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Border Chinese:
Making Space and Forging Identity in Mexicali, Mexico

A dissertation presented

by

Ernesto Martinez

to

The Department of Anthropology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Border Chinese:
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Abstract

Through the lens of a Chinese restaurant, I examine the overseas Chinese community in Mexicali, B.C., Mexico, a city located at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Adopting Gloria Anzaldua's 'hybridity model,' that treats borders as 'open wounds' where cultures mix and new one forms, I explore the ways in which *Chinescos* construct an identity that is uniquely neither Chinese nor Mexican. *Chinescos* is a term that I use to refer to those that refuse to be categorized, or who are asked to choose an identity, who struggle to economically and socially survive at the border, but who also live a moral life (Kleinman 2006)—a life with a set of values that will protect themselves, their families, and what matters most to them. Specifically, *Chinescos* are ethnic-Chinese Mexicans existing in communities near the borderlands. This study includes a history of Chinese in Mexico. It examines the social relations among Chinese and Mexicans, analyzes violence as an ever-present aspect of life, and compares Chinese business practices. It does this through the study of food as a window into the local and political (Watson and Caldwell 2005, Bestor 2004).

Chinescos tell us much about border cities that is not captured by Anzaldua. People who are not Anglo-Saxon, Mexican, or Indigenous can also contest the identities that are thrust upon them. They also use assumed identities to strategically navigate their social experience. Both border scholars and diaspora scholars have overlooked *Chinescos* and Chinese-Mexican immigrants. It is my view that these immigrants provide a way to contest anthropological understandings of cultures in a nation that is bounded by multiple

forces. More specifically, *Chinescos* are both long-standing residents of the city (who have converted their citizenship to Mexican) and Mexican-born Chinese who are called "Chinos" [Chinese] because of their physical appearance. Both sets of people understand the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1972), the politics of identity and citizenship in Chinese and Mexican cultures. The goal, then, of recent Chinese immigrants is to become *Chinescos*, a group that accommodates to local community norms without surrendering their core identity and values. They struggle to negotiate the economic, social, and cultural challenges presented to them. The transformation of recent Chinese immigrants into *Chinescos* takes place in Mexicali's 300 Chinese restaurants, cultural arenas where people, culture, food, money, and events converge. Chinese restaurants thus constitute the critical focus of this study, and serve as dynamic frameworks for the analysis of borders and transnational migration.

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Harvard is a place that as the years passed I grew from hating to really loving. My first year in graduate school I was very lucky to have my friend and roommate, Johnny Vong, introduce me to several great friends who made my transition to the east coast easier. Johnny introduced me to Kathy Hutson, Linh Ho, Antoinette Hurtado, among many other great people. My first year in graduate school I also had great roommates in this enormous beautiful house (48 Pearl St.) where I had a lot of fun. My roommates were Johnny, Daron K. Roberts, Matthew Stephenson, and Marco J. Gonzalez. Marco, along with Melanie Penny, Miles Rodriguez, C.J. Alvarez, and Linda Rodriguez were my 'student of color' Ph.D. cohort that I met when being recruited to Harvard. In addition, Israel Silva, my friend at the law school, was incredibly supportive my first year in grad school (often reminding me how 'great' I was for being in a Ph.D. program, even when I didn't believe it), as well as Mina Pacheco-Nazemi, my friend at the business school who introduced me to a wealth of knowledge.

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Introduction
A Chicano in the U.S., China, and Mexico

People often get surprised to hear that there is a Chinese overseas community in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. The perception is that Mexicali will have Mexicans, and maybe some Anglo-Americans, but not Chinese. Yet, their presence has been there for over one hundred years. Mexicali is an important site of study because it is a city that borders the United States; it has two border port entries, and a chain-linked fence that divides it with Imperial County, California. Mexicali is unlike its bordering U.S. (small) cities and has gone through dramatic transformations over the last 15 years. This city is dependent on foreign investment in the *maquila* [foreign owned factory] industry, while Imperial County is sustained by its agricultural and government sector economies. The overseas Chinese population I researched is overwhelmingly located in Mexicali, however, as my dissertation will reveal, there are many moments of interaction with the U.S. border city.

This dissertation is about identity and how people develop an identity in a place where many cultures come together, in the city of Mexicali. It builds on the work of Glorida Anzaldua, a Chicana anthropologist who wrote *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) where she describes the border as an "open wound" where people's identity, culture and history come together. She writes her book using Nahuatl (the once dominant indigenous Mexican language) words, English, and Spanish. In doing so, she is providing a larger critique to the social sciences in the way a study is conducted, often times omitting many important elements that contribute to a person's identity. Anzaldua's critique and understanding of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is an important contribution to the social sciences, but it does not give more examples beyond the Chicano, Mexicano, and Anglo

populations living there. I go beyond these groups and show how the long-standing Chinese population living in Mexicali is an example of the abstract notions of a place in the borderlands to which Anzaldua refers.

Gloria Anzaldua challenged anthropological understandings of studying culture when writing about the borderlands. In her study, she situates the reader at the Texas-United States border and unravels the violent historical history that the place has. The United States' Anglo population came into power in the area and, "*El anglo con cara de inocente nos arranco la lengua"* (1987 54) [The Anglo, with an innocent face, ripped our tongues out]. The social consequence, like losing ones language, being force to assimilate and forget history, are illustrated and historicized by Anzaldua. Anzaldua, however, provides a critique of this Chicano community she belongs to. The Chicano community subordinates her as a woman, and sets rules and limitations consisting of what she are to be: "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system of men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males" (1987 17). Throughout the book, Anzaldua invokes past Aztec figures to challenge and state that it was not always like that for the women, and uses the metaphor of *Coatlicue*, an ancient goddess that gives light and can take it away, it is: "the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror" (1987 47). Thus, Anzaldua explains (through metaphors, history, and life experience) how the borderlands are a place of mixed history that can only be explained by understanding the new products being created there.

Chinescos is the group of immigrant (and Mexican born) ethnic Chinese that I identified in Mexicali that has learned how to navigate the city and are part of the new

groups being created at the borderland that Anzaldua describes. They do so by firmly knowing their history in pioneering the city, understanding the local community, and having a keen understanding of their Mexican and Chinese identity. *Chinescos* are the long-standing Chinese of Mexicali, some who have been there for several generations and were born and raised there, or some who have been in the city over ten years and now have an in-depth understanding of the city. I derive the term *Chinesco* from *La Chinesca*, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Mexicali where Chinese immigrants and Mexican emigrants in the early 1900's first settled.

The history of Mexico and the U.S. as a zone of contact has left the image of Mexico as a 'sending' country, a developing country that sends its immigrants to a more developed country (in this case, the United States). Despite this overwhelming image, the Chinese in Mexicali illustrate how a 'sending' country is quickly becoming a 'receiving' country, a country that receives immigrants, and as a result, identity becomes important in understanding Mexican politics and immigration. The recent Chinese immigrant population in Mexicali has been growing because *Chinescos* have facilitated that growth. *Chinescos* know the city and the environment well enough to build businesses that will employ the recent Chinese immigrants.

In order to insure that he or she belongs to the community, the *Chinesco* speaks Spanish and Cantonese fluently. In some cases, the *Chinesco* speaks English, or his children speak English. The *Chinesco* population is primarily male. They know the history of Chinese in Mexicali, and they see themselves as part of the community, not as temporary visitors or a transient community. They are naturalized Mexican citizens, but also visit China from time to time. The *Chinescos* have learned the cultural codes of the

city, the *habitus,* that Bourdieu (1977) refers to in his writing, but have also learned to contribute to the city through the large amounts of Chinese food served at their restaurants. An example of the *Chinesco* is an owner of a Chinese restaurant where he employs recent Chinese immigrants as cooks and teaches them what flavor Mexicans like. The *Chinesco* also employs young Mexican women to work at his restaurant because he knows that many of them would rather do restaurant work, than the more mundane and repetitive work found in the *maquilas* [the foreign owned factories].

The *Chinesco* knows the cultural traditions of his local community. For example, the *Chinesco* understands some of the important holidays of Chinese people, like Chinese New Year, and will give his employees a red envelope with money inside it to wish them luck and well-being. The *Chinesco* also knows Mexican culture, and gives out calendars to his patrons as gifts during Christmas Day, one of the most important holidays for the predominantly Christian-Catholic Mexican population. Some *Chinescos* have also converted to Catholicism, but despite this conversion, they still have images of Buddha in their restaurants and make sure to give gifts to Buddha. The *Chinesco* will face discrimination because of his Asian phenotype, but knows that this discrimination is rooted in Mexican history of nationalistic pride. He combats racism by highlighting the contributions Chinese have made to the city of Mexicali, including building a Chinese pagoda as one enters or leaves Mexicali through the United States port of entry/exit. Therefore, the *Chinesco* comes in different forms; but they are an example of the 'hybridity' model that Anzaldua describes: a combination of the way history, language, race, and sexuality has been reconfigured in the borderlands.

This dissertation argues that *Chinescos* and the recent Chinese immigrant population in Mexicali live a moral life by being able to have a firm identity based on the local community they are part of. *Chinescos* is a term that I employ to refer to those who refuse to be categorized, or who are asked to choose an identity, who struggle to economically and socially survive at the border, but who also live a moral life—a life with a set of values that they will protect for themselves, their families, and what matters most to them (Kleinman 2006). More specifically, *Chinescos* are both long-standing Chinese people of the city (many who have converted their citizenship to Mexican) and Chinese-Mexicans who are called "Chinos" [Chinese] because of their physical appearance. They understand the cultural codes of the border community, the politics of identity and citizenship; they remember their past in order to live the present and the future. The goal, then, of recent Chinese immigrants is to become *Chinescos*, a group that understands the local community without surrendering their core identity and values, but ones who effectively negotiate the economic, social, and cultural challenges presented to them.

Before going into greater discussion of my research about *Chinescos*, I want to situate the reader with respect to the community that I researched. I include an explanation of how I became interested in this topic, how I formulated this project, my initial experience with China and later arriving in Mexicali, the methods I used to research the community, my personal life history and the importance of being reflexive in social science research. I also present aggregate data about the U.S.-Mexico border, and provide a general introduction to the core chapters of my dissertation.

Initial encounters with the U.S.-Mexico border

My roots are in the U.S.-Mexico border. I was raised and lived part of my life in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and grew up noticing what many would find very awkward. At my third generation Chicano family gatherings it would not be uncommon to see undocumented people being chased, tackled, and arrested by United States Border Patrol agents. It happened often. From my upbringing in the late 1980's to today, the border fence would undergo dramatic changes, and there would be an increase in the number of agents patrolling the area to astonishing numbers.[1] The number of Border Patrol agents in Imperial County was so high that many of them became bored with their job with very little to do. There boredom was so apparent that harassing U.S. citizens of Mexican decent was also part of their routine. For example, my family members had been accused of aiding undocumented immigrants shortly after the funeral of one of my uncle's, who, ironically, gave his life as a Border Patrol agent. Aiding undocumented immigrants by members of our extended family in Calexico would risk the jobs of my Mexican-American uncle and my cousin, both who depended on their Border Patrol jobs to support their families and live the comfortable American dream promised to them. Yet, some of them became targeted and accused of doing this because of the abundance and over-supply of border patrol agents.

Strangely, in this border community, my brothers and I also learned to take pride in our Chinese background. My mother's maiden name is Chinese ("Yee"), my grandfather is half Mexican and half Chinese, and our great-grandfather was Chinese. My

[11] Even before the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks in New York City, the amount of border security measures has increased ever year. The Washington Times reported that during President Clinton's years, he increased the amount of Border Patrol agents by 126%. Meanwhile president Bush plans to have 18,000 agents by 2008 (in 2006 it was about 12,000). "Arrests of Illegals Falls off Clinton Pace" in *The Washington Times*, May 25, 2006, by Stephen Dinan.

mother told us about the entrepreneurial spirit her grandfather had, and how proud we should be of the contributions the Chinese community has made to Mexicali. Since China was far and distant from the U.S.-Mexico border, we did not think too much of it and took our Chinese ancestry for granted. I do remember that we would go to Chinese restaurants in Mexicali where we would observe the entrepreneurial spirit of Chinese workers about whom my mother would tell stories: most of the restaurants were owned, managed, and operated by them. But my brothers and I were raised in the U.S. and were fourth generation Mexican-Americans from my father's side. This combined with an identity of a first generation in the U.S. Mexican mother with Chinese ancestry. For us, things were the way they were, and there really was not much discussion about the Chinese influence or past. It was not until I left to college, to the big city of San Diego, where I began thinking more critically of the community I had grown with. I did not return to the U.S.-Mexico border until I was 24 years old, and this time I stayed in Mexicali (instead of El Centro, the American border city where I grew up) to conduct this ethnography.

I lived in Mexicali for 10 months, and made frequent visits to the U.S. I chose to live in Mexicali because it is where more Chinese people live, and because it was different from what I knew. I wanted to experience life in Mexicali, despite my parents living on the U.S. side of the border. This dissertation will show how ethnic Chinese living in the U.S.-Mexico border understand the history of this place, their business practices, experience with violence, and how the relationships they form continuously intersect with each other in order as people try to live a moral life. The place they enter is a market city that was created for its sole purpose in exploiting people, as I will show in

the beginning of Chapter 1. The marketplace is the U.S.-Mexico border, and although my focus is the ethnic Chinese in the area, one cannot ignore the many objects and subjects that constitute this community that are occurring globally and affecting the same world the social scientists belongs.

Johaness Fabian (1983) reminds social scientist that people are never by themselves, but are always coexisting with many other elements of society and the world. Fabian brings the term 'coevalness': the process by which objects, subjects, and people never exist on their own, but as part of a larger structure, the same structure to which the social scientists belongs. This concept is very important considering that despite being an anthropological study, I borrow from Border Studies, Chinese Studies, Ethnic Studies, American Studies, and Latin American Studies; disciplines that have a rich history of academic contributions. These area studies coexist in my study, and affect the way I think of the community where I lived and how I am also changed just like they are changed because what is happening in the world.

My ethnography of Mexicali goes beyond a local community trying to assimilate, or the formation of ethnic enclaves forming in an urban city. Rather, I seek to show how global processes of world domination by the United States are occurring and how people are reacting to these global processes. How do people's culture change and adapt as the United States continues to pursue economic, political, and social power at the turn of the century? What does China's rapid economic development mean to its people in their migration patterns? How do Chinese people, as well as other immigrants from other countries, negotiate their identity in a largely *mestizo* population? While these questions are very complicated to answer, my attempt is to illustrate and argue that people will be

engaging in different activities that will serve their interest, separate from the U.S. interest in the rise to power. When people serve their own interest, they create and redefine traditional cultural codes drawn on by the nation as a means to exploit people. It is my purpose to provide the reader with different ways of understanding both the rapid changes in China and the developmental changes in Mexico through a Chinese restaurant in Mexicali, a place I worked and observed history, political economy, society, and culture come together to define the border city where I lived.

A Chicano in China

My strong interest in Chinese immigrants settling in Mexicali did not start until I arrived at Harvard. Several things intimidated me from doing a project like this: not speaking Cantonese, having to return to the U.S.-Mexico border, and my lack of knowledge of China. With strong support from my advisors and my department, I began reviewing the literature that was available about the community. There was pieces missing, mainly, there was no ethnography of one of the largest Chinese diasporas[2] in Mexico. In addition, the abundance of literature about U.S.-Mexico borderland scholars omitted the Chinese community from their studies. My interests became clearer, and I chose to study Chinese in Mexicali, Mexico.

I learned more about the history of Chinese immigrants in Mexicali when I began reviewing the literature about the community while in graduate school. The community came primarily from southern China, from Guangdong providence, spoke predominantly Cantonese, and their history in Mexico dated back to the late 1800's. With the support of my school and department, I took some basic Cantonese courses in Cambridge before

[2] After talking to several recent Chinese immigrants and long time Chinese-Mexicans, all confirmed to me that Mexicali had the largest number of Chinese in Mexico. The second place where there are several Chinese is Tijuana, but not as much as Mexicali. See also Curtis, 1996.

going to Hong Kong to continue Cantonese studies and once in Mexicali, I continued to practice the language with the people with whom I worked.

This ethnographic study began when I headed to China in July of 2005. I arrived in Hong Kong to take courses, but was able to absorb some of the rich culture Hong Kong had to offer. During this time, Hong Kong was recovering from the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) 'outbreak' of 2003, and was also still transitioning from the 1997 transfer as a British colony to being part of the People's Republic of China. When I was in Hong Kong the people often chose not to talk about SARS; it was an ill reminder of a bad time (and stigma) for them. However, on the issue of Hong Kong returning to the People's Republic of China, some Chinese people from Hong Kong claimed that the 'mainlanders' [referring to Chinese from the mainland] were going to ruin the many gains that Hong Kong had accomplished (despite Hong Kong being a labeled as a special administrative region of China, where Hong Kong was to keep it's own laws, regulations, and customs for 50 years). Others saw the reunification of Hong Kong to China as something very positive: Hong Kong's past experience with economic growth would help with China's current economic growth. And, others saw the socio-history behind it: it made sense that Hong Kong was returning to China since it has always been part China, but it was just momentarily occupied by the British. I was quickly trying to absorb all these statements, only to notice that there were many contradictions I heard from the same people, at one point, some of them agreeing with all three statements! The way Chinese would contradict themselves would be very similar to they ways they contradicted themselves when I would talk to them in Mexicali.

I soon decided to travel to Guangzhou, the city that many Mexican historians pointed to as the place of origin of many Chinese who migrated to Mexico. Guangzhou, only a three and a half hour bus ride from Hong Kong, was another big city, but nothing like Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a small capitalist island with a large population, but very cosmopolitan, driven by tourism and financial services, which in turn maintains a modern look with huge western business buildings, fast comfortable air-conditioned subways, and an overall clean city. Guangzhou was not quite like its expensive neighbor. Although it is very industrial, with a dense population, Guangzhou is at a low level of economic development then Hong Kong. Not knowing people in Guangzhou, and the lack of English signs or English speakers, I ventured to Beijing to learn more about Chinese people.

I wrote a journal in my laptop about my experience in Beijing. I do not even know how to describe Beijing: it is unlike anything I had ever seen or experienced before. I wrote:

> Probably the most amazing thing is seeing these ancient, cultural buildings and parks surrounded by high rises, McDonald's, Starbucks, vendors, taxis honking, tour groups pushing each other, and foreigners bargaining. I often sat and wondered, 'If I'm in a communist country, what is communism? One-child policy? Government propaganda? Cheap food?' Maybe my short stay did not allow seeing communism at work, or maybe communism is simply dying in this nation where people struggle to make a sale or work a tedious job to buy that new cell phone. Aside from the red flags, it was difficult to locate communism.

I was an eyewitness to the fast economic growth that Beijing was experiencing. Construction and the building of high rises were as visible as the many people China had: they were everywhere. China was only a few years away from the Olympics, and it was already celebrating that important year. One Chinese man told me, "China will show to the world how strong we are," when talking about the Olympics. There was lots of

optimism in the air, and Chinese (at least on the surface) were filled with pride for their nation.

My trip to China was in many ways very important in gaining entry into the Chinese community in Mexicali. I underestimated how useful the trip to Beijing, along with the pictures, became until I began showing them to my Chinese friends while working at the restaurant. My friends found a connection with me for traveling that long distance to know more about them. They would go over the pictures and smile, immediately recognizing some of the cultural places I had visited. Although they were from the south, they too had the opportunity to be tourist in Beijing and recognized those places. They were impressed with me venturing out to China by myself, and, thus, this trip served to show them my dedication to truly know who they are. As for me, everyday I was impressed with them for venturing out to Mexico, where they did not know the language and had to quickly learn how to adapt.

Arrival to Mexicali, Mexico

Upon arriving in the Imperial Valley (the bordering county to Mexicali) in September, I immediately felt the sizzling dry weather that was unlike the hot humid weather of China. It was still over 100 Fahrenheit when I arrived but this was surprisingly pleasant for me. I enjoyed being in China, but having been born and raised in California, I rarely experienced humidity that made you sweat from simply standing in the shade. After eight years of being away from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, where I had grown up, family and friends in Imperial Valley and the Mexican border city of Mexicali welcomed me back.

My primary residence was Mexicali. I had memories that are now faded of the time I lived there when I was four years old. At the time of doing my field research, I was 24 soon to be 25, so it had been over 20 years since I lived there (although, growing up my family would frequent the place). I was strangely unfamiliar with this land where I was to live, a common feeling for anthropologists. The right of passage for most anthropologists is to be able to live in a community long enough in order to be able to record the human behavior that is occurring. The process I undertook as my primary field research method is called participant observation, or "a method in which an observer takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their culture" (Bernard 260 2000).

Participant observation is often the method of research for sociocultural anthropologist; it is an extensive process where we stay in a community to record and understand the place. Training as an anthropologist, I was required to read classic anthropological works like Bronislaw Molinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) that provided detailed observations of the daily lives of the Omarkana Trobriand Islands. For the non-anthropologist, Molinowski's classic study may appear like a detailed account of an exotic community that differs so much than from the one lives the reader lives in. He bounds the community, makes it static, unchanging, and within a 'controlled' environment by which he, as the researcher, is able to carefully extract the finer details of everyday life. Close to forty years later, his and other anthropological works began to be criticized by anthropologists for presenting communities without looking at political economies, outside and inside forces that contribute to cultural

changes, nor recognizing that cultures are not unchanging, timeless, and bounded. Despite these criticism survived is the method fostered by Malinowski: participant observation.

Going to a remote part of the world to observe, analyze, and understand a foreign culture seemed to me much easier than doing ethnography in Mexicali. This was a fast developing urban Mexican city where some members of my family live. Family members cautioned me continuously on how dangerous Mexicali was; I initially refused to take any of their advice on where to live or how to approach my research. A small air of arrogance and confidence was in me: I was the cosmopolitan anthropologist who had already traveled to China, had read books about disasters in the Ukraine and India, about dangerous communities like *favelas* [shantytowns] in Brazil or urban ghettos in Chicago and New York. I was under the impression that if other anthropologist could do field research "by themselves," certainly I could too. Upon starting my research, however, the ethnographies I read felt useless: most had very interesting findings, yet failed to let you know the process of doing their study. Most anthropologists omit how exactly they were able to do basic things before studying a community, like finding housing. Therefore, I will log out the process of finding housing, which will show how in an urban community finding housing the basic life experiences of the anthropologist require lots of time, networks, and previous knowledge of the community. All things that I did not have upon arriving, but that I was able (or needed to) acquire in a short amount of time.

Finding Housing at the field site

I began looking for housing by starting to drive around neighborhoods where I was interested in living in hopes of spotting a 'for rent' sign somewhere. Tony, my

Mexican-American friend who lived in Imperial Valley, went with me for security. Despite Tony growing up on the U.S. side of the border, he was very unfamiliar with the renting process or locations in Mexicali, putting him in a situation like me. When driving around, I saw how enormous, unorganized, and polluted Mexicali was. 'Was I back in fast developing urban China?' I thought. Often, cars would not signal to change lanes; they ran stoplights more often than in the U.S.; and just like California, sidewalks were a mere luxury to be seen but only used by a few people. Everyone drove (there were no bicycles around, so I knew I was not in China); California plates and Baja California plates marked the different types of older and newer model cars in the city.

After about four hours of driving around, taking numbers down, calling renters, looking at apartments from the outside, along with using an entire tank of gas, my friend and I had given up. We found nothing. Furthermore, I was frustrated that more questions arose about Mexicali and I realized I knew very little about the community: I did not know the neighborhood (*colonias)* names, local (crime) history, or even the price range of the locations where I was looking. I was dumbfounded. I, who had family in living in this city, who would go visit my grandparents at least once a month growing up, did not know anything about it. Noticing my frustration, Tony told me, "Let's just go grab dinner and drink some beers." The sunlight was nearly all gone, and dinner and beers seemed to be the best thing to do. I looked at my field notes and all I had to show were scribbled numbers, but no names, no prices, no contacts.

Two days later, I once again ventured out on the hunt to rent an apartment. This time I had given up on the false ideology of the lone individualistic anthropologist out to research a community on his or her own. Anthropologist use local networks extensively

to gain information: I went to my family in Mexicali. My aunt told me the basic thing to do that would facilitate this process was buying the local newspaper. Despite having the newspaper, I did not know the names of the neighborhoods, streets, or points of major interest, which would mean it would be useless for me to find a newspaper. My aunt Blanca, a middle-class Mexican housewife, volunteered to go with me: "*Mijo,* I will just go with you to look at the places. I know Mexicali pretty well, and I know the names of the *colonias* [neighborhoods]. Actually, I WANT TO help you out. God forbid you choose to live in the wrong part of town!" I felt guilty for taking up her time, but she insisted.

My aunt, a light-skinned, blond hair, green-eyed woman in her 40's was able to command respect, prompt service, and less rent prices when we were looking for apartments. I had called places and made a list of appointments to go see some of these places. By bringing my aunt, I had both a vast amount of options open up to me but also a limited amount of options available because of her expert opinion. One of the first places I drove to, my aunt immediately protested, "Don't even bother to get off the car, I will not let you rent an apartment on this side of town." Other statements that I heard from her were, "If you rent this apartment, you will definitely not be able to bring friends over for social events...there are a lot of older people living in this area," and, "It's a nice apartment, but you need safe parking, and that place does not have it." Because of her guidance and insight my aunt proved to be an incredible asset in finding a home. In addition, I noticed how she would straightforwardly ask renters questions about safety, such as, "How many robberies were there in this neighborhood within the last month," or questions about price such as, "What is the best price you can give us." After the renters

would answer these questions, they would expect an offer. My aunt would say that we were not ready to put an offer. I would jot down the number of the person renting along with some notes, and we would leave. One renter told us, "It belongs to a family that lives in the other side [of the border], and you can negotiate a good price. They prefer having someone renting it than no one being here." The price of places also depended on the location of where the owners lived. My aunt explained to me that there was homes (both nice and run down) around Mexicali that are left by them because it was the second home of some Mexican people who now lived in the U.S. According to my aunt, I had the opportunity to get a reasonable price by renting homes owned by Mexicans living abroad, since unattended homes often get destroyed, vandalized, or have stuff stolen from them.

I did not find many housing options of those homes owned by people who now lived in the U.S., but I did have other options. At a home that I saw that I was mildly interested in, I asked for an application and, to my surprise, the answer was, "If you like the place, it's yours." This revealed discrimination in housing: if you look "right" (which in this case, being with a white woman helped) the place is yours. In fact, even before seeing the apartment, renters would first arrange to meet somewhere else before showing the apartment or house. Discrimination based on class (shown by the type of car one drove or type of clothing one wears) and race (the lighter white skin, the better), was common, but also expected, even among people who were out looking to rent. This process of housing discrimination was familiar to me: I had heard of racial profiling in the U.S., but now I was seeing it occur in Mexico.

After about five hours of searching for housing and seeing ten different apartments with my aunt, I got to know the city fast. Eventually, I found an apartment that I liked. The place was in a semi-gated community, fully furnished, and within my price range (under $600). "It's way too expensive. It's nice, it's just too expensive," my aunt said. This time, I thought, my aunt was not going to make the decision for me. I did not want to disrespect her, and I politely told her that do to the circumstances I was in, I needed a place soon, and that this place was going to do. The renter initially asked for $650. My aunt was unconvinced about the price, and did not allow me to make the deal or an offer. She told me, "Get her phone number and make her an offer later." A week later, I got the place for $500.

My vignette in finding housing helps the reader understand the realities anthropologist (and other social scientists) face in researching a community: networking, letting other people describe the community, and building on relationships. My experience finding housing also provides a small glimpse into the dynamics of the city and Mexico, including racism and class-based discrimination. As such, participant observation becomes an important way of untangling what is going on in a community, and in turn, how that community can reveal much about a country. I built upon this method and began meeting people, collected stories of experiences in Mexicali, I trusted people, and slowly, people began to trust me too.

Research methods

From September 2005 to July 2006, I was able to meet several people who would help me with my project. I had an affiliation at the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, Mexicali, Centro de Investigaciones Culturales-Museo [Cultural Research

Center-Museum] or *El CIC* (as the local researchers there would call it) became my home base for doing research and for me to establish credibility as doing my project strictly for research, and not for the government or any other agency. This affiliation was important in ensuring the trust of the minority Chinese community.

I reviewed some of the published scholarship that I collected, and worked on establishing more contacts to learn about the Chinese community. In addition, I was able to locate published scholarship in Spanish, including old historical archives. The *ElCic* had a prior exhibit of Chinese of Baja California, along with several government documents, including letters by Chinese people to government officials, as well as anti-Chinese propaganda and correspondence among government officials about Chinese people in Baja California and other parts of Mexico. Some of these letters will be used throughout the history of Chinese in Mexico.

My goal was to get to know people from the Chinese community in Mexicali. It took me several phone calls, visits, and failed attempts at trying to get more involved with the Chinese community. When asked if they would participate in a study I was doing, the most prevalent answer was, "You should go to the Chinese Association, they have all that information you need there." Despite highlighting the importance of documenting their life history, most ethnic Chinese would point me to the Chinese Association. Located in *La Chinesca,* one of the oldest parts of the city, and founded in 1919, the Chinese Association is the place where some recent Chinese immigrants go when they first arrive to the city. My attempts to get more information from the Chinese Association proved to be unfruitful: twice the President of the Association hung the phone up on me, or would tell me to come at another time. Frustrated with the situation, I

went to visit my grandfather, whose father was Chinese. My grandfather told me, "Don't be surprised, that's how Chinese are. They are very close with each other, and try not to interact with members outside their community. You should talk to your aunt, she tries to get involved, and she could help you out. She is so involved that she even went to China one year. I, unfortunately, know very little about them." He gave me his sister's phone number.

I called my aunt, with whom I had not spoken in over four years. "Hello, Tia? Yes, this is Ernesto Martinez Yee, I'm your brother's grandson. You use to be my dentist growing up. Yes, Titina is my mom. Yes, that's me. No, I'm not the one that went to Thailand. That was my brother. He's doing well. Well, I was calling to see if you can help me with my project for school, can you meet with me? Friday at 2 p.m. sounds like a good time. I'll see you then," I told her.

My aunt was the key I was looking for to enter into the community. She had several Chinese friends and was persuasive with her friends in having them talk to me. I told her that the best way for me to know the Chinese community more is if I actually worked with them at a Chinese restaurant. She laughed. "You, a professional, working at a Chinese restaurant? Are you sure?" We scheduled a second meeting where we would ask her friends if they would hire me at one of their restaurants. In essence, this was a form of 'snowball sampling' that I engaged in, or, using one person to introduce the researcher to other people with similar characteristics as the one being studied. My aunt introduced me to many people, including the Chinese Association President, the same person who initially refused to talk to me.

My aunt helped me locate the place where I eventually would work. We went to three Chinese restaurants before I was actually able to get a job working as an assistant cook. We entered the restaurant of one of her Chinese friends, where she would be greeted and asked how her son was doing in school, followed by my aunt asking them how business was. Then she would tell them, "This is my nephew, and he attends Harvard, a big university in the United States. He's doing a study on Chinese in Mexicali, and wants to continue learning how to speak Cantonese. I was wondering if he could work here at your restaurant." All restaurant managers (who were *Chinescos*) that we entered were impressed with the Harvard name, but not all were convinced about their restaurant being used as a training ground for Cantonese learning. One *Chinesco* manager told us, "Let me check with the other partners." As we would leave the restaurant, my aunt told me, "That's their polite way of saying no." Finally, the last restaurant we visited was partially managed by the owner. The owner, to my surprise, seemed genuinely excited about having me around. In fact, he also understood what I was going to be there for: my thesis research. "I have a daughter and a son who studied at universities in the United States, I know some of the work that is asked of you," he told me. He introduced me to the head cook, Lee, and I started my participant observation at the Chinese restaurant for the following four months working from 20 to 30 hours a week.

By working at the Chinese restaurant, I was able to observe the large amounts of Chinese food being consumed in the city of Mexicali. I would observe what Chinese restaurants friends of mine chose to go to, noted what they would order on the menu, and asked them how (or why) they chose what they did. Followed by the observations, I also

met a lot of people while working there. The restaurant industry has a high turnover rate, especially in Mexicali where people are constantly finding a 'better' job. I met recent immigrants from China, but also migrants from different parts of Mexico. All these people knew why I was there. The teenage waitresses did a good job at introducing me to the new workers. I remember one time a new waitress approached me and asked, "You're Ernesto, the American who studies at Harvard and is doing research on Chinese people, right?" All the workers there knew what I did, and felt comfortable sharing their stories with me.

Surveys and questionnaires

In addition, I also produced a two different surveys: one where I was able enter over 50 restaurants and observe the Chinese restaurants and ask the Chinese owners or managers questions, and another that asked the general population's perception of Chinese food. Despite entering several restaurants and asking several individuals for their responses, my research assistant and I had the most difficulties getting answers from both Chinese owners of the restaurant and from Chinese workers. Beyond some of the language barriers, Chinese refused to speak to two individuals who they did not know, who both were Mexican and represented the dominant society. Chinese are a minority community, and being a member of the dominant group in Mexico clearly had limitations. I tried to correct my limitations by having a Chinese graduate student from the University of California, San Diego help me apply some of the surveys, but that brought one word answers or "I don't know" answers. Despite my difficulties in getting questionnaires answered, the fact that I had an excuse to go inside the restaurant as a researcher of the university to do surveys, it allowed me to compare the observations that

I had made at the restaurant I worked at. Both methods, working at restaurants and conducting questionnaires, allowed me to see the group dynamics of work in a Chinese restaurant, where Chinese people and Mexican people came together to work.

The names of all the people who I interviewed, hung out with, and spoke with are all pseudonyms. In giving names to Chinese people, I have given some of them "Mexican" or "American" names. Not because they are living in Mexico, but because that is how the referred and introduced themselves when I met them. The Chinese people who I give "Chinese" pseudonyms are those that chose to not change their names to a "Mexican" name and chose to keep either their (family) surname or the name.

A note about the author

Chicano anthropologist Renato Rosaldo wrote:

> Such terms as *objectivity, neutrality,* and *impartiality* refer to subject positions once endowed with great institutional authority, but they are arguably neither more or less valid than those of more engaged, yet equally perceptive, knowledgeable social actors. Social analysis must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics, and their politics. (1989 21).

I follow Rosaldo's suggestion of questioning 'objectivity' and welcome the interrogation by people from the community where I studied, as well as those that read my interpretations and analysis of the overseas Chinese community in Mexicali. One of the most important contributions that anthropology has done to the social science community is questioning the role of the researcher. The best way to understand Rosaldo's critique of the social scientist is by providing an example. During the summer of 2007, the Governor of California, foreign-born Arnold Schwarznegger, stated that the best way for the non-English speaking Latinos to learn English is by turning off their

Spanish language television channels. In deconstructing his statement, it is important to note that this observation was based on assumptions and reveals much about his life experience as an immigrant (possibly fully immersed into English) and his lack of understanding of the Latino community.[3] Rather than take Governor Schwarznegger's statement as fact, we can question what exactly qualifies him to make that statement beyond being Governor of California. Understanding his world and his experience reveals much about his statement. Is it because he, as an immigrant, had little exposure to his native language once he came to the United States that he believes others should follow the same way of learning English? Thus, it is important for the reader to understand also that the anthropologist, like any social scientist, should also be questioned on the claims and analysis he is making, just the same way the Governor should.

Throughout the dissertation I will be writing in the first person and I will also be using words that convey emotions like "I was surprised..." Again, this is to inject some of personal values I hold, and for the reader to understand where I am coming from. Feminist anthropologist in the 1980's reminded social scientist that what they constituted as 'objective' was false, as most social science writings were embedded in an industry largely dominated and created by men (Behar and Gordon 1992). Let me give another example. When I first presented my chapter on violence, colleagues from other disciplines were concerned that I was "too involved" with the way I wrote. Specifically, that chapter describes how I was shocked to hear the response of light-skin Mexican women regarding the murder of a Chinese restaurant owner and employee. She blamed

[3] For an editorial response about Governor Scharznegger's comments, please see "Learning a Second Language: When Simple Solutions and Anecdotes Collide with Facts" by Ana Celia Zentella and John Moore, *San Diego Union-Tribune,* June 28, 2007

the death on the victims because, in her view, they refused to give up the money when they were being robbed. In writing that "I was shocked," the reader can draw two interpretations about me: I am either sympathetic to the Chinese community, specifically the victims, or I have a naïve upbringing where I was unaware of the high value people place on money. What will follow, however, is my interpretation of her attitudes, which the reader could dispute. The reader will notice my 'presence' throughout the dissertation. My personal reactions and I myself constitute a research instrument.

This study also needs a brief autobiography for the reader to know my mode of analysis. I grew up working-class, raised by a third generation farm-working Chicano father and an immigrant Mexican middle class mother. For a large portion of my life my parents, my two brothers and I would move from one place to another as sons of migrant farm laborers. My mother placed a high value on school, and my older brother and I would attend summer school every summer when I was growing up (unaware that students who went to summer school were often students who were deficient in some academic areas). However, we would also be pulled out of school a couple of months after starting, and then try to catch up once we arrived at another of the schools in the border city of El Centro, California. I have great memories of the migrant farm labor camp where I grew up; we had good friends who had similar backgrounds as us, and our dad had a steady job that provided for our living during the season. In El Centro, I have fond memories of going to Mexicali to visit my mother's side of the family.

After participating in outreach programs for 'at risk students,' most notably the Migrant Education Program, I headed off to college at the University of California, San Diego. There, I majored in Economics and Ethnic Studies and was taught how to think

critically about my role as someone who can do social change, both through my work as an activist and as an academic. I was again introduced to another outreach program, this one aimed at increasing the amount of students going to graduate school, the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program. This program paired me up with my mentor, and thus, I prepared to enter graduate school at Harvard University after graduating from UCSD. Harvard is where I received my graduate training in social anthropology.

My life, then, is filled with unusual turns and paths, just like the life that the people in Mexicali live. I identify with my working-class background, but I also recognize that I have been socialized during my late teenage years and early adulthood to be part of the educated middle-class. I hope that readers will find value in my background, but, more importantly, a dissertation that contributes to creation of new knowledge.

The U.S.-Mexico border: by the numbers

Just two hours east of San Diego, California, one hour west of Yuma, Arizona, and three and a half hours south of Los Angeles, lays the desert city of Mexicali, Mexico and the California county of Imperial, U.S.A. Maria Fuentes, 43, from El Centro, California, tells me, "I like the Imperial County. You get the small town feel, with some of the things from the city. I mean we have a Wal-Mart and a Target now. It's a good place to raise a family. Things are very calm out here." Along the same positive lines, Juan Sanchez, 52, tells me about Mexicali, "It's a city and there are jobs for whoever wants to work. We have a mix of different people from all over the country living here after the *maquiladoras* starting setting up here. We even have people from China!" These optimistic views of Mexicali and Imperial Valley show that despite the pursuit for

financial and economic gains of each country, people are able to adapt and live on both sides of the border, despite the obstacles.

In doing research on this community, getting to know the city of Mexicali, close to one million people,[4] was also a task that I needed to accomplish. The city had much to offer, including the many venues that it's neighboring small American border cities (Calexico, El Centro, and Brawley) did not enjoy, like a bowling alley, and the IMAX giant size theater. Beyond those two things, Mexicali is a booming city that has fine restaurants, nightclubs, big new homes, boutiques, several movie theaters, jewelry stores, high-end car dealerships like Audi and BMW, and an abundance of retail stores. By contrast, on the U.S. side lays an impoverished county with a high unemployment rate, with several inexpensive fast food chain restaurants, and a combined population (which includes three cities) of less than 200,000.[5] Mexicali is one of the most expensive Mexican cities to live in, and also considered a 'rich' city because of the many *maquilas* that fuel the local economy. When I spoke to the then mayor of El Centro, Cheryl Walker, she told me that many retail developers who opened their businesses in Imperial County first inquired about the growth, population, and age group of the city of Mexicali.[6] Mexicali has the jobs and number of people to allow the U.S. neighboring city to grow. But despite its resources, I was capturing how large portions of *Mexicalenses*[7] idealize, romanticize, and fantasize the prosperity of the United States, even when they

[4] The official Mexican government census states that the population is 709,271 in Mexicali in 2005., however, many people in the city say the actual number is close to one million because of the transient community tha tlives there from time to time, and the growth over the last two years. The official figures are from www.inegi.gob.mx accessed January 2006.
[5] The official U.S. government census stats that the estimated population is 160,301 in Imperial County in 2006. www.census.gov accessed June 2007.
[6] Personal interview, June 5, 2006.
[7] People of Mexicali.

enjoyed more recreational activities and particularly greater wealth than in the Imperial County.

What divides these two places is the U.S.-Mexico borderline that extends from the Pacific Ocean all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, cutting through four U.S. states (California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas). Geographer Joseph Nevins identifies the terms border, boundary, and frontier the following way:

> I employ a classification that treats a *boundary* as a strict line of separation between two (at least theoretically) distinct territories, a *frontier,* as a forward zone of contact with the uncontrolled or sparsely settled, and a *border* as an area of interaction and gradual division between two separate political entities (2002 8).

These definitions become useful in understanding this border area, the Mexicali and Imperial County, one part of the Mexican territory, and the United States territory, respectively. I will use the term 'border' to describe each territory demarcated by the nation line and to describe those economies.

Neighboring the city of Mexicali is the agriculture, the government, and the retail sector that predominantly sustain the Imperial Valley's economy. During my time of field research in 2005 there was still high speculation that the Imperial Valley would also become a 'bedroom' community to San Diego. A bedroom community is often formed when adjacent major urban cities have real estate property so expensive that makes living there unaffordable. In 2002 major home developers, including Pulte Homes, D.R. Horton, and Centex Homes began building new single-family homes in the Imperial Valley in hopes that the prediction of it becoming a bedroom community comes true. The average single family home in 2004 for Imperial Valley was $170,000 compared to San Diego's

$580,670.[8] By the time I was in the field in 2005, single family home prices in Imperial Valley had skyrocketed to the $250,000, still affordable compared to San Diego's market (where homes also increased and condominiums started being developed at a higher pace), but not affordable for residents of Imperial County. The per capita income for Imperial Valley in 2004 was $17,976, where most of the jobs come from agriculture (24%) and transportation and utility (19.8%). The government sector, however, does provide higher incomes in the $40,000's range, particularly in the growth of the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the Border Patrol, and is also a sizeable sector for employment (30.7%).[9] Further, the 'housing boom' of Imperial Valley resulted in the increase demand for construction workers employed by the developers. By 2007, many construction workers I knew were losing their jobs, as there was a sharp decrease in home buying and construction in Imperial Valley due to the bursting of the housing bubble caused by the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the United States.

Commercial retail developers were also in hopes of taping into the potential growth of the Imperial County and Mexicali. In March of 2005, the first regional mall was opened in Imperial Valley, along with other major retailers in other parts of the city including a Loews (a home improvement store), a Target (a retail store), a new Wal-Mart, as well as other small chain retail stores. These retail stores do employ several residents, but do not provide them with adequate health care plans or even a pay high enough to purchase a home. Despite the high optimism in the air about the economic growth of the Imperial Valley, the unemployment rate was still among the highest in the state at 19%.[10]

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[8] This information was compiled by the California Center for Border and Regional Economic Studies at San Diego State University- Imperial Valley Campus (CCBRES Bulletin, Vol. 8, No. 3,4)
[9] CCBRES, 2007, Vol. 8, No. 5/6
[10] ibid.

Despite the high hopes for the community to be a bedroom community, and despite all the money that flows through the border from Mexico, Imperial Valley remains one of the poorest counties in California, with the lowest education attainment. The low education attainment should be an alarm to several state leaders, considering that Imperial County is 73.8% "Hispanic" with the second largest group being "White" at 19.4%, "Blacks" are 3.3% and "Asians" are 1.6%. Only 8% of the population in the Imperial County is going to public four-year college and universities after high school, half the rate of the San Diego and the California population (roughly 18%). In addition, people with college degrees comprise less than 10% of the Imperial County, compared to over 25% in the State and in San Diego.[11] The lack of resources for education in this area is alarming, yet few efforts have been implemented to improve educational attainment levels.

Some consider the Imperial Valley a relatively safe place to live, with crime rates being lower than large metropolitan cities. Crime rate were considered low, with 8,066 arrests in 2000, many of these from drug-related violations (2131) and driving under the influence (1343).[12] This population is affected by the illegal drug activities that are located in the border. People are caught in the informal economy in hopes of making quick money. People working with drugs become the suppliers or consumers or drugs victims because of its relatively easy availability. "It is easier to buy drugs than alcohol," one of my informants once told me. And there is always an opportunity to get involved in selling them.

[11] CCBRES, Socioeconomic Profile of the Imperial Valley.
[12] This information was obtained from the FBI on the web page (accessed October 2007): http://www.fedstats.gov/mapstats/arrests/county/06025.html

The conditions are quite different economically in Mexicali, Mexico, where the population is officially 855,962 people (although some say it has passed the 1 million mark), and where the manufacturing industry dominates the employment sector. The informal sector is also alive and well in Mexicali, where it has been much more difficult to control drug trafficking, as well as underemployment. The aggregate numbers for Mexicali in terms of unemployment are quite positive. Unemployment is less than 5%, and the major industries of employment are manufacturing (40%), commerce (18.8%), agriculture (10.3%), and construction (6.2%).[13] Safety is often an issue in Mexicali (*La Cronica* published that Mexicali was the 12th most dangerous city to live in Mexico) and many Chinese-Mexican entrepreneurs have said that the reason they chose to live in Calexico was for the fear of getting kidnapped in Mexicali.

Mexicali is also growing astronomically. Many track homes were being built, as well as movie theaters, restaurants, Carl's Jr., a second Wal-Mart, Costco, and many other U.S. retail and non-U.S. stores. I was witness to new freeways being built, getting stuck in traffic during traffic hour (unheard of when I was growing up), and many new buildings being erected. *Maquiladoras* also continued to grow, as did the amount of people migrating to Mexicali from different parts of Mexico. More money continues to be invested in Mexicali, and as a result, segregation based on socioeconomic background is also sprawling. Inequality is growing, and walls are being built to protect the homes of the very rich. Education is also growing, with private schools opening up in different parts of the city, many of them teaching English. As stated earlier, many recreational places are also being built, including night clubs, bars, bowling allies, and casinos. Restaurants are also growing, and people are going to them because they feel the need to

[13] CCBRES Vol 8, No.5 & 6

reward their hard work by having someone else cook for them, or because it is easier to buy than cook. Much is going on in Mexicali, and I will illuminate these activities throughout the chapters.

The Chinese population is part of this growth and employment in Mexicali. Through the lens of a Chinese restaurant, I examine Mexicali as a place where violence occurs, businesses flourish, gender is segregated, history is unraveled, and where cultures come together through food. Rather than argue that people "place borders on themselves" in order to distinguish their identity, as sociologist Pablo Vila (2000) suggest, I argue that identities converge and overlap through a complicated history that includes the manipulation of policy, race politics, exploitation of genders, and informal violent economies. Again, Anzaldua's 'hybridity' model best explains the convergence and overlap of experience on the border. Unlike Anzaldua and Vila, I examine Mexicali through the experience of *Chinescos* and Chinese immigrants, groups that have been overlooked by both border scholars and overseas Chinese and diaspora scholars. The transformation of recent Chinese immigrants into *Chinescos* happens at the more than 300 Chinese restaurants, where people, culture, food, money, and events come together. Chinese restaurants are therefore a useful and critical focus of my study.

The Chinese Diaspora and my research

I build on scholarship about Chinese diaspora. This work focuses on adaptation and acculturation (Skinner 1957; Pan 1990), kinship organization (Watson 1977 and 2004), immigrant's relationship with China (Lever-Tracy, Ip, and Tracy 1996), and the dominance of them in a particular market (Oxfeld 1993). Migration processes, with focus on places like San Francisco (Chen 2000), along with types of work Chinese did and the

discrimination they faced (Hsu 2000), and the period of exclusion of Chinese from the U.S. (Lee 2003) all touch on life experiences the community have encountered as well. Most of these writings do not include the process of migration in a place as complicated as Mexicali, but rather, how Chinese immigrants adapt and how host countries change policies towards Chinese (which is yet to happen in Mexicali in more contemporary times, but which did happen during between 1880-1930). In thinking of diasporas, James Clifford questions Safran's definition of diasporas as people who are expatriates who are dispersed, have a memory of a past home, the lack of acceptance in a country, ancestral return, restoration of a homeland, and where solidarity are defined (1994). Clifford seeks to expand the concept beyond the articulation of a real or symbolic homeland, into a "shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance maybe as important as the projection of a specific origin" (306 1994). I will provide a model different than Clifford and Safran that will understand how the Chinese living in the U.S.-Mexico border, already at the occupying the space two very different countries, constitute a different type of diaspora. This diaspora is one that is located in a unique space where multiple identities emerge, and where economies are changing dramatically.

Some authors suggest that Chinese people stick to enclaves and refuse to integrate into the host society. Coughlin writes, "Yet the Chinese in Bangkok have not been assimilated" (1955 312) and the reasons they do not is because, "Virtually any need that the average Chinese experiences can be satisfied within the Chinese community in Bangkok. His livelihood, his home, his recreation and entertainment, his political and religious expression are all provided for through its agencies and organizations" (1955 315). Although Coughlin's article is quite outdated, his findings are very similar to the

perceptions that people in Mexicali have about the Chinese community there. I heard many stories and myths of "underground cities" built by Chinese in Mexicali, how they are exclusionary and self-sustaining. While many recent Chinese immigrants do only interact with only members of their own community in Mexicali, they eventually do interact with the host society that soon becomes theirs too. This will be understood in how they form their businesses.

In addition, the Chinese community in Mexicali illustrates what happens when U.S. economic interests are being pursued, both in the past and now in the present. There was an active financial expansion in the early 1900's by American businessmen, and today, this is once again seen through the financial expansion of major corporations and companies. In the past, however, Chinese were used to facilitate this expansion (more on Chapter 1), while today, the Chinese immigrant population is facilitating this expansion by feeding the workers of the *maquilas* different foods from what they know (Chinese food, more on Chapter 5). The Chinese community in Mexicali shows what happens when the United States is in constant influence with its southern neighbor, while at the same time how they negotiate these processes.

In addition to the U.S. financial expansion historically and in contemporary times, China's recent expansion into a global power during my field study is of great relevance. The Chinese in Mexicali have the potential of facilitating China's expansion and growth. In particular, stories have been published of Chinese visits to Mexico to increase imports into the city. During my time in the field, there was a delegation from Nanjing, China, that met with the Chinese diaspora in Mexico to discuss the possibility of business

expansions. My work speaks to Chinese as a globalizing power, and how Mexico treats the people of China.

Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation will incorporate history, encounters with violence, social relations at work among Mexicans and Chinese, business organization and economics, and food in understanding how the Chinese have become co-producers of culture in the U.S.-Mexico border region as they negotiate their identity. The first chapter outlines the history of the Chinese in the border region, revealing that U.S. interests and Mexican interests were at the forefront on the recruitment of Chinese immigrants since the 1880s. Chapter two captures the conflict and violence and shows how it shapes the lives Chinese in the city of Mexicali and the risks that are involved in participating in this market that can be dangerous. Violence is at the extreme of the lives being constructed at the border. Chapter three will focus on Chinese partnerships, unveiling how the Chinese community is not as detached as many local people make it seem to be. This chapter will show how *Chinescos,* the long-standing Chinese immigrants of the city, have used creative methods to manage both Mexican and Chinese labor effectively in order to reduce inefficiencies in the restaurant business. Chapter four will discuss social relations at the restaurant, and how people are divided in order to secure the financial interests of the *Chinesco* owner. This model is taken from what is happening globally, where people are now being forced into new jobs created by dominant structures that did not exist before. Finally, chapter five will discuss how food acts as a medium of exchange in border culture, specifically the abundance of Chinese restaurants in Mexicali and how Chinese food became local food. Chinese food reveals much about local occurrences, and how *Chinescos* capture it.

It is my goal that after reading my dissertation, you will get a sense of the structures set up to exploit minority communities, but also how communities respond to live a moral life. Life in the border city of Mexicali, as I have learned, is not as difficult as many people make it out to be.

Chapter 1
Migration Processes and Life Experiences

"Are *you* a *paisano*?" –Lazaro Chung, Chinese cook, asking me.

This chapter is about the history of Chinese immigrants in Mexicali, Mexico, as well as the life experiences of Chinese in Mexico in contemporary times. Before writing about the history, I will write about a word used by the Chinese community to identify each other: *paisano. Paisano* is a Mexican word used by Chinese immigrants, *Chinescos,* and Chinese-Mexicans to refer to each other. *Paisano* is not an exclusive word used by Chinese people only; indigenous people in northern Baja California also use the term to identify each other. How and why do Chinese people use it? I will use this word conceptually to show how it has multiple meanings, how it opens and closes doors of opportunity for people, and to show how the word forms ties to Mexicali's Chinese population.

Let me elaborate on the use of this word through a series of examples where I heard the word. One day, after leaving from work as a waiter at a Chinese restaurant, my Chinese-Mexican friend, Lolita, yells to the Chinese female worker, "Bye *paisana,* I'll see you tomorrow!" Lolita, 22 year-old United States born citizen with a Chinese father and a Mexican mother, identifies herself as Mexican with a strong American influence. Her Chinese heritage, however, is often ignored or taken for granted. For example, she refused to speak the few Cantonese that her father taught her with me. "It's not that I'm ashamed, I just don't find any need for it," she told me as I attempted to practice some of my Cantonese words with her. "Would you call yourself *paisana*?" I asked her after work. "No, because I'm not one hundred percent Chinese," she answered me. "What does *paisano* or *paisana* mean then?" I asked. "It means a Chinese person in Mexicali," she

answered. Lolita chose not to reveal much about her father's Chinese past, but knew what I was referring to when I used the term *paisano,* the word used to refer to Chinese people in Mexicali. It was not that Lolita did not trust me. We worked side by side at the small Chinese restaurant where I worked on the weekends, and we would hang out and have drinks afterwards. We went to parties together, and I even attended her wedding. Lolita, I believe, did trust me. But, she was still very protective of her Chinese father—the "real" *paisano.*

Lolita protectiveness in regard to her father was not a surprise to me. I knew that Lolita had seen the racism that her father had experienced while living in both Mexicali and the Imperial Valley when she worked his restaurant. She would tell me about the rude behavior she observed from some of the customers coming into the restaurant her father owned, and the annoying face that the food distributors would make when her father spoke with his broken Spanish. Lolita had come to understand that the use of Chinese language and anything related to Chinese people was something she needed to distance herself from. But she also came to understand some of the cultural codes that Chinese people used to communicate with each other, including how they would refer to other members of the Chinese community. What she did not know is how her father negotiated his ethnic Chinese background. Lolita believed that the best way to protect him was by keeping him away from her friends, from the dominant group that her father always interacted with. "People are not patient with him when he speaks Spanish. Besides, what is so important about him? He's a hard working man just like many people around here," she tells me when I asked her more about him. This contradiction, of her actions distancing her father from the dominant Mexican group she now identifies with,

but considering him "just like many people around here" fits within the broader history of Chinese in Mexicali. The use of a *paisano* as a concept can reveal the history and life process of people in China migrating to Mexico and eventually residing in the United States. The word becomes a community builder, but because it is a word in Spanish, a reminder of the social exclusion Chinese people face do to language barriers, 'racial' difference, or cultural misunderstandings.

Within the first couple of months in Mexicali, I had heard the word *paisano* tossed around to identify members of the Chinese community. The first time I heard the word used was when my grandfather (a Mexican born citizen with a Chinese father and Mexican mother) asked me if my sister-in-law was a *paisana.* I initially thought that he meant a countryside girl; I was confused by his question and I answered to him, "No, she's a city girl, she grew up in San Diego." My grandfather answered back, "I already know she grew up and lived in San Diego. I'm asking you if she's Chinese!" Still surprised by why he used the word *paisana*, I simply replied, "No, she's not Chinese, she is Hmong, which is a tribe from the country of Laos. Laos is located next to Vietnam, and many of them came during the Vietnam War as refugees." He then responds, "Well, she looks Chinese." My grandfather, a mixed Chinese-Mexican, although far and removed from the Chinese community, knew that the word *paisano* was used to refer to Chinese people in Mexicali. His father, a Chinese immigrant entrepreneur, was locally engaged with the Chinese community of Mexicali.

The word *paisano* literally translates to "peasant," and its definition in Spanish is either a person from the rural countryside, a person from the same country of origin, or a

person who is from the non-military personnel.[14] During my time doing fieldwork, this is the word that Chinese people in Mexicali would use to describe each other, especially the recent Chinese immigrants. This was also a word that Chinese people in Mexicali would use to describe anyone with some Chinese "blood" in them. When I inquired about the process of foreign migration into Mexico at the offices of the Secretaría de Gobernación [Secretary of the Interior], I received a pamphlet that read, *"Paisano, Bienvenido a Casa* [Welcome Home, Peasants/Countryman]" on the cover. The pamphlet mainly contained information for Mexican newcomers living abroad for an extended period of time about local state agencies, including social services and utilities of the city. I wondered, "Was this where recent Chinese immigrants borrowed the word to incorporate it into their daily lives to identify each other?" *Paisano* as a term used by the Chinese community to refer to the people of their own community becomes a useful term of analysis to extrapolate the history of Chinese in Mexicali and Imperial Valley. As in the exchange that I had with Lolita, *paisano* can mean "Chinese of Mexicali" or "just like many people around here," locally. The ethnic Chinese living in Mexicali accurately use the definition of *paisano*: it denotes their historical roots in Mexicali as countryside laborers *and* it is a term used to identify other members from their own country, in this case, China. The word *paisano* is accurately used to build community among Chinese, but is also as a reminder that they are members of the Mexican community. Chinese coming from the China are readily known as *paisanos,* in the everyday politics of Chinese people in Mexicali. The Chinese that have adopted Mexican citizenship (or are Mexican by birth), also make claims as *paisanos*, as fellow citizens of Mexico. They do so because many of

[14] The "Real Academia Espanola" dictionary, the official source for 'correct' Spanish usage defines the word this way.

them know that they helped create the city of Mexicali when they were the *paisanos* picking cotton as laborers.

This chapter specifically addresses the nature of Chinese people's identity in Mexico's northern borderlands, in a culture dominated by a 'mestizo' [mixed race] Mexican identity and a United States possessive investment in whiteness.[15] People who are *mestizo* constitute 60% of the population in Mexico.[16] These people are a 'mixed' race, and the phenotypes range from very tan and indigenous looking people (like myself) with dark brown eyes and dark brown hair, to very light tan, almost white, looking people with green, blue, or hazel eyes, light brown hair, or even blond. To the north of the United States are a dominant 'white' majority, where, according to George Lipsitz, their economic, social, and cultural interests are often favored and protected through policy, education, media, and through the benefits of being 'white.' People of Chinese descent in Northern Mexico are right in the middle of these two different cultures. They creatively deal with these two conflicting and historically changing sets of ideas about race and the place of "Chinese" in forming their identities and seeking a moral life, or a life where their values that they have are so important to them that they would do anything to protect them, including the value of their family, religion, or prized possessions (Kleinman 2006). Although the history of Chinese living in Mexico has been well documented, the way they form and negotiate their identities has not.

The history of Chinese in Mexicali is the history of the flow of capital and information across both sides of the border where they become both local citizens and are

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[15] *Possessive investment in whiteness* is a word that I borrow from historian George Lipsitz, who argues that U.S. policies and structures have been historically constructed to benefit white people. For more, please read The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics, University of Minnesota Press, 1998

[16] www.inegi.gob.mx

involved in *differential inclusion*, or, "The process whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation's economy, culture, identity, and power—but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinate standing" (Espiritu 47 2003). They are local citizens because they have roots in the community of Mexicali and Imperial Valley as people who helped develop the agricultural cotton industry. The process of *differential inclusion*, was first used in reference to the exploitation of Filipino-American communities in the United States, but the concept also becomes useful in extending it to U.S. and Mexican financial interest in the exploitation of Chinese people in Mexico. The Chinese in Northern Mexico are a community that moves to this particular part of the country to serve the needs of Mexico, even if the country does not recognize them. *Paisano* as a concept becomes very valuable in expanding the concept of *differential inclusion* in analyzing the contemporary state of Chinese people in Mexico and where their identity fits in the larger discussion of communities being exploited, specifically in Mexico, a country traditionally understood as a 'sending country,' a country that sends cheap immigrant labor into a developed nation, in this case, the United States.

The continuing debate since the 20th century that Mexican citizens go to the United States to fill jobs Americans are not willing to do (or the jobs being lost by cheaper Mexican labor), obscures the fact that Mexico has long been a nation receiving immigrants and internal migrants into the border regions. This happens because of changing global economic forces occurring in China, Mexico, and other less developed countries. Because of the strong economic growth that China is experiencing, it is allowing for more disposable income where laborers and entrepreneurs use to immigrate out of the country into places like Mexico. Chinese migration to Mexico, however, is not

a new phenomenon. Rather, it can be traced back to the 1880s. Past Chinese immigration into Mexico established networks necessary for the revival of immigration of more Chinese into Mexicali at the start of the Twentieth Century. The recent Chinese immigrants are not rural poor; they come as entrepreneurs or as manual labors ready to provide gains for themselves and the exploitative country they are in. They become *paisanos* in the local sense, as people who are laborers from abroad (rather than the countryside) and are in the process of learning how to adapt in a new environment. Interestingly, to be a 'peasant' or from the 'countryside' (in the most literal translation) in China means to be of a lower class, a marginalized class that is at the most exploited spectrum of society. The exclusionary practices (in education, social services, and jobs) in China affecting the rural workers migrating into the urban areas shows overt discrimination based on different forms of employment and even the schooling of their children in a communist country (Solinger 1999). Interestingly, the denial of schooling, jobs, and even some social services, is the same treatment that recent Chinese receive when migrating to Mexico, and the same position Mexicans (regardless of urban or rural background) occupy when they too migrate to the United States. *Paisano,* however, is a community building word used to welcome each person subject to exclusionary practices in both countries.

Paisano then becomes an analytical point of departure that fits well in understanding the global processes of discrimination and accommodation of recent immigrants. To get a better sense of this concept, and where Chinese began to embrace it, both literally and figuratively, I will provide an understanding of the characteristics of the place (Mexico) that Chinese have found themselves in. Followed by the place I will

provide the circumstances that led to the encouraging of Chinese into Mexico after the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In addition, the work of several American and Mexican scholars becomes useful in identifying the history, but also how they discuss the role of Chinese immigrants in Mexico, from entrepreneurs to manual labor. Finally, I will draw on these scholars' works to pave the path into my understanding of the Chinese community during the time I did my ethnography, including the driving binational economic and political forces (such as the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 and the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001) that once again brings their presence into the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Specifically, I will provide a popular pattern that I observed on how Chinese people become local *paisanos* but retain their identity and are what I refer as *Chinescos*[17], meaning Chinese born, raised, or who have had a long stay in Mexicali who know and participate in the local culture and contribute to it.

Mexico

Mexico is a diverse nation with over 60 different languages spoken (particularly by the indigenous population), in addition to the Spanish, African, and Asian influence in the country.[18] Furthermore, immigration to Mexico from different countries during the last 20 years has included immigrants from just about all over the world, including Arabs, Japanese, Chinese, and South Americans. Despite its diversity, Mexican national leaders and the United States people (Mexico's northern neighbor) often have the image of the "Mexican" being a mixture of Spanish and Native American "blood." In fact, the official

[17] *Chinescos* is a word I created based on the neighborhood in Mexicali known as "La Chinesca," the place where Chinese would go sell their goods during the early 1900s.
[18] See www.inegi.gob.mx to see Mexico's socioeconomic differences, as well as different languages spoken by indigenous people. No data is provided on the different 'races' of people.

government figures state that the country is 60% "mestizo" (mixed race), 30% American Indians, 9% European, and 1% other.[19] The total population is estimated at 108,700, 891 people.[20] This rich mixture of racial difference can be seen throughout the country. In a Mexican family, one can see a light whiter skin individual be the sibling of a darker skin person. The racial diversity, or rather, the skin pigmentation of the people of Mexico is rich, especially endemic in the cities where people come together. The large *mestizo* population, one that has the mixture of different ethnic groups (with an emphasis on 'white' and indigenous background) is often thought of as the "real" Mexican. The *mestizo* population is by far the dominant, though, in terms of the most access to resources, "whiter" or lighter skin *mestizos* (the more western European looking) Mexicans are often those in media, governmental positions, and high ranks of business, while the darker skin *mestizos*, and the indigenous population is often excluded from Mexican policy making and participation in the media. But "race" in Mexico is more complex; an example would be Julio Frenk, former Mexican Minister of Health, whose descent is that of European Jews fleeing Nazi oppression in the 1930's. Racism against Mexico's indigenous population (the second largest state identified group) is prevalent, from the lack of access to education and jobs, to high poverty and higher disease rates than the dominant *mestizo* group. Gross inequality can be seen in terms of the indigenous versus the *mestizo* and white population. To be exact, Carlos Slim (a Mexican *mestizo* with a Lebanese background), the richest man in the world is from Mexico,[21] yet Mexico

[19] http://www.sre.gob.mx/mexico/general/datos_basicos.htm in Mexico's Secretary of External Relations website.
[20] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/mx

[21] See TIME Magazine, July 2007

has 40% of its population living in poverty.[22] This system of racial exclusion is much like in the United States, where 'whiteness' and the privilege of 'whiteness' has social, economic, and political benefits (Lipsitz 1998, Harris 1995). Chinese people, being neither white, nor a mixture of European nor Native American ancestry, stand out from the general population. The Chinese population is primarily located in the northern part of Mexico, where the *mestizo* group is most prominent. There are indigenous groups in the northern part of Mexico, but their presence is most visible (and more activism and protest is located) in southern Mexico. In summary, the northern part of Mexico has a large *mestizo* population, in contrast to the southern part of Mexico and its multiple indigenous communities. The Chinese group where I did fieldwork is located in the north, among the *mestizos.* Because Chinese people stand out from the general population, they have historically received different treatment because of the different meanings that 'race' has taken on in Mexico.[23]

The United States of Mexico practices democracy, and has 31 states and 1 federal district that form their union. The official state language is Spanish, and their currency is the *peso.* Mexico declared it's independence from Spain on September 16, 1810, and the president during my time of field research was Vicente Fox from the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional), the first president to be elected after the ruling PRI (Partido Revolucionario de Institucional) had dominated since 1946. In 2006, the PAN maintained control of the presidency with the narrow election of Felipe Calderón, the current Chief of State and Head of Government of Mexico. The legal system in Mexico is a mixture of U.S. constitutional theory and civil law system. The legislative branch features a Senate

[22] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/mx
[23] For a brief outline of the history of 'race,' please see Appendix A.

(with 128 seats) and Federal Chamber of Deputies (with 500 seats). The judicial branch is the Supreme Court of Justice. There are approximately eight political parties, but in the last election, three dominated, the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática), the PAN, and the PRI.

The people of Mexico have a high literacy rate (estimated at 91%), and high life expectancy (about 75.63 years).[24] In addition, it remains one of the largest Roman Catholic nations in the world with 76.5% of the population identifying as Catholic. Economically, Mexico also enjoys a free market that has had a real growth rate estimated at 4.8% in 2006, and a GDP of $1.149 trillion. The GDP comes from agriculture (3.9%), industry (25.7%), and services (70.5%), roughly matching the labor force's division into agriculture (18%), industry (24%), and services (58%). The unemployment has been calculated at 3.2%, however, many economists point out the large underemployment of over 25%. Mexico enjoys many telephone lines, wireless communications, and the Internet. Mexico borders Belize, Guatemala, and the United States. The major concerns for the people and the country are the illegal drug trade (marijuana and cocaine), as well as environmental damages.[25]

Mexico, therefore, is not a 'poor' developing country, yet it is very complex. The Chinese in Mexico add to this complexity and find themselves during contemporary times in an economy rising from free trade agreements and a great deal of imports and exports.

Chinese in Mexico

[24] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/mx, although, in some regions where there is a large indigenous population, the literacy and life expectancy rates are much different, and not as well documented.

[25] This information comes from the CIA's website: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/mx

There are a few articles and three dissertations that have been written about Chinese presence in and contribution to Mexico.[26] One article documents the presence of Chinese as early as 1635, when Spain colonized the Philippines and was in close contact to China (Hubs and Smith 1942). In Mexico, the Chinese became a sizeable community after the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese people from immigrating or naturalizing in the United States. At about the same time, Mexican policy allowed and encouraged the migration of Chinese because of the need for cheap labor for agricultural expansion (Lee 2003). In 1893, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce established between Mexico and China gave the immigrants coming from China the status of "the most favored nation" to Mexico (Hu-DeHart 1985). At this time, President Porfirio Díaz viewed cheap Chinese labor as useful for the country's economic development (Phillip 1979 66). In addition, the failure to recruit a white labor force and the abolition of slavery forced Mexico to look to the Far East (Kim 2000). As a result, Chinese began populating different regions of Mexico, including Sonora and Baja California. The goal in mind was to only allow them to immigrate for work in the production and development of certain goods, like cotton, never for them to become entrepreneurs. To remind the reader, this was the process of *differential inclusion,* that is, the group was integral for the economic gains and development of the nation, but not integral to their incorporation as citizens in Mexico or the U.S. In the process of welcoming immigration of Chinese into Mexico, Mexico agreed to allow immigrants to work as laborers or engage in commerce without restriction (Jacques 1981 13). In the view of the Mexican government during the Porfiriato, Chinese would not move beyond being the cheap labor force they needed. According to historian Leo M. Jacques,

[26] See the dissertations of Robert Chang Romero, Mee-Ae Kim, and Grace Pena-Delgado.

> Chinese entered Mexico because that country was in dire need of laborers for its economic development. In the favorable climate of the Porfiriato, they progressed from the status of immigrant-laborers to that of entrepreneurs who competed with domestic labor and businessmen. This transition was totally unexpected and undesirable; thus, they became an economic liability in the eyes of domestic labor and middle-class businessmen. With the outbreak of the Revolution, Mexicans were more prone to express bitterness towards the Chinese immigrants and their success (1981 15).

The use of Chinese as a cheap labor force was effective for some time, but Chinese entrepreneurs also began to emerge. Baja California Norte was a place where there was a strong demand for manual labor to develop the land agriculturally by the Compañia de Terrenos del Río Colorado, S.A. (Colorado River Land Company, S.A.). The expansion of the Colorado River into southern California and northern Mexico during the early 1900s provided the imports for the rise of Chinese immigrants. In addition, the political environment was very favorable for Chinese to move there.

For U.S.-Mexico border scholars, it is no surprise that the history of Chinese in Mexico's northern part is rooted in United States economic interests. The history of Chinese in Mexicali, specifically, was part of financial expansion at the turn of the 20th century by two American tycoons: Harrison Otis and his son-in-law Harry Chandler. History Evelyn Hu Dehart shows how Otis and Chandler (two *Los Angeles Times* publishers) had strong financial interest in developing agricultural land that they owned in southern California and in the Mexicali Valley as early as 1910 (Hu-DeHart 1985). Rather than invest their own money in growing and cultivating the land, they instead chose Chinese people (not Mexicans or Americans) to partner up with. Otis and Chandler leased out land that they owned to California Chinese businessmen and Mexican Chinese entrepreneurs. According to Hu-Dehart:

> To Otis-Chandler and other large American landowners in Mexicali, the Chinese partnership proved efficient, economical and, thus, most satisfactory and profitable. First, since before cotton most of the land had never been used, much work was involved to prepare it for cultivation the first time around. The Chinese were perfectly willing to include the arduous task of clearing the virgin land among their obligations. Second, in this sparsely populated outpost of Mexico, the Chinese easily solved the obvious labor problem by contracting and importing coolie labor directly from China. The Chinese lessee-partners supervised this docile, diligent labor force made up of their own countrymen, who never presented any labor trouble of any kind (1985 10)

Chinese entrepreneurs of the United States, in search of economic livelihood after being formally excluded from the United States, looked to the southern neighbor. Ironically, while many Chinese were being excluded from different parts of Mexico (like Sonora), Mexicali was recruiting them to develop the cotton industry. The less hostile Mexicali, with the lack of manpower to develop these agricultural lands, did not seem to care who did the work. According to Hu-Dehart, by 1920 Chinese laborers were growing 80 percent of the cotton crop in the Baja California Norte region, where Mexicali is located (1985). This was further encouraged in the American side in Calexico, California, where ginners were located to export the now finished cotton.

Political conditions also allowed for even more Chinese to be brought into the north. This was due in large part to the the governor of Baja California Norte, Colonel Esteban Cantu's, 1919 welcoming of the Chinese immigration because he personally collected between U.S.$35-$40 for each Chinese immigrant (Hu-DeHart 1985 18). While other states were passing anti-Chinese laws, Cantu allowed six companies to import 1,000 Chinese, at a total cost between $135 to $140 dollars per Chinese person (Cardiel Marin 1988 156). As a result, Chinese were allowed and even imported into Mexicali (Velasquez Morales 2000). In Mexicali, it is estimated that in 1919, 11.9% of the total population was Chinese (Velasquez Morales 1989). The primary occupation for many of

the Chinese there was in the cotton agricultural business, but they also had jobs as grocery workers, clothing sellers, as well as hotel and restaurant owners. The community grew so large that by the year 1919, the Chinese Association in Mexicali was formed, primarily as a response to prejudice and racist attacks towards them that was occurring in the north and in Mexicali. The Chinese Association served as a place where Chinese exchanged information about currency exchange rates, property, and the price of goods. Historical archives also reveal that Governor Cantu was bribed into allowing the selling and trading of opium in local Chinese gamble houses in Mexicali patronized by predominantly male Chinese clientele.[27] Governor Cantu's corruption allowed him to increase his personal wealth, and in that process, American entrepreneurs and Chinese entrepreneurs stood to profit as well. The ties among these individuals propelled the growth of Chinese in the Mexicali. By 1921, there were 23,537 Chinese people in the north (Hu-Dehart 1985 14). However, by 1926 the Mexican government prohibited the entry of Chinese.

Despite the growth of Chinese in the north, Chinese faced expulsion and hate crimes in other parts of Mexico. As Chinese became merchants, jealousy arose among Mexicans culminating in the anti-Chinese sentiments and violence during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and in the 1930's in Sonora, a state east of Mexicali in the mainland. [28] These anti-Chinese sentiments throughout Sonora as well as in places like Ensenada, pushed them to the Mexico-U.S. border region where it was less hostile (Cardiel Marin 1988). The Revolution in Mexico was aimed at having a more democratic rule since it was suffering from a dictatorship under Porfirio Díaz, and had severe

[27] These documents were accessed at the Centro de Investigaciones Culturales of the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, during my field research year 2005-2006.
[28]Documents accessed at the Centro de Investigaciones Culturales.

consequences on Chinese merchants that resulted in hate crimes from 1910-1917 (Monteon Gonzalez and Trueba Lara 1988). Other scholars point out that anti-Chinese sentiment was strongest during the time when President Plutarco Elias Calles was in office (1924-1928), a president from the state of Sonora with anti-Chinese credentials that he instated while in office in Sonora. During the Great Depression from 1929 many Mexicans living in the U.S. were deported back to Mexico (including U.S. born citizens of Mexican descent) as a way to reduce unemployment and because of the racist ideologies by the United States on what constituted an 'ideal' citizen. When Mexican laborers returned to their homes they found several Chinese entrepreneurs owning and operating businesses, particularly in the state of Sonora. Several Chinese lost their lives as a result of the jealousy and hatred felt by Mexicans (Sanderson, et. al. 1981). Many Chinese began leaving Sonora, Mexico returning to China. As the Chinese entrepreneurs withdrew their money, some banks nearly went bankrupt (Dennis 1979). Mexican historians document much of the history about Chinese in Mexico, specifically the presence of Chinese, massacres and hate crimes in the area of Sonora.

According to some authors, Chinese immigration began to decrease after and during 1930. However, other authors show that 1930 was the year with the highest number of Chinese in Mexico. For example one author states that by 1930 there were approximately 15,976 Chinese in Mexico (Anderson et. al. 1981); in Mexicali that year there was 2,919 men and 63 women, a number higher than in 1921, which was 2,793 men and 13 women (Velasquez Morales 1989). All these numbers are questionable, since other authors give different numbers as well (Curtis stating that between 5,000 to 11,000 Chinese lived in Mexicali in 1919). This discrepancy in population numbers raises

questions about how the state functions depending on the particular conditions of labor, corporations, and the informal sector. It is difficult to get a more accurate number because perhaps the manual labor was not counted, or perhaps they were far from Mexico's census counting. In addition, I speculate that this discrepancy was the result of "paper sons", meaning the use of documentation of deceased Chinese by recent immigrants to circumvent the laws that prohibited Chinese from entering the country, as noted by historian Madeline Y. Hsu in the U.S. (Hsu 2000). Another reason is that there may have been more growth in the informal, human trafficking network that went unnoticed.

Unfortunately, the people who initially faced the anti-Chinese acts were laborers. Unconfirmed stories I collected by Mexican people state that over 500 Chinese people were killed in the Valle de Mexicali during the 1930s. Many historians have written about the anti-Chinese campaigns in Mexico, fueled by negative propaganda targeting Chinese people as greedy, and from an inferior race, especially in states like Sonora. This propaganda included the formation of anti-Chinese committees, as well as pamphlets and flyers with warnings of interactions with Chinese people. Historians like Hu-DeHart and Dennis have argued that the strong nationalism exerted in Mexico allowed for these anti-Chinese campaigns to occur. I obtained documents sent by Chinese people to then President of Mexico, Álvaro Obregón, pleading that he stop the anti-Chinese campaigns or any legislature expelling them from the country. Anti-Chinese campaigns were happening, and Chinese did fear for their safety. In his overview of race and racism in Mexico, historian Alan Knight argues that although the indigenous population suffered (and suffers) much discrimination in Mexico, discrimination against the Chinese was the

most obvious and vicious, including a history of massacres (Knight 1990). This was seen most after the Great Depression in 1929, when Mexico also began excluding all unskilled foreign labor and manual laborers. By the late 1930s, President Lázaro Cárdenas appropriated all land owned by foreigners, thereby ending lessee-lesser relationship that the Chinese had with the Americans, and increasing the amount of Chinese in Mexico.

What would allow for Chinese people to move to Mexicali, a hot, dry desert land with only mountains surrounding it? Aside from the recruitment of Chinese manual laborers by Chinese entrepreneurs, Chinese manual laborers believed that moving to Mexico from China would allow them to enter the United States illegally. Historian Erika Lee documents this type of immigration. Lee writes on the different forms of resistance that Chinese people in the United States coped with as formally and legally excluded inhabitants. She shows how immigration from China to Mexico was a temporary process oriented toward entering into the United States. Lee has photographs of Chinese "passing" as Mexicans, and entering the United States (Lee 2003). In fact, the U.S. Border Patrol was created not to exclude Mexicans from entering the United States, but Chinese people. So intense was the anti-Chinese sentiments in the United States, that Mexico was a viable option for many Chinese to pursue initially, but later, as we saw, Mexico replicated the same actions that the U.S. performed on them.

Two types of Chinese people were introduced to this region and took on different economic roles: the laborers and the entrepreneurs, the same groups of Chinese people that exist in Mexicali today. This brief history shows that at the turn of the century, Chinese laborers became *paisanos* in the most literal sense: the peasants were in the countryside developing agricultural goods in Mexico. The Chinese entrepreneurs who

recruited the manual labor also became *paisanos,* conceptually speaking, they became like fellow countrymen of Mexico (without the citizenship) in doing transactions with U.S. businessmen and Mexican people. As discussed earlier, *paisano* is the word I have found that Chinese use to build community among each other, but since the word is a Spanish word, I also use it to mean the ways that the Chinese people become Mexican without fully being incorporated by the state. The Chinese entrepreneurs were granted by government legislation the opportunity to "be like citizens" of Mexico (through the Treaty of Amity signed by Porfirio Díaz), and later by the creation of a favorable political environment through the bribing of local state officials, most notably Governor Cantu. They were able to become like fellow countrymen of *Mexico* (without the citizenship) to navigate their new surroundings and do business. Together, these two different groups, the Chinese laborers and Chinese entrepreneurs, helped each other through the networks they created, specifically the creation of the Chinese Association in 1919 that still stands to this day in Mexicali. Yet, while the Chinese manual workers were hated and even killed, the Chinese entrepreneurs often fled with the money they had made back to China. Slowly, the Chinese population that remained began to integrate into the hostile environment with the Chinese Association as their base and began to marry local Mexican women and form families. Most historians end the discussion of the sizeable Chinese presence after 1940. I have found only one Mexican historian, Maricela Gonzalez-Felix, who fills in the gap from 1940-1990 through *testimonios* [oral written autobiographies] of two Chinese descendants.[29] These *testimonios* reveal the semi-normal

[29] The two biographical/testimonio books that Gonzalez-Felix published are: *Viaje al Corazon de la Peninsula: Testimonio de Manuel Lee Mancilla* (2000) and *Testiomonio de Saul Chong Martinez* (2006)

Mexican lives that Chinese lived, crossed with racism from both Mexico and the United States.

In addition to entrepreneurs and laborers, a third sizeable group was also formed, which I call *Chinescos*—long standing Mexican-Chinese people who were born, raised, or have lived there a long time who understand the local cultural codes of the Mexicali community and Chinese community who have been able to negotiate their multiple identities to live a moral life at the U.S.-Mexico border. By moral life, I am referring to the way people will defend what is important to them, the values they carry, what makes their life worth living, or what is at stake for them (Kleinman 2006). *Chinescos* as a group was not a creation of U.S. or Mexican interests, but by Chinese who moved to Mexicali and decided that Mexico was going to be their home, or were forced to have it be their home because they could not return to China. Therefore, some *Chinescos*' history can be traced back since the early migration of Chinese in the 1880's. This dissertation looks at contemporary migration of Chinese into Mexico, how it is facilitated by the *Chinescos,* and how, through this process, recent Chinese immigrants become *Chinescos.* The stories of both recent Chinese immigrants once again entering Mexico usually begins by the recruitment of family members and Chinese-Mexican entrepreneurs. Before delving into that component, it is important to untangle the pull factors that gave rise to the current formation of Chinese immigrants and other groups into the northern part of Mexico.

Border growth and Border 'security': the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Operation Gatekeeper and September 11, 2001

After owned land in Mexico was repatriated, and Americans lost land in the 1930s, the numbers of Chinese immigrants to Mexico was reduced. In Mexicali, 610 men and 8 women were registered in 1940 (Velasquez Morales 1989). Neither Mexican nor American policies encouraged their migration after 1940. To further exclude Chinese racist propaganda was circulated on both sides of the border. Despite Mexican social (the racism and massacres on the ground) and political (the laws being passed banning them) structures working to keep Chinese people out, many of them remained in Mexicali. Some of them owned land, some of them were born in Mexico, and some of them were sons and daughters of Mexican and Chinese relationships. Their social and cultural presences were also still alive, most notably the continued existence of the Chinese Association. This also occurred, through oral memories being passed down, as well as traditions. As stated earlier, the evidence that indicates their survival and continuity are the oral histories collected by historian Maricela Gonzalez Felix, *Viaje al Corazon de la Peninsula: Testimonio de Manuel Lee Mancilla* (2000) and *Testiomonio de Saul Chong Martinez* (2006), as well as Eduardo Auyon Gerardo's *El Dragon en el Desierto: Los Pioneros Chinos en Mexicali* (1991). While the formal option was never really open for the Chinese to integrate, they did.

While interviewing Betty, granddaughter of a Chinese man, and I asked her when her grandfather came to Mexico and how they were able to stay in Mexico after the exclusion era. She tells me, "He came in the 1930's, as a teenager. But he first came to Sinaloa, not Mexicali. Then he met my Mexican grandmother and they married. The

racism against the Chinese was very bad, so he took all five of their kids to China. They came back in the 1950's to Sinaloa. The racism was still pretty bad, so my grandfather heard of Mexicali, where it apparently was much better. In the 1950's, he set up some *abarrotes* [convenience stores] but also worked with his Chinese family distributing food through a warehouse he was a partner in. My father was the manager of the warehouse, so we lived comfortably." Here, Betty lets me know the story she heard of how her father still maintained ties to Mexico, despite moving back to China. When I asked Betty how her father was able to return to Mexico, she said she did not know, "But I can call and ask my mom," she tells me. She reaches her phone and dials. I can hear her say, "How did he granddad come back from China with dad? It's for a project that a student is doing. Well, I remember it was a secret, but he's dead now, can't you tell me the secret? Mom, you can be weird sometimes. I'll let you go because he is here in front of me." Betty hangs up the phone and apologizes to me, "I'm sorry, but my mother wouldn't give me the information as to how my grandfather and father returned." I told her it was okay. I suspected that her father came back as what Chinese historians have called *paper sons,* or individuals who borrow the identities of deceased or living individuals to immigrate legally into a country (Lee 2003). The Chinese used creative ways to continue their business and social ties in Mexico, with some of them wishing to continue their immigration into the United States. As historian Erika Lee has found, American authorities knew that, and used the Border Patrol to primarily keep Chinese out, while Chinese people used creative ways to 'pass' as Mexicans (Lee 2003).

The increase in Chinese presence at the U.S.-Mexico border can also be attributed to the U.S.'s goal of expanding and increasing the economic interests into Mexico

through the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Put into effect January 1, 2004, NAFTA was aimed at eliminating tariffs in order to increase and facilitate trade between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The United States Department of Commerce proudly boasts:

> Since the implementation of NAFTA, Mexican imports from the U.S. have increased exponentially, from US$41.6 billion in 1993 to over US$ 120 billion in 2005. Through November 2006, U.S. exports to Mexico were US$124.1 billion, up over 12.7 percent over the same period in 2005. 2006 is expected to set new records for U.S.-Mexican trade. Although China just surpassed Mexico as the second largest trading partner of the U.S., U.S.-Mexico bilateral trade has more than tripled since the implementation of NAFTA: from US$81.5 billion in 1993 to US$290.5 billion in 2005 (which represents an increase of 256%). 69% of Mexico's bilateral trade is with the United States.[30]

In the Imperial County-Mexicali border region, employment of *maquiladora* (foreign owned factories) workers increased from 26,140 in 1995 to 54,248 in 2006, with Black & Decker (an American company) and Sony of Mexico (a Japanese company) the largest employers of the area.[31] Financially, NAFTA shows strong promise, with reports published by the World Bank showing global exports and foreign direct investment increasing for Mexico.[32] Despite these 'positive' financial accomplishments, several anthropologist and sociologist have noted the negative impacts of NAFTA, including missing women, human rights violation, loss of wages, and environmental damages. While in the field, I heard and saw abuses, exploitation, and environmental damages done by *maquiladoras.* My concern here, however, is to show how this abundance of money also gave rise to the service, leisure and hospitality sector in Mexicali, specifically the

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[30] see http://www.export.gov/articles/Mexico_MoM.asp, page accessed June 2007.
[31] Please see the California Center for Border and Regional Studies Bulletin , Vol. 8, No. 5 and 6, May/June 2007 at http://www.ccbres.sdsu.edu page accessed July 2007.
[32] See the World Bank report: http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/lac/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/3e557037145eeae385256dfe007d62c7/$FILE/Lessons%20from%20NAFTA_exec_summary.pdf accessed June 2007.

restaurant industry. These sectors did exist before NAFTA, in large part to attract American consumers to spend their money there. However, Mexicali neighbors the poor agricultural county of Imperial Valley, and the amount of money flowing in to Mexicali for nights of debauchery (unlike the city of Tijuana, Mexico, bordering San Diego, California) is very low. What NAFTA specifically increased was fast food, as maquiladoras and factories were recruiting many women. Some Chinese restaurants existed before NAFTA, and those were the first businesses to be able to expand and profit the most post-NAFTA.

In pursuit of economic interests by the United States, Mexico, and Canada, the *Chinescos* of Mexicali were also in a position to financially profit. Chinese entrepreneurs, specifically those with ties to China and with local knowledge of Mexico, began recruiting Chinese labor again into Mexico. I was told several times how some "older" Chinese (meaning 10 or more years living in Mexicali) owed money to their bosses at Chinese restaurants for financing their trip to Mexico. This was paid to the bosses/owners of the Chinese restaurants through labor. Like in the past, there existed American interest (most notably through the amount of American companies setting up *maquiladoras*), Chinese entrepreneur interest, and Mexican interest in exploiting recent Chinese immigrant labor. This time, it was another type of manual labor that differed from the agricultural labor of the past: service sector Chinese restaurant labor. This labor being recruited from abroad reflected the recruitment of labor that was occurring in Mexicali after NAFTA. There are many differences in the labor recruited (*maquiladoras* were in search of young women, while Chinese restaurants looked for skilled men who could

cook), but the expansion of Chinese restaurants was the same expansion that Mexicali was experiencing.

As Mexicali grows and changes social norms, people are beginning to adapt to these changes. Where in the past women lived at home, they are now entering the workforce, disposable income is becoming available, and the need for luxury goods (including eating out) has become part of Mexicali culture. As stated in the introduction, Mexicali's productivity is sustaining business growth in luxury consumption on *both sides* of the U.S.-Mexico border, providing jobs in the industrial sector in Mexicali and retail sector in Imperial County. With the explosion of *maquiladoras*, women and men are seeking the consumption of alternative foods unknown to them before migration. There is no doubt in my mind that Chinese food is consumed in large quantities in Mexicali. A study published in 1990 found that Chinese people owned sixty restaurants, retail establishments (especially grocery stores), currency exchanges, real estate, and commercial land development (Gonzalez-Felix 1990, Curtis 1995). In 2006, the Chinese Association President of Mexicali told me that there are well over 300 Chinese restaurants, and that Chinese people continue to own lots of property. I saw and entered several of these Chinese restaurants. Food is in great demand because of the huge amount of people moving into Mexicali, not just Chinese food, but also hot dog and hamburger stands, corn carts, churro carts, as well as the famous taco carts. I will discuss the problems of food and consumption in a later chapter. The thing to keep in mind is that the demand for food is so great because of the growing population of Mexicali. Further, people migrating to the border that had wishes to illegally immigrate into the United States are staying in Mexicali longer because of the U.S. anti-immigration movements

started in 1990s, and the further militarization of the border following the terrorists attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York City on September 11, 2001. These people also consume the food in the border.

U.S. border enforcement is not a new phenomenon, but it has recently reached new heights of surveillance. Demographer Joseph Nevins outlines the history of the U.S.-Mexico boundary, including the policies and procedures for this enforcement. Nevins concludes that:

> Modern territorial states are not disappearing; they are merely changing. We can make the same observation about national boundaries. What this book demonstrates is that national boundaries are more than simply changing; they are also growing in strength, physically and ideologically—at least with respect to unauthorized immigrants. In this regard, the legality of boundary—in terms of the degree to which law based practices are and assumptions penetrate it—has also grown (2002).

What Nevins shows is that border patrolling is increasing in ways that criminalize Mexican individuals (specifically undocumented immigrants), thereby increasing more security along the border. The monitoring of borders gives rise to a population increase from people from not only Mexico but also other parts of the world. What I find interesting, and becomes important, is exactly how these people navigate their identity living in a moment of surveillance and persecution. Through the lens of the ethnic Chinese, I show how people navigate the city, how they get treated, and thus learn to live a moral life. What follows is my research on the different groups of Chinese people I encountered while doing research.

Becoming *Chinescos*

Having presented some characteristics of Mexico, and a history of the treatment of Chinese people in the context of population growth in the U.S.-Mexico borders, we

now turn to the contemporary state of Chinese immigrants, Chinese-Mexicans and *Chinescos*[33] of Mexicali. By Chinese immigrants, I am referring to the group of Chinese people who have fewer than two years living in Mexicali. I chose fewer than two years because by their third year in Mexicali most Chinese have processed their immigration papers to become permanent residents or naturalized Mexican citizens. Chinese-Mexicans are people who are of mixed Chinese-Mexican ancestry, or who were born in Mexico. This group tends to become fully assimilated, and their Cantonese language skills and knowledge of China becomes is lost. In this case, my friend Lolita (at the beginning of the chapter) would be a Chinese-Mexican. Lolita is not the only Chinese-Mexican, my friend Ramon can also be part of this group. His Chinese father and Chinese mother discouraged him from learning Cantonese and to assimilate into Mexican society. Ramon tells me, "My parents refused to teach me Cantonese, even when they spoke it around the house! They said that if I wanted to speak Chinese, to learn Mandarin. Cantonese was useless, according to them." When I probed Ramon more about his parent's actions, he said that according to parents, Cantonese was no longer used in China. China's official language is Mandarin, but even though his parents knew that the official language of China was Mandarin, they did not do anything to encourage his learning of the language. Instead, they wanted him to learn how to speak English. Ramon's family had no intention of returning to China, but they hoped that their son would be able to get a much better paying job if he knew English.

The group that I have identified as the *Chinescos* include the Chinese people living in Mexico who identify as both Mexican and Chinese. They speak Spanish and

[33] *Chinescos* is a word I derived from *La Chinesca*, the part of town where Chinese entrepreneurs would sell many goods from the early 1920's. *La Chinesca* still exists today, and local, long-term Mexicali people know where it is.

Cantonese either fluently or semi-fluently, and know how to communicate effectively with both ethnicities of the community. It is usually the goal of the Chinese immigrants to become *Chinescos*. It is not the goal of Chinese-Mexicans to become *Chinescos,* because they mostly do not find value in being "Chinese." Although I only identify three different sub-groups in the Chinese population, this by no means is the absolute and the only groups that exist among Chinese people in Mexicali. In fact, some would argue that despite a small community, there is a wide array of them, including over 20 Chinese organizations (Auyon 1991). However, in reducing the number to these three groups, I am attempting to provide a general picture and understanding of how the community identifies itself. The goal of this section is to explain how these categories operate in the border area. I will provide narratives of Chinese people that include 1) their arrival to Mexicali and 2) the children's socialization. These stories will illustrate the life of these people, but also the city of Mexicali and Calexico, the borderlands where I conducted research.

The new recent immigrants: The story of Francis, Pancho, and Tony

I met Francis and Pancho while working at the Chinese restaurant. A short, thin, slender woman in her early 30's, Francis would ignore me, rarely give me orders on what vegetables to chop, or even make eye contact with me. She was not shy, as I observed her attempting to talk to the waitresses—teenage Mexican girls who would 'teach' her some words in Spanish. On the other end, Pancho, one of the cooks in the restaurant, would sometimes be impatient with me, tell me I had chopped the food wrong, or would take the long spatulas away from me when I would accidentally burn the fried rice on the wok. He tried to be patient, but he could not. Running from one place to another, he was always

very busy making sure that things in the restaurant were well organized and would also be very fast in cooking up the food when it was ordered. This was different than Lazaro, Juan, or even Chang. Slowly, they would take their time, read the order very patiently, and pick up a cookie to eat on their way to the kitchen, talk with their fellow co-workers, and then finally assemble the ingredients to cook the food ordered. Pancho and Francis's work ethic initially impressed me, but I did not know why.

After two weeks working there, I told Juan I would teach him Spanish. Both Francis and Pancho got to the table where I was trying to teach Juan the vowels and the sounds of vowels. They tried to imitate the "ahhh" "eeehhh" "eee" "ohhh" "uuuu" in Spanish that I would make. They practiced with me, but when the customers came, Pancho quickly left to prepare the food, while Juan slowly walked behind him. Still attentive to the lessons, Francis stayed behind and continued practicing with me. I pointed at my book in Spanish and my Cantonese book and tried to explain to Francis that I wanted to do a language exchange. She laughed, and nodded her head and agreed. It was close to the end of the workday, so we needed to clean up the restaurant. I invited Francis, Luk Sum (another assistant cook), Pancho, and Juan to come over to my place to continue practicing Spanish there. They agreed and followed me to my apartment where we continued practicing Cantonese and Spanish.

I still remember that evening because that was the night when the Chinese people from the restaurant first put their trust in me. I specifically worked to know the Chinese people, and I began to closely know the recent immigrants Pancho and Francis, who had only one year living in Mexico. Soon after I learned that Pancho and Francis was a married couple. The next time we hung out was when I was invited to the home of

Pancho and Francis, because Francis was afraid that Tony, their son, was not doing well and needed tutoring for school. Since they were barely starting out, they were car-less, and so I agreed to personally drive them to their home after work, at around 10 p.m. at night. They told me they lived in the "Centro" of the city. I knew where that was, but was a bit surprised. The "Centro" is the 'red zone' part of the town...the place where prostitutes hang out, where there are many bars rumored to be owned by drug lords, where topless dancing at bars is located, and where pharmacies surround the area. In short, it was not the best part of town.

I drove to a dark four level deteriorated apartment complex adjacent to the "Centro" where Francis and Pancho lived. This was a new place that I had not seen before in Mexicali. My car hit a few potholes along the way, before finally arriving to the spot where I was told to park. Mexican men wearing muscle shirts and baggy pants gathered together talking outside the apartment complex. Upon arriving, I was reminded of the urban ghettos described by some anthropologists who study Harlem or the *favelas* in Brazil.[34] Yet, I was not scared. I placed full trust in my Chinese friends. Pancho greeted the men hanging outside with a simple wave, and then guided his wife and me to the apartment. As we were walking to the second floor of this four level apartment complex, Francis stops because she is greeted by one of her Chinese friends and began to talk with her. After a couple of sentences, she says good-bye to her friend, and we continue to go inside their apartment. We entered their two-bedroom apartment, where I met their son, Tony.

Tony was only 12 years old when I met him, and spoke Spanish pretty well. For being in Mexicali only one year, Tony had a good Spanish vocabulary, but did have a

[34] See Philip Bourgois' Selling Crack in the Barrio, or Teresa Caldeira, City of Walls.

slight accent when he spoke. Tony was having trouble with reading and comprehension. This helped me realize that reading and comprehension were vital for Francis and Pancho to navigate the city of Mexicali. Tony, with the help of his mother and father, told me the story of arriving to Mexicali. While getting to know Tony, I noticed that when we arrived, Francis changed her clothes and went immediately into the kitchen. Pancho went to his room and then to shower up, while Tony ran to his room and brought his Gameboy Advance, a pocket size Japanese video game very popular among kids Tony's age, and showed it to me. "Do you own one of these?" he asked me. "I don't, but my brother does," I answered. "How many games does he have," he asked. "I think he has only one or two," I answered. "Really? I thought my mom and dad said you were American?" he asked surprisingly. "I am, why?" I asked. "Because Americans are suppose to have a lot of things. I am Chinese and I have 20 games!" he told me. I smile and laugh. At the time of doing fieldwork, the price range of Gameboys was about U.S.$100, with games costing a retail value of US$35-$45. In China, the games used for the Gameboy were very inexpensive ranging from US$3-US$5 each, depending on popularity of the game. I explained to Tony that my brother was 19 years old and not really as interested as him in video games. "How did you get so many games anyways? Did your parents get them for you?" I asked. "My parents did get me lots of them, but before coming to Mexico, a lot of my friends gave me some as good-bye gifts," he told me. Francis comes in and begins yelling, "¡Muy caro, muy caro! [expensive, expensive!]" She told Tony to put his Gameboy away and to bring out his Spanish book. Tony went to his room and puts his Gameboy away. Francis pulled out a foldable square table and puts it in the middle of the living room. She begins to set up the table to have dinner, at about 10:45 p.m.

Left alone for a few minutes I took the opportunity to write my observations of their place in my notebook; by this time, Pancho and Francis are used to me having my notebook around and don't even bother to ask me what I was doing or what I write in it (I had told them about my research through my fluent Cantonese-speaking friend). Francis begins to put lots and lots of food on the table. Rice, steamed vegetables, fried fish, and egg rolls. She puts four bowls on the table and calls Pancho to come eat. He comes, and he invites me to sit with them. I sit, but I'm not particularly hungry. "Eat, you are too skinny!" Francis tells me. I shake my head and tell them that I'm okay. Francis goes to the refrigerator and pulls out some wieners and points them at me, thinking I did not like their Chinese food, and offering me something more 'western.' I tell her no, that it's okay, that I'm full. They don't believe me, in large part because I work with them and had seen how much I had eaten at the restaurant. "It's good food!" Pancho tells me. I life my spoon and serve myself some rice, and little bit of the fish, but then Francis pulls my bowl and adds more food to it. I eat the food that is served to me, and refuse to eat anymore. After dinner, I sit next to Tony in the small sofa they had at the corner of their living room and begin reading to him, and he began reading back to me. I did this for many months to come. Sometimes I would go three times a week, other times four, other times once or twice. This tutoring helped me identify some of my key informants. These individuals helped me understand the experiences of Mexicali's recent Chinese immigrants. Having befriended them, they would also introduce me to other Chinese people who would share information about their lives.

One evening, Pancho asked to see my Cantonese-English mini dictionary and looked and looked for the word to describe his profession in China before coming to

Mexico. "Factory manager?" I asked, based on my observations of him being one of the most responsible cooks at the restaurant. He shook his head. Francis ran to her room and pulled out old pictures she had taken in China. In looking at her pictures, Francis looked very healthy, and Pancho a lot chubbier and heavier. Tony looked the same, if not smaller. Tony then began to laugh at his father's figure, "Dad was big and fat, not all skinny like he is now!" The pictures revealed so much about their social and economic standing in China. "How much did you pay to come to Mexico? [Geido che-nah, neih Machsaigo?]" I asked Francis in Cantonese, but later said it in Spanish for Tony to translate. She pulled out a piece of paper and writes, 10,000. "For all of you? [Nei daih?]" Francis raised her eyebrows, and shook her head and points at $10,000 for each individual. "Pesos?" I asked. "No, U.S. dollars," she responded. Tony then runs to the room and pulls out the passport/visas they have, with the People's Republic of China logo in the front. "They're FM1," he told me. I write that in my notebook, not knowing what he means. "Do you have one?" he asked me. I tell him I do, but that it is at home, and that its issued by the U.S.A. "Can I see it next time you come?" he asked me. I nod my head and told him I would. Tony then asked me, "If you are from USA, what Visa do you need to be in Mexico?" I explained to him that my mother is Mexican, so I had recently become a Mexican citizen. He had a puzzled look. Then I tell him some of my family lives in Mexicali, and then he begins to understand.

Pancho finally finds the word in my mini Spanish-Cantonese dictionary and phrases. He points at the word in Chinese characters, and I read, "*entrepreneur*" next to it. I don't understand. "You worked for an *entrepreneur*?" I asked. Francis tells me, "No, he was like Don Lolo." "Oh! Pancho, you were an owner of a restaurant!" Pancho shook

his head again. Francis then told me, "No, like ABSA." ABSA, the "Chinese" supermarket of Mexicali, sold fruits, vegetables, and other home items. "Oh... so you had a small *abarrotes,*" I asked him. He knew the word *abarrotes* [convenience store], probably because of the abundance of them throughout the city of Mexicali, and nodded his head. Francis then proudly told me, "We owned three of them, lived in a nice house, and were very comfortable. We sold them all to come to Mexico." With a frustrated look in her eyes, and almost in tears, Francis told me how disappointed she was to be in Mexicali, "Yes, you make some money, but you live a bad life. Everything here is expensive. It would take my husband and me years to save enough to pay for what we invested to come here," she told me. Francis and her husband paid a total of U.S.$30,000 to go immigrate with their son to Mexicali. They were in Mexicali legally and slowly going to be there illegally—I later found out that an FM1 visa was a tourist visa that was would expire by the end of the year. This explained why Pancho and Francis worked long hours at the restaurant—from its opening at 10:30 am to its closing at 10:00 p.m. They had only one day off during the week.

When Pancho, Francis, and Tony first arrived they used the Chinese Association to some key restaurant Spanish words. So, despite many Chinese-Mexicans telling me to go to the Chinese Association to get my information, I soon learned that the main purpose of the Chinese Association was to teach recent immigrants how to speak basic Spanish, and for Chinese kids Mandarin and Chinese history. This was confirmed by Francis when one time we drove past the Chinese Association and I asked her about it, to which she told me, "What about the Chinese school?" Recent Chinese immigrants viewed the Chinese Association as a school. To find work, the Chinese immigrants did not rely on

the Chinese Association. Pancho had some cousins already living in Mexicali, so he was able to get placed quickly at the restaurant where I worked. For the type of work they did, Pancho got paid MEX$7000 (approximately US$700 in 2006) a month and Francis got paid MEX$4000 (about US$400 plus tips) for being a waitress. They worked and worked to insure that they saved enough money to recuperate what they invested. "I want to go back to China 2008, in time for the Olympics, and to stay there," Francis told me one day.

With the sensitive information given to me by Francis and Pancho, I was able to quickly cross reference the information with other recent Chinese immigrants. This is a valuable part of ethnography. Because many of the Chinese immigrants at the restaurant were used to seeing me around so much, they began to slowly reveal sensitive information like how much they paid to go to Mexico. It was like magic, once I had obtained one piece of 'secret' information from one individual, others felt comfortable enough to talk about their experiences. The prices to immigrate quasi-legal and illegally to Mexico ranged were from US$10,000 to US$15,000. If they wished to emigrate illegally from Mexico to the U.S. it was an additional US$5000. When I told them that US$5000 was too much, that the price usually ran from US$1500 to US$2500, they told me, "That's because you are Mexican and can speak Spanish well to make those contacts, we cannot." Despite many of the Chinese wishing to go to the United States, I found little evidence of any continuous stage migration into the U.S. I saw, however, a couple of news reports on Mexicali's local television station of a Chinese person found hidden inside a car's trunk while crossing to the U.S.

The next question I asked my friends was how they got so much money to come to Mexico. I asked them if the money they owed to the owners of the restaurant depended on their culinary skills? For some Chinese, the answer was yes. "But that was in the old times, when the owners couldn't convince people to come to Mexicali, so they would petition some of them, and they would work with the owners until their debt was paid off," Tito, my 32 year old co-worker at the restaurant, told me. "Now, people in China will pool money together to send their son or daughter to Mexicali," Tito explains. That was the case with Yang, a Chinese man in his early 20s. "I owe lots of money to my mother and father, and some of my uncles back in China, but not the owner," he tells me. Yang, however, did need the owner to petition his labor to immigrate into Mexico legally. Yang immigrated like Francis and Pancho on a FM-1 tourist visa that soon expired. For Yang to stay in Mexicali legally, he would need to be there under the criteria of a 'specialized worker not found in Mexico.' Many Chinese immigrants would legalize their status that way, but needed a Mexican (born or naturalized) sponsor to do this for them. In Yang's case, even though he did not owe money to the owner, he still had the obstacle of finding a way to stay in Mexicali legally. Don Lolo, the owner of the restaurant where we worked, would only do this to his workers if they worked for him for at least two years.

Immigration into Mexico by Chinese immigrants is legally permitted but requires established Mexican networks to be in place in order to successfully navigate the governmental bureaucratic system. The *bureaucracy*, theorized by Max Weber, the rational and efficient form of how an organization (in this case government) organizes for legal domination, is ever present in Mexico. The *Chinescos* know the bureaucracy

involved and often exploit recent Chinese immigrants in Mexico for information with how to navigate the system. This is usually done either through labor (as explained above), or by charging a price. Chinese immigrants have gone through the Mexican government system to immigrate legally and they begin to charge a price for the information. For example, Lazaro, my Chinese friend, told me that people charge for information all the time, "If you want to know how to get something from the U.S. at a cheaper rate, you know its going to cost you. Even if it is not money, it will cost you a favor. Nothing is free here!" Here, Lazaro has learned that there are several goods that are much cheaper to get in the U.S., and that there people in the Chinese community who know how to get them for you. For immigration legalization it is not only a good but also a legal document where the price is even greater.

This is akin to the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, or the process by which Chinese individuals use their connections and friendships to get something done.[35] In this border city, this concept is applicable not only to Chinese, but to many people. The Chinese example of navigating through the Mexican system of immigration is but one example of the *guanxi* that goes on at the border; from people needing cheaper goods from the U.S. (usually electronics) to get imported, to things like finding a service in Mexico (such as auto body work or mechanical work). It is only those that have participated and used the Mexican and U.S. bureaucratic system that are able to move through it. But knowing people is not the only way of getting things done, it's the practice of *paying* for these services that gets things done, even if there is no past relationship established with a person doing the transaction.

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[35] For a discussion on guanxi, see *The Declining Significance of Guanxi in China's Economic Transition* in China Quarterly, No. 154. (Jun., 1998) pp.254-282

The process of paying your way to get things done is very common in Mexico, including informal corruption, and Chinese are not immune to this. Juan, who always gave a ride to four other Chinese workers, was one of day from work. At first shy to ask me a favor, Francis asked me if I can give them a ride, and I agreed. I was driving down a street with no stops a bit fast when Francis told me, "You should slow down." "Why? I'm not going that fast," I responded. Luk Sum then told me, "The police one time stopped Juan for going fast. It cost us $200 pesos!" I immediately began to wonder how the situation unfolded, considering that Juan speaks limited Spanish. I asked Juan the next day to describe the incident to me, "Well, I was driving my car down *Colon Street* when out of nowhere the police lights come on. The officer stopped me and said he needed my license and registration. I have my license, but my car is registered under my parents. I gave him the information, and then he comes back. He tells me that he is going to charge me $400 pesos for the violation. I tell him I was not going to pay him that. Then, everyone in the car pulls out money. We collected $200 pesos and offer him that. He gave me my stuff and then lets me go." I told him that amount was excessive and unfair, considering that my cousins who live in Mexicali advised me to never give more than $100 pesos for a speeding violation. "Yes, but you are Mexican, we are not. You can do that, we can not," he reminded me.

Both of these incidents raise several issues on how identity is played out among recent Chinese people living in Mexicali. Recent Chinese immigrants have learned about the 'informal' networks of getting into the Mexico both legally and illegally. In addition, they know that asking for this information comes at a price. For example, the recent Chinese immigrants learned that the speeding ticket violation could be paid off to officers

in Mexico for as much as $200 *pesos* to police officers. They have learned, like other immigrants and emigrants of the U.S.-Mexico border that corruption is alive and well. They have learned that just about everything has a price in Mexicali.

Learning to make Mexicali your home: Lee's story

Lee was the head cook/manager when I first started working at the restaurant. Everyone really liked him. After living in Mexicali for about eleven years, Lee spoke a good deal of Spanish, but not yet fluently. He too was from southern China's Guangzhou region and had wished of going into the U.S. "I just thought that was what I really wanted. I had some family members in Mexicali, distant, but some. They are the ones that helped me with finding a job. It was not that much to come into Mexico back then, about US$5000 with papers and flight. I figured I could work to get that money and then move again to the U.S.," he tells me. Lee came to Mexicali with his one year old daughter and his wife in 1994, at the height of Operation Gatekeeper. Word came around that the U.S. was going to put more patrol cars in the border. So, after a family friend told him to register his daughter as a newborn so she would get her Mexican citizenship, he jumped on the opportunity. Many Chinese know that there are several stereotypes about their community. One of the stereotypes is that Chinese are 'backward' and do things 'very traditionally.' Playing on the myths that Chinese people do things the "traditional way" and that Chinese women have their kids "at home" instead of a hospital, Lee was able to get a registered Chinese-Mexican doctor to "verify" that his daughter was born in Mexico. In less than two years, his son was born in Mexicali.

Here, I will show how people slowly start making their life in Mexicali, and begin to settle, with the rearing of their kids. One day I spoke to Lee about his past and future in

Mexicali. "Life just begins to happen," Lee told me. Before Lee knew it, his young daughter was entering kindergarten. I met his daughter, now nine years old, who was a fully assimilated Chinese girl, schooled in Mexico, and who spoke a bit of Cantonese, at the restaurant one day. "My name is Beatrice, what's your name?" she asked me. "Ernesto, I'm one of the assistant cooks that works for you dad," I tell her. "Really? My dad is your boss?" she asks me. "Yes, he is a very nice respected man," I tell her. She smiles. "And where are you from?" she asked with an interested voice. "I'm from El Centro," I answer. "El Centro? That part of town is not nice. We live in the Eastern part of the city, it's a lot nicer," she tells me. "How do you know *el centro* is not nice?" I ask her, letting her believe that I meant the old city center part of Mexicali, not the city of El Centro, California. "Because that's where I go to school to learn about being Chinese. I'm Chinese, not Mexican only," she tells me with a sense of pride in her voice. I tell her in Cantonese, "*Lei ho ma? Nei giu mah ye mat man?*[Hello, how are you? What is your name?]" She has a surprise look on her face, "*You* speak Chinese?" I reply, "*mah mah deih.*" She smiles again. "Well, that's good," she replied in Spanish and refuses to answer in Cantonese. Then, she asks me, "Do you have a girlfriend?" and smiles. I was caught off guard with the question and simply smile and tell her, "No, but maybe you can be one day when you are much older you can be one of them." She giggles. "No, I cannot, because I am still very young and you will be very old," she replies. I laugh. I go to Lee and tell him, "Lee, your daughter is going to be my wife when she grows up!" I start laughing. Lee has a surprised look on his face. Then I tell him, "I'm just kidding…I'm Mexican, I know." He then looks at me and says, "So? She can marry a Mexican. Why not? You are a good guy, educated. If she finds one like that, why not?" I was caught by

surprise with his response. "You don't mind if your daughter marries a Mexican?" I asked. "No, I do not. I want her to be happy and to marry someone who can take care of her and treat her well. Just because someone is Chinese does not mean that they will be good to her," he tells me. His daughter listening on simply stated, "There are not that many Chinese men here in Mexicali, what am I suppose to do, be single all my life?" I smiled at Beatrice's observation.

The anecdote of Lee and my exchange with his daughter, Beatrice, shows that Chinese men are coming to realize that their life is now in Mexicali. A popular conception among people in Mexicali is that the Chinese community is very exclusionary, a group that only marries among themselves and does not participate in Mexican culture, or that they do not interact with Mexican people. My exchange with Beatrice shows quite the opposite: she is Mexican in every sense. And, further, her father encourages this assimilation. Beatrice has been schooled and raised in Mexico, and her father expects her to marry a good man "that will treat her well," that does not necessarily mean a Chinese man. There are Chinese men in Mexicali, more than women, and there are opportunities for Beatrice to marry a Chinese man with her participation in the Saturday Chinese schooling, but her father is realizing that "Chinese" is not a criteria for a happy marriage. In fact, intermarriage is happening in Mexicali. I found this to be true with Chinese men with Mexican women more often than Chinese women. This is not because of "Chinese traditional values" on Chinese women, but because of the absence of women in Mexicali. The number of Chinese women is slowly rising; one of the reasons being that Chinese women are being born there.

About one month and a half that I had been working at the Chinese restaurant, Lee puts in his resignation letter to the boss. Lee told me that he was leaving to begin his own restaurant. His wife and him had been saving all their earnings to open their own Chinese restaurant in the outer parts of the city, where it was now more developed. "Is it a big one?" I ask. "No, smaller than this one. Only for about 30 people," he tells me. "Is there that many people in that part of town that will buy Chinese food?" I ask him. "Yes, there are two high schools, and three elementary schools. I should be okay," he tells me. I then asked him about the U.S., "What happened to moving to the U.S.?" He responded, "The U.S. was back when I was a lot younger, still in my late 20's. Now I'm much older, and I have a family. I cannot go to the U.S.; it will be very difficult on my family starting from nothing. Beatrice and little Lee are both in school and enjoying it. They are Mexican and I'm giving them a better life with what I have learned about life in Mexicali. I also have been paying my *seguro social* for when I retire (government social security benefits). Besides, I will be able to go to the U.S. whenever I want now that I own my restaurant. I will get my passport in about two years, and my kids can also get their passports to enter the United States. I'm happy in Mexicali and I know the city well." For Lee and his family, Mexicali is their home now.

Deciding to move to the U.S.: Mr. Cheung, the 'Chinesco'

Not all Chinese stay in Mexicali, and many of them who do end up leaving find entry into the United States. That is the case with Mr. Cheung, the father of my friend, Lolita. Mr. Cheung, now in his 50's, has been living in the Imperial Valley for over 15 years. He was the in his mid-30's with two of his children already born when he decided to move to the United States. Unlike Lee, Mr. Cheung actually had the right networks to

enter the U.S. He had married a Mexican woman in Mexicali while he was a cook and she was a waitress. Together, they worked very hard to move into the U.S. and to build their restaurant there. With her family networks and his business networks, they were able to successfully purchase and run their restaurant. By networks, I mean the people who each of them would go to receive support, either monetary or non-monetary. Below I will describe some of the networks that each of them had that made their immigration process into the U.S. successful.

Mr. Cheung arrived to Mexicali in the late 1970s. He found work at a Chinese restaurant as a cook, but made it his goal to learn Spanish as soon as he could. As a result, he would talk to the Mexican waitresses in order to practice and learn. That's when he met Stella. Stella, already with one child from a failed marriage, really liked to be around Mr. Cheung. She complemented him well: she had an assertive voice, and a commanding presence, which matched the soft-spoken and less assertive Mr. Cheung. In less than a year Mr. Cheung and Stella married. When I met Stella, it made sense how Mr. Cheung worked well with his wife in their business. Mr. Cheung told me, "Stella is very bossy and ambitious, but ambitious in a good way. When I married her, I never thought she had a plan for us. I thought we were simply going to live in Mexicali all our lives." Mr. Cheung and Stella had saved money and had their daughter in Mexicali. He noticed many other Mexicans would be having kids in the United States, including some of his Chinese friends. "I didn't know how they did it, but they did. Then, Stella told me that her father had permanent resident status in the U.S. She suggested that we use the saved money so we could immigrate to the U.S. Initially, I did not want to. That would of cost us U.S.$2,000, a large portion of our money. But Stella insisted. She said to do it for her and

for the kids. I talked it over with my cousins and asked them what they thought. They really liked the idea. They said that at least one of us could achieve the dream we had set for ourselves a long time ago. They told me that if we needed extra money, they would help us. So, we did it. We left to the United States in 1990. Soon after we arrived, my son was born." The life of Stella and Mr. Cheung in the U.S., however, was not as great as everyone talked about for them.

Life for Mr. Cheung and his family in the Imperial Valley was very difficult. With high unemployment rates plaguing the Imperial Valley, Mr. Cheung could not find any job in the restaurant industry. His wife, however, did find a job cleaning home. Mr. Cheung decided to return to Mexicali to continue working at one of the restaurants where he had senior rank and began commuting everyday to work to Mexicali from Imperial Valley. Mexicali is where his networks were established and where he came to find work. Once again, he and his wife began to save while they lived in a cramped one-bedroom apartment. After two years, they bought commercial land in the less developed part of Imperial Valley that had a small building. With the help of capital that he raised from Chinese kin in Mexicali, he and Stella set up his small Chinese restaurant in El Centro, California. The Chinese restaurant was not as successful as they initially had hoped. Mr. Cheung remembers practically living in the restaurant with his kids in order to not hire anyone to work. But slowly, his clientele increased, his food became known, and he and Stella finally began making profits after one year of being in business. By the time I met Mr. Cheung, he had sold his business to another Chinese person. "I made a couple of investments in Mexicali that are slowly paying off. I don't live in the Imperial Valley

either, I live in Mexicali in the house we own there, so I do not spend much money," he tells me.

"I don't regret coming to the United States to work. It was very difficult at first, but we learned to get by. My son is in college, and my daughter is married now to a good man. I am very happy for them, and I know we provided for them to be where they are. I was able to do this because of my wife, Stella. As a Mexican who pushes really hard for her family, we were both able to achieve our goals. Stella's drive is what really pushed me. I could not have come to the United States without her, and it was a decision she proposed and I eventually gave in. Now we are retiring in Mexicali, where a lot her family and my family lives," he tells me. I asked him if he helped other Chinese people from Mexicali immigrate legally into the U.S. with his status as a permanent resident. He smiles, "Well, we all help those who help us, right? You do that, don't you?" I nod my head. "I have some friends who also have their children in colleges here in the U.S.," he told me and changed the conversation about how one can achieve much through working hard.

Chinese-Mexican: The story of Wesley

My cousin introduced me to Wesley, or "El Chino." Wesley remembers him being picked on for looking Chinese when he was attending school in Mexicali. "There's not much I can tell you about being Chinese…I'm really Mexican," he tells me. His life certainly seems that way. His Chinese immigrant father married a Mexican woman, refused to teach his children his language (Cantonese), and allowed them to practice the dominant Mexican religion of Catholicism. This goes very contrary to the perceptions several *Mexicalense,* (people of Mexicali) have of Chinese. I remember one woman once

told me upon my return to Mexicali, "Chinese people are very exclusionary. If you are not Chinese, they do not befriend Mexicans, and they marry within their own race only. They do not interact with other Mexicans, unless it has to do with business, and they are never seen anywhere in the city! I guess that is how their culture is." Wesley's life as a Chinese-Mexican revealed to me that the comment by the woman I spoke to was simply not true. On the contrary, Wesley's brief biography and upbringing show how he has assimilated to the dominant culture. His phenotypes reveal his family's past in the city, but not how he interacts in the everyday. I befriended Wesley and noticed that he was right: He had learned to be Mexican and was not taught about his Chinese cultural traditions. Wesley knew that I had been in China and would ask me about Chinese life, culture, and the country. For Wesley being Chinese was a distant past represented only through his phenotypes. Different than Lee who at least took Beatrice to Chinese school during the weekends, Wesley's father chose to allow his son to assimilate completely.

General patterns of integration into the city

After speaking to several ethnic Chinese of Mexicali, I began to notice a consistent pattern that occurred in the development of both their identity and migration in the border region. The history of their development is based on the size of the community. Demographer James R. Curtis estimated about 10,000 Chinese living in Mexicali in 1995. Today the number is estimated to be about 50,000 'full' Chinese.[36] Curtis correctly lets the reader know that ethnic Chinese are dispersed throughout the entire city, not living in an enclave like many minority communities in the U.S. *La Chinesca*, the "Chinatown" that Curtis describes, of Mexicali is once again serving as the stepping-stone to where recent Chinese immigrants arrive. Recent immigrants told me of

[36] This was communicated to me by the Chinese Association President in April 2006.

the about the ease in starting their immigrant life there and later moving to different parts of the city.

The general pattern among Chinese immigrants in Mexicali was that they were constantly moving as they came across more information, but first start off at the older part of town. For example, immigrants first live and settle in *La Chinesca*, where the Chinese Association is located (or the "Chinese school"), where there is property owned and operated by Chinese people, and to be close to other Chinese people who also live there. This part of town is also very close to the U.S.-Mexico border. This proximity to the border allows them to access some American goods at a cheaper price, like cell phones. I remember pulling my cell phone to see the time and noticed that because the apartment of my friends was in very close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico borderline, that my American cell phone picked up the American cellular phone frequency without a problem. Recent Chinese immigrants have American cell phones and after 9 p.m. call China using an American calling card. This is much cheaper to do than using the Mexican phone lines or cell phones, which are very expensive to operate. I saw Chinese people using American cell phone carriers (like Verizon and T-Mobile) not once, but several times. To get these phones, they had close friendships get them for them. The location of *La Chinesca* also has a grocery story that stocks Chinese food and products (like egg roll wraps, ginger, chop sticks, and woks), and is within close proximity of the Chinese Association (or 'the school' as the Chinese immigrants called it). However, living in this part of town is expensive for Mexicali's 'working class' standards. Francis, my Chinese friend, told me that a two-bedroom apartment was MEX$2,000. In a different part of town of Mexicali renting a house with a backyard will cost about that much

money. As Chinese immigrants live longer in Mexicali they begin to know the information about cheaper, bigger, and better housing. They will move to those homes that will give them a cheaper rental price, or in some cases, will buy a house. Despite moving from the old city center, they still know that they can access that part of town without a problem.

The process of moving to other parts of town usually entails one member of the family or close kin to be able to be semi-fluent in Spanish. This is often because the negotiation of renting a home occurs in Spanish with a Mexican landlord. Not all Chinese immigrants are renting some are choosing to buy. During the time I was doing field researcher I was affiliated at a research university where I had a Colombian colleague researcher. One day, my Colombian colleague asked me, "Did you know Chinese are also trying to buy the new homes being built in the eastern part of town? Because I am an immigrant, they told me they knew the whole process of buying a home for immigrants because several Chinese are going into their offices to ask." I went to URBI, one of the major home developers of Mexicali, and the place where my Colombian colleague inquired, and indeed, the receptionist told me that Chinese have been inquiring, but also other groups, including people from El Salvador and Guatemala. The process of buying and financing a home in Mexico once again requires people to navigate through a complex bureaucratic system, and as soon as one of the Chinese immigrants finds out what it is, I am sure that information will be available for sale.

From the places they live to the places they work, Chinese immigrants have to be in constant contact with the dominant Mexican community. Not all of them have vehicles, so they will take the bus or carpool with fellow co-workers. In addition, as I will

describe in Chapter 4 the workplace also serves as a place where they work with Mexicans. One goal of some of Chinese people is to become co-owners of a restaurant, which promises high profits and security for them and their family. Chapter 3 will describe how partnerships are formed, including how some partners are 'Mexican.' To be a "Mexicano" is to have your papers legally fixed. Another goal of Chinese people is to be able to provide much access to their kids through education. I found that many Chinese are choosing to send their kids to private schools in Mexico, and are especially encouraging them to learn how to speak English. Finally, a 'successful' Chinese person often identified as someone who has a business that is so profitable that it allows them to move to the United States, specifically Imperial County California, where they can send their kids to American schools and live without fear of crime, an aspect that plagues Mexicali (and discussed in Chapter 2).

Chinese immigrants go through a process where they have the characteristics of the *paisano* conceptually speaking. They are recent immigrants (and emigrants) who are discriminated against, but must find a way to survive. Within 3-5 years Chinese immigrants become "Mexicanos," with legal documents that allow them to own property, vote, and petition to enter the U.S. legally through tourist visas. They become *paisanos*, or "just like everyone else," fellow countrymen that understand the local community and learn from the culture around them. This process is seen through the life histories that I have presented and happen through either education, networks of contact, and through work relations.

What is important about this chapter is to understand that the claims of being *paisano* are rooted in U.S. and Mexican financial interest that continue to occur. I have

outlined how historically this happens: American financial interests bringing in cheap Chinese labor and Chinese capital into Mexico. In addition, Mexico's hope to expand and to develop the north also caused for the increase in the Chinese population. These past historical interests gave rise to the Chinese population that exists today. Following the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, once again the Chinese population began to grow. Again, there was an active recruitment by Chinese entrepreneurs, the *Chinescos,* to recruit Chinese labor into the region, this time with their culinary specialty. The lives of Chinese people and how they are navigating the city once they get to Mexicali is also of great importance. They have learned that there is corruption in the city, some have learned to accept that their children will be fully assimilated, and others hold on to their culture by sending their children to Chinese school. The Chinese Association, established in 1919, becomes a place where recent Chinese immigrants start their life, and begin to learn how to navigate this border city. Chinese people eventually become as Mexican as any person living there. What remains different is how they are treated.

The following chapter continues to track the lives of people in Mexicali, with a focus on how Chinese people are perceived and understood by the dominant group. I begin the chapter by providing a story that made headlines in Mexicali: the assassination of two Chinese people working at a Chinese restaurant. How people understand and participate in violence is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 2

The Last Meal: Death of Chinese in a Mexican city

At approximately 11:30 p.m. on August 17th, 2005, two Chinese people were assassinated while working at a Chinese restaurant in Mexicali, Baja California. Surrounded by bars, a large movie theater, and governmental offices, the restaurant is located less than two miles from the U.S.-Mexico border crossing. The next day, the major newspapers of Mexicali headlined the crime along with the local news channels. For the next two weeks, everyone in the city seemed pre-occupied with what happened: was this a general homicide or internal violence among the Chinese community? While violence in this border city is not uncommon, the way people in the community talked about what happened to the Chinese people during this incident differed in many ways. Chinese became newsworthy after a century of history making in Mexicali. The diversity of the city revealed through the view of different members of the community regarding this crime is important in understanding Mexicali's political economy and how it affects its citizens. The goal of this chapter is to show how there are contrasting views of the same event from different members of Mexicali's population.

Sally Falk Moore's work (1987) is useful in thinking of the relevance and importance of events. Moore reminds the anthropologist of the methodological consequences of the "processual perspective," in which the ethnographer is aware of the "time-oriented perspective on both continuity and change" (1987 729) in constructing their ethnography. This favors certain field materials to be collected and suggests how these materials once collected are to be read and understood. Rituals, economic exchanges, public meetings, along with other forms of cultural formations are well

documented by the ethnographer, but all address structural systems, omitting local voices. Moore sheds light on the debate going on in the 1980's among anthropologists as to whether our work is either seen as history making or practice oriented. For Moore, it is important that the ethnographer document different facets of life that capture time and historical moment and, not simply see ethnography as one or the other. Moore then suggests understanding events as they happen: "Events may equally be evidence of the ongoing dismantling of structures or attempts to create new ones. Events may show a multiplicity of social contestations and the voicing of competing cultural claims" (1987 729). Events, things that happen in a local community and are talked about by members of the community, reveal much about responses to cultural forms being reproduced. Moore continues to suggest the methodological ways in which one can capture certain events that interrupt traditional ways of understanding, what she calls, "diagnostic events." These "diagnostic events" reveal information about ongoing contests, conflicts, and competitions and the efforts to prevent, suppress, or repress such events through commentaries (1987 730). Moore argues that events reveal much about local context as well as the political environment surrounding the event.

She grounds her claim by providing examples of events she captured when doing fieldwork in Africa. One event describes a young African who dies in a car accident. The young African, who she calls Protas, was educated in Canada and returned to Africa where he was quickly appointed to a high-level government job. On the way to his village, Protas dies in a fatal car accident. What Moore documents is how a highly educated and religious woman (a devoted Catholic and teacher who later becomes the school principal) is convinced that the former tribe chief's magistrate cursed the young

man because of a dispute that the magistrate had with Protas' father. Moore suggests that this event had to do with the changing political economy, where there were changes in power occurring locally: Protas was appointed to a high official government job, and becoming a higher earner (and gaining higher status) than the local chief magistrate. Moore concludes that one can unpack these events as a phase in the development of African bureaucracy, or, "the state not as a fixed form, but as an entity being produced" (1987 734). Moore provides a useful method for understanding both how a local system of events speaks to larger political forces, and how people from different backgrounds construct and interpret events.

I use Moore's methodological suggestion and show how the homicide of two Chinese people in the Baja California incident illustrate the different world systems that people live in along the U.S.-Mexico borderland. Like Moore, I unpack the same event and show how different people framed and understood the assassination. In doing this, I capture the different attitudes people had regarding the crime and the Chinese people in Mexicali. How events are viewed and understood show the rapidly changing economies of Mexico, China, and the influences of the United States. The changes occurring from the constant influx of new Chinese immigrants into a country largely understood as a "sending country" (a country that sends immigrants to developed nations) in addition to the continuing emigration of rural and southern Mexicans into the city, allows the reader to understand how people live and understand their lives in relation to others (especially, ethnic others). In addition to the political process in the U.S.-Mexico borderland, I capture people's experience through the crime and what is at stake for them.

The local moral experience of the Mexico-U.S. borderlands is ultimately unpacked. In defining the local moral experience, I am referring to the way Arthur Kleinman describes it as: "Experience is *moral*, as I define it, because it is the medium of engagement in everyday life in which things are at stake and in which ordinary people are deeply engaged stake-holders who have important things to lose, to gain, and to preserve" (Peterson, ed., 1999 362). Kleinman suggests that in moments of danger, people come to terms with what really matters most to them.

On the surface, it appears that, two Chinese were simply killed while working. This specific event was viewed differently by people based on what matters most to them and the people around them. In understanding the local moral experience through the lens of varied conceptualizations of this event, we will see how different people began to embody and experience the U.S.-Mexico borderland, but more importantly, what really mattered to people in a land characterized as chaotic, unruly, drug-infested, and filled with violence.

In this description I present the perspectives of several individuals who provide competing views of the crime. Along with a brief description of their background, I will provide my version of what I deduced to have happened the night of the killings based on several newspaper accounts. This is not to suggest that I am a neutral observer whatsoever, as I also carry my own values and beliefs, but to show how people developed views that differed from the 'official' narrative provided by newspapers. In addition, I will try to make sense of the way people understand crime in U.S.-Mexico borderland that goes beyond the incident and reveals more about their life.

Mayling's account

I met Mayling when working at the local Mexican university as a visiting researcher during my fieldwork. I came to know more and more about her as time passed, and felt comfortable enough to ask her to help me with my study. Mayling is half Mexican and half Chinese, and is currently a business administration major at the state university.

"Don't ask me about being Chinese and Chinese traditions because I don't know anything," she would tell me. Several times I asked her if I could meet her father, but she refused, "Just ask me, and I'll ask him the questions." I told her it was not about the questions, but about knowing him, I needed to make more Chinese friends, especially if I was going to write about them. "I'll be your friend, just ask me and I'll get the answer," she would say.

Soon, I began asking her questions not about being Chinese, but about her upbringing. I learned that she worked at a Chinese restaurant as a waitress when she was younger. Her Mexican mother managed the restaurant, while her Chinese father was the head cook.

I once told her that I was surprised that waiters and waitresses only got paid 400 pesos a week [U.S.$37], and we began talking about wages at the restaurant. "Wages aren't that low for waiters and waitresses at the restaurant, if you add the tips. If you do a really good job, you can earn up to 1100 pesos a week [U.S.$102], which is more than [what you would earn at] a *maquiladora* [foreign owned factories located along the U.S.-Mexico border]," she told me.

"It still seems like a low wage to me, maybe that's why they have a turn over rate, and find it difficult to keep employees for long," I told her.

She immediately responded:

> What happens here in Mexicali is that there are lots of jobs, and they are not good paying jobs. So, people are always looking around for a better job. I just recently learned that wages are three times the national average here [in Mexicali compared to all of Mexico]... Now tell me, how can a Chinese restaurant pay their employees a lot of money when they sell their food so cheap? They can't. That's why lots of them end up employing family members, or people from China. They work long hours, because they know that there are a lot of sacrifices to be made. You work from 10 in the morning until 10 at night because you have to get whatever customers are available. So the entire family helps out to work those long hours. For example, at my parent's restaurant they had me as a waitress, my mom as the cashier/manager, my dad as a head cook, and my aunt as another cook when it was busy. We had a couple other employees, but let me tell you, Mexicans are lazy. And its not like they are asked to do a difficult, boring, non-stop job like in the *maquiladoras*. It's not to be mean, but they are. They come in late, or drunk, and they are just not good workers. My dad was so nice to not fire them, but my mom was always firing people! She knew how to deal with Mexicans because she is Mexican.

Mayling, despite claiming to not know anything about the Chinese community, accurately described the life many Chinese immigrants live: long hours at work at the restaurant. After getting to know Mayling more, I asked her about what she heard about the murder of the Chinese people working at the restaurant during the summer:

> It's sad what happened on that night to the Chinese workers. I really couldn't believe it! Getting shot in the head and getting thrown into the refrigerator room? Who could have possibly done that? And for what, money? How long is money going to last anyone? Just take the money and leave the people alone, don't take their lives! Did you know one of them was only 16 years old? It's just really sad, people working hard for their money and then getting shot. I say to the people doing the shooting, go get a job. A job can last you a lifetime, instead of stealing from restaurants. And did you know one of the guys they caught used to be an employee? See, look how fast that money they stole lasted; they caught him within a week.

A brief background of Mayling would not surprise many readers as to why she sympathized with the deaths of the Chinese workers. Coming from a family background

where they owned a restaurant, worked with the family at the restaurant, and worked with other Mexicans, the assassination was very personal for Mayling. She and her parents could easily have been the victims of this unfortunate incident. At stake was her own personal safety, as well as that of her parents. As Kleinman argues, in moments of danger people reassess their moral worlds and what really matters to them. People, according to Kleinman, react in various ways to protect those values (2006), including placing negative perceptions on others. Her view of the accounts was based on her perception of an easy way of making money for the assailants: the robbers and assailants wanted money and the poor Chinese restaurant workers were the victims. Interestingly, despite how she viewed the situation, her parent's business had never suffered an armed robbery.

Lupita's account

I met Lupita, a short, blond-haired, light-skinned Mexican woman, in her late 30's, when visiting my cousin in an affluent Mexicali neighborhood. As an American coming from a famous university, I often became the 'must meet' person for family members. Lupita was one of those people. I began telling her about my dissertation project, and she began to show interest in it. I asked her if I could interview her regarding the recent crime against the Chinese in Mexicali. She was surprised, "Me? What can I possibly tell you?" she asked. I told her that because I was new to the city, anything about Mexicali and its characteristics would be useful to me, including her opinions about the crime. After insisting and assuring her that her opinions and information were useful to me, she finally agreed. At her request, we decided to meet up for lunch at a Mexican restaurant.

Lupita is an English teacher for a private school in Mexicali. She received her bachelor's degree in Education at Ensenada, a coastal city in the state of Baja California, but was born and raised most of her life in Mexicali. She met her husband in Ensenada, married him, and then moved to the U.S. a couple of times because of her husband's work. She described herself as a middle-class woman, and to show it, would tell me about her kids attending private schools. I would see her from time to time when visiting my cousin, and I always managed to learn something new about her.

"Mexicali has changed so much, and I'm really starting to like it. It has several things that I enjoyed while I was living in Phoenix, like coffee shops, and restaurants, and all these movie theaters. It's pretty much a big city that has a lot to offer," she would tell me. I asked her if she was surprised with the presence of the Chinese in Mexicali. She responded:

> At first I was very surprised with their presence here. How could it be? Then I began observing them beyond their working at the restaurants. To me, they are becoming more and more visible. For example, one of my daughters takes some courses at the cultural arts center, which is located in the old part of town. I remember a while back dropping my daughter off, and seeing about four women walking with their umbrellas open to cover them from the sun. I found it very weird because we Mexican people do not do that, we just let the sun tan us. After close observation, I figured out that they were not Mexican, but that they were Chinese women! Apparently, they had dropped off their kids at the school that is in front of the cultural arts center. That school, although its one of the oldest in Mexicali, is a pretty good federal school, somewhat upscale. I wondered how they managed to get their kids in there? Anyways, now every time I see someone with an umbrella open on a bright sunny day, I figure it's a Chinese person.

For Lupita, noticing Chinese women around the old city center was a surprise to her as well as the use of umbrellas for protection from the sun. Many Chinese recent immigrants do live in the old city center, and Chinese women do use umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun, a practice that I saw a lot in China and Japan. Here, Lupita's

activity of sending her children to private cultural arts classes allowed her to bump into an unexpected group that she perceived as very different from hers.

I proceeded to ask her about her perception of the Chinese. She told me,

> I think they are a very small and exclusionary group. They keep everything to themselves and do not interact with Mexicans. I think some of them do not even speak Spanish, which shows you how reluctant they are to accept our culture and our traditions. I don't personally know any Chinese, but that's what I have noticed when I see them. They are always with one another, and you hardly see a Mexican near them.

Lupita's observation is like many Mexicans of Mexicali who do not interact with Chinese people: an exclusionary group that does not interact with anybody. Lupita's upper middle-class standing further excludes her from interacting with recent Chinese immigrants, many who hold jobs in the food service sector as cooks, waitresses, waiters, or busing tables.

I then proceeded to ask her if she heard about the assassination of the Chinese immigrants in Mexicali during the past summer,

> Oh yes, I did hear about it. It's sad, very sad. I believe the owner and one of the waiters got killed. The police were able to catch the thieves. But what I think is that if the Chinese owner wouldn't have been so obsessed with the money, he would have been alive today. The way Chinese people are with money, it's no surprise that they got killed. I mean if I were to have been in that situation, I would have just given the money! My life is more important than anything else, especially money!

I was a bit shocked at the response because she shifted the blame onto the victims rather than the criminals. For Lupita, at fault was the greed that Chinese have over money; it was their understanding and value of money that caused the death, not the possible involvement with the informal sector (such as drug cartels), or the rise in inequality in Mexicali, or a robbery gone badly. I took this opportunity to ask her what her knowledge was of the way Chinese view money. She responded, "I've seen and heard

that they work these long hours to get lots of money. I believe they even send their wives to work for long days in order to get more. All this work and eagerness to get lots of money surprises me. They work so much that they do not even get to enjoy life. And then, a tragedy like this happens. All because of money," she told me.

For Lupita, money was the important factor as to why the Chinese were killed. Unlike Mayling, Lupita rationalized that the ones responsible for the death of the Chinese were the workers themselves. Because they refused to give the money when being held up, the assailants shot them. In the different ethnic stereotypes here and in Mayling's narrative, we can see Fredrik Barth's view of ethnic boundaries, that is, the process by which an ethnic boundary carries a social category and meaning. Lupita, as a Mexican, placed an ethnic boundary of difference between her and the Chinese community.

Pepe's account

In a city where many crime cases get closed without ever being solved, it was a big surprise for several people in Mexicali that the culprits of the crime were caught within a week, including for one of my neighbors, Pepe. Pepe is a self-employed businessman who has a tire repair and towing business. He is in his late 30's, and often complained to me about all of the expenses he had. It's no secret that Pepe is a ladies' man—he would brag about how easy it was to hook up with women when he would go out to party during the weekend. Even with a wife and three kids, Pepe did not hesitate to brag about the many ladies he would hook pick up. From time to time I would see him and would say hello. I began to tell him about my research, and also asked him if he would be interested in telling me his perceptions about the Chinese and about the recent robbery at the Chinese restaurant. He agreed.

He began by telling me:

> Yeah, I heard what happened at that Chinese restaurant… the one in the *Centro Civico*, right? How the owner and one of the workers were found inside the refrigerator? Man, that really sucks. I mean, but that's how business is, unfortunately. Especially here in the *frontera* [border area], where businesses are always getting robbed. But what I'm surprised about is how quick the robbers got caught…in less than a week! I mean there was a guy two blocks from here that was found dead at the abandoned home on the next block. Yeah, I knew who he was, he wasn't my friend, but I knew who he was. The family went to the police, and the police said nothing really could be done because there were no witnesses. All the police did was come once, took some pictures, and that was that. Nothing else. But these Chinese people, they are a serious thing, huh? They definitely have some connections in government or something that helped them out. I just really could not believe how fast they got the culprits. Justice isn't the same for different people, and that is very sad

Pepe was very aware of the homicide because of the media outlets, and, in contrast Lupita, he knew the outcome of the crime. The culprits were caught within a week. Pepe sympathized with what happened, but reasoned that this happens because it is one of the risks in opening a business in a city where crime exists. What Pepe found very interesting was how the culprits were found. He was convinced that there was more to the crime being solved, since in his personal experience, crimes never get solved in Mexicali.

I asked him why he thought there was more attention to the Chinese people than the guy found dead in his neighborhood. He replied:

> Money. Chinese have money, and the guy out here who got shot did not. And even if he did, it was illegal money. Everyone knew he sold drugs, so why should the police care? For them, the death was probably linked to drugs and that whole other cartel problem and fiasco. Police know about these things, and just let things slide. Death is the form of payment when it comes to drugs.

Pepe provides an explanation of how the case got solved in a short period is linked to the unequal resources being distributed in the city, and the informal activities being conducted. Money is Pepe's initial response because Mexico's legal and political system are believed to be controlled by and for the wealthy.. Like the United States, an increase

in inequality will provide benefits to those who have money, and disenfranchise those that do not. Pepe shows how the informal sector of Mexican society operates and how it affects the lives of people who are victims of homicide. Pepe suggests that money alone does contribute to the speedy solving of a crime. The source of the money is considered as well.

In other settings, after getting to know Pepe better, I often would get frightened to talk to him because of the stories he would tell me about his personal life. He was so vivid with his descriptions of organized crime, that I felt somehow I would be involved in them. Often, he would begin telling me more information than I wanted to know. After agreeing to hang out with him, he was over at my place drinking beers when he started telling me things that he did on the side. One day he told me, "Man, these Chinese people got it going right. They have their business set up, and they live in peace. Look at them, getting the police to find the culprits quick...now that's protection. Here I am looking for a different way to protect myself..." I did not want to ask him how he protected himself and his business, but he voluntarily began to tell me:

> You know how I fix tires and tow cars? I'm the guy the drug lord's call to do this work for them whenever they need any help with those types of things. I got in to this business because one of my buddies introduced me to a lot of them [the illegal drug traders and sellers]. One of the guys needed a car towed because it had broken down. My buddy calls me up to go and help. In front of like four other guys the guy with the broken car asks my friend if he would put his hands in the fire for me—if I can be trusted. I was scared. I did not say anything. My friend was calm and collected, and said he would. From then on, I'm the guy they call for favors when its tire or towing related. One time I was towing a car with lots of drugs in it, I know cuz I saw it. I just did my job and continued towing the car, as if I had not seen anything.

He paused. Then he continued, "It's a good gig. I do it cuz they always pay me more than what the cost is. And, I know they got my back. I can go to them if I would

have a problem." Pepe had just revealed to me how he was involved in the informal sector. Although he claimed to not be personally involved with the drug trade, or the selling of drugs, he revealed to me how he knew several key people whose wealth was built on the informal sector. Knowing that "he could go to them if he had a problem," primarily meant that he could ask them for protection if he got in a bar fight, or if he was in need of money, as he later revealed to me. Pepe told me that everyone in Mexicali needs to know someone to help them out, and he happened to know powerful people in the informal sector.

Although the situation scared me, primarily because I did not think that drugs or the issue of drugs would come up during my research, Pepe's account of what protection was in the border spoke a lot about who receives what type of protection and when. The impression he has of the Chinese community showed jealousy, but at the same time respect for the community to get 'real' justice for themselves. Whether or not the Chinese are involved in the informal economy, such as with drug dealers, is beyond the scope of my study. Despite some friends verbally accusing some Chinese restaurants of having ties with drug lords, I neither confirmed nor further researched the claim.

Fernando's account

I met Fernando at a party to which one of my friends invited me. Roughly my age, Fernando was an undergraduate at the U.S. University in Calexico. Fernando lived the life of a *transfronterizo*, an American-born and raised individual who frequently returns to Mexicali because of the extended family living there. In the U.S.-Mexico border, American working-class citizens can inhabit a comfortable middle-class status. Fernando, therefore, sees himself as a middle-class citizen, that is, an individual with

some degree of disposable income for entertainment. Subsequently, despite his father having a blue-collar job as a construction worker, and his mom working as a secretary both in the U.S., he is able to think and act as Mexican middle-class in Mexico, by always comparing himself to his family that resides in Mexico.

When telling Fernando about my research, from the very beginning, he told me his negative views of the Chinese community: "Chinese are corrupt, and all of them are, not just some." I was surprised at the accusations, especially because in the five months that I was living in Mexicali, no one had really made such blunt accusations about them. "I could help you with your research, I know a lot about the Chinese," is what Fernando told me. I asked him how he knew so much, only to get a vague explanation, but which coincidentally connected with the assassination. I asked him what he knew about the crime that had occurred during the summer.

"Well, I personally know the guys accused. Well, I mean, not personally, but I've met them before, and it's not all their fault what happened, and it is not true what the newspapers wrote, it's all lies," he told me. I asked him how he knew the people accused of the crime, and he responded, "Cuz I have connections, that's why." He laughed. "Nah, I'm just kidding. Cuz they're friends with my cousins. It was two guys, right? A young guy who was like maybe 20 and the other one who is like early 30s, right?" he asked me.

"Something like that," I responded.

"Yeah, I knew those fools. When I would go visit my cousins in Mexicali, they would be around. They would kick it [hang out] with my cousins. That's why I know what really happened," he told me.

I sensed that he was trying to build up a suspense as to what *really* happened. "Well, are you going to tell me what you think happened, or not?" I asked him.

"Well yeah, fool, kick back. Well, see what really happened is that the Chinese owner guy, the old one, owed some drug money. And well, he hadn't paid up. So the two guys went to get paid, and the guy didn't want to pay them. So when you don't pay, you pay with your life," he told me.

"But what about the young guy, he couldn't have been involved in drug stuff at so young in his life, could he?" I asked.

"It's Mexico fool, people start dealing when they're 14, sometimes even younger. But nah, the deal was mostly with the old guy. He owed money," he told me.

I replied, "They [the Mexican perpetrators] still committed the crime, even if they [the Chinese owner and waiter] owed the money."

"Nah, fool, when it's about drug stuff, police usually don't do anything. But Chinese, they're so corrupt. They started making a big fuss about it that it got to China, and the Chinese consulate came here and wanted the culprits of the crime. And yeah, I mean they caught them, but the truth did not come out. It came out as if they were robbing the place, when they were just trying to get their money. And when they got arrested, the police beat them up and made them say that they just wanted to rob the place. But that's all show for the newspaper. In Mexico, if you got money, you can have a re-trial. Once things cool down and people forget, my friends are going to have a retrial, cuz it's not fair what happened to them," he told me.

Fernando claimed to personally know the situation, and the associated events. He was one of the few people who provided an alternate story to what several people were

told. The times I would hang out with Fernando, he was often unclear, or would exaggerate. I wondered how he detailed this event so well.

I am not concerned with whether Fernando told the truth or not, but how he too perceives the crime and criminal proceedings for people in Mexico, and how justice is not the same for everyone. It was the second time that someone had told me that if crime occurred because of drug related conflict, police would step aside and not do anything. I began to understand that people held beliefs about differential meting out of justice at the Mexico-U.S. border.

Sofia's account

Sofia is another 20-year-old undergraduate student at the major public university of Mexicali. She is a friend of Mayling, but they were interviewed at different times. Sofia's account, while very brief, highlights that, for many, violence is a rare thing, but when it happens, justice is served.

Sofia told me, "Basically what happened is that one of the co-owners of the restaurant was staying late with a waiter, two robbers came in, shot them, and robbed them. Luckily, within less than a week the culprits were caught. I saw in the news conference the people confess to the crime, so there really isn't much to it. My cousins have friends that know the people who committed the crime; they too believe that's what happened. They know them, so they know how they are," she tells me. I asked her if Chinese are more prone to violence because they are a minority, or if Chinese brought the violence onto themselves. She responds, "No, things just happen. It wasn't their lucky day. The robbers needed money, the Chinese had some, but the robbers panicked and decided to kill them."

Sofia's understanding of the incident brought some sense of neutrality—it was not a matter of race or poverty in the city, but simply things that happen that are unforeseeable. What I found strange in her response is that she made no judgments, stereotypes, or assumptions about the Chinese. She saw the Chinese as members of the community who were caught in a crime, just like anyone else in the city could have been in the same situation.

May-fu's account

May-fu is an elementary teacher in Mexicali. She is 22 years old and is Chinese-Mexican. Her father was a Chinese worker, as was her mother. Her father was a cook, while her mother served as either a waitress or cashier. May-fu was born in Mexicali, Mexico, and also has a passport to the U.S.A., but she would never considering moving there: "I have some cousins in Los Angeles, and I never really enjoyed going there when I was growing up. I'm Mexican, this is where I was born, this is where I grew up, and this is where I want to die." Although May-fu identifies herself as Mexican, she acknowledges that she is Chinese and is proud of being Chinese too. Unlike Mayling, she speaks some Cantonese, and can get by speaking to her elderly relatives who live in Mexicali and Los Angeles. I remember going once to a restaurant with her and having the royal treatment by the Chinese manager and the waiter. She communicated with the Chinese workers in Cantonese, and she was very friendly—nothing like the snobby American born Chinese from the U.S., according to May-fu. For May-fu, "I have a deep sense of respect for Chinese people. It's like I'm talking to my parents. They left a lot of things behind in China to be here, to have a better opportunity, just like Mexicans leave to the U.S. It irritates me to see better off Chinese treat them so badly, as if they were

better than them," she tells me. May-fu's compassion and understanding for Chinese workers was seen when talking about the homicide.

May-fu was visibly upset when we started talking about the homicide. In her mind, Chinese work really hard, and this homicide was a vivid reminder that nothing is ever safe for them, despite all the sacrifices they have already made. May-fu tells me, "It's Chinese philosophy to care more for your life beyond any material possessions. It's really hard for me to believe that the Chinese did not want to give up the money they had and that they preferred death to money. I just don't think that's what happened. " May-fu openly refuted Lupita's explanation as to their deserving death because they refused to give the money. She explained to me that Chinese people know the risks of owning a restaurant, including robberies, She continued, "That is why it is so closely ingrained in Chinese culture to give all the money if one is being held up in a robbery." I asked if this would be true, even if you had worked long hours for that money. She responded, "Not when you see a gun, certainly not, why risk it? Would you?" she asked. I then asked her if she believed that this was an intra-Chinese community violence incident. "I'm not sure about that. Usually when there is conflict within the Chinese community, it's settled other ways, hardly ever through violence. Like for example, if someone opened a restaurant too close to another one, it becomes known to all the Chinese restaurant owners, and either Chinese events will not be held at the new restaurant, or contracts that some older Chinese have with goods, like food, will be priced higher to whoever was at fault. Violence is hardly seen here, at least my father never talked about that," she told me. I then asked her what she believed happened.

"I believe the version of the newspapers....that the people were there to rob them, they panicked and decided to kill both of them. It's Mexico, people ALWAYS think they can get away with crimes. And you know that's true too. Don't tell me you don't know people who try to bribe police officers when they run a red light, or when they are speeding? That's Mexico. Mexico will not get any better if we keep with this mentality that it does not matter if we corrupt police officers, that it's okay to kill someone because no one will know. And this is not okay. As Mexicans, we need to be holding people accountable, including for the crimes we commit, big or small. Mexico is a good country, but we need to make it better."

May-fu's criticism and strong sense of Mexican nationalism really surprised me. Being "full" Chinese (meaning both of her parents were both ethnically Chinese), but raised as a Mexican, she believes that the country her parents came to can be much better, despite the corruption that exists. Regarding the crime, the Chinese had no fault whatsoever in what happened in May-fu's view. She, like Mayling, believes that Chinese are hard workers and that violence in this border city is because of the people who believe in an unjust and informal way of settling things (i.e. bribing the police).

The Chinese Association President's account

Several months after the assassination, I was able to finally speak to Mexicali's Chinese Association President about the crime. This person is suppose to be the representative of the Chinese community of Mexicali, and also has a seat in the city's government as a representative of the community. He is supposed to be the representative of all the smaller Chinese associations. As seen in the earlier chapter on the history of Chinese, the Chinese Association once served as a place for Chinese to come together

and learn about accurate exchange rates, business rules and regulations of the city, and to lobby the government. For many Chinese, the Chinese Association functions as the school where children go. I managed to finally get an interview with him only after my aunt was able to persuade him to do so. Because there is little that people know about the Chinese, when anything regarding the Chinese community happens, he is the one who is called to the scene. After a while, I began to understand how his job of representing the *entire* diverse Chinese community could be overwhelming.

After talking for several minutes about the Mexicali Chinese community in a very general way, I proceeded to ask him about the assassination of the Chinese during the summer. The president was quoted in various newspapers, so it was to my surprise that he was very brief in describing his version of what had happened. He told me, "One of the owners of the restaurant was working with the son of another of the owners when two people came in to rob them. They panicked and shot both of them, and were locked up in the refrigerator. They were found dead in the refrigerator." He was very reluctant to give any details, or even the names of the people (despite all of the names having been published in all the newspapers).

I then asked, "so how did the Chinese consulate get involved?"

He answered, "*Mijo,* [son] when this happened, EVERYONE was talking about it, and it was EVERYWHERE. The Chinese consul in Tijuana is very attentive to what's going on. Here we are too. So I was the one that initially tried to pressure the police to capture the culprits, but then the China consulate came, and we worked together in asking the police to help us." He was being so brief that I did not know what question to follow

up with, other than by saying, "oh, that's what happened." Like Sofia, the Chinese Association President kept it short and brief.

His short and brief answers regarding the incident did not surprise me; he probably had been asked to comment about the issue several times. Or, he knew more information than anyone else and did not want to reveal it to me.

The newspapers account

"Matan a 2 Chinos en un restaurante," [Two Chinese Killed at a Restaurant] reported La Cronica, one of Mexicali's leading newspapers. The day after the assassination, several local Mexicali and national newspapers reported the incident on their front page. In reviewing the newspaper articles, the tone of the reporting changed from initially suspecting that it was organized crime within the community when the news first broke out, to later shifting to only a robbery committed by two individuals.

The summary first went something like this: It was August 17th, 2005 at about 11 p.m. The *Nuevo Hong Kong* Chinese restaurant had just closed and only the co-owner/partner of the restaurant, 67-year-old Jose Woo Wong (last named spelled 'Hong' instead of 'Wong' some papers, age consistent in all papers), and waiter, 16-year-old Chen Jiaxioing (first and last name spelled different in other papers, 'Cheng' and 'Jiaxiong,' age consistent in all newspapers) were present. The assassination occurred at around 11:30 p.m. at night, at around midnight, a waiter from the neighboring *Los Toros* bar called police officials to the scene of the crime when noticing that the door of the Chinese business was wide open (the reports on who found the victims was reported by *La Jornada*, and by the *San Diego Union-Tribune's* Spanish edition online newspaper, *EnLaceLink* on August 19th, 2005, but not by La Cronica). The victims were found dead

inside the refrigerator of the restaurant. Chen (the 16-year-old) had one bullet in his head, while Wong had two or three. All newspapers reported that approximately $4000 U.S. dollars was still in the restaurants safety box, and about $5000 Mexican pesos [approximately US$ 500] with $20 U.S. dollars were in the cash register after the homicide. *La Jornada* newspaper also reported that the bodies had no bruises or signs of physical violence. The initial agency assigned to the case was the Violent Homicides division of the Ministry of Public Security of Mexico.

Two days after the robbery, the Chinese community of Mexicali was in the spotlight of the newspapers. Suspicions arose as to whether this was really a robbery, an act of vengeance killing, or some sort of intra-Chinese community violence. The police started making declarations about the case on the previous day. A large sum of money was left behind, so robbery was initially ruled out. Investigators announced that they were interrogating the family members, employees, and some customers about any possible suspects.

News about the crime had been discussed intensely in the Chinese community, and the president of the Chinese Association, Eduardo Auyon, began stating that as a community, the people of Mexicali needed to demand from law enforcement and peace officers the ability to live in peace and tranquility. The community he was referring to was the city of Mexicali, not the Chinese community. In essence, he did not make claims about the minority status of the Chinese, but rather, incorporated the Chinese community as a rightful Mexican entity that deserved justice. He immediately dismissed the incident as a hate crime directed towards Chinese. He went on to state that: "Historically, we know that Chinese were pioneers of Mexicali and that to this day Chinese have lived very

tranquil, and have received from Mexicans local harmony and support" (La Cronica 8/19/05). However, he stated that what most likely happened was that it was a robbery, even though the police did not believe that's what it was.

Although Auyon claimed that he did not believe this was a hate-related crime towards Chinese, the consul from China based in Tijuana, Mexico (two hours east of Mexicali), issued a declaration stating that justice needed to be done and that the culprits needed to be found. He-Sun, the consulate's representative, explained that the Chinese community of Baja California was enraged with what had happened. They presented their complaint to state and local authorities, and put pressure to have investigators put on the case.

La Cronica also began trying to provide a more personal picture of the victims by writing brief biographies of each of them. They reported that Jose Wo Wong (the 67 year old) was an executive member of the Chinese Association of Mexicali, and President of the Chang-Wo Association (one of the many small Chinese associations formed in Mexicali). According to the newspapers, Mr. Wo had arrived in Mexicali from Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico in the late 1960's, where he earned the love and respect of the Asian community. Once in Mexicali, he became partner/co-owner in a restaurant, then he opened a small convenience store, but before that, he became a partner at the restaurant where he was working as a manager the night of the homicide. Not much was said about the 16-year-old Chen Jiaxiong, only that he was the waiter, and that he was the son of one of the restaurant's partners. Both of them were Mexican naturalized citizens.

On August 20th, 2005, the funeral services began for 67-year-old Jose. According to the newspapers, for a Chinese burial there is a dragon dance where the dragon is

decorated all in white (as opposed to the any other color). The dragon is white to show mourning and begins to dance in front of the coffin, the dragon gets scared, but realizes its purpose there, and begins to move in a particular subtle motion in order to honor the deceased. The event was used as a way to provide readers a "cultural" understanding of Chinese people, especially by highlighting their "ethnic" and "cultural" difference. The Chinese Association, as the official representative of the community, provided the explanation of the white dragon. Ironically, the newspaper reported that no dragon dance was going to be performed, and the funeral service for Jose Wo Wong would be held in Calexico, California, USA because the majority his family lived there.

On the other hand, 16-year-old Chen's classmates described him as a happy, athletic, and good student. He was only in his third semester at the *preparatoria* [High School] at COBACH (a public high school known for being competitive to gain admission). Several of his friends attended the services in Mexicali, where he was buried. A friend was quoted as saying in *La Cronica*, "The truth is that he was very young and someone who was very peaceful and he did not deserve to die the way he did. Everyone that knew him knows that he never looked for trouble." Chen's father was reported to be one of the co-owners of the restaurant, but was never quoted or spotlighted by the media.

There was a breakthrough in the homicide case on August 21st, 2005. Two men were identified as the last ones to leave the restaurant on the night of the homicide. One of the men was described as being around 38 years old, 1.77 meters tall, regular build, brown skin, big slanted eyes, bushy eye brows, closed beard, short hair, and small ears. He was wearing a plaid shirt, and denim blue jeans. The second suspect was thought to have been between 27 to 32 years old, light brown skin, and straight hair. He was

wearing a black shirt and black pants, used a cane on his right side, and limped when he walked, and the cane he used to walk had a green sticker. Investigators included robbery as a possible motive, since Wong had some personal items missing. The PGJE (La Procaduria General de la Justicia Estatal) asked the general public for help in locating the individuals and assured complete discretion for people who had more information about the suspects.

Only three days after releasing the description and mock pictures of the alleged suspects, they were caught on August 23rd, 2005. The suspects were 21-year-old Angel Edgardo Rodriguez Estrada and 34 year old Eduardo Navarez Cañez. The motive of the crime was robbery, although Rodrigruez Estrada panicked and shot Woo Wong with a rifle, causing his death. Later, Navarez Cañez asked Rodriguez Estrada for the same rifle and shot the young Cheng, supposedly to not have any witnesses. The suspects left with U.S.$1,500, a gold necklace with a jade stone, a watch, and a ring. Although it was deemed a robbery, earlier investigations revealed that the money in the cash register and in the safety box was left behind untouched. The Ministry of Justice *(procurador)* explained that it was possible that with the panic and the hurry they did not notice that those valuables were there.

On August 24th, 2005, the front page of *La Cronica* and the Ministry of Justice described how the homicide occurred by stating that they had received a confession from the suspects. Angel Edgardo worked at the restaurant five years ago, and that was the main reason that the robbery was planned there. On the night of the homicide, Angel Edgardo hid a .22 caliber rifle on the side of his leg, making it seem that he was sick and the reason why he was using the walking cane. The men ordered food, and after some

time passed, Angel Edgardo left to go to the bathroom, where he took out the rifle from his pants and prepared for the robbery. He came out and threatened the owner and the waiter, and guided them towards the cold refrigerator room where they were killed. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice stated that thanks to the police sketches and the newspapers, they were able to receive some tips, despite the suspects having cut their hair. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice also indicated that currently 70% of crimes reported in Mexicali get solved [some of my friends would debate whether this number was accurate].

That same day, the newspaper interviewed family members of the 21-year-old Angel Edgardo, one of the suspects of the crime. Angel Edgardo's aunt stated, "He is a good and serious young man and I cannot believe he is in this problem." She continued saying that he was a student, and was about to go on a school field trip. Angel Edgardo's aunt then said that it was possible that all this was a mistake, but then the reporter showed her the pictures of her nephew. She began to cry, "The truth is that it is very difficult to believe that he participated in this homicide, because we know him and we know that he is not a bad kid. We hope this gets cleared up during the investigation." The father of Angel Edgardo was quoted as saying, "He does not live here, he lives with his mother, and we know nothing about him." Tucked on the eleventh page of the newspaper, the article's attempt at trying to get a family version of the events only showed their emotions (or lack of) from the family, but no real alternative facts behind the accusations.

On August 24th, 2005, on the front page next to the headlined report of suspects being caught, the president of the Chinese Association, Eduardo Auyon thanked the authorities for solving the double homicide, "We always trusted from the start that this

double homicide would be solved." He indicated that recent pushes for investments by Chinese investors in Mexicali could be threatened had this not been solved.

On August 30th, 2005, a short articled hidden on the sixth page of *La Cronica* reported that the suspects pleaded guilty. Only 13 days after the homicide there was a trial, and they were sentenced to jail. The suspects were charged with homicide and armed robbery with the use of violence. Nothing else was said, and the case was closed.

The press in Mexico has been known to be very critical of the government, the drug mafias, and other establishments. Political scientist Chappell Lawson (2002) details the history of the rise of the free press in Mexico, showing the strong ties that the press had with the government, but later changing those ties during the 1980's and 1990's as independent newspapers emerged. The Mexican press is fierce in uncovering corruption, drug dealers and drug lords, and even conspiracies. As a result, the free press has had to pay a high price for uncovering some of those stories; in particular journalists have lost their lives or have been kidnapped for reporting some of these corruptions. I am not suggesting that the press in Mexicali, B.C. is fair and always accurate, but I do want to emphasize that Mexico as a democracy does have a free press that tries to present a balanced perspective.

My account of what happened

My purpose here is to not solve the case, but to provide a version of what happened at the restaurants. In doing so, I will show that the narratives of the people I interviewed vary greatly from what I know very well about the restaurant industry. Many assumptions, from the police, to the people, to the newspapers, were made, but as someone who worked there and knew people, I believe that I can provide a story that

raises questions that point to the Chinese community being involved with the informal sector that caused this violent crime. As I argue in this dissertation, the Chinese slowly become part of the local community through different ways. One of the ways was inevitably the informal sector.

I arrived in Mexicali soon after the assassination to do fieldwork. "Chinese people are not going to talk to you, they're all scared," is what Blanca, one of my aunts, told me. "Didn't you hear about the recent assassination?" she asked. I had not. I then asked my grandparents what happened, and my grandfather searched through the newspapers. Very soon after I started documenting the event and asking people their views on what occurred.

While documenting what happened, I began exploring other ways of researching the Chinese community in Mexico. One of my primary methods was *participant observation,* which is participating in the activities that Chinese people engage in. Therefore, I worked for four months at a Chinese restaurant, for approximately 25 hours a week, during the evenings and sometimes in the early afternoons. The restaurant where I worked had five cooks, six waitresses, and one general restaurant manager. The maximum occupancy in the restaurant was 125 persons. My job varied Sometimes I was an assistant cook and diced food, other times I was a waiter, and other times I would cook. When I worked evenings, I would stay until the closing and would give my Chinese friends a ride home. As a result, I got to know the Chinese restaurant business well by talking to all the workers, including the owner, manager, waiters and waitresses, cashiers, cooks and dishwashers. After gaining this knowledge of the restaurant industry,

I decided to go to the site of the homicide four months after it happened in order to follow the steps that the newspaper had reported.

I remember driving to the scene of the homicide, the *Nuevo Hong Kong* restaurant. I parked my car where an older man in his 60s told me that he would take care of my vehicle. The three times I went to examine the crime scene; he was there before and after I would leave. I would go to the restaurant primarily to observe the people, the location, and to eat. In fact, I remember going there when I was 20-years-old, five years before, with some friends who assured me that *Nuevo Hong Kong* was the best Chinese food restaurant in all of Mexicali. The restaurant itself is colorfully decorated from the inside with dragon pictures on the wall, crimson red carpet, and white tablecloths on all the tables. It is about the same size as the restaurant I worked at. From what I observed, the staff was about the same size too. A rough sketch of the layout of the restaurant is in the appendix.

The details of the restaurant are important in mapping out the events. As customers walk in, there is a small office room to the right and a sit-in bar to the right. In Chinese restaurants in Mexicali, there is usually the cashier (who, if the business is slow, will be the manager), the waiters/waitresses, and the cooks. The minimum amount of employees is usually three, although, because minimum wage laws are for eight hours daily work, not hourly rates, restaurants can afford to have more staff even when there is nothing for them to do until closing time. In the case of the homicide, the newspapers reported that there were only two employees, the manager/co-owner (Mr. Wong) and the waiter (Mr. Chen). The person missing is the cook. Rarely does a cook leave when there are customers still inside eating, he will stay until the customers have paid, and rarely

does the parking attendant leave until he also has all of the cars out of the parking lot. So, given the newspaper accounts that the suspects stayed until the very end with only two employees behind at the restaurant raises several doubts, mainly because the cook is left out of the picture and so is the parking attendant. It is possible that the manager/co-owner filled in as a cook, or possibly the waiter, but this is very unlikely— as I never saw any co-owner, manager, or waiter work inside the kitchen to cook in a restaurant of this size (small, 20 person capacity restaurants do have owners and managers as cooks, however). It is also possible that the manager/co-owner might have agreed to let the cook go early, with the two suspects still inside. Another possibility is that the suspects might have left, and then come back when they knew no one was there but the co-owner and the waiter.

Let's stay with the assumption that the assailants stayed until the very end when only the waiter and the manager/co-owner were left. Even then, several questions arise as to whether this was really a restaurant robbery. The first is obviously what the newspaper initially reported: if it were a robbery, why would the culprits run off without touching the money in the cash register and the safe box? The money left behind at the scene was far more than that taken. Based on my observations from working at a Chinese restaurant and from going to *Nuevo Hong Kong,* it seems to me that something else was going on that evening beyond regular business. Either one of the assassins knew the restaurant really well, along with the schedules of everyone, or they were very lucky in calculating the time people would leave. I state this because I have noticed several Chinese restaurants count the money that is in the register *before* closing, when there are customers, so that if there is a robbery, people can identify other people who are there. If the culprits were to have stayed and waited for the restaurant to close, then they would

have easily gone for the money in the register because they would have seen it. Something that is also not too clear is why there was only one bullet shot in the head of the teenager, and 2 or 3 to the owner? Were the culprits trying to get a message across? At the restaurant where I worked, the owner told me that Chinese restaurants are equipped with silent alarms. Silent alarms were not used at all. What brought the police to the scene was a neighboring business employee who happened to be walking through the restaurant late at night. Looking at my rough sketch of the restaurant, if we follow the events as the newspaper presents them, one of the culprits exited the bathroom with the rifle already out. One of the silent alarms should have been set off either in the office or the cash register. I remained surprised that a worker from a nearby bar found the suspects dead, as opposed to the police. I rule out the police having any involvement in this case, as they were able to produce suspects immediately, and had arrests made in less than a week. In addition, the police calculated the killings to have happened at about 11:30 p.m., yet most Chinese restaurants close at 10 p.m., especially on weekdays. What were the owner and a waiter doing up so late on a weekday? Many things remain unclear for me as to what really occurred that night, and whether this was only a robbery.

I do believe that the assassination that occurred was premeditated and planned because the Chinese people, especially the *Chinescos*, of Mexicali have learned how to protect themselves, their families, and their businesses. Mexicali is a market place where people will buy and exchange things, often in the informal sector. The informal sector includes drug trafficking (although, that is a common occurrence), buying goods and commodities from the formal market, getting loans from people instead of formal institutions, and hiring people without formal documents. Working with the informal

sector, therefore, has its own set of rules where money sometimes cannot pay for past debt. The money left behind on the cash register, along with the money left behind in the safe, is an indicator that something else was going on at that Chinese restaurant. Killing one of the co-owners, along with the son of another co-owner are also signs that this was a vengeful act, not a robbery gone wrong. Having worked at a Chinese restaurant, I know the many security measures that Chinese people take to secure themselves, including the security alarms, but also the extra (Mexican) staff that they hire to be present if such crimes were to occur. I do believe May-fu's statement that Chinese people, like Mexican people, do value and appreciate their life and would not die simply to try to save money.

I believe that Angel, the suspect who had worked at the restaurant five years prior to the incident, had past established networks with the owners to enter the informal sector. These ties were maintained throughout the five years after he stopped working at the restaurant. Since Jose Wong (one of the co-owners) knew Angel, he allowed his staff to leave the premises, hoping that he would fix any past debt. The past debt was beyond monetary value, and Angel and his partner were there to take the life of Jose. As a security measure, Jose Wong probably thought that by having the son of another co-owner stay behind, he would be able to save his life. The dispute erupted, and in the attempt of escaping, Jose Wong was shot three times. The young waiter, Chen, was forced into the refrigerator, where he was shot once in the forehead. The two culprits left, with only the few symbolic things from Mr. Wong—his necklace of jade.

In an attempt to make sure that the informal sector did not reveal itself, accounts of how the crime was committed in the Chinese restaurant changed several times in the newspapers. The journalist went after family members of the culprits to provide an

alternate view, to investigate if there had been another motive. But the family members were not knowledgeable of the activities, or refused to reveal them. Among people in Mexicali, I often heard about the rampant corruption in the police department, so the reports that were being released to the press might have been changed to suit the needs of the informal sector. The press could not uncover any other story, beyond the one provided by the police, which is that the culprits were attempting a robbery. That is the story the Chinese consul and the Chinese Association president are standing by. In the view of these two organizations, the Chinese community does not need bad press, nor does it need to be implicated in informal sector activities.

What was the informal activity? The trafficking of illegal drugs is the most common cause of crime in the border city, as well as laundering money for that activity. Whether or not the Chinese participate in these illegal activities was beyond the scope of my study. However, because the Chinese are participants of the community, I do believe that there is some level of involvement with drugs, just as with many other people I encountered in Mexicali. The deaths of the two Chinese people are part of the larger story of many deaths that remain a mystery at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Conclusion

This chapter provides the conflicting, converging, and sometimes contradictory views that people have about the state, other individuals, and themselves. Mexico does have racial tensions with the Chinese community, and it can be seen with some of the statements I captured during my time in the field. In addition, Mexico as a nation has had anti-Chinese movements based solely on cultural and ethnic difference. Chinese immigrants have both been welcomed for their manual labor during the 1880s, and later

excluded by the state because of their unexpected entrepreneurial success in the 1920s (Jacques: 1982). The racial tensions that exist are not produced locally either. Competing policies by both Mexico and the United States contribute to the space within which the Chinese find themselves (also discussed in Chapter 1). Other issues exist as well, such as justice, what justice means to individuals, and who performs it.

Moore's reminder of what is going on in the political economy is of great relevance here. During my time in the field, drugs and mafias were still very much active. The growing gap between rich and poor was visible in the city, with security walls being built along nice suburban and inner city neighborhoods, and where violence in the city grew. Violence, justice, and (in)security were expressed in the many interviews I conducted throughout my time in Mexicali, and were highlighted by this violent incident. Two individuals who I interviewed questioned the state and its role in mitigating "justice" between what is deemed as formal and informal spaces (who is to say that a mother who has lost a son to a drug related incident does not deserve proper justice?), and what one can expect from the state given the circumstances of their incident?

The stories that people shared with me reveal that in moments of danger and uncertainty people (including people writing 'objective' news reports) will be have differing opinions of an event that is highly publicized. To re-iterate what Kleinman writes in a newer publication:

> Danger arises when our most deeply held values and emotions are threatened or lost. And people themselves become even more dangerous when they feel that these things are at serious risk. Then they are frequently prepared to do anything and everything to protect and defend what really matters (2006 19).

The assassination of Chinese people in a profession that most of them occupy clearly shaped the way May-fu, Mayling, and the Chinese Association President saw the

event. They were victims, simply working to get by. For Fernando and Pepe, at stake was justice and how to obtain it when they were engaging in illegal activities. May-Fu and Mayling reflected their moral values in the cultural context where they are different and challenged. The incident itself brought Mayling to struggle with her own identity as both Chinese and Mexican. She saw them at odds with one another. On the other hand, May-Fu's identity is bicultural. She sees herself as both Chinese and Mexican, and used global perspectives on the experience of migration and immigration to draw parallels where people can understand each other, the way she has understood herself. Lupita, a middle-class Mexican citizen, analyzes the event based on money. This analysis is based on her class status and her perceived threat that Chinese people may be taking what is suppose to be for middle class Mexicans (i.e. Chinese kids enrolling in the affluent elite public schools). Her understanding of difference is rooted in class. Pepe encounters danger everyday, and why he engages in danger is of importance. His family, his unique way of finding justice, and his own role in perpetuating violence makes him envious of what he believes to be the Chinese lifestyle. . The President hid what he knew of the events from me, yet he was very public in newspapers on the "Chinese perspective." At stake were community representation and misrepresentation. Sophia sees the event as unfortunate; something that could happen to anyone in a city plagued with violence and poverty. Her view becomes neutral, but this neutrality a naivete or misinformation about her surroundings where different views are being expressed and perceived.

Violence is at the extreme of the lives being constructed at the border. Violence, however, is interpreted in multiple ways with multiple meanings, based on what is 'at stake' for individuals.

The chapter that follows moves away from violence into the individual stories of people entering different markets, specifically the Chinese restaurant, and how the people negotiate ascribed divided roles to manage a restaurant. In addition, the chapter that follows shows how people are divided based on race, gender, and language, but that despite this visual segregation, there is integration in a world filled with division. Integration is at the other end of violence. An example is the cooperation and management of a Chinese restaurant for the success of those working there. This includes recent Chinese immigrant male cooks, young Mexican women waitresses, and an owner who has a keen understanding of the changes in the political economy. Violence, although it impacts the economies, individuals, and societies, is not the only element that exists in Mexicali. People learn to cooperate, and this cooperation will be explored in the chapter that follows.

Chapter 3

Chinese and Mexican Workers at the Restaurant: Social Relations on the Ground

Chinescos, the long-standing Chinese people of Mexicali, live their life and build their businesses along the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexicali has historically experienced increases in immigration from different parts of Mexico and now Central America. Political scientists, historians, economists, sociologists, journalists and anthropologists have written about economic development and labor at the U.S.-Mexico border, most notably criticizing labor conditions at the *maquiladoras* [foreign-owned assembly] factories (Cravey 1998). From the violation of human rights by Nike to the disappearance of *maquiladora* women workers in Ciudad Juarez, working in a border city has been described primarily in terms of extreme danger and exploitation. What is often overlooked at the U.S.-Mexico border is other jobs available to migrants and immigrants coming into the city, including jobs for Chinese recent immigrants. This chapter first describes how a *Chinesco* sole proprietor manages and recruits workers for his restaurant, and the social working relations between two different ethnic groups. Rather than looking at the conditions in the Chinese restaurant, I examine the relationships formed by individuals working there, including the owner, managers, and workers. By describing the social relations, I show how people do work together to form a community. In addition, this description shows how *Chinescos* know the community of Mexicali in a way that facilitates them to be absent from the restaurant industry.

Labor at the U.S.-Mexico border cities, Mexicali in particular, is quite varied. There are different types of work in which people of Mexicali in the informal sector engage. This includes selling merchandise without a proper stall or store on the streets,

parking cars, serving as parking attendants, and various other jobs that are common in urban areas. Economists refer to these jobs as "underemployment," work with pay that allows unskilled laborers to enter a particular job sector where there is no formal setting recognized by the state (Rauch 2005). Other jobs that have become increasing available in urban settings are service sector jobs. Service sector jobs are mostly seen in rapidly growing cities that are experiencing fast economic growth, but they were first introduced and seen in modern economic cities like New York, London, and Tokyo (Sassen 2001).

This chapter looks at one of the places where the interaction is seen the most: the work place at the Chinese restaurant. The aim of this chapter is two fold: 1) to see how the *Chinesco* owner divides his workforce and 2) to introduce the reader to everyday working conditions at the restaurant. However, the restaurant is only a glance at what actually happens in Mexicali. People interact. People fight. People speak different languages. People have different histories. By introducing the backgrounds of the main managers of the restaurant, it is my goal to not only illustrate how labor is recruited (including the policies both in the U.S. and Mexico), but to also show how labor is managed and divided in the same way that Sassen suggests manufactured labor is divided globally.

Divisions at the restaurant: using ethnicity, gender, and language in a Chinese restaurant business for different purposes

When I first started working at the Chinese restaurant, I quickly began to notice that labor was divided along gender and ethnic lines. Upon arriving, the sign at the front of the restaurant read, "HELP WANTED, WOMEN PREFFERED." I asked the manager, Rigo, why this was so and he said that he did not know, but that the owner, Don Lolo,

preferred women as waitresses. The help wanted sign was to hire more waitresses, not cooks. I later learned that cooks were hired through word of mouth by the owner directly, and not by the restaurant manager. Born in China, but raised in Mexico, Don Lolo considers himself both Chinese AND Mexican, culturally and nationally. In addition, Lolo fluently speaks both Spanish and Cantonese. The hiring of restaurant workers was directly linked with the divided negotiated identity of Don Lolo. This issue will become important and relevant as I explain the way the restaurant is run.

The Chinese restaurant I worked at for over five months had a staff of 14 that included the owner, two restaurant managers, one cashier, six waitresses, four cooks, and two 'floaters' (Chinese women who cook, or fill in the gaps for waitresses and cooks, such as prepare the drinks, cookies, or other food). One of the restaurant managers is Rigo, a Mexican male in his early 30's who spoke Spanish and some English. The other restaurant manager was Lee, a Chinese male in his early 40's who spoke Cantonese and some Spanish. Rigo was in charge of the service staff, which was entirely composed of Spanish-speaking Mexican females, while Lee was in charge of the cooking staff, which was entirely composed of Cantonese speaking Chinese people. The division of labor was thus based on gender, language. The review of Chinese businesses in the previous chapter revealed the active involvement of Chinese entrepreneurs, but what I found in Mexicali's *Chinescos* was the absence of the owner in actually operating the restaurant. This absence shows how long standing Chinese have a keen understanding of labor relations on the ground, and how they can benefit financially from these interactions. In what follows, I provide examples where the Chinese manager will supervise Mexican workers and will communicate any discrepancies of the restaurant to the owner in Cantonese. Likewise,

the Mexican manager will supervise the Chinese workers and communicate any discrepancies of the restaurant to the owner in Spanish. As a result, the owner (who has been in Mexicali for a long time) is fully aware that Mexicali is a city where many immigrants and migrants arrive, and that there languages differ. His strong command of both languages, Cantonese and Spanish, allows him to supervise his workforce without being present.

During the twenty hours a week I spent working at the restaurant, I would see Don Lolo, come into the restaurant for a limited amount of time. While he was at the restaurant, he would have several friends over for either lunch or dinner. Unlike other businesses that I observed where the owner (or owners) spends a large portion of their time overseeing and managing a restaurant, Don Lolo was only highly attentive of the business when it was time to count the money in the evening. Sometimes, he was not even there for that. This was unlike the event I described earlier where an owner was assassinated during closing hours. Unlike that incident, during closing time at Don Lolo's Chinese restaurant, he would have a diverse mix of people stay until closing time with him: the Mexican cashier, the Chinese manager, and the Mexican manager. If the owner was absent, it was only the cashier and the two managers. Don Lolo told me that he had a mix of employees as a way to be safe, but I observed through my stay that this was also to monitor his workforce. By being able to assign the monitoring of his workforce to his managers, he was able to spend less time there.

As explained earlier, the role of the managers was to supervise the employees in their designated area; however, the managers were also monitoring people who spoke the opposite language and who were of a different race. Rigo (the Mexican manager)

supervised the Mexican waitresses and cashier, but he also instructed the waitresses to report any inefficient activities in which the Chinese cooks engaged (such as not working, delivering food late, or making food that was not cooked well). At the other end, Lee (the Chinese head cook manager) ensured quality food control of the Chinese cooks and also had the duty to insure that the Mexican waitresses were doing their job (such as picking up the food orders on time and making sure they were charging the right amount of money for the meals). The duty to supervise was not designated only to the managers, but to everyone on staff.

The divisions of the restaurant, as well as the assignments of people to certain areas was a way of maintaining control and power in order to allow the restaurant owner to be absent. Michel Foucault's concept of panopticon, where a constant surveillance is a mode of controlling an environment, becomes useful (1995). Foucault suggests that governments will operate like prisons where constant surveillance is needed, and uses the metaphor of the panopticon, a tall tower overseeing all the actions of prisoners. However, while this concept structurally captures what is going on (the constant monitoring of people's actions), it does not capture how it is played out on the ground, or how people (in this case, the managers) have become loyal to the owner. It also does not capture how workers working in the panopticon are loyal to the government structure. The following section provides the life backgrounds of both Rigo and Lee, the managers trusted with the restaurant, to show how modes of surveillance and assignments of supervision were actually produced. In seeing their life histories, I attempt to show how both Rigo and Lee's transnational experiences in different jobs have led to a creative way of understanding why differentiation is used to manage the restaurant. After discussing their

backgrounds, I will show how they negotiate the monitoring of the restaurant when conflicts occur to show that despite the owner wishing to have control of an environment, conflict is inevitable.

The Mexican manager: the early years

Rigo is a Mexican man in his late 30's born who was raised in Mexicali, but whose parents migrated from Sinaloa, Mexico during the early 1960's. Rigo tells me, "My father and mother worked in their little farm in Sinaloa before coming to Mexicali. They still have it, but it's taken care of by my aunt who still lives there. My parents left Sinaloa because they had been told that the government was giving away free land in Mexicali, which they knew was near the U.S.-Mexico border. The plan was for my parents to live in Mexicali for some time, and to then move to the U.S. But the plans changed; my mother had my older brother, followed by two more brothers, my sister, and then me. Pretty much, they began to settle in Mexicali and found jobs near and around in agriculture. Soon, my father heard from a friend about the *bracero program,* and he would leave us for three months and later return with lots of money. Because of that program, some of us were able to immigrate legally to the U.S. Some *maquiladoras* were being set up in the early 1970s, but nothing like you see today, so they never worked there. There were other jobs, like going to the Imperial Valley to work as a *bracero.*"

Rigo's upbringing in Mexicali was a result of his parents' settlement in Mexicali, drawn there by state efforts to develop the land agriculturally. According to elder citizens of the city, there were time periods when the city of Mexicali, in an effort to develop and attract more residents and to increase government taxes, would "give out" plots of land to people. The conditions behind these programs (as I am told by local people) were that

the new owner would be given ownership of the land only after paying for the paperwork transactions (which many saw as inexpensive), as well as paying for the installation of water and electricity lines to go to that particular segment of the new lot (which many saw as high, but that could be done in small payments). This was done as an effort to build more communities and to increase the population for agricultural reasons, the same reason as earlier in the century when Chinese immigrants were recruited.

The *Bracero Program* that Rigo refers to, in which his father participated, was an effort by the United States to bring agricultural workers from Mexico to harvest lands in the United States. It was called the "Emergency Farm Labor Program," but it is most commonly referred to as the "Bracero Program." The United States was experiencing labor shortages, especially during World War I and after World War II, and the U.S. government looked to its southern neighbor to provide some workers (Gamboa 1999). The Bracero Program was started in 1942 and ended in 1964. Many older people I spoke with in Mexicali had their share of being *braceros*, and would talk about buses with signs posted on them with cities and states such as "Colorado" "Chicago" "Stockton" "Arizona" "Oxnard" "Bakersfield" "Fresno" and other names. These buses would be in either Calexico, California, or directly in Mexicali. As a result, Mexicali, like many other border cities, became the gateway for people to participate in the *Bracero Program.* Because this was only a guest worker program, some of these people have built their lives in Mexicali, and waited patiently for other programs to recruit them, or they would return to their families living there (since the program was only for the men, not women or children). Many of the *braceros* stayed and settled in the United States, bringing over their wives and children.

With a plot of land and income from his father working in the U.S., Rigo's family stayed in Mexicali and enjoyed the benefits the city had to offer. Rigo has seen the changes of the city, and claims to know people from different walks of life as a result of living in Mexicali for such a long time: "I know Mexicali so well, before all these buildings starting being built, before Wal-Mart arrived! I have lived here all my life, except for a few years back in 1988 when I left to the U.S. for a couple of years." Rigo had real financial reasons to immigrate to the U.S. and was able to enter legally. He explains, "I had just gotten my girlfriend, now my wife, pregnant so I felt I could have made money in the U.S. and then take her with me. But life in the U.S. is difficult. I managed to learn how to speak some English since my sister married an Anglo, and he was patient with trying to teach me. The U.S. is not for me. My home is Mexicali. I was not in the U.S. illegally. My father had fixed all our papers. Since he had worked and lived in the U.S. for many periods of his life, he was able to get permanent residency status in 1986, you know, the one that *el Reagan* [U.S. President Reagan] gave us. I lost my status as a permanent resident, but I used to have it and came and went to the U.S. all the time." I asked him how he lost it, and he simply replied that it was because he had missed an appointment for renewal. However, he had a local passport. Rigo indeed does speak some English, as we conversed a few times very basic lines with each other: "How are you?" and "How is everything going?". Unlike Rigo, Rigo's sister did settle in the U.S. and chose to live in Arizona. Rigo's father, since he was able to get a U.S. permanent residency card (referred to by locals as *una mica*), requested that the entire family obtain U.S. legal statuses. As a result, they have the opportunity to also live in the U.S., yet most of them choose to stay in Mexicali. However, what this shows is that many

people living in the U.S.-Mexico border are in some ways interconnected with relatives that live in the U.S. This relationship also holds true with the Chinese population that lives in Mexicali.

Rigo's encounter with Don Lolo, the Chinese restaurant owner

Rigo met Don Lolo as a teenager when he worked in one of Don Lolo's restaurants and established rapport with him. Rigo soon learned much information about Don Lolo, including that he was the president of the Chinese restaurant group Liu Lang, one of the largest Chinese business associations in Mexicali. Rigo began running a restaurant when he was very young, which really showed he was a hard worker to Don Lolo. "He liked me from the beginning, but I did not want to do that type of work. I was young, and wanted something different," he told me. Rigo then chose to be a bartender at a local club, "The scene was wild. It was always partying after people left. I was getting all messed up all the time. Working at clubs is always wild because the boss needs to make sure his staff is happy so they will not steal from him and to make sure that they get customers happy so they can return." Since he could discreetly give some of the women free drinks, it was the ease of meeting women that led him to be a bartender. The opportunity to meet women was so available that he accidentally impregnated his present wife. "I was young, she was young, and temperature rises," he told me. "But, it was not a one night stand like those of many guys who get women pregnant and leave. No, I had been dating my wife for a couple of months before I got her pregnant," he told me. Panicked in knowing that he would not be able to support his wife and future son with a bartender salary, Rigo chose to go to the U.S.

As stated earlier, life in the U.S. was too difficult for the young Rigo. Rigo was away from his family, working in the hot sun as a farmworker, and in a rural town with very little to do for a young man in his early 20's. He had promised his wife that he would return to Mexicali to settle permanently. After sending remittances and visiting his wife for two years, he did. He had managed to save much of his earnings and he and his wife bought a home. Soon after, another baby was on the way. "I needed a job, fast, but I did not want to return to the United States. So, I went to look for Don Lolo and he gave me a job as a waiter," he told me. Despite the possibility of working in the U.S. where he could make a lot more money doing agricultural work in the neighboring Imperial Valley (like many people with his immigration status do), he chose not to. He explained, "That type of work is difficult. You are out there in the sun in the 100+ degree weather, breaking your back, making long border wait lines to cross over and back, and all for a pay that only seems like a lot. Doing that type of work does not get you health insurance either, and I needed *mi seguro social* [government social security] for my wife. The first birth was expensive because we did not have anything. By working as a waiter, it is at least air conditioned inside, I get health insurance for my family and me, and I can get some tips." Rigo exemplifies part of a population in Mexico that has experienced and understands some of the harshest labor conditions that the U.S. offers to Mexicans.

Because of Rigo's strong work ethic, Don Lolo immediately saw his talent to manage a restaurant. Don Lolo would test Rigo and see how he would perform and to see how loyal he was by asking him to work during Mother's Day or Father's Day, the busiest times for restaurants in Mexicali. "A good worker does not only work hard, but is loyal. I always check the loyalty that a person has with me. If he cannot be loyal, then he

cannot be trusted," is what Don Lolo told me. After two years, Rigo showed his loyalty and was promoted to manage one of the many restaurants in which Don Lolo was a partner. The job of manager at Chinese restaurants is often reserved for the sons of Chinese partners, but Rigo was one of the few Mexicans to be named a manager. "I've worked for Don Lolo for 12 years now," he told me. "Managing Chinese restaurants?" I asked him. "Oh, no, he has had a restaurant that specialized in seafood too. I managed that one, as well as Chinese restaurants," he told me. Rigo indeed was well trusted by Don Lolo, as he would often count the money without the owner present. I also observed that Rigo would be allowed to sit with Don Lolo and his friends to eat late lunch during non-busy evenings.

The Chinese Manager

Like Rigo, Lee was also a trusted friend of Don Lolo. Lee, a man in his early 40's is a Chinese man from the Guangdong Province in China. When I asked him where he was from, he answered sarcastically, "China, where else?" He was like most Chinese I had met initially: blunt, non-responsive, and distrusting. With time and patience, however, I got to meet Lee's wife, ten-year-old son, and twelve-year-old daughter. I eventually learned his life history.

Lee was born and raised in a small village near the city of Guangzhou, China. Lee had ten years of schooling, and quit school when he was fifteen. He had heard of opportunities opening up in Guangzhou and chose to follow some family members who had moved there earlier. "The city [Guangzhou] was not very big at first. It was in 1981 when I first moved there. I was a teenager and wanted to explore and see different things outside of my village. We had gone as a kid to Guangzhou, since some of the health

services that my parents needed were there. I liked being there, so I said, why not take a shot at it?" he told me. At fifteen years old, he quickly found a job at one of the many companies being opened up in Guangzhou. "It was at a factory making fans. It was not the best type of work, but it was income I could count on. And, it was the best type of work available. Despite my age, I got the job because I had a lot more education than plenty of people around," he said. Lee's family members were small time entrepreneurs in the village and had been able to provide for his educational expenses, which gave him greater possibilities in getting hired.

Working long hours and with a decent pay, Lee began thinking of other possibilities for his life. He did not want to stay as a factory worker, but he knew Guangzhou offered the best work he could obtain in China without an education beyond the age of 15. If he were to move to Beijing, he would not have the networks set up the way he had them in Guangzhou with his family and friends. Where would he arrive? Where would he work? His life was too comfortable to risk it for something unknown. Lee thought of moving to Hong Kong, the British colony neighboring Guangzhou, but it had the same limitations. He would also have more expenses because he would need to be smuggled into Hong Kong, in addition to the future cost of paying to get legalized. He had heard from friends that the fees and prices were astronomical. "*Mucho dinero para ir a Hong Kong* [too much money to go to Hong Kong]," he told me. Still tempted with the idea of trying to make it to Hong Kong, he decided to work only for the purpose of saving money and not for unnecessary luxuries or expenses, like his friends did. He does remember that the only luxury he could not get rid of was smoking, a habit he continued when I met him.

Then, at twenty, Lee met the love of his life. His future wife was not arranged by his parents, nor was she a girl from his village; it was a girl working at a cafeteria that he would frequent. Jian Nuan, his wife, worked as a cashier. Soon, he began taking his lunch break after everyone else had taken theirs. Since he was one of the youngest to ascend in a managerial position in the company, he could take lunch breaks at different times than the employees he supervised. He would strategically go to the food stall where Jian Nuan worked after most of the customers had left. Having few friends because he worked a lot and because of his position as a manager, he would eat alone. Jian Nuan, being only 16 years old, was on the constant watch of her parents that owned the restaurant. She would smile and initiate small talk with Lee. Lee, eating very slowly and patiently, would observe Jian Nuan's every move. He really began developing a strong romantic relationship for her. "It took me two months of eating there before her parents formally agreed to let her go out with me. We had been seeing each other, but only for a short amount of time. She would lie and say that she needed to get change for the cash register so we could go to the park and talk. I got to know her and she got to know me," Lee remembers.

Heading to the Americas: Lee's journey to Mexico

Less than a year had passed when Lee married Jian Nuan in 1984. Jian Nuan, coming from a family with a restaurant business, was actually financially better off than Lee who was a manager at a factory. Lee tells me that one day he told Jian Nuan's family about the money he had saved and how he did not know how to use it. His father-in-law gave him the following advice: "You should open your own business, but not in China. You need to own your own business. Why stay with a company? You are a manager now,

a top position. But do you think they will ever let you be an owner? No. This is China, owning anything is difficult. What you should do is save more money and move west. That is where the money is. I have family in Mexico, and they tell me that the city is growing at a very fast pace. Mexico is close to the U.S., but it does not cost nowhere near as much to move there. To save money, you should not have kids with my daughter until you move to the country where you want to be. It will make it easier for you to move. I can help you out, but you have to keep saving money."

With those words, Lee and Jian Nuan continued working for the next ten years. Then, Jian Nuan, at age 25, became pregnant in 1993. "I was happy that Jian Nuan and I had our first daughter, but I was worried about the goals we had set out for ourselves," he told me. With their one year old daughter, Mei Meng, Lee and Jian Nuan decided that it was time to move west in 1994. The cost to go to Mexicali, Mexico for the entire family amounted to US$15,000. "We moved right on time, it was not as expensive as it is now," he told me. That was almost all of the money Lee and Jian Nuan had saved. They still had US$2000 left, which they would use to find a place to live before Lee found a job.

Jian Nuan's father helped Lee when he moved to Mexicali by putting him in contact with family members there. However, once there, he noticed that the apartments where Jian Nuan's extended kin lived were much too small for them to share. They stayed there for less than a week and soon found a small apartment. Jian Nuan's family told Lee where to find a job at one of the many Chinese restaurants in the city. Not knowing anything about restaurants and not being able to speak Spanish, Lee was assigned to be a busboy. The need to find a job, any job, forced him to go from being a

manager in China to being a busboy picking up plates for people in Mexico. With bills mounting, he had needed to find work, any type of work.

It was 1995 and by this time there was a lot of talk about the city of Mexicali growing, despite a *peso* devaluation and inflation that was occurring in the country. Among Lee's friends, many of them expressed wishes to open a Chinese restaurant. Jian Nuan's extended family members were not owners, and they too were excited about the opportunity of restaurant ownership. Lee, however, was hesitant. He knew that before starting a restaurant, he needed to learn how to cook. The first place he found a job busing tables seemed like a place where he could not really advance: it seemed like the restaurant always had more employees than customers, and some of the people working there had been working there for a long time. He was not going to learn how to be a cook there, especially with the groggy older cooks who always seemed to lose patience with the waitresses over everything. One of his friends told him about a new restaurant that needed cooks.

Lee's encounter with Don Lolo

On his only day off from work during the week, Lee went to the Chinese restaurant where people said new cooks were needed. When he asked to speak with the owner, he realized he had been speaking with one of the co-owners, Don Lolo. Don Lolo said that he had plans to open a new restaurant, but not for another year. Lee was honest with him and told him he did not know how to cook, but that he really wanted to learn. Don Lolo told him that he would place Lee as a helper in the kitchen, those that help with the chopping and dicing. Lee, although interested, could not take the job because of the low salary it entailed. He knew that the kitchen helper position received the same salary

as the busboy position, except that being a busboy provided some additional gratuity tips that the waiter or waitress would split with him. Don Lolo explained that if he took the position of helper, he would order the other cooks to train him to be a cook and that he would be immediately hired at the new restaurant. He could not, however, offer him a better salary. Faced with a difficult decision that required even more time from him, Lee accepted the offer. Jin Nuan decided to go to work herself too, and left her daughter in the care of her extended family.

The restaurant work schedule for Lee was from 11 in the morning to 10 at night, with two hours of break in between. Despite the 11 in the morning start time, Lee would wake up early at 8 in the morning to get ready to go to take Spanish classes at the Chinese Association near his apartment. He showed me his low-quality copies of words in Spanish, such as "la orden numero" (order number) or "brocoli" (broccoli), or "el camaron" (shrimp), which are some of the popular words used in the restaurant setting. A year passed, his Spanish improved, as well as his ability to cook many dishes. He got promoted to assistant cook mid-way through the year. He was fast, efficient, and had a knack for making food for the Mexican palate.

Once the new restaurant was completed (and, subsequently his apprenticeship completed), Don Lolo immediately asked him to the new restaurant. However, the current partners where Lee cooked were not happy with the possibility of losing their assistant cook and offered him more money. Lee did not know how much Don Lolo was going to offer him for going to the new restaurant. It could be lower than his current wage. For the meantime he was unsure of what to do. He knew that it was because of Don Lolo that he had the skills of a cook. Remembering that, he decided to go and help

Don Lolo with the new Chinese restaurant where Don Lolo was the lead investor and president. To Lee's surprise, Don Lolo had assigned him as head cook and manager of the food division. His salary doubled from US$320 monthly to US$600, above all the other employees' salaries and close to the general restaurant manager's salary. The increase in salary came also at an important time: Jian Nuan had become pregnant again.

Lee worked for Don Lolo for seven years, one of those years as an apprentice. When I met Lee, he had saved enough money to open up his own restaurant in the outer parts of the city where the city continued to grow. The restaurant was still being built, so he needed to continue working as cook until it was done. I worked with him for a few months before he left to his new job and noticed the way he managed and helped Don Lolo run the restaurant.

Divisions in the restaurant: beyond managers

Both Rigo and Lee have a long history of being employed by Don Lolo. Although they are not partners in the restaurant, they have formed strong times with Don Lolo and have tried to ensure that Don Lolo continues to do well in his business. Thus, the job of monitoring the restaurant becomes especially important for both of them, and they both take very seriously. But, the ultimate power of reprimanding and telling people what to do is with the owner. The owner has the final say in employment matters, as he is the one that all employees fear. There are times when the owner stepped in to improve the operation of his restaurant. The owner also helped with times when conflict occured separate from work, and instances when managers could not possibly do anything to control what went on inside the restaurant.

A conversation I had with Yoli, a 17 year-old waitress, illustrates how this happens:

"Did you hear that Don Lolo yelled at us earlier today?" Yoli asked me.

"No, what happened?" I responded.

"Well, he came in and said that he wanted to have a meeting will all the front staff, so we all sit down and like just start listening to what he has to say. Apparently, one of them [pointing at the Chinese cooks] snitched on us that we would put the radio on full blast before the store opens up and that we get nothing done. Which is true, and I completely understand Don Lolo in getting angry with us, because if I were a business owner I would want people to be working and not be messing around. When he gets done telling us off, I tell him that we are not the only ones that are not doing our work on time; the cooks sometimes don't have all the to-go food ready for the day. He was surprised, and then goes back to the kitchen and talks to them. So today, we all got a chew out," she told me. I ask her if she is mad at any of the workers as a result of this reprimand, and she responded, "Well, not really. I don't really know which one of them told on us. Besides, it's his [Don Lolo's] business, and I understand him wanting to make sure that it runs well."

Yoli's (and the other waitresses) lack of resentment toward being reprimanded surprised me. I attribute this to the waitresses' ability to also bring forward complaints about the cooks and to their inability to identify which one of the cooks accused them of not doing their work. In the eyes of the waitresses, it could not have been Lee, the manager of the cooks, because he was only in charge of the cooks and most of the waitresses had a good relationship with him. Likewise, the cooks were also not upset at

being reprimanded by the owner. Their inability to identify the waitress who told on them because of language barriers prevented them from being upset about the situation. Here, language became an important factor in reducing tensions.

Another way that the managers supervised the employees was through the physical space of the restaurant. They assigned only Mexican women to be in the front part of the restaurant and only Chinese men to the backside of the restaurant. "I don't like being in front of the restaurant during off-peak hours, it's very boring," Yoli told me one day. Yoli could have been placed in the back helping with the peeling or chopping, but she was not allowed to be in the back except to pick up food orders. In the front part of the restaurant, where all the customer interaction occurred, the work regelated the young Mexican women as waitresses. They seated the customers, took down the orders, and were attentive to any customer needs. The only male presence in the front was Rigo, the Mexican manager who was in his late 30's. In the back of the restaurant, where food was prepared, were the male Chinese immigrant cooks. Their ages ranged from 25 (the youngest) to 60 (the oldest). The cooks would do most of the food preparation: chop the vegetables, prepare the chicken, and cook the dishes. Even though everyone had their designated tasks and divided physical space, they continuously interacted with each other and observed each other's behavior. While these may seem like natural divisions in a restaurant, with waiters and waitresses' being assigned to the front and cooks being located in the back kitchen, what makes this situation different and important is the lack of financial and social mobility that existed once assigned to these positions. A male waiter was never going to be Chinese, and a cook was never going to be a Mexican

woman. Similarly, the job of a manager was never going to be given to a Mexican woman.

Despite this division through the physical space, which are normal restaurant settings, there were many other ways that the monitoring and supervising of the opposite groups' behavior would occur. One way is when food was ordered. The waitresses would give the food order on a carbon copy paper to the cooks. The Chinese cooks would see the order, read the food to be made, and check the prices being charged for the food. Any inconsistencies would be immediately corrected. In one instance, I observed the following interaction: "Hey, hey, prices... where?" Julio, a Chinese immigrant cook in his 30's, asked and pointed at missing prices to Jessica, an 18-year-old waitress. "Oh, sorry, I forgot," she answered. After making the food, Julio told another cook to make sure that the prices were right. That cook went to the booklet and insured that the prices were added to the bill. Jessica had intended that her friend (from the neighboring American fast-food restaurant) get a discount off the Chinese food. Jessica, not keeping her end of the deal with her friend on the discount, simply apologized and said that she was unable to do anything. Later, I asked Jessica if she was mad about not being able to give the discount, "Well, yes, I'm mad, because he had given me a discount when I went to the restaurant next door. It just sucks that I got caught," she told me. I asked her if she was mad at the cooks, "Not really. They're just doing their job. Plus, I'm not even sure who to even be mad at, Julio or Lee. Julio is obviously the one that saw the prices were missing, but Lee is the one that checked it. I'm not sure if Julio told him, or if Lee just happened to check it. My guess is Julio, but I can not be sure," she told me. In addition, most waitresses know that it really is not worth being upset too long with any of the

cooks because then they will not get their food out fast enough, and if that happens, the customer will get mad and not give them a good gratuity. The waitresses' interdependence with the cooks was apparent, and their relationships were important to keep.

Feelings of disrespect at the worksite

There are incidents, that regardless of language and the physical division of the labor, when people will get upset and interrupt the way business is supposed to be conducted. Regardless of the manager's role, employees in a restaurant setting will face conflicts. This often happened when people felt disrespected, not when it was directly related to getting a work task done. There was an unusual silence and tension at the restaurant one day that I went to work. It was an uncomfortable place to be. The division was sharp: the Chinese cooks were not talking to the Mexican waitresses, and vice versa. The Chinese people claimed nothing had happened, despite the obvious silence. After a couple of hours of working in silence, I decided to go to the front of restaurant and investigate what had happened. Yoli, the Mexican teenage waitress who was usually attentive about the restaurants operations, also had nothing to say. Had the owner come in and reprimanded them again? She said that Don Lolo had not been there all day. Yoli had a new very chic hairstyle on that day, which she volunteered to elaborate on, "I got my hair done yesterday. Do you think it's nice?" I responded that yes, I thought it was nice. She then responded, "Well, you would not know, because you are a guy," she told me. I remain confused. "What do you mean?" I asked her. "I was going to ask you if you knew how much something like what I had done would cost, but you're a guy, you wouldn't know," she replied. I then tell her that my friend from Japan told me that men were

spending up to US$80-US$100 for haircuts, so I would imagine it would be a bit less in Mexico. She responded, "No, it's about the same, because women have a lot more hair than men, so then it's the same here. Well, my hair style cost $800 *pesos* [U.S.$75]" I was surprised at the high price, but did not respond. She continued talking, "Well, Francis [the Chinese woman 'floater'] said it was really nice when she first saw me. I thanked her. Then she asked me how much it cost. I told her $800 *pesos.* She had a confused looked on her face and asked me if it was $80 *pesos* and I told her, no, $800 *pesos.* She then did the rudest thing in the world; she laughed at me! Then, she went with Lily and told her too, and then both of them started laughing. Then, the other cooks heard them laughing and asked what they were laughing about, and then they started telling them that I'm so dumb and that I spent $800 *pesos* for a hairstyle, and they start laughing too! They said Mexican women are so dumb and don't spend their money right, and all these other things," Yoli told me with teary eyes. My immediate reaction was to defend the Chinese people and say that there must have been a misunderstanding, especially since she did not speak Cantonese, she could not possibly understand them. "Look Ernesto, I don't need to know the language to know that they were talking about me. I would see the gestures, the pointing, and the laughs. They were directed towards me!" she told me. I then told her that she needed to understand that $800 *pesos* was a lot of money, and that for Chinese who left everything in China they could not ever imagine spending so much on a haircut. "I know that, but that still does not give them any right to laugh at me. I spend a week's worth of my hard worked money on this because it is what I wanted, and they should respect that," she replied. Yoli felt immensely disrespected at the actions that Francis

committed. Yoli did not fully understand the Cantonese words she had heard but she had understood the gestures that showed ridicule of her actions.

That day was one of the most unpleasant days for me to work at the restaurant. The Mexican waitresses were simply not talking to the Chinese cooks or floaters. The division was strictly on ethnic lines, and I felt I was caught in the middle of a silly misunderstanding. I often hung out with the Chinese and all the Mexican women knew that. Would I get ignored if I continued to befriend the Chinese workers after learning what happened to Yoli? On this occasion the Mexican waitresses decided to rally behind Yoli and let it be known through their actions that it was unacceptable to disrespect their peer. They avoided interaction with all the Chinese, and when making the orders, they would look the other way and avoid eye contact. The Chinese felt bad about the entire situation, but did not know what to say or do. The Chinese cooks often joked around with each other, or were playful. This time they were quiet, and also uncomfortable with the surroundings. I decided to act like the naïve, uninformed worker. I asked Francis if she noticed Yoli's hairstyle. She replied, "Yes, it's very nice. But it is very expensive. Teenagers these days are crazy. Just the other day Tim wanted me to buy him a game system that was $3,400 *pesos* [US$317]. That's a lot of money! It's good that Yoli is working to pay for that, but it really does seem a lot of money to spend on a hairstyle," she told me. She did not laugh, nor did she make fun of her. She realized her mistake in making fun of a teenager, but more interestingly, she never made it a racial issue, as Yoli thought had happened.

Yoli made assumptions of the conversation without completely understanding the conversation, and in that process, assumed some ethnic racist comments directed towards

her. The city of Mexicali is filled with people from all over the states. Rivalries and critiques based on the origin of one's state or where one grew up are common (for example, people from Mexico City are called *chilangos* and are often accused of talking 'funny'). In addition, class tensions and divisions that exist in the city are targets for harassment (not wearing the 'right' clothes, or having the 'right' style). In terms of race, while the assumption is that 'we are all the same' in Mexico, this is far from true. Lighter skin people are treated better than darker skin Mexican *mestizos*. Yoli is a darker skin Mexican, a reason as to why she felt Francis and the other Chinese made an ethnic racist comment. My close interactions with Francis beyond the restaurant lead me to believe that Francis attributed Yoli's decision to her age, not her gender, nationality, or ethnicity. Francis has a pre-teenage son who she often complained about spending exorbitant amounts of money in "meaningless" stuff, so she understood that she was wrong to laugh at Yoli.

Francis was sitting down and making ice tea, I was chopping broccoli, when Yoli passed by to place an order in the kitchen. I asked Francis if Yoli is mad at her, and Francis responded, "I don't know." On her way back from the kitchen, I called Yoli, "Hey Yoli..." Yoli stops at the table, avoids eye contact with Francis, and looked at me. "Are you mad at Francis?" Francis' eyes get wide open. Yoli looked at Francis. Francis immediately told her, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Don't be mad." Yoli then started lecturing Francis, "What you did is wrong. I'm not mad at you I'm just hurt. I can't believe you said those things about me to all the cooks!" Francis, half understanding Yoli, just began to tell her, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" Yoli then looked at her and said, "Okay, fine Francis, I forgive you." Francis gets up and gives Yoli a hug. Yoli shrugs, but accepted

the hug. The incident never came up at any conversation again. And, the situation got settled without the managers intervening. My intervention shows that as anthropologists, we can move beyond being detailed observers recording conflict happening; we can also initiate mediation, even in mundane things like improving work relations at a restaurant.

Sexual harassment and 'playing' around at the restaurant

There have also been cases where all the Chinese workers get angry with the Mexican waitresses as well. Sara, a 21-year-old waitress that had worked for the owner a few years back, had an outgoing persona and was one of the fastest waitresses. She was one of the few waitresses able to get customers to give her large gratuity tips. Sara had the ability to strike quick conversations with people, smiled consistently, and would sometimes play around with the Chinese cooks. A prevalent problem with the Chinese cooks, however, was that whenever waitresses began being playful with them, they would be sexually playful with them. They would pretend to grab their breast, buttocks, or legs. They would also hug them against their will, or in some extreme cases, pretend to be engaging in sex. The Chinese cooks would sexually harass the waitresses, but to them, it was more play and fun rather than harassment, a form of passing time in a mundane job. Observing this was difficult to note, especially since I was unsure if they did this to the Mexican women because they were young teenagers. They never did this to the older Chinese women. As I observed this behavior, I wondered whether Chinese cooks had misconceived ideas that Mexican women were sexually available to them. Sexual harassment by Chinese men who were much older than these young women was only a sign of how Mexican women continued to be exploited in Mexico.

Sara was one of the few women who stood up to the Chinese men and tried to stop the sexual harassment. She did not enjoy the harassment, nor did she find it funny when Chinese cooks would use obscene gestures. The way Sara would communicate her discomfort was by smiling and telling the Chinese cooks to stop. On one particular day, Lee decided to play with her, but Sara took it as sexual harassment. Sara was walking to pick up some food that was ordered, and Lee pretended to grab her breasts. Sara told me, "I was walking to get the food, and I could swear that his hand was already going to touch my breast! The only person who is allowed to do that is my husband. I got scared. I should not be working in these conditions, so I went and told Don Lolo. You can sue for things like that, you know?" Sara had had enough and decided to tell the owner about the behavior by the Chinese men.

The owner of any restaurant will minimize any risks that could potentially cause any losses to the business. Later that evening towards closing time, Don Lolo called a meeting with all the male Chinese cooks in the back of the restaurant near the kitchen. Don Lolo sat next to me. "How are things going?" I asked him, not suspecting that anything was really wrong. "These guys, they get out of hand with the girls..." he replied to me. I then remained quiet, as the Chinese cooks headed to the table and started sitting down. I was in the middle of the entire Cantonese conversation and could observe the gestures, the high voices, and the argument that erupted between the manager and the other cooks. I heard Sara's name repeated several times. Francis, walking by, stops and also starts speaking in Cantonese and contributing to the conversation. She too was angry, and I hear her saying Sara's name. I could not follow the entire conversation but I had a good idea on what was going on: Sara's complaint to the owner included the

possibility of suing him. The owner could not take that risk, and was very upset. Lee, the accused person and manager of the cooks, kept defending himself and the other cooks began defending him too. It was time to close the restaurant, and the arguing had to stop, but the conflict remained. I never asked Lee for his side of the story. I felt that after being reprimanded by the owner in front of all his co-workers, Lee would be too ashamed to tell me anything. I did, however, ask the other Chinese workers.

On the ride home my Chinese friends kept talking about the whole situation and were very upset. Francis kept insisting that Sara always flirted with workers, rubbing their arms, and always playing with them. Julio kept laughing it off, and kept saying that if Lee's wife found out why he got in trouble at work, it would be a good fight to see. Francis slapped Julio in the arm and told him not to say anything. Later in the evening, I was told what happened by Francis. According to Francis (one of the Chinese woman workers), "Sara is always playing around with the cooks. The cooks like to play with the waitresses. Sara went and told the owner that all the cooks do when the waitresses go to pick up an order is sexually harass them. That is not true. The waitresses know that the cooks are all married and that they would never touch them or make any sexual advances. Sara was overreacting, even though she is the one that is always playing with them. It simply is not fair that Lee got yelled at the way he did when he was not doing anything but playing." Although Francis is a woman, she did not recognize the prevalent sexual harassment expressed by Sara that DID go on at the restaurant.

Sara was not exaggerating, nor overreacting. Since the first day I started working, I constantly observed the cooks sexually harass the waitresses. The waitresses' reaction was always to ignore them, or to slap them in the shoulder. The cooks loved the slapping

and attention the waitresses would give them, and continued the sexual harassment. Sara, entering to work two weeks after me, did not think this was appropriate. Sara was also one of two waitresses that were married (the other woman was in her late 20s and quit after two weeks of work). Sara, a woman born and raised in Mexicali, was 21 years old when I met her. Sara told me that she had worked before with Don Lolo as a waitress for one of his other restaurants when she was a teenager. She never got promoted to manager or anything higher than a waitress, but her outgoing and friendly attitude captured the eye of the owner who remembered her three years later when she was looking for a job. With her son now old enough to be left with her mother, Sara decided to go back to work as a waitress, since she felt her husband's income was not enough for her personal expenses (in her words, like make-up and new clothes). Sara did not imagine that work was going to be so difficult.

The next day after the reprimand by the owner, the cooks decided to punish Sara for bringing forth the complaint. When Sara would put in an order for food during peak hours, she would be the very last to get the order, even if she placed the order before the other waitresses. In addition, the Chinese cooks were mad at the Mexican waitresses over what had happened. They were unsure if the complaint put forth by Sara represented all of them. The waitresses, not knowing how to communicate that it was not a collective complaint, just pretended ignorance and continued to be friendly with the cooks. In doing this, they had signaled to them that it was Sara's battle, not theirs. Within the day, the cooks began communicating and playing around once again with the waitresses, but not with Sara. For the next three days, Sara kept getting her orders put until the very end. It did not matter that she yelled at them, or later pleaded to them to do the order fast; the

Chinese cooks refused to cook the food fast enough for her. In addition, Sara got ignored as soon as she stepped foot in the kitchen. Conversations would stop, and all the cooks would just stare her out of the kitchen. Since this was a collective action by the Chinese cooks, the owner could not really do much to help Sara out. The cooks would simply deny that they were not cooking the food fast enough for her, telling him that it was busy and that they would do the food in the order received, but that they had no recollection on whose order came first. Sara's gratuity tips were declining, but she claimed to me that what was most difficult, was the awkward tension she would feel upon entering the kitchen. In an effort to keep her employed, the owner then decided to "promote" her to cashier. The position of cashier is a much lower paying job: in terms of set wage, it was a higher paying, but the cashier could not collect tips. Sara quit the restaurant after only one week as a cashier.

In this situation, the tension arose among the workers initially because their assumption was that all the waitresses had the same sentiments as Sara. This quickly got reduced when all the waitresses showed that Sara's complaint was a sole complaint only. Although most of them were bothered by the sexual harassment that went on, they learned to simply "deal with it." They knew it was a way that the men entertained themselves, and they knew how to respond by slapping them or ignoring the behavior. After Sara's complaint, the sexual harassment was reduced substantially, until Yen Chung (a new younger cook) was hired.

Yen Chung once again started the sexual harassment. As an anthropologist, it was a difficult situation to be in. I knew that the sexual harassment was not comfortable for the women, but I did not want to be the one to be alienated by the cooks if I spoke out

against it. I personally told Yen Chung to stop it, but he would just simply ignore me and continue doing it. Understanding the division of labor, I decided to tell the owner how Yen Chung sexually harassed the women excessively on his day off. "You should tell Yen Chung to tone it down with the harassment towards the women, he bothers them a lot," I told him. He nodded his head and tells me, "Ok." I returned back to work after telling Don Lolo this, and then after about an hour, I left the restaurant.

I had the weekend off and when I returned on Monday, Yen Chung' behavior towards women had changed; he no longer sexually harassed them as soon as he saw them. All the Chinese workers, including Yen Chung, continued to be welcoming and to treat me the same. It seemed like an ordinary workday, except without the sexual harassment. I did not see any sexual harassment as the day went by, and the days that followed. I remain convinced that my theory worked: since Yen Chung could not identify which one of the waitresses accused him, he could not be mad at any of them. Of course, it was not only me being able to accuse him of sexually harassing the women; laws in Mexico (as Sara noted earlier) are becoming more serious about reducing sexual harassment in the workforce. The owner can not take any risks with lawsuits or bad publicity about him, so he will step in to correct any behavior that can cost him his business, including sexual harassment.

When management disagrees on their roles

Don Lolo ,as a sole proprietor in this Chinese restaurant, divided the managers based on ethnicity in order to be able to be absent in the everyday activities. However, as a *Chinesco,* he knew that he needed to maintain stronger ties to the Mexican dominant community than with his Chinese workers. As a result, cultural misunderstandings can

happen within the Chinese community that Don Lolo works with. For example, Rigo, the Mexican manager, or Lee, the Chinese manager, were responsible for the delivery of food and would sign off it once it was inspected. Lee had recently left the restaurant to open his new restaurant and now Yen Chung was the manager of the Chinese cooks. Yen Chung was younger than the other cooks, so it was difficult for him to earn their respect and it was difficult for me to understand how he got the job. I later learned that Yen Chung was the son of one of Don Lolo's partner and good friend from another restaurant. Therefore, Yen Chung' sole function was to strictly monitor the backside of the restaurant for the owner (i.e. make sure none of the Chinese cooks stole food rather than insuring that they cooked food on time), than to make any decisions. Yen Chung also received the seafood coming into the restaurant and inspected it before signing off on it. I was chopping food one evening and Francisco (the owner's Mexican friend and distributor of seafood) comes in and tells me to go outside to help him. Since I was chopping food, I did not really catch what he had said. He then goes to Yen Chung and tells him to go outside to help him. Yen Chung goes outside, and now understanding the request, I follow him. Francisco gives Yen Chung a box out of his truck; Yen Chung gets it and immediately goes inside. Francisco hands me a box, but tells me to wait for the next box, since they are not too heavy. I wait for the second box, when Yen Chung runs out and tells him that one box is okay. Francisco ignores him, and tells me to take the boxes. Yen Chung takes one box away from me and immediately rushes inside. Francisco decides to go to the front Mexican manager.

I go inside and I see Yen Chung erupted in anger and saying, "This is *basura* [trash], *no bueno* [not good]." According to Yen Chung, Francisco had just delivered

shrimp to the restaurant that was poor in quality. Yen Chung looks at me and says, "Look, this is trash. The shrimp we get from Lily's husband is much better. Lily's husband gets it from San Felipe. This is trash. Look…it's all covered in ice too. This is trash!" I go to the middle table to observe what Francisco is doing. Francisco was in the front of the restaurant talking to Rigo, the Mexican manager. Yen Chung then goes to the front of the restaurant with Rigo, Mexican manager, and begins complaining to him. Yen Chung' Spanish was not fluent, but one could understand his discontent. At this point, I see Francisco pulling out the invoice to be signed, and I see Rigo pointing at Yen Chung to sign. Yen Chung refuses to sign it. I turn to see the shrimp, and I see the other cooks inspecting the shrimp. I make eye contact with Lily and she tells me, "*Si, basura* [yes, this is trash]." Lily thinks the whole thing is amusing and started to laugh. I then see Yen Chung, Rigo, and Francisco start walking to the back of the kitchen. Yen Chung shows the shrimp to Rigo and told him: "See, it's trash!" Francisco got mad (or pretends to be) and says, "That's how all the shrimp is coming out, and it's not trash. The shrimp is good. Can you sign this so I can leave?" Rigo reaches for his pen to sign and Yen Chung tells him not to. Yen Chung begins to say, "No, no, no. Send it back." Francisco at this point is just quiet, waiting for Yen Chung to sign the invoice. Yen Chung signs the invoice; Francisco gets it, and proceeds to leave. Yen Chung is pissed off and heads towards the front of the restaurant. At this point, Yen Chung is in the front, Francisco has left, and Rigo goes to the kitchen.

Rigo stands in the back of the kitchen and begins to look at the shrimp, trying to process what just happened. I remain standing quiet, not saying anything. Rigo looks at me, and says, "There are some good pieces here, but there is a lot of ice." I turn to see

where Yen Chung is, and he is near the cash register talking on the phone. I turn and look at Rigo and asked him, "Who is Yen Chung calling?" Rigo replied, "Probably the owner. Yen Chung does not understand the difficult situation I was in. I wanted to return the shrimp back, but I couldn't. Francisco is the owner's *compadre* [the Godfather of his daughter] and if I would have not signed it, I would have probably gotten myself in trouble. I figured that the owner could see the shrimp himself and make his mind as to whether he wants to continue doing business with him." Yen Chung comes to the back of the kitchen, begins to open the boxes, and puts the shrimp in big bowls so they can start defrosting. Yen Chung tells me, "It's fine, the owner said it's fine." There is an awkward silence. Rigo returns to the front of the restaurant.

Yen Chung is the only authorized person to receive the seafood deliveries, so he personally felt his power being taken away when being overruled by Rigo. Yen Chung, a Chinese immigrant who has been in Mexicali for five years, could not understand why Rigo signed the paper, and why the owner was not upset after he called him and told him what had happened. Rigo did not want to have this tension with Yen Chung, but could not explain to him the concept of *compadrazgo,*[37] because of the language and the space division (the space division does not allow for a lot of time to be spent with each other). I go towards Yen Chung and begin helping him break the ice that the shrimp is frozen in. Yen Chung tells me, "Rigo and Don Lolo are dumb. This shrimp is bad quality." I make the attempt to explain *compadrazgo* to Yen Chung and tell him that Francisco and Lolo are very good *pangyauh* [friends]. Yen Chung has a confused look in his face. Yen

[37] Chicano anthropologist Velez-Ibanez explains how *compadrismo/compadrazgo* extends to simply being a Godfather to a friend's son, but rather, it can also serve as a symbol of extended trust. See, Bonds of Trust: The Cutlural Systems of Rotating Credit Associations Among Urban Mexicans and Chicanos, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J. 1983)

Chung, always joking around, makes gestures as if he is having sex with someone else and says, "Like that friends?" I have a surprised and scared look and say, "No, no, no." The last thing I wanted was for Yen Chung to tell the owner that I was insinuating that he was gay. Yen Chung laughs. Since I could not communicate to Yen Chung in Cantonese, I put my hands together as if I am praying and pretend to have a baby in my arms. I point at him, point at the mythical baby, and point at myself try to equate it with a bond sharing. I say "More *pangyauh* [friends]." He has a confused look on his face, but is trying to understand. "It's okay...never mind," I tell him. As an anthropologist, I wanted to bridge the cultural gap in understanding that Yen Chung was trapped in. This event at the restaurant showed that there *are* cultural differences that can interrupt the way *Chinescos* envision and will run their restaurant.

Yen Chung was fully dedicated at protecting the financial interests of the owner because of his job, but also because of his father's relationship with him. He refused to sign the invoice because he knew the quality of shrimp was poor. Yen Chung knew that his boss was a friend of Francisco, but it did not mean that Francisco could rip him off. What confused him was how the owner told him it was okay to leave the shrimp at the restaurant. Interestingly enough, however, Yen Chung' complaint *was* listened to, just not immediately. The shrimp received at the restaurant by Francisco was never as poor quality as that time. Had Yen Chung stayed quiet about the poor quality, Francisco very likely would have continued delivering the poor quality shrimp thinking that the Mexican manager would have not cared. Yen Chung monitoring the quality worked to improve the quality of future shrimp shipments and the owner of the restaurant did not have to be there to inspect every item coming into the restaurant.

When it goes beyond monitoring: Romance, Affairs, and relationships in the workforce

After working two full weeks at the restaurant, I realized how boring, mundane, and repetitive this type of work was. In Mexico, you get a paid a salary for an agreed amount of work (usually 40 hours), and will hardly ever get paid by the hour. This meant that you had to work the entire 40 hours to get the MEX$500 pesos (equivalent to approximately US$48) for the week if you were a waiter or waitress (plus tips), or the MEX$2,000 (equivalent to approximately US$181) if you were a cook (no tips). Customers entering restaurants are like waves in the ocean, sometimes they are high and sometimes they will not show. I particularly enjoyed the low waves, as it allowed me to get to know the Chinese people more. On one particular occasion when I was working on a Tuesday afternoon, the wave was very low and far in sight. The cooks were just sitting around, and the waitresses were too. Jessica, a 16-year-old waitress, constantly flirted with Joe, a 25 year old cook. This time it was no different, and it appeared that the lack of work encouraged more interaction. Joe and Jessica disappeared from sight for about 20 minutes. I was unaware of their disappearance, until Francis (the 35-year-old Chinese waitress) pointed it out, "Where is Jessica? I don't see Jessica… did she go to the store?" she asked. I was still unsure of what was really going on. I remained curious as to why Francis kept looking for her, considering that there was *nothing* really to do. I began to look around the restaurant to see if I would spot her.

We then spot Jessica coming down the restaurant's office (which was on the second floor/storage room of the restaurant). She was unusually quiet, and proceeded to the front of the restaurant without speaking to anyone, as if she had done something wrong. A few minutes later, Joe comes down the stairs too. Unlike Jessica, Joe has a big

smile in his face. He walks towards the buffet part of the restaurant (where the fast food take-out food is located) in order to "check" if any more was needed. We had no customers for about two hours; of course no more food was needed. He went to the area where the food is served to see Jessica; he smiled at her, and went back to the kitchen to chop food up. Chopping food, apparently, was something that was always needed. It was the most dreaded thing for the cooks, as well as for me as an apprentice when I started working. It then became obvious to the rest of the workers and me what had happened between Jessica and Joe.

The incident was never talked about among the Spanish speakers, and certainly never around Jessica, but it was certainly *the* conversation among the Cantonese speaking Chinese workers. The other cooks, who were all married, kept asking Joe about what had happened. Joe just kept his smile, and would shake his head and say nothing. Someone asked him, "Joe, *nuin panyauh a?"* or, "Is she your girlfriend?" I understood that. Joe's smile was his only response. Everyone laughed. I just observed.

In front of the restaurant, the teenage women decided to avoid the conversation at all. They either did not suspect that Jessica had just made out with Joe, did not imagine a Chinese-Mexican relationship occurring, or were to shy to ask Jessica about the incident around me. Based on my observations, I would suggest that the women did not imagine a Chinese-Mexican relationship occurring, in large part because, according to Ruth (another Mexican waitress), Jessica was very snobby and picky about whom she even spoke to. When I moved to the front of the restaurant to be around them (and to see what was going on with Jessica), I no longer sensed the discomfort that Jessica first had when I saw her. I asked her, "Where were you? Francis was looking for you." She responded

with a long explanation that was redundant and unnecessary, "Really? I wonder for what? I was just upstairs getting some make-up out of my purse. My purse is locked inside the office. The office is located upstairs and it is locked at all times. I have important things in my purse that need to be locked." The girls watched her. Some of them were confused at such a long explanation to a simple question. I remained standing there, acting uninterested, and said to her, "Okay, I was just wondering because of Francis, but I'll let her know you are now back." I went to Francis, and pointed to Jessica, as to indicate that she was there. Francis knew that she was there, and just laughed. I went back to chopping vegetables.

Jessica's view of Chinese men in Mexicali revealed much about the way she was socialized as a Mexican woman. She explained whether she could envision herself with a Chinese man, "I don't think so. They don't speak Spanish, and they would not be able to support me if I were to get married to them. A salary like his would not be able to support all the make-up and luxuries I like to enjoy. I'm also not attracted to them [Chinese people]," she answered. I was surprised with the response, clearly her actions were indicating otherwise. I proceeded to interrogate her, "So you don't find Joe attractive," I asked. She opened her eyes wide, not sure of what to do with my question and unsure if I knew that Joe and her had been kissing already. "I think Joe is attractive, but the reality of the situation is that nothing can happen between us because I am Mexican and he is Chinese. Culturally, we are just not the same," she responded. Despite my assumption that Jessica was romantically in love with Joe, she stated the practical things that would make her have a happy marriage: speaking the same language, a stable income, cultural compatibility, and physical attraction.

Jessica's response tells us a lot about the city of Mexicali, with the abundance of *maquiladoras* that attract female workers. Despite Jessica's working-class background, she aspires for upward mobility, like many of the women who entered to work at the *maquiladoras.* Ideas of race and class are being reconfigured, in large part because of the growing inequality recognized by workers. Jessica's response about the possibility of being in a relationship with Joe pointed initially to class, and later to what she is supposed to be attracted to (in another conversation, Jessica told me she was primarily attracted to 'whiter' skinned men). Women in Mexicali entering the workforce feel the need to have the power to choose their future husbands, and in this situation, Jessica was looking for someone who had higher earnings than her. Although this was one exchange we had, I often heard Mexican women talk about their "ideal" future husbands, and more often than not, it was tied with a stable and higher income than theirs. In the words of Concha, "*Si no gana mas que yo, para que me caso? Yo solita puedo mantenerme. Mejor sola que mal acompanada* [If he does not make a higher earning than me, than why get married? I can support myself financially. It's better to be by myself than with bad company]."

On the other hand, I asked Joe what he thought of Mexican women. Joe responded, "*Mexicanas muy feas"* [Mexican women are ugly]. Surprised, I responded, "Really? No they're not." He laughed. Then he proceeded to show me the physical attributes that make them 'unattractive.' With his hands he points at his chest and shows an enlargement of the breasts, and then of the buttocks. Then he points at height. Finally, he concludes by telling me, "*muy grande para mi"* or "too big for me." All the cooks start to laugh. "What about Jessica," I asked him. All the cooks start to laugh, and stared

at him attentively while they awaited his response. His response: a smile that stretched from one ear to the other.

Chinese men are immigrating to Mexico in large numbers, with a limited amount of Chinese women available, which causes those who are single (and even the ones married with a wife in China) to reconsider who they will ultimately choose as their wives. Joe's example shows that ideally he would prefer someone of his own race, mainly because of the physical attributes. But beyond the physical attributes, there are also cultural differences, such as religion, ideologies, food, traditions, and language. In Mexicali, mixed racial background (Chinese father and Mexican wives) children often stated that their parents met at the work place. This was the case with Joe, whose limited options of finding a wife were confined to the workplace, since he spent over 60 hours working there. Even though his wish was to marry a Chinese woman, he formed romantic relationships with those at work, who were Mexican women. I observed this from time to time when he would flirt not only with Jessica, but with Tanya as well. Joe, in his early 20's, had a way of ensuring that Mexican women paid attention to him.

Conclusion

The life histories of how managers were recruited to work for the owner of the restaurant shed light on their experience in both Mexico and China. Both countries were going through different economic stages that allowed for this recruitment of labor: in Mexico, the signing of NAFTA in 1994, and in China, the establishment of a free enterprise zone during the late 1970s and 1980s. Interestingly, what happens in the ground is what Sassen argued was the goal of what was going on globally between first world and third world nations. Although the workforce is divided, as nations are, there is

interaction with one another. The monitoring of employees becomes a role of everyone. Furthermore, as I have shown, it goes beyond supervising employees for the good of a business, it extends to relationships being formed where people hurt each other, where roles are misunderstood, and where an understanding of local systems becomes important.

Sassen's earlier works addresses how many manufacturing jobs in industrialized and developed nations were relocated globally, mainly to third world countries (1991; 1998; 2001). As a result of this relocation, there was a separation of the new jobs (mostly financial sector ones such as investment banking, consultants, hedge funds) in the first world cities, with the new jobs in the third world cities, but where one (the first world) maintained control of the other without being present (Sassen 1991). Anthropologist Aihwa Ong extends her argument and suggests that global firms located in first world countries will look for places where goods could be produced inexpensively, including Free Trade Zones and Special Economic Zones. These zones are often in search of specific labor, like women, but when this search is not met, they will employ men and even children (Ong 1997). To historicize this process, Ong points to Japanese transnational companies in the 1970s forming industrial zones in Southeast Asia. She then suggests that following the 1970s world recession, "intensified competition in the global arena compelled a new pattern of accumulation marked by flexible strategies. Mixed production systems were located anywhere in the world where optimal production, infrastrastructure, marketing, and political conditions existed" (Lowe and Lloyd 64). In essence, third world cities exist because corporations from first world countries going global created them.

Sassen and Ong show how labor is being reconfigured; Sassen shows it through aggregate numbers and theorizing a global economy, while Ong draws her analysis on ethnographic studies throughout the world. Shifting away from the work done in first world countries (i.e. the banking jobs) and the manufacturing sector (the work done in factories), I focused my study on the 'spillovers' of these economies. In spillovers, I am referring to the unforeseen jobs that arose in both first world countries (like the rise in domestic work and nannies) and third world countries (like the rise in underemployment). Thus, the rise of the service sector occurred in both economies, including places where manufacturing jobs were created, like Mexicali. Service sector jobs can also be formal and be recognized by the state, such as fast food service industry workers, nightclub attendants and bartenders, house cleaners, or even small business employees like current money exchange houses. In essence, service sector jobs are particular to cities (with growing economies) in third world and first world countries because these formal service sector jobs would not be seen in other parts of the world or economies.

The service sector jobs described above are very particular to urban spaces, since many places in rural Mexico would not have any need for them. For example, people coming from rural parts of Mexico are surprised that a business is set up exclusively to serve an array of fancy types of coffee, and are even more surprised at the prices people pay for it. This example shows how tasks like making coffee have been created to cater to the wealthy elite and upper middle classes. As Ong and Sassen reflect, Mexicali is an example of a city created by and for first world interests. We know that with the rise of maquiladoras (the foreign owned factories), there is also a rise in the managers who oversee them, doctors who will take care of them, and schools that need to educate the

children of the workers. The middle-class and upper-class elite need services to satisfy their global tastes, like fancy types of coffee. What Ong and Sassen do not show is how other forms of labor (such as restaurant work) are replicating first world interests in the everyday lives of how businesses are run.

My analysis has shown how Don Lolo is absent from the restaurant, unlike other Chinese business owners, but that he was only able to do this by first securing and finding two individuals who would be able to manage and look out for his financial interests. In addition, Don Lolo, as a *Chinesco*, knows the area very well. In order to be able to be absent from the restaurant, he has been able to understand the life history of his key workers: the managers. These managers also understand the life histories of those that they supervise, hire, and ultimately manage to create money for the owner. As a result, the way to raise financial profits includes an invisible mechanism where workers are producing and working for someone else, not for themselves. In this situation, it seems that Don Lolo, a *Chinesco* who knows the community well, is the one that truly benefits and is able to successfully manage his workers.

Mexicali's rapid changing economy and diversity of service sector jobs is a surprise for the new Chinese immigrants wishing to find jobs, but the Chinese immigrants are often relegated only to jobs run by their Chinese counterparts. Recent Chinese immigrants often only enter the Chinese restaurants as dishwashers, cooks, and some of them as waiters. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, their quasi-legal status, on top of their limited Spanish-speaking skills, affords them only a limited amount of opportunities. But the Chinese immigrants would not come to the U.S. if the opportunities did not exist, and the opportunities often exist only in the abundance of

Chinese restaurants that Mexicali has. When entering the Chinese restaurant, they quickly learn the heterogeneity of the city that forces them to interact with the dominant Mexican *mestizo* group. Central to the argument of this dissertation is that people from different walks of life will interact with one another, regardless of their social background, race, gender, or ethnicity. This goes against the popular misconception of people from Mexicali. The most vivid example of the interactions taking place later in the life of Chinese people are the *Chinescos,* the ethnic Chinese who understand both Chinese and Mexican customs, traditions, and cultural codes. Before becoming *Chinescos*, they learn a lot from the social relations they develop at their workplaces, like the Chinese restaurant.

Communities are not bounded and static, they interact, change, and are fluid. The popular perception among local people in Mexicali is that Chinese are a secluded community that does not engage with the dominant society and that they operate 'successfully' with little interaction with Mexicans. In fact, as stated earlier, other scholars researching overseas Chinese populations echo these statements as well (Coughlin 1955, Moore and Tubilewicz 2001). These statements are made, even after people from Mexicali see Chinese serve as hosts at restaurants where they eat, where Chinese waiters and waitresses serve them, where they share buses with Chinese during the long commute home, or even in classrooms shared by Chinese kids with Mexican kids. Labor in the Chinese restaurant is one of the places where immigrants are introduced to the host society.

The way the workforce is divided in Chinese restaurants is not unique to Chinese businesses. The workforce divisions are seen in the United States as well, and will slowly

be seen around the world. Monolingual communities remain hidden and do tasks where no verbal contact is required, except from the person managing them. During my time in Hong Kong, I was told that multiple Filipinas work in the residence of Hong Kong elite families. Anyone familiar with Hong Kong knows that there is a large *female* Filipina workforce that is divided based on language skills, where those that speak English (not Cantonese or Mandarin) will take care of the children and those that are learning English are pushed into cleaning the homes. The Filipinas that do not speak English are supervised by those that speak English. Saudi Arabia is also another example where labor is divided, this time based on *ethnicity:* where Indonesian migrant workers will immigrate legally and illegally to work for Saudi Arabians. Examples most commonly known to the American reader are the large amounts of Latinos doing the behind the scenes work in restaurants and other service sector jobs. In large metropolitan cities, there are many monolingual Spanish-speaking cooks, busboys, housekeepers, gardeners, and construction workers managed by bilingual speaking contractors or managers.

The owner of the restaurant (Don Lolo) is an illustration of bilingual workers working in foreign countries. They have direct power and control to dictate the ways people are divided and managed because of their understanding of changing power dynamics. Obviously, the *Chinesco* profits monetarily, however, what I show is that in order for him to have profited he was required to cultivate and invest in the formation of individuals beyond his kin that would work for him. These individuals (especially Lee) were profiting in adjusting to the new social life they were confronted in the city of Mexicali. They allowed themselves to work these difficult jobs to transition into their new setting. The case of *Chinescos* in Mexicali will of segregate based on gender,

language, and ethnicity. There is no sign of an end to the common occurrence of globally recent immigrants are controlled by longer established communities in service sector businesses. During fieldwork in Mexicali and my experience in the United States as a Latino, I observed these divisions implemented by members of their own community.

In the chapter that follows, I will show how long standing members, specifically Chinese entrepreneurs, set up their businesses. Although Don Lolo is an example of an entrepreneur being able to manage the restaurant, it was not always easy to raise the capital to see his restaurant running.

Chapter 4
Chinese Restaurants in Mexicali: Multiple Recipes for Business Formation

One of the reasons that I picked this research project, as opposed to researching Mexican-Americans, was because I thought this project shifted away from anthropological norms of looking at the 'marginalized' or the 'oppressed.' Chinese people of Mexicali, in my eyes, are successful. They run several restaurants in the city of Mexicali, the city where my mother was born and raised. *Chinescos*, the group I identify as being able to best acculturate to the city, may also be seen owning small businesses in Calexico, California, on the U.S. side of the border. In my view, and without really knowing their life histories and sacrifices, Chinese people are successful. In fact, my mother's side of the family was part of that Chinese financial and educational success in Mexico. My view of their success was based on an assumption that a business owner made profits from his business. My great-grandfather was Chinese and a restaurant owner. On the surface he seemed successful: he owned lots of property, paid for his son to attend medical school, for his daughter to attend dental school, and for his other daughter to earn an elementary teaching credential. Not all of his sons and daughters enjoyed the educational success; some immigrated to the U.S. and took low-wage jobs, and others chose government jobs in Mexico where they constantly negotiated their wages and work conditions with corrupt unions. My grandfather passed away when I was still very young, so I do not have a complete history of how he was able to build his wealth. The question that remains for me is: How deep were his ties to the Chinese community in Mexicali? Did he join partnerships to 'succeed'? What was success, in his view?

This chapter is about how Chinese people in Mexicali formed some of their businesses, most notably the Chinese restaurants that are abundant in the city.[38] Rather than focus on overseas Chinese success in dominating a particular market (Oxfeld 1991) my focus here is looking at business formation through individual's personal histories and experiences. Business formation in Mexicali does not happen only within the community, but also through the forging of different networks, including the dominant Mexican community. The structure of Chinese businesses is very complex and requires not only kin relationships, but also people outside of those relationships who can be trusted. Assumptions by the dominant Mexican community (as well as Chinese about the dominant Mexican community) sometimes limit the interaction among Chinese entrepreneurs, but that is not always the case. Before providing a description of my fieldwork findings, I will review literature on how other overseas Chinese communities' entrepreneurship activities have been studied and understood.

What is meant by the "Chinese business" and how are these businesses seen globally?

A common assumption from people belonging to the dominant group about minorities is that the minority group is a self-centered community that chooses to isolate itself from the dominant group. Also, this assumption is validated by much of research on overseas Chinese businesses. Since the mid-20th century, scholars have shown that overseas Chinese communities work in isolation and become dependent on each other to run their business (Coughlin 1955). Research about the isolated overseas Chinese community business model also includes the characteristics of this community, including perseverance, frugality, being family-oriented, and cultural affinity (Li 1993, Bonacich and Modell 1980). Anthropologist James L. Watson found that members of an overseas

[38] All the names of individuals and restaurants are pseudonyms.

Chinese community in London refused to communicate to him when he was conducting research because he was not Chinese and because he was not from the community.[39] Methodologically, there are many challenges in learning about how businesses are formed, especially if you are not Chinese.

The idea that overseas Chinese business communities are a self-sustaining unit is best described by Richard Coughlin's article on Chinese in Bangkok. He writes, "Chinese resist assimilation" (1955 315) and they do so because "the Chinese form a commercial 'middle class,' performing essential economic services for both Thai society and for Western business community, yet remaining functionally separate from each" (314). In addition, they enjoy their comfortable standing as traders and 'middlemen' (a group in the middle of the dominant consuming host society and the European imports) of the retail industry after Thailand opened to Western trade during the 19th century. Their 'middlemen' standing ensured that they could function independently without the host Thai society members. This was strengthened, according to Coughlin, when Chinese businesses in Bangkok joined volunteer associations that carried social prestige but could also help them out financially in the event of a community disaster.

Chinese businesses are also characterized as having something 'cultural' about the way Chinese people conduct their business. Ivan Light argues that kinship and clanship were essential for overseas Chinese to succeed, and they that used their extended family in order to do so in the United States (1972). Michael A. Goldberg also describes how their cultural values, such as flexibility, hard work, familism, and value on education and land contribute to how Chinese businesses prosper financially (1985). Extending the

[39] Personal communication, April 2005. His findings can be found in Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977

'cultural' traits, other authors suggest the 'sojourner' mentality of Chinese entrepreneurs, claiming that their yearning to return to their homeland drives them to work hard for their business in order to flourish financially (Light 1979).

Chinese businesses are also formed because of external factors (such as racism) that cause an internal ethnic solidarity in the business formation. Racism that overseas Chinese experience by the host society as in the case in the United States and Canada, prevent them from interacting with the dominant host society, thus, forcing them to enter into sectors that the dominant society refuses to enter (such as laundry or agriculture). This view, put forth by authors like Loewen (1971) and Light and Bonacich (1988) is an extension of Coughlin's early findings, but argues that the ethnic solidarity happens because of structural forces preventing them from integrating with the host society. The 'middleman minority' theory is another explanation as to how Chinese businesses overseas succeed financially. In her study of the overseas Chinese community in Calcutta, India, Ellen Oxfeld Busa argues that the financial success in the leather tanning industry that the Chinese enjoy is because it is a 'low status occupation' (1991). The general Indian population considers the tanning industry as a "polluting activity, the work of untouchables" and a "low status occupation" that allows Chinese businesses to go unchallenged (1991 702). Chinese fill in the 'gap' of work in which the dominant society does not want to engage, and thus, are able to profit financially. Overseas Chinese, however, they see their financial success as due to their hard work and perseverance. Oxfeld Busa also suggests that their drive for economic betterment is what pushes overseas Chinese to do well, especially since they do not believe in the caste system of India, but in economic wealth.

William Skinner writes that the Chinese businesses in Thailand do participate in Thailand's society and acculturation process (1957), an argument different from the one put forth by Coughlin. Skinner found that despite the profits made by Chinese in the trade industry (which they dominated), they were often forced to give the first cut of their trading profits to the Thai elite. As a result of these practices it, "whetted the desire of Chinese traders for assimilation to the Thai elite strata" (1957 240). There was a financial reason as to why Chinese would want to participate and be part of Thai society, but, according to Skinner, there was also encouragement by Thai nobility for Chinese to be part of the elite in order for them to be loyal to the Crown. Skinner argues and shows that Chinese become part of Thai society, including through their business practices. Skinner's observations and claims are in line with Bernard Wong's more contemporary study of Chinese businesses in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he finds the interaction of Chinese businessmen with mainstream business opportunity structures (1998). Wong, however, also suggests that kinships and clans also help Chinese businesses flourish.

In more contemporary times, Wong (2005), Li (1993), and Ong (1999), have suggested that currently affluent Chinese from China are making major investments in developed nations, including Canada and the United States. Li suggests that many of the theories put forth do not explain the different business activities that Chinese from China are engaging with foreign countries with the aid of overseas Chinese. Li finds that in addition to the service related businesses (such as restaurants) there has also been a rise in professional services in Canada. Ong similarly shows that wealthy Chinese from Hong Kong engage in real estate property investment. Already established Chinese

communities in those countries aid the rise of professional services and venturing into different business activities. This is similar to the findings of Moore and Tubilewicz, who find that Chinese businesses in the Czech Republic are being aided by Chinese State Owned Enterprises for other businesses (in this case, the textile industry), but also are providing the wealthy citizens of the Czech Republic with fancy restaurants (2001).

The findings and arguments put forth by all of these authors are seen in Mexicali, including some of the older findings. Coughlin's argument, that Chinese refuse to assimilate, resonates with how people in Mexicali imagine how Chinese businesses are formed: as a self-functioning isolated community. During my time living in Mexicali, I heard Mexican people state that Chinese people were financially successful because of their "work ethic" and because they work well "within their own community." People of Mexicali framed all of the Chinese people as an isolated community with no ties to Mexico's people, their culture, networks, or businesses. Coughlin's early study, like some of the statements of Mexicans in Mexicali, were accurate in describing recent immigrants entrepreneurship, but not the *Chinescos,* whom I observed who form ties with Mexicans and use recent Chinese immigrant labor to succeed. *Chinescos* are like many Mexicans living in Mexicali: they look for opportunities in order to profit financially. There are many opportunities in Mexicali, especially because it borders the United States, and Chinese people engage in different activities to capture a market share. *Chinescos* know the Mexican cultural codes, speak the language, eat Mexican food, and use other Mexican businesses to profit. Like Skinner's observations, they found reasons and benefits to get to know Mexican customs and to become Mexican citizens. In forming their businesses some Chinese people break away from their family kin in order to form their own

business. What follows are my findings in how businesses are formed in Mexicali by the Chinese. These findings show the complexity of forming a business among Chinese people, *Chinescos*, and how relationships are formed.

Partnerships: the common "Chinese" business model?

The most common type of ownership of Chinese restaurants and businesses by Chinese people in Mexicali are partnerships that range from three people to up to ten. Several of the partnerships are family-based, however, being a kin member is not a criteria to form a business. Partnerships form by combining any people that will contribute any missing pieces to form a restaurant. Future Chinese partners will contribute one of their strengths (whether it be his or her Mexican citizenship or culinary skills) in order to insure that the partnership can build a restaurant business. In addition, those wishing to start a large partnership will recruit any missing pieces in order to cut costs. The following example shows that instance.

Jenny, a woman in her early 50s, told me, "My husband is a doctor and one of our friends asked us to be a restaurant business partner with them. He said that our contribution would only be U.S.$10,000. We were unsure if we wanted to belong to it, and told him we would think about it. Some weeks elapsed, and we decided not to be part of the business. He seemed upset about the situation. The invitations to eat dinner at one of the restaurants he co-owned disappeared. Later, we found out through another friend that the reason he wanted us to join was because of my husband's profession. By him being a doctor, they would of saved money on purchasing the required medical government insurance." In Mexico, all employees of a business are required to contribute to the *seguro social*, or social welfare of those employed. According to Jenny,

parts of the *seguro social* requirement can be waived if the company shows that they will be providing medical care to its employees. Jenny's husband, a medical doctor, would have made the business cut down on the costs of providing the basic medical coverage. I continued to ask her about the future business into which she was invited.

Jenny and her husband had no formal ties to Chinese communities, especially because both of them were second generation Chinese-Mexicans, with limited Cantonese speaking skills, limited knowledge about China, and without family in China. Jenny revealed more about the restaurant to me when I asked: "How big was the restaurant supposed to be?" She answered, "I believe it was about 10 partners, with some partners paying more. So the size of the restaurant would have been pretty big. It would have been one that accommodates at least 500 people. Those are the ones that profit the most because of the banquets that can be held there." Jenny also revealed how other potential partners were recruited, "Most people believe that it is family members who are the only ones asked to join restaurant partnerships, but that is not true, at least not for large restaurants. Often times it is employees who have been with a particular restaurant for a long time, like the cooks or the managers. They have no blood relationship with each other; they are simply in it to be business owners. That was the case with this partnership being formed." Jenny revealed how the situation would have been if she and her husband would have joined, "After asking other managers and owners, I think it would have been disastrous. Apparently, the owners spend lots of time at the restaurant to make sure that they reduce the amount of employees employed and to constantly check on the sales of the restaurant. My husband or I would have been constantly at the restaurant, and with our professions, that just could have not been possible. It's a different type of lifestyle,

and I am glad we did not jump into it." Jenny and her husband's decisions not to join were made after much research, especially consulting acquaintances they knew in the restaurant business. Jenny's responses contradicted herself at times; she first revealed that she was not that interested about joining because she did not have enough time to think about it. However, her knowledge of how businesses were formed indicated to me that she had done lots of research on business formation with Chinese people.

Jenny's information about Chinese business was very valuable to me because of the validity of her responses; the way she spoke about the business practices revealed she was very informed about aspects of the Chinese community. She is very inquisitive and questions and re-questions what people tell her. She researches everything she does or wants to know about well. For example, when she first met me she asked what I did. Rather than accept the cocktail party answer that I told many people ("I study peoples' cultures"), she continued to ask more questions about my profession. Since my aunt introduced me to her, she also called her and asked and re-asked her about my student status and profession, just to make sure. Her initial distrust in me showed her status as a minority member of the Mexicali community, being half-Chinese and half-Mexican, and being weary of any damages that could be done to the community. As a (partial) member of the minority community, she had seen and heard some of the abuses her Chinese father faced in Mexicali.

Recruiting for partnerships

After securing the trust of Jenny, she proceeded to answer my inquiry into the Chinese restaurant business formation process. I asked her how she and her husband met the Chinese people who invited her to form the business. She answered: "Through a

Chinese friend. We get invited to different events. Being a professional [Jenny is a principal at an elementary school] brings a certain status among Chinese, and if your friends with them, it elevates your status. This particular person who invited us was already a partner at a restaurant, but wanted to expand. That is how we met him, at one of the restaurants where he was a partner," she told me. Jenny's frankness and honesty allowed me to explore the ways Chinese people organize partnerships for a business that extend to people beyond the kin (and to a certain degree, members outside of the Chinese community) of those trying to form one, since neither Jenny nor her husband were related to the owner, nor were they 'full-blooded' Chinese.

Through the interview, Jenny revealed more information about business practices in Mexico, including the medical health care requirements. Regardless of the business size in Mexico, if one employs people outside their family for business, they are required to purchase the federal medical insurance, *el seguro social* (social security). Virtually all people know about this requirement, and often ask for it when they begin working, including non-Spanish speaking Chinese immigrant workers. One would think that some businesses simply do not carry it because of the prevalent corruption and lack of enforcement in Mexico; however, this is not the case for Chinese restaurant owners of large restaurants. The punishments for not having the insurance are steep. If a worker gets hurt on the job, the restaurant would be required to pay all medical expenses, and a full salary for the time that the worker is away, plus any federal punishments for violating the law (usually 150 times the minimum salary). The example of the federal medical insurance shows the importance of partnerships on one level. Partnerships are important because they provide enough capital to cover all start-up costs, including the medical

health requirement, along with building the business, buying the operational supplies, and providing a labor force while people get hired. It made sense that Jenny and her husband were asked to join; her husband's skill set would reduce costs.

A Utopian Vision of Chinese partnerships: Don Lolo's rise to ownership

Kinship structures map onto business models as a way to maximize profits and minimize costs, and the popular assumption is that they also provide trust and reliability among Chinese people. This was what Don Lolo, the owner of the restaurant where I did many of my observations, indicated to me. He was about 60 years old, and had lived in Mexicali for 50 of those years. He was a partner at about six restaurants, and a sole proprietor at the one I was working. When talking about the formation of restaurants, broadly speaking, in Mexico, Don Lolo first explained that it was very complex: "It depends what kind of restaurant you want," he responded. "What do you mean?" I asked. "Well, there is the small ones that you can see at the mall, and in some *colonias* [neighborhoods], then there is the medium sized ones like this one, and then there are the large ones," he told me. "Which are the ones that require partnerships?" I asked. "To start out a business, all of them. It's really difficult to come up with so much money up front. Banks here won't necessarily loan you money for restaurants, or if they do, it's impossible to make payments on the loan term conditions. So, you figure out the costs of putting up a business, see how many people are willing to start it with you, and that's how you figure what type of restaurant you want to start," he answered. Don Lolo then revealed what it took to open a restaurant, but first asked me, "Do you want to open a Chinese restaurant?" I assured him that my interests were purely research. "The first thing you need to do is learn how to cook Chinese food. You don't want be at the mercy

of the cooks," he told me. His response was not a description of the bureaucratic system, but rather, about the workers and the different functions workers have to ensure that a restaurant flourishes.

Don Lolo shared how he first began as a cook, and how he later partnered with his uncle and some cousins to open their first restaurant. "How do you insure that there is no conflict in partnerships?" I asked. He answered, "If it's a big partnership, which usually means more than four people, there is a president elected who divides up the profits and oversees the general operation of the restaurant. A set amount is agreed upon all owners on how much the president should be paid, on top of the monthly dividend." The more questions I posed, the more Don Lolo seemed to be willing to answer. Presidents, according to Don Lolo, are usually elected through an anonymous vote, and after the first election, the position of president is rotated among the partners, unless the next person in the rotation does not want the position. When asked what happened if the president or a partner is found guilty of mismanaging the restaurant (i.e. stealing or giving away food), he answered, "Oh, that doesn't happen that often. In part because you can get a bad reputation, and then no one will want to work with you. There is lots of trust in these situations." Don Lolo assured me that trust was a key feature in partnering with people, and this trust was often found in kin (like the cousins and uncle with whom he initially partnered). According to Don Lolo, if partners need money, they can work in the restaurant if they want, but they work as paid employees, thereby reducing the amount of people needed to staff the restaurant. A contradiction arose on his explanation and trust in partnerships: If this model of partnership works, then why did he open a restaurant on his own? Don Lolo saw owning his own restaurant as a way to be away from partners, and

for him to be able to hold meetings and eat with friends, and to be able to enjoy his own restaurant. This did not seem to be the only reason.

When partnerships break up: Esteban's dissatisfaction with Chinese partnerships

Don Lolo, the owner of the restaurant where I worked, has a utopian vision of partnerships. His success with the partnership model of business only reaffirms the common academic and lay views that this model is the main and only form that Chinese businesses take. Yet, as I began to meet and know other restaurant owners, I drew different conclusions about partnership model. Working within the Chinese community seemed to have benefits, as many authors cited above showed. When speaking with another Chinese restaurant owner, however, I had a sharply contrasting view of partnerships.

I met Esteban, a cousin of the restaurant owner, a fluent Spanish speaker, and a very funny person. He would often come around to take things from the kitchen (which he later replaced). Yoli, one of the waitresses, once told him, "Wow, you speak Spanish so well!" After she said this, we could all see a big smile in his face. He responded, "I've lived in Mexicali 25 years, and I taught myself, no school, I taught myself." The first time he met me, he was surprised to see me in the wok cooking fried rice, as recent Chinese immigrants are usually the only ones cooking food. He asked the owner about me, came back, and asked me my name in Cantonese. When I responded in Cantonese, he smiled and said, "You *are* learning here!" He knew I was doing both research and learning how to speak Cantonese. Soon after that question (and my successful response) he opened up to me and always asked me how I was doing when he was in the restaurant.

Esteban provided me with an alternate view of the utopian vision that Don Lolo gave me. One evening, during a dinner at the restaurant's central table with Don Lolo, the owner, Esteban, his wife, and two other couples, Esteban told me more of his story. Esteban was walking around the restaurant, many times flirting with the waitresses. The waitresses did not mind his flirtatious behavior, as he was friendly and an attractive Chinese man in his late 40s, but also, the waitresses had either grown accustomed to his behavior or felt that any resistance to his flirting was futile since he was the owner's cousin. The restaurant was busy this time, so the waitresses were not paying any attention to him. I was by myself sitting on the table chopping up broccoli. Seeing no other alternative, Esteban sat down and started talking to me. After I answered his, "*Lei ho Ma* [hello, how are you?],"I asked him how many restaurants he owned. He told me, "I am a sole owner of one, and a *socio* (partner) of three. I use to be partner in about eight, including a few in the mall. But that is *muchos problemas* (lots of problems). Lots of people have different ways of managing the restaurant, lots of owners looking after each other, and people always distrusting each other. That's why I prefer just owning my own restaurant, like my cousin. I sold five of the shares I had and put up my own restaurant instead." Esteban had many restaurants, including in the older *colonias* [neighborhoods] of the city. Esteban noticed that he was away from the table too long, and concluded by telling me, "*muchos problemas con estos Chinos* [it's always lots of problems with these Chinese]." He went and sat back down with the owner, his wife, and the other couple.

While the owner of the restaurant I was working described to me a model that is built on trust and friendship (and in several cases, kinship), Esteban described how this model falls apart once people engage in it. Another restaurant owner, Miguel, described

the conflict that often arises in these partnerships. Miguel told me: "The restaurant business is really tough. Partnerships seem like a necessary option because when there are losses or unexpected costs, everyone is able to absorb a little bit of the loss or costs. The periods of loss happen when there is a low amount of customers for an extended period of time, or because of the high temperatures here [that drive up electricity costs]. Partners begin to blame each other for something that they really have limited control over. You can't force Mexicans to eat Chinese food. As you have probably observed, the best marketing that the restaurants have is word of mouth. The city is so big that you really can't advertise for only one Chinese restaurant; you would be advertising for all restaurants." Although there are benefits in partnerships, which most of my respondents clearly identified, there are other factors that contribute to partnerships becoming a burden, as Miguel clearly illustrates.

How partnerships benefit

In a desert city where temperature rises over 110 degrees Fahrenheit, one of the main costs that rise and reduce profits is high electricity usage.There are times when the Chinese restaurants do not do so well, especially in the summers.

I observed several *Chinescos* working at the restaurant during the summer. No Mexican cashier, no Mexican manager, no Mexican bartender, all Chinese people. To absorb the costs and get some sort of income in this period, Chinese restaurant partners will stop replacing the Mexican workers who quit (often times because of the lack of customers, thereby, lack of gratuities), and start working at the restaurant themselves. Profits are absent, labor input by partners rises, and the restaurant operates simply to break even (or in some cases, it goes more in debt). Some partners, however, do not work at the

restaurants because they are also partners in other restaurants. When these partners are not receiving any dividends for extended periods of time, they reach the conclusion that they are being robbed or cheated (especially if the other restaurants in which they are partners are doing well). Conflict inevitably happens. The partners input more time at the restaurant to observe the management, or to oversee the operations, but too many partners working side by side at the restaurant produces different views on how the restaurant should be run or how people should be managed. Other times, people *are* being cheated from profits.

I asked Don Lolo about his vision of partnerships once more. "I was speaking to Esteban the other day, and he said he much rather prefer owning his own restaurant like you than having partners. He said partners bring a lot of problems." He answered, "It's different experiences, that's all. I'm still a partner with eight restaurants, and he is a partner with three. If there would be a lot of problems, they would not exist," he told me. The answer was simplistic, and did not provide an answer to Esteban's frustration. He then said, "That's because he got cheated by his own father. When we first started our restaurant, Esteban's father was the principal owner, meaning that he had put in thirty percent of the costs to start the restaurant. I had only put in about ten percent, but I also worked at another restaurant being a cook and I was also receiving the dividend for investing in that restaurant. I worked lots of hours at my other job, and would save the money. After saving enough money, I sold my small share and became a principal owner at another restaurant that I launched and opened. Esteban was the son of the principal owner, and thus, he was expected to work at the restaurant. His pay was the salary he would receive, but he felt he was a partner and wanted dividends paid to him. His family

had collectively gotten the money to be principal owners, with a larger amount of money being put by Esteban than his other brothers. The sole representative was Esteban's father, so the dividends were paid only to his father. His father would not distribute the dividends evenly with the family because he had ambitions of opening up a second restaurant with the profits. Esteban then became trapped in a difficult situation. His father did not want him to quit the job, but would not pay him a dividend. He quickly saw that he was not going to have any progress like me. He decided to stick around and continue working with his father, hoping that his father would choose him to manage the other restaurant that he would open. Since he was the oldest, his younger brothers were not expected to contribute as much to the restaurant as him.

When they opened the next restaurant Esteban was not chosen to manage it, a partner of the newly formed restaurant was chosen instead. With the little money he managed to save up, he quit the restaurant he was in, and separately partnered with his cousin into another restaurant." Esteban was the cousin that partnered with Don Lolo. He smiled after saying the story. I understood why there was a strong bond between the cousins and why Esteban would come to the restaurant every so often for no apparent reason.

Other forms of partnerships

Belonging to a Chinese kinship group does not always ensure financial success in Mexicali, and an alternative model is sought because kinship structures do not map on to matrices of trust, reliability, and assimilation into the host nation. Partnerships based on solely on family kin *do* exist but these tend to have more conflicts because of the

assumed trust in the family kin. Therefore kin are no longer becoming the primary source for business partnerships.

Don Lolo revealed how cooks become an important component of the business, and many times if the cook has saved enough money, he or she will be invited to be a partner. Joe, a worker at the restaurant where I worked, left the restaurant to help start the family's own business. His mother was working as a cashier, his sister as a waitress, and his father as a cook. After three years of working in Mexicali, they saw an opportunity to buy their own restaurant with their savings. However, they did not have all the money secured to open it. Joe had been working with Don Lolo for three years, without ever asking for vacation time. He had proven to Don Lolo that he was looking out for his business, but more importantly, built a relationship where Don Lolo trusted him. Joe's parents were unable to secure additional money from their direct family kin, so Joe privately asked Don Lolo for a loan. Don Lolo's daughter Sara, a teenager who sometimes worked as a cashier at the restaurant however, exposed this partnership: "Joe is not working here anymore because he opened up a restaurant with his family, my dad lent them some money to open it up," she told me. Sara understood the power and influences her father has when people ask him for money, "If he [Don Lolo] can have a say in the way the restaurant is going to be operated, he will lend money out to businesses trying to open up." Don Lolo not only served as a lender, but as a "business mentor" where he would provide advice to Joe's family business, such as where to get cheaper products for the restaurant or how to navigate government bureaucracy. Joe knew it was in his best interest to bring Don Lolo as an investor to provide guidance and so the business would not fail. Lazaro, the other cook that also left the restaurant, asked Don

Lolo several questions on how to operate his own restaurant before leaving, but did not ask for a loan.

Sole proprietors know about the expenses that they will incur if they decide to open a restaurant on their own, such as the federal medical insurance discussed earlier. Despite its added expense, some Chinese restaurant owners like this model and adapt to it well. Don Lolo actually thought some of the requirements, like the medical ones, were beneficial for society as a whole. He explained, "It shows that Mexico cares about the people. Mexico is a socialist-capitalist state, first being socialist and taking care of its people, like China. How are you not going to take care of the workforce that is giving you the profits?" Initially, I found Don Lolo's statements too idealistic, however, my views changed when during my time at the restaurant I saw a Chinese doctor come check up on and prescribe medicine to some of the undocumented Chinese workers at the restaurant. I witnessed the medical expenses being paid by the owner, not the worker. I later asked the Chinese worker if the medicine was discounted from his wages, to which he replied, "No! Why would he do that? I was working for him, and he needs to take care of me." Surprised by the answer, I took note that in the United States there is always a sharp division between business and personal medical health care, where medical health care is often absent in low wage labor.

This close relationship, where the employee expects the employer to take care of his well being, developed at the Chinese restaurant. There is a community responsibility to take care of those that might be ill. Sole proprietors are not the only ones that take corporate responsibility for their workers. Partnerships also know this medical expense exists and they too absorb medical expenses incurred by the business. In addition, as

partners, they understand that care for the employees is both a federal requirement, as well as a community requirement.

Partnerships seem to be an ideal model to operate on the surface: costs and information are shared, labor costs are reduced, and trust is built. However, there are many obstacles in partnerships as well: distrust among the members, arguments about management of the restaurant, and frustration with failing profits occur during the slow down of business. Partnerships also do not include kin, as many people perceive it. They can include the cook, individuals who want a business as a future investment, a former boss, or someone who can cut costs on a big business expense (such as the doctor). Partnerships come in different forms, but what makes partnerships at the Chinese restaurants different is that many do not use formal banking institutional loans to open up the business. Partnerships in Mexicali allow for different forms of information to flow in order for the business to succeed. A restaurant will not succeed unless they have a keen understanding of what type of customers are potentially available for them to serve. And, in this border city, there are many customers to serve: Americans, *maquiladora* workers, drug lords, business workers, office workers, retail business workers, and an abundance of other people. In this border city, there are many complex interactions in how business are formed, how transactions are made, and the relationships that are being formed.

Exploiting your own? The family run business

Several people who were engaged in family owned businesses, including the owners and children of the owners indicated the different conflicts that happen when engaged in these specialized partnerships. Family owned businesses are put under lots of economic pressure to do well. Beyond making money to pay the operations of the

restaurant, they are under the pressure to pay their personal home expenses. What makes the Chinese family owned business different than a traditional small business in Mexico is that they have used all members of the family to make sales and to get money.

I met Betty, a 20-year-old ethnic Chinese woman born and raised in Mexicali, through a personal family connection. Betty's smile, hand gestures, and engaging manners were very welcoming, and allowed me immediately to feel comfortable asking her questions about her upbringing. "My upbringing was your typical Mexican child upbringing where I went to school, had a boyfriend, and just really enjoyed life," she told me. Working during her teenage years did not seem like a typical Mexican upbringing to me, but she insisted that it was: "Oh, that's where you are wrong. Lots of my friends had jobs at gas stations, cleaning homes, or at grocery stores during the weekends. I just happened to have a job the restaurant." Betty tried to draw lots of parallels between her experiences and the dominant Mexican experience. Despite drawing parallels to her classmates, Betty's experience was different from other teenagers.

Betty's parents are immigrants from a small town near Guangzhou, China who went to Mexico in 1982. According to Betty, her parents were entrepreneurs and were searching for other opportunities. They sold the family business in China and headed to Mexico, in hopes of eventually making it to the United States. Betty was born three years later, and has a much older brother who was born in China seven years before. According to Betty, she had it "very easy" growing up, compared to her brother. She noted: "My brother was only in second grade when he came to Mexico, but so much was expected from him. My parents depended heavily on him to learn the language quickly while they worked at restaurants. Their hope was to eventually use him to navigate the restaurant's

business side in Mexico." Betty revealed that she remembers her brother feeling marginalized growing up, since he was often picked on for having a "funny Mexican accent, which he still has." Different from her brother, Betty was more 'accepted' into Mexican society and was not picked on, as she told me, "Oh no, not at all [I was not picked on]. I speak Spanish very clear." Betty, despite her Chinese phenotypes, was very assimilated into Mexican culture as she picked up several Mexican cultural codes, including the northern Mexican accent and heavy use of make-up, a style choice commonly criticized by many Chinese women where I worked.

Betty remembers wanting to help out in the restaurant when she was thirteen years old. "My brother and father were the cooks, and my mother was the cashier. They were always having problems with the waitresses quitting. My parents really could not pay them more, and since it was mostly a small restaurant, most of the food was carryout and the waitresses would not receive customers to give them tips. Sometimes my brother would be put as waiter, with his bad Spanish! My family was always working. On the slow days, my brother would be the cook, and my dad would take the day off, but sometimes it was just to buy more stuff for the restaurant. My mother would take the day off when we would have a waitress, and then my dad would be at the cash register. My brother would sometimes take Saturday off, because he would hang out with friends Friday nights. It was always the family rotating the duties, even when we would have extra help. I wanted to really help, but they would not let me." Betty's father did not want her to work: "My entire family loves me and spoils me, even my brother," she told me. Betty decided to become an accountant, anticipating that she could provide that service for the restaurant and because it was only a two-year degree that she could work

on during high school. "Even after my accounting degree, [my father] still did not want me to work in the restaurant. He said everything was in place, and that he had learned how to deal with the business in a more efficient manner. He had partnered with some of my uncles and built a bigger restaurant. A bigger restaurant meant that it could be in a busier neighborhood, with more customers," she told me. Betty's family restaurant was small and in a small neighborhood, but soon expanded into a bigger one. Most of the larger (and busier) restaurants are on the main boulevards of Mexicali.

Betty's example of not being allowed to work at the Chinese restaurant with her family shows that Chinese constantly struggle with whether to fully assimilate into the host society or not. Betty, however, is an anomaly compared to many other children of family owners who use their teenagers to help in their restaurants. Later in the interview, Betty said: "My mom is working with my aunt at her restaurant. Not because she needs to, but because the Mexican waitresses were stealing from her business. I have several Chinese friends who are working for their families as managers or accountants for the restaurants too." Chinese people understand that losses at a restaurant can come internally, and they assume that by employing kin it will reduce those losses. In employing their own sons or daughters into the business, they are also stratifying them into the food industry. Studies in the United States are showing that sons and daughters of working-class Chinese immigrants are obtaining higher education at a fast rate and entering white-collar professional jobs in various industries; however, it is rare to see Chinese-Mexicans in Mexicali hold positions as doctors, lawyer, or managers. Betty told me, "My cousin got a law degree at [the local state university], and I'm not lying to you when I tell you that he is working as a manager at a Chinese restaurant!" Ease of finding

work in restaurants, and racism, she felt, determine the type of employment to which she has access. She responded, "It was difficult for me to get a job as an accountant, but I eventually got one with the government. I took these exams, placed well, and got the job. The *maquiladoras* [foreign owned factories] would not hire me for some reason, but I did not give up. My cousin applied to several places, and would not get an offer anywhere. He told me some of the places he felt the racism. He should not have given up, though. Now he is stuck at the Chinese restaurant." Betty reflected on her cousin's experience and ignored obstacles to obtaining a job by showing how she was able to have a job herself.

Betty's experience shows the variation in experiences that shatter assumptions about kinship-work obligations among Chinese who operate restaurants in Mexico. Family-owned businesses tend to be small and in the *colonias* [neighborhoods], as opposed to the main boulevards of the city. This tends to be because the main boulevards of the city are quite expensive to either buy or lease, and require a much bigger investment to operate the big buildings. In a small family owned Chinese restaurant, the restaurant focuses on fast food, ready to go, instead of a place where customers sit and enjoy the meal. At most, the small family owned businesses could seat 25 people. Through several visits to smaller family owned Chinese restaurants throughout the city, I observed the deteriorated buildings, antiquated façades, and torn or chipped tables and chairs. All the restaurants were very clean, but the old appearance that they displayed often signaled that they sold food mostly to working classes of Mexicali. My experience working as an apprentice Chinese cook allowed me to identify what was *"basura* [trash]*"* in Julio's (one of the Chinese restaurant workers) words, versus, "*muy bueno* [very

good]." The food quality at the small Chinese businesses varied: at some restaurants the food was fresh and well-made, while at others the meat was clearly recycled from old dishes. The smaller restaurants show the entrepreneurial spirit of the Chinese people: despite being unable to own nicer restaurants, they persist in owning their own restaurants, though they are smaller and less attractive. Since they do not have partners, they have to cut costs on many things, including the appearance of their restaurant, and sometimes the quality of the food.

The most difficult thing for the small-owned restaurants is the amount of labor that goes in to make the business work. Betty remembers this from her childhood, but what makes her account interesting is that it seems that most of the profits of the restaurant were going to her, as she told me that she was "spoiled." At first, I thought that Betty was an investment for the family and lots of the money would go to her, but after Betty told me about her dad's refusal to work at the restaurant, I had to rethink why her family would "spoil" her. My only conclusion was that Betty was living her family's immigrant dream of living comfortable and without worries, even though they would work countless hours at the restaurant.

The challenges of a family owned restaurant

Not all the children of Chinese immigrants get the same amount of resources that Betty received growing up. As Betty told me, several of her cousins and Chinese friends were working at the restaurant. Flor, my Chinese-Mexican friend tells me the difficulties of growing up in a family owned Chinese restaurant: "Being a waitress at a family owned business is tough. You have no social life whatsoever. The entire time you are at the restaurant. I would go from school, straight to the restaurant to help out. People think that

Chinese overwork people, but that is not always true. It is not just Chinese, my mother [a Mexican woman] would expect me to work so much! My mother was obsessed about making the business work to get profits, but it was difficult. As a result, I would be the one that had to sacrifice my social and academic life. I would not get a salary. My salary was my tip, so I would make sure to be nice with customers. That's why I tell you that a waitress can make a fair amount of money." In different time periods, Flor would tell me the difficulties of working at her parent's restaurant. "My father decided to sell the restaurant. The restaurant was old, and he did not have enough money to invest in it, and he did not want to borrow money from his family members. Also, he knew my mom was difficult to work with; she always wanted to be at the restaurant. She was obsessed. I don't think my dad's family liked her either. It was easier to just sell," she told me. I asked Flor what her dad did now, and she said that he was retired. "So he just stays at home all day?" I asked her. "No, he goes and hangs out with his brother at his brother's restaurant all day. It's a small café. My mother is convinced that he is part owner there and needs to work. But no, she followed him once, and saw that all he does is sit and talk with his brother," she told me. "How does he get money, then?" I asked. "It's our savings from selling the restaurant. We budget it well, but we're poor! That's why I go to college Ernesto, I can not depend on my parents to help me out financially. We have to budget well. I'm not rich like you!" she told me. "I work, my parents do not give me money," I responded. "Well, that's what I want to do," she told me. "But what about your parents? They don't get a pension or a retirement because they owned their own restaurant, right?" I asked. She responded, "Well, no, they don't, but even though my dad told my mom that he is not part owner of the restaurant, he really is. He just does not want to tell her,

because then she'll want to go to the restaurant and feel like an owner and run it. So, that's how we stay afloat. My dad just tells my mother that the money is from the sale of the restaurant." The conversation with Flor extended throughout the year, as I saw her frequently from time to time.

Although Flor told me that her family is "poor," when getting to know her better, I saw the discrepancies in that description. I went to visit her once at her house and it was not in the humble parts of Mexicali, as other homes I had seen scattered throughout the city. She lived in the outer part of the city, which is less expensive, but her neighborhood had paved streets and it was in a relatively safe neighborhood with outdoor public lighting. In addition, her father was able to make investments in a restaurant in order to use the dividends as his retirement fund. Flor's upbringing working as a waitress, and member of a family owned restaurant conditioned her to think that resources were scarce when that was not necessarily the case. Her parents had material things, like a car and a house, but she oversaw the material things they obtained because her family was always working. Rather than have a middle-class consciousness as the daughter of a business owner, she has a false working-class consciousness that drives her to succeed in school and as a professional. Flor is ranked at the top of her class in college.

Understanding family-run Chinese businesses in Mexico is inucumbent upon understanding how they organize themselves in the city, how they operate the restaurant, and how the children grow up in the host society. Family owned businesses are often found in the older neighborhoods of towns, where people are familiar with the food, and where it is cheaper to start the business. These restaurants are operated by family members themselves, and do not employ Mexican labor. The children of Chinese small

business owners often are driven to succeed because of the sacrifices that their parents are making. Together, Chinese small businesses flourish in different ways: monetarily, and socially.

Continued entrepreneurship? The Chongs of Mexicali

The Chongs are one of the oldest Chinese and Mexican families in Mexicali. They own several properties in the old city center, not only Chinese restaurants. The Chongs are rumored to be extremely wealthy; so wealthy that they have bought property not only in Mexico, but also in the United States and China. Many Mexicans and Chinese people have also said that their success can been seen through their U.S. and Mexican college educated children. While watching the local news in Mexicali one evening I saw a very fluent Spanish speaking Chinese man with the last name of Chong being interviewed by the local television station promoting the performing arts in Mexicali. He was proud to be from Mexicali and wanted to increase awareness to the performing arts that he was involved in Monterrey, Mexico. He had received his education from one of the most prestigious (and most expensive) private schools in Mexico, *Instituto Tecnologico de Monterrey.* Like in the United States, to send a son or daughter to a prestigious private (and public) school secures the upward mobility of the family through marriage and through the quality of the education. Unlike in the United States, private schools in Mexico offer little to no economic support by the government or the schools; the family of the student finances most (if not all) of the education. The Chong I saw being interviewed on television is part of the Chongs' wealth that I am referring to, and provides a glimpse of what is rumored in Mexicali: he is part of the old Chinese wealth

that many people from Mexicali assumed. The question that remains in most peoples' minds is: how did the Chongs attain so much wealth?

The Chongs are part of the early formation of Mexicali, before its expansion, development, and growth during the late 1990s. They owned lots of property before the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and as a result, were the first to be able to raise capital to build other small businesses while the city grew, including grocery stores, currency exchange booths, restaurants (Chinese and Mexican), and food distribution warehouses. In addition to those businesses, the Chongs are naturalized Mexicans or Mexican-born, thereby allowing them to own land. In 1937 Mexicans of Baja California appropriated the land owned by U.S citizens in Mexicali who were leasing their lands to Chinese and other groups. This sent a clear message to Chinese entrepreneurs that they needed to be become Mexican citizens to enjoy the privileges of owning property. There was an incentive to become naturalized Mexican. As a result, purchasing real estate in Mexicali before NAFTA was inexpensive. Subsequently, the economic growth of the city spurred the price of the land to become very expensive, and the Chongs were able to sell some parts of it to several Mexican developers and businessmen and to other Chinese people. During the last decade, and while I conducted my fieldwork, development in Mexicali was booming, with several homes, theaters, grocery stores, boutiques, gas stations, and restaurants being built throughout the city.

Jeannette, a long time friend, met a female member of the Chong family at a political fundraiser in Los Angeles, California. She immediately called me and told me, "I met a Chinese-Mexican, and she's from Mexicali. She spoke English very well, but

then she came up to me and started speaking Spanish very well to me. I was very surprised. I asked her how she spoke Spanish and English so well, since she was clearly Chinese. She told me because she grew up in Mexicali and Calexico." Later, in a second encounter, Jeannette was able to get her story and her information.

Lili Chong was born in Calexico, California, but lived part of her life in Mexicali. Lili remembers that the business her father belonged to flourished very well. So well that Lili attended private school in Mexicali,her entire time there. Concerned about the family's safety, Lili's father moved the entire family to Calexico. Lili states, "Mexicali is a great city, and it has contributed tremendously to my family's wealth, however, something that Mexicali does not have is safety. There have been kidnapping attempts against my father, and that was not good for his health." Lili's father continued to work in Mexicali, while Lili and her brothers attended private schools in Calexico. Lili eventually moved to Los Angeles to go to a technical school, where she met her husband, a Los Angeles-born Chinese engineer.

Despite the financial success that the Chongs enjoy through their past investments and inherited wealth, they know that Mexicali's violence and crime has a negative impact on their family and business and presents a potential risk of their lives. This is another benefit in having partnerships, as most of the wealth and profits can be distributed. In the case of the Chongs, their wealth is all concentrated in one family. Their wealth is visible to many people of Mexicali, making them prime targets of personal robberies and kidnappings. During my time in the field, I heard of the steady rise in the demand for bodyguards being hired by Japanese managers visiting their *maquiladora* [factory]

operations. The rise in inequality that is growing in the city is increasing the crime rates, and the targets of robberies are businesses.

Lili's story allows us to get a glimpse of the wealth the Chong's have built on their business. Her story also tells us the challenges that Chinese businesses face when opening a business. My chapter on the assassination of two Chinese in a restaurant discusses further the ways the Chinese businesses try to minimize that risk.

Integrating local with Chinese ways?

One of the most popular places to go eat in Mexicali is *High Tide*, a seafood (mostly shrimp) cocktail restaurant. The bright blue walls, decorated with pictures of swordfish, shrimp, sharks, and reefs had nothing Chinese, only a small golden smiling-faced Buddha statute greeting guests at the cash register. This partnership was between a Mexican and a Chinese person. I was unable to get an interview with the owners, so most of my sources are stories I collected from people, including some of my Chinese friends.

This partnership was made possible because of Mexicali's location, a popular local food item, and the friendship developed between the Chinese and Mexican owners. Mexicali is located just 110 miles north of San Felipe, a beach town with a fishing port on the California Gulf. I met Chinese people working at the fishing port in San Felipe through my friend Luk Sum. Luk Sum's husband, Zhou Le, lived in San Felipe during the week, and would go take the bus to Mexicali during the weekends to be with his family. Zhou Le told me that he originally started working at a Chinese restaurant and was eventually promoted to head chef. He was surprised that he was asked by the owner to work at the fishing port in San Felipe. "I did not want to own a restaurant. I was content

with my salary as a head cook. One day, the owner of the restaurant approached me to work in San Felipe. I was confused even when he told me that my salary would be much higher. There were no Chinese restaurants there, and he knew my entire family lived in Mexicali. Even with a higher salary, I did not want to go to San Felipe," Zhou Le told me. Zhou Le agreed to have lunch with the owner, still reluctant to consider the offer to move to San Felipe. "San Felipe does not have a Chinese population like Mexicali. To live in San Felipe would also be difficult because my wife had a job in Mexicali as a cook. We were both earning a good amount of money," Zhou Le told me. Zhou Le then realized that the owner was venturing out into a new business unfamiliar to him and many people from the Chinese community: shrimp from San Felipe. Other *Chinescos* had ventured in setting up a seafood restaurant, but were not financially successful. Zhou Le thought that it was because no Chinese were in the production or supplying of the shrimp and other seafood. The shrimp industry is primarily dominated and owned by Mexicans.

Zhou Le understood that the high pay was because of the relocation, but also to aid the owner in the supply side of the shrimp and seafood. Zhou Le was recruited with two other Chinese people working at other Chinese restaurants to work in San Felipe packaging the shrimp and seafood. "I thought a lot about the opportunity. The money was better, but what really drew me to the job was because I wanted to do something different. If this job worked well I could have my son work with me. The last reason was because the owner had given me the opportunity before to work at the restaurant, so I wanted to do this to pay him back. I told him I would work for at least a year and then if it was not working out, I would like to have my old job back. He agreed." Zhou Le thought about the higher opportunity pay from working as a cook. As stated earlier, head

cooks get paid a fair wage (about US$700 a month), but that would be the most they could get paid. The next step for many head cooks would be to own their own restaurant, especially if they wanted to increase their income. Zhou Le did not reveal the amount he was getting paid to me, but I am sure that it was much higher. In addition, Zhou Le saw that this was going to be a different type of job than what most Chinese people (especially recent immigrants) engage in, which would also help out his son if the job seemed better. The last reason that Zhou Le indicated is a way of maintaining ties and helping the owner, who helped him when he was working as a cook.

Zhou Le told me that when he arrived to the fishing port, he immediately recognized the seafood distributor to the Chinese restaurant where he worked, Sergio. Sergio also knew Zhou Le, as Zhou Le is the one that signed off on the receiving of the shipment. "I felt at ease when I saw Sergio. He was like a friend, because he was always a nice person to me when he would go to the restaurant," Zhou Le remembers. Sergio then revealed to Zhou Le that he had entered a partnership with his former boss. Zhou Le thought that the new venture his boss was entering was by him, but it soon appeared that this was not the case. Sergio told Zhou Le that he was tired of going around the entire city of Mexicali delivering seafood to customers, even when they were small amounts. Sergio preferred to have a place where he only delivered large quantities of seafood, especially shrimp, only to a few restaurants. He would want to open his own restaurant, but knew nothing of that business.

Zhou Le's boss was approached by Sergio to open a seafood restaurant. Since Sergio's seafood operation was mostly shrimp, the focus he and Zhou Le's boss agreed on was to provide high quality jumbo size shrimp on the shrimp cocktails. The restaurant

started off really small, built on the side parking lot of the old Chinese restaurant that Zhou Le's boss owned. The business model was built on Chinese restaurants providing options that can feed individuals to families, from a mini cocktail that would feed one person to extra-jumbo size that could feed a family of six. Unlike the Chinese restaurant that provides several pages of food options along with food combos, Sergio suggested that there be a limit in items being sold, with the focus being strictly on shrimp. Sergio had faith that if shrimp was one of the few items sold, he would be able to eventually reduce the amount of small shrimp orders and shift it more to his new restaurant that he was building with the Zhou Le's boss.

According to Zhou Le, there was intense negotiation on what the food menu should be, since being limited to only sell shrimp at the restaurant would benefit Sergio two times, as partial owner of the restaurant and as the owner and distributor of the seafood. Zhou Le's boss negotiated that three of his employees work at the seafood distribution package shed in San Felipe. If the business went really well, Zhou Le would be allowed to invest in an additional seafood-packing shed warehouse in San Felipe, with the help of Sergio. Zhou Le's boss calculated that by having his employees work at the packing shed he would be able to learn more about the seafood distribution business, but also be able to check the amount of shrimp being shipped and ordered to the restaurant. Sergio told Zhou Le that he did not mind that his boss was distrustful of him, that he actually preferred it. In return for having to hire Zhou Le and two other of his friends, Sergio had his son be one of the assistant managers at the *High Tide*. Sergio also wanted to learn how a restaurant business was run and chose his son to be the apprentice. There was an exchange system of employees who would learn about each other's trade, but also

as a way to ensure that there was a check on the business. Zhou Le tells me, "*High Tide* is doing very well, and I do not see or hear many conflicts with Sergio and my boss like I had seen when I was working at the Chinese restaurant. This, I think, has to do with how everything was set out from the beginning. There were no secrets or assumptions. This was a business to profit, and it is doing well."

Zhou Le's exposure to working at a Chinese restaurant, and the beginning of a partnership between a Mexican and Chinese person, reveals the complexity of Chinese business organization and how they branch out in search of other business opportunities. My grandfather and I went to *High Tide* to eat a shrimp cocktail on a Sunday afternoon. Cooked shrimp mixed with cut up cucumbers, avocado pieces, finely cut fresh onions, cubes of tomatoes, in a tomato juice did not appeal to me that time. The shrimp cocktail is served cold and I was interested in eating a hot food item, like fried fish tacos. I asked the waiter if they had fish tacos, and he guided us through the restaurant and through a walkway that I thought led us to the kitchen, only to be at a mixed Mexican and Chinese food restaurant next door. My grandfather protested our move to the restaurant next door: "I want a shrimp cocktail from *Hide Tide*, not the food here!" The waiter replied to us, "You can get order the food that we serve at *High Tide* here; we work with the same people. They're the same owners." Satisfied with the response, my grandfather ordered his shrimp cocktail and I ordered my fish tacos.

Conclusion

The Chinese businesses that exist in Mexicali are very diverse and include many of the characteristics found by earlier authors researching overseas Chinese communities. They use their kin to raise capital to build their restaurants, they work in service sector

jobs, they have purchased real estate, they work long hours, and have a hard work ethic. I found that despite following some of the processes described by other overseas Chinese scholars, this population has endured great challenges that push them to break away from some of the previously observed methods. Forming businesses using kin increases distrust among them, and also puts a strain on the amount of time they put in the restaurant in order for them to make financial profits. As a result, many of them become bitter at each other, and prefer to be sole proprietors. Family owned businesses require lots of time, and are often of lower quality because of the lack of capital to add the nicer details in a restaurant, or maintain high food quality standards. Chinese family owned restaurants in Mexicali have gone beyond their kin and used other older successful established *Chinescos* as mentors. This is achieved through borrowing funds to establish the family owned restaurant. Chinese business communities, especially those well known for their wealth, are challenged to maintain their safety. Finally, I found that *Chinescos* do not always stay with Chinese people to build or expand a business. They use Mexican partners in order to delve into businesses that are unknown to them. Both parties do this with caution when engaging in new business ventures. But, laying out the terms and conditions from each side initially usually allows less conflict among the partners, unlike family or kin based businesses where distrust increases as a result of assumptions of how a business should be run.

I posed questions in the opening of my chapter on what my great-grandfather's life might have been forming his businesses. I asked my grandfather the same questions, and told me that my great-grandfather was very active in the Chinese community, once serving a term as the Chinese Association President. My grandfather also revealed that he

did join some partnerships, since his original Chinese food business failed. Later, he better understood the people of Mexicali's preference for food and eventually succeeded by breaking off into his own restaurant, like Esteban and Don Lolo. Success, in his view, like the Chongs, was sending his kids to private schools and giving them access to what Mexico's higher education. In addition, it was being able to own his property, which he could manage without the approval of business partners.

The overseas Chinese community in Mexicali shows how Chinese people have learned to acculturate into the host society, like Skinner suggested with the Chinese in Thai society. What makes the Chinese community of Mexicali very interesting is the location: the U.S.-Mexico border. In the following chapter I will outline how labor is organized in this place, through the lens of my work at a Chinese restaurant. Instead of looking at how Chinese businesses are organized, the following chapter reveals how food is a medium of exchange whereby Chinese entrepreneurs are part of the city.

Chapter 5
Kung Pao Hits Mexico:
Chinese Food as Regional Food in Mexicali

I left the restaurant tired, smelling like fried food, and with ketchup, carrot, and tea stains all over my clothes. I scrubbed myself with soap and shampooed my hair and I could smell the different food odors being released from my body. After I finished showering, I dried myself off and was reminded of the odors of the restaurant once again when I picked up my clothes from the shower floor and carried them to my laundry basket. I opened the door of my refrigerator to grab a beer, and went to sit and relax after having worked over seven hours at the Chinese restaurant. I turned on my television, put my feet up on my coffee table, and sat back. I fell asleep within a couple of minutes, trying to ignore the scents of the Chinese restaurant that followed me.

I gained great insight from working at the Chinese restaurant. I found out about Chinese people's life histories, Mexican's life histories, work relations, Chinese business organization, and how to cook Chinese food. Equally important in my findings was how people of Mexicali consumed Chinese food in large quantities. I collected and heard many stories of people's encounter with Chinese food, but there was no 'specific' reason (or story) that encompassed all these experiences. Mexicali people overwhelmingly ate Chinese food. This is a local characteristic particular to Mexicali, but an important one in understanding how culture is created, changed, and transformed by the *Chinescos*. *Chinescos* is the group that I have identified that is often left outside (and very far from) discussions about U.S.-Mexico border.

In this chapter, I will review the importance of studies of food in the social sciences, (specifically anthropology), my observations of how Chinese food is consumed

and its taste, the preparation of Chinese food, the characteristics of the Chinese restaurant that facilitates and attracts Mexican consumption, the meaning and importance of Chinese food for the people of Mexicali, as well as how other foods in Mexicali rival Chinese food. My intimate experience in the Chinese kitchen as a cook, along with my friends and family patronizing Chinese restaurants, gave me access to my sources of information. Chinese food in Mexicali adds to the argument I am making in this dissertation: that *Chinescos* are part of Mexicali, understand the local cultural codes, and contribute to the city's culture. The large amount of Chinese food consumed demonstrates how it is understood as non-Mexican, yet becomes part of the ordinary life of people from different backgrounds.

Mexicali: the best Chinese food in Mexico

Chinese restaurants rarely advertise in any of the major newspapers of Mexicali, yet the food continues to sell, and sell in large quantities. The demand for Chinese food is so great that the first regional mall, *La Cachanilla,* has seven fast food Chinese restaurants. Some estimate that the city of Mexicali (with a population of an estimated one million people in 2007) has over 300 Chinese restaurants.[40] As a result of the stiff competition, some of these Chinese restaurants offer bargain prices on their food. For only U.S.$10, or one and a half days of work for at the *maquiladora* [foreign owned factory] worker in the city, one can easily feed a family of four on take-out Chinese food found in *colonias* or Mexican neighborhoods. For example, during Mother's Day, Chinese restaurants become the premier place to celebrate the holiday. This is because some Chinese restaurants carry an aura of luxury, with the price of an American fast food

[40] Personal communication with Chinese Association President, and earlier findings by Gonzalez-Felix in 1990 show that many Chinese owned businesses are Chinese restaurants.

combo about U.S. $5, MEX $55 per person. The restaurants are not strictly for the family on a budget: if you wish to venture into their seafood menu, or order the special duck, the price increases three-fold into about U.S.$16, MEX$170. The city of Mexicali has become a target for Chinese entrepreneurs that understand the heterogeneity of the city: the city's rising upper-middle and middle class, the plentiful *maquiladora* working-class, as well as the neighboring American middle and working classes. Food is in great demand, and, to be more precise, cheap plentiful fast food is desired. *Chinescos*[41] are ready to serve the appetite of the city.

Food is a "window on the political" (Watson and Caldwell 2005) that can provide a glimpse into the way society is being changed or transformed. Through my examination of Chinese food consumption and production, I show how cultural processes and local economies begin to unfold among the people who live and experience the city. The importance of Chinese food in Mexicali cannot be underestimated.

Food and the social sciences

Food is an excellent entry into understanding society's culture. Early anthropological works, and the early foundations of the discipline warned that anthropologists should not discount food in their ethnographies (Malinoswki 1922). How food is collected, consumed, and what it means to people becomes an interesting anthropological and even historical study because of universal component it contains. Food is what we all know people consume (or should be consumed), and even today, anthropologist and researchers can find it as a useful entry into communities that we study.

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[41] *Chinescos* is the word I have created to identify long-standing Chinese and Chinese-Mexicans of the borderlands. This is very different from Chinese recent immigrants.

Not all food is the same, nor are the meanings associated with food consumption. Malinowski only concerned himself with collecting the types of food eaten by natives, and how it could be used for barter or other economic local systems. Today, the study of food has taken new directions than what Malinowski had in mind. Watson (1997) argues that globalization of McDonald's, through its sale of American food (i.e. the hamburger), and the drive for globalizing the product, changed their encounters with eating in Asian countries. For example, he noted that in China people have changed their eating habits (i.e. using their hands), and even shifting the decision makers when dining out (to children). The process is not completely imperialistic- certain aspects unique to McDonald's that are essential in the United States to cut costs (such as busing your own table, or using dispensable utensils without overseers) were unable to be reproduced in Hong Kong and Beijing. When dining out, Chinese people prefer to have their tables bused for them, and Chinese people would use and take the unlimited use of disposable utensils, thereby, leaving the restaurant without any by the end of the day. Favorable factors, however, included the standardization of clean restrooms throughout China. In addition, McDonald's came to mean to the Chinese people a more cosmopolitan view of themselves: they were able to engage with American culture. The hamburger and McDonald's became not only a sign of American dominance, but also a place where national and cultural identity and business were negotiated. Watson challenges our understanding of "globalization" by suggesting that even what we think is familiar and common to the west (McDonald's), is also familiar and common to the east, but localized in a different way, questioning what is really globalization.

In *Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World* (2004) anthropologist Theodore Bestor shows how sushi became a negotiated good from the shores of New England, to the fish market in Tokyo. Bestor focuses on the sushi and how it transforms markets, consumers, and producers. In one example, Bestor shows how a piece of fish is flown from New England to Tokyo for it to be graded, and is subsequently flown back to New York City to be consumed by Japanese customers at a five-star restaurant. More importantly, Bestor unlocks the ways in which commodities and people are linked and forge unexpected relationships from far away. By focusing on sushi, Bestor looks at the important role of a food item that has transformed the way we think of what we consume, but also reveals how sushi is understood in Japan. In his chapter titled "The Raw and the Consumed," Bestor shows how class, political economy, and rituals affect sushi consumption. Consumed by all Japanese, Bestor provides an example of Bourdeiu's (1984) concept of "distinction" (how class and identity impact consumption) in the way raw fish has changed to the rare fishes as well as different unorthodox places where the fish is caught. Bestor also reveals how sushi consumption falls when Japan is host to an international event, in large part because people are discouraged from eating out. A ritual Bestor found was the "Day of the Ox," where many people from Japan go out to eat fried eel. Bestor shows the different meanings that sushi affect the way it is produced, consumed, and understood by people in Japan.

Other studies that focus on food production also include Sidney Mintz's important study on sugar (1985) and Pilcher's study on hybrid cuisine and the changes of the tortilla in Mexico (2002). Sugar, according to Mintz, was a product enjoyed by the privileged few, and is now abundant and consumed by all. Mintz's study shows the historical,

material, and cultural value placed on sugar in an anthropological way. In the study he unravels the tension between class and race, as well the impact of consumption in the Caribbean. In looking at and understanding sugar, he is able to show the political significance of food. Similarly, Pilcher draws on the different political changes that the tortilla has gone through as a result of Mexican economic policy. Pilcher shows how the Mexican tortilla went from the *metate* (a saddle quern) to *Maseca,* a large tortilla manufacturer that mass-produces flour to make tortillas with the 'add water' instruction. Despite resistance from women, the 'traditional' way of making tortillas was lost due to economic policy that encouraged industrial growth. Pilcher does, however, recognize that there are different meanings that are associated with food, and what food means. The tortilla has not been abandoned, despite government subsidies being eliminated, or even the 'original flavor' being changed.

In contrast to Watson and Bestor, who both look at food markets from the 'first world' going global or trendy, and Mintz and Pilcher that take an 'anthro-historical' approach to looking at the changs in food, I focus on the consumption of Chinese food in Mexicali. Chinese food is particularly interesting because it can be found in a number of very different environments. The movie *Chinese Restaurants: Latin Passions* (2006) looked at different parts of Latin America and the world where Chinese food is present.[42] Eric, my friend who was studying in a remote part of Africa, told me how Chinese food was even present near the village where he was. In addition to the movie and my friend's personal observation, other studies have focused on Chinese food consumed by the

[42] The movie was released 2006, and it is called *Chinese Restaurants: Latin Passions* directed by Cheuk Kwan.

Jewish community (Miller 2006), while others have looked in places like London (Watson 1975). What makes Chinese food so appealing and part of a culture's cuisine?

Jews and Chinese Food

Chinese food has become a part of a number of environments in addition to Mexicali. . For example, in a study done by sociologists Tuchman and Levine, they show how New York City's Jewish communities incorporated Chinese food into their culture (1993). In this study, the authors seek to challenge the sociological assumptions and claims that culture of minority/ethnic groups in the United States is inherited and changed from their traditional 'own' culture. They state:

> In this article, we explore the internal logic of ethnic cultural invention by delving into an unusual by no means unique case: an American ethnic group (or its predominant variant) that has incorporated into its culture a practice and value that is utterly alien—completely beyond the bounds of its traditional culture. We focus on the way that Jews who immigrated from Eastern Europe to New York City, and especially their children and grandchildren, have incorporated Chinese restaurant food into their new Jewish-American culture (1993 383).

Tuchman and Levine show how the quality of food, price, and proximity of Chinese restaurants were only some of the many factors that contributed to to the increasing popularity of Chinese food in the Jewish community. Chinese food is closely related to the identity of modern Jews in New York City. They suggest that Jews view Chinese food as "cosmopolitan, urbane, and sophisticated" as well as Chinese food being 'safe *treyf*' or, "less threatening and more attractive than other non-Jewish or *treyf* food" (389) and that second generation Jews they identified Chinese food as something modern American Jews did together.

Tuchman and Levine review the history of migration of Eastern European Jews entering New York City and find that they arrived at the same time as Chinese between

1880 and 1920, along with Italians. They also claim that Chinese restaurants welcomed everyone, as opposed to Italian restaurants. They suggest that since Italians had strong ties with their Catholic background, including their restaurants displaying Christian images that made Jews feel uneasy. In addition, Jews preferred Chinese restaurants to Eastern-European style Jewish food because their 'traditional' dishes could be done at home. Chinese restaurants grew in New York City because they were able to target the Jewish community, a community that enjoyed eating out, had the money to spend on eating out, and because they thought the food tasted good.

Another reason that Jews began to like Chinese food is because of the 'cultural' component behind the cooking: it was considered 'safe treyf.' Tuchman and Levine reveal that Chinese food "disguises the tabooed ingredients by cutting, chopping, and mincing them"[43] which the Jews really appreciated. In addition, they found that Chinese cooking does not use any milk products, thereby avoiding the mixing of milk and meat, a Jewish cooking norm. Chinese food was compatible with Jewish traditions and food culture.

Finally, the Tuchman and Levine go into detail as to how Chinese food consumption is viewed as 'cosmopolitan' and as a way to forge a 'New York Jewish culture.' Chinese restaurants were as 'un-Jewish' as they can get, and Jews found this foreignness as "appealing, attractive, and desirable" (392). This was because of the way that Chinese restaurants decorated and designed the inside of their business. In addition, eating at these establishments symbolized that they had "possessed the sophistication and urbanity so central to both modern society and to modern Jewish culture" (394). As a result, many Jewish families found other Jews eating at the Chinese restaurants, in large

[43] Tuchman and Levine, 1993, p. 383

part because Chinese restaurants facilitated some elements important to the Jewish community, including "emphasis on family meals, intense dinner table conversation, love of an abundant table ('eat, eat'), and appreciation of a real bargain" (394). As a result, for many second and third generation Eastern European Jews, eating at a Chinese restaurant rekindled family memories.

Chinese food was a part of the immigration, assimilation, and acculturation processes for Eastern European Jews. According to the authors, Jews experiences with racism (like the Chinese), along with their cultural heritage, also a helped them to accept Chinese food. Further, they viewed the consumption Chinese food and the patronizing of Chinese restaurants as something that was in accord the with American (more specifically New York) way of living. The Jewish experience with Chinese food provides a glimpse of their immigration experience, cultural rituals, and traditions.

Mexicans eat Chinese food too

My study of Chinese food in Mexicali revealed a few similarities with Tuchman and Levine's findings. First, Mexicans of Mexicali enjoy the price, quality, and quantity that Chinese restaurants provide. Second, Mexicans also enjoy the comfort of the well-adorned Chinese restaurants. Third, the arrival of Mexicans paralleled the arrival of Chinese a Mexicali. However, there are also many differences. One is the emigrants from different states of Mexico do not see the consumption of Chinese food as a necessary way of assimilating or becoming part of the people of Mexicali (like the Jews forging an identity through Chinese food consumption); people from different parts of Mexico actually romanticize and are proud of the region of Mexico they come from. Chinese food is also not religiously compatible (or in accordance) with the dominant Catholic

Mexican's religious view on food; Mexican Catholics generally do not have dietary restrictions. Consumption of Chinese food in Mexicali is only seen as something urbane and sophisticated in certain settings (as I will show later, there are strict class divisions in the way Chinese food is ordered). Finally, the high consumption of Chinese food is different in Mexicali because of the rise in disposable income through the entering of women into the workforce, unlike the Jewish case where the community as a whole could afford to eat out, enjoyed to eat out, enjoyed the flavor of the food, and enjoyed the price of the food. The participation of women in the workforce allows them to consume Chinese food because it is inexpensive, it is cooked and delivered quickly, and they enjoy the flavor because they consider it very different from Mexican food. In reviewing the similarities and differences between the consumption of Chinese food by Jews of New York and Mexicans of Mexicali, I show that there is nothing "cultural" about Chinese people that allow for them to expand their Chinese businesses globally. Instead there are historical, economic, and religious meaning associated with Chinese food in Jewish and Mexican communities.

Chinese and Mexicans in Mexicali: 1900's through today

The correlation of history, food and the body and how it relates to society, as a form of analysis is best explained by Australian sociologist Elspeth Probyn (2000). In Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities, she writes that Australian's original "aboriginal" cuisine is, "Hard to detect, the taste of the past at times threatens to come to the fore, then recedes again to the collective background" (2000 102). Probyn suggest that in Australia there is a link in history with eating, and how eating in the present cannot ignore the past. Specifically, she is referring to the oppressive history of Australia's aboriginals. Probyn

shows that settlers in Australia did not initially consume the food of aboriginals because they still depended on food from Britain. The relationship between aboriginals changed when settlers began to ration food as a way to control them (2000 111). Historically, food was used to exclude and control a community, and the current relationship with food disguises this relationship when it celebrates Sydney as one of the "world's foodie meccas" (2000 102). Just like food from Sydney is celebrated because of its aboriginal influence, Mexicans also celebrate the Chinese food in Mexicali. The official city's tourism website states: "The Chinese, who were the pioneers of these lands, contributed greatly to our cuisine with a very ample variety of dishes. Their food is as traditional to Mexicali as carne asada."[44] These positive outtakes of Chinese food disguise the anti-Chinese movements and hate crimes that the Chinese people of Mexicali experienced.

Chapter 1 reviews how Chinese arrived to Mexicali to harvest and develop the agricultural sector during the 1890's, when Mexicali was still not a city. Chinese in Mexicali were recruited directly by Mexico, but also by Chinese-American entrepreneurs working with Ottis and Chandler (owners of large plots of land leased out to Chinese-Americans and Mexicans). When the political situation changed, and there was a downturn in the Mexican economy, Chinese people became the scapegoats of the economic problems. As a result, many anti-Chinese movements occurred during the 1930's most notably in Sonora, the neighboring state of Baja California (Dennis 1979). Chinese, therefore, are part of the earlier settlers of the city, along with Mexican labor from different parts of Mexico recruited by Mexican and American entrepreneurs, with a very different history from the Mexican settlers. Probyn's caution of the history hidden behind food becomes important.

[44] See: http://www.mexicaliturismo.com/en/About-Restaurants.php; website accesses June 2007.

It is no surprise, then, that the oldest Chinese restaurants are located in *La Chinesca*, one of the oldest *colonias* [neighborhoods] of Mexicali, which is located in close proximity to the border. Many of the oldest buildings are located at *La Chinesca,* along with several Chinese restaurants, many of them selling food to Mexicali's residents. *La Chinesca* is also home to Chinese Association, formed in 1919, the place where earlier Chinese immigrants went to exchange information about local happenings and proceedings. *La Chinesca* is also the neighborhood where many Chinese immigrants first arrive when immigrating to Mexicali. Since many of the older Chinese restaurants are located in *La Chinesca,* I would suggest that Chinese food consumption by Mexicans coincided with the early formation of Mexicali, since many Chinese people served as entrepreneurs. Even though Chinese food is different, there is curiosity from different groups to try food that is 'not their own,' in this case, Chinese food was one of the options, along with American food. There is a tense history that is forgotten when Chinese food is currently celebrated today.

Historically, and looking at some historical archives, the earliest restaurants I noted were from the 1930's and 1940's (after the anti-Chinese movements in Mexico). The popularity of Chinese food continued through the 1980's, and through my time doing fieldwork in 2005-2006.

Food Taste and Class: Petra and Broccoli

Today, many people consume Chinese food, despite the fact that many do not know the history of anti-Chinese movements. What is it about Chinese food that makes it so accessible and appealing to people? The taste. People in Mexicali really enjoy the taste of Chinese food because of its blend with local ingredients and with the East Asian

cooking style. This mixture allows for *Chinescos* to be able to sell their food in large quantities. *Chinescos* have learned to create a taste that is appealing and widely known in the city; thus, creating a local cuisine with is often understood as foreign. Taste is undoubtedly the main element in the high food consumption. The large amounts consumed show how it has become a second cuisine whereby some people claim that Chinese food is not really foreign food, but part of Mexicali's cuisine. This shows how Chinese food (despite thought of as 'foreign' food by non-Mexicans and Mexicans not from Mexicali) has become part of the everyday, and how *Chinescos* have negotiated their Chinese cooking with local cooking. While studying in China I became familiar with the *dim sum* (small snacks) served on the streets along with the eight course meals served during banquets. Cantonese style cooking in Mexicali is very similar to Chinese food from China, except that it is much sweeter, at times more spicy, and it blends in local flavors that bring to light its unique cultural setting. I will explain how this taste is captured through a barter exchange I witnessed.

Petra, a young dark skinned indigenous woman in her mid-20's, entered the Chinese restaurant where I was working with her four-year-old daughter and with three boxes filled with broccoli. She wore old worn out clothes, with sweat stains and dirt marks, and was atypical of customers to whom the restaurant would cater. The restaurant mainly had many *maquiladora* workers as customers, rarely agricultural workers from the poorest section of Mexicali like Petra. . She was part of a Mexicali population that lived in extreme poverty, working in the agricultural sector as an employee, where the pay is MEX$45 for an eight hour day (about US$4.50). Petra came in looking for the one of the managers in order to sell the broccoli she had with her. She succeeded in talking

with both managers, each with different responses. First, she talked with Rigo, the Mexican manager and asked him how much he would pay for the broccoli. I waited for to hear a cash amount, but instead, it was an exchange in cooked food for raw food. Rigo told her, "I will give you two combos that include three Chinese food items." Petra saw the offer as unreasonable and responded, "No, that's not a lot. Give me four combos." Rigo then made a counter-offer, "I will give you three, but no more than that." Petra paused, and then responded, "I'll take three, but I have to choose the food I want, and I want two cans of soda." Rigo agreed, and told Yoli (the waitress) to lead Petra to Lee, the Chinese cook.

Lee inspected the broccoli, and asked Petra, "How much?" Petra yelled at Lee, "I am getting three combos," as if he did not understand Spanish, and raised three of her fingers. Lee then yelled back at her, "No, not three. That is too much. This is not worth that much. That's MEX$150, and all this broccoli is not worth that much!" Petra, visibly angry, tells him that she has already made a deal with Rigo. Lee tells her that she needs to pick food from the buffet trays where the food was already pre-made, and leaves to the back. Petra looks at the food and sees that there are no breaded shrimp, a favorite (and expensive) dish among Mexicans. Petra complains to Yoli about the absence of shrimp. Lee comes to the front and tells her to shut up and to take what is given to her. Petra fights back and tells him that was not part of the deal and that she could get whatever she wanted. The yelling gets so loud that Rigo decides to go to the back to see what's going on. Rigo pushes Petra to the back of the restaurant, away from the public eye, and separates her from Lee. He then instructs her to get the dishes she wants, but only the ones available in the buffet trays. Petra was visibly upset. She knew that the dishes in the

buffet had been sitting there longer, and did not taste as good as freshly cooked ones. She demanded something, at least one item, be cooked for her. Rigo told her that it could not be an expensive item outside the food sitting in the buffet tray. Petra then agreed to *chop suey* (bean sprouts with chicken or any other meat), another popular dish among Mexican people, but that was inexpensive to make or to buy. Lee agreed, and Petra went for her soda cans. Meanwhile, Petra's four-year-old daughter looked on.

As Petra waited for the food to be cooked, I asked her what she did for a living. Still angry about the exchange she had with Rigo and Lee, she told me, "Can't you tell? I work in the [agricultural] fields." In an effort to ease the tension, I responded, "You have a beautiful daughter, did you just pick her up from school?" She smiled at me, and replied, "I just picked her up from her grandmother's place, she is only four years old and not in school yet." I then asked her about her experience with Chinese food, "When was the first time you had Chinese food?" She paused, then she answered, "My father would take us when I was young to a small Chinese restaurant. Your managers think I don't know the foods, but I know which the Chinese food is good." I asked her what food is the one she enjoys the most, and she replied, "Any of the dishes that have shrimp. Kung Pao shrimp is my favorite." The food was now ready for her to take. Lee handed it to her, almost shoving it at her, and told her to take it. I told Lee to be nice to her. Petra left with her daughter holding one of her hands, and her bags of food and soda in the other. As soon as Petra left, Yoli, the waitress, approached me and told me, "You should have told her to be nice to Lee too, she was yelling at him."

An unequal relationship existed in the way this exchange occurred, but it also reveals much about food taste in Mexicali. Before talking about the unequal exchange

and mistreatment Petra received, it is important to review Petra's initial encounter with Chinese food. Petra, despite working as a farm worker, revealed how she had been exposed to Chinese food at a young age. Petra also learned how to barter for what she wanted with some of the fruits from her labor. As a farm worker, she is able to receive some of the crops she harvests (in this case, broccoli) from her job site, which she can later barter for Chinese food. Petra's early exposure to Chinese food gave her the information she needed that showed that broccoli is a common (and popular) Chinese dish served to Mexican people. She could have chosen *any* of the 300 Chinese restaurants in the city, and all of them would have exchanged some prepared food for the broccoli.

The rich agricultural sector of the Mexicali Valley and the neighboring Imperial Valley allow for very fresh and tasteful Chinese food to be prepared. Rather than food being picked, processed, packaged, refrigerated, transported, delivered, and eventually bought, many restaurant owners know that they can purchase their agricultural products locally at a cheap price. In doing so, they also enhance the flavor of Chinese food. The exchange that Petra and the managers had is not an anomaly; I saw this happen several times. If there was no one going to the restaurant to exchange vegetables for Chinese food, whenever I would unload the boxes of vegetables supplied to the restaurant, I would read the labels, "Made in Holtville, California," a small town in the border county, among the names of other small towns. There is a direct relationship between the agricultural sector and the Mexicali and Imperial Valley, and this can be seen through the taste in food served at the Chinese restaurants.

Petra's keen eye for what will taste good is also important to analyze. There are many Chinese buffet restaurants in the city of Mexicali that offer 'all you can eat' food at

highly inexpensive prices (anywhere from MEX$65 to MEX$85, US$6.20 to US$8.10). These prices are much cheaper than eating at a Chinese restaurant where you can choose from the combos, in large part because the 'all you can eat' buffet restaurants also include the drinks in the price, where traditional restaurants do not. The 'all you can eat' Chinese restaurant buffets are just as nice and elegant as the traditional Chinese restaurants; however, traditional Chinese restaurants (non-buffet, all you can eat) outnumber them. One of the reasons is because of the taste. People of Mexicali would overwhelmingly tell me that the taste is very different in the two types of restaurants. "Food sitting there for God knows how long is sometimes not that good," Lola, one of my friends, told me. For the most part food is warmed up or cooked in the woks when you go to the traditional restaurant, where as the 'all you can eat' restaurants the food is maintained warm with steaming water below the trays that the food sits on. The restaurant where I worked had 'fast-food-ready-to-go' buffet trays (which was much cheaper), but one could also order food to be cooked. That is what Petra was negotiating. She did not want the food that was sitting on the trays; she wanted at least one dish to be cooked for her. She knew, like many people in Mexicali know, that the taste is much better when Chinese food is cooked when ordered.

Another observation on the exchange between Petra and the manager that is important to understand how Chinese food becomes introduced into the Mexican palate is by pointing out Petra's daughter. Petra told me that her daughter was only four years old, not even in kindergarten yet. At a young age, Petra's daughter is being introduced to the unequal society she will be living in through food. Her mother was engaging in a business transaction that was hostile. Lee and Rigo both mistreated her mother, but Petra

fought on. She knew what taste she wanted in the Chinese food, the taste to which she was introducing her daughter. Despite living in an unequal society, where Petra belongs to the working-class poor, she has found ways to acquire the taste that many people in Mexicali enjoy: Chinese food. In bringing her daughter, she is ensuring that she knows the ways of the city. The introduction of Chinese food to Petra's daughter, however, is also ensuring that Chinese food will be consumed by the generations to follow.

Finally, the availability and inexpensiveness of the Chinese food is also something important to understand. The food that was sitting ready to go, if not sold, will be thrown to the trash. Rigo and Lee both knew this. However, Rigo and Lee also risked the chance of having a busy day and having to cook more food. In addition, if Petra chose food that was part of the more "desirable" food, it would probably also not be cost-effective for the to have bartered the food for the broccoli. Regardless, bartering broccoli for cooked food made financial sense, since there is more ways to replenish the food they gave away.

Broccoli and beef: plentiful, good, and inexpensive

As the broccoli was received, I knew what the next task was: chopping it. There are many Chinese dishes that Mexicans enjoy eating, but a dish that was consumed a lot was broccoli and beef; therefore, the act of chopping broccoli was always assigned to me. During the four months I worked at the Chinese restaurant, I inescapably was able to learn how to make this dish. Once I had secured the trust of Chinese workers, there was no real "secret" behind how Chinese food was made. The perception among Mexican people is that there are lots of secret "Chinese" recipes that are unavailable to them. Chinese food was difficult for Mexicans to make at home, which helped *Chinescos* to

secure the restaurant market. This results in a barrier into the Chinese food business based on food preparation. As a result, the specialized skills of Chinese immigrants are sought out after. *Chinescos* are put in a position to help the migration by petitioning the legal immigration of recent Chinese immigrants (since it is a 'specialized' profession in demand) into Mexico. Food preparation reveals much about Mexicali, including the plentiful food that is asked for by customers and that *Chinescos* use to insure the return of Mexican customers.

Initially, I was not allowed near the wok stations to cook the food. I first imagined that it was part of the forbidden area that Mexicans were not allowed to enter, as many Mexicans indicated and perceived. When I would try to go in the wok stations where the great majority of the food was cooked, I was told to stay away by the Chinese cooks and given a tedious assignment, like pealing shrimp or slicing and dicing broccoli, carrots, mushrooms, or onions. But even these tedious tasks had an art form; they required a certain way of slicing, dicing and chopping. Broccoli was sliced in a way to only get rid of the uneatable components and at the same time make it look fancy and presentable after being cooked. The first time I started working, Julio asked me before starting to slice the broccoli if I knew how, which I confidently had said yes, thinking, "What could possibly be so difficult about cutting broccoli?" He laid the cutting board on the table, gave me a very sharp knife, pulled the broccoli out, and put a trash box under the table so I can throw the 'unwanted' pieces of broccoli. I was left alone cutting the broccoli, and soon I was done. I thought I had done this task efficiently, and was proud of myself. I went to get Julio so he could tell me the next task. Julio came to see the work I had done, and soon his thin slender eyes were wide open. "*Ting-Lung,* no no no!" he said

to me. He reached towards the ground and reached down to see some of the eatable pieces of broccoli in the trash box. Julio began to laugh, and quickly got the pieces and threw them in the trash outside the restaurant so the manager would not see. Then, he pulled out another box of broccoli but this time showing me what pieces did belong in the trash box. The cutting of the broccoli was not so easy, and it took more time because the assistant cooks would only cut out the very bottom stem, near the roots of the broccoli. The slicing of the broccoli revealed my apprentice status as an assistant cook, and showed that what we find as easy and low skilled, actually takes some form of training.

The slicing of the broccoli, and the act of not disposing valuable eatable components, reveals that food preparation also has a process that ensures that Mexicali residents get what they want: plentiful good tasting food. By cutting out only the non-eatable parts of the broccoli, Chinese cooks are able to provide a lot more broccoli than beef, the more expensive item on the dish. Big chunks of broccoli would fill the plates, with very few slices of beef. This did not seem to bother the Mexican customers, as many indicated that they would become full from one serving. . "It's not only the broccoli that we are eating, it's the whole taste that I won't be able to capture at home," I was told. The other ingredients in broccoli and beef included onion, garlic, MSG, oil, a splash of soy sauce, and a bit of sugar. Combined, these ingredients enhanced the flavor of the broccoli that made the few bits of beef not as important.

Broccoli and beef is only one example of many dishes whereby Chinese cooks are able to provide large portions of food by conserving the more expensive ingredients and adding more of the inexpensive one. This was done with fried rice, the staple of all Chinese restaurants. Rice in relation to Mexican cuisine is consumed in many dishes, but

usually made by frying tomato sauce, onion, and boiling it with chicken broth. Fried Cantonese style rice was therefore easy to introduce to the Mexican palate. Fried Cantonese style rice was also not difficult to make; it usually consists of day old rice, fried with green onions, MSG, a splash of soy sauce, peas, pieces of either BBQ pork pieces, shrimp, or chicken (depending on the choice of the customer). The items that are preserved are the meats, and the item that is served in large quantity is the inexpensive rice. What the large amounts of inexpensive foods combined with the preservation of expensive ones shows is that *Chinescos* have been able to satisfy the needs (or rather, wishes) of the Mexican consumer: cheap plentiful food. In doing so, they are once again increasing their customer base, but also ensuring that Chinese food is localized food.

Facilitating Chinese food consumption: the heterogeneity of Chinese restaurants size

The different types of restaurants that exist in Mexicali cater to the heterogeneity of the city. The large size of some of these restaurants accommodates big groups of people. In addition, the ability to cook large amounts of food in a short period of time is also important factors that several Chinese restaurants use to increase their consumer base in Mexicali. This shows that Chinese entrepreneurs further encourage the high amount of Chinese food consumption in Mexico; with the consistent presence throughout the city, this shows that even what seems so different becomes normal for the residents of Mexicali.

Restaurants come in different sizes, and often one chooses one based on how many people a restaurant can accommodate. Beside the large restaurants (that accommodate up from 200-500 people), there are medium restaurants (that accommodate from 60-200), and medium-small restaurants (that accommodate 30-60 people), and small

restaurants (that are usually take-out, and will accommodate less from 0 to 30 people, or are located in the mall, or in a *colonia*/neighborhood). The size of the restaurant often indicates the customer base: larger restaurants will welcome just about all people. This includes take-out orders, orders for couples, small and large families, and some host quienceneras [sweet 15 celebrations for Mexican teenage girls], wedding banquets, or other celebrations. Medium size establishments will welcome all of the larger restaurant populations but will not allow large banquets. Medium to small restaurants will cater to families and couples, and smaller ones are often strictly for take-out or small families. The different types of Chinese restaurants that are available allow for a deep penetration of Mexican society. Mexicali residents know this wide array of restaurants, and will use each appropriately. To illustrate the diversity of restaurants an observation of Mexican Mother's Day and an event from the institution where I was affiliated will show the way Chinese attract the Mexican population to eat at their restaurants.

Mexican Mother's Day (May 10 every year) is one of the most popular holidays in Mexico. Dining out is the preferred option for many Mexicans, considering that many Mexican men do not usually cook or know how to cook. The restaurants (both Chinese and non-Chinese) that attracted the most customers were all Chinese restaurants. Just about all the restaurants (regardless of cuisine type) in the city were filled with customers. Lines of people would crowd outside restaurants waiting to be seated; all the main Chinese restaurants (which outnumber any other types of restaurant) in the city center and main boulevards were full. In one situation, I roamed the parking lot a few times before the parking attendant was able to find a spot for me. Upon entering the restaurant by myself, the manager greeted me and asked, "Do you need food to go?" He

seemed surprised that I was by myself on such a large holiday. I told him I did, and ordered a Chinese dish. As I waited for my food to be cooked, I entered the main eating area and observed a sea of over 300 people consuming fried rice, soup, BBQ pork strips, broccoli and beef, along with other Chinese dishes in large quantities. I saw large families with multiple generations sitting together: from the elderly gray-haired grandparents, to the crying baby in the stroller. Chinese restaurants' size and family style seating welcomed groups, especially on this occasion. The tables were put together, as people sat and passed the plates to each other to serve themselves food. Chinese restaurants were a preferred option to standing in a *carne asada* taco stand (another popular food option for many in the city) or the more expensive Italian or Mexican restaurants.

Part of the larger Chinese restaurants strategy is to have large enough tables (or joining tables) to accommodate large amounts of people. There are two types of tables: the round large tables that fit up to eight people, and the large rectangular tables that fit six people, but can attach more and fit as many as thirty or more. Although reservations for large parties are recommended by the restaurants in order to know how many guests to expect, they are rarely required, making it an ideal and preferred place to go to, especially on Mother's Day. If a group arrives with 20 people, the larger Chinese restaurants are ready to accommodate this large group. Large families or groups choose Chinese restaurants as their choice in Mexicali over any other restaurant because of they have had past experiences where they have either seen or experienced that catering to a large group does not pose a problem to the owners or managers of Chinese restaurants. Other types of restaurants in the city either do not have large enough venues, or staff to accommodate large groups.

Accommodating large families or groups on holidays is not the only time when people decide to dine-in at Chinese restaurants only; they choose it for special events as well. Of those who answered my questionnaire, 42% ($N = 100$) indicated that they went to eat Chinese food on special occasions, such as weddings, birthdays, *quinceaneras* [sweet 15 parties for young teenage women], and other celebrations. This was the case at the Centro de Investigaciones Culturales-Museo (CIC), where I had my university affiliation. The director of the center had just recently been appointed. It was a big event with presence from the newspaper, and the local television channels. The Chancellor of the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California and a representative from the state of Baja California presented this appointment. In the excitement of the people in the center, who all knew the new director, someone suggested we go celebrate. Almost immediately, the people at the center began debating which Chinese restaurant would be the best, quickly omitting any other types of food options. They all knew that the Chinese restaurant would be the place that would accommodate the largest amount of people with little notice. In addition, everyone was invited to this celebration, from the CIC's financial controller, to the researchers, to the landscapers, to the janitors. The amount totaled more than 20 individuals. Upon arriving, the tables were immediately set, and within a few minutes, we were seated. There was no calling ahead of time for a reservation; the assumption was that the restaurant would accommodate the big party.

Physical space is not the only way Chinese restaurant people accommodate the high demand for their food. At some of the much smaller restaurants that are mostly for take-out food, customers are not shy to ask for take-out food for up to thirty people. During the time I worked as an employee at the Chinese restaurant it allowed me to

observe how Chinese restaurants will accommodate the high demands for their food. One day while working at the restaurant by myself with Joe, he yelled at me, "*Tin-Leung, chau-fahn fai-fai!*" ['Ernesto, hurry and do the fried rice!"] He was telling me to cook fried rice and fast. Yoli, the 17-year-old teenager revealed why Joe was in a panic mode, "Joe is just stressing because he's the only cook on duty and they just asked for a take-out order for 40 people...and they want it an half an hour." Yoli knew the task was not an option on whether we were going to have it done, she knew it was going to be done. She laughed and told me, "Good luck, because you are the only other person here who is going to help him!" The huge 3-foot diameter woks in the kitchen allowed for the large amount of food to be made in a short amount of time. In half an hour, with Joe cooking the main dishes, while I cooked the rice and the 'easier' dishes, we were able to make the order. The quickness of the cooks, as well as the large woks, allowed for the manager of a nearby *maquiladora* [foreign owned assembly companies] to feed his workforce that asked for take-out food. People in Mexicali know that Chinese food could be made in large quantities in a relatively fast time, a very important factor in accommodating large amounts of people.

Class and Social relations at the restaurant: appearance

Along with the heterogeneity of Chinese restaurant sizes, the menu's prices show how the *Chinesco work* to become part of the Mexicali community by being inclusive of different social classes. However, an interesting contradiction also occurs. Many of these restaurants are very elegant, and one would not imagine that they are inclusive to a variety of customers. However, the menu at the Chinese restaurant allows people to self-discriminate based on the different prices available. To elaborate, let me include the

observations that Luis (my college friend who came to visit) pointed out. This will allow me to analyze the restaurant menu and setting. He began by asking me a simple question: "Who eats at these places?" I responded by asking him, "What do you mean?" He replied, "What types of people eat at this place?" he asked. Still confused by his question, I answered, "You mean, like older people…" He responds, "No. I mean do mostly rich people eat here?"

Navigating higher education and graduate education has taught me that white Americans view themselves with more education, social-class and higher social standing based on how 'cosmopolitan' they are. Be it through traveling, the university, or visiting large urban cities, they try to expose themselves to different foods and cultures. For Anglo-Americans, symbolizing their higher-class status (either academic or social), means going to nice restaurants, different restaurants--*ethnic* restaurants. This is what Bourdieu (1977) calls *distinction,* the process by which people are taught from an early age about their class position. It's no wonder that Luis, who shares my Mexican-American background and navigation through higher education, asked that question when seeing the elegance of the Chinese restaurant (which was not one of the nicest ones) in Mexicali.

Luis' observation was right: some of these restaurants are nice enough to pass as an exclusive place where only rich people would eat. The big chandeliers that light the room, wait staff all in uniform, plush carpets or shiny floors, colorful walls with dragons or Chinese symbols, and a manager greeting customers when they enter the restaurant, these restaurants make the customer feel important and valuable. The competition to capture costumers is stiff, since Chinese restaurants in Mexicali are plentiful, thus, most

of the bigger restaurants must follow the elegance that the current Chinese restaurants have in order to survive. The smaller ones cut costs and have a buffet serving trays and will not invest in nicer tables, decorations on walls, or tablecloths. The older restaurants from the old downtown (*La Chinesca*), despite attempting to keep their elegant appearance, are now deteriorated and old, making it difficult for them to maintain the nice appearance of the newer ones. However, even the older restaurants ensure that their appearance is clean and that their service is fast and hospitable.

Building nice restaurants is certainly a strategy used by *Chinescos* when building, designing, and maintaining their businesses. Don Lolo, the owner of the restaurant where I worked told me, "People in Mexicali work hard, and they come to expect nice things for their hard earned money. Some of these new Chinese restaurants owned by Chinese immigrants think that they can capture Mexicali's customer base without investing in nice things like a chandelier or having tablecloths on their tables. However, those restaurants will not succeed. They will only capture a certain type of customer," he told me. Don Lolo was referring to the smaller restaurants that are set up by recent Chinese immigrants in the older *colonias* [neighborhoods] of Mexicali. Indeed, those differ greatly from the ones in the city centers and only serve more working class people getting food to go. The restaurant where I worked served all social classes, and had a very nice appearance, chandelier included.

The goal of the more elegant restaurants is to serve and welcome *all* customers, not just 'certain customers.' These elegant restaurants are usually owned by large *Chinesco* partnerships, and in order to sell their food, they will not deter any of the social classes of people of Mexicali (and even the people of working class background from the

United States). This is similar to Tuchmine and Levine's finding in New York City where Jews found the Chinese restaurants they patronized as elegant (1993). However, class divisionsare less significant in Mexicali than in New York. While gross inequality does exist in Mexicali, Chinese restaurants have yet to participate in excluding moderate and low-income customers. In the Mother's Day example that I provided earlier, I saw different classes seated in tables within close proximity of each other. From the business type man with his suit and tie, to a man with his cowboy hat and gold chain necklace, to a man with his well-ironed button-up plaid shirt. The women's attire also varied—some with their new dresses, others with their hair well done, and all of them happy to be with their families. Chinese food was a preferred option for most of the people because it provided a large venue that would accommodate them all, regardless of age, sex, or income. This accommodation was accomplished through the menu prices.

The price of Chinese food

The different prices in the menu allow for people to purchase what they can afford, and the people will know that they will be getting plentiful food, regardless of price, thereby, contributing to *Chinescos* business and acculturation into the city. My questionnaire (N=100) found that even a person with a monthly income of MEX$1400 (U.S.$140) (which is the income of a student), to a person with a monthly income of MEX$60,000 (U.S.$6000) (which was the income of a professional engineer) ate Chinese food and find Chinese food good. Everyone in Mexicali eats Chinese food, or has at least tried it. The popular Chinese food combos that are in the menu of virtually all restaurants are probably the best indicator that shows that it accommodates all social groups. The price range on the food menu is from U.S.$5.25 a dish (MEX$55) (for items like beef and

broccoli) to up to U.S.$16.65 (MEX$175) (for a seafood delight mixture or duck). Individual dishes are not the ones that sell the most; it is the popular Chinese food combos that are more popular.

Upon opening the Chinese food menu, the customer is introduced to about six different food combos, all with different items (usually from five to six different dishes), and all with different prices that will accommodate the diversity of classes in the city. The least expensive of the Chinese food combos are MEX$55 (U.S.$5.25), which have items like egg rolls, friend rice, grilled chicken, broccoli and beef, and a soup. The most expensive combo is usually MEX$165 (U.S. $15.70), and includes shrimp, BBQ pork, friend rice with shrimp, grilled fish, seafood mixed with vegetables, breaded shrimp, and shrimp in hot sauce. The items in the middle are between MEX$65 – MEX$110 (U.S.$6.20-$10.50) and usually contain two seafood items, and two non-seafood items. Usually, as the food combos became more expensive, the more meat and/or seafood were included on them. In addition, not all Chinese restaurants had the same items on the food combos; while some had pineapple-fried chicken, other restaurants may substitute it for Mongolian chicken instead. The food item that is found in virtually all of the combos is rice: it's plentiful, good, and expected by Mexicans.

If the customers in Mexicali prefer to not go to a Chinese restaurant to dine-in, they have the option of going to a fast food Chinese restaurant, often located in the mall or in their nearby *colonias* [neighborhoods], that primarily serve the large working-class. The prices in these restaurants are substantially cheaper, but carry less expensive items in their menu. The food in these Chinese restaurants is laid out in trays on counters in a buffet setting with steaming hot water keeping it warm, and a glass window separating

the customer from the food. The customer walks in and can tell the server what items they want. The prices vary, but I noted in 2005 that some restaurants charged anywhere from MEX$30 (U.S.$2.85) for three generous portions to MEX$35 (U.S.$3.33) for four portions in the smaller neighborhood restaurants, while in the malls the price rises from MEX$40 (U.S.$3.80) for three portions to MEX $45 (U.S.$4.28) for four portions. These fast food Chinese places often have from 15 to 20 items hot, ready, and available to go. The price of these food combos are from a third to a half of a day's worth of Mexican labor in a *maquiladora* [foreign owned assembly company] where the wages range from MEX $70 (US$6.66) to MEX $100 (US$9.52), or half an hour of a person on a minimum salary in California (in 2005 it was $6.50).

What these variations in food prices show is two things: the inclusion of different social classes by *Chinescos* and how Chinese are active participants in the production of culture. Chapter one showed how Chinese immigrants have adapted to the border city. Similarly, through Chinese food consumption, new Mexican emigrants coming into Mexicali and consuming Chinese food for the first time are shown how to try different foods through the combos and prices. Chinese people have learned that they have to "teach" their customers about Chinese food. In the process of having the malls with their food on display, they are educating the customers what key items are in the dishes. If the item is obscure, the bigger restaurants teach them the variation of food through the food combos. They do this by always having an item on the combo that is cheap to make, but also different than what the consumer has eaten. For example, if the combo is usually fried rice, orange chicken, egg rolls, bean sprouts and beef, and broccoli and beef, they instead will introduce a dish that they would not recognize, like wonton soup instead of

the egg rolls. This way, the Mexicali people will be exposed to different and new Chinese food that they otherwise not have tried. Once the Mexican emigrant consumer has learned how to eat Chinese food, he is in a position to choose from other available Chinese food.

Chinescos and Chinese immigrants in the city display Chinese cultural traditions, like communal style eating, while other traditions are excluded, like eating with chopsticks. While chopsticks are available at just about all the Chinese restaurants that I observed, they were rarely requested or used. The only people who I observed using chopsticks were Anglo-Americans managers from the United States going to supervise the *maquilas* [foreign owned factory]. The Chinese tradition of serving a variety of dishes and people sharing these dishes is enjoyed very much by Mexican people. The multiple dishes served through the combos allows for people to serve themselves, but also to share. It is frowned upon if a person serves him or herself more than their share of a popular item. To some, it is compatible with the Mexican norms of eating together in a big family and sharing the food with one another.

Class and social relations: how people order food and drinks at the restaurant

In providing different menu prices for the combos, Chinese people are also revealing much about the community they are part of. The act of eating out is a symbol of status regardless to what class people belong. People who are patrons to restaurants are engaging in an act in which someone else is cooking and serving them, thereby, putting another group in a subordinate position to theirs. Despite my observation (like the example of Petra) that Chinese food was consumed across the whole social strata in Mexicali, this was done differentially depending on people's social class status. In particular, the consumption of Chinese food at the restaurant highlights the social class

that people belong to. The types of food people choose also show how people from Mexicali view themselves and their economic conditions. Geertz's earlier writings gave anthropologist the tools to understand culture through a 'web of meanings' that social scientist need to untangle (1973). Geertz provides the example of the Balinese cockfight and argues that the cock is a representation of a person's identity. Despite many changes in anthropology since his earlier writings, this important theoretical and methodological contribution is important today in understanding how people's actions can reveal much about their identity. In examining the food choices of patrons, I was able to observe how people from Mexicali view themselves and their economic conditions in relation to the food combos.

Lupita, the upper-middle class light-skinned Mexican woman, once told me, "Growing up, we would always pick the #1 combo...that is always the cheapest combo!" I asked Lupita if she still orders the #1 combo and she answered, "I do, but only sometimes. If the entire family comes along, it is definitely the cheaper option to go with. If it is just my husband and I, I will pick whatever I am in the mood for. I can go up to combo number 6!" she told me. Lupita reflected on how Chinese food showed her past experience with food, but more importantly, her life history in moving up the social strata. I asked Lupita what her father did for a living, and she told me, "He was a doctor. But we were not well off. My father believed in working for the people and subsequently worked at the *IMSS* [government social security offices]. Our family never really enjoyed the income of a real doctor." Lupita then tied her perception of her father's low income with the food she ordered at the restaurant, "My father really enjoyed eating out with the family and sometimes with other friends. Chinese restaurants were the cheapest place we

could go, however, we could not order beyond the #1 combo. It would be too expensive for him!" she told me. From the Chinese restaurant her family would pick to the food they would order at the restaurant, Lupita was able to reflect on the social status her family, and eventually her upward mobility. Lupita, now married to a lawyer, told me, "It was the same situation when I got married. Francisco [her husband] had just started working, so there was not much money, but I still missed the Chinese food. My husband's earlier salary was modest, but he was not shy about ordering other things in the menu beyond the combo. It was the first time I did that." Lupita told me that her husband had more exposure to the different Chinese food available in the menu because of the type of work he does; Francisco was always in meetings, and some of them were at Chinese restaurants for lunch. Lupita now lives a comfortable upper middle-class life; she is one of the few non-Chinese people that I met in Mexicali who knows the flavor of many of the menu items, from the crispy duck to the Cantonese seafood delight.

Lupita's experience with Chinese food during her life provides a glimpse into what is actually on the menu. As discussed earlier, there are many food combos to choose from, which can reveal their social status. Thus, going to a Chinese restaurant for the first time can be an experience in itself. When taking my American friends who were not familiar with Mexicali to a Chinese restaurant, I (or the waiter) needed to teach them how to eat and pick the Chinese food, Mexicali style. They would stare at the menu (which had English translations) and would wonder what to eat. "How is the orange chicken?" Dustin asked me. "It's okay…what combo are you looking at?" I asked. Dustin and Iris looked at me wondering what I meant. I begin to explain, "Oh, if you look at the first page, it has different combos. We can just pick the combo we like, but the minimum

order is two," I explained to them. "Isn't that going to be too expensive?" Iris asked. "What do you mean?" I replied. "Well, some of these combos are expensive...why are we going to pay $55 pesos [U.S. $5.23] for each item that we don't want?" she asks. "Oh, no no no, we will be getting six dishes for the $55 pesos *per person,* it is not $55 pesos for each dish. So, we can order for three of us and it will be $160 pesos, about $15 total," I explained to her. "Oh...wow, that's really cheap. And we get to try all the items on there?" she asked surprised. I nod. I explained to them that we could actually order for only two people because of the large portions. Dustin and Iris both revealed their social status and preference after learning about the combo situation. They chose combo #3, the medium level one. Since they were American college students, they had more money to spend than #1, but not enough for #6. They had U.S. currency, which makes their purchasing power greater in Mexico. For them, spending US$7 a person seemed like an accommodating price for them to pay in this nice, clean, and luxurious foreign restaurant. In their view, a similar meal with so many dishes would have been twice the amount in the United States.

The Chinese restaurants also allow for modifications and substitutions of their food combos in order to appeal to the heterogeneity of groups going to the restaurant. Some waiters or waitresses will suggest ordering one or two combos less than the actual size of the group. For example, if there is a group of ten people, the waiter or waitress will suggest that ordering a combo for seven people will be enough food for everyone to be satisfied. The amount of money one spends is therefore less, which encourages large groups to go to Chinese restaurants instead of other ones. People do not order according to the number of people, instead, they can calculate people's food preference in the

variety of combos. If they feel that people like more fried rice than *chop suey* (bean sprouts with beef), then they can eliminate the *chop suey* and request more rice. Chinese restaurants managers do not frown at this practice, and are willing to accommodate their customer's food preference. In addition, any food leftover can be taken home. .

In addition to the food items, someone's social class can be read through the drinks they order. At the medium size restaurant that I worked, aside from sodas, water, and ice tea, there is a full range of American and Mexican beers available for the consumer to drink. At some of the restaurants, large and medium, there is also a full alcohol bar menu. Drinks are another way of revealing the social status of people. Many of these restaurants serve what has now been local and popular to order because of the taste and price: the ice-cold "Chinese" lemon honey tea. The tea is brewed every morning, and because it is relatively inexpensive to make, a pitcher of the tea costs MEX$20 [U.S.$2], and can quench the thirst of up to four customers. An individual can of soda is MEX$10 [U.S.$1], far more expensive, and is 100% more than ice tea. Buying a beer is MEX$20, the cost of a pitcher of tea. The Chinese restaurants accommodate the variety of economic class statuses, but the individual customers choose the drink (soda, beer, or ice-tea) and in that process reveal their social class. In the larger Chinese restaurants, the beverage menu extended to a full bar where you could have any mixed drink. This further highlights your economic class or upward social or economic mobility. No other types of restaurants in the city have pitchers of tea, or any other drink. It is clear to me that Chinese restaurants did accommodate the different social classes, from the cheaper combos, to the drinks that could be ordered. This demonstrated how *Chinescos,* because they have been living in Mexicali for a long time, understand the

different social classes that exist in the city, and how they can be inclusive to serving those classes.

Conclusion

I do not believe I am over-stating the familiarity, exposure, or consumption of Chinese food in Mexicali. In addition to having 100% of all respondents in my questionnaire (N=100) reply that they have tried Chinese food in Mexicali, during my time working at the restaurant I observed people from all walks of life eat the food. The odors I smelled when I was near Mexicali's Chinese restaurant reminded me how the food was cooked, and how it also had a history that began well before d worked there. Just like the smell of Chinese food followed me, it follows and tells story about people's experience in the city. I have explored how different processes allow for Chinese food to be consumed in large quantities.

People in Mexicali eat other non-native foods. During my time in the field, Mexicali was experiencing arise in the popularity of Chinese food. . The *Chinescos* quickly caught on to this phenomenon, and some of them began offer it in their menu, specifically the sushi rolls. Many of the sushi rolls at the Japanese restaurants had an ingredient that I found uncommon in sushi rolls in the United States: American cream cheese. Japanese food, however, was not easily accessible to everyone. Many people told me that it was, "too expensive for the amount you get." Another item that was found in many parts of the city were small carts selling American hotdogs that usually had a condiment bar that included cheese, mushrooms, relish, salsa, and the usual mustard, mayonnaise, and ketchup. While there were many carts with American hotdogs throughout the city, I did not see any restaurants that specialized exclusively in hotdogs.

In addition to the Japanese food and the hotdogs, there were also plenty of taco stands.[45] While there were restaurants that sold only tacos, none of them had the aura of luxury Chinese restaurants. Upscale Mexican restaurants did sell tacos, but that was not the main item that people go to a Mexican restaurant to eat, nor is the price on the menu the same as a taco stand.

The other foods consumed in large quantities in the city (hotdogs, tacos) and popular eating places (sushi rolls), reveal that people in Mexicali are interested in different foods, including the Chinese immigrants. Francis, my Chinese friend often complained to me that Tony (her son) really enjoyed eating American hotdogs. Francis, however, thought of as hotdogs unhealthy food. Tony, being a pre-teenager and socialized in the Mexican educational school system, was constantly influenced by his friends' eating habits, and was subsequently exposed to a variety of foods. Tony is an example of the many people in Mexicali that are in constant interaction with different cultures, and food is an entry in understanding how that happens. Food is a relatively safe medium of exchange that facilitates communities' interaction. However, not all foods have had an easy entry into the city.

Chinese food illustrates how *Chinescos* have a non-discriminatory class attitude in who consumes in their restaurants. *Chinescos* understand the class heterogeneity of the city and accommodate it by meeting their taste and appetite, providing large and small venues to meet customers' demand, having a diversity in prices in their menu, allowing for modifications in the menu, and providing it all at a relatively inexpensive price. Will

[45] A taco is a popular Mexican food item is usually filled with meat (chicken, *carne asada* [grilled skirt steak], tripe, or pork), and can be topped off with vegetables like cabbage, salsa [hot sauce], beans, lemon, and onions.

structural forces of inequality change the business practices of *Chinescos?* Mexicali's tremendous growth has increased inequality, and it makes me wonder if the inclusiveness that it brings will continue, or if it will branch out and include restaurants that will be frequented by the privileged few. If these new entrepreneurs contribute to Mexicali's culture, they will continue to find ways to ensure that everyone has access to their food.

Conclusion
Mexico and its Relationship with the Chinese People

Identity in Mexicali is affected by carefully highlighting history and migration in the development of the border city, violence, and how social relations at the restaurant unfold. In addition, I outlined how Chinese businesses form and the appeal of Chinese food by their Mexican customers. The topics I covered in this dissertation show how *Chinescos* negotiate their identity in the city. Their presence is tied to American and Mexican interests to cultivate the land. Gloria Anzaldua showed how new cultures form at "La Frontera," in the borderlands. *Chinescos* are an example of this hybrid culture forming. This hybrid culture has many implications in the way we view history, violence, and the ties that Chinese people have with Mexico. In providing a conclusion to my dissertation, I want to draw out the relevance of these important issues and how they relate to events and experiences happening in the city. This conclusion aims at taking a larger view of Mexico and points to future research.

History, Migration and Immigration

From the 1880's into 1910, Chinese-American and American entrepreneurs recruited Chinese immigrants to cultivate the agricultural land in Mexicali, Mexico. Faced with the Mexican revolution, and strong anti-Chinese sentiments, Chinese became targets of hate crimes. During my time doing fieldwork in 2005 to 2007, Chinese immigrants were still migrating to Mexico. Unlike the Chinese immigrants immigrating to Mexico during the 1880's to 1910, the Chinese immigrants I encountered are not poor. Many of them were entrepreneurs in China, but have to take jobs as cooks, waiters, and even fishermen until they save enough money to start their own business in Mexicali. It is their goal to become *Chinescos*, the long-standing Chinese people who understand local

culture in order to navigate the city, and who are successful in understanding their habitus. The case of the *Chinescos* illustrates the benefits of being in Mexicali, including being mobile enough to move back and forth the United States and Mexico with their Mexican naturalized citizenship. Some *Chinescos* are so financially successful that they choose to live in the United States, but continue to run their Chinese restaurants in Mexicali. There is opportunity for financial success, and many Chinese immigrants are taking a close look at how that happens so they can replicate that success. Moreover, with the rise of China as a global superpower, it remains to be seen whether the *Chinescos* and Chinese immigrants will facilitate their home country's global expansion.

Chinese are not the only Asians immigrating to Mexicali. Koreans and Japanese immigrants are moving to Mexicali as well, but in smaller numbers. During my time in Mexicali, I interviewed one Korean man who immigrated from Los Angeles, California to set up a Korean restaurant in Mexicali with the hope that Korean managers and owners of the *maquilas* [factories] would frequent his restaurant. "When they [Korean managers] come, they spend lots of money and sing [in the karaoke machine], but that's only two or three times a week. What do I do the rest of the week?" he told me. This Korean person was unaware of the local community and could not find ways to integrate his food into Mexicali. Japanese restaurants became a trend for Mexican people, especially the upper class. When going to a Japanese restaurant, rarely did I see a Japanese person making sushi; it was usually a Mexican person. There is a Japanese association that serves as a networking place for Japanese people. The Japanese Association is much smaller and was always closed. These other Asian groups migrate to Mexico for different reasons compared to the Chinese. Many migrate to oversee the local businesses setup by there

countrymen. Unlike the Chinese, I do not see them integrating in Mexicali's local culture, beyond employing Mexican people.

Another group of immigrants that are entering Mexicali are Central Americans. People from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and even Panama are in Mexicali. The Central American population has not dramatically increased in Mexicali because their goal is to enter the United States. These groups can be seen in Mexico City, or in southern parts of Mexico, where they get trapped on their journey north. Once they reach Mexicali or other border cities, they will risk their lives and try to cross illegally to the United States. Since they also speak Spanish and some have the Mexican racial phenotypes, they have a lot of potential of integrating into the city, especially if the U.S. Border Patrol deports them back to Mexico (as oppose to Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, or even Honduras). If they get deported to Mexico, Central Americans will work in Mexicali in order to save money to pay the *coyote* [human trafficker] to help them cross once again. Central Americans, however, will not settle in Mexicali because they do not have the historical roots in Mexicali that Chinese do. As a result, there are few networks they can tap into to facilitate integration into the city. Their presence remains unnoticed because they do not want to stay in Mexico; they want to go to the United States.

Finally, the group that is increasing and choosing to stay in Mexicali like the recent Chinese immigrants is other Mexican people from different parts of the country. People from Sonora, Sinaloa, Guanajuato, and even more south places like Michoacan are settling in Mexicali. They have many ways of integrating into the city, and there presence is facilitated by the state and country, including the availability of jobs, ability

to enter the federal social security system, qualify for home loans through their employer, apply for credit at stores, among many other things that citizens are afforded. The people from different parts of the country are the ones entering the *maquilas* [foreign-own factories], but are also becoming part of the informal economic sector of the border city. They have the ability to quickly learn the local cultural codes, and immediately integrate.

The heterogeneity of the groups immigrating into the Mexicali suggests that Mexico will become a 'receiving' country (a country that receives immigrants from developing countries) as well. My data suggests that immigration will soon enter the national dialogue in Mexico just the same way it has in the United States. Mexicali is a city on the growth because of U.S. and other international interest, and, as a result, is expanding financially and opening up jobs for Mexican and Central American immigrants, and Chinese immigrants. The case of Chinese immigrants and *Chinescos* reveals the complexity of identity, but also how their identity is tied to history, which provides a venue for grounding that identity locally. During this process of identity formation, *Chinescos* employ Mexican people and contribute to the local economy; yet, they are also being proactive in preventing Chinese hate crimes. Because of their distinct ethnic features, they are more vulnerable to being excluded if Mexican nationalism is revived. My chapter on violence revealed that many people did not see the assassination of the two Chinese people as a hate crime; some suggested it was their participation in the informal economy, others saw it as a crime gone badly, and others attributed to the Chinese's value placed on money. My interviews never revealed that Chinese were killed specifically because of the hate towards them.

Volatility and Violence in the Border City

What causes people to enter the informal economy that is dangerous? How do you avoid violence? The case of *Chinescos* show's that the informal economy in Mexicali is rising and how people from different walks of life are becoming part of this sector. The informal economy does not have to relate to drugs, although it often is. It can include people bartering for food, as in the case of Petra, or it can be people selling goods purchased in the United States to Mexicali residents who cannot go to the U.S. The murder of the Chinese workers show is how people set up their narratives and interpretations about how society works based on their life experiences in the city.

People will engage in illegal activities, not because they are prone to, but because they seek ways to supplement their incomes. . Despite unemployment being very low in Mexicali, the wages are also very low. Even though Imperial County has a lot less recreational activities and a higher unemployment rate than Mexicali, it was favored as a better place to live by people in the region. This is because of the presumably better wages, but also because of the security that the United States provides to its citizens. The hope for justice and equality still exists for people in the Imperial County. Justice and equality are getting reconfigured and reinterpreted in Mexicali because of the prevalent corruption affecting the entire country. As a result, the informal economy is part of this reconfiguration and reinterpretation of justice, equality, and hope.

Justice, equality, and hope work differently in the minds of the people in Mexicali (and Mexico, to a certain extent). Justice is not a matter of the formal government punishing those who have committed a crime. For some who have been part of the informal economy, it is paying with actual money or through the lives of people. Equality

in a society that continues to be unequal is the opportunity to work and make some sort of living, even if it is in exploitative conditions at a Chinese restaurant or at a *maquila*. "We are better off then we were before," is the statement I would here over and over again by people working in these places. Hope is in the mind of the entrepreneurs and workers through the expansion of the city of Mexicali. New buildings, new homes, new vehicles, new restaurants, new highways, this all provides optimism among residents of Mexicali for a new beginning into what they hope a prosperous life.

Chinescos and Chinese immigrants are part of the justice, equality, and hope sentiments that surface in the city. Historically they were labeled as isolationist, working among themselves and not employing Mexican labor. Today, many *Chinescos* will identify as Mexican, and are (naturalized) citizens of Mexico. They are making the necessary connections to be incorporated in the local and national agenda as citizens. During my time of field research, violence is what was talked about and, as I suggest, a complex way of thinking. Among Chinese, violence is something that they are keenly aware about, but know that as members of the Mexicali community they have some sort of protection. Protection lacks when they engage themselves in the informal economy. My discussion of the murder of the Chinese suggests members of the *Chinesco* group are tied with local communities, and this includes the informal economy.

Social Relations and Ethnic Relations

In Mexico there is this common perception among the people that the nation is divided along political or class lines, rarely race. Nicknames like *prieto* or *negra* for being darker, or *chino* for having Asian phenotypes reveal the racial heterogeneity of the people, but they rarely enter the discussion of inequality among minority people. The

only group that has been excluded and targeted in Mexico because of racial indifference through organizations and the government are the Chinese (Knight 1990). How, then will people of Mexico deal with there differences?

Although race is an important concept, and people of Chinese descent were targeted because of their phenotypic difference, in contemporary times the situation has changed. In the workplace, people will fight, tensions will arise, sexual harassment will happen, and loyalty for the owner (or company) will be secured. In Mexicali, the need for unskilled labor from any social or ethnic group allows for a separation based on ethnicity or gender. When tensions arose at the Chinese restaurant, it was difficult for people from different backgrounds to mediate the conflict. But, with enough time and with the mundane type of activities happen, people would eventually resolve their differences. In cases where the conflict could not be mediated, it forced people to quit and leave the job. This can lead to a dislike of one group to another, based on ethnic difference, as oppose to the structural conditions placed on individuals.

Mexico's current dialogue is similar to the United States "multiculturalism," where cultures and communities can get along provided that they all learn from each other. The "multiculturalism" dialogue is often directed towards the heterogeneity of Mexico's indigenous population. In taking a "multiculturalism" stance, Mexico's indigenous population is left with inadequate resources that will provide for greater economic opportunity, appreciation of their history and language, and inclusion in the political atmosphere. "Multiculturalism" while very optimistic about what it can accomplish, has many limitations. The case of Chinese immigrants in Mexicali can highlight the potential as well as limitations. I showed how Chinese immigrants are able

to actively participate in building a business, provided they have the right information. The limitations are related to their racial difference, which include stereotypes of the community, as well as them having to work within their own group because of that difference, and can stratify them to particular jobs only, in this case, restaurant work. In an economic downturn by Mexicali, it remains to be seen how ethnic and social relations will be. Mexicali: Inequality and Indifference

The profits are great for foreign investors if they choose to set up their factories in Mexicali. The city of Mexicali is forced to improve the infrastructure, including expanding and building new roads, add new buses (some that are air conditioned), increase their telecommunication networks, and expand the electricity and water utilities to new developments. This growth continued from the time I was in the field in 2005-2006, to the time I returned in 2007. In addition to the growth in infrastructure, Mexicali is also a city that is forced to provide different forms of entertainment to appeal to the managers and owners of these factories, but also the low-skilled people working at these factories. The heterogeneity of things to do in the city is segregated by class. Inequality is on the rise, and gated communities are now becoming part of the norm.

What will happen to Chinese restaurants?

I went to Tijuana, the Mexican city bordering San Diego, California, to compare the Chinese restaurants there. I found some similarities, but also some sharp differences. I drove around the city to locate Chinese restaurants, and ate at one that was located in a very affluent neighborhood. The menu prices at this restaurant were clearly for the upper-middle class resident. The cheaper "combo" prices I described in chapter 5 were nowhere to be found on the menu of this fine establishment. The aura of luxury was similar, if not

less nice, than the restaurants in Mexicali. The customers were also very different, many with men wearing nice suits and ties, and women wearing dresses with pearl necklaces. This Chinese restaurant seemed to pride itself on its exclusivity, and the menu had many high-priced food items to cater to Tijuana's upper class, including items like lobster and duck throughout the menu. The taste of the food was not much different than Mexicali's Chinese food. Further, none of the waiters or waitresses was Chinese; only the fluent-Spanish speaking manager was Chinese.

I drove around to a less affluent area of Tijuana and also saw the smaller Chinese restaurants that mostly serve "to go" items. Sitting on the trays with warm water keeping the food warm were the foods I was familiar with from Mexicali. The prices were much higher, given that it was mostly a fast-food Chinese restaurant. The workers were Chinese, with two other workers being Mexican. The customers were Mexican, but were not consuming Chinese food at the high levels like in Mexicali. If Tijuana is a glimpse of the future of Chinese in Mexico, I can see them integrating less into the city and more being an ethnic enclave. There is a Chinese community in Tijuana, including the Chinese consulate being there. What was apparent was that Tijuana was very segregated in terms of class, and a community like the Chinese people would be virtually indifferent to their consumption. Because of the increase in inequality in Tijuana, people chose to live in what was safe and familiar to them; Chinese people were completely absent. However, since I was not in Tijuana too long, I was unable to capture a holistic picture of Chinese there.

Obesity, Food, and Health

In a society that is becoming unequal and where women are entering the workforce, families are choosing to have meals cooked and ready to go. I outlined how *Chinescos* captured the Mexican palate by blending Mexican cultural elements, with Asian flavors. I also discussed how people in Mexicali really enjoyed the taste of Chinese food, and illustrated other foods consumed in the city. Equally important in this discussion is the rise in obesity as a result of these fast foods. MSG, the popular flavor enhancer found in just about every Chinese dish, came under attack in the United States several years ago because of the high blood pressure it causes. When I was in the kitchen cooking some Chinese food, I saw how the orange chicken was made: fried with lard, then reheated and refried in hot oil. These ingredients are harmful to the health if consumed in large quantities. And there lies the dilemma. While Chinese restaurants are very inclusive in serving all social classes, they do so by providing large servings of their food. Chinese restaurants do this because their customers expect it. These large portions and the competition from other restaurants to also have large portions, only feeds to the obesity "problem" that I also observed.

Beyond the large servings by restaurants, unhealthy eating goes on in the factories. Instant made soups (such as Top Ramen) are popular because they are inexpensive and easy to make, along with potato chips and snack foods like Doritos or *Sabritas.* These foods have high sodium levels, and an excess of calories. It is expensive to live in the city, and these foods are appealing to cut costs with meals. Recent Chinese immigrants, although many of them work in Chinese restaurants where they eat, are not

immune to unhealthy food patterns, especially among the children. Many times I observed how Chinese children in Mexico were becoming part of this obese group.

Although I did not collect any aggregate data that suggests obesity is becoming a problem, I did observe many overweight people in the city. I heard many people taking medication to control high blood pressure, diabetes, and to lower their cholesterol levels. The culture of "eating out," combined with the expectation of eating in large quantities, is contributing to obesity. Although the *Chinescos* have captures the palate of the Mexican border people, they (like many other restaurants and food stalls) have also contributed to their obesity.

The Future of Chinescos

Sociologist Tomas Jimenez (2006) has argued that Mexican identity among third and fourth generation Mexican-Americans has continued because Mexico is in close proximity to the United States. Jimenez refers to this process as "replenishing identities," and shows how the American media, the influx of Mexican immigration, and the history of racism and exclusion contribute to the continuity of Mexican identity among groups that should have been fully assimilated and incorporated into the larger American society. While similar processes occur among Chinese-Mexicans, this will not be the case for Chinese who are children of Chinescos.

China is not near Mexico, but China's investment and the diaspora in Mexico will contribute to the movement and culture of Chinese people among nations. However, these people are very different to the children born in Mexico by Chinese parents. My interaction with the Chinese and Chinese mixed-children (those that had at least one parent being non-Chinese) showed that they were becoming more aware and conscious of

their local Mexican community, rather than their Chinese culture. China was a country far from where they lived, and they only knew about it because they were being informed only once a week in their Chinese school at the Chinese Association. When meeting Chinese-Mexicans, I quickly found out that I knew more about local China than them: many had never been to China, nor did they see it as an appealing place to go. They were integrating so well into local culture that they knew more about the places in the United States, where other members of the Chinese diaspora were located (like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York). Like people in Mexicali, they too romanticized moving to the United States for a better life.

Despite the rise to global power by China, the common perception of the Chinese-Mexicans growing up in Mexicali is a negative view of Chinese people (immigrants) in Mexicali. For them, to be "Chinese" means to be a Chinese restaurant worker or owner. A Chinese owner once asked me, "How many restaurants can this city really sustain?" when complaining about how recent Chinese immigrants were saturating the restaurant market. Likewise, some of my interviews and observations revealed that Chinese food has been so localized that people are also viewing the Chinese population as simply Chinese restaurant owners or workers. This can potentially stratify ethnic Chinese-Mexicans into particular service sector jobs and businesses.

Only recently have Chinese-Mexicans been all over the Mexican media. During the summer of 2007, Zhenli Ye Gon was detained in the United States and was accused of conspiring to illegally traffic drugs (methamphatamines) into the United States. Mr. Ye Gon was a naturalized Mexican citizen, and when his home was raided, over $250 million was found. Mr. Ye Gon has publicly spoken about his innocence, and has said

that half of the money belonged to the Mexican ruling political party, the PAN (Partido Accion Nacional/ National Action Party). The PAN has denied the accusations, and the government has now seized the money because no one came forward to claim it. Similarly, in Mexicali during the campaigns for state governor, one of the candidates was accused of having close ties to a *Chinesco* to help him win his election. It was rumored that the *Chinescos* provided several thousands of dollars to both political campaigns, but more to the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ Institutional Revolutionary Party). What both of these situations show is that Chinese people are far from being self-segregated with their Chinese community, they are working with state and federal officials to be part of the country.

The number of Chinese people in Mexicali is relatively small, despite their influence in local cuisine and in some instances national campaigns. The experience of the recent immigrants is varied, but they have come to learn that they need to integrate into the city in order to do well. One of the ways that Chinese immigrants of Mexicali integrate is through the school of their children. When I last visited my friend Francis, her son Tony was speaking Spanish fluently and was asking me to play *RBD (Rebelde,* a popular teenage pop singing group) in the CD player of my car. Francis told me, "What could I do about what he likes? Nothing. He's turning into a Mexican, but he knows what it means to be Chinese." To be Chinese in Mexicali is to be engaged with a multiplicity of ideas, some influenced by the United States, some by Mexico, and some by China.

Appendix A: A brief overview of "race" in Mexico [Notes to Chapter 1]

Colonial rule in Mexico started in 1519, which resulted in different ideologies of what constituted social progress, including dealing with an indigenous population that was intermarrying or being raped by Spanish colonial settlers. Although there was a diverse and segregated population that already existed in Mexico and the Americas before the arrival of the Spanish, the arrival of Spanish legitimized colonial rule, oppression, and, especially racism.[46] The Spanish created the "Indian" other. Specifically, the "white" Spanish colonial settlers placed themselves as the rulers (with orders of the crown), followed by the *mestizo,* and with the bottom group to be exploited were the indigenous people.[47] For three hundred years Spain controlled Mexico and racial miscegenation between the two groups was inevitable. Churches were built, and Catholicism was used to convert the native population. Power and privilege along racial lines, or the separation of Spanish and Indian were maintained.[48] Whiteness was further favored when in 1819 the Adam-Otis Treaty passed, where boundaries were agreed upon by Spain and the United States; causing a direct contact with the slavery champions of the north. After a bloody battle with the colonial rulers, Mexico becomes independent from Spain in 1821, yet continues to favor whiteness, both because of its colonial past and because of the strong racist ideologies being developed in the United States, its northern racist neighbor.

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[46] See Eric Wolf, Europe and People Without History,

[47] For more on the exclusion of pueblo lands and peasantry people, see Kouri's "Interpreting the Expropriation of Indian Pueblo Lands in Porfirian Mexico: The Unexamined Legacies of Andres Molina Enriquez" in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 82:1, Duke University Press, 2002 and Peter Guardino's Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857, Stanford University Press, CA 1998

[48] For further discussion, please see Alan Knight's "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940" in The Idea of Race in Latin America, UT Press, Austin, TX 1990

In 1848, Mexico lost nearly half of their land to the United States after the U.S.-Mexico War, and settled new land borders through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Resistance grows by Mexican people over the take over of their lands, and legendary heroes are born on the Mexican side, but labeled as bandits from the U.S. side. Once again Mexico becomes under attack by European nations, including France, Britain, and Spain in 1862, asking for debt owed. France tries to invade, and Mexicans fight back in the famous battle of Puebla on the 5th of May in 1862. Despite losing against the French, Mexicans are able to fight back and regain control of Mexico by 1867, led by indigenous leader Benito Juarez. Soon after Mexico enters the *Porfiriato,* the era of dictatorship of the *mestizo* Porfirio Diaz, who had close ties to European and American interests. Despite being *mestizo,* many began to notice his favoritism to whiteness and Europeans, with the bad treatment of the indigenous population. During Diaz's tenure (1876-1911), there was an increase in economic growth by Mexico (in large part by foreign direct investment), but only very few white and *mestizo* privileged population enjoyed the prosperity of the country. The dissatisfaction by Mexicans resulted in the Mexican Revolution, which erupted in 1910 and ended in 1920.

According to historian Alan Knight, prior to and during the Mexican Revolution racist ideologies in Europe were running parallel with Mexico's state formation process. According to Knight:

> The heyday of European racist thought—dated from approximately 1850 to 1920—roughly coincided with Mexico's phase of liberal state-building and capitalist export-oriented economic development. Both of these processes, which culminated in the neo-liberal or 'order and progress' dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz (1876-1911), lent themselves to racist interpretations and rationalizations. At the intellectual level, Porfirian thinkers were profoundly influenced by social Darwinism; Spencer's evolutionism, with its denigration of human hybrids, exercised strong appeal. (1990 78).

To be a 'half-breed' was therefore something unappealing, and as it was to be indigenous. Therefore, Porfirio Diaz prompted a model that quickly transformed the way of popular thinking about Indian people population to forcibly assimilate or annihilate. In some ways, the Revolution was aimed at ending this annihilation, and to integrate the Indian population into the country, rather than have them engage in coercive assimilation.[49] Influential writer and Mexican anthropologist, Manuel Gamio, was at the forefront of eliminating the negative images of Mexico's indigenous population, or *indigenismo,* or a wide range of ideologies whereby the indigenous population is included in state-formation processes, including the appreciation of their culture. Racism often meant towards the indigenous population, or even those in peasantry work even, to this day.

In 1925, Mexican intellectual Jose Vasconcelos attempted to write ways of viewing and thinking about this 'new' race, the mixed generation of people. His ideas were very influential in Mexico because President Obregon (1920-1924) contracted him to be Secretary of Education during his presidency, thereby, making Vasconcelos' cultural policies as official state policy for those years and the following years.[50] Vasconcelos wanted to instill pride of the racial mixture of all people living in the Mexico along phenotypes and ethnic lines. He wrote: "We in America [Northern/Mexico] shall arrive, before any other part of the world, at the creation of a new race fashioned out of the treasures of all the previous ones: The final race, the cosmic race" (Vasconcelos 1997[1925] 40). Vasconcelos argues that the miscegenation of races is what constitutes Mexican identity, a *raza cosmica* [cosmic race] that should be praised, celebrated, and

[49] Knight, 1990, 80
[50] See Clude Fell's book, Las Anos de Aguila for more on this history.

embraced, not be denied or ashamed. For several scholars, Vasconcelos' writing is considered racist and exclusionary. The document where he defines *la raza cosmica* [the cosmic race] includes language that states how the mixed race is a 'better race' and 'genius race' that should be regarded as better than the white one. In addition, aside from the white race, there is the encouraging of the indigenous population to also start mixing in order to become part of the *raza cosmica.* Reducing Vasconcelos's writing as racist disregards his utopian project of including and promoting a love towards people of mixed racial background, who were rapidly becoming the majority of the nation. Although not explicitly anti-white, Vasconcelos' writing was a response to the racist behavior of the northern United States neighbor, but it also fed into a nationalism that potentially excluded the Chinese who were in Mexico as entrepreneurs and not necessarily yet "mixing" with the local population. His writing, therefore, is racist. Vasconcelos' writing became very influential on the nation. The overall project grounded Mexican identity and opened it up to be more prideful of a past that included a history of colonialism by European settlers, while at the same time identifying, locating, and ultimately defining what the "Mexican race" is.

Vasconcelos' *cosmic race* is only one part of a larger debate in terms of Mexican identity among intellectuals in Mexico. Octavio Paz and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla are two other influential Mexican writers who have engaged in the national discourse regarding identity, race, and character of the Mexican nation. Octavio Paz, an influential Nobel Prize Literature writer from the 1960's and 1970's, wrote that one of the central problems with Mexican identity is that "the Mexican breaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins, and lives in isolation and solitude" (24 1962). The lack of a clear understanding

of the true origin of Mexican people troubled Paz. Paz called for the embracing the two dominant groups (the Spanish and Native American) that made up Mexican peoples identity, race, and character. He observed that: "The Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or Spaniard. Nor does he want to be descended from them. He denies them. And he does not affirm himself as a mixture, but rather as an abstraction: he is a man. He becomes the son of Nothingness. His beginnings are in his own self" (25 1962). As a result, for Paz, this denial of heritage has resulted in the lack of progress of the nation. By being able to recognize the two dominant parts of what "Mexican" is, Paz is defining what a 'true' Mexican is. Paz identified a blend of European and indigenous pride as what Mexican identity is.

Similar to Paz, Batalla, another influential anthropologist, writer, and ethnographer from the 1970's and 1980's, also believed that the Mexican state and people were denying their heritage. However, Batalla claimed that the true Mexican identity lay in the deep cultural roots represented by the indigenous and rural mestizos whose culture was Mesoamerican. He labeled this true Mexico as "Mexico profundo" (deep Mexico), the identity that is denied by the nation's elite that wishes to imitate Western Europe and deny the social realities of their own country (Batalla 1996). Batalla noticed the western expansion of ideological thought during the 1960's at the cost of eliminating and denying the rich indigenous part of Mexican culture.

To understand why these Mexican scholars were engaging in Mexican identity, one must understand the dialogue that they were responding to in Mexico: U.S. racism along with Mexican patrimony and the nation. A prevalent view that developed since the 1840's were negative images of racial mixing in Mexico's by its northern neighbor, the

United States, as well as the European racist ideologies discussed above. According to historian David Gutierrez, Mexicans were seen as lazy half-breeds, which, "Represented a primitive 'mongrel race,' little better than the 'wild' Indian tribes" (20 1995) in the United States. These racist ideologies allowed for Manifest Destiny, or U.S. policy allowing expansion of the state under the slogan that it was "God's gift to expand" into territories where the Mexican 'savages' were unable to control themselves. Other negative stereotypes of Mexicans included Joel Roberts Poinsett, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico who authored a short book Notes on Mexico, which depicted Mexicans as "laborious, patient and submissive, but are lamentably ignorant" who are "gross[ly] superstitious" and now became "more ignorant and debauched people than their ancestors had been" (1925 1623). These early negative images continue to this day, and have resulted in policy that has denied Mexicans in the United States basic human social services, including education and health (Lipsitz 1998). The implications of the consistent negative image of Mexicans cannot be underestimated. It is important to note that these images of Mexicans are not in isolation or live only momentarily; they have spread not only within the country of Mexico, but also into the United States. The search for identity, therefore, must include views opposite of those presented by influential people of the U.S. The negative depictions of Mexicans come and go depending on the economic conditions of the United States, but inadvertently affect the ways authors and people react to these presented stereotypes and images. These stereotypes need to be understood in relation to how they would get transmitted to the new Chinese populations living very close to the United States, both historically and in contemporary times.

In no way is the history I have provided complete, but rather, its aim is to provide a general understanding of the way identity is contested and understood for the reader not familiar with Mexico's history.

Why is it important to know about Mexican identity, racial formation, and citizenship? During the time I was doing fieldwork in Mexico, I heard comments that were both favorable and unpleasant along racial lines by Mexican and Chinese people. Some ethnic Chinese would celebrate Vasconcelos concept of the *cosmic race* by suggesting that if their kids married Mexicans, their grandchildren would have the "best of both worlds," Chinese and Mexican blood. Or, even if they would not marry outside their race, Chinese born and raised in Mexico would eventually assimilate into Mexican society because of Mexico's history of embracing "all races," a multicultural model of propaganda in existence, often to include the rich diversity of indigenous people. Alternatively, some Chinese people I spoke to would invoke that Mexican identity understood by Paz as exclusive to only Spanish and Indian, thus denying them to participate as a minority other. Because of the location of the Chinese in the Mexican side of the Mexico-U.S. border, the situation is more complicated. Negative perceptions and stereotypes of Mexican people by the images put forth by the neighboring United States discourages them from wanting to become participatory citizens of the host Mexican nation. Being Chinese would be the cultural identity what they wished to preserve, as some of my female Chinese friends would say that their fathers would warn them against marrying Mexican men because they were lazy and abusive. Further, I observed that Chinese people naturalizing themselves as Mexican citizens would grant them actual benefits such as owning property, being an educated, obtaining a passport to cross to the

U.S., with the end goal of understanding the cultural codes of Mexican society. The identity of Chinese people living in the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, therefore, becomes complex. These old, and recent Chinese *paisanos* learn the differences of the categories, either informed by members of their community or others. To untangle it these differences in identity formation, I will highlight some historical moments of Chinese in Mexico that continue to surface in the way they interact with other people in their host country.

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