

# Steamships across the Pacific

Maritime Journeys between Mexico, China, and Japan,  
1867–1914

Ruth Mandujano López

## Crossing Seas

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# Acknowledgments

“I feel lost in the middle of the Pacific without knowing where to start rowing!”

“Don’t row! Fire up a steam engine! Seriously, just start and stick with it, you’ll build momentum.”

—Conversation of the author with Bill French

Like many of the transoceanic travels described in these pages, the end of this long book journey feels more like a shipwreck than a landing. If I reached port, it was only thanks to innumerable people who helped the project and helped me remain afloat during the emotionally exhausting and physically taxing writing process. Unfortunately, I don’t have enough space nor the names of many of them as they include the strangers who smiled and shared instances of comradery, the cooks of the meals I ate, the musicians whose songs lifted my spirits, and many others. The following are only some of the most important and direct contributors. I wish I could thank everyone who supported me in one way or another over the past years; I apologize for all the unintentional omissions.

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Ruth, for her eternal love and patience, and for her delicious meals while I was writing part of the manuscript.

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# Introduction

A routine health inspection of a steamship on the morning of May 15, 1908, turned out to be anything but ordinary. When Dr. Valenzuela, Health Delegate of Salina Cruz, entrusted with performing a general examination of passengers docking at the southern Mexican port, boarded *Suisang*, a steamer of the China Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC) that plied the waters between Hong Kong and Salina Cruz on a monthly basis, he found 10 second-class passengers and close to 400 of those in steerage to be infected with trachoma, a contagious eye disease. Unsure of how to proceed, he asked federal authorities for instructions. They told him to “suggest” to the second-class passengers that they isolate themselves in barracks, as they had no authority to compel them to take such a step; as for those in steerage, they were given no choice but to remain on board until further notice. First- and second-class passengers not presenting symptoms were permitted to land without additional procedures; those in steerage were forced to undergo a ten-day quarantine in the barracks, where they were made to take baths and their luggage was fumigated.<sup>1</sup>

The CCSC had signed a contract with the Mexican government in 1903 to establish a regular steamship service between Hong Kong or other ports of China, Japan, and the United States and the Mexican port of Manzanillo.<sup>2</sup> The company eventually added Salina Cruz as one of its terminals; it brought, on average, 480 monthly passengers to Mexico. While in previous inspections sick passengers had been put in quarantine, this was the first time that such a numerous contingent had been found to be ill.<sup>3</sup> After the quarantine, 111 steerage passengers deemed in good health were given their liberty, but the port’s authorities ordered 28 who had developed symptoms to re-embark; a total of 413 ended up locked in the *Suisang*

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1. Public Records Office–Hong Kong (PRO-HK), C.O.129/352, 342–44 and C.O.129/378, 102.

2. “Contrato,” *Diario Oficial*, February 1903, 677.

3. Before *Suisang*’s arrival in May 1908, the largest number of CCSC passengers rejected at Salina Cruz had been forty-eight. PRO-HK, C.O.129/349, 312.



without permission to land.<sup>4</sup> All the second-class passengers were allowed to leave even though they were still suffering from trachoma, four of them “in an advanced stage and very serious form.”<sup>5</sup> CCSC representatives filed a complaint arguing that, according to the ship’s surgeon, the disease was not trachoma but a simple conjunctivitis that was not contagious. In their view, it was unlawful to forbid the remaining steerage passengers to disembark.<sup>6</sup> This triggered a long diplomatic dispute involving Mexican, Chinese, and British authorities and passengers, with catastrophic consequences for many of those involved.<sup>7</sup>

Until recently, it was widely accepted that links between Mexican and Asian ports had ceased or, at best, become irrelevant as of 1815, when the famous 250-year-long route between Manila in the Philippines and Acapulco in Mexico was shut down as the latter became independent from Spain.<sup>8</sup> But as the *Suisang* and the CCSC case, as well as others analyzed in this book, illustrate, such connections existed and mattered, not only for those directly involved, but also as part of broader local, regional, and global interactions and exchanges. The central premise that guides this book is that during the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, when steamships became the main international mode of transportation for people and merchandise, they also became sites of contention where shifting power relations between individuals, groups, communities, nations, and empires were configured, negotiated, exerted, and reimagined. By studying the maritime connections and the specific steamers, companies, and people that circulated between Mexican and Asian ports, my aim is to contribute to a more complex picture of the individual, regional, and global transformations happening around the globe, and particularly in the Pacific basin, when industrial changes hit maritime transportation.

## Mexican–Asian Connections in Historical Studies

I spent my childhood summers in my grandparents’ home, on the Pacific coast of Chiapas, hearing family stories that often included old acquaintances with foreign heritage.<sup>9</sup> Coming from Mexico City, with its millions of inhabitants, it surprised

4. PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 345.

5. Only one suffering from mumps remained isolated for a few more days and then was released on June 1. PRO-HK, C.O.129/352, 345–47.

6. PRO-HK, C.O.129/378, 105–6.

7. The case will be thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 5.

8. Even though isolated galleons traveled to Mexican ports up to the 1820s, most researchers agree on 1815 as the official end date for the route. See Peter Gordon and Juan José Morales, *La plata y el Pacífico: China, Hispanoamérica y el nacimiento de la globalización, 1565–1815* (Madrid: Siruela, 2022), 98; Vera Valdés Lakowsky, *Vinculaciones sino-mexicanas: albores y testimonios, 1874–1899* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1981), 62.

9. As will become evident in subsequent chapters, Mexican ports had direct and regular steamship connections with Asia only with Hong Kong and Yokohama during the period analyzed in this book, so the historiographical review focuses on those ports and Chinese and Japanese travelers and migrants. This is not to suggest that other ports and nationalities do not matter, but they are not the focus of this book.

me that such a small place would have more diversity than what I experienced in the “big city.” But the explanation was simple: Tonalá, my mother’s hometown, connected to the railway system since the beginning of the twentieth century,<sup>10</sup> lies between two of the largest Mexican Pacific ports, Tapachula to the east and Salina Cruz (where the CCSC vessels landed) to the west.<sup>11</sup> My grandfather worked as a coal stoker and assistant for the trains that connected the two ports, and my grandmother and her twelve children peddled the products that he brought from Tapachula to supplement the family’s tight income. It is therefore not surprising that they knew many people, including some with Asian heritage. In the stories I heard, part of my family referred to them as entirely part of the community, while others saw them as foreigners regardless of the fact that many were actually born on Mexican soil.

My family’s ambivalent attitude toward Mexicans with Asian heritage as both insiders and outsiders reflects the kinds of debates that academics in Mexico have had for decades. On the one hand, studies on foreigners and on the country’s foreign relations pioneered the research on Asians in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, many researchers have long questioned the assumed alienness of Asian heritage in a place with such a long history of regular transpacific connections. Their combined studies have convincingly shown that Asian otherness is a creation with Spanish colonial antecedents that consolidated with the Mexican Revolution, which broke out in 1910, and its nationalist ideologies based on racial improvement that centered around the notion of the “Mestizo” as the ideal (and often the only) way of being Mexican.<sup>13</sup> While “Mestizo” is a complex and highly contested term that continues to

10. Valente Molina Pérez, “Impacto económico y social del Ferrocarril Panamericano en la región de Tonalá en el siglo XX,” *Revista Pueblos y Fronteras Digital* 11, no. 21 (January–June 2016): 72–74, <https://doi.org/10.22201/cimsur.18704115e.2016.21.9>.

11. Tapachula is the name of the city and the municipal territory, and it is also the name that my family used. The actual port, located some thirty kilometers from Tapachula city, was called San Benito during the period studied in this book and is now called Puerto Chiapas.

12. Two studies and compilations by Moisés González Navarro were pioneering in the field: *La colonización en México, 1877–1910* (Mexico City: Talleres de Impresión de Estampillas y Valores, 1960) and *Los extranjeros en México y los mexicanos en el extranjero, 1821–1970*, Vols. 1, 2 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1993–1994). Subsequently, María Elena Ota Mishima published more detailed compilations on Asian migrations in *Siete migraciones japonesas en México, 1890–1978* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1982) and *Destino México: Un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1997). Relevant works on diplomatic history with a focus on China and Japan include Mercedes de Vega et al., *Historia de las relaciones internacionales de México, 1821–2010*, Vol. 6: *Asia* (Mexico City: SRE, 2011); Carlos Uscanga, “Hacia una contextualización histórica de las relaciones diplomáticas de México y Japón,” *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior* 86 (June 2009): 67–89; Shicheng Xu, “Algunas reflexiones sobre el desarrollo de las relaciones sino-mexicanas,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 121 (July–September 2007): 171–86; Jorge A. Schiavon et al., eds., *En busca de una nación soberana. Relaciones internacionales de México, siglos XIX y XX* (Mexico City: SRE, 2006); Vera Valdés Lakowsky, “México y China: del galeón de Manila al primer tratado de 1899,” *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México* 9 (1983): 9–19; and Valdés Lakowsky, *Vinculaciones sino-mexicanas*.

13. Two of the most recent and complete monographs on Asians in colonial Mexico are Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Déborah Oropeza, *La migración asiática en el virreinato de la Nueva España: un proceso de globalización, 1565–1700* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2020).

be debated, in its simplest form it acknowledges Spanish and First Nations (referred to as *Indígenas* in the Mexican context) mixed ancestry, often to the detriment of any other heritage.<sup>14</sup> In this context, studies on *antichinismo* or Sinophobia have been particularly fruitful in showing that Chineseness has often been portrayed as foreign by Mexican politicians or specific interest groups with the aim of creating cohesion among a heterogeneous population and enforcing developmentalist projects under their nationalist and paternalistic supervision.<sup>15</sup>

More recently, the study of Asian–Mexican and, more broadly, Asian–Latin American connections has been expanded by the contributions of researchers coming from Asian American, transnational, borderlands, and diaspora studies.<sup>16</sup> Rather than focusing on national politics as their predecessors mostly did, they have

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14. This basic definition of *Mestizo* was prevalent for the period studied in this book, but the concept will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter 3. There is an extensive literature on *Mestizaje*. The following are only some of the key works in English, cited chronologically: Moisés González Navarro, “*Mestizaje* in Mexico during the National Period,” in *Race and Class in Latin America*, ed. Magnus Mörner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); Alan Knight, “*Racism, Revolution and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910–1940*,” in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997); Alexandra Minna Stern, “From *Mestizophilia* to *Biotypology*: Radicalization and Science in Mexico, 1920–1960,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy Appelbaum, Anne Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblat (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 187–210; Ana María Alonso, “Conforming Disconformity: ‘*Mestizaje*,’ Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism,” *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 4 (November 2004): 459–90; Laura Gotkowitz (ed.), *Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Edward E. Telles, *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race and Color in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Christina A. Sue, “Is Mexico Beyond *Mestizaje*? Blackness, Race Mixture, and Discrimination,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 18, no. 1 (January 2023): 47–74. I thank Bill French for helping me navigate this historiography.
15. The most recent and complete study in English on *antichinismo* and the creation of Mexican identity is Jason Oliver, *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880–1940* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017). Earlier works focused on *antichinismo* in Mexico also used in this book are Charles C. Cumberland, “The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (May 1960): 191–211; Philip A. Dennis, “The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 65–80; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Mexico,” *Amerasia Journal* 9, no. 2 (1982): 1–28; Humberto Monteón González and José Luis Trueba Lara, *Chinos y antichinos en México. Documentos para su estudio* (Guadalajara: Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco, 1988); José Luis Trueba Lara, *Los chinos en Sonora: una historia olvidada* (Hermosillo: Universidad de Sonora, 1990); Knight, “*Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo*”; José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México, 1871–1934. Problemas del racismo y del nacionalismo durante la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: INAH, 1991); Juan Puig Llano, *Entre el río Perla y el Nazas: la China decimonónica y sus braceros emigrantes, la colonia china de Torreón y la matanza de 1911* (Mexico City: CNCA, 1992); Gerardo Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora’s Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico’s Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s–1930s,” in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblat (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 211–36; José Luis Chong, “Hijo de un país poderoso. La inmigración china a América (1850–1950),” *Diacronías. Revista de Divulgación Histórica* 1, no. 1 (February 2008): 55–64.
16. Since this book focuses on Chinese and Japanese links with Mexico, my historiographical research has also focused on them and not on other ethnicities. The following two historiographical essays have done an excellent job at discussing the literature on Asian migrations to Latin America: Tatiana Seijas, “Asian Migrations to Latin America in the Pacific World, 16th–19th centuries,” *History Compass* 14 (2016): 573–81, and Jian Gao, “Chinese Migration to Latin America: From Colonial to Contemporary Era,” *History Compass* 19, no. 9 (2021): 1–13. I thank Fredy González for referring me to these articles.

introduced a broader perspective that places each case study within a transnational, Latin American, US–Mexico borderlands, hemispheric, Pacific, and/or global context, allowing for more comprehensive explanations and for people’s voices to be taken more into consideration. A key pioneer has been Evelyn Hu-DeHart with her early studies on Chinese merchants in northern Mexico, followed by various other topics such as Chinese labor migrants in the Americas, Chinese diasporas in Latin America, comparative studies in race and ethnicity, and Chinese in colonial Spain, among others.<sup>17</sup> Hu-DeHart, along with, subsequently, Daniel Masterson, Jeffrey Lesser, Robert Chao Romero, Erika Lee, Grace Peña Delgado, Fredy González, Elliot Young, Julia Schiavone Camacho, and others, have successfully shown that, as of the 1880s, Asians, in particular Chinese and Japanese, created interconnected transnational orbits (Romero), communities (Masterson), networks (Hu-DeHart, Peña, Young), and diasporic communities (González, Lesser) and/or citizenry (Lee, Schiavone) throughout the Pacific Rim and especially along the American hemisphere. They did so to advance their interests and, at times, to adapt to Chinese and Japanese exclusion laws imposed throughout the continent, starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) for the Chinese and the Gentleman’s Agreement (1907) for the Japanese in the United States. All these studies have also determined that the transoceanic travelers in the period studied in this book were overwhelmingly male.<sup>18</sup>

This book has taken this historiography as a point of departure. However, it is less concerned with how migrants adapted and formed transpacific networks to

17. Evelyn Hu-DeHart has published an extensive scholarship. Cited here are only a few of her publications that have been used in this book, starting from the 1980s to present: “Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Mexico”; “Latin America in Asia-Pacific Perspective,” in *What Is In a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, ed. Arif Dirlik (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 251–82; “Mexico,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, ed. Lynn Pann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 256–58; “On Coolies and Shopkeepers: The Chinese as Huagong (Laborers) and Huashang (Merchants) in Latin America/Caribbean,” in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wannu W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005): 78–111; “Multiculturalism in Latin American Studies: Locating the ‘Asian’ Immigrant; or, Where Are the Chinos and Turcos?,” *Latin American Research Review* 44, no. 2 (2009): 235–42; “Latin America in Asia-Pacific Perspective,” in *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions*, ed. Rhacel Parreñas and Lok Siu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 29–62; “Ceremonia Solemne de Recepción como Académica Corresponsal en Estados Unidos: Evelyn Hu-DeHart: Petición de perdón en Torreón y memoria histórica de los chinos en México,” filmed January 2023 at Academia Mexicana de la Historia, Mexico City, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk46Uk0fkas>.

18. Daniel Masterson with Sayaka Funada-Classen, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Jeffrey Lesser, *A Discontented Diaspora: Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy, 1960–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) and his edited book *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Julia María Schiavone Camacho, *Chinese Mexicans: Transpacific Migration and the Search for a Homeland, 1910–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Elliott Young, *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era through World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Fredy González, *Paisanos chinos: Transpacific Politics among Chinese Immigrants in Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

further their interests; how they formed hybrid societies wherever they settled; or how the receiving societies excluded or integrated them, even though all this has been taken into consideration. Instead, it takes inspiration from the way in which Henry Yu and Elizabeth Sinn set out the approach to be adopted in the Crossing Seas series, of which this book forms a part, privileging “the journeys themselves, in multiple directions and at different times, between multiple locations, and what these journeys meant to the migrants as they crossed the seas.”<sup>19</sup> Rather than centering solely on Chinese migrants and networks, this book concentrates on the maritime networks and the vessels that transported diverse people across the seas in order to show how the interests of travelers from one region sometimes coincided with those of other nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic classes and how, at times, they collided, not only with other ethnicities but also with members of the same ethnic group or diaspora. By not concentrating solely on Chinese, as diaspora studies tend to do, but rather on steamship travelers, sailors, diplomats, port officers, and other professions that made travel possible, it becomes evident that the coincidence or divergence of interests is based not only on nationality or “race” but also on class, profession, and personal or group goals at specific periods of time. Since those who traveled across the ocean were overwhelmingly male and no records of female transoceanic travelers to and from Mexico for the studied period were found, gendered differences are not part of this study but remain an important pending subject.<sup>20</sup>

## The Importance of Pacific Steamships in the Nineteenth Century

In its beginnings as a field, global studies concentrated on the Atlantic and the rise of British and US imperial interests, routes, and exchanges. Dirk Hoerder criticized this Atlanto-centric approach and advocated for an actual global vision that did not preconceive of the Atlantic as the avant-garde of what happened in the rest of the world. With this in mind, he identified five periods of global migration, the third of which frames the exchanges discussed in this book: in the nineteenth century, intercontinental migration systems formed when people moved in response to the demands for labor and the need for jobs created in the context of industrialization.

19. Henry Yu and Elizabeth Sinn, “Foreword,” in *Returning Home with Glory: Chinese Villagers around the Pacific, 1849 to 1949*, by Michael Williams (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018), vii.

20. For a fascinating first-person account of the transpacific travels of a First Nation woman, see Margarita James, “My Transpacific Life,” *BC Studies* 204 (Winter 2020): 139–50. For an excellent study on female transpacific travelers for an earlier period than the one covered in this book, see chap. 1 on Catarina de San Juan’s journey in the seventeenth century in Seijas, *Asian Slaves*, 8–31. For a later period, see parts III and IV on the Mexican women married to Chinese men who were expelled from the country in the 1930s and who ended up living in Guangdong in Schiavone, *Chinese Mexicans*, 103–73. For the transatlantic world, see Adriana Méndez Rodenas, *Transatlantic Travels in Nineteenth-Century Latin America: European Women Pilgrims* (Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press/Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and Sara Beatriz Guardia, ed., *Viajeras entre dos mundos*, (Dourados: Ed. UFGD, 2012). The latter also includes an account of a trip along the Pacific coast of Mexico.

At the heart of transpacific movement between the 1830s and the 1920s, according to Hoerder, was the Asian contract labor system, because once slavery was abolished, the imperial powers found in Asian indentured servitude the cheap labor needed to industrialize their Pacific colonial domains.<sup>21</sup> Adam McKeown refined this argument by suggesting that a global perspective “provides insight not only into the global reaches of an expanding industrial economy, but also into how this integrative economy grew concurrently with political and cultural forces that favored fragmentation into nations, races, and perceptions of distinct cultural regions.”<sup>22</sup> He coincided with Hoerder in seeing industrial transformations at the heart of human migrations in the nineteenth century, but he criticized him for considering mostly the industrial needs of European empires. McKeown instead argued that industrialization in Asia (and I would add Latin America as well) beyond European concerns also explained human movements because, after all, “non-Europeans were very much involved in the expansion and integration of the world economy.”<sup>23</sup> As Mariano A. Bonialian pointed out when studying the centrality of Hispanic America in global exchanges between 1580 and 1840, “Hispanic America has exercised its own agency, one that isn’t recognized in global history.”<sup>24</sup> This book adds to these discussions by including the diverse industrial needs and interests of Mexicans as factors that encouraged transpacific mobility, while keeping in mind the centrality of Asian migrants suggested by Hoerder and McKeown, in particular those from the province of Guangdong.

In this regard, the works of Henry Yu and Elisabeth Sinn have been of particular use as they have explained both the rise of Hong Kong as a transoceanic hub and the centrality of Cantonese in transpacific exchanges as of the second half of the nineteenth century. As Yu pointed out, hundreds of thousands of migrants had departed from the southern ports of Guangdong and Fujian provinces since the fifteenth century for a diverse array of destinations. But it was after the takeover of Hong Kong by the British in 1842, as part of the settlement with the Qing Empire over the opium trade, that this port monopolized transpacific travel, so that those from nearby Cantonese-speaking counties, with their aspirations for a better life, formed the large majority of travelers crossing the ocean. Together, they created “a coherent century-long migration process that was persistent, recurring, and unique in its effect on global history.”<sup>25</sup> On her part, Elisabeth Sinn explained how Hong Kong transformed from a small British port centered on the transportation of raw opium

21. See chap. 15 in Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 366–404.

22. Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940,” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 156.

23. McKeown, “Global Migration,” 171.

24. Mariano A. Bonialian, *La América española: entre el Pacífico y el Atlántico: globalización mercantil y economía política, 1580–1940* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2019), 16.

25. Henry Yu, “Unbound Space: Migration, Aspiration, and the Making of Time in the Cantonese Pacific,” in *Pacific Futures: Past and Present*, ed. Warwick Anderson, Miranda Johnson, and Barbara Brookes (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2018), 178.

to westward cities to a global shipping hub thanks to the social, economic, and cultural exchanges promoted by hundreds of thousands of Cantonese free migrants who traveled through Hong Kong to various ports, particularly San Francisco, after the Gold Rush.<sup>26</sup> Her work was a necessary complement to the numerous studies focused on Cantonese indentured experiences. This book explores the journeys of some of those Cantonese who traveled to Mexican ports as part of the process elucidated by Yu and Sinn.<sup>27</sup>

Sinn has also provided a key concept for this book, that of in-between places. Arguing that “migration is seldom a simple, direct process of moving from Place A to Place B,” she finds instead a process of repeated, even continuous, movement, along with the appearance of hubs that “witness the coming and going of persons and things”; such hubs provide infrastructure to continue traveling as well as to maintain ties with the homes left behind. In order to “accentuate the sense of mobility,” Sinn prefers to call Hong Kong an “in-between place” and acknowledges that other locations may also be described this way.<sup>28</sup> Mexican historian Karina Busto Ibarra also defined ports as dynamic sites where regional economies were articulated and inserted into global processes.<sup>29</sup> With these authors in mind, I argue that by conceiving of not only the ports that the transpacific steamships described in this book regularly visited, such as Hong Kong, Yokohama, San Francisco, Manzanillo, and Salina Cruz, but also the steamships themselves, as in-between places, we are better able to grasp the sense of mobility that characterized the Pacific basin in the nineteenth century. After all, the steamships as well as these ports were the first places of exposure and contact between what had been left behind and what was to come. In effect, during the few weeks that the transpacific journeys lasted, travelers were exposed to ideas, hierarchies, experiences, and relations that had to do with

26. See Elisabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

27. The Migration Law of 1926 required foreigners residing in Mexico to register their personal information with the federal government in the recently created National Registry for Foreigners or *Registro Nacional de Extranjeros* (RNE). The *Archivo General de la Nación* safeguards some 14,000 RNE cards of Chinese residents who entered the country between 1895 and 1949. I reviewed some 3,000 from those who landed in the port of Manzanillo. While the large majority simply cited China as their place of origin, those that included a city cited Kaiping (Hoiping), Toisan (Taishan), and Hong Kong, confirming that Mexico was part of the “Cantonese Pacific” described by Henry Yu. Ruth Mandujano López, “La migración interminable, cantoneses en Manzanillo,” *Legajos. Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 1 (July–September 2009): 48–49.

For a general overview of the information found in the over 14,000 Chinese records, see Roberto Ham Chande, “La migración china hacia México a través del Registro Nacional de Extranjeros,” in *Destino México: Un estudio de las migraciones asiáticas a México, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. María Elena Ota Mishima (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1997), 167–88.

28. Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, 9. I have discussed Sinn’s notion of the in-between in Mandujano, “Migración interminable,” 48, 58 as well as in “Cantoneses en Manzanillo: la importancia del “lugar de en medio” en el proceso migratorio,” in *Tierra receptora y espacios de apropiación. Extranjeros en la historia de México, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Martín López and Marcela Martínez (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán y El Colegio de San Luis, 2015), 321–36.

29. Karina Busto Ibarra, *El Pacífico mexicano y sus transformaciones: integración marítima y terrestre en la configuración de un espacio internacional, 1848–1927* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2022), 19.

the places they left behind as well as the places they were going to. As the chapters in this book show, steamships were in-between places where people's experiences both shaped and were shaped by power relations as defined by imperial, national, and capitalist enterprises as well as by their own family and interpersonal interests and negotiations. In addition, understanding the voyages themselves can also shed light on what happened to people as they landed (or were refused landing), settled, and/or continued to move around.

Travel and travel writing studies also offer conceptual support for the book as they remind readers that movement is an essential trait in human history. "Whether we travel to foreign lands or just across the room, we all journey and from our journeying define ourselves."<sup>30</sup> As movement defines our lives, our expressions are full of terms and metaphors related to it, for instance, "as your eyes travel through this introduction, as you read my words going across the page, keep track of how often you get up from this reading to move about the room and refresh yourself from your otherwise stationary task."<sup>31</sup> This forces us to rethink the discursive rootedness and politics of belonging that national histories tend to enforce. Another important premise to highlight from this field is that travel and descriptions of travel have been at the core of the inequalities related to nation and empire-making and the reproduction and expansion of capitalism, so there is an inextricable link between mobility and power that is in turn permeated by class, ethnicity, profession, gender, age, place, identity, scientific paradigms, and other distinctions.<sup>32</sup> It is thus important to pay attention not only to who travels and under what conditions but also to who speaks about the trip when travel narratives are the main source. Since many of the primary accounts from this book come from national archives or from travelers whose mobility was sponsored either by merchant maritime companies or national and imperial governments, the asymmetries that they directly or indirectly promoted should not be overlooked.

Jerry H. Bentley's notion of a maritime region, Steven Vertovec's definition of social networks, and Bruno Latour's actor network theory are also central concepts in this book. Bentley's work has been the pillar for the idea of a Pacific region for numerous historians. According to him, sea and ocean basins become useful categories once "human societies engage in interactions across bodies of water and they become a less useful focus as societies pursue their interests through other spaces."<sup>33</sup> For Bentley, integration, defined as a "historical process that unfolds when

30. Susan L. Roberson, "Defining Travel: An Introduction," in *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*, ed. Susan L. Roberson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), xi.

31. Roberson, "Defining Travel," xi.

32. See the texts by different authors that compose Roberson, *Defining Travel* and those from Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, eds., *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2009). See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

33. Jerry H. Bentley, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 217. Bentley recognizes Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* as the foundational study that worked with a maritime region.



cross-cultural interactions bring about a division of labor between and among interacting societies or when they facilitate commercial, biological, or cultural exchanges between and among interacting societies on a regular and systematic basis,”<sup>34</sup> is a necessary element for a maritime region to exist. Bentley admits that there are never absolute and fixed boundaries. Rather, it is the particular circumstances of each case that determine the limits of a maritime region. This study shows that through the efforts and travels of various Mexicans, Japanese, and Cantonese, the Mexican ports of Manzanillo and Salina Cruz became integrated into a transpacific maritime region that they helped to shape. Vertovec, for his part, talks about space in terms of social networks, that is, each person is seen as a node linked with others to form a network.<sup>35</sup> Latour expanded this concept to include nonhuman and non-individual actors—or actants—because they also participate in the functioning of a certain social order.<sup>36</sup> The transpacific network that this work studies is therefore formed by people—travelers, diplomats, crews, and others who made transpacific travel possible; ports—notably Hong Kong, Yokohama, San Francisco, Manzanillo, Salina Cruz, and Panama; and technological devices—the most important of which is the steamer.

Tatiana Seijas stresses another reason why a Pacific world vision that takes into consideration what happens at sea is of worth. She states that such a paradigm “offers a path for studying Asian migrations as the multi-directional flow that it was . . . [and] encourages historians to make non-territorial connections and showcase how water currents shaped peoples and environments in all cardinal directions.”<sup>37</sup> In this regard, the research on the Pacific Mail Steamship and other companies that operated from San Francisco by John Haskell Kemble, William Kooiman, and particularly E. Mowbray Tate also serves as a key point of departure for this study.<sup>38</sup> By tracing the history of specific companies and their steamers, these historians succeeded in showing the dynamism and mobility that has characterized the Pacific and pointed to the centrality of vessels in the construction of a maritime region. In regard to Mexican mercantile maritime relations, this book benefited from the early

34. Bentley, “Sea and Ocean Basins,” 218.

35. Networks are characterized by size, defined by the number of participants; density, or the extent to which every one of the nodes contacts the others; multiplexity, or the degree to which relations between participants include overlapping institutional spheres; clusters or cliques, or the specific area of a wider network with higher density than that of the network as a whole; durability or length; and frequency, or the regularity of contacts within the network. See Steven Vertovec, “Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization,” *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 646–47.

36. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

37. Seijas, “Asian Migrations,” 574.

38. John Haskell Kemble, “The Genesis of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (December 1934): 386–406 and “Pacific Mail Service between Panama and San Francisco, 1849–1851,” *Pacific Historical Review* 2, no. 4 (December 1933): 405–17 (among others); William Kooiman, “Grace’s Pacific Mail, 1915–1925,” *Journal of the Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society* 21, no. 1 (September 1987): 3–20; E. Mowbray Tate, *Transpacific Steam: The Story of Steam Navigation from the Pacific Coast of North America to the Far East and the Antipodes, 1867–1941* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1986).

surveys of Juan de Dios Bonilla, Enrique Cárdenas de la Peña, Inés Herrera, Vera Valdés Lakowsky, and especially the more recent work of Karina Busto Ibarra. Busto Ibarra carefully studied how Mexican ports became incorporated after the Gold Rush into what she has described as the San Francisco–Panama axis, part of a larger set of transformations experienced throughout the Pacific due to the introduction of steam technologies.<sup>39</sup> This book adds to this body of work by determining the routes and studying the companies, steamships, and people that circulated between Mexican ports and Hong Kong and by examining some of the challenges, experiences, and consequences of this constant movement of people and vessels across the ocean; its focus is on personal lives as well as national and imperial imaginings and policies.

An actual maritime journey on the Pacific gave me the last intellectual push I needed for conceiving this book. Some time ago, I embarked on a memorable boat ride to Yuquot, where local leader Margarita James explained how the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations (MMFN) have been part of global history and how their territory became a transpacific hub in the eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Her views on the subject reflect what one of the welcoming plaques explain to visitors: “Explorers and traders were attracted to this safe harbour, which they called Friendly Cove. As a result, Yuquot, also known as Nootka, developed into an important center of trade and diplomacy, and it was briefly the site of Spain’s only military establishment in present-day Canada. Yuquot became the focal point of the Nootka Sound Controversy of 1789–1794, when the rival interests of Great Britain and Spain brought those countries to the brink of war.”<sup>41</sup> After his own visit to Yuquot, historian John Price wrote an article that explores the transpacific mobility of the MMFN and of Chinese, whom he described as “essential to the operations of many vessels plying the Pacific.” He concluded that there have been “multiple, overlapping networks of migration and trade in the Pacific” and that “the overlapping tides of Indigeneity, imperialism, and migration/diaspora should be given their proper weight.”<sup>42</sup> Just like Yuquot, the Mexican coast found itself at the heart of the rival imperial interests of Spain and Great Britain. Chinese also played a key role in

39. Juan de Dios Bonilla, *Historia marítima de México* (Mexico City: Litorales, 1962); Vera Valdés Lakowsky, “Cambios en las relaciones transpacificas: del *Hispanis Mare Pacificum* al Océano Pacífico como vía de comunicación internacional,” *Revista de Estudios de Asia y África* 53, no. 1 (1985): 58–81; Enrique Cárdenas de la Peña, *Historia de las Comunicaciones y Transportes en México: Marina mercante* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, 1988); Inés Herrera, “Comercio y comerciantes de la costa del Pacífico mexicano a mediados del siglo XIX,” *Historias* 20 (September 1988): 129–36, <https://revistas.inah.gob.mx/index.php/historias/article/view/14909>; Karina Busto Ibarra, “El espacio del Pacífico mexicano: puertos, rutas, navegación y redes comerciales, 1848–1927” (PhD diss., El Colegio de México, 2008); Busto, *Pacífico mexicano*.

40. Margarita James is the president of the Land of Maquinna Cultural Society, a nonprofit arm of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations (MMFN) whose purpose is to promote Yuquot’s heritage.

41. Copied by the author from the original plaque and also cited in John Price, “Relocating Yuquot: The Indigenous Pacific and Transpacific Migrations,” *BC Studies* 204 (Winter 2019–2020): 22–23.

42. Price, “Relocating Yuquot,” 41–42.

linking it with the transpacific world. This book explains how parts of the Mexican coastline reconnected with Asia during the transition from Spanish to Anglo imperialism, from colony to nation, and from sail to steam in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recognizing the voices and travels of First Nations inhabiting the Mexican coastline remains one of the pending tides to give voice to and to analyze.

### Chapters, Methodology, and Sources

Methodologically, this book begins from a basic premise of transnationalism that maintains that researchers have to be as mobile as the subjects and flows they study. As Tatiana Seijas argues, “scholars must engage varied historiographies, gather documentation in distant archives, and read different languages.”<sup>43</sup> In this sense, this research has sought to include archival sources from almost as many places as are mentioned in the book. As a consequence, the materials used come from over twenty personal, municipal, provincial, and federal archives and libraries in the following locations: Hong Kong, San Francisco, Mazatlan, Manzanillo, Colima, Mexico City, Oaxaca, Seville, and London. Archival sources range from the 1820s to the 1920s and include personal memoirs and letters, diplomatic correspondence, maps, newspapers and other periodicals, journals, censuses, books, and brochures, mostly in English and Spanish. As such, it incorporates the voices of Mexicans, Cantonese, Japanese, British, and bureaucrats from the United States that spoke or were translated into those languages.

The book is divided into six chapters, each centering on a specific steamship that encapsulates the state of transpacific journeys “in-between” Mexican ports, Yokohama, and/or Hong Kong during the specific decade analyzed in the chapter. It is therefore not an exhaustive review of transpacific travels in the age of steam, but rather a selective study of key steamship journeys and companies between the 1860s and the 1910s.<sup>44</sup> The time frame corresponds to the beginning of regular transpacific passenger services by steamship and the pause of the services that happened in the context of the First World War. In order to favor a more literary flow that is accessible to everyone and so that interested readers have additional bibliography for the multiple topics that are not at the center of the book but intersect with its themes, academic references have been, for the most part, taken out of the main text and put into the footnotes.

Chapter 1 takes as its point of departure Tatiana Seijas’s argument for “a Pacific World perspective in the *longue-durée*” when analyzing the history of the people who crossed the ocean because “studying their experiences from a frame of four

43. Seijas, “Asian Migrations,” 577.

44. Even though the flow of commodities, notably of silver, is sometimes mentioned, it is not part of this study because it requires its own contextualization and research that goes beyond the scope of this book.

hundred years (1500–1800s) allows for more nuanced understandings of the hemispheric and transpacific connectivities of this human story before the reification of historical narratives centered on the nation state.<sup>45</sup> With this in mind, the chapter starts with the Manila–Acapulco route inaugurated by the galleon *San Pedro* in 1565, which connected the two continents on their northern hemispheres on a regular basis for the first time in history, between the sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. It then moves to examine the transition from sail- to steam-powered navigation in the Pacific, which came hand in hand with the transition from Spanish to Anglo imperialism and from colonial to national status. It explores how all these transformations affected the Mexican coastline and its transpacific connections. It ends with the trip of *Colorado* in 1867, which inaugurated regular steamship passenger services across the north Pacific.

Chapter 2 centers on the travels aboard *Vasco de Gama* made in 1874 by the first official Mexican delegation to visit Asia. The impressions and the experiences of the scientists who comprised it enable a discussion of the intricacies of the trip during the first decade of regular transpacific passenger services, when steam technologies were not yet fully developed. The analysis of the diaries of the travelers shows how they conceived of the importance of transoceanic connections between Mexico, Japan, and China for the development of scientific and national objectives as defined by the national government with which they were associated. It also shows how power and mobility related to the interconnected notions of race, nation, science, and empire at the time.

Chapter 3 studies *Mount Lebanon* and the formation of the first Mexican steamship venture ever created to establish direct maritime routes between Mexico and Asia in 1884. Using mostly government records and letters found in British, Mexican, and Hong Kongese archives, this case study reveals the coincidence and divergence of interests between Mexican, Chinese, and British diplomats and businessmen as they all tried to partake in the lucrative business of transoceanic passenger transportation. It also shows that, even if journeys did not actually materialize, their mere planning and negotiation mattered for personal, national, and imperial objectives.

Chapter 4 explains the coinciding interests of Japanese and Mexican diplomats and travelers that led to the arrival of the first Japanese colonists in Latin America aboard *Gaelic* in 1897. Using newspapers from the time as well as various secondary sources that have studied the period, the chapter delves into the parallel modernization projects, journeys, and diplomatic exchanges that made it possible for Mexico and Japan to establish relations in 1888 as well as into the subsequent travels by Japanese officers and eventually those of the first colonists to show how nations and empires have been created through movement.

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45. Seijas, "Asian Migrations," 573.

Chapter 5 centers on the first successful regular direct service between Mexican and Asian ports created by the CCSC during the first decade of the twentieth century. Using mostly official correspondence found in Mexican and Hong Kongese archives as well as newspapers from the time, it exposes the coincidences and divergences between British, Mexican, and Chinese authorities and businessmen in relation to transpacific passenger services and how travelers from different classes (first, second, and steerage) experienced their trip and negotiated their entrance or refusal to the country.

Finally, Chapter 6 explains how the maritime system that connected Mexican Pacific ports with Hong Kong began to decay in the 1910s in the context of a series of transformations which included the Mexican Revolution and the First World War, the opening of the Panama Canal, and the replacement of steam by oil as the vessels' main fuel.

I referred earlier to the importance that the concept of “in-between” places has in my work in highlighting the sense of mobility and the connections to what was left behind and what was to come for the people and ships that are at the center of this book. But it goes beyond this. As someone who travels and encounters different places and ideas and feels connected to different worlds on a regular basis, I define myself as also being “in-between” and therefore my work does not aim to be definitive. As Susan L. Roberson concludes: “Traveling across disciplines and individual experiences, we find that travel itself is an unsettled term, one whose definition depends on the particular ‘politics of location’ of the writer . . . what constitutes mobility . . . is not so easily defined. Mobility, too, is mobile.”<sup>46</sup> I therefore encourage readers and researchers to engage with and reassess my ideas according to your own backgrounds as you move through the chapters.

All voyages, all stories of voyages, have a beginning. Sometimes, for dramatic effect, stories of voyages begin at the end. Mine begins in-between.

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46. Roberson, “Defining Travel,” xxiii.

# Conclusion

In the age of the steamship, people and objects moved like never before. In turn, they set off a chain of reactions that washed over the world like the wake left behind the steamers themselves. These waves touched everything, crossing localities, borders, oceans, and continents, changing ideas and minds in spite of—and in some cases because of—the status quo. This book situates itself in the midst of these tides and has used Elizabeth Sinn's proposal of "the in-between place" as a paradigm for migration studies instead of the more traditional notions of places of origin, destinations, or their interconnections in order to showcase steamships' key role in promoting movement and transforming lives across the Pacific as of the second half of the nineteenth century.

By concentrating on the steamships that circulated "in-between" Asian and American coasts, this book exposed how these new technologies reconfigured power dynamics and accentuated mobility by compressing time and space. The first were those circulating in the mid-nineteenth century, overloaded with male passengers lured by the promises of riches emanating from Pacific coast gold rushes. Ships such as *Monumental City*, *New Orleans*, and *Golden Age* turned an arduous, months-long journey by sail into a straight-line voyage that could transport thousands of people and mountains of cargo in just a handful of weeks. Fueled by coal and human ambition, these motors of change were a consequence of the consolidation of industrial capitalism dovetailing with Anglo-imperial expansionism. The changes wrought together by these traveling people and vessels consisted not only in surmounting previously technical and geographical obstacles but also in supercharging a nascent industrial economy, including the construction of railroads, ports, factories, and the development of specialized machinery, and in introducing an upward spiral of wants and needs.

Steamships embodied the values of modernity and helped mold people's vision of themselves and of others as individuals and collectives, contributing to the formation of personal, national, regional, and imperial imaginings, aspirations,

prejudices, and inequalities. This process was accentuated by the stratified treatments and procedures to which the ships' diverse passengers were subjected. These primarily depended on class (first, second, or steerage) and were exacerbated once "race," economic status, and nationality were factored in, as was evident on the *Suisang*, where the Chinese in steerage were forced to undergo a series of compulsory examinations where ultimately many were refused landing and thus indirectly sentenced to die on the return voyage, while sick second-class passengers disembarked freely. The pride and astonishment of Chapter 1's first-class passenger finding herself moving quickly against the wind past a sea of smaller sailing vessels offers another example, capturing some of this sense of individual entitlement, but also of neglect for those with lesser means. Steamers thus affected the dreams and routines of everyone they passed, even of the large crowds that regularly gathered at the port for welcomes and send-offs. While these latter experiences were not the subject of this book, they hint at the impact that vessels had on the surrounding populations. Steamers also manifested national and imperial prestige in displays of geopolitical power. Perry's 1853–1854 expeditions aboard *Mississippi*, *Susquehanna*, and *Powhatan* forced Japan to sign a series of unequal treaties. In turn, Japan's 1910 pan-Pacific voyage of *Asawa* and *Kasagi* paraded the country's expansionist policy in Asia. *Ancon's* 1914 sailing of the Panama Canal, a concession originally given for life to the US government by a nascent Panamanian state, offered a statement beyond the obvious symbol of inauguration.

Individuals, interest groups, communities, and emerging nations throughout the Pacific Rim participated in the reconfiguration of the transpacific mosaic, each stamping their imprint with varying levels of access and success, depending on their position in the rising and ebbing cartographies of power. Certainly, the British and US governments, situated at the cusp of industrial and technological advancements, consolidated their geopolitical influence in the Pacific. The former appropriated its strategically located Hong Kong outpost in the 1830s, while the latter defeated the Mexican army in 1848, taking over much of its extensive west coast at the timely moment of the discovery of gold in California. Both empires also had access to capital surpluses and the foresight to sponsor and defend costly commercial steamer fleets. The British subsidized the Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSN), operating out of South America as of 1840. Eight years later, the US-supported Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSS) inaugurated its Panama to Oregon route. In 1867 it then connected California with Yokohama and Hong Kong, buoying San Francisco into importance as North America's largest international transport hub.

Yet the Pacific was far from a "British" or "American Lake," as some within a more imperial tradition have previously sustained. The diverse interests of Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese diplomats, sailors, passengers, bureaucrats, businessmen, merchants, and laborers helped form the contours of transpacific life. For instance, the establishment of the two companies that thwarted PMSS's transoceanic monopoly, the Hong Kongese China Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC)

and the Japanese Toyo Kisen Kaisha (TKK), complexified transpacific maritime networks by directly connecting Mexico and Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century. The routes departing from Manzanillo and Salina Cruz helped transform the latter into a key international port, particularly in the fruitful period between the opening of the transcontinental Tehuantepec railroad and the inauguration of the Panama Canal. While Mexican attempts to create a transpacific line failed, the country's systematic participation in the network dates from as early as 1848, when it provided ports of call. When PMSS launched its transoceanic line, Mexico's ports connected with Asia via San Francisco. Furthermore, as the Mexican Astronomic Commission's trip showed, they also connected via the Atlantic through Veracruz, using the Gulf of Mexico steamers and then the US transcontinental railroad to San Francisco.

Notwithstanding these clear instances, global histories, Pacific studies, and maritime and national historiographies have rarely acknowledged Mexico's participation and links with Asia during the age of steam. Instead, they have for the most part sustained that their interactions ended in 1815 with the sailing of the last Manila galleon, in the context of the War of Independence from Spain. In conjunction with pioneering research, mostly from Asian American, borderlands, diaspora, and transnational studies, this book has insisted on highlighting the longevity and importance of Mexican–Asian connections and the participation of Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese interests in the construction of a Pacific region.

As the examples in the book have shown, decisions by hegemonic actors that affected Pacific networks were neither overpowering nor monolithic, but rather characterized by shifting alliances and antagonisms. These depended not only on imperial, national, or ethnic affiliations, but also on class, gender, age, profession, economic interests, and notoriously on “race,” an elastic notion used by those in power to justify their privileges within a hierarchical social order and to discriminate against those considered inferior. For instance, the stakeholders behind the Compañía Mexicana de Navegación del Pacífico (CMNP) forged alliances with London bureaucrats to circumnavigate the sailing prohibition imposed by Hong Kong's imperial authorities. Later, the company's British representatives confronted their own compatriots who had chartered *Mount Lebanon* to the CMNP. Mexican authorities, on their part, supported their co-nationals' pleas at times but disregarded them at others. The CCSC's Hongkongese stakeholders, who worked together with Mexican authorities, suffered the same fate once the latter denied entry to most of *Suisang's* steerage passengers. The 1908 dispute also saw the country's doctors facing off against one another and eventually drew in Chinese and British diplomats as well. Long-lasting bonds were created between Mexican and Japanese authorities who were sympathetic to each other's modernizing projects and demands for equal treatment on the international stage. These consonances led to unprecedented bilateral relations, which in turn paved the way for the arrival of the first Japanese state-sponsored colonists to the Americas aboard *Gaelic*. In contrast, many Mexican



elites ended up embracing racist ideologies against Chinese, as was visible in the Astronomic Commission's visit to Asia aboard *Vasco de Gama* in 1874. Initially the Chinese were allowed into the country only as cheap labor for large industrializing projects, such as the building of the Salina Cruz port and the Tehuantepec transcontinental railroad. The authorities later used medical terminology to limit Chinese entry aboard CCSC vessels at the very port that the Chinese themselves had helped build and, eventually, in the 1930s, expelled them from some northern states.

In spite of the regulations and restrictions imposed by imperial and national elites, common travelers found ways around them and fueled the formation of transpacific networks. As we have seen, the main business sustaining transpacific steamship service from the 1860s to the 1910s was transporting Cantonese in steerage. Ostensibly they were being sent to work as underpaid laborers, but thousands arrived in Mexico with a very different goal: to reach the United States through its unsupervised border, particularly after the 1882 Exclusion Act. Many who remained in Mexico sidestepped the Sinophobe traps laid in their paths, becoming prosperous merchants. These, in turn, exchanged consumables with others to improve their lot, supporting, yet again, the circulation of steamers. Likewise, the state-sanctioned Japanese colonists abandoned imperial plans soon after arrival, creating their own prosperous businesses and associations that subsequently brought more Japanese to Latin America. In terms of the ships themselves, regardless of the place of origin of the owners and operators, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican sailors formed the main workforce aboard transpacific carriers. The movement and presence of all these peoples in this vast sphere broke norms, materialized changes, and made it possible for these ships to cross oceans. Without these actors, the Pacific as we know it would not exist.

In sum, by tracing the routes and stories around a selected group of transpacific steamers between 1867 and 1914, this study has shown how they became sites of contention where shifting power relations among Cantonese, Japanese, Mexican, British, and US individuals and collectives clashed, converged, and were constantly (re)negotiated. In order to complexify these stories, it is important to continue adding layers of historical experiences from other peoples, steamers, and commodities, keeping in mind the generative value of the journeys in-between.