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Asian American History

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Journal of Asian American Studies, Volume 8, Number 3, October 2005, pp.
235-256 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2005.0051>



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ORIENTALISMS IN THE AMERICAS

A Hemispheric Approach to Asian American History

erika lee

HEMISPHERIC ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY

AS THE OTHER ARTICLES IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE illustrate, the most common face of transnational Asian American history focuses on the Asia-United States connection across the Pacific Ocean. As Gary Okihiro reminds us, however, a sole focus on the “east-west filaments” of migration blinds us to the “messier” reality that “migrants moved east and west but also north and south.”¹ Forty-two percent of pre-war Japanese migration to the Americas (1868–1941) settled in Latin America.² During the World War Two era, thirty-three percent of the Chinese population in the Americas lived in Latin America, while forty-six percent lived in the United States and twenty-one percent lived in Canada.³ Paying close attention to Asian migration throughout the Americas, hemispheric Asian American history complicates the traditional east-west axis of transnational scholarship and challenges the very definition of Asian America.⁴ By broadening our perspective to include the *inter-American* dynamics of Asian migration, it also provides us with a way to situate the history of Asians in the Americas in local, regional, national, and global contexts.⁵ In this way, hemispheric Asian American history might resemble and contribute to recent work in the study of the Atlantic world and the African diaspora as well as complement existing transnational scholarship on the Pacific world.⁶

Even more broadly, hemispheric Asian American history also inter-venes in the larger fields of American history, comparative inter-American Studies, and Latin American Studies. Richard Ellis, Paul Giles, and Jane Desmond argue that this particular contemporary moment of transnationalism and globalization has made it necessary to “reposition the study of America hemispherically and internationally.”⁷ However, much of the current interest in hemispheric studies examines continental integration under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or efforts to secure North America against terrorism. Scholars, for the most part, treat transnationalism as if it is a new phenomenon, and historical perspectives are largely absent.

What would a hemispheric Asian American history look like? It would first draw and build upon existing scholarship on Asians in Canada and in Latin America and the Caribbean, taking into account both the unique contours separating—and the similarities connecting—the multiple histories. The unevenness in scholarship across the fields must be considered as well. Compared to scholarship on Asians in the United States, histories of Asians in Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean are much more limited in number and scope. Lisa Mar and Christopher Lee explain that Asian Canadian Studies has been slow to emerge. In comparison to Asian American Studies, it has been “glaring in its absence,” according to Lee.⁸ Current historical scholarship on Canada is largely represented by contributionist studies that document immigration and community formation or political histories of anti-Asian racism.⁹ With its unique relationship to Britain and its colonies, its multiracial society, and its proximity to the United States, Asian Canadian Studies challenges and enriches Asian (U.S.) American Studies. According to Mar, Canada is “both within Asian Pacific American history and beyond it.”¹⁰

The field of Asian Latin American Studies has suffered even more from a lack of attention by both Latin Americanists and Asian Americanists.¹¹ Evelyn Hu-DeHart has noted that Latin Americanists refer to Asians only in passing” and that generally, Asians have been omitted from Latin American and Caribbean studies.¹² Roshni Rustomji-Kerns has complained that the “existing materials, as well as the scholarship and theoretical frameworks, in the fields of Asian American (U.S.) studies have proved inadequate for many of us who are interested in the history of

Asia throughout the Americas.”¹³ Like Asian Canadian Studies, a number of new, exciting publications demonstrate growth in the field. While early scholarship focused on the role of Asians as cheap labor in Latin America, the latest work is wide-ranging in its examination of transnationalism and return migration, identity, anti-Asian racism, economic activities, and the creation of new transcultural identities.¹⁴

The growing number of new works focusing on Asians throughout the Americas allows us to move in another direction as well—one that privileges intersections and interconnections, rather than just a comparison of discrete units, groups, and countries.¹⁵ As Henry Yu explains, when we shift our perspective away from geographically bounded nation-states with “static definitions of place and legal regimes of citizenry,” space becomes transformed into sites that are both inextricably connected *by* the “movements of human bodies” and interconnected *with* “each other and with myriad other sites around the Pacific and the Americas.”¹⁶ Hemispheric Asian American history thus not only connects the experiences of Asians throughout the Americas together; it also links the Americas to the global world.

ORIENTALISMS IN THE AMERICAS: A CASE STUDY

There are several possible topics that might engage historians writing hemispheric Asian American history: migration circuits and networks, transnational capital and labor, homeland politics, cultural production. But, one of the most significant aspects connecting the multiple histories of Asian migration in the Americas is the global dynamics of Orientalism: the ways in which Asian migrants were racialized as dangerous and unassimilable foreigners around the world during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Although scholars have generally examined how notions of race have been created and enforced at the local and national levels, understanding the *transnational dimensions* of racial formation is vitally important. The construction of racial identities was a global phenomenon central to the development of the modern world, as Howard Winant argues. We must therefore recognize how ideas about race and racial categorization were produced and reinforced both inside and outside national borders.¹⁷

Exploring what Winant has called the “globality of race” is useful to the writing of hemispheric and transnational Asian American history. There are several episodes and key contact zones where the global and hemispheric dynamics of race were played out most explicitly, but it is the widespread opposition to Chinese migration throughout the Americas beginning in the late nineteenth-century that is the natural starting point. It was the “Chinese Problem” that brought people and ideas into contact and stimulated both international discourse about and cooperation against this seemingly global threat. Exploring the campaigns against Chinese immigration in the Americas illustrates the ways in which people, racial ideologies, and policies move and interact with each other *across* national borders instead of solely *within* them.

The history of the anti-Chinese movement and the resulting Chinese exclusion laws in the United States may be one of the most well-known chapters in Asian American history. What is less known is how anti-Asian sentiment in general—and opposition to Chinese immigration in particular—traveled and played out in other countries. How did ideas about race and stereotypes about Chinese circulate across borders? How did they resonate internationally as well as nationally and locally? What role—if any—did the example of the United States’ treatment of Chinese play abroad? This article argues that beginning in the 1870s, racialized understandings of Chinese as economic, social, and cultural threats circulated throughout the hemisphere.¹⁸ The U.S., Canada, and Mexico were structured by their own unique systems of race relations and hierarchies as well as colonial legacies. These differences translated into important distinctions in the ways in which Chinese immigrants were viewed and treated. Nevertheless, a hemispheric Orientalism that commonly defined the Chinese as a threatening invasion traveled widely. As the country with the earliest and largest population of Chinese migrants and as the originating point of many of the stereotypes, racialized arguments, and campaigns against the Chinese, the U.S. played an important role in these debates and in the circulation of Orientalism throughout the hemisphere. U.S. “expertise” on all issues related to Chinese immigration was also highly sought after, respected, and universally accepted as applicable to other countries. Lastly, the “Chinese Problem” in the U.S. served as a constant

example to Canadians and Mexicans anxious about their own countries' abilities to withstand an onslaught of Chinese immigrants.

THE CHINESE MUST GO! ANTI-CHINESE CAMPAIGNS IN THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, AND MEXICO

Almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States, Chinese immigrants were charged with being undesirable and inassimilable aliens who brought disease, economic competition, vice, and immorality to the communities in which they settled. Being the first Asian immigrant group to settle in large numbers in the Americas, Chinese bore the brunt of the first waves of anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination. As John Kuo Wei Tchen and Robert G. Lee have illustrated, the racialization of Chinese as the forever foreign and dangerous "Oriental" preceded large-scale migration of Chinese to America.¹⁹ Once large-scale migration of Chinese began in the U.S., Chinese immigrants were the targets of racial hostility, discriminatory laws, and violence. This racism was grounded in an American Orientalist ideology that homogenized Asia as one indistinguishable entity, positioned and defined the West and the East in diametrically opposite terms, and used those distinctions to claim American and Anglo American superiority.

Orientalist fears of the Asian "Other" intersected and overlapped with domestic fears about American race, class, and gender relations. During the 1870s, massive population growth, coupled with economic dislocation in the West in general, and California in particular, helped fan the fires of early anti-Chinese sentiment. Blaming Chinese workers for unfavorable wages and the scarcity of jobs, anti-Chinese leaders charged that the Chinese were imported "coolies" engaged in a new system of slavery that degraded American labor. Chinese immigrants' purported diet of "rice and rats" was cited as a clear sign that they had a lower standard of living, one that white working families could not (and should not) degrade themselves by accepting. Exclusionists also pointed to the large presence of Chinese prostitutes as a sign of rampant immorality that could easily cross beyond the confines of the Chinese community and bring ruin to white Americans. Furthermore, Chinese men—with their will-

ingness to do women's work and their purportedly effeminate ways—threatened existing gender ideals and relations. But above all, the Chinese were considered to be racially inferior and completely inassimilable, thereby contributing to the nation's existing race “problem” involving African Americans and American Indians.²⁰

Organized opposition to Chinese immigration began in California during the gold rush era. During the 1870s, Denis Kearny's Workingmen's Party rallied an ever-increasing number of Californians to the cause under the slogan, “the Chinese must go!” Efforts to pass federal legislation restricting Chinese immigration were successful in 1875, when the Page Law barred women suspected of entering the country for “immoral purposes,” and again in 1882, when the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited all but a few select classes of Chinese from entering the country. Both laws represent the first attempts to regulate immigration at the federal level and transformed the United States into a gatekeeping nation, in which immigration restriction—largely based on race and nationality—came to determine the very makeup of the nation and American national identity.²¹

The exclusion laws had a tremendous effect on curbing Chinese migration to the United States, and in response Chinese migration to Canada and Mexico grew. As the Chinese population increased, so did anxiety about their impact on local populations and economies. Canadian opposition to Chinese immigration was centered in the province of British Columbia. As historian Peter Ward has explained, the prevailing image of Chinese was that of “John Chinaman,” the same stereotype common in the U.S., which charged that Chinese immigrated in great numbers, were purportedly indistinguishable from each other, and brought economic competition, immorality, filth, overcrowded housing, disease, and drug addiction to the region.²² But, it was the stereotype of the unassimilable Asian, Ward argues, that “loomed far larger than all the rest,” and it was central in all arguments aimed at limiting Chinese immigration.²³

As in the United States, Canadian arguments against Chinese immigration were rooted in larger anxieties about race, class, gender, and sexuality and especially played a highly significant role in the formation of regional and national identities. The rise in anti-Chinese sentiment in

Canada coincided with British Columbia's 1871 admission as a province to the recently formed Dominion of Canada. Within the context of these monumental political changes, both regional and national identities underwent great change. In British Columbia, in particular, membership was increasingly framed around whiteness. Patricia Roy argues that an overriding goal in British Columbia in the post-Confederation era was the attraction of white immigrants and investors into the region. Neither of these goals was achieved. While the white population doubled in number, the Chinese population tripled. Roy further explains that the prosperity and greater political independence for which British Columbians yearned did not materialize, and delays in the completion of the trans-continental railway kept the province isolated from the rest of the country. During the economically depressed 1870s and 1880s, the growing number of Chinese immigrants in the province became the scapegoat for larger woes. Anti-Chinese activists in British Columbia called on the restriction of Chinese immigration in order to maintain a "white man's province."²⁴

Like their fellow migrants in the North, the Chinese in Mexico also faced racial hostility, and an organized anti-Chinese movement developed in the northern state of Sonora in the early 1900s. Evelyn Hu-DeHart argues that Mexican anti-Chinese leaders drew upon well-known stereotypes of the Chinese circulating throughout the Americas and modified them for Mexican audiences. Images of Chinese as vice-ridden, inferior, diseased, and inassimilable aliens surfaced in local newspapers and political campaigns. Chinese immigration was described in catastrophic terms as a "yellow wave," the "yellow plague," and the "Mongol invasion."²⁵

Historians agree that the "basic complaint" against the Chinese in Sonora and in northwest Mexico centered on economic competition. Although the Chinese population was never large, they dominated local commerce. Unlike the Chinese in Canada and the United States, those in Mexico did not take laboring jobs. Instead, as Hu-DeHart has illustrated, their economic activity was concentrated in commerce as independent entrepreneurs. The Chinese provided goods and services in border towns such as Nogales and Agua Prieta that sprung up in response to growing U.S. trade and U.S.-financed mining and railroad activities.²⁶ Sonorans

already felt disadvantaged by the heavy infiltration of American capital in the region, and the perception that the Chinese minority was taking away jobs from Mexicans fueled their resentment.²⁷

As in the United States and Canada, charges that the Chinese competed economically with Mexicans intersected with other arguments that found Chinese undesirable on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality. But unlike Americans and Canadians, the anti-Chinese sentiment in Mexico was not centrally grounded in the fact that the Chinese were non-white and thereby threatened the sanctity of a “white man’s country.” Rather, Mexicans emphasized the fact that the Chinese were a Mongol race that registered near the bottom of Mexico’s complex racial hierarchy. (Mexicans characterized themselves as “Westerners.”)²⁸ Evelyn Hu-DeHart explains that there existed at least fourteen different racial casts, or *castas*, in colonial Mexico. The word “*chino*,” or Chinese, sometimes referred to the offspring of a white-Black *mulato* and an Indian woman, which ranked eleventh on a scale of fourteen casts. The concept of “*chino*,” Hu-DeHart explains, clearly “assumed particularly derogatory overtones.”²⁹ This mark of racial inferiority was expanded upon by anti-Chinese leaders. State senator and newspaper publisher José Angel Espinoza portrayed the Chinese as racially, physically, and culturally inferior and threatening in his two sensationalist books, *El problema chino en Mexico* (The Chinese Problem in Mexico) (1930) and *El ejemplo de Sonora* (The Example of Sonora) (1932). While Chinese lived alone and subsisted on an “oriental diet” of rice and “sausages of dogs, rats, etc.,” even the lowliest Mexican peon required more substantial sustenance and living conditions, he argued.³⁰ In several illustrations printed in *El ejemplo de Sonora*, Chinese are portrayed as misshapen and grotesque, with disgusting personal habits and little morality. Reinforcing his argument that Chinese were racially inferior, Espinoza describes Chinese men as being both deviant and lacking in masculinity. They were “effeminate men . . . washing dishes and plucking chickens . . . like authentic queers,” he claimed.³¹ That they would invert traditional gender roles and take on women’s work was disturbing enough, but as Espinoza charged, Chinese labor competition with Mexican women had even more nefarious consequences. Lacking other work, many Mexican women were forced into prostitution in Chinese brothels or into

marriages with Chinese. The offspring of these unions, Espinoza claimed, displayed “all of the evil characteristics of the father and none of the mother.”³²

As in the United States and Canada, debates over Chinese immigration were also inextricably related to larger transformations in Mexican national identity. Charges of economic competition and racial inferiority merged with a larger anti-foreign, especially anti-American hatred that was an integral part of Mexico’s revolutionary nationalism in the early 1900s.³³ Under the regime of President Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), Mexico had favored foreign immigration and investment. After the Revolution of 1911, Mexican leaders sought to “Mexicanize” the country and its economy.³⁴ Leo M.D. Jacques explains that “national” and “pro-fatherland” campaigns sought to define a new national ethos.³⁵ In the United States and Canada, the restriction of Chinese was inextricably related to the consolidation of whiteness and the purported need to defend a “white man’s country.” In Mexico, while precise definitions of a new national Mexican identity fluctuated, Jacques argues that leaders of the anti-Chinese committees had a “definite conception of what it did not include—the Chinese.”³⁶

These brief descriptions of anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States, Canada, and Mexico illustrate the striking similarities that link these separate histories. A comparative approach to this subject might end here or go on to compare and contrast the motivations, actions, and consequences of the three separate campaigns against Chinese immigration. Such a comparison is important. But, a transnational and hemispheric approach requires us to look between the lines and borders separating these seemingly separate histories and explore the interconnections and intersections that link them together.

First, common stereotypes and sensationalist rhetoric about the Chinese circulated freely throughout North and South America. Canadian historian Peter Ward goes so far as to argue that the animosity directed towards Asians “paid little heed to political boundaries.” West Coast whites in the U.S. and Canada shared their racial prejudices to such a degree that Ward refers to their attitudes as a “west coast racialism” that transcended the international boundary line.³⁷ These common prejudices were first

forged when American miners and their anti-Chinese attitudes traveled north from California to Canada's Fraser River gold fields beginning in 1858.³⁸ One veteran of the California gold rush was Nova Scotian Amor De Cosmos, who later migrated to Vancouver and became a leading spokesman in the anti-Chinese movement while also serving as a newspaper editor and prominent provincial politician. At the height of the debates over Chinese immigration in 1882, De Cosmos complained in the British Columbia newspaper, *The Daily Standard*, that "in place of white men and women to the country . . . we are daily over-run by hordes of Chinese laborers who can never assimilate with our people."³⁹

Canadians also formed their opinions about Chinese immigration from American publications that were either circulated or reprinted in Canada. In 1859, the *Victoria Gazette*, a newspaper published by two transplanted San Franciscans, printed an outspoken editorial that criticized the Chinese. In what Ward has described as "the first analysis of the Chinese question published in the colonies, the editorial "appropriated the [anti-Chinese message] of the California goldfields." Drawing from the experiences of Californians and Australians, the editorial sowed the seeds of what would become the standard anti-Chinese argument in the province. It charged that Chinese hurt white workers by accepting lower wages, and that, in short, they were not "desirable as permanent settlers in a country peopled by the Caucasian race."⁴⁰ Other Canadian publications, such as *Maclean's Magazine* and *Saturday Night*, reprinted numerous "sensationalist" articles attacking Chinese immigration that had originally appeared in American sources. In 1906, the Canadian labor paper *The Tribune*, for example, reprinted an article written by the Asiatic Exclusion League of Vacaville, California that charged "Orientals" with "deteriorat[ing] the value of every ranch on which they worked."⁴¹

As a result of the cross-border circulation of commentary and racialized stereotypes about Chinese immigration, many Canadian writers saw the problem as a North American one that was shared across the forty-ninth parallel. Reverend James S. Woodsworth argued in 1909 that the menace was "essentially the same for the United States and Canada," and that much could be learned from the United States.⁴² In his book, *Strangers within Our Gates or Coming Canadians*, Woodsworth went so

far as to support his argument for immigration restriction in Canada with large excerpts from books written by U.S. anti-immigration writers and activists, including Prescott F. Hall, one of the founders of the influential Immigration Restriction League in Boston, and Frank Julian Warne, another nativist and author.⁴³ Canadian labor organizations also believed that their plight was a shared one with U.S. workingmen. A Canadian labor journal editorialized, “change the word American to Canadian and it applies to this side of the line as well as the other.”⁴⁴ Eastern Canadian labor organizations even adopted Denis Kearny’s war cry of the “The Chinese Must Go.”⁴⁵

Anti-Chinese sentiment originating in the United States circulated southward to Mexico as well. Evelyn Hu-DeHart notes that “not surprisingly,” some of the anti-Chinese attitudes formulated in California and other western states during the 1880s “began filtering into Mexico” as Chinese immigration to northern Mexico became more noticeable.⁴⁶ The Sonoran newspaper, *El Tráfico*, published pieces whose anti-Chinese attitudes were “obviously informed by well-established anti-Chinese propaganda current in California and the American West.”⁴⁷ James R. Curtis writes that the “collective perception and treatment of the Chinese in northern Mexico, especially after 1910, was not unlike what they experienced in California.” Resentment of the perceived economic success of Chinese was active on “both sides of the border,” and the propaganda circulating about the Chinese in Mexico was “identical” to that which was disseminated earlier in the United States.⁴⁸ Mexicans returning from the United States also brought their own opinions about the Chinese back to their homeland. Alberto H. Mertes of Sonora, for example, became an early critic of Chinese immigration in Mexico in 1884. Basing his opinions on his observations of the Chinese in California, Mertes concluded that the Chinese were “egotistical, ungrateful, lazy, and cruel.” They were economic “parasites” who arrived with no families, proceeded to fill their pockets and then left with their debts unpaid.⁴⁹ Years later in 1932, José Angel Espinoza observed that the Chinese were “already known by many [returning] Mexicans, due to the war that had been begun against them in California.”⁵⁰

Hemispheric circulation of anti-Chinese attitudes included a second dimension. The “Chinese Problem” in the United States acted as an im-

portant example and lesson for Canadians and Mexicans anxious about their own country's ability to withstand a Chinese "invasion." With its lengthy experience with Chinese immigration, the U.S. was credited with possessing the expertise necessary to understand and manage the threat at hand. Both Canada and Mexico relied heavily on U.S. government evidence and wholeheartedly accepted U.S. charges against the Chinese as both irrefutable and completely applicable in their own countries. In 1879, for example, the Canadian Select Committee on Chinese Labor and Immigration began its investigation of Chinese immigration in the Dominion by first familiarizing itself with the significant governmental evidence gathered in the United States. The committee noted that the U.S. investigations had already demonstrated the "undesirableness of encouraging Chinese labor and immigration" and thereby implied that the need to come to their own independent conclusion was unnecessary.⁵¹ Canada's 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration went further to explicitly equate California with British Columbia, by stating ominously that "the present of California may prove the likeness of the future of British Columbia."⁵² Indeed, the commission felt that the perils facing the two countries were so similar that they interviewed many of the exact same witnesses who had participated in the U.S. government's investigation in 1876. Out of a total of sixty-eight witnesses, eleven came from San Francisco, California and six came from Portland, Oregon. The remaining individuals were from Canada, mostly British Columbia.⁵³ U.S. experts included San Francisco police officers, labor contractors, missionaries, lawyers, and other city and local business leaders. The commission also made extensive visits to the Chinatowns of San Francisco and Portland. The final published report included 181 pages of the 1876 U.S. government report on Chinese immigration as well as a reprint of the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the 1878 and 1883 Chinese restriction laws of the Hawaiian Kingdom.⁵⁴

As Mexican historians have pointed out, the Chinese immigration problem in the United States was also warily regarded by Mexican officials as a potential precursor of a troubling future for Mexico. Like their neighbors to the far north, Mexicans easily accepted U.S. portrayals of Chinese and readily applied them to Mexico without question. In 1881,

the Mexican consul based in Tucson, Arizona described Chinese immigration in the United States in order to warn his government of the perils that Mexico would surely face. He reminded his superiors “that the Chinese [in the U.S.] are considered . . . to be harmful and dangerous.” He cited the familiar litany of charges made by Americans, but despite the vast differences distinguishing Mexico from the United States, the consul seemed to argue the Chinese threat was the same for both countries. “If such harm has arisen in the U.S.,” he explained, “I leave for your consideration what could happen to us.” At the time of his dispatch, the U.S. was on the verge of passing the Chinese Exclusion Act. Such legal measures, the consul concluded, could serve Mexico as well. “I believe it is my duty,” he gravely concluded, “to make clear the harm that in my opinion can occur with the great influx of individuals of the Mongol race of our country.”⁵⁵ By 1904, when President Porfirio Díaz established a commission to study Asian immigration to Mexico, U.S. attitudes regarding Chinese immigrants were regarded as the logical starting point. It was the position of the commission’s chairman, José Covarubbias, “to examine the validity of the “dark accusations” that the United States had leveled against the Chinese.” “Should we accept ourselves those men who have been rejected by the United States?” Covarubbias asked. The commission studied American accusations against the Chinese and also conducted its own investigation of Chinese immigration. Its conclusion echoed U.S. opinion that the Chinese were indeed inassimilable and that the “Chinese and the Westerner are essentially different.” Covarubbias suggested that should Chinese immigration to Mexico continue, the government should monitor it through “constant intervention.”⁵⁶

During later anti-Chinese campaigns, the example of the Chinese exclusion laws in the United States would resonate even louder with Mexicans. Historian José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo writes that “the anti-Chinese leagues were insistent in arguing that the solution lay in the expulsion of the Chinese, following the example of the United States.”⁵⁷ For example, at an anti-Chinese rally in Magdalena in November 1917, Profesora María de Jesus Valdez argued that Chinese exclusion laws would raise Mexico’s stature in the international order. Subscribing to racist notions of civilizations, Valdez explained that “other civilized nations won’t permit the

entry of the Chinese. They throw him out like poisonous plants, which is what we must do in order to place Mexico among these nations.”⁵⁸ Likewise, in 1932, anti-Chinese leader José Angel Espinoza again invoked U.S. denigration of Chinese to justify the Mexican anti-Chinese crusade. Writing in *El ejemplo de Sonora*, Espinoza pointed out with approval that the United States had already deemed the Chinese to be “a devouring plague of rats that ruin the soil they invade.”⁵⁹ According to Charles Cumberland, Espinoza “took comfort from the fact that [anti-Chinese leaders in Mexico] had company in their prejudices and made frequent reference to the need for laws “already adopted in the United States.”⁶⁰

While opposition to Chinese immigration in Canada and Mexico was grounded in similar U.S. complaints about Chinese as cheap laborers who brought immorality, vice, and disease to the country, the two countries responded quite differently from the United States in crafting their own solutions to their “Chinese Problems.” Due to British relations with China, an all-out exclusion of Chinese immigrants was not feasible in Canada. Instead of replicating America’s direct exclusion of Chinese laborers, Canada restricted Chinese immigration by imposing a fifty-dollar head tax on all Chinese laborers. Thus, while the United States explicitly singled out all Chinese laborers, Canada’s early measures allowed entry to every Chinese provided that he or she paid the landing fee.⁶¹ Canada raised its head tax to one hundred dollars in 1900 and then to five hundred dollars in 1903.⁶² In 1923, Canada transformed its regulation of Chinese immigration altogether. Closely mirroring U.S. Chinese exclusion laws, the 1923 Exclusion Act completely abolished the head tax system and instead prohibited all people of Chinese origin or descent from entering the country. Consular officials, children born in Canada, merchants, and students were exempted.⁶³

In Mexico, regulation of Chinese immigration took place more at the local and regional levels than at the federal. Mexico’s central government was reluctant to violate international agreements with China or to damage U.S. economic investments in northern Mexico, which relied upon Chinese labor, and Chinese businesses. Sonorans thus turned to mob violence as well as to local laws, regulations, and annoyances designed to harass the Chinese. These methods included the Chinese massacre at

Torreón in 1911 as well as public health regulations, segregation provisions, and bans on interracial marriages that became law in various municipalities during the 1910s and 1920s. It was hoped that the Chinese would find such harassment unbearable and leave voluntarily.⁶⁴ The center of the anti-Chinese movement remained Sonora, but by 1924 the American Embassy reported that a “very strong movement” was underway throughout the country to “combat further Chinese immigration” to Mexico. Under the leadership of President Plutarco Calles, Mexico cancelled its treaty with China in 1927.⁶⁵ Following the Great Depression of 1929 and the resulting unemployment in the country, the Chinese were routinely harassed into leaving Mexico. Beginning in 1931, vigilante groups rounded up Chinese “by the truckload” and took them to the U.S.-Mexico border.⁶⁶ Following an order by Sonoran Governor Rodolfo Calles (son of the President) to dispose of their goods and evacuate their businesses, Chinese in Sonora began to close their businesses in August of 1931. By September, the expulsion of all Chinese residents from Sonora had been accomplished, and Governor Calles could announce with satisfaction that the “bitter twenty-year campaign” to terminate the “Chinese problem” had finally been won.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

By the 1930s, Chinese had been successfully excluded, restricted, or expelled from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Significantly, while the attitudes toward the Chinese had been remarkably similar across the three countries, the solutions to the “Chinese Problem” had differed. Because of these similarities and differences, the campaigns against Chinese migration demonstrate both the rich possibilities and the challenges to hemispheric projects in Asian American history. When our perspective is shifted from the nation to the hemisphere, the strands of history that are bound together across national borders are illuminated in ways that can help us rewrite traditional narratives. Still, unique national and regional differences must be understood and explained as well. Charting a course that addresses both is the challenge that lies ahead. Scholars must first avoid the simple application of U.S. (mainland) -centered questions to Canada, Hawai’i, the Caribbean, and Latin American countries. We must

immerse ourselves in the relevant debates and both the secondary and primary literature in order to understand not only the similarities, but also different contexts that affected the experiences of Asians. In the quest to link separate national histories together into a larger transnational, hemispheric framework, historians and others must also attend to what Lisa Mar has similarly referred to as the need to “reconcile evidence of common history with international variation.”⁶⁸

A final challenge involves intellectual imperialism. Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire Fox warn that “exceptionalist premises continue to inform post-national American studies work on the hemisphere,” including the tendency to “privilege the United States as primary interlocutor vis-à-vis other countries, to focus on Anglophone material, to marginalize other fields’ perspectives, and to extend U.S.-based research paradigms to the hemispheric level.” As a corrective, they argue that Canadian and Latin American Studies must be placed on equal footing with American Studies as “protagonists rather than mere recipient sites of U.S. policies and of U.S.-based theoretical perspectives and comparative paradigms.”⁶⁹ Similarly, Christopher Lee points to the danger of Asian American Studies “co-opt[ing] Canadian texts and contexts without adequate regard (or sometimes any regard) for contextual differences.”⁷⁰

While it is vitally important to heed these and other scholars’ warnings, we cannot discount the overwhelming role that the United States did play—and continues to play—in the hemisphere, and indeed the world. It is imperative that Americanists interested in transnational history seek out a balanced approach and methodology. Other countries should not be treated as “mere recipients” of U.S.-based policies. But at the same time, the behemoth that is the United States, with its economic, military, cultural, and political might and influence, cannot be ignored. The task is to examine the ways in which the United States has influenced and intervened abroad, while also exploring how the sites of those interventions responded according to their own local and national agendas and unique socio-political conditions.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these challenges, hemispheric Asian American history represents one of the newest and most important directions in Asian American Studies. The initial goal of the Asian Ameri-

can movement to preserve our histories continues to be fulfilled. The latest scholarship has gone even further to transform American history more generally. Asian Americanists have also been some of the primary contributors to the transnational turn in American Studies, renewing connections and linkages to Asian Studies. Hemispheric Asian American history builds upon these legacies. It forces us to recast our gaze beyond our own borders and beyond the Pacific Ocean. In turn, it will help us rewrite Asian American history and challenge conventional understandings of migration, borders, and globalization.

Notes

- Many people helped me cross disciplinary and geographical borders during the research and writing of this article: Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Henry Yu, Jigna Desai, Christopher Lee, Greg Robinson, Guy Beauregard, Candace Fujikane, Josephine Lee, Patrick McNamara, Andrew Urban, Mary Strasma, and Naoko Shibusawa.
1. Gary Okihiro, "Turning Japanese Americans," in *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas: An Illustrated History of the Nikkei*, Akemi Kikumura-Yano, ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: Altma Mira Press, 2002) 25. Scholars working on the Atlantic world also warn against reifying the east-west axis as opposed to a north-south one. Jorge Canizares Esguerra, "Some Caveats about the 'Atlantic' Paradigm," *History Compass* 3 (2005).
 2. 245,966 Japanese settled in Latin America; 338,459 settled in North America. Exact figures for countries with the largest Japanese population are: Brazil: 188,985; Peru: 33,070; Mexico: 14,667; Argentina: 5,398. Kikumura-Yano, *Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants*, 67.
 3. 54,474 Chinese settled in Latin America and the Caribbean compared to 112,131 in North America. Exact figures and years are as follows: U.S. (1940) 77,504; Canada (1941): 34,627; Caribbean (1946): 5774 (including British Guiana, British Honduras, Antigua, Trinidad, Jamaica); Cuba (1950): 23,000; Peru (1950): 12,000; Mexico (1950): 12,000; Panama (1950): 2,700. Judy Yung, *Unbound feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 293; Lynn Pan, *The Encyclopedia of Chinese Overseas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 235, 252, 262.
 4. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, "From Area Studies to Ethnic Studies: The Study of the Chinese Diaspora in Latin America," in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives*, Shirley Hune, ed. (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1991), 9.
 5. See Wally Look Lai's promotion of "an Hemispheric consciousness . . . as an intellectual notion," as cited in Rajini Srikanth Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, Leny Mendoza Strobel, eds., *Encounters: People of Asian Descent in the Americas*

- (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), xvi. Similarly, Lisa R. Mar advocates for including Canada in a larger Asian Pacific North America. Lisa R. Mar, "Asian Canada: An 'Alternate Asian America?'" (Asian Pacific American Collective History Project, 2004 [cited May 2 2005]); available from <http://www.apachp.org>.
6. On the Pacific World, see Arif Dirlik, "American Studies in the Time of Empire," *Comparative American Studies* 2: 3 (2004): 287–302.
 7. Richard Ellis, Paul Giles, and Jane Desmond, eds., "Editorial," *Comparative American Studies* 1:1 (2003) 5.
 8. Mar, "Asian Canada." Christopher Lee, "The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies," unpublished paper, 2005.
 9. On historiography, see Mar, "Asian Canada;" Edgar Wickberg, "Overseas Chinese: The State of the Field," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (2002): 1–8. Early community histories include: Harry Con et al., *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982); Anthony Chan, *Gold Mountain: the Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983). Political histories of anti-Asian racism include: W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978); Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875–1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989) and *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914–1941* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003); Hugh J. M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1989); Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps, North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada during World War II* (Malabar, FL: R.E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1981); Saul M. Cherniack, *Canada and the Japanese Canadians* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, 2000); *Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese during the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
 10. Mar, "Asian Canada."
 11. Notable exceptions include the pioneering work of Evelyn Hu-DeHart. See Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society: The Chinese in Northern Mexico, 1875–1932," *The Journal of Arizona History* (Autumn, 1980): 275–312; "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution in Sonora, Mexico, 1876–1932," *Amerasia* 9 (1982): 1–27; "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers: The Chinese of Mexico and Peru, 1849–1930," *Amerasia* 15 (1989): 91–116; "The Chinese in Baja California Norte, 1910–1934," in *Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Council on Latin American Studies* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1985–1986); "Huangong and Huashang: The Chinese as Laborers and Merchants in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Amerasia* 28 (2002): 64–90.

12. Hu-DeHart, "From Area Studies to Ethnic Studies," 6–7.
13. Rustomji-Kerns, *Encounters*, xv.
14. In general, see Daniel M. Masterson and Sayaka Funada-Classen, *The Japanese in Latin America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) and *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese-Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Akemi Kikumura-Yano, and James A. Hirabayashi, *New Worlds, New Lives: Globalization and People of Japanese Descent in the Americas and from Latin America in Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, "Reconsidering Transculturation and Power," *Amerasia* 28:2 (2002): ix–xxii; Wannu w. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, eds., *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
15. See, for example, *Amerasia* 30:3 (Winter 2004/2005); Grace Peña Delgado, "At Exclusion's Southern Gate: Changing Categories of Race and Class among Chinese *Fronterizos*, 1882–1904," in Samuel Truett and Elliott Yount, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 183–208; Erika Lee, "Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882–1924," *Journal of American History* 89: 1 (2002): 54–86.
16. Henry Yu, "Los Angeles and American Studies in a Pacific World of Migrations," *American Quarterly* 56: 3 (2004): 537–538, 541. (emphasis mine).
17. Howard Winant, *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 142–143, 2–3.
18. Due to space limitations, this article focuses only on the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, although comparisons with other countries, including the Hawaiian Islands, Cuba, and Peru, would be equally fruitful.
19. John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).
20. See generally Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Alexander Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); R. Lee, *Orientalists*, 104; Karen J. Leong, "A Distant and Antagonistic Race:" Constructions of Chinese Manhood in the Exclusionist Debates, 1869–1878," in Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, Dee Garceau, eds., *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 133; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 153–182.
21. George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999);

- Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
22. Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 6–22.
 23. *Ibid.*, 12.
 24. Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), viii, 14, 37, 38.
 25. Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 294; Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 7–8.
 26. Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 6; Hu-DeHart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers," 91, 97.
 27. James R. Curtis, "Mexicali's Chinatown," *The Geographical Review* 85:3 (1995), 340–341; Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 6–7.
 28. José Covarubbias described Mexicans as "Westerners" in *La inmigración china considerada desde los puntos de vista intelectual y moral* [Chinese immigration considered from the intellectual and moral points of view], in *Varios informes sobre tierras y colonización* [Various Reports Regarding Land and Colonization] (México: Imprenta y Fototipia de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1912), 209–210.
 29. Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 2.
 30. José Angel Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora* (México, D.F. 1932), 23, 64.
 31. Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora*, 168, cited in Philip A. Dennis, "The Anti-Chinese Campaigns in Sonora, Mexico," *Ethnohistory* 26:1 (Winter, 1979): 73.
 32. Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora*, 21–24, 36.
 33. Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 2–3; Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 276–282, 294; Raymond B. Craib, "Chinese Immigrants in Porfirian Mexico: A Preliminary Study of Settlement, Economic Activity and Anti-Chinese Sentiment," Research Paper Series No. 28 (Albuquerque, NM: Latin American Institute, 1996), 8; Charles Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 40:2 (1960): 195–196.
 34. Curtis, "Mexicali's Chinatown," 340.
 35. Leo M.D. Jacques, "The Anti-Chinese Campaign in Sonora, Mexico, 1900–1931" (University of Arizona, 1974), 199–200.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 3.
 38. Roy, *White Man's Province*, 6; Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 13, 24.
 39. Roy, *White Man's Province*, 14, 37. "Amor De Cosmos" (Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, Library and Archives of Canada [cited August 8, 2005]); available from <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=40188>.

40. Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 25.
41. Kathy Paupst, "A Note on Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Toronto," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9:1 (1977): 56; Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 5.
42. James S. Woodsworth, *Strangers within our Gates, or coming Canadians* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, Methodist Mission, 1909), 6, 181; Paupst, "A Note on Anti-Chinese Sentiment," 55.
43. Woodsworth, *Strangers within our Gates*, 199, 216–234; Frank Julian Warne, *The Immigrant Invasion* (New York: Dood, Mead, and Co., 1913), 295; Prescott F. Hall, *Immigration and its Effect upon the United States* (New York: H. Holt, 1906).
44. Paupst, "A Note on Anti-Chinese Sentiment," 55.
45. Roy, *White Man's Province*, 62–63.
46. Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 3.
47. *Ibid.*, 7.
48. Curtis, "Mexicali's Chinatown," 339–340.
49. Jacques, "Anti-Chinese Campaign," 53.
50. Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora*, 16.
51. Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence," (Ottawa: Order of the Commission, 1885), xix.
52. *Ibid.*, xi–xii.
53. *Ibid.*, li–lii.
54. *Ibid.*, 371–372, 413–414.
55. Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 3.
56. Covarubbias, *La inmigración china*, 123–125, 209–210; Hu-DeHart, "Racism and Anti-Chinese Persecution," 3.
57. José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo. *El Movimiento Antinchino en México (1871–1934): Problemas del Racismo y del Nacionalismo durante la Revolución Mexicana* [The anti-Chinese movement in Mexico (1871–1934): Problems of Racism and Nationalism during the Mexican Revolution] (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991), 99.
58. Gordon V. Krutz, "Chinese Labor, Economic Development and Social Reaction," *Ethnohistory* 18:4 (1971): 321–333.
59. Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora*, 16.
60. Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora*, 32, as cited in Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," 210.
61. An Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration into Canada, Jul. 20, 1885, ch. 71, 1885, S.C. 207–12 (Can.); Roy, *White Man's Province*, 59–63.
62. An Act Respecting and Restricting Chinese Immigration, Jul. 18, 1900, ch. 32, 1900 S.C. 215–21 (Can.); An Act Respecting and Restricting Chinese Immigration, ch. 8, 1903 S.C. 105–11 (Can.).
63. An Act respecting Chinese Immigration, Jun. 30, 1923, ch. 38, 1923 S.C. 301–15 (Can.); E. Lee, "Enforcing the Borders."
64. Jacques, "Anti-Chinese Campaign," 199–200. On the Torreón massacre, see Wilfley and Bassett, *Memorandum on the Law and the Facts in the Matter of*

- the Claim of China against Mexico for Losses of Life and Property Suffered by Chinese Subjects at Torreon on May 13, 14, and 15, 1911* (Mexico, 1911).
65. Jacques, "Anti-Chinese Campaign," 200; Hu-DeHart, "The Chinese in Baja California Norte," 21.
 66. Hu-DeHart, "Immigrants to a Developing Society," 305.
 67. Espinoza, *El Ejemplo de Sonora*, 140; Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese 191, 203.
 68. Mar, "Asian Canada." See also Hu-DeHart, "From Area Studies to Ethnic Studies," 9.
 69. Claudia Sadowski Smith and Claire Fox, "Theorizing the Hemisphere: Inter-Americas Work at the Intersection of American, Canadian, and Latin American Studies," *Comparative American Studies* 2:1 (2004): 7, 20–23. Other scholars express anxiety that new hemispheric, transnational scholarship might simply reify U.S.-centered narratives, or as George Lipsitz describes, "project American Exceptionalism onto a broader geographic terrain." George Lipsitz, "Abolition Democracy and Global Justice," *Comparative American Studies* 2:3 (2004): 272. See also Robert McKee Irwin, "¿Qué Hacen Los Nuevos Americanistas?: Collaborative strategies for a postnationalist American Studies," *Comparative American Studies* 2:3 (2004): 303–323; Thomas Bender, "The LaPietra Report: A Report to the Profession," (2000) (Organization of American Historians/New York University Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History [cited April 30, 2005]); available from <http://www.oah.org/activities/lapietra/final.html> April 30, 2005.
 70. C. Lee, "Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies."