

## **Ethnic groups in China and America**

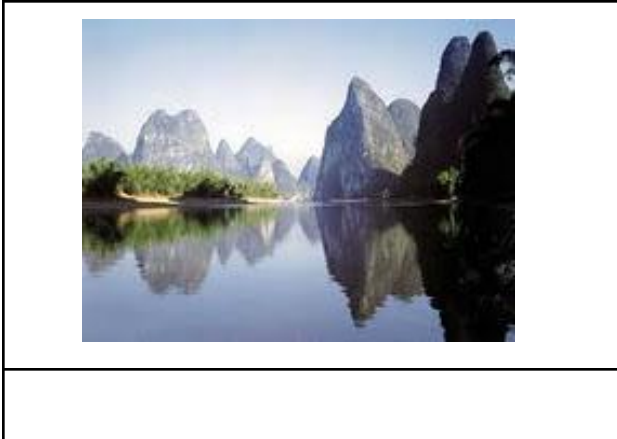
America is famous for its diversity, because it features of different ethnicities .Most citizens originally came from different countries. Before I came to America, I was not aware of the ethnic issue deeply. I only knew about the Caucasian is the dominate ethnicity which has most power in the society. After took race class and my own experience in the United States, I have deep understanding about race concept which remind me of ethnic minorities group in China. Actually, China not only has thousands of history, but also is a country of immense diversity in cultures, climates, dialects as well as people. There are no racial differences but 56 officially recognized ethnic groups in China. The largest and also dominated ethnic group is Han Chinese which most foreigners who do not know Chinese culture very much know about and interact with, just the same situation with the ethnic issue in America from the Chinese perspective. “Han Chinese makes up 92% of the population while the 55 ethnic minorities compose 8% of the rest. Each ethnic minority group has his own unique racial, social culture and economic background (1).”

In this article I will focus on minority ethnic groups in China and America, because there are 55 minorities in China except Han Chinese, and 5 or 6 ethnicities in America. Due to the the limited space available, I will select two groups from both sides to introduce, and then analyze the differences between ethnic groups in China and America.

### **The Zhuang Nationality**

#### **Background**

Firstly, I would like to introduce the Zhuang nationality. The reason why I choose it is that not only its largest population except Han Chinese, which is approximately 17 million, according to the population census in 2005, but also it is the first ethnic group I heard about when I was young due to the legend of Third Sister Liu who was called the Immortal Singer in the Tang Dynasty, invented Zhuang ballads that still circulate and are sung by various ethnic groups.



The Zhuang is a nationality with a long history and splendid culture .It developed from a branch of Yue people (Yue was one of the Warring States) in ancient China far back as 400 BC. “The Zhuang has its own language and writing, which belong to the Chinese-Tibetan language family, dividing into two major dialects, north and south. Its written language is phonetic alphabet writing”(2). But most the Zhuang people can speak and write standard mandarin because of closely interaction with Han Chinese.

字	形	音	义	字	形	音	义	字	形	音	义	字	形	音	义
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己
自	自	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己	自	zɯ	zɯ	自己

### Zhuang Language

[http://wszhuangzu.cn/yuyan/UploadFiles\\_2026/200905/2009052316423647.jpg](http://wszhuangzu.cn/yuyan/UploadFiles_2026/200905/2009052316423647.jpg)

### Distribution :

The Zhuang Nationality is distributed mainly over Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Yunnan Province which are both in the southern part of China. (See the map below, yellow part)



## Costume:

The style of a man's costume is like T'ang's. A woman dresses decent, simple and in a good taste. Black and blue are the normal colors in a suit. “Women like to wrap head with embroidered towel, and have an exquisite apron around waist. Zhuang women like to wear earrings, bracelets and necklace. Little decorative ornaments are always worn with a Zhuang woman's Suit(3) .”



<http://cul.shangdu.com/cul/images/Image/200881411221770377806.jpg>

## Festivals:

Besides same festivals share with Han Chinese, the Zhuang people have their own festivals, such as Devil Festival and March the 3rd Day

The Devil Festival is also named Zhong Yuan Festival, which is held on July 14th. On that day, every family needs to prepare duck, pork and good wines along with some candies and fruits to sacrifice ancestors.

The March the 3rd Day is also called The Singing Festival, of course which is held on March 3rd. It is from the legend of Third Sister Liu I mentioned before. The Zhuang people who are good at singing will sing to each other to challenge each other not only the song itself but also the wit. Lyrics are usually improvisational and humorous. It is also a festival for young people express their love to each other by singing. Bamboo dancing is another essential activity. Youngsters dress up in festive costumes, beating drums and expressing their admiration for each other.



[http://www.gx.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-03/14/xin\\_4830305141040687546550.jpg](http://www.gx.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-03/14/xin_4830305141040687546550.jpg)

**Believes:**

They believe in gods, ancestors, and worship the power of many natural things, such as huge stones, old trees, mountains, earth, dragons, snake and birds. Sacrifice activities are usually held because of their beliefs of being blessed by the divinity and to prevent all kinds of disasters.

## **The Mongolian Nationality**

**Background:**

With a population of 5,813,947, the Mongolian Ethnic Minority is the ninth largest ethnic minority group in China.(Census 2005), Mongolian people and their life style are my favorites. They are nomads who live in the Mogolian Yurt called “a vaulted tent” or “felt tent” in the prairies. I admire free and unrestrained spirits of Mongols. Other people refer to them as “an ethnic minority on the horseback”. From a young age I have been admiring the horseback nation, riding on horseback on the vast grassland is so heroic, free and easy. .



[http://zt.ccots.com.cn/res\\_base/upload/article/image/2010\\_3/7\\_2/info\\_pipf gb4orb3j.jpg](http://zt.ccots.com.cn/res_base/upload/article/image/2010_3/7_2/info_pipf gb4orb3j.jpg)

The Mongolian Nationality is the one of the two minority groups which ruled China in ancient time. Another is the Man Nationality which ruled Qing dynasty. The Mongols originated from a tribe in Northern China in the seventh century of the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907). In the 12th century, a legendary leader, Temujin, unified the Mongolian tribes. Afterwards, Emperor Shizu Kublai established the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) which was the first minority group dominated the entire China (Reuven &. David, 1999)

“The Mongolian language belongs to the Mongolian group of the Altaic phylum and has three main dialects. The written form is derived from the 13th century and experienced many changes. The Mongolians have made brilliant achievements in their literature; the 'Mongolian Secret History' has been listed among the world's famous works by UNESCO (4).”



Mongolian language

### **Distribution:**

Most of them reside in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region which is a vast and rich expanse of land, covered with wide tracts of excellent natural pastureland. The rest live in other autonomous regions and provinces, including Xinjiang, Qinghai and Gansu, etc.

### **Costume:**

In order to adapt themselves to the natural conditions, the Mongolian people have developed their unique national costume which consists of the loose sleeved tunic, the long sash, Mongolian boots and head ornaments. "The Mongolian women often wear head-dress which is made of agate, pearls, coral, jadeite, gem, gold and silver, with which many different beautiful patterns are formed. The Mongolian men wear hats with heavy ear-flaps in winter (5)."



<http://www.56china.com/uploadfile/2009/0307/>

### **Festivals:**

The primary festivals for Mongolians are Nadam Fair, Off Year Festivals.

Nadam Fair is held for five to seven days during late August. Mongolian people with new clothes gather from many areas. Many of them participate in the exciting competitions of shooting, wrestling, dancing and horse-riding.

Off Year Festival is on the 23rd day of the last month of the lunar calendar, which is the day for family come together to have a reunion dinner, and worship the "Kitchen God". They believe that the "Kitchen God" could bring happiness and wealth to them.

### **Believes:**

In the 16th century the Mongolians believe in Shamanism but turn to Tibetan Buddhism-Lamaism during the Yuan Dynasty Era.



## American Ethnicities

Next comes to the ethnic groups in America, my first superficial impression of them were the blacks and the whites when I was a little girl. I saw conflicts between the white people and the black people from movies, news, as well as books. Actually, according to the population census in 2008, U.S.A resident population is over 300 million, becoming the third most populous country in the world after China, India. White people are dominated which account for 72.4% of the population, the largest of the ethnic minorities is the blacks who number about 12.6% of the population. The first blacks were brought to North America as slaves in 1619. Follow on Hispanic and Asian American which make up 6.2 % and 4.8% respectively. Then Native American composes of 0.9% while 3.1% occupies the rest of population. (6) Compare to the past, the population of minority groups has been growing rapidly, and it still has an upward trend.

## Native Americans:

### Background:

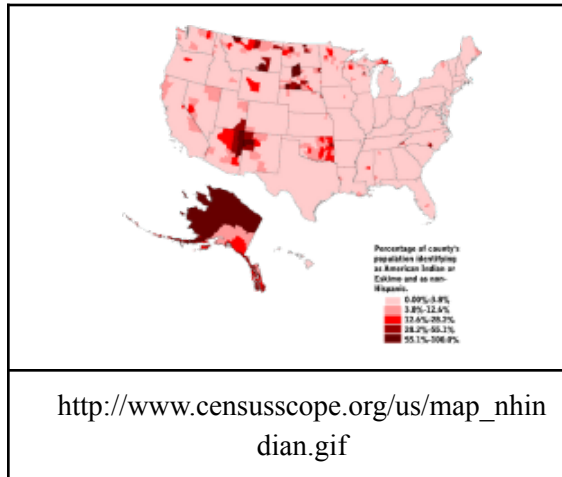
Native Americans refer to indigenous peoples of the America, which means the first residents in America long before the Europeans reached America. Native Americans are also called Indian Americans. My curiosity of the Native American is the reason why I choose Native Americans as my first introduction for American ethnic groups. I remember when I was a kid, I used to wonder why there were two Indians in the world, one was in the Asia, and another was in the America. My father told me a story about that. Back to 1492, Italian navigator Columbus who discovered America sailed to America which was a new continent at that time, and mistook it for India, so named the indigenous peoples Indians. Most Native Americans are kind and hospitable. When the first European immigrants came to their lands, Native Americans warmly and selflessly welcomed them with food and daily necessities, and also taught them how to farm and hunt to help them settled down in America. Thanksgiving is the festival originally from it. First European immigrants held a turkey feast to thank Native Americans' help. Ironically, with the population of European immigrants growing, Native Americans' lands were taken by them,



and they were violently forced to move to Indian Reservation. Columbus Day which is the annual festival to mark Columbus discovered America. Surprisingly, from what I have learned this semester, Native Americans are angry with this holiday. They hold protests to against it and call for government to cancel the holiday. Since Columbus who was a rapist and murder, brought catastrophe to their ancestors according to my professor.

### **Distribution:**

The population of Native Americans tends to be concentrated in specific geographic areas, as the map shows below, often those designated as reservations by the U.S. government, rather than distributed through the nation as a whole. Although I have never seen a real Native Americans in person, but I know there are many Native Americans in Minnesota. “Minnesota Native Americans are almost exclusively either Ojibwe or Dakota, and it is home to more bands of the Ojibwe or Chippewa nation than any other state (7).”



### **Costume:**

By far I still have not seen a real Native American besides in the Movies and TV. My first understandings about them are from movies *Dances with Wolves* and *Legends of the Fall*. In my impression they are all brave and loyal; they speak their own languages; they are good at singing and dancing; they long for freedom. However, the first impression leave for me is their costume. Most of them have long hair no matter men or women, and they like to wear hat and necklace made by feather. As matter of a fact, their clothes were closely related to the environment in which they lived and their religious beliefs. “ In most tribes, Native American men wore breechclouts, sometimes with leather leggings attached in colder climates. They often used bark and animal skins to weave skirts, aprons, capes, and hats (8).”

### **Believes and customs:**

I saw Native Americans



worshiped the mountains, trees, and

other natural stuff with special ritual from the movies. They believe in animism, and they have great reverence for nature including animals as well as plants. They think natural things have spiritual power. Many Indians also believe that by wearing parts of an animal a person could gain some of that animal's power and strength. "The concept of totem animals is also the same, which was riddled with superstition. The locals believe that every human being had inherent animal such as a wolf or an eagle or an eagle or other noble beast. Native Americans took them as angels or as guides" (Wholey, 2007).

Nowadays, most Indians Americans influenced by Christianity, they become Christians.

## **Asian Americans:**

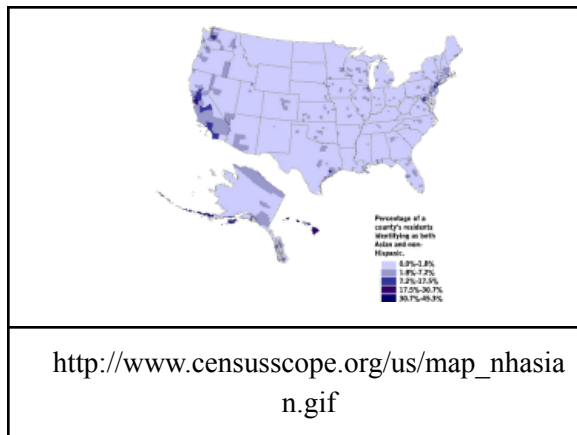
### **Background:**

When I was a child, I had no idea about Asian Americans. I only heard about ABC. I could not tell the difference between us, Chinese and ABC, only based on their appearance unless when you heard they speak. Later I found out ABC meant American born Chinese, which is one category of Asian Americans. According to the Wikipedia, the definition of Asian Americans is Americans of Asian descent (9). Asian Americans encompass Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Asian Indians, Pakistanis, Vietnamese and others. Asian Americans are the fastest growing group in the United States. Chinese are the largest group, followed by Filipinos, Indians, Koreans, and other Southeast Asian groups. In the past, Asian Americans had experiences of harsh discrimination similar to Blacks. "Chinese is the first group of Asian to enter the United States in sizable number in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first Chinese came to this country, lured by rumors of gold in California. Documented accounts list three Chinese arriving in San Francisco Harbor in 1848. By 1852, twenty thousand more had arrived." (Patricia, 1989) With enormous demand of cheap labors in mining, railroad building and sugar plantations, Chinese works were shipped to America. They worked very hard with a great intensity while still had low incomes and poor living conditions. After five years, when their labor contracts expired, most Chinese chose to establish their own farms or businesses. However, their hard working threatened local workers. "Anti- Chinese sentiment rose in America, various restrictions and taxes began to appear with the purpose of driving out Chinese laborers"(Patricia, 1989). Emigration from Japan also began in the nineteenth century. The Immigration Act of 1965 promoted family reunification and admitted skilled professionals, which brought the increasing number of Asian immigrants to America. As I see it, in the past, Asian Americans did the low pay and dirty tired physical labors. " In recent decades, they have come to be associated with Whites, due to similar socioeconomic and educational attainments and similar residential patterns" (Juanita, 1998). Most Asian Americans are bright, diligent and obedient. Although their social statuses are not high, they still have high incomes due to their hard working.



**Distribution:**

In 2008, all these groups together accounted for 4.8 percent of the total U.S. population, up from 1.2 percent in 2000. There are Chinese Towns, Japanese Towns and Korean Towns in the big cities for Asian Americans live and shopping. This summer I travelled Los Angeles, then got chances to visit those three towns in a row, as if I went to three countries in one day.

**Costume:**

Asian Americans show no uniformity of dress, since they originally come from different countries. They wear traditional dresses which represent their own original cultures in some significant occasions, such as, Chinese qipao, Japanese kimono and Korean hanbok.

**Believes and customs:**

No religion can claim a majority of followers in the Asian American community, as of 2008, those who claim no religious affiliation are the largest group. The second largest-religious group among Asian Americans are "Eastern Religions" that include Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Baha'i, Shintoist, Zoroastrian, and Sikh. The category of "Christian Generic" is the fourth-largest group at 10% in 2008. The results show that in 2008, Muslims represented 8% of the Asian American population (up from 3% in 1990) (Jane, 2011).

I have met some Asian Americans who born in America claimed themselves as Americans, not Asians. And their behaviors and values more like Americans not Asians. As much as Asian immigrants identify with the culture of their homeland in the first generation, by the third generation, Asian Americans will have developed values inherently Western(Joann,

1992).

Bruce Lee and Bruce Lee-wannabe movies are well known in America. And other successful kungfu movies and the action stars bring Asian Martial arts to America. Establishing martial clubs became unique business for Asian Americans. There are several types of martial arts, Chinese kung fu, Japanese karate, Karan taekwondo and Thai Boxing.

### **Differences**

America and China are both diverse countries due to their people with different ethnic background. However, they still have huge differences between ethnicities in China and America except Native Americans.

The first difference is identification. Ethnic groups in American can be easily differentiated from each other, but Chinese ethnic groups cannot be told. Most ethnic groups in American originally emigrated from other countries across the continents over the world. The wide geographic scope led to huge gap between different ethnicities. They are physical and biological diverse. We can distinguish most of them by their appearance except biracial peoples, such as skin colour, eye colour and hair texture. It means that even if people with different ethnic background dress up in the same way, still can be distinguished from each other by their distinct physical appearance. However, Chinese ethnic groups are all native Chinese, they are homegrown people who have been born and grown up in China from generation to generation. Most of them have similar physical appearance. It is difficult for us to tell their identities by physical appearance. Fortunately, they still remain their cultures. We can distinguish them by their traditional costumes and languages.

The second difference is culture. As I mentioned above, Chinese ethnic minority groups remain their own cultures as much as possible, but American minorities' cultures almost unified by Caucasians which is the dominated peoples in terms of social economic, political, and ideological levels. Firstly, comes to languages. Most Americans speak one language which is English except other foreign languages which learn in the schools. For those people who just emigrated from other countries, their English may have strong accent, but they have to have active attitudes for leaning and speaking English in order to rapidly integrate into American society and cultural environment. They overcome culture shock by learning local culture. As time passes, the more they blend into American society, the less they remember their own cultures. I have met several Chinese Americans who were born in America, most of them could not speak Mandarin, and some could speak a little, their English is much better than Mandarin.

It well known that Mandarin is the standard Chinese, but there are lots of dialects in China. Minority groups' dialects are much different than the one that Han Chinese speak. In other words, their dialects are other languages, because the written words and speaking words are totally different from Mandarin. They speak their own languages in daily lives. Once I went to Qianhumiaozhai in Guizhou where the Miao people live. Although many Miao people even

could not speak Mandarin, they were still very hospitable. We communicated by gestures, which was an interesting experience I can never forget.

Same situation comes to costume, although many people in America still keep their traditional dresses, and will wear them in some important occasions. Unlike many Chinese minorities they still dress the traditional clothes in their daily lives in most tribes. Because many of them live in specific areas where are far away from the places Han Chinese live, their cultures are less influenced by Han Chinese. On the one hand, government retains culture of minorities to attract the tourists as far as possible so that it can develop the tourism. On the other hand, the visits of tourists affect their normal lives.

The third difference is status which is the one of the reasons other two differences I mentioned above exist. Although the dominated groups are Whites and Han Chinese in America and Chinese, the status of minority groups is another different story. In the United States, there is no doubt that the white people is playing predominant role in social and economic development. According to article *White Privilege* written by Peggy McIntosh and my own personal experience, white privilege is hidden rule for white people to have a special advantage or benefit. For example, I remember last semester, We who are several students of colour waited in a line outside of the Garvey from the midnight 2am to the morning 9am for applying for the job in the canteen. A white student came latest at the 8am, but she got the job, I did not. This job was supposed to be for the people who came earlier.

The situation in China is opposite, although Han Chinese is leading the Chinese economy, education and politics. Being a member of minority is still a proud thing for them. If we know someone is from a minority group, we would like to admire him/her. Because not only their attractive special cultures, but also some privilege policies for them provided by Chinese government. Such as, extra points are given them for college entrance examination; they can have two children while others have to obey one child policy.

In conclusion, the culture of ethnicity is an interesting topic for me, but it is difficult to cover all of the information. If you want to travel China and experience minority's customs in person, Yunnan province which located in southwest of China is the first place I would recommend. It composes of 52 minorities; almost every town has its unique feature. If travelling to China is not available for you, the book *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* is a good choice. In addition, you can feel diversity in America everywhere. I wish I could have chance to visit Indian reservation to experience their cultures. Diversity keep country interesting, we had better take measures to protect their unique ethnic characteristics, cultures, traditions and customs, and also prevent them from being assimilated by modern civilization, and eventually becoming extinct.

### References:

- Juanita, T (1998), *Asian Americans : from racial category to multiple identities*, Walnut Creek, CA : AltaMira Press
- Joann, L (1992), *Asian Americans : oral histories of first to fourth generation Americans from China, the Philippines, Japan, India, the Pacific Islands, Vietnam, and Cambodia*, New York : New Press.
- Jane,I (2011), *Virtual orientalism : Asian religions and American popular culture*, New York : Oxford University Press
- Patricia, H (1989), *East and Southeast Asian material culture in North America : collections, historical sites, and festivals*, New York : Greenwood Press.
- Reuven , A& David & M, (1999), *The Mongol empire and its legacy*, Leiden ; Brill.
- Wholey, D ( 2007), *Native American religions*, New York, N.Y. : Films Media Group
- Wikipedia, Retrieved from:  
<http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%BE%8E%E5%9B%BD%E4%BA%BA%E5%8F%A3>
- (1) Ethnic Minorities of China, *orientaltravel.com*, Retrieved from:  
<http://www.orientaltravel.com/people.htm>
- (2) Zhuang, omniglot.com, Retrieved from: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/zhuang.htm>
- (3)Zhuang people *Orientaltravel. Com*  
Retrieved from: <http://www.orientaltravel.com/people.htm>
- (4)Mongol (Mongolian) Nationality, *travelchinaguide.com*, Retrieved from:  
<http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/nationality/mongolian/>
- (5)The Mongolian Nationality, *chinavista.com*, Retrieved from:  
<http://www.chinavista.com/experience/inner/mongolian.html>
- (6)<http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%BE%8E%E5%9B%BD%E4%BA%BA%E5%8F%A3>

- (7)Minnesota Native Americans, *minnesota-visitor.com*, Retrieved from:  
<http://www.minnesota-visitor.com/minnesota-native-americans.html>
- (8)Clothing of Native American Cultures, *fashionencyclopedia.com*, Retrieved from  
[http://www.fashionencyclopedia.com/fashion\\_costume\\_culture/Early-Cultures-Native-American/Clothing-of-Native-American-Cultures.html](http://www.fashionencyclopedia.com/fashion_costume_culture/Early-Cultures-Native-American/Clothing-of-Native-American-Cultures.html)
- (9)[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian\\_American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_American)