

While Cuba's aging Chinese immigrants and their descendants gradually reposition themselves in the political economy of the Cuban revolution, their counterparts in Mexico are faced with more urgent problems. Criticized in the mass media for deepening Mexico's trade deficit with China, targeted by thieves and kidnapers, and unprotected by the police, Chinese people have few friends in Mexico and even fewer in high places. Image-conscious private- and public-sector officials are reluctant to openly support trade fairs organized by Mexico's Chinese associations, since these events are widely viewed as conduits for the import of manufactured goods that compete with Mexican products (see chapter 2).

When Mexican officials have seen past the disincentives and engaged local Chinese communities, positive results have quickly followed. The government of the state of Baja California has led the way, harnessing the social connections of Chinese associations in Mexicali and Tijuana to attract investors from China and negotiate access to the Chinese market for Mexican products. However, once these partnerships are off the ground, a lack of regulatory follow-through has left the way open for abuse. Smuggling of Chinese contraband into Mexico is part of the problem, but more serious is the illegal recruitment of employees from China to work in the restaurants and maquiladoras of northern Mexico. Mexico's Chinese associations have sometimes brokered these exploit-

ative connections, departing in every respect from their historical tradition of humanitarian protection, mutual aid, and trust.

This chapter begins by discussing the turbulent lives of the pioneer Chinese settlers in Mexico. Arriving during the revolution of the early twentieth century, thousands of Chinese cotton, copper, and railroad workers found themselves on the wrong side of history. Unlike their counterparts in Cuba, Chinese immigrants in Mexico were excluded from the revolutionary struggle, whose main purpose was to advance the rights and interests of Mexico's disenfranchised indigenous population. As the number of Chinese settlers grew and their businesses prospered, public hostility toward them increased. By the mid-1920s, the Valley of Mexicali was home to nearly ten thousand Chinese, outnumbering the Mexican population and giving rise to a strong backlash against them. Turning inward for economic and social defense intensified their segregation and fueled anti-Chinese campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s and ultimately the expulsion of some ten thousand Chinese people from across Mexico. As Grace Peña Delgado has observed, Mexico's revolutionary vision was rooted in a carefully guarded blend (*mestizaje*) of Spanish and indigenous influences: "*Mestizaje* guided the efforts of post-revolutionary architects to assimilate native populations into mainstream Mexican society, to exclude blacks from the national image, and to expel most Chinese from the country. . . . Chinese Mexicans are nearly absent from the Mexican national narrative" (2012, 5). Despite the efforts of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) in the 1930s to set Mexico on a more inclusive and progressive course, in the second half of the twentieth century Chinese immigrants and their descendants continued to face prejudice and suspicion, stirred up not least by Mexico's fervent anticommunist movement. From its beginnings, the Chinese diaspora in Mexico was viewed as a foreign intrusion, with no place in the revolutionary vision of national identity.

Echoes from the early twentieth century still resound in the predicament of Mexico's Chinese diaspora. Accusations of unfair commercial practices channeled through obscure Asian networks appear frequently in the mass media, as they did a hundred years ago. But allegations that the Chinese community and its trade fairs are deepening the bilateral deficit are only the tip of the iceberg. Even more confrontational are reactions to Chinese involvement in Mexico's massive informal sector. The

chapter's second section looks at a bitter debate that has broken out in Mexico City's historic center, where small business owners complain that the influx of Chinese contraband toys, shoes, DVDs, and other products is forcing them to close their shops. As Chinese suppliers gain a foothold in the notorious Tepito black market district on the perimeter of the historic center, critics have even accused Mexico City's former mayor, Marcelo Ebrard, of colluding with Chinese businesses to "invade our capital city" (*Uno más Uno* 2007). Proposals for containing the black market and its Chinese connections range from the expulsion of street vendors to the provision of more weapons to police, but strategies for managing the social dimensions of the informal sector are yet to emerge. The latter would involve engagement with Chinese communities and their social networks, a course of vertical synergy that Mexican leaders have been reluctant to explore. To do so would not only expose them to public criticism but also require them to demonstrate their trustworthiness to Mexico's Chinese associations.

As is the case in Cuba, Chinese networks in Mexico have long coalesced around ethnic associations. The chapter's third section examines the work of the Chinese associations of Mexicali and Tijuana, two of the country's most active. The state government of Baja California has been more active than its federal- and state-level counterparts in forging cooperative synergies with Chinese associations. Its endorsement of Chinese street fairs, marketplaces, and business networking have promoted public awareness of Chinese cultural heritage, facilitated trade and investment with Chinese partners, and helped to improve Sino-Mexican diplomatic relations. The Chinese government has also offered financial and logistical support to Baja California's Chinese associations, on the condition that they agree to publicly adopt the One-China policy, break ties with Taiwanese institutions, conduct official business in Mandarin, and assist Chinese firms to expand into Mexico. Association leaders describe these commitments as a matter of building trust between investors, suppliers, customers, and ultimately between Mexico and China, but they have yet to convince local Mexicans that they stand to benefit.

The fourth section explores the human fallout from the Chinese associations' hot pursuit of business ties with China. The associations' advocacy of corporate interests has sometimes clashed with the very humanitarian commitments they were founded to honor. As well as promoting

bilateral trade in commercial goods, the associations also help northern Mexico's factories and restaurants recruit Chinese employees. As the associations increasingly focus on business consulting, matching employers with workers, and arranging visas, they have turned a blind eye to the plight of exploited laborers. The victims of this process live on the margins of a marginalized community, unable to turn to the associations for help and cut off from nearly all avenues of support. One of the few avenues open to them is a Baptist church in Mexicali, whose congregation of past and present Chinese contract workers has traveled there from around the region in search of protection. Introduced by their minister, these individuals speak of the pressures they face to keep quiet about their situation. To break their silence or associate with anybody beyond their immediate community invites retribution against themselves and their families. This extreme form of enforceable trust has underpinned a tightly guarded system of migration and employment, underscoring the need for regulatory follow-through once deals are struck between Mexican businesses and Chinese suppliers.

China's relations with Mexico have great potential, including the potential for abuse. To reduce commercial and humanitarian exploitation will require forms of cooperation between the Chinese associations and the Mexican government that extend beyond business facilitation. Jointly conducted visa monitoring, workplace audits, and commercial inspections are possible first steps. As President Enrique Peña Nieto endeavors to set Mexican relations with China on a more amicable and productive course, the Chinese associations and their wider communities have much to gain from proactive engagement with state and society. As well as establishing themselves as credible brokers of Sino-Mexican trade and investment, they might also begin to turn back the tide of public distrust that has surrounded them for over a century.

REVOLUTION: EQUALITY FOR WHOM?

A bold statement adorns the iconic central library of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM): “por mi raza hablará el espíritu” (my spirit will speak through my race; figure 4.1). Inspired by the indignant pride of the Mexican Revolution, Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos penned the motto in 1921 while also serving as UNAM's presi-



FIGURE 4.1 The coat of arms of UNAM. Photo by the author.

dent. The statement openly challenged a European legacy of racial and cultural stratification by vindicating the *raza bronce* (bronze race) as a source of dignity rather than shame.

Vasconcelos would have known that thousands of Chinese migrant workers had by then settled in the arid lands adjacent to the United States to pick cotton and mine copper. Many arrived after abandoning the search for gold in California and finding themselves denied permission to work or bring family members to join them in the United States (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, 1328). Laws passed in California between 1850 and 1870 prohibited Chinese employment in chartered corporations, required Chinese people to live outside of incorporated towns, and even banned the carrying of poles laden with goods on public sidewalks. Many of these laws were overturned because they violated federal jurisdiction, but as Adam McKeown (2008, 129) notes, this drove California's senators in Washing-

ton to advocate more centralized restrictions. The federal 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act made Chinese people “the first group specifically designated by race to be barred from entering the country” (Hu-DeHart 2007, 41) and made Mexico a more practical destination for Chinese immigrants.

The Treaty of Friendship and Navigation between Mexico and China, signed in 1899 and ratified in 1900, facilitated direct migration from China, as had Peru’s and Brazil’s treaties with China in 1874 and 1881, respectively. The introduction of Chinese contract laborers indirectly supported Mexico’s revolutionary cause: populating the northern states diminished the chance of a second U.S. annexation. Arriving in Mexico both directly and via the United States, Chinese immigrants established themselves as the fourth largest minority group in the country, representing 11 percent of the population.

Commercial and migratory ties between Mexico and China had commenced in the mid-sixteenth century. The Manila Galleons, known in Mexico as the *Nao de China*, would set sail once (later twice) per year from the Philippines, then a node of contact between the Chinese and Spanish empires. Landing in Acapulco, the *Nao* unloaded Asian silk, porcelain, medicines, and high-quality furniture for distribution throughout the Spanish American colonies and on the return voyage carried silver from across the Americas. This pattern of trade between China, the Philippines, and the Americas persisted for some 250 years. The first Chinese migrant workers arrived in Mexico in 1864, contracted by U.S. employers first to build railroads between the cities of El Paso, Chihuahua, and Juárez and then to expand the rail network in the 1880s to the cities of Sonora, Tampico, and Tamaulipas. By the mid-1890s, 1,800 workers had been contracted from Macao and Hong Kong to work in Mexican agriculture, but nearly half died from disease and extreme working conditions (Auyón Gerardo 2003, 32).

The ratification of the Treaty of Friendship and Navigation in 1900 was expected to boost trade and migration between Mexico and China, but Mexico’s ambassador to the United States, Manuel de Azpiroz, argued that the treaty would signal to the world that his country was “demonstrating sympathy for that barbaric nation . . . that has no idea about modern international law” (quoted in Valdés Lakowsky 1981, 255–56). Azpiroz’s opinions of China were widely shared, and by the time Vasconcelos became president of UNAM, negative perceptions of Chinese immi-

grants, reinforced by the revolution's racial pride, were beginning to fuel violence against them (Young 2014). In the chaos that followed the 1910 fall of José Porfirio Díaz's government, the immigrants' hopes for protection and representation from China collapsed, as did the Qing dynasty in 1911. On May 15, 1911, the revolutionary troops of Antonio Madero, led by Francisco "Pancho" Villa, took the city of Torreón, where Chinese immigrants had set up convenience stores, banks, and small agricultural operations. With the assistance of local residents, the troops rounded up and killed some three hundred Chinese people and destroyed their businesses. A commission led by the prominent Chinese diplomat Woo Chung-yen traveled to Mexico to investigate these events and, with the assistance of an Anglo-American law firm, secured the signing of the 1912 Protocol of Indemnity on Chinese Interests (R. Romero 2010, 154). The protocol settled on a compensation of three million one hundred pesos, but the 1913 military coup that installed President Victoriano Huerta ensured that this was never paid (Connelly and Cornejo Bustamante 1992, 43).

From its inception, the Mexican Revolution was closely tied to the politics of race. As early as 1908 Emiliano Zapata, a speaker of Nahuatl, was advocating the land rights of rural indigenous and mestizo people in his home state of Morelos (Horcasitas 1968). In a tense environment saturated by racial politics, economic grievances were directed at ethnic "others." The Chinese community was a convenient target and became an example of a well-established sociological premise: the consolidation of solidarity among insiders entails the simultaneous rejection of outsiders. Galvanized by popular pride in the *raza bronce*, the revolution found no convenient place for linguistically and visibly distinct foreigners (Sato 2006).

Deeply embedded in Chinese Mexican historical lore is the arrival of the first group of Chinese people in the Valley of Mexicali in 1908. Abandoning the copper mines of Sonora in search of opportunities in the town of Mexicali, 160 Chinese sailed across the Gulf of California to San Felipe and were advised to walk the remaining 121 miles across the state of Baja California to their destination. After three days in temperatures of 125 degrees Fahrenheit, they became disoriented in the desert without a compass and began to die of thirst and exhaustion; only a handful reached Mexicali. The desert where they perished came to be known as

the Sierra de los Chinos or El Chinero by locals, who report that those willing to visit this place of tragedy and sorrow have found coins and other objects abandoned by the Chinese pioneers. The former director of the Chinese Association of Mexicali, Eduardo Auyón Gerardo, told me that “when clouds gather over El Chinero, you can still hear their voices screaming for water” (interview, October 7, 2008).

The horrors of El Chinero were prelude to a turbulent period of settlement for the Chinese of Baja California. The size of the community grew through the activities of the Mau Li and Chung Hwa corporations, which by 1921 were operating across Mexico and had contracted between 40,000 and 50,000 Chinese laborers to work in mining, construction, and agriculture (mainly cutting sugarcane and picking cotton). Assisted by the sympathetic immigration policies of Baja California’s Governor Esteban Cantú (1915–20), Chinese traders came to dominate niche economies in cities across the state, while making deep commercial inroads into the neighboring state of Sonora and onward into the state of Sinaloa. They manufactured tobacco and other agricultural products, furniture, leather goods, and clothing, all of which were distributed through a network of convenience stores stretching from the town of Culiacán in Sinaloa through Mexicali to San Francisco, laying the foundation of Mexico’s commercial infrastructure (Chou 2002, 17).

As noted above, by the mid-1920s Chinese settlers in the Valley of Mexicali outnumbered the local Mexican population (Velázquez Morales 2001, 59; Werne 1980, 16). The tendency of Chinese companies in Mexicali and across Mexico to trade primarily with each other and to employ staff members from within their ethnic community provoked popular resentment and legal action. As in Cuba and Panama, anti-Chinese campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s convinced the federal government to implement laws requiring Chinese businesses to guarantee that 80 percent of their workforces were national citizens.

Public hostility gave rise to protective measures among Chinese mutual aid associations, which since the early 1920s had underpinned the development of the Chinatowns of Mexicali and Mexico City. Many people outside the community perceived the alternative framework of trade, distribution, and finance provided by the Chinese associations (seventeen of which were registered in Mexicali in 1920) as giving Chinese immigrants an unfair advantage. Media articles and pamphlets of the time

described the solidarity and mutual aid of the Chinese community as a reflection of its inherent “meanness” and “selfishness” (Monteón González and Trueba Lara 1988, 41; also see J. Romero 1911; Velázquez Morales 1989). *La Frontera* and other northern Mexican newspapers were prominent forums for spreading anti-Chinese sentiment, publishing statements such as: “[The Chinese community] is rejected not for the mere fact that it is Chinese, nor for racial hatred, nor for its color, and much less for its ambition to imitate our Northern neighbors. . . . It is rejected because it is the incarnation of a rotten tree trunk: selfishness. . . . And the selfish Chinese community par excellence sows a bad seed wherever it implants itself” (quoted in Velázquez Morales 2001, 270).

The reputation of Mexico’s Chinese communities suffered further as conflicts erupted between supporters of the conservative Manchu Chee Kung Tong faction and the National China League (later the Chinese Nationalist Party), which followed Sun Yat-sen. The two groups undertook violent actions against each other, including the assassination of leaders, which gave the Mexican government a pretext for the expulsion of Chinese people from the country. In the words of President Álvaro Obregón (1920–24), “our office firmly believes in the need to impose order and prevent our country from becoming a theater for the intrigues and assassinations driven by the passions of foreign gangs” (quoted in González Oropeza 1997, 49–50).

Obregón chose his interior minister, Plutarco Elías Calles, to succeed him as president (1924–28), paving the way for the anti-Chinese campaign to expand. Together with his son, the governor of Sonora, Calles endorsed the prohibition of Chinese-Mexican intermarriage and the forced closure of Chinese businesses. In 1924 the Pro-Race Committee (Comité Pro Raza) of Baja California proposed the expulsion of all Chinese people from Mexico, while the Anti-Chinese Committee (Comité Antichino) of Sinaloa backed a law requiring Chinese people to live in districts segregated from the rest of Mexican society. The municipal president of Nogales, Walterio Pesqueira, alleged that “the isolation of the Chinese race is a matter of public interest, considering that they have monopolized all of the local sources of wealth,” while his counterpart in the municipality of Huépac proposed abrogating the Treaty of Friendship and Navigation “to ensure the health of la raza” (quoted in González Oropeza 1997, 53, 54).

The first Grand Convention of Anti-Chinese Committees of the Republic of Mexico was held in Nogales in 1925, augmenting the movement's visibility and giving rise to a series of subgroups. These included the Anti-Chinese Youth Subcommittee of Mazatlán, anti-Chinese associations in Durango and San Luis Potosí, and the National Anti-Chinese Workers' League, which declared that Mexicans "find themselves at risk of losing their noble Latin heritage" (quoted in González Oropeza 1997, 55). With the slogan of Mexico for Mexicans, the various groups shared four goals: the prohibition of Chinese immigration, expulsion of illegal Chinese immigrants, prohibition of Chinese-Mexican intermarriage, and establishment of special residential districts for Chinese people. The movement drew inspiration from a concurrent surge of xenophobia in the United States, among whose victims were Mexicans. Manuel González Oropeza notes that "on February 12, 1926, Francisco Martínez wrote to President Calles to suggest the expulsion of all Chinese, whom he categorized as a 'stench,' just as officials in the United States had announced in Brawley, California, in relation to Mexicans; Martínez suggested taking advantage of this idea" (1997, 51).

In the late 1920s the Grand National Pro-Race League (*Gran Liga Nacional Pro-Raza*) had come to champion the anti-Chinese cause at the national level. The historian Catalina Velázquez Morales has collected the organization's numerous press releases and pamphlets, including one titled "La bestia amarilla" (The yellow beast) that offers the following advice: "Fathers—do not allow your daughters to get close to the Chinese. Mothers who are proud of your bronze complexion, who carry in your veins the blood of Cuauhtémoc; matrons who have inherited the language of Cortés! Do not mix the blood of jackals with the blood of Incas. How deep is the misery and abundant the filth that Hong Kong has thrown at our shores! For Mexico and our race—if you are a patriot of good stock, be sure this notice circulates profusely throughout the Republic" (*Gran Liga Nacional Pro-Raza* 1927).

The pamphlet describes the Mexican race as hybrid, yet a resource whose purity should be protected and preserved. Citizens of "good stock" are enjoined to take pride in both their indigenous Latin American ancestry (via Cuauhtémoc) and their Spanish heritage (via Cortés). In the spirit of the Mexican Revolution, indigenous and European ethnicity are

placed on equal footing, and both are elevated above the “filth” of Chinese impurity.

Nationalist movements are fertile ground for the reification of race and moralization of place, as China’s own revolutionary history attests. Two decades before “La bestia amarilla” was circulated in Mexico, Sun Yat-sen’s supporters were imploring Chinese settlers in southeast Asia to limit their foreign commitments, return home, and join the insurgency against the Qing dynasty. A patriotic appeal to racial loyalty permeates the *Geming Ge* (革命歌; Song of the revolution), which nationalist sympathizers promoted among overseas Chinese communities:

It is hard to be happy all one’s life,
 You need but little conscience to feel shame.
 What then is the most shameful matter?
 To forget one’s ancestors deserves the greatest hate!
 If not that, then to register as a foreign national,
 Forgetting that you come from Chinese stock. (quoted in Wang G.
 2000, 69)

The *Geming Ge* offers overseas Chinese settlers a stark choice: return home to fight for the national cause and be exalted, or remain abroad and be hated. Like “La bestia amarilla,” it invokes racial stock as a moral compass for orienting its audience to the preferred decision. Both works limit the possible choices to two extreme alternatives that carry momentous consequences and afford no middle ground. If the Chinese revolutionaries tried to force this moral hyperbole on men living in southeast Asia, in Mexico it was local women, writes Peña Delgado, who were forced to choose between the extremes of becoming national “gatekeepers” or “traitors”: “In reinforcing women’s primary role in the revolutionary project, state-makers simultaneously cast women at two extremes of the moral-political tandem: as traitors of the Mexican state by way of marriage to Chinese men, and as gatekeepers of the revolutionary state by way of marriage to Mexican men. To choose one over the other circumscribed women’s relationship to Mexico’s revolution” (2012, 10).

Adding further tension to this vitriolic blend of race, nationality, and gender, in the early 1930s the Great Depression forced the mass return of unemployed Mexican men from the United States. Angered and hard-

ened by the expulsion of its citizens, the Mexican government deported around ten thousand Chinese nationals and their descendants, citing violence between rival Chinese gangs and illegal lending and exclusionary hiring practices as the reason (Carr 1973; Rojas Peña 2009). This hard-line policy reflected the continuing influence of Calles, who by then had declared himself Mexico's *jefe máximo* (maximum political chief) and had quietly supervised the short presidencies of Emilio Portes Gil (1928–30), Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–32), and Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932–34). Many Chinese immigrants were sent with their Mexican wives and children to Macao and Hong Kong, leaving behind only five thousand Chinese people in Mexico, according to the census of 1940 (Pardiñas 1982, 478–79).

Mexico's rejection of China and its people would have continued into the late 1930s had it not been for the diplomatic skill of Cárdenas. Calles had trusted Cárdenas—they had served together in the military—and expected to manipulate him as he had the previous three presidents (Buchenau 2006). However, Cárdenas gradually removed Calles's allies from office and eventually had Calles arrested and deported to the United States in 1936, where he became acquainted with several known fascists and forged a friendship with Vasconcelos, the designer of UNAM's coat of arms and motto.

Cárdenas sought to reverse many aspects of Mexico's economic and social trajectory, including the treatment of Chinese migrants. In 1937 and 1938, as war broke out between China and Japan, he repatriated four hundred previously expelled Mexican women and a large (but undocumented) number of Mexican Chinese children (Schiafone Camacho 2009, 560; Schuler 1998, 57 and 94). Despite these advances, the Cárdenas administration maintained a restrictive view of Mexican nationhood, which, as Julia Schiafone Camacho writes, denied Chinese men the right to return with their families: "Families that had not split up had to decide whether to do so, since Chinese men remained barred from returning to Mexico. The choice brought immense heartache to families who had wanted to stay unified but saw no other option than to be divided for the well-being of the women and children in a climate of war and uncertainty in China" (2012, 122). Mexico's former economic consul to China, Juan José Ling, was personally affected by these developments:

My grandfather moved from Taishan in Guangdong Province to Tampico during Mexico's oil boom in the early twentieth century. He met my grandmother there, but they were forced to go to China when things turned nasty for Chinese people in the early 1930s. My grandmother finally returned to Tampico with her seven children, but not my grandfather, on one of the ships sent by Lázaro Cárdenas at the end of the 1930s. One of the children was my mother. In my community people were basically ashamed to be Chinese, and I think many still are. Have you noticed that in many photographs and in public, even recently, Chinese people like to wear sunglasses? That's to blend in better, because apart from our eyes we don't look that different to Mexicans. In my whole family I am the only one who has married a woman of Chinese descent, and the only one with an interest in Chinese culture. The rest all wanted to be more Mexican. (interview, June 8, 2010)

Like thousands of Chinese Mexicans, Ling's family endured forced migration, division, and ethnic discrimination. Their predicament was not helped by a steady flow of postwar movies, television, and radio productions (many imported from the United States) that negatively portrayed Chinese people and their government. Witnessing this renewed hostility, Ling recalls that for at least three decades after Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Chinese Mexicans were perceived to be associated with communism. As the historian Wang Gungwu writes, "after 1949, especially in the anticommunist nation-states, every Chinese was suspected of being a communist, or at least a sympathizer, whose loyalty could never be trusted" (2000, 82). Nothing was further from the truth for most Mexicans of Chinese ancestry, particularly those who cited their rejection of communism as ground for their being repatriated from China. Championing their cause in the 1950s, the political activist Ramón Lay Mazo argued that thousands of people who had been expelled from Mexico were stranded in China, hoping for the Mexican government to save them from communism (Schiavone Camacho 2012, 145–46).

Although *China Popular*—a Spanish-language magazine that supported the Chinese government—was available in Mexico in the 1950s, its voice was drowned out by a wave of anticommunist literature. Citing

China as the epitome of political depravity, articles such as “If Communism Comes to Mexico” (1961, 9) were widely distributed in rural and urban Mexico by the U.S. Christian Anti-Communism Crusade to show “what would happen to the Mexican people in the event of a Communist takeover.” Mexico’s first ambassador to the PRC, Eugenio Anguiano Roch, believed that the persistence of these fears into the 1970s was inflammatory and damaging to bilateral relations, and after his return to Mexico he attempted to dispel them (interview, June 9, 2010). Between 1973 and 1980 he tirelessly lobbied the Ministry of Education, urging it to permit Chinese students to study Spanish at the Colegio de México. The ministry finally granted two hundred visas on the condition that the Chinese students live in a designated dormitory with minimal public contact, and in this way be impeded from spreading communism.

Mexican fiction also portrayed China and Mexicans of Chinese descent in a negative light, focusing on the criminal activities of gangsters and opium dealers. Rafael Bernal’s (1969) novel *El Complot Mongól* (The Mongolian conspiracy) describes the corruption of the Mexican political system, which is surpassed only by the inadequacies and moral shortcomings of the protagonist, a Chinese Mexican police detective named Filiberto García. Meanwhile, history textbooks made no mention of Mexico’s Chinese diaspora and—according to Yolanda Trápaga Delfín, a China specialist at UNAM—generally still do not (interview, June 16, 2010). Both the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions were underpinned by class struggle, but as Gerardo Rénique (2000 and 2003) has shown, narrow nationalistic notions of racial identity have continued to shape Mexico’s development. This has complicated the lives of Chinese people in Mexico, as have political differences between the two countries—from Mexican anticommunism in the mid- to late twentieth century to recent tensions over the so-called disloyal competition of China’s state-backed manufacturers (see chapter 2).

Like their Cuban counterparts, leaders of Mexico’s Chinese community are attempting to leverage China’s growth to advance their interests. But unlike the situation in Cuba, Chinese people and their descendants in Mexico face public opposition to the expansion of their transpacific commercial ties. Journalists have fervently described the damage inflicted on Mexican industries as Chinese imports—both legal and contraband—flood into the country and deepen the bilateral deficit. Fear of

public criticism has discouraged state and private-sector engagement with the Chinese diaspora, impeding the development of consensual efforts to regulate its deepening business partnerships with China. The next section argues that this vertical disjuncture has fueled the expansion of informal Sino-Mexican trade, evident in Mexico City's notorious Tepito district.

CHINA GOES GLOBAL: PRODUCTS, PEOPLE, AND PERCEPTIONS

China's unparalleled economic growth, recorded by the World Bank (2015a) as averaging 9.3 percent between 1980 and 2014, is sustained by a massive flow of exports to the world. Overseas Chinese communities have played an important role in familiarizing mainland suppliers with foreign markets. To consolidate a sense of belonging, loyalty, and Chinese cultural identity among emigrants, in 1978 the State Council of China provided new funding for the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO). The office had been established more than sixty years earlier, shortly after Sun Yat-sen's nationalist forces overthrew the last Qing emperor and founded the Republic of China in 1911. Initially OCAO focused on extending diplomatic protection to Chinese expatriates, but it increasingly dedicated resources to promoting their cultural affinity and national allegiance.

Wang notes that prior to the Republican period, successive imperial regimes professed that overseas travel could erode subjects' moral commitment to their homeland and discouraged anything more than temporary "sojourning": "Throughout the centuries since the Song dynasty (since the tenth century), the Chinese who went overseas in the ports across the South China Sea were not supposed to have left China permanently. If they were good sons who were filial and loved their homes, they would always have planned to return. Thus when they were away from China, they would not have stopped being Chinese. This normative approach clearly represented a view from the top, an elitist view describing an ideal type. There was ample evidence throughout those centuries that it was often not practicable, and often not true" (Wang G. 2000, 44–45).

Struggling to publicly justify the growth of enduring overseas Chinese communities, imperial lawmakers had categorized émigrés as *huaqiao* (华侨), a term borrowed from classical poetry to describe dutiful foreign

service while temporarily sojourning. The creation of OCAO under the Republican government went much further, signaling for the first time that Chinese leaders not only approved the practice of overseas work and settlement but also “confirmed it as a patriotic obligation” (Wang G. 2000, 70). This break with the past nevertheless sustained a quintessentially imperial ethos: Chinese people, wherever they may live, should remain trusted subjects of their motherland.

Today, OCAO assists overseas Chinese communities to create opportunities for trade with China, to overcome linguistic and cultural misunderstandings, and ostensibly to build “harmony with the governments and communities that host them” (Minor 2010). OCAO’s Mexican activities (discussed below) range from trade facilitation to advocacy of the One-China Policy, but the prospect of harmonious public- and private-sector relationships remains distant. A remark made in 2008 by China’s then consul general in Tijuana, Gao Shoujian, remains true today: the convergence of economic competition with persisting social and diplomatic tensions constitutes a formidable challenge to any Chinese effort to build trust with the Mexican government, let alone with Mexican customers (interview, November 5, 2008).

Mexico’s trade deficit with China is the largest in Latin America, surpassing \$60 billion in 2014 (United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database 2015). For more than a decade, a pervasive effect of the economic imbalance has been a homogenizing tendency in the Mexican public sphere to equate Chinese businesses, products, and people with the global ambitions of the Chinese state (Haro Navejas 2007, 457). This tendency is strengthened by the frequent appearance in the mass media of domestic and foreign articles critical of human rights abuses in Chinese state-operated factories, the substandard quality of the products they manufacture, and the unfair competition they represent for Mexican businesses (González Alvarado 2008; *La Prensa* 2005). As illustrated by the assault on the Chinese travel agency described at the beginning of this book, Chinese resident in Mexico are viewed by many as the foot soldiers of China’s commercial invasion.

According to Mexico’s most recent census (conducted in 2010), the country is home to 6,655 Chinese-born individuals, the twelfth largest foreign group. The Chinese embassy counts 20,000 Mexicans of Chinese origin, and community leaders report that Mexicali and Tijuana alone

are home to some 60,000 Chinese people (including Mexican-born descendants of Chinese immigrants). Even in light of these informal reports, this is a small populace compared to the 738,103 expatriates from the United States, the largest foreign group (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Geografía 2010).

Unofficial reports estimate the number of U.S. citizens residing in Mexico to exceed one million, many of them unregistered. These figures are not surprising considering that in 2014 U.S.-Mexico trade amounted to \$537 billion (more than seven times the value of China-Mexico trade) (United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database 2015). Commercial ties, though, are only part of the explanation. The other part concerns the aging U.S. population: in 2005 some 250,000 U.S. senior citizens were living in gated villages on Mexico's Pacific coast, where Spanish is barely spoken and "you can't really tell you're in Mexico" ("Retiring Americans: Go South, Old Man" 2005). These communities are growing, promoted by a Mexican government plan to attract some five million U.S. retirees by 2025 (Oppenheimer 2010). This objective reveals a sharp divergence of public attitudes toward U.S. and Chinese migrants, though the reasons for this extend beyond historical familiarity and trade integration and other economic considerations. As a student at the Autonomous University of Baja California explained, "Even though we hate the gringos, we wish we could be like them. It bothers us that they look down on us, so we pass this feeling on, especially to Chinese people" (interview, October 31, 2008).

It does not require a detailed investigation to reveal that multiple ethnic origins, historical backgrounds, political affiliations, and economic aspirations have produced considerable diversity in Mexico's Chinese diaspora. Communities descended from Chinese migrant laborers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for instance, did not automatically embrace the 1949 establishment of the PRC and have generally maintained only distant relations with its diplomatic missions. For thousands of Chinese Mexican entrepreneurs, diplomatic indifference has stemmed less from political considerations than a reluctance to expose their blend of local, global, formal, and informal business activities to the scrutiny and regulatory designs of Chinese and Mexican authorities. For their part, the governments of both countries have shown little interest in Mexico's Chinese community or even in each other, instead focusing what little

cooperation they have on the upper echelons of transnational business. Their failure to find bilateral solutions to Mexico's chronic trade deficit with China has not as yet provoked serious efforts from Mexico's federal government to harness the entrepreneurial capacities of resident Chinese communities.

Identifying missed opportunities for engagement, Chinese entrepreneurs and their descendants in Mexico City—as in Havana—have begun to develop commercial initiatives with partners in China. Conscious of these thickening international ties, the Chinese embassy has pressured resident Chinese communities to register their activities officially, advance opportunities for Chinese firms through local political and business connections, and explicitly articulate support for the PRC's One-China Policy. In response, the Confederation of Chinese Associations of Mexico (CACHIMEX) has sought open endorsement from the Mexican and Chinese governments for its commercial expos and trade fairs. However, as noted in chapter 2, official support from either government has been hindered by the political sensitivity of Mexico's trade deficit with China and popular perceptions that such activities are dedicated to importing Chinese products—legally and otherwise—into Mexico.

Chinese communities in Mexico—like those in Cuba—have faced pressure to integrate into their surrounding economic and legal environments, but unlike in Cuba, in Mexico the pressure has been intensified by commercial competition on the ground. Cuban industries do not compete with China, especially in the commercial sector—which prior to the revival of Sino-Cuban relations in the 1990s relied on consumer goods imported from the Soviet Union. The Cuban state's dependence on allies for manufactured goods, combined with the U.S. embargo's detrimental impact on economic diversification, has produced a vacuum that Chinese products fill without opposition. No such vacuum exists in Mexico, where industrialization in the 1970s and subsequent market reforms underpinned the growth of manufacturing to meet U.S. demand for consumer goods. Since the 1980s Mexico's liberal democratic governments have remained committed to free trade in spite of the recent wrangling over customs tariffs on Chinese exports and allegations of disloyal competition.

Extending to the activities of Chinese importers resident in Mexico, anti-Chinese allegations emanate mainly from small and medium-sized

Mexican enterprises unable to compete with the flood of inexpensive Chinese consumer goods. These sectors perceive a chronic lack of fairness and transparency in the apparent ethnic exclusivity of Chinese trade fairs, the labor conditions and low wages in Chinese factories, the piracy of traditional Mexican handicrafts, and the seemingly ungovernable expansion of illegally imported Chinese textiles, shoes, toys, office equipment, and steel products.

Criticism of Chinese people in Mexico has drawn on long-standing beliefs about Chinese cultural and economic practices. This legacy did not go unnoticed by the historian Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, when the Chinese Mexican drug trafficker Zhenli Ye Gon was arrested in 2007: “Prejudice comes to us from a past era, in which the Chinese community in Mexico was the object of resentment, jealousy, and violent assault carried out by nationalistic groups backed by a range of state institutions. In the mass-mediated lynching of [Zhenli] Ye Gong, a series of Mexican social perceptions of China and its people have reappeared. Prejudice and ignorance, as always, go hand in hand when mobilization draws on the formation of phobias. . . . The racist hostility toward ‘the Chinaman’ is not new in our country” (2007, 5–6).

Media reports have perpetuated essentialist portrayals of Chinese culture, suggesting that Chinese people in Mexico are “reserved, because their culture forces them to be . . . they are determined to generate their own sources of employment” (G. López 2009). Some articles, Internet sites, and radio broadcasts are overtly malicious, criticizing the disloyal, opportunistic, and dishonest nature of Chinese business activities, which have allowed “China to invade us with its products through disloyal competition” (“¿Y la soberanía?” 2007; also see *El Economista* 2008; A. Simón 2007). Chinese immigrants and their descendants are publicly associated with Mexico’s diminishing productivity and competitiveness as local producers are squeezed out of the market (Páramo 2008). They are also publicly accused of importing counterfeit goods, including traditional Mexican handicrafts such as blankets and pottery for the domestic and tourist markets.¹

Just as the xenophobic pamphlets of the 1930s urged Mexicans to ostracize the “yellow beasts” whose “selfish” and “mean” mutual aid activities gave them an unfair economic advantage, contemporary Mexican websites—as discussed in chapter 2—carry inflammatory titles such as

“Pinche Chinos” (Damn Chinese), “Fourteen Reasons Not to Buy Chinese Products This Christmas,” and “Buying Fraud from China.” As Chinese Mexican businesses and associations become more active in establishing commercial partnerships with mainland Chinese exporters, the historical parallels are deepening. A Tijuana taxi driver shed light on local perceptions of China’s impact:

It’s sad because we were proud of our industrial advancement, but now we’ve been undercut. I know this is the free market and globalization, and I accept that there will be winners and losers, but people like me are the losers. I was a manager in a factory making microchips, well paid, and in charge of a team of thirty-five workers. Now look at me: driving a taxi. Not only have Chinese workers taken our jobs, but the products we used to make are now being sold to us, and the Chinese people here in Tijuana are helping to make it happen. To answer your question, yes, I do blame them. Chinese people have come here, set up their import businesses, and we’ve suffered the consequences. (interview, December 20, 2011)

An emerging focal point of face-to-face tension between Mexican critics and Chinese vendors is Tepito, a notorious outlet for unregistered merchandise on the eastern perimeter of Mexico City’s historic center. As early as the 1870s Tepito was known as the “Thieves Market,” where “stolen merchandise could be sold three months after the theft, without fear of prosecution” (Piccato 2001, 37). By the mid-1970s the Tepito district had evolved into a labyrinth of tents and stalls (known as *tianguis*) dedicated to the sale and bartering of clothing, food, live animals, and practically anything else (figure 4.2). By 2006 it had grown to more than seventy-five city blocks, accommodating some 150,000 vendors (Mondragón 2006). It has since expanded to a hundred blocks and 175,000 retailers, who—according to a representative of 500 vendors—perceive little need for external law enforcement: “The police leave us alone because we have our own security systems and our own rules for organizing the district” (interview, June 21, 2010). Research by John Cross (1998) and Carlos Alba Vega (2012) confirms this point, noting sophisticated modes of representation and advocacy developed by Mexican street vendors to protect their commercial interests. Another Tepito organizer put it this way: “our basic needs are more important than official legal regula-



FIGURE 4.2 The informal market of Tepito, which is expanding into Mexico City's historic center, May 2012. Photo by the author.

tions; street vending is a safety valve” (quoted in Mondragón). Former Economic Consul Ling agrees: “Mexicans should realize that their informal sector, which constitutes something like 40 percent of business in the country, is something they need. The official figure of 5 percent unemployment is a blatant lie. There is an abundance of people we call *nini*: *ni trabajan ni estudian* [neither work nor study]. They need informality to survive. The real problem is the lack of government support for education, training, Mexican companies—which should be actively finding new markets, including in China—and creating jobs. Without Tepito, Mexico would be in trouble. There’d probably be another revolution!” (interview, June 8, 2010).

Tepito’s steady expansion since the 1870s demonstrates its ongoing appeal for thousands of Mexicans in search of inexpensive consumer goods, but not everybody perceives its value as a safety valve for averting “another revolution.” Residents of the adjacent historic center, for instance, contend that tourism to their neighborhood and the commercial viability of their businesses are being negatively affected. Unable to compete with low-priced contraband, owners of the historic center’s 17,670 registered

enterprises are increasingly converting their shops into warehouses for the 40,000 unregistered merchants who have spilled over from Tepito (M. López 2006a). At the forefront of the campaign against the expansion of Tepito is the Unión del Centro Histórico, which has lobbied the city government to place restrictions on where vendors can set up their stalls. The Unión points out that some 80 percent of merchandise sold in the historic center is contraband from China, and that the street vendors who sell these products do not pay taxes to help pay for the physical maintenance and legal governance of the district.

The Unión alleges that government officials have taken bribes to allow some 17,000 Chinese and Korean immigrants to illegally take up residence in Tepito and establish 2,500 registered businesses to import contraband from China (Bazán 2005). According to the Unión's president, Victor Cisneros Taja, "the historic center has been kidnapped and is a lawless territory" that could follow Tepito's lead in becoming a safe haven for drug-related activities (quoted in S. González 2006; also see M. López 2007). Local authorities, he lamented in a 2010 interview, are not willing to intervene:

We've raised the problem with the city government, but the officials have a convenient excuse: contraband is a federal problem, so not their responsibility. This is actually not the case, because it's written into law that if something is going on in the streets under your jurisdiction, then it's your responsibility. Because of Tepito over 80 percent of what is sold in the historic center is contraband, nearly all of it from China. You can see the Chinese vendors in their stalls in Tepito. They used to do this in the [historic] center, but in October 2007 we started to get them out. They mostly sell women's goods because those items sell fast—handbags, watches, shoes, and clothes that are copies of brand names. We're talking about organized crime. There are showrooms in China where Mexicans go to look at products. The Chinese even pay for the twenty-hour charter flight to go over and look at their merchandise, and you can simply pay for the products at Western Union here in Mexico City. We recently denounced Western Union for this in the press, and they came out a few days later with a public statement saying that it's not their responsibility. Apparently it's nobody's responsibility. (interview, June 18, 2010)

To interrupt the flow of Chinese contraband, Cisneros Taja sent a list to the city government of 250 businesses that illegally rent their shops to unregistered traders (Solís Peña 2006). Constant lobbying by the Unión and thirty-two prominent business leaders to strengthen the Law of Merchant Establishments (*Ley de Establecimientos Mercantiles*) finally led the city government, on October 12, 2007, to order vendors to remove their stalls from the thirty-four restored blocks of Mexico City's historic center (Osorio 2007). To diminish resistance from the informal sector, Cisneros secured a commitment from registered businesses that they would also remove merchandise from public spaces outside their shops and stores. Street vendors, he argued, should be relocated to delineated open-air plazas so that the historic center could once again become orderly, "like it was in the era of the conquest" (quoted in Osorio and Díaz 2007).

Unimpressed with this vision of history, representatives of the informal sector confronted Cisneros in a public forum, arguing: "We street vendors are the pride of Mexico. . . . We do not want more commercial plazas; street stalls are better because people can buy from us as they walk by" (quoted in Páramo 2007). To build public support for their case, informal traders—the majority of whom are Mexican—turned on the mayor of Mexico City, Marcelo Ebrard, and accused him of conspiring with Chinese businesspeople in his plan to redevelop the historic center:

They [government officials] want to expel the people into the street, and give their territory over to companies that will build large commercial centers, but not for the informal vendors or even for registered businesses, but rather for the Chinese. Marcelo Ebrard, the interviewees say, is destroying the local informal sector; he is going to take it away by force on October 12, from one day to the next, leaving nearly 10,000 street vendors with no way to feed their families. The local government is complicit, but everyone loses out. The only people benefiting from the expropriation, with the protection of the city government, are the Chinese businessmen who will find ways to sell contraband and their merchandise freely. . . . [Ebrard] is helping Asian networks to invade our capital city. (*Uno más Uno* 2007)

It is well known that Mexico City's government is eager to accept Chinese investment in tourism, communications, and information technology (Courtade 2013), but the historic center's street vendors are concerned

about the influx of Chinese products and people that might accompany this investment. Alleging collusion between the city government and Chinese businesspeople, the vendors have publicly distanced themselves from Chinese merchandise, which is widely associated with the massive growth of the informal sector and its deleterious economic impact (M. López 2006b). Cheap Chinese-made blank DVDs (1.9 pesos, or 15 U.S. cents, each) and high-speed copying devices are believed to be responsible for the annual production of some sixty million musical CDs in Tepito, which are subsequently distributed around the country and throughout Latin America (Aguilar 2012, 37; Padgett 2005; Sierra 2004).

Ling argues that allegations like these use China as a scapegoat: “Actually China produces much more than cheap goods, and the Mexican Chinese community isn’t that involved in piracy. Ninety percent of piracy is operated by Mexicans, including those who import goods from China and then change labels to ‘made in USA’ or ‘made in Mexico.’ To escape the attention they blame the Chinese community” (interview, June 8, 2010). Ling’s contention is supported by evidence that Chinese contraband is smuggled and distributed in partnership with Mexicans, including unscrupulous officials on the country’s southern border with Guatemala and northern border with the United States (M. González 2005; Ochoa León 2008). As one report has it: “Whether it be with shoes, clothes, ‘brand name’ perfumes, or 10 percent of the value of fake jewelry, the Chinese traffickers pay the officials to smuggle their merchandise during the night through the Suchiate River [on Mexico’s border with Guatemala]. . . . Most of the Chinese mafia operating in Tepito are actually owners of distribution centers” (J. García 2008).

Cisneros Taja of the Unión del Centro Histórico does not deny Mexican collusion, but he argues that it results from the irresistible overtures of Chinese traffickers and providers. The latter, he says, pay Mexican “big sellers” to visit factories in Guangdong and Zhejiang Provinces, buy cheap consumer goods in bulk, and sell them in Tepito and other organized street markets (interview, June 18, 2010). They have become especially attracted to the city of Yiwu in Zhejiang, which allegedly operates “as a sort of ‘Wall Street’ for the counterfeiting industry” (Fingleton 2008, 41). This arrangement gives Chinese wholesalers a presence in Mexican street markets to which their access would otherwise be limited (Ellis 2012, 71).

The informal networks that enable the movement of undeclared products from factories in Guangdong and Zhejiang across Mexican borders and into street markets are expansive, robust, and evolving. By 2014 Cisneros saw evidence that Tepito's illicit supply network was changing, and for his own safety he stopped campaigning against it:

Since we met in 2010, middlemen have become less prominent because Chinese traders now have a foothold and *dan cara* [show their face] directly in Tepito. Some of the old guard don't like it, but the Chinese distributors have bought their way into retail and even have their own building for coordinating supplies from China. In a place like Mexico, where there is little enforcement of the law, they can do what they like. . . . The Partido Revolucionario Democrático [Party of the Democratic Revolution, PRD] asked if I'd like to represent it, but it became dangerous. My denunciation of the city government for not enforcing commercial laws shone a light on a bigger problem. Drugs and arms are being traded, and a lot of money is changing hands between criminals and local politicians. I wasn't trying to expose this, but once you look under the rock you can't help uncovering things. The city government ran a campaign to trash my name, and it affected my family. I'll take on anybody one on one, but we're talking about fighting an enormous monster. You can't win, so it's better not to try. And safer. (interview, May 30, 2014)

Counterfeit merchandise is one strand in Tepito's intricate web of informal goods and services, sustained by connections that have flourished in step with a well-documented lack of regulatory enforcement. The resulting scenario, described by Cisneros Taja as a "culture of impunity," has permitted the expansion of illicit trade in everything from consumer goods to narcotics and arms. It has also further eroded public trust in the state's ability to govern (evident in the Latin American Public Opinion Project and National Electoral Institute surveys noted in chapter 2), particularly since public servants appear to be bound up in the "enormous monster" of organized crime.

Policy recommendations for stemming illicit commerce range from mandatory taxation of bank deposits through the system of Impuesto Empresarial a Tasa Única (Unified Business Tax Rate) to arming customs officials and police officers with more powerful weapons to com-

bat offenders (Ayón et al. 2009; Dussel Peters 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2009, 59). These and other proposals reflect the enormity of Mexico's informal sector, but they have placed growing emphasis on negative rather than positive reinforcement: sticks instead of carrots.

Fighting the hard edge of organized crime has entangled Mexican police in de facto warfare along with the armed forces, deployed by President Felipe Calderón in 2012 to combat drug cartels. Critics argue that this strategy and the broader U.S.-financed Plan Mexico, also known as the Mérida Initiative, are counterproductive because they have militarized police and security services that are themselves implicated in violations of the law (Behrens 2009). They also leave few resources for policing the softer dimensions of the informal sector, a point that has not escaped the attention of sensationalist reporters eager to expose Chinese involvement in Mexico's black market:

Could it be that pursuing one kind of criminal network has obscured the pursuit of another, which is responsible for even more damage by causing unemployment, putting the textile, shoe, electronics, toy, and accessory industries out of business, and furthermore, operating in a totally illegal way in the very center of the Republic? . . . If we compare the damage caused by the traditional criminals of Tepito, however associated with cartels they were, with the damage caused by the Chinese, the differences are enormous, gigantic, because the latter are leaving millions of Mexicans with nothing to eat, nowhere to work, and without opportunities to develop, and nobody stops them. (Arellano 2013)

To pin Mexico's structural problems on Chinese contraband is facile, but the allegation that criminal cartels have drawn police attention away from the broader informal sector merits consideration. There is evidence that the allocation of resources to hard-line *mano dura* law enforcement has compromised the resilience of civilian police forces and impeded more socially engaged containment strategies (Casey-Maslen 2014, 13).

Among the casualties of socially disengaged policing is vertical trust between state and society, already fragile in Mexico owing to successive electoral scandals, economic mismanagement, and collusion between politicians and criminal networks. A more constructive policy orienta-

tion to Mexico's informal sector and China's role in it would set out to understand, engage, and harness the social capital underpinning its cooperative networks. This proposition has recently been tested in the northern state of Baja California, where local government initiatives have tried to accommodate unregistered trade in regulated street markets and an official chamber of commerce. Baja California is a historical settling place of Chinese people in Mexico, and the Chinese associations of the region have long been a hub of regional business connections—registered and otherwise. Identifying and collaborating with the leaders of these associations has opened a channel of community engagement for the state government and revealed the practical benefits of culturally sensitive policy design.

The next section draws on research I conducted in Tijuana and Mexicali between 2008 and 2012 to examine how Mexico's oldest Chinese associations are forging new partnerships both in China and with the Baja California state government. Resulting as much from a gradual process of relationship building as from more immediate economic goals, these partnerships have the added capacity to overcome popular distrust built up over more than a century.

CHINA GOES LOCAL: THE CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS OF MEXICALI AND TIJUANA

The problems endured by Chinese people in Mexico City have also emerged in the northern state of Baja California, where a vicious circle of hostility and protection has long revolved around the region's Chinese associations. Despite these conditions, geographic and legislative distance from federal politics has afforded government officials in Baja California more room than their peers in the capital to reach out to the associations. The presence of Chinese people in the state for over a century has favored this process, since their associations in the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana have provided a longstanding institutional platform for official communication.

MEXICALI

From 1990 until 2006 Eduardo Auyón Gerardo served as president of the Chinese Association of Mexicali, a position he used to initiate communication with outward-looking commercial exporters in China. In 2001

his efforts to connect Chinese exporters with Mexican retail networks were recognized by OCAO, which appointed him as one of its thirty-two worldwide “assessors.” Providing a stable nexus for bilateral trade, together with the related advertising, matchmaking, and visas, have made Auyón (as he is known) a key node of contact for entrepreneurs from both sides. Building commercial networks under the auspices of OCAO, he says, has provided a robust and enduring framework for business development:

The important thing is security. Some Chinese businesses have shipped their products over only to find that the market has turned against them because of exaggerated media reports about product safety and competition with Mexican producers. As an assessor for the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office I am responsible for selecting trustworthy clients who will follow through with their commitments. This has worked very well for us with electronic products and home appliances. Mexicali is on the same latitude as the Sahara Desert, so we are sourcing a new line of powerful air conditioners under our “Kooling Air” and “Dragón Refrigeraciones” brands and selling these through the network. (interview, October 7, 2008)

Auyón was born in Zhongshan, Guangdong, shortly after his Chinese father and Mexican mother were expelled from Chiapas, Mexico, in the 1930s. In Zhongshan they reestablished themselves as small traders, but they lost their business in 1949 when the communist government seized power. Again facing political hostility, they migrated to Macao, where Auyón studied visual arts. He eagerly seized an opportunity to visit his brother in Mexicali in 1960 and soon became one of Baja California’s foremost painters of traditional Chinese and Chinese-Mexican themes (figure 4.3). His trademark series of celestial horses drew acclaim, enabling him to work his way into the executive ranks of Baja California’s School of Fine Arts. Among Auyón’s students were the school’s former director and the secretary of education of Baja California, people he later drew on to support cultural exchanges with China, such as a visit by forty members of the China Central Opera and a series of artistic exhibitions in the 1980s. “These relationships,” he says, “gave me a platform for making contacts in China. . . . I have blood from both countries, and



FIGURE 4.3 Eduardo Auyón Gerardo's renowned mural on the outside of a Mexicali nursery school, whose students are mostly Chinese or descendants of Chinese immigrants. Photo by the author.

I've always wanted to be a bridge between them" (interview, November 9, 2008).

Auyón's aspiration to become a "bridge" between Mexico and China is no doubt stimulated by his fragmented family history, but as David Palumbo-Liu writes, among Chinese and other diasporic communities "there is an abiding possibility that the cultural identification with home is more than (merely) sentimental" (2007, 283). For Auyón, the gradual construction of bilateral ties has the added advantage of increasing market opportunities to import Chinese products. This is evident in the delegations of forty to fifty Mexican businesspeople (mostly of Chinese descent) that he brings four times each year to Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.

The delegations visit important historical and cultural sites in China, but their primary focus is the Fair of Canton. Sponsored by the government of Guangdong and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, the fair is China's largest trade convention, bringing together thousands of the country's leading exporters. Each year the fair has a theme, such as medicine or interior design, around which Auyón designs his trips. At the fair, the Mexican visitors contract suppliers, collect product catalogues, and organize visits for Chinese business partners to Baja California. "Last

year [2007],” explained Auyón, “we arranged for slightly over a hundred Chinese businesspeople we had met at the fair to visit trade expos that we organized in Mexico. The Chinese Association is not a government organization, but we work through the Chinese consulate in Tijuana and the Mexican embassy in Beijing to arrange the visas” (interview, November 9, 2008).

Throughout his career, Auyón has cultivated relationships to facilitate cultural and commercial initiatives between Mexico and China. In 2004 he began arranging meetings for the governor of Baja California, Eugenio Elorduy Walther, with Chinese counterparts such as the governor of Jiangsu Province, Liang Baohua. When President Hu Jintao visited Mexico in 2005 to discuss strategies for reducing the trade imbalance, he recognized Auyón’s leadership in facilitating new business linkages. The government of Baja California praised the potential benefits of these connections during National Immigration Week in October 2008. Seven Mexican states participated in the festivities, but the Baja California branch of the National Institute of Migration (Instituto Nacional de Migración, INAMI) dedicated the week specifically to Chinese immigration, holding all related events and ceremonies in the main hall of the Chinese Association of Mexicali (figure 4.4). The city’s mayor, Rodolfo Valdez Gutiérrez, described the Chinese community as “a motor of the local economy” (Mejía 2008), while Javier Reynoso Nuño, Baja California’s delegate to INAMI, promised to simplify the process of visa acquisition for relatives of local Chinese people (*La Crónica* 2008).

The Baja California government first showed its interest in working with Auyón by sponsoring Chinese festivals, parades, and marketplaces. These initial activities, he says, have matured into broader public-private partnerships:

The Baja California government wanted to work more closely with China, so we set up the Sister City relationship between Mexicali and Nanjing in 1991. In 2005 when Hu Jintao came to Mexico I met him personally, and the Mexican government started to see our community as a bridge to China. We created the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises of the Northwest [in 2010]. The Chamber takes advantage of the relationships we’ve built up with the Baja California government and businesses in the area to export Mexican food and other products to



FIGURE 4.4 The headquarters of the Chinese Association of Mexicali. Photo by the author.

China, and to promote Chinese investment in Mexico in the copper mining and the energy sectors. (interview, December 19, 2011)

The Chamber of Chinese Enterprises coordinates the activities of some four thousand businesspeople living in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Coahuila, and Chihuahua. As well as working with the Baja California government, it also benefits from the logistical support of OCAO's Guangdong office, which views such initiatives as an opportunity to advance the Chinese government's worldwide aspiration to become "the central force of the Chinese community" (Barabantseva 2005, 17). Through the Chamber, Auyón aims to "generate a bridge to support commerce between Chinese entrepreneurs and producers in Asia and those in this region of Mexico," particularly in the maquiladora and automotive sectors (Minor 2010).

Embedded in his dislocated personal history, Auyón's attempts to build connections between Mexico and China resonate with OCAO's more overtly instrumental goals. Overlapping personal pursuits and

political strategies, writes Khachig Tölölyan, are a common feature of diasporic communities, which have often been complicit in the projects of the nation-state (1991 and 1996). Indeed, as Palumbo-Liu observes, the concept of diaspora entails not only “longing for home, but political strategizing for a nation-state. . . . Historically the notion of diasporic identity (a shared disseminated/dispersed identity) was in large part a compensation for the loss of a state. Diaspora was precisely the condition of statelessness read as homelessness. It mourned deeply that loss, yet retained the possibility of its recovery or re-creation” (2007, 283).

Whether or not OCAO aspires to expand the global reach of the Chinese nation-state, Auyón believes his work serves Mexico by helping to place its products in the Chinese market and attracting Chinese investors to copper mining projects and renewable energy initiatives in Mexicali’s emerging Silicon Border complex. His nephew, Alfonso Auyón, a businessman who works in the U.S. border town of Calexico, shares his uncle’s vision of win-win cooperation: “We’ve been looking at how we can export products to China, like tequila, abalone, beets, and shark fins for soup and medicine. We’re also working with Chinese investors in Mexican copper mining in Chihuahua and the central states. On the other side of the coin, we’re always looking for opportunities to help Chinese exporters enter the Mexican market, and where possible the U.S. market. It’s important that the benefits flow both ways. . . . We’re Mexican as well as Chinese, and the last thing we want is to be attacked for being against Mexico somehow” (interview, December 21, 2011). Mutually beneficial outcomes are sorely needed for both Mexico and its Chinese communities, whose difficulties stem largely from public perceptions that they have monopolized economic opportunities rather than extending them beyond their tight-knit business networks. Support from Baja California politicians, their Chinese counterparts, and OCAO may prove decisive in this regard, as institutionalized cooperation would enable the diversification and formalization of previously narrow trade ties and reduce perceptions of unfairness and illegality. Conscious of the power of perceptions, Auyón has undertaken a media campaign to publicly demonstrate the mutual benefits of Sino-Mexican cooperation brokered by Mexicali’s Chinese community. Luis Ongay Flores, director of the Institute of Cultural Research at the Mexicali Museum, has observed this firsthand:

Some time ago Auyón donated part of his collection of Chinese-Mexican artifacts to the museum, and every so often he visits with Chinese government officials, Mexican politicians, and an entourage of photographers. I don't really know what they want, besides to snap some photos together. I guess they do their business and then have a symbolic moment for the press. The museum is a symbol of Mexicali's multicultural heritage and of human ties between China and Mexico in general, so it makes for a good visual backdrop. When those photos appear in the press in China and in Mexico, they demonstrate respect for local history and culture. (interview, December 21, 2011)

The photographs imply that Mexico's Chinese community is ensuring the continuity of a historical human connection, and in the process doing its part to advance Mexican national interests. This message is not trivial, especially in light of the negative reactions to the Chinese diaspora that China's growing impact has provoked. Hostility has taken an especially visible form in Tijuana, where the city's Chinese association has been overwhelmed by the growing frequency of attacks on its members' businesses.

TIJUANA

The Chinese Association of Tijuana, 135 miles west of Mexicali, has also positioned itself as an intermediary of bilateral trade. Its secretary general, Willy Liu Ke Wei, was a key lobbyist in a local effort to persuade the airline Aeroméxico to operate a direct flight between Shanghai and Tijuana. The effort paid off, and in May 2008 the new route was launched with the ambition of attracting 30,000 Chinese tourists per year, inspiring Liu to set up a travel agency catering to Chinese entrepreneurs exploring opportunities in Mexico. The agency set out to generate new Chinese trade and investment at a time when the global financial crisis had reportedly caused the earnings of Baja California's Chinese businesses to decline by 30 percent (G. López 2009).

To stimulate business partnerships Liu initially focused on building Chinese and Mexicans' understanding of each others' cultural traditions, since in his view "commerce and culture are like sisters, and if you go down the path of culture, you arrive at the path of business" (interview, October 21, 2008). The path forged by Liu's agency was paved with both culture and commerce, bringing Chinese entrepreneurs to Tijuana three

times a year to meet Mexican business partners at conventions and banquets coinciding with the Chinese New Year, the PRC's Independence Day, and the Qingming Festival (which commemorates ancestors). By 2012 these events had expanded through a partnership with the Autonomous University of Baja California that enabled a series of trade exhibitions inspired by CACHIMEX's annual Expo China (see chapter 2).

Between 2005 and 2014 Liu's events were accompanied by public parades and Chinese-themed street markets, coordinated by his association at the invitation of the Tijuana city government. The Chinese consulate contributed resources to support these occasions, for as Liu says, "the PRC needs our help in creating a good public image" (interview, October 21, 2008). Consul General Gao confirmed this point, noting that the expansive networks developed by the Chinese Association of Tijuana function as a catalyst for advancing China's political as well as economic interests (interview, November 5, 2008). For instance, with OCAO's support, Liu's association has been instrumental in convincing other Chinese associations to break their ties with Taiwan. To this end, in 2001 OCAO established the Chinese Peaceful Pro-Unification Alliance of Baja California, which the state's three Chinese associations (in the cities of Tijuana, Mexicali, and Ensenada) immediately joined, adopting Mandarin as their operating language as a condition of membership.

For the Chinese Association of Tijuana, 2001 marked the first time since its 1918 founding that it did not conduct its annual meeting in Cantonese, the first language of 98 percent of its members. The adjustment, along with vigilance against anti-PRC and pro-Taiwan activities, appears to be the price of institutional recognition. This recognition, says Liu, has enabled the association to attract additional support from the Baja California government and begin to develop officially endorsed business activities, like its counterpart in Mexicali. Operating in Mandarin is fundamental to this process, and therefore translators fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin, and Spanish are in demand. One such person is Li Zhuohong, who is contracted by the association as an intermediary for Chinese and Mexican lawyers:

When I was fifteen I came to Mexico to join my father, who had been here for three years. I'm from Guangdong, so I speak Cantonese, like most Chinese people here. The problem is that to do business with

China these days, you have to speak Mandarin. I learned Mandarin in school in China, and then I improved here in the Chinese Association of Tijuana. Then the association hired me to teach Mandarin to the children of newly arrived Chinese. From there I've become a sort of translator and interpreter. . . . I was hired by Geely [a Chinese carmaker] to help it negotiate the establishment of a factory in Guanajuato. If there are legal documents that Chinese firms need, then I point them in the right direction. I also get a lot of calls from the Chinese consulate, which sends Chinese businesspeople to our association because we have good relations with practically all industries in the Tijuana area. Some of these are restaurants, some are maquiladoras, and some are retail outlets. (interview, November 11, 2008)

In 1998 the Chinese Association of Tijuana published a set of guidelines for its members, titled “Laws of the Chinese Community of Tijuana.” Circulated in Mandarin and Spanish, the document spells out the organization’s four primary responsibilities: (1) assist the government of the PRC in any way possible; (2) strengthen the unity of the Chinese community, promote its peaceful development, and secure maximum possible benefits for it; (3) build friendship between Chinese and Mexican people and their countries through economic and cultural exchange; and (4) encourage the Chinese people of Tijuana to compensate other members of the community for losses resulting from calamities with donations and support (Chinese Association of Tijuana 1998).

While the first responsibility leaves the association’s political allegiance to the PRC in no doubt, the second and fourth reveal a specific preoccupation with the community’s well-being. Considering the adversity faced by Chinese people in Mexico, past and present, this is a logical concern. Indeed, while the efforts of people like Liu, Li, and Auyón to build Mexican trust with mainland Chinese businesses are recognized and praised in China, anti-Chinese “calamities” are commonplace in Baja California (*Xinhua* 2007; Zhan 2002). Liu laments that his community has borne the brunt of this hostility:

In the last five years, things have gotten worse for our community. All of our businesses, 100 percent, have been robbed or assaulted in some way, some of them four or five times in one year! We don’t go to the

police because we feel they won't resolve anything for us and we'll just waste more time and money dealing with them. Criminals target us because they know the police won't investigate. My agency was robbed three times this year. That's why my door is locked with a buzzer. If you don't have an appointment or we don't know you, we don't let you in. Now Chinese businesses have to hire security guards. . . . We're suffering, and we're running out of hope. Many are scared, and many are leaving. When your businesses are attacked you have to make a choice. You can either turn around to make a fuss or you can go on without looking over your shoulder. We choose to go on and not draw even more attention to ourselves. (interview, October 21, 2008)

In the second half of 2008 alone, the Chinese Association of Tijuana registered over ten attacks on its members' businesses, prompting Consul General Gao to publicly denounce the assaults. The perpetrators, he said, were probably emboldened by expectations of police indifference to Chinese immigrants and their descendants. Liu had previously expressed his dismay to the newspaper *La Frontera* about the fact that the law cannot help his community: "We want protection, but we do not know which institution or individuals to go to because we don't trust the authorities, the police, or others" (quoted in Ramírez 2007). When I followed up with Liu in December 2011, he noted that little had changed: victims of abuse still preferred not to involve the police, instead turning to the association for social and financial support.

Faced with ineffective law enforcement and fears of police discrimination, it is no surprise that community protection should reemerge as a core activity of Mexico's Chinese associations. While adversity has renewed the associations' purpose, their members' reliance on customary internal procedures rather than the police and institutional legal defense has further ingrained their reputation as a community unwilling to integrate. As Alejandro Portes puts it, "sociability cuts both ways" (1998, 18). Liu acknowledged his community's part in perpetuating this reputation: "I am aware that our silence is partly to blame for society's lack of understanding of us. It's one of the things we have to change" (interview, October 21, 2008). More than three years later, Liu conceded that beyond the creation of a group that performed folk music and a festival of Chinese food, the association had made little progress in building external

trust: “culturally things are going well, but people are still suspicious; the problem is politics” (interview, December 22, 2011).

Mexico’s Chinese associations have long protected and advanced their members’ interests, but deepening business ties to China may be compromising this humanitarian tradition. Their networks now include Chinese providers of low-skilled labor for Baja California’s industries, not least the maquiladora sector. Oppressive working conditions and inadequate safety standards have brought misery to thousands of Chinese immigrants, whose passage to Mexico has been overseen by the associations. Severe consequences await those who complain or even discuss their predicament outside a tight circle of fellow employees. The next section examines this closed circle of trust and how a lack of regulatory oversight has let it spin out of control.

ENFORCING TRUST: THE DEPTHS OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL

Investors from mainland China and Taiwan have taken a keen interest in northern Mexico’s maquiladoras, whose geographic location and rapid turnaround times have made them responsive to the fluctuations of the U.S. market and enabled the region to retain a foothold in the textile, electronics, and automobile industries (Hu-DeHart 2003, 248). The Han Young maquiladora in Tijuana, for instance, manufactures truck chassis, which under the North American Free Trade Agreement are shipped free of duty to the Hyundai assembly plant in San Diego and sold on the U.S. market. The success of this model owes much to the long working hours of maquiladora employees, and, according to the workers’ rights activist Antonio Velázquez Loza, “it is not only Mexican workers who are victims of low wages and ill treatment; Chinese laborers who work in these plants suffer even worse abuses” (quoted in Gómez Mena 2006). Employed in China as technicians, most Chinese maquiladora workers live onsite, are prohibited from interacting with Mexicans, and have limited access to medical attention. Like the Chinese immigrants of the early twentieth century, they arrive in Mexico with hopes of earning a respectable living, but according to Velázquez Loza soon find themselves “practically living in slavery.”

The Chinese associations assist Mexican and Chinese companies to navigate the legal procedures of sponsoring and contracting Chinese em-

ployees. This assistance is not limited to the maquiladora sector; other major importers of labor include northern Mexico's thriving Chinese restaurants and clothing retailers (Spagat 2005). Tijuana and Mexicali are each home to approximately six hundred Chinese restaurants, but approximately one-third of these are reportedly not formally registered. The labor force that supports this wide range of businesses is similarly diverse. It includes migrants seeking to enter the United States, who have traveled for weeks or months from mainland China and Hong Kong by air to Colombia and then by a combination of land and sea voyages to Panama and across Central America (*Protocolo* 2007).

In the border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, unregistered Chinese migrants work alongside descendants of Chinese immigrants and a growing pool of laborers who enter Mexico on temporary work and study visas and remain indefinitely. Depending on the complexity of their passage, Chinese migrant workers incur costs ranging from \$30,000 to \$60,000 per person, and according to a senior figure in the Chinese community of Tijuana, these costs must be repaid: "It's very expensive for Chinese workers to come. Officially the cost to arrange a work visa for an employee is 800 pesos [\$80], and there was a point when this worked, especially for chefs. But things have tightened up, and now, after paying lawyers to push the case through, it costs about \$8,000 per employee just for the paperwork. When they get here they work extremely hard, almost without sleep, so the restaurant and factory owners make their money back in this way. It can take fifteen or twenty years to pay back the debt" (interview, October 2, 2008).

Bound to their sponsors until their debts are paid, Chinese immigrants are in no position to formally advocate for improved working conditions. To do so would leave them destitute, subject to retribution, and in many cases exposed to prosecution under immigration laws. Their fate illuminates the underside of globalization, as observed by Wannan Anderson and Robert Lee: "Many thousands of Asian migrants who belong to the transnational working class, the new hewers of wood and haulers of water in the global economy, are tied to 'homelands' by debt, familial obligation, and statelessness" (2005, 13).

In a context of extreme pressure against independent unionization, Chinese migrant workers in Mexico have few sources of support. Even the Chinese associations have not extended their assistance, in part be-

cause their efforts focus on Chinese migrants and their descendants who have already established themselves in Mexico, but also because their business commitments impede them from doing so. According to Juan Arroyo, a Baptist minister who works with Chinese newcomers in Mexicali, the associations' tradition of humanitarian support to marginalized workers has been turned on its head, since their assistance goes instead to the managers of factories and restaurants in the name of building bridges to China: "The leaders of the Chinese associations are too busy arranging business deals for wealthy mainland investors to pay attention to the problems of these people. Most of the new arrivals are victimized. They are targets of discrimination in hospitals, in workplaces, and in public . . . [they are] denied services and refused legal representation. When they have difficulties learning Spanish they are humiliated, and sometimes they are even physically abused" (interview, October 12, 2008).

The Chinese associations have provided unofficial channels of migration into Mexico, and onward to the United States, since the mid-nineteenth century (Taylor 2002). Whether or not they have abandoned their humanitarian tradition, as Arroyo believes, they continue to broker a social contract that commits new arrivals to pay for their passage by working hard and keeping quiet. For the few who refuse to honor these terms in northern Baja California, Arroyo has been a beacon of hope. His congregation, which consists mainly of Chinese contract employees, has grown to include over a hundred migrant workers who have walked away from exploitative factory and restaurant jobs and others who are considering doing so. After a Sunday worship service in a Baptist outreach center in downtown Mexicali, Arroyo invited me to his nearby house for lunch.

THE DEFECTORS

Arroyo takes me from room to room, introducing me to groups of people standing with bowls of fried beef and pork with rice in hand, conversing in Mandarin. In each room he describes me, in Spanish, as an anthropologist from the Autonomous University of Baja California [where I was working at the time] doing a research project on Chinese people in Mexico. I'm here, he explains, because I want to learn more about the outreach activities of the Baptist church, and I am a trustworthy person who won't reveal people's information to the authorities. My Mandarin salutations evoke smiles and soon lead to

conversations about where people are from and how they are finding Mexico. I hear stories about unexpected hardship, the impossibility of acquiring legal residence papers, the constant threat of corrupt police officers, and the unrelenting demands of sponsors. A restaurant worker says she was kidnapped last year, and a diabetic factory worker says that his sponsor threatened to harm his family in China if he continued to take sick days. The hub of activity is a grill outside the back door, around which four men and two women busily take requests and sizzle thin strips of beef. Arroyo suggests that we all take a photo together, but polite smiles accompanied by exaggerated waves of the hand force him to abandon this idea. His mobile phone rings, and he says we need to leave. Another victim has asked him to come and help at the hospital.

—Mexicali, November 5, 2008

Some of Arroyo's guests that Sunday were also staying with him, their former accommodation withdrawn by their sponsors when they left their jobs. One young man said the official fee for coming to Mexico and acquiring residence papers is \$18,000, but that unofficial payments of thousands of dollars are also necessary to advance the paperwork and upgrade a tourist visa to a work visa. The restaurant owner who had employed him had still not paid these unofficial fees, and after two years he was still working illegally. An older man had been stopped by the police, and when they found he was without his residence documents, they asked him to pay an impossibly large fine on the spot. His sponsor, a prominent member of Mexicali's Chinese association, paid the fine but then required the man to work days and nights without rest in an electronics assembly plant. A woman spoke of the unsafe conditions at the plastics factory where she worked, which had resulted in her young daughter burning her hand. She had to wait eight hours for treatment in the public hospital.

These and other stories revealed frequent abuse by sponsors, neglected labor standards, and public discrimination. Arroyo's church was doing all it could for its desperate congregation, he said, but it did not have the resources to sustain the growing number of new arrivals. Other religious groups, including Baptist congregations in Mexicali, had "cut us off," Arroyo said, because they did not want to be publicly associated with Chinese workers and face the potential vengeance of their employers. During my subsequent visits, Arroyo answered several calls on his mobile phone each hour, providing advice, making appointments, and

responding to the latest crises. Driving through Mexicali with me, he pointed out apartments housing ten to twenty Chinese laborers in one or two rooms. “You don’t see them,” he said during one of our meetings, “and nor does anybody else. They leave for work before light and return after dark.” As Liu confirmed, Chinese immigrants are disproportionately targeted by kidnappers emboldened by their victims’ illegal status, and by confidence that their sponsors will pay a high price to recover their investments (interview, October 21, 2008; also see Ramírez 2007).

The detail in which Arroyo introduced me to his congregation reflected its delicate predicament and the circle of trust defining its boundaries. The understandable reluctance of its members to be photographed, even at Arroyo’s request, suggested the danger of transgressing these limits. To do so could expose them to their sponsors’ wrath in the form of longer work hours, withdrawal of access to housing, and even threats to family members in China. These sanctions constitute an extreme form of “enforceable trust,” a concept that Portes (1998, 8) borrows from Max Weber ([1922] 1947) to describe informal sanctions applied within a community to ensure compliance with rules of conduct. For Arroyo’s congregation, the rules are clear: focus on your work, do not complain, speak to nobody, and in return you will be safe and eventually free. These conditions make it almost impossible for hundreds of Chinese migrant workers in Mexico to build linkages and friendships beyond each other. Prevented from doing so both by the fear of retributions from their sponsors and the insecurity of being Chinese in Mexico, they live on the margins of a marginalized community.

There is no shortage of solidarity among Baja California’s Chinese migrant workers, but as Raphael De Kadt (1994) and Johannes Fedderke, Raphael de Kadt, and John Luiz (1999) have shown, the benefits of social capital result more from optimization than from maximization. Optimization in this case would mean extending relationships outward, with Arroyo’s help, to potential allies and advocates. Barred from this path by ruthless employers and recruiters, the members of Arroyo’s congregation were almost entirely isolated from external connections. Ronald Burt (1992) describes such scenarios as “structural holes,” social vacuums that confer especially high value on intermediaries who endeavor to fill them. Arroyo was such an intermediary and embodied this point: he provided a lifeline to pull the Chinese workers out of their hole and sought only

spiritual fulfillment in return. As Nan Lin (2001, 39–40) writes, cooperation across community boundaries requires a reciprocal flow of rewards, whether social, economic, or divine.

The problem for Arroyo and, consequently, his congregation was that his own external affinities were weak. Facing rejection from his broader religious network for his association with Chinese immigrants, Arroyo risked being trapped in the social void he had dared to enter. The missing ingredient for him was vertical synergy—with the church, a nongovernmental organization, a business, or a government outreach office—that might lift him and his congregation out of isolation and into contact with potential friends and allies. Without vertical institutional support, they had no way to develop horizontal alliances.

Closer economic cooperation between Mexico and China will not in itself create vertical structures capable of addressing the predicament of Chinese migrant workers and may even do the opposite. The Peña Nieto administration's negotiations with China to establish more direct flights to and from Mexico and to increase the number of Chinese tourists from the current 50,000 (only one-tenth the number of Chinese who visit the United States) could result in further abuse, as could INAMI's promise to facilitate Chinese immigration to Baja California. As the number of Chinese visitors grows, integrating these efforts into a broader governance strategy will become more urgent. Early attempts to do so have been unsuccessful. In 2008 an official at the Mexican embassy in Beijing proposed to hold information sessions to inform visa applicants of potential risks, but these were not authorized for fear of repelling prospective tourists. A 2010 scheme to track the conversion of tourist visas into work visas was also abandoned owing to insufficient consular resources.

The proven disposition of Baja California's government to work with the Chinese associations of Tijuana and Mexicali could provide a more promising platform for confronting abuse. The associations have previously embraced opportunities for vertical collaboration through cultural festivals, street markets, and the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises of the Northwest. These activities provide a foundation for promoting social responsibility within Chinese business networks. Initiatives could include periodic briefing sessions among INAMI, the Chinese consulate in Tijuana, and the associations; joint outreach services for victimized employees; and audits of conditions in local restaurants, factories, and

other sectors powered by Chinese contract workers. The Chinese associations would gain much from actively participating in such schemes, not least an opportunity to improve their reputations as responsible and trustworthy intermediaries. As China's economic and demographic ties to Mexico deepen, official support for such vertical partnerships, and the disposition of the Chinese associations to participate in them, will carry growing political and humanitarian weight.

CONCLUSION

Compassion alone rarely stimulates political action, and Mexican officials are unlikely to engage more closely with their nation's Chinese diaspora unless doing so secures tangible benefits. As in Cuba, motivation for new synergies will come not from goodwill, but in response to perceived opportunities and threats. People-to-people ties with China are generating both. New channels of trade, such as those developed by the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises of the Northwest, have caught the eye—and received the endorsement—of the Baja California government. By supporting the organization's commercial partnerships with China, facilitating trade fairs, and inviting Chinese associations to conduct public festivals, administrators are discovering that their electorates stand to gain when business networks and the trust underpinning them are integrated into formal development strategies.

Failure to engage more assertively with its Chinese communities will leave the Mexican state exposed to an expanding informal sector fueled by imported Chinese merchandise. Cisneros's characterization of Tepito as one limb of "an enormous monster" is worrying, especially since the monster's other limbs reach outward to suppliers across the Pacific and inward to unscrupulous customs officials and politicians. To cage the monster and limit the expansion of illicit trade networks, Cisneros advocates more assertive policing and stricter enforcement of the Law of Merchant Establishments. Stronger rule of law would no doubt help contain illicit transpacific networks, but inadequate legal resilience extends beyond specific commercial regulations into the daily conduct of politicians.

Allegations of undue cooperation between so-called Chinese economic invaders and civil servants—including Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico

City's former mayor—are symptomatic of broad public suspicion of government. The profound “distrust and disconnect among citizens, and between the population and the government” acknowledged by the National Electoral Institute in 2014 constitutes fertile ground for narratives of unwelcome Chinese informal trading (Saldierna 2014). The electoral, security, and procurement irregularities described in chapter 2 have generated a vertical disjuncture that must be bridged through comprehensive anticorruption measures alongside tighter regulation of the black market. The two problems are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, and neither can be fully understood—or remedied—independently of the other.

Sustainable trust between state and society requires carrots as well as sticks. As the case of Baja California showed, social engagement strategies have made headway in integrating informal Chinese networks into registered markets. Experiences of state-society collaboration in Mexicali and Tijuana offer lessons for the broader Mexican public and private sectors, which have been slow to reach out to Chinese networks because of public concern about the national trade deficit with China and the supposed role of the resident Chinese community in deepening it. Evident in the press, on Internet sites, and in violent acts against private businesses, popular antagonism toward the Chinese diaspora in Mexico echoes the nationalism of the early twentieth century, predicated on the perceived selfishness of Chinese people. The response from Chinese communities—then and now—has been to avoid direct confrontation with opponents and seek protection within the long-standing mutual aid and economic assistance services of the Chinese associations.

External hostility and internal protectionism constitute a perennial vicious circle surrounding Mexico's Chinese communities, but as the circle revolves over time, the distrust it generates has extended outward. According to analysts at UNAM's China-Mexico Research Center, aggression toward Chinese interests is discouraging Chinese investors and importers from proceeding with their Mexican projects. This is detrimental to Mexico, as Chinese investors and importers possess more power than anybody else to restore some measure of balance to the bilateral trade relationship. The potentially massive demand of Chinese markets for Mexican products, coupled with the apparent inability of the two gov-

ernments to formulate projects that produce genuine mutual benefits, endows the activities of intermediaries like Eduardo Auyón, Willy Liu, and Li Zhuohong with considerable gravity. The challenge lying before these individuals and the Chinese associations they represent is to expand the scope of their networks horizontally beyond Chinese suppliers to Mexican exporters, and vertically to secure government endorsement at the state and federal levels.

The community support structures of the Chinese diaspora in Mexico have benefited those with a stake in the international expansion of Chinese firms, but for thousands of Chinese migrant workers, conformity to internal codes of loyalty has been less beneficial. Indebtedness and subservience to employers has subjected them to inhumane working conditions and to the threat of kidnappers seeking to cash in on their precarious legal standing and their value to commercial sponsors. The predicament of Chinese laborers in Mexico bears out a truth observed by Peter Evans (1997): social capital is no more inherently beneficial than financial capital.

The concept of enforceable trust among Chinese migrant workers helps illuminate the conditions they endure, but the facts on the ground warrant cautious application of this and other sociological constructs. The control exercised over desperate migrant laborers by powerful sponsors belies the existence of a cohesive Chinese diaspora in Mexico. At most a Weberian ideal type, “the term diaspora holds within it a series of contradictions that the name itself seeks to elide” (Palumbo-Liu 2007, 282). More accurately understood as a hub of diversity than uniformity, the Chinese community in Mexico demonstrates the extent of inequality, fragmentation, and diversification created by twenty-first-century labor migration. With this process comes the need for conceptual tools that are less reliant on bounded notions of community and more sensitive to the globalization of trust in all its forms.

Social and financial capital are interacting in new ways as the reach of mainland Chinese formal and informal institutions extends further overseas. Emerging labor markets and production chains are creating new contexts for the deployment of trust, and trust is enabling the creation of new niches in the global economy. This book’s conclusion argues that a looming challenge for the governments and citizens of Mexico, Cuba,

and other nations that are pursuing closer relations with China is to more effectively harness the resulting social affinities to create inclusive development opportunities. Implicit in this challenge is the formulation of analytic concepts capable of grasping the social as well as economic implications of China's historic rise.