

Transpacific Steam: Mexico and the unexplored case of the China Commercial Steamship Company (1903-1913)

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In May, 1903, *Clavering* arrived in Manzanillo, Colima with some 500 Chinese passengers aboard. Over a thousand people had gathered from all over the state to witness the landing. The event exerted such fascination as *Clavering* was inaugurating direct regular steamship runs between Asia and Mexico, by the recently-formed, Hong Kong-based, China Commercial Steamship Company (CCSC). From 1903 to 1913, the CCSC would contribute to the transpacific circulation of peoples, ideas, and merchandises, by offering a monthly service connecting Hong Kong, Yokohama, Manzanillo, and Salina Cruz. Its principle business: the transportation of thousands of Chinese to Mexico. By the end of its run, Chinese would reside in every Mexican state forming the second largest resident foreign ethnic community in Mexico, just after the Spaniards.

Despite its importance in fostering transpacific relations, there exists no systematic study of the CCSC and its repercussions. Both Chinese Overseas and Mexican historiographies have put limited attention to the study of Chinese in Mexico and, with notable exceptions, the large majority has concentrated on Mexican xenophobia and anti-Chinese campaigns. Influenced by the works of Adam McKeown, Madeleine Hsu, Elizabeth Sinn, Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Robert Romero, amongst others, this paper aims to open up the historiography of Chinese in Mexico by highlighting the transnational routes and networks as well as the complexity of experiences of the Chinese traveling by steamer to Mexico. Drawing from archival documents found in Mexico and Hong Kong, the paper traces the history of the CCSC's vessels and those who traveled in them, arguing that these are key to understand the mobility, the routes, and the plurality of voices, interests and experiences of the Chinese traveling to the Americas at the beginning of the 20th century.