harsh topography that made it difficult to link Mazatlán with the cities on the other side of the Sierra Madre. In fact, the line, finished in 1909, only connected it with other Pacific ports but failed to tie it to the central states. In this sense, Mazatlán was different from the other three ports in that its early port infrastructure was not linked to the expansion of the railway but rather to the boom in the agricultural, mineral, and later industrial sectors of Sinaloa. It was capital from those activities that financed the port improvements that started beginning in the last years of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{573} Of all these ports, Manzanillo and Salina Cruz became the only ones with regular direct transpacific traffic precisely due to their improved railway connections with the rest of the country, the former with Colima and Guadalajara, and from there to Mexico City and to the northern states, and the latter with its easy access to the Atlantic coast via the country’s only transcontinental railroad.

While Mexican maritime links in the Pacific had broadened, there were still limitations to overcome. According to the government, in a document presented to the Fourth Panamerican Conference, held in Buenos Aires in August, 1910, the most notable weakness was the lack of communications with South America. Even though some contracts had been signed, they were not enforced. This was due to the fact that “companies, on the one hand, lacked commercial incentives to carry [the contracts] out, and the governments, on the other hand, did not encourage them.”\textsuperscript{574} In 1899, two companies began dispatching steamers from Valparaiso,

\textsuperscript{573} Luis Antonio Martínez Peña, “Mazatlán, historia de su vocación comercial, 1823-1910,” in Jaime Olveda and Juan Carlos Reyes, 157-178. To know more about the specific improvements started at the end of the 19th century, see “Informe del Presidente de la Republica al abrirse el 3er periodo del 19º Congreso de la Unión, 19 de septiembre de 1899,” \textit{El Economista Mexicano} 28 (Aug., 1899-Jan., 1900): 90. For an analysis made by a local newspaper, of the role played by Mazatlán in the Pacific port system as well as the problems faced by the port with the 1909-inauguration of the railway, see “Nuestras comunicaciones marítimas y terrestres,” \textit{Diario del Pacifico}, December 6, 1910, 6 and “El comercio exterior de Sinaloa,” \textit{Diario del Pacifico}, December 27, 1910, 6.

\textsuperscript{574} AHGE-SRE, L-E-187, s/f.
Chile, to Mazatlan, stopping at various ports along the way. These were the British Pacific Steam Navigation Co. and the Chilean Compañía Sudamericana de Vapores.\(^{575}\) Yet, by 1903, they both announced that they had retired their routes north of Panama.\(^{576}\) It wasn’t until 1910 that the Japanese Toyo Kisen Kaisha connected Mexican, Peruvian, and Chilean ports once again\(^{577}\) and, in 1913, a South American company, the Compañía Peruana de Vapores y Dique del Callao, signed a contract to establish a service between Callao, Peru, and Salina Cruz. In exchange for tax reductions, it agreed to use exclusively the Tehuantepec railroad to transport merchandise across the continent.\(^{578}\) Yet it is uncertain that this contract ever materialized. Besides the lack of routes to South America, there were other important obstacles to surmount. For instance, El Economista Mexicano, a biannual journal specializing in economic affairs, listed the following two central problems: the scarcity of successful Mexican-owned companies that traveled abroad as well as the lack of shipyards that could fabricate large steamers, which made Mexico too dependent on foreign variables and interests for its maritime connections.\(^{579}\)

In terms of transpacific routes, two companies had direct services from Asia to Mexico at the time of the Centennial: the China Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC) and the Toyo

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\(^{577}\) The case of this company will be discussed more thoroughly later in this section.

\(^{578}\) “Servicio de vapores entre Salina Cruz y el Callao (Perú),” El Economista Mexicano 57 (Oct., 1913-Mar., 1914): 281-283.

\(^{579}\) “Alientos a la marina y a la navegación,” El Economista Mexicano 57 (Oct., 1913-Mar., 1914): 246. While this diagnose was written in 1913, when the Mexican Revolution had already started, it applies to the last years of the Porfiriato as well. In effect, of all the companies listed in the previous pages, only three had Mexican capital, the Compañía de Vapores de la Costa del Pacífico, the Compañía Naviera del Pacífico, and the Compañía del Desarrollo de Baja California.
Kisen Kaisha (TKK). The first was a Chinese venture that started its services between Hong Kong, Moji, Kobe, Yokohama, Manzanillo—and later Salina Cruz—in 1903 and was discussed at length in the previous chapter. The second was a Japanese company created in the mid-1890s with a governmental subvention, in order to enter the transpacific trade between Yokohama and San Francisco. It did so with three 6,000-ton British steamers, *Nippon Maru, America Maru,* and *Hong Kong Maru,* which sailed approximately every month. The first entered San Francisco Bay on January 1899 and became the largest and fastest commercial carrier ever to land there up to then. It had accommodations for 98 first-class, 40 second-class and 1,000 steerage passengers. In the summer of 1896, the company had sent an agent to Mexico, Mr. Tomioka, to review the possibility of starting a regular service, but this did not materialize until 1910. By then, the TKK had fabricated three new steamers in Nagasaki’s Mitsubishi Dockyard & Engine Works—named *Tenyo Maru, Chiyo Maru,* and *Shinyo Maru*—and was ready to open new routes. A service to Peru and Chile had begun in 1905 with only two or three trips per year and without necessarily touching Mexican ports. In October 1908, TKK’s

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580 Often referred to as the *Compañía Oriental de Vapores* in Spanish and the Oriental Steamship Company in English.


583 The three new steamers were again some of the fastest and largest to sail across the ocean at the time. Tenyo Maru, for instance, imposed a record on June 29, 1908 that took many years to beat. She sailed from Honolulu to San Francisco in 4 days, 18 hours, and 30 minutes. In terms of size, they all surpassed the 13,000-gross tonnage and had accommodations for 275 first-class, 64 second-class, and 800 steerage passengers. They all possessed electric lights, and private bathrooms for first class passengers, an innovation for the time. Tate, 64. *Toyo Kisen Kaisha/Línea Oriental de Vapores. Folleto sobre el servicio directo entre Japón, China, México y Sudamérica,* 1909, 20-21.

584 Tate, 66; “Toyo Kisen Kaisha,” *The Hong Kong Daily Press,* February 12, 1907, 6.
general manager, Mr. Shiraishi, visited Mexico with his wife and inspected the Pacific ports. 585

Finally, in the early 1910, after a visit from a TKK executive, 586 a contract was signed with the Mexican government for up to twelve trips per year between Asian ports and Manzanillo and Salina Cruz. TKK would receive $10,000 in subsidies for every round trip it completed. 587 On April 15, Mexico City newspaper El Imparcial announced that the steamer Kiyo Maru had finally arrived to Manzanillo, inaugurating TKK’s regular service to Mexico. 588 The whole itinerary, named the South American Line, linked Hong Kong, Moji, Kobe, Yokohama, Honolulu, Manzanillo, Salina Cruz, Callao, Arica, Iquique, Valparaiso, and Coronel. The return trip included the same stopovers. 589

The main business for both companies—the CCSC and the TKK—at least until the end of Porfiriato, was the transportation of Asian labourers. Most were Chinese, from the southeastern province of Guangdong, who began arriving on the Mexican coast in small numbers beginning in the 1860s but whose presence had notably increased since the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between Mexico and China in 1899, and even more after the CCSC started its operations in 1903. 590 In 1910, over 13,000 Chinese lived

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586 “Desde Hong Kong hasta Salina Cruz,” El Tiempo. Diario Católico, April 13, 1910, 1.
587 AHGE-SRE, L-E-187, 55.
589 Dirección General de Correos. Noticia del Movimiento Probable de Vapores durante el mes de enero de 1911, (México City: La Ilustración, 1911): 10 and Toyo Kisen Kaisha/Línea Oriental de Vapores. Folleto sobre el servicio directo entre Japón, China, México y Sudamérica, 3. The brochure, written in Spanish, cites Hong Kong Maru, Kiyo Maru, and Bayu Maru as the vessels devoted to the South American Line, and Tenyo Maru, Chiyo Maru, America Maru, and Nippon Maru as those servicing the Hong Kong-San Francisco run. Both the TKK and the CCSC had fixed itineraries and destinations but could stop at additional ports if there was enough demand.
590 Chapters Two and Five talk about the transportation of Chinese labourers to Mexico at length.
in Mexico, mostly in Sonora and the neighbouring north-western states, many of whom had
to work in haciendas, notably of sugarcane, mines, and in the construction of railroads. Their
presence dates back to the early 1900s, a few years after a pioneering group of Japanese
colonists and free emigrants had established themselves in Chiapas with the aid of their
government.\footnote{See Chapter Four for more information on this subject.} Just as their Chinese peers, most were young males between 15 and 30 years of age who established themselves in the north-western states, from where a large majority eventually crossed into the United States. In contrast to the Chinese, Japanese labourers were never banned from entering that country. Yet, by the turn of the century, they faced increasing
discrimination, particularly in California. As a consequence, in 1907, the government of Japan
informally agreed to stop the immigration of new labourers in exchange for a promise by the
U.S. authorities that they would respect the rights of those already living inside their territory.\footnote{The pact is often referred to as the Gentlemen’s Agreement.} Mexico thus served for many as a springboard into the U.S. It is calculated that at least 10,000 Japanese workers arrived in Mexico during the Porfiriato. The majority came from the island of Honshu, particularly from the prefectures of Hiroshima, Wakayama, Yamaguchi, Shizuoka, and Nagano. Another large group came from Fukuoka, in the Kyushu islands and, to a lesser but still significant extent, from Okinawa.\footnote{María Elena Ota Mishima, “Características sociales y económicas de los migrantes japoneses en México,” in \textit{Destino México: Un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX}, María Elena Ota Mishima, ed. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1997), 56-63; Tate, 231.} Not all crossed the ocean in one of the CCSC’s or the
TKK’s steamers but rather traveled in the vessels chartered by immigration companies and/or the Mexican businessmen who hired them, often under precarious conditions. This was also the case for a group of over 1,000 Koreans, who traveled aboard the chartered British steamer *Ilford*, from the port of Inchon to Salina Cruz, in the spring of 1905. They all ended up working under strenuous conditions in Yucatan’s henequen plantations.

But by 1910, not all Asians living or travelling throughout Mexico were labourers; instead, many had established themselves as merchants, mostly engaged in retail trade, although they also prospered in other businesses such as restaurants, bakeries, and laundries. The Chinese living in Sonora represent a case in point as that border state had the largest concentration of Chinese in Mexico. In effect, of the 13,203 Chinese registered in the 1910 census, roughly a third—or 4,486—lived in Sonora, where they composed the largest foreign minority, surpassing the second place—formed by the United States’ nationals—by over 1,000 people. Of them, only 37 were women, confirming the pattern of an overwhelmingly male population. Most were small entrepreneurs who, since the 1890s, began establishing *abarrotes* or small grocery stores, and had slowly overtaken Europeans as the region’s main providers, to the point that they held a virtual monopoly on retail trade, with a presence in all the

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597 To learn more about the wide range of occupations of the Chinese living in Mexico in the first decades of the 20th century, see Romero, 98-118.

598 Hu-DeHart, 89-90; Romero, 58.
state’s districts. They did so by maintaining competitive prices, offering a wide variety of products, and by peddling to isolated communities that had never before been serviced. The owners usually employed Chinese relatives and friends brought from their hometowns who, after working for several years with them, would amass enough earnings to establish their own abarrotes, hiring their own acquaintances, and therefore reproducing the pattern over and over.\textsuperscript{599}

One of the main reasons why Chinese retail merchants prospered in Sonora and other parts of Mexico had to do with the connections they maintained with other Chinese capitalists throughout the Pacific. While the main relationship occurred with those living in California and Southeastern China, the Chinese in Mexico could easily locate and carry out transactions with other fellow countrymen as well. This becomes evident when reviewing the International Chinese Business Directory of the World, which included the updated names and addresses, in both Chinese and English, of thousands of businesses and associations in hundreds of cities in China, Japan, India, Indochina, the Malay peninsula, Siam, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Australia, Africa, New Zealand, Hawaii and continental United States, the Philippines, Canada, the West Indies, and Latin America. In the Mexican section, some 600 establishments appeared—almost half of them located in Sonora. In order to contact someone, one simply had to search for the locality one was interested in and then a list of merchants and their contact information would show up.\textsuperscript{600} From their connections abroad, Chinese in Mexico could obtain cheaper and varied supplies as well as credit with no or low rates of interest; they could exchange stock and knowhow; and, if they partook in a joint-transnational venture, they could receive regular

\textsuperscript{599} Hu-DeHart, 89-94.

dividends or even monthly salaries ranging from $30 to $75. Working together, each small merchant could obtain yearly profits of $1,800 to $3,000.\footnote{Romero, 97-98, 124-125. Romero identified four different types of Chinese merchants living in Mexico at the time: the immigrant merchant magnate, the medium-sized merchant, the sole proprietor, and the small merchant; the latter being the most numerous. For the characteristics and specific examples of each one see Romero, 118-129.}

The Chinese businessmen of Mazatlan, Sinaloa, provide an example of the way they promoted mobility in the Pacific through their connections with other businesses abroad.\footnote{See other examples throughout Romero’s book.} In the 1910 census, Sinaloa listed 663 Chinese. Many of them owned retail businesses in Mazatlan, such as Yuen Fo San & Co., Ramon Kooc & Co., and Hop, Ley & Co., each with an initial capital of Mx$2,000; Fon Chon Fay & Co., with Mx$4,750; Leon & Co., with Mx$1,800; and Hon Yuen & Co., with Mx$3,000.\footnote{Rigoberto Arturo Román Alarcón, \textit{La economía del sur de Sinaloa, 1910-1950} (Mazatlán: Instituto Municipal de Cultura, Turismo y Arte de Mazatlán/DIFOCUR, 2006), 131. Other retail businesses listed in the \textit{International Chinese Business Directory of the World for the Year 1913} include those of: Chong Yuen Lee, Fong Hie Gui, Fong Sang Wo, Hop Lee, Hop Wo, Juan Pat, Kwong Qui, Quong Sang Yuen, Quong Wah Shing, Quong Wo, San Wo, Ton San Foy, Wah Ling, and Wah Lung Jan.} As mentioned above, Mazatlan had regular maritime connections, particularly to the north with San Francisco and to the south with Panama, and all the intermediate ports. A review of the local newspaper \textit{Diario del Pacífico}, which reported the movements done by sea during the summer of 1910, shows that Chinese were, after the Mexicans, the most mobile nationality, not only in terms of people but also of merchandise they sent and received. For instance, in just the month of July, Mazatlan registered the following maritime movement related to the Chinese community. On July 5, Ramon Kooc received 10 sacks of rice and 46 of generic goods from Manzanillo.\footnote{Since Manzanillo was one of the transpacific terminals for the TKK’s and the CCSC’s transpacific vessels, then some of these merchandises could have come from China.} On July 7, the German steamer \textit{Sisak}, coming from Hamburg, brought the following for the local Chinese: a barrel of glassware for Miguel Wongpek; 92 packages of news’ paper, cinnamon, dry fruits, tinned food, pastas, beans,
oil, sugar, starch, potatoes, and wooden artifacts for Juan Pat; and 36 packages of fish and shrimp for Ramon Kooc. On July 9, Yuen Kui received 12 packs of hats, clothes, shoes, fabric, and liquors from Guaymas and two out of the nine passengers landing from San Francisco aboard *Newport* were Chinese. On July 10, steamer *Manuel Herrerías* brought from Ensenada nine packages of cheese and skins for Juan Pat and the next day she departed for San Diego with eight Chinese on board. On July 12, *Rio Yaqui* brought from Teacapan 22 sacks of corn for Jose Wongpek. The next day, 53 Chinese arrived aboard Luella, from Manzanillo. On July 15, Ramon Kooc exported 36 packs of fish and shrimp worth Mx$440 to San Francisco and the steamer also carried one Chinese. On July 16, Norwegian steamer *Transit*, coming from Salina Cruz, brought 73 Chinese and a bunch of generics for Miguel Wongpec and the Yacho Brothers.  

On July 22, Ton On Hing and Tung Sang Wo received mail. A day later, steamer *San Juan* from San Francisco brought 10 Chinese passengers as well as silks and porcelain for Chon Yuen. The next day she departed back with six packs of fish and skins worth Mx$220 from Juan Jiho.  

A similar pattern repeated itself in the successive months with the following Mazatlan businessmen as the most active in sending and receiving merchandise: Chon Yuen Lee, Hong Tac, Hong Yuen, Hop Ley, Juan Chan, San Wo, Tong Chong Tay, Tong San Fo, Tung Sang Wo, Wing Gung, the Yacho brothers, Yuen Chan, Yuen Fo San, Juan Jiho, Juan Pac, and Ramon Kooc—the last three formed part of the board of directors of the port’s main Chinese organization, the *Club Asiático*. All these exchanges reveal that the wide variety of products offered by the Chinese retail stores relied on the community networks which covered mostly North America but also included China and Europe.

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605 As mentioned above, since Salina Cruz was one of the transpacific terminals for the TKK’s and the CCSC’s transpacific vessels, then some of these merchandises could have come from China.

606 All this information came from monitoring the section “Por el Muelle,” found in p. 2 of *Diario del Pacífico*, during the entire month of July, 1910.
Although fewer in number than the Chinese, there were also Japanese and, to a lesser extent, Mexican businessmen traversing the Pacific. In 1910 the most publicized Japanese businessman arriving in Mexico was the President of the TKK, Shintaro Morimoto, who landed in mid-February “with the purpose of carefully studying maritime and commercial matters in Mexico in order to contribute to strengthen the commercial relations” between both countries. He first visited Mexico City for two months. In mid-April he traveled with N. Kobayashi, a member of the Japanese legation, to Manzanillo, where they embarked on TKK’s Kiyo Maru to Salina Cruz in order to examine the Tehuantepec railroad. They then traveled to Chiapas, the last destination in Mexico before Morimoto departed for South America to continue with his research. In Chiapas, he met with the first Japanese community established in Mexico, by then composed by close to one hundred small entrepreneurs, many of whom, after arriving as colonists and farmers, had made the transition to small merchants and owned various retail stores in the area. Other Japanese business stories reported in the Mexican media at the time include: the opening of the first Japanese furniture stores in Mexico City in the late 1890s, La Japonesa, La Crisantema, and El Lirio Japonés, as well as the 1899-visit of five entrepreneurs to Mexico City and of several others interested in importing silk products. In terms of the Mexican businessmen present in Asia, the pioneer was Mauricio Wollheim, a diplomat and

607 “Un enviado da compañía de vapores Kisen Kaisha,” El Imparcial, February 20, 1910, 4. In this article, Morimoto is described as a representative of the TKK, but in a later article by the same newspaper as well as in “Llega millonario japonés,” El Correo de Chihuahua, February 16, 1910, 1, he is referred to as the president of the company.

608 “Un enviado da compañía de vapores Kisen Kaisha,” El Imparcial, February 20, 1910, 4; “El tráfico marítimo entre México y el Japón,” El Imparcial, April 15, 1910, 7; “Desde Hong Kong hasta Salina Cruz,” El Tiempo. Diario Católico, April 13, 1910, 1.

609 Ota, Destino México, 46-9; Cortés, 80-81; Relación de la visita oficial a la zona de la colonia Enomoto de la Chiapas, sur de México (Mexico City: 1958), 56-61. See Chapter Four for more information on the Japanese in Chiapas and for other Japanese businessmen visiting Mexico at the turn of the century.

610 Cortés, 68-69.
entrepreneur of German origin, who became the first Mexican representative in China. As early as 1898 he invested in the Colonization Society that brought the first group of Japanese colonists to Mexico.\textsuperscript{611} He was also responsible for various commercial reports, for importing samples of Mexican products into Japan and putting up an exhibit in 1890 with the purpose of boosting the commercial exchanges between both nations.\textsuperscript{612} Yet these remained insignificant at a time when no direct maritime routes between Asia and Mexico existed. For instance, in the first semester of the 1896-7 fiscal year, Mexico imported roughly $13,329 worth of merchandise from Japan and $23,023 from China—compared to the $13.1 million imported from the U.S., its main trading partner, and $3.6 million from England—and exported only $4,000 to China and nothing to Japan—in contrast to the over $36 million to the U.S. and $7.6 to England.\textsuperscript{613} At the time, silver coins, the only significant Mexican commodity imported by Japan since colonial times were also on a steady downward trend, after the latter had made the transfer from silver to the gold standard in October 1896.\textsuperscript{614} By 1910, with direct maritime services on the go,

\textsuperscript{611} Archivo Particular de Matías Romero, Instituto Mora, reel 69, f. 48781, 7. See Chapter Four for more information on this subject.


\textsuperscript{613} This does not include the amount of silver coins exported to Asia. “Importaciones y exportaciones de México habidas en el primer semestre del año fiscal de 1896-7,” \textit{El Economista Mexicano} 23 (Feb.-Jul., 1897): 29.

\textsuperscript{614} Between January and October 1900, Mexico exported via San Francisco and Europe some $494,500 of silver coins to Japan and $23.2 million to China. Yet during the same period in 1901, these figures had drastically diminished to $96,000 and $12.1 respectively, as part of the transfer from silver to gold standard that was happening worldwide and the political instability of China. “Remesas de plata al Extremo Oriente,” \textit{El Economista Mexicano} 33 (Oct., 1901-Mar., 1902): 182. See also “La nueva ley monetaria del Japón y la baja de la plata,” \textit{El Economista Mexicano} 22 (Aug., 1896-Jan., 1897): 193-194, 206-207. On the history of Mexican silver in Asia see
Mexican imports from Asia had broadened. For instance, in April the country received $288,850 worth of merchandise from that continent, making it the third most significant import region after the United States and Europe (with $11.2 million and $6.3 million respectively) and surpassing Canada ($244,011), South and Central America ($80,007 and $14,411), and Africa ($23,223). Exports to Asia, on the other hand, continued low, with only $200 registered for that month.\(^{615}\) Since Mexico had limited exports to Asia, most CCSC and TKK vessels needed to make stops outside the country on the way back to Asia, in order to fill the vessels up with enough people and merchandise.\(^{616}\) In order to improve this, in the late 1910 there was talk of organizing a business trip to Japan for Mexican entrepreneurs.\(^{617}\)

Besides labourers and businessmen, another important group of transpacific travelers included sailors who manned the ships. Since the PMSS opened the first transpacific passenger service run by steamers in 1867,\(^{618}\) the pattern repeated itself in practically all companies: officers were normally English-speaking and white while crews were largely composed of Chinese. Companies preferred hiring the former to cater to their first-class Westernized clientele used to seeing and dealing with whites in positions of power, and the latter as crews because they were allegedly more obedient, skilled and, over all, up to 50% cheaper than their white counterparts. In the case of the TKK steamers, they had Japanese crews and since their first transpacific sailing in 1899 and continuing up to the late 1910s, their first and second officers

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\(^{615}\) “Aumento en las importaciones,” Diario del Pacífico, July 13, 1910, 3.

\(^{616}\) Sandra Kuntz affirms that in many Mexican ports there was often not enough load to carry on their return trip, so ships had to leave in ballast and/or stop in other international ports, notably the United States. Kuntz, 108.


\(^{618}\) See Chapter One.
were from Europe or the United States, while the third and fourth were from Japan. Once again, this was done mostly to please European and U.S. customers travelling in first class.  

Mexicans also served in transpacific ships. This was made evident in 1909 by the Mexican consul in Hong Kong, who sent a letter to the minister of Foreign Affairs urging him to take measures to stop Mexican sailors from departing without “the proper documents that prove or justify their nationality …abroad.” He complained about the increasing number of Mexican sailors in Hong Kong who found themselves jobless, penniless, paperless, without speaking the language and therefore without the possibility of negotiating any contract to take them back. He claimed to have helped “some of those who seemed to deserve aid” by getting them a “job in the ships and to some others [he] had managed to make ... the steamers that do the service...to Manzanillo or Salina Cruz to take them back to Mexico, working on board [in exchange] for their fare and food.”  

In reply, the ministry circulated an order to all the harbourmasters, instructing them not to

“under any circumstance allow the embarkation of Mexican sailors aboard foreign vessels without [them] being provided with the documents that prove their citizenship,...[as well as with] contracts that explicitly oblige to their repatriation... the harbourmasters must [also] make certain that...all sailors hired in their port return to it, and if there is one missing, they must find out why...[and prove] it with a written evidence of desertion, if that was the case,... or...with the receipt that shows the severance paid [to the sailor]...”

While it is unlikely that a harbourmaster would be able to gather such written evidence, the fact that the ministry took the issue so seriously suggests that the number of Mexican sailors travelling abroad was not insignificant.

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619 Tate, 238-240.

620 AHGE-SRE, 18-25-83, “Mexicanos en el extranjero sin documento de nacionalidad. Informa el cónsul de Hong Kong, November 17, 1909, s/f.

One last group of common transpacific travelers consisted of state agents. This dissertation has described trips made by various officials, such as those of the Mexican scientists who visited Japan and China in 1874,⁶²² and of the multiple Japanese envoys who traveled to Mexico in the 1890s in order to lay the groundwork for the establishment of the first Japanese colony in Latin America.⁶²³ In 1910, a particular trip made by Japanese officers caught the attention of the Mexican press. In mid-December a large group of cadets arrived in Manzanillo aboard the imposing war steamers Asawa and Kasagi, both of Japanese manufacture. The former’s crew was composed of 900 sailors and 35 officers and the latter’s by some 560 crewmembers and 32 officials. The visit to Mexico was part of a larger expedition around the main ports of the Pacific Rim in order to salute the nations of the world, which apparently was happening not long after the U.S. marines had embarked on a similar venture. The Japanese were coming from San Francisco where, according to some reports, they had been disdained by the local aristocracy in the social events that were held in their honour. In contrast, they received a magnificent welcome both in Manzanillo and during their short visit to Mexico City, where they were greeted by Porfirio Díaz himself.⁶²⁴ They returned to the coast by railway and proceeded to Acapulco, where they provisioned themselves with enough coal to continue towards Salina Cruz, the last Mexican stop before traveling towards Panama.⁶²⁵ Fifteen years before, in 1895, the government of Porfirio Díaz had embarked on a similar undertaking: a

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⁶²² Even though they were scientists without a specific political post at the time, they were financed entirely by the Mexican government and were in an official scientific mission. See Chapter Two.

⁶²³ See Chapter Four.

⁶²⁴ Cortés, 119.

traverse around the world by Mexican steamer Zaragoza. She had been built in Havre’s La Forgés shipyard in 1891, especially for the Mexican navy. In April, 1895, she departed from Tampico, in the Gulf of Mexico, and arrived on the country’s Pacific coast four months later, via the Magellan Strait. After some repairs made in the Guaymas shipyards, she departed once again in April 1896 towards San Francisco, Honolulu, and finally arrived to Yokohama in early August. She stayed in Japan for two months. A young Mexican sailor aboard Zaragoza held his stay in Japan in high esteem, particularly regarding his favorite site, the Yokosuka arsenal, which he described as “admirable [since] the Japanese order the construction of a few vessels in England or France with the purpose of building here three or four of the same model.”626 The Mexican sailors then left for Hong Kong, where they stayed for three weeks and afterward continued their trip towards the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Zaragoza returned to the Gulf of Mexico in July 1897, completing the first Mexican circumnavigation of the globe.627 President Díaz made a mention of this accomplishment in his speech delivered at the opening session of the 18th Federal Congress and referred to it as a proof that the “Nation does not stop in her quest... [towards] progress.”628

The state agents who most frequently travelled across the Pacific were the members of the diplomatic corps. In terms of the Mexican diplomats who established themselves in Asia, the first was José Martín Rascón, who opened the country’s first legation in Tokyo—and Asia—in 1891. His poor health forced him to resign after fourteen months and Luis G. Pardo took his

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post from 1893 to 1895. He was replaced by Mauricio Wollheim, previously spoken about in this
section, who remained in charge until 1898. During his years of service, he returned to
Mexico at least two times and finally left Yokohama for good on December 10, 1898, aboard
the PMSS steamer China, via San Francisco.\footnote{AHGE-SRE, L-E-1856, 257.} Two months earlier he had sent the corpse of
the Mexican consul in Yokohama, Eduardo J. Plaza, aboard another PMSS steamship. The two
replacements were Ramón G. Pacheco for a few months, followed by the Cuban-born lawyer
Carlos Américo Lera in Tokyo, and Fidel Rodríguez Parra in the Yokohama consulate (which
was soon moved to Kobe). Pacheco took over again in 1907 and stayed for the remaining years
of the Porfiriato.\footnote{AHGE-SRE, L-E-1856, 401, 404.} In China, Pablo Herrera de Huerta opened the first Mexican legation in
Peking in 1903. Yet Mauricio Wollheim became the country’s first official representative in
1904. Less than a year later, he resigned due to health problems and departed Hong Kong for
Yokohama in early April. On the 15th, he saw Yokohama for the last time aboard the U.S.
steamer Coptic, which took him to San Francisco, where he continued to Mexico City by
railroad.\footnote{AHGE-SRE, Lista Diplomática de México en China, Tomo 5.} Between 1905 and 1910 the post was occupied successively by Carlos Américo
Lera, Ignacio Altamira (who died in Peking), Ramón Pacheco, Leopoldo Blázquez, and Alfonso
Acosta. Their Chinese counterparts in Mexico City between 1904 and 1910 were Liang-Cheng,
Hsun Liang, Tan Poishing, Li Ching Hsu, and Shan Chi.\footnote{AHGE-SRE, L-E-1856, 401, 404.} Another important member of the
legation was Tam Pui-Shum who worked for 10 years on the first translation of a Chinese-
Spanish dictionary in Mexico, finishing it in the summer of 1910.\footnote{AHGE-SRE, Lista Diplomática de México en China, Tomo 5.} In terms of the Japanese

\footnote{AHGE-SRE, L-E-1856, 257.}
\footnote{Cortés, 103-104.}
\footnote{AHGE-SRE, L-E-1856, 401, 404.}
\footnote{AHGE-SRE, Lista Diplomática de México en China, Tomo 5.
ministers and general consuls in Mexico City, the long list between 1891 and 1910 included the following names: Gozo Tateno, Shinishiro Kurino, Toshiro Fudyita, Jisashi Shinamura, Yoshibuni Murota, Aimaro Sato, Keichi Ito, Koichi Suguimura, Minozi Arakawa, and Konaichi Joriguchi.\textsuperscript{634} Taking into consideration that all these diplomats brought coworkers and family members along with them and often travelled back and forth, they were responsible for enhancing to a significant degree, the number of transpacific crossings.

In the fall of 1910, more diplomats than ever—and more visitors in general—arrived in Mexico in order to be present for the flamboyant Centennial celebrations organized by the Porfrian government. In effect, between July and December, 1910, over 53,000 people entered the country—that is, double the number of entries recorded for the next recording period—two thirds of whom were male mainly from Mexico, the United States, Spain, China, and Great Britain (in that order).\textsuperscript{635} In terms of diplomats, some 30 countries sent representatives to the festivities.\textsuperscript{636} Besides taking part in the celebrations planned by the Mexican government, many

\textsuperscript{633} “El diccionario español está traducido al chino,” \textit{Diario del Pacífico}, June 7, 1910, 1.

\textsuperscript{634} Cortés, 110-114. Some of them appeared in Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{635} The complete figures for the economic year going from July 1, 1910 to June 30, 1911 are the following: 79,484 people registered their entrance into Mexico; 61,073 were male and 18,412 were female. Of them, 25,747 entered through the Northern border with the U.S., 18,006 via the Gulf of Mexico and 7,179 via the Pacific ports, while only 30 did so by land from Guatemala. 26,004 reported to be Mexican, 23,598 from the United States, 5,734 from Spain, 3,959 from China, and the remaining from various different nationalities other than these. “La inmigración y emigración en México durante el último año económico,” \textit{El Economista Mexicano} 53 (Oct., 1911-Mar., 1912): 271.

\textsuperscript{636} Italy, Japan, the United States, Germany, Spain and France sent special diplomatic missions. The following eighteen countries sent special envoys: Honduras, Bolivia, Austria, Cuba, Costa Rica, Russia, Portugal, Holland, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Panama, Brazil, Belgium, Chile, Argentina, Norway, and Uruguay. Switzerland, Colombia, and Venezuela commissioned residents in Mexico to represent them. Great Britain could not sent its mission due to the recent death of king Edward VII and Nicaragua was not officially represented either because of a recent coup d’état. Yet the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, who had been appointed before the coup, was present and treated as a guest of honour. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, “1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario,” \textit{Journal of Latin American Studies} 28 (Feb., 1996): 90; Michael J. Gonzales, “Imagining Mexico in 1910: Visions of the Patria in the Centennial Celebration in Mexico City,” \textit{Journal of Latin American Studies} 39 (2007): 511. Neither of the articles mentioned the presence of a Chinese delegation, yet, some newspapers at the time often referred to the Chinese special delegate for the Centennial and Cortés, 116, uses the term special
foreign legations hosted their own parties, exhibits, and presentation of ostentatious gifts and monuments in honour of the Centennial. On the part of Díaz, the planning had started in 1907, when a special federal committee and hundreds of local commissions had been appointed to put together a month-long set of festivities for September 1910, in order to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the initiation of the war of Independence against Spain. The largest celebrations were to happen in Mexico City. During that month the capital’s main avenues were decorated with independence-related motifs and electric lights, and hosted the inauguration of monuments, public buildings, speeches, exhibits, parks, and academic congresses; the renovation of museums, schools and several other public places; the passing of parades, military bands, and allegorical carriages; the printing of various publications, banners, and a special collection of stamps, and the detonation of colorful fireworks. The celebrations reached their peak on September 15, the supposed date when the war of independence had started. In reality, the fighting had allegedly begun at dawn of September 16, yet Díaz decided to move the commemoration forward in order to make it coincide with his eightieth birthday. As a consequence, on the 15 the Gran Desfile Histórico (Great Historical Parade) took the streets, with hundreds of actors dressed in costumes, portraying the (official) history of Mexico, followed by allegorical carriages depicting the regime’s achievements. Some 200,000 people gathered to witness it. In the meantime, Porfirio Díaz celebrated an exclusive birthday party in the nearby Chapultepec Castle with some 15,000 invited guests, pertaining to the political and economic elites as well as to the foreign diplomatic corps. Finally, at dusk, everyone gathered

ambassador to refer to the head of the Chinese delegation. This suggests that China sent at least one special envoy to the Centennial.

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638 This practice continues until today.
in the Zócalo (the masses in the plaza, the elites in the balconies of the surrounding buildings) to watch the fireworks and witness Porfirio Díaz give a speech and ring the independence bell from the National Palace, exactly at 11pm.⁶³⁹

From across the Pacific Ocean, two delegations came from the only Asian nations that held diplomatic relations with Mexico, Japan and China. The former was one of the six countries— together with the United States, Spain, France, Germany, and Italy—that sent an entire special diplomatic mission to the Centennial. It had five members: viscount Yasuya Uchida, then ambassador to the United States and head of the delegation, who came accompanied by his wife; lieutenant colonel Kunishigue Tanaka; navy captain Tokutaro Jiraga; and Soichi Takajashi, secretary at the Mexican embassy. They arrived on the Mexican coast aboard TKK’s Hong Kong Maru. From there they took the train to Mexico City, arriving on September 4. They were hosted by Lorenza R. Braniff— whose deceased husband had made a large fortune as an hacendado⁶⁴⁰— in one of the largest and wealthiest mansions in the central avenue of Paseo de la Reforma. Right before their arrival, on September 1, a Japanese Exhibit had been inaugurated by the head of the Japanese legation, Konaichi Joriguchi, and Porfirio Díaz himself. The original idea for the exhibit had been conceived during the spring visit of TKK president, Shintaro Morimoto, whose company ended up sponsoring the transportation of the objects. The exhibit, one of the largest displays put together for the Centennial by a foreign delegation, consisted of dozens of objects that represented the vanguard of Japan’s industries, arts, and agriculture. It also included a Japanese garden, a tea hall, and a small theater where concerts and martial arts performances took place. The Japanese Exhibit was hosted at the

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⁶³⁹ Gonzales, 496-521; Tenorio, 76-77.

⁶⁴⁰ Large land-owner
impressive Crystal Palace\textsuperscript{641} and remained open to the public until the end of October.\textsuperscript{642} The Chinese legation also organized an exhibit, much smaller in scale, referred to as the \textit{Salon chino} (Chinese Hall). It was in one of the halls of the National Palace and included a few pieces of furniture, two fine earthenware jars, a chest, and several tapestries. It remained open for visitors after the Centennial as well. The government also donated the so-called \textit{Reloj chino}, a slim tower crowned at the top by a clock, which was placed in the Walk of Bucareli, near the Ciudadela, one of the most transited plazas of the downtown core. Additionally, on September 20, the Chinese ambassador hosted a special dinner in his residence for all the foreign delegates and the Díaz Cabinet. Another remarkable party held by the Chinese to celebrate the Centennial was the one offered by the merchant community of Mazatlan. After months of planning, they organized four days of festivities hosted in their headquarters, the Asiatic Club, which was aptly decorated with Chinese motifs, including the Chinese and Mexican flags hanging from the roof. They gave away beer and lunches and, on September 18, when the Sinaloa governor dropped by Mazatlan, they organized a special banquet in his honour and set off colourful fireworks ordered from San Francisco especially for the occasion. Additionally, they donated four iron columns, one for each corner of the city’s central plaza, marked with the inscription “Chinese Colony of Mazatlan, 1910.”\textsuperscript{643}

\textsuperscript{641} The name comes from the structure, made of crystal and steel, built in Germany in 1895 and sent to Mexico to serve as a venue for exhibits. Once the Japanese Exhibition ended, it became the venue for the National Museum of Natural History. Tenorio, 81.

\textsuperscript{642} “Una exposición japonesa tendrá lugar en México,” \textit{El Imparcial}, March 10, 1910, 1; “Impresiones de viaje para el Diario del Pacífico,” \textit{Diario del Pacífico}, October 24, 1910, 3; Cortés, 114-116; Tenorio, 81, 90.

A large majority of foreign diplomats and press described the Centennial celebrations as a great success. This was not surprising as the Porfirian circle treated them with utmost care, making sure that they visited the most catered places, circulated in the most prosperous avenues, and had limited—if any—contact with the vicissitudes of the average Mexican. The guests saw the crowds in the various public events but never from too closely. Instead, the diplomats were hosted by the wealthy in the city’s finest mansions. The members of the foreign press, on their part, were lodged in the most expensive hotels and got all their expenses paid—which amounted to 54,611 pesos of a total of 187,986 pesos that composed the Federal Centennial fund. Not surprisingly, the New York Times correspondent referred to the Centennial in the following terms:

“Mexico’s celebration of the 100th anniversary of martyred Father Hidalgo’s proclamation of independence has been coupled with an equally impressive celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the birth of that wonderful old man, Porfirio Díaz. Who can doubt that the supposedly lesser includes the seemingly greater? Mexico’s centennial of independence is unquestionably another manifestation of the power of the president.”

Shintaro Morimoto expressed himself in similar terms on his way back to Tokyo. In a conference held at the local Chamber of Commerce he praised the Díaz administration and dismissed the incipient rumours of possible armed dissidence. In response to his and the entire Japanese special mission’s support, in December, 1910, Díaz appointed his own son to serve as a special ambassador to thank emperor Mutsujito. The trip to Japan never took place, however. In the end, Morimoto had been wrong and the rumours were not unfounded—an armed revolution against Díaz was beginning to emerge.

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644 Gonzales, 506. See Starr, 55-57, for a description of the editorial staff that was brought to cover the Centennial celebrations.

645 Gonzales, 521.

646 Cortés, 104, 116.
6.2 Revolutions and the Transformation of Mexican Transpacific Links

While the impressive Centennial commemoration put together by the Porfirian government seemed, in the words of the NYT, “another manifestation of the power of the president,” there were pockets of dissent which suggested that Díaz was perhaps not as dominant as the affiliated press declared. Despite the protective atmosphere that distanced most foreigners from the large crowds that attended all public events, the expressions of discontent did not escape the eyesight of some visitors. This was the case, for instance, of U.S. anthropologist Frederick Starr, who, on September 11, on his way back from the inauguration of the statue of George Washington—a gift donated by the U.S. residents in Mexico—witnessed a “demonstration of the opposition”. In a book published four years later, he described the event in the following terms:

“For the most part, it was a band of common working people, men and women; there were, however, a number of well-dressed men among them. Their conduct was irreproachable. From their banners we saw that they represented various anti-re-election societies... the groups carrying their beautiful floral pieces and a dozen or so banners began to sing the national hymn before they should march and deposit their offering in memory of the patriot fathers. [When, all of a sudden,] Castro, chief of the mounted police, face flaming and sword raised, rode into the party upon his horse, in a rage demanding, “who is leader here?” There was no response and he ordered his men to disperse the crowd.”648

The German ambassador in Mexico, Karl Bunz, accidentally witnessed another anti-Díaz protest. On September 15, while enjoying the fireworks that preceded Díaz’s speech in one of the balconies of the National Palace, Bunz suddenly heard gunshots coming from the crowded plaza. They were fired by a group of people carrying a large portrait of Francisco Madero, an

647 Gonzales, 521.
648 Starr, 50-51.
opposition leader. After glancing at the alarmed German, Federico Gamboa, the sub-secretary of Foreign Relations, approached and calmed him by lying. He assured him that the event was a pro-Díaz demonstration. 649

Public criticism of Díaz had increased in the electoral year of 1910, when the octogenarian presented his presidential candidacy for the eighth time. The most widespread and articulate challenge came from the group led by Francisco Ignacio Madero González, a young, wealthy businessman from the northern state of Coahuila, who had studied in Mexico, France, and the United States. In his 1908 best-seller, The Presidential Succession of 1910, Madero made an assessment of the state of politics in Mexico. While he praised the economic growth achieved throughout the previous decades, he condemned the social inequalities and the prolonged centralization of power in the hands of Díaz. This, in his view, threatened the country’s stability. He requested free elections without the participation of Díaz, an idea that the president himself had first suggested in February, 1908, in an interview with U.S. journalist James Creelman, from Pearson’s Magazine. But Díaz did not keep his word and announced his nomination a few months later. Madero, on his part, formed an Anti-reelectionist Party and was elected its presidential candidate. He traveled extensively throughout the country during his campaign and was widely welcomed. In June, only a few days before the voting, Madero was arrested during a visit to Monterrey, the most northern industrialized city. He was accused of concealing Roque Estrada, a man charged with misdemeanours and who happened to be his personal secretary. He was transferred to a jail in neighbouring San Luis Potosí, where he was now accused of sedition and held captive during the electoral process. Díaz was proclaimed winner, but accusations of fraud were widespread, particularly amongst Madero’s supporters.

649 Gonzales, 521-522.
After being released on bail, Madero escaped to the United States where, in early October, just as the Centennial celebrations ended, he launched what became known as the Plan of San Luis Potosí—a document that had been drafted when Madero was in jail there. In it, he declared the elections illegal, proclaimed himself temporary president until new elections were held and called for the Mexican people to take up arms on November 20, at 6pm, in order to depose the current government.650

The armed struggle that would eventually lead to the resignation of Porfirio Díaz did begin in November. It started with several armed insurrections mostly in the northern states. While some of them were led by Madero’s allies, others had local leaders whose social demands went beyond the maderista plea for free and democratic elections. This was the case, for instance, of Emiliano Zapata, whose forces rebelled in the state of Morelos, just south of Mexico City, demanding the dissolution of large estates and the redistribution of land amongst peasants. And of the Flores Magón brothers, the anarchist leaders of the Mexican Liberal Party, who went so far as to suggest the abolition of the state and private property and who operated in the borderland between the Californias. As weeks passed, several rebel leaders from the north began to join forces with Madero and to deliver major setbacks to Díaz’s troops. In May, 1911, after taking Ciudad Juárez, they forced Díaz and his vicepresident, Ramón Corral, to resign. They left the Secretary of Foreign Affairs as interim president for the sole purpose of organizing elections. On May 29, Díaz and his close family members took the train from Mexico City to Veracruz, escorted by general Victoriano Huerta. Two days later he embarked for Europe

aboard the German steamer *Ypiranga*, never to return.\footnote{The 8,103-ton *Ypiranga* belonged to the oldest German transatlantic steamship company, the Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt Aktien Gesellschaft (Hapag), which by 1911 covered the route Veracruz-Havana-Vigo-Gijon-Santander-Plymouth-Le Havre. She took 24 days to take Díaz to his destination. After visiting several European countries and Egypt, Díaz settled in Paris, where he died and was buried on July 2, 1915. Andrés Becerril, “Se cumplen 100 años de la partida de Porfirio Díaz en el Ypiranga,” *Excelsior*, May 29, 2011. Retrieved from the web: www.excelsior.com.mx/index.php?m=nota&id_nota=740696} Madero won the elections that took place in October and assumed the presidency a month later.\footnote{For an introduction on the Mexican Revolution see Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Javier García Diego and Sandra Kunz Ficker, “La Revolución Mexicana,” in *Nueva Historia General de México*, coords. Bernardo García Martínez and Javier García Diego (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010), 537-594.}

Madero’s government was short and turbulent. He faced multiple and contradictory demands that he was unable to reconcile. For instance, in the state of Morelos, Madero aligned with the *hacendados* who had supported his claim to free elections, but refused to submit to the agrarian demands of the Zapatistas. He sent the federal troops to suppress the peasant revolt. This put him in direct confrontation with Zapata’s forces but, unable to defeat them, he began to face the opposition of the *hacendados* as well. The federal army was able to contain various revolts from unsatisfied ex-maderista allies but, in the end, several of its members ended up turning their backs on Madero. This was the case of General Huerta who, in February, 1913, led a successful *coup d’état* with the help of Felix Díaz—Porfirio Díaz’s nephew—and Henry Lane Wilson, the Republican ambassador to Mexico, who was seeking more advantageous concessions for U.S. investments. Madero, his vicepresident, and other close members of his political entourage were apprehended. During the fight that led to Madero’s imprisonment, the *reloj chino* that the Chinese government had given as present for the Centennial got severely damaged. The Japanese legation was also at the heart of events. Before his arrest, Madero had appointed his brother Gustavo as special ambassador to Japan. Just as had happened with Díaz’s son, Gustavo never accomplished this task. Instead, he was arrested and shot by Huerta
on February 18. Francisco and his vicepresident were killed on the 22. When this happened, the
Madero family sought refuge in the Japanese legation and the minister, Kunaichi Joriguchi,
impeded their arrest and, most likely, saved their lives. After Madero’s assassination, the
country plunged into a civil war that would take close to a decade to appease.

Until 1913 the circulation of steamers on the Mexican Pacific coast was hardly affected
by the local war. In effect, between the departure of Porfirio Díaz in May 1911 and the
assassination of Madero in February 1913, at least ten major companies continued operating in
Mexico. These were the German Kosmos, with its long route between Hamburg and San
Francisco; four companies from the U.S.: the PMSS, navigating weekly along the San
Francisco-Panama axis, the Jebsen Line, with a service between Seattle and Central America,
the Fast Steamer Salvador, renamed Salvador Railway Co. Ltd. Steamship Service, with a semi-
weekly steamer between Acajutla, El Salvador, and Salina Cruz, and the American-Hawaiian,
navigating between Honolulu and Salina Cruz; the Mexican Costa del Pacífico, circulating
monthly between San Francisco and Baja Californian ports, and the Compania Naviera del
Pacífico, with various national routes along the stretch between Baja California and Colima; the
Canadian Mexican Pacific Steamship Line (CMPS), sailing monthly between Victoria, B.C. and
Salina Cruz with stops in Guaymas, Mazatlan, San Blas, Manzanillo, and Acapulco; and finally
the CCSC and the TKK, each with a monthly and later bimonthly service between Hong Kong
and Salina Cruz (the latter continued all the way to Chile). Some experienced delays or a
slight reduction of services, but continued to circulate regularly. The major upset was for the

653 Cortés, 113-4; Rosa Elvira Vargas, “Embajador apremia a auxiliar a Japón,” La Jornada, April 6, 2011, 23.
654 Compañía de la Guía Oficial S.A., Guía Oficial de los Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos, monthly issues
between January, 1911 and June, 1913; Dirección General de Correos, Noticia del Movimiento Probable de
Vapores, monthly issues between January, 1911 and January, 1912; “In the Business World,” The New York Times,
September 12, 1913.
foreign companies, such as the *Jebsen* and the TKK, that were entitled to subsidies from the Mexican government but stopped receiving them. President Madero discontinued the policy in 1911 for two reasons: he needed the money to pay for the federal army’s increasing expenses and his government was not deaf to a revolutionary nationalist discourse that questioned the privileges granted to foreigners during Porfirian times.\(^{655}\)

Nevertheless, after Madero’s assassination, the civil war intensified and the Pacific coastline began to feel its repercussions. A key event that triggered changes in the maritime world was the U.S. invasion of the port of Veracruz. As mentioned above, the support of the Republican government of William Taft—particularly through the participation of ambassador Henry Lane Wilson—to Huerta’s coup d’état had been key to his success. Yet in March, 1913, barely a month after the coup, Democrat Woodrow Wilson assumed the presidency of the United States and changed the country’s policy towards Huerta. He replaced Wilson with John Lind and demanded that the general hold immediate free elections without his own participation in order to restore the Constitutional order and put an end to the civil war. Huerta did not accept. This put him at odds with an important foreign ally and arms’ supplier. In April, 1914, following an incident between Huerta’s forces and a group of U.S. marines in the port of Tampico and knowing that a shipment of weapons for Huerta aboard *Ypiranga*—the same German steamer that took Díaz to exile—was about to land in Veracruz, Wilson ordered an invasion of the port, which remained in control of U.S. forces until November.\(^{656}\) Nine days

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\(^{655}\) René De La Pedraja, *Oil and Coffee, Latin American Merchant Shipping from the Imperial Era to the 1950s*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 53-54.

later, general Vigueras, head of Manzanillo’s federal troops, received information that Raleigh and two other U.S. war steamers were anchored close by. Fearing a massive disembarking of marines, this time in the Pacific, he decided to set fire to the port’s pier, one of the most modern in the Mexican Pacific and the only one besides Salina Cruz that received direct transpacific shipments. In the end, a U.S. invasion of Manzanillo never took place, but the port remained without proper dock facilities until 1952.\footnote{A provisional rustic pier was built during the 1930s, but the construction of a permanent facility started until 1946, ending with its inauguration in 1952. José Luis Ezquerra de la Colina, et al., Historia y futuro del desarrollo turístico y portuario del litoral en Manzanillo (Estado de México: COEDI, 2006), 60. Ochoa in Olveda, 123. For information on the plans of a U.S. invasion of Manzanillo, see interview with historian Servando Ortholl in Pedro Zamora, “Según reportes de 1908 a 1914 de la Oficina de Inteligencia Naval estadounidense,” Proceso, May, 15, 1999. Retrieved from the web in www.proceso.com.mx/?p=180654. The only systematic quantitative study of Manzanillo’s maritime traffic throughout the Porfiriato and the Revolution suggests that the number of vessels arriving to Manzanillo did not diminish significantly after this incident, but after 1918. Busto, 370.}

Meanwhile, the second transpacific port, Salina Cruz, was also experiencing problems. The Tehuantepec railway, which had continued to run regularly throughout the war due to the relatively low intensity of the conflict in the southern part of Mexico, was attacked by local revolutionaries or bandits in April, 1914.\footnote{De la Pedraja, 55.} Additionally, during that same month, right after the U.S. invasion of Veracruz, the American-Hawaiian Company found itself with six freighters berthed at Puerto Mexico and Salina Cruz, the Atlantic and Pacific terminals of the railroad. Fearing reprisals from Huerta’s government, the company decided to reroute all its vessels so that they would not touch Mexican ports anymore. Instead, the regular shipments of sugar transported from Hawaii to the eastern coast of the United States would from then on travel through the Magellan Strait. This would take 20 days longer but would require no rehandling of cargo and would eliminate any risk that it might be seized or delayed either by the Mexican government or by the local revolutionaries.\footnote{De la Pedraja, 55.}
most important customers. Three years later, the TKK also announced that it would reroute some of its sailings out of Salina Cruz after the Japanese legation had received multiple complaints of robberies from travelers arriving in Salina Cruz aboard TKK vessels.660

The decision of the American-Hawaiian to reroute its vessels was also motivated by the inauguration of a new transcontinental route more favourable to its interests, the Panama Canal. After 10 years of construction—or 34 if we take into account the unsuccessful initial French efforts—by some 40,000 workers,661 the U.S. government finally inaugurated the Canal in August 15, 1914, with the sailing of SS Ancon described at the beginning of the chapter. The Tehuantepec system, which up to then had increasingly monopolized the transcontinental exchanges, suffered a major collapse. In effect, between 1913 and 1914, the profits generated at Tehuantepec fell by more than half and, as of 1917, the system began operating with losses.662

In the specific case of the port of Salina Cruz, the irreversible decline in maritime movement became visible as of 1918.663 The reasons why the Panama Canal triumphed over Tehuantepec as the preferred transcontinental route were multiple. First, the U.S. government lobbied so that the U.S. steamship companies—which made up the bulk of Tehuantepec’s clients—would switch to the Panama Canal.664 This was the case, for instance, of the American Hawaiian, whose vessels only circulated via the Magellan Strait for four months and, just as the Canal

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660 AHGE-SRE, 16-20-176, “Robos de equipajes de japoneses que han desembarcado en Salina Cruz,” July, 1917, 1, 9.


662 Valdés, 21; Arce, 146-148.

663 Busto, 357-358.

664 Arce, 148.
opened, moved to Panama. Second, the canal did not require vessels to transfer their cargo and passengers. Third, its rates were more competitive: while the transhipment costs at Tehuantepec averaged about $3.50 per ton of cargo, the canal toll required a payment of around $1 per ton. Finally, as mentioned above, the Tehuantepec isthmus presented additional uncertainties related to the Mexican revolution.

A third event starting in 1914, the World War, also had an impact on the circulation of steamers on the Mexican Pacific coastline. While the Atlantic merchant traffic was the most transformed by the international conflict, in the Pacific most commercial carriers had to either stop circulating, diminish their sailings or transform their load, purpose, and schedules in order to serve the war efforts. Kosmos represented an example of the former case. The line, which had been linking Hamburg with South, Central, and Mexican Pacific ports regularly since the turn of the century, stopped its service in the context of the German withdrawal from Pacific trade. The American-Hawaiian (AH) exemplifies the latter case. Since 1914, it began chartering some of its vessels to other companies for war service. The same was done by the Panama Railroad Company, the owner of steamer Ancon, which also ended up transporting war-related cargo. By 1916 the AH suspended its inter-coastal service and its ships were operating only on war charters. Additionally, half of its fleet had switched to cover the transatlantic run. A year later, when the U.S. formally entered the war, and until 1919, the whole fleet passed under government control. Throughout this time, American-Hawaiian vessels carried a million

664 They once again moved to the Magellan Strait route when the Canal was temporarily closed in 1915-6 due to landslides. Cochran & Ginger, 361.
666 Huebner, 817.
tons of cargo to the Allies and, at the end of the war, they brought back from Europe over 122,000 U.S. soldiers. Even after the war ended, the firm never reopened its Hawaiian run.\(^{668}\)

The PMSS, the company that had first started a regular transpacific passenger service in 1867, also experienced changes at the time. Following passage of the Seamen’s Act in 1915, which required all U.S. maritime companies to have 75% of their crewmembers be able to understand commands in English, the PMSS’s general manager, Rennie P. Schwerin, declared that the act would drive his company into bankruptcy. The new law was made to get rid of the Chinese crews that had traditionally been employed in U.S. maritime companies—particularly those with services to Asia—as a way to save costs on an efficient workforce (the Chinese were paid up to half of a white sailor’s salary). The PMSS announced the selling of its fleet and set its final sailing for August. In the end, the company was saved by the capital injected by the American International Corporation and the W. R. Grace & Co. Yet the relief was only temporary. The PMSS became unable to compete with transpacific companies with newer and stronger fleets and, following the loss of a bid for five larger vessels in 1925, it ceased existing. The PMSS was acquired by Dollar Co., the company that won the bid.\(^{669}\)

The wars also affected the two direct regular passenger services between Mexico and Asia, which were first reduced and, then, as of 1916, entirely cancelled. In the case of the CCSC, the company that had inaugurated regular transpacific trips to Mexico in 1903, it had been engaged in a dispute with the Mexican government since 1908. As explained in the previous chapter, the CCSC demanded compensation for the over nine hundred steerage passengers who were not allowed to disembark after Salina Cruz’s health delegate had declared

\(^{668}\)Cochran and Ginger, 361-363.

\(^{669}\)Tate, 39-41, 78.
them infected with a contagious eye disease—a diagnosis that the company contested. While Díaz had informally expressed his desire to settle the claim in a friendly manner, Madero’s government explicitly refused to grant any sort of compensation. In 1913, both parties faced the renewal of the CCSC’s contract and with the confrontation at its highest point—and the country in such a chaotic situation—it seems highly unlikely that this took place. The disappearance of all reference to the CCSC from the Official Guide for Mexican Railways and Steamers as of June, 1913, seems to confirm this assumption. Yet there is evidence that the CCSC continued with irregular sailings at least for one more year, but with a much reduced list of steerage passengers. This was also the case for the only other regular transpacific steamship service existing at the time, that of the TKK. TKK had been affected by the revolutionary government since 1911, when Madero canceled subsidies to foreign maritime companies which, in its case, amounted to $10,000 per round trip, but it had continued sailing albeit with a bimonthly—rather than monthly—service. During that year, the authorities registered 4,910 Chinese entries to Mexico. But in 1914, the number was reduced to only 1,491. By then, both TKK’s and CCSC’s vessels began crossing the ocean with fewer and fewer passengers. This was the

670 See Chapter Five for more details.
671 The original 1903-contract had a five-year long duration, extendable indefinitely every five years until either of the signing parties objected. “Contrato,” Diario Oficial, February, 1903, 677.
672 Compañía de la Guía Oficial S.A., Guía Oficial de los Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos 13, no. 7 (Jun., 1913).
673 No records were found of any more CCSC arrivals to the Mexican coast after 1914.
674 AHGE-SRE, L-E-187, 55.
675 In effect, for 1913 the company listed three vessels—Kiyo Maru, Anyo Maru, and Buyo Maru—circulating between Asian ports, Manzanillo, and Salina Cruz in March, May, July, September, November, and January. Compañía de la Guía Oficial S.A., Guía Oficial de los Ferrocarriles y Vapores Mexicanos 13, no. 3 (Feb., 1913): 83.
676 Romero, 54.
case, for instance, of TKK’s *Anyo Maru*, which in August, 1914, brought only sixty travelers—two in first class, seven in second class and 51 in steerage.\(^{677}\) Other examples include CCSC’s *Marie* and *Mexico City*, which docked in Manzanillo in July and August, 1914, with 245 and 37 steerage passengers respectively.\(^{678}\) In 1915 and 1916 the Chinese arrivals in Mexico diminished even more, to only 474 and 228. In the case of the Japanese, only 337 entries were registered during the 1911-1920 period.\(^{679}\) In 1916, the World War occurrences’ forced the steamship passenger service from Asia to Mexico to completely shut down. When the traffic reopened in 1919, after the end of the international conflict, 1,151 Chinese entered the country. The number increased to 2,669 in 1920 and dropped to 1,320 in 1921. Whereas Chinese immigration experienced a resurgence once the transpacific steamship services recommenced, it never rebounded to its prewar levels. In effect, whereas 12,114 Chinese entered Mexico between 1911 and 1913, only 10,062 did so between 1919 and 1928 and the numbers continued to drop afterwards.\(^{680}\) As for the Japanese, there are records of 1,636 entries in the 1920s. However, in 1926, TKK, unable to face the increasing competition of U.S. and Canadian transpacific companies, merged with the strongest, government-backed Japanese enterprise, Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK).\(^{681}\) While it is not certain what happened with the Mexico/South


\(^{678}\) *Marie*, once again like the *Suisang* in 1908 (see Chapter Five), had to spend several weeks docked at port waiting for the health inspector’s clearance. See AGNM, Galería 5, Ramo Gobernación, Periodo revolucionario, caja 123, expedientes 43, 45, 46. June-August, 1914.

\(^{679}\) Ota, 60.

\(^{680}\) Romero, 54-55.

\(^{681}\) Tate, 68.
American Service once NYK took over, the truth is that Japanese immigration to Mexico never reached pre-war levels again.

The dramatic decrease of Asian labourers arriving in Mexico—which had been the central business of all transpacific steamship ventures created until then—not only related to the emergence of the World War, but also to the accentuation of a nationalist economic policy and of a xenophobic, anti-Chinese discourse on the part of Mexican revolutionary governments. Whereas, in the late 19th century, most Porfirian elites saw Asian labourers as a desirable element needed for the economic development of the country, with the turn of the century and the massive influx of Asian—notably Chinese—labourers, the government’s stand began to be more ambivalent. As analyzed in the previous chapter, this led to the creation in 1903 of a federal commission to evaluate the impact and desirability of such immigration as well as to changes in the Immigration Law in 1908 that allowed the newly created Immigrant Inspection Service to examine the incoming labourers and refuse entrance to those deemed sick and/or morally unfit. In 1911, the year that Díaz left for exile, José María Romero, one of the 1903-commission’s members, published a 121-page report on the subject. He concluded that it was not “advisable for the national interests to permit the unlimited and unrestricted immigration of Chinese as an element of colonization… [nor] as an element of manual labor, be it in group or individual form, free or by contracts formed outside of our territory.” He discredited the idea of Chinese as industrious labourers and rather dismissed them as an unproductive race, notably inferior to the more desirable, hard-working Europeans. Additionally, he argued that Chinese

682 Paul Garner sustains that since the last decade of the Porfiriato, there was already a visible turn towards economic nationalist policies. See British Lions and Mexican Eagles: Business, Politics, and Empire in the Career of Weetman Pearson in Mexico, 1889-1919 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 94-137.

683 See Chapter Five.

684 Cited in Romero, 181.
kept their loyalties in Asia and were therefore not prone to assimilation. Even worse, if they managed to integrate into Mexican society through their daily coexistence with the local lower classes, they would only degenerate the Mexican masses with their unhygienic practices and delay the much desired assimilation of indigenous communities to the idealized Mexican who was considered to be Spanish-speaking and Europeanized creole or mestizo. Following this trend, in the early 1920s, after the Chinese arrivals reemerged, the federal government enacted a new Immigration Law that tightly regulated the foreign presence. In particular, the law gave the Secretary of the Interior special powers to establish temporary prohibitions on the entry of foreign workers in the event of local labour shortages and granted wider powers to the Sanitation Agents to deny entrance to immigrants than the 1908 law did. 685 By this time, Japanese labourers had practically ceased traveling to Mexico. Instead, it was mostly family members of those already living there and young professionals—notably doctors, dentists, veterinarians and pharmacists—who arrived in the country, after a 1917-treaty signed by the Mexican and Japanese governments encouraged this type of migration. 686 Chinese labourers, on the other hand, continued to arrive—although in decreasing numbers—aboard TKK vessels or via the irregular sailings of companies such as the Spain and China Navigation Co., owned by merchants from Hong Kong and operated mostly by Spanish and Philippine sailors willing to profit from the transportation of Chinese labourers to Spanish-speaking countries, notably Peru, Chile, and Cuba. 687 In the early 1930s, in the midst of an economic crisis, the xenophobic, protectionist trend of Mexican legislation further intensified with the enactment of laws that temporarily barred the entrance of immigrant labourers as well as required commercial

685 Romero, 44-45.
686 Ota, 57.
687 Romero, 44-45.
employers to have 90% of their employees be of Mexican nationality. In addition, a new report on Asian immigration blamed the Chinese once again for introducing health hazards into the country and for stealing Mexican jobs and therefore forcing local labourers to migrate to the United States. All these reports and legislation contributed to putting an end to the import of Asian labourers to Mexico by the early 1930s.688

Asian labourers were not the only ones affected by the revolutionary anti-foreign discourses and policies—so too were merchants, particularly those of Chinese descent. As mentioned earlier, a large number of Chinese merchants lived in Mexico by the end of Porfiriato, particularly in Sonora. By 1926 their importance was such that the Chinese had become the second largest resident foreign ethnic community in the country.689 While, since the turn of the century, they had faced discriminatory accusations, it was not until the beginning of the Revolution that they became the targets of systematic attacks. As early as 1911, various Chinese and Japanese merchants from all over the country filed complaints to their embassies—which, in turn, sent urgent petitions to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs to request protection for their subjects—after their businesses had been ransacked by revolutionary troops or uncontrolled mobs.690 The most horrendous episode—and the worst act of violence experienced by any Chinese diasporic community in the Americas during the 20th century—happened in the northern city of Torreon, in May, 1911, when maderista forces that had just taken hold of the city, killed 303 Chinese and five Japanese and caused damage of close to $850,000 to their businesses.691 As of 1916, a more organized anti-Chinese movement began to consolidate with

688 Romero, 180-190.
689 In 1926 there were 24,218 registered Chinese living in Mexico. The most numerous foreign community was that of the Spaniards, who amounted to 48,558. Romero, 55.
690 See, for instance, AHGE-SRE, 16-4-33; 16-4-34; 16-4-56; 16-5-115; 16-4-60; 13-1-143; 13-1-145; 13-1-149.
the formation of leagues and juntas, particularly in the north-eastern states. Formed by middle-
class Mexican merchants and often supported by local workers who lived in poor conditions,
these associations sought to eliminate the competition of Chinese merchants and their
employees. They appealed to patriotic propaganda that portrayed Chinese as foreigners who
had become rich at the expense of Mexican small entrepreneurs and workers. The former could
not compete with the Chinese’s allegedly corrupt business practices and the latter found
themselves displaced from their jobs by other Chinese who were brought to work for paltry
salaries. As had become usual, Chinese were also blamed for introducing diseases, vices, as
well as degrading the “Mexican race” when procreating with local women. The hostility
exacerbated during the economic crisis of the late 1920s, when the Chinese served as the
scapegoat for the tougher economic conditions. The tension reached its peak in the summer of
1931, when the Sonoran governor issued an order to vacate against Chinese merchants due to
their non-compliance with a state labour law that required that 80% of their employees be
Mexican-born. Chinese fought through legal means but, in October, a new order forbid them
from reopening their businesses and accused them of violating an existing state law that barred
marriage between Chinese men and Mexican women. As a result, thousands of Chinese
merchants and their Mexican-born families left Sonora—the state with the largest concentration
of Chinese—for good. While a few relocated in other states, the large majority left the
country.692 The Chinese population never recovered from this blow and, by 1940, only 4,856
Chinese lived in Mexico.693

691 Romero, 149. See also Juan Puig, *Entre el río Perla y el Nazas: La China decimonónica y sus braceros
emigrantes, la colonia china de Torreón y la matanza de 1911* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1992).

692 Romero, 145-190. On the subject of anti-Chinese sentiments and campaigns in Mexico see Charles C.
Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40,
no. 2 (May, 1960): 191-211; Philip A. Dennis, “The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico”, *Ethnohistory* 26,
no. 1 (Winter, 1979): 65-80; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Mexico,” *Amerasia*
One last factor that contributed to altering the configuration of the Pacific maritime world was the introduction of oil technology. Just as with the case of steam, it was the Anglo empires—first Britain, then the United States—that began the research and then the implementation of oil technology into their maritime industries. While early research can be traced to the 1860s, it was in the first decade of the 20th century that the systematic study and exploration of oil deposits actually started. The British led the way towards conversion of naval and merchant vessels from coal to oil. In effect, by 1911, when Winston Churchill became the First Lord of the Admiralty and assumed command of the Royal Navy, the country already had over 60 destroyers and 74 submarines running with oil and most of its vessels had been equipped with oil sprayers for coal furnaces. The United States government followed closely and, by 1913, the newly appointed Wilson administration ordered the construction of the first battleship running solely on oil. By the end of that year, the U.S. navy had built or had under construction exclusively as oil burners four battleships, 30 submarines, and 41 destroyers and was progressively switching the remaining fleet to oil. The change was particularly useful in the Pacific, where the coal supplies were more limited and the reserves of oil more abundant.  

That is why in terms of commercial vessels, it was a Pacific firm, the American-Hawaiian,
which was at the vanguard of oil technologies. In effect, since 1902, it had installed an oil burner—the so-called Lassoe-Lokevin, in honour of its inventors—in two of its newest steamers, Nevada and Nebraska, running from San Francisco to Hawaii. That summer the former completed the first ocean voyage by an oil-burning vessel under the U.S. flag. Two years later, Nebraska became the first oil-powered vessel to engage in inter-coastal trade with its pioneer 52-day trip between San Diego and New York via the Magellan strait. The Marine Journal referred to this accomplishment as “the sensation of the time,” and listed the following advantages: “taking into consideration the saving of time, cargo space, and fire room force, it has been estimated that this vessel saved on the voyage about $20,000 in the substitution of oil for fuel in place of coal.” Other benefits included more efficiency in the combustion process, longer and faster trips without the need to refuel, and the possibility of carrying more cargo as the storage for oil was much reduced than for coal. On the Mexican coastline, the revolution indirectly enhanced the switch from coal to oil as the imports of coal diminished and became more expensive, while oil began to be more available as there were local deposits exploited by Mexican and UK firms. Therefore, by the mid-1910s, many local and foreign ship owners sent their vessels to the U.S. for the relatively inexpensive procedure of adapting coal boilers to run on oil.

The gradual conversion of coal steamers into oil had various repercussions for the maritime traffic on the Mexican Pacific coastline. To begin with, vessels running along the San Francisco-Panama axis no longer needed to stop in Mexican ports to refuel. Secondly, those

695 Cited in Cochran and Ginger, 349.

696 As opposed to coal, with oil, the boiler doors were not opened throughout the trip and therefore the heat remained constant which enhanced the boiler’s longevity and efficiency.

697 De la Pedraja, 54.
ports that possessed adequate oil facilities were preferred over those that did not and this could have led to the emergence of new ports and the decay of others. Thirdly, the advent of oil as fuel promoted the creation of new communication technologies, such as cars and planes, which, in some cases, replaced, and, in others, competed with the more traditional routes offered by ships and railroads. Fourthly, oil technologies promoted the construction of new infrastructure which affected ports unevenly. This was the case of roads and highways, which in the case of Mexico, eventually replaced the routes covered by railroads. As a consequence, those ports with highway connections acquired more pre-eminence. Acapulco, for instance, became the first Pacific port to be connected with Mexico City via a paved road in 1927. Lastly, a new geopolitics in the Pacific—and the world—emerged for the control of the available oil supplies of which Mexico possessed substantial reserves.698

6.3 Mexico and the Transpacific World in the 1910s

In 1910, when Porfirio Díaz celebrated his eightieth birthday, his eighth re-election, and the country’s centennial, Mexico’s Pacific coast had more regular maritime connections than ever before. Over a dozen steamship companies linked the Mexican ports internationally, particularly with San Francisco and Panama. Additionally, two monthly direct transpacific services from the CCSC and the TKK had prospered, particularly due to the transportation of Asian immigrants to Mexico. The two companies served the route between Hong Kong, Yokohama, Manzanillo, and Salina Cruz—with additional stopovers if there was enough demand. The latter two had consolidated as the only Mexican ports with regular transpacific

698 These are hypothesis suggested in Busto’s work that need to be explored by further research. Busto, 82, 458-462.
connections. This was due to their modern infrastructure and to the railroad connections that linked them with two of the countries’ largest cities, Mexico City and Guadalajara, in the case of Manzanillo, and because of the short and fast transcontinental service they offered, in the case of Salina Cruz and the Tehuantepec railroad. While the country still lacked proper shipyards capable of building transpacific vessels and various national liners that would make it less dependent on foreign variables, the situation seemed full steam ahead, much like the impressive Centennial celebrations put together by the Porfirian regime, attended by some thirty foreign delegations and hundreds of thousands of local and international spectators.

But the apparent macroeconomic progress was not founded on solid social or political grounds. When different groups revolted demanding more social and political rights following opponent Francisco Madero’s call for arms, the regime fell within months. The so-called Mexican Revolution erupted and a period of instability that had repercussions for Mexico’s transpacific links followed suit. To begin with, both Manzanillo and Salina Cruz—and their adjacent railroad service—suffered the deterioration of their infrastructure due to armed attacks combined with chaotic administration. While this did not immediately translate into a decrease of maritime traffic, decline came slowly and, by 1918, it had become irreversible. Additionally, the two transpacific steamship companies that offered direct services to Mexico went from reducing to suspending their runs and, then, to disbanding operations completely by the 1920s.

The Mexican Revolution also contributed to the decline and eventual extinction of the main transpacific business during the Porfiriato, that is, the transportation of Asian immigrants to Mexico. This was due to the exacerbation of two tendencies already present by the end of the Porfiriato: a more nationalist economic policy combined with xenophobic, anti-Chinese discourse and legislation. The revolutionary governments found in the Chinese a perfect scapegoat for the economic crisis. Both Chinese businessmen and labourers, who had increased
their presence and participation in the economy during the Porfiriato, particularly in the north, were accused of taking the wealth and the jobs from the Mexicans as well as polluting the locals’ health. During the harshest period of armed confrontation, these immigrants suffered both personal and property attacks. Once the armed violence diminished, Chinese businessmen became the main targets of a nationalist and xenophobic legislation that obliged them to fire Chinese workers and hire Mexicans. This same legislation then fined them for alleged violations to public health, later forbid them from marrying local women, seized their properties, and finally, in 1931, expelled them from Sonora, the state where most lived. The local Chinese population never recovered from this blow.

The Japanese, on their part, also diminished their presence due to various reasons. On the one hand, the nationalist revolutionary governments stopped subventions to foreign companies. This affected TKK’s economic interests as their initial contract stipulated an important subsidy from the Mexican government. Moreover, their main business—bringing Asian immigrants to Mexico—was no longer a viable option due to the xenophobic events and laws described above. Additionally, their direct service was interrupted due to World War hostilities and, in the 1920s, the company ended up disappearing, bringing an end to regular direct steamship runs between Japan and Mexico. In addition, those Japanese who traveled to Mexico after the 1910s were no longer large groups of contract workers, but rather young professionals and their families, following a treaty signed by the Mexican revolutionary government and Japan, in 1917.

The opening of the Panama Canal and the emergence of the World War, both starting in August, 1914, also affected Mexico’s transpacific connections. In the case of the former, the canal took over most of the transcontinental traffic that had formerly used Salina Cruz and the Tehuantepec railroad, contributing to their eventual demise. This was due to the fact that the
canal offered a short and peaceful gateway to the Atlantic, with no need to transfer cargo and passengers, with competitive prices and run by the U.S. government, which lobbied so that the U.S. maritime companies would move their operations there. In the case of the World War, it affected Pacific maritime circulation by channelling the use of merchant vessels into the war effort rather than to the traditional commercial routes, causing the cancelation of transpacific passenger services between Mexico and Asia from 1916 to 1919.

Lastly, a technological revolution gave the final blow to the Pacific system created during the Porfiriato, based mostly on the circulation of steamers run by coal. The appearance of oil, which, as of the 1910s, slowly replaced coal as the main fuel for vessels, introduced new geopolitics, routes, ports, needs, infrastructure, and communication technologies that, just as had happened during the transition from sail to steam, would transform the face of Mexican transpacific connections, a topic that awaits further research.
7 Conclusion

The study of Mexico’s transpacific relations during the age of steam contributes to an understanding of the country’s national formation in at least four distinct ways. First, it confirms that Asians formed an essential part of the liberal imagining of Mexico since the second half of the nineteenth century. Second, it shows that Porfirian diplomats promoted relations with China and Japan as a way to consolidate their economic strategy and gain legitimacy and respectability in international circles. Third, transpacific steamers—and steamers in general—had an economic and symbolic value throughout the studied period that must be taken into account in any consideration of the era. And lastly, the study of Mexico’s transpacific steam connections contributes to a reconsideration of the usual temporal boundaries of Mexican historiography by situating Porfirian Mexico in a continuum—rather than as a disruption, as has often been the case—that includes the preceding liberal legacies as well as subsequent Mexican Revolutionary policies.699

By shifting the traditional spatial scope to study Mexico’s formation from a land-based to an ocean-basin perspective, this study reveals that transpacific connections mattered for the discursive formation of the Mexican nation. In effect, the way that late nineteenth and early twentieth century liberal elites—in, before and after the Porfiriato—imagined the nation was influenced by their dynamic and sometimes contradictory views—or imaginations—of China and Japan.700 On the one hand, Meiji Japan served Porfirian elites as an idealized mirror of

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699 Each of these aspects will be carefully explained in the following paragraphs.

700 Alan Knight and Gerardo Rénique have suggested that the xenophobia against Chinese helped construct the racialized Self of Revolutionary Mexico. I am expanding this reasoning in two ways: first, I include a larger timeframe that goes all the way to the Juarista period and, second, I also incorporate the role that Japanese played in the process. See Gerardo Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora’s Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico’s Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s,” in Race and Nation in Modern Latin America, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina
themselves, that is, as a modern and powerful nation that had successfully confronted European military colonialism and had rapidly industrialized based on material progress and the incorporation of Western scientific and technological advancements. In order to emulate this, they found a place for Japanese colonists and Chinese labourers in their vision of Mexico; the former could establish in the country to make the land productive and serve as example for the locals while the latter could serve as temporary cheap, submissive, hard-working labour that could enhance productivity. On the other hand, imperial China and its inhabitants simultaneously served as the necessary nemesis to the imagined Mexican Self, the exact opposite of what Porfirian elites aspired to, that is, as a decaying and supposedly static and retrograde empire that had succumbed to European militarism, precisely because it had not embraced Europeanized values and manners. Their inhabitants, therefore, were often assigned negative racialized stereotypes that were used in contrast to the idealized Mexican Self. These tropes would eventually serve to delegitimize the presence of Japanese immigrants as well, particularly after they arrived by the thousands in the first decade of the twentieth century. This double vision served Porfirian elites well. It allowed them to incorporate Asians on their terms whenever they found it useful and to reject them when they found them a nuisance. In the larger picture, these strategies serve not only to highlight the importance of the transpacific world in the formation of Porfirian Mexico but also the need to take into consideration the global circulation of ideas when studying the changing ways that Mexico has been imagined throughout time, a topic that has become a veritable staple of today’s so-called new cultural Mexican history.

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Porfirian international relations not only situated Mexico within the transatlantic world but also as part of a transpacific one. Due to the importance that Porfirian elites gave to the internationalization of Mexico’s relations and image, this is no secondary topic. Broadening the country’s relations served Porfirian elites to strengthen Mexico’s image abroad as a modern nation (necessary to break with the long legacy of foreign interventions), to legitimize their right to govern, and to increase their access to foreign markets. Inaugurating official ties with Japan and China served them for all of the above-mentioned reasons. In the case of the former, the alliance with a modern emerging nation, such as Japan, that demanded a space for itself in equal terms with the European powers, was attractive to Porfirian elites. It is, therefore, no surprise that the inauguration of official ties with Japan happened during the same decade that relations with the major European powers opened up. If it did not happen even a few years earlier, it was not because the Mexicans did not seek it but rather because Japanese diplomats took their time to do the follow up. The same goes for the case of the Chinese diplomats, who took even longer to reply positively to the Mexican request for inaugurating bilateral ties. China and Japan also helped to achieve Mexican economic goals by providing both cheap labour for increasing productivity and potential markets for local products—at least in rhetorical terms. Finally, relations with both China and Japan were used by Porfirian elites to achieve legitimacy and recognition. This was clearly evident, for instance, in the Centennial Celebrations where Asian residents in Mexico organized events in various states and Chinese and Japanese diplomats came to participate actively in the Mexico City festivities—the latter were even one of a handful of delegations that sent an entire special commission.

The study of Mexican transpacific relations also highlights the economic and symbolic importance that steam maritime connections had for Porfirian elites, an aspect that has been widely overlooked by researchers. From an economic perspective, Porfirian stress on material
progress made it necessary for the country to have the fastest possible accessibility to foreign markets. While railroads accomplished this objective in terms of the land connections, steamers did so for the maritime world. This is one of the reasons why, from the first decade of Porfirian rule, the effort was made to create a national merchant navy on both coasts. Even though the attempts were equally unsuccessful—at least for international connections—on both the Atlantic and the Pacific, the strategy did not disappear but rather shifted so that foreign companies would provide international maritime services. From a symbolic perspective, steamships contributed to the formation of personal, national, regional, and imperial imaginings and aspirations. To begin with, steamers embodied modernity as they represented the latest available technology that made it possible for humans to challenge natural obstacles in order to compress time and space at an unprecedented pace. Take, for instance, the comment of one of the first Pacific steamship passengers—cited in Chapter One—regarding her astonishment and sense of entitlement by finding herself moving fast against the wind past a sea of smaller sailing vessels. This type of personal satisfaction could turn into national pride, as when a steamer navigated as a representative of a particular country, like Zaragoza in the last decade of the twentieth century, when she became the first Mexican vessel to circumnavigate the globe. Not surprisingly, this event merited a special mention in Díaz’s 1896 address to the Congress and throughout the national press. In contrast, failure to succeed at sponsoring a steamship traverse could trigger frustration, as happened with the Mexican failed attempts to create a direct transpacific service. Steamers could also embody imperial prestige and be used for displays of geopolitical power, as in the case of the Perry’s 1853 expedition to Japan or the Japanese 1910 pan-Pacific expedition, mentioned in Chapters One and Six respectively. For those travelling inside the ships, the actual voyage could help shape their vision of themselves and the others as individuals and collectives, by giving them an insight into the distant worlds to come. This
The process could be accentuated by the different physical spaces, treatment, and procedures that the diverse passengers had to undergo which depended on their class (first, second, or steerage) and was often correlated with their race and nationality. But, ultimately, steamers affected the dreams and routines not only of those who traveled in them but also of larger portions of the population. The examples of the large crowds that regularly gathered at port to receive or see steamers off are a case in point. While these experiences were not the subject of this work, they hint at the impact that steamers had on the daily lives of port inhabitants and even on the surrounding populations, as people would often travel from another city just to see a steamer dock.\footnote{The cultural significance of steamers is a topic that deserves further exploration, not only in Mexican historiography.}

By focusing on Mexican transpacific steam connections, this study embraces current discussions on the reconsideration of the traditional periodization of Mexican history. As neo-Porfirismo studies have suggested, rather than seeing the Porfiriato as a radical rupture of the long-standing tradition of Mexican liberalism, the study of the country’s steam connections suggest a series of continuities that expand (at the very least) to Juarista republican antecedents as well as to the Mexican Revolutionary policies that followed the deposition and exile of Porfirio Díaz. In effect, the idea to create a direct steam service linking Mexico and Asia as well as the steam connections themselves—at the beginning via San Francisco—date from the late 1860s, the initial date of this study. They continue until the mid-1910s—the ending date of this study—when, in the context of a series of revolutions that will be addressed below, the service was interrupted. What is interesting is that as much as Porfirian Mexico created the conditions for the establishment of direct transpacific steam services, it also conceived the...
premises that would serve to dismantle them, particularly in regard to the inadmissibility of Asian labourers to Mexico.

This study also aims to contribute to debates that expand beyond the realm of Mexican historiography. For the case of Pacific and maritime historiographies, the study of the Mexican coastline and its transpacific connections serve to illustrate the transformations that were happening throughout the Pacific rim as well as to make evident the creation of new geographies of power that came along with the introduction of steam technologies. First, they reveal that this process was dominated by British interests, which were at the cusp of the new technological advancements, had access to the capital surpluses generated in the context of the industrial revolution, and managed to consolidate their geopolitical influence in the Pacific, particularly after their appropriation of a strategically-located outpost in Hong Kong in the 1830s. Yet, this study also shows that the relation amongst British as well as with other national elites was complex and with sufficient room for constant renegotiations of power so that Mexican—and Chinese and Japanese—elite interests could also influence the outcome of transpacific exchanges and disputes. Second, it exposes that these renegotiations of power affected all kinds of transpacific travelers—from diplomats, to labourers, to sailors—as well as their personal, national, and imperial aspirations. Third, it reveals that these new geographies of power were influenced by a combination of variables which included nationality, class, science, race, and age, amongst others. Fourth, it shows that at least two Mexican ports, Manzanillo and Salina Cruz, became part of the steamers’ transpacific network and, as such, became the locus of international disputes and negotiations. Fifth, the transpacific exchanges propelled by steam not only reshaped the maritime space but also the inland communication networks so that the ports and routes that had easy access to railroad connections flourished over those that did not, as was the case of Manzanillo and Salina Cruz. And lastly, the construction and operation of these new
production and communication facilities required the labour of a large working force.

Therefore, Asian contract labourers became one of the most sought-after commodities throughout the Pacific and Mexico was not the exception, even though few studies situate the Mexican demand for labour during industrial times within a transpacific context.

For the case of transnational studies, this work attempts to widen their scope in at least two ways: by showing that connections across national borders are not a new phenomenon and that transnational premises serve as an important means to study not only non-institutional actors but also governmental elites. While the first aspect has already been stressed by numerous researchers, the second deserves further consideration. In effect, this study of Mexican transpacific links reveals a world of movement where a plurality of actors—institutional and non-institutional—travelled and created dynamic networks in order to fulfil their personal, national, and/or imperial aspirations. This was as true for non-institutional actors, such as the south-eastern Chinese peasant who travelled with a contract to work in the Tehuantepec railroad with the hopes of providing for a better life for his family and community, as it was for the Tehuantepec-born diplomat—for instance, Matías Romero—who spent half of his life abroad seeking to build a respectable career and national community. Both created a series of networks in various places to help attain their goals and most likely generated attachments in most of the places they lived. Yet the fundamental difference is that the transpacific geographies of power during the age of steam described above made it easier for the latter to claim a privileged place for himself within Mexico (and the transpacific) and, furthermore, to deny such a right to the former. This was despite the fact that the so-called “Chinese immigrant”—the category used by the Porfirian authorities to describe Chinese—could have actually spent more time within Mexican territory and had a Mexican wife and children as opposed to the Mexican diplomat who had a wife from the United States, left no
descendants, lived for decades abroad and even died outside the country. While this is an extreme example (not all diplomats spent as much time abroad and not all labourers decided to stay in Mexico and form a family), it does serve to highlight the fact that claims to “national belonging” reflect the power dynamics of a particular time and space. In this sense, this study has shown that elites are not necessarily rooted to a specific territory and, moreover, that their construction of a national imaginary depends on what they do “outside” as much as “within” the country. Therefore, the premises and methodology used by transnational studies in order to understand non-institutional actors could prove useful to analyze elite behaviours as well.

In terms of global studies, this work forms part of an academic trend that attempts to decentre the transatlantic focus that has traditionally prevailed in the field. It does so by showing that just as industrialization serves to explain the exchanges that took place in the transatlantic world during the nineteenth century, the same happened for the transpacific world. Furthermore, the region also participated in global discussions on race, science, imperialism, and nation-formation, although the specificities of each case varied according to the specific locations and participants. Moreover, the study highlights the participation that non-imperial actors had in global discussions, as was the case, for instance, of Mexican Porfirian elites, who have been widely overlooked in the field.

While the focus of this work has been state-sponsored travelers, this by no means is intended to suggest that their interests were the only ones that mattered in reconfiguring the transpacific space during the age of steam. Asian labourers might have been treated as commodities by the Mexican authorities and the wealthy Chinese businessmen who transported them and as subjects who should conform to their emperor’s desires by some Chinese and Japanese elites, but, to themselves and their families, they were simply trying to achieve their own individual and group goals. These could sometimes coincide with those of some governing
elites and wealthy businessmen but they could also clash. The latter was the case, for instance, of the Japanese colonists who arrived in Chiapas sponsored by their government, but who complained and returned to Japan when actual conditions did not fulfill their expectations or, rather, abandoned the project and started their own businesses in the vicinities. Or the case of the Chinese labourers who rejected the subordinate position given to them within the Porfirian national project and instead established their own businesses in Mexico or returned to Asia or moved to other Hispanic countries or to the United States in order to follow their own plans and dreams.702

The way Porfirian Mexico had chosen to incorporate itself into the transpacific world suffered major disruptions as of the 1910s. The year 1914 became the symbolic date to end this study because, by then, all the major events that would have an impact on the Porfirian transpacific system had emerged. During that summer, the World War erupted and the Panama Canal opened. The former affected Pacific maritime circulation by channelling the use of merchant vessels to the war effort rather than to the traditional commercial routes. This eventually led to the cancelation of transpacific passenger services between Mexico and Asia from 1916 to 1919. As for the Panama Canal, it took over most of the transcontinental traffic that had formerly used Salina Cruz and the Tehuantepec railroad, contributing to the demise of one of the two major Porfirian transpacific ports. The second one, Manzanillo, also suffered a major upset in 1914, when its port facilities were destroyed in the context of the Mexican revolution, a civil war that had erupted after different sectors of the Mexican society revolted against Díaz’s last re-election. This led to his deposition and exile in 1911 and a subsequent

702 The fate, dreams, and actions of these peoples deserve more attention from Pacific and Porfirian historiographies, although great advancement has been made with the recent publication of Robert Chao Romero’s *The Chinese in Mexico*, and the work that Maria Elena Ota Mishima and her multiple disciples have been doing since the 1990s for the case of the Japanese in Mexico.
period of instability and violence which affected the Pacific in several ways. In effect, the port infrastructure was neglected and there was a subsequent decrease in maritime traffic and the extinction of the two steamship companies that made transpacific runs to Mexico. Also, the main business that supported the transpacific traffic—the transportation of Asian labourers—disappeared in the context of revolutionary nationalist economic policy and xenophobic legislation, which particularly targeted the Chinese populations. And, finally, the appearance of a new technology, oil, which gradually replaced coal as the fuel for transpacific vessels, introduced new geopolitics, routes, ports, needs, infrastructure, and communication technologies that, just as had happened during the transition from sail to steam, would transform the face of Mexican transpacific connections.\footnote{This transition from steam to oil technologies in the maritime world is one last topic that needs consideration from future research.}
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