

Chinese Interracial Families

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ABSTRACT: In an increasing multi-cultural America, the Chinese population as well as the number of Chinese interracial families has significantly risen among all other nationalities. Since the 1940's, the Chinese population has soared in numbers. There have been many contributing factors. These factors of assimilation include World War II, the Immigration Act of 1965, the Civil Rights Movement, and the ruling of anti-miscegenation laws as unconstitutional. But despite this continual increase over the years, many Chinese and Chinese interracial families still face barriers such as subtle and blatant racism. From history and current statistics we see these families have overcome many obstacles or barriers to become what they are today. Barriers nor negative factors should block the way of Chinese interracial families because these families are *special* in their own way.

Chinese interracial families reflect the flexibility that Beth Rubin identifies in her book, *Shifts in the Social Contract*. This type of family has increased and is more widely accepted in the United States over the Accord Era and the modern generation. Many factors such as World War II, the Immigration Act of 1965, the Civil Rights Movement, and the ruling of anti-miscegenation laws as unconstitutional, have played a major role in this change. A discussion of these major factors leads to a better understanding of why and how Chinese interracial families have assimilated and are increasing in the United States. But, most significant of all, is the point that this type of family is beneficial to its members and to society as a whole. It should be shielded from racism and allowed to increase in number in future years.

The family has undergone many major changes; specifically, in structure. In the past, there were many nuclear, breadwinner-homemaker families in which husband and wife raised their own biological offspring. Once, this was the dominant family norm, but now it may be becoming the minority. In 1960, 75% of U.S. households were formed by married couples; 10% were single parents; 15% were non-family (singles, roommates, etc.). Based on current trends, the expectations are that by the year 2000, married couples will compose only 55% of the U.S. Households. Single-parent households will make up 14% of the households, and 31% will be non-family. As spectacular in magnitude as these changes are, they only touch on some of the other transitions affecting families (Rubin 18). From 1970 to 1990 the marriage rate fell 30%, and the divorce rate increased 40%. In 1970 only 10% of all births were to unmarried mothers; by 1990 almost a quarter of all births were to single mothers (Ahlburg and De Vita, 1992). And yet even more changes characterize the family at the close of the century. Besides the increased divorce rate, old family norms have changed considerably to make the families very flexible. According to Rubin, this flexibility includes multiple marriage families, gay and lesbian families, interracial families, and blended

families. The characteristics which Rubin describes also apply to the flexibility of Chinese interracial families.

Chinese interracial families are described as a family with two different races. The family must include the Chinese race and then any combination of any other race such as African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Indian, or any other Asian race (Stokes 1). Chinese interracial families in this generation—or Post-Accord Era—are becoming more popular, which has to do with the major social changes which have occurred in society since the Accord Era.

To better understand Chinese interracial families in the Accord Era, it is critical to have a basic understanding of the economic, governmental, cultural, and family structures that existed in this era. The Accord Era was generally one of economic growth, a liberal and interventionist state, and an increasingly exploratory culture. The economic society or labor-capital accord in this era included hard work and a stable employment records for white Americans. It also included workers' having a cooperative attitude, which translated into long-term, stable employment, as well as growing wages for workers and growing profits for their white employers (Rubin 60). White Americans in this era had very high and new economic opportunities. These economic opportunities, though, were very different or limited for the Chinese.

The Chinese in the early Accord period experienced discrimination and were not accepted by mainstream society. Economically, many occupations were specifically prohibited to the Chinese (Wong 198). In New York State, 27 occupations were legally off-limits to the Chinese. These included lawyer, engineer, doctor, band director, chauffeur, dentist, pawnbroker, guide, security guard, embalmer, plumber, horse track employee, veterinarian, architect, CPA, realtor, registered nurse, teacher, and anything associated with the sale or production of liquor. The only areas of employment open to the Chinese were domestic service or work in the Chinese ethnic niches in various Chinatowns. The government policy during this period presented another economic barrier to the Chinese.

The government policy in this Accord Era was narrowly focused on ensuring the security and stability of the white, or mainly European, nation. At this time, that focus meant maximizing the interests of the white business community over those of any other sector of society. The government in these years was uninvolved in protecting the citizens from some of the harsh consequences of a growing economy. Rather, the government concentrated on helping the economy grow

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through its use of military force, the creation of an infrastructure, the minimal regulation of business, and the increased regulation of labor (Rubin 147). Since the government in this era was only interested in the white business communities' opportunities, the Chinese faced limited economic opportunities.

Most of the people in this era were white and middle-class (this group constituted the majority of the producers and consumers of the culture). Society was largely Christian and of European descent (Rubin 163). The minorities in this culture included Hispanics, Blacks, Native Americans, and Asians. The total Chinese population in this era was only 177,461 people (United States Census). This number was comprised of 106,279 males and 71,182 females. Due to the lack of Chinese females in the community, the population was highly unbalanced, with males significantly out-numbering females. The community was such that it was often labeled a "bachelor society." Social interactions between Chinese and whites were limited during this period. Many states also had laws against the marriage of Chinese to whites. As a result, intermarriage and interracial families were infrequent. Even though Chinese intermarriage and interracial families were low throughout the years after the Accord-Era, the rates of these families started to increase in numbers.

The Post-Accord Era, or the twentieth century generation, saw major changes in the social contract and economic, governmental, cultural, and family structures. The Post-Accord Era, Rubin notes, was when flexible families started to form, the globalization of the economy started, the challenges of multi-culturalism started to rise, and technology such as telecommunications and the Internet started to become norms of society. To understand how Chinese interracial families began to increase in this era, one must look at the major familial changes in society that took place across the entire culture.

First, flexible families were formed in this Post-Accord Era. The typical family had centered on a gendered division of labor (Rubin 97). The ideal family was composed of a "stay-at-home mom," a working father, and dependent children. Dad earned the wages; Mom cooked, cleaned, and cared for the home, managed the family's social life, and nurtured the family members. The bread-winning father and homemaking dependent mother dominated the culture. And most significantly of all, the race of the breadwinner (the father) and homemaker (the mother) was of European descent. In the Post-Accord Era, though, this family structure changed, just as the norm of same-race marriages ultimately did.

Indeed, the family structure in this modern generation has become very flexible. For example, in the Accord Era it might have been deemed morally wrong to marry outside one's race, and interracial families overall were very uncommon. Currently, interracial families are increasing, a transformation caused by the changing conditions in society such as wars, legislation, and civil movements. Several of these Post-Accord Era factors caused an increase in Chinese interracial families.

The first significant factor that caused an increase in Chinese interracial families was the impact of World War II on the assimilation of the Chinese (Daniels 350). With the commencement of World War II, many Chinese were drafted to serve in the armed forces. Proportionally, more

Chinese served in the armed forces than any other ethnic group (Locke 81-85). In a population of 200,000 or so Chinese in America, there were 70,000 Chinese servicemen (Chu 129). Thus, 30 percent of the Chinese in America were in the various branches of the armed forces, participating in the war as combat soldiers, staff, or support personnel. One reason for so many Chinese being in the armed services was the high number of unmarried single males in the community. Second, even among those who were married, their wives or family members were in China, since American laws did not permit the immigration of wives. Thus, married males were treated the same as single males and were likely to be drafted. Another reason for the participation of the Chinese was that their ancestral land, China, was also at war with Japan. Finally, those who served in the United States armed forces could be naturalized as citizens. Thus, there were personal incentives, as well as political and demographic factors, that account for the relatively large number of Chinese servicemen in the armed forces. This war had an impact on the assimilation of the Chinese in America, as did the widened new economic opportunities for the Chinese.

For one thing, World War II created a manpower shortage in America (128). Paradoxically, due to the lack of manpower, many Chinese restaurants and laundries had to close their doors. However, employment opportunities were not diminished. For those who lost their jobs in the ethnic niche, they could easily find employment in the defense industries. Thus, the war had helped the Chinese move out of their stereotyped businesses. Because the defense industry needed more manpower, many Chinese were recruited to work in shipyards, for airplane companies, ammunition plants, and other defense-related enterprises. For the first time American employers learned that the Chinese could be good workers in the manufacturing sectors. The barrier of employment was thus broken. The tradition of working as engineers and technical personnel among the Chinese today was perhaps set during this period. Many Chinese continue to work in the defense industry today in such capacities as engineers, scientists and technical personnel. The Chinese professionals working in white establishments proved to be more easily assimilated than those Chinese working in Chinatown surrounded by their co-ethnics. These professionals had to adapt to the behavioral patterns and attitudes of their white peers (Pei Chi Liu 3). Working with white colleagues also helped break down some of the stereotypes. From this assimilation, interracial marriages and families occurred among these professionals after World War II (Gaddy 1). But it was not until the late 1960s that the rate of interracial marriages and families started to increase significantly.

During the 1960s, a new immigration law was enacted. The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the inequitable national quota system that had hampered Chinese immigration. Instead, all nations (Chinese and non-Chinese) were treated equally. The new law established a preferential system that ranked immediate relatives, family members, specially skilled individuals, refugees and so on, in a priority system. Chinese immigrants were no longer barred from bringing along their families. After 1965, new immigrants became committed to staying in the United States, to making America their home, and to securing a place for themselves

Chinese Interracial Families

and their children. Accordingly, the Immigration Act of 1965 brought about a giant influx of Chinese immigrants in the United States between 1965 and 1974 (Kau 1). During these years, the U.S. allowed an annual total of 170,000 immigrants from the East into the country. In particular, more female Chinese came to the United States. Before 1945, there were few women and children in Chinatown, and the population consisted mainly of male sojourners. The female population among the Chinese in America had gradually grown since 1945, initially with the influx of Chinese war brides. However, only after 1965 did the sex ratio narrow significantly. In 1960, the male/female ratio was 2:1. In 1980 it was almost equal (Wong 120-30). The influx of new immigrants thus created an opportunity for a normal family life.

This new immigration law, in conjunction with other legislation, appreciably broadened the economic opportunities for Chinese. In particular, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the most significant piece of legislation to date, has had a lasting effect on the elimination of discrimination and segregation (Holloway 1). This 1964 act included eleven titles that covered a variety of issues. Among other things, this act:

- I Outlaws arbitrary discrimination in voter registration and expedites voting rights suits;
- II Bars discrimination in public accommodations such as hotels and restaurants;
- III & IV Authorizes the national government to bring suits to desegregated public facilities and schools;
- V Extends the life and expands the power of the Civil Rights Commission;
- VI Provides for federal financial assistance to be terminated or withheld from educational institutions and programs that practice racial discrimination;
- VII Prohibits private employers from refusing to hire or from firing or discriminating against any person because of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin and mandates certain affirmative action programs.

This law, building on the other strides made during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, assured equal employment opportunity to millions of minorities and women in American society, and thus created favorable conditions for the assimilation of the Chinese (Lebrun 1). Such legislation, with its ripple effects on economic opportunity, the naturalization process, and social interaction, proved to be an important instrument for the assimilation of the Chinese into American life. Today, Chinese are no longer limited to work associated with businesses such as restaurants and laundries. Increasingly, Chinese find their employment outside of Chinatown. In fact, those new immigrants who are professionals especially tend to work outside of Chinatown and in white establishments. Many second, third, or fourth generation immigrants have attended college or professional schools, and after graduation, they usually prefer to work according to their professional capacities for white Americans.

Working and living among white Americans have enabled such Chinese professionals to have more contact with the rest of U.S. society through education, careers, neighborhood connections, professional associations,

churches and other institutions. Even today, of course, Chinese have the same aspirations as white Americans: better jobs, better housing, better cars, a better education for their children, better household appliances, and better economic mobility. The lifestyle of these non-Chinatown-connected professionals is principally a product of their careers, which are intimately connected with the American economy and society (Locke 84-85). These changes, not surprisingly, have led to a significant increase in interracial marriages and families between the Chinese and members of the larger society. D. Y. Yuan has noted that the increase of out-marriages among Chinese males went from 7.4% (1940-49) to 13.5% (1950-59) to a high of 17.7% (1960-69) (184-89). Correspondingly, the out-marriages among Chinese females for the same periods rose from 5.6% to 10.2% and finally to 18% for the period of 1960-69 (184-89). In recent years, the assimilation of the Chinese clearly has resulted in a rise in the rate of interracial marriages and families.

Court rulings that held anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional also contributed to the acceptance and increase of Chinese interracial families in the Post-Accord Era (Lebrun 1). Miscegenation is intermarriage or extramarital relations between persons of different racial types (Encarta 1). In the U.S., restrictive legislation against miscegenation originated during the period of slavery. These original laws were designed to protect the right of the slaveholder to own the offspring of the slave, and the laws imposed severe penalties. Statutes passed subsequently in the majority of the states declared miscegenetic marriages and families void, purportedly to preserve racial purity. While anti-miscegenation laws were mainly directed towards blacks, their scope also included many other minorities, such as the Chinese. Several state courts had upheld the constitutionality of such statutes, but in 1948 the California Supreme Court declared such laws invalid. California thus joined the 14 states that, between 1942 and 1967, had repealed their anti-miscegenation laws. And in 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court authoritatively ruled all anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. Since 1967, the number of Chinese interracial marriages and families in the U.S. has increased markedly. These court rulings therefore have furthered the assimilation process of the Chinese in America and significantly increased the acceptance of Chinese interracial families in the U.S. This increase is shown by the following statistics: In 1940, there were only 77,504 Chinese in the U.S., but by 1980, the total Chinese population in the U.S. was 806,040 (United States Census, 1860-1980). Of this 806,040, females comprised a total of 398,496. In 1940, there were only 20,115 Chinese females in the United States, and 57,389 Chinese males; but in the 1980s, there were 407,544 males. As the United States Census on Chinese Population in the U.S. clearly indicates, there has been a remarkable increase in the total Chinese population from the Accord Era to the Post-Accord Era. This increase is largely the result of legislation and the consequent breakdown of the societal barriers that had impeded assimilation in the Accord Era.

As the factors and statistics above indicate, Chinese interracial families have increased over many years. However, despite these gains, some barriers against Chinese

interracial families still exist. These barriers include subtle and blatant racism (Locke 87), and the argument in society that interracial marriages are "bad for the children." The people who believe in this proposition argue that such marriages would be "socially inconvenient;" that is, communication between the non-Chinese spouse and the Chinese friends and relatives would be difficult (Huang 131). This difficulty would also include the children in these families when they mature and learn to communicate efficiently. From these premises, people in mainstream society imply that children from interracial relationships will have to contend with communication barriers which will impede their assimilation into mainstream society and the achievement of educational goals.

Concerns about Chinese interracial families, dating, or marriages come in three categories. First, one may worry about cultural differences, such as different rituals, clothes, customs, and ways of viewing the world. Second, one may become distressed over religious differences; for example, a Catholic and Hindu couple would have two different ways of worshipping God. These concerns are legitimate, because they involve different ideologies, which need to be accommodated and compromised in order for a couple to enjoy a harmonious relationship. And, third, some people are upset by the racial differences, such as skin color and other genetic characteristics. These last concerns are not legitimate, because they are superficial, based upon prejudice and racism.

Despite the reservations of some, the couples involved in Chinese interracial families are benefitting from this experience, not doing something wrong. The main benefit from this flexible family is educational knowledge and experience. Since Chinese interracial families involve two different races, more knowledge concerning the other culture is learned and appreciated. Education is the method by which a society passes its knowledge, culture, and values from one generation to the next. The individual who is being educated develops physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, and

socially. Thus, by educating, learning, or exploring more knowledge that is foreign or distant, humans enrich their minds. This new knowledge will also reflect and mold one's perception of the world. From this, couples who are involved in these flexible family structures will become better ethically and morally.

In support of this thesis, one may look at Connie Chung and her white husband, Maury Povich as an example of a successful interracial Chinese marriage. Connie Chung, a very unique and well-known journalist, has hosted many talk shows such as "Eye to Eye," and "Saturday Night," and has worked as co-anchor with Dan Rather on the CBS Evening News. Her many roles include TV copy editor, news writer, and reporter for major networks. She is currently the only Chinese-American woman seen regularly on TV. Connie dated Maury Povich, who is also a top-rated talk show host, for seven years before they got married in 1984.

The late Chinese martial artist Bruce Lee, and his white wife, Linda Emery represent another successful interracial couple. Bruce Lee, better known as the "Immortal Dragon," achieved international renown with his classic Hong Kong martial arts films, "Fists of Fury," "Enter the Dragon," and "Way of the Dragon." Lee was the essential self-made man who combined Eastern martial-arts philosophy with Western movie-making magic.

Chinese interracial families have increased over the Accord Era and the Post-Accord Era. As a result of this increase, more families are able to benefit from shared cultural experiences. Because of these many enrichments, these interracial families should not be discriminated against or persecuted by the racist elements of mainstream society. As history and current statistics indicate, these families have overcome many obstacles or barriers to become what they are today. And no barriers or negative factors should block the way of Chinese interracial families because these families are special in their own way; and they enrich society as a whole with their unique contributions.

Chinese Interracial Families

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