

(Mis)Representation of Chinese
Women in the United States: *America
Today* Magazine and the Cultural
Cold War in Asia, 1949-1952*

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Abstract

This article analyzes *America Today*, a United States Information Service publication that was distributed to Southeast Asian Chinese between 1949 and 1952. It argues that the magazine promoted the

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idea that Chinese immigrant women could develop their professional careers in the United States, which differed from the dominant scholarly narrative of Cold War domesticity that championed women's primary responsibilities as mothers and wives. Featuring mostly middle-class women and their successful careers, *America Today* sought to showcase the United States as a land of opportunity for these women to flee oppression in China and develop their professional ambitions in the United States. The reality, however, proved otherwise. The US government had no intention of changing the dismal annual Chinese immigration quota of 105 persons or accepting a large number of Chinese refugees.

Moreover, war brides and wives of Chinese American citizens accounted for the preponderance of postwar Chinese immigration. They mostly toiled in working-class employment after their arrival. The War Brides Act of 1945 enabled Chinese veterans to reunite with their long separated wives, barred from immigration due to the Chinese Exclusion Acts (1882-1943). The law also motivated many Chinese veterans to rush to China to get married. The Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act of 1946 gave wives of American-born Chinese a legal means to immigrate. Nonetheless, *America Today* failed to report their stories.

In addition, this article contends that *America Today* emphasized that Chinese immigrant women could showcase their Chinese femininity in the United States, because the People's Republic of China encouraged women to be masculine. The effort to equate Chinese femininity with traditional Chinese clothing served to Orientalize Chinese American women.

Key Words: Cultural Cold War, *America Today* magazine
Chinese female students, war brides, wives of
American-born Chinese

Originally printed in the *Des Moines Tribune*, an *America Today* article reported how a Chinese nun bravely fled to the United States, had a successful operation on her bound feet, and attained a job in a hospital.¹ The majority of Chinese immigrant women featured in *America Today* similarly enjoyed thriving white-collar careers. *America Today* (*Jinri Meiguo* 《今日美國》) was a bi-monthly periodical published by the United States Information Service (USIS) to target Chinese in Asia as part of psychological warfare. During the Cold War, policymakers considered culture as a pivotal arsenal in winning foreigners' hearts and minds over communism, which Frances Stonor Saunders has coined as the "cultural Cold War."² The above portrayal of Chinese immigrant women in *America Today*, however, was in stark contrast to war brides or wives of American citizens, who constituted the majority of postwar Chinese immigration and mostly toiled in working-class employment. The War Brides Act of 1945 enabled US veterans of Chinese descent to reunite with their long separated wives who were barred from entry to the United States due to the Chinese Exclusion Acts (1882-1943). The law also motivated many veterans to rush to China to get married. The Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act of 1946 gave wives of American-born Chinese a legal means to migrate to the United States. Nonetheless, *America Today* failed to report their stories. Instead, it stressed the upward mobility of middle-class women,

¹ *America Today* 16 (May 27, 1950), p 25, Box 111 "*America Today* (Chinese), 11-56," Records of the United States Information Agency, Record Group 306, National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter RG 306, NACP). The author has translated all Chinese into English and used pinyin to Romanize Chinese characters if Romanization was not provided in the original texts.

² Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999).

which differed from the dominant scholarly narrative of Cold War domesticity that championed women's primary responsibilities as mothers and wives.³ The emphasis on White domesticity also fails to shed light on the different strategy that US propagandists used to manipulate minority women in psychological warfare because they often emphasized these women's professional abilities.⁴

Through analyzing the representation of Chinese immigrant women and their American-born Chinese counterparts in *America Today*, this case study argues that the magazine promoted the idea that these women could develop their professional careers and maintain Chinese femininity in the United States. An opportunity to retain Chinese femininity distinguished the portrayal of Chinese

³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), pp. 19-22. Scholars have increasingly argued against Cold War domesticity, for example Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1946-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

⁴ For information about using white American gender norm as a propaganda tool, see Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pp. 257-262; Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 136-158.

For information on African American women in cultural diplomacy, see Melida Schwenk, "'Negro Stars' and the USIA's Portrait of Democracy," *Race, Gender & Class* 8:4 (2001), pp. 125, 127-128, 130-136.

For studies on Chinese American women, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 241-243; Ellen Wu, "'America's Chinese': Anti-Communism, Citizenship, and Cultural Diplomacy during the Cold War," *Pacific Historical Review* 77:3 (August 2008), pp. 399-400; 402-416; Chiou-Ling Yeh, "'A Saga of Democracy': Toy Len Goon, American Mother of the Year, and the Cultural Cold War," *Pacific Historical Review* 81:3 (August 2012), pp. 432-461.

American women from their African American counterparts. The emphasis on Chinese femininity enabled US policymakers to showcase US democracy and ethnic integration over Chinese communism. The strategy, however, also perpetuated Chinese American women's foreignness.

America Today has received little scholarly attention, although *World Today*, its successor, has enjoyed abundant notice.⁵ Only recently have scholars examined US cultural diplomacy in Asia. They mostly have emphasized Washington's policies and the general activities of United States Information Agency.⁶ Few have analyzed in depth the content of print materials. This article will bridge the gap by studying *America Today*. Produced by USIS-Hong Kong between October 26, 1949, and February 20,

⁵ The only exception is my article Chiou-Ling Yeh, "Images of Equality and Freedom: the Representation of Chinese American Men, *America Today* Magazine, and the Cultural Cold War in Asia," *Journal of American Studies* (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875817001840> (Retrieved May 24, 2018).

Lo only provides a quantitative analysis of *World Today*. Lo Shen-Tung, "Jinri shijie suzao yingxiang de neirong yu fanwei, shang" 《今日世界》塑造映象的內容與範圍(上) [The content and scope of images produced in *World Today*, part I], *Si yu yan* 思與言 9:4 (November 1971), pp. 41-47; Lo Shen-Tung, "Jinri shijie suzao yingxiang de neirong yu fanwei, xia" 《今日世界》塑造映象的內容與範圍(下) [The content and scope of images produced in *World Today*, part II], *Si yu yan* 思與言 9:5 (January 1972), pp. 34-47; Jing Jing Chang, "China Doll in Flight: Li Lihua, *World Today*, and the Free China-US Relationship," *Film History: An International Journal* 26:3 (July 2014), pp. 1-28.

⁶ Meredith Oyen, "Communism, Containment and the Chinese Overseas," in Zheng Yangwen and Hong Liu, eds., *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 77-83. For other US propaganda efforts in Asia, see Charles K. Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62:1 (February 2003), pp. 71-99; Marc Frey, "Tools of Empire: Persuasion and the United States's Modernizing Mission in Southeast Asia," *Diplomatic History* 27:4 (September 2003), pp. 543-568.

1952, right after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and in the midst of the Korean War, this magazine reveals the strategy US policymakers deployed during the highest tension in East Asia. Although it is crucial to study its reception, it is difficult to perform the task due to shortage of archival evidence. This article contends that *America Today* featured middle-class immigrant women who came to the United States as refugees or students, while in reality working-class war brides and wives of American citizens accounted for the preponderance of postwar Chinese immigration. Downplaying their domestic responsibilities, *America Today* sought to showcase that the United States was a land of opportunity for educated Chinese women to flee oppression in China and to develop professional ambitions in the United States.

In reality, no such opportunities existed for the majority of Chinese refugees. The US government had no intention of changing the dismal annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants or accepting a large number of Chinese refugees. Omitting the information about some Chinese women's US citizenship status, the magazine intended to conflate Chinese Americans with Chinese. It not only reinforced Chinese Americans' foreignness but also masked the problem of racial discrimination in the United States. While the magazine stressed Chinese women as victims and Uncle Sam as their liberator, it did not feminize the PRC. Instead, it portrayed the regime as an aggressor who persecuted Chinese women and deprived them of their freedom of developing their careers or expressing their gender identity. By contrast, the magazine strove to show that Chinese women had an opportunity to pursue both in the United States. The effort to equate Chinese femininity with traditional Chinese clothing, nonetheless, Orientalized Chinese American women and perpetuated

their exoticism. This article will first discuss the cultural Cold War in Asia and then examine how the magazine represented Chinese women in the United States.

The Cultural Cold War in Asia

Winning the hearts and minds of the Chinese living in Southeast Asia became particularly important for US policymakers when Communists successfully took over China in 1949, and the PRC entered the Korean conflict in October 1950. Policymakers believed that the approximate 9.6 million Chinese in Southeast Asia were vulnerable to Communist Chinese infiltration because of their cultural and economic ties to the PRC.⁷ Even before the PRC was established, the United States had created cultural exchange programs with the Republic of China (ROC) in 1942 to support its efforts in defeating Japan.⁸ During the Cold War, President Harry Truman considered propaganda an important strategy in battling global communism. Emerging in Asia in 1947, the USIS offices created various propaganda outlets including radio, print materials, and exchange programs to win the support of Chinese diasporas in the fight against communism.⁹

Hong Kong and Manila were the two main posts of the USIS

⁷ For the propaganda efforts aimed at Chinese overseas from the US, the PRC and the ROC, see Meredith Oyen, "Communism, Containment and the Chinese Overseas."

⁸ Wilma Fairbank, *America's Culture Experiment in China, 1942-1949* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Dept. of State, 1942-1949), p. 11.

⁹ Charles K. Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950," p. 78; Meredith Oyen, "Communism, Containment and the Chinese Overseas," pp. 59-93.

that generated propaganda materials for Chinese. Because of the influx of refugees from Communist China, Hong Kong became the ideal place for US intelligence to gather information about the PRC and to target the mainland population. The post employed fourteen Americans and seventy-nine local people. However, due to budget cuts, the number of staff were reduced to nine and seventy-five respectively in April of 1953. Creating, translating, and distributing numerous Chinese-language propaganda materials, the office also established a library that displayed major US books, periodicals, and newspapers.¹⁰ In 1950 the Department of State established a “Far East Regional Production Center” in Manila, which produced printed materials such as *Free World Chinese* targeting Chinese diasporas in Phnom Penh, Jakarta, and northern Thailand.¹¹

America Today magazine was the first major USIS periodical created for Chinese overseas. Edited by Vincent Shui, a former employee of the USIS-Nanjing office during the Republican period, the magazine reprinted many articles from US domestic magazines and newspapers, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Times*, *Collier's*, the *American Mercury*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Reader's Digest*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.¹² Only a

¹⁰ “Confidential: Statement to Facilitate Inspection: International Information and Educational Exchange Program,” p. 1, folder “Cultural Affairs, July-Dec,” Box 1, Hong Kong Classified General Records of the USIS, 1951-1954, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter RG 84, NACP); Johannes R. Lombardo, “A Mission of Espionage, Intelligence and Psychological Operations: The American Consulate in Hong Kong, 1949-64,” *Intelligence and National Security* 14:4 (1999), pp. 64, 66-69.

¹¹ Marc Frey, “Tools of Empire,” p. 552.

¹² John W. Henderson to W. Bradley Connors, “USIS Central Office Report for April 1950,” p. 2, Decimal File, 1950-54, 511.93/5-1050, Box 2532, RG 59,

small number of articles were locally produced, mainly the ones concerning the PRC, Taiwan, and the Korean War.¹³ Printed in Chinese (except that one article in each edition was in English), the magazine aimed to introduce readers to the American way of life, political system, foreign policies, as well as to denounce communism. To compensate for its limited number of images, the USIS produced *America Today Pictorial*, inserting it as a supplement in every second issue. About sixty-five percent of the articles were on the United States while the rest centered on the horrible conditions behind the iron curtain—half of which reported about the PRC and the rest focused on the USSR, North Korea, or other communist countries. The few articles regarding Southeast Asian countries were mostly on US aid to the region. A column entitled “Readers’ Mailbox” reflected readers’ interest in the topics of US governmental institutions, the United Nations, Korean War prisoners of war, and oppression in China.

America Today enjoyed a wide readership. The magazine’s initial production was 69,020 copies, and its later prints increased to 124,600, larger than its renowned Russian-targeted counterpart, *Amerika*, with a peak dissemination of 50,000 copies.¹⁴ Its

NACP.

USIS used articles from more than 250 weekly and monthly domestic periodicals for their publications. Department of State, “For the Press, No. 1143,” November 10, 1950, Box 163, Publications, General Records Historical Collections Subject Files, 1953-2000, RG 306, NACP.

¹³ American embassy Taipei to the Department of State, “IIA Semi-Annual Evaluation Report, December 1, 1951-May 31, 1952,” July 12, 1952, p. 5; Decimal File, 1950-1954, 511.93/7-1252, Box 2532, Records of the Department of State, National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter RG 59, NACP).

¹⁴ John W. Henderson to W. Bradley Connors, “USIS Central Office Report for April 1950,” p. 2; Decimal File, 1950-54, 511.93/5-1050, Box 2532, RG 59, NACP; From Amconsul, Hong Kong to the Department of State, “IE: Press:

distribution was also higher than a rival publication, *Free World Chinese*, with a circulation of 43,000 copies.¹⁵ The Hong Kong office secretly mailed the magazine to mainland China, as well as delivering it through other major US posts in Southeast Asia, including Manila, Taipei, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Djakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Saigon, Bangkok, Rangoon, and Hanoi, as well as Latin America, particularly Lima. Mailed to individuals, schools, bookstores, secret societies, and social, labor, and political associations for free, the magazine targeted well-educated groups such as politicians, educators, students, business people, and union leaders.¹⁶

After three months of production, the magazine added a new column, the “Chinese in America.” The change was a response to the criticism of a State Department official who asserted that the previous issues contained excessive anticommunist materials, which Sinophone readers disdained.¹⁷ In fifty-four examined issues, about twenty-seven issues reported on Chinese in the United States, indicating their significance in the cultural Cold War in Asia.¹⁸ Seventeen essays profiled men. Seven featured

‘America Today’ No. 20, July 22, 1950,” July 27, 1950, p. 3, Box 111, RG 59, NACP; From Amconsul, Hong Kong to the Department of State, “IE: Press: ‘America Today’ No. 40, April 28, 1951,” April 28, 1951, p. 3, Box 111, RG 306, NACP. The initial production for *Amerika* was 10,000 copies in 1945, but it increased to 50,000 a year later. Creighton Peet, “Russian ‘Amerika,’ a Magazine about U.S. for Soviet Citizens,” *College Art Journal* 11:1 (October 1951), p. 18.

¹⁵ Meredith Oyen, “Communism, Containment and the Chinese Overseas,” p. 81.

¹⁶ “Draft Country Plan for USIS Hong Kong, June 9, 1953,” pp. 2-4, folder “Cultural Affairs, July-Dec,” Box 1, RG 84, NACP.

¹⁷ Department of State, “Outgoing Telegram,” January 25, 1950, Decimal File, 1950-54, 511.9321/1-2550, Box 2533, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, NACP.

¹⁸ The entire publication of *America Today* magazine contains 57 issues. However,

women while six mentioned them briefly. Four introduced children, sixteen entries presented Chinese cultures, two covered community organizations, and one on the first public housing for Chinese. Chinese Americans also were included in several illustrations with no written texts attached. As I have argued in the *Journal of American Studies*, the coverage of well-educated men “promoted the idea that the US provided humanitarian assistance to stranded Chinese students and abundant opportunities to them and other Chinese American men to achieve successful careers, form a heterosexual family, and enjoy patriarchal power.”¹⁹ The magazine reported about prominent Chinese American politicians, scientists, and artists, with the exception of a cook and a restaurant owner, indicating a tactic to profile professionally successful Chinese living in the United States. This article instead analyzes the ways in which *America Today* chose to represent middle-class Chinese immigrant women but failed to include their working-class counterparts.

Targeting Women

In general, US Policymakers considered women a pivotal target group in their psychological warfare, especially female leaders, wives of elites, women’s associations, female members of organizations, and female college students, whom they assumed would exert an enormous impact on local people. Bombarding foreign women with various propaganda materials including print sources, films, radio programs, special seminars, and English

issues 36, 46, and 47 are missing in the archives. Therefore, I could only evaluate 54 issues.

¹⁹ Chiou-Ling Yeh, “Images of Equality and Freedom,” p. 4.

classes, the USIS attempted to “assure [foreign] women that American women have interests and goals in common with their own” and “to encourage on a basic human level an identification of the local women with American women.”²⁰

To achieve this, information officials carefully crafted the image that the United States was a leading force in global women’s liberation and viewed women’s progress as part of efforts in spreading democracy. In an essay in *America Today* that identified ten major events in the first half of the twentieth century, women’s liberation was second on the list, only after World War I. In a reprint from *Independent Women*, Dorothy Kenyon, an original US member of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, explained the goal of the commission was to battle the disparities in women’s status in various countries. Moreover, other female politicians such as Eleanor Roosevelt were portrayed as being actively involved in improving women’s lives abroad.²¹

The magazine featured many biographies of professional and career-oriented European and African American women who excelled in a variety of fields, including the ones traditionally considered men’s employment. Because US information strategists and officials alleged that “no Soviet women held positions of real power,” the stories of outstanding women demonstrated the superior US system that provided upward mobility for women.²² *America Today* reported prominent female politicians, including Roosevelt and Eugenie Anderson (the first female ambassador). Other female trailblazers also gained recognition such as

²⁰ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War*, pp. 261-262.

²¹ *America Today* 7 (January 21, 1950), p. 6, Box 111; 10 (March 4, 1950), pp. 8-9, Box 110; 16 (May 27, 1950), pp. 4-5, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

²² Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way*, p. 154.

Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female doctor. To demonstrate that African Americans equally achieved prominent careers, the magazine introduced Marian Anderson (a singer), Gwendoyne Brooks (a poet), Edith Sampson (the first African American to be appointed as US representative to the UN), and Mary McLeod Bethune (an educator and politician). Their biographies emphasized their tenacity to achieve respective careers yet failed to acknowledge the racial prejudice they encountered.²³

It was also pivotal for *America Today* to showcase racial progress for Chinese American women. Chinese had long criticized the discriminatory immigration laws that significantly reduced the immigration of Chinese women, as well as racial prejudice and mistreatment at the borders and after their arrival. They protested the hostilities through boycotting American goods in 1905, the first boycott against a foreign country.²⁴ Japanese propaganda during WWII and Russian broadcasts during the Korean War manipulated the discriminatory immigration laws to incite anti-Americanism among Chinese. The PRC adopted the same tactic as well.²⁵

Indeed, prior to 1945 very few Chinese women migrated to the United States due to Chinese cultural traditions as well as US

²³ *America Today* 17 (June 10, 1950), p. 9, Box 111; 7 (January 21, 1950), p. 21, Box 110; 14 (April 29, 1950), p. 17; 25 (September 30, 1950), pp. 7-8, Box 111; 10 (March 4, 1950), p. 10, Box 110; 23 (September 2, 1950), p. 17, Box 111; 1 (October 26, 1949), p. 13, Box 110; 51 (December 10, 1951), pp. 16-17; 30 (December 10, 1950), p. 24; 25 (September 30, 1950), p. 8; 29 (November 25, 1950), p. 11; 20 (July 22, 1950), p. 18, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

²⁴ Guanhua Wang, *In Search of Justice: The 1905-1906 Chinese Anti-American Boycott* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 81-191.

²⁵ The President's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization, *Whom We Shall Welcome: Report of the President's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1953), p. 52.

labor practice, the hostile environment, and discriminatory immigration laws. Chinese traditions expected married women to raise children and serve in-laws. Moreover, violence, racial prejudice, and little job prospects in the frontier United States deterred them from migration. The Page Law of 1875 banned the admission of felons, Chinese, Japanese, and Mongolian contract laborers, as well as women for the purpose of prostitution, notably reducing the immigration of Chinese women.²⁶ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred the immigration of Chinese laborers. The subsequent 1884 amendment and court decisions prohibited the entry of their wives, because they were classified as the same laboring class as their husbands. Although the exclusionary laws permitted merchants, diplomats, teachers, students, travelers, and their family members to enter the United States, these people still encountered difficulties at the borders. Moreover, most women failed to be eligible for the aforementioned exempted classes, so the majority of them migrated as wives or daughters of merchants or U.S. citizens. However, the laws failed to specify the immigration requirement of the wives of US citizens. As a result, these women had to file lawsuits to gain admission. The 1924 National Origins Act completely barred Chinese immigration. After vigorous lobbying from the Chinese American community, in 1930 Congress passed a statute “to allow Chinese wives of American citizens who were ‘married prior to the approval of the Immigration Act of 1924’ to be admitted into the country.”²⁷ Nevertheless, the discriminatory immigration laws

²⁶ George Anthony Pepper, “Forbidden Families: Emigration Experiences of Chinese Women under the Page Law, 1875-1882,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 6:1 (October 1986), pp. 28-46.

²⁷ Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943,” in Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*

contributed to a lopsided gender ratio, which was 2.9 to 1 between men and women in 1940.²⁸

The gender ratio became more balanced in the postwar years, when women constituted the majority of Chinese immigration between 1945 and 1965. Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 to encourage Sino-American relations in the battle against Japan and to defuse Japanese propaganda that criticized US immigration restrictions on Asians. The repeal granted China a small annual immigration quota of 105 persons. Although the federal government had no intention of lifting the token quota, since 1943 the Chinese population had grown “by 51.8 percent to reach 117,629 in 1950.” Many of them entered the country without using the annual quota.²⁹ The War Brides Act of December 28, 1945, and the Fiancées and Fiancés of the War Veterans Act of 1946 granted the admission of 5,132 Chinese women with a non-quota status. The Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act of 1946 also provided the same benefits to nonveterans to bring their wives from China. Between 1945 and 1953, eighty-nine percent of admitted Chinese immigrants were women, 10,837 out of 12,151 (see Table 1). Between 1945 and 1965, seventy-five percent of these women entered as the wives of American citizens, who had long been separated from their husbands due to immigration restrictions.³⁰

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press), pp. 126-127.

²⁸ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family and Community, 1940-1965* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 1.

²⁹ Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 233.

³⁰ Chiou-Ling Yeh, *Making an American Festival: Chinese New Year in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 44; Rose Hum Lee, “The Recent Immigrant Chinese Families of the San Francisco-Oakland Area,” *Marriage and Family Living* 18: 1 (February 1956), p. 15.

Table 1: Chinese Immigrant Aliens Admitted into the United States, 1945-1953

Year	Total	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
1945	109	45	41	64	59
1946	233	71	31	162	69
1947	1,128	142	13	986	87
1948	3,574	257	8	3,317	92
1949	2,490	242	10	2,317	90
1950	1,280	110	8	1,179	92
1951	1,083	126	11	957	89
1952	1,152	118	10	1,034	90
1953	1,093	203	19	890	81
	12,151	1,314	11	10,847	89

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, quoted in Rose Hum Lee, "The Recent Immigrant Chinese Families of the San Francisco-Oakland Area," *Marriage and Family Living* 18:1 (February 1956), p. 15.

Those women who immigrated under the War Brides Act and the Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act mostly came from working-class backgrounds. The War Brides Act granted the admission of new war brides and old war brides. The latter were the wives of Chinese immigrants who separated from their husbands due to the exclusionary laws. Although both groups were born and grew up in the same rural villages in Guangdong, China, new war brides were at least ten years younger than separated wives. The average age for the former was about 20-25 years old, and they were likely self-taught or had about four years of schooling, while the later received none. These two groups had no formal occupations prior to their immigration, because both groups received remittances from their relatives in

the United States. Most planned to be housewives after immigration. After their arrival, however, they worked as seamstresses, kitchen helpers, food packers, and vegetable or seafood sorters to supplement their husbands' incomes.³¹ The majority of them were trapped in ethnic enclaves with little English proficiency.³² Women who immigrated under the Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act shared a similar background as separated wives. Likewise, they would find few paths to upward mobility after their arrival.

Chinese students and scholars were the third group who could enter the slightly ajar American gate. The turmoil in China and the passage of the Fulbright Act of 1946 encouraged Chinese women to flee China and seek further education in the United States. The number of Chinese female students increased from 82 in 1945 to 164 in 1946. It jumped to 340 in 1947, decreased slightly to 320 in 1948, and dropped slightly again to 297 in 1949 (see Table 2). When the prospect of the Chinese Communists winning the Chinese Civil War was in sight, Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 to allow 3,645 Chinese students or scholars who lived in the United States before April 1948 to obtain permanent residency.³³ Although the majority of the students were male, the portion of female students possibly constituted more than twenty-eight percent, because some students failed to disclose their gender (see Table 2).

³¹ Rose Hum Lee, "The Recent Immigrant Chinese Families of the San Francisco-Oakland Area," pp. 17, 20.

³² Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 284-285.

³³ Meredith Oyen, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 191.

Table 2. Number of Chinese Students Entering the United States by Year of Entry

Year of Entry	Male	Female	Sex Not Indicated	Total
1940	140	55	11	206
1941	138	64	18	220
1942	114	32	4	150
1943	158	50	10	218
1944	204	52	14	270
1945	408	82	53	543
1946	422	164	62	648
1947	780	340	74	1194
1948	846	320	108	1274
1949	672	297	47	1016
1950	422	221	20	663
1951	318	205	22	545
1952	317	192	14	523
1953	191	97	17	305

Source: China Institute in America, *A Survey of Chinese Students in American Universities and Colleges in the Past One Hundred Years* (New York: China Institute in America, 1954), p. 27.

These highly educated Chinese women were able to acquire employment in universities, research laboratories, and private industry.³⁴ Other American-born Chinese women also could acquire similar jobs for the first time. The percentage of Chinese women in the United States who worked as professionals reached

³⁴ Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 141.

19.4 percent in 1970.³⁵ It is no surprise that *America Today* featured middle-class immigrant women, rather than the working-class war brides or Chinese wives of American citizens, because their professional advancement could showcase the upward mobility available in the United States. Femininity and career opportunities were the two key areas underscored in the magazine.

Preserving Chinese Femininity

The PRC waged an intensive propaganda effort on the home front to publicize the idea of gender equality when the Cold War pushed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to militarize and masculinize Chinese women in order to defend the country. The CCP had already advocated unbound feet and non-arranged marriages before taking over China in 1949. In 1950 the PRC passed the Marriage Law to grant women the freedom of marriage and divorce. It also compelled women to attend schools and to participate in the workforce. To the CCP, gender equality “meant that women should learn and labor in the same fashion as men, in theory and practice.”³⁶ To encourage Chinese women to conform to the new gender ideal, the CCP developed extensive propaganda through literature, artwork, posters, films, musicals, operas, ballets, and radio programs. The military conflict in Korea and the imminent threat from Taiwan and the United States further motivated the CCP to promote young women to take on various

³⁵ Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 149.

³⁶ Yangwen Zheng, “Women’s Liberation in China during the Cold War,” in Yangwen Zheng, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi, eds., *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 123.

tasks that were traditionally viewed as men's jobs. Accentuating their roles as peasants, soldiers, and workers, PRC propaganda portrayed these women with "[big bodies], big hands and big feet [and in] the gender-blind uniforms [which made] them look shapeless." Slogans such as "hate cosmetics [and] love army uniforms" further pressured women to give up their femininity.³⁷

Because gender distinction was an essential part of US cold war ideology, US media attacked this masculine image of Chinese women. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that female pilots participated in the Chinese Air Force and female soldiers were members of the Chinese Tank Corps during the Korean War.³⁸ Headlines, such as this one in the *New York Times*, criticized the lack of femininity of Chinese women: "Close-Up Miss Communist China: Her feet are unbound, but she wears outsize[d] men's boots—for, in gaining the equality her mother never knew, she lost her femininity as well as her human freedoms." While acknowledging that the PRC had made tremendous progress in legalizing gender equality, the article declared that "the sacrifice of all feminine standards and values" was "tragic." It also quoted a woman who voiced that she preferred to wear the old-style qipao, a Chinese long gown usually made of silk with a slit up the side, although she asserted that the Mao uniform symbolized liberation.³⁹

America Today equally lambasted the disappearance of femininity in the PRC. Written by an Indian journalist, one essay

³⁷ Yangwen Zheng, "Women's Liberation in China during the Cold War," pp. 137, 126.

³⁸ "Women Reported Flying in Red China Air Force," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1951, p. 16.

³⁹ Richard Hughes, "Close-Up Miss Communist China: Her feet are Unbound, but She Wears Outsize[d] Men's Boots," *New York Times*, May 19, 1957, p. SM14.

described women's "liberation" (quotation original) under Communist China this way: "Women wore workers' uniforms and traveled everywhere. They worked in military, police, government, and the CCP. The PRC abolished polygamy and denounced arranged marriages." Questioning the changes in women's lives, the author put "liberation" in quotation marks. In the end, he suspected that the new gender ideal would take root in China as he questioned the fate of Red China.⁴⁰

The criticism especially centered on the disappearance of gender distinctions. A Hong Kong-produced article mourned the demise of traditional Chinese female clothing, which set them apart from men. Under the PRC, both men and women wore military caps and front-buttoned shirts and pants. The drabness of the new uniforms made it impossible to distinguish women from men. Although no law forced women to dress in uniforms, many felt the pressure to conform. Mainland Chinese men also loathed the look of the "new women." Many bachelors found no desirable mates because the CCP disapproved of beautiful women as marriage partners. Two large sketches accompanied the article: one showcased a heavy-set woman with bobbed hair and a pair of goggles. Clothed in a uniform, the woman appeared shapeless, or shaped like a man. The other was a slender woman with shoulder-length permed hair in a side-slit qipao that showcased the contours of her body. The article lamented the transformation of Chinese women and the loss of their femininity.⁴¹ Another essay claimed that Chinese men were outraged by the PRC ban on the images of beautiful women on calendars. One person protested the ban by cutting out a picture of a Chinese imperial princess emerging from a bath from last year's calendar and

⁴⁰ *America Today* 38 (March 30, 1951), p. 25, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁴¹ *America Today* 42 (May 26, 1951), pp. 8-9, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

pasting it over that of a laboring hero on the new calendar.⁴² These articles clearly attacked the gender policy of the CCP that deprived Chinese women of an opportunity to be feminine or to be treated as a sexual object.

By contrast, American women had freedom to pursue femininity and various fashions, including traditional Chinese-style clothing. Two small photos of high-heels and handbags from the latest summer fashion were included in the same issue that criticized the disappearance of women's fashion in the PRC. The caption indicated that shoes should be accompanied with matching handbags and stressed that the photos only represented two styles from among the varieties available in the United States.⁴³ Many articles featured Chinese American, African American, and white women who wore make-up and used accessories and clothing to showcase their femininity. Not only did American women have freedom to choose various Western-style fashions, but they also had liberty to select Chinese attire. Featuring a Chinese tailor shop in San Francisco, an article reported that the store's non-Chinese patrons adored Song dynasty styles of silky short jackets, pants, and robes, with photos of traditional Chinese pantsuits and qipaos. It employed diverse tailors including Chinese, Russians, Swedes, and Latin Americans. The shop also enjoyed international customers from Japan, Australia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.⁴⁴ Conveying the message that it was American democracy that preserved traditional Chinese apparel, the article also stressed that American freedom enabled women to wear pantsuits if they desired. The traditional Chinese style pantsuits, nonetheless, still preserved

⁴² *America Today* 39 (April 14, 1951), p. 26, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁴³ *America Today* 42 (May 26, 1951), p. 14, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁴⁴ *America Today* 45 (September 10, 1951), pp. 3, 19, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

femininity, a stark contrast to the Mao uniform that not only eliminated gender difference but also symbolized masculinity.

Indeed, US policymakers and information strategists seemed to deem traditional Chinese attire, especially qipaos, important in showcasing Chinese femininity and anticommunist conviction. People in the West considered the qipao traditional female Chinese dress, although it only appeared among middle-class progressive urban women in the 1920s China. Resembling a man's robe, the dress was a one-piece straight garment. In a Chinese society that distinguished male and female apparel by one-piece or two-piece clothing, qipaos thus represented androgyny to Chinese "new women" who advocated women's progress and equality with men. This failed to last very long. By the 1930s, qipaos were cut close to the figure with long slits on the sides to emphasize "female sexual characteristics: breasts and hips divided by waist" so that the gown could reflect a clearer boundary between women and men.⁴⁵ As the national female dress of Nationalist China, the qipao became its symbol in the West when Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Soong Mei-ling) donned it in public appearances during her tours to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁶ To US information strategists, qipaos symbolized freedom of oppression from a Communist China that restricted femininity. However, qipaos also feminized Nationalist China and implied that the latter needed the protection from the United States to fend off the aggression of Communist China. Nonetheless, qipaos enabled the USIS to connect with women in Chinese diasporas because they were the main attire for middle-class Chinese women in the

⁴⁵ Antonia Finnane, "What Should Chinese Women Wear?: A National Problem," *Modern China* 22:2 (April 1996), p. 119.

⁴⁶ Antonia Finnane, "What Should Chinese Women Wear?: A National Problem," p. 119.

1950s.⁴⁷ Many Chinese American women appeared in qipaos in photos in *America Today* magazine. One issue's cover even showed off a woman wearing a qipao and a bamboo hat.⁴⁸ While qipaos symbolized modern China because of the association with middle-class progressive women and Madam Soong, the bamboo hat, nonetheless, represented agrarian China. Both, however, Orientalized and exoticized Chinese women.

Professional Opportunities

World War II created a turning point for Chinese American women's employment opportunities. Prior to the war, the majority of them worked as seamstresses, domestic servants, or at other service sectors. Even high school and college graduates found no employment commensurate with their education or training, as racial and gender discrimination deterred mainstream employers from hiring them. A labor shortage during WWII created openings for Chinese American women to work in defense, manufacturing, clerical, business and professional fields. The number of Chinese American women employed in the above sectors increased to 58.5 percent in 1950 from 30.4 percent in 1940.⁴⁹

America Today magazine demonstrated the professional opportunities available to Chinese female immigrants to defuse the criticism of job discrimination. The magazine profiled five Chinese immigrant women: three artists, one television worker,

⁴⁷ Annie Hau-Hung Chan, "Fashioning Change: Nationalism, Colonialism, and Modernity in Hong Kong," *Postcolonial Studies* 3:3 (November 2000), pp. 299-300.

⁴⁸ *America Today* 51 (December 10, 1951), p. cover page, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁴⁹ Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet*, pp. 260, 306.

and one postmistress. The backgrounds of the three painters, Chang Linda Tung-Chen, Lao Jiuling, and Fang Qimei, were quite similar: born and educated in China, each specialized in traditional Chinese painting but received training in Western art while in the United States. Each came from well-to-do families and received a college education in China, likely as beneficiaries of the May Fourth Movement. In addition to protesting against the weakness of the Chinese government in facing Western imperialism, the May Fourth reformers rebelled against Confucian gender ideology that delegated women to the domestic sphere. Instead, they advocated that women obtain education so that they could contribute to nation building through their vocational skills. In 1919 “the National Federation of Education Associations recommended eliminating sex segregation at all levels of the school system.” The following year, Peking University, the most prestigious university in China, admitted the first nine women to the campus. Other colleges and universities followed suit.⁵⁰ The reformers created an opportunity for women to pursue a variety of art-related occupations, ranging from art teachers to professional artists.⁵¹

The coverage of Chinese female artists was part of cultural diplomacy because the US and ROC governments considered cultural exchanges crucial to enhancing Sino-US relations. During WWII, although the Nationalist government favored sending scientists and technicians to receive further training in the United

⁵⁰ Jane Zheng, “The Shanghai Fine Arts College: Art Education and Modern Women Artists in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 19:1 (Spring 2007), p. 195; Paul Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 65.

⁵¹ Jane Zheng, “The Shanghai Fine Arts College: Art Education and Modern Women Artists in the 1920s and 1930s,” p. 204.

States, the US State Department also funneled funds through the China Institute in America to recruit high-achieving students in liberal arts and social sciences to attend US universities for two years.⁵² After WWII, the US federal government regarded cultural exchanges as an important weapon in dealing with communism and Congress passed the Fulbright Act in 1946 to facilitate programs with allies. China was one of the first targeted countries in 1947. In 1948, 2,710 Chinese students enrolled in 405 US colleges and universities.⁵³ From 1947 to 1949, the number of Chinese entered the United States as students almost double when compared with those who entered in 1946 (see Table 2).

The growth of Chinese and other international students motivated *America Today* to promote the image that the United States provided superior higher education for them. Several articles discussed their influx and the generous intellectual, social, and financial support they received.⁵⁴ A 1951 article boasted that Chinese students were the second largest group among international students, with 3,549 attending US colleges and universities. The majority of them received scholarships from universities, while others had personal funding or attained financial support from other private organizations such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. The article also showcased a photo of a Chinese female student, Di Mei Mei, a freshman at Oberlin College.⁵⁵ Another article included the picture of a

⁵² Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, p. 121.

⁵³ Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority*, pp. 110-111.

⁵⁴ For example, *America Today* 15 (May 13, 1950), pp. 5-6, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁵⁵ *America Today* 49 (November 10, 1951), p. 37, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

Chinese female scientist examining a microscope slide at a lab.⁵⁶ Although the magazine accentuated the hospitality of Americans toward Chinese students, the latter continued to face racial discrimination. Commissioned by the Institute for International Education and published in 1945, Ching-Kun Yang, a Chinese scholar educated in the United States, penned a handbook entitled *Meet the USA* to help international students adjust to the new life. He warned Chinese students that they might encounter difficulties at the Immigration and Customs. Even after they entered the country, they could face other barriers such as housing discrimination.⁵⁷

Although male students made up the majority of Chinese students, a sizable number of Chinese women also attended US colleges and universities. Receiving her medical degree in 1885, Jin Yunmen was the first Chinese woman who pursued higher education in the United States. According to Weili Ye, more than two hundred female students attended colleges or universities in the year 1922 alone.⁵⁸ Initiated in 1909, the Boxer Indemnity scholarship was funded through the US portion of the indemnity of the Qing government. After the Boxer Uprising, the Qing government had been forced to pay reparation to the United States and other Western powers. In 1914 the scholarship started to award Chinese women the opportunity to further their education in the United States. Before the program terminated in 1923, forty-five Chinese women benefited from the scholarship.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *America Today* 45 (September 10, 1951), p. 26, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁵⁷ Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority*, pp. 112-114.

⁵⁸ Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 114.

⁵⁹ Paul Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China*, p. 64.

Featuring Chinese female artists and their art promoted the idea that the US admired and preserved traditional Chinese art and culture. During the Cold War, culture became indispensable in the efforts to distinguish the US from Communist China, as the latter suppressed traditional Chinese culture. A USIS confidential document that detailed propaganda strategies advised that *America Today* should stress that the PRC imposed on China “an alien reactionary culture.”⁶⁰ Preserving and admiring Chinese cultures and traditions thus became a means to demonstrate US diversity and democratic values. Traditional Chinese culture also enabled US propagandists to target Chinese diasporas, because many Chinese business leaders considered Chinese cultural proficiency a pivotal element in trading with China.⁶¹ Several *America Today* essays focused on Chinese poetry, holidays, and traditional paintings and clothing.⁶² In addition, a pictorial story featured a Chinese performance event that introduced Chinese music, dance, and folk culture to Americans while another demonstrated how students at Baldwin High School on Long Island, New York, learned about China’s history and culture.⁶³ *America Today* also featured articles about two male Chinese artists such as Feng

⁶⁰ “Confidential: USIS Plan for Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia,” May 28, 1952, folder “Cultural Affairs, July-December,” Box 1 E#UD2689, Hong Kong Classified General Records of USIS, 1951-1954, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, RG 84, NACP.

⁶¹ Gungwu Wang, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 58-59.

⁶² *America Today* 7 (January 21, 1950), p. 19 [From Robert Payne, introduction to the *White Pony*], Box 110, RG 306, NACP; *America Today* 33 (January 20, 1951), front and inside cover; 25 (September 30, 1950), p. 25; 45 (September 10, 1951), pp. 3, 19, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁶³ *America Today* 52 (December 22, 1951), pp. 20-21; 56 (February 20, 1952), pp. 12-13, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

Zhou and Dong Kingman.⁶⁴ These examples attempted to illustrate that US democracy fostered Chinese culture and Americans enjoyed traditional Chinese art.⁶⁵

The popularity of traditional Chinese art among Americans translated into the acclaim of Chinese artists, as in the example of Chang Linda Tung-Chen's exhibitions. In 1946 she graduated from St. Johns University in Shanghai, one of the most prestigious universities established by US missionaries. She studied Chinese painting in China but changed to modern painting while attending the University of California, Berkeley in 1948. Since receiving a master's of art degree in 1950, her artwork had been exhibited at the Berkeley Public Library and the De Young Museum of San Francisco. Showcasing the popularity of her exhibition at the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Society, an article in *America Today* reported that it attracted more than one thousand spectators, including local elites such as San Francisco Mayor Elmer Robinson. Clad in Chinese-style clothing, as the accompanying photos indicated, Chang demonstrated her brush painting, signed autographs, and was surrounded by many viewers, including European Americans, African Americans, and Chinese Americans.⁶⁶

Lao Jieling was another thriving artist. She had nine successful public exhibitions, including the one at the Arts Club of Washington, within one year of her arrival from China in 1948.

⁶⁴ *America Today* 27 (October 28, 1950), p. 23; 42 (May 26, 1951), p. 20, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁶⁵ Other essays regarding Chinese cultures are *America Today* 3 (November 26, 1949), pp. 16-17, Box 110; *America Today* 13 (April 15, 1950), pp. 11; 22 (August 19, 1950), p. 10; 25 (September 30, 1950), p. 25; 45 (September 10, 1951), pp. 3, 19; 54 (January 19, 1952), p. 1, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁶⁶ *America Today* 49 (November 10, 1951), pp. 20-21, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

Studying painting under a renowned Chinese artist since she was ten years old, Lao received a Bachelor degree in economics at Zhongshan University in Guangdong. Lao's painting combined Sung and Ming styles as well as new impressionism. She planned to study American art, especially human figures.⁶⁷ Lao, like Chang, fled the Chinese civil war and pursued further education in the United States. While the articles in *America Today* revealed no information as to whether Lao and Chang were sponsored by the cultural exchange programs, the number of Chinese women who entered the United States as students had increased from 1946 to 1949 when compared to the previous years (see Table 2).

While Lo and Chang left China in 1948, it was unclear when Fang Qimei came to the United States to pursue her art career. An article in *America Today* reported that Fang gave a two-week lecture on Chinese painting in Denver, Colorado in 1950. A former lecturer at the East Asian Institute in New York, she was selected to be included in a contemporary Chinese art exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. While Fang and her husband were in the United States, their three children remained in a boarding school in Hong Kong.⁶⁸ Far from homebound, Fong exemplified the ideals of the May Fourth generation of women who prioritized career ambitions over domesticity.⁶⁹ The selection of traditional Chinese painters accentuated the ways American democracy enabled traditional Chinese art to flourish, as opposed to the PRC that eliminated the Chinese traditions. Moreover, the emphasis on Chinese female

⁶⁷ *America Today* 3 (November 26, 1949), p. 16, Box 110, RG 306, NACP.

⁶⁸ *America Today* 22 (August 19, 1950), p. 10, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁶⁹ The May Fourth Movement inspired women to seek individual fulfillment and economic independence. Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927*, p. 115.

artists revealed an attempt to endorse the Nationalist China as the United States not only deliberately portrayed it as the carrier of Chinese traditions, but also helped it to implement Chinese language education in Chinese diasporas.

In addition to art, the story of Kuang Guofang (Gladys Chang) illustrated that Chinese women could advance their careers in other mainstream jobs, traditionally held by men. Kuang, along with her two sisters and three brothers, left war-torn China in September 1940 to attend schools in Hawaii. They migrated again to the US mainland after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Graduating in anthropology from St. Lawrence University in New York, she received two excellent opportunities. One was to pursue graduate school at the University of Hawaii with a scholarship and the other was to work for a television station. She chose the latter. Her responsibility was to produce interview topics, gather information from interviewees, and design background stage sets.⁷⁰ Focusing only on her job, the article stressed her professional ability and the abundant opportunities that enabled her to fulfill her career in the United States.

While the article emphasized Kuang's independence and her fast assimilation to mainstream society, the accompanying two photos showcased her in a qipao at a television studio. It seemed that the dress was just ordinary clothing, rather than ethnic garb, thereby demonstrating the freedom Chinese women could enjoy in the United States. In this propaganda, not only could Chinese women pursue their career ambitions, but they could also display their ethnicity and femininity.

As a postmistress in New York's Chinatown, Chang Wu Mei Qi (May Que Chang) similarly had a nontraditional woman's job. Born in Guangdong, China, Chang immigrated to the United

⁷⁰ *America Today* 43 (June 9, 1951), p. 12, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

States when she was five years old. In addition to receiving a public elementary and secondary education, she also attended Chinese school. At the post office, Chang had to spend hours helping clients who spoke in various Chinese dialects, although she considered these experiences the exciting part of her job. While praising Chang's job performance, the essay also mentioned that she inherited the work from her father-in-law who fought to establish a Chinese-speaking postal branch in Chinatown and became the first postmaster in that branch. Even though most of the article focused on her work, it briefly mentioned that she was a good wife and worthy mother—her husband was a flourishing businessman while her children were diligent students.⁷¹ The *America Today* article, however, misrepresented some important aspects of her life. Although Chang was born in China, she was the child of an American citizen—her father was born in California.⁷² Due to this status, she had no problem migrating to the United States but could still have faced grilling interrogations at Angel Island. Between 1910 and 1940, the Angel Island station detained approximately 100,000 Chinese immigrants with an average stay of two to three weeks. But some detainees had a prolonged incarceration, ranging from months to nearly two years, while the Ellis Island counterpart processed European immigrants within a few hours, or, at most, a few days.⁷³

The article also failed to mention that Chang's example could only demonstrate Chinese women who grew up in the United States during the 1920s. They were the first generation to

⁷¹ *America Today* 49 (November 10, 1951), p. 12, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁷² Meyer Berger, *Meyer Berger's New York: A Great Reporter's Love Affair with a City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 168.

⁷³ Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 8, 48, 69-70.

get access to public education and attain mainstream jobs. Prior generations were not so lucky. Established in 1859 in San Francisco, the Oriental School, a segregated facility, provided elementary education for Chinese students until 1871, when it was closed by the school board. Although a Chinese couple won a legal battle for their American-born daughter to receive a public education, the San Francisco school board refused to allow her to attend the neighborhood white school. Instead, it opened a segregated school for Chinese. Other school districts maintained the same policy. Desegregation began to make inroads by the 1920s. Public schools started to integrate Chinese American children into neighborhood schools. Those who were born in the 1920s usually were able to attend high school, with some even receiving a college education.⁷⁴ For example, the postmistress went to the City College of New York. Her generation was also the first one to break into the mainstream job market. Previously, Chinese immigrant women and their American-born Chinese counterparts could only find jobs in canneries, laundries, restaurants, and sweatshops. WWII created an opportunity for them to work in defense and other better paid sectors. After the war, they continued to work outside the home in various mainstream jobs, especially in scientific and technical fields. The story of May Que Chang illustrated the racial progress made in the United States.

The United States as a Liberator

While emphasizing the United States as a land of professional

⁷⁴ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family and Community, 1940-1965*, p. 51.

opportunities for Chinese women, the magazine also accentuated that Uncle Sam was their liberator. White women attending ailing foreign children and soldiers in hospitals or orphanages were frequently covered by the magazine.⁷⁵ Featured as an orphan savior, Pearl Buck, the Nobel Prize winner for *The Good Earth*, accepted three Chinese American orphan siblings into her Welcome House, an adoption agency for children of mixed Asian and American heritages.⁷⁶ Another white woman rescued and adopted an abandoned and starving Chinese boy in Kunming, China.⁷⁷ *America Today* prominently reported white women in a mothering role that cared for the well-being of Third-World children or adults.

Similarly, an abbess who “saved” a Chinese woman from her bound feet illustrated the role of the United States as a savior. As mentioned at the beginning of the article, a Chinese nun regained relatively normal mobility after a successful operation on her bound feet. She, along with two other Chinese Catholic nuns, fled to the United States before China fell to Communists. An abbess placed them in a hospital in Iowa, where two of them worked as nurses. The third one, thirty-eight years old at the time, had her feet bound when she was eight years old. Eight of her toes were twisted and folded under each of her feet. Born in 1912, she was the victim of the old tradition. Converted to Catholicism and serving as a nun, she worked as a nurse in a Chinese hospital. The abbess took the woman to see a surgeon. Described as the first operation to unbind a woman from the medieval restriction, the surgeon cut off her fourth and fifth toes and used metal strings to strengthen the rest of the folded toes. The pain from the strings

⁷⁵ *America Today* 27 (October 28, 1950): unpaginated, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁷⁶ *America Today* 23 (September 2, 1950), p. 14, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁷⁷ *America Today* 17 (June 10, 1950), p. 13, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

was so unbearable that the woman took them off one night. However, her toes were able to maintain the shape, and she managed to walk normally and worked in a hospital. She even learned to speak English to express her gratitude to the surgeon for her new life.⁷⁸ Detailing the foot operation accentuated the United States as a liberator to Chinese women, while implying that China was a traditional patriarchal society that restricted women's mobility and freedom. The failure to include the names of these women, nonetheless, revealed the racial prejudice and the patronizing attitude of the author: the emphasis was more on the humanitarian efforts of Americans rather than the heroic behaviors of Chinese refugees. Ironically, the PRC also touted itself for liberating Chinese women from gender oppressions.

Catherine Mo Han Woo's marriage to a white man served as another example that revealed the ways Americans "rescued" Chinese women. Although not cured from polio, despite receiving care at the famous Warm Springs polio rehabilitation center in Georgia, Woo's life was enhanced by a marriage with an American man. Her story was on the same page as the article that discussed Warm Springs and the March of Dimes movement. President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the former in the 1920s and called for everyone to donate a dime for the polio disease in 1938 to create the March of Dimes foundation. In 1949 Woo went to Warm Springs to seek medical care because she was stricken by polio the year before and was paralyzed from the waist down. When her condition got better, she went to New York to study broadcasting technology, where she met her future husband, John F. Yohrling. They wed in Hong Kong after a two-year courtship. The article concluded that Woo overcame the difficulties resulting from polio and fell in love with and married an American man.

⁷⁸ *America Today* 16 (May 27, 1950), p. 25, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

Dressed in a bridal gown and sitting in a wheelchair, one photo accompanying the article showed Woo smiling radiantly while her husband stood behind her.⁷⁹ The story implied that the marriage was a solution for Woo, while the United States was a solution for the ill Third-World countries, which required medical and financial attention.

The article, nonetheless, omitted inconvenient facts of antimiscegenation laws and racial discrimination in medical facilities. Many states had statutes barring marriage between Chinese and Caucasians. The Supreme Court finally overturned them in 1967. Numerous medical facilities, including Warm Springs, only accepted white patients. Healthcare professionals considered polio a white disease. They argued that because few Asian Americans and African Americans suffered from the illness, they did not require medical attention, even though the reality proved otherwise. It was only under the pressure of Cold War politics to create an image of racial equality that Warm Springs opened a few “emergency” beds for African American patients.⁸⁰ Woo’s story fittingly showcased the acceptance of interracial marriages and of nonwhite patients at Warm Springs while masking the plight facing interracial couples and nonwhite patients.

The story of a Chinese girl, Antoinette, equally showcased white American men as saviors. Frank Chisari, an American soldier, rescued a Chinese orphan girl when he was stationed in China in June 1945. Helping her attain medical treatments and settle in a church orphanage, Chisari eventually adopted little

⁷⁹ *America Today* 34 (February 3, 1951), p. 11, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁸⁰ Naomi Rogers, “Race and the Politics of Polio: Warm Springs, Tuskegee, and the March of Dimes,” *American Journal of Public Health* 97:5 (May 2007), pp. 786-788, 793.

Antoinette, who reunited with him four years later. The author concluded that he was greatly moved by Antoinette's story, especially given that Communist Chinese's carnage in mainland China and in the Korean peninsula had produced many orphans. The magazine also featured other similar stories highlighting the ways American soldiers rescued individual Chinese and Korean orphans. Group rescues equally received attention. For example, the US Air Force air lifted more than one thousand Korean orphans.⁸¹

The above stories nonetheless either omitted or only briefly mentioned the immigration issue that had drawn criticism from the Chinese for decades. For Antoinette, the author briefly commented that he was amazed that US officials could quickly secure a visa for her but disclosed no further details.⁸² Only one article revealed a little more information about the immigration difficulty. One Chinese adoptee would have had to wait for two years for his admission to the United States if President Harry Truman had not granted him a special parole in 1947.⁸³ However, the intention here was not to address immigration barriers but to showcase Americans' humanitarian effort. Other articles included no information regarding immigration. The readers would be left with the impression that it was easy for the Chinese to migrate to the United States, although the reality was the contrary. Moreover, the immigration issue facing the wives of Chinese American citizens persisted to be uncertain prior to the passage of the Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act in 1946.

⁸¹ *America Today* 45 (September 10, 1951), pp. 24; 48 (October 24, 1951), pp. 12-13; 34 (February 3, 1951), p. 12, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁸² *America Today* 45 (September 10, 1951), p. 24, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁸³ *America Today* 8 (February 4, 1950), p. 13, Box 110, RG 306, NACP.

Supportive Wives

America Today only reported about three wives of Chinese American citizens. They were the wives of Zhanshui Luo, Wing Ong, and Buoyang Kuang (Benson Fong).⁸⁴ Since the focus was on the husbands, the articles revealed little information about them, including eliminating their first names, as it was the practice to do in the 1950s. As aforementioned, the wives of American citizens of Chinese origin often had to resort to litigation to gain entry to the country during the exclusionary era. Unsurprisingly, *America Today* never mentioned these obstacles and only briefly referred to these women as supportive wives and mothers.

The magazine described Ms. Lin as Luo's dutiful wife. Luo was born in Puget Sound, Washington, to a father who worked on the railroad. Receiving only an elementary school education, Luo worked as a cook on a ship. Because very few Chinese women were in the area, Luo had to go to China to look for a wife. He had to leave her behind due to his finances, as the essay explained. He did visit her after he saved enough money every few years. Four sons were born during these visits. The article revealed no information regarding how many years passed before Lin could migrate to the United States. They finally reunited in 1923. A tiny woman, she is described in the essay as a hardworking wife—raising ten children and being an even better cook than Luo. She was good at preparing both Chinese and American food.⁸⁵ Her ability to make bread indicated her easy transition and assimilation. In reality, separated couples rarely had

⁸⁴ When referring to Buoyang Kuang, I will use his English name, Benson Fong, because it was the name that he was known in the United States.

⁸⁵ *America Today* 25 (September 30, 1950), p. 22, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

harmonious relationships due to their long separations. Many immigrant women had cultural clashes with their American-born husbands and had difficulty adjusting to the new environment.⁸⁶

America Today again revealed little information about Mrs. Ong, the wife of Ong Wing who was the first Chinese American to be elected to state office in 1946. Coming from his neighboring village in China, Rose Ong entered the United States through Seattle and never met Wing before their wedding, as the essay claimed. The couple had a successful marriage and raised six children, ranging from nine to twenty years of age.⁸⁷ The description again intended to demonstrate the smooth adjustment Chinese female immigrants experienced.

The brief biography implied Ong's domesticity, while in reality she managed a grocery store while taking care of a growing family—rearing six children, when her husband was away for college and later busy with his legal and political careers.⁸⁸ Similar to her, numerous Chinese immigrant women had to work immediately after immigration in restaurants, laundries, canneries, sweatshops, or grocery stores, in addition to raising children and maintaining housework. They found the “double burden” challenging, especially without the assistance of their husbands or other family members in childcare or domestic chores.⁸⁹

The article also left out Ong's immigration history. She immigrated to Seattle, Washington, in 1920 when she was nine

⁸⁶ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family and Community, 1940-1965*, pp. 127-139.

⁸⁷ The article omitted her first name. *America Today* 20 (July 22, 1950), p. 9, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁸⁸ Richard Nagasawa, *Summer Wind: The Story of an Immigrant Chinese Politician* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1986), p. 43.

⁸⁹ Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family and Community, 1940-1965*, pp. 137-138.

years old, as a child of a merchant, an exempted class under the Chinese Exclusion Act. Her father, Toy, came to the United States as a student but later became a partner in an import-export business, a common practice during the exclusionary era. The family subsequently relocated and opened a restaurant in Yakima, Washington, where Rose attended local public schools until she was fourteen years old when her father's sudden death interrupted her schooling. She and her family went back to China to bury her father. During this time, her grandfather arranged her marriage. With a valid passport, she encountered no problem in returning to the United States in 1928. She, however, was detained along with her two children, Catherine and Jack, when they sought reentry from China in 1932. Catherine was America-born, while Jack was China-born. The immigration officer suspected that Jack was a "paper son." During the exclusionary era, a merchant often reported that a daughter or a son (in most cases) was born during his visit in China to create a chance for the child to migrate to the United States later on. This practice created a black market for some Chinese to acquire an immigration opportunity for their children. In this instance, Jack was a real son and was present with his parents. Nonetheless, he, his sister, and his mother encountered unpleasant treatment at Angel Island. When an employee found out about Rose's English-speaking ability, she was asked to be an interpreter and witnessed the humiliating treatment Chinese immigrants faced. Although her husband successfully resorted to a personal connection to get the family released after 36 hours, he himself was not so fortunate—he had previously been detained for three months in 1919 in spite of being the son of an American citizen—Wing's father was born in the United States.⁹⁰ The

⁹⁰ *America Today* 20 (July 22, 1950), p. 10, Box 111, RG 306, NACP; Richard Nagasawa, *Summer Wind: The Story of an Immigrant Chinese Politician*, pp. 14, 32, 38,

article conveniently omitted these details and instead emphasized the opportunity the Ongs enjoyed in the United States.

While the magazine portrayed Rose Ong as a traditional wife, it described Gloria Fong as a modern spouse. Formerly an actress, she was married to Benson Fong, an actor. The article briefly described their marriage and Gloria's subordinate role: her assistance in Benson's preparation of movie scripts as well as her toting a golf bag for him. In addition, it mentioned their amicable relationships with white neighbors in the example of assisting each other with child care. Photos of the family with neighbors and their outing to an amusement park demonstrated their acculturation to mainstream society.⁹¹ In reality, Gloria Fong gave up her acting career after marriage and co-managed the family restaurant business, along with raising five children. She was not much different from Rose Wong. Failing to report her American-born status, *America Today* represented her as what historian Mae Ngai has coined an "alien citizen," who had a "badge of foreignness that could not be shed" and a product of "both formal and informal structures of racial discrimination."⁹² Instead, the article intended to demonstrate that Fong and her family could easily assimilate to the larger society, even though the Fongs felt compelled to continuously seek acceptance from white society, in spite of their citizenship status.⁹³ Moreover, many American-born Chinese women continued to encounter

40, 72.

⁹¹ *America Today* 56 (February 20, 1952), pp. 20-21, Box 111, RG 306, NACP.

⁹² Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 2-8.

⁹³ Jenny Cho, *Chinese in Hollywood: Images of America* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), p. 54; Benson Fong, "Character Actor and Founder of Cafes, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1987, p. A3; Marshall Berges, "Gloria & Benson Fong: Home Q & A," *Los Angeles Times* (May 7, 1978), p. G58.

discrimination and glass ceilings, although some inroads had been gained in postwar years.⁹⁴

Conclusion

To enhance US global leadership in the battle between democracy and communism, information strategists considered Chinese women in Asia an important target group in psychological warfare. They produced numerous propaganda materials, including *America Today*, in an attempt to win their hearts and minds. The magazine revealed an intention to demonstrate that Chinese women could start a new life and achieve upward mobility in the United States. Except for the three women whose domesticity was briefly highlighted, the magazine mostly featured middle-class women who could achieve their white-collar professional ambitions in various fields such as art, science, nursing, and television. The representation, however, failed to reflect the majority of newcomers who entered the country as war brides or wives of American citizens and toiled in working-class employment with no chances of upward mobility.

Although *America Today* emphasized the smooth assimilation of Chinese immigrant women into the mainstream society, it reinforced their ethnic difference. The majority of the featured women appeared in photos wearing qipaos. The strategy was to showcase the openness of American society to accept the distinct Chinese culture. It also served as a way to affirm the Nationalist government and connect to Chinese women in Southeast Asia. It, however, glaringly Orientalized Chinese American women and

⁹⁴ Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Pictorial History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), p. 79.

perpetuated their foreignness.

Another strategy was to use the triumphant stories of Chinese immigrant women to demonstrate the humanitarian efforts of the United States, even though the latter had no desire of repealing the token 105-person annual immigration quota or raising the quota for Chinese refugees. The successful operation on bound feet and the adoption of orphans illustrated the United States as a savior to Chinese women and children. They were the exceptions, however. With the small quota, the majority of Chinese refugees could not seek sanctuary in the United States. Moreover, *America Today* never revealed any racial discrimination or barriers the “fortunate” Chinese female immigrants experienced. It also failed to disclose the effect of the Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Acts on the Chinese American community. The exclusion of historical and contemporary racial prejudice facing Chinese American women indicated a deliberate effort in denying their membership in the nation’s history and identity, despite endeavoring to showcase their inclusion to Chinese readers in Asia.

In the end, the thriving stories of Chinese women and their American counterparts created mixed results in the cultural Cold War in Asia. On the one hand, the success stories of Chinese women continued to be featured in other propaganda materials, including *World Today*.⁹⁵ On the other hand, in 1951 a State Department report already indicated the failure of *America Today* to “fit in with local preoccupation” and replaced it with *World Today* in 1952.⁹⁶ Jointly produced by the Hong Kong and

⁹⁵ Lo Shen-Tung, “*Jinri shijie* suzao yingxiang de neirong yu fanwei, xia,” *Si yu yan* 9:5 (January 1972), p. 39.

⁹⁶ From the Department of State to American embassy, Taipei, “IIA: Recommended Changes in USIS Hong Kong Magazine,” May 8, 1953, folder

Formosa posts, *World Today* reduced US coverage and included more materials from indigenous authors such as a serialized novel from Eileen Chang's *The Rice-Sprout Song* to cater to readers in Taiwan. By 1957, US propagandists had given up using one strategy to target Chinese in Southeast Asia and instead adopted "a more nuanced, country-by-country approach, treating the overseas Chinese as part of the domestic politics of the host countries."⁹⁷

"World Today," Box 3 E# UD2689, RG 84, NACP.

⁹⁷ Meredith Oyen, "Communism, Containment and the Chinese Overseas," pp. 73, 92.

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《今日美國》雜誌對在美中國女性的形象塑造與亞洲文化冷戰 (1949-1952)

葉秋伶*

摘要

本文藉《今日美國》(*America Today*)雜誌(美國新聞局在1949到1952年間,針對東南亞華人所出版的刊物。)來探討美國對東南亞華人的文化冷戰宣傳。它的策略是宣傳中國移民婦女可以在美發展她們的職業。學界強調冷戰期間婦女的主要責任是作個賢妻良母(cold war domesticity)。本文則認為《今日美國》只報導中產階級職業婦女卻忽略了勞工婦女。實際上,大多數中國難民並沒有機會移民美國。因為美國政府沒有打算提高每年給中國移民一百零五人的限額,也不願接受大量的中國難民。此外,第二次世界大戰後,來自中國主要的移民是勞工階級的戰爭新娘和華裔美國公民的妻子。以前她們因為《排華法案》(Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882~1943)而無法和丈夫團圓。在1945年美國國會通過的《戰爭新娘法案》(War Brides Act)規定華裔退伍軍人的妻子可以移民美國。這條法律也促使了華裔退伍軍人趕回中國結婚。1946年

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的《允許公民華妻到美國法案》(Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act)也讓華裔美國公民的妻子可以移民美國。可是，《今日美國》並沒有報導她們。再者，《今日美國》強調中國婦女在美國可以繼續保持她們的中國女性傳統，因為中華人民共和國的婦女更多地展現出男性化的特徵。不過，《今日美國》以中國傳統婦女服裝來代表中國女性的傳統。由此可見這個雜誌把華裔美國婦女「東方化」(Orientalize)。

關鍵詞：文化冷戰、《今日美國》雜誌、中國女學生、戰爭新娘、華裔美國公民的妻子