

Chosen Women Choosing Chinese Men A tradition of love?

Are you Jewish?" I am asked. This is not new to me. I hear this all the time because my last name ends in "burg," a common Jewish suffix.

So I wasn't surprised when I heard it from Arnold, a new friend of mine from the local gym in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. He knew my last name because I had handed him my business card weeks before. And he was, after all, as bold as the espresso in the coffee shop where I met him.

When he asked me over coffee, I shook my head and smiled. As this is not the first time I have had this conversation, I have my stock responses at hand. But yet I replied, "No, I'm not actually. I was raised Catholic. Why do you ask?"

I waited for the usual explanation — my name — but it never came. "Well, of course because you have a Chinese husband," Arnold offered without hesitation, as if he were merely stating the obvious while casually leaning back in his chair. "You usually see Jewish women married to Chinese men." Arnold's words hit me like a jolt of caffeine — I'd never heard this before.

As a Western woman married to a Chinese man, I knew I was

a minority when compared to the ubiquitous couples of Western men and Chinese women around the world. But all of a sudden, I wondered if I also was a minority within the world of Western wives and Chinese husbands. Was Arnold right? Do more Jewish women

really love Chinese men? Could there be any truth to this? Was there a connection?

Even before I raced home to google "Jewish women" and "Chinese men," I realized it wasn't the first time I'd heard the words "Jewish" and "Chinese" put together. When I first visited Kaifeng, China in 1999, I learned about the city's Sephardic Jewish community, which lasted over 700 years. Later, when I lived in Shanghai, I read a magazine article about the Jews of Shanghai, who found refuge there in the 1930s during the Holocaust.

As I scoured the Internet and the library, I found more evidence that Chinese and Chosen wasn't just in Arnold's head. I discovered numerous articles exploring the Jewish love affair with Chinese food, from its place in a traditional "Jewish Christmas" in the US to the existence of kosher Chinese restaurants such as Genghis Cohen and China Glatt. Deborah Jiang Stein, in her article "What's With the Jewish Man/Asian Woman Connection, Anyway?" wrote that "Jews and Chinese have been referred to as 'people



of the book,' when...the intellectual appears to be fading from the American culture," and mentioned "similarities in family values and upbringing." In the play *The Men of Mah Jongg*, one man even described this ancient Chinese game as "invented by Chinese men and stolen by Jewish women."

These connections – from the history to mahjongg – were interesting. But what about relationships? Then I found a study titled "In Search of the Right Spouse: Interracial Marriage among Chinese and Japanese Americans," which offered this insight:

...it appears that there is a propensity for our interviewees to meet and date Jews in college or in their professional fields and marry them. Eighteen percent of the Chinese and Japanese American women and men we interviewed were married to Jewish partners. Five described how they shared a cultural affinity with their Jewish spouses; most often they mentioned how both cultures valued strong family ties and educational achievement. Interviewees also described their Jewish spouses as having a sense of "ethnic tradition" and an immigrant legacy found lacking in non-Jewish whites they had known or dated.

Suddenly, I remembered what a Chinese-American Ivy League graduate once told me -- that the 80 percent of Chinese men at his university who didn't

date Asians dated Jewish women. While that statistic might be difficult to verify and is likely inflated, the statement was nonetheless an interesting observation.

When I thought about it, Jewish women wrote and produced some of the most popular creative works about relationships with Chinese men. Anna Sophie Loewenberg embraced the sons of Han in her online TV series *Sexy Beijing*. Rachel DeWoskin bared her love affairs with Chinese men -- onscreen and off -- in the book *Foreign Babes in Beijing*. And Susan Blumberg-Kason, author of *All the Tea in Chicago*, is turning experiences from her former marriage to a Chinese man into a memoir. Did they have any answers?

Blumberg-Kason believes Chinese men and Jewish women have such an affinity because most Chinese are atheists, making religion less of a family issue. "Even though we're now divorced, my former husband and I just celebrated with our son at his bar mitzvah. I think if Jake's dad had had another religion, the bar mitzvah might not have resonated as much as it had. Even when Jake was a baby, it was easier at the holidays because we celebrated the Jewish ones and the Chinese ones, but there was no religious conflict between the two."

According to DeWoskin, it's more a question of location. "My instinct is that if there are more Jewish girls in love with

Chinese boys, then it's probably the result of Jewish girls being more likely to come to China in the first place," she said, wondering if more Jews enrolled in East Asian studies or became China scholars like her own father.

After seeing *Sexy Beijing's* two-part "Freudian Episode," I think Loewenberg would agree with her.

"Why is it that I find Chinese men so fascinating, so masculine, and so very sexy?" Loewenberg asked. "I just can't seem to get over this obsession with Chinese men. So I'm going to talk to the one person who might be able to analyze my neurosis -- Dr. Peter Loewenberg, historian, psychoanalyst and my father."

She then sits down with him at a lakeside cafe in Hangzhou for a discussion. "Let me ask you a psychoanalytic question," said Loewenberg. "What do you think my obsession with finding a Chinese husband has to do with my relationship with my father, and his relationship with his mother?"

Her father responded, "I think you have some identification with your father's Chinese childhood." He is referring to the fact that he and Loewenberg's grandparents lived in Shanghai during the 1930s – a personal connection the two then explore, including a search for the old family home on Nanchang Road. Watching this episode brought me full circle right back to the historical

Viewpoint

by Jocelyn Eikenburg

connection I recalled when I first pondered the question of Jewish women and Chinese men. For Loewenberg, history was the reason, and a powerful one at that.

I never did find any indisputable, black-and-white statistics to answer my question. But, yet, all the evidence I uncovered lined up before me in terracotta-warrior fashion, and I couldn't help but see the reality. Jewish women and Chinese men really do have a special connection -- probably far more than we shiksas and Chinese men ever will.

"As my father returns to America and I return to Beijing, I can't help but wonder if perhaps one day my Chinese grandchildren will look back at the

choices I made in life and love, and marvel at how their family survived the burdens of history," said Loewenberg. I, however, had to marvel at her story. Her romance with Chinese men had such an epic background, intertwined in the history and culture her people shared with China for thousands of years. My story, on the other hand, began with a serendipitous, last-minute decision to teach in China. Nothing about my Catholic upbringing or Midwestern suburban childhood suggested I would ever end up in the arms of a Chinese man.

Then again, Loewenberg still had to make her own choices "in life and love." Didn't I do the same? In that sense, we belonged to the same tradition -- of Western women who dared to love China, and its men. ♪



Writer and founder of the award-winning blog *Speaking of China*, Jocelyn Eikenburg is one of the most prominent voices on the web for

Chinese men and Western women in love. She draws on her own marriage to a Hangzhou native to explore love, family and relationships in China through her writing. Her writing credits include *Matador*, the *Global Times* and the *Idaho State Journal*.

Jocelyn found her passion for writing — as well as her true love — while living and working for five and a half years in China, including Zhengzhou, Hangzhou and Shanghai. A Cleveland, Ohio native, Jocelyn is currently working on a memoir about love and marriage in China.



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