

*Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842—1943*. Emma Jinhua Teng. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780520276277

Emma Jinhua Teng's *Eurasian* is a detailed and nuanced investigation of Chinese-Western interracial families in the United States, China, and Hong Kong during the unequal treaties era, 1842–1943. This tumultuous period, stretching from the opening of China to the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, witnessed increasing foreign influence and dominance in China. Placing her study within this transnational context, Teng offers an alternate picture of discourses of mixed race.

Ideas concerning racial and cultural intermixing are central to this study as they directly or indirectly influenced Eurasian lives. These ideas, as Teng points out, fall into two categories: the belief that amalgamation was detrimental (hybrid degeneracy and abnormality); and the belief that racial mixing was beneficial (hybrid vigor and racial improvement). Why did these two competing claims coexist in tension? To answer this question, Teng seeks to demonstrate that Eurasians were treated at times as a social “problem” while at other times as a “promise” by paying attention to the tension between the discourses of inclusion and exclusion. In so doing, she explores a variety of texts about Eurasian lives on both sides of the Pacific. She also addresses how Western anthropologists and natural scientists viewed Eurasians in the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition, she examines sociological discourses on mixed race in the early twentieth century and recent mixed race studies in the United States. Furthermore, she discusses how Chinese intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries promoted Sino-Western racial mixing as a means for improving the Chinese race. While showing that these different contexts shaped diverse representations of Eurasians, Teng challenges the widespread

assumptions about interracial families: “intermarriage was never accepted by either side” (30); and “half-castes” were tragic figures who were “despised by both sides” (9).

What is refreshing about this study is that Teng deals with Eurasians not only as an object of discourse but also as producers of their own discourses on mixed race. She seeks to investigate comparatively how Chinese-Western mixed families negotiated their identities in multiple societies in which monoracial identity was the norm and interracial marriage was often treated with suspicion. To this end, her use of various life narratives of Eurasians works effectively. For example, the book begins with a story of a Chinese-Western couple. When Yung Wing, a member of the Chinese elite, married Mary Kellogg, the daughter of a well-to-do New England family in the 1870s, the community welcomed this international union, and the local press portrayed it positively. As Teng explains, this was possible in the years before the Chinese Exclusion era through Patrician Orientalism (Ch.1). In contrast to this privileged mixed couple, she talks about the notorious pickpocket George Appo, who was born to a Chinese father and an Irish mother in New York City’s impoverished, racially mixed neighborhood in 1856. Teng describes how, in an era when hybrid degeneration theory was on the rise, the press portrayed this “half-caste” as a natural born criminal embodying the worst of both worlds (Ch. 3). Simultaneously, she draws attention to ambivalent aspects of the story of Appo. For example, she adds that Appo himself, unlike the press’s focus on his racial hybridity, attributed his criminality to poverty and hard luck (176). Moreover, she points out that the press almost uniformly racialized him along with the images of “Heathen Chinese,” with slanted eyes, buck teeth, and black hair, whereas the journalist Louis Beck referred to Appo’s physical attractiveness, describing him as a “handsome young man of striking appearance” (102). Considering inconsistencies like this, Teng complicates discourses of mixed race.

Turning her focus to the other side of the Pacific, Teng discusses Sir Robert Ho Tung, a Eurasian millionaire, born to a Dutch man and a Chinese “protected woman” in Hong Kong. Utilizing his bilingual and bicultural abilities under British rule, Ho Tung became the richest man in Hong Kong and had significant political influence in China. Teng identifies a link between his success and Chineseness: the fact that Ho Tung, despite his striking Western physical features, chose to take on a Chinese name and present himself as Chinese gave credibility to his claim to Chineseness, which required ties of patrilineal kinship as signified through surnames (201–202). While exploring the Ho Tung case and other life narratives (Ch. 6–8), Teng argues that Chineseness, as articulated in paternal descent, ancestry, and birth on Chinese soil, differed from American conceptions of whiteness which emphasized “purity” of blood, blood quantum laws, and appearance. Thus, throughout the book, Teng convincingly elucidates that Eurasians’ social experiences varied considerably according to geographic location, gender, and class. Not only prejudice but also privilege, depending on time and place, shaped their lives.

If I were to identify one weakness in the text, it is Teng’s use of the term *Eurasian*, which is the title of the book and the term she frequently uses throughout the text. She defines *Eurasian* as “a person of Asian and European ancestry, while not excluding people who were multiply ‘mixed’ with diverse heritages” (264). I agree with this definition and her contention that the term is “the best (though not perfect) umbrella term” (5–6). However, the term *Eurasian* is a bit misleading here. Whereas the title *Eurasian* clearly suggests that this volume is concerned with people of Asian and Western mixed ancestry and their families, and one might even assume that it broadly covers Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese war brides, Teng narrowly uses the term *Eurasian* in order to refer exclusively to a Chinese Eurasian.

Despite this small quibble of mine, the beautifully written and well-researched *Eurasian* offers a captivating account of mixed race and Chinese-Western mixed families during the unequal treaties era. Scholars in mixed race studies, race and ethnicity, history, and Asian studies will find this book a welcome contribution to their fields, and it is also suitable for both undergraduate and graduate teaching.

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