

BECOMING CHINESE AMERICAN

The Chin Siblings During China's War of Resistance

Jin Feng

Abstract. The Chin siblings, three second-generation Chinese Americans, went to their ancestral land to teach at institutions of higher education during China's War of Resistance against Japanese Invasion (1931–1945). While there, they availed themselves of opportunities that were denied to Chinese Americans in the U.S. but also faced prejudice and suspicion. Nonetheless, in family and business correspondence they often portrayed themselves as patriotic citizens of both countries and cultural ambassadors who connected the two peoples. They employed such efforts to negotiate competing nationalist demands made by the Chinese and U.S. governments and thus offered invaluable insights into the complex processes of becoming Chinese American. This article shines a light on a significant yet little known body of materials to demonstrate how family dynamics, as well as political, racial, and cultural forces, shaped the identify formation of Chinese Americans in the mid-twentieth century, especially immediately preceding, during, and after World War II. Ultimately, it builds up the archives of Asian American history and amplifies Asian American voices from the unique perspective of a sibling unit's wartime experiences.

The Chin siblings, three second-generation Chinese Americans, went to their ancestral land to teach at institutions of higher education during China's War of Resistance against Japanese Invasion (1931–1945). While there, thanks

to their English fluency, academic training, and bicultural background, they availed themselves of opportunities denied to Chinese Americans in the U.S., but they also faced prejudice and suspicion. Nonetheless, they often portrayed themselves as patriotic citizens of both countries and cultural ambassadors who connected the two peoples in family and business correspondence. They employed these efforts to negotiate competing nationalist demands made by the Chinese and U.S. governments, offering a microcosm of the complex processes of becoming Chinese American, inevitably shaped by transnational movement as well as by the ever-shifting coalescence of factors such as class, gender, race, and institutional affiliation.¹

This article shines a light on a significant yet little known body of materials to reveal how family dynamics as well as political, racial, and cultural forces shaped the identify formation of Chinese Americans in the mid-twentieth century, especially leading up to, during, and after World War II. While the Chin siblings' experiences reflect what is gradually understood as a seemingly regular pattern of movements among Chinese Americans during that historical period, this study will build up the archives of Asian American history and amplify Asian American voices from the unique perspective of a sibling unit's wartime experiences. Specifically, it contributes to Asian American studies in three distinct ways. First, it illuminates an understudied part of Chinese American experiences. I focus on *civilian* Chinese American experiences *in China* during World War II, since existing Chinese-language scholarship pays more attention to the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asian countries and to military experiences, while English-language scholarship emphasizes Japanese American experiences.² Scott Wong's book offers the missing wartime experiences of second-generation Chinese Americans.³ Adding to their experiences in the continental U.S. and Hawai'i delineated in his work, I show how the Chin siblings coped with various challenges in wartime China. Second, it examines not only how the source materials reflect specific cultural and sociopolitical context, but also how the siblings actively created meanings and fashioned identities, despite or precisely because of their double marginalization as cultural outsiders in China and racial outsiders in the U.S.⁴ To paraphrase Sau-ling Wong's terminology, the Chin siblings had to contend with the "real" Old World values when living in their parents' origin country, as well as with "the 'ideal' Old World Values" as presented by their parents and "the 'real' New World values" as they saw them.⁵ Induced to live a transnational life by economic and political necessities, they oscillated between the position of patriotic "overseas Chinese," or *huaqiao* 華僑, a term coined by the Nationalist government to perpetuate a "sojourner mentality" among and assert extra-terrestrial power over the Chinese diaspora,⁶ and that of Chinese Americans

integrating two cultural heritages. The third and last contribution of this study, then, lies precisely in examining the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and affiliation in the formation of the Chinese American identity.

My study continues to trace Chinese American identity formation back to its earlier years, a task already undertaken by Gloria Chung, Wendy Rouse, Huping Ling, Judy Yung, Charlotte Brooks, and many more. Rather than studying Chinese communities on the West Coast or in the Midwest, however, I present an equally revealing snapshot of a Chinese American family at a critical juncture in China and, to a much lesser extent, New England, a region explored little by scholars of Asian American history. Ultimately, it creates a more contextualized and nuanced account of Chinese American experiences by investigating a case from an underexamined episode in U.S. immigration history.

The siblings under study include Luther (1908–1980), Rocky (Rockwood, 1911–1998), and Ettie (Henrietta) Chin (1913–2005), whose parents originally hailed from South China and settled in Worcester, Massachusetts, to raise a family from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. While they did not view themselves as extraordinary figures worthy of memorialization and published little, if any, writings on their own lives, they left behind a wealth of family correspondence. They wrote about their sense of exhilaration as well as frustration in private correspondence, wrestling with material deprivation, life-threatening dangers, and exile between two continents while living in the Chinese hinterland in the 1930s and 1940s. By situating these private writings in their historical context and in contrast to the siblings' public-facing contemporary writings, I examine the ways in which they navigated complex cultural forces and systems of knowledge to pursue agency and belonging at a critical moment in both Chinese and Chinese American histories.⁷

Below, I first describe the siblings' formative years growing up in a white town, spotlighting parts of their earlier socialization that would both serve them well and come into conflict with Chinese reality after they landed in the old country. I then summarize their trips to China and their experiences there in the 1930s and 1940s. In the next two sections I use their family correspondence and other writings as primary sources to examine how they described and reshaped those experiences, comparing the brothers' output with Ettie's where appropriate. I end with some reflection on the memorialization of Chinese American experiences. Since China's Resistance War effectively started in 1931, following the annexation of Manchuria by Japan, I will refer to Chinese war effort and Chinese American's related contributions from that point on instead of using the periodization of 1937–1945, when a full-scale Sino-Japanese war raged on.

GROWING UP IN EXCLUSION-ERA USA

The siblings' parents, Henry I Sheu Chin 陳大受 and his wife Ung Shee 伍氏, were first-generation Chinese Americans from Toisaan (Taishan county), Guangdong, China. They were the first Chinese family to settle in Worcester, though single Chinese men had lived there. Worcester, then a bustling industrial town that boasted convenient railway and river transportations to Boston, attracted a lot of European immigrants to work in the local factories. The 1920 census showed that 70 percent of the residents were or had at least one parent born abroad.⁸ Although whites still dominated, its African American population dated back to the eighteenth century.⁹ The Chins probably welcomed both the business opportunities and a relatively friendly local community. Their five children included: Henry (Quock Quon 國光, born in China in 1898), Luther (Quock Hong 國康), Stanley (Quock Wing 國榮), and Rockwood (Quock Ping 國平), and one daughter, Henrietta (Len Toy 璉采). Belonging to the exempt class of "merchant" according to the Chinese Exclusion Act since he ran a dry goods store, the father was able to bring his wife and oldest son from China. But he only made a modest living, and money was tight in his big family. He perhaps tied high hopes for his sons to the fate of the Chinese nation, as signaled by the generational given name Quock, or "country," and the auspicious second characters in their given names respectively meaning "honor," "health," "prosperity," and "peace." He also seemed to subscribe to modern notions of education and gender, since he sent all his children to schools, unsegregated in Worcester at the time, and took no issue with his wife and daughter posing in swimming suits in family photos.

The children all excelled in Worcester's public schools. They also took out loans, earned scholarships, and worked part-time jobs to attend college, except for the oldest, Henry, who did not receive a college education. Ettie secured loans from the Rotary Club of Worcester as well as Smith College and the University of Michigan, her two alma maters. As the youngest and only female of the five children, she also enjoyed some parental indulgence and sibling doting and was able to pursue her dreams for higher education. It is known in her family that Rocky, then a Yale student, encouraged her to attend college by declaring: "No sister of mine is not going to college!"¹⁰ Additionally, the siblings' ventures into higher education would not have come to fruition without the encouragement of female American missionaries who had served in China and befriended them in Worcester and beyond. In the early twentieth century, female Chinese immigrants frequently turned to the Christian church for spiritual solace and adopted the modern American concepts of individual rights and gender equality that it propagated.¹¹ It was likely that the Chin children admired the missionaries as independent women who served China.

The siblings' credentials in engineering, economics, and women's physical education, fields deemed crucial to a burgeoning Chinese higher education, later helped them secure faculty positions respectively at a large government-run university (Luther), a private Chinese institution (Rocky), and a missionary-founded all-women's college (Ettie). Their Christian affiliation also supplied cultural and social capital for them to make connections in China when discriminatory laws and the Great Depression made securing livelihoods difficult in the U.S. However, at times their embrace of modern Western values also led to cultural shocks and disillusionment in China. Their experiences thus echoed Charlotte Brooks's findings about second-generation Chinese Americans who immigrated to China prewar; they enjoyed competitive social and economic advantages and legal protection, while also experiencing discrimination and suspicion of their loyalties from both governments due to their cultural hybridity.¹² Ettie, however, was able to negotiate traditional gender codes and cultural expectations and modern aspirations for individual achievements during the war years and afterward. While acting as the caretaker and helper of her two brothers when needed, she also pursued a career of teaching, did not get married until later in life, and never had children.¹³ Essential to this study, she played the family archivist and ensured that their correspondence survived wartime displacement and transpacific travels, preserving not just family memories but also a portion of Asian American history.

SAILING FOR WAR-TORN CHINA

The Chin siblings had complex motives to go to China in the 1930s, reflecting the spectrum of responses from Chinese Americans who contributed to the Resistance War in China; those ranged from patriotism to both China and the U.S., humanitarian concerns for justice for all, and the desire to raise their social status in the Exclusion era.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Great Depression hit China later than it did the U.S. and Europe, with a Depression-related economic boom in China initially drawing a steady stream of Chinese Americans seeking job opportunities, though the eventual economic downturn also made living difficult there.¹⁵ For the siblings, their travel to China was also a collective family project. It had originally been instigated by their parents, and later expanded to include Rocky's wife Frances (Ruyu 如玉) Wang and their nephew Wesley. Their trouble with landing good jobs, even while equipped with an advanced degree, and with finding spouses as Chinese Americans battling racial discriminations also played a role in their decisions.¹⁶ The men admitted to having an "inferiority complex" when interacting with Caucasian women, whereas their parents had wanted

their sons to marry Chinese girls.¹⁷ Ettie seemed to have gone to China partly because her brothers had done so, as she had not made definite plans as late as 1936. But she was as determined to go into interior China despite Stanley's and Henry's pleas for her to return to the U.S. All three had underestimated the length and toll of the war.¹⁸

Yet the hint of an "accidental herohood" should not detract from their sincere wish to serve the suffering masses at China's darkest moment, especially after they joined the mass exodus of Chinese people displaced by the war. Even before the eruption of the full-scale Resistance War on July 7, 1937, after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (Lugou Qiao Shibian 盧溝橋事變), Chinese Americans had devoted time and money to China's resistance effort. Stanley described the fundraising efforts among Chinese Americans in New York.¹⁹ He also mentioned the visit of H. H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi 孔祥熙) and other Chinese dignitaries to Washington, DC, the efforts of the Chinese Student Club to offer Mandarin instruction and publish articles about China; and his first class of Mandarin.²⁰ He would follow the war in China closely through the years, cognizant of the dangers the siblings faced.

Luther left for China first and took up a teaching position as Instructor of Electrical Engineering at Central University 中央大學 in Nanjing in 1936 after receiving his BS in Engineering from the Worcester Polytechnical Institute (WPI). In June 1937, Ettie and Rocky set sail together on the *Empress of Canada*. Ettie had just received her master's degree from Michigan in 1937, after earning a bachelor's degree from Smith in 1936. Rocky had earned his PhD in economics from Yale. Ettie was appointed to the Physical Education Department at Ginling College, an all-women's college founded by female Western missionaries in Nanjing, China, in 1913, later a sister college to Smith. On August 13, 1937, when the two siblings were docked in Hawai'i, the Japanese bombing of Shanghai started, signaling an escalation of military conflict. Although local friends tried to convince them to stay, they decided to push on, because they believed that their parents, who had passed away, would have wanted them to and that the conflict would be over soon.²¹

By the time their vessel reached Shanghai, however, the Japanese blockage forced it to detour to Hong Kong, where Luther met them during his summer vacation. Ginling and other institutions in Nanjing, including Central, soon began evacuation to the interior. Luther flew from Hong Kong to Chongqing, Sichuan, later the wartime Chinese capital, in October 1937 and remained on Central's faculty until 1944. A few days later, Rocky flew from Hong Kong to Changsha, Hunan. He again evacuated to Chongqing in early 1938, before Changsha was taken by the Japanese. He first worked at the National Institute for Compilation and Translation 國立編譯館 in Chongqing. His colleagues there, including Dr.

Chen Ko-Chung 陳可忠, who received a BS in chemistry from Yale,²² helped him study Chinese and familiarized him with Chinese customs. In August 1939, Rocky joined the faculty of the Nankai Institute of Economics, a graduate division of Nankai University. He taught master's students and took on some secretarial duties for the director of the institute, Dr. Franklin L. Ho (He Lian 何廉), who also served as head of the National Joint Council for Rural Reconstruction. Ho and his deputy, H. D. Fong (Fang Xianting 方顯庭), both Yale PhDs, had built up "China's foremost Econ [journal]" before the war, *Nankai Social and Economics Quarterly*, which was continued and widely read during the war. Rocky was housed in a newly built quarter called One Hundred Trees Village 百樹新村, only fifteen minutes away from Stone Gate Village 石門村, where a large part of Central faculty, including Luther, lived. Rocky got married to Frances in Chongqing in June 1941. Daughter of the Chinese diplomat Ching-ch'un Wang (C. C. Wang 王景春), Frances received her PhD in bacteriology from Michigan as a Barbour Scholar in 1941. They were finally able to marry after a few delays, but their small wedding ceremony was interrupted by a Japanese air raid, which forced them to leave the church for the dugout. Ettie would also come to spend some of her summer vacations with her brothers after evacuation to Sichuan.²³

Ettie was stranded in Hong Kong for half a year while waiting for news from Ginling. She taught and took on some clerical duties at the True Light Girls' Middle School, which had moved from Canton to Hong Kong, then neutral territory. She joined a unit of Ginling students in Shanghai in February 1938, and in July that year accompanied them to Chengdu, Sichuan, which became the site of Ginling-in-exile from 1938 to 1946. Ettie worked in the Physical Education Department until 1944, when she returned to the U.S. together with Luther, Rocky, and Frances, and joined the faculty at Smith. She served as assistant professor in Smith's Physical Education Department until 1953. An active member of the Smith Alumnae Committee for Ginling, her firsthand war experience in China made her a valuable and popular speaker.

The siblings' stays in China during the war fall into three periods. From 1936–40, they gradually settled down in Chongqing and Chengdu, each with a steady job and generally sounding optimistic. From 1941–43, after Pearl Harbor, they increasingly felt the pains of living in wartime China. Starting in 1943, and during the third and last period, they began to consider returning to the U.S. In 1944, with Frances concealing her second pregnancy, the four of them rode a propeller plane over the Himalayans, boarded a U.S. naval ship, crossed the Pacific, and eventually landed in the U.S. after more than a month.²⁴ Just like other second-generation Chinese Americans who had gone to China, with the conditions that had made China attractive gradually unraveling, they mostly chose to return to the U.S.²⁵

THE CHIN BROTHERS IN WARTIME CHINA

This, in outline, is their story illustrated by correspondence. A total of 294 letters, all from Ettie's collection, can be broken down by years as follows: 1936 (2), 1937 (56), 1938 (39), 1939 (17), 1940 (59), 1941 (35), 1942 (20), 1943 (28), 1944 (36), and 1945 (2). Among the 231 family letters, Luther penned 60 and Rocky 78, constituting around 60 percent, while Ettie also saved her letters to Rocky (2), and those to and from other family members (91) as well. Her business letters (51) and correspondence with friends (12) in the U.S. made up the rest. The siblings' correspondence to each other during the war years center around several themes: their experiences as Chinese Americans who could not speak Chinese well and were not familiar with local customs; their romantic relationships and marriage; and their financial situations and living conditions. Other than mortal dangers such as air raids and diseases, they lacked adequate facilities for lavatory, cooking, and so on. They suffered financially because of inflation and the lack of food and other necessities; socially because of their poor Chinese and unfamiliarity with local gender codes; culturally because of their in-between status; and psychologically due to a sense of isolation and disillusionment with the apathy they saw among the Chinese toward the latter half of the war. Their family in the U.S. also ran into hardships. Their business did not do well due to the Great Depression. Draft orders came for the men. Their oldest brother, Henry, had a stroke and incurred huge debts due to insurance complications. As the war situation deteriorated in China, the siblings' personal losses also piled up. Luther suffered from mental health issues. Rocky and Frances's first born, a baby boy, died before turning one month old. Ettie lost more than twenty pounds, caught malaria, and suffered bad injuries in a fall. Despite all the challenges, the siblings enjoyed warm family relationships through hard times. They wrote to each other frequently, visited whenever possible, sent small cash gifts, offered practical advice and help with housekeeping, took care of each other in sickness, alerted each other to changing family dynamics back home, and sustained each other in China.

The siblings' letters demonstrated the complex process of becoming Chinese American, with each deploying different strategies to manage cultural duality. That they embraced their Chinese American identity in different ways and to different degrees, even while sharing similar educational backgrounds and the same family and cultural heritage, testifies to the shifting roles played by race, class, gender, and other types of affinity in Chinese American identity formation. An engineer by training, Luther was more practical and also more pessimistic. Steeling himself against a crippling sense of loneliness, he showed

no interest in contemplating abstract ideas of identity, while listing in detail the challenges facing a single Chinese American man living in interior China. In comparison, Rocky sounded more conscious of the complexity of his Chinese American identity and frequently reflected on its precarity. Ettie was often the recipient of brotherly wisdom and protectiveness especially regarding romance and finance. But she appeared most able to connect with her colleagues and students, and most successful in fashioning her own agency and identity through public-facing writings. In this and the next section, I show their different ways of claiming Chinese American identity: Luther chose to ignore its complexity, Rocky dwelled on it, and Ettie sought to overcome the contradictions therein, while pointing to related factors such as personality traits, institutional affiliation, and gender.

Luther was the most assertive about material gain and viewed it not only as a lifeline but also the only mark of social status. In this aspect, he arguably expressed more alignment with American capitalist values than with traditional Confucian precepts of modesty and reverence for authority. He often complained about inadequate material conditions in wartime China. But he also enjoyed plenty of privileges such as a good salary, reasonable accommodations, and prestige that came with a faculty position at an elite institution and through socializing with important Chinese officials and academics, widely different from his experience back in the U.S. or that of the truly destitute in China. According to him, situations at Central were far from ideal to start with, since they had a pressing schedule to build classrooms and dorms while student enrollment was much higher than it could possibly accommodate.²⁶ Chongqing was “dreary” with bad air and little sun.²⁷ With his teaching due to start in a few days, classroom construction was still incomplete, with no electricity or running water, and he had to ride on horseback for two hours to supervise construction.²⁸ There were also salary cuts and delays in payment at Central.²⁹ With limited amenities in his room, he had some sheets and pillows made locally.³⁰ He spent a quiet birthday and Christmas on December 24 and 25, 1937, without lavatory facilities.³¹ He felt enough discontent to ask for a raise of \$20 from his department head in 1938, explaining to Ettie: “If it goes thru, it really will mean only actually a few more dollars’ raise but the money is not the point, I have been classified as a lecturer or instructor since my coming to the university. Outside of pay, I see no other means of determining status, so if the raise is given, it means a change in status to professor.”³²

Luther’s grievances concerning pay were undoubtedly compounded by the war, for they contrasted sharply with his attitude at the start of his appointment at Central in 1936. Then he counted himself lucky that his Chinese employer offered a monthly payment of \$280, the top grade that normally took eight

to ten years for someone at the entry level to reach, while job prospects were almost nil in the U.S.³³ Luther was in fact more insulated from scarcity than less privileged Chinese residents during the war. His request for a raise came through, as a contract letter from Central appointed him professor and listed his monthly payment at \$510.³⁴ Incidentally, Ettie only made \$117 each month in 1939.³⁵ Moreover, as a college professor he had access to fixed-priced rice (*pingjia mi* 平價米), shielded from rampant inflation of food prices.³⁶ In addition to a material cushion, he also enjoyed opportunities to hobnob with those in power. For example, he went to the Xingzheng Yuan 行政院, the executive branch of the Nationalist government, at the invitation of H. H. Kung and had supper with a group of famous intellectuals such as James Yen (Yan Yangchu 晏陽初), who had received education in the U.S. and returned to China to promote rural reconstruction, and Zhang Boling 張伯苓, the president of Nankai University.³⁷

Luther attributed his tendency for negativity, justified or not, to his academic field. As he commented to Ettie: "I do believe that you and Rocky are imbued with much more idealism than I. Perhaps that is due to the fact that I studied engineering which places more emphasis on the practical side of things."³⁸ But it more likely had to do with a lack of sustained and meaningful social connections beyond the family, caused by his institutional affiliation and personality as well as by his identity as a single Chinese American man. Central, though a prestigious institution, was a big public university with many departments as more or less autonomous entities. Luther could not and did not enjoy the same kind of collegiality as Rocky and Ettie, whose workplaces were far smaller and working relationships closer. His tendency to focus on the practical side of things perhaps also signaled a lack of social skills and of ability to read nuances in human interactions. Luther rarely named any colleagues or friends he made in China in his letters. He also experienced a series of romantic setbacks. He had planned to propose to a woman called Jenny and settle down in Sichuan, but this fell through for reasons undisclosed, though a family letter from Stanley hinted that he could have been "more patient and romantic."³⁹ Later he was introduced to a Miss Wei, and announced his engagement to her, but nothing came out of that either. In 1939, he had a "nervous breakdown," serious enough that Ettie flew from Chengdu to Chongqing to care for him, and Rocky moved in with him for a while until Rocky got married.⁴⁰

Rocky sounded more upbeat than Luther but also experienced his share of challenges. As will be shown, his sense of identity was neither fully aligned with the Nationalist regime nor just "tied to an abstract 'China,'"⁴¹ but rather embedded in and shifted with his daily observations of and interactions with the local culture and people. In contrast to Luther's isolation, he found security and belonging with his circle of family, colleagues, and friends. In addition to the care

from his siblings, he was supported by his partner and later spouse, Frances, and enjoyed a long and happy marriage. His Chinese senior colleagues, fellow Yale alumni well established in Chinese academia and government, took him under their wings; they helped him adjust to local life, introduced him to the national project of rural reconstruction, and acquainted him with dignitaries beyond academia as well as with Chinese academics. He also derived satisfaction and inspiration from teaching.⁴² Yet, valuing human connections more and anchored deeper in local life than Luther, he also could not help being more affected by the milieu outside his immediate circle of supporters. After the initial euphoria wore off, he moved from idealistic enthusiasm to more realistic considerations until reaching a breaking point.

Rocky vacillated between antipathy and adaption to local cultural norms. He stated early on: "Thou there is a good deal of poverty in China, and some of the customs need reforming, there is much that is good and attractive about this old land."⁴³ But he was not blind to the shortcomings of living in China, noting gender segregation, the lack of a social life, and air raids. He also remarked on the widespread trends of indifference, self-interest, and cliques among his Chinese acquaintances.⁴⁴ It was never easy for him to fit in. He considered Changsha people too "conservative" because he saw gender segregation at social events.⁴⁵ He described his attempts to hint that he was not "eligible" so people wouldn't misinterpret his intentions "if he helped a girl or pays visits to a family too frequently."⁴⁶ As late as April 1, 1940, he still regretted that Chongqing people did not smile back at him.⁴⁷ Yet he picked up cultural cues adroitly, looked at the world through local eyes, and even occasionally "enforced" traditional Chinese gender codes. He remarked on Stanley studying Chinese with a woman in DC, commenting that such behavior would immediately rouse gossips in Chongqing.⁴⁸ He returned Ettie's letter (together with an enclosed photo of her) to her, which she had wanted sent to Dr. Fong, Rocky's colleague at Nankai, because he thought it inappropriate: "This is China, Ettie, and people can misinterpret and people can tell."⁴⁹

A particular challenge to his "Chineseness" was Chinese language proficiency. Regarding it as a crucial marker of his Chinese identity, Rocky worked hard and excelled, able to publish short Chinese-language articles while in Sichuan, no small feat. He also repeatedly urged his siblings to practice Mandarin by speaking, reading, and writing in Chinese at all times. Still, there were people who mocked him as "Zhongguo ren bu hui jiang Zhongguo hua" 中國人不會講中國話 (a Chinese person who could not speak Chinese), a sentence that he wrote in Chinese in a note to Ettie.⁵⁰ Moreover, "people elsewhere are not always so understanding and tolerant as [his] pupils and associates."⁵¹ He admitted: "I realize that without my Chinese I am of no use here,"⁵² and "The more I study,

the more sensitive I become to my own inadequacies.”⁵³ But he felt the need to defend himself, arguing that he had a valuable Western training and could serve China even with his lack of Chinese as “a temporary handicap.”⁵⁴ Indeed, it was his felicity with English as well as his academic specialization that made him a valuable assistant to Dr. Ho, director of the Nankai Institute of Economics and head of the National Joint Council for Rural Reconstruction. Rocky felt both honored and burdened by the clerical duties that role involved.⁵⁵

Rocky’s experience in wartime China expanded his awareness of the diversity of his ancestral land—previously glimpsed only through his parents’ tales of their home village and brief interactions with family in Hong Kong—and complicated his understanding of what it meant to be “Chinese.” For instance, he “never quite realized there was so much difference in dialect” until he came upon Sichuanese,⁵⁶ vastly different from the Taishanese he grew up with. But he grew more frustrated with the limits of Chinese society, a discontent exacerbated by family woes amid a protracted war, until he pulled away from the commitment to work in China. He commented that, “When we are away from China we are often more patriotic than those *in* China,”⁵⁷ questioning the demand of undivided loyalty made upon “overseas Chinese” by the Nationalist government. Although he felt “strongly we overseas Chinese have something to contribute to Chinese society; we should not let ourselves be swallowed up in the weaknesses of the environment and lose our pep for doing things,”⁵⁸ his family situation and deteriorating societal morale made it infeasible to practice what he had preached. He came down with malaria.⁵⁹ Frances, who had been working for the Health Institute of the Nationalist government and investigating Japanese biological warfare at Gele Shan Mountain 歌樂山 since her return to China, fell ill. They lost their baby son to respiratory trouble, made worse by many a night spent in cold and damp dugouts during air raids, and Frances had to ask for a leave from work. With Frances pregnant again, they finally decided to return to the U.S.⁶⁰

The private correspondence discussed above provides a rich source to document Chinese American experiences in China during World War II. However, the letter writers, situated in specific locations and moments, might lack a historical perspective and overlook the large picture. For instance, both brothers mentioned that Chongqing customs concerning gender relationships were backward, a far cry from their earlier experiences in the U.S. But Chinese scholars have revealed that the evacuation of institutions to hinterland China effected changes in local culture,⁶¹ leading to the abolishment of certain “unwholesome customs” such as “superstition, foot-binding, and infanticide,” while marriages across regional boundaries increased.⁶² In addition, although Luther tended to paint a rather bleak picture of Central, scholars mentioned that thanks to both

the generous support of Liu Xiang 劉湘, then governor of Sichuan, and the capable leadership of Central's president Luo Jialun 羅家倫, the evacuation was a success. Central built the new dorm for 1,000 students within forty-two days and started the fall semester in November 1937. By 1939, all university cattle, poultry, and pigs were also transported from Nanjing to Chongqing.⁶³

Concerning Rocky's workplace, Nankai Institute was the only Chinese institution that focused on the study of economics during the war, later credited as a leading program that introduced Western ideas of economics to Chinese universities.⁶⁴ During the war, faculty at Nankai carried out numerous important projects focusing on Southwest China, investigating its agriculture, industry, and mineral resources. They published monographs, textbooks, and an English-language newspaper *China Economy Daily*, winning international sympathy.⁶⁵ Thanks to successful recruitment strategies targeting returned Chinese students with advanced degrees from Western universities, Nankai secured talented academics despite their relatively low pay grade. Rocky must have found camaraderie with this cohort. Moreover, the school built Western-style residences for its young faculty, including a club house for them to drink M.J.B. coffee imported from the U.S. and exchange pleasantries. Their outdoor grass tennis court must have also appealed to Rocky,⁶⁶ an avid tennis player.⁶⁷ Although these achievements and amenities were not apparent in Rocky's letters, he remembered the bright and eager Chinese military officers he taught even decades later.⁶⁸ He admired his Chinese colleagues, leading experts in economics and his mentors, and also met quite a few political leaders in Chongqing. Other than the support from his family and friends in both China and the U.S., his work in the public arena sustained him through the long war as well.

THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNDER ETTIE'S PEN

Despite the limits of the private letters discussed, their rich details and emotional authenticity add depth to our understanding of the process of becoming Chinese American. But neither Luther nor Rocky published any accounts of their personal experiences in wartime China. Ettie, on the other hand, leveraged public-facing writings, in addition to private correspondence, to carve out her identity as a Chinese American woman. She especially stood out with a show of unflinching optimism while faced with similar life-threatening dangers, financial hardships, and discrimination. What made it possible for her to overcome overwhelming hardships and defy the common psychological tendency of "negativity bias"? I argue that her attempts at managing gender and racial expectations,

perhaps more so than a sunny personality and institutional affiliation, decided her narrative tone.

Unlike her brothers, Ettie needed to prove to her family that she led a well-adjusted, fulfilling life as a single career woman, since her brothers, those in China and the U.S., frequently expressed well-intentioned (though patronizing) concerns. To them, their little sister needed counsel not to fall for the wrong man and to keep herself safe while going about in China. It would come as no surprise, then, that she frequently emphasized the positive side of her experience in family letters. For instance, after a long grueling trek amid Japanese air raids, she only enthused over the nice accommodations and opportunities to meet Chinese dignitaries after she finally reached Ginling-in-exile.⁶⁹ She mentioned the visit of Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang (Soong Mei-ling 宋美齡), who went to Chengdu together to attend the inauguration of the new governor of Sichuan. Chiang was invited to address the Ginling students. Ettie observed: "She is indeed an attractive woman and with a commanding figure," and "he is a slight but very strong-looking figure. His eyes are small but clear and piercing, and his voice held the attention of all."⁷⁰ As with her brothers, the access to government leaders and dignitaries in China offered enough novelty and gratification to be included in a U.S.-bound family letter.⁷¹ But Ettie also offered up these tidbits as proof of her success to reassure family.

Surrounded by loving siblings, Ettie was more fortunate than sociologist Rose Hum Lee, another second-generation Chinese American woman who went to China around the same time; Lee shouldered the double burdens of family and career while suffering abuses from Chinese in-laws due to her inability to bear a child.⁷² Yet Ettie also felt the need to claim independence through her work. Her career may not seem as glamorous as that of Gladys Ling-Ai Li, another Chinese American woman who went to China during the war, coproduced the film *Kukan* portraying the Chinese resistance,⁷³ won an Honorary Academy Award in 1941, and mesmerized U.S. society with her exotic dresses and deportment.⁷⁴ Neither did Ettie enjoy the same high profile as Flora Belle Jan, whose journalistic and literary works published in English while she lived in China in the 1930s–1940s, as well as her "extravagant, ambitious, and mercurial" personality and "flapper" lifestyle, won wide attention then and now.⁷⁵ But all the same, her work at Ginling brought a sense of fulfillment and anchored her identity.

As will be shown, her manifestation of optimism, in accounts of both Ginling's remarkable evacuation and her work as a PE instructor, represents a conscious strategy to appropriate institutional and national discourses to pursue agency and belonging. In exile, Ginling was located in wartime "heaven" Chengdu, as compared to Chongqing, where Luther and Rocky resided and endured many more Japanese air raids. Small and more intimate, it also provided

more infrastructure for its faculty and students to connect with one another than many other institutions including Central, to some extent constituting a self-contained oasis amid a raging war. More importantly, Ginling administrators, faculty, and students frequently deployed the family discourse, their foundational institutional ethos established in more peaceful times, to unite all constituencies during a national crisis.⁷⁶ These institutional features, as well as nationwide patriotic calls at the time, provided resources for Ettie to fashion her identity through public-facing writings.

Among the few published accounts of the Chin siblings' war experiences is a letter from Ettie to Ginling's New York office. It records part of the legendary long trek from Shanghai to Chengdu, undertaken by a group of fifteen women: five Ginling faculty (including two foreign missionaries and another Chinese American, Alice Chong), eight Ginling students, and two students from other institutions. The group left Shanghai on July 14, arrived in Hankou, Hubei, on July 30. They stayed for three weeks waiting for passage up the Yangtze River amid incessant Japanese bombings. Around August 8, 1938, they secured a riverboat and sailed for Chongqing, navigating the treacherous waters of the Three Gorges. Finally, they took a bus from Chongqing to Chengdu, arriving in mid-August. Their long trek covered between 2,500 and 2,600 miles, utilized every means of transportation available, and took more than two months to complete. Although involving only a small portion of the college, it later became a permanent part of the institutional lore at Ginling both because of its unprecedented length and the grave war situation that added a heady mixture of danger, excitement, and heroism.

One member of the group, Florence Kirk, a Canadian missionary and a faculty member in Ginling's English Department, took up the role of the official transcriber by keeping diary entries between July 12 and August 1, 1938. In comparison, Ettie's letter, the only other surviving written account of the long trek, spans only a few days, from July 27 to August 2, 1938. She wrote it to Ginling's Board of Control on the train from Kowloon to Hankou and described the activities of the group as they trekked across war-torn China. Although the letter sheds some light on her wartime experience, it only provides a slice of a rich and complex period of her life. Therefore, in what follows I first analyze this letter in some detail and then examine it against writings produced by her colleagues at Ginling.

Ettie's letter started on July 27, 1938, typed by her own hand while the train her group rode on was stranded by a Japanese air raid. They were then only a day from Changsha. The letter first backtracked the group's activities, mentioning the starting point of the long trek, when they left Shanghai on the *Empress of Japan* on July 13, and arrived in Hong Kong on July 15. They stayed

in Hong Kong from July 15–25 until boarding a train from Kowloon to Hankou. When she started the letter, the group had been riding on the train for two days, and had suffered unrelenting heat, soot, an air raid, and general uncertainty. However, we can scarcely notice any signs of psychological strains in her letter.

Ettie told first about their delightful trip from Shanghai to Hong Kong. Despite the dangers of braving Japanese military checkpoints in Shanghai before they could exit the city,⁷⁷ or Kirk's worries that the bright moon under which they set sail would invite Japanese bombing,⁷⁸ Ettie enthused over experiences such as:

The steward was very good to us and the girls had special privileges and a special morning breakfast. The Captain was perfectly grand to us and we visited the navigation bridge and had a bit of education on navigation. The trip from Shanghai was short and comfortable. Some of the Ginling alumnae were at the boat to greet us.⁷⁹

This tone of optimism is also typical of her description of their uncomfortable and dangerous train ride from Kowloon to Hankou. They had to cook their own food, constantly cover their mouths and noses with a piece of wet cloth to keep out the soot, sleep in the hallway of the train when temperature in their compartments rose to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and take refuge in rice paddies and rustic houses when an air raid came. Her former students who also undertook the journey recalled sleeping next to a pigsty in the farmhouse and a lice infestation.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Ettie focused only on the positive aspects. She stated: "The train was most comfortable, I think, and we all slept fairly well with the exception of the one night when we stopped in Yuchow [due to a Japanese air raid]," and, "Our trip up on the whole was a safe one without much alarm along the way with the exception of one time when there was an air raid warning." She was lighthearted enough to note that the food situation was satisfactory:

We spent fifteen dollars and we got some grand noodles which tasted exceptionally good especially when we cooked them ourselves on the train. I had brought a pot pan with me and we had the ingredients to make it delicious. Then there was a continuous fire on the platform where our water for drinking was boiled for us and we could use the fire for cooking.

She also found the company of her colleagues and students delightful: "One of the most wonderful things about this whole group was the way they

accepted what had happened and kept a cheerful face and optimistic outlook upon everything even in the face of disaster and suffering.” At the end of the trek, she even claimed to have found the key psychological element that would sustain the Chinese people through the war: “I think this [optimism and forbearance] must be the attitude of nearly all the people in China during the present.”

In praising China’s beautiful scenery and Chinese people’s heroic forbearance during the war, Ettie’s observation very much resembled those uttered by her more experienced missionary colleagues. For instance, her British colleague Eva Spicer, who also went on the trek, mentioned “heat and beauty” when asked about her impression of the trip. Kirk voiced similar admiration for the “greatness” of China: “What a wonderful piece of luck that I am here to see these lovely provinces of China! They strengthened my consciousness of the greatness of China’s resources, both human and material.”⁸¹ Those foreign faculty members at Ginling who did not take the long trek also echoed each other in their praises of the Chinese people’s capacity for suffering during the war.⁸² While resembling her missionary colleagues in providing a fairly superficial and romanticized commentary from the perspective of an alien observer, she also differed from them in her insistence on finding common grounds between her American and Chinese heritages:

Many times I thought that the trip along the embankments with mountains towering high above and a large stream of water flowing just below were like the trips I have taken in America. One time especially I was reminded of my trip to Yellowstone. China is indeed beautiful and there is more beauty than we can imagine.

Without a doubt, Ettie was genuinely inspired by what she saw on this trip and sought to process her new experience by comparing it to what had been more familiar to her up to that point in her life: her experience in the U.S. Yet considering the constant signs of war-induced ravages and mortal danger, one cannot help marveling at the overly bright narrative tone of her letter. Not yet twenty-five and never out of school before she went to China, she may have found her war experience a source of stimulation and excitement as well as that of danger. Moreover, she was a PE instructor accustomed to an active lifestyle. Her youth and health must have made it easier for her to endure physical discomfort than it was for her more sedentary and older colleagues. Indeed, Kirk noted in her report that Ettie insisted on taking photos when they were taking shelter from a Japanese air raid in the rice fields. One of her former students also recalled that she taught them how to sing “Old Father Time” while the group sailed by the treacherous Three Gorges.⁸³

But most importantly, her letter's audience determined her narrative tone. In fact, she described the dangers and hardships caused by the war in a news report published in *Worcester Telegram and the Evening Gazette* in far franker terms than what she had adopted in the letter. In the news article she mentioned finding Wuchang, Hubei, the destination of their train ride, "desolate," and noted that although it was midnight when they arrived, they "made haste to cross over to Hankow [Hankou] by the last ferry, for in the morning there was no telling but that the station might be bombed. Already many attempts had been made on it."⁸⁴ She described for a hometown audience the grave picture of the Sino-Japanese war, creating a perfect backdrop for showcasing the heroic mettle of the Ginling group. In the same article, she predicted China's "great resources" and "the ability of the people to adjust and adapt themselves to new environment" to be the definitive elements that would lead to a Chinese victory against Japanese invasion. She shared her impression of Chinese patriotism: "Everywhere little children of all classes up to the older folks sing with fervor their patriotic songs which are beautiful to hear." She particularly rhapsodized about the young people of China while urging her American audience to pay attention:

The youth of China today is worthy of notice. They are strong and sturdy and applying themselves to study and at the same time, giving service. These years have burned into them a greater sense of responsibility, of new and practical ideals—of building themselves up for the growth of a new China and resistance to Japanese aggression.

Thus, she in effect took up the role as spokesperson for Ginling and even for the Chinese people, secure in her identity as a "hometown hero" who joined the life-and-death struggle against Japanese invasion in China. Furthermore, she acted as a bridge between Chinese and American cultures and peoples when she claimed in another news article: "The Chinese people are very much like Americans. We have a good sense of humor, are hardworking people, and get along well with others. We try to make the American soldiers feel at home [in Sichuan]."⁸⁵ In one brilliant move, Ettie simultaneously conjured up the image of the overseas U.S. soldiers fighting side by side with the Chinese people, an emotionally charged picture that could resonate with American readers; spoke for the "hardworking" Chinese people who had "a good sense of humor," interestingly adopting the first-person plural pronoun "we"; and, most importantly albeit subtly, claimed her membership among both the Chinese and American peoples, now that she had established meeting grounds between the two groups

by invoking both their joint war effort and the cultural values purportedly shared by both. In this respect, she echoed other Chinese Americans' efforts to "pose as cultural bridges between two worlds."⁸⁶

In contrast, when writing a letter about the long trek to the U.S. sponsors of Ginling, she had just joined Ginling faculty as a junior member and must have felt some uncertainty about her position at the college. But she clearly understood the expectations from the U.S. side. Business correspondence sent to her from NYC specifically asked for heroic and dynamic images and accounts from China, explaining that those would inspire American benefactors most and lead to successful fundraisers.⁸⁷ Serving as the official photographer of the Long Trek, small wonder that Ettie risked a Japanese air raid to take photos. Her optimistic letter sent to NYC likewise aimed to produce good fundraising materials for Ginling. Furthermore, her bright narrative tone and focus on the little delightful details of the trip functioned as a way for her to highlight common grounds with a group of people to whom she was a newcomer. Indeed, at the beginning of the war it was common practice among the Ginling faculty and students, whether Chinese or foreign, to write to their U.S. correspondents in just such a heroic and optimistic tone.⁸⁸

Similar to Ettie's letter discussed above, her intentionally rosy representation of her work as PE instructor belies her precarious place at Ginling, which was not always as welcoming and inclusive as she had hoped for or described to her American audiences. Ettie, as well as Alice Chong, was paid as a Chinese faculty member, on a lower grade than that of the Caucasian missionaries, according to the policy adopted by the Board of Control and conveyed to her by Ginling president Wu Yifang.⁸⁹ This was a common practice, also applied to Chinese American women teaching at other Chinese colleges, such as Flora Belle Jan, at the time.⁹⁰ Wu apparently harbored some misgivings about (non-Christian) Chinese Americans, as she stated to Ginling's New York office: "[T]here is the chance that the [non-Christian] American-born Chinese may have lost the Chinese culture and, at the same time, may not yet have gotten enough from the West to have a worthwhile working principle of living."⁹¹ She also did not seem to value Ettie's contributions as Ettie should have deserved, commenting that Ettie would "do better as a teaching member of the faculty than carrying the administrative duties of running a department," perhaps due to her inadequate Chinese, as at one point Ettie requested a translator, and her lack of administrative experience. Yet one may question whether at Ginling Ettie had been given sufficient opportunities to develop into a leader that Wu would have approved. Although neither Kirk's nor Ettie's account mentioned it, Ettie was assigned, together with the other Chinese American and Chinese faculty members, to take care of the students, eating and sleeping in third-class passage on the ship

and then in a second-class compartment on the train, while her Western colleagues, Kirk and Spicer, enjoyed better accommodations on both occasions. Moreover, although a bona fide instructor,⁹² Ettie was expected to pick up all the practice sessions that her pregnant Chinese colleagues were not able to teach. Her teaching duties and schedule resembled those of several recent Ginling graduates who stayed on to teach PE at a reduced salary as "Teaching Assistant" (*zhu jiao* 助教) to the extent that even those students close to her sometimes misunderstood her rank.⁹³

Expected to do most of the heavy lifting, Ettie was unable to make full use of her own talent and passion in PE instruction. But this is not to deny that she drew satisfaction from and took pride in her work. Ettie contributed to the overall wellbeing of the PE department, which achieved the impressive record of winning most of the championships at joint sports meets.⁹⁴ She not only gave students classes, but also taught foreign faculty members how to play badminton.⁹⁵ Additionally, she refereed volleyball games, organized indoor and outdoor meets and field days, and initiated a cheerleading group,⁹⁶ though she was not able to do what was dearest to her heart: teaching fencing.⁹⁷ As a young instructor with an outgoing personality, she was well liked by her students, drawn by her youth, energy, and less formal way of interaction. Some even found in her a unique combination of Chinese courtesies and American openness, noting that Ettie always took care to reciprocate a gift without appearing transactional.⁹⁸

All the same, Ettie did not receive her fair share of accolades, since among her colleagues she was more the work horse than their leader. At one point she even felt the need to state in a forthright, though still elliptical, letter to Wu that she "can stand only so much and not any more" after being so "impeded by certain factors" at Ginling.⁹⁹ Later her sense of family obligation also came into conflict with the sort of wholehearted devotion to Ginling that the administration had requested. In 1944, Ettie's continued employment at Ginling rose as an issue because "[She] has family debt to help pay off," as Wu told Ginling's U.S. office.¹⁰⁰ Wu refrained from making harsh judgments on such "self-centered" behavior, prevaricating with remarks such as: "[Ettie] is a fine person and as she sees the need for her [at Ginling], she has changed somewhat her former definite decision [of leaving Ginling]." Seen in the hindsight, it was perhaps unreasonable to demand exclusive loyalty at a time when the faculty had to wrestle with more challenges than ever to support their own families because of the raging war and skyrocketing inflation.¹⁰¹ Nor should Wu have passed judgments on the ethical and cultural makeups of Chinese Americans as a group or on Ettie as an individual. But just like Ettie, Wu was a product of her time and of certain cultural and educational background. The stressed-out wartime president shouldering enormous responsibilities, she had also internalized and reproduced some of the racial prejudices inherited from Ginling's American benefactors.

Ettie left China in 1944. But her attempts at self-representation and self-advocacy in China and the U.S. did not end there. For her audiences at Smith and elsewhere, she transformed her experience of marginalization in China into a positive self-portrait both as a valued PE instructor and friend to the missionary faculty at wartime Ginling in her many promotional speeches after World War II. Ettie did establish congenial relationships with her Ginling colleagues, essential at a small, all-women's college. She even recalled being consulted by them on fashion. But she was more likely lower on the social hierarchy than she had represented herself to be to her American audiences. Such self-representations were not just motivated by a desire for self-promotion, for she also took upon herself to speak for the Chinese people during and after the war, seeking individual meaning through a collective project that in her mind meant building bridges between Chinese and American cultures. In the 1980s, it was also she, alongside the Ginling alumnae in the U.S. and Wu Yifang, who spearheaded the reopening of Ginling under the umbrella of Nanjing Normal University.¹⁰²

EPILOGUE

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 disqualified foreign-born Chinese immigrants in the U.S. from naturalization and forbade Chinese laborers to enter the U.S. With the eruption of World War II, especially after Pearl Harbor, Chinese Americans suddenly became the “good Orientals,” while Japanese Americans were rounded up for internment camps. In 1943, the Exclusion Act was finally repealed when it became an embarrassment to the U.S. government. Juxtaposing the history of racial discrimination against people of Chinese ancestry in the U.S. with the Chin siblings' experiences in China, we can see their uneasy position of being caught between two cultures and two nations, neither of which they could lay full claim to or would accept them as full-fledged members. Their parents' fond memories of the old country could not forestall their marginalization in China, while in the U.S., the avowed values of freedom and equality did not always ring true for them. Ettie's efforts to bring the two cultures and peoples closer, as well as her and her brothers' attempts to combine two cultural heritages to form a coherent identity, cast a poignant light on their wartime experiences. Neither she nor her brothers could surmount deeply ingrained racism in the U.S. or cultural prejudices in China, but they pursued agency and belonging despite the odds against them during World War II. They continued those efforts in the postwar U.S.: Luther worked as an engineer for Westinghouse, Rocky wrapped up a successful career as college professor and administrator, and Ettie served as faculty member and public speaker.¹⁰³ Their legacies lived on in other ways

as well. Rocky's son, Rockwell (Rocky) Chin, a civil rights attorney, preserved their correspondence after Ettie passed away, the last of the siblings to go.

The Chin siblings' case challenges both Chinese nationalist discourses aiming to dominate the Chinese diaspora and the image of a homogenized and normalized (white) nationalist subject as required by the discourse of cultural assimilation circulated in the U.S.¹⁰⁴ For them cultural interactions and adaptations, rather than static cultural roots, played a crucial role in gaining agency and forming identities. Although they and their families did not see their actions as anything out of the ordinary, their experiences contribute to that esteemed set of historical narratives of Asian Americans living through a similar period from the perspective of an unknown, understudied, and perhaps even undervalued, treasure trove of personal, intimate correspondences within one family of this group and time. The lesson here is to never underestimate the value of personal intimate biographies, which honor the common yet discrete threads among those who were caught in the interstices of competing cultures.

NOTES

1. For an elaboration of the theory of transnationalism, see Lina Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound* (Routledge, 1994).
2. E.g., Minako Waseda, "Extraordinary Circumstances, Exceptional Practices: Music in Japanese American Concentration Camps," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 2 (2005): 171–209.
3. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Harvard University Press, 2005).
4. The complexity of becoming Chinese American would appear more pronounced when Asian American emerged as a full-fledged political identity in the civil rights movement. See Jennifer Ho, "Identity," in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy Schlund Vials, Linda Tinh Vo, and K. Scott Wong (New York University Press, 2015), 126.
5. Sao-ling Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography: Some Questions of Definition and Approach," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 302.
6. See Gungwu Wang, "Chineseness: The Dilemmas of Place and Practice," in *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century*, ed. Gary G. Hamilton (University of Washington Press, 1999), 120.
7. For a fuller discussion of identity formation based on "communion" and "agency," see Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great*

Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness (Penguin Press, 2024), 171.

8. John B. Anderson, "Social, Political and Economic Changes in the City," accessed July 27, 2025, <https://college.holycross.edu/projects/worcester/worcestertoday/anderson.htm>.
9. Daniel Ricciard, "Census Data of Worcester's People of Color in the 1850s," accessed July 27, 2025, https://college.holycross.edu/projects/worcester/africanamerican/census_data.htm.
10. Oral interview with Rockwell Chin, October 2005, "Data re Life of Rockwood Q.P. Chin," handwritten autobiographical notes.
11. Shehong Chen, "Republicanism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Capitalism in American Chinese Ideology," in *Chinese American Transnationalism: The Flow of People, Resources, and Ideas between China and America During the Exclusion Era*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Temple University Press, 2005), 186.
12. Charlotte Brooks, *American Exodus: Second-Generation Chinese Americans in China, 1901-1949* (University of California Press), 2019.
13. She married Edward Lim Hong, a Chinese American restaurateur, in 1953.
14. Jingyi Song, *Shaping and Reshaping Chinese American Identity: New York's Chinese during the Depression and World War II* (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2010), 115-44.
15. Brooks, *American Exodus*, 116.
16. E.g., Luther's letters dated September 25 and November 4, 1933.
17. Henry Chin to Ettie, Rocky, and Luther, August 14, 1938.
18. Ettie's handwritten notes in Rocky Chin's 80th birthday memory book, October 9, 1991.
19. Stanley to family, January 3, 1937.
20. Stanley to family, July 11, 1937.
21. Ettie's handwritten notes in Rocky Chin's 80th birthday memory book
22. Rocky was mistaken when stating Chen held a PhD in Chemistry from Yale. He had a PhD from the University of Chicago. He served as head of Science Department in the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (1926-1936), and then as the director of National Institute for Compilation and Translation (1936-1948) in Chongqing.
23. Rockwood Chin, "Data re Life of Rockwood Q.P. Chin," handwritten autobiographical notes.
24. Author's email interview of Rockwell Chin, November 15, 2012.
25. See Brooks, *American Exodus*.
26. Luther to Rocky, November 2, 1937.
27. Luther to Rocky and Ettie, November 16, 1937.

28. Luther to Rocky, November 30, 1937.
29. Luther to Rocky and Ettie, November 16, 1937.
30. Luther to Ettie, November 2, 1937.
31. Luther to Ettie and Rocky, December 24 and 28, 1937.
32. Luther to Ettie, June 20, 1938.
33. Luther to family, August 30, 1936.
34. "Faculty List of the Department of Electric Engineering, Central University," Nanjing University Archives, #01.zd.153116J3092.
35. Ettie to Rotary Club of Worcester, May 16, 1939.
36. Luther to Ettie, September 10 and September 20, 1940.
37. Luther to Ettie, November 22, 1938,
38. Luther to Ettie, June 20, 1938.
39. Stanly to the siblings, August 31, 1938.
40. According to his family, Luther had enjoyed good physical and mental health before going to China. He "did not have any mental illness prior to or after the breakdown" (author's email communication with Rockwell Chin, November 15, 2012). But he remained a bachelor all his life.
41. Brooks, *American Exodus*, 153.
42. These can all be found in his autobiographical notes included in his 80th birthday memory book.
43. Rocky to Ettie, December 28, 1937.
44. Rocky to Ettie, January 18, 1938.
45. Rocky to Luther and Ettie, December 1937.
46. Rocky to Ettie, January 18, 1938.
47. Rocky to Ettie, April 1, 1940.
48. Rocky to Ettie, April 13, 1940.
49. Rocky to Ettie, November 4, 1940.
50. Rocky to Ettie, November 3, 1937.
51. Rocky to Ettie, November 3, 1937.
52. Rocky to Ettie, December 9, 1937.
53. Rocky to Ettie, November 26, 1938.
54. Rocky to Ettie, November 26, 1938.
55. Rocky to Ettie, April 11, 1941.
56. Rocky to Ettie, November 26, 1938.
57. Rocky to Ettie, January 18, 1938.
58. Rocky to Ettie, September 22 and 24, 1940.

59. Rocky to Ettie, May 5, 1941.
60. Author email interview of Rockwell Chin, November 15, 2012.
61. Zhang Chengjie and Mo Hongwei 張成潔, 莫宏偉, “Lun Kangzhan shiqi ga-oxiao neiqian dui xinan diqu guannian jindaihua de yingxiang” 論抗戰時期高校內遷對西南地區觀念近代化的影響 [The influence on the modernization of Southwest China by evacuated universities during the Resistance War], *Guizhou wenshi congkan*, no. 3 (2002): 77–81.
62. Zhu Dantong 朱丹彤, “Gehe yu ronghe: Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing ‘shangxi-ajiangren’ de qiutong cunyi” 隔閡與融合—抗戰時期重慶“上下江人”的求同存異 [Isolation and melting: Up- and down-the-river people seeking common ground during the Resistance War]; *Guangxi shehui kexue*, no.1 (2005): 146–49.
63. Chang Yunping, 常雲平, “Shilun Kangzhan qijian neiqian Chongqing de gaodeng yuanxiao” 試論抗戰期間內遷重慶的高等院校 [On institutions of higher education evacuated to Chongqing during Resistance War], *Xinan Shifan Daxue xuebao*, no. 6 (1997): 45–50.
64. Paul Trescott, *Jingji Xue: The History of the Introduction of Western Economic Ideas into China, 1850–1950* (The Chinese University Press, 2007), 216.
65. Chang, “Shilun Kangzhan,” 48.
66. Yung-Chen Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83–84.
67. Rockwood Chin’s 80th birthday memory book.
68. Rockwood did not identify the name of this institution, but it was most likely GMD’s “Military Officers’ Foreign Language Extension School,” established at the foot of the Yuelu Mountain in Changsha at the start of the war. See Liu Xuyi 劉續義, “Bainian junshi jiaoyu chengjiu huxiang chuanqi” 百年軍事教育成就湖湘傳奇 [One hundred years of military education that made a legend in Hunan], *Hunan Ribao*, August 1, 2018, accessed October 3, 2024, <https://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/n1/2018/0801/c85037-30183188.html>.
69. Ettie to family, October 30, 1939.
70. Ettie’s account foretold Madame Chiang’s successful tour to rally American support for Chinese war effort in 1943, further boosting rising Chinese American status and pride in the U.S. See K. Scott Wong, “From Pariah to Paragon: Shifting Images of Chinese Americans during World War II,” in *Chinese Americans and the Politics of Race and Culture*, ed. Sucheng Chan and Madeline Y. Hsu (Temple University Press, 2008), 163.
71. Incidentally, on March 2, 1941, Wesley wrote to state that he met T. V. Soong (Song Ziwen 宋子文), Madame Chiang’s brother, and the “charming and beautiful” Madame Chiang at Yale, even managing to get a letter of recommendation from T.V., and consequently landing a job with an airplane factory.

72. Huping Ling, *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community Since 1870* (Stanford University Press, 2012), 196.
73. Katrina Valcourt, "Local Documentary Reveals Story of Lost Oscar-Winning Film in 'Finding Kukan,'" November 2, 2016, accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.honolulumagazine.com/local-documentary-reveals-story-of-lost-oscar-winning-film-in-finding-kukan/>.
74. Danke Li, "Li Ling-Ai, Kukan, and China's Resistance War," unpublished manuscript, June 2025.
75. Fleur Yano, "Preface," in *Unbound Spirit: Letters of Flora Belle Jan*, ed. Fleur Yano and Saralyn Daly (University of Illinois Press, 2009), ix.
76. For a more in-depth discussion, see Jin Feng, *The Making of a Family Saga: Ginling College (1915–1952)* (SUNY Press, 2009).
77. Brian Dillon, "Alice Chong Biography," unpublished manuscript, 137.
78. All quotations of Florence Kirk can be found in her report of the long trek, "Typed Report of Shanghai Unit, March 27, 1938," Smith College Archives, Box #1338.
79. All following quotations from Ettie Chin's letter can be found at: https://www.library.yale.edu/div/colleges/Smith/bios/EC_3.html (accessed November 2012).
80. Oral interview with Loretta Pan, September–October 2005.
81. Kirk, "Typed Report," March 27, 1938, Smith College Archives, Box #1338, 14.
82. Typed letters, December 26, 1937, Smith Archives, Box #1338.
83. Loretta Pan, "A Tribute to Ettie Chin on Her 85th Birthday," unpublished, May 3, 1998, 2.
84. "Former City Girl Writes of Experiences in China: Miss Ettie Chin, Smith Graduate, Relates Adventures as Teacher," in *Worcester Telegram and the Evening Gazette*, September 23, 1939. The article cites extensively from Ettie's letter to Mrs. Lawrence A. Averill, her friend in Worcester.
85. Rose Thompson, "Chinese Girl Teacher Tells How Inflation Swept Land," in *Worcester Telegram and the Evening Gazette*, September 23, 1939.
86. Gloria Heyung Chun, *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity* (Rutgers University Press, 2000), 42.
87. See for example, Mrs. Macmillan to Ettie, April 14, 1941.
88. See Feng, *The Making of a Family Saga*, Ch. 4, for more details.
89. Wu to Ettie, November 10, 1937, in which she states: "Our New York Office wished to count you as appointed by the College directly as all the Chinese staff are, and not as the missionaries or other foreign members who are appointed by the Personnel Committee in New York." Private collection of Ettie Chin.

90. Judy Tzu-chun Wu, "Introduction," in *Unbound Spirit: Letters of Flora Belle Jan*, ed. Fleur Yano and Saralyn Daly (University of Illinois Press, 2009), xxiii.
91. Wu to New York, February 7, 1945. All letters from Wu to Ginling's New York Office cited in this article can be found at the Yale Divinity School Library Archives, Group #11, Box #149.
92. Salary report for 1937–1938, Yale Divinity School Library Archives, Group #11, Box # 148.
93. Oral interview with Yizhen Chen Wang, October–December 2005.
94. Chin, "Circular Letter," November 1943, Yale Divinity School Archives, Group #11, Box 136, folder #2731.
95. Kirk, "Typed Report," March 27, 1938, Smith College Archives, Box #1338.
96. Oral interviews with Yizhen Chen Wang, October–December 2005.
97. She had been on the Smith Fencing team as an undergraduate and received a Smith Blazer as recognition of her achievements in that sport. Newspaper clippings, Smith Archives, Box # 697.1.
98. Oral interviews with Loretta Pan, Mingzhang Lu Liao, and Yizhen Chen Wang, September–December 2005.
99. Ettie to Wu Yifang, May 1, 1941.
100. Wu to the Ginling Office in NYC, April 29, 1944.
101. E.g., Chin's description of buying a pair of shoes for \$10,000, in Rose Thompson, "Chinese Girl Teacher Tells How Inflation Swept Land," *Worcester Telegram and the Evening Gazette*, September 23, 1939.
102. For more details, see Feng, *The Making of a Family Saga*, especially the "Epilogue."
103. Ironically but hardly surprising, Rocky was denied a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship when the granter rescinded their offer, citing his American citizenship, and he had to scramble for a job to support his young family after his return to the U.S. in 1944. See Rockwood to Gracia Chin, October 21, 1995.
104. Lisa Sun-Hee Park, "Assimilation," in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy Schlund Vials, Linda Tinh Vo and K. Scott Wong (New York University Press, 2015), 14–17.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chen En-tsi. "A Report of the Physical Education Department Since 1937 and the Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War." Typed excerpts. Yale Divinity School Library Archives, Group #11, Box #159.
- Lowe, Lisa. "Canon, Institutionalization, Identity: Contradictions for Asian American Studies." In David Palumbo-Liu, ed., *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995. 48–68.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. "Memory." In Cathy Schlund Vials, Linda Tinh Vo and K. Scott Wong, eds. *Keywords for Asian American Studies*. New York: NYU Press, 2015. 153–157.
- Rouse, Wendy. *The Children of Chinatown: Growing up Chinese American in San Francisco, 1850–1920*. University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Yung, Judy. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese American Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2023.