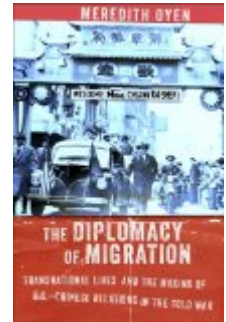


Meredith Oyen. *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War.* The United States in the World Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. 320 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-0014-9.



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Meredith Oyen's book *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War* is an important contribution to the scholarship of US-Chinese relations during the Cold War. The book's goal is to explain "the role that 'migration diplomacy'—the process of using migration policy for diplomatic ends—played in managing the larger, complex relations between the United States and its Chinese ally and Chinese enemy from the formation of the Cold War during World War II until the start of its denouement in Asia" (p. 4). Oyen makes a brilliant effort to bridge diplomatic history and Chinese migration history by bringing into sharp focus the diplomacy of migration and its impact on the triangular relationship between the United States, Nationalist China, and Communist China.

Oyen recognizes the importance of the relationship between human migration, foreign policy, and national security. Although war and other geopolitical and strategic issues dominated US-Chinese relations from 1943 to 1972, Oyen correct-

ly argues that when enough problems added up, "traditionally 'secondary' issues like migration policy and management can achieve primary importance" (p. 3). In fact, the very usefulness of migration policy in Sino-American diplomatic maneuvers came from its "secondary" status because the perceived low-stakes migration policy created safe ways for the American and Chinese governments to pursue larger diplomatic goals with only limited risk. Policymakers did not need to worry that missteps on migration issues might cause catastrophic consequences, thus they regarded migration "a useful venue for trying out new policy approaches, reacting to changing events, or making symbolic gestures" (p. 7). At the same time, Oyen argues, "policy makers in all three governments shared a common experience of recognizing that low risk did not mean no risk ... and persistent problems managing migration issues could affect both prestige and national security" (p. 6).

Oyen develops a sophisticated understanding of the delicate migration diplomacy by focusing on three patterns that underlined US-Chinese ex-

changes on migration: migration policy used by American and Chinese governments to signal positive and negative developments in their relationships, migration diplomacy employed by the three governments as a form of public diplomacy to bolster prestige and legitimacy, and migration policy used to forge Chinese and Chinese American communities into the so-called model minority. Accordingly, each of the eight chapters “considers a core migration policy or related policies in particular context, then unpacks the policy’s efficacy in achieving associated geopolitical goals, as well as how migrants experienced it” (p. 8).

The book first focuses on migration policies during World War II once America entered the war and China became a weak yet indispensable ally. Oyen starts by revisiting the well-known story of the repeal of extraterritoriality in China and Chinese exclusion in the United States in 1943, which was pushed by the exigencies of war. Both Great Britain and the United States recognized that extraterritoriality, a historical legacy of China’s humiliation at the hands of Western powers, stood in the way of creating a strong war-time alliance with the Nationalist Chinese regime. The United States also realized that the exclusion of Chinese immigrants belied the rhetoric of treating China as an equal partner in the war. Moreover, since London and Washington could not satisfy China’s demands for war aid given their Europe first strategy, revoking extraterritorial rights and revising Chinese exclusion became a useful way to maintain the fiction of China being an equal ally, to promote Chinese morale and keep China in the war, and to undermine Japanese propaganda based on American racial discrimination toward the Chinese. In other words, those measures were low-stakes but high-reward and they “became a way to give an inch and ignore the mile” (p. 15).

But those efforts to use migration policy to renegotiate the Sino-American relationship met with a mixed record of success. The repeal of Chinese exclusion, Oyen argues, did not really end

racial exclusion and only codified the unequal citizenship of Chinese Americans into a quota system. This post-exclusion quota, which accepted about 105 Chinese immigrants each year (still de facto exclusion), covered all persons of Chinese ethnicity regardless of their citizenship including Chinese wives of Chinese Americans. By “claiming that this ‘Chineseness’ trumped whatever other local citizenship they might have had in their place of residence, the measure served to reemphasize the unassimilable nature of the Chinese and ensure that as far as the U.S. government was concerned, even Chinese Americans were Chinese first, and then Americans” (p. 32).

This “Chinese-first-then-American” assumption was, however, not alien to the Nationalist Chinese government. Instead, Oyen argues, this assumption created a policy divergence between the two allies. While America regarded issues of migration as domestic politics, China deemed migration policy as an extension of its foreign policy. As a result, the Nationalists regarded the mobilization of overseas Chinese communities as a crucial part of their war effort against Japan. While Chinese officials largely played the role of a passive observer in the repeal of exclusion out of the fear that pressing too hard for changes might backfire, they were more active in reaching out to the Chinese diaspora in the United States. The Nationalists’ effort of extraterritorial control over the Chinese abroad entailed two policies. On the one hand, China tried to strengthen the ties between migrants and the homeland and thus acquired financial support from them. On the other hand, China tried to negotiate better terms for immigrants with their host countries. However, as Oyen shows, the two policies “frequently worked at odds with each other in the United States, where greater immigrant rights would include access to full citizenship, and full citizenship would eventually break the bond with the homeland” (p. 44).

The Nationalists soon faced another tough issue of migration. During World War II, about 1.5 million Chinese fled to China from Southeast Asia or elsewhere, and the need to help those stranded overseas get back to their countries of residency became urgent once the war ended. However, repatriation was not an easy task once the Chinese Civil War broke out. Now the diplomacy of migration became more complicated, because the Communist Chinese government emerged as a third player in the game. Defeated by the Communists, the Nationalist government regarded repatriation and other efforts to help overseas Chinese families as a way to bolster its legitimacy as the only government of China. Meanwhile, Nationalist officials tried to ensure that only the right kind of people—pro-Nationalist, anti-Communist, educated, and accepted—could go to the United States. The objective was both to have a loyal group of supporters abroad and to create a positive image of the Chinese among American people. Communist China also realized the symbolic importance of representing the interests of overseas Chinese, and that explained why the International Refugee Organization continued to work in China until 1956.

The United States was caught between the political pressure to support Nationalist China and the popular reluctance to accept more Chinese immigrants. Unwilling to intervene in the Chinese Civil War on the behalf of the Nationalists, Washington again used migration diplomacy to placate an ally. The War Brides Act of 1945 and the War Fiancées Act of 1946 allowed Chinese women to enter in large numbers for the first time, and the Chinese Alien Wives of American Citizens Act of 1946 extended the non-quota privilege to all Chinese Americans. Although those relaxed migration policies signaled America's support for the Nationalists, they did not change the *de facto* exclusion of Chinese immigrants. Oyen argues that "a sort of institutional memory of what the [American] consuls [in China] called 'rampant document fraud' caused all Chinese visa applications—in-

cluding expedited war bride application—to be suspect" (p. 84). The resulting harsh investigations and long delays helped to build a sense of antagonism and distrust between the two allies.

Migration continued to be a contested issue between Washington, Taipei, and Beijing once the Cold War was in full gear. Nationalist China continued its extraterritorial control over Chinese migrants, believing that the ability to represent overseas Chinese was crucial for its claim to be the only legitimate government of China. The US migration policy was again caught between two conflicting principles: protecting national security by carefully screening new immigrants to prevent Communist infiltration or promoting a more liberal policy to shore up America's international image and credibility as the leader of the "free world." According to Oyen, "national security won" (p. 102). The 1952 McCarran-Walter Act limited immigration from Asia on a national security prerogative. Meanwhile, Oyen makes an interesting observation that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) were busy detaining and deporting illegal Chinese, only to create more political dilemmas. The US government could not deport them to mainland China, and those Chinese did not want to go to Taiwan since they had no families there. Nor could they be allowed to stay in the United States. Eventually they went to Taiwan, but not before they caused a lot of political headaches and damage to US international image. Beijing, on the other hand, took the opportunity to argue that racism and inequality for the Chinese was inherent in the American system, an accusation Beijing used to consolidate its revolution at home and gain domestic support.

The Cold War battle over migration was also fought on other fronts. Here Oyen offers two detailed chapters on the issue of Chinese family remittances and refugees from mainland China to Hong Kong, respectively. She convincingly argues that both Beijing and Taipei were trying to control

the money sent back by overseas Chinese to their families at home. Both governments had certain advantages in this battle, and both regarded the contest as important to their legitimacy. While the Nationalists had more access to and control over the overseas Chinese, the Communists actually controlled their families. Oyen demonstrates that the excessiveness of land reform in mainland China eventually stopped the flow of remittances and damaged the Communist image among overseas Chinese communities. Nationalist China and the United States, however, did not emerge from the battle with proved moral superiority. Pressured by Taipei, the US government made sending remittances to mainland China illegal, and even launched political persecutions against pro-Communist Chinese Americans.

The refugees who poured into Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s proved to be another difficult problem. While this was obviously embarrassing for Beijing, the refugee problem became a good propaganda issue for Taipei and Washington. However, as Oyen shows, while Taipei was eager to speak for the refugees in order to support its claim to legitimacy, its policy actually made the United Nations reluctant to recognize their refugee status because they could appeal to Taipei for help. The Nationalist government, however, was unable to absorb so many refugees, and the United States was reluctant to come to its rescue. Although the United States eventually accepted fifteen thousand refugees, the problem was not fundamentally solved. Once again, migration complicated, and was complicated by, the Cold War.

While migration contributed to Cold War tensions, Oyen argues in the final two chapters, it also helped to bring a *détente* between Beijing and Washington. In chapter 7, Oyen focuses on what she calls “Cold War hostages,” that is, Chinese scholars detained in the United States and Americans imprisoned in China. She argues that “it was a relatively low-stakes issue, citizen repa-

triation, that became the forum that required the United States and Communist China to open a direct line of communication” (p. 188). This issue helped to initiate the US-China ambassadorial talks, Oyen points out, which paved the way toward the later Sino-American rapprochement. The Nationalists opposed the talks because they feared that negotiation would lead to American recognition of Communist China.

The direct negotiation between Beijing and Washington was not the only issue that troubled Taipei in the 1960s. In the final chapter, Oyen explores the problem caused by the growing Taiwan Independence Movement. The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 finally ended *de facto* Asian exclusion, but it also made it easier for Chinese dissenters to enter the United States. Oyen’s sophisticated treatment of the cases of Thomas Liao and Peng Mingnin, two prominent leaders of the Taiwan Independence Movement, shows how the US decision to grant visas to the dissenters deeply upset the Nationalists. Interestingly, Beijing was equally upset because both Beijing and Taipei insisted on a one-China policy, and they feared that American support of the Taiwan Independence Movement would create a *de facto* two-Chinas policy. Oyen argues that both the US-China ambassadorial talks and the “visa diplomacy” talks between America and Taiwan showed that all three governments used migration diplomacy to signal policy changes, manage alliance, and probe new strategic possibilities. Her brief discussion of the Nixon administration’s relaxation of travel restrictions to mainland China in order to facilitate the US-China rapprochement further establishes the usefulness of migration diplomacy in managing geopolitical realignments.

Based on multinational archives and meticulously researched, Oyen’s book is a must read for diplomatic history students. I am, however, obliged to raise a few questions. Occasionally, perhaps too eager to prove the importance of migration diplomacy, Oyen makes some seemingly

forced arguments. For example, while she does a good job in showing that the Chinese migrants were not passive victims of the complicated migration diplomacy, the full agencies of those individuals do not always emerge from the pages. Instead, most of them could hardly make their own choices under the highly contested Cold War migration policies. Thus, it is a little forced to argue that “the migrants themselves drove policy as much as any bureaucrats” (p. 130). Oyen’s handling of the “visa diplomacy” also invites more debates. While she is correct in identifying the Nationalists’ concern in this matter, it is not entirely clear why America’s decision to grant visas to supporters of Taiwan independence should be interpreted as a sign of the breakdown of US-Nationalist China alliance. As Oyen herself points out, behind the US decision was the concern that the denial of visas would be interpreted as America’s failure to uphold its own principles of free speech and human rights, and America frequently issued visas to dissenters from other allies. Despite some concerns within the US government that the grant of visas would upset Taipei, there was certainly no consensus among American policymakers that this issue “offered a clear signal that Washington was rethinking China policy” (p. 236).

Overall, these minor questions do not undermine Oyen’s solid research. And her book certainly fills an important gap in the current scholarship.

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