

Allies, Enemies and Aliens: Migration in U.S.-Chinese Relations, 1940-1965

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In the early 1940s, when the United States was debating whether to end its exclusionary laws preventing Chinese immigration to the United States, an official of the Republic of China suggested that there would be no danger in doing so because the Chinese as a whole were “not a migratory race.” He was appealing to an image of China, that of a static empire of peasant farmers, that captivated American imaginations in the early Twentieth Century through novels like Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* or reports from missionaries and merchants returning from the exotic east. He might have thought the claim was the way to soothe fears of a continent overrun by the “yellow peril.” Perhaps he believed it himself, and thought – as many Chinese officials before him did – that no loyal Chinese, no worthy Chinese citizen, would even consider migrating. As countless scholars have shown, and the observations of this man’s contemporaries would have demonstrated, the Chinese were as likely to move overseas as any other ethnic group; perhaps even more likely to do so.

Emigration from China has only been legal since 1858, and since then not consistently so. Nonetheless, for as long as China has been interacting with the world, the presence of its people abroad has been a factor in international relations. This has been especially true of the Sino-American relationship; historians of both diplomatic and immigration history have demonstrated the tensions that the American laws excluding Chinese from immigration (beginning in 1882 and lasting until 1943) created in the relationship, and they are increasingly turning their attention to recent decades, when

events like the investigation of Wen Ho Lee and questions about Chinese contributions to U.S. Presidential campaigns has created increased interest in the role that individuals play in bilateral relationships. What is lacking from this new, rich scholarship is close attention to the interim period, the tumultuous decades of the Second World War and early Cold War, when both Sino-American relations and visions of immigration law and policy were changing rapidly. This is the topic that this dissertation was designed to address.

Between 1940 and 1965, the Republic of China (ROC) and the United States developed a closer relationship as allies against first the threat of Japanese imperialism and then communist expansion. By the late 1940s, the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) complicated the notion of “Sino-American Relations” and introduced new sources of contention between all three governments. At the same time, the United States engaged in continuous revisions of its immigration policies, now more than ever before created to serve the twin goals of promoting foreign policy and preserving national security, alongside more traditional considerations such as the economic consequences of new migration and the preservation of the traditional ethnic composition of the country. It is not at all surprising that these two sources of profound change should have influenced each other to the extent that they did; it is only surprising the extent to which the way they intertwine is left out of modern histories.

This dissertation demonstrates how clearly interconnected immigration and foreign policy issues were during these vital two and a half decades of American relations with China. By drawing upon extensive research in archives on mainland China, in

Taiwan, and in the United States, it attempts the first truly international history of this era of U.S.-Chinese relations and Chinese-American international migration. This is accomplished by examining four different types of migration issues within the context of state-to-state interactions and ROC, PRC, and U.S. policies at different points in time; these are immigration law and governance, deportation, repatriation, and diaspora politics. Immigration law and governance includes studies of the impact of major U.S. changes to immigration law on migrants of Chinese ethnicity and the use of immigration laws as a branch of U.S. foreign policy; it also examines how Chinese governments control immigration and emigration and for what purposes. Studying deportation reveals how entwined the decisions of who to deport and to what destination are with foreign policy issues such as government recognition and national security. Repatriation is linked to deportation, especially the discussion of involuntary repatriation that is so much a part of the post-Korean War dialogue between the United States and the PRC and the dilemma of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. Repatriation also includes post-war demobilization. Finally, diaspora issues include the use of an overseas population as a source of soft power, as well as the financial importance of remittances to both sending and receiving countries.

To study these four issues in the history of international migration in the context of foreign policy, this project made extensive use of what would be considered the traditional sources for both immigration and diplomatic history. In addition to the State Department and Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents available in Washington, Beijing, Taipei, and London, the author also examined records from the United States

Immigration and Naturalization Service, from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commissions of both the ROC government in Taipei and the PRC government (available on both the national level at the archives in Nanjing and the provincial level from the archives of one of the key sending areas of emigrants, Guangdong Province), and the British office of Colonial Affairs (which dealt with Chinese nationals in key locations such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia). Records from other government bureaus, printed government documents, newspapers and media sources, collected oral histories, and private paper collections (such as those of the American Civil Liberties Union and Congressman Walter Judd) also contributed important new perspectives. Extensive, multi-archival and multi-language research made it possible examine Sino-American and Chinese-American-Taiwanese relations from a truly international perspective.

In the course of this research, this study found two general categories in which immigration issues and foreign policy goals consistently intersect and can have at times profound effects on state-to-state relations. The first of these is in the area of public diplomacy. During the 1940s and 1950s, the United States, the ROC, and, eventually, the PRC consistently used the movement of people, their laws controlling their borders, citizen services, and their interactions with the Chinese diaspora to promote the legitimacy and positive image of their respective governments internationally. The second category is that of national security, as individuals migrating alone or en masse were not only an important part of how each country's image was formed, but also a potential source of insecurity. The United States, for example, underwent a period of profound suspicion of immigrants as potential communist spies in the early Cold War, however it

also tried to prevent skilled Chinese scientists from returning to aid their homeland in improving its military technology. For the Republic of China, accepting deportees was a project fraught with dangers, including potential destabilization and the problem of precedent. The government of the People's Republic of China found that security sometimes meant detaining foreign nationals or allowing its own dissidents to depart, but it also ran the risk of allowing spies in as overseas returnees. Moreover, all three governments turned to the Chinese population of Southeast Asia as a means of influencing a critical region at a time of international contention. The importance of migration in both national prestige and national security is explored in each of ten chapters that move partly chronologically and partly thematically through the history.

In the first chapter, the project establishes the importance of Chinese overseas (as past, present and future migrants) to the Chinese government during the Second World War. It discusses the ways the ROC worked to protect its citizens abroad, which given the vast amounts donated by Chinese overseas in war bond drives, was linked to protecting a source of financial support during the war and upholding the image of a strong central government in the face of challenges from both the Japanese and internal conflicts with Chinese communists. This discussion offers background for what will emerge as several important themes in the project overall: the international context for Sino-American disputes over immigration and the Chinese diaspora, the importance of overseas Chinese support to government legitimacy, and the far-reaching repercussions of American laws excluding Chinese from immigration.

The second and third chapters address the concept of the United States and China

as “unequal allies” in their battle against the Axis powers. Examining the U.S. decisions to abandon its right to extraterritoriality, repeal its Chinese exclusion laws, and permit Chinese merchant sailors in the Allied Merchant Marine shore leave when visiting U.S. ports during the war, these chapters demonstrate that Chinese migrants suffered from inequalities that stemmed from the unequal treatment of the Chinese government in the international system. In this section, the heretofore untold story of the struggles of Chinese seamen to gain equal treatment, equal pay, and equal access to shore leave in the face of racist mistreatment by Allied merchant shipping companies shows just how important individuals can be in world affairs; through mass desertions, a few thousand Chinese sailors nearly crippled North Atlantic shipping in 1942 and 1943. Meanwhile, American and British extraterritoriality and exclusion policies offered an unlikely but powerful weapon to the enemy's information campaigns – all the more powerful because charges of American discrimination against Chinese and other Asian immigrants were all too true. Under pressure, the U.S. Congress passed these immigration measures to offer China a symbolic victory in place of material assistance, and even then only after strong representations from the ROC government. Although U.S. information campaigns lauded the measures abroad in the hope that they would eliminate a source of resentment against the United States in Asia, they passed by keeping in place strict caveats that ensured Chinese equality remained in name only.

Serving as a bridge between the Second World War and the emerging Cold War, chapters four and five discuss the mechanics of immigration, deportation, and repatriation in a changing international climate. In the late 1940s, migration between China and the

United States became tied up in American concerns about prestige and security and ROC concerns about legitimacy. Both governments used immigration policy to promote their image to each other – the U.S. sought to soften immigration restrictions against the Chinese to improve impressions of America in Asia, while the ROC tried to improve American ideas about the Chinese by carefully handpicking emigrants. Meanwhile, facing a challenge from the Chinese communists and engulfed in an ongoing civil war, the ROC still managed to stress citizen services, looking for support from Chinese abroad and aiding in postwar repatriations.

After 1949, however, the situation for Chinese living and migrating overseas became more complicated, as both the ROC and the newly-established PRC began to compete openly for the right to represent their interests. The lack of diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC hindered movement between the two countries, as deportations to mainland China ground to a standstill and American anticommunists grew to suspect all new arrivals from China as potential spies. Heavy-handed application of immigration laws in the United States opened propaganda opportunities for the PRC and embarrassed the perennially weak ROC government for being unable to protect its citizens. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service and U.S. Congress frequently found themselves at odds with the President and State Department, as U.S. immigration policy and foreign policy worked at cross-purposes in Asia.

A specific example of the problem is introduced more fully in chapter six in the form of the Hong Kong refugee crisis. While encouraging residents of communist countries to “vote with their feet” and flee their oppressors, the 1953 Refugee Relief Act

was designed to aid European escapees only; forceful representations from a strong minority in Congress added only a token number of visas for Asians. For more than a decade, the United States, ROC, British colonial government in Hong Kong, PRC and even the United Nations struggled with how to address the growing humanitarian crisis in the city without sacrificing prestige, legitimacy, or stability. The chapter argues that although the United States created its refugee policy to serve foreign policy goals, failure to apply it equally in Asia damaged its credibility.

Moving into the issue of diaspora politics, the seventh and eighth chapters explore the importance of overseas Chinese support to the PRC and ROC, and by extension, the United States, during the 1950s. Chapter seven stresses the links between domestic and foreign policy, using newly released sources from the Guangdong Provincial Archive to connect land reform policies and attempts at extortion of relatives of overseas Chinese resident in South China to the overall drop in remittances the PRC observed in the early to mid 1950s. At the same time, American efforts to criminalize family remittances, demonstrated through the prosecution of the *China Daily News* for violating the Trading with the Enemy Act, attempted to exploit the rift but ultimately backfired. The eighth chapter examines the three-way battle for loyalty in Southeast Asia, as the United States courted overseas Chinese support for the purpose of containing communism and the ROC and PRC battled for legitimacy in the eyes of some twelve million Chinese nationals living abroad. In this case, the United States and PRC arrived at the same conclusion, that the propaganda battle ultimately harmed to their relations with the governments of Southeast Asia, and shifted to a softer policy of promoting local assimilation. Together,

these chapters demonstrate the role a migrant population can play in facilitating and damaging bilateral ties between sending and receiving countries, as well as offering a warning against imposing Cold War constructs on unrelated events.

The last two chapters engage a very traditional issue in diplomatic histories of the era, the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks that began in Geneva in 1955, and considers the implications of the talks for transnational migrants. Repatriation of nationals – Chinese students and scientists detained by the United States during the Korean War and American citizens imprisoned in China after 1949 – was the issue that brought the United States and PRC to the bargaining table at long last. Meanwhile, the ROC treated its loss of the right to speak for its citizens as what it was: the beginning of the decline in its legitimacy as the government of all China. Just as they had with the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and the refugees in Hong Kong, the ROC and PRC battled over who had the right to protect and speak for Chinese nationals in the United States. Here was the idea of migration issues as an extension of public diplomacy at its height; what government took part in the repatriation negotiations and where the individuals involved choose to live had more weight on the international stage than ever before.

The conclusion of this survey of the intersection of immigration and foreign policy issues in Sino-American relations in these decades demonstrates that the two are far too interconnected for one to be left out of either story. At every juncture, the United States, ROC and PRC used their policies toward migration and migrants to further the goals of promoting image, prestige and legitimacy abroad. Moreover, migration issues touched upon every major issue and conflict in Sino-American relations over the course

of the decades, and at times both facilitated and damaged relations. In addition to new sources and a new perspective on this history, there are several innovative aspects about the approach. For one thing, this project sets Chinese migration to the United States in the international context of Chinese migration around the world and counterbalances it with discussion of Americans in China. Additionally, it takes on the issue of the human costs of foreign policy grand strategies and contributes to the growing trend of examining the role of non-state actors in the Cold War and international affairs. Finally, the dissertation as a whole offers a caution about the unintended foreign policy consequences of immigration law and policy. Whether or not international reception was taken into account in the initial creation of new policies, how the United States received, repatriated, detained, and deported Chinese nationals in practice at mid-century had long-lasting implications for how it related with the Chinese governments and how it was perceived by the Chinese people.