

# From Exile to Integration: Immigration Patterns and Cultural Identity of Chinese and Jewish Communities in the United States

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## Abstract

The Chinese immigration experience began in the mid-19th century, driven by economic opportunities and marked by significant challenges. In contrast, Jewish immigration, primarily occurring in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was driven by severe religious and racial persecution in Europe. Jewish immigrants sought refuge from violence and the Holocaust, finding a relatively open environment in the U.S. to maintain their religious and cultural traditions.

This paper examines the immigration patterns and cultural identities of the Chinese and Jewish communities in the United States, highlighting their distinct historical backgrounds and experiences. This study applies theoretical frameworks from sociology and anthropology, including Everett Lee's "Push-Pull Theory," Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory, and Anthony Giddens' theory of modernity, to analyze how these communities' immigration patterns have influenced their cultural identities. The study compares the Chinese community's economic-driven integration and the Jewish community's diverse approach to cultural preservation. The findings provide insights into the complexities of cultural identity within the U.S. multicultural landscape and highlight the varied strategies adopted by different immigrant groups. Limitations of this study include its focus on Chinese and Jewish communities, which may not fully represent other immigrant experiences. Future research should consider a broader range of immigrant groups to enhance understanding of cultural integration and identity.

**Keywords:** immigration, cultural identity, diaspora, assimilation, multiculturalism

## 1. Introduction

As a nation with a rich immigration history, the United States has attracted diverse immigrant groups from across the globe, leading to a complex and multicultural society. Among these groups, Chinese and Jewish immigrants stand out as significant subjects of study in the history of American immigration due to their distinct historical backgrounds and cultural characteristics. The history of Chinese immigration to the U.S. dates back to the mid-19th century during the Gold Rush, when many Chinese labourers were brought over to work in mining, railroad construction, and agriculture. However, these early Chinese immigrants quickly faced intense discrimination, most notably embodied in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This legislation was the first in U.S. history to restrict immigration based on race, symbolizing the marginalization and social exclusion of the Chinese community.

The history of Jewish immigration to the U.S. was primarily shaped by religious and racial persecution. Jews, a historically dispersed people, faced severe hardships in Europe, especially from the late 19th to the early 20th century. During this time, many Jews fled to the U.S. to escape violent pogroms and racial persecution in Russia. The rise of the Nazi regime in Europe further intensified Jewish immigration in the first half of the 20th century, as Jews sought refuge from the Holocaust. For Jewish immigrants, this period was not only about escaping

persecution but also about seeking opportunities for survival and a better life.

This study draws on multiple theoretical frameworks from sociology and anthropology to examine the intricate relationship between immigration patterns and cultural identity. The concept of diaspora is essential in understanding the experiences of both Chinese and Jewish immigrants. Diaspora involves the physical act of leaving one's homeland and the efforts to rebuild communities and maintain cultural identities in a new country. For both the Chinese and Jewish communities, immigration was driven by the need to survive and a strong commitment to preserving their cultural identities. In this context, studying the immigration histories of these groups and their cultural identities in the U.S. holds significant academic and social importance (Grossman, J., 2019). Immigration theory, particularly Everett Lee's "Push-Pull Theory," provides a valuable lens for understanding the motivations behind Chinese and Jewish immigration. According to this theory, the decision to immigrate results from the combined effects of push factors from the home country and pull factors from the destination country. In the case of Chinese immigrants, push factors included war, poverty, and political instability during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, while the pull factors were the industrialization and labor demands of the U.S. Similarly, Jewish immigration was driven by religious and racial persecution in Europe, with the U.S. offering the pull factors of freedom and economic opportunities (Mohamed, M. A., & Abdul-Talib, A. N., 2020). Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory and Anthony Giddens' theory of modernity and identity formation offer essential theoretical insights in analysing cultural identity. Hall's theory emphasizes that identity is not fixed but constructed within constantly changing historical and social contexts, making it particularly useful for analyzing how immigrant groups reconstruct their identities in a cross-cultural environment. Giddens' theory further suggests that in modern society, identity is shaped through individual self-reflection in response to globalization and the pressures of modernity (Branaman, A., 2009). By applying these theories, this study will explore how the immigration patterns of Chinese and Jewish communities have shaped their cultural identities and will compare the similarities and differences in their experiences of cultural integration. Additionally, the study will examine the intergenerational changes in cultural identity within these communities.

## **2. Overview of Immigration History**

### *2.1 History of Chinese Immigration*

Chinese immigration to the United States began in the mid-19th century, driven largely by the gold rush in California. Many of these early immigrants were poor farmers from southern China seeking better opportunities. As the gold rush faded and the U.S. economy shifted, Chinese immigrants transitioned from gold mining to working on railroads and in agriculture. However, their willingness to work for lower wages and their efficiency led to hostility from both white workers and the government. This resentment resulted in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the first U.S. immigration law to target a specific race. The Act not only prohibited new Chinese immigrants but also denied Chinese Americans basic rights, such as the ability to naturalize, leading to their marginalization and prolonged hardship in American society (Wang, Y., 2021).

The history of Chinese immigration is not only shaped by economic factors but also by political relations between China and the United States. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, internal conflicts in China, such as the Taiping and Boxer Rebellions, exacerbated social instability and spurred emigration. In the U.S., industrialization created labor demands that initially provided opportunities for Chinese immigrants. However, as the economy evolved and the labor market became saturated, these immigrants faced increasing exclusion. By the early 20th century, anti-immigration sentiment extended to all Asian groups, culminating in the 1924 Immigration Act, which effectively banned nearly all Asian immigration. This policy severely impeded the development of the Chinese community in the U.S. (Kadanthodu, S. R., 2022).

It was not until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that conditions began to improve. This Act abolished the discriminatory quota system and established a more equitable immigration process, leading to a significant increase in Chinese immigrants. Unlike their predecessors, these new immigrants were often highly educated professionals and students, contributing fresh cultural elements and enriching the diversity of the Chinese community. Additionally, the rise in family reunification immigrants further stabilized and developed the community. As Chinese immigrants' socioeconomic status improved, America's cultural identity became more complex and diverse (Cai, H., 2018).

### *2.2 Jewish Immigration History in the United States*

The history of Jewish immigration to the United States began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, driven largely by the need to escape religious and racial persecution in Eastern Europe. During this period, a significant number of Jews from Russia, Poland, and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire fled widespread anti-Semitic violence and discrimination. Jews faced frequent anti-Jewish riots in Russia and were often marginalized and oppressed, living on the fringes of society. Seeking safety and better opportunities, many Jewish immigrants came to the

U.S. (Lev Ari, L., 2019). In the United States, Jewish immigrants predominantly settled in the Lower East Side of New York City, which became a major center of Jewish culture. Although they encountered some discrimination, the U.S. offered a relatively open social environment compared to Europe, allowing Jews to preserve their religious and cultural traditions. The history of Jewish immigration is deeply rooted in the quest for security from religious and racial persecution. In Europe, Jews were frequently isolated in ghettos and subjected to severe restrictions on their economic and social rights. The rise of nationalism and racism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries fueled anti-Semitism, resulting in violent attacks and further persecution. In Russia, for instance, state-sanctioned pogroms forced many Jews to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. Many chose the United States as a place of safety and new possibilities (Amini, S. S., & Nguyen, A.-M. T. D., 2021).

The Holocaust during World War II intensified the crisis for Jews, leading to the murder of millions and prompting survivors to immigrate in large numbers to the United States and Israel. Post-war Jewish immigration introduced new cultural and social challenges, as survivors had to adapt to new environments while coping with the trauma of war and loss. In the U.S., Jewish communities saw significant improvements in their social status, particularly in economic and educational fields. With the establishment of Israel, some Jews chose to emigrate there, creating a new dynamic within the global Jewish community. Concurrently, the Jewish community in the United States continued to thrive, maintaining its cultural identity through strong religious and cultural institutions (Lev Ari, L., 2019; Amini, S. S., & Nguyen, A.-M. T. D., 2021).

### **3. Sociology of Exile and Identity Formation**

#### *3.1 Diaspora and Cultural Identity*

Diaspora, as a global phenomenon, has significantly influenced the cultural identities of both Chinese and Jewish communities. For these groups, diaspora involves more than just geographical migration; it is also a process of cultural and identity reproduction. Memory plays a crucial role in this process. For the Chinese community, traditional festivals and cultural activities are vital for maintaining collective memory and cultural identity. For example, the Spring Festival, celebrated as the traditional Chinese Lunar New Year, serves not only as a time for family reunion but also as a crucial occasion for the Chinese community to express its cultural identity. In cities like San Francisco and New York, the Spring Festival parade has become an integral part of local multiculturalism. These celebrations are not just a heritage of Chinese culture but also a significant means for the community to affirm its identity.

Similarly, the Jewish community places great importance on the preservation and transmission of memory. Religious festivals like Passover and Yom Kippur hold deep significance within the Jewish community, serving both as religious rituals and as commemorations of Jewish history and culture. For instance, Passover conveys the Jewish spirit of pursuing freedom and liberation by recounting the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. This collective memory is not only preserved in religious rituals but also passed down through family education and community activities. The Jewish community's remembrance of the Holocaust has profoundly shaped its cultural identity. Holocaust Memorial Day (Yom HaShoah) serves not only as a commemoration of the deceased but also as a reflection on historical lessons. Through establishing Holocaust memorials and organizing educational activities, the Jewish community ensures that this history is not forgotten, while simultaneously reinforcing its cultural identity (Egmont, W., Takeuchi, D., McBrady, E. E., & Enelamah, N., 2021).

#### *3.2 Identity Negotiation*

Identity negotiation is a key process for immigrant groups as they maintain and reconstruct their cultural identities in a new environment. Both Chinese and Jewish communities must find a balance between preserving their original cultural identities and adapting to mainstream American culture. The Chinese community has demonstrated a high degree of flexibility and adaptability in this process. Language plays a critical role in the negotiation of Chinese identity. As generations of immigrants progress, the use of Chinese language within the community has gradually declined. However, through Chinese schools and community organizations, Chinese families continue to strive to preserve their linguistic heritage. This language education is not only a protection of cultural heritage but also an essential tool for enhancing children's cultural identity. The Chinese community also expresses its cultural identity through various cultural activities, such as Spring Festival celebrations and cultural festivals. These events not only showcase the richness of Chinese culture to the broader society but also strengthen the cohesion within the community (Egmont, W., Takeuchi, D., McBrady, E. E., & Enelamah, N., 2021).

For the Jewish community, identity negotiation is more prominently reflected in religious and cultural education. Jewish schools and synagogues serve not only as places of worship but also as centers of cultural identity. Jewish children receive religious education within these institutions and learn Hebrew and Jewish history. This

education not only helps them understand and identify with their cultural background but also provides a foundation for negotiating their identities in a multicultural society. Regarding political participation, the Jewish community has shown a high level of involvement. They have played a significant role on the American political stage through political donations and lobbying activities. This political participation is not only an adaptation to American society but also a reflection of the Jewish community's efforts to maintain its own interests and cultural identity.

#### **4. Integration and Adaptation Models**

##### *4.1 Assimilation and Diversification*

In terms of cultural integration, the Chinese and Jewish communities exhibit distinct patterns and paths. For the Chinese community, assimilation is primarily evident in the economic and educational sectors. By placing a high value on education, Chinese Americans have achieved notable economic status in American society. U.S. Census data reveals that the average income of Chinese households is generally higher than that of other ethnic groups, reflecting the community's emphasis on education. Chinese students frequently excel academically, particularly in fields like science and engineering. This success in economic and educational spheres comes with complex shifts in cultural identity. The second and third generations of Chinese Americans often display a degree of cultural differentiation. While they may increasingly distance themselves from their ancestral culture due to American influences, they still preserve their Chinese identity through community involvement and cultural celebrations. This duality in cultural identity illustrates the delicate balance between assimilation and cultural preservation within the Chinese community.

In contrast, the Jewish community demonstrates a more pronounced multicultural approach to cultural integration. They maintain their religious and cultural traditions while actively engaging in American political and social life. The Jewish community has secured the transmission of culture and identity through robust community networks, such as the Jewish Federation and Jewish schools. These organizations not only offer educational and social services but also serve as vital platforms for internal communication and interaction. The Jewish community displays a high degree of adaptability in preserving their culture while integrating into the broader American society. Many Jewish families celebrate religious holidays and also participate in American secular events like Thanksgiving and Christmas. This integration not only enhances the community's social adaptability but also enriches their cultural experience.

##### *4.2 Intergenerational Change*

Intergenerational change plays a crucial role in the transmission of cultural identity. Over time, the second and third generations of Chinese and Jewish Americans exhibit differing trends and characteristics in cultural identity. For the Chinese community, the second and third generations often experience a weakening of language and cultural heritage. Many young Chinese Americans, born and raised in the U.S., have diminished proficiency in Chinese and limited understanding of Chinese culture. Despite efforts through Chinese schools, cultural summer camps, and community activities, maintaining cultural identification remains a challenge (Mallapragada, M., 2021). The increasing rate of intermarriage within the Chinese community further complicates cultural identity, as children from such unions navigate a dual cultural background. Nonetheless, many Chinese families continue to work diligently to uphold their children's connection to Chinese culture through family education and community engagement.

The Jewish community, on the other hand, demonstrates a strong commitment to cultural identity across generations. Although the second and third generations may show varying degrees of secularization in religious beliefs, the core values of Jewish culture are effectively passed down through Jewish schools and family traditions. For example, Jewish families often observe religious rituals at home, such as the Sabbath dinner, which serves as a crucial moment for imparting cultural values (Yi, R., 2009). Additionally, support for Israel and remembrance of the Holocaust are integral to intergenerational cultural transmission. Participation in programs like the Jewish Youth Israel Visit Program and Holocaust commemoration activities helps the younger generation strengthen their connection to Jewish culture. This intergenerational transmission encompasses both religious beliefs and the preservation of historical memory and cultural identity.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper explores the immigration patterns and cultural identities of the Chinese and Jewish communities, highlighting the notable similarities and differences between the two groups. The Chinese community's immigration is primarily driven by economic factors, leading to integration into American society through achievements in the economic and educational spheres. However, this success brings challenges in cultural preservation, particularly in intergenerational transmission. In contrast, the Jewish community's immigration has been shaped largely by religious and racial persecution. They exhibit a more diverse approach to preserving cultural identity, relying on robust community organizations and religious education to maintain cultural

continuity. The Jewish community not only preserves its cultural and religious independence but also plays a significant role in American society through active political engagement. The differing paths of cultural identity and integration reflect each community's historical background and social environment. The Chinese community's integration is marked by economic success, while the Jewish community sustains its unique cultural identity through a strong cultural and religious network. This contrast provides valuable insights into the multicultural nature of the United States.

This study has significant implications for understanding the broader American immigrant experience. It highlights the diversity of cultural identities among different immigrant groups and reflects the complexity of the U.S. as a multicultural society. By examining the Chinese and Jewish communities, this paper underscores the connection between immigrant experiences and cultural identity and demonstrates the importance of cultural adaptation and retention. The analysis reveals how different immigrant groups adopt varied strategies to navigate cultural assimilation pressures, with the Chinese community's economic success not fully eliminating cultural identity challenges, and the Jewish community's strong cultural network aiding in maintaining its uniqueness in a diverse society.

However, this study focused primarily on Chinese and Jewish communities in the United States, which may not fully represent the experiences of other immigrant groups in the United States. Therefore, this study may not be applicable to other cultural or ethnic communities with different immigration patterns and integration experiences. Future research should expand the scope of the study to other immigrant groups to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural integration and identity.

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