

INTRODUCTION

Policy debates in the United States today treat immigration almost exclusively as a domestic problem that must be solved, somehow, with the passage by Congress of better laws. Americans repeatedly debate what those laws should be. Yet laws that treat immigration as a purely domestic problem are likely to fail. Why? Because immigration is an important, continuous, and contentious relationship between the United States and rest of the world. With this book, I suggest that immigration policies might better be debated from a global rather than a domestic perspective.

Of course, immigration is just one of many connections between the United States and the world, and over the past two decades historians have enthusiastically written transnational, international, and global histories to explore those connections. Unlike many historians who write about the United States from a global perspective, I will not try to analyze or to assess the entire tangle of economic, social, and cultural connections that constitute a global America. I will focus steadfastly on the intersection of transnational linkages created “from below” by immigrants—I will call these “immigrant foreign relations”—and American international or foreign policies, created “from above” by the federal government. Immigrants, much like diplomats and State Department officials in Washington, are deeply concerned with the world beyond U.S. borders. Their interest in their own foreign relations finds expression in the memoirs they write; such accounts most often suggest that the global

perspectives of immigrants differ from, conflict with, and diverge from those of both diplomats and other Americans. Studies of official American foreign relations, by contrast, occasionally point to moments when the global perspectives of immigrants and of the executive branch encourage them to become political allies in domestic struggles with Congress or with coalitions of American voters over the implementation and direction of the official foreign policies of the United States.

Immigrant foreign relations originate in the reality that almost all immigrants remain connected to the people and places they supposedly left behind when emigrating. Initially, their connections may be limited to private, social networks of family, kin, and friends. Immigrants are often, quite literally, the foreign relatives of Americans: many—and at times even the majority—of immigrants have migrated to the United States in order to join friends or members of their own families. Once arrived, the newcomers encourage others to join them, thus continuing a practice that scholars have long labeled “chain migration” or “family unification.” Chain migration creates a unique and changing geography of foreign places and foreign peoples connected to the United States; this geography has become more extensive and global over time. Nevertheless, scholars more often label immigration as transnational rather than international. In the early 1990s transnational theorists imagined that the migrants’ social relations revealed the declining power of nation states in a globalizing world; some predicted that proliferating transnational relations were undermining the importance of national governments and nation states, rendering them irrelevant. I demonstrate instead that no one understands

better than immigrants the continuing power of national governments to draw borders and to set rules for crossing them. Immigrants experience the power of nation states in an extremely intimate fashion, sometimes on a daily basis.

Because humans typically form deep, sentimental attachments to the places where they and their ancestors were born—immigrants are not different in this regard from other Americans—immigrants' personal ties to people in foreign lands have often persisted over several generations. Their lives thus challenge sociological theories of swift or straight-line assimilation that measure Americanization as the progressive abandonment of social and cultural connections to foreign lands.

Because they are deeply felt, immigrant foreign relations can also at times extend into the public arena as political mobilizations, whether in the United States or transnationally. Immigrants' power to mobilize varies with their gender, race, and class, but even poor, female, and racially stigmatized immigrants have at times collaborated across borders, for example in attempts to influence the politics and governance of their homelands. Immigrants have also repeatedly mobilized as residents and as naturalized citizen voters in the United States. Their goals in mobilizing are not always domestic. On the contrary, immigrants often seek to influence American policy toward their countries of origin or to influence the immigration policies that inevitably shape the lives, decisions, and transnational moves of their friends and relatives.

In the United States, the intersection of immigrant foreign relations with the far-better-known history of American diplomacy becomes most visible in domestic political

struggles over some of the main themes of global history—that is, in the areas of foreign trade and investment, empire-building, warfare, and geopolitics. Collectively these struggles illustrate a central tension historians have observed between Americans' desire for isolation from a world that they perceive as somehow dangerous and the obvious global activism of the U.S. government, particularly in the twentieth century. Domestic debates about global matters can and have transformed immigrants and their foreign relations from welcome friends and allies into dangerous enemy aliens. A focus on the intersection of immigrant foreign relations and American international relations reveals clearly that immigration has never been a purely domestic matter. Global perspectives on American immigration provide the foundation for pondering why efforts to control immigration through domestic legislation are likely to fail.

DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL HISTORIES OF U.S. IMMIGRATION

Figure 1 and table 1 serve to introduce readers to the time-worn outlines of U.S. immigration history. In data like this, historians have found evidence of the purportedly unique racial and ethnic challenges of nation-building in the United States, a country with a long history of quite diverse immigration. That the history of immigration, as traced here, is in fact not so very exceptional—similar figures and tables could easily describe Argentina, France, Canada, Israel, or Singapore as “nations of immigrants”—is a point worth making, even though I offer only fitful comparisons of the United States to other countries in the chapters that follow. Here,

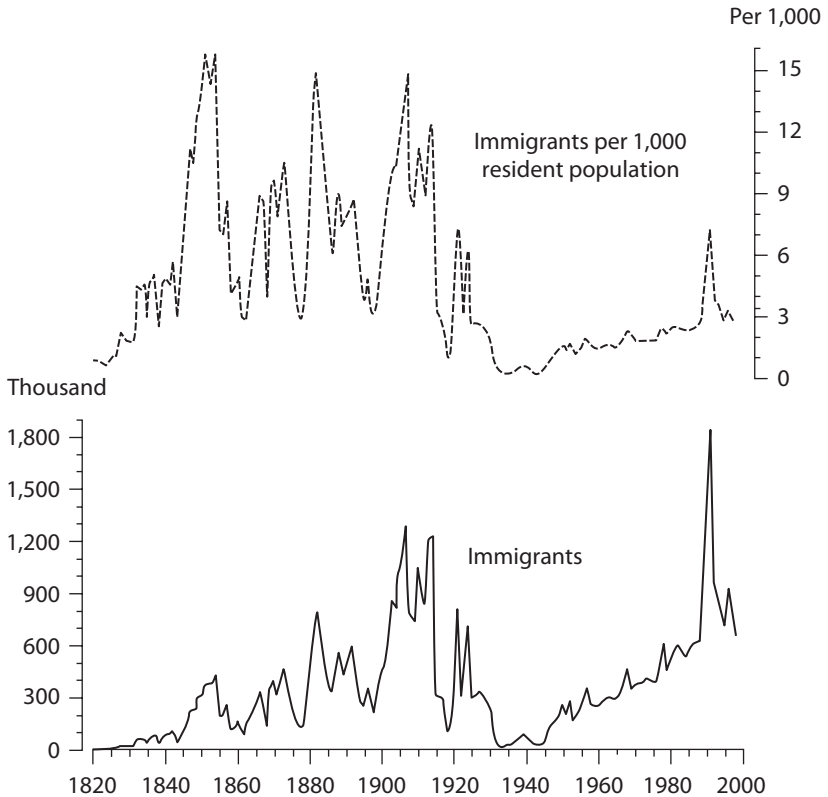


Figure 1. Immigrants to the United States, Total and Number per 1,000 in Resident Population: 1820–1998. Adapted from *Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

figure 1 and table 1 are included mainly to tease out the global perspectives buried in their data.

The immigration graphed in figure 1 meant that, between 1850 and 1950 and again after 1980, foreign-born residents of the United States constituted between 10 and 15 percent of the American population. (Chapter 1 will suggest

Table 1. Immigrants, by Continent of Last Residence, 1820–1997

	1820–1849	1850–1924	1924–1965	1966–1997
Europe	90%	87%	52%	15%
Americas	4%	10%	43%	49%
Asia/Pacific	—	3%	5%	33%
Africa-origin				
Caribbean	5%*			
Africa			—	2%
TOTAL	99%	100%	100%	100%

Note: My calculations, based on Susan B Carter, et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Table Ad90-97.

*Immigrants of unknown origin have been excluded from this table, with one exception. To acknowledge the forced mobility of slaves during the antebellum years, I have added an estimated figure for slaves illegally smuggled into the United States after 1808. As with most illegal—and in this case, illegally forced—entries, the exact origins cannot be known. Most, however, including those possibly born in Africa, had been smuggled into the southern states from the nearby Caribbean Islands by slave traders.

that migratory linkages to the rest of the world were just as significant in the late eighteenth century.) In addition, the children of the foreign-born typically constitute an equivalent or somewhat larger segment of the American population. During peak periods of immigration, voluntary immigrants (together, in the past, with a sizable population of enslaved or recently emancipated Americans of African origin) truly built America. But the same numbers suggest that there were many times when 20 to 30 percent of the American population was potentially engaged in immigrant foreign relations. Since a third or more of the white foreign-born, along with all of their children, have throughout American history been citizens and since, over time, naturalization and birth-right

citizenship has increasingly empowered foreigners of all backgrounds to participate in American politics, immigrants have also intermittently become very important influences on American politics.

Immigrants built an America that changed in its racial and ethnic composition over time. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, migrations from Europe facilitated the building of a white nation. Nineteenth-century immigrants promised to submerge the demographic legacies of the country's colonial origins—represented racially to most Americans by its enslaved African American and conquered indigenous populations—in a sea of new settlers from northern and western Europe. Demands for immigration restriction rose in the second half of the century as an effort to exclude immigrant workers from Asia, initiating what would become a long period of immigration restriction that figure 1 also documents. Even after racial barriers to entry and national belonging were eliminated by civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa have continued to experience special difficulties in becoming American. This is why domestic accounts of immigration, race, and ethnicity, and of exclusionary and inclusionary nation-building will likely remain important well into the future. Such a history provides a useable past for a nation still confronting issues of racial bias.

An American history written from a global perspective, drawing on exactly the same data as figure 1 and table 1, raises different but equally important questions. Many of these questions are about the dynamics that define relationships between U.S. immigration and foreign trade, the formation of a global economy, American and European

empire-building, anti-imperial movements, international warfare, and American geopolitical strategies as they have shifted, collectively, “from isolation to global hegemony.”¹ Viewed from a global perspective, the United States comes into focus as an empire builder that created its own empire in the North American West with immigrant settlers and as an independent nation still almost completely embedded—through its immigrants and its foreign trade—in the imperial and Atlantic trading and labor market circuits of its former ruler, Great Britain. As chapter 1 will argue, the United States was independent; but it was not isolated from the global economy and empires of the early nineteenth century. The subsequent expansion of American merchants, investors, and missionaries into Asia and the Americas—accomplished through “dollar diplomacy,” through the building of a strong and globally engaged navy and army, and through the acquisition of foreign territories—accompanied the vast international migrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter 2 will argue that the rise of the United States to global leadership rested on expanding industries that in turn depended on the employment of millions of newly arrived immigrant workers, many of them from disintegrating foreign empires on the peripheries of Europe and East Asia. Both American immigration and U.S. empire-building helped to forge an increasingly interconnected global economy, linking closely the Atlantic to the Pacific, already in the years around 1900.

A global interpretation of U.S. immigration also calls attention to the fact that American campaigns for immigration restriction, and the sharp drop in U.S. immigration that followed (as figure 1 shows), unfolded against a backdrop

of domestic political struggles over the global role of the United States. The United States built its empire of trade and influence—at first ambivalently and then briefly embracing a more active global role—in the years preceding World War I. After the war, immigration restriction triumphed in the United States as part of a powerful and isolationist congressional backlash against the internationalism of President Woodrow Wilson and his promise to make the world safe for democracy. Emerging from a global depression in the 1930s, American international activism carried a heavy price in the form of recurring and expensive military engagements and foreign wars, a development that chapter 3 portrays as feeding continuing demands by worried American voters for protection, including protection from the threat supposedly posed by immigrant foreigners.

Also visible in figure 1 is the temporary dampening effect on immigration of almost every American war fought prior to 1945. After World War II, by contrast, scattered but often long-term American military engagements—many of them undeclared regional wars—did not prevent the rise of immigration numbers. To understand the changing role of global warfare in shaping American immigration dynamics and policies requires that we pay close attention to the nature of American global leadership. For example, after World War II increasing proportions of the immigrants tracked in figure 1 were either refugees who fled from areas of U.S. military engagement or foreign brides of American soldiers. Table 1 also clearly demonstrates that by the last decades of the twentieth century, the origins of the newest immigrants were in Asia and in Latin America; immigrants, in other words, had come to mirror the geography of an American global

empire built through trade, military intervention, and international investment.

Global perspectives raise new questions about the timing, geography, and significance of American immigration. Overall, a history of American immigration written from a global perspective cannot sustain hoary domestic myths of either an isolated United States or independent immigrants easily detached from their origins. It points toward the impact of changing U.S. geopolitics on foreign places, foreigners, and America's borders and toward the transformation of immigration from a foreign to a domestic policy, a story told in chapter 3. It suggests that American global leadership and immigration restriction have linked histories that both draw on rising xenophobia and fears of threats that originate beyond the borders of the United States.

Where did that fear originate? Although the existence of immigrant foreign relations can be documented continuously from the colonial era down to our own times, Americans' awareness of and attitudes toward immigrants and their foreign relations changed dramatically with America's role in the world. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the same theories of "scientific" racism that encouraged American empire-building also fostered hostility toward immigrant foreigners, and especially toward those whose foreign relations connected the United States to countries outside the small circle of the powerful empire-building nations of northern and western Europe. Hostility toward Asian and southern and eastern European immigrants emerged from a complex cocktail of both xenophobia and racism. Xenophobia is arguably a constitutive element of all human societies—since all necessarily distinguish between insiders and outsiders—but

American xenophobia intensified as the United States abandoned its ideological commitment to remaining isolated from the international system of diplomacy and foreign wars that Europe had created in the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly, immigration restriction and hostility to immigrants' transnational political mobilizations became persistent and populist features of American political life as the country's leaders, including Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, embraced internationalism and American global leadership. By recognizing the importance of xenophobia, this book encourages readers to ponder a late-twentieth-century paradox—that popular hostility to immigrants has outlived the racism that is understood to have motivated immigration restriction.

The persistence of xenophobia in a twenty-first-century world led, if not completely dominated, by a powerful United States, also raises a final troubling question. If, indeed, it was a deeply rooted desire for isolation and protection from a suspect world that exacerbated American hostility to immigrants through the middle years of the twentieth century, why did the United States, as leader of the capitalist free world during the Cold War, again move toward allowing increasing numbers of foreigners—many of them from Asia and Latin America—to enter the country, as both figure 1 and table 1 document? Had Americans finally become so comfortable with their country's global activism that they no longer feared the world beyond its borders? Had immigrants' own political mobilizations played a role in this change? This key question about U.S. immigration policy, provoked by global perspectives, deserves an answer, and chapter 4 will provide one.

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND IMMIGRANT FOREIGN RELATIONS

Fortunately, there is no need to resort to abstractions in order to answer questions like these, for stories of individual migrants nicely illustrate the complex intersection of immigrant foreign relations and U.S. foreign policies in rich, human detail. Take the case of just one immigrant from China, Yitang Chang, and his family. Historian Haiming Liu has teased the Chang family story from a series of family letters and oral histories covering more than seven decades.² Throughout that time, the Chang family sustained their ties to China while responding to, and often also challenging, the official international policies of the United States.

Yitang Chang was a trader in medicinal herbs who departed Hong Kong on the British steamer *Strathgyle* and arrived in San Diego in July 1900. He disembarked carrying several bolts of silk and perhaps also the thousand dollars that he would soon invest in a Los Angeles business. Rules and practices put in place by the U.S. State Department (the government agency charged with the conduct of foreign affairs) governed Chang's first contacts with the United States. As he entered the offices of Customs Collector William Wallace Bowers, Chang handed the Chinese inspector a folded paper written in two languages; it included his photo (figure 2). Called a "Section Six Certificate" and named after the section of a bilateral treaty that made this certificate a requirement for immigrant merchants, it had been issued to Chang by a diplomat, the U.S. consul in Hong Kong. The purpose of the document was to certify Chang's identity as a merchant.

Hidden and sometimes completely missing from domestic histories of U.S. immigration is a curious detail that nevertheless determined every detail of Chang's entry into the United States. For much of the nineteenth century, it was bilateral commercial treaties negotiated by diplomats to encourage foreign trade that kept U.S. ports open to merchants, their cargo, and their foreign passengers. When Pacific migrations began—soon after the signing of a U.S. trade treaty with China in 1844—angry white Californians, among them many recent immigrants from Ireland, demanded protection from the foreign threat of a “yellow peril” supposedly posed by the racially disparaged Chinese. Western legislatures listened to angry voters, but the U.S. Supreme Court overturned most of the restrictions imposed by state law on the immigrant Chinese. Such laws violated not only the treaties the United States had negotiated with China, but also the constitutional empowerment of Congress, and Congress alone, to regulate foreign trade. Only when Congress—under pressure from western voters—forced President Rutherford Hayes in 1880 to send his diplomat James G. Angell to negotiate a new treaty specifically allowing Congress temporarily to exclude Chinese laborers did Congress begin to insist that immigration was a domestic matter. And even then tensions between Congress and the executive branch simmered for decades, because this treaty with China continued to guarantee reciprocal liberty of movement and residence to Chinese and American merchants, including Yitang Chang.

In the years after 1900, as American dollar diplomacy flourished in Asia under the leadership of presidents and their State Departments, Congress consolidated its control over immigration, wresting it from bilateral treaties and

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Section . . . it is hereby amended so as to read as follows:—

"Sec. 6. . . to the faithful execution of the provisions of this Act, every Chinese person, other than a laborer, who . . . said Treaty or this Act to come within the United States, and who shall be about to come to the United States, shall obtain the permission of and be identified as so entitled by the Chinese Government, or of such other foreign Government, of which at the time such Chinese person shall be a subject, in each case to be evidenced by a Certificate issued by the Government, which Certificate shall be in the English language, and shall show such permission, with the name of the permitted person in his or her proper signature, and which Certificate shall state the individual family and tribal name in full, title or official rank, if any, the age, height and all physical peculiarities, former and present occupation for profession, when and where and how long pursued, and place of residence of the person to whom the Certificate is issued, and that such person is entitled by this Act to come within the United States. If the person applying for a Certificate shall be a merchant, said Certificate shall, in addition to above requirements, state the nature, character and estimated value of the business carried on by him prior to and at the time of his application as aforesaid: *Provided*, That nothing in this Act nor in said Treaty shall be construed as coming within the meaning of the word 'merchant,' hucksters, peddlers, or those engaged in taking, drying or otherwise preserving shell or other fish for human consumption or exportation. If the Certificate be sought for the purpose of travel for curiosity, it shall also state whether the applicant intends to pass through or travel within the United States, together with his financial standing in the country from which such Certificate is desired. The Certificate provided for herein shall not entitle the person named therein, shall, before such person goes on board any vessel to proceed to the United States, be void by the indorsement of the diplomatic representatives of United States in the foreign country from which such Certificate issues, or of the Consular representative of the United States at the port or place from which the person named in the Certificate is about to depart; and such diplomatic representative or Consular representative whose indorsement is so required is hereby empowered, and it shall be his duty, before indorsing such Certificate as aforesaid, to examine into the truth of the statements set forth in said Certificate, and if he shall find upon examination that said or any of the statements therein contained are untrue it shall be his duty to refuse to indorse the same. Such Certificate voided as aforesaid shall be *prima facie* evidence of the facts set forth therein, and shall be produced to the Collector of Customs of the port in the district in the United States at which the person named therein shall arrive, and afterward produced to the proper authorities of the United States whenever lawfully demanded, and shall be the sole evidence permissible on the part of the person so producing the same to establish a right of entry into the United States; but said Certificate may be controverted and the facts therein stated disproved by the United States authorities."

Article 3, of the Treaty between the Government of the United States and the Government of China, proclaimed by the President of the United States on the 8th day of December, 1894, reads as follows:—

The provisions of this Convention shall not affect the right at present enjoyed of Chinese subjects, being officials, teachers, students, merchants or travellers for curiosity or pleasure, but not laborers, of coming to the United States and residing therein. To entitle such Chinese subjects as are above described to admission into the United States, they may produce a Certificate from their Government or the Government where they last resided voided by the Diplomatic or Consular representative of the United States in the country or port whence they depart.

It is also agreed that Chinese laborers shall continue to enjoy the privilege of transit across the territory of the United States in the course of their journey to or from other countries, subject to such regulations by the Government of the United States as may be necessary to prevent said privilege of transit from being abused.

CHINESE ADMITTED AS MERCHANTS CANNOT BECOME LABORERS.

(Extract of Opinion, U. S. v. Yang Yew, respondent.)

ADAMS, District Judge: " * * * Constraining all the legislation on this subject in the light of our internal policy as already stated, I am disposed to hold that the law, properly and effectually construed, contemplates that a 'merchant' of China may enter this country and remain here as a merchant only. He may not under guise and pretence of being a merchant, secure entry as such, intending immediately to become and continue a laborer. * * * (the respondent's) conduct in proceeding immediately to work as a laborer and continuing to do so continuously up to the time of his arrest, belies his pretensions as a merchant. The *prima facie* case made by his certificate is overcome by the facts."

CHINESE TRADERS AND CLERKS NOT ADMITTED.

"It may be stated comprehensively that the result of the laws and decisions thereon is to determine that the true theory is not that all Chinese persons may enter this country who are not forbidden, but that only those are entitled to enter who are expressly allowed."

July 15th, 1898.


"You are, therefore, directed to hereafter refuse admission to Chinese persons who are engaged in or about to engage in any occupation or calling not clearly indicated that they are members of the exempt class of Chinese as defined by law and applicable to the admission of such persons described as students, clerks, buyers, bookkeepers, assistants, managers, store-keepers, agriculturists, agents, cashiers, physicians, proprietors of restaurants, barbers, cannibians, etc., should be directed by you."

July 20th, 1898.

(Signed) W. A. FELL, Asst. Sec. of Treasury.

Handwritten notes and signatures on the right side of the page, including "Admitted for August 20", "July 1919", "July 1918", "July 1917", "July 1916", "July 1915", "July 1914", "July 1913", "July 1912", "July 1911", "July 1910", "July 1909", "July 1908", "July 1907", "July 1906", "July 1905", "July 1904", "July 1903", "July 1902", "July 1901", "July 1900", "July 1899", "July 1898", "July 1897", "July 1896", "July 1895", "July 1894", "July 1893", "July 1892", "July 1891", "July 1890", "July 1889", "July 1888", "July 1887", "July 1886", "July 1885", "July 1884", "July 1883", "July 1882", "July 1881", "July 1880", "July 1879", "July 1878", "July 1877", "July 1876", "July 1875", "July 1874", "July 1873", "July 1872", "July 1871", "July 1870", "July 1869", "July 1868", "July 1867", "July 1866", "July 1865", "July 1864", "July 1863", "July 1862", "July 1861", "July 1860", "July 1859", "July 1858", "July 1857", "July 1856", "July 1855", "July 1854", "July 1853", "July 1852", "July 1851", 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No. 167



This Certificate is issued under the Treaty between the Government of the United States and the Government of China proclaimed by the President of the United States on the 8th day of December, 1880, and in conformity with Section 9 of the Act of Congress of the United States approved July 3rd, 1884, entitled an Act to amend the Act to exempt certain Treaty stipulations relating to Chinese, approved May 6th, 1882, to Chung Hsi-shan a Chinese person, "other than a laborer," who is about to go to the United States, as evidence of the permission of the Government where he last resided for him to go to the United States, and as a means of establishing his identity, and it shall be prima facie evidence of his right to land in the United States.

張采臣

Name of permitted person in his or her proper signature _____

Full name, individual Tsai-shan family Chung tribal Chung

Title, or official rank, if any none

Age 34 years Height, feet 5 inches 5 1/2

Physical marks or peculiarities no marks or scars

Former occupation or profession Master of a haberdashery business

Where pursued Canton

Present occupation or profession Merchant and shareholder in the
Yai Shan Chung haberdashery business

Estimated value of last mentioned business \$50,000 Capital \$15,000 Annual profits about \$2,000

Where pursued Hongkong When in 1894-1900

For how long six years Place of residence 134 Jordan Street

Is not a laborer, and is entitled to land in the United States, under the Act of Congress approved July 5th, 1884, and the Treaty of March 17th, Ratified December 7th, 1894.


Is going to 1133 J Street
San Diego Cal. to take
over a share in the Shing
Yi Chung' chandery
business.

Registrar General, Hongkong.
16 May 1900.

I do hereby certify that I have examined into the truth of the statements set forth in the foregoing certificate, and that upon examination that the same are true. The seal and signature to the foregoing certificate are the genuine seal and signature of F. H. May

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal the seal of this Consulate at HONGKONG

The San Diego Consulate, MAY 17 1900 190


R. Williams
 U. S. Consul-General. CC FOR VISE
 \$1.00 GOLD.

Under the opinion of the U. S. Attorney-General, dated May 20, 1896, this certificate will be valid if signed by the proper officer of the Government in which the Chinese last resided, and the Registrar General at Hongkong is recognized as competent to sign certificates for Chinese residents of that Colony of the exempt class. The Secretary of the Treasury has uniformly held that the omission from these certificates of any of the statements required in the Statute, is fatal to the sufficiency of the certificate, as showing prima facie right to enter the United States.

Figure 2. Title Six Certificate of Yitang Chang (front and back).
Courtesy of the National Archives at Riverside.

the diplomats of the executive branch, thereby domesticating immigration policy, and making it—along with the governance of foreign territories, and of U.S. citizens living in Asia—a unilateral exercise of U.S. sovereignty through a newly discovered and Supreme Court-sanctioned “plenary power.” In a nation with universal manhood suffrage, xenophobic and racist voters could now continue to pressure Congress, producing a proliferating catalog of restrictions on immigration during the years when the United States expanded its global presence and its international activism. Repeatedly, legislators translated growing voter hostility toward foreigners into restrictive immigration policies that in turn undermined and frustrated the executive branch’s strategies for expanding American international leadership and influence. This tension between democratic electoral politics and executive geopolitics has never been—and perhaps never can be—fully resolved, since it is integral to constitutional governance and to the famous “checks and balances” that characterize the federal government of the United States.

Because migration had long been governed through federal trade policies, it was a customs collector who in 1900 examined the immigrant, Yitang Chang, along with his rolls of imported silk. The Constitution had empowered Congress to regulate foreign trade and Congress had empowered customs officers to collect both the so-called “head taxes” it imposed on immigrants (which financed an expanding immigration bureaucracy) and the tariff fees (also called “customs” or “duties”) it imposed on imported goods (which provided most of the revenue needed by the federal government). As Yitang Chang entered the United States, Congress was debating the benefits of higher vs. lower tariffs with a

fervor devoted more often today to debates over immigration policy.

As Yitang Chang waited patiently for Customs Collector William Bowers to review his papers and rolls of silk, however, change was underway in the governance of foreign trade as well. American presidents, hoping to expand foreign trade by lowering U.S. tariffs, regularly encountered resistance from members of Congress whose elections as “high tariff” candidates encouraged them to represent their constituents’ fear of foreign economic competition. Presidential successes in wresting tariff policies from the hands of Congress came only after 1912, as income taxes began to replace tariffs as the most important source of federal revenue, and as voters came to see immigration restriction as a better protection than high tariffs against foreign threats. Thereafter, tariffs were increasingly set through bilateral and multilateral executive-branch diplomacy rather than through congressional legislation. Only today’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency, which polices smuggling and other border violations involving both imports and immigrants, remains as a reminder of immigration policy’s origins in the governance of foreign trade.

Smuggling was very much on the mind of Customs Collector William Bowers in San Diego when he encountered the Chinese merchant Chang in 1900. Surprisingly, his concerns actually worked to Yitang Chang’s advantage. Well known as an anti-Chinese zealot, Bowers had for some time worried over the possibility that Chinese laborers were entering the country illegally across San Diego’s largely unguarded land boundary with nearby Mexico.³ Focused on this possibility, Bowers chose not to challenge Chang’s right

to enter the United States, as he had other merchants from China. Yitang Chang exited the San Diego Customs House as an immigrant resident alien. Unlike many other Chinese merchants, he was not detained for further questioning.

In becoming an American immigrant, Yitang Chang did not cut his ties with China. On the contrary, the lives of the Chang family unfolded across borders and across the Pacific Ocean for over seventy years. Theirs was a transnational family for many decades. Chang had journeyed to San Diego because distant relatives of his wife lived there: he slept that night on a bed improvised from a table in their business office. When he relocated to Los Angeles, his first business partners shared his lineage name and were also probably relatives. Because his wife had remained in South China with their children, Chang returned to China in 1904. When he again boarded a ship for America, his youngest son, Elbert, accompanied him. This chain migration of family members continued to grow. For years afterward, Chang sent money (called “remittances”) to his relatives in China. Historian Haiming Liu describes China as remaining the family’s “cultural home” for many years.⁴

The Chang family and their white neighbors undoubtedly viewed chain migration very differently. Under anti-Chinese laws, merchants could bring their wives and children to the United States, just as American merchants could bring theirs to China. Racist westerners hated this acquiescence to diplomatic reciprocity. And they hated how merchants like Yitang Chang made this provision into a loophole through which restrictive congressional laws could be bypassed. After his wife in China died, Chang sponsored entry to the United States not only for his own son, Sam, a policeman, but also

for several nephews, by claiming that they too were his sons. Since the nephews were not merchants, they had no other way to enter the United States. Chang sent coaching papers to prepare the nephews for their entry interviews; those papers replicated false information about his children that Chang had given years before in order to prepare the way for the nephews' migration. Chang's goal was a mundane and humane one—he wanted to assist the nephews he already supported—but Americans instead saw his “paper sons” as criminals who disobeyed American laws and who thereby threatened their own security.

The Chang family's ties to China raised even greater suspicions as relations between the United States and China soured. Under the racially discriminatory naturalization laws that were in effect before 1943, Chang and his China-born children could not become citizens. Even Chang's American-born, citizen children found it difficult to acquire higher education and professional opportunities in California. Thus, during the same years when Chang's paper and biological sons settled into American life, two of Sam's children and their uncle Elbert returned to China. After studying in China in the 1920s, Chang's grand-daughter Constance escaped her war-torn homeland and immigrated to New York, where she eventually married a young Chinese-American war veteran. Then, in 1949, after the successful communist revolution in China, the United States ended trade and diplomatic relations with “Red China,” and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover declared the Chinatown laborers' organization employing Constance's husband to be communist-influenced. Terrified, the young couple fled with their newborn, American-citizen daughter to the People's Republic of China. Many years later, in 1972,

that same daughter, Nancy, served as translator for President Richard Nixon when he traveled to China to thaw the Cold War between communism and the “free world” and to reestablish diplomatic and trade ties with China. According to Sam Chang, “The U.S. president was impressed by Nancy’s American accent.”⁵ Official relationships between China and the United States had had direct, intensely personal consequences for the Chang family for over seventy years.

With many foreign kin, the Chang family understandably maintained a lively interest in politics in both China and the United States. In South China, Sam Chang had supported the 1911 republican revolution and was an advocate of modernization and Chinese self-rule. While there is no evidence that Sam or Yitang Chang joined the California Chinese associations that supported warring political factions in China during the 1920s and 1930s, their sense of political engagement with China (which scholars label as “diaspora” or “long-distance” nationalism) certainly made them opponents of the corrupt warlords who fought for control of much of southern China. The Chang children who returned to China quickly became critics of European and American imperialism, of Western economic domination of China’s coastal cities, and of the Japanese imperial aggression that sparked World War II in Asia. Prior to 1949, no one in the Chang family had expressed much enthusiasm for Mao Zedong’s communist movement. Whether Constance accommodated to the new communist regime after 1949, as the appointment of Nancy as Nixon’s official translator suggests, or suffered from the intense xenophobia and suspicion of Chinese with foreign connections that marred both China’s “Great Leap Forward” (in the 1950s) and its 1960s “Cultural Revolution” is not known.

In the United States, the Chang family undoubtedly resembled many other immigrant families in becoming more interested over time in American electoral politics. As citizens and voters, Chinese-Americans supported laws that allowed naturalization by the China-born, created visas for refugees from Asia, and provided access to scarce visas for close family members. Undoubtedly, too, in the 1950s, the Chang family hotly debated whether the family's paper sons should confess to their status (in order to gain legal permanent residency) or whether they should remain silent for fear that such confessions might exacerbate suspicions of their loyalty (as citizens of a communist country) and possibly provoke deportation or harassment. By 1972, members of the Chang family almost certainly hoped that the revival of diplomatic ties between the United States and China would allow them again to visit, study, and send money to China and to welcome visits or even to initiate a renewed chain migration.

The Chang family's story belies domestic histories of immigration that frequently portray immigrants exclusively as Americans-in-the-making. What we see instead is a chronicle of transnational connections involving economic assistance, return migration, and political mobilization that sustained immigrant foreign relations over several generations. The Chang family viewed China differently from both American voters and American officials in the State Department. For the immigrant family, China was a familiar but also very complex place. American voters more often viewed China simplistically, with a combination of awe, anger, or fear. And American officials perceived China mainly as a potential ally, enemy, or trading partner within their larger geopolitical strategies.

Americans' ambivalence toward China, toward the world, and toward their country's exercise of global power are central themes in a history of American immigration written from a global perspective. Today's debates about immigration are a product of that history. The exact threats Americans have perceived as coming from abroad have changed over time—from entangling alliances and foreign wars, to imported, foreign-manufactured goods, or immigrants themselves. Strategies for protecting Americans from foreign threats also have changed, from military isolation and economic protection by means of high tariffs to immigration restriction. The tension between electoral politics focused on the protection of citizens from foreign threats and American foreign policies of economic expansion and international activism and leadership have all worked to transform the United States from an immigrant nation secure in its supposed isolation into a militarily and economically powerful advocate of free trade that restricts immigration but uncomfortably tolerates high rates of illegal residence by foreigners. Completely lost in this transformation was popular support for the liberty to move and to travel internationally, a liberty that had been created through commercial diplomacy and then eliminated by democratic, legislative politics.

To explain such a dramatic shift requires readers to pay attention both to American foreign policy and to the global concerns and political mobilizations of native and foreign-born citizen voters. As political actors, immigrants most often sought advantage for their homelands and unification with their relatives. Rightly or wrongly, Americans have desired protection from threats they perceive as coming from abroad. Periods of international warfare have almost

always heightened xenophobia and demands for protection from immigrant threats. Until Americans better understand how their country became an international power and how the exercise of global power has nurtured xenophobic fear of immigrants and immigrants' foreign relations, they are unlikely to resolve the political impasse over immigration legislation that characterizes our own times.