

Chinese American Suburbanization and the Diversity of Sociocultural Adaptation of Contemporary Chinese American

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ABSTRACT

Chinese American suburbanization mainly stems from the improvement of Chinese American social status and the prosperous Chinese American economy. Not only does Chinese American suburbanization promote the improvement of Chinese economic strength and social status, but also results in the diversity of sociocultural adaptation. The paper verifies that living in suburbs is a symbol of spatial assimilation of immigrants, which is an important step for immigrants to integrate into American society. Chinese Americans suburbanization plays an important role in the changes of Chinese American sociocultural adaptation and the integration into the mainstream society. On the basis of contemporary research, this paper summarizes the sociocultural adaptation models of contemporary Chinese Americans as: "traditional", "self-isolated", "transplanted and adapted" and "transnational".

Keywords: *Contemporary Chinese American, Suburbanization, Sociocultural adaptation, Diversity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese American suburbanization has built a platform for sociocultural adaptation, which is conducive to the communication and integration between Chinese American and other ethnic groups, and has a profound impact on American society and Chinese American society.

Sociocultural adaptation is a necessary process for immigrants to integrate into mainstream society. Chinese has a long history of immigration to the United States. The acculturation model of Chinese American changes constantly due to the different periods of immigration to the United States. Although they once suffered from unequal treatment and exclusion, they worked hard and actively improve themselves. After the implementation of the Immigration Law in 1965, the population of Chinese American increased significantly from 240,000 in 1960 to 4.025 million in 2010, and 5.5 million in 2019. Simultaneously, the social and economic backgrounds within the ethnic groups were diverse. The traditional Chinatown is still the first choice of residence for Chinese immigrants, but the proportion is declining,

since Chinese American living patterns are more diversified. Some of them join the wave of suburban migration to the new Chinese American suburbs or suburban satellite towns, which is a major structural change that affected the ethnic structure and regional distribution in the entire United States since the 1970s, and it is also a major opportunity and challenge for Chinese American immigrants to integrate into American society.

2. CHINESE AMERICAN SUBURBANIZATION AND ITS IMPACTS

Chinese American joined in the process of American suburbanization after World War II. They not only moved into suburbs and suburban communities with majority Chinese American residents, but developed diversified characteristics, which has profound impacts on American society and Chinese American society.

2.1 Overview of Chinese American Suburbanization

Chinese American suburbanization developed with metropolitan areas in 1960s and 1970s. The process expanded rapidly not only in the suburbs, but in the suburban communities with majority Chinese American residents, such as Monterey Park in Los Angeles and Newton in Boston. Although the number of such suburban communities is small, their significance is far greater than their proportion of population. New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, Boston, Houston and many other metropolises have emerged middle-class Chinese American suburban communities. This phenomenon simultaneously happened in Vancouver, Canada, Auckland, New Zealand and other Chinese American communities.

The main reasons of suburbanization lie in the improvement of the Chinese American social status and the prosperous Chinese American economy. Since 1990s, the restructuring of global capital and labor has created opportunities for the Chinese American economy. The Chinese American economy is transforming from small and localized to one driven by global, transnational capital. Its clients include members of their own communities, mainstream society and multinational corporations. The Chinese American economy has communicated the ethnic society with the mainstream society and the global economy, which rebuilt the social network of different classes in the ethnic community, broke the situation of isolation and exclusion from the mainstream society. It has played a bridge role to promote the upward social mobility of ethnic groups. The Chinese American economy organically combines the entrepreneurial spirit of immigrants with foreign capital to promote the rapid growth of ethnic economy.

In addition to the prosperity of the suburban economy, the Chinese American economy also promotes the establishment of community organizations, which creates a special and favorable social environment for Chinese immigrants, and provides social services necessary for Chinese immigrants' life and makes it easier for them to participate in community activities. They reconstruct ethnic social life network, and bring huge social and economic benefits to Chinese American society and enterprises, strengthen the economic base of the Chinese American community. The organizations, in turn, stimulate the growth of traditional Chinese American economic industries, strengthen the organizational

structure of the Chinese American community, and provided a favorable social environment for members of the ethnic group.

Theoretically, living in suburbs is an important symbol of spatial assimilation, but although the proportion of Chinese American who settles in the suburbs is very high, the degree of assimilation may not be matching to it. This paper states that Chinese American suburbs can be divided into three categories: white middle-class homogeneous suburbs that fully conform to the American values; multi-ethnic, middle-class suburbs, which are the main choices of Chinese American; multi-ethnic, multi-class suburban communities. It can be seen that Chinese American suburbanization has obviously diversified characteristics, and directly or indirectly caused the diversity of sociocultural adaptation. This reflects that even if the Chinese American live in the suburbs, they may not integrate into the local society on a large scale and like the traditional suburban residents, quickly become a homogenized members. However, it has still enriched suburban life in the United States to a large extent, adding vitality to suburban life, and has its positive significance.

The mutual promotion of Chinese American suburbanization and sociocultural adaptation model is beneficial to the communication and integration between Chinese American and other ethnic groups, which has profound impacts on American society and Chinese American society.

2.2 The Social Impacts of Chinese American Suburbanization

First of all, Chinese American suburbanization not only provides broad space and superior conditions for the prosperity and development of the Chinese American economy, but also gives opportunities for Chinese American immigrants to start businesses and employment and help them adapt to the new social and cultural environment. Land in the suburbs is abundant, cheap and easy to plan. The financial capital brought by the new Chinese American immigrants organically combines with the social resources of the suburban communities and changes the operation mechanism of the traditional ethnic economy. Ethnic economy creates the transnational entrepreneurial spirit and the opportunity for the global development of the local economy, which contributes to the integration of the ethnic Chinese American economy with the mainstream economy. Naturally, the development of the Chinese American economy increases the

economic strength of the Chinese American and enhances their image and social status.

Second, Chinese American suburbanization strengthens the awareness of participation in politics. The white middle class saw Chinese American suburbanization as a provocation and a threat. They believed that the new Chinese American immigrants were "embedded" in their territory and interfered with their lives, thus they blocked and resisted in many ways, and even stirred up political disputes. However, the unfriendly attitude of the white people unconsciously awakened the consciousness of democratic rights and political consciousness of the Chinese American immigrants. The Chinese American accelerated the establishment of the community organizations, to support of the ethnic society, and the ability to safeguard national interests of Chinese American, and actively to participate in politics.

Third, Chinese American suburbanization challenges the traditional assimilation theory, which holds that cultural assimilation is closely related to residential assimilation, and residential assimilation is realized by living in suburban areas. Today, however, Chinese American living patterns challenge these views. With the help and guidance of the real estate industry, some of Chinese American crossed the process of cultural assimilation and directly bought houses in the suburbs to achieve residential assimilation. However, this pattern of living made the Chinese American more isolated from other ethnic groups. These phenomena need to continue to follow and pay attention to whether Chinese American immigrants can integrate into American society after skipping cultural assimilation.

Fourthly, after Chinese American suburbanization, the settlement model tends to disperse. Chinese American suburbanization follows the pattern of "embedded-replacement". When the socioeconomic status of the Chinese American increased and poured into white middle-class homogeneous suburbs, the white people moved to the outer suburbs with better conditions. Due to the close network of Chinese American ethnic groups, a large number of relatives, friends or fellow townsmen will follow the Chinese American and settle in the same suburban community, and the scale of settlement continues to increase.

After the Chinese American moved to the suburbs, the degree of segregation from whites has decreased. Despite the emergence of suburban

settlements, Chinese American isolation from other ethnic groups did not deepen. Not like the black people, when they moved into suburbs, and gradually formed a "separate capital", resulting in "re-segregation" after suburbanization.

3. THE STAGES OF CHINESE AMERICAN SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION

Roughly, Chinese American sociocultural adaptation can be divided into two stages: Before 1970s, it was in the stage of forced isolation and traditional assimilation. After 1970, the cultural adaptation of Chinese American entered the stage of diversification and integrated into American society in a new way. After the improvement of Chinese American socioeconomic status, some of them moved out of Chinatown, dispersed to cities or suburbs, and integrated into American society to a certain extent.

3.1 The Stage of Forced Isolation and Traditional Assimilation

Chinatown was the main settlement of Chinese American in the early years, when they were forced to isolate themselves. At the end of the 19th century, under the threat of discrimination and violence from the mainstream society, the Chinese American retreated from small towns and rural areas to the run-down slums or underdeveloped areas in the city center to establish Chinatown, which had strict geographical boundaries, in order to cope with the harsh living conditions in American society. For Chinese American immigrants, Chinatown became "a refuge, a residential community, or (an) economic zone, or a place to experience traditional culture,"¹ "It is a place that provides services to Chinese American residents to meet the needs of shopping, transportation, dining, food and finding work; A place where Chinese native speakers have the opportunity to live."²

To American society, Chinatown is marginalized ethnic ghettos or "slums" whose inhabitants are unassimilated foreigners. The Chinese American are forced isolation within Chinatown, a combination of external factors

1. B. P. Wong, *Chinatown Economic Adaptation and Ethnic Identity the Chinese American*, 1982, Holt, Rinnart and Winston, New York, p.77.

2. C. Loo and D. Mar, "Desired Residential Mobility in a Low-income Ethnic Community: A Case Study of Chinatown", *Journal of Social Issues*, 1982, Vol.38, pp. 95-106.

imposed by law and mainstream society and internal factors that are self-contained, self-sufficient and male-dominated.³ The Chinese American sociocultural adaptation model basically follows the path advocated by the traditional assimilation theory. Especially after the promulgation of the Immigration Law in 1965, the socioeconomic status of Chinese American improved, and the attitude of American society towards Chinese American was more tolerant, the forced isolation situation gradually changed, and Chinatown underwent earth-shaking changes. Some Chinese American immigrants with strong economic ability and high social status have moved out of Chinatown, dispersed to the city or the suburbs to achieve spatial assimilation. At this stage, Chinese American suburbanization has taken shape.

3.2 The Stage of Diversity of Sociocultural Adaptation of Chinese American

With the diversified socioeconomic background, Chinese American expanded and improved their living space and upward mobility. Therefore, the sociocultural adaptation model shows a diversified trend. At this stage, Chinese American suburbanization progressed rapidly, such as suburbs and suburban satellite towns in the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles and the Boston metropolitan area. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than half of the Chinese American lives in suburban areas.

Due to the development of economic globalization, some new Chinese American immigrants carry overseas financial capital, while some Chinese American entrepreneurs travel back and forth between China and the United States, or even between other countries, engaging in transnational economic activities, so transnational immigrants continue to increase, such as astronauts, parachuting small students and so on. The proportion of professionals or the rich has increased in Chinese American immigrants. Due to their high education, professional skills and fluent English, they have no barriers in communicating with mainstream society, and even some of them identify with both cultures, "adapt" to American culture and "transplant" Chinese culture to the United States.

3. Wei Li, Chinese Americans, In Skutsch C.(ed.), Encyclopedia of the World's Minorities, Routledge, New York, 2005.

4. THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE AMERICAN SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION MODELS

Assimilation theory holds that living in suburbs is a symbol of spatial assimilation of ethnic minorities which is an important step to integrate into American society. The author finds that the Chinese American suburbanization is an important way for Chinese American sociocultural adaptation and integration into the American mainstream society. In turn, Chinese American sociocultural adaptation promotes the process of Chinese American suburbanization. On the basis of empirical research, this paper summarizes the four models of sociocultural adaptation of Chinese Americans: "traditional", "self-isolated", "transplanted and adapted" and "transnational".

4.1 "Traditional" Sociocultural Adaptation Model

"Traditional" means that the Chinese American followed the traditional assimilation steps of early European immigrants. Chinese immigrants settled in the urban ethnic populated areas, where they completed economic assimilation and realized cultural assimilation, and then dispersed to live in the homogeneous suburban life of the middle class that immigrants yearn for, and realized spatial assimilation. Chinese American immigrants first had to work hard, accumulate wealth, and achieve economic assimilation before they could afford to move to the suburbs and have the opportunity to improve their education and social status. Chinese American immigrants with high education, high income and high social status mainly live in the typical American suburbs of the middle and upper class, and have better integrated into the mainstream society of the United States. They identify with American culture, and accept American values. Even they have a strong sense of participation in politics, and actively safeguard the interests and political rights of the middle and upper classes. In fact, they have become such an integral part of American society that they have been fully accepted.

4.2 "Self-isolated" Sociocultural Adaptation Model

"Self-isolated" refers to the fact that some Chinese American, whether they live in cities or suburbs, are voluntarily or involuntarily isolated from American mainstream society and trapped

within the Chinese American community. Some are working class or underclass, with low education, poor English language skills or knowing little English at all. They have low social and cognitive ability, narrow vision of observation, poor ability to accept new things, and low social status, and they are ruthlessly trapped in their own ethnic communities or suburban ethnic ghettos. Because their own ethnic communities or suburban communities can meet their needs, they did not take the initiative to communicate with the mainstream society. They were unable to communicate with native Americans in their daily life and work so that formed a structural isolation, that is, partly replicating the lifestyle of the early Chinese American in Chinatown. For example, Ms. Liao in the Monterey Park L.A. I interviewed a waitress at the Hubei Hotel. It is difficult for her to have the opportunity of adaptation and integration into mainstream society.

Some wealthy Chinese American immigrants or transnational immigrants crossed the traditional stages of "economic assimilation" and "cultural assimilation", directly moved into the suburban areas populated with Chinese American middle class, and lived the middle and upper class suburban life with peace of mind and freedom. Seemingly, they have been accepted and integrated into American society. In fact, whether it is the rich Chinese American or the poor under class, moving directly into the suburbs leads to their lack of experience and understanding of American social culture and code of conduct. Coupled with their lack of fluency in English, it is difficult or even impossible to integrate into American society, which is bound to give birth to a new type of "self-isolation", which is different from the self-isolation of traditional Chinatown, caused by the anti-Chinese American policy of American society and the racial discrimination of white people. Two results of contemporary self-isolation might be: one is to spend more time in the future to understand the American social culture and code of conduct, and thus prolong the process of sociocultural adaptation; The other is to be disconnected from American society and to live entirely in their own ethnic suburban communities. This seems to be similar to the old immigrants in traditional Chinatown. Their desire to assimilate into American society can only be realized by the second or third generation.

4.3 "Transplanted and adapted" Sociocultural Adaptation Model

"Transplanted and adapted" means that immigrants "transplant" their mother tongue and culture to the United States, and "adapt" to American society and American culture. They can not only freely use and identify two languages and cultures, but also integrate into American society, and maintain close contact with the Chinese American society. Zhou Min believes that if the Chinese American abandon their own national culture and language and separate from the Chinese American society, and completely accept American culture, then their assimilation path may not be smooth.⁴ Because as a Chinese American, "Chinese" and "American" are indispensable factors, just like human beings need to walk on two legs to be stable. Only by identifying with the two languages and cultures can the social status, and even the political status, of Chinese American immigrants be strong and lasting. That is, learning to "adapt" the American language and social culture, and to "transplant" the Chinese culture into the American society, and to preserve the Chinese language and culture to maintain the connection with the Chinese American society, are the basis for the successful assimilation of immigrants and their children into the mainstream society. Obviously, this kind of assimilation is of great benefit to Chinese Americans' happy life and work.

Historically, immigrant colonies have provided an important and harmonious environment for the socioeconomic development and emotional exchange of immigrants. "From colonial times to the present, all ethnic groups (non-British immigrants) have established colonies in the hope of preserving some of their own cultural patterns. As natural as breathing, the colonies were later supported by a growing number of friends, relatives, and fellow townsmen who also sought a familiar oasis in a unfamiliar world - and by the desire of the settlers to rebuild a society in which they could communicate in a familiar language and maintain familiar organizational structures. Finally, they are also in line with the necessary need to come together to help and protect each other against the uncertainties of an unfamiliar and often hostile environment."⁵

4. Zhou Min, "The Changes of Chinese American Society", Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Book Company, 2006.

5. Milton M. Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," in Norman R. Yetman (eds.), *Majority and Minority* (Fifth edition). Allyn and Bacon, 1991, p. 254.

Both the traditional Chinatown and the new suburban Chinatown or suburban satellite towns provide the Chinese American with the survival and development opportunities that the mainstream society cannot provide, where enable the Chinese American to maintain and contact the Chinese American culture, without losing the precious cultural traditions of the Chinese American nation when they integrate into the mainstream society. Chinatown provides a shortcut for most Chinese immigrants to survive and develop in the United States and integrate into American society smoothly. That benefit from the material, spiritual and emotional support of the ethnic society. Because the Chinese American community provides a full range of living environment from employment, daily life, entertainment to emotional support and social support provided by the ethnic network, it objectively becomes a "haven" for the Chinese American, especially the new Chinese immigrants, to avoid "culture shock" and retreat in the process of interacting with the mainstream society. This may, to some extent, explain why the Chinese American in general has fewer mental health problems than the majority ethnic group.

4.4 "Transnational" Sociocultural Adaptation Model

"Transnational" highlights the close ties between Chinese immigrants and the United States, China and other countries economically, socially, politically. In the context of globalization, transnational cooperation is particularly important. After the 1990s, the United States ushered in a large number of transnational Chinese immigrants, most of them received good education and have a strong economic strength, with the desire and ability to start a business freely. Some transnational immigrants inject transnational financial capital into the Chinese American economy and engage in trans-regional, trans-ethnic and global business activities, making the Chinese American economy an important part of the global economy, and even some Chinatown and Chinese American suburban communities become global economic centers and play the role of world economic outposts. Other Chinese American immigrants engaged in scientific research or high-tech industries, taking advantage of very attractive "intelligence" programs or other preferential policies to seek scientific research cooperation or mutual support between the United States and China to. In the era of information technology, the transformation rate of high scientific research achievements is extremely fast,

which makes people dizzying. Therefore, it is imperative that countries develop in a coordinated manner, share scientific research results and benefit each other.

5. CONCLUSION

The future of Chinese American society demonstrates inevitably the diversity of the sociocultural adaptation models, which will profoundly change every aspect of American society. The sociocultural adaptation of immigrants is a complex and systematic process, which depends not only on subjective initiative, but also on material and spiritual support from ethnic societies, as well as opportunities in mainstream society. Gaining more equal civil and political rights is essential for the development of Chinese American society. After decades, the Chinese American population has continued to increase, and more and more Chinese Americans have settled permanently, which is changing the face of metropolitan areas in the United States from social, economic and cultural aspects. The Chinese American society will gradually change from an immigrant society to an ethnic society dominated by Peranakan as the socioeconomic status of the Chinese American increases and the class distribution is diversified. Obviously, in this process, opportunities and challenges coexist.

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