

CHAPTER 1

Gateways and Gates in American Immigration History

UNDER CLEAR SKIES on July 3, 1986, in a ceremony broadcast around the world from Governor's Island, President Ronald Reagan presided over the first of a four-day commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the Statue of Liberty with a one-time presentation of Medals of Liberty to twelve outstanding immigrants.¹ These highly select acclaimed Americans included no less than *three* individuals of Chinese ancestry—the architect I. M. Pei (Bei Yuming, b. 1917), the computer scientist and entrepreneur Wang An (1920–1990), and the astronaut Franklin R. Chang-Díaz (b. 1950).² From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, the celebration of Chinese Americans as exemplary immigrants seems unsurprising given the pervasive image of Asians as model minorities whose educational and professional attainments surpass that of any other racial group, including whites.³ This is very recent history, however. Such an honor would have been inconceivable, and legally impossible, just a century before and as recently as World War II, when Asians categorized by race were barred from naturalized citizenship and subjected to highly limited rights of entry. The earliest American law concerning citizenship, the Nationality Act of 1790, had set aside Asians as racially ineligible, and the earliest enforced immigration laws (1875–1943) had targeted Chinese by race, who thereby became the first illegal immigrants against whom the legal and institutional foundations of American border controls were established. Under such circumstances, how did Pei, Wang, and Chang-Díaz, as Asians but particularly as Chinese, ascend so rapidly to become model American immigrants?

I. M. Pei's life story surfs astride the shifting ideological, political, and legal tides that advanced the integration and visible successes of Chinese. Individual brilliance aside, Pei had excellent timing, for his arrival in the United States in 1935 at age seventeen coincided with the onset of major changes in the relationships between immigration priorities and practices, the politics of foreign relations, and views of domestic racial inequalities that transformed the positioning and possibilities available to Chinese. The immigration histories of Pei and his generation of fellow students, heretofore



Figure 1.1. Ronald Reagan awarding Medals of Liberty, July 3, 1986. A dozen exemplary immigrant Americans were honored at this one-time ceremony to celebrate the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. I. M. Pei is third from the left, next to Franklin Chang-Díaz and Wang An. Courtesy of Ronald Reagan Library.

treated as exceptional to the mainstream of Asian American history, require our attention because they illuminate the many intersections between immigration history and international relations, underscoring that the evolution and institutionalization of American border controls emerged not just from domestic political agendas and racial ideologies but as manifestations of American ambitions and constraints abroad. The twentieth-century turn from restriction to selection gained momentum as the U.S. government—chiefly the executive branch and the Department of State but in conjunction with internationalists active in education, missionary work, and public policy—realized and co-opted the use of educational and cultural exchanges as means first to advance American foreign interests and eventually to develop national reserves of economically enhanced human resources. Immigration policies and practices shifted from a set of defensive measures protecting America from unwanted immigrants seen as posing dangers to the state to a set of selective processes recruiting immigrants seen as enhancing the national economy.

Pei entered the United States as a student, which, along with merchants, diplomats, and tourists, was one of the few exempt classes of Chinese permitted legal admission, although only for temporary residence. A banker's son, he came to study architecture first at the University of Pennsylvania but then transferred to MIT and continued to Harvard University for graduate study. As did other Chinese students, and even some American-born Chinese facing discrimination in the United States, Pei anticipated working in China, where professional careers were more readily available to ethnic Chinese. The Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), the outbreak of the Cold War (1948), and the hardening of political divides with the Korean War (1950–1952) shattered these plans and transformed him from a relatively privileged professional-in-training with a secure future in his homeland to a stateless refugee with uncertain prospects for either residence or employment. Unlike most Chinese in America, stigmatized as working class, ghettoized, and inassimilable, however, Pei had abundant talents, bicultural adeptness, and top-notch educational credentials that brought opportunities knocking at his door. On graduating in 1940, he received the Alpha Rho Chi Medal, the MIT Traveling Fellowship, and the AIA Gold Medal and continued his studies at Harvard with leading architects such as Walter Gropius, garnering special attention and teaching assignments. Pei was not alone in receiving support and succor from Americans. In 1948, alerted to the plight of thousands of elite Chinese students and technical trainees rendered homeless in the United States by the tragic turn of events, Congress made legal and financial provisions to provide sanctuary that included payments for tuition and living costs, stays of deportation, and legal employment. In the mid-1950s the Department of State came to accept the permanence of China's communist government and sought ways for the "stranded students" to gain permanent residence and eventually citizenship in the United States, a strategic move in light of the intensifying Cold War competition in the arms and space race.⁴ In 1954 China's assistant foreign minister, Wang Bingnan (1908–1988), had issued an open invitation for overseas Chinese scientists and technicians to return and help rebuild their homeland, a move that prompted the State Department to make U.S. citizenship available to selected resident Chinese refugees of good standing and demonstrated usefulness, such as Pei and Wang, who were otherwise unable to regularize their status because of restrictive immigration laws.

They and others in their cohort of student-refugees, such as the Nobel Prize-winning physicists Li Zhengdao (T. D. Lee, b. 1926) and Yang Zhenning (C. N. Yang, b. 1922), are also early examples of the phenomenon later criticized in the 1960s as "brain drain," the dynamic of educated elites departing their developing homelands to work in advanced economies, chiefly that of the United States, seeking better professional opportunities and working conditions, resources conducive to intellectual development, and

political stability. In the face of Chinese with such outstanding capacities, and in the context of the mounting Cold War refugee crisis and intensifying competition for highly valued knowledge workers, changing the priorities and practice of U.S. immigration controls to privilege individual merit rather than race and national origin presented compelling imperatives.⁵ The product of these shifting considerations, the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, facilitated the transformation of Asian Americans into model minority groups by prioritizing employment and educational criteria over race and national origin in potential immigrants. *The Good Immigrants* traces the longer history of such selective processes to the exemption for students articulated in the 1882 law restricting Chinese entry by race, a differentiation that laid the ideological and legal foundations for the role of Chinese students and refugees in enabling this dramatic turn in American immigration strategies, racial ideologies, and foreign relations, as immigration controls turned from emphasizing restriction to selection, with the aim of enhancing America's international political and economic agendas.⁶

Considering immigration as both a restrictive *and* a selective process makes several major interventions. At a basic level it integrates students and intellectuals into standardized narratives of excluded, largely working-class Asian immigrants, thereby providing the connections between the dominant, early twentieth-century trope of Asians as a yellow peril to the late twentieth-century positioning of them as model minorities.⁷ Furthermore, it alleviates the scholarly neglect of the Cold War era by tracing how the international alliances and enmities of World War II and the Cold War improved acceptance for certain kinds of Asian immigrants and conditions for their permanent resettlement in ways that foreshadow the transformations more usually associated with the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. Although some monographs have addressed social and cultural history dimensions of race and foreign relations during the Cold War, none so far has addressed how international politics and fiscal considerations contributed to significant shifts in immigration laws, practices, and ideologies that in turn transformed the demographics, attributes, and trajectories of Asian American communities and U.S. immigration policies more broadly.⁸

The Good Immigrants contributes to discussions concerning the relationships among foreign policy, the naturalization of neoliberal principles, American immigration laws, and domestic ideologies of racial difference and inequality. Celebratory narratives emphasizing the successes of Asian "model minorities" have obscured how selection processes serve economic purposes by screening immigrants for educational attainment and economic potential, thereby eliding domestic limits on access to opportunities and systems enabling upward mobility and success for those without such advantages. Cold War politics laid the groundwork for transformations associated with the Civil Rights era in repositioning Asians, here particularly

Chinese, as capable of, and even ideally suited to, participating in American democracy and capitalism. Attributed with exemplary economic, social, and political traits, educated and readily employable Chinese, and other Asians, gained preferential access to “front-gate” immigration as permanent residents eligible for citizenship, in the framing of Aristide Zolberg. In contrast, “back-door” immigrants such as refugees and unsanctioned migrant laborers face greater, sometimes insurmountable, barriers to naturalization.⁹ To these I would add the “side door” through which migrants such as students, paroled refugees, and now H-1B workers legally enter through less scrutinized temporary statuses yet routinely gain permanent status leading to citizenship. Between 1948 and 1965, such side doors enabled thousands of Chinese screened for educational and employment credentials to resettle in numbers far exceeding quota allocations as part of campaigns for general immigration reform. The H-1B visa side-door system, which primarily admits Asian workers in the high-tech sector, exemplifies twenty-first-century priorities in immigration selection that demonstrate how this metamorphosis has become naturalized, thereby rendering invisible how our systems of border controls continue to designate certain racial and ethnic groups for success while severely penalizing others.

Legacies of Exclusion

Asian Americans have featured most prominently in U.S. history in the Gold Rush period, as workers on the transcontinental railroad, and as the innocent victims of incarceration during World War II. After the shocking attack by Japan on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were categorically treated as “enemy aliens” who were liable to engage in sabotage or espionage if allowed to remain within one hundred miles of the West Coast. “Military necessity” justified removing about 120,000 Japanese Americans, a majority of whom were American-born citizens, from their homes to isolated, hastily erected, “relocation camps” in the interior. Although no evidence of espionage or treason ever came to light, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of such mass civil rights violations in cases such as *Hirabayashi v. United States* (1943) and *Korematsu v. United States* (1944), decisions that were not vacated until the 1980s.¹⁰ That the executive branch enacted such mass incarceration against targets defined by race as bound to enemy national origins, a move sanctioned by the highest reaches of the judicial branch, illustrates the pernicious prejudice with which ethnic Asians have been viewed as essentially foreign, inassimilable, and therefore probable threats to national security if allowed to enter and remain in the United States.

The impossibility of Asians becoming U.S. citizens was established early in America’s history. As noted earlier, Asians had been excluded from

citizenship when the Nationality Act of 1790 confined naturalization rights to “free white persons,” a category that then referred to white, male property-owners. The groups eligible for citizenship expanded with the inclusion of Mexicans through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and African Americans with the Civil War (1861–1865) but Asians not fully until 1952.¹¹ Asians thus existed for most of American history as “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” a legal category underpinning discriminatory legislation such as the alien land laws that prevailed in many western states during the first half of the twentieth century and used to ban their entry altogether with the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924.¹² The move to restrict the admission and residence of racially incompatible Asians had begun much earlier with Chinese, who were the first to arrive in noticeable numbers during the Gold Rush. These numbers only grew as economic development in the western states enticed workers with abundant job opportunities in trade, agriculture, fishing, service industries, manufacturing, mining, and railroad construction. Although Chinese constituted but 0.2 percent of the national population during the 1870s, some 70 percent of this number lived and worked in California, which spearheaded efforts to impose limits on their entry as early as the 1850s. During the 1870s the most severe economic contractions yet experienced by the United States, anxieties regarding the economic and racial legacies of recently abolished slavery, the restoration of southern Democrats to Congress after the Civil War and Reconstruction, and California’s influence as a swing state in razor-close presidential elections¹³ propelled the anti-Chinese movement into a heated national campaign. Presidential candidates of both parties in 1876 and 1880 featured platforms that declared the racial incompatibility and inferiority of Chinese—as marked by their status as unfree, heathen, coolie laborers; the undermining of white, working-class family men through unfair economic competition; and the sheer numbers of Chinese poised to take over the West Coast if allowed to enter unchecked. Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, seemed to grant scientific authority to such beliefs in intrinsic racial inequalities and incompatibilities and the imperative to segregate different “species” of men otherwise bound to erupt into evolutionary competition and violence.¹⁴ Such arguments justified the transformation of America from a nation founded by free immigrants to a “gatekeeping nation” that began shutting its doors by targeting Chinese.¹⁵

Congress first passed what came to be popularly known as the Chinese Exclusion Law in 1882 under the title “An Act to Execute Certain Treaty Stipulations Relating to Chinese” (47th Congress, Sess. I, Chap. 126; 22 Stat. 58). This law restricted Chinese entry by enacting the terms of the Angell Treaty of 1880 in which China had acknowledged America’s sovereign powers “to regulate, limit, or suspend” the entry of laborers with the stipulation that certain exempt classes, including students, merchants, merchant family

members, teachers, tourists, and diplomats were “permitted to come and go of their own free will and accord.”¹⁶ In practice the United States interpreted the law much more severely than the Chinese government had expected, a source of tension for decades to come, so that *all* Chinese not of the exempt classes were presumed to be laborers and therefore barred from entry. The 1882 law also affirmed the ineligibility of Chinese for naturalized citizenship and set the United States onto the path of securing its borders—evolving from a nation of free immigration to one preoccupied by excluding unwanted migrants as expressed through restrictive laws with an expanding array of targets and a growing bureaucracy for enforcement. This institutionalization of American nativism ran against the determined dexterity of Chinese in continuing to pursue the greater economic opportunities in the United States by defying the thickening jungle of laws and enforcement strategies of surveillance, interrogation, confinement, and deportation by challenging their constitutionality in court, sneaking across land borders, assuming fraudulent statuses and identities, and multitudinous other manipulations and evasions of American laws and bureaucratic practices. These contestations laid the foundations for the legal, ideological, judicial, and institutional implementation of America’s border control regime in all its twenty-first-century contradictions, abuses, and ineffectiveness. From enforcement of Chinese exclusion developed legal and procedural strategies such as the sovereign and plenary powers of the U.S. government to enact immigration laws, the executive branch’s sole authority over border controls, an explicitly funded and designated immigration bureaucracy, standardized profiling, practices of documentation and authorization, early versions of green cards, deportation of illegally resident aliens, the limited rights of such aliens to access American courts, and the caste-like inability of unsanctioned immigrants to gain legal status.¹⁷

From Chinese, immigration restrictions extended to paupers, those with diseases, and illiterate people in 1891; to Japanese in 1908 through the diplomatically negotiated Gentlemen’s Agreement; to a legislated “barred zone” in 1917 reaching from Palestine to Southeast Asia; and capping overall numbers by imposing a quantitatively discriminatory quota system based on national origins and applied to most of the rest of the world in 1924, accompanied by an absolute bar against immigration by “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” Historically and academically the legacies of Asian exclusion have framed the chief contributions of Asian Americans to the evolution of the United States as a nation-state through racial definitions of what peoples cannot participate fully in its republic as citizens, who should therefore be restricted from entry, and the rationales for marking and maintaining such differential statuses. The emergence of Asian exclusion illuminates America’s continuing ambivalence about the meaning of constitutional assertions of equality, specifically the priorities and criteria we should apply in

determining whom and how many others we should admit and welcome to become fellow citizens.

Much of immigration studies scholarship has usefully focused on the goal of *restriction*—the targeting of certain populations as unwanted in the United States. Such gatekeeping agendas were critical to American nation-state formations by positioning certain categories of people, and particularly Chinese and other Asians, as essential outsiders and threats against whom the United States ideologically, legally, and institutionally defined its boundaries.¹⁸ Until 1965 race and national origin were the chief criteria framing immigration laws, revealing deeply held convictions concerning racial incompatibilities and differing potentials for national integration. By focusing on restriction, however, the scholarship has neglected the *selective* aspects of immigration laws, which not only erected *gates* barring entry to unwanted persons but also established *gateways* that permitted admission to peoples deemed assimilable but also strategic, as determined by a variety of revealing rationales. We should strive not only to understand who America has tried to keep out and why, but also who America has chosen to admit and the priorities guiding such choices. Rather than emphasize the “centrality of race in immigration restriction,”¹⁹ *The Good Immigrants* explores why certain categories of Chinese, particularly students, were deemed exempt from such racialized restrictions and what support for their continued mobility can tell us of how considerations of class, political and economic pragmatism, and individual attainments mitigated Asian exclusion and immigration restrictions more generally.

From the earliest implementation of immigration restriction, distinctions based on class, cultural capital, and political and economic utility justified differential treatment for certain categories of immigrants. Earlier precursors to Chinese exclusion, such as the “Act to prohibit the ‘coolie trade’ by American citizens in American vessels” (1862) and the Page Act (1875), specified limits on the importation of prostitutes and coolie workers, permitting continued entry by other classes of Chinese.²⁰ By examining how processes of immigration *selection* had existed alongside restriction from its beginnings, *The Good Immigrants* underscores that debates regarding immigration involved many highly invested constituencies apart from labor organizations and segregationists. This broader and more nuanced view reveals the dynamic and inextricable relationships between immigration controls, foreign diplomacy and internationalist agendas, competing racial ideologies, and economic prerogatives. Restricting immigration demonstrated America’s status as a sovereign nation while satisfying domestic pressures clamoring for more secure borders,²¹ domestic priorities that often impeded efforts to strengthen international relationships by offending the governments of excluded peoples, thereby inhibiting trade and other forms of economic cooperation and the expansion of American influ-

ence abroad. For such reasons, a group that Michael Hunt has called “the Open Door constituency,” which included missionaries, cultural internationalists,²² educators, business leaders, and diplomats, worked alongside Chinese government representatives to ameliorate the drive toward Chinese exclusion by advocating for selected ranks of Chinese migrants seen to possess useful attributes such as education and skills, economic contributions, and the potential to enhance America’s foreign influence while advancing China’s modernization. In particular, for a variety of reasons and by a range of advocates, Chinese students were regarded not as inassimilable, barbaric coolies but as a malleable leadership class whose education in America and employment in China could foster stronger ties between the two countries while spearheading China’s advance into a Christian, democratic republic. Such high hopes attracted a breadth of supporters and advocates for Chinese to study in the United States, so that even at the height of the Asian exclusion period, Chinese students were constantly among the most numerous of international student populations attending American universities and colleges.

Studies of Asian American and immigration history tend to leave out students, who, after all, are commonly seen as but temporary presences in America that do not participate in struggles for settlement and acceptance. However, students demand greater attention for several notable reasons. Despite their low numbers relative to the total population of Chinese in America—around 1,300 compared to 102,159 in 1930 for example—even in the thick of the exclusion period they were consistently among the most numerous international students from the 1910s through the 1940s. In 1931 they were second in numbers only to Canadians out of a total of 9,806 international students overall.²³ The contradiction between the relatively high percentage of Chinese among international students compared with the very low number allowed to immigrate speaks to important nuances and slippages in the standard narrative of racialized segregation and exclusion. For example, missionaries and educators emphasized cultural differences that were mutable, rather than the essential difference of biological race. Students such as I. M. Pei demonstrated the possibilities of cultural convergences between Chinese and Americans and presented living examples that Americans could welcome and economically benefit from the presence of the right kind of Chinese: educated, Westernized, well-mannered, and possessed of practical skills and talents. Although Pei presents an exceptional profile in terms of ability and success, he nonetheless reflects a critical minority strand in the history of Asian immigration, revealing what would become a prevailing discourse in U.S. immigration by the late twentieth century. Such students could benefit the United States not only by returning to become leaders in their home countries but also by resettling permanently and contributing their professional and technical skills to the

American economy. Highly educated and skilled Chinese students such as Pei, who gained U.S. citizenship after becoming a refugee, illustrated the possibilities of such alternative rationales for immigration control, in which individuals could be selected by inoffensive and highly strategic criteria such as political alignment, personal merit, and attainment rather than the often impractical group criteria of race and national origin.

Despite their apparent challenge both to foreign policy and to constitutional ideals, gatekeeping priorities have dominated both practice and scholarship in the United States. Nativism and fear of economic competition as the governing principles for immigration restriction gained ascendance in the 1870s, grew in intensity through the 1920s, and staved off immigration reforms until 1965. However, throughout the eras of Asian exclusion (1882–1952) and national origins quotas (1921–1965), internationally minded advocates of more measured and less offensive immigration controls remained active and gained standing, particularly with the rising importance of America's foreign relations during World War II and the Cold War. Throughout America's exclusionary era, missionaries, educators, and internationalists developed and funded an expanding set of institutions promoting cultural exchanges, with Chinese as particularly valued participants, while they and business leaders continued to press the Immigration Bureau to respect the rights of exempt Chinese to enter and receive fair treatment. During the 1930s such international education programs gained State Department backing as inexpensive, soft diplomatic measures to strengthen relations with America's neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. Through technical training programs, U.S. corporations gained access to international students as cheap but highly trained temporary workers. As technological innovation emerged as a key force in economic competitiveness, maintaining access to suitably educated knowledge workers became necessary to maintaining America's capitalist edge.²⁴ World War II broadened the array of nations that the United States needed as allies, as did the revolutionary wave of decolonizations in Africa and Asia during the Cold War. International exchange programs increased in scope even as America could no longer afford to shut out by race and national origins the citizens of the many new governments in the Third World confronting miniscule immigration quotas and the tracking of Asians by race rather than by citizenship or nativity. These global shifts compelled a bipartisan succession of presidents—Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson—to press for immigration reforms so that America might present to the world a less discriminatory face.²⁵ For well over a decade, however, the only modifications that could get through Congress were stopgap, limited measures that acknowledged the compelling demands of America's wartime allies, family ties, and refugees. This long campaign finally culminated in the much delayed passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965, which displaced considerations of race and national ori-

gins by prioritizing family reunification, employability, and refugees with some consideration for investors.

As the earliest targets of race-based exclusion, Chinese as students, and then as refugees prioritized for educational and professional attainments during the 1950s, contributed to the working out of how the United States might displace race and national origins criteria for those of individual attainment and merit by providing reassurances that America's racial and cultural essence could be preserved even as it enhanced its political and economic interests through more strategic selection of its immigrants. Students such as Pei and others of his cohort presented highly persuasive examples of why the United States should make it more feasible for them, and others of high educational attainment and useful technical and scientific training, to remain and work permanently. With the growth of international education programs, and the likelihood that those trained in science, engineering, and technology fields could readily find employment and convert from student to permanent resident status in the United States, increasing numbers of ethnic Chinese, Indians, and South Koreans chose such specializations to position themselves to immigrate to America. The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 facilitated such resettlement by ending the offensive quota system and making employment preferences part of general law. These transitions in immigration law and racial ideologies drew on the pivotal role of Chinese students as a strategically malleable category in immigration policy and practices, racial theories, economic expansion, and diplomatic outreach, transformations that are inexplicable if we consider only the racial implications of Asian exclusion without due attention to the mitigating circumstances of selected admissions based on individual class and merit, but also the international implications of immigration controls.

International Imperatives in American Immigration Controls

Seen solely from a domestic perspective, border control is a matter primarily of defense, protecting the nation against those who might undermine or dilute the coherence and security of the state. International perspectives, however, emphasize the many necessary relationships entwining the United States with other nations and their peoples and how select and strategic types of migration enhance political and economic agendas both abroad and at home. For both America *and* its foreign allies, circulating people in the roles of, at a minimum, diplomats and businesspersons, but additionally technical, cultural, and economic experts, relatives and family members, military personnel, students, and tourists, is essential to projects acknowledging, promoting, and seeking advantage from our sharing of the world. This book highlights the international dimensions of American immigration

control that are revealed through Chinese student and refugee migrations to provide necessary complication for narratives that have emphasized domestic motives and impacts.²⁶ We cannot conjoin the state of America's immigration controls at the beginning of the twentieth century to the situation at its end unless we track the systematic privileging of educated and other kinds of economically and politically useful migrations.

Emphasizing domestic rationales for exclusion obscures the range of American opinions regarding racial difference and the need to strengthen foreign relations rather than isolate the United States. For example, the extensive American Protestant missionary establishment, for which China had been a major field of activity starting in the 1830s, opposed Asian exclusion. Although with some variation and inconsistencies, missionaries did not believe that essential racial differences divided Chinese from Americans. As expressed through the eyes of Presbyterian missionary William Speer (1822–1904), who ministered to Chinese in both China and San Francisco, the key divide was that between heathen and Christian, which “encompassed superiority and inferiority in social and moral life, just as hierarchical theories of race did, but provided a changeable and individualistic base for this difference—Christianity.” In response to the competing discourse of scientific racism, missionaries such as Speer's Methodist counterpart, Otis Gibson (1826–1889), pursued “antiracist” projects that “attempted to better the lot of racially oppressed groups and individuals,” with the only meaningful differences between people stemming from their religions.²⁷ Both Speer and Gibson were outspoken opponents of the anti-Chinese movement during the 1870s, despite virulently hostile attacks from other Americans. With their belief in the “universal brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God” and their considerable investment in physical infrastructure in China, such as missions, schools, hospitals, and thousands of human agents, missionaries had powerful ideological and material reasons to advocate for Chinese immigration rights before restriction began and for the mitigation of exclusion after it was implemented.²⁸ Such ecumenism battled with Christian paternalism and continuing assumptions regarding the superiority of Western civilization, fundamental contradictions that limited the impact of missionary projects in China despite the tremendous efforts expended.

The missionary establishment was but one component of the overlooked minority but nonetheless influential coalition of interests emphasizing that exclusion damaged America's relationships with foreign nations. Even the commonly used term “Chinese Exclusion Act” misleads by obscuring its roots in diplomatic negotiations and overstating original intentions. As described earlier, the law passed in 1882 enacted terms negotiated diplomatically with the Chinese government in the Angell Treaty of 1880, including the emphasis on entry by laborers while preserving admission for the ex-

empt classes. Reflecting the limited nature of its initial scope, the law was called the Chinese Restriction Act, with “exclusion” applied only in 1883 in a *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial criticizing lax enforcement of the law and conveying Californian pressures for a more extensive ban. The drive to exclusion quickly gained steamed, and in 1888 passage of the Scott Act eliminated the rights of returning laborers to regain entry, whereby restriction became known as exclusion, which was then applied retroactively to the earlier period.²⁹ The exempt classes retained their legal rights of entry even if at times—particularly between 1897 and 1908 when organized labor leaders gained control—an overzealous Immigration Bureau attempted to enact complete exclusion, only to be reined in eventually by presidential fiat in response to the 1905 anti-American boycott led by Chinese students and merchants and lobbying by their diplomatic representatives and the Open Door constituency.³⁰

Hunt describes the “special relationship” between Americans and Chinese ironically in arguing that the efforts of the “Open Door constituency” to present the United States as friendly to China and supportive of Chinese were not entirely benevolent. This group consisted of “American businessmen, missionaries, and diplomats—with a common commitment to penetrating China and propagating at home a paternalistic vision . . . of defending and reforming China” with the aim of protecting access to markets and China’s millions ripe for conversion.³¹ Through the Open Door policy developed by Secretary of State John Hay (1838–1905) in 1899, the United States did present a less rapacious image by pressuring other foreign powers to respect China’s national integrity and not claim separate territorial concessions in order to maintain commercial access for all on equal terms. Absolute exclusion undermined such efforts by limiting the mobility merchants needed to conduct trade and by offending Chinese who could choose not to convert, not to study in America, and to consume others’ products.³² These considerations, along with the rising challenge of Japan in the western Pacific and concerted lobbying by the Open Door constituency and Chinese diplomats, led President Theodore Roosevelt to modify course and allocate funds to sponsor scholarships for Chinese to study in the United States through the Boxer Indemnity Fellowships (1909–1937) and insist that the Bureau of Immigration respect the rights of the exempt classes to enter without undue harassment if properly documented. From the nadir of Chinese entry rights at the turn of the twentieth century, the pendulum would swing back so that educated and other economically useful Chinese would become among the most valued of immigrants to the United States.

Understanding this transformation requires that we acknowledge and track the activities of missionaries and business leaders such as those who formed the American Asiatic Association to facilitate trade with East Asia, neither of which exhibits the domestic and security perspectives that frame

the exclusion interpretation of American immigration history. Akira Iriye's explorations of internationalism help to break through the silos of such nation-based histories. Iriye defines internationalism as manifested in "an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and interchange." He is particularly interested in "cultural internationalism, the fostering of international cooperation through cultural activities across national boundaries," including exchanges of ideas and persons across borders and regions. Although before World War I proponents of this worldview confronted the problem of "allegedly immutable racial distinctions," in the aftermath of World War I's devastating display of the destructiveness of nationalism, internationalism became seen as "civilization's universalizing force [which], many even began to argue, could in time obliterate differences among people."³³

Educational exchange programs became key vehicles through which internationalists sought to promote world peace that extensively involved the missionary establishment. Entities such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA, founded 1844), its affiliated Committee on Friendly Relations among Foreign Students (CFRFS, founded 1911), and the Institute for International Education (IIE, founded 1919) devoted funds, personnel, and buildings to providing services that encouraged and facilitated students from around the world, and very prominently Chinese, to come to the United States with the idea that such personal encounters were critical to mutual understanding and world peace.³⁴ The Chinese and American governments readily collaborated on organizing and funding programs for Chinese to study in the United States, although in service of different agendas that superficially enhanced the image of a "special relationship." Their highly effective collaboration around international education masked the potential for conflict as China sought to strengthen its national economy through the acquisition of relevant knowledge and training while the United States aimed to extend its political influence and trading advantages. As China stabilized and sought to reclaim greater sovereignty during the Republican era (1912–1949), even friendly programs such as educational exchanges could not prevent clashes with an imperially minded United States.

The international historian Paul Kramer urges the concept of "imperial history" to highlight the relationship between how the global "pursuit of power and profit . . . transformed 'domestic' settings." By emphasizing "the way power is exercised through long-distance connections," we can understand advocacy for migration by exempt Chinese as forms of "imperial openings" maintained "because empire-builders in both China and the United States in different ways freighted these social groups with geopolitical significance, as the means to advance their respective states' power." Class-

based exemptions drew lines between civilized and uncivilized Chinese, enabling their mobility as conveyors of “nonimperialist expansion” that eschewed expensive military ventures and territorial expansion in ways that allowed the United States to retain rights to trade, fish, proselytize, and conduct business. Through expanding expressions of soft power, missionaries and educators “began to make their presence conspicuous” in both China and America by the 1890s.³⁵

Kramer has developed a typology of educational exchange to capture the variety of motives, expectations, and imperial ambitions that shaped such programs and convey the changing complexity of Sino-American political and economic relationships they reflect. China’s primary focus was self-strengthening as a means to halt its precipitous nineteenth-century decline by acquiring technical, military, and economic expertise to reinvigorate national development. However, from its earliest organized efforts with the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM) (1872–1881), study abroad has provoked tremendous ambivalence in Chinese, who weigh the necessity of emulating more advanced, powerful societies against deeply rooted anxieties that the essence of Chinese values and culture will thereby be lost and that Chinese foreign students will become “denationalized.”³⁶ Even so, Western-educated Chinese have attained positions of great visibility and influence in the shaping of modern China.³⁷ Kramer also points to “colonial and neocolonial migrations” organized by imperial states for “crafting a loyal, pliable, and legible elite in the hinterlands with ties to metropolitan society and structures of authority,” a strategy most visible in the *pensionado* program that sought to mold elite Filipinos into an acculturated leadership class and was one justification for the Boxer Indemnity Fellowships for Chinese. Christian organizations such as the YMCA and the CFRFS facilitated “evangelical migrations,” although with uncertain and limited outcomes. Perhaps most successful were “corporate internationalist” migrations, as implemented by the IIE and developed after World War I “among educators and business and philanthropic elites preoccupied with the causes of the war and possible ways to forestall future conflict.” In practice, however, education leaders working with their corporate funders “fastened and often subordinated pacifist idioms to projects in the expansion of U.S. corporate power through the training and familiarization of foreign engineers, salespersons, and administrators in U.S. techniques and products for potential export.”³⁸ This co-optation of international education by corporate interests accelerated with technical training programs during and after World War II. Although Kramer considers these categories inapplicable to Cold War dynamics,³⁹ after World War II state-facilitated corporate-internationalist migrations evolved to synchronize with economic agendas and facilitate development through student resettlement patterns that became known as “brain drain.” Although this book will treat these migrations more as forms of knowledge circulation

and transnational corporate collaboration, such international partnerships facilitated America's Cold War drive to integrate developing economies into global systems of capitalism that it dominated.

Growing acceptance that educated Chinese as valuable workers should have access to employment, residency, and permanent status in the United States accompanied shifts in conceptions of racial difference. During the 1930s and 1940s, culture, articulated as ethnicity, gained ground over race as an explanation for differences between peoples. As such Boasian conceptions of race and culture gained general recognition, bringing the mainstream more in line with views long held by missionaries, once immutable categories based on essential biological, racial incompatibilities and hierarchies became increasingly untenable.⁴⁰

International conflicts and competition reinforced pressures for Americans to demonstrate their capacities to integrate all peoples, regardless of race. During World War II, "official and unofficial propagandists celebrated America as a racially, religiously, and culturally diverse nation," contributing to the process of "transform[ing] the ethnic immigrant from a marginal figure into the prototypical American."⁴¹ According to Christina Klein, "Questions of racism thus served to link the domestic American sphere with the sphere of foreign relations, proving their inseparability: how Americans dealt with the problem of race relations at home had a direct impact on their success in dealing with the decolonizing world abroad."⁴² And so the Chinese Exclusion Act had to be repealed in 1943 so that Chinese and later other Asian allies of the United States gained naturalization rights. Such transitions accelerated into the 1950s, for the established and emerging nations of Asia gained strategic importance during the Cold War, with the United States committing unprecedented levels of political, military, and economic resources in efforts to foster alliances to construct a defensive belt enclosing the People's Republic of China (PRC) that extended from South Korea through the islands of Japan and Taiwan, enfolding Southeast Asia and reaching to the Indian subcontinent. Cultural exchanges such as the Fulbright programs assumed a central role in this building of relationships and common values that brought unprecedented numbers of Asians to study in America even as "hundreds of thousands of Americans flowed into Asia during the 1940s and 1950s as soldiers, diplomats, foreign aid workers, missionaries, technicians, professors, students, businesspeople, and tourists."⁴³ The balance of such movements was decidedly uneven, with a large proportion of Asian international students finding means to remain and permanently resettle in the United States, unlike the usually temporary sojourns by their American counterparts. The direction of such flows would not recalibrate until conditions of political stability and economic opportunities in sending states more closely approximated those in the United States starting in the 1970s.

Refugee admissions were another increasingly accessible means of immigrating, as about thirty-two thousand Chinese under this status did between 1948 and 1966.⁴⁴ Although Chinese barely register as refugees if they are acknowledged at all in most accounts of refugee or Asian American history, the State Department's refugee programs advanced the image of Chinese as politically sympathetic, or anticommunist, and assimilable, ready-made immigrants. As argued by Carl Bon Tempo, these two traits constituted the main thrust of State Department but also liberalizers' efforts to gain support for refugee admissions and to press for general immigration reforms.⁴⁵

Klein identifies the "global imaginary of integration" that operated on "the Cold War as an opportunity to forge intellectual and emotional bonds with the people of Asia and Africa. Only by creating such bonds . . . could the economic, political, and military integration of the 'free world' be achieved and sustained. When it did turn inward, the global imaginary of integration generated an inclusive rather than a policing energy." Despite the "global imaginary of containment" propelling the struggle against communism, this campaign was primarily "directed inward and aimed at ferreting out enemies and subversives within the nation itself." Klein points out that integration "originated in the nation's fundamental economic structures" and fed into the constant expansion needed for the American capitalist economy to remain healthy. This underlying agenda fueled "the double meaning of integration in the postwar period: the domestic project of integrating Asian and African Americans within the United States was intimately bound up with the international project of integrating the decolonizing nations into the capitalist 'free world' order."⁴⁶ The seeming idealism of racial and ethnic integration had at its core the pragmatic agendas of economic and political expansion that impelled immigration reform and the elevation of Chinese into model immigrants.

Outline of Chapters

The Good Immigrants explores the emergence of the Asian model minority through competing immigration agendas and reforms. Chapter 2 begins with the story of Yung Kuai (1861–1943), a CEM student who graduated from Yale but remained in America for the rest of his life where he married a Euro-American woman and raised a biracial family, which he supported by working as a diplomat at the Chinese embassy. Yung Kuai's story reveals the holes in Asian exclusion, from the welcomed presence of the CEM in New England even at the height of the anti-Chinese movement in California, and highlights the efforts of Americans such as missionaries, educators, and diplomats who treated Chinese as culturally distinct yet malleable in ways that could be turned to advantage. Fears that unilaterally imposed immigration

restrictions might damage relations with China meant that initial forays into imposing controls came through diplomatic negotiations. Even as domestic constituencies such as organized labor, segregationists, and the politicians catering to them pressed for absolute exclusion, Open Door advocates and the Chinese themselves campaigned for the rights of exempt Chinese. Particularly after 1905, both Americans and Chinese agreed on the usefulness of educating Chinese in the United States, although for different agendas. The “imperial opening” of the Boxer Indemnity funding provided the foundations for the development of international education institutions and policies in the United States molded in large part by the experiences of Chinese students. The Theodore Roosevelt White House threw its support to this coalition, helping to set exempt Chinese migrations on a different path from that of excluded laborers.

Chapter 3 examines the ready institutionalization of this form of Sino-American collaboration through the China Institute in America. Meng Zhi (1901–1990) directed this organization for thirty-seven years (1930–1967) and helped the Chinese government gain greater influence over the selection and training of Chinese students in the United States. In so doing, he became a valued participant in the development of America’s international education establishment as spearheaded by the Institute for International Education under the leadership of Stephen Duggan. Meng effectively advocated on behalf of Nationalist Chinese agendas and Chinese students to claim growing levels of support and accommodation from entities such as the IIE and later the Department of State. This shifting balance resulted in part from rising tides of Chinese nationalism, the growing conviction of liberal missionaries that their role was to abet but not convert Chinese in their modernization, and rising hostilities with Japan, which positioned China as a crucial ally in the western Pacific.

Chapter 4 describes how international war compelled repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws, which were seen as unacceptable insults to a wartime ally. As the first liberalization of immigration law since 1924, the campaign for repeal showcased long-simmering contradictions between foreign policy agendas, nativist racism, ethnic and religious groups, organized labor, and economic priorities that would channel and distort the long struggle for immigration reform and eventual passage of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. With her Christian upbringing, American education, and proximity to power in China, Madame Chiang Kai-shek served as a potent symbol of the humanity and assimilability of Chinese as well as the possibility that long-cherished missionary dreams for the transformation of China into a Christian, democratic nation might be realized. Despite the international conflict, Chiang Kai-shek continued to send significant numbers of Chinese students and technical trainees. His preparations for China’s postwar development coalesced with State Department agendas to promote foreign rela-

tions by assuming greater management and expansion of the once privately run field of international education, particularly through technical training programs that located highly skilled and talented Chinese, such as Wang An, in cutting-edge research facilities in the United States.

As explored in chapter 5, the best-laid plans often fall apart. As illustrated by C. Y. Lee, the author of *Flower Drum Song*, Chinese present in the United States on temporary visas as students, technical trainees, diplomats, sailors, and so forth suddenly found themselves “stranded” by the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. Lee was rescued from refugee status by changes in immigration laws and procedures that allowed resident Chinese in good standing to receive permanent status. On behalf of this group of elite, highly educated Chinese, the State Department and Congress made accommodations rather than force such usefully trained workers to return to a now hostile state. Lee’s transformation from student to refugee and then to legal immigrant mirrors that of thousands of other Chinese intellectuals, some not as famous, many in scientific and technical fields, who received American assistance to remain, enter the U.S. workforce, and become citizens. The decade after World War II was a time of flux in which China’s future remained uncertain; it also revealed the responsiveness of the U.S. government in providing the sequence of piecemeal legislation, including the Displaced Persons Act (1948), the China Area Aid Act (1950), and the McCarran-Walter Act (1952), which set many of the “stranded students,” particularly those with strategic skills, on the road to becoming model immigrants.

Chapters 6 and 7 address the neglected topic of Chinese refugees and their roles in reframing American perceptions of Chinese as exemplary immigrants by entwining exigencies of the Cold War, economic competitiveness, and domestic race relations in ways that compelled immigration reform. Identified as a crucial population in East and Southeast Asia, overseas Chinese and their loyalties had to be channeled away from the PRC despite U.S. willingness to provide only limited aid and resettlement options. Vigorous media campaigns sought to magnify both American benevolence and the deserving traits of Chinese refugees that entwined foreign outreach with domestic immigration reforms.

Chapter 6 describes the enactment of political agendas under the guise of humanitarian outreach through the operations of the CIA-funded Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, Inc. (ARCI). This ostensibly nongovernmental agency targeted intellectual Chinese for assistance and migration, first to aid the Nationalists on Taiwan and then to the United States in fulfillment of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. Congress had allocated Asians only a few thousand refugee visas, a drop in the bucket compared to the estimated 1.5 million refugees in Hong Kong alone, and a token gesture of American concern insisted on by a former China missionary, Representative Walter Judd (R-MN) (1898–1994).⁴⁷ Despite the limits of U.S. assistance, the Department

of State through the Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs (ORM) and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), sought to maximize the impact of such symbolic relief programs. Cold War propaganda, the “battle for hearts and minds,” proclaimed American friendship and concern for Chinese overseas while reassuring Americans domestically that applicants vetted not only for political views but also for prearranged employment and U.S. citizen sponsors guaranteed that even Chinese refugees were readily integrated into the United States. The political imperatives of admitting deserving Chinese refugees paralleled the dismantling of the “paper son” system of immigration fraud to apply growing pressures for the reform of American immigration laws to admit immigrants on the basis of individual merit rather than attributions of racial inferiority.

As described in chapter 7, the mandate for refugee relief and widespread publicity that magnified the merits of Chinese applied further pressures for U.S. immigration reform. Hong Kong’s refugee crisis of 1962 provided opportunity to affirm the transformed image of Chinese with White House authorization of parole for over fifteen thousand with popular and congressional support. Committee hearings promoted the deserving traits of Chinese as refugees but also as immigrants, described culturally as highly employable and self-sufficient, politically conforming, and with family values that minimized social burdens on the public so that whether admitted on the basis of individual merit, family reunification, or refugee status, their likely success as Americans demanded more general immigration reform based on such criteria rather than race and national origin. This concerted push, spearheaded by Philip Hart in the Senate, failed yet again, although Congress passed a less sweeping measure, Public Law 87–885 in October 1962, titled “An Act: To facilitate the entry of alien skilled specialists and certain relatives of United States citizens,” which made permanent the economic nationalism at the core of President John F. Kennedy’s vision for replacing the discriminatory national origins system.

Chapter 8 explores immigration reform and the knowledge worker recruitment aspects of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 to track the intensifying convergence of educational exchange programs, economic nationalism, and immigration reform. During the Cold War the State Department expanded cultural diplomacy programs so that the numbers of international students burgeoned, particularly in the fields of science and technology. Although the programs were initially conceived as a way of instilling influence over the future leaders of developing nations, international students, particularly from Taiwan, India, and South Korea, took advantage of minor changes in immigration laws and bureaucratic procedures that allowed students, skilled workers, and technical trainees to gain legal employment and eventually permanent residency and thereby remain in the United States. This so-called brain drain became an international crisis during the 1960s, with Eu-

ropean and Third World “losers” of “brains” accusing the United States of stealing their investments in human resources. Considering this phenomenon over a longer term of decades reveals that “knowledge circulation” is a more apt description for relationships with countries that managed to develop manufacturing sectors that benefited from a symbiotic cycle of exchanges that both sending and receiving countries rationalized as driven by market forces. As described by the British economist Brinley Thomas, the employment preferences of Public Law 87–885 and the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 had turned immigration selection into an aspect of fiscal policy. The growing influence of such neoliberal principles has masked emerging forms of inequality in global migrations that privilege the mobility of educated elites, particularly for those concentrated in what are now labeled STEM, or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, fields, and most prominently from Asia.

The conclusion, chapter 9, considers early twenty-first-century immigration controls as furthering national economic advantage. The exemplary immigrant I. M. Pei, with his imported talent and skills, illustrates the diminishing of racial inequality through his exceptional accomplishments and success even as he reflects the hollowness of such civil rights victories. The quantified overattainment by the Asian American model minority emanates in large measure from immigration preferences that privilege those most likely to succeed educationally, economically, and now entrepreneurially. America’s anxieties about immigration invasion have shifted toward its problematic, unenforceable southern border, which has admitted millions of unsanctioned immigrants just as eager for gainful employment but unscreened for educational and employment credentials. In contrast, few criticisms attend the geometric growth in the ranks of international students, particularly in STEM fields, and the expanding H-1B visa program for skilled workers seen as advantaging the U.S. economy by admitting primarily Asians who immigrate through employment preferences to the benefit of corporate interests. Although largely dependent on the importation of foreign talent, model minority successes have served as rebukes to less well performing minority populations by implying that their failure to attain equal standing does not result from past and ongoing discrimination but is somehow attributable to a lack of the kind of cultural values that would produce upward mobility in the land of equal opportunity, which a race-blind America had already become. Since its earliest articulation in the mid-1960s, the model minority image has become a pervasive, pernicious trope that attached higher standards of academic and employment expectations to ethnic Asians, while blaming other communities of color for failing to attain equitable status, thereby masking ongoing forms of racial inequality in the United States.

The Good Immigrants demonstrates the close relationship between the emergence of Asians as model minorities and selective processes deliberately

encased in immigration law that serve neoliberal ends. The Asian American population has exploded since 1965, with a significant component entering through the preference system that privileges those with educational credentials, work skills, and professional and entrepreneurial proclivities. This importation of a middle-class minority has transformed the face of race relations in the United States. Twenty-first-century battles over immigration restriction and concurrences over immigration selection reveal the uneven fashion in which Kennedy's push toward economically rational principles have become naturalized and reworked racially. General consensus supports the use of H-1B visas to attract more workers in STEM fields, who are presumed to be educated Asians, whereas entrenched resistance meets proposals to allow normalization of status for unsanctioned immigrants, even those brought as children and of long residence in the United States, who are coded as primarily Latino. Simultaneously, even as Asians are positioned as highly sought after technical workers and entrepreneurial talent, as mobile, transnational subjects they remain vulnerable to yellow peril anxieties that readily situate them as hostile foreign agents, as illustrated by the 1999 espionage campaign waged against Wen Ho Lee.

The importation of a model minority obscures the failure of domestic educational and employment structures to advance historically disadvantaged populations of color. Moreover, educational attainment and socioeconomic class tend to be replicated across generations. Some of the most visibly successful American-born Chinese, including Secretary of Energy Stephen Chu, author Amy Tan, architect Maya Lin, writer Iris Chang, journalist and activist Helen Zia, and presidential speechwriter Eric Liu, are products of refugee and brain-drain families. If many Chinese Americans, and other post-1965 immigrants, bear the markers of "model minority" achievement, such educational and professional attainments were prerequisites for both their entry and their settlement in the United States. If we are to comprehend the character of racial inequality in the twenty-first century, we must address the distortions and privileges naturalized and enacted through our systems of immigration controls.