Abstract

This paper examines the operations of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (arci). It argues that arci’s project failed in ways that illuminate the politicized, symbolic operations of refugee relief and the difficulties of manipulating mid-twentieth century migration flows, particularly of Asians. arci’s challenges included registering too many, poorly qualified refugees for assistance rather than a useful “leadership” class; the limited willingness of the Nationalist regime to accept even well-educated new residents into the struggling economy of its tightly controlled political base; dependence on the State Department for funding and the imposition of its priorities onto arci’s programs; and the preferences and capacities of arci registrants in forging their own paths. These problems illuminate the complicated, codependency of the “special relationship” between American “China hands” and the China Lobby and the Christian leader of the Nationalists, as well as the politicized and perhaps intractably irreconcilable messiness of managing refugee flows.