Interracial Marriage among Asian Americans
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Interruption data offer a basic marker of the status of cultural boundaries among groups in a geographical area.\(^1\) While the specific features of Asian intermarriage may differ from those seen in earlier European immigration waves,\(^2\) intermarriage in the United States is increasing with time and acculturation across Asian subgroups.\(^3\) Trends in immigrant Asian intermarriage underscore the need for a timely examination of protective cultural and genetic factors in the constituent societies involved.

The issue of racial intermarriage is complicated by the lack of comprehensive data and the effect of immigration by already married individuals on the limited general information available.\(^4\) However, analyses of U.S. census data show that among American-born Asians, the extent of outmarriage increased from 35.9 percent for women and 33.1 percent for men in 1980 to 42.5 percent for women and 37.7 percent for men in 1990.\(^5\)

Numerous factors affect the degree to which members of racial and cultural groups intermarry. Predisposing social norms, acculturation, gender, status attainment, size of minority communities, distance from time of immigration, generation, residential segregation, disparity of socio-economic status and education, and prior marriage status all contribute to partnering and intermarriage outcomes.\(^6\) The interplay of these factors can be seen in the different intermarriage rates occurring among Asian subgroups in the United States.\(^7\)\(^8\)

Hawaii, with an indigenous non-European population and a long history of Asian immigration, has witnessed increasing levels of outmarriage among its Asian residents. The outmarriage rates for the period 1980-89 (the latest available) were 65.4 percent for Chinese, 49.9 percent for Filipinos, 44.8 percent for Japanese, 67.4 percent for Koreans, and 51.6 percent for Vietnamese.\(^9\) All rates were higher than those for the preceding period. Also, rates were higher for women than for men among all groups, significant as mothers may be considered the primary transmitters of cultural content to the next generation.

One in three Asian Americans reside in California. An examination of Los Angeles County Asian outmarriage rates for 1989 by generation in the United States reveals the pull towards assimilation that occurs over time.\(^9\) Among women, first generation outmarriage rates stood at 31.8 percent for Chinese, 46.9 percent for Filipinos, 41.0 percent for Japanese, 13.3 percent for Koreans, and 25.5 percent for Vietnamese. Rates increased for second generation brides to 64.7 percent for Chinese, 65.8 percent for Filipinos, and 50.0 percent for Japanese. For third generation brides, rates increased further to 86.6 percent for Chinese, 85.7 percent for Filipinos, and 62.9 percent for Japanese. Second and third generation counts for Koreans and Vietnamese were small, owing to their more recent immigration status. However, all of the 15 third generation Korean and 10 third generation Vietnamese marriages in the county in 1989 were outmarriages.
An additional feature of Asian outmarriage is the apparent trend of Asians in America to choose marriage with Asians of other ethnic or national origins, perhaps in preference to marriage to non-Asians. For the purposes of the Pacific Rim study, such intergroup marriage carries the same effect as racial intermarriage.

Outmarriage among Asians, as with any group, can be seen as both a result and accelerant of acculturation. A corresponding loss of information on protective cultural features inevitably will occur. Such changes also are taking place at the moment when genetic research is reaching a stage where biological traits within a discrete population, and the possible inter-relationship between these traits and the population’s culture, may begin to be discerned.

References


