



From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America

The Committee of 100 Elaborates on the History, Status Quo, and Challenges of Chinese Americans

By Guan Liming

Commissioned by the Committee of 100 (C100), the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has compiled a landmark comprehensive research report: *From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America*. Officially released to the public on February 8, this report is the first of its kind, in that it presents a quantitative analysis of Chinese Americans' enormous contributions during the past 170 years from an economic perspective. It is intended to educate the public that not only have Chinese Americans always been an integral part of the American society, they have also made indelible contributions to every aspect of the American economy and culture; however, on the other hand, as a minority group, Chinese Americans still face many challenges and obstacles in realizing their full potential.

The 142-page comprehensive study report is the fruit of years of preparation and the effort of many researchers. Mr. Huang Zhengyu, the President of the Committee of 100, remarked during our interview that it is a perfect opportunity for the release of the report, because during recent years, the geopolitical conflicts between China and the U.S., coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, has exposed Chinese Americans to various discrimination and hatred. During the past year, the number of such reported cases reached almost 3,000, to say nothing of the unreported ones. In addition, President Biden, upon inauguration, signed executive actions condemning the discrimination and hatred facing Asian Americans. It so happens that the release of the C100 report has provided an opportunity for the general public to learn more about the contributions that Chinese Americans have made to the United States.

“Most of the people are opposed to racial discrimination. However, what they do not know is that during the past two centuries, Chinese Americans have made significant contributions to every industry of the American society. This lack of knowledge has led to the negative perception of Chinese Americans as the “perpetual foreigners” during the last 200 years. The tensions in China-U.S. relations have also served to reinforce the stereotype. Therefore, we have to demonstrate with facts that Chinese Americans are not perpetual foreigners; instead, they have a long history in this country, and have made important contributions to this country.”

Mr. Huang Zhengyu claims that the pandemic has lent an urgency to changing the negative perception of Chinese Americans. He hopes that the release of the report will bring about positive effects; during the next few months, C100 will work with more than 200 organizations to introduce and promote the discoveries in the report.

According to the report, today, 5.3million people in the US are of Chinese descent, and 75% are American citizens. There are over 160,000 Chinese-American-owned businesses in the U.S., generating approximately US\$240 billion in revenue and supporting 1.3 million jobs as of 2017. In addition, they contributed over US\$300 billion to U.S. GDP in 2019 through consumer spending, supporting 3 million jobs.

One in every 40 Chinese Americans aged 17 years old or over has previously served in the military. During World War II, as many as one fifth of the Chinese Americans served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The report also quotes that there is “nothing so all - American as Chinese food.” Because by 2016, the sheer number of Chinese restaurants in operation in the U.S. was 45,000, greater than the combined number of McDonald’ s, KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell and Wendy’ s branches.

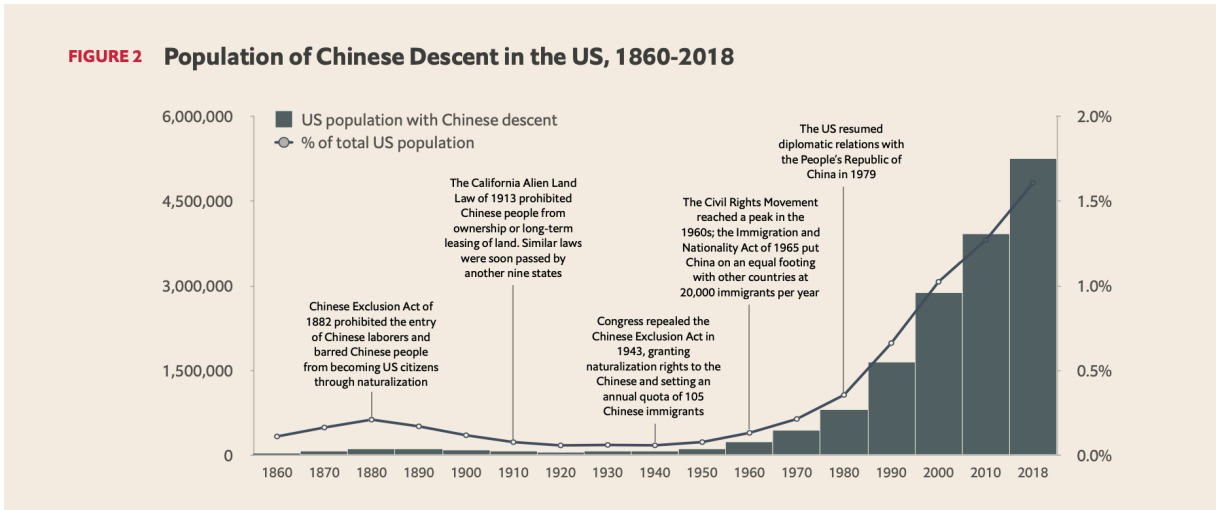
However, on the other hand, Chinese Americans still face a bamboo ceiling in their career development. Chinese Americans accounted for roughly 3% of professional occupations, but held only 1.5% of mid-level management roles and 1.2% of executive positions. Contrary to the model minority’ s image as high-income earners, roughly one in ten households earns less than US\$15,000 per year and 35% have incomes below the national median.

Mr. Huang Zhengyu points out that regarding the discrimination and obstacles facing Chinese Americans, the report reveals a rarely-known fact - from 1996 to 2008, 17% of the defendants in cases involved espionage or economic fraud and intellectual property theft were Chinese Americans, but from 2009 to 2015, the number increased to 52%. “It has raised our concerns. As is shown in the cases where Mr. Chen Gang, a Chinese-American professor from MIT, was criminally charged, behaviors that used to be penalized by the university administration, are now charged criminally. Even the MIT made a public announcement to clarify that the 190 million US dollars involved in this case were for public cooperation between the two universities, and the case did not involve technology theft. The data shows us that on the one hand, Chinese American scientists are sandwiched in the China-U.S. geopolitics; on the other hand, 170 years after Chinese Americans set foot in this country, they are still affected negatively by these stereotypes. ”

“Faced by prejudice and discrimination, Chinese Americans have made enormous contributions during the last 200 years. They will have the opportunity to make more contributions without prejudice or discrimination.”

As for the impacts that the US-China relationship may have on Chinese Americans, Mr. Huang Zhengyu remarked, “America is home to us Chinese Americans. It’ s impossible that we would just pack our luggage and leave. The U.S.-China relations would definitely have an impact on Chinese Americans, who can nevertheless play a positive role in this issue. We are Americans, indeed, but we are also proud of our Chinese heritage. There must be considerable disagreement on many issues between the U.S. and China, but there are also many areas where the two countries may cooperate. Cooperation is important to the two countries, as well as to the world. The ideal of C100 is seeking common ground while reserving differences. As Chinese Americans, we only have one choice in US-China relations, which is to be positive and to play a positive role.”

In addition to presenting various types of economic data, the report also tells the stories of 12 famous Chinese Americans to illustrate their experience and influence in American society. Among them is Wong Kim Ark, whose Supreme Court case established the concept of birthright citizenship in the U.S. The renowned Chinese American figures whose stories are featured in the report also include I.M. Pei, Chien-Shiung Wu, Tung-Yen Lin, Coral Wong Pietsch, Debra Wong Yang, Steven Chu, David Ho, Yo-Yo Ma, Oscar Tang, Lulu C. Wang, and Jerry Yang.



The figure above is an excerpt from the report depicting the growth trend of the population of Chinese descent in the U.S. from 1860 to 2018.

To read the article in Chinese, simply click:

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