Narratives of Migration and Diaspora

An Exploration into the Liang Family’s Alternating Experience as Sojourners and Settlers

by

Raymond Liang

Department of Graduate Liberal Studies
Duke University

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Approved:

Carlos Rojas, Supervisor

Donna Zapf

Eileen Chow

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## Conclusion

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**Introduction**

The first time I came across the novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* was in a graduate seminar at Duke University. At one point in the novel the protagonist, Wittman Ah Sing, argues that the phrase “Chinese-American” is inaccurate because the hyphen makes it seem as if Chinese Americans suffer from some internal confusion over their double identity. In other words, it denotes that the individual is Chinese *and* American, rather than just an American who happens to be Chinese. Thus, in an effort to reconcile the two seemingly distinct signifiers into a singular identity, he proposes removing the hyphen so that “American” now becomes the noun and “Chinese” the adjective, thereby facilitating the distinction that Chinese is a subset of American.\(^1\) While the book raises several quandaries related to identity, ethnicity and stereotypes, this particular passage stood out amongst all the others for me, in part because it made me grapple with my own identity as a Chinese American: what did it mean to *me* to be a Chinese American?

Growing up in white suburbia I had tried, as an adolescent, to minimize the Chinese side of me in an effort to separate myself from the “foreign.” This unhealthy undertaking, however, also caused me to develop a disinterest and apathy towards my past—more specifically my familial past. And yet, as I entered college and eventually graduate school, I began to realize that in my effort to Americanize myself all I had really been doing was denying an inherent part of my identity: after all, before there was ever an “American” signifier to my identity, there was a “Chinese” one. This realization became more distinct during my time at Duke where, in addition to *Tripmaster Monkey*, I read first hand accounts about the Chinese immigrant experience at Angel Island in Him Mark Lai’s *Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrations on Angel Island* and fictional works like Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone*, which explored the tribulations of two

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generations of Chinese Americans in San Francisco. Such works not only made me realize the
dearth of knowledge I had regarding my own familial past but also made me yearn to discover
and openly embrace a part of my identity I had long denied.

And so I decided to embark on a journey to discover my roots—more specifically to
investigate the significant periods of migration and displacement experienced by my ancestors,
which ultimately precipitated their immigration to the United States. By primarily relying on
interviews conducted with family members who not only have extensive knowledge about our
family history but also experienced firsthand some of these diasporic journeys, I was able to
document and recount a more coherent account of my family’s historical narrative. To
supplement these oral histories, I also relied on a variety of other primary sources such as
personal letters, photographs and official documents. It was also important for me to understand
these narratives alongside a broader historical context in order for me to develop a deeper
appreciation for them. Some questions I hoped to answer included: What political, economic and
social forces shaped and made such journeys possible and, at times, even necessary? And how
did such experiences fit into, or go against, the broader historical and socio-political movements
of the time? Thus, throughout sections of this paper, I have included historical discussions to
supplement and enrich these narratives.

This paper will focus on three significant periods of diaspora and displacement,
beginning with my grandfather’s educational sojourn to America in the 1920s. Tsinghua
College—the preparatory school my grandfather, Liang Chao-wei, studied at before his
educational sojourn to the United States—was made possible through the Boxer Indemnity
Scholarship. The scholarship was an educational program arranged between the Chinese and US
government in 1908 when the US government agreed to return the excess indemnity to help set
up a preparatory college to train and prepare students for future study in America. While the objective of such a program was to further develop rapport between the two countries, in reality, each country hoped to manipulate the students for their own economic and political benefit. Such diametric objectives would indelibly shape the lives of these Chinese students and the future of their country. This chapter will examine the historical origins of Tsinghua; investigating the various internal and external political, economic and social factors that led to the establishment of the school. In addition, it will explore in detail Liang Chao-wei’s educational sojourn to America and more generally the challenges he and other students faced on their diasporic path towards achieving national redemption; a path which would be littered with impassioned success and devastating failure in both their personal and professional lives.

The second significant period of diaspora follows the defeat of the KMT (Guomindang) by the Communists in 1949 during the Chinese Civil War. As Chiang Kai-shek fled China to set up a temporary government on the island of Taiwan, thousands of Chinese on the mainland began to flood into nearby Hong Kong in search of political asylum. Due to my grandfather’s connection with the KMT government, he and his family were similarly forced to flee from China, for fear of being persecuted by the Communist Party. This chapter will examine the family’s pursuits to seek refuge in Hong Kong and the struggles they faced in trying to transition to their new life as refugees in the British colonial city.

The final period of displacement involves the family’s immigration to America in 1963. Though Congress decided to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 due to China’s alliance with the U.S. during World War II, Chinese immigration was still limited to an annual immigration quota of 105. It would be another twenty-two years before President Lyndon B. Johnson would sign a law ending the national-origin quota that had restricted non-European, and
especially Chinese immigration into the United States. In addition to investigating the political backdrop that led to the liberalization of America’s immigration policy, this section will also explore how, in the face of all these obstacles, the family managed to successful immigrate to the United States and begin their lives as Chinese Americans.

Some may argue that narrative history is unreliable due to its subjectivity, simplistic chronicling of events and reductionist approach. However, I disagree. I believe that narrative histories are useful in that they can provide perspectives outside of the predominantly accepted accounts of historical events and people. In *Some of Us*, a collection of memoirs by Chinese women growing up during the Mao era, several of the authors recount positive narratives of their life during the time period. In the preface, the authors recollect being made to feel as if their experiences were somehow not as valid because they did not fit into the “victim vs. victimizer” dichotomy that is often associated with this time period—in effect, they felt as if traditional academic approaches to history had disregarded their experiences as mere anomalies. As one author laments, “everyone who was talking, including the once victimizer Red Guards, was a victim scarred by the Maoist dictatorship. But I could not think of any example in my life to present myself as victim or victimizer. I did not know how to feel about my many happy memories and cherished experiences of a time that the most vocal people now called the dark age.”

This is the perhaps the greatest value of narrative history: it permits diverse and, at times, contradictory perspectives and in the process enhances, rather than diminishes, the study of history. Historian Wm. Roger Louis has argued that narrative history is the “best history because it reaches a wide audience…[it] can be as analytical and sophisticated as any other type of history. What matters in the end is not how one is described as a historian but the presentation of

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a clearly written and closely reasoned case based on a careful examination of the evidence.”

It is with this mentality that I approach a subject of great personal value to me, and I hope you will find to be as equally compelling and meaningful as I do.

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Part 1: The Vacillating Identity of Tsinghua Students, 1911-1928

Tsinghua owes its origins to the Boxer Rebellion. From the rebellion’s bloodshed Tsinghua emerged as a testament to the thousands of Chinese lives lost. Because of the West’s influence on China, students studying in America reached its peak. Of the students sent abroad to America, a majority came from Tsinghua, which like a factory churned out numerous students every year. That is why Tsinghua shares such a deep connection with China. If you are concerned with China’s future, you cannot forget Tsinghua’s past. – Liang Chao-wei and Yu Shaoguang, 1923

From 1911 to 1928, Tsinghua College educated and sent abroad more than 900 students to America, all of whom were tasked with the same mission: to import Western knowledge and technology back to China in order to restore and strengthen a country crippled from years of humiliation and foreign plunder. As a 24 year old my grandfather, Liang Chao-wei, was selected to be one of these students. Like many other students at Tsinghua, his educational sojourn was made possible through the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship—an educational program arranged between the Chinese and the US government. In 1908 the US agreed to return the excess indemnity from the Boxer Rebellion in order to establish a preparatory college in China to help train and prepare Chinese students for study in America. While the educational plan was meant to further advance the relationship between the two countries, underneath this friendly veneer lay more selfish ambitions: both countries sought to take advantage of the arrangement to further their own political and economic interests. The Chinese hoped that these overseas-educated students would return to China with their newly acquired knowledge in order to help reform and reestablish their country’s former glory. The Americans hoped that by training the future leaders of the Chinese nation, they would be able to exact some amount of control over the development of the country.

Tsinghua, however, was more than just an institution for academic preparation. It was also a center of diaspora, one that created two significant periods of displacement in the students’

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lives: the first as Chinese preparing to temporarily settle in a country with an entirely different way of life; and the second, as returned Chinese who—after becoming accustomed to the Western ideals that once seemed so foreign to them when they were younger—now felt incongruous in their homeland. Ultimately, in addition to testing the students’ adaptability and resolve, such conditions would also force them to grapple with their conflicting identity as American-educated Chinese.

**Attempts at Reform and The Boxer Rebellion**

During the late 1800s, in the wake of internal rebellions and impending foreign threats, a crippled Qing court desperately sought measures to save their country from further disaster. In an attempt to reverse the tide, a “self-strengthening movement” began to take hold and ultimately culminated in the Hundred Days Reform of 1898. The Hundred Days Reform—led by Kang Youwei and his mentee Liang Qichao—advocated using Western technology and philosophy to facilitate social and institutional changes within China. In particular, it pushed for the creation of a constitutional monarchy. While the Emperor Guangxu supported the Hundred Days Reform, the movement was short lived. It abruptly ended when the Empress Dowager, backed by powerful conservative Qing officials, staged a coup d’état to gain control of the throne. Shortly afterwards, in an effort to quell all efforts at reform, the Empress Dowager began to purge and kill the reformers. Though Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were forced to seek refuge in Japan for almost 14 years, they would eventually return to China, where their writings and philosophies would continue to influence future Chinese leaders and scholars. In particular, Liang Qichao would play a pivotal role in shaping Liang Chao-wei’s educational pursuits and future endeavors.

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Though the Hundred Days Reform was ultimately crushed, this would not be the end of the reform period. Ironically, an anti-foreign movement known as the Boxer Rebellion would help usher in a new chapter of reform, and with it the welcoming of Western ideology through education. The rebellion began in rural, northern China and was led by a group known as the Righteous and Harmonious Fists. Motivated by extreme anti-foreign sentiments, the movement violently culminated in the Boxers attacking foreign residences, missionaries and eventually the legations in Beijing on June 20, 1900. In response, an eight-nation alliance was formed between Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Japan to end the siege on the legations and extinguish the Boxer movement.

On August 28th, as the Allied forces made their way into the Forbidden City, representatives from each country displayed their national colors in an attempt to “impress the Chinese court with a sense of humiliation, and convince the Chinese people of the victory of the foreign forces”.

Shortly after its defeat in the Boxer Rebellion, the Qing court signed a peace agreement known as the Boxer Protocol with the Eight-Nation Alliance on September 7, 1901. In addition to punishing high officials who supported the Boxers, the 12 Articles of the Protocol also called for a five-year suspension of the Confucian civil service exams in cities where foreigners were

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murdered and an indemnity of 450 million taels ($330 million U.S.) of which the US was apportioned 7.5% of the total, or roughly $25 million.\textsuperscript{7}

Interestingly, at the same time that China was experiencing a period of national weakness and humiliation, the United States was also in a period of transition. However, instead of faltering under the devastation of internal strife (recovering from the lingering effects of the American Civil War and the recent economic Panic of 1893), Americans openly embraced the idea of political and cultural reform, as evidenced by the Progressive Movement that began to take hold in the late 1890s. The movement stressed the importance of science and technology, especially as it related to education. As a result, the American educational system was revamped in order to better produce leaders in fields that could assist in America’s transition into an industrial society. Such optimism soon began to translate into bouts of superiority, as evidenced by author Henry James’ perception of the American attitude when he visited New York in 1904: “[Americans] have everything, don’t you see? Every capacity and appetite, every advantage of education and every susceptibility of sense…”\textsuperscript{8} (emphasis added). Ultimately, this sense of superiority, mixed in with a hint of morality and opportunism would help facilitate America’s future educational partnership with China.

**Under the Fragile Veneer of Friendship—A Plan to Develop Sino-American Relations**

When Theodore Roosevelt was elected president in 1901 he warned that if the United States was to maintain its position in the world it could not follow in China’s example. Roosevelt’s warning was partly influenced by his belief that the Chinese were an inferior people who were unable to efficiently manage their economy and government due to their unassertive personalities. However, despite his belittlingly views of the Chinese, Roosevelt nonetheless


\textsuperscript{8} Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 178.
believed that gaining control of China would be vital in advancing US influence around the world. His goal of befriending the Chinese nation in order to steer its development, however, would be hindered by years of mistreatment of the Chinese by the US government. In particular, the Chinese Exclusion Act was seen as a glaring impediment in developing Sino-American relations. In fact, in 1904 Supreme Court Justice David Brewer warned that if the maltreatment of the Chinese continued, the US would inevitably find a great adversary in China: “the careful student of history will recall the words of Scripture, ‘they have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind.’” While Roosevelt tried to heed these warnings by ordering immigration officers to treat Chinese students with greater respect, he ultimately signed the renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1904, out of fear of alienating voters on the West Coast during his bid for reelection.

How then could the US continue to maintain its exclusionary policies against the Chinese, while at the same time trying to advance Sino-American relations? In 1906, Edmund James, the President of the University of Illinois, sent a letter to President Roosevelt suggesting that education be a conduit in which to develop amiable relations with the Chinese people. More specifically, he advocated using the excess from the Boxer Protocol to support educating Chinese students in America. According to James:

The nation which succeeds in educating the young Chinese of the present generation will be the nation which for a given expenditure of effort will reap the largest possible returns in moral, intellectual, and commercial influence. If the United States had succeeded thirty-five years ago, as it looked at one time as if it might, in turning the current of Chinese students to this country, and had succeeded in keeping that current large, we should to-day be controlling the development of China in the most satisfactory and subtle of ways,—through the intellectual and spiritual domination of its leaders.

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10 U.S. v. Sing Tuck or King Do and Thirty-one Others, 194 U.S. 182 (1904).
James believed that the Chinese would be extremely receptive to the idea of sending its students to the United States, especially in light of the first Sino-Japanese War in which Japan’s victory over China had increasingly strained the relationship between the two countries. Though President Roosevelt initially believed such a proposal would be interpreted as an act of weakness, he ultimately decided to support the endeavor, stating that it would not only appease the Chinese over the renewal of the Exclusion Act but could also prevent future disturbances between the two countries. According to Roosevelt, now was “the time for the West to implant its ideals in the Orient, in such fashion as to minimize the chance of a dreadful future clash between two radically different and hostile civilizations; if we wait until to-morrow, we may find that we have waited too long”. The educational plan would also assist in increasing America’s presence in Asia in a strategically subtle way. By cultivating a friendship with China, the United States hoped to share in the country’s untapped economic resources through the training of its future business partners. By the same token, educating China’s future political leaders would cultivate a more amiable environment in which the U.S. could then advance its political agenda onto the Chinese government. While the benefits of such a policy could not be reaped as quickly as would be allowed under the standard terms of warfare, it did provide a more stable route in which to achieve these goals. For example, such a policy could be carried out without alarming Japan, whose rising global influence was hard to ignore. On May 25, 1908, a bill was passed promulgating that the excess from the Boxer Indemnity be used to set up a preparatory school that would train and develop about 100 students a year for their studies in America. While China would continue to pay the Boxer Indemnity, the bill stipulated that around $500,000 would be

returned annually to China to be used towards establishing and maintaining the preparatory school.\textsuperscript{15}

It may seem odd that the American government granted the excess funds solely to the Qing government, who was then responsible for setting up an official school in China, rather than directly having American missionaries use the funds to establish a school led by American administrators. However, as was the case with many of the other requirements of the bill, this too was intentional. According to Qing government regulations, only graduates from \textit{official} national schools could occupy high-ranking government offices. Therefore, if the U.S. government wanted to assert its political agenda onto China by influencing its prospective senior government officials it could not do this by educating them through an independent educational institution.\textsuperscript{16} However, just because the preparatory school was to be established under the Chinese government, did not mean it was free from American influence. Under the educational bill, the United States was granted the right to play a supervisory role over the school’s development on the basis that it was the primary funding body.\textsuperscript{17}

Interestingly, while such a policy may have been motivated by the United States’ desire to influence China’s future, many Americans also felt a sense of moral pride from such a benevolent act. In their minds, America was not only the first country to offer to return the

\textsuperscript{16} Su-Yan Pan, \textit{University Autonomy, the State, and Social Change in China} (Hong Kong: London: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 66-67.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
excess indemnity but they also did so with the hope of ameliorating China’s future. As mentioned before, the American’s thought highly of their educational system—believing it to be on par or even better than many European countries. Extending this opportunity to the Chinese was seen as an act of friendship—one that Americans hoped would be remembered and reciprocated, if needed, in the future.

Liang Chao-wei’s Early Life

Liang Chao-wei was born on January 20, 1900 in the county of Kaiping (Hoiping) in Guangdong Province. His father, Liang Dong, was a man of unusual characteristics for his time: born in 1857, he became an early Chinese Christian, which at the time was extremely uncommon. In fact, in addition to his nickname (ruming) “Dong Re,” people in his village often addressed him as “Christian Dong”—the name given to him by his Christian brethren. Perhaps even more remarkable was that in 1876 Liang Dong left Kaiping at the age of 19 to travel abroad to Portland, Oregon for employment. After several years, he relocated to Melbourne, Australia to establish an import trading company and a money exchange shop. With the success of his entrepreneurial businesses in America and Australia, Liang Dong returned to China and used the money he saved to set up similar business ventures in Hong Kong. These businesses also proved to be incredibly successful allowing Liang Dong to invest in other enterprises, such as land. Land was an especially important investment because culturally the Chinese have always viewed land ownership as a sign of not only personal success but also familial prosperity, in that it was something that could be passed on to the next generation.

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18 Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 44.
19 Jennifer Tang and Theresa Caples, interviewed by Raymond Liang, September 22, 2013, interview 1, transcript; Chaowei Liang, Liang shi zhui yuan lu (梁氏追遠錄), (1957), [S.l.]: Shuyu zhong xue chou bei chu.
Liang Dong, however, used his money for more than just personal gain; he also invested a great deal of his wealth into philanthropy. Coming from a family of scholars, Liang Dong was an avid supporter of education and eventually helped establish a school in Kaiping called Bó jiàn in order to improve the village’s literacy rate. He believed that doing so would facilitate the village’s economic growth by providing a more educated and skilled work force. Such philanthropic deeds eventually made Liang Dong a respected and well-known individual in Kaiping: he was widely regarded as a pioneer for education and vital in the training of future scholars in his home village.\(^{21}\)

It was thus only naturally that Liang Dong sent his son to Beijing at the age of nine, to continue his studies in the hopes that he would eventually be accepted into a prestigious university. Originally, when Chao-wei began applying for universities, he had wanted to attend Peking University (Beida). However, when he was not accepted into the university, a close family friend recommended that Liang Dong send his son to study at a newly established school in Beijing called Tsinghua College. This family friend was none other than the renowned Chinese scholar and reformer, Liang Qichao, who was currently serving as a guest lecturer at Tsinghua College.\(^{22}\)

Liang Dong’s association with Liang Qichao began when he befriended Qichao’s father, Liang Lianjian, who lived in the neighboring city of Xinhui. As a staunch proponent for reform, Liang Qichao advocated for changes in the country’s political system and heavily endorsed the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. When Yuan Shikai, the newly appointed President of the Republic, proclaimed himself as the Emperor of China in 1915, Liang Qichao and several military leaders led a revolt against Yuan Shikai (later to be known as the National Protection

\(^{21}\) Tang et al., September 22, 2013, interview 1; Chaowei Liang, Liang shi zhui yu yuan lu (梁氏追遠錄), (1957), [S.l.]: Shuyu zhong xue chou bei chu.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
Liang Dong travelled to Hong Kong where he learned about Liang Qichao’s efforts to overthrow Yuan Shikai. As a man who deeply loved his country, Liang Dong was troubled by China’s turmoil and sent a message to Liang Qichao informing him that he would support his revolutionary cause by offering his financial assistance. Liang Dong, however, ended up investing so much into the cause that he eventually became bankrupt. While Yuan Shikai’s plans to ascend the throne were thwarted, few people were ever made aware of Liang Dong’s sacrifice and involvement due to the secrecy needed to keep him safe from possible danger. Despite Liang Dong’s financial collapse, his support of Liang Qichao’s reform efforts would further facilitate the relationship between the two individuals and they eventually became close confidants. In fact, so much so that Liang Qichao eventually acted as a godfather (kiyea) to his son, Liang Chao-wei. He advised Liang Dong that now was the opportune time to send Chao-wei to Tsinghua. According to Liang Qichao, acceptance into Tsinghua would offer Chao-wei the opportunity to study abroad in America—an opportunity that would make him an incredibly valuable commodity to the newly reform-oriented Chinese government. Heeding Liang Qichao’s advice, Chao-wei took the competitive entrance exam and was subsequently granted admission into Tsinghua College in 1920.23

**China’s Reaction to the Educational Plan**

When China first received word that President Roosevelt was contemplating how best to utilize the returned indemnity, the Qing court took it as an opportunity to try to influence the

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23 Tang et al., September 22, 2013, interview 1; Chaowei Liang, Liang shi zhui yuan lu (梁氏追遠錄), (1957), [S.l.]: Shuyu zhong xue chou bei chu.
President’s decision. Echoing the sentiment of American leaders, several Chinese officials advocated that the money be best allocated towards education. For example, Sir Liang Cheng, the Chinese minister to Washington, D.C., argued that developing China’s education would reap future benefits on several fronts: first it would be agreeable to President Roosevelt’s intentions, second it would largely be supported by both the Chinese and American people, third it offered the possibility of improving China’s future in the long run, and lastly it would serve as an example for other Western countries to follow.\(^24\) However, Cheng’s plan was not universally supported. Some feared that sending their country’s brightest students to the United States could result in a brain drain: with some students refusing to return China, especially if they had lost their sense of national identity under American influences. Some Chinese, therefore, recommended that the money instead be allocated toward endeavors like mining and improving China’s railroad system and other infrastructure. Still others argued that China would be better strengthened if the money were used to develop a strong banking and financial system. Tang Shaoyi, an early foreign educated Chinese for example, believed that establishing a bank in Manchuria was far more advantageous than “distributing dynamics and moral philosophy in prize packages”.\(^25\)

Despite these differing views, when Congress passed the bill in 1908, official reaction to the proposed educational plan was, for the most part, positive and grateful. In particular, the Chinese government looked favorably upon the educational plan—viewing it as an opportunity to strengthen the future of the country. The president of the Board of Foreign Affairs (Waiwubu), Prince Qing, for example remarked that:

\(^{24}\) Hongshan Li, “From the Boxer Indemnity Remission to the Emergency Aid to Chinese Students: American Cultural Policy Toward China, 1905-1950” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, Columbia, 1992), 159.

Convinced by the happy results of past experience of the great value to China of education in American schools, the Imperial government has the honor to state that it is its intention to send henceforth yearly to the United States a considerable number of students, there to receive their education.26

Several converging factors ultimately convinced the Chinese government to send some of its students abroad to study in the United States. One factor was the abolition of the competitive civil service examinations in 1905, which had governed the relationship between ruler and government officials for more than 1,300 years. Second, several powerful court officials heavily endorsed the idea of sending students abroad.27 Viceroy Zhang Zidong, for example, believed that the quickest way to reform China was through education. Though he preferred sending students to Japan, he nonetheless endorsed scholarships for students pursuing education in the United States and Europe.28 Lastly, after the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese began to display a sense of xenophobia. Prior to the war, Chinese interest in Western education was not particularly high because most students and scholars interested in the West would simply study in Japan. Not only was it much cheaper to do so but the environment was also more familiar: Japan shared a script and custom similar to China (Confucianism). However, after Russia’s defeat, many Japanese felt that they were treated unfairly during the peace negotiations, causing a degree of acrimony to develop that would linger throughout the Japanese populace. As Chinese students became targets of Japan’s international frustrations, many Chinese students in Japan began to return home. In as little as five years, the number of Chinese students studying in Japan fell from a peak of 13,000 in 1905 to under 4,000 by 1910.29

Chinese public opinion towards the education plan, however, was not nearly as positive. Some Chinese viewed America’s good will with caution. The revolutionary newspaper Minbao,

29 Borthwick, Education and Social Change in China, 84.
for example, warned that it was a “long-range plan for cultivating Chinese traitors.” Regardless of these differing views, there was no turning back: the proposed educational plan was already in the works, prompting the Chinese government to quickly finalize logistical details in order that the first group of students could sit for the entrance examination into Tsinghua College, and if their studies proved fruitful, an American university.

**Life at Tsinghua College**

On April 29, 1911, Tsinghua Imperial College officially opened with an enrollment of 460 students. Admission into the school was granted based on exams that were administered at the provincial level or directly by the school at provincial capitals like Beijing and Shanghai. Initially, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education were divided about the purpose of Tsinghua. Though it was originally meant to be a one to two year language school, it was eventually designated an eight-year preparatory school when it was discovered that few candidates qualified for the initial exams. By the time Chao-wei entered the school in 1920, the program was further restructured from an eight-year training program to a four-year program. The first years focused on familiarizing students with American culture and etiquette and learning basic English, while the later years focused on developing advanced English skills and giving the students a broad liberal arts education that would allow them to succeed as upperclassmen when they transferred to American universities. To further increase the success of its students, Tsinghua tried to familiarize students with the structure of the American educational system by adopting a credit-based system for all its courses.

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31 Israel, “Draft History of Qinghua University,” 12; Li, “From the Boxer Indemnity Remission,” 183.
32 Pan, *University Autonomy, the State, and Social Change in China*, 74.
33 Ibid., 69.
Life at Tsinghua for Liang Chao-wei was very regimented—students rarely had the time to enjoy the beauty of the campus, which was established on the former garden of a Manchu prince. A bell situated near the campus’ lotus pond dictated the students’ activities during the day. A usual day at Tsinghua started at seven o’clock with the striking of the bell, which signaled the beginning of the day as students got dressed and made their way to the dining halls. From eight to noon, American teachers or overseas-trained Chinese teachers instructed students in mathematics, geography, English and American history. After lunch, students were instructed for another three hours, this time in subjects such as Chinese literature and history. These teachers were usually scholar-officials who had passed the now obsolete imperial exams and had to support themselves through teaching after the decline of the imperial court. From four to five o’clock, all students were expected to participate in physical exercise on the athletic field. After dinner, students were required to return to their classroom for study sessions that lasted from 7:30 – 9:30 PM. The last bell rang at ten, signaling the end of the day as students returned to their dormitories.34

The students were also very secluded from the outside world. The main gate of the school was heavily monitored; both in terms of people entering and exiting the campus. Outsiders, for example, were not allowed onto the campus, unless someone at the college—usually a student or teacher—vouched for them at the gate. Furthermore, the younger students were not allowed to leave the campus without prior consent from their guardians. During the three-week Chinese New Year vacation, for example, students were required to have a letter specifying the date and time they were allowed to leave the campus to return home.35

34 Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 55-56.
35 Ibid., 57.
Another unique aspect of the school was that in addition to academics, it also placed an unusually large emphasis on athletics. In fact Tsinghua’s fight song, “fight to the finish, never give in” (gan daodi, jue bu song jing) is a tribute to the role sports played in the school’s identity. Part of this was due to the belief that athletics would promote character and camaraderie amongst the students. Another reason was that early indemnity scholarship students were often physically weak, with many of them forced to return to China after falling ill during their studies. Such an occurrence became so common that they were soon jokingly referred to as being the “sick men of East Asia.”

To alter this perception, Tsinghua hired a physical education instructor in 1914, helping to raise the stature of the school’s athletics. During Chao-wei’s time at Tsinghua, the school set twenty national records and captured championships in track and field. The school further asserted its athletic prowess by winning championships in baseball, basketball and soccer at the 1924 North China competition—the most prominent regional athletic association at the time. At Tsinghua, Chao-wei was an accomplished sportsman himself, excelling in sports like archery.

While Tsinghua was designed to prepare students for future study in America, the school also tried to ensure that students maintained a connection to their Chinese roots. At times however, such a contradictory goal often created tension over the school’s supposed curriculum and identity. In fact, when British philosopher Bertrand Russell visited Tsinghua, his first impression of the university unexpectedly highlighted these underlying tensions. According to

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36 Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 71.
Russell, Tsinghua’s “atmosphere [was] exactly like a small American university.” In part this was due to Western studies being more heavily emphasized than Chinese studies in the school’s early days: except for the Chinese classics, the majority of classes at Tsinghua were conducted strictly in English. Furthermore, during the first two years that Chao-wei was at Tsinghua, Chinese studies courses did not carry any academic credit, even though they were still required for graduation. Such a policy caused students to look down on and neglect their Chinese courses.

In an effort to address this imbalance, Tsinghua made all Chinese courses credit bearing in 1922 and students were required to take six credits in Chinese studies before graduating—a policy that would take effect during Chao-wei’s final two years at Tsinghua.

In spite of these challenges, Tsinghua tried to create a balanced intellectual environment in which its students could be exposed to a variety of perspectives. The school regularly hosted lectures by both influential Chinese and American men. Famous American lecturers included John Dewey from Columbia University and Robert McElroy, President of Princeton University. Revered Chinese lecturers included men like Cai Yuanpei, the president of nearby Beida, Hu Shi, the leader of the New Literature Movement and Liang Qichao, the great reformer. It was during this time in the early 1920s that Liang Qichao became increasingly distant from his political work. After becoming disillusioned with China’s political development and the destruction of Europe following World War I, Liang Qichao subsequently turned to academia as a new way to influence the future leaders of China. In particular, he continued to have an immense influence on Chao-wei’s academic life: in addition to recommending him to Tsinghua, Liang Qichao also served as Chao-wei’s academic mentor during his studies at Tsinghua.

39 Pan, *University Autonomy*, 73.
40 Bieler, “*Patriots*” or “*Traitors*,” 69-70.
Conflicted Identities: Neither Chinese nor Westerners

When the Qing court abolished the extremely competitive civil service examinations in 1905, the fabric of Chinese society was put in a state of uncertainty. Prior to their elimination, the exams were often seen as a way to bring honor to one's family: becoming a scholar-official meant prestige and financial rewards. As a result, many Chinese began to view studying abroad in the West as the new route to attaining honor and power (liuxue zuoguan). Yet this sense of distinction was also tainted with a sense of national humiliation. After all, Tsinghua’s campus was located on a former Manchu prince’s garden that had been destroyed by the British and the French in 1860. It was perhaps no surprise then that while many students were honored to have the opportunity to study abroad, they also felt a bit of indignity in having to study Western subjects on a campus that was previously a site of Western imperialism. In an action that symbolized their conflicted emotions, students moved a broken pillar from the nearby Yuanming Garden—which had also been pillaged by the Allies—onto their campus,\(^\text{41}\) to serve as a poignant reminder of their purpose at Tsinghua: to import Western knowledge to China, in order to strengthen their country and restore national dignity. On a similar note, while students at Tsinghua complained that some of the courses focused too heavily on the greatness of America, many of these same students were also heavily influenced by the belief that “everything from the West [was] good and everything from China [was] bad” (yi qie wenwu xiyang bi hao, zhong guo bi huai).\(^\text{42}\) In fact, such perspectives were what fueled students’ disrespect towards their Chinese classics teachers—scholars who students believed were trapped in the past as they continued to revere the Qing dynasty and the teachings of Confucius.

\(^{41}\) Pan, *University Autonomy*, 72.
\(^{42}\) Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 69.
Such embracing of Western ideals, however, would cause many Tsinghua students to become targets of nationalistic attacks. Tsinghua was unique in that it was under the control of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whereas other universities were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. This was partly motivated by the fact that officials at the Ministry of Education were not entirely cooperative with the US ambassador who, under the initial educational agreement, was given administrative rights to certain areas of Tsinghua’s affairs. The US ambassador, for example, was involved in assigning students to American universities after their graduation from Tsinghua.\textsuperscript{43} One reason officials at the Ministry of Education may have been uncooperative was due to their educational background, which put them at odds with Tsinghua’s intended mission. Many of the top officials at the Ministry of Education were conservative and concerned with preserving traditional Chinese values. A number of them received their degrees from Japan—a country that shared similar Confucian values with China. This, however, was not the case with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the time, all the officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had graduated from St. John’s College, an American missionary institution in Shanghai. Furthermore, many of them had also gone on to continue their education at American universities. They were therefore more receptive towards embracing Western ideals than their counterparts at the Ministry of Education. Naturally, the ambassador found working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs far more accommodating and in 1912 governance of Tsinghua College was granted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\textsuperscript{44}

However, at a time when Chinese students were becoming increasingly nationalistic, such a distinction was quickly singled out. Students at neighboring universities like Peking University (Beida) and Beijing Teachers College (Shida), for example, would often ridicule

\textsuperscript{43} Pan, University Autonomy, 70.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 71.
students at Tsinghua, taunting them by saying things like “You are students in a school set up by foreigners (yang jiushen), while we are the real Chinese students,” and refer to them as the “running dogs of foreigners” (yang zou gou). Such sentiments from Chao-wei’s peers must have initially been difficult for him to tolerate, especially in light of his original desires to attend nearby Beida. These accusations however did not prevent Tsinghua students from participating in nationalistic campaigns like the New Culture Movement—a movement that was gaining popularity around the time Chao-wei was a student at Tsinghua. The movement advocated for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on Western ideals, such as democracy and science. As this cultural movement garnered more supporters it would eventually develop into a political movement known as the May Fourth Movement.

Despite Tsinghua’s seemingly contradictory attempts at educating its students in Western ideals all while trying to cultivating a deep sense of Chinese nationalism, many individuals—including some of its own students—felt that Tsinghua wasn’t entirely successful in developing students who were both Chinese and American. Instead, Tsinghua students inhabited an indefinable, grey zone: they were neither Chinese nor Westerners (bu zhong bu xi). In a sense, some questioned whether embracing reform and Western ideology made an individual less Chinese. Wen Yiduo, a 1922 Tsinghua graduate, addressed this very question by stating that:

In reality, these educated students with their Westernized habits, speech, writing, views, and thought, are the very ones to imperial China’s future because they have forgotten their cultural origins…There is more than one way to carry out cultural aggression. Under the pretext of returning the indemnity funds, certain foreign powers have sought to control the education and publishing enterprises of China.

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45 Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 57-58.
47 Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 74.
Surely such questions and doubts would continue to plague students like Liang Chao-wei as he prepared for and eventually continued his studies in America.

**Preparing for Study in America**

Since studying abroad became one of the new routes to achieving personal and familial honor (*guang zong yao zhu*), acceptance into Tsinghua was highly competitive as prospective students vied for the opportunity to “drink foreign ink” (*he yang moshui*). However, acceptance into Tsinghua was only half the challenge; graduating was the other. The school was known for its strict grading system. In fact, between 1911 and 1921, only 42 percent of students who entered Tsinghua graduated (636/1,500).49

When Liang Chao-wei graduated from Tsinghua in 1924, his next step was to begin making final preparations for his study in America. This included having a medical examination clearing him of trachoma and tuberculosis. After receiving medical clearance, Liang Chao-wei and other students were sent to Shanghai to acquire passports and other necessary travel documents. At the time, Shanghai was the financial and commercial hub of China. The city’s modernization took off after it was ceded to Britain in 1942, following China’s defeat in the Opium War, which opened up the coastal city to Western trade. There followed an uptick in international trade, transforming Shanghai into the country’s most cosmopolitan and westernized city. Many students therefore took this opportunity to buy Western attire and further familiarize themselves with other Western commodities. As the day of departure arrived, Liang Chao-wei would board a ship from Shanghai headed for California, where he was to continue his studies as a student at Stanford University.

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49 Israel, “Draft History of Qinghua University,” 42.
Life at Stanford University

The set up of Tsinghua was unusual in that middle school took four years to complete, while the last two years of high school were suppose to be equivalent to the first two years at an American college. To add to the confusion, early on in the school’s history, the word “high school” was used on the student’s graduation diploma. If an American university was unaware about the structure of Tsinghua, they automatically assumed that the student should start as a freshman.\(^5\) It seems, however, that Stanford was familiar with Tsinghua’s set up, as Liang Chao-wei was awarded transfer credit for his final two years of study at Tsinghua, allowing him to officially begin his studies as a junior at Stanford in the fall of 1924.

Like many other Tsinghua students, Chao-wei’s field of study would be partially dictated by the preferences of the Chinese government. In an effort to emulate the success and power of the United States, the Chinese advocated that the country could only be saved through science and technology and therefore deemed that 80% of the students sent overseas would study in fields related to engineering, architecture, agriculture and finance. However, after years of being mistreated by Western powers at treaty negotiations, the Chinese also recognized the need for trained diplomats who could properly represent the Chinese nation in the international arena. They therefore advocated for educating some students in fields related to government. This, along with his affiliation with the political workings of Liang Qichao, may have influenced Chao-wei to pursue a degree in Political Science at Stanford.

Liang Chao-wei’s time at Stanford would prove to be influential in shaping his future political ideals and associations. Particularly significant, was his involvement with the Chinese Students Club (CSC) at Stanford. While at Stanford, Chao-wei opted to reside in the Chinese Students Clubhouse. The Clubhouse was purchased from Stanford in 1920 with the purpose of

\(^5\) Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 68.
housing club members and providing them with a space in which to regularly interact and conduct various club activities. According to the club’s constitution, the residence was “to remain as ‘a house for all Chinese’ but with all races invited to mix and integrate in fostering international fellowship.”

In the early years of the club, membership was heavily comprised of foreign-born Chinese students. From 1922-1928, for example, the percentage of foreign-born members in the club ranged from 78%-86%. Such a network offered a degree of familiarity that must have been extremely beneficial to foreign-students like Chao-wei, especially as he tried to adjust to his new life in America. Perhaps even more reassuring was the fact that out of all the major cities in China at the time, Chao-wei’s hometown of Canton (Guangzhou) was also the most represented in the club. When the club was founded in 1916, 86% of the members were from Canton. In the years when Chao-wei was a student at Stanford, 28% of the club’s members were from Canton, compared to 17% from Anwhei, 11% from Beijing, and 6% from Shanghai. Amongst other benefits, coming from the same hometown offered the familiarity of a common language: while residents from Beijing predominantly spoke Mandarin, like most residents from Canton, Chao-wei was more comfortable speaking in his native Cantonese dialect. The group’s diverse make up, however, also caused some logistical tensions within the club. During the 1920s, for example, members were unsure of what the official designated language of the club should be:

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52 Ibid., 18.
53 Ibid., 19.
English, Mandarin or Cantonese. Though the meeting minutes were almost always recorded in English, they often also included Chinese characters and translations. Even though it was eventually decided that English would remain the official language of the club, the club continued to hold Mandarin-Cantonese language exchange classes in the 1920s to help bridge these linguistic differences.\footnote{Stanford University. Chinese Student Club (1916-1963). Minute book. Stanford Digital Repository. Chinese Students Club (CSC) meeting minutes, 10 October 1919.}

The issue of language is interesting because it is directly related to the identity of the group and its members. While all members of the CSC could speak English, the conscious decision to amend the official language to Mandarin or even Cantonese is an indication of how these foreign-born Chinese students at Stanford tried to maintain and honor their connection to their homeland. As mentioned before, such an issue was of extreme concern to Chinese students studying in America, particularly those from Tsinghua, who had been accused of being tainted by Western ideology. Whether such language debates were motivated by patriotic intent or guilt, the students hoped that utilizing Mandarin instead of English would be a testament of their loyalty to their country—that despite the influences of American culture they were still deeply Chinese. The idea that language could possibly quantify “Chineseness” can be further supported by the fact that by the early 1940s, the demographic of the club became dominated by native-born Chinese students and the issue of language was never brought up again.

The subtle nationalistic implications of language were only one area of political concern to the members. In fact, in the club’s early history, political issues were the most common topic of discussion during meetings. This may have been due to several related factors: first, during the 1910s and 1920s China was in severe political turmoil. Second, since the demographic makeup of the club was predominantly foreign-born Chinese students, many of its members were
naturally concerned with the state of their country. As evidenced by the meeting minutes, the club heavily supported the development of the Chinese Republic, particularly the Nationalist Party. For example, it held an annual celebration on October 10 to commemorate the start of the Wuchang Uprising, an event that eventually led to the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and marked the symbolic establishment of the Chinese Republic.

The political activities of the club, however, were not limited to Stanford’s campus. In fact, the club’s political fervor and activism helped facilitate students’ engagement with the surrounding Bay Area community, particularly in cities with large Chinese communities like San Francisco and Berkeley. The club, for example, routinely distributed information about the Nationalist Party and ongoing political events in China to members within these communities. Even more impressive, in 1922 the club produced a play in San Francisco to support the Nationalist government, “with the proceeds of the first two days to go towards keeping the Southern (or Nationalist) government and the returns of the third day to be put to the use of our club house.”

The club also networked with other Chinese students at nearby universities, particularly with the Chinese community at UC Berkeley. The two groups engaged in various activities together, ranging from social events, such as athletics and formal dances, to political activism. For example, on October 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1924—a meeting in which Liang Chao-wei was present—the club discussed the detaining of several Chinese students in California. Though the specifics of the event were not recorded in the minutes, the members were most likely discussing an incident connected to the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924 (which included the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924). In effect, the Immigration Act of 1924 sought to further limit the number of immigrants into the United States by first lowering the percentage quota from 3% to 2% and then

\footnote{CSC meeting minutes, 24 February 1922.}
moving to a proportion system, where total immigration would be limited to 150,000. It also sought to completely exclude immigrants from Asia by allowing the US government to deny the entry of any individual based solely on race or nationality.\(^{56}\) In response to the passing of the new law, the club members discussed the possibility of creating some sort of coalition amongst college students across the United States, or at the very least with “colleges along the coast.” Eventually it was decided that the secretary was “to write another letter to the U.C. Club about the question.”\(^{57}\) Such collaborations between the Chinese Clubs at Stanford and Berkeley were quite common, with both groups recognizing the mutual benefits of such interactions. According to the CSC at Stanford, such opportunities, allowed an “ample opportunity for fostering closer contact and comradeship among the students of the two universities and other institutions.”\(^{58}\)

This was certainly the case for Liang Chao-wei, who would later form a relationship with a Berkeley student named William Knowland. William Knowland would eventually go on to have an influential career as a prominent American politician whose political weight and authority would later be of use to Liang Chao-wei as he sought assistance in immigration matters. Though the details about how they became acquainted are unclear, the CSC at Stanford certainly played a pivotal role. Without the club there would be little to no impetus to initiate such intercollegiate interactions and without these interactions, the Chinese students at Stanford would have most likely remained isolated on campus. Through social and political activities, the CSC enabled students to expand their networking capabilities beyond the immediate campus and form relationships with members outside the Stanford community which would not have naturally formed otherwise.


\(^{57}\) CSC meeting minutes, 2 October 1924.

\(^{58}\) CSC meeting minutes, 6 November 1916.
On April 2, 1926, Liang Chao-Wei was awarded a bachelor’s degree in Political Science from Stanford University. He then spent two quarters at the University of Chicago before continuing his studies as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University. His final dissertation, titled “Federal Government as Applied to China,” argued that the Western concept of government based on the rule of law was far too remote and foreign to the Chinese, who had for centuries been governed by the Confucian idea of government led by example of a divine ruler. According to Chao-wei, because of China’s current political turmoil, establishing governmental integrity and stabilization were of paramount importance. He, therefore, recommended that instead of mimicking the Western rule of federalism, a unitary form of government should first be adopted in order to limit the rise of excessive localism. Upon the successful completion of his dissertation, Chao-wei was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University on June 10, 1930.

**Returning to China**

Though the students at Tsinghua had expected and prepared for the challenges they would face studying abroad in the United States, many were surprised to find their journey back home to be as equally challenging. Part of this challenge stemmed from internal struggles: after spending four or more years studying and acclimating to life in America many of the students had developed new friendships. As difficult as it may have been to admit, American culture had influenced these students. As one returned student phrased it “in America I had measured things American by the Chinese yardstick. Now I reversed the process, measuring things Chinese with the American yardstick, or most likely with a sort of hybrid stick…vacillating between the

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59 Chao-wei Liang, “Federal Government as Applied to China” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md, 1930).
two. In effect, these returned students experienced two significant periods of displacement: the first when they were sent abroad to study in America and the second when they were required to return to their homeland after having acclimated to their new life in America.

Even though this “hybrid stick” highlighted the adaptability of these students, it also confirmed the doubts that the original opponents of the educational missions laid forth. It certainly did not help that many of the returned students exhibited a sense of pride that was often construed as arrogance. For example, in 1917, Chinese minister Wellington Koo noted that:

> It does not always occur to [the returned student] that men who are senior to him in age may have learned from experiences something which he did not get from books…by his pride mingled with intolerance of opposition he offends the sensibilities of men of the old school of thought and courts their enmity rather than winning their sympathy and support to his ideas and to his ways of looking at life.61

The need to win approval from those with seniority was especially key for the returned students because the support and success of the educational missions had always been dependent on those in power. In other words, while key officials in the Qing court may have initially viewed the educational plan favorably, their successors might not have had the same outlook. This was especially true during the economic and political instability of the 1920s and 30s, when the leaders of Republican China began treating many of the returned students with contempt and suspicion. The students’ liberal beliefs, independent stance, and candidness—all virtues that were extolled in America—were now areas of weakness to be vehemently targeted by their enemies. As the KMT and the Communists began to vie for power, returned students like Liang Chao-wei found themselves caught in between the two contending powers: they were either too liberal for the KMT or too conservative for the Communists. Eventually though, the returned

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students would be forced to pick a side—a decision that would indelibly shape their future discourse.

Yet, despite these challenges many returned students were still able to assert some influence in fields like teaching and educational policy. Schools like Tsinghua University and Nankai University famously built their faculty around returned students. In 1937, for example, 73% (69/94) of Tsinghua’s full professors were made up of returned students who trained in America. Similarly, Nankai University hired graduates from American universities like Princeton University when it was establishing its “science quartet.”

Almost immediately after returning to China in 1930 Liang Chao-wei was hired as a law professor by National Sun Yat-sen University. He would go on to contribute his expertise in political studies by joining the faculty of Political Science at schools like Central University (中央大學) and National Chung Cheng University (中正大學). During the second Sino-Japanese war, Chao-wei assisted in wartime efforts by teaching special courses at several military academies in China. He served, for example, as a graduate professor of Political Science at the Yantang Military Academy and also briefly instructed at the Whampoa Military Academy in Guangzhou where he taught advanced and honor courses in political studies to the Academy’s fourth graduating class.

Returned students also made inroads in research. For example, they were well represented in the prestigious Academia Sinica, a national think tank. In fact, in 1948 an

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62 Bieler, “Patriots” or “Traitors,” 318.
astonishing 93% of the fellows were Western trained (75 out of 81) with American-educated Chinese being the largest cohort (52 out of 75).\(^4\) Though Chao-wei was not involved with the Academia Sincia, he did play a founding role in the Chinese Political Science Association, which was established by the Chinese government on September 1, 1932. At the association’s inaugural meeting held at Central University in Nanjing, the association’s 45 founding members—who were recognized by the government as being experts in the field of political science—were in attendance;\(^5\) among them was Liang Chao-wei. As a prolific and avid writer, Chao-wei also influenced others through his writing by first serving as the director of the Hunan Provincial Government Gazette and later as the President of Hunan National Daily Newspaper.\(^6\)

![Liang Chao-wei speaking at the inaugural Chinese Political Science Association meeting, September 1, 1932.](image)

At the same time that the KMT government sought to limit the returned students’ influence and their overt critiques of the government, it also realized that it could utilize the students’ unique skills and knowledge to its advantage. This tenuous relationship granted the students some autonomy in which to carry out their goals. For many, this often came in the form of holding political positions in the new Republic. In fact, a census of returned students in 1918

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\(^{6}\) Parliamentary Library Legislative Yuan, accessed September 22, 2013.
found that of the 950 individuals surveyed, an astonishing 806 were employed in government service.\(^67\) It perhaps comes as no surprise then that for a student who had devoted his studies to politics and government, Liang Chao-wei would go on to have a life long career in politics upon returning to China. In addition to teaching, he served as the Gaoming district executive for a number of years before working as a consultant for the Guangdong Provincial government. He was also eventually selected to act as the Chief Secretary of the Fisheries Management Office and later appointed to be an advisor for the National government. When the KMT government relocated to the island of Taiwan after the Communist takeover, Chao-wei would also serve as a member of the first Legislative Yuan.\(^68\)

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the students sent abroad from Tsinghua were placed with Herculean goals and expectations. They were seen as potential saviors of the country: tasked with lifting China from foreign oppression and unjust treaties, establishing a parliamentary style government and a modern military, and developing the country’s commerce by creating a new financial system. Yet China’s rapidly changing economic and political landscape would prevent such goals from happening. As an article in the Chinese Students’ Monthly put it, despite the students best efforts and intentions, their actions were like “drops of rain, which, having fallen into a polluted stream immediately mix with the water with little effect of purgation.”\(^69\) The polluted streams of the late 1920s caused by the warring warlords prevented students from affecting any sweeping changes. From the 1930s to the 1940s, the students contended with the KMT government, who despite seeking the expertise of the students, did not welcome overt...
dissent. As students like Liang Chao-wei tried to find a position of stability amid these waves of transition, little did they know that a new wave was approaching: one that would drastically impact not only their lives but millions of others and forever change the country they so desperately loved and served.
Part 2: Refugees in the Pearl of the Orient

As I sit across the table from my aunts, Jennifer and Theresa, I decide to take the opportunity to explain to them the nature of my project while we wait for my other aunts, Joan and Rose, to arrive. They’ve gone to visit my grandmother’s grave, something all my aunts do whenever they come visit New York: a sort of pilgrimage to pay their yearly respects to their mother. Being spread out across North America makes it difficult for the family to come together, except on rare instances like the occasional wedding, or graduation. Thus, having them all coordinate their schedules in order to come together for a few days to talk about their diasporic experiences is therefore a really meaningful gesture and an invaluable opportunity to learn more about my family’s history.

After an hour past our appointed meeting time, the three of us decide to begin the interview, agreeing the others can join in once they arrive. I start by asking Jennifer and Theresa about the family’s reaction to the rather swift rise of Mao Zedong and the Communists who, after taking hold of northern China, turned their focus towards seizing the territories south of the Yangtze River. On the top of their priorities was capturing the Nationalist capital of Nanjing, which they were finally able to do on April 23, 1949, after only four days of occupying the city. At the time of the capital’s surrender, Jennifer explains that her father was working as a government official in Nanjing. Due to the Communists unforeseen capture of the capital he was required to make a last minute escape from the city: “my father was still in the capital when the Communists came,” she explains. “He was one of the last ones to leave the capital and he took one of the last planes from Nanking back to Canton.”70

Canton, as it turns out, was where the KMT had decided to retreat to after the fall of Nanjing and perhaps, more importantly, it was also where Chao-wei’s family was currently

70 Jennifer Tang and Theresa Caples, interviewed by Raymond Liang, October 22, 2013, interview 2, transcript.
residing. Sensing the ever-increasing presence of the Communists and the danger his family was in, Chao-wei wasted no time in making arrangements to relocate his family to Hong Kong. Jennifer, for example, tells me that after arriving to Canton from Nanjing her father “immediately took the three of us [Jennifer, Theresa, and Joan] to Hong Kong the next day. He left in such a hurry; he didn’t take anything with him. Just some money.”

Chao-wei’s wife, Kwan Lai-Fong—who was also pregnant with their fifth child at the time—agreed to remain behind with their youngest daughter, Rose, in order to pack up as much of the family’s necessary belongings before reuniting with the rest of the family in Hong Kong. As I hear this, I cannot imagine the state of chaos and panic the family was thrown into, and ask Jennifer to elaborate on what she remembers of the experience. “I remember the house was in chaos… My mother had to throw away a lot of stuff…the house was [so] empty and all the furniture was gone…and my mother was also pregnant at that time [with your father]. Rose was only three years old. It was really difficult,” she explains.

While the family’s impromptu relocation necessitated Lai-Fong to temporarily remain behind to settle the family’s affairs, everyday she remained in Canton put her and her daughter closer to danger as the Communists were quickly making ground on the rest of China. Shortly after the fall of Nanjing, Communist forces made their way into Wuhan, the commercial and industrial stronghold of the middle Yangtze region. By May 27, 1949, Communist forces had taken control of Shanghai, China’s financial stronghold, and many believed the rest of China

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71 Jennifer Tang and Theresa Caples, interview 2, transcript.
72 Ibid.
would shortly follow. As these and other cities fell under Communist control, police forces were dispatched to search out individuals that the new regime identified as its most threatening enemies: war criminals, leaders of secret societies, and prominent Nationalist officials who had not had the chance to escape from China yet. Police, for example, would often enter the homes of individuals who had connections to the old regime and search for intel or forbidden items. Though mass executions and public displays of violence were not yet in order, behind closed doors the Communists were brutally swift in dealing with their enemies. In Shanghai, several hundred people identified as “counter-revolutionaries” were shot in the months after December 1949. In Hebei province, almost 20,000 people were executed within a year of the city’s fall to the Communist. Many others were interrogated relentlessly and kept under close surveillance by the police.

The impending arrival of the Communists was, therefore, perhaps made even more dangerous given the fact that Lai-Fong was the wife of a Nationalist government official. In fact, shortly after Chao-wei departed for Hong Kong, Jennifer informs me that her mother received a letter from an individual—most likely a Communist supporter—imposing as her husband. In the letter, the impersonator reassured Lai-Fong that the Communists were friendly and that there was no need for her to leave Canton since the Communists would not harm her or the family. Lai-Fong was unsure about what to make of the letter: though the handwriting in the message was very similar to Chao-wei’s, she remained skeptical about its validity. After seeking out a relative’s advice on the authenticity of the letter, she ultimately decided to ignore the letter and continue on with the family’s original plan of relocating to Hong Kong.

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74 Ibid., 45-46, 48-49.
Naturally, after hearing such stories I automatically assumed that such a time period would have been especially traumatic for everyone involved. However, contrary to my expectations, Jennifer and Theresa’s initial reaction to the family’s sudden relocation is surprisingly muted. Theresa explains this by stating, “We didn’t have any strong feelings because we were too young to really know about or understand the political situation.”75 While their young age may have prevented them from fully understanding the family’s precarious circumstances, I suspect they were also probably shielded from the truth. Jennifer reaffirms this notion, stating that nobody told them why they were moving to Hong Kong: “my Dad didn’t tell us anything. He just told us we were moving to Hong Kong and brought us to a hotel.”76 It was perhaps this conscious effort to minimize the consequences of such events that made the sisters sudden displacement less traumatic than expected.

Lai-Fong and her daughter, Rose, remained in Canton for the remainder of the summer before eventually taking a train to Hong Kong. While they were able to escape Canton before the Communists occupied the city in October 1949, other members of the Liang family were not as fortunate. Lai-Fong’s parents were wealthy landowners in the village of Chikan in Kaiping County. Her father, Kwan Ping-Fong, had traveled to Canada at the age of 17 as a laborer for the Canadian Pacific Railway. After almost ten years of living in Canada, he finally returned to China where he invested his money into becoming a landowner.77 In 1949, as the Communist forces advanced further south, Lai-Fong’s father decided to temporarily leave for Hong Kong with his daughter. Her mother, Chow Yen Tai Kwan, however, decided to remain behind to look after the house and property. Finding this decision rather odd and dangerous, I ask Jennifer and

76 Jennifer Tang and Theresa Caples, interview 2, transcript.
77 Ibid.
Theresa if they know why she refused to leave Chikan. Theresa explains that her grandmother’s decision was based on the fact that “the family had buried all their gold in the walls of the house and [my grandmother] was worried about leaving the house unattended to. She decided she would be okay staying behind to look after the house and property because she thought the Communist takeover was only temporary. So she ended up not leaving.”

Her assumption about the Communists, however, proved to be inaccurate. When the Communists arrived, they demanded she turn over all her possessions. When she refused to do so, they beat and tortured her—forcing her to kneel on glass, before ransacking the house and taking the hidden gold.

Though she survived the ordeal, the attack left her crippled for the rest of her life.

The story leaves me stunned and a bit ashamed. For years, I have passed by a picture of my great grandmother in my living room—her tiny hunched over figure supported by a feeble looking cane—never once contemplating why she was handicapped. It is, simply put, an eye-opening story and one that makes me conscious of the fact that as a society we are often solely fixated on the strength and nobility of men: the so-called heroes of the story. But in this instance I am amazed by the strength of Chow Yen Tai Kwan—a petite woman who was not only tortured by soldiers but, even more remarkably, survived the ordeal. As it turns out, resilience is an attribute exhibited by many women in the Liang family—something I quickly discover during the course of my interview.

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78 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
79 Ibid.
**Hong Kong: A City of Refugees**

“We chose to go to Hong Kong because we needed to get out of China as quickly as possible,” answers Joan in response to my question regarding why the family decided to relocate to the British colonial city. “Since it was the closest city to Canton outside of China, our parents decided that it would be the easiest option for us. Especially since we had such a large family to move. When we left for Hong Kong there was a feeling that the move would be an indefinite one. We did not have a sense of when we would be allowed to return to China,” she explains. 80

Hong Kong was also an appealing location for many Chinese refugees to relocate to because movement into the city was not particularly difficult at the time. There was no geographic feature that formed a natural frontier demarcating the border or impeding movement into the city and even though Hong Kong was a British colonial city, the British government never heavily monitored the border.

The government’s policy of unrestricted movement between China and Hong Kong was grounded on the colonial city’s historic relationship with China. Economically, Hong Kong served as an entrepôt for the rising market in China and its colonial economic policy allowed greater freedom for buyers and itinerant traders. Socially, the people of Hong Kong and China shared close familial and cultural ties, particularly with neighboring Guangdong province. Politically, the city, under the attentive rule of the British, had reconciled itself to the notion as a safe haven for refugees during times of economic and political turmoil on the mainland. During and after World War II, for example, the Hong Kong government cited “humanitarian reasons” for its lax border control: “immigrants were admitted on humanitarian grounds alone…Hong Kong accepted the burden which they brought with them in the name of humanity.” 81

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80 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
these factors contributed to a sense of “territorial fluidity” that facilitated the transnational movement of people between Hong Kong and China.\(^{82}\) In fact, movement between the two regions had become so common that Norwegian diplomat Edvard Hambro—who would later be appointed to carry out a study regarding the refugee crisis in Hong Kong after the arrival of the Communists—noted that “ingress and egress of the Chinese population between Kwangtung (Canton), the nearest province, and Hong Kong [was] as normal and easy as turning the palm of the hand.”\(^{83}\) Despite these facts, as a millennial accustomed to the formality of passports and visas when traveling outside one’s country, I remain skeptical about such territorial fluidity and ask the sisters if they encountered any difficulties entering Hong Kong. To my surprise they corroborate Hambro’s assessment by stating that travel into and out of Hong Kong was analogous to someone traveling between two states in the United States.\(^{84}\)

However, while the government was sympathetic to the plight of the refugees, it also began to realize the need to control the flow of people entering the city to a manageable level, especially in light of the deteriorating situation in China. Thus, in April 1949, the Hong Kong government introduced several immigration regulations. All Chinese immigrants, except those from Guangdong, were now required to present visas or permits. Immigrants were also required to register and apply for identity cards, and the process of identifying and deporting illegal immigrants was simplified.\(^{85}\) Luckily, even though these new policies were passed several months before the Liang family decided to immigrate to Hong Kong, they were exempt from such regulations because they were residents of Guangdong Province.


\(^{84}\) Jennifer Tang and Theresa Caples, interview 2, transcript.

\(^{85}\) Hambro, "Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 71; Mark, "The ‘Problem of People’: British Colonials, Cold War Powers, and the Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 1147.
The governor of Hong Kong, Alexander Grantham, also strongly opposed introducing tighter immigration regulations because he argued that doing so would economically harm the port city by stifling trade and causing opposition amongst the Chinese who had become accustomed to entering the city without prior registration. Furthermore, the view of Hong Kong as simply an asylum for the refugees contributed to the false belief that their stay in Hong Kong would only be temporary. Grantham believed that new immigration policies were not necessary because historically the movement of people into Hong Kong was not a one-way phenomenon. The city, for example, had experienced sharp increases in its population during the Sino-Japanese war, only to have the population return to normal levels after the end of the war. He, therefore, held the view that once the situation in China had stabilized, the refugees would return to the mainland and the population of the city would once again return to a manageable level. To him, the problem was neither a permanent one nor a new one. However, while this had usually been the case throughout Hong Kong’s history, Grantham would soon discover that the arrival of the Communists created an entirely different situation that would forever change the city’s future. As immigrants continued to flood into Hong Kong, the government was forced to introduce a daily quota system in May 1950 and, at the same time, wire the border and turn back any refugees trying to enter the city.86

Transitioning to Life in Hong Kong

Upon arriving to Hong Kong, Chao-wei and his three daughters were left without a place to stay: the new house Chao-wei had commissioned to be built in Diamond Hill would not be completed for a few more months. Having taken almost nothing with them, the family was required to find lodging at a hotel. Upon hearing this, my prejudices creep in once again, and I

86 Louis, "Hong Kong: The Critical Phase, 1945-1949," 1079; Mark, "The ‘Problem of People’: British Colonials, Cold War Powers, and the Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 1148; Peterson, "To be Or Not to be a Refugee," 175.
ask the sisters to describe the difficulties they experienced adjusting to their new living conditions. To my surprise, they laughingly tell me that their months living in a hotel were “some of the best times of their life.” Slightly bewildered, I ask them to elaborate on what they mean by this. Theresa fittingly explains their sentiment through an anecdote, detailing what she and her sisters would do for entertainment:

Downstairs of the hotel we lived in was a department store, and at that time if you brought a shirt or something they didn’t put it in a bag; they just wrapped it up in tissue paper with a few rubber bands. And so there were always a lot of rubber bands on the floor. It was during the summer and we had nothing to do, so Jennifer and I would always go downstairs to pick up the rubber bands and string them together to make a rope to hang our underwear on after we washed them in the bathtub.  

Not everyone had as good of a time though. Joan, who was only four years old at the time, remembers being bullied by her older sisters. Upon hearing this, Jennifer and Theresa erupt into laughter. “Oh yes!” exclaims Jennifer. “We used to tell her she was too young to come downstairs with us to collect rubber bands!” Unfortunately for Joan, this often meant staying behind and being relegated to the task of washing the undergarments. As the sisters continue to laugh about the experience, I too cannot help but to smile. Though I have not been able to identify with many of their experiences, navigating the challenges of sibling relations is one thing I can relate to.

Interestingly, the only other memory that all three sisters share during this time was the experience they had going to an American restaurant in Hong Kong with their father. The restaurant, Niunai Gongsi, specialized in serving American breakfast and offered its customers the rare chance to drink fresh milk. Such a beverage was a commodity because “at the time not too many people had access to fresh milk. Only powered milk was readily available,” explains

87 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
88 Ibid.
For the sisters, the restaurant was an experience of firsts: it was the first time they had an American breakfast that consisted of novel foods such as sunny side eggs, pancakes, sausages and of course, fresh milk. “When we ordered the sunny side eggs, our father taught us how to cut around the yolk…to cut away the egg white, so that you could then use the fork to put it under the yolk and suck up the yolk,” recalls Theresa. Laughing, Jennifer states “I remember thinking: Oh! That’s the American way to eat an egg.”\textsuperscript{90} Much to my surprise, it was also the first time the sisters used Western utensils, like forks and knives—an event marred by their father’s instruction to never put the knife in their mouth or they would run the risk of cutting their tongue!

Hearing this anecdote, I find it interesting that that this was perhaps the first time Chao-wei shared his knowledge of American culture and etiquette with his family. Thus, despite being more westernized than his peers Chao-wei also made a conscious effort to raise his family in a more traditional Chinese culture. I cannot help but wonder if the accusations Tsinghua students faced for being “traitors” because of their westernization may have played a role in Chao-wei’s efforts to minimize his Western upbringing. In any case, for the sisters who had limited knowledge of the West, the restaurant left an indelible impression. “We felt so important,” explains Theresa, “because it was a very high class restaurant.”\textsuperscript{91}

Not everyone, however, was entirely pleased with the outing. Not shortly afterwards, Lai-Fong arrived to Hong Kong and was dismayed that her husband had spent so much money on the children. Even worse, with summer quickly coming to an end, her husband had not yet found a school for the children to attend. The situation was made even more difficult because their house was still not completed when Lai-Fong arrived, forcing the family of six to continue living in a hotel. Things were about to get more stressful when Lai-Fong gave birth to her fifth child, a son,

\textsuperscript{89} Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
on October 28th 1949. Jennifer recalls, “When your father [George] was born we were still in the hotel. I remember going to the hospital to get him and some people in the hotel complained about the noise of the baby.”92 It is amazing to think about the circumstances surrounding my father’s birth: from my grandmother fleeing China while still pregnant with him, to him being delivered at a time when so much uncertainty and change was occurring. Like my great grandmother’s story, hearing this anecdote for the first time is an incredibly humbling experience. Luckily, for the family their house in Diamond Hill was completed shortly after my father’s birth, allowing the family to finally begin to settle into their new lives and establish what they believed would be their permanent roots in the burgeoning city of Hong Kong.

**The Conundrum of “Relative Eligibility”**

In April 1952, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Advisory Committee authorized “an investigation of the position and of the possibilities for the solution of the problem of the Chinese refugees [in Hong Kong].”93 The report, which was carried out by Edvard Hambro, spanned a three-month period from April to August 1954. While the report was able to conclude that around 667,000 or 29.6% of the city’s 2.25 million inhabitants were refugees from the mainland,94 the issue of eligibility was a far more difficult question to answer, in part, because of the sensitive political factors surrounding the refugee situation. In order to meet the UNHCR mandate for refugee status, an individual had to meet two conditions: 1) the

92 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
94 Ibid., 27, 29.
refugee was unable or unwilling to avail himself of his national government’s protection because he “had well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality or political opinion” and 2) because of these fears fled or was unwilling to return to his country of nationality.\textsuperscript{95}

In regards to determining if the refugees had a “well-founded fear of persecution,” Hambro admitted that it was impossible to check on an individual level the validity of such claims. He was willing, however, to extend them legal refugee status under the belief that such fears were “seldom entirely without foundation,” especially in a country that was experiencing a civil war.\textsuperscript{96} Furthermore, he acknowledged that while many were not refugees in the legal sense, they could be considered refugees under a broader sociological and humanitarian sense: “they are uprooted. They are aliens. They cannot return to their own country. They face the future with despair and have lost their initiative,” he reasoned.\textsuperscript{97}

The real issue, however, lay in what Hambro described as the “duality” of Chinese governments, or the existence of “two Chinas” after 1949—the People’s Republic of China on the mainland and the Republic of China on the island province of Taiwan. The problem that divided the international community revolved around the status of these immigrants and whether they were indeed eligible for UN assistance. If the People’s Republic of China had been the only internationally recognized government of China, then the relocated Chinese living in Hong Kong would have undoubtedly qualified as refugees under the UNHCR mandate. However, the issue was complicated by the fact that some states recognized the PRC while others only recognized the ROC. For the states that recognized the PRC, asylum should be granted to the immigrants under the UNHCR, because the immigrants would have been viewed as political refugees with

\textsuperscript{95} Peterson, "To be Or Not to be a Refugee," 174; Hambro, "Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 73.

\textsuperscript{96} Hambro, The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 32.

\textsuperscript{97} Hambro,"Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 74.
no government that could offer them protection and no country of citizenship that they were willing to return to. Most states at the time, however, officially recognized the ROC. For these states, the immigrants were not technically refugees from a legal standpoint, since they could theoretically be offered protection by the Nationalist government without fear of persecution. From their vantage point, the immigrants should therefore not be offered assistance under the UNHCR mandate. If a country who recognized the ROC were to offer assistance to these immigrants, they would then also be implying that the immigrants were victims of their own communist government and this in turn would amount to a tacit recognition of the PRC! Hambro coined the conundrum a problem of “relative eligibility.”

The situation was even more confusing for a country like Great Britain. Motivated by a desire to appease the communist regime in China and maintain its rule in Hong Kong, the British declared in January 1950 that it would establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, thereby becoming one of the only western powers to officially recognize the communist country during the Cold War era. Under such conditions, the British government should therefore have recognized these immigrants as refugees under the UNHCR mandate. Hong Kong, however, was not subject to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees because even though the United Kingdom was a signatory of the agreement, it did not extend its application to Hong Kong on the grounds that doing so would have challenged the PRC’s assertion that Hong Kong was Chinese territory and force an antagonistic response from China. Legally, the refugees in Hong Kong were, therefore, not technically entitled to any assistance from the government.

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98 Mark, "The ‘Problem of People’: British Colonials, Cold War Powers, and the Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 1159-1160; Peterson, "To be Or Not to be a Refugee," 174; Hambro, "Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 74-75; Hambro, The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 33.

99 Peterson, "To be Or Not to be a Refugee," 174; Burns, "Immigration from China and the Future of Hong Kong," 670.
Perhaps even more bizarre, the ROC was one of the five permanent members of the United Nations. In theory, the UN was, therefore, obligated to not recognize these immigrants as refugees because to do so would result in serious complications. As Hambro pointed out it would be unusual for the UN to “act as if the Government which has a seat in the organization is not the legal Government of the country in question.” Thus, under such obligations the immigrants could not be considered refugees and would not be afforded any rights under the UNHCR mandate, on the grounds that they could be offered protection by the ROC government. Taking all these various scenarios and factors into consideration the only legitimate case in which the immigrants could be considered refugees under the mandate would be if they could show well-founded fear of persecution by both the PRC and ROC governments. In his report, Hambro estimated that only 2,000-3,000 of the immigrants in Hong Kong fell under this category.

In his conclusion, Hambro stated that while international recognition of the ROC in the United Nations prevented the immigrants from legally being recognized as refugees, he argued that “from a broader and humanitarian point of view…they are de facto refugees…[and] seem to be in a worse situation now than they would be even if they had no Government at all to protect them.”

Ultimately, however, legal regulations and political conundrums made it difficult to extend international assistance to the refugees in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong’s response to the ordeal was to try to minimize the perception of a refugee problem, in the hopes that doing so would contain the issue and prevent it from becoming an international sensation. They tried to achieve this through two means. The first was by not

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100 Hambro, The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 38.
101 Hambro, The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 35; Peterson, "To be Or Not to be a Refugee," 174-175.
excluding the immigrant population from the same legal entitlements as the citizens of Hong Kong. According to the UNHCR, the mandate could not be extended to an individual “who is recognized by the competent authorities of the country in which he has taken up residence as having the rights and obligations which are attached to the possession of the nationality of that country.”

The immigrants in Hong Kong were not confined to refugee camps, nor were they discriminated against in terms of schooling, medical care or employment. Thus, since they were legally accorded the same opportunities as local Hong Kong citizens, the government was not obligated to provide them with special assistance.

Secondly, the Hong Kong government began to alter its official discourse by refusing to employ the word “refugees” to describe the new immigrants. Instead, it substituted the word for terms like “illegal immigrants” and “squatters.” During the late 1940s and early 1950s the government had used these terms interchangeably in its official documents and records. However, beginning in the late 1950s a noticeable shift away from the term “refugees” towards “illegal immigrants” was utilized in order to differentiate between the immigrants who were flooding into Hong Kong after May 1962. In effect, the government was trying to exclude these “illegal immigrants” because unlike genuine refugees who were fleeing for political reasons, these new immigrants were primarily leaving China for economic reasons and should, therefore, not be allowed to stay in Hong Kong. In fact, according to Johannes Chan, a Hong Kong legal expert, “a characteristic feature of the immigration regime in Hong Kong [was] its discretionary nature…[determining] how an illegal immigrant was to be dealt with was decided by the prevailing executive policies and not by law.” In other words, the shift from “refugee” to “illegal immigrants” was motivated not so much by legal obligations but as a mechanism for

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103 Hambro, The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 36.
strategic exclusion; thereby removing the local government’s burden of providing special assistance to these immigrants.

**Changes in Socio-Economic Status**

Shortly after the family relocated to their new house in Diamond Hill, Chao-wei left for Taiwan to resume his work with the Nationalist government, which had retreated to the offshore island in 1949. Though being separated from his family was not ideal, he had no choice but to make the long distance travel for several reasons. First, he was not open to the idea of relocating his family yet again and second, finding alternative employment in Hong Kong would have been extremely difficult. In Hambro’s report to the UN detailing the plight of the refugees in Hong Kong, he noted that former Nationalist government employees were severely limited in finding employment, with only 17.1% of immigrants able to continue in their prewar occupation.\(^{105}\) Thus, Chao-wei was lucky to even have retained his job at the Legislative Yuan.

In reality, however, the family was accustomed to his frequent absences. Even in Canton, Chao-wei would often have to leave his family for long stretches of time when he was required to travel to the capital in Nanjing for work. His absence though had an obvious impact on his children. Joan, for example, tells me that when she was a young child every time she heard a plane fly by she would shout, “an airplane is coming! My Daddy’s coming home! … I was so excited to see him,” she explains, “probably because he was never around.”\(^{106}\) Joan’s explanation prompts me to ask the sisters how often their father returned to visit them. Interestingly, there is a

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105 Hambro, "Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 77.
106 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
discrepancy in their responses. Rose, for example, tells me that her father came back once a year at most, to which Jennifer immediately rebuts, telling me instead that he came back several times a year—an occasion that was marked with anticipation and delight, she says. Particularly when he brought home famous Taiwanese treats such as beef jerky and pineapple cakes. “We were so happy when he came back and brought us all these treats,” she recalls.\(^{107}\) This is not the only time during the course of my interview that I witness such discrepant responses, especially regarding conversations about my grandfather. Initially, such occurrences are hard to reconcile, and it is only as the conversation progresses that I slowly begin to understand the reason behind these seeming lapses of memory.

The family’s situation was also distinct from other refugee families in other ways. In his report to the UN, Hambro classified the refugees into three categories: 1) Hong Kong born families 2) pre-war immigrant families who had arrived to Hong Kong before August 30, 1954 and 3) post-war families who arrived after August 30, 1954. As expected, many of the refugees in their respective categories shared similar traits. For example, using the head of households as the subject, most post-war refugee families were found to be more educated than pre-war refugees, with many receiving higher education in the West—particularly from the United States. In fact, overall only 4.5% of the Chinese refugees received a college education and only a third had a primary school education.\(^{108}\) Not surprisingly, because of their higher educational background many head of post-war refugee families tended to have more prominent positions in pre-Communist China. Almost 47.7%, for example, held professional, white collar or government jobs with the Nationalist government.

\(^{107}\) Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.

Yet, while the Liang family would have been classified as a “pre-war” family under Hambro’s study, the head of the Liang family actually shared more characteristics with patriarchs from post-war refugee families: not only did Chao-wei receive an advanced degree from a Western academic institution but he also held a government position with the Nationalist government. Generally speaking, the family fared a little better in its diaspora than other uprooted Chinese families. For example, when UNHCR Deputy Commissioner James Read toured Hong Kong in 1952 he noted that “all over the city one see clusters of squatters and refugees in the most primitive circumstances…their houses are shacks and lean-tos, put together from a few pieces of wood and corrugated iron…sanitary arrangements are simply non-existent.”

Though the family of seven had to live in a hotel for a few of months, they did not experience such squalid conditions. Furthermore, their inconvenience at the hotel was only temporary as they were able to eventually resettle into their new home in Diamond Hill.

But the family’s life had also changed in many ways. Like many of the refugee families that Hambro studied in his report, the Liang’s experienced a significant decrease in their socio-economic status after moving to Hong Kong. In Canton, Chao-wei’s government position afforded the family a more comfortable lifestyle. Their residence, for example, was large enough to not only house themselves, but also Lai-Fong’s family. The family also had a chauffeur who would escort Chao-wei’s children to school in a government jeep. Socially, the family was also well-respected in the community. Chao-wei’s impressive educational background and occupation made him a well-respected individual, so much so, that people would simply refer to him as “Doctor” because there were no other individuals in the

109 Peterson, “To be Or Not to be a Refugee,” 172.
village with a doctorate degree. In fact, he was so popular Theresa recalls that during the August Moon Festival, “so many people gave him Moon Cakes. At that time refrigeration was not that good so [the family] had to string the Moon Cakes on the ceiling to air them. We had to use an entire room just to do that. A whole room full of Moon Cakes! That’s how popular he was,” she explains.\textsuperscript{110}

Despite the opulent standards of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, I am impressed by Theresa’s story and comment that the family enjoyed the benefits associated with their higher socio-economic status. Jennifer and Theresa agree and admit that the family would probably have remained in China had it not been for the arrival of the Communists. “At that time, there was no thought of us immigrating to the United States. There was no thought of leaving the country, because our family enjoyed a high status. We would’ve probably gone to universities in either Hong Kong or Taiwan. Even if we went to the United States to study we would’ve probably come back—just like my father [went to America] for graduate school and came back. There was really no reason to leave at that point,” explains Theresa.\textsuperscript{111}

Conclusion

Though the actual experience of relocating to Hong Kong after the defeat of the Nationalists was not particularly traumatic for the family, trying to resume a normal life in the shadow of a nearby Communist state turned out to be challenging for some members of the family. Joan, for example, recalls growing up with a profound fear of the Communists. “I always had nightmares of the Communists when I was in Hong Kong…I remember all the radio stations and novels at the time telling everyone that Communism was no good…I still have the fear of

\textsuperscript{110}Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
\textsuperscript{111}Ibid.
being captured today,”¹¹² she explains. Interestingly, while her two older sisters also lived under the same circumstances, neither of them recollects sharing similar fears about the Communists. In fact, their memories of growing up in Hong Kong were largely apolitical. As I soon discover during the course of my interview, however, one should not automatically assume that because of such discrepancies one narrative must be more “truthful” than another. History—though rarely presented this way—is never simply black and white. Herein lies, perhaps, the power of narrative history: the ability to offer varying perspectives of the same events, each as unique and valid as the other.

Despite the family having an easy experience en route to Hong Kong, it is important to point out that in his study Hambro noted that the refugees who often had the most difficult time assimilating to their new life in Hong Kong were those who were well educated and had enjoyed a higher socio-economic status on the mainland. As Hambro put it “status reduction and ‘downgrading’ of self are not easily accepted and in the process of reevaluation, a person’s sensitivities and emotions undergo severe abuse.”¹¹³ Though the Liangs were more fortunate than many other Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, this would not remain true for long. Due to unforeseen circumstances, they would soon experience the “status reduction” and “downgrading of self” described by Hambro. Hampered by severe financial difficulties and familial strains, the family would quickly be forced to reassess their life in Hong Kong and seek alternative routes for a better life. America, which had never been on the family’s radar before, would soon become their only salvation.

¹¹² Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
¹¹³ Hambro, "Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong," 77.
Part 3: Establishing Roots in Gum Shan

In 1958, after being granted a ten-year sabbatical by the R.O.C. government, Chao-wei traveled to the United States to work for a union representing overseas Chinese in America while his family remained behind in Hong Kong. During this time, he continued to be employed by the Legislative Yuan and would send a portion of his salary back to his family every month. My aunts, however, inform me that on more than one occasion the family did not always receive the entirety of the allowance. This was perhaps due to the roundabout way in which the family received the money. Every month, Chao-wei would send the monthly allowance to his younger brother in Taiwan, who was then supposed to exchange the US money into Hong Kong currency before sending it to Chao-wei’s family in Hong Kong. There is some speculation that during this exchange process, Chao-wei’s brother may have misappropriated some of the money. Whether or not this is true, as time went on the family received less and less money and eventually the monthly allowance stopped coming in all together. To make matters worse, around the same time, Lai-Fong found out that her teaching contract at the local high school would not be renewed because she did not have the proper teacher’s certification.\footnote{Prior to arriving in Hong Kong, Lai-Fong had taught in Guangdong, China where she received her certification. The Hong Kong government however required that teachers needed to be certified, or in this case recertified in Hong Kong, before they were allowed to teach in Hong Kong schools. Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.} Without a steady source of income, the family was on the verge of being destitute: they had no money to pay for food and rent and were eventually forced to turn to relatives and friends for financial support. “My mother would write out the letters asking for some money and then we would deliver the letters,” explains Joan. Theresa, however, remembers one time when her mother did not prepare a letter: “I had to go
and ask [for money]. I remember getting to the door and my legs were shaking. It was very
terrible.”

As we continue talking, the conversation slowly begins to develop an air of indignation
as some of the sisters begin to question their father’s character. Rose and Joan, for example, both
note that their father had essentially abandoned the family. “He was a deadbeat dad,” says Rose.
“I don’t want to blame [our situation] on the Communists. [Communism] has nothing to do with
your personal character.” I am a bit surprised by these comments: up till now,
besides the brief debate over how often their
father returned to visit the family, I haven’t
noticed any jarring stories about Chao-wei
that would suggest he would suddenly
abandon his familial obligations. As the
conversation becomes more antagonistic, however, I decide not to push the topic any further and
make a mental note to return to the subject at a later time.

Ultimately, the family’s financial situation forced Jennifer to postpone her plans of
matriculating at a university in Canada for the upcoming year due to her inability to pay for
tuition. Instead, she decided to temporarily teach at a nursery school in order to assist her family,
while also saving up some money for school. During this time, she heard about a friend who had
gone to nursing school and in the process, was able to make some money at the same time.
Jennifer explains to me that she decided nursing school would also be a good fit for her because
it would be an excellent chance for her to “get money right away [which] the family was in dire

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115 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
116 Ibid.
need of. Financially we were really in a bad situation,” she explains. We were literally starving.” Nursing school turned out to be even more of a blessing than expected. Not only was tuition completely covered for every nursing student but so was room and board. Upon learning this, Jennifer decided to move into the school dormitories in the hopes that this would lighten the family’s burden because there “would be one less mouth to feed.” Furthermore, every student received a stipend of $300, which Jennifer would save and bring home every month. “I only saved two dollars for myself for the bus fare home,” recalls Jennifer. “My mother’s eyes would brighten up every time she saw me come home. Because she knew she didn’t have to go and borrow money anymore.”

**Studying Abroad in Canada**

When I first learned about Jennifer and Theresa’s decision to go abroad for their college education, I asked if their decision was in part based on their desire to follow in their father’s footsteps. They informed me that unlike when their father was sent abroad in 1924, going overseas for a higher education had become increasingly popular. In fact, at the MaryKnoll Convent High School, where the sisters attended secondary school, many of the students went on to receive higher education in America (perhaps not entirely surprising giving that the school was run by Catholic American nuns). Rose elaborates that, “many [students] applied to study in the United States, Canada or Australia. The United Kingdom was also very popular,” she explains.

However, Jennifer and Theresa would soon discover that even though studying abroad in America had become more popular, this did not necessarily mean it had also become easier to do

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117 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
In part, their plan to study abroad in America was complicated by the fact that their father was also currently residing in the United States. “They knew our father was already in America. They had investigated our family and were afraid that we wouldn’t go back to Hong Kong…students were required to return to their country after the completion of their studies. They believed that our intention wasn’t really to come to study but to use that excuse as a stepping-stone to permanently settle in America,” explains Theresa. Thus, when their student visa to the United States was denied the two sisters decided to study abroad in Canada instead, because the country’s immigration policies were not as strict as America’s at the time. The sisters’ decision to study in Canada was also influenced by financial reasons: though they were accepted to a number of universities they decided to attend Saint Dunstan’s University on Prince Edward Island because it charged the cheapest tuition. “We were accepted to schools in Montreal but they were very expensive—around $1,000 a year. Saint Dunstan’s cost $600 for the whole year, including room and board. By the time we graduated in 1965 it was only $800,” recalls Theresa.

In 1961, Jennifer and Theresa boarded President Wilson and headed to San Francisco en route to Prince Edward Island. Upon arriving to San Francisco, they met up with their father who was currently working in the city at the time. He then brought them to Chinatown where he treated them to a meal and bought them food for the rest of their trip. After their quick rendezvous with their father, the sisters boarded a train headed for Prince Edward Island. A year later, their sister Joan

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120 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
121 Ibid.
would join them at Saint Dunstan’s as well. For better or for worse, the family was separated again and dispersed around different parts of the world: Chao-wei had moved to California for his sabbatical, Jennifer, Theresa and Joan were in Canada pursuing their college education, and Lai-Fong and her two youngest children, Rose and George, remained behind in Hong Kong. However, unlike the first time the family was separated, the second time would not end with the family reuniting as a whole.

The JFK Refugee Parole Program and the Immigration Process

In a previous interview, Jennifer and Theresa informed me that their mother and two youngest siblings, Rose and George, immigrated to America via a special program known as the “Refugee Parole Program.” Curious to learn more about it, I ask the sisters how they first learned of the program. Like most things in life, Rose informs me they found out about the parole program serendipitously. “There was a kid in my school; her name was Ann Lau, and her family was always trying to come to this country too,” recalls Rose. “One day I noticed something strange. She didn’t come to school for a few days which was odd because she never missed school. So I told my mother, I said: ‘Mom, Ann Lau was not in school for a few days…something’s up. I suspect they are applying for immigration, but their mouths are very, very tight…closed.’ They didn’t want anyone to know.”

The family, which was desperate to find any means to improve their situation, had set their hopes on the possibility of immigrating to the United States for a while now. As was the perception of many hopeful immigrants at the time, the United States was seen as a land of opportunity: a place to start anew and where everyone had the same chance of achieving success. “We called [the United States] *gum shan* (gold mountain),” explains Joan. “The idea that there

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122 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
was gold all over the place and America was like a paradise. In part, because people believed it was easier to make a living. And not just for those who were poor, even for people who were considered middle class. That’s why people always wanted to come to America.”

Whether or not this perception was true, however, was a moot point if one was unable to even enter the United States, and for people of Asian ethnicity the odds were stacked against them. Up until the late 1940s the Chinese—through a series of laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and later on the National Origins Act of 1929—were barred from immigrating to the United States. Only after 1943, with the passage of the Magnuson Act, were Chinese legally allowed to immigrate to the United States. Even so, Chinese immigration was still restricted to a quota of 105 Chinese per year. With such abject prospects, I am not surprised that the Lau’s kept their immigration plans secret. In fact, Jennifer tells me that at that time everybody kept their immigration plans secret. “We even kept it secret from other members of our family,” she explains. “So many people were trying to get to America…but there was a limited amount of people who could come through…so people kept it a secret because they didn’t want any other competitors or even worse, if somebody found about your immigration plans and tried to sabotage your application.”

Thus, the family was forced to maintain a low profile, all while trying to actively look into any leads regarding new immigration programs in the hopes that if one turned out to be true they could apply to them before such channels were closed.

As it turned out, Rose’s speculation about the Lau’s was correct: they had found out about a new program that had recently been passed by President John F. Kennedy known as the

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123 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
125 Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
“Refugee Parole Program.” Interestingly the program—which would allow an unspecified number of Chinese refugees living in Hong Kong to immigrate to the United States—was born out of legislation intended to restrict immigration into America. Known as the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, the bill was motivated by political concerns over possible communist infiltration through increasingly liberal immigration policies. In effect, the Act pushed for selective immigration as a means to ensure national security during a time when fears of communism where at an all time high and was basically a continuation of the National Origins Quota system. While it is true that the Act created opportunities for Asian immigration, these were largely symbolic. For example, even though Asians were finally allowed to become naturalized citizens and the few remaining laws that barred Asian immigration were eventually repealed, these developments were largely offset when the quota policy moved to a system based on race and not nationality. In other words, an individual would now be categorized under the country of his or her parents’ ethnicity, regardless of where the individual was born. Not surprisingly, with such low quota numbers to begin with, total Asian immigration into the United States continued to remain relatively low.126

The Act, however, unintentionally contained provisions that provided loopholes for the entry of a substantial number of aliens into the country. More specifically, under Section 212 (d) (5) of the Act, the Executive Branch (i.e.: the attorney general) was given the power to parole, or grant temporary admission to an unlimited number of aliens “for emergency reasons or for reasons deemed strictly in the public interest.”127 Thus, when a refugee crisis erupted in Hong Kong in 1962 after China’s removal of its border control following the Great Leap Forward,
President John F. Kennedy signed a Presidential Directive on May 25, 1962 admitting several thousand refugees into the United States under the parole provision. By 1965 more than 15,000 Chinese refugees had been granted entry into America under the program.\textsuperscript{128}

In order to qualify for the program, immigrants had to file an application for visa form (Form No. FS-510) in addition to satisfying several political stipulations as well: namely, that 1) they were opposed to communism and 2) that they met the terms to qualify as a “refugee” as delineated under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. According to the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, a refugee was defined as:

\begin{quote}
Any person in a country or area which is either Communists or Communist-dominated, who because of persecution, fear of persecution, natural calamity or military operation is out of his usual place of abode and is unable to return thereto, who has not been firmly resettled, and who is in urgent need of assistance for the essentials of life or for transportation.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

Meeting the political requirements was not difficult for the Liangs: by fleeing from communist China due to their support of the Nationalist government, the family was easily able to demonstrate both their persecution and opposition to the Communists, thereby satisfying the terms required to be classified as refugees under the Relief Act.

In February 1963, after completing all the required paperwork, Lai-Fong was finally scheduled for an interview with the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, where she would be further vetted by the agency (because of British concerns over offending the PRC, the Department of State handled refugee admission rather than the Immigration Bureau).\textsuperscript{130} What she hoped would be a straightforward process was anything but. To my utmost disbelief, my aunts inform me that during the interview process, the immigration officer revealed to Lai-Fong

\textsuperscript{130} Hsu, ”The Disappearance of America's Cold War Chinese Refugees,” 18.
that her husband had filed for divorce in December 1961 and had been remarried for nearly two
years. Upon hearing the news for the first time, Lai-Fong was overcome with shock and emotion.
Though the immigration officer could have denied Lai-Fong’s visa application on the spot, Rose
tells me that amazingly he did the opposite and took pity on her situation: “he told her ‘I want
you to come over to this country, on your behalf and on your children’s behalf. I want you to
fight for your rights,’” she recounts. In order to do so, the immigration officer agreed to expedite
the visa approval process—on the condition she also complied with the other visa
requirements—so she could contest the divorce before the statute of limitation was up. “We were
approved in May or June. The process was very fast—three months or so,” explains Rose.\footnote{131}

One of the conditions Lai-Fong was required to satisfy was proving financial stability.
This could be fulfilled either by securing employment in the United States or by obtaining
sponsorship from an individual or group willing to take financial responsibility for the
immigrant. Thus, without employment Lai-Fong was required to identify someone in America
who would be willing to serve as her sponsor. Finding a sponsor, however, would prove to be
quite challenging. “She dare not ask anybody to sponsor our family because she didn’t want her
husband or any of her relatives in America to know we were coming in case they would tell her
husband and he would possibly try to sabotage our immigration,” explains Theresa.\footnote{132} To be
frank, I am still rather stunned and baffled by these revelations and ask why he would try to
sabotage their one chance at coming to America. “Because he didn’t want us to be in this
country,” Rose bluntly answers. “He wanted use to starve to death. It’s the honest truth. You
have to know about the other side of your grandfather.”\footnote{133} While this assertion was not in the
least what I expected to hear, I too admittedly share in Rose’s dismay and frustration after

\footnote{131}{Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.}
\footnote{132}{Ibid.}
\footnote{133}{Ibid.}
learning about Chao-wei’s betrayal. Suddenly, the moments when some of the sisters gave seemingly discordant, and at times, antagonistic responses about their father also becomes clear: their responses were in part a reaction to their father’s abandonment and reprehensible behavior. In retrospect, I am not completely surprised by such reactions. After all, how we remember an event or individual is often affected by the circumstances surrounding that subject. Again, while some may argue that such subjectivity makes narrative history “unreliable” or “untruthful” I disagree and believe it enhances efforts at historicity by providing varying degrees of perspective that can help one attain a more complete and “truthful” version of history.

When Lai-Fong revealed her fears about finding a sponsor in America to the immigration officer, he informed her that her application could still be approved if she were able to demonstrate financial independence. In other words, in order to waive sponsorship she needed to prove she had a substantial amount of savings. This too, however, would prove to be rather difficult. Not only was the family penniless, they also had no assets in their possession. They had sold their house in Diamond Hill to provide the funds for Chao-wei to travel to the United States for his sabbatical. The family was now living in a small apartment on Nathan Road currently owned by Lai-Fong’s father. Without any other alternatives, Lai-Fong’s father urged her to sell the apartment and use the funds for her visa application. With the sale of the apartment Lai-Fong was able to put down $3,000 into her savings account. As an extra precaution, her father also signed an affidavit of financial support. Even though he could not legally sponsor her due to his Canadian citizenship he agreed “to be responsible for [the family’s] living expenses during their
stay in the United States.” With her father’s affidavit of financial support and the money from
selling the apartment, Lai-Fong was able to meet the requirement for financial independence.
Now all she could do was wait for her visa application to be finalized.

As the sisters continue to recount their immigration experience, Theresa points out that
her mother was “really lucky because a kind-hearted immigration officer interviewed her and
took pity on her situation.”134 The sisters agree and note that in all likelihood if a different
immigration officer had interviewed her, her visa application may have had a much different
outcome. This sense of fortuity does not escape me either and I cannot help but to engage in
existential thought. This project began as a realization of how I had taken my identity for
granted: I had never realized or was interested in learning about how my ancestors arrived in this
country and the hardships they had to endure to get here. But the process has also given me even
greater perspective, by making me realize how much of my life, and life in general, I take for
granted: if my grandmother had been denied entry into the United States, my father would have
never arrived in this country either and a whole series of events would most likely have never
occurred—including my birth. To think so much could hinge on one moment in a person’s life is
both a frightening and humbling thought. During our conversation Joan comments that such
events were made possible by “God’s grace, too.”135 And in that moment, I cannot agree with her
more.

The Liberalization of America’s Immigration Policies

While the immigration process was anything but straightforward for Lai-Fong, it is
necessary to note that she benefitted from several political developments that took place in
America during the early 1960s. Previously, prejudicial immigration policies had hindered the

134 Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
135 Ibid.
United States from cultivating relationships with countries they had discriminated against. However, this exclusionary attitude started to change in the midst of the Cold War’s race for allies, when the United States began to realize that if it was to establish itself as a dominant force in the international arena it needed to cultivate diplomatic relationships, not undermine them. In order to accomplish this, several American leaders argued that the United States needed greater flexibility in its immigration laws. President Kennedy, for example, believed that determining immigration eligibility based on nation-of-origin had “no basis in either logic or reason [because] it neither satisfies a national need nor accomplishes an international purpose. In an age of interdependence among nations,” he argued, “such a system is an anachronism, for it discriminates among applicants for admission into the United States on the basis of the accident of birth.”

Thus, beginning in the late 1950s, the American government began to increase its humanitarian outreach in the form of more liberal immigration policies—more specifically through the admission of refugees into the country. The United States hoped that such a tactic would improve its image as a fair and democratic society, which would in turn attract new allies, extend its global influence and embarrass communist regimes as it witnessed its own citizens seeking asylum in democratic nations like the United States.

As part of its strategy for bolstering its humanitarian outreach, the United States began to champion itself as a guardian of family values, especially in regards to refugee families. For example, according to a statute passed in 1957 (PL 85-316) the government determined that any unused refugee visas created under the 1953 Refugee Relief Act could be allocated to refugees currently seeking asylum in the United States before the visas were set to expire in 1956. The selection of these refugees was based on the following criteria: “1) the degree of professional,

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technical or other skill, 2) hardships or persecution, 3) sponsorship in the United States, 4) ability to speak English, and 5) unification of close relatives.”137 (Emphasis added). Such selection standards created a preference-based system giving priority to immigrants who either had technical skills or to families that had been separated because of persecution or hardships. Similar criteria would be used when John F. Kennedy paroled immigrants from Hong Kong in 1962, enabling the Liangs to be granted priority preference in the hopes that Lai-Fong could contest her divorce and if not salvage the marriage, at least, fight for her family’s rights.

The true beneficiary of such policies, however, was the United States because it either won over immigrants of extraordinary talent or improved its image as a nation of benevolence and virtue. However, beneath this friendly veneer of humanitarianism laid more selfish ambitions. In a 1964 study by the CIA, the agency stated that President Kennedy’s directive was “an exceptional opportunity to collect information at first hand on the most denied of denied areas (the People’s Republic of China),” and summarized its efforts as “a promising start in exploiting the emergency mass admission of Red China refugees to this country.”138 The refugees, in other words, were primarily seen as intelligence assets who could provide direct information about China’s geographic, economic and political landscape—information that would otherwise have been unattainable. Of most importance to the agency, and aligned with the preference-based system, were refugees who once held positions of prominence in China, because they could potentially offer details about individuals and procedures of interest to the agency. Yet at the same time that the parole program provided new sources of intelligence, it also presented its share of difficulties. For example, because of regulations imposed upon the Immigration and Naturalization Services, the first refugee files reviewed were those who had


Li & Liang arrived in Hong Kong in the 1950s (directly after the arrival of the Communists) and had previously been waiting for years to immigrate to the US when the tiny quotas were still in place—not those who had arrived after 1962. These earlier refugees tended to have less intelligence of interest to the agency. Thus, not until this backlog was cleared could the agency have access to more promising sources. Furthermore, the agency also noted that locating immigrants with possible intelligence was difficult because despite remaining sheltered in Chinese communities like New York and San Francisco, the Chinese could also be incredibly mobile. Despite these difficulties, the agency declared in its report that the “Chinese refugee program promises to continue as a unique and productive means of extracting information from a country which is both the most bellicose Communist power at the present time and perhaps our most difficult intelligence target.”139 This unique mixture of humanitarianism and exploitation eventually paved the way for the liberalization of immigration policies, giving shape to measures like the refugee program, which ultimately enabled the Liang family to immigrate to the United States.

**Preparing to Immigrate to the United States**

Though the family had passed the most difficult stage of the immigration process, they were not out of the woods yet. All members of the family were still required to pass a strict medical exam before they could immigrate to the United States. “It was very difficult,” recalls Theresa. “It wasn’t just passing a T.B. test. If you had a parasitic worm or even trachoma, they wouldn’t let you come either.”140 The medical exam, however, turned out to be the least of their worries. During our interview, Theresa reveals what made them even more apprehensive was the need to be constantly aware of their surroundings in case they accidentally associated themselves with the communists, especially since it was during the height of the McCarthy era. “We dare not

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139 Turgeon, *Windfall from Hong Kong*, 74.
140 Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
even look at the communists stores,” adds Joan. In agreement, Theresa further explains that “if there was a communist store on one side of the street, we’d walk on the other side of the street, because they might take a picture of you simply walking by the store and then you’d be accused of being a communist. Once they had some evidence to label you as a communist, they wouldn’t let you into America.”

Even after their visa had officially been approved and the family began finalizing their travel plans to America, Lai-Fong still feared that that they would somehow be denied entry into America. Rose, for example, recalls that her mother was “scared of taking the boat because traveling by boat took a lot longer and she was so afraid that during our travel they would suddenly deny her application and turn her back to Hong Kong.” Thus, even though traveling by air cost significantly more than traveling by sea, the family opted to fly in order to get to America as quickly as possible. However, knowing the family had financially put almost everything into their visa application, I asked how Lai-Fong was able to come up with the money for the airfare. The sisters inform me that their mother had to sell a lot of their remaining possessions but even then she did not have enough money. Theresa, who was finishing up her studies in Canada at the time, explains that she had to send some money to her mother so she could buy the plane tickets to America. “The airfare was around $300. I had worked throughout the summer so I was able to send them the money I had saved during my summer employment for their airfare. When they arrived my mother paid me back with the money she got from selling the apartment in Hong Kong, which I then used to pay my school tuition,” explains Theresa.

In the summer of 1963, after years of struggling in Hong Kong, Lai-Fong and her two children

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141 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
finally boarded a plane for New York where they were to begin their lives again: this time as Chinese Americans.

Arriving to New York

A few weeks before Lai-Fong and her two children were scheduled to depart for New York, she sent a telegram to Jennifer and Theresa informing them of the date and time of their arrival. The two sisters were currently spending their summer in New York working as waitresses and agreed to pick them up at the airport. However, what the sisters didn’t realize was that the date of arrival noted on the telegram was in respect to Hong Kong’s time zone! Due to the twelve-hour difference, the sisters went to the airport a day earlier and were alarmed when their mother and siblings were nowhere to be found. “We were so scared,” recalls Jennifer. “We thought they ran into some immigration problem that was holding them up.” After announcing their names on the loudspeakers proved fruitless, Jennifer’s husband, Philip, decided to go to the airline counter and see if their names were listed on the flight roster for that day. When they found out they were not, the sisters were dejected: with no way of contacting their family or finding out the reason for their delayed arrival, the sisters decided to return home and wait to hopefully receive word from someone soon.

The following day, Lai-Fong and her children arrived in New York. Unaware of the misunderstanding and confusion that had occurred the previous day, the three of them waited anxiously in the airport for Jennifer and Theresa’s arrival. After several hours of waiting and no sign of either sister, Rose noticed a Chinese man in the airport and decided to ask him for help. After explaining the family’s situation to the gentleman, he agreed to take them to his home in Long Island so they could get their bearings and hopefully get in contact with the rest of their

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144 Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
family. Hearing this, I’m immediately alarmed and comment that such an action does not sound like an entirely safe thing to do, to which the sisters laugh in agreement but point out that people were “very friendly back then.” It’s an adage I’ve heard many times before, and though I admit I’m reluctant to believe it, perhaps there is some truth in it. Luckily, thanks to the man’s hospitality they were eventually able to get in contact with Jennifer and Theresa.

Even though the family had made it safely to New York, there was still a lot that needed to be done before they could finally settle into their new life in America. The first priority was to finalize housing arrangements. Though Jennifer and Theresa had found a studio apartment for the family to live in on Henry Street in Chinatown, they could not move into the apartment right away, because the current tenants were still residing there. Luckily, Lai-Fong knew a relative who lived on 125th street in Harlem and asked if her family could temporarily reside in their home until their apartment was vacated. Much to Lai-Fong’s gratitude, the relative extended her hospitality to the family, and the Liangs resided with them for two weeks until they were able to move into their apartment.

The family also looked forward to finally being reunited after several years of separation. Shortly after Lai-Fong arrived in America, she applied for her daughters to become permanent residents of the United States. Thus, after Theresa completed her undergraduate education in Canada, she decided to apply for and was admitted to graduate school at Fordham University and Hunter College, eventually opting to matriculate at Hunter because of the cheaper tuition. Similarly Joan—who had been at Saint Dunstan’s for one year—decided to transfer to New York University in order to be closer to her family. However, while Theresa and Joan were granted permanent residency in the United States, the process was not as straightforward for Jennifer.
When Lai-Fong applied for Jennifer to become a permanent resident in 1966, Jennifer was already married and had a child, making the process more complicated. Jennifer, for example, informs me that after submitting all the necessary paperwork, the government required that they also collect the family’s fingerprints and footprints. Upon hearing such a request, Jennifer decided not to continue with the application process. “I felt the process was so humiliating,” she explains. “It was like we were criminals. I thought to myself: ‘we are not criminals. We are well-educated people. We have good jobs in Canada. We shouldn’t have to go through such a process.’ It was really humiliating for us. I thought to myself Canada is just as good. At that point getting into the United States was no longer a life and death situation; like escaping from war. So we decided to remain in Canada.”\(^{145}\) In contrast, the process was a lot simpler for Lai-Fong’s other two daughters because they were already in the United States on student visas and were single. All that was required was for Lai-Fong to prove she had savings of over four figures in order to show she was capable of financially supporting her two daughters. Thus, even though the family was not entirely reunited, they had more or less achieved their goal of leaving Hong Kong and starting new lives in North America. With one goal realized, they would soon begin working towards fulfilling another goal: this time, the American dream.

**The Big Apple: Why New York?**

It is a well-known fact that immigrants are attracted to big metropolitan areas for their large number and various employment opportunities. In fact, in 1963, more than half of Chinese immigrants chose to settle in either California or New York,\(^ {146}\) in part because of favorable employment prospects, but perhaps even more importantly, because of their large and well-established Chinese communities. However, while all these factors may be true, it does not

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\(^{145}\) Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.

\(^{146}\) Zhou, *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave*, 82.
entirely explain why the Liang’s chose to settle in New York, versus another large city with a significant Chinese population like San Francisco. Curious to know why they chose New York I asked what ultimately led them to settle on the east coast. Joan explains that the family mainly chose to relocate to New York for reasons of practicality. She points out New York was the closest city to Prince Edward Island, where they had been studying. “If we were studying in a city like Vancouver, then [my mother] would probably not have come to New York,” explains Joan. Similarly, Theresa explains that they had relatives on the both sides of the family living in New York, so they believed having a familiar support system would make assimilating into American life a lot easier, especially for their mother who did not speak English very well. Joan, however, also reveals a more personal reason as to why the family chose to settle in New York: their father was living in San Francisco at the time. “He didn’t even want us to come to America,” agrees Theresa. “Why would we go to San Francisco?” Such a response is still startling to me. Despite getting a better sense of who my grandfather was throughout the course of these interviews, it is still difficult for me to process these two vastly different sides of the same man: a father who would heartily greet his daughters in San Francisco as they made their way to study abroad in Canada and the same father who would also abandon his family and prevent them from immigrating to the United States in search of a better life. It is at times like this that I wish I could have known my grandfather, even for just a little while, so I could ask him why.

In her book *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave*, Min Zhou argues that Chinatown should be viewed as an ethnic enclave economy, rather than just an immigrant neighborhood because Chinatown contains a distinct labor market and an autonomous economic system, which many Chinese immigrants utilize as an alternative source of
employment outside of the traditional larger market where they may be more disadvantaged. She argues, for example, that in addition to being shielded from the deficiencies of language and knowledge of the market economy, Chinese immigrants can draw upon social capital in Chinatown to discover firsthand opportunities in employment and business enterprises, thereby helping to facilitate their social mobility and eventual assimilation into larger society.¹⁴⁷ During our interview, Theresa corroborates this view by stating that a main reason they decided to live in Chinatown after arriving to New York was because “Chinese people knew other Chinese people and if you needed a job or housing or anything else they would connect you to other Chinese people who might be able to help you.”¹⁴⁸ Wanting to test this “ethnic enclave economy” theory, I ask the sisters if they ever worked in Chinatown and if so, what kind of jobs they were employed in. The sisters’ respond that they all had jobs in Chinatown because, as Jennifer puts it, “Chinatown was the best place for us to find jobs.” Additionally, all of the businesses they worked for were Chinese operated. In regards to the services they were employed in, Theresa informs me that in her earlier years in New York she worked mostly in sales. “The first summer in New York, I worked in a gift shop in Chinatown called Gum Shan (Golden Mountain)… Not shortly after a Freedom Land opened up in the Bronx…it was like an amusement park. That following year my boss from the Chinatown gift shop asked [me and Jennifer] to go and work in his Freedom Land gift shop.”¹⁴⁹

Waitressing was another popular line of work with the sisters. Jennifer, for example, tells me that one year all four of them worked as waitresses at the 1964-1965 World’s Fair in New York. Though they were glad for the opportunity, the work was grueling: sometimes they were required to work sixteen-hour shifts! “We would stand the entire day,” recalls Jennifer “and our

¹⁴⁸ Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
feet would hurt so much when we got home.” Hearing this is unfathomable to me, in part, because such working conditions sound illegal, at least by today’s standards. In any case I ask if the pay was at least reasonable as consolation for the physical demands of their job. Rose immediately interjects with a resounding “No!” According to her the tips, which comprised most of their earnings, was meager. “I remember it was like 99 cents a dish for Chop Suey and a little fried rice and some of the customers would only leave you a penny for tip. They would pay with a dollar and say keep the change.”150 Theresa, however, takes a more lenient view and maintains that their earnings were adequate. As she explains “when I first graduated from college I made $4,000 a year from waitressing. That was pretty good at the time.”151 In fact, the money Theresa made alone from waitressing was enough to pay for her tuition as well as room and board for one year at graduate school. Whether or not it was “good” money, however, was probably not a factor in the sisters’ minds back then—getting any kind of employment, no matter how taxing, was the most important thing.

I am somewhat amazed that all of the sisters were able to balance such demanding work schedules alongside their schoolwork and originally believed their situation to be born out of necessity and thus unique. However, as it turns out, Chinese women constituted a significant portion of the ethnic labor force. For example, in one of her surveys, Zhou discovered that for women 16 years and older, 59% held some kind of employment in the ethnic labor force, and of these almost 60% worked in the garment industry. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that

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150 Jennifer Tang et al, interview 3, transcript.
151 Ibid.
many of the Liang women also held jobs in the garment industry at one point in their lives. In fact, one of Lai-Fong’s first jobs after arriving to New York was working as a seamstress at a garment factory in Chinatown, where she was required to work 12-15 hours a day and was paid by piece. An injury to her hand, however, eventually prevented her from continuing her as a seamstress: “one time, she had to go to the emergency room when the sewing needle pierced her finger,”Jennifer informs me. The manager of the factory, however, agreed to keep Lai-Fong employed, where she could assist with cutting loose threads from the garments, on the condition that her daughter Joan also work there as a seamstress. Finding this condition rather odd, I ask the sisters if there was a reason behind the manager’s request. Theresa explains it was due to the fact that there was a lot of competition for Lai-Fong’s particular job. “Cutting loose threads didn’t require any real skills; so many people could have easily filled those positions. And Joan was very skilled with the sewing machine—she was very fast.”Joan, however, would only remain at the factory for a short while, leaving a year later when she matriculated as a student at New York University.

For several years, the family would continue to call Chinatown their home before eventually relocating several times: first to the Bronx and later to College Point, where after many years of saving up money, Lai-Fong was able to finally purchase her first home in America. Purchasing a home was a monumental event: it was not only a significant investment but also a testament to having successfully made it in America. Perhaps even more

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152 Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
153 Ibid.
importantly, it was a symbolic shedding of the family’s sojourner status: after being uprooted from their homeland and fleeing to Hong Kong, only to later immigrate to the United States, the family had planted its first permanent roots in a new country. Only time would tell if these roots would take hold.

**Conclusion**

As I begin wrapping up my last interview with my aunts, I ask them if they have any closing remarks or thoughts they would like to share. Joan takes the opportunity to reiterate how momentous it was for the family to arrive to the United States. “Do you know coming to America was a dream come true? Your whole world brightens up. It wasn’t like it is now. Now you can come and go wherever you want. It’s relatively easy to travel and visit another country if you want to. But back then it was very expensive and there were a lot of restrictions: there was the Chinese Exclusion Act and even when that was repealed they still had quotas until 1965. It was a dream come true coming to this country.”

Even before I had embarked on my project I heard these sentiments repeatedly expressed by other immigrants as well, almost to the point where it became clichéd. The danger in viewing such sentiments as “clichéd,” however, is that it imbues these immigrant experiences with a sense of banality and devalues their significance. Throughout this journey, I have realized that in order for such sentiments to be regarded as more than saccharine platitudes, it is imperative to understand the circumstances behind these expressions. In other words, it is important to remember that while many of these immigrant narratives may have the same conclusion—the view of coming to America as a “dream come true”—it is often not so important how a story

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154 Jennifer Tang et al., interview 3, transcript.
ends, but rather the details in between: only through the process of sharing the immigrant’s narrative can we begin to see a unique voice behind the seemingly trite.
Conclusion

Coincidentally, the week that I scheduled to conduct my interviews was also the week that my father would be celebrating his 65th birthday. Since the whole family would be together again, my family decided to arrange a small party, not only to celebrate my father’s birthday but also to celebrate family and life in general: Joan, who had been diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer a few months back, had recently found out that the mass in her brain was not a malignant tumor after all, but rather a benign calcification. Though the original diagnosis had been frightening, it had also brought the family closer together by reminding everyone how unpredictable life was. Suddenly these interviews, which were originally just meant to help facilitate my project, were now something so much more personal and invaluable: they presented a moment to gather, reflect and remember—an exercise that we often neglect to engage in as we become swept up in the everyday obligations and routines of life.

While I identified three significant moments of diaspora as the focus of my paper, on more than one occasion the conversation drifted in different directions. Though I tried to ensure we didn’t deviate too far from the scope of my project, I admittedly enjoyed and appreciated these tangents, as I found them personally fulfilling to hear about. For example, after completing my last set of interviews, Theresa informed me that she had also brought with her all her photo albums and wanted to know if I would like to go through them. I gladly accepted her offer as she showed me pictures of my father and my grandmother when they were younger, as well as pictures of relatives I had never known about. As we sat around the table distributing photos amongst ourselves, Theresa admits to me that she has not seen these pictures in years and that in most likelihood, after they all passed away, these photos would probably have been thrown out. Hearing this saddens me deeply: throughout the course of my project I have witnessed on one
hand the effort needed to remember and preserve one’s past, and on the other how easy it can be forgotten. In a way, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn about and document a segment of my family’s history, no matter how brief. Perhaps Joan said it best during one of our many tangents: she had brought with her a letter written by her mother, in which her mother was recounting to her relatives the hardships she had to endure after her husband abandoned her. I remember Jennifer telling Joan not to get into that now, as that was not one of topics we had planned to discuss. Joan, however, stated it was important for all of them to remember their mother’s struggles—the memory of which time had worn away. This project is my promise and attempt to always take time to remember, reflect and preserve my family history, so that future generations may have the opportunity to learn about their past and in the process to discover more about themselves.

Lai-Fong with her five children.
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