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## Adaptation of Chinese Immigrants in America

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# **Adaptation of Chinese Immigrants in America**

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**UFR ETUDES ANGLOPHONES**

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And my deepest gratitude to my parents in supporting me.



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## **Introduction**

Initially, I wanted to write something about racism toward African Americans in the United States. However, later, when I talked with my thesis advisor, Professor Cornell, I decided to take his suggestion to write something about Chinese Americans, since there is also racism toward the other minority ethnic groups in the United States, like the Latinos and the Asian Americans. As a Cantonese woman from mainland China, I am interested in the subject, because not only can I write something that is familiar to me, but also I want to know more about the history of Chinese immigrants than I had never known before. During the process of my research, it seemed that I was looking for the root of my ancestry, since the first group of Chinese immigrants was from Canton.

In my thesis, I am studying how Chinese immigrants adapt to life in the United States, because I want to know what immigrants risk losing about their sense of self and community, and in order to help my reader understand how morals and values change depending on the society one lives in.

In my study, there were many questions that I wanted to answer. When did the Chinese immigrants go to America? What kind of people were they? Why did they choose to go to the United States instead of staying at home? How did they manage to arrive in the U.S.? What did they do after arrival? How did they succeed in surviving in the new world? Did they change a lot so as to adapt the new environment? Did they change a lot so that they lost their identity? Were they attacked by racism like the African Americans? Did they live a better life in America? With all these questions, I begin my thesis.

First of all, I will give a historical background of Chinese immigrants. And then I will argue how they changed in respect to religious beliefs, dating patterns and attitude toward marriage. Some changes were good choices, as Chinese women's social position became higher and higher. They changed because of their different experiences in America, economic and political reasons as well as racism, which shaped their identity. At last, I suggest the Chinese-Americans should create their own new culture in order not to lose their identity.

The thesis is written chronologically. I focus on two different periods of Chinese immigrants: the first one is from 1848 to 1920, while the second one is since 1965 until present. There are three chapters in my thesis. The first chapter mainly talks about the Chinese immigrants from 1848 to 1920. I will illustrate why they immigrated, who they were, what they did and how they were assimilated. The second chapter has almost the

same structure as the first one, in which I talk about the reasons the new comers went to America again, what kind of people immigrated and their different ways of assimilation since 1965. For the last chapter, I will present the Chinese immigrants' changes in several ways, ranging from their choice of religion, their commentary toward the dating partners, their views on marriage, as well as women's social position. And I will argue the changes are good or not, and give my opinion on the racism towards the Chinese Americans.

## **Chapter 1**

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### **Chinese Immigrants to America during 1848-1920**

According to recent archaeological studies, some thirty man-made, coral-encrusted rocks inscribed with identifiable Chinese characters were found on the south California coast, which caused a speculation that America was maybe discovered by Chinese Buddhist missionaries in the fifth century. Some legends say that the first Chinese who arrived in America were three seamen, namely Ashing, Achun, and Accun. However, the recent archaeological studies lack proof to confirm their speculations, while the legend is just a legend. In fact, the Chinese didn't arrive in America until the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). According to the historical reports, some Chinese merchants, carpenters, coopers as well as servants came to Philadelphia, Nootka Sound in Canada, and Hawaii. And in 1847, a trickle of Chinese students began to arrive in the New World for education. At the beginning, the number of Chinese in America was tiny. From 1820 to 1849, American immigration record showed that there were only 43 Chinese in America. From 1644, China was under domination of the Manchu, Qing dynasty. The Qing government worried that the domestic rebellion of Han, together with the Chinese abroad, would overthrow the Manchu authority hand in hand. For this reason, emigration was forbidden. However, things began to change near the end of the Qing dynasty.

Shih-Shan Henry Tsai writes that “two men and one woman from China, probably servants of Charles Gillespies, stood on the deck of the ship Eagle on February 2, 1848, as it came into San Francisco Harbor; they were the first Chinese settlers in California.”<sup>1</sup> From then on, the number of Chinese immigrants to America increased rapidly during a comparatively short time. By 1850, the number of Chinese settlers in San Francisco increased to 787 men and two women. And in the following few decades, tens of thousands of Chinese, most of whom were married men, aging from 15 to 40, flocked into America.

The group arriving after 1848 is known as the first wave of Chinese immigrants to America. This sudden movement raises many questions. Why did a large number of Chinese go to a totally new and unknown country, choosing to face lots of challenges, instead of staying at home? What were the pushing and pulling factors driving them to a new country? What did they do there and in what kind of conditions did they live in the new land? Were they accepted or not in the new society? How did they adapt a new way of living? How did they change after immigration, and what was their new identity? In this

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<sup>1</sup> Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986) 2.

chapter, answers will be offered to these questions based on the research of my study. There were different treatments towards the Chinese immigrants in Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. Chinese immigrants in Hawaii could adapt themselves more easily than their counterparts on U.S. mainland, due to the less harsh policies, while the Cantonese on the mainland were tortured by the white working class and their assimilation retarded the assimilation of their second generation. There are four parts in the following chapter. The first part deals with pushing factors, illustrating the reasons why the Chinese were pushed from home to America. The second part talks about how America pulled the Chinese to come, while the third part presents how the Chinese lived in America after their arrival. Finally, the fourth part discusses how the Chinese adapted to living in the new society.

## **I. Pushing factors**

The Qing dynasty dominated China from 1644 to 1911. At the beginning, with the newly built dynasty, the society was thriving. However, during the late nineteenth century, the Qing government began to collapse. Corruption prevailed and the government imposed higher and higher taxation on poor people. And at that time, Western imperialist countries began to abuse their power and invaded China. The British Opium War (1839-42) marked the beginning of foreign invasions by imperialist-nations and resulted in a humiliating treaty, causing the Qing government to pay debts and rent Hong Kong to Britain as a colony. The incapable government couldn't resist the outside invasion; it asked the poor people for money by imposing high taxes in order to grant all the imperial countries' needs. Those peasants who were not able to pay the taxes lost their lands. Without their lands, the illiterate peasants couldn't find other opportunities for employment. According to Ronald Takaki, "the hardships were particularly severe in Guangdong, where the population had increased by 76 percent—from sixteen million in 1787 to twenty-eight million in 1850."<sup>2</sup> Besides, the weather was extremely bad and it rained a lot. This led to floods which hurt the harvest of the crops for the peasants during successive years. Moreover, an unusually large number of natural disasters—"droughts, storms, typhoons, blights, earthquakes, and plagues between 1833 and 1882"<sup>3</sup> hit Guangdong severely.

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York, Boston, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1989) 33.

<sup>3</sup> Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, 3.

Starvation was the result of the higher taxation and natural disasters. Peasant rebellions broke out, such as the Taiping revolts and the internal conflicts between the Punti (local Cantonese people, who spoke Cantonese) and the Hakkas (guest people, who were from north of China, and spoke a different dialect from Cantonese).<sup>4</sup>

The harsh economic conditions, the natural catastrophes, as well as internal riots forced the Cantonese to go to another place to find new opportunities to seek fortune. At that time, there were a certain numbers of Cantonese returning to China from America, with large amounts of money, which gave honor to families. Those people talked with others of their successful experiences in American, which assured more people to believe that there was a Gam Saan, which means “Gold Mountain”, in America, waving hands to them and waiting for them to come. In fact, the story-tellers were low-paid laborers working in California mines. Their living conditions were not good. Takaki wrote that “a newspaper correspondent decribed companies of twenty or thirty Chinese ‘inhabiting close cabins, so small that one...would not be of sufficient size to allow a couple of Americans to breathe in it’...”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, their work in mines was not easy, since “to extract the gold, they shoveled sand from the stream into a pan or rocker and then washed away the sand and dirt until only the heavy particles of gold remained.”<sup>6</sup>

However, those people who returned home, just told the bright side of the story, omitting the dark side of their experiences in America. The young Cantonese, most of whom were illiterate peasants with little education, believed the stories without doubt. They thought they had better go abroad to earn money, instead of staying at home, in a catastrophic society. Thus, they made their efforts to pay for an expensive trip, ranging from \$40 to \$50 for one way, to \$60 to \$70 for round-trip, sailing to America. Those who couldn't raise enough cash to pay for the ticket even signed a “credit ticket agreement” to go abroad. That means that before getting access to the trip, the Chinese immigrants signed a contract with an English company in China. Once they landed in America, they had to work for the company as laborers and each month their salaries had to be deduced by a sum of money, \$120 for each laborer, to pay for the debt until their debts were totally paid off.

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, Little, Brown and Company: New York, Boston, London. 33; Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Little, Brown and Company: Boston, New York, Toronto, London. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, 195.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

On one hand, the chaos in the old country, causing numerous hardships to the poor people, pushed the Chinese to go abroad to seek for their fortunes, no matter how expensive the trip would be. On the other, the American government's foreign policy encouraged the Chinese to come.

## **II. Pulling factors**

As there is no storm without wind, the internal hardship pushed the Chinese to go abroad, while America had its own reasons to let the Chinese immigrate. In fact, the first group of Chinese was found working in the plantations in Hawaii in 1835. Since Hawaii was not a territory of the United States until 1900, the policies toward the Chinese in Hawaii and in the mainland of America were different. Hence, it is better to discuss the different pulling factors respectively in Hawaii and in mainland.

### **2.1 Exploitation in Hawaii**

After the First Opium War (1839-42), according to the Treaty of Nanking, all English nations had the privilege of extraterritoriality. Extraterritoriality allowed the imperialist nations to be considered exempt from the jurisdiction of local laws of Qing government, and permitted the foundation of military bases of foreign nations in China, as a result of diplomatic negotiation. That is to say, the imperialist nations could demand many requirements of the Qing government. For example, Shanghai had to become a major center of foreign activity. Other European nations like the United States and Spain could also enjoy this privilege. At that time, the slavery was removed and the slave trade was forbidden in America and in Latin America. However, a lot of laborers were needed in Latin America to work in the plantations, especially in Cuba and Peru, which used to be colonies of Spain. So when the Spanish Republics had learned that the Chinese laborers were cheap and hard-working, and that they shared the privilege of extraterritoriality with all European countries, a large number of Chinese, who were known as "coolies", were brought to Latin America. Spain was not the only nation which made use of the Chinese "Coolies" to exploit their plantations. Planters in Hawaii were also in favor of them.

## 2.2. “Coolie” trade

“Coolie” means “bitter force” in Chinese. The Chinese “coolie laborers” worked all the time and “no regard is paid to their complaints for food, etc and slavery is nothing compared to it.”<sup>7</sup> At that time, Hawaii was still an independent island kingdom, which the American planters wanted to use to make economic profits by exploiting plantations, especially sugar plantation. The planters were “frustrated by the inefficiency and recalcitrance of Hawaiian laborers and began to employ a few Chinese.”<sup>8</sup> The Chinese laborers were better than the Hawaiian workers, because they were more industrious and more efficient. Because of them, the production of sugar increased. What’s more, the planters in Hawaii wanted to employ more and more Asian laborers in order to avoid strikes, because different races of workers had less probability to gather together to improve conditions without the same language. The more profits the planters gained, the more Chinese “coolies” they needed.

Large numbers of Chinese in China were induced, or dragged onto the ship against their will, or carried to the ship when they were asleep outside. They were sold to Latin American and Hawaiian planters to work for very low pay, against their will. And they couldn’t quit the job once the contract was signed. This was called “coolie trade”, a form of labor similar to the slave trade. During the trip to the destination, the conditions in the ships were extremely bad and there were no sanitary facilities. The Chinese coolies were treated inhumanly like African slaves. They were always put into a limited space, receiving little food. Some Chinese coolies couldn’t tolerate the terrible conditions in the ship, so they chose to commit suicide by throwing themselves to the sea, by hanging themselves from the masts, or by stabbing themselves with a piece of wood. Others Chinese coolies, who were more resistant and militant, organized and fought against the captain by butchering crew and officers. However, the riots were always calmed down by the captain, who had an armed crew. According to Tsai, “of the 150,000 coolies taken to the Spanish and South America colonies before 1865, fewer than 500 lived to return to China.”<sup>9</sup>

“Coolie” later became a term which was misused by some Americans to define the Chinese laborers, who came to work in California mines on their own will.

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<sup>7</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Tsai, *The Chinese Experience*, 5.

### **2.3 The mainland immigration policy**

At the beginning, the Qing government didn't deal with the "coolie" problem, and did little to help the Chinese coolies, because it didn't care about the emigrants who had left their ancestral home. As the situation was getting worse and worse, the Qing government sent two investigation teams to Peru and Cuba to handle the Chinese problem. It resulted in bilateral treaties with Peru and Spain, with promises to better the treatment to the Chinese labors, but the Qing government did nothing to protect the Chinese's interests in the Latin American. Later, as more and more businessmen on the U.S. mainland found business opportunities to build American society by employing the cheaper but efficient Chinese laborers to work for the production of raw material and for the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad, the United States authorities began to pay attention to the "coolie" events. Sometimes, the Chinese coolies were taken by American vessels from the treaty ports of China to their destinations. Therefore, there were some reports in American newspapers about the suffering of the "coolies". With the involvement of the United States, two U.S. laws and one Sino-American treaty were passed to ban the coolies from going to Latin America. In 1847, a law was passed to protect the lives and the health of the Chinese coolies. It is said that those who failed to guarantee the lives and the health of the coolies on the ship were considered guilty of misdemeanor. However, this law didn't prohibit the coolie trade. It was not until 1862 that the Prohibition of Coolie Trade Act was enacted to end any form of the coolie trade.

Later in 1868, the Supplementary Articles to the Sino-American Treaty of Tianjin, commonly known as the Burlingame Treaty, came out, which not only marked the end of the century-old Chinese prohibitory emigration laws, but also repealed the American principle of free immigration. According to Tsai, Article V of the treaty said:

The United States of America and the Emperor of China cordially recognize the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantages of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively from one country to the other for the purpose of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents.<sup>10</sup>

These anti-coolie acts and free migration agreement between the Qing government and the United States ensured large numbers of Chinese flocked into America. And it was

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 7.

the domestic chaos and the free migration law that pushed the Chinese to escape from their motherland to the New World to change their destiny. In my study, I think that the main reason why the U.S. government intervened in the “coolie” issue, banned “coolie” trade later, and passed Chinese immigration law, was that it wanted to develop the industries in America by use of cheap Chinese laborers, in order to save more money from the cost of production. Hence, the American government passed the immigration law, which seemed to protect the rights of the Chinese in order to drive more Chinese to come on their own will.

### **III. Arriving in America**

As the law was passed, many Chinese rushed to the dream golden land to search for fortune. The Cantonese rushed mainly to Hawaii and California, among them there were two groups of Cantonese. One was Punti, who were local and native Cantonese, who spoke standard Cantonese. The other was Hakka, who migrated from north of China to Guangdong long ago, spoke a different dialect and shared a little bit different culture. The Punti went to the U.S. mainland while the Hakka flocked into Hawaii. Here, it is worthwhile to comparing the two different groups of Chinese immigrants in two territories in America.

#### **3.1 Living in Hawaii**

Different from the Punti, the Hakka didn't have foot-binding tradition on women, so Hakka women could work together with Hakka men and had more ability than Punti women, whose feet were too little to walk and stand. Hence, Hakka women could accompany their husband abroad to work in the agricultural domain. According to Takaki, “in Hawaii, there were efforts to promote the migration of Chinese women.”<sup>11</sup> The planters in Hawaii treated the Chinese laborers as permanent workers, who would settle down in Hawaii once they began to work there. Hence, in order to retain more and more Chinese in plantations to produce economic profits, their wives were allowed to come with them. Besides, the missionaries in Hawaii suggested treating the Chinese morally and humanly by practicing Christianity on them. Takaki mentioned that “missionaries also voiced alarm

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<sup>11</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 38.

about this population of Chinese male laborers ‘without women and children’ living like ‘animals’ on the plantations.”<sup>12</sup> Even though the number of Chinese women was larger than in mainland, the ratio between Chinese men and women was not 1:1. According to Takaki, “in 1900, of the 25,767 Chinese in Hawaii, 3,471 or 13.5 percent were female.”<sup>13</sup> Not every Chinese man had a Chinese wife in Hawaii. In order to keep the Chinese laborers, interracial marriage between the Chinese and Hawaiians was allowed. The Chinese men were encouraged to marry local people to settle families there.

In my research, I think that the reason why the Chinese immigrants could have more freedom and encountered less racial discrimination is because the Hawaiian society was not a predominantly white society, with whites “totaling only 6 percent of the population in 1878.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the whites didn’t worry that the purity of race would be destroyed. Moreover, the planters focused on gaining profits by making use of the lower paid Chinese workers. What’s more, there also was no white working class competing for jobs. Hence, an attitude of “The Chinese Must Come” prevailed in Hawaii. What’s more, the planters employed the Chinese laborers in order to reduce strikes among the Hawaiian workers, who were higher paid, but less efficient and less obedient.

### **3.2 Chinese community in Hawaii**

Initially, the Chinese wanted to work as sojourners abroad, which means they didn’t want to stay permanently, but to return to China to rejoin their families after they earned enough fortune. However, once the Chinese found jobs and settled down with their wives and children in Hawaii, they began to build their community there. They lived in cottages and brought their own Chinese traditional culture to Hawaii. They brought Chinese festivals, like the Spring Festival, to the new country. Their food, like rice, was also introduced in Hawaii. Some Chinese men had two wives: one was Chinese and the other was Hawaiian. Some Chinese workers did return to China to join their families, but most of them stayed in Hawaii with their Hawaiian wives or Chinese counterparts. Some Chinese workers with two wives even managed to bring their Chinese wives to Hawaii.

The life style in Hawaii was mixed, half Chinese and half Hawaiian. The Chinese husbands had to learn Hawaiian while the Hawaiian wives learned Chinese to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 40.

communicate. Since there were other Asian groups working in Hawaii, like Japanese, Korean, Filipinos and Indians, Chinese laborers began to learn the common language-English for better communication. What's more, the Chinese began to learn Western culture by practicing Christianity.

It seems that the living condition of the Chinese immigrants in Hawaii didn't make the Chinese suffer much and they enjoyed a certain degree of liberty. However, their brothers' situation in mainland was totally opposite.

### **3.3 Chinese immigrants on the U.S. mainland**

Different from their counterparts in Hawaii, most of the Cantonese were Punti. Once they arrived in America, they began to work hard to pay the expense of their trips to America. And as the Chinese laborers worked hard and were paid low in various domains, they were more and more welcomed to America by the employers. Firstly, they worked in California mines during 1850's, where the living condition in the mining camps was extremely bad and unsanitary. And they were lower paid, compared with the white employees. It was their hard-working characteristic and their loyalty that made the white mine owners prefer them to the white employees. Even though the employers preferred the Chinese workers, the policies didn't treat the Chinese well. With a different attitude as their counterparts in Hawaii, the mainland attitude toward the Chinese was "The Chinese Must Go". For one thing, mainland was a society predominantly with whites, "as early as 1850, whites constituted 99 percent of the state's population".<sup>15</sup> The whites were afraid of their purity being destroyed by the entrance of the Chinese. As Takaki pointed out, the whites "felt the need to protect their white society and saw the entry of Chinese women and families as a threat to racial homogeneity and their view of America as a 'white man's country'".<sup>16</sup> Thus, the whites treated the Chinese workers as sojourners and Chinese women were not allowed to enter the "Golden Gate". For another, since the jobs like mining, and railway building, were not the long-lasting jobs like plantations in Hawaii, the Chinese laborers always changed working places. The Chinese treated themselves as sojourners, too. They were not willing to bring their wives to America, because according to their tradition, a married woman, who practiced foot-binding, should stay at home, do the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

sewing work, and take care the elders and children. Hence, the Chinese husbands left their wives to seek fortune in America and wanted to go back to China with large amount of money to have a family reunion.

Most of the Chinese women who entered the United States before 1875, were Chinese prostitutes. According to Takaki, “in 1870, of the 3,536 Chinese women in California, 2,157, or 61 percent, had their occupation listed as ‘prostitute’ in the population census manuscripts.”<sup>17</sup> Different from the Hawaiian society, the Chinese immigrants on the mainland lived in a bachelor society, as “in 1900, of the 89,863 Chinese on the U.S. mainland, only 4,522, or 5 percent, were female.”<sup>18</sup> The United States couldn’t control the entry of Chinese prostitutes effectively, since the immigration law allowed them to come to America voluntarily. Takaki said that, “the Chinese community in California was large composed of migratory men dependent on prostitutes to satisfy their sexual needs.”<sup>19</sup>

Living in a bachelor society was not the only thing which burdened the Chinese men. These immigrants, who had little education, were considered to be of an inferior race, judging from “their yellow skin, strange features, small figures, and incomprehensible language.”<sup>20</sup> Some white employees even held strikes to show their hostility to their Chinese counterparts, because they thought they were threatened by the Chinese in the competition of jobs in capitalism, who could accept the lower pay. White workers were not satisfied that the employers preferred the diligent Chinese labors, since the Chinese degraded their wages. Nevertheless, the employers continued to recruit more and more Chinese labor, not only because they were cheaper workers, working hard, but also because the strikes caused by the white workers could be controlled.

Later, when the railroad construction from the America East to the West was begun, the Chinese laborers proved their loyalty and efficiency again and won a good reputation because of these virtues. Even though the working conditions were dangerous, the Chinese railroad builders worked very hard. It seemed that the Chinese laborers were not afraid of death, and they worked during winter. Some of them were frozen to death. Their bodies were not found until the snow melted the next spring. They were different from the white employees, who acquired higher salaries and better working condition. The Chinese also did a very good job in agriculture and fishing industry. Tsai states that, “by 1882, the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Tsai, *The Chinese Experience*, 14.

Chinese made up between 50 and 75 percent of the harvest labor in some counties in California.”<sup>21</sup> However, no matter how hard the Chinese immigrants worked, they were not fully accepted by the American society. In response to these conditions, they built up their own social circles to help themselves and continue the same life of living in the outcast community, where they formed a nation within a nation.

### **3.4 Chinatowns and Chinese communities in America**

When the Chinese immigrants settled down in America, they considered themselves as sojourners. Most of them were married men, who had to leave their wives and children in China to go to America, since at that time few Chinese women were allowed to immigrate to America for fear of losing racial purity. The majority intended to return to China once they earned enough money. And even those who had to stay for a comparatively longer time always went back to China several times during their settlement in America. As sojourners, they were not ready to fully adapt to the new society psychologically and they hoped to return home instead of abandoning their family. They preferred to keep the same way of living as when they were in China, which was more familiar to them. They ate rice, kept their long queue, “a peculiar hairstyle imposed on them since the seventeenth century by their Manchu conquerors”<sup>22</sup>, wore long and loose robes, played mah-jong for amusement and they celebrated Chinese festivals. Most of the Chinese women continued to practice the tradition of foot-binding.

Even though there were Christian missionaries to preach and persuade the Chinese to believe in God, the Chinese continued to believe in their own religions: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. According to Tsai, “Chinese religious concepts pictured the universe as a trinity of heaven, earth, and man; heaven directs, earth produces, and man cooperates.”<sup>23</sup> That means that one should maintain harmony among the heaven, the earth, and himself so that he could live a good life. If not, he might suffer from diseases and natural disasters caused by his own mishandled deeds. And in Confucianism, the Chinese emperor was considered to be the son of Heaven, whose most important mission was to set an example and to develop the relationship between the heaven and mankind. Thus, a Confucian, who could be agnostic, or an atheist, or worship many deities at the same time,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 43.

pays more attention to his personal deeds instead of believing in God and life after death, which is different from the concept of Christianity.

Beside, Chinese people also believed in Taoism, which advocated immortality and harmony with nature. One is supposed to search for long life by keeping tranquil and calm, by doing good deeds, by good diet and taking Chinese medicine. Moreover, a Taoist also believed that after death, he could go to the pantheon where there were a variety of deities who shared the same power among each other, when he had practiced good virtues during his life.

What's more, Buddhism was also practiced by the Chinese. Originally speaking, the concept of Buddhism was that Man suffered from desires. Therefore, one should eliminate all desires in order to live happily and enter nirvana after death. However, after it came to China, Buddhism was transformed into a concept of happiness and was combined with Confucianism and Taoism. The three religious concepts, mixed together, dominated the Chinese people's minds and directed their deeds. That was one of the reasons why the first generation of Chinese immigrants couldn't be persuaded to believe in Christianity.

The Chinese immigrants were not only bound in a religious and psychological way in America, but also restricted in their own communities. Some richer and more respectable merchants built up the Six Companies to protect Chinese culture and tradition for fear that people would believe in Christianity. Normally speaking, the majority of the first Chinese immigrants were from Guangdong province, where people spoke different dialects, depending on the various regions. People from Guangzhou (Canton) spoke Cantonese, which was considered to be standard Cantonese, while the Hakkas, who came from north of China originally, spoke a totally different dialect. People with different dialects gathered together in America and formed their own communities. Once the new immigrants arrived in America, the first thing they did was to find someone who spoke the same dialect in Chinatown who could help them. Sometimes, there were conflicts among the various communities, but the Six Companies did offer help to the Chinese immigrants. They offered accommodation to the immigrants, and when there were conflicts among the immigrants, it was the Six Companies' responsibility to handle it. Tsai wrote that "before the establishment of the Chinese legation at Washington, D.C, in 1878, the Six Companies

functioned as representatives for the whole Chinese population in America.”<sup>24</sup> The Six Companies had religious function as well as a political one in the Chinatown.

Besides the Six Companies, other community organizations like “tongs”, meaning hall of parlor, were formed to satisfy people’s need in Chinatown. These “tongs” had the same religious and political function as the Six Companies. However, the “tongs” gave a bad impression to the Americans, who thought most members of “tongs” were criminals. And inside the Chinatown, there were indeed some serious problems, like opium-smoking, prostitution, and Chinese criminals.

Facing a new group of immigrants, who were not willing to assimilate themselves to the American society, who didn’t believe in God, who dressed, and who didn’t speak the same language, but who competed for employment with the local people, the Americans’ repugnant feelings towards the Chinese immigrants grew deeper and deeper.

### **3.5 Exclusion against the Chinese**

The Chinese immigrants demonstrated that they didn’t want to be assimilated into a new society by keeping the same mode of living as the Chinese at home. At the same time, the Chinese suffered from discrimination by the white society. The Chinese immigrants were called heathens, and considered an inferior race, like African Americans. On one hand, the white working class was angry with the Chinese employees, because they were much lower paid but worked more efficiently and industriously, which the white employers preferred. This made the white workers feel threatened, because they had less power as union members, which could make them lose jobs, and made them less competitive in job seeking.

Many arguments in favor of restricting the Chinese were made. Some Americans criticized the Chinese people’s hairstyle and the way of dressing. The Chinese people, who had long queue and wore loose robe, and who needed their women’s help to handle the business affairs, were considered to lack manhood. On the other hand, Chinese prostitutes were conceived as a threat to the purity of the white race and carriers of venereal diseases. According to Ericka Lee, “their mere presence made possible the crossing of racial and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 50.

class lines and renewed fears of ‘moral and racial pollution.’<sup>25</sup> Thus, the number of female Chinese was limited and the number of Chinese prostitutes was comparatively small. The Americans white employees considered the Chinese immigrants as a toothache that they wanted to get rid of. During the 1870’s, America began to exclude the Chinese immigrant. At first, there were violent attacks on the Chinese and their property and discriminatory laws were passed to restrict the Chinese laborers. There were laws to enact more taxation on the Chinese laborers. In 1879, a law was passed to advocate that no company was allowed to employ any Mongolian. In 1880, Angell’s treaty was passed, which marked the end of the free Chinese immigration guaranteed by the Burlingame treaty, and the United States Congress immediately began consideration of its first exclusion law against the Chinese.

In 1882, after the negotiation between the Qing government and the United States, for fear that there would be a sentiment from Chinese people against the Americans, the Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed. Only ten exempt classes, including “students”, “teachers”, “missionaries”, “ambassadors”, “traders” and so forth could be allowed to go to America. However, since Chinese officials were later charged with enlarging the number of the exempt classes by creating false certifications, the Exclusion Act of 1884 was enacted to deal with the problems of substitution and falsification of certifications.

As laws were enacted to exclude the Chinese, the antagonistic feeling from the society toward the Chinese reached its peak during the early 1880’s. Outrages took place in many areas like California and Washington. According to Tsai, “Chinese were attacked in 34 California communities, harassed or expelled from 9 Washington localities and tormented in 3 Oregon and 4 Nevada towns.”<sup>26</sup> There were various violent attacks on Chinese and their property was damaged. The Chinese were killed, wounded, and their property was stolen by the whites in the incidents. Some Chinese were even shot and burned with fire. The Chinese were expelled from their homes at night by a mob of whites, while the whites cried “Kill the Chinese!” Tsai mentioned that “it was in Negro Alley that a mob of several hundred whites shot, hanged, and stabbed 19 Chinese to death on October 24, 1871.”<sup>27</sup> Some local police had to come out to keep order, but they said they didn’t have right to protect the Chinese from being attacked. The helpless Chinese always chose to tolerate the

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<sup>25</sup> Erika Lee, *At American’s Gate: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>26</sup> Tsai. *The Chinese Experience*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

unjustified discriminatory treatment and the violence by whites, since they were not able to change the situation. Besides, the Qing government was too weak to help itself at home, much less the Chinese abroad. Later, since the unfair treatment went on and on, the overseas Chinese had to organize to defend themselves, which resulted in the 1905 anti-American boycott, whose purpose was to injure America's commercial trade by boycotting American goods. This kind of reaction also led to some reforms taking place in China, which had an interlocking influence on the overseas Chinese. And it was not until the early twentieth century that the Chinese immigrants began to change themselves to adapt to the white society.

## **IV. Chinese Adaptation in America**

### **4.1 Influence of political change at home**

Even after the first immigrants landed in America, what they concerned with was the situation in China, since majority of the immigrants were peasants who were not able to speak English. They kept in close touch with Chinese affairs. Therefore, they knew what was going on in time. In the early twentieth century, China was invaded by an imperial-nation alliance, while the corrupted and collapsing Qing government was unable to resist. Informed of the 1905 anti-American boycott, the Chinese at home decided to save their country by themselves. There were two reform teams, namely the Baohuanghui (Imperial Reform Party) led by Kang Youwei and Tongmenghui (United League), whose leader was Sun Yet-sen. Both of the reform parties advocated using Western techniques to reform China. The difference between them was the degree of how to dilute Confucianism and adapt Western culture. There were conflicts between the two revolutionary parties. But at last Tongmenghui, whose reform ideas were more suitable to China's situation, won the final support from people. And later, under the leadership of Sun Yet-sun, the Qing government, whose dominance in China lasted for centuries, was overthrown. The Republic of China was founded in 1911. These domestic affairs had a deep influence on Chinese immigrants in America.

It was during this period that the Chinese immigrants began to be willing to be assimilated by the Western society. The Chinese men in Chinatown had their queues cut, changed their old loose clothing style, and began to wear the costume of Sun Yet-sun. The

Chinese women never stayed at home, or practiced foot-binding any more. The women could have jobs and receive education. The Chinese immigrants began to go to Sunday schools to receive education and learn English. And some second and third generation of Chinese-Americans accepted Christianity.

## **Conclusion**

In my study, I found that the first generation of Chinese immigration on the mainland of America was not so much assimilated by the American culture. Instead, they constructed their own nation within the nation. For one thing, the white society didn't accept the Chinese or their culture. They were regarded as an inferior race to the whites. There were many anti-Chinese movements to expel the Chinese. In that case, the Chinese had to ask for help within their communities. On the other hand, the majority of the Chinese laborers were illiterate peasants, who were not able to speak English. They spoke Cantonese or Cantonese dialects. And sometimes, those who spoke the same dialects gathered together. Thus, they still lived in a traditional Chinese way of life in the Chinatowns in American, eating rice for meals, keeping queues, and drinking tea. However, it is worth mentioning that the situation in Hawaii was quite different from that on the U.S. mainland. As the Chinese were not forbidden to marry the local people in Hawaii, the interracial marriage was common at that time. And the majority of those who had interracial marriage lived in a biracial way, that is to say, combing Chinese ways with Hawaiian ways. However, when the Exclusion Act came out, and Hawaii became a territory of America, the number of interracial marriages declined, since the Chinese men preferred Chinese women to bear sons for them.

The first generation of Chinese immigration retarded the process of assimilation of the second and third generation in America because they kept a very close pace of what happened in China. However, their concerns with domestic affairs eventually woke them up to change themselves to adapt to the New World. Things began to change with the second generation of the American-born Chinese. Different from their mothers, they received Western education at school while speaking Chinese at home. Their way of thinking began to change when they integrated into the American society. And it is interesting to mention that some children of the first generation of fathers' in Hawaii, who had learned English and Hawaiian culture, were much more assimilated into the new society.

In the next chapter, the second big wave of Chinese immigrants since 1965 will be talked about. Their assimilation was different from the first generation of Chinese comers, because of their various social backgrounds. And in this period, the acculturation and assimilation of the American-born Chinese was different from their parents, who were the first generation in America.

## **Chapter 2**

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### **Chinese Immigrants in America since 1965**

Last chapter mainly talks about the first big wave of Chinese immigrants who flocked into America 130 years ago, while this chapter discusses the second big wave of Chinese immigrants coming to the U.S since 1965. The questions raised on the new comers in this chapter are nearly the same as the first one. I wonder who the new comers are, how they came, why they came, what they did in the new environment. I will also discuss how they were assimilated in the white society, and talk about whether they were accepted by the society or not. The Chinese immigrants during this period were various, judging from their social background. The ways of their assimilation were different. The higher social class people could be assimilated more effectively and more accepted by the white-dominated society. The Fuzhounese people were called the modern “coolies” in the twentieth century, whose way of assimilation was a bit like the Cantonese 130 years ago. It is the Chinese American who were the most assimilated, since they were native born and grew up in American society. There are three parts in this chapter. The first part gives a brief description about the Chinese immigrants between 1920 and 1965. The second part presents the new Chinese immigrants while the last one analyzes their degree of assimilation.

## **I. Prelude before 1965**

### **1.1 Transition after the Exclusion Act**

After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was enacted, the American gate kept a majority of Chinese immigrants outside. The population of Chinese in America decreased by “a total of 81,973”<sup>1</sup> during a decade after the law was passed. Only 39,579 Chinese were allowed to enter the United States, while 102,991 immigrants from Great Britain and 250,630 immigrants from Germany were welcomed to America. Harsh racial sentiment was still imposed on the Chinese immigrants. For several decades, Chinese immigrants lived under racial discrimination in America. During the exclusion period, the Chinese immigrants always could find loophole to come to America. Peter Kwong wrote that “under U.S. law, all persons born on American soil are automatically citizens, as are the children of citizens

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<sup>1</sup> Tsai, *The Chinese Experience*, 66.

even if they are born abroad.”<sup>2</sup> And the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 destroyed most of the immigration document and birth records. Thus, some illegal immigrants could gain their legal status and many Chinese made use of this opportunity to immigrate to America as “paper sons”. Many Chinese paid to the Chinese American citizens to be their “sons”, usually, \$100 per age. The older the person was, the more expensive he had to pay. In order to stop the illegal Asian immigrants, an immigration station, which was considered to be most effective but most controversial, was established on Angel Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay in 1910. Although the immigration station was built to keep the illegal “paper son” away, unfortunately, it was always the lawful Chinese immigrants who suffered a lot. The checking process was long, with lots of detailed questions, such as at which floor you live at your house, do you have a dog, and so on. Many lawful Chinese immigrants were deported because they were not able to give the correct answers to the questions. Those who were detained in the Angel Island were tortured too. The quality of food offered there was bad, and people could be detained there for weeks, months, and even for years. While Ellis Island was regarded as a place where numerous European immigrants were detained, but could pass easily in a few hours, the Angel Island was a place where Asian immigrants were detained. While Ellis Island was considered as an entrance to America, the Angel Island was gate to deport the Asian immigrants, where they suffered a huge pain. Things began to change during the Second World War.

## **1.2 Wartime Period**

After Madame Chiang Kai-shek’s successful visit to America in 1943, America had a great appreciation on her. She received education in America as a teenage; was able to speak English fluently, and was beautiful and graceful. Besides, China became allies with America during wartime. In 1943, for the first time after the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Magnuson bill, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act 1943, was signed by President Roosevelt. It allowed Chinese immigration and permitted some Chinese immigrants who had resided in America to become naturalized citizens. However, the act only allowed an annual quota of 105 Chinese to immigrant in America. Though the bill repealed the exclusion act, it didn’t put an end to legal discrimination toward the Chinese

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<sup>2</sup> Peter, Kwong, *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor*, (New York: The New Press, 1997), 93-94.

in America. During the wartime period, like the Japanese Americans who join the army spontaneously to fight for America, the Chinese Americans also contributed a lot in the bomb industries and fought for America at the front. Roger Daniels pointed out that “almost 16,000 Chinese Americans served in the military between 1940 and 1946.”<sup>3</sup> Because of their loyalty and their contribution to America, the War Brides Act of 1945 was amended in 1947, which permitted wives and children of American citizens of Chinese origins to come to America on a nonquota basis. It seems that the immigration act toward the Chinese was less strict during WWII, due to the foreign policy between America and China, and Chinese Americans’ contribution toward America. However, legal discrimination toward Chinese immigrants was not repealed, while the acts passed during the war comforted people superficially. Like the Chinese immigrants, who were detained on Angel Island for interrogation during the period of Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese American war brides had to be locked and detained at the immigration building on Sansome Street. It was normal for them to be detained there for week, months, and even for years in order to be subjected to interrogation to prove their legal identity, family background as well as their relationships with their husbands. It was a huge psychological torture for the war brides so that some of them got desperate and committed suicide. As *Chinese News Service* reported in 1948, “On September 21, a Chinese woman, Leong Bick Ha, wife of a former U.S. Army sergeant, Ng Bak Teung of New York, hanged herself in the immigration quarters at 630 Sansome Street, San Francisco.”<sup>4</sup> Chinese immigrants, legal or illegal continued to suffer after the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed. And the situation didn’t change better during the Cold War period.

### **1.3 During the Cold War Period**

Things went worse when the New China was founded in 1949. In 1949, after a five-year civil war, Chinese Communists, under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, defeated the Kuomintang forces led by Chiang Kai-shek. The People’s Republic of China was founded while Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang forces fled to Taiwan. The internal conflict in China soon extended to overseas Chinese in America. In America, there were pro-

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995), 299-300.

<sup>4</sup> Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 2006), 234.

Communist and anti-Communist groups of people, both of which had their own newspapers to influence on the Chinese American community. *Chinese World* of San Francisco, founded in 1891, was pro-Kang Youwei's Reform Party and later became pro-Communist after the foundation of People's Republic of China. Dai Ming Lee, the owner of the paper, was once threatened with death by some pro-Kuomintang people, because he often published items meant to destroy the image of Chiang Kai-shek. The diplomatic relation between China and America had influence on the Chinese in America. According to Roger Daniels, "there were in American eyes at least, two Chinas: Mao Tse-tung's Communist China, pagan and threatening; and Chiang Kai-shek's capitalist China, Christian and supportive."<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, anti-Communist sentiment toward the Soviet Union prevailed in America after WWII, the anti-Communism sentiment also extended to Chinese Americans, most of whom were scared to have any relation with Communism. In that case, anti-Communist was the dominant power in Chinatown in America, and even the Six Companies was pro-Kuomintang. Chinese Americans lived under a tension, since the anti-Communism sentiment went higher and higher.

Ronald Takaki said that "in the late 1950s, U.S. Congress passed the McCarran Internal Security Act, which provided for the internment of Communists during a national emergency."<sup>6</sup> The law gave the right to investigate those who were suspicious of organizing conspiracy activities to promoting the establishment of a "totalitarian dictatorship", fascist and communist. The suspicious members were not permitted become citizens of the United States or to enter America. The law also contained an Emergency Detention statute, which allowed the government to detain anyone who was suspicious or likely to engage in activities to overthrow the government with the communist organizations. Therefore, anti-Communism among the Chinese-Americans was high, because they were scared to be found to have any relation with the communists.

In 1955, the "Confession Program" was created to search for communist spies in America, after the American Consul in Hong Kong became suspicious that there were illegal Chinese communists sneaking into America by using fraudulent citizenship papers. Under the "Confession Program", any illegal Chinese immigrants were encouraged to confess themselves. The illegal confessors also had to give all information about their relatives and friends, which could implicate the others. If the confessors were not found

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<sup>5</sup> Daniels, *Asian America*, 301.

<sup>6</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 415.

guilty of spying, the government would give them legal status in return. When the program was carried out, flocks of Chinese went to confess. “In San Francisco, there were 10,000 Chinese confessors, and 99% of all confessors were given legal status to resident in American.”<sup>7</sup> (Shih-Shan Henry Tsai: P.135-136) The “Confession Program” did help thousands of Chinese immigrants become naturalized in America, but in fact, it was rather a “weapon to target certain Chinese residents.”<sup>8</sup> And it was considered as a means to show that it was a second exclusion of the Chinese immigrants after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, since many “illegal” Chinese immigrants were found “guilty” after their family members confessed to the government and were punished or deported. One example can be seen in an article named “*Father and Son*”, which was written by Maurice Chuck, based on his own experience. In 1948, Maurice Chuck came to America to join his father, who immigrated into the U.S as a paper son. Against his father’s will, Maurice Chuck became a member of a left-wing organization, Min Qing (Chinese American Democratic Youth League) and he often wrote articles for a pro-Communist China newspaper, the China Daily News. In “*Father and Son*”, against the son’s idea, the father confessed to the government that he used a fake name as a paper son to come to America, which brought his son into a hot water. The father had to testify against his own son in the court later, and finally his son was found guilty and sentenced to jail. In Chuck’s opinion, the “Confession Program” was a tool to tempt the innocent people to confess in order to target some suspicious pro-Communist members easily. “Father and Son” was a microcosm of many relationships between the father and the son, which were destroyed during the hysterical Cold War period.

In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act was passed to allow the “Asian-Pacific Triangle” immigrants to come, mainly South and East Asia, but the act also had racial discrimination limit, which permitted only one hundred immigrants from the countries within the triangle region to come. The situation before 1965 went up and down, and the laws were passed according to the America’s foreign policy. There was no radical immigration law to eliminate racial discrimination toward the Chinese immigrants. However, the cold war and the limited immigration laws led America to reflect their foreign policy, because they were afraid that the extremely anti-Communism sentiment and racial immigration laws would had a bad influence on their foreign relations.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 416.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Meanwhile, the Civil Rights Movement drove American society to condemn racial discrimination, including racially discriminatory immigration laws. According to Peter Kwong, “it was only after the successful struggles on the part of African Americans leading to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Asians (along with all colored minorities) were able to enjoy legal equality.”<sup>9</sup> A year later, the 1965 Immigration Act was signed by President Kennedy. According to Ronald Takaki:

The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the national-origins quotas and provided for the annual admission of 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere. Twenty thousand immigrants per country would be allowed to enter from the Eastern Hemisphere; exempted from the quota would be immediate family members, specially spouses, minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens. Immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere were to be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis by preference categories for adult unskilled laborers, and refugees.<sup>10</sup>

Although it is said that the passage of the act was used as a psychological tool to fight against the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and to show that America was a democratic country full of freedom, the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act began a new chapter for Asian immigrants in immigration history, and began a new chapter in the history of Chinese American life.

## **II. The new comers**

Different from their ancestors, who were illiterate peasants who came for the gold rush, the new comers did not come to work in mines or in agricultural business. Most of them came to America in search of higher education as well as more opportunities. Besides, it is interesting to point out that the new immigration act allowed more and more Chinese women to come, which thus balanced the ratio between Chinese men and women. Takaki said that “fifty-two percent of Chinese arriving between 1966 and 1975 were female.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, the Chinatowns in America were no longer a world of Chinese bachelors any more. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that different from the old Chinese immigrants, the new immigrants were mostly from urban areas and the new Chinese immigrants were not exclusively from Canton. This time, people from other provinces in

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<sup>9</sup> Kwong, *Forbidden Workers*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 419.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 423.

mainland China, who spoke Mandarin, as well as from Taiwan and Hong Kong also flocked into America.

### **2.1. The intellectual comers**

There were various types of new Chinese immigrants. One was Chinese students who had graduated from superior universities in China and wanted to do their further studies in America, or who wanted to study in American universities. The students were not only from Canton, but also came from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. According to the new law, after they had graduated, if they were able to find jobs in America, they could bring their wives and relatives to America. Generally speaking, they were very capable students who almost always served in high-technology industry or worked as managers in companies. Compared with the first generation of Chinese immigrants, the new Chinese immigrants' capability and English language skills, which made them more competitive, allowed them to climb higher on the social ladder in American society.

### **2.2. The political refugees**

The second group of new Chinese immigrants was political refugees, who were mainly from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Taiwanese, who supported the independence of Taiwan, and those from Hong Kong, who were afraid of communist dominion of People's Republic of China after 1997's returning of Hong Kong, chose to immigrate to America. And some Chinese intellectuals from mainland China, who were afraid of the coming Cultural Revolutionary (1966-1976), escaped from China to America. The Cultural Revolutionary was a social-political movement, taking place in China from 1966 to 1976. Initially, set into motion by Mao Tse-tung, the revolution started with the goal to enforce socialism by removing capitalism, traditional and cultural elements from the Chinese society, and to impose Maoist orthodoxy within the Communist party. Nevertheless, the movement turned out to be a wrong direction, since the position of Mao's absolute power was too much over stated. The Red Guards went wild and abused the power to torture the innocent people. Many innocent Chinese intellectuals were humiliated with words, detained in jail, beaten violently, or even whipped to death. The ten-year revolutionary hindered the economical and social development of China for at least several decades. During the revolution, some intellectuals, like the "father" of China's rocket program, were

protected by Chinese Minister Zhou Enlai. Some suffered a lot while the others succeeded in escaping from China to America. According to Peter Kwong, after the Tienanmen Massacre in 1989, “President George Bush compromised with China’s critics by issuing an executive order permitting all Chinese students in the United States to adjust their immigration status so that they could not be forced to return if they faced political repression.”<sup>12</sup> The Tienanmen Massacre was a student demonstration, taking place between 15 April and 4 June 1989. At first, it was a group of students and intellectuals who denounced corruption of the government and demanded political and democratic reform of China. The students refused to eat and sat in the Tienanmen Palace in Beijing, the capital city of China. Later, since the situation was lost control, the government used militant power to calm down the strike. Some students were put in prison, some were killed, and the others run away to America. In this way did the Chinese political refugees come to America because of diplomatic relation between China and America.

### **2.3. The Fuzhounese people**

The third type of Chinese immigrants, who were less educated and low-skilled came to America to work in the manual labor force. They took blue-collar work. Most of these immigrants lacked English language skills and didn’t even have a high-school degree. And it is worth to mentioning that most of this group of immigrants was from Fujian Province.

In fact, the Fuzhounese didn’t come to America until the late twentieth century. During World War II, some Fuzhounese people worked as seamen in America. The cargo ships travelled across Atlantic from New York to England and to Soviet Union. It was an extremely dangerous mission because the ships might receive attacks from the German ships. Thus, after the war, the Fuzhounese people were allowed to live in America as residents, as a reward.

Things began to go wild during 1970s. The Fuzhounese seamen began to jump out of the ships in harbor to stay in America without a legal status. And some arranged phony marriage with the American-born Chinese women, paying \$3,000 for the bogus marriage. Once the Fuzhounese arrived in America, illegal or legal, they began to smuggle their family members to America. Therefore, the Fuzhounese people were neither welcomed by

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<sup>12</sup> Kwong, *Forbidden Workers*, 32.

the Cantonese in Chinatowns, nor by the America. Of course, the Fuzhounese didn't work alone to create the smuggling network.

The Taiwanese crime syndicate, which used to deal with the smuggling of heroin, found that smuggling of "snake people" was a low-risk but high-profit business, since "the smuggling fees increased tenfold to \$18,000 per person."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the agencies were built by the syndicate in Fuzhou to do the business. Local people were recruited in Fuzhou as "snaketails" to be in charge of "signing up the would-be migrants, working out the cost of the smuggling, the method of payment, and the providing the syndicate with all the details concerning the immigrant's sponsor, family assets, and risk-worthiness."<sup>14</sup> "Snakeheads" were those who were in America, in charge of smuggling the illegal from China to America. Usually, some U.S. officials were bribed to make sure the "snake people" could pass the interrogation. In that case, both the "snakeheads" and the American officials shared profits from the smuggling of people. In order to make sure the illegal would pay back the debt, "snakeheads" usually recruited non-Fuzhounese as enforcers in Chinese community in America, who were infamous for their gangsters in the New Chinatowns, to torture the illegal until the debt were paid. The enforcers always used some violent ways to push the illegal into paying back the debt. The illegal were raped, beaten violently, detained in a closed house until the debt was paid back, which was so normal for those in debt. Once the "snaketails" in China made sure the relatives of the illegal had paid back the debt, the illegal were released and then they could begin to find jobs. Nevertheless, due to their lack of English skill, they could only find some low-waged jobs, like dish washer, or waiter in the Chinese restaurants.

Different from the first wave of Chinese immigrants, who were mostly peasants, the new Chinese immigrants during this period took on different identities, ranging from working class to professional class. Takaki wrote that "between 1966 and 1975, 43 percent of the immigrants were operatives, clerks, crafts workers, and service workers, while 49 percent were managers, professionals, and technical workers."<sup>15</sup> Since the new Chinese immigrants were different from their ancestors, the ways of their assimilation into American society were not the same.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 423.

### **III. New ways of assimilation**

In my study, I found that the ways and degree of assimilation of the Chinese immigrants are more complicated since 1965 compared with the first wave of immigration, not only because there were various groups of Chinese immigrants, but also because America's laws were different.

#### **3.1 Professional class**

This group of people, due to their capacity, was usually the successful people in the American society. They came to America for higher education and then stayed in America to contribute to the new country. They had good grades in the American universities, and had good jobs after graduation, ranging from managers, to scientists. According to Takaki, "the number of scientists and engineers immigrating from Hong Kong and Taiwan skyrocketed from thirty-six in 1964 to 1,164 in 1970."<sup>16</sup> Takaki also said that "in 1980 half of the 300,000 foreign students here were from China and other Asian countries."<sup>17</sup> Thousands of Chinese students were able to get skilled jobs after their graduation in America, and later succeeded in changing from students into immigrant status. Once they settled down, they were allowed to bring their kin to America. Because of their success in American society, they were called a "Model Minority". Compared with the old Cantonese immigrants, most of whom were low-educated peasants, this group of Chinese immigrants was more willing to adapt into the new society, because of their better language skills and capabilities, which allow them to survive in the white society. Besides, they were more willing to be assimilated in the new society. Eric Liu, a second generation Chinese-American, recalled a memory of his father, who was born in Nanjing and moved to Taiwan because of fear of the arrival of Communist forces. He described a black-and-white photograph of his father. In the photo, Liu's father was wearing a sweatshirt with ILLINOIS and a Stars and Stripes shield, and was smoking a pipe. At the moment the picture was shot, his father was an undergraduate at Yale University and had been in America for over seven years. In Liu's opinion, he thought that his father was not quite Chinese, but showed a typical image of American student of Yale University. Later, Liu

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 422.

told about his parents' wedding. It was a Western wedding. Different from the traditional Chinese wedding, where ancestor worship and kowtowing and burning incense were supposed to be taken, his parents' wedding took place in a church, and both his parents spoke their vows in English. His mother wore white while his father wore a black tuxedo. However, almost everyone there was Chinese. Liu was a second generation of Chinese immigrants, who was born in America and grew up as a native English speaker in a Chinese-background family in America. He thought that his assimilation began from his parents, who had adapted to American life, and who were not like the traditional Chinese parents, because they were not pushy, status-obsessed, rigid, disciplined, or prepared.<sup>18</sup>

In my study, I found that the situation of the professional class since 1965 was similar to that of the Chinese merchants, who were still allowed to come to America as one of the ten exempt classes of Chinese during the Exclusion period. The Chinese merchants came to America with their investment and they had political influence on the Chinese community in America, while the intellectual counterparts of the modern time received superior education in America and contributed for America in the technological and economical sectors. Both of them were allowed to bring their kin to America, and they were in the higher place of the social ladder. Thus, they were not only welcomed by the U.S, but also they lived a better life in the white society, compared with their brothers and sisters. It is no wonder that they were more easily assimilated, since they were more accepted by the new society.

### **3.2. Weakening of Old Chinatowns**

The new Chinese immigrants became more assimilated than the old ones, not only because that they were more competitive, but also because that they came from different regions. In the past, the Chinese immigrants came from rural Canton, where there were various different dialects. There were three important things for them: their dialects, their surnames, as well as their ancestral villages. Since they were illiterate and they faced discrimination in America, the first thing they did upon arrival was to find those who spoke the same dialect, who shared the same surnames, and who were from the same village as them. That's why there were many Chinese organizations in Chinatowns. And because

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<sup>18</sup> Eric Liu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*, (New York: Random House, 1998), 11-13, 36-37.

people spoke different dialects, they didn't often stay together and didn't accept each other. That's why there were tong conflicts between different groups of Chinese immigrants. But the recent Chinese immigrants were not only from the same region. There were immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong didn't have the three main important identities as the Cantonese, thus they didn't gather together with the Cantonese. Besides, immigrants from Hong Kong were usually comparatively rich people, who could bring their families to America. They were more used to the Western culture when they arrived, since Hong Kong had become a "colony" of Great Britain since the Qing dynasty lost the Opium War in 1860. Therefore, the immigrants from Hong Kong could adapt to the American life much more easily and spontaneously. According to the study of Lawrence K. Hong, "most of the recent immigrants, especially those from Hong Kong, have a more cosmopolitan outlook on life; they tend to have kept abreast with the newest Western ideas and life-styles."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, immigrants from Taiwan didn't speak the same dialect as those from Hong Kong. Thus, neither Taiwan immigrants nor Hong Kong immigrants gathered together with the Cantonese immigrants. As a result, the power of segmented organizations in Chinatown was weakened, which also led the new comers become more independent in the society, instead of dependent on the help from the Chinese community.

### **3.3. The Fuzhounese illegal workers**

While the intellectuals were more willing to accept the new world, the situation of another group of people-the Fuzhounese was totally different from their counterparts at the same time of immigration. Their situation seemed to be similar to the Cantonese peasants, who were the first groups of immigrants more than a century ago. They had something in common, ranging from the reasons of coming out, they ways they lived in America, to the way how they were treated.

Firstly, they came to the U.S because of economical reasons. When Deng Xiaoping initiated the liberal reform of "open door policy", the village condition did improve at the beginning, with some small-scale factories built. However, the good time didn't last long. Since more and more people were joining for the shoe and clothe making business, the

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence K. Hong, "Recent Immigrants in the Chinese-American Community: Issues of Adaptations and Impacts," *International Migration Review*. Vol. 10. No. 4 (1976): 513.

market was overcrowded and the profits dried up. Besides, the small-owned village enterprises were not able to compete with the urban ventures with modern machinery backed by the foreign investment. Meanwhile, there were more and more “wai-sun-ren” (non-local people from other provinces), who came to Fuzhou to take the lowest paid jobs so as to gain the “hukou” (residential registration) in Fuzhou. So they didn’t care to take some good-for-nothing work, like a slave, “digging ditches, carrying bricks, loading trucks and building roads,”<sup>20</sup> which the local Fuzhounese didn’t want to take. Such dilemma pushed the Fuzhounese people to find another means of livelihood in a new place. Moreover, some Fuzhounese people who came back to Fuzhou from America told the stories on the bright side of America and attracted more and more Fuzhounese to go. However, the reality always goes against the hopes. When the Fuzhounese arrived in America, they thought they were too stupid to be deceived to come, because they could do nothing but the low-paid hard work that nobody liked to do. They considered themselves as modern “coolies”, just like their Cantonese counterparts 130 years before, because they risk of smuggling from China, facing the extremely bad condition on board, but arriving to do some low-paid work.

Secondly, the Fuzhounese people could smuggle themselves to America, because they found loopholes from the laws passed by the American government. Peter Kwong wrote that “the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) contained an amnesty provision granting legal status to all those who could prove that they had resided in the United States as undocumented aliens before January 1, 1982.”<sup>21</sup> The passage of the Act was a piece of luck news for the illegal Fuzhounese in America. With a stroke of pen, they changed from illegal status to legal immigrants. Even those illegal Fuzhounese who wanted to smuggle into America could gain their legal status as long as they arrived in time for the application before November 1988. Kwong also mentioned that “there were plenty of crooks in Chinatown willing to provide them with the back-dated employment records and tax receipts needed for the application-if they could come up with \$500 to \$600.”<sup>22</sup> The result was that the Fuzhounese people rushed into America. The IRCA together with the 1989 and 1990 Bush executive orders enabled more and more Fuzhounese laborers to come to America.

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<sup>20</sup> Kwong, *Forbidden Workers*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*.

Finally, the contemporary Fuzhounese people were not treated better than the Cantonese “bachelors” 130 years ago. They were neither accepted by the Cantonese immigrants, nor by the American society. The Fuzhounese people lived in East Broadway, on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, locally called as Fuzhou Street. It is a ghetto now, which was used to be occupied by Chinese immigrants from Vietnam and Malaysia. The Fuzhounese lived in their own community, which is not the same as the Chinatowns nowadays, the function of which is tourism. Peter Kwong said that the Cantonese call the Fuzhounese “gan-she-gui, the ‘fearless ghosts,’ who don’t shrink from operating take-out restaurants in the worst and most dangerous ghettos.”<sup>23</sup> The Cantonese blamed every wrong doing on the Fuzhounese, which brought bad reputation in the Chinese community in America. The Fuzhounese were accused of “the unfair job competition, the overcrowded housing, the filthy and congested sidewalks, and the increase in violent crime”<sup>24</sup> by the Cantonese immigrants. Moreover, they didn’t speak the same dialect as the Cantonese.

In a way, the Fuzhounese illegal immigrants, the “coolies” in the twentieth century, shared something in common with the Cantonese peasants, who initially were “coolies” 130 years before. Both of them were “victims” of the economical reasons at home and political reasons abroad.

### **3.4. The Chinese Americans**

Different groups of immigrants from different social background shared a diversity of means of assimilation. However, no matter how well the first generation of Chinese immigrants became assimilated, they were not as much assimilated as the Chinese Americans, who were the second or third or latter generation of the Chinese immigrants.

In fact, the Chinese-Americans’ assimilation began after 1911, when the Qing dynasty came to an end. Different from the Chinese immigrants, the second and third generations were native-born. Even though they grew up in the Chinese families, they began to go to schools, like Sunday schools, which were established by churches. They began to receive Western culture and ideas. Thus they grew up as half-Chinese and half-American. Their traditional concepts began to change. Girls were allowed to go to school, which was different from the past, when only boys could receive education.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Once the girls had received education, they became more “rebellious”. A sixteen-year-old Chinese-American girl spoke about her own story. Her parents were Chinese. Her father was from the first group of Chinese immigrants and was a merchant. Her father had two wives, one of whom was in China, the other was in America. She had an elder sister, who always took care of her. When her sister grew up, according to the traditional Chinese culture, her sister was supposed to have an arranged marriage, which meant that she would get marry with a man she hadn’t known before, except from the photo. Since her sister was the eldest one, she didn’t have any choice. Thus her sister agreed to get married, but with some conditions. That was she could take her little sister with her and after the marriage she could stay in America. And then she got married, a man who was suggested by her family, who was fifty years old and had experiences. But actually, he was a cook in America. Since the girl was taken by her elder sister, she grew up in a comparatively opened society. She preferred to have her own choices, instead of having her future decided by her family. She thought she was much more American than Chinese. Therefore, when her father came back to America to ask her to get married to a man she had never know before, she refused. She decided to control her fate and have her own way of life.<sup>25</sup>

In a way, assimilation is a good thing for the Chinese immigrants, because through the assimilation, they could adapt to the new much more in order to survive in American society. However, since not everyone is the same and not every Chinese family had the same forms of discipline and the same ideas, their degrees of being assimilated were different. Some remained half-Chinese and half-American, while the others hoped to become fully American. Eddie Gong, who was a native-born Chinese-American, received education in American and graduated from Harvard. His article named “I Want to Marry an American Girl” was published in the *American Magazine* in 1955, showed an attempt to have an interracial marriage, which was not allowed in many states at that time. At the same time, it indicated that some Chinese-Americans’ traditional Chinese culture was changed in a deep way. In the article, Gong said in 1995, he was supposed to go back to Hong Kong and find a beautiful girl in Hong Kong to get married. It was his parents, especially his grandmother, who picked his would-be wife for him. However, he didn’t think that the beautiful Hong Kong girl was as beautiful as his parents thought. In the end, he came back to America, without any wife from Hong Kong. In fact, when Gong was

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<sup>25</sup> Ronald Takaki, *A Large Memory: A History of Our Diversity, with voices*, (Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 145-151.

young, his ideal girl was a white girl, because in his eyes, he thought a beautiful and graceful girl should be like Grace Kelly or Ava Gardner. And he considered himself American. Gong did marry later, and married twice, but neither of his two wives was of Chinese ancestry.<sup>26</sup>

Eddie Gong was just a microcosm of the Chinese-American community in American, who regarded themselves completely as American. Some Chinese-American girls even felt ashamed of themselves because they didn't have the large eyes, big nose, long legs and plump breasts like the white women. In their mind, they wanted to be assimilated completely in order not to look different than whites, but in reality, they looked yellow. No matter how hard they tried to be looked white outside, they were still physically yellow, even though white inside.

## **Conclusion**

The new wave of immigration since 1965 was totally different from that of the time of the Gold Rush, because in this period, there were different groups of Chinese immigrants from different social backgrounds, who came to America for various reasons. This kind of first generation of immigrants had more complicated identities: they were namely scholars receiving superior education in America, political refugees, who escaped into America, as well as the Fuzhounese people, who were the forbidden workers in America. The scholars were much more welcomed by the white society, because their intelligence enabled them to find skilled jobs after their graduation and contributed to America. The political refugees were accepted by the American government due to the diplomatic reasons. However, the Fuzhounese people who smuggled into America illegally were the least wanted people by the new society, neither in favor by their Cantonese counterparts. In this way, Chinese immigrants' degrees of assimilation were different. At the same time, during this period, there were not only the new comers facing assimilation, but also the second generation and latter generation of the first generation of the former comers a century before. These American-born Chinese's degree of assimilation overweigh than the first generation, since they were born and grew up in America. They had an almost totally different way of thinking as their parents, while they were the completely the same compared with their white friends. What's more, it seems that during this period, Chinese immigrants were

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<sup>26</sup> Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Voices: From Gold Rush to the Present*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 2006), 240-246.

struggling and felt contradictory, because they wanted to be more accepted by the white society by being assimilated, but at the same time, when they were too much assimilated, they got lost, and lost their own original identities. This created psychic stress, and pushes them to a marginal place.

## **Chapter 3**

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# **Analysis of the Assimilation of the Chinese Immigrants in America**

In the previous parts of my research, I have given a historical background to the Chinese immigrants during two different periods, respectively from 1848 to 1920, and from 1965 until today. I talked about why the Chinese came to the United States, what they did after their arrival, how they were treated in the new society, and how they adapted to the new life in America. In this last part, I will discuss that the ways of dating patterns and gender roles of the Chinese immigrants were changed in order to adapt to the American society after they settled down. Some changes are good, as women's social position is higher than before. I will also discuss the way that racism has impacted Chinese Americans. There are many reasons for the changes: new religious beliefs, economic necessity and economic opportunities, the example of how Americans live, and racism. No Chinese American can avoid being assimilated, since they were born and grew up in America. When some Chinese Americans lost their identity, they should create their own style of being assimilated, instead of changing in order to cater to the American society. There are two parts in this chapter. The first part illustrates the changes of the Chinese immigrants in their choice of religion, their attitude of choosing dating partners, and their view toward marriage and Chinese women's social position. The second part analyzes how racism has shaped Chinese American's identity. It is the migrants' experience of moving to the United States that changes the ways Chinese think of themselves, and their values.

## **I. The assimilation of Chinese Americans**

During my research, I found that the acculturation and assimilation of the Chinese immigrants was a very long process, which means they were not assimilated the moment they arrived in America. Instead, their assimilation took a long time and was generation by generation. It is the American-born Chinese who found it comparatively easier to adapt to the American society. And I found groups of Chinese immigrants with different family backgrounds, had different processes of being assimilated. Besides, I found that the way of the assimilation of the children of the different first generation of Chinese immigrants are various. That means, the more assimilated the first generation were, the easier it was for the second generation to be assimilated. And the means of assimilation of the later generation are different. In the following paragraphs, changes in religion, changes in dating and marriage patterns, and changes of Chinese women's position will be talked about.

### **1.1 Chinese religious belief in America**

After 1920, Chinese original religions like Buddhism and Taoism began to lose their ground gradually in the Chinese community in America. Even though Confucianism was also taught as a program in Chinese-language schools, temples of Buddhism and Taoism lost their important role as a worship place, because the new generations were taught Christianity. As a result, more and more American-born Chinese became Christians. Sunday schools operated by Chinese Christians practiced Christianity. Churches and missions were built by and for the Chinese Christians to spread Christianity.

In fact, the degree of acculturation of religion was different between the first generation and the new immigrants, which made the process of assimilation in Christianity to go more slowly. According to Tsai, “in spite of the fact that Chinese Christian population had probably tripled by the end of World War II, the vast majority of the new arrivals still affiliated with traditional Chinese religions.”

<sup>1</sup> Most of the new Chinese immigrants thought that it was not necessary to depend on the religious beliefs to keep a good morality. If they wanted to practice a good morality, then it might not have to be Christianity. However, many new comers since 1965, such as students from Taiwan and Hong Kong, who had been practicing Christianity before emigrating, continued to practice Christianity after arrival.

Compared with first generation of immigrants in America, it is the American-born Chinese who were most assimilated to the Christianity. Many new generations who grew up in non-Chinese neighborhoods and went to American public schools found it more possible to believe in Christianity. Tsai said that:

According to a 1955 survey conducted by the National Council of Churches, the Chinese had established and administered 62 Protestant churches in the mainland United States and 4 in Hawaii...By 1968, approximately 20 percent of Chinese in San Francisco had become members of the Christian churches.<sup>2</sup>

Many Chinese churches were built by the Chinese Christians in almost all the large Chinese communities in the United States. Usually, some of these churches which were small-scale with less supportive funds maintained limited programs, while the affluent Chinese churches were equipped with not only parsonages and large sanctuaries, but also with kitchens, playgrounds, libraries, nurseries, and air-conditioned modern facilities. Chinese churches arranged weekly worship and offered services mainly to the Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Tsai, *The Chinese Experience*, 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 144-145.

students. And sometime, services were provided by a visiting white minister of Caucasian father. Initially, the programs were taught in Cantonese. Nevertheless, since 1965, Mandarin and English were used to cater for the new different immigrants. Meanwhile, Chinese-American Christians established Roman Catholic churches, where the programs were in English.

To sum up, in spite of the increasing number of the Chinese Christians in America, the deep-rooted Chinese traditional heritage and the social organizations in Chinese communities still resisted Christianity. It is the Chinese Americans who are more likely to embrace Christianity, while for first generation of Chinese immigrants, Chinese traditional religions were their first choice.

For me, I am not a religious believer, because I think that religion is a tool used by a nation to manipulate their subjects in order to make them more obedient to control. And I don't have much knowledge about Christianity. Thus, here I don't judge which is better, between the Western religions and the Chinese one. However, I think it is good to see some feudal concepts were changed according to changing the choice of religions. In the past, some feudal concepts in Confucianism include: in a woman's life, she should obey her father, and then she should obey her husband after marriage, and then she should obey her elder son after the death of her husband. Besides, for the Han women, particularly the women in the South of China, they had to practice foot-binding, which hindered them from working and restricted them to stay at home and do some sewing work. I don't approve of those feudal concepts in Confucianism, because for one thing, women were manipulated by being taught with obedience so that they couldn't have their own characters, but to obey without saying NO. For another, women were human beings, who should be equal to men. Thus, they should have their own saying on their life and they should have their own choice of living, instead of living under the dominance of men.

I think, in a way, changing religious practices played a role to liberalize the Chinese women, which is good for them, since they were controlled too much by men before. Not only did the Chinese immigrants change their choice of religion, but also changed their dating patterns.

## **1.2 New concepts of dating process and marriage**

In my study, I found that Chinese American women changed tremendously in their views of dating and marriage. In the past, women didn't have a say about when their

marriage came. It was their parents who arranged the marriage and decided who their future husband would be. Thus, having a girl was like losing money, because when a girl was married, she was like water poured off -- she didn't belong to the family any more. An example can be found in one of Amy Tan's novels named *The Red Candle*. The story, told by Lindo Jong, who immigrated into America during the WWII, showed the arranged marriage in the old China. Lindo Jong grew up in a village in Taiyuan, in northern China. When she was two years old, a matchmaker with a well-off lady came to her house and arranged her future marriage with the son of the rich lady, according to her date of birth. The wealthy lady was her future mother-in-law. Therefore, her parents began to teach her everything, from sewing to cooking, when she was still a kid, in order not to lose her family's reputation. When she was sixteen, her mother-in-law wanted to have a grandson. Thus, Lindo married with the wealthy lady's son, who was spoiled and didn't know what love was. Lindo Jong's husband, who was a year younger than her, had no desire for her, even though they slept together on the same bed. They were sleeping like sister and brother. Nothing happened between them, so no grandson was born. In that case, Lindo Jong was blamed for no grandson.<sup>3</sup> Although it was a work of fiction, the story represents a microcosm of old feudal Chinese society before 1949. Women were always the first ones to be blamed when problems arrived.

Compared with former generations, the Chinese Americans are more rebellious. They have their own mind of choosing dating partners and decide whether to marry or not. In Professor Melford S. Weiss' study, I found that American-born Chinese young women, as well as some foreign-born Chinese young women, tend to choose Caucasian males as dating partners. They associated the American-born Chinese young men with "inadequacies" and "failure", opposite to the Caucasian males, who they believed full of "confidence" and "success" in the similar situations. The American-born Chinese young women complained that the dating conversations with the American-born Chinese young men lacked introspective elements, and that they were more egoistical, childish and immature. Moreover, the dating process was boring, limited to evening hours with drive-in movies. Compared with the Caucasian young men, who know better about the dating procedures, the American-born Chinese young men's hurried, clumsy love-making attempts in parked cars could not meet the women's romantic expectations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, (New York: Ivy Books, 1989) 42-63.

<sup>4</sup> Melford S. Weiss, "Selective Acculturation and the Dating Process: The Patterning of Chinese-

For me, I think that assimilation for the American-born Chinese is inevitable, since they were born and grew up in the Western world. They tend to think as the Western young women and what they need is different from that of the Chinese young women. Unlike the traditional Chinese women, who want to find boyfriends based on marriage finally, the Chinese-American young women prefer to find boyfriends and they don't care whether their boyfriends are their future husbands or not. Therefore, for the traditional Chinese young women, they prefer to choose a comparatively stable relationship and to date guy, depended on their characteristics and their capability to earn money. However, for the Chinese-American young women, they focus on some romantic techniques, which please them during dating procedure, and on the physical features, from which the Caucasian young men look comparatively stronger and more attractive. It is normal and understandable for the Chinese-American young women to compare the American-born Chinese young men and the Caucasian counterparts, since they grew up in the American society. However, just because Caucasian boys show more confidence and are more mature and romantic in the dating procedures doesn't mean that all of them are good guys and successful dating partners. For me, it is one's personality and ability of intellect that count, when finding a dating partner. It is one's self-knowledge and self-confidence that attracts me rather than the superficial dating techniques. Here, I don't mean that Caucasian young men with romantic techniques are not good. I don't think every Caucasian man is better than the Chinese-American men. I think we should judge them equally, objectively and individually. And I suggest that we should not choose a dating partner in a superficial way. There are also many elements which count, like personality, intelligence, and so forth.

Not only did the Chinese American women change their attitude toward dating mates, but they also changed their view toward their marriage. In Professor Susan J. Ferguson's research, the marriage rate is declining in the United States, and what is shocking is that in recent years, there is an increasing number of people either delaying marriage or rejecting marriage. Particularly, the number of Chinese women and Japanese women who choose to never marry is increasing. There are four main reasons for that. Firstly, they are not satisfied with their parents' marriages which are based on duty and obligation, instead of romantic love. Besides, their mothers are always the victims, who have to endure the alcoholism, opium addiction, gambling and verbal or physical violence of their husbands, while facing the unhappy marriage. Divorce is not a witty choice for women, because

traditionally, when women were married, they were not supposed to get divorce or remarry after their husbands' death, which would bring bad reputation to the women's family. If they got divorce or remarried, they were considered to be unfaithful to their husbands. The Asian American daughters don't want to go the same way as their parents. Thus, they prefer to be single, rather than marrying as their parents. Secondly, many of the Chinese and Japanese American respondents are the elder sister in the families, which means their responsibilities are more than their siblings. As the elder sisters, they have to take care of their brothers and sisters, and sacrifice their own time to help their parents to deal with the family affairs. Some are expected to stay with their parents and take care of them until they are dead. In that case, they don't have time to date with guys. Thirdly, Chinese and Japanese American daughters are expected to do well in schools. The traditional Chinese and Japanese parents expect their children to achieve high scores in schools, since they think that the more the children do well in schools, the more successful they will become in their future careers. Thus, the daughters are supposed to succeed in everything they have tried. Their parents have a very high expectation on them. They are expected to be good wives and mothers and at the same time to receive a higher education. However, when they are concentrated with their education and career, they don't have enough time to date with boyfriends. For me, I think that it is good to receive higher education and work hard for the career. However, it is a pity that if we have to sacrifice the marriage to do well in career, since love and marriage is important, too, with which life become a full circle. Finally, they lacked appropriate suitors. Most of the respondents grew up in the non-Chinese neighborhood, and received higher education. However, they were expected to marry Asian American males from the same ethnic groups. Moreover, the traditional wives are docile daughters-in-law are supposed to be a more traditional wives. Nevertheless, the educated and career-focused Chinese and Japanese women couldn't accept the traditional women's role, so they choose to out-marry or reject marriage. Some were too career-focused, so they could not find an appropriate suitor when they were young. The older they were, the more difficult it became for them to find Mr. Right.<sup>5</sup>

Nowadays, the American-born Chinese women can choose their dating partners in their own way and decide between American-born men and Caucasian males freely. They even can go against the traditional way and choose to never marry, if they miss the right

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<sup>5</sup> Susan J. Ferguson, "Challenging Traditional Marriage: Never Married Chinese American and Japanese American Women.," *Gender and Society* Vol. 14 (2000): 136-159.

time to choose their Mr. Rights. Compared with their ancestors, they are much more fortunate, because in the old days women were not allowed to divorce, no matter what happened. That means no matter if the marriage was happy or not, or even if their husband was dead, they were not permitted to divorce or remarry again. Women's marriage was decided by their parents, which was tragedy for many women. One of Amy Tan's stories, named *Scar*, can represent married women's situation in the old days. An-mei Hsu who had immigrated into America, recalled memories of when she was a young girl in China. She grew up with her grandmother. However, when she was little, she was not allowed to see her own biological mother, who remarried after her father's death. The whole family thought that An-mei Hsu's mother humiliated the family reputation and made the family loose face by remarrying. She was taught to know that her mother was a bad woman, and should not act like her mother. The reconciliation wasn't made even when An-mei Hsu's grandmother was sick. An-mei Hsu's mother came back to see An-mei Hsu's grandmother, but the grandmother wasn't willing to see her. At the end, An-mei Hsu's grandmother died without compromise.<sup>6</sup> In the old days, Chinese women's position was extremely low. A woman who had married was considered to be of no use for her own family any more. And a married woman should obey her husband family and give birth to sons. If not, she would bring no respect to her own family. People in the old days were so superstitious that women were always the victims to blame even if it was not their fault.

The changing of women's position is not only represented in the dating and marriage, but also can be seen in the changing of structure of Chinese household, because of economical reasons.

### **1.3 Women's position in family household**

According to Professor Evelyn Nakano Glenn, the family structure of the Chinese immigrants can be divided into three different kinds depending on the three different periods. The first one was the split household during 1850 to 1920. That means that the first group of Chinese immigrants, mainly the Cantonese, who worked like sojourners in America, left their family in China. Traditionally, the Chinese lived with several generations together: great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children, which was considered to be happy and wealthy. However, when the husbands left home for America,

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<sup>6</sup> Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, 33-41.

their wives were left behind at home to take care of the elder as well as the children, which was also the tradition role for the Chinese wives. Besides, most of Cantonese women were feet-bounding, which didn't make them walk conveniently. Moreover, they were not allowed to accompany their husbands to America. Thus, the wives and children were separated from their husbands. The traditional wives didn't have much private time to handle their own business and they were regarded to be inferior to men. The second kind of family household was called "small producer", which was from 1920 until 1965. During this period, most of the Chinese immigrants were forced to set up their own business, like restaurants and laundries, because in that way, they wouldn't have competition with the white working class. Even though Chinese women were not allowed to come to America, some quota of merchants' wives could come under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. And later as the War Bride Act was passed in 1945, more women could come to the U.S. Chinese men could set up families in America, by bringing their own wives in China, or by marrying the Chinese prostitutes. Since the business like restaurants and laundries were not very big, wives and children had to help husbands to operate the family business. Work was divided by all the family members. Thus, the social position of Chinese women was changed since this period, because they didn't committee feet-bounding any more, and they were allowed to work as their husbands. Meanwhile, their children were American-born Chinese, who could speak Chinese and English, which also help the family business, because they could communicate between the family and the outer world. Finally, the third kind of household was named "dual wage earner" since 1965. Under the new Immigration Law of 1965 was passed, a new wave of Chinese immigrants rushed to America again. This time came a new group of persons, who were highly-educated people. Both the husbands and wives belonged to the professional class, after whose graduation in American universities, they succeeding in finding jobs in America. Both the husbands and wives had individual wages. It is interesting to find out that Chinese women could enjoy more freedom than they used to be, since they were totally economically independent.<sup>7</sup>

From Professor Glenn's theory, we can see that the Chinese family structure was changed from traditional family with several generations living together to nuclear family, in order to survive in American society. Besides, women's social position was changed too. The cruelly racial environment forced the husbands to change their traditional concept

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<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Split Household, Small Producer and Dual Wage Earner: An Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45, NO.1(1983): 35-46.

to call for their wives to work with them as breadwinners. Women were no longer feet-binding and occupied with the sewing work, but did the same work as their husbands. Women could also be bread-winners, which contributed to the family. Their American-born children adapted the Western way of living more easily than their foreign-born parents, because they were born to speak English and contact the white society. In a word, religious beliefs, the American life of living as well as the economic reasons forced the Chinese to change traditional concepts. It is good to see Chinese women's position became higher after their experiences in America.

As my research went on, I wondered what the Chinese Americans think of themselves and how they consider themselves, when they are different from their parents. Then I found Professor Stanley Sue and Professor Derald W. Sue's theory, of which I approve.

## **II. Assimilation, a means of Racism?**

The Sues analyzed the Chinese-Americans in a psychological way in order to help them to find therapy to cure their mental problems, like mental stress due to being assimilated in a white society. They divided the Chinese-Americans into three different groups: the traditionalists, the marginal men and the Asian-Americans. Each group of people has their own distinguishing features. The traditionalists were those who obey their traditional Chinese parents. They find dating mates, marry and work according to their parents' will. This kind of people feel contradictory and stressed, because they have their own mind of thinking and they want to live their own life, but filial piety leads them to obey instead of saying no to their parents. The second group is marginal men. Their life is much more miserable, because they want to be completely assimilated into the new society, but they face discrimination in the white world. They live in an extreme world, just like living in the marginal world. They are willing to become exactly like white people, thinking as the white do. So they are proud to be friends of the white, and don't like to make friends with people of Chinese-origins. The Chinese-American females prefer to date with the Caucasian male, regardless of the objection of their Chinese parents. However, their physical appearance, which often includes smaller black eyes, shorter legs and flatter breasts make them frustrated. They are not totally white, so they receive racial discrimination. They have a self-hatred feeling toward themselves. The Sues' last group is the Asian-Americans, who can combine the good points of the Chinese tradition and the

Western culture. They know themselves well and they don't want to change their appearances, but to accept them. And at the same time they have their own way of thinking as the white do in a way. They live their life on their own terms. And their parents tend to view their disobedience and assimilation as a disrespectful view toward the traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, they feel a kind of guilt toward their traditional parents.<sup>8</sup>

Professor Sue's theory gave us a very useful analysis of three different groups of Chinese Americans. However, Professor Ben R. Tong argued that the Sues focused on their mental stress and analyzing their ways of thinking in a psychological way, which is not appropriate enough. In Professor Tong's point of view, the reasons why the Chinese-Americans would have such mental problem were due to historical and political nature, which makes them become more assimilated from generation to generation. He gave a brief historical context to tell why the Chinese immigrants came. He pointed out that the Chinese came and were excluded, because America said they could come and they should go. From Gold Rush, laundry and restaurant to exclusion, the Chinese immigrants changed their work to survive in the new society because of economic and political reasons. No matter how they changed, they were not accepted completely. It is the white-dominated society that needs the Chinese and makes them assimilate to fit in the new society.

I think both of them make sense. The Sues analyze the Chinese Americans by means of psychological problems while Professor Tong relates the issue to racism.

Judging from the history of Chinese immigrants, the first group of Cantonese laborers was allowed to come to America because they could contribute the development of industries in California and work in plantations but they didn't cost much in wages. However, since more and more Chinese laborers came, they degraded the wages and threatened the white working class, which led the white working class to exclude the Chinese, because they said that the Chinese with long queues were heathen and could not be assimilated. As a result, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed. For many years after that, only the Chinese merchants, teachers, students, ambassadors, missionaries and so forth, who belonged to middle class or upper-middle class, could come. The second generation began to be assimilated since 1900's. However, during the Cold War era, anti-Communist sentiment set some pro-Communist Chinese Americans into political activism. It wasn't that the Chinese didn't want to be assimilated, but no matter how they changed,

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley Sue and Derald W. Sue. "Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health," *Amerasia. Journal* 1 (1971): 36–49.

they never satisfied the white society, which always had excuses to exclude the Chinese. Later, since 1965, as the second big wave of Chinese immigration began, different groups of immigrants came, including those called the “Model Minority”, who brought wealth to America. It is said that the “Model Minority” could gain higher wages than the white counterparts. However, is the “Model Minority” really so successful as they were described in the white society? According to Takaki:

Their comparisons of incomes between Asians and whites fail to recognize the regional location of the Asian-American population. Concentrated in California, Hawaii, and New York, Asian Americans reside largely in states with higher incomes but also higher costs of living than the national average: 59 percent of all Asian Americans lived in these three states in 1980, compared to only 19 percent of the general population. The use of “family incomes” by Reagan and others has been very misleading, for Asian American families have more persons working per family than white families. In 1980, white nuclear families in California had only 1.6 workers per family, compared to 2.1 for Japanese, 2.0 for immigrant Chinese, 2.2 for immigrant Filipino, and 1.8 for immigrant Korean...Thus, the family incomes of Asian Americans indicate the presence of more workers in each family, rather than higher incomes. Actually, in terms of personal incomes, Asian Americans have not reached equality. In 1980 the mean personal income for white men in California was \$23,400...only \$11,200 or 52 percent for the Chinese men.<sup>9</sup>

Maybe, the so called “Model Minority” was exaggerated and used as a tool to encourage people to chase “American dreams” to compete in the social ladder. Or maybe it is a tool to promote the competition between different immigrants and races, like the other Asian immigrants, the Latino immigrants, and the African Americans.

Moreover, it seems that the Chinese Americans lost their identity when they were acculturated and assimilated. The more they were assimilated individually, the less important they found their ethnic groups. They were born and grew up in the white society. Despite their appearance, their ways of thinking are almost the same as the whites. Thus, normally speaking, if there were no racism toward them, there would be no “marginal men” as defined by the Sues. They thought they were Americans, and they thought they were whites inside. Therefore, they think they should be treated as Americans. However, their

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<sup>9</sup> Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 475.

physical appearance told them not. And the whites thought them not. This put them into a plight, where they couldn't reach the white, either the yellow. Eric Liu said that:

Unlike blacks, Asians do not have a cultural idiom that arose from centuries of thinking of themselves as a race; unlike Jews, Asians haven't a unifying spiritual and historical legacy; unlike Latinos, another recently invented community, Asians don't have a linguistic basis for their continued apartness. While the Asian American identity shares with these other identities the bones of collective victimization, it does not have their flesh of cultural content.<sup>10</sup>

Facing the extreme phenomenon, some Chinese-Americans tried to search for their history of ancestors and find out their identities.

According to Daryl J. Maeda, "On March 22, 1969, there were a group of Chinese-Americans, calling themselves the Red Guard Party and holding their '10 Point Program'. They announced a Free Breakfast program for children at the Commodore Stockton School, denounced the planned destruction of the Chinese Playground, and called for the 'removal of colonialist police from Chinatown.'<sup>11</sup> This was called Chinese-American Civil Rights Movement, which began during the 1960s, and ended in the 1970s. Enlightened by the African-American Civil Rights Movement, and facing their plight of discrimination, the Chinese-Americans tried to act militantly to defend their own civil rights. They borrowed the Black Panthers' "10 Point Program" and combined with some ideas of the Red Guards, which were a group of young people who were supporters of Chairman Mao during the Chinese Cultural Revolutionary from 1966 to 1976. However, some argued that the Yellow Power Movement was in vain, because they were just like a photocopy of the Black Movement, and they didn't have their own logical principles. Some people considered the movement to be just a spectacle, which turned out to be no good, because of too much influence from the Black community and the limitations of their organizations. No matter what, the Chinese Red Guards did begin a wave for the Chinese Americans to doubt their American identity, to find their root of culture, and to think of who they really are.

### **Conclusion:**

Once the Chinese immigrants arrived in a new nation, they could not be as they used to be any more, because they had to change themselves to adapt to the new environment,

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Liu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*, (New York: Random House, 1998) 11-13, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Daryl J. Maeda, "Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness 1969-1972," *American Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 4 (2005): 1079-1103.

no matter if their changes were good or not. In my study, I mainly talk about their changes through their choice of religion, young Chinese American women's attitude toward Chinese American men and Caucasian males, their decreasing rate of marrying, and Chinese women's social position. They were changed because they had different experiences in America, had to survive for economical and political reasons, and they were forced by racism, which made them lose their original identity. In a way, these changes were not bad. However, since the degree of assimilation among the Chinese American was different, problems existed. Some Chinese Americans suffered from mental stress when they considered their situation of assimilation. Others even lost their identity while expecting that they could be totally integrated into the society. In fact, it is the white society that forces them to the marginal world, neither white nor yellow. They couldn't find their roots, since they were half Chinese and half American. They lost their identity. Thus, some Chinese Americans began to take the Black Panther Party as an example to fight against racism and for their identity. Some argued the movement was a farce, but at least it was a movement that encouraged the Chinese Americans to find their roots.

## Conclusion

Comparing the two different periods, the Chinese immigrants came to America with different reasons and their social backgrounds were varied. Most of the first groups of Chinese immigrants were illiterate Cantonese immigrants, who came to America to work as miners, railroad builders, agricultural farmers, laundry and restaurant owners, and so forth. They were encouraged to come to contribute to American economy. However, they were not able to be assimilated in an efficient way, because of their low educational levels. Later, they were excluded by the white working class, because they were too competitive to grab the job opportunities of the white employees. They were not totally accepted by the American society.

The second big wave of Chinese immigration began since 1965. During this period, people with different social background came to America. There were scholars, who rushed to America to receive superior education and most of whom were able to become residents in America. It was them who were considered the example of the “Model Minority”. There were political refugees, who were deported by China and accepted by American government for diplomatic and political reasons. There were also illegal Fuzhounese workers, who smuggled into America, who were considered to be modern “coolies” as their Cantonese forefathers more than a century ago.

Different groups of Chinese immigrants had different ways of assimilation in America. Generally, for the first generation of Chinese immigrants, the more education they received, the easier it was for them to adapt to the society. It is the Chinese-Americans whose assimilation reached the highest peak. Some were half Chinese and half American, while the others became so assimilated as to reject their own traditional culture.

There were many changes of the Chinese immigrants: religious belief, dating patterns, and attitudes toward marriage. Some changes were good, compared with the past feudal concepts, as women’s social position went much higher. They changed because of their experience in America, economic and political reasons, and racism, which influenced on their identity.

However, no matter how they changed, they couldn’t be completely accepted by the white-dominated society. There was still racism toward them, which made some of them lose their identity, and expelled them to a “marginal world”.

I think the Chinese Americans are victims of assimilation in a way, because no matter how they change, they still are not totally accepted by either the white, or the

yellow. They have the Western way of thinking, but at the same time, they have some connection with the traditional heritage. This half-and-half situation gives them a different identity. In fact, it's not bad to change or to be assimilated. Nevertheless, when the Chinese American change only to be accepted by the white society, instead of for self-value, it is easy for them to lose their identity. I suggest to change depending on self-value, instead of for satisfying others' needs. The Chinese Americans should change, but they should know they are half Chinese, which should not be neglected. They should create their own Chinese American culture, with combined Western and Chinese features.

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## **Résumé**

Le sujet de ce mémoire est l'adaptation des immigrants chinois aux Etats-Unis. Deux périodes vagues des immigrants chinois aux Etats-Unis se seront entretenus, comme les immigrants chinois du 1848 au 1920, et les immigrants chinois depuis 1965 jusqu'à maintenant.

Ce mémoire a pour but de discuter comment les immigrants chinois, ils se sont adaptés la vie à la société américaine par leurs assimilations, et de se disputer si c'est bien d'êtres assimilé, parce que c'est un risque à courir de perdre leur identité et leur communauté ;

## **Summary**

The subject of this paper is the adaptation of the Chinese immigrants in America. Two eras of big waves of Chinese immigrants to American will be talked about, namely Chinese immigrants from 1848 to 1920, and Chinese immigrants since 1965 until present.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how the Chinese immigrants adapted to American society through assimilation, and to argue whether it is good to be assimilated, since they risked of losing their identity and community by changing themselves.

## **Mots-clés**

Immigrants chinois – Adaptation – Assimilation – Chinois-Américains – Identité

## **Keywords**

Chinese immigrants – Adaptation – Assimilation – Chinese Americans – Identity