

# Chinese Migration to America: Changes in Policy, Diaspora and in Returns

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## Abstract

The past century and a half has been witness to large scale waves of migration of Chinese to America. Migration policy in the United States and in China has played an important role in shaping migratory flows between the two nations. However, these waves have significantly different migrant profiles and have provided different returns to China. The purpose of this poster is to highlight major migration policies from both nations and the key differences in the type of work that the migrants engaged in and to argue that new forms of migration have emerged which are providing superior returns to China.

## Migration Policy

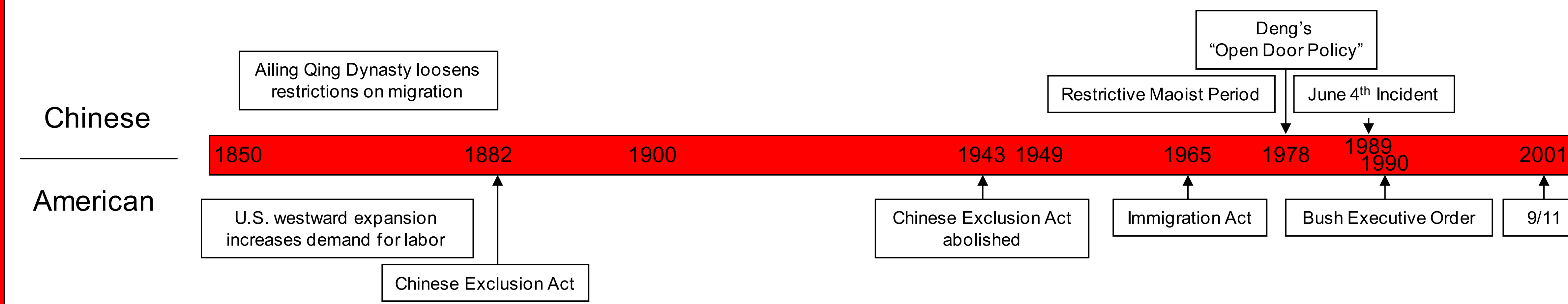
- Migratory flows between China and the United States are directly influenced by the migration policies of the two countries.
- In the mid 1800s, labor in America was in high demand and pro immigration policies facilitated Chinese immigrant's significant role in America's westward expansion. Large numbers of Chinese aided in the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, worked in mines and provided laundry services.
- This inflow of Chinese was only possible because it coincided with an ailing Qing Dynasty's change to its restrictive emigration policies. China's defeat during the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1857-60) served as a warning that China was losing pace with the rest of the world and contact with the outside was necessary.
- Analysis of U.S. Census data shows that at the height of this wave of migration there were roughly 102,500 Chinese in the United States in 1880 (IPUMS, 2010).
- However, the end of the gold rush and the American Civil War resulted in fewer job opportunities. Anti-Chinese sentiment grew as Americans increasingly found themselves in direct competition for jobs with Chinese immigrants.
- The struggle came to a head in 1882 when the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act was passed effectively eliminating Chinese immigration to America. As a result of the creation of the "Great White Wall," the number of Chinese living in the U.S. reached its lowest point of 42,000 in 1940 a function of a limited number of new immigrants, expulsion and mortality.
- This lull in acceptance of Chinese into the United States was met with the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the rise of Mao Zedong to power. The arrival of the new government ushered in a new wave of restrictive policies on migration and negative sentiment to those that were overseas lasting from 1949 until the late 1970s.
- The U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act was abolished in 1943. However, it was not until the civil rights movement in 1965 when the Immigration Act was signed that Chinese were unburdened by the discriminatory quota system that replaced the Chinese Exclusion Act.
- While the 1950s and 1960s did see increases in migration of Chinese to America, much of these migrants were fleeing the catastrophes of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.
- A true turning point in the level of migratory flows from China to the U.S. occurred in the 1980s and 90s as a consequence of the Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy initiated in December 1978. Analysis of the most recent American Community Survey data estimates that there are just over 1.3 million Chinese in the U.S. in 2008 (IPUMS, 2010).

## June Fourth and 9/11

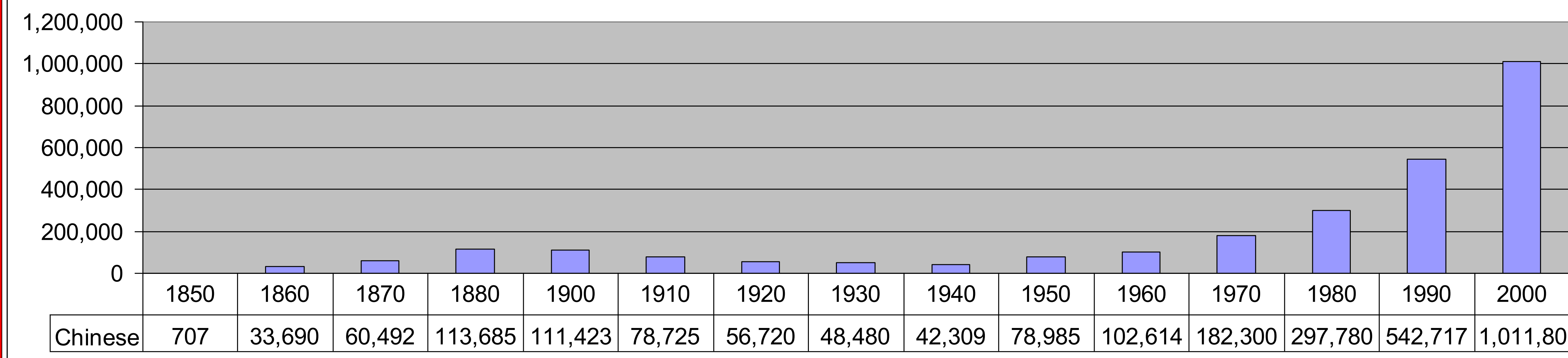
June fourth, 1989 was the culmination of a pro-democracy student movement that ended in bloodshed as the government sought to clear Tiananmen Square of the protesters. The American policy response was an Executive Order issued in April 1990 by President George Bush. The Order allowed all holders of J-1 student visas to convert to more flexible F-1 visas and any Chinese in the U.S. at the time to apply for permanent residence.

The tragic events that took place in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 led to passage of the USA Patriot Act of 2001 which included significant changes to U.S. immigration policy. In addition to overall tighter restrictions on migration, there has been an increase in physical boarder security, reductions in student visas and restrictions on subjects that can be studied by foreign students. Furthermore, the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> are thought to have caused more negative attitudes towards immigration (Essas, Dovidio & Hodson, 2002).

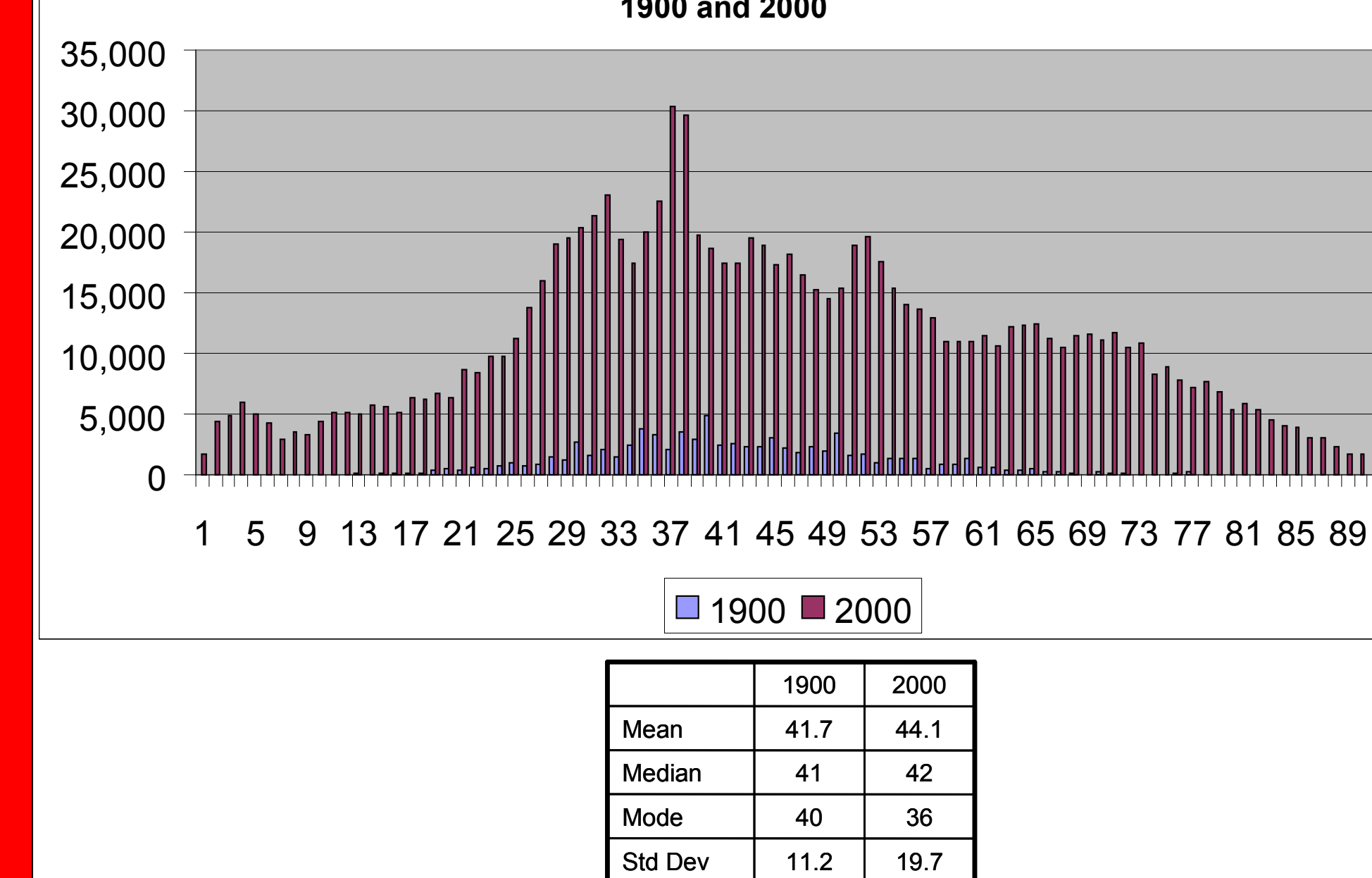
## Timeline of Major Migration Policies and Events



## Chinese Born People Living in the U.S.A.



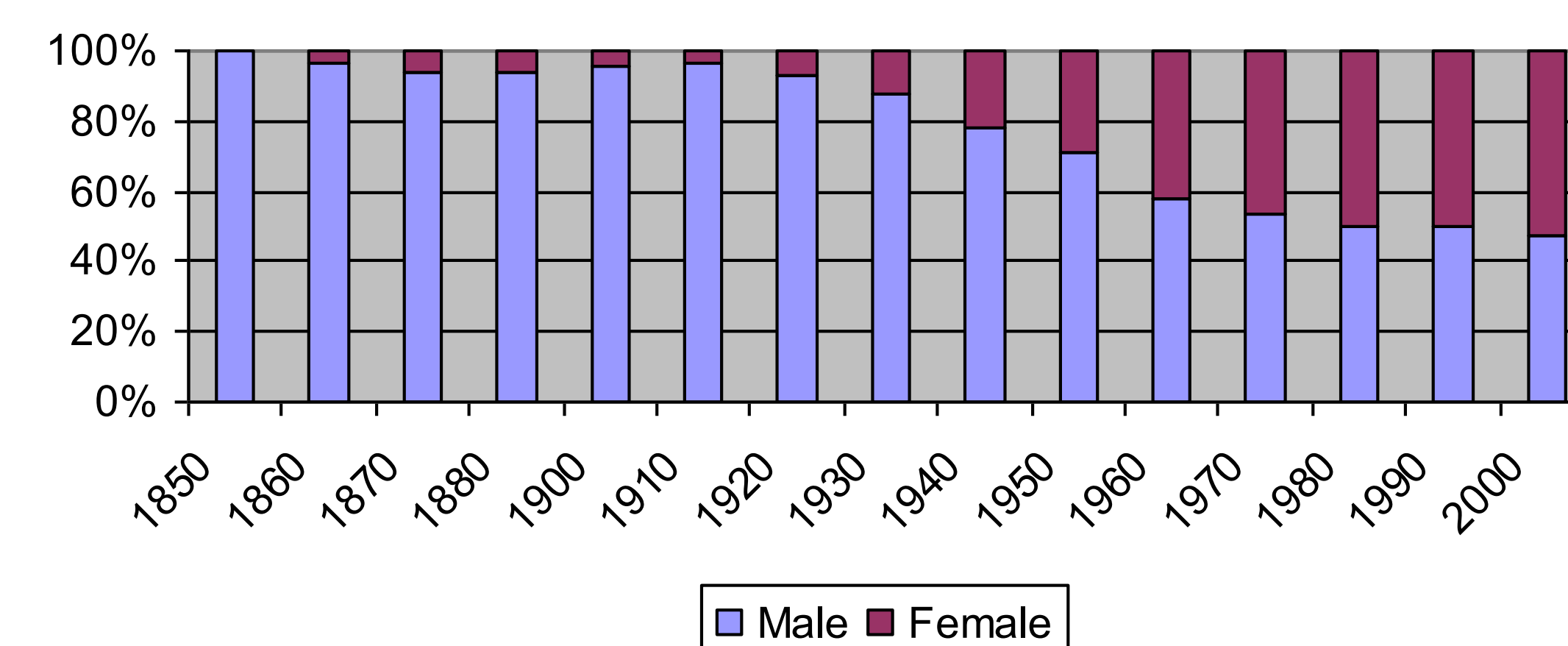
## Age Distribution of Chinese Born in the U.S.A. 1900 and 2000



Occupation	1900	2000*
Operatives	36.0%	12.4%
Laborers	18.6%	1.5%
Service Workers (not household)	13.8%	18.3%
Farm Laborers	11.2%	0.2%
Managers, Officials, and Proprietors	7.0%	11.2%
Non-occupational response	5.2%	0.0%
Service Workers (private household)	3.0%	0.0%
Farmers	1.8%	0.2%
Professional, Technical	1.3%	36.4%
Craftsmen	1.0%	3.9%
Sales Workers	0.9%	4.0%
Clerical and Kindred	0.3%	11.9%
Student	<1%	~10%

\*One third of population "N/A (blank)". Of these, one third are "in school".

## Sex Ratio of Chinese Born in the U.S.A.

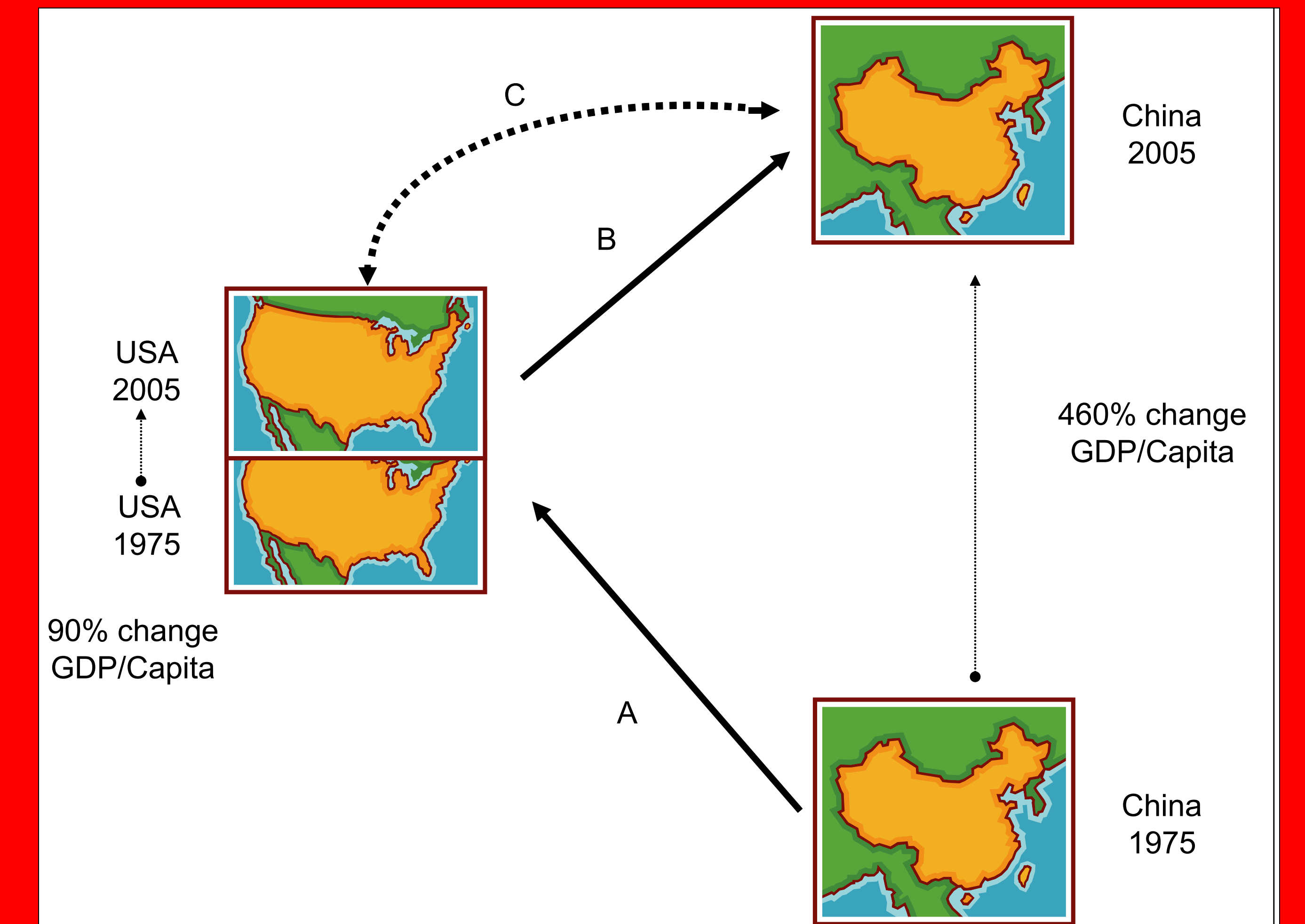


## New Patterns of Migration

As most migration theories were developed to address an original act of migration (A), they fail to provide insight on the process of return migration (B). China's transformation over the past thirty years has been unprecedented. China today is categorically different than it was thirty, twenty or even just ten years ago. A returnee would be misinformed about the China that exists today if relying only on conceptions of the China that they had left. But these conceptions are their reality. This reality is only augmented by new information from external sources (friends, family, media, etc.) and/or personal experience through visits back to China.

Not only has the place changed but the process of migration itself has changed. Aneesh (2006) differentiates between what he calls embodied migration and virtual migration, with the distinction being that virtual migration "does not require workers to move in physical space" (p. 1). Extending the concept to return migration, one can conceptualize the case of "virtual return migration" (C). The ever increasing level of connectivity between any two locations on the globe or the "death of distance" (Cairncross, 1997) must in some way be affecting the process of migration. Virtual return migration may intervene in ways that would reduce or eliminate many of the risks associated with the migration process.

In addition to the notion of virtual return migration suggested here, another pattern of migration has evolved in the anthropology literature that seeks to explain the activities taking place in the liminal space that exists between the dichotomous positioning of the traditional theories of migration of "being here" or "being their." Transnationalism is a pattern of migration that refers in general to people that are constantly moving back and forth between locations. They maintain a residence in two or more countries and fly back and forth between them. Specific to the Chinese case, these families are called astronaut families, the children are called parachute children, and the individuals returning to China are referred to as *haiou* or "seagulls".



## Conclusion

As China continues its transformation, individual migrants are contributing in new and increasingly different ways. Contemporary Chinese migrants to the United States are older, constitute a wider range of ages, and are engaging in different occupations. Increasingly they are starting to return migrate or at least extending the type of returns to China from financial capital or remittances to also include human capital.

Special Thanks to:

