IN 1881, THE FIRST RECORDED Chinese female students arrived in the United States. Since then, the trickle of Chinese female students into the United States has continued. Their increasing visibility over the years has attracted scholars’ attention. Scholars first made an effort to examine the difficulties of the so-called “stranded students” in the early 1950s. In “The Stranded Chinese in the United States,” Rose Hum Lee divided Chinese students who had arrived in the United States since World War II into three groups: highly trained professionals, former officials from the Chinese Nationalist government, and wealthy Chinese. Y. C. Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West, 1872–1949*, the most comprehensive work on Chinese students studying abroad, contains information on Chinese male and female students in the United States. A more recent study, Leo A. Orleans, *Chinese Students in America: Politics, Issues, and Numbers*, discusses the Chinese government’s policy on cultural exchange programs and the consequent problems and provides substantial statistical information on Chinese students and scholars in America. These studies, however, have generally focused their discussion solely on male students. Those scholars who have paid attention to Chinese female students have mentioned them only in passing. In recent years, Chinese students in the United States have been the subject of a few doctoral dissertations, for example, Weili Ye, “Crossing the Cultures: The Experience of Chinese Students in the U.S.A. 1900–1925” and Jesse Chain Chou, “A Survey of Chinese Students in the United States, 1979–1987.” Their scope, however, is limited to only certain periods. Likewise, Weili Ye, “‘Nu Liuxuesheng,’ The Story of American-Educated Chinese Women, 1880s–1920s,” one of the most recent studies on Chinese female students, has a similar limitation. A comprehensive and systematic study of Chinese female students is therefore needed.

This article is a step toward providing such a comprehensive work on
Chinese female students in the United States. Their social origins, means of emigration, educational and professional experiences in America are explained and their history is divided into three periods: (1) pioneer Chinese female students, 1881–1930s; (2) wartime and postwar Chinese female students, 1940s–1950s; and (3) contemporary Chinese female students, 1960s–1990s.

The history of pioneer Chinese female students (1881–1930s) is based on a small number of immigration records from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and in San Bruno, California, on contemporary newspapers in English and Chinese and original surveys by the China Institute in America, and on statistics and cases from the secondary literature. The history of wartime and postwar Chinese female students (1940s–1950s) and of contemporary Chinese female students (1960s–1990s) are derived primarily from surveys of Chinese students and their families conducted by the author, from original, in-depth interviews of over a hundred individuals, a majority of whom came to America during these two periods, and from statistics and cases of the secondary sources. The questionnaire for the oral history interviews was designed to gather information regarding the interviewee’s emigration background, education, employment, marriage, family, and sociopolitical activities.

PIONEER CHINESE FEMALE STUDENTS: 1881–1930s

Between 1881 and the 1930s, pioneer Chinese female students braved the Pacific Ocean to study in the United States. Most of them had been associated with American Protestant missions in China.

Since the first Chinese male student, Yung Wing, graduated from Yale University in 1854, the flow of Chinese students has never ceased. From 1872 to 1881, 120 Chinese students studied in the United States supported by Qing government scholarships. In the following two decades, the number of Chinese students entering colleges or universities in the United States totaled 32. In 1903, there were 50 Chinese students in America. From 1909 onward, however, the number of Chinese students in the United States began to increase. There were 239 in 1909, 292 in 1910, and 650 in 1911. The rapid increase was due partly to China’s westernization movement and partly to the Boxer Indemnity Fellowship, which provided scholarships for selected Chinese students to study in the United States.

A few Chinese female students arrived in the United States as early as
1881. According to a survey conducted by the China Institute in America in 1954, the number of female students continued to increase after the turn of the century. Between 1910 and 1930, their population increased sixfold, in the same proportion as the overall increase in the Chinese student population as a whole (see table 1). Since this survey probably did not include all Chinese students in the United States, the actual number of Chinese female students in America was likely even greater than the number indicated in table 1.

While most Chinese male students came to America with Chinese government scholarships, the majority of early Chinese female students arrived in the United States with private funds. Christian missionaries proved to be the primary source of support for these Chinese female students. Since the Opium War opened China's door to the Western powers in the 1840s, American missionary workers had been preaching along coastal areas and in port cities. There they established schools, hospitals, and other charitable facilities. At a time when public education was not accessible to women in China, schools run by Christian missions provided opportunities for women to obtain a Western education.  

The first schools for girls were founded by Christian missionaries in Hong Kong in 1844, in Guangzhou in 1846, and in Shantou in 1860. According to a report from the Canton [Guangzhou] Missionary Conference, in 1920, there were 236 Chinese girls enrolled in middle schools in Guangdong Province run by the missions. Most of these girls were from affluent Chinese Christian families. According to a private survey done in 1933, more than 90 percent of these girls were daughters of businessmen or professionals, and more than half of them had Protestant Christian parents. Chinese girls who studied in mission schools and daughters of Chinese Christians benefited from their association with the missionaries and were able to enter the United States in a period when the Chinese exclusion prevailed (1882–1943).

Between 1881 and 1892, according to Y.C. Wang, four Chinese female students sponsored by American missionaries came to the United States and received medical degrees from American colleges. These four Chinese women were the first recorded Chinese female students in America.

In the following decades, Chinese female students continued to arrive in the United States as revealed by immigration records. In January 1900, a twenty-year-old Chinese woman named Mary Chan, daughter of
TABLE 1
Chinese Students in American Colleges and Universities by Year of Entry (1900–1953)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Entry</th>
<th>Male Students</th>
<th>Female Students</th>
<th>Chinese Immigrants (Not Including Students)†</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Percentage of Total Chinese Immigrants</td>
<td>Count</td>
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*All Chinese Students**
TABLE 1 (Continued)

All Chinese Students**

<table>
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<th>Male Students</th>
<th>Female Students</th>
<th>Chinese Immigrants (Not Including Students)†</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
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</table>

* During the period of Chinese exclusion (1882–1943), Chinese students could enter the United States as one of the exempted classes (other exempted classes were teachers, merchants, travelers, and diplomatic and other officers of the Chinese government). After the repeal of Chinese exclusion acts in 1943, Chinese students continued to be admitted as non-immigrants. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 allowed Chinese students and other Chinese temporarily in the United States to be eligible for adjustment of status to that of permanent residents on the basis of fear of Communist persecution in China, which explains the sharp increase in the entry of Chinese students to America between 1947 and 1950, as indicated in Table 1. Many Chinese students who fled the Communist take-over in China in 1949 also entered the United States as refugees under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, which allotted a total of 2,000 visas to Chinese whose passport had been endorsed by the Chinese Nationalist government, and issued 3,000 visas to refugees from Asia.

** China Institute in America, A survey of Chinese Students in American Colleges and Universities in the Past Hundred Years (New York, 1954), pp. 26–27.
FIGURE 1
Comparison of Chinese Female Students with Other Chinese Immigrants (1900–1953)

the Rev. Chan Sing Kai, entered America from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, where she had lived for five years as a student. She was admitted to the United States by the Controller of Chinese and Collector of Customs at Victoria, British Columbia. Whether she became a student in America is unknown, but she was probably one of the earliest Chinese female students to visit America.

In April 1914, Ng Gan Tong, a fifteen-year-old Chinese girl was admitted as a student after American immigration officials denied her first application for admission as the adopted daughter of an American citizen of Chinese ancestry. Her educational background in the South China Girls’ School, a mission school in Guangzhou, played a crucial role in her admission to the United States. In his letter to the Commissioner of Immigration at San Francisco, the American Consul General in Canton gave this argument in favor Ng Gan Tong’s admission as a student:

the applicant attended the South China Girls’ School for a period of four years. This school is one of the recognized institutions of learning in Canton, and has a large number of Chinese girls in attendance. An examination of the record at the school shows that Ng Gan Tong attended from September 1909 to June 1913, or eight semesters, which corresponds to four years, pursuing the regular course of studies, viz, Bible studies,
national reader, arithmetic, Chinese geography, Chinese history, hygiene, English, drawing and music, physical culture and needle work. This establishes the fact that she was a bona fide student. The photograph of applicant was positively identified by Miss Edna Lowry, Principal, and Rev. C. A. Nelson, missionary in charge.23

The immigration authorities also directed that after her admission Ng Gan Tong be “placed in a proper school” and stated that “adequate provision would be made for her maintenance and tuition.”24

In 1916, the sisters Chan Ping On, Chan Pink Hong, and Chan Pink Ning, along with their mother, arrived in the United States to join their father, Chan Lok Shang, a minister and teacher in a Chinese Methodist Episcopal Church and school in San Francisco, California.25

The most celebrated Chinese female students of this time who were associated with American missionaries were the Soong sisters, Eling, Chingling (later married to Dr. Sun Yat-sen, known as Mme. Sun Yat-sen), and Mayling (later married to Chiang Kai-shek, known as Mme. Chiang Kai-shek) Soong. They were the daughters of Charles Jones Soong, one of the earliest Chinese Christian ministers and industrialists in Shanghai. Between 1904 and 1907, through arrangements made by their father and his American missionary friends, the three Soong sisters successively arrived at Wesleyan College, a private women’s college in Macon, Georgia. They all started their college education at the age of fourteen and maintained outstanding academic records. Eling and Chingling returned to China after their graduation in 1908 and 1913 respectively, while Mayling transferred to Wellesley College in Massachusetts in 1913 to finish her undergraduate degree.26

Although Christian missionaries sponsored most of the Chinese female students of this period, a few came to America with scholarships from the Chinese government. According to Y. C. Wang, three women were awarded scholarships in 1907 by Jiangsu province, and one by Zhejiang province the same year, for study in America.27 Y. C. Wang’s study also indicates that “by 1910 self-supporting female students abroad were competing on equal terms with male students for government scholarships.”28

After the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, the new government continued to send students abroad to study. In addition to national scholarships, the provincial governments and other private organizations also provided scholarships for study abroad.29 As a result, the number of Chinese students in America increased to 1,446 in 1922,
including 135 women. Most of these female students had obtained a Western education at mission schools in China and had a good command of the English language.

Academic life was a large part of Chinese female students' experiences in America. Just as most Chinese male students concentrated in such practical fields as business administration, chemistry, and engineering, most Chinese female students also chose courses which would be "useful" in their future career. According to the China Institute in America survey, the top ten courses of study chosen by Chinese female students were, in descending order, (1) education, (2) sociology and chemistry, (3) home economics, (4) English, (5) general arts, (6) music, (7) history, (8) psychology and nursing, (9) mathematics, and (10) biology, art and archaeology, and medicine. Many Chinese female students had outstanding academic records. Mayling Soong, the third Soong sister, for example, majored in English literature, with philosophy as her minor at Wellesley College in Massachusetts (1913–1917). In her senior year she was named a Durant Scholar, the highest academic honor conferred by the college.

These pioneer Chinese female students also participated in extracurricular activities such as Y.W.C.A. programs, prayer meetings, and club meetings. The Soong sisters, especially Mayling, were very active outside of their classrooms. They went to church regularly, joined the tennis club, and traveled around the country during the summers.

More importantly, some Chinese female students were concerned about their country and conscious of their future roles in China. In 1911, Chingling Soong, the second Soong sister, in her essay for the college magazine, The Wesleyan, entitled "The Influence of Foreign-Educated Students on China," recommended a western type of government in China and suggested that the returned Chinese students had improved the quality of Chinese officialdom.

The Chinese female students also played a significant role in Chinese student organizations in many American universities and colleges. Local student clubs had been organized as early as 1911. On the basis of these clubs a national Chinese student organization, the Chinese Student Alliance, was formed later. The Alliance held a conference for Chinese students each summer and had "annual," "quarterly," and "monthly" publications which reported news of student activities and presented substantial articles reflecting Chinese students' thinking and ideas. Chinese female students not only participated in the activities of the
Alliance, but also announced in the Alliance’s publications their opinions on political issues in China, especially their concerns about China’s future and the women’s liberation movement there. In June 1922, Rosalind Mei-Tsung Li published an article entitled “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Women” in *The Chinese Students’ Monthly*, in which she criticized rigid Chinese social etiquette and morals and Christian dogmas as well, and called for Chinese girls to rid themselves of social restrictions and to renew their lives.

The chief difference between the Chinese men students and the Chinese women students in America is, so far as my intuition can tell, that the former have no ideals and the latter have. . . . The amazing uniformity of personality of Chinese women students in America shows that they have all been dominated by the same ideals. As I analyze them carefully, I find that there are two: Correctness and Usefulness.

The uniform yellow of Chinese social etiquette and morals is very much like frost in April. Added to all this, most of us have had the privilege of a regimented education in a missionary school where our own puritanism is made doubly, nay triply, “Grundyish” by the Old Testament and the American frontier tradition. We were bound in our homes and society and killed, cured, and ossified in the missionary school. The wonder is that we still walk.

If the Chinese Revolution is to be something which our descendants shall be proud of, it must mean a renewal of life. Of course, it cannot renew life in China if it does not touch the broad and populous realm of the womanhood of China.39

This quest for emancipation in political, professional, and personal realms was part of the general effort for “enlightenment” by modern Chinese intellectuals at the time.

Some of the Chinese female students not only associated themselves with the political movement in China, but also identified themselves with their counterparts in American Chinatowns. They spoke out against the earlier system of female slavery that bought girls from poor parents in China and then sold them to brothels as prostitutes or to well-to-do Chinese families as concubines or servant-girls. In 1902, Sieh King King, a sixteen year old Chinese female student from Tianjin, gave a speech in front of a Chinatown theater, condemning the slave-girl system, and calling for equality for men and women.40 They also delivered speeches to raise the consciousness of Chinese women in America and
encouraged them to join the revolutionary efforts in China. In 1904, Zhang Zhujun, a Chinese female intellectual, spoke to a San Francisco Chinatown audience, urging Chinese women to unite and fight against the oppression of Chinese women in China and to support her organization's efforts to open schools for girls and provide relief for widows and orphans. Wu Fengming, another Chinese female intellectual, delivered many speeches from 1903 to 1905 at rallies in Oakland and San Francisco, California, Baltimore, Maryland, and other places around the country. In her speeches, she spread revolutionary ideas and attacked the monarchists, while calling on the Chinese in America to support the revolutionary cause.

Many of the pioneer Chinese female students returned to China after the completion of their education or training, and became prominent in their professions. The first four recorded Chinese female students who received medical degrees from American colleges became the "initial women doctors" upon their return. Other Chinese female students also became pioneers in their professions in China. Ms. C's mother, for instance, received her degree in sociology from Denison University in Ohio in 1930, after which she returned to China and taught English at several leading universities. In 1936, she and her husband established South China College in Hong Kong. During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, the couple moved their college to China. Just before the Communists took over China in 1949, they moved the college to Hong Kong once again. In 1949, she began to teach at Chung Chi College (the present Chinese University of Hong Kong), and later became the Dean of Women there.

Similarly, the Soong sisters utilized their education in America by devoting their lives to Chinese politics. Chingling Soong returned to China after receiving her degree in philosophy at Wesleyan College in 1913. She served as Sun Yat-sen's personal secretary and supported his revolutionary career. After Sun Yat-sen's death, she continued supporting her husband's cause and became a highly revered Chinese woman leader. Mayling Soong had the same ambition as her sister. After her marriage to Chiang Kai-shek, president of the Republic of China, in 1927, she assisted Chiang's political career as his personal secretary and interpreter. As a leader of Chinese women, she led the women's department in Chiang's government in the 1930s. As an envoy of Chiang, she visited the United States during World War II to obtain American support for the Nationalist government.
WARcIME AND POSTWAR CHINESE FEMALE STUDENTS: 1940s–1950s

From the 1940s to the early 1950s, a larger number of educated Chinese females came to the United States. According to the survey by the China Institute in America, the number of Chinese students in America increased from 706 in 1943 to 3,914 in 1948. The ratio of female to male students also increased from 1 in 6 in the 1930s to 1 in 3 in the 1940s and 1950s (see table 1). These Chinese female students’ socio-economic and cultural connection to the Nationalist government and the elite classes in China differentiated them from their predecessors. Some came to America for further education, with scholarships from the Chinese government or American institutions, or with funds provided by individuals in America. Others were sent by their wealthy families in China to escape Communist rule and to inherit family fortunes in the United States. Still others who were daughters of former Nationalist diplomats stayed with their parents when the latter decided to remain in the United States after the Communists took over China.

The stories of Dr. Jianxiong Wu [Chien-shiung Wu], Mrs. D, and Ms. C exemplify those who came to America for further education and personal fulfillment. Jianxiong Wu, daughter of a high school principal, spent her childhood in Liu Ho, a small town near Shanghai, and received her Bachelor of Science degree from the National Central University in Nanjing, China. She came to the United States in 1936 on a Nationalist government scholarship to pursue her graduate studies under Dr. Ernest Lawrence, the director of the radiation laboratory at the University of California and a Nobel Prize winner in 1939.

Mrs. D was born into a well-to-do family in Canton, China, in 1919. She obtained her bachelor’s degree in geography at Xiangqin University in Guangdong in 1941 and was a winner of the national college thesis competition. Wars and social upheavals in China delayed her plan for further education in geography. She first worked as a researcher at the National Geography Research Institute in Chongqin, Sichuan, jointly supported by the war-time Nationalist government and the British government. When the Communist victory was imminent, Mrs. D moved to Taiwan in 1947, along with her aunt, a prominent woman general in Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Army. Mrs. D taught geography courses at the Teacher’s College of Taiwan until 1952 when the Nationalist government initiated a program to grant scholarships to individuals for
study in the United States after five years of service to the government. Mrs. D grabbed this opportunity and was awarded one of the eight yearly governmental scholarship of $500, enough for her trip to America. Meanwhile, she applied to the University of Oregon and was accepted with a scholarship. In early 1953, she came to America to pursue graduate study. She was the only female student in her department at the time.50

Ms. C was born in Kowloon, Hong Kong, in 1938. Both her mother and father had obtained higher education in the United States and were well-known educators in China. In 1955, when she was seventeen years old, she decided to get her college education in the United States. Her father provided her traveling expenses from the proceeds of his books on elementary, secondary, and higher education. Her benefactor in the United States supplied $18,000, enough for her four-year education at Berea College in Kentucky.51

The second type of Chinese female students came from wealthy families in China, sent to the United States by their parents to become beneficiaries of their family assets in America on the eve of the Chinese Communist party’s triumph. Ms. Y was one such student. She came to America in 1949 supported by her affluent family in Beijing. She then enrolled at a prestigious university on the east coast to study Chinese language and literature.52 Similarly, Ms. W came to America to escape the Communist take-over in 1949. She was born in an interior city, Taiyuan, Shanxi, where her family had accumulated considerable wealth. In 1948, when the Communist troops were approaching Taiyuan, her family immediately transferred all their assets to the United States, where they had friends and relatives, and sent Ms. W and her grown-up brothers to America to inherit the family wealth. Upon arrival in America, Ms. W and her brothers all enrolled at prestigious universities and later became scholars in physics and chemistry.53

In the late 1940s, when the political situation in China was about to change dramatically, some former Nationalist government officials and diplomats working in the United States decided to stay after their terms of service were completed.54 Bette Bao Lord’s father was one of these former Nationalist officials. He was a Chinese diplomat whom the Nationalist government of China had assigned to work in New York City in 1946. He took up his position and brought his family, including young Bette. Though he had not planned to stay in America, he decided to remain when the Communist party took over China and expelled the Nationalist government in 1949.55
Like their earlier counterparts, most Chinese female students of this period worked hard and enjoyed academic success. Interviews provide a glimpse of their life in America. As Mrs. D recalled:

My life in Oregon was fun. Since my scholarship only covered my tuition, I had to work to support myself. A friend of mine introduced me to an American couple. They would provide room and board for me, and in turn, I would work one hour a day to cook and to clean house for them. I never cooked in China and did not know how to cook in the beginning, but the couple taught me. I broke a cup when I was washing dishes and wrecked the glass door of the fire-place when I was cleaning it. I told them what I did and was going to quit the job. But the couple told me, "We hired you because you are honest and sweet." The friendship between the couple and I grew so strong that when I got married they bought my wedding dress and airline ticket for my honeymoon.

I was the only woman in the geography department [at the University of Oregon], but I had good grades in my courses. I also had a personal art exhibit of my paintings in traditional Chinese southern style in the university gallery in January 1954, which was a great success.\textsuperscript{56}

Similarly, Ms. C’s college years were challenging yet rewarding.

I came to the United States for my undergraduate work in 1955 when I was 17 years old. . . . In the first year at Berea [College], I was very shy, because I could not speak English and I looked different. . . . But I could get along with my classmates and roommates and did not feel lonely, for I was so interested in what I saw and so busy studying that I did not have time to think I was lonely. I was behind in English, but I got high scores in math and other science courses. . . . I stayed at Berea from 1955 to 1957. Then I transferred to the University of Chicago. . . . Using the money from my benefactress and the money I earned in summer, I was able to support myself. [In 1960], I entered the graduate program at the University of Chicago with a scholarship. I never felt I was discriminated. I was always the only female in my class. I was treated like a queen. I felt I was special.\textsuperscript{57}

Ms. R also came to America in the 1950s to major in library science at the University of Oregon. She still remembers how hard she had worked for her degree.

When I was finishing my thesis for my master’s degree in library science, I worked very hard. The papers and books spread all over the floor and I
was working on the floor for days and nights. I would eat a sandwich and drink coffee while I was still writing or reading. I was like crazy.\textsuperscript{58}

Many of these women completed their education smoothly and found employment in academic and professional fields in America. Ms. C’s case is illustrative. After completing her doctoral degree in chemistry at the University of Chicago, she became a research fellow in several American research institutions, and finally joined the faculty at a midwestern university as a member of the chemistry department.\textsuperscript{59}

Some prominent Chinese female students even made inroads into advanced scientific fields. Dr. Jianxiong Wu’s success is a good example. After receiving her doctorate in physics at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1940, she taught at Princeton University. In 1943 she went to Columbia University to work on the development of the atomic bomb with the Manhattan Project. In 1957 Wu joined a group of scientists from the National Bureau of Standards, Washington, D.C., and tested the proposal by two male Chinese-American physicists, Zhenning Yang [Chen-ning Yang] and Zhengdao Li [Tsung-dao Lee], of parity violation in weak interactions within the atomic nucleus. That same year, Yang and Li won the Nobel Prize in physics. This work not only brought worldwide acclaim to Yang and Li, but professional fame to Wu as well.\textsuperscript{60}

Chinese female students not only succeeded professionally, but a few also seemed to have managed to assimilate, more or less, into the mainstream society. Some of them had chosen mates outside of their ethnic group and maintained successful marriages. Ms. R, for instance, was employed as a university professor and married an Italian American, who worked at the same campus as a librarian. With appreciation for each other’s cultural heritage, they have enjoyed a happy marriage.\textsuperscript{61} Similarly, Ms. C met her husband, a European-American chemist, at her work place, and they have had a happy family life since then.

I am very happy about my marriage. If you work with somebody, then you might develop relationship with him, which was what happened to us. My husband appreciate oriental culture. He has great knowledge of Chinese history and geography. He made the whole thing smooth.\textsuperscript{62}

Many Chinese female students or professionals, especially those who settled in small university towns, were enthusiastic participants in local Chinese community activities. Mrs. T’s story is a good example. A
native of Shanghai, Mrs. T came to the United States in 1947 to study library science at the University of Oregon and later settled in the university town, Eugene, Oregon. Being an active member of several local organizations such as the American Association of University Women, the Red Cross, and the Human Rights Commission, she was among those who organized the Eugene Chinese Benevolent Association.63 Like Mrs. T, Ms. C had been active within Chinese communities in a midwestern university town where she resided. She made efforts to participate in all major activities organized by the Chinese students and to provide financial and moral support to the needy students.64 Similarly, Mrs. D was also very involved in the local Chinese community. After her marriage to a Chinese professor at a midwestern medical school, she settled in the small midwestern university town. Remote from any major Chinese community, Chinese students and faculty there found friendship and support among themselves. Mrs. D. had been a magnet within this small Chinese community:

I like to be with people, and I always have friends to come to see me. On weekends or holidays, Chinese students and professors would come to my house to read Chinese newspapers, exchange news, and try new Chinese cooking recipes. Somebody joked that my house is a “Chinese Club.” Many students still wrote to me or send me gifts long after their graduation.65

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FEMALE STUDENTS: 1960s–1990s

From the 1960s to the 1990s, two large groups of Chinese female students came to the United States: one group from Taiwan beginning in the 1960s and a second group from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) since 1979. Most Chinese female students of this period were pushed to America by their governments’ desire for modernization and by the various practical considerations or unpractical illusions of studying in America. The two groups will be discussed separately, since the initial emigration of each group started from a different date.

In the 1960s, pressured by the civil rights movement, American immigration policy became more liberal and the United States attracted more Chinese immigrants than ever before.66 Students from Taiwan formed the first wave of a large-scale student immigration. According to John T. Ma, from 1950 to 1974 a total of 30,765 students were approved
by the Chinese Ministry of Education in Taiwan for advanced study in the United States.\textsuperscript{67} Although there is no exact figure on how many of these students from Taiwan have stayed after the completion of their education, the same study indicates that many of them planned to stay instead of returning home.\textsuperscript{68} In the following decades, the number of Chinese students from Taiwan increased rapidly. Between 1979 and 1987, approximately 186,000 students from Taiwan came to America to continue their education, with only 10,000 returning home.\textsuperscript{69} The "study abroad craze" in Taiwan has its roots in the success of the postwar Taiwan economy. In the 1950s and 1960s, Taiwan experienced economic growth accompanied by structural and demographic changes. There was a dramatic rise in the relative significance of the nonagricultural sector, particularly manufacturing, and industrial development required more highly educated and well-trained personnel.\textsuperscript{70}

Ms. L, a graduate of Cheng Gong University who majored in English literature, Ms. M, a graduate of Danshui University who majored in French literature, Ms. R, a graduate of Providence College, a private Catholic college, who majored in western languages, Ms. S, a graduate from National Taiwan University who majored in economics, and many others, all "followed the national trend" to come to America for further education during the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{71} Ms. M's decision to come to America was typical.

We think that we just follow the trend. . . . At my time, that type after college to go to abroad it's a fashion. So every college graduate, if they have financial capacity, or they can get admission from the school of U.S., everybody would like to go.\textsuperscript{72}

Many of the female students from Taiwan during this period were from families of present or former Nationalist government officials, who had followed the Nationalist government to Taiwan prior to the 1949 Communist take-over of the mainland.\textsuperscript{73} This common trait was exemplified by Ms. R's family story. As she recalled, "[My father] was a general in the [Nationalist] Army. . . . We had a good life . . . [In 1949] we had to abandon everything, following the government to Taiwan."\textsuperscript{74} After moving to Taiwan, however, their family life was filled with hard work and a scarcity of material comforts.

Many of the students had to depend on scholarships from the Nationalist government in Taiwan or from American higher educational institutions or private funds to study in American universities and colleges.\textsuperscript{75}
Many others worked part-time jobs while enrolled as students or worked during summers to save money for the school year.\textsuperscript{76}

The social origins and means of emigration for Chinese female students from Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s, however, are different from those of students from Taiwan in the earlier decades. As indicated by a survey of over one hundred female students from Taiwan, about 70 percent of the students in this period were daughters of businessmen in Taiwan, dealing with clothing manufacturing and computer production, or selling interior decorating materials and musical instruments, or working in banks and advertising firms, to name just a few.\textsuperscript{77} As a result, most students at this time were financially supported by their parents or savings of their own.\textsuperscript{78} Chinese female students from Taiwan during this period had different life experiences in America. For some, life in America was exciting and full of opportunities. For others, it was a mixture of bitter and sweet experiences. However, no matter what specific situations they faced, they all worked hard to achieve their educational and professional goals.

In their initial years in the United States, language problems and cultural unfamiliarity seemed to be the major difficulties for many of these students. Ms. M came to America in the late 1960s. She had a bachelor’s degree in French literature from Danshui University in Taiwan, but she decided to study math at a midwestern university in the United States, because this subject “does not use English more than calculating.”\textsuperscript{79} Ms. R’s personal story is also revealing:

[When I first came to America] it was very hard. I was in such a shock. . . . I didn’t know anybody—scared, frightened, homesick. . . . The first year I would not even talk to anybody unless I was talked to. . . . I was hungry and I didn’t know how to cook. I learned to cook rice from my American landlady. . . . I was not used to American food like salad. I didn’t know what to do with the dressing. I had it on the airplane [for the first time]. It tastes like rats to me. Now I realize [that] it took, I think, about 5 years to really feel comfortable in the United States and took about 15 years to feel at home.\textsuperscript{80}

Ms. K, daughter of the owner of a large computer company in Taiwan who came to America in 1993 to major in finance at a midwestern university, expressed her frustration this way.

We want to find more American friends. But they usually speak English very fast, and if maybe we are in the same group we cannot get their
meanings. I feel very awful that, if the professor divide[s] us in groups, some people don’t want to be with us, because our English is not as good as theirs, and maybe we cannot explain our thinking as well as theirs. . . . So we feel upset because of that.81

In addition to language problems and cultural differences, financial difficulty was also disturbing for those who did not have sufficient scholarship or other funds to support their education. Ms. R worked part-time at the university library to subsidize her living expenses.82 Ms. M worked as a restaurant waitress to support her schooling, and eventually quit school to work full-time in a restaurant.83

Despite difficulties, most Chinese female students from Taiwan successfully completed their education and found employment in the United States. Some of them were employed by educational or research institutions, others entered the business world as entrepreneurs or brokers. Of the seven interviewed women who came from Taiwan during the 1960s and 1970s, for example, three received their doctoral degrees in economics, food science, and finance, and three obtained their master’s degree in counseling, library science, and special education, respectively. Four of them became professionals working in educational institutions as professor, researcher, librarian, and high school teacher, two became restaurateurs, and one a stock market broker.84

The professional women have encountered favorable work environments and developed a positive attitude towards their professions. “The whole school environment,” as Ms. S, a professor of economics at a midwestern university, recalled her first impression of the university when she was invited for a campus interview for employment, “gave me a very warm feeling. . . . I met a few students here, they welcomed me to come.”85 Ms. R, a food science researcher at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, enjoyed her research, and felt it was both “exciting” and “challenging”:

I like doing research because the more you know, the more you don’t know. And then there’s no end for research. It’s exciting when you see your knowledge accumulate and things start to make sense. So to me, research is a challenging work.86

Like the professional women, the business women have likewise enjoyed an encouraging business environment, friendly and supportive patrons, and good economic returns. Ms. M’s story best exemplifies
those business women's experiences. The owner of two Chinese restaurants and two Italian restaurants in a midwestern small town, Ms. M recalled the difficulties and joys when she and her husband started the business in 1972.

When we opened restaurant, we didn't have any knowledge or skill about restaurant or cooking. So the hardest part was [that] we had to learn the knowledge, learn the skill in short period of time. . . . Every time we got a chance to visit friends, or go to other cities, we [were] always willing to spend money on food, to try different restaurant. If we had some good dishes, we always try to imitate. Maybe we didn't come out hundred percent of that dish, but pretty close. So little by little we added on the menus. . . . I am very grateful to this community, because without their support, [or if we were in] other community or big city, [the business] probably would have been shut down . . . long time ago.87

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the "study abroad craze" in Taiwan spread to the Chinese mainland. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the government, like its predecessors, has relied on foreign countries to train its specialists. The Soviet Union was the only foreign power friendly to China during its first decades; therefore, the Chinese government kept sending students to Russia, until the 1960s when the relations between Moscow and Beijing deteriorated. From then on, Mao Zedong led China into a reclusive existence by advocating self-sufficiency and self-reliance. During the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) international exchange programs were essentially suspended and nobody was sent abroad to study, except for 1,629 students who primarily studied foreign languages.88 Following the Sino-American reconciliation in 1972, the government of the PRC once again began to view foreign study as a shortcut to the acquisition of world-level scientific and technical knowledge. The decision to initiate scholarly exchanges was made in 1978, even prior to the normalization of relations between the United States and the PRC in 1979. Since then, this cultural exchange has remained a vital link in the relationship between the two countries.

Similar to what had happened in Taiwan two decades earlier, study abroad became very popular in the PRC, simply because one could be better off with an American degree. For middle-aged and established scholars, study abroad became a criterion for promotion.89 For young university or college graduates, an advanced degree from a foreign insti-
tution, especially from one in the United States, symbolized the beginning of a promising career in China.90

Study in America for many of these people, however, meant not only academic improvement but also material gain, in terms of the savings they could make from their meager scholarships, stipends, or any other type of income. These savings were small by American standards, but to many Chinese they were significant in modernizing their daily life. They could equip their families with modern electronic gadgets when they converted their savings into Chinese currency at a very favorable exchange rate.91 Still many others simply wanted to find an opportunity to stay in America by going to study there.92

Motivated by their various dreams and expectations, more and more Chinese students and scholars have entered the United States since 1979. According to official Chinese records, from 1979 to 1988, 36,000 Chinese students studied in the United States; 37 percent of them were self-supporting.93 According to American sources, the figure was even larger. Jesse Chain Chou’s study indicates that there were 63,000 students and scholars from the PRC during the same time period.94 The Immigration and Naturalization Service estimated that there were 73,000 Chinese students in the United States in June 1989.95 In a statement on 2 December 1989, President George Bush announced that “as many as 80,000 Chinese have studied and conducted research in the United States since these exchanges began.”96

In contrast to government-sponsored students and scholars (J-1 visa holders), self-supporting students (F-1 visa holders) were financed either by American institutions or by their relatives in the United States.97 They usually hoped to earn a graduate degree first, then find a job and eventually become a permanent resident in America. A survey of over 200 Chinese students’ spouses conducted by the author indicates that 90 percent of F-1 students hoped to stay in the United States after the completion of their education. The path toward their dream, however, has been rough, even for those who came to the United States with financial support from their American relatives. They were legally guaranteed at least one year of financial aid from their sponsors but, in fact, most of them had to earn their living and tuition from the very beginning. Ms. Z, a female student from Shanghai sponsored by her relatives in the United States, expressed her concern by noting that “even though I am sponsored by my relatives here, actually I have to live on my own. I have to make money for my schooling and everything. I work in
TABLE 2
Percentage of Women among Chinese Students (1979–1985)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>J-1 Students</th>
<th>F-1 Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


cafeteria, I work in library, I work in whatever job I could find. Before I came, I never thought life would be this hard.”98

The sex-ratio among Chinese students from the PRC has remained uneven. Since 1979, according to Leo A. Orleans, less than 20 percent of the J-1 students have been female, while female F-1 students did not even exist until 1983 (see table 2). In fact, this small percentage of female Chinese students in America reflected the student sex-ratio in Chinese higher education. In most Chinese universities or colleges, the percentage of female students varied from 10 percent to 45 percent, depending on the field of study. Generally, female students in Chinese universities amounted to roughly 10 percent in the pure sciences and engineering, 30 percent in medicine, and 40 to 45 percent in the humanities.99 In other words, female students had been underrepresented in all subjects, especially the sciences, within the Chinese higher educational system. This disparity is a complex historical phenomenon. Traditional values and gender discrimination in secondary education and in university admission policy have worked together to discourage women from pursuing higher education. Not surprisingly, this small percentage of female university students in China has resulted in an even smaller percentage of female students studying abroad.

In addition, as a general rule, the Chinese government has given first priority to sending students in the pure sciences and engineering abroad. Chinese authorities have always been reluctant to spend the nation’s foreign currency reserve on students in the humanities, for they believe that only those individuals who have special training in advanced science and technology can immediately profit the country.
The uneven gender distribution among Chinese students began to change in 1985, when the Chinese government revised its policy regarding cultural exchange programs, making it more flexible and less restrictive than before. More students and scholars in the humanities were selected to study in the United States, and consequently more female students were allowed to cross the Pacific Ocean. By the end of the 1980s, female Chinese students comprised 30 percent of all Chinese students in the universities and colleges in the United States.¹⁰⁰

The relaxation of official Chinese policy also contributed to another demographic change. Starting from the early 1980s, many Chinese students began to arrange for their spouses to join them, something never officially permitted before. In December 1986, to regulate the procedure, the Chinese government modified its policies on study abroad. In the document entitled “State Education Commission Provisions on Study Abroad,” the government agreed that “since the time of studying abroad for the graduate students is relatively longer, the application of their spouses for visiting them abroad should be handled.”¹⁰¹ The same document also stipulated:

If, during the visiting period, the spouse of the graduate student has obtained foreign scholarships or subsidiary funding and applies for studying abroad she/he can report to her/his employing unit for approval during her/his visitation abroad, thus becoming a public- or self-funded student studying abroad through proper procedure.¹⁰²

Since the formulation of this policy, more Chinese women have joined their student husbands, and similarly, some Chinese men have joined their student wives. According to the author’s survey among over 200 Chinese students’ spouses, more than 90 percent came to the United States after 1987. Ninety-five percent of the wives of students were university and college graduates, and many of them came to America with the plan of being a dependent first (it was practically much easier to enter the United States as a dependent of an already-admitted student than as a student), and then with the secondary goal of being admitted to an American institution for a graduate degree.¹⁰³ These women became potential students, and many of them have, in fact, fulfilled their secondary goal of studying in the United States.¹⁰⁴ The presence of Chinese student wives balanced the uneven sex distribution among Chinese students, and in 1990 the ratio of female to male became 3 to 4 in most universities and colleges.¹⁰⁵
The socioeconomic background of the current Chinese female students from the PRC resembles that of their predecessors. The above survey indicates that about 90 percent of them are daughters of professionals such as teachers and doctors or cadres (government officials, equivalent to civil servants in the United States). The intellectual influence from their families and their parents’ easy access to power and privileges in China helped them achieve higher education and obtain government permission for emigration.106

Reflecting the academic situation in China, most Chinese female students from the PRC concentrated their studies in the general sciences, engineering, and the humanities.107 Like their counterparts from Taiwan, many of them have had to struggle in their academic work due to their lack of English proficiency. Ms. S, now a chemistry researcher at a midwestern university, came to America in 1986 to join her student husband, and then became a student herself and received a master’s degree in chemistry in 1990. She recalled her experience in America during the first years:

I had a really hard time in graduate school. My English was very poor. Before I went to graduate school, I had not read any textbook in English. So for every class, I had so many new vocabularies. Lectures to me were totally unintelligible. I had to read textbooks before and after classes. Basically, I studied on my own.108

Ms. X, who used to be an English major and taught English for three years in a university in China, still experienced great difficulty with the language:

I came to West Virginia first. [Then] I really doubted if I knew English at all. I thought I knew English, and I couldn’t understand what people were talking about. In so many classes I couldn’t quite understand what the classmates were discussing. And at parties some people try to have a conversation with me. Yeah, I was very slow in responding. It took some time to get used to it.109

In addition to difficulty with English, computer illiteracy was another barrier in their academic life. Most Chinese female students had never used computers in China and therefore were very intimidated by them. Realizing that an ability to use the computer was indispensable for academic training and for any profession, they battled their fear and frustration in learning and using computers.110
Also like their predecessors, many Chinese female students from the PRC were concerned about the future of China, urging the Chinese government to carry out democratic political and economic reforms, and supporting the democracy demonstrations in China in early 1989. The Tiananmen Incident of 4 June 1989, however, disappointed them. Many of them decided to take advantage of the liberal United States immigration policy open to Chinese students after the Tiananmen Incident, staying in the United States and looking for employment upon or even before the completion of their education. Although we do not have specific statistics on how many Chinese female students have entered the professions in the United States, individual cases have indicated that some Chinese female students have become professionals such as professors, lawyers, researchers, and librarians, and that they are making steady progress in their careers. Like their counterparts in the earlier decades, Chinese female students from the PRC are transforming themselves into members of the Chinese-American middle class, and their cultural and socioeconomic importance will gradually be noticed.

CONCLUSION

This article finds that Chinese female students from different periods had primarily different means of emigration, which reflects the impact of the evolving United States immigration policies on Chinese immigrants: when the Chinese exclusion prevailed, female students connected with American Christian missions had easier entry, whereas when American immigration policies turned less restrictive, female students sponsored by Chinese governments and private funds started to arrive in America in large numbers. Although the Chinese female students and intellectuals formed a small percentage of Chinese-American women they have enjoyed a higher rate of economic success and greater social mobility. Their individual and collective experiences in the United States have in this sense enriched and diversified the lives and history of Chinese-American women as a group. The history of Chinese-American women is not only a history of oppression and exploitation of race, class, and gender, but also one of triumph and success.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Professors Mohammad Samiullah, and Allan Winkler for their critical reading, and Professor Roger Daniels for his helpful suggestions.
The author also wishes to express appreciation to Truman State University for its partial funding of this project through a Summer Faculty Research Grant.


2. During WWII, as part of a plan for massive postwar reconstruction, the Nationalist government in China began to send large groups of professionals and students to the United States to study. In 1949, when the communists gained control of the Chinese mainland, some 5,000 native Chinese professionals and students who had been admitted into the United States since World War II for the pursuit of specific objectives were stranded and were classified by American immigration authorities as “stranded students.”


10. The “means of emigration” here refers to the physical and financial support that facilitated the emigration of Chinese female students. For more information on the definition of “means” of emigration, see Roger Daniels, Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850 (Seattle, 1988), pp. 9–10.

11. Chinese students were one of the nonlaboring classes which were exempted from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Law.


15. Ibid.

16. When the anti-imperialist Boxer Uprising occurred in China in 1900, the Western powers invaded China and forced the Qing government to sign an unequal treaty and to pay an indemnity of 450 million taels to the winners. In May of 1908, however, the United States Congress passed legislation to return part of the indemnity to China to quiet China’s then growing anti-imperialist sentiment. The legisla-
tion stipulated that the refund should only be used to improve education. Beginning in 1909, when the United States began to pay the refund, the Qing government used the refund to send students to America under the so-called Boxer Indemnity Fellowship.

17. For studies on the educational effort by Protestant missionaries on behalf of Chinese women, see Mary Raleigh Anderson, *A Cycle in the Celestial Kingdom* (Mobile, Ala., 1943).


There are two Chinese spelling systems—Wade-Giles and Pinyin—used in scholarly writings. To avoid confusion, I will use the Pinyin system for Chinese names, unless a preferred transliteration of certain proper nouns, such as “Chiang Kai-shek” (Wade-Giles) for “Jiang Jieshi” (Pinyin), and “Yangtze” (Wade-Giles) for “Changjiang” (Pinyin), has been widely used.


23. Case 12994/6-18, RG 85, National Archives, Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, Calif.

24. Ibid.


27. Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals*, p. 73.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., pp. 99–120.


33. *A Survey of Chinese Students* states that “the general academic record achieved by the Chinese students in American universities and colleges has always been on a high level,” p. 21.


41. “The revolutionary efforts” refer to attempts and activities associated with the overthrow of the Manchu monarch and the founding of the Republic in China, which actually happened in 1911.

42. *Chung Sai Yat Po*, 26 April 1904.


44. Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals*, p. 49.
45. In order to protect interviewees’ privacy, I quote only the first letters of the interviewees’ last names and cite the interviews by number. Interview 1.


47. China Institute in America, *A Survey of Chinese Students*, p. 18. The numbers quoted here are derived from different statistics by the China Institute in America and different from those in table 1. The greater numbers here are due to duplication in the process of compilation.


51. Interview 1.

52. Interview 5.

53. Interview 11.


57. Interview 1.

58. Interview 4.

59. Interview 1.


61. Interview 4.

62. Interview 1.

63. Interview 6.

64. Interview 1.

65. Interview 8; Ling, “Sze-kew Dun.”


68. Ibid., p. 85.


71. Interviews 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20.

72. Interview 13.

73. Interviews 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 41.

74. Interview 14.

75. Interviews 11, 12, 14, and 15.


77. Survey conducted by the author of over one hundred female students from Taiwan; also interviews 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 51, 52, 53, and 55.

78. Ibid.
79. Interview 13.
80. Interview 14.
81. Interview 51.
82. Interview 14.
83. Interview 13.
84. Interviews 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, and 35.
85. Interview 15.
86. Interview 11.
87. Interview 13.


89. Since the 1980s, it has become a common practice for many universities and colleges in China to promote faculty members who had studied in a foreign institute, in accordance with the open door policy from the Chinese central government. Among the twenty-seven visiting scholars from the PRC interviewed by the author between 1985 and 1987, most indicated that the major motivation for them to come to America was to be promoted when they returned to China after the completion of their training or research projects in American. Interviews 75–101.

90. Of the thirty-two interviewees who came to America from the PRC since the 1980s as female students, a majority of them originally intended to return to China after the completion of their education in America and hoped their training in the United States would help their future careers in China. Interviews 2, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, and 102.

92. Interviews 58, 60, and 61.

97. The so-called J-1 visa requires its holder to return home for at least two years before seeking an adjustment in immigration status (usually permanent residency in the United States, commonly known as “green card”), whereas the F-1 visa has no such restriction. The J-1 visa was designed to alleviate the “brain drain” suffered by other nations when their students gained an education in the United States and then refused to go home. Normally, the government-sponsored Chinese students or scholars are issued J-1 visas. Therefore, American immigration restrictions as well as the support they have received from the Chinese government obligate them legally and emotionally to serve their country upon completion of their education or training in the United States. However, “the Administrative Measures for PRC Nationals” issued by President Bush after the Tiananmen Incident of 4 June 1989 virtually lifted all restrictions on J-1 visa holders by allowing all Chinese nationals who were present in the United States on 1 December 1989 to stay and to be employed; also see note 111.

98. Interview 2.
99. This percentage comes from the author’s analysis of interviews and surveys of female students from the PRC.
100. According to the author’s survey.
102. Ibid.
103. According to the survey conducted by the author, among Chinese students' wives at Miami University, 96 percent expressed their desire to earn a graduate degree at an American university; also interviews 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29.
104. Interviews 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, and 29.
105. According to surveys conducted by author.
106. Interviews 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, and 102.
107. Interviews 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, and 34.
108. Interview 19.
109. Interview 34.
110. Interviews 17, 18, 19, and 22.
111. Responding to the pressure from the U.S. Congress and the general public, President Bush issued "administrative measures for PRC nationals" on 30 November 1989, to protect Chinese students involved in the Tiananmen Incident. The order contains such measures as the waiver of the two-year foreign residence requirement to any Chinese national who was present in the United States on 1 December 1989 and the employment requirement for all Chinese nationals who were in the United States on 5 June 1989 (according to a cable sent to all U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service field offices on 4 December 1989).
112. Interviews 17, 18, 19, 22, and 30.