

Chapter 4

THE CHINESE

After 1943

Although it is quite clear that World War II marked a crucial turning point in the lives of Chinese Americans, it is also clear that significant changes were occurring even before the war began to dominate the thoughts and actions of most Americans at the end of the 1930s. First of all, as we have seen, significant demographic changes had begun in the peaceful 1920s and 1930s. The long population decline that was triggered by the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act had ended, and a small upturn due to natural increase and ingenuity in evading immigration regulations had set in. Between 1920 and 1940 the census recorded an increase of 25 percent, from 61,000 to 77,000, in the Chinese American population. (This does not take into account the 28,000 Chinese who lived in Hawaii in 1940; residents of Hawaii were counted in national population figures only after statehood in 1959.) Even more significant than the turnaround in sheer numbers was the fact that by 1940 citizen Chinese Americans for the first time outnumbered the alien segment of the community. If we look at the population breakdown for 1940 in Table 4.1, we will see the effect of the paper sons phenomenon.

The fact that there were 75 percent more citizen and presumably native-born Chinese American males than females is probably the best possible numerical index to the number of paper sons in the population, although not all of the difference can be so explained.

Table 4.1 Chinese American Population, 1940

Group	Male	Female	Total	Males:Females
All Chinese	57,389	20,115	77,504	2.9:1
Alien	31,687	5,555	37,242	5.7:1
Citizen	25,702	14,560	40,262	1.8:1

Source: U.S. Census data.

CHANGES IN IMAGE

By the time citizens outnumbered aliens—and we must remember that many of the citizens were small children, meaning that among adults aliens continued to predominate—the image of the Chinese was beginning to change, however slowly. Even before Americans began to see the Chinese people as heroic resisters and victims of Japanese aggression, the picture most Americans had of China and her people was being altered by the daughter of a missionary, Pearl S. Buck (1892–1973). In a whole series of immensely successful novels, beginning with the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Good Earth* (1931), Buck dealt with all levels of Chinese society, but her focus was on “the character of the Chinese peasant . . . hardworking, strong, persevering . . . kind toward children, respectful toward elders, all in all an admirable [and] warmly lovable character.”¹ This idealized image, which was even more unreal in the popular movies made from *The Good Earth* and its sequel, *Dragon Seed*, which dealt with peasant resistance and suffering under Japanese attack, was an important element in making the period after 1937 one that the social scientist Harold Isaacs, in his study *Images of Asia*, called an “Age of Admiration.” According to Isaacs, Buck “created” the Chinese “for a whole generation of Americans, “in the same sense that Dickens created . . . the people who lived in the slums of Victorian England.”² At a lower level of culture, the cartoonist Milton Caniff created *Terry and the Pirates*, a popular adventure comic strip set in war-torn China, in which American heroes helped the Chinese fight the Japanese.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor made the United States and China allies, and to the growing positive stereotype of the noble Chinese peasant was added the grossly distorted favorable picture of a great democratic leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his Christian, American-educated bride, usually referred to as Madame Chiang Kai-shek. In addition to receiving favorable media treatment, the couple was lauded by American political leaders. One public message from President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed that “all the world knows how you have carried on that fight which is the fight of all mankind.”

In China, however, the knowledgeable American ambassador wrote a private memorandum, noting realistically that

it is unfortunate that Chiang and the Chinese have been "built up" in the United States to a point where Americans have been made to believe that China has been "fighting" the Japanese for five years, and that the Generalissimo, a great leader, has been directing the energetic resistance of China to Japan and is a world hero. Looking the cold facts in the face, one could only dismiss this as "rot."⁵³

Although in the long run this false image had unfortunate consequences—it helped make it easy for demagogues in the 1950s to convince many Americans that their country had somehow "lost China"—in the short run it was useful to the Chinese American community. But not all of the improvements in the position of Chinese Americans were based on false images. Other important factors included real changes in the nature of the Chinese American community, changes in the attitudes of the larger society, and the real accomplishments of Chinese Americans. In addition, the favorable wartime climate of opinion was manipulated to bring about significant and lasting changes in American immigration and nationality law, modifications that at first affected only Chinese Americans but also, we can now see, marked a crucial turning point in overall American immigration policy.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

The demographic changes of the 1940s were quite pronounced. Nearly 20,000 Chinese American babies were born during the decade; for the first time in history the most numerous five-year cohort of Chinese Americans was persons under five years of age. Total population jumped some 40,000, aided, as we shall see, by a relaxation in immigration laws. Large numbers of younger American citizen adults—the children born or brought over in the 1910s and 1920s—assisted by the wartime boom that improved the economic circumstances of almost every group in American society, were able to move outside of the ethnic economy. By the end of the decade about 7 percent of all Chinese workers were in professional jobs, although most employed Chinese were in service, managerial, clerical, and sales positions. The educational achievement of Chinese Americans, once well below the norm, was by 1950 at about the level of the general population: Median years completed were 8.4 for males and 10.3 for the younger and more predominantly native-born females.

Within the larger society the war years had the effect of minimizing, but certainly not eliminating, racism as a stated value in American society. As Philip Gleason has written:

For a whole generation, the question "What does it mean to be an American?" was answered primarily by reference to "the values America stands for": democracy, freedom, equality, respect for individual dignity and so on. Since these values were abstract and universal, American identity could not be linked exclusively with any single ethnic derivation. Persons of any race, color, religion or background could be, or become, Americans.⁵⁴

While Gleason may be overstating somewhat the pervasiveness of cultural pluralism, it was quite pronounced during the war years, especially among the elite movers and shakers of American society. Nothing more clearly indicates this than the successful campaign for the repeal of Chinese exclusion, a campaign mounted, not by members of the Chinese American community, but rather by members of what can be called the white establishment.

The successful campaign was studied at length years ago as a classic example of "pressures on Congress." The key figure was a New York publisher, Richard J. Walsh, who was also the husband of Pearl Buck. Walsh was the major force behind the Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion and Place Immigration on a Quota Basis. The more than 150 names on the committee's letterhead represented a broad group of the American upper class and intellectuals, from Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union on the left to Henry Luce of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* on the right. Assisted by bipartisan allies in Congress—Democrat Emanuel Celler and Republican Clare Boothe Luce led the way—and by a strong message from President Roosevelt, the fifteen separate laws that had effected Chinese exclusion were repealed in December 1943. The new law was a simple one, in three sections. Section one repealed the old acts. Section two gave a quota to "persons of the Chinese race," later set at 105 per year. The quota retained overt racist features: A Chinese born anywhere in the world would be charged to the Chinese quota rather than to the country of birth or nationality. Section three amended the nationality act to make "Chinese persons or persons of Chinese descent" eligible for naturalization on the same terms as other aliens. Two and a half years later, Congress, feeling that the phrase "Chinese person" was inexact, defined it as "any person who is as much as one-half Chinese blood."⁵⁵

President Roosevelt made it clear in statements urging and then celebrating passage that repeal was essentially a foreign policy matter. He told Congress that the legislation was "important in the cause of winning the war and of establishing a secure peace." FDR admitted that "it would give the Chinese a preferred status" vis-à-vis other Asians but argued that "their great contribution to the cause of decency and freedom entitles them" to it. When he signed the bill, he remarked, "An unfortunate barrier between allies has been removed. The war effort in the Far East can now be carried on with greater vigor and a larger understanding of our common purpose."⁵⁶

Nothing more clearly indicates the lack of concern for Chinese Americans, as opposed to China, than the way that Congress and President Roosevelt ignored bills introduced in Congress that would have allowed the alien wives of Chinese American citizens to enter as nonquota immigrants. Family reunification, later to become a prime factor in our immigration legislation, was not considered important in 1943, at least not for Asian American families. Nevertheless, the repeal of Chinese exclusion was important, both because it reversed the trend of American immigration naturalization law as it related to Asians and because within three years bars would be similarly lowered, as we shall see, for Filipinos and "natives of India," and in nine years for all otherwise eligible Asians.

But for tangible, as opposed to symbolic, importance to the Chinese American community, a little-noted act passed in 1946 was actually more immediately significant. It simply made Chinese alien wives of American citizens, native-born or naturalized, admissible on a nonquota basis. This set off a minor boom in the legal migration of Chinese women and is an example of how, once given a quota, a group, no matter how tiny, could under immigration law and without subterfuge greatly exceed that quota. For the eight years from 1945 to 1952, there was a total of 840 Chinese quota spaces; as Table 4.2 shows, that quota was all but meaningless.

This migration of almost 10,000 females in eight years, almost all of them after the 1946 act and almost all of them adults, had tremendous impact on the structure of Chinese American society, which contained, as late as 1950, only 28,000 women fourteen years of age and older. One must remember that the impact of this relatively large number of adults would serve, in the short run at least, to reinforce Chinese as opposed to Chinese American culture.

Other changes during the war included a significant but little-remarked contribution to the war effort. Almost 16,000 Chinese Americans

Table 4.2 Immigration of Chinese by Sex, 1945–1953

Year	Male	Female	Percent Female	Total
1945	45	64	59	109
1946	71	162	69	233
1947	142	986	87	1,128
1948	257	3,317	92	3,574
1949	242	2,248	90	2,490
1950	110	1,179	92	1,289
1951	126	957	88	1,083
1952	118	1,034	90	1,152
Total	1,111	9,947	90	11,058

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Annual Reports*.

served in the armed forces between 1940 and 1946. Unlike the Japanese, the Chinese were not placed in segregated units. About 1,600 served, including some as officers, in the more restrictive Navy, which took no Japanese Americans at all. William Der Bing, who became the head of protocol and community affairs for NASA in the 1970s, described some of the obstacles he overcame to become a naval aviator in wartime.

They were reluctant to give me the application forms. I said, "Either I can get them here or I can get them from my Congressman." The minute I mentioned "Congressman," the next thing I know I had a pile of papers. Even in the Navy there were some real good men, but the majority didn't want a "Chinaman" in their outfit. They made every remark possible to harass you.

Personally, I was told that "No Chinaman will ever fly in my outfit." I was told that by a doctor—a Navy doctor. He gave me a physical. He said, "I want you to know that I would do anything I can to fail you in your physical." I looked at him and said, "If you do, it would be the most dishonest thing that an officer in this United States Navy would ever do to another member of the United States Navy." I put it just this way.⁷

The bittersweet nature of increasing Chinese American success during the war continued in the immediate postwar years, as the following incidents—trivial in themselves—illustrate. They are the kinds of things that could happen only when successful middle-class Chinese began to move out of the Chinatowns. In San Francisco a former Guomindang officer, Sing Sheng, moved into the middle-class San Francisco suburb of Southwood. After some turmoil about his presence, an informal neighborhood referendum found 174 persons voted against his staying, 28 voted for his continuing, and 14 had no opinion. Yet when the story received widespread publicity, Sheng and his family received invitations to move into scores of communities across the nation. Sheng eventually settled peacefully in Sonoma, in northern California. In the Midwest a fraternity at elite Northwestern University revoked the bid it made to Sherman Wu, the son of a former Nationalist officer, because at least seven Caucasian pledges said that they would not join if Wu was accepted. Again publicity brought a counterreaction: Two other fraternities at Northwestern offered to pledge the young Chinese American, who was understandably hesitant. "If they are sincere enough," the *New York Times* reported him as saying, "I may join one. I don't know yet."

THE COLD WAR

But as World War II eased into the Cold War—and in Asia the crucial event was the victory of the communist forces of Mao Zedong in 1949—the American image of China was again transformed. Harold Isaacs's "Age of Admiration" degenerated into first a brief "Age of Disenchantment" (1944–1949),

then quickly into an "Age of Hostility."⁸ The latter lasted until 1971–1972, when "Ping-Pong diplomacy" and President Richard Nixon's trip to China, spectacularly covered on television, ushered in a new wave of good feeling toward China. Knowing that in the past attitudes toward China had quickly been translated into worse or better treatment for Chinese in America, many in the Chinese community were nervous about their possible fate after 1949. The nervousness increased when China intervened against American troops in Korea in late 1950. Many feared that Chinese Americans would be placed in concentration camps as Japanese Americans had been just eight years previously.

That, happily, did not happen, and the American view of China and Chinese became plural. Just as in World War II, United States policy and ideology had carefully differentiated between "good" and "bad" Germans, in the Cold War era distinctions were made between "good" and "bad" Asians as well. There were now, for most Americans, two Chinas: Mao Zedong's communist, pagan, and threatening China and Chiang Kai-shek's capitalist, Christian, and supportive China. The clearest example of this new attitude can be seen in our insistence during the long negotiations at Panmunjon, which finally brought the fighting in Korea to an end, that Chinese prisoners of war had the right to choose to go back to China or to Chiang's regime on Taiwan. This was a new "right" and one we had denied to the Soviet prisoners of war we had liberated in Europe in 1944–1945. Even more significant for Asian Americans would be the way in which the Cold War would modify our immigration and refugee policies.

The Cold War came to Chinese Americans, too. The Guomindang had enjoyed overwhelming support in America's Chinatowns, before and during the war, as Overseas Chinese here and elsewhere were important mobilizers of support for China in her struggle against Japan. However, slowly but surely, most Chinese Americans—including many who were refugees from communist rule—have come to support or at least be reconciled to the People's Republic, which has, after all, what Chinese call "the mandate of heaven."

One is tempted to say that, just as international developments produced two Chinas, domestic developments produced two Chinese Americans. But that would be a gross oversimplification. As Rose Hum Lee pointed out in the mid-1950s, about half of the Chinese American population was native-born, and this segment of the population, reinforced by elite émigrés from Nationalist China, was becoming increasingly middle class, disassociating itself from the concerns of the American Chinatowns and striving for acculturation, if not assimilation, into American society.

Other positive effects of the Cold War in Asia for Chinese Americans can be seen in changing refugee policy. The 1950 Displaced Persons Act had reserved 4,000 spaces for "European refugees from China," largely White Russians and members of the Shanghai Jewish community, and provided

no spaces for Asians. In 1953, for the first time, Asians were designated admissible refugees, and 2,000 visas were reserved for "refugees of Chinese origin." These had to be vouched for by the government on Taiwan, because of the fear in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s about the danger of letting in "red" Chinese. This tiny trickle was the start of a flow, which by the late 1970s became, with the so-called boat people and other Southeast Asian refugees, a major component of American immigration.⁹

Another gain from the Cold War was the permanent addition to the American population of a few thousand "stranded" Chinese. When China "fell" there were perhaps 5,000 Chinese nationals resident in the United States on nonimmigrant visas. A majority of them had come as undergraduate and graduate university students; others were highly trained professionals. They represented very different elements of Chinese society from most of the previous immigrants, who had been largely southern peasants. One student, Donald Tsai, who had come to study at Pomona College in 1941 and went on to do graduate work at MIT, told interviewers:

Many students came from China on scholarships from the Chinese government, although I myself did not come as a scholarship student. Those were very difficult scholarships to obtain, through competitive examinations, and so on. And the reason why you see so many Chinese people in the United States who are eminent professionals, teachers, and so forth is that many of these were, indeed, the scholarship students. . . . When they arrived, the war occurred and they were either cut off or decided not to return, and they have indeed made out very well. . . . I went to M.I.T. [which] was my father's school also. He studied mining engineering there in 1910. . . . All of the students were planning to go back to China. There was no thought of staying.¹⁰

Yet as things turned out, a majority of these students did stay, making them the first important segment of the postwar brain drain, which saw more and more technical and professional personnel from less developed countries migrate to the United States and other advanced nations. Some of the students did "return," but to Taiwan rather than China. A very few did choose to go to the People's Republic; the most prominent was physicist Dr. Hsue-shen Ts'ien, who is considered to be the father of the first Chinese satellite.

Although the worst fears of Chinese Americans in the 1950s were not realized—none were sent to concentration camps—they did suffer from domestic aspects of the Cold War. Some of the most traditional and conservative Chinese institutions in America, such as the family associations that united all persons sharing the same last name, ran afoul of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI and other "red-hunting" organizations because of their continuing communications with related clan groups in mainland China. As late as 1969, long after the peak of the Cold War hysteria, Hoover testified before a congressional committee that

Red China has been flooding the country with propaganda and there are over 300,000 Chinese in the United States, some of whom would be susceptible to recruitment either through ethnic ties or hostage situations because of relatives in Communist China. . . . In addition up to 20,000 Chinese immigrants can come into the United States each year and this provides a means to send illegal agents into our Nation.¹¹

Another onslaught on the Chinese American community came in late 1955 from the American consul general in Hong Kong, Everett F. Drumwright. He made a report to the State Department about what he called "a fantastic system of passport and visa fraud" and later argued that Chinese communists were using the system to infiltrate agents into the United States. (Ironically, the only spy for China we know of, Larry Wu-tai Chin, who committed suicide after apprehension in 1985, was brought into this country by the CIA.) In March 1956, in an apparent follow-up to Drumwright's charges, agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) conducted a series of raids to seize illegal immigrants in the Chinatowns of both the east and west coasts. The major protest of the Chinese American establishment, interestingly enough, stressed economic losses rather than human rights violations. In a complaint couched to appeal to the Eisenhower administration, New York City Chinese leaders claimed that the immigration raids were costing merchants there \$100,000 a week in lost sales.

But even some of the "humane" reforms of immigration procedures could be twisted and used as weapons in the Cold War. The government provided an amnesty program, the "confession system," to regularize the status of long-established illegal immigrants, the paper sons of Chinese America. Written into the statute books in 1957 after a trial period as an administrative innovation, the program provided that illegal Chinese immigrants *might* be able to regularize their status if a close relative—spouse, child, or parent—were a citizen of the United States or a permanent resident alien. Because of the climate of fear engendered by the Cold War and because much discretion was placed in the hands of officials of the INS, an agency that Chinese Americans had learned to distrust, most potential beneficiaries probably were not willing to use the program. In some cases the government used information gained under the confession program selectively, hoping to get rid of those who favored the People's Republic of China. Many Chinese Americans also believe that the INS was abetted by informers in the service of the Chinese Nationalist regime. Maurice Chuck, the publisher of a left-wing newspaper, the *San Francisco Journal*, reported an eventually unsuccessful attempt to deport him:

My grandfather used the name of Chuck to come to this country, so naturally my father was under the same name and became a citizen of this country. . . . What happened was [that my father confessed and] they arrested me and tried me and used my father's confession as evidence against me. They didn't use it

against my father. . . . They tried to deport me to Taiwan but my activities here in this country were so totally against the Chiang Kai-shek government, it's like sending me to a firing squad.¹²

Obviously there was, and continues to be, illegal immigration, and the Chinese, as the first group to be shut out, were pioneers in developing methods and techniques of entry. No one who has read Maxine Hong Kingston's marvelous book *The Woman Warrior*, with its evocations of "ghost" names and dual lives, can underestimate the impact that illegal status has had on the Chinese American community.¹³ But from the 1950s on, illegality was surely less and less important, both statistically and psychologically, as more and more of the Chinese American population was native-born or became naturalized and as more humane American immigration legislation and procedures allowed greater numbers of Chinese to enter the United States legally.

Further psychological strength resulted from the admission of Hawaii as a state in 1959. Hawaii had a majority of persons of color in its population—almost all of them Asian or Pacific peoples. One of its first senators was a Chinese American banker, Hiram Fong, who served in the U.S. Senate until he retired in 1977. The fear of having Asian Americans in Congress had been a major factor in the inordinate delay in the grant of statehood to Hawaii. Statehood bills had passed the House in 1947, 1950, and 1953, but in each instance they were bottled up in the race-conscious Senate. Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, for example, quoted Rudyard Kipling with approval, "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet," and stressed the "impassable difference" between the majority of Hawaiians, whose ancestors came from Asia, and the majority of Americans, whose ancestors came from Europe.

By 1960, natural increase and continued, relatively small-scale immigration had changed the Chinese American profile significantly. Including Hawaii, which had 38,000 Chinese Americans, the census recorded a total Chinese American population of 236,000. Though still a male-dominated community—males outnumbered females in every five-year census cohort—that dominance was reduced to 57.4 percent. Just over 60 percent of Chinese Americans were native-born. Three-fifths of all Chinese were located in the four Pacific states of California, Hawaii, Washington, and Oregon; more than 90 percent were found in just thirteen states and the District of Columbia. The age distribution still reflected the bachelor-society pattern established in the nineteenth century. With a median age of 28.3 years for the whole Chinese American population, men were significantly older than women, 30.9 to 25.2 years. Urban centers away from the Pacific coast tended to be more heavily male: The Chinese population in the cities of New York, Chicago, Boston, and Washington, DC was between 58.3 and 62.2 percent male.

Education and income data show a Chinese American community that was increasingly becoming two communities: one educated, relatively affluent, and becoming acculturated to American society; the other largely uneducated, distinctly nonaffluent, and still retaining much of its traditional culture. Some who have written about Chinese Americans have been misled by the median figures, which show for education a number close to the national average—11.1 years—and show females as somewhat better educated than males—11.7 years to 10.7 years. But a close look at the data shows that rather large numbers of Chinese had either a great deal of education or none. In addition, the advantage females had disappears when we look only at the well-educated. At the upper end of the spectrum, just under half of all Chinese Americans were high school graduates, 48.3 percent of the women and 44.1 percent of the men. At the very top of the spectrum, more than a sixth of all Chinese American men and an eighth of Chinese American women were listed as having college degrees. At the very bottom of the educational spectrum, about a seventh of the adult population (14.7 percent for males, 15.2 percent for females) was recorded as having no formal schooling.

Given the number of well- and relatively well-educated adults, the income figures for Chinese Americans were quite low. Chinese American men earned an annual average of \$3,471; Chinese women earned only about three-fifths of that amount, \$2,067. It is relatively easy to explain the reasons for the depressed earnings of Chinese Americans. Major factors were the long-established patterns of discrimination and their virtual exclusion from some of the best-paid sectors of the economy, particularly those sectors in which effective unionization had occurred. Among Chinese American wage earners, over a third (36.7 percent) were in wholesale and retail trade, more than a quarter provided services (26.2 percent), and hardly any (1.2 percent) were engaged in agriculture, fishing, or forestry. Very few Chinese Americans had good-paying blue-collar jobs: Fourteen percent were in manufacturing—large numbers of them underpaid female garment workers—and just 1.9 percent in construction.

To make these data more meaningful, they should not be compared to national averages and medians, which are depressed by the inclusion of the South, where standards were low. Instead they should be compared with figures for the West, the region in which most Chinese Americans lived. The easiest comparison to make is with California because the state Division of Fair Employment Practices published superb data for 1959–1960.¹⁵ The data clearly show that Chinese Americans were better educated than the white majority, although we must understand that the white data are somewhat depressed by the inclusion of what the census bureau calls “Spanish surname” data (see Table 4.3).

As shown in the national data, Chinese are both less educated and more highly educated than the state norm. Income data do not produce a

Table 4.3 Educational Attainment in California, 1960: Percent of Population, 14 Years of Age or Older

Educational Level	Male	Female
Eighth Grade or Less		
Chinese	40.8	38.7
White	27.2	24.2
Completed at Least One Year of High School		
Chinese	59.2	64.3
White	72.8	75.6
Completed at Least One Year of College		
Chinese	29.2	23.2
White	24.1	19.6

Source: California FEPC, *Californians of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Ancestry* (San Francisco, 1965).

similar pattern. The median income was \$5,109 for white males and \$3,803 for Chinese males. Chinese females earned slightly more than whites, \$1,997 as opposed to \$1,812, doubtless reflecting larger labor force participation (47 percent of all Chinese women over fourteen and less than 36 percent for white women). If we look at just the income for males 25 years of age or older—the persons who earn the most in American society—the disparities are even more striking, as Table 4.4 shows.

Thus, compared with their white counterparts, Chinese American men were 63 percent more likely to be poor, nearly as likely to be lower middle class, 88 percent less likely to be middle class, and 78 percent less likely to be well-to-do. While it can be argued that the overrepresentation on the lowest rung of the economic ladder reflects the larger number of poorly educated Chinese, their underrepresentation in the two higher brackets fails to reflect their educational achievement. On the other hand, the data show clearly that, however they might be disadvantaged vis-à-vis whites, the California Chinese (and Japanese, see Chapters 5 and 6) were achieving

Table 4.4 Annual Income in California of Men 25 Years of Age and Older, 1959

Annual Income	White	Chinese
\$1–\$3,999	29.4%	48.0%
\$4,000–\$6,999	38.9%	34.5%
\$7,000–\$9,999	19.6%	10.4%
\$10,000+	12.1%	6.6%

Source: California FEPC, *Californians of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Ancestry* (San Francisco, 1965).

middle-class status and income much more rapidly than California Filipinos and other nonwhites, only about 1 percent of whom had incomes of \$10,000 or greater.

What the data show is that although increasing numbers of Chinese Americans were finding niches in the larger, as opposed to the ethnic, economy, there were still significant barriers, both real and psychological, to their advancement within that economy. One of the readily discernible patterns was that although well-trained Chinese Americans could find suitable employment with relative ease, it was still very difficult for them to gain promotion to supervisory and higher administrative positions. Many were clearly overqualified for the jobs they held, and it was clear that many employers were reluctant to place Chinese Americans in jobs that gave them the power to hire and fire whites. As a corollary to this, it was almost equally clear that some Chinese Americans were reluctant to be placed in such positions. Both phenomena were clearly carry-overs from the more racist past. No rational observer should attempt to deny that substantial progress toward equality has been made since the years before World War II; at the same time there should be no attempt to deny that discrimination and deprivation have continued. Yet in the years after 1960 the continued existence of discrimination was denied time and again. In addition, the relative success of Chinese and other Asian American groups was used as a kind of rhetorical club to belabor groups whose measurable progress was less outstanding.

Since 1960 the most striking characteristics of the Chinese American population have been its rapid growth and the degree to which much of the Chinese American population would begin to be viewed as a "model minority." In 1960 no one could have predicted that the Chinese American population would increase more than fourfold in the next twenty-five years (see Table 4.5).

These dramatic increases had two primary sources: the Immigration Act of 1965 and the admission of refugees from Southeast Asia, particularly after the fall of Saigon in 1975. (A sizable number of these refugees were of Chinese ethnicity, although most were born in Southeast Asia and had never seen China.) A secondary cause of population growth was the natural

Table 4.5 Chinese American Population, 1960–1990

Year	Number	Increase per Year (Percent)
1960	237,292	5.8
1970	436,062	8.4
1980	812,178	8.6
1990	1,645,472	10.2

Source: U.S. Census and Population Reference Bureau.

increase of the population, whose median age was slightly below that of the general American population. It should be noted that in 1980 the fertility of Chinese American women was significantly below that of whites and most other identifiable groups in the population. Chinese women had 1,020 children per 1,000 women; white women had 1,358. In comparison, Vietnamese, black, and Hispanic women had 1,785, 1,806, and 1,817, respectively (it was clear that these rates were more reflective of class than of ethnicity).

Under the Immigration Act of 1965, the quota system was scrapped, and a complex system of preferences was set up that favored persons with close kin in the United States or who had professional and entrepreneurial skills. The refugees were not as carefully selected—and were to a great degree self-selecting. Since the Chinese in Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia tended to be entrepreneurial rather than agricultural, large numbers of the Chinese refugees were psychologically prepared to adapt to the economic aspects of American life.

Nothing better symbolizes some of the changes of attitude toward Chinese immigrants than the Chinese Student Protection Act of October 1992. Enacted in the wake of the massacre of the students who demonstrated for democracy in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in June 1989 and the subsequent mass executions and imprisonments, the law has enabled Chinese students—21,000 in 1994 alone—who were in the United States and did not want to return to become permanent residents.

THE "MODEL MINORITY"

By the early 1980s, the American media were noticing the great success of many Asian Americans. In 1982, *Newsweek* headlined a favorable story: "Asian-Americans: A 'Model Minority.'"¹⁵ The catch phrase, "Model Minority," has an interesting history. Coined in 1966 by sociologist William Petersen, who at first applied it only to Japanese Americans, it has become the new stereotype. Like all stereotypes, it has some relationship to reality but is no more indicative of the variety of Chinese American experience than the former "coolie laborer" stereotype was. It is ironic, as Peter I. Rose has put it, that the image of Asians has gone from "pariahs to paragons," and certainly among the current generation of Chinese Americans there are many paragons.¹⁶ For example, in 1983 the grand winner of the Westinghouse Science Talent Search was Paul Ning, a 16-year-old Taiwan-born student at the Bronx High School of Science. But even more significant than his achievement was the fact that of forty finalists in Westinghouse's national contest that year, no fewer than twelve—30 percent—were Asian Americans, nine of them immigrants. Nor was spectacular success limited to the young. Two of the first 100 persons on *Forbes's* 1983 list of the "richest" Americans were Chinese: An Wang, the 63-year-old proprietor of Wang

Laboratories, the fifth on the list, was said to be worth \$1.6 billion, and Kyupin Philip Hwang, the 46-year-old head of TeleVideo Systems, logged in at \$575 million.¹⁷ Such achievements, plus a very good press, clearly made the Chinese American community more self-confident than it had been, say, in the 1950s. The fact that after 1972 American relations with the People's Republic of China were all but regularized and quite friendly was also a factor leading to greater community self-esteem.

Chinese Americans were also attaining places of prominence in American culture, higher education, and politics. Following the trail blazed by Jade Snow Wong and Maxine Hong Kingston, a whole host of other Chinese American writers, including Frank Chin, Amy Tan, and David Hwang, achieved both critical and popular success. A young Chinese American sculptor, Maya Lin, designed the haunting Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC, the most stunning memorial executed in America in this century. The Chinese American scholar Tien Chang-Lin assumed the position of chancellor of the flagship Berkeley campus of the University of California and the Los Angeles councilman Michael Woo became the first Chinese American to contend for a major political position in the Los Angeles mayoral election in June 1993. Woo, a liberal, lost to a conservative Caucasian, but garnered almost half the votes.

This very self-confidence enabled some community leaders to demand better treatment and redress for wrongs. Early in the 1960s, Chinese American leaders on each coast called for federal assistance for the needy in their communities. Irving S. K. Chin, chairman of the Chinatown Advisory Committee to the Borough President of Manhattan (the mere existence of such a body speaks volumes about social change), told a U.S. Senate committee that Chinese were a "silent minority," who had not previously protested very much because of their problems with English, "a lack of familiarity with the American governmental system," "fear of government," lack of political influence, and a philosophical and cultural reluctance to engage in political activity. Ling-chi Wang, a San Francisco community activist and later chairman of the Asian American Studies Department of the University of California, Berkeley, spoke to the same committee about the "silent" Chinese of San Francisco. Wang advocated "manpower" training programs, which he said were "long overdue," "much needed," and "relevant." Wang also cited evidence showing that in San Francisco's inner-city Chinatown unemployment was almost double the citywide average, that two-thirds of the housing stock was substandard, and that tuberculosis rates were six times the national average. He argued that the major social problems for Chinese Americans were discrimination, educational handicaps, lack of marketable skills, language barriers, citizenship requirements, and culturally biased and irrelevant tests.¹⁸

How is it possible to square these complaints of poverty and deprivation with reports about "model minorities" and superior educational

achievement? It is possible because there is more than one Chinese America. Chinese Americans often speak of the differences between ABCs and FOBs, that is, between American-born Chinese, and the Fresh-off-the-boat (or plane) immigrant Chinese. The former tend to be college-educated, have middle-class occupations, and live outside of the inner-city Chinatowns. Many of the FOBs are poorly educated and deficient in English, live in Chinatowns, and ply the low-wage service trades or sweatshop manufacturing plants typical of inner cities. (Although large numbers of recent Chinese immigrants are poor, many are both middle-class and well-educated and have brought a good deal of capital with them.) The bifurcated nature of the Chinese American community is indicated quite clearly by some census data. In 1970, to cite just one example, although about a quarter of Chinese American adults were college graduates, another quarter had never completed elementary school.

In the 1980s and 1990s sharp educational and other differences also became apparent among new Chinese immigrants, whether from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Southeast Asia. On the one hand, large numbers were relatively poor—such as the thousands of immigrant workers, largely women, who found jobs in the Chinese-dominated sector of New York City's garment industry. Like their Eastern European Jewish predecessors at the beginning of the twentieth century, they worked long hours for relatively low pay under abominable working conditions for Jewish immigrant entrepreneurs. These contemporary Chinese workers also are exploited by bosses who are largely immigrants of their own ethnicity.¹⁹

On the other hand, there were the Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in California's Silicon Valley, the vital center of America's computer industry. Anna Lee Saxenian, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley's Public Policy Institute, reported that in 1988 the 2,775 firms there started by Chinese [and Asian Indian] entrepreneurs in the previous eight years accounted for nearly \$17 billion in sales and over 58,000 jobs.²⁰

These new entrepreneurs, most of whom arrived in the United States after 1970, have created an extensive network of activities that facilitate information exchange, job search assistance, and access to managerial expertise and capital. The region's most successful Chinese and Indian managers rely heavily on such ethnic resources while simultaneously integrating into the mainstream technology economy. Nor are these networks merely local. These entrepreneurs are building far-reaching business and professional ties with regions in Asia, and they are uniquely positioned to do so: Their language skills and technical and cultural know-how allow them to function effectively in the business culture of their home countries as well as in Silicon Valley. Their long-distance networks are enhancing opportunities for entrepreneurship, investment, and trade both in California and in newly emerging regions in Asia.

Although some scholars write as if prejudice and discrimination against Asians were a thing of the past, others have understood the ambivalent nature

of the status of Asian Americans in post-1965 America. Bryan Man examined the achievement patterns of Chinese and white men in California and Hawaii in 1960 and 1970. He concluded that race, country of birth, migration experience, and the social structure of American society all had continuing effects. "While some Chinese equal or surpass whites in occupational achievements," he wrote, "it is quite clear that many Chinese achieve less than their white counterparts, all things being equal. This fact, then, calls upon us to seriously question the notion that the Chinese are a 'model minority.'"²¹

In the mid-1980s and early 1990s the national media linked a number of criminal events with Chinese American society. Crime and violence by inner-city youth gangs on both coasts—including the mass execution of thirteen Chinese by youths recently immigrated from Hong Kong during the robbery of an after-hours gambling establishment in Seattle—traumatized many in the Chinese community. The grounding of the freighter *Golden Venture* in plain view of New York City with 288 illegal Chinese immigrants aboard on June 6, 1993, exposed large-scale smuggling operations that alarmed some of the public, already apprehensive about incoming Hispanic "feet people." Apparently, each of the Chinese on the *Golden Venture* had agreed to pay \$30,000 to the smugglers, who were connected to criminal groups in Asia and America. If all paid the trip would gross almost \$9 million. Most of the immigrants had at least made a down payment: One had paid \$6,000 before boarding.

A year later the *New York Times* reported that 224 of the 288 passengers were still locked up, ten were dead, five had escaped INS custody, and forty-nine had been released. Twenty-five of the latter had been granted asylum as refugees: Chen Benxu, for example, was granted asylum based on his opposition to China's one-child policy, and Wang Libin, a former student, because of his involvement in China's democracy movement. Another ten had been able to post bond, while fourteen were released as juveniles. Those who were still being held were costing the U.S. government about \$30,000 a year each, the same sum that each one was supposed to pay to come to America.

Similarly, there was a several-month-long campaign of leaks to the press accusing Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a naturalized American citizen born in Taiwan, of being a spy for the People's Republic of China. Lee, a scientist employed at the government's Los Alamos National Laboratory, was first publicly fired in March 1999 and finally indicted in late 1999 on fifty-nine separate counts of "mishandling classified information." The *Washington Post*, which had printed the various leaks from the FBI and other security agencies without naming its sources, eventually took a "neutral" position in an editorial:

Mr. Lee is, of course, innocent until proven guilty—a presumption that he has been largely denied in the public arena throughout much of the investigation. But the seriousness of the allegations against him should give pause to those convinced in advance of Mr. Lee's innocence, just as surely as the shifting na-

ture of the allegations against him should give pause to those convinced he is a nuclear spy. Given the poor handling of this investigation to date, it is well worth reserving judgment until the government proves the very grave accusations it has now leveled.

What the *Post* editorial failed to ask was the question that many students of Asian American affairs asked: "Would this kind of campaign have been conducted against a Caucasian scientist?"

In September 2000, after nine months in solitary confinement as a dangerous threat to "national security," the federal prosecutors dropped all but one charge against Dr. Lee and, as part of a plea bargain, released him with time served. President Bill Clinton publicly criticized the long incarceration but was "sure" that anti-Asian prejudice was not a factor in the admitted miscarriage of justice.²²

Chinese Americans reacted to these and similar incidents in various ways. Some tried to ignore them; others pointed out, accurately, that Chinese American criminal activities, although significant, involved only a small percentage of the community. Still others, such as Oakland attorney Alan S. Yee, called for a united front of all Asian Americans:

Even though the Asian-American community has traditional divisions . . . we find that, from the outside, we're all perceived as the same, and, despite an image as "model minorities," we see the search for scapegoat still there.

We would point out, however, that despite this and other calls for pan-ethnic unity, the various ethnic communities that comprise Asian America are more divided than united.²³

But Yee's premise needs to be considered. Were Chinese Americans in the last decade of the twentieth century a model minority or scapegoats? The more than 1.5 million Chinese Americans comprise a diverse community whose differences are probably increasing more than they are decreasing. Chinese Americans, although clearly overrepresented in many areas of achievement in American life, are also overrepresented among America's poor. And even for those who have "made it," there are often the nagging reminders of a racist past. Diana Fong pu: it well on the op ed page of the *New York Times*:

We're still not fully integrated into the mainstream because of our yellow skin . . . we still cannot escape the distinction of race.²⁴

NOTES

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2. Harold R. Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India* (New York: Harper, 1972), pp. 71, 155. (Originally published as *Scratches on Our Minds*.)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

4. Philip Gleason, "Americans All: World War II and the Shaping of American Identity," *The Review of Politics* 43 (1981): 483-518, at p. 484.
5. Fred W. Riggs, *Pressures on Congress: A Study of the Repeal of Chinese Exclusion* (New York: King's Crown, 1950).
6. Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 1943 vol. (New York: Harper, 1950), pp. 429-430, 548.
7. Quoted in Diane Mei Lin Mark and Ginger Chih, *A Place Called Chinese America* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1982), p. 96.
8. Isaccs, *Images of Asia*, pp. 123-124.
9. Roger Daniels, "American Refugee Policy in Historical Perspective," in J. C. Jackman & Carla Borden, eds., *The Muses Flee Hitler: Cultural Transfer and Adaptation, 1939-1945* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1983), pp. 61-77.
10. Mark and Chih, *Chinese America*, pp. 104-105.
11. Quoted in Stanford M. Lyman, "Red Guard on Grant Avenue: The Rise of Youthful Rebellion in Chinatown," in Lyman, *The Asian in North America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Clio Press, 1977), p. 198.
12. Mark and Chih, *Chinese America*, p. 104.
13. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (New York: Knopf, 1976).
14. California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Fair Employment Practices, *Californians of Japanese, Chinese, Filipino Ancestry* (San Francisco, 1965).
15. *Newsweek*, Dec. 6, 1982, pp. 39 ff.
16. William Petersen, "Success Story, Japanese American Style," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 6, 1966, pp. 20 ff.; Peter I. Rose, "Asian Americans: From Pariahs to Paragons," in Nathan Glazer, ed., *Clamor at the Gates: The New American Immigration* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1983), pp. 181-212.
17. "Confucian Work Ethic: Asian-born Students Head for the Head of the Class," *Time*, Mar. 25, 1983. *Forbes* list as cited by the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, Sept. 30, 1983.
18. Testimony in Integrated Education Associates, *Chinese-Americans: School and Community Problems* (Chicago, 1972), pp. 12-17, 18-25.
19. Xiaolan Bao, "Holding Up More Than Half the Sky": A History of Women Garment Workers in New York's Chinatown, 1948-1991," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1991.
20. Scott Thurm, "Asian Immigrants Help to Reshape Silicon Valley as Entrepreneurs," *Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 1999.
21. Bryan Dai Yung Man, "Chinese Occupational Achievement Patterns: The Case of a Model Minority" (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1978). The quotation is from *Dissertation Abstracts International* 39 (1978): 3172A.
22. The *New York Times* for September 14-16, 2000 contains some important documents about the case.
23. Material about the 1980s and 1990s comes from a variety of sources, including personal observation. Especially useful were two newspaper articles: David Smollin, "Violence, Sturs—U.S. Asians Feel Trade Backlash," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 14, 1983, and Robert Lindsay, "The New Asian Immigrants," *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 10, 1983, pp. 22ff. Story on *Golden Venture* from Ashley Durn, "After the Golden Venture, the Ordeal Continues," *New York Times*, June 5, 1994. "Estimated Undocumented Immigrants . . . 1996," *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1999), Table 10, and *Washington Post*, December 16, 1999, p. A38.
24. Diana Fong, "America's 'Invisible' Chinese," *New York Times*, May 1, 1982.