

Deteriorating Internal Orientalism: The Murder of Real Chinese Image

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Abstract: Orientalism, which refers to western people depict Asian people in the way that is completely opposite to them, has troubled Asian American for a long period. Even though there is are and less study of Asian based on Orientalism in contemporary society, the depiction of Asian as “others” does not fully disappear. Apart from the possibility that the work based on Orientalism is still creating, the gradual deepening of internal orientalism is also a factor that cannot be ignored. This paper is mainly focusing on how does Chinese media, local tourism accelerates the internal orientalism, which refers to the phenomenon that the spreading of any form of work or idea that destroys the diversity of Chinese. And how does this internal orientalism negatively affect the spreading of real Chinese image, culture and value. Through determining the existence of this phenomenon, this paper can play the role in stopping the spread of any forms of works that present the possibility to deepen western people’s misunderstanding of real Chinese image, which enables the authentic Chinese culture and value to be spread into foreign countries, and Chinese American will derive the cultural recognition and deserved attention from other Americans with different origins or races.

Keywords: internal orientalism, Chinese culture, Chinese American

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the expansion in the population of Asian Americans in society, the problem of ‘model minority’ has been brought to people’s attention, which is the mass’s misperception of this group because of orientalism. The word “orientalism” refers to those people from eastern countries who are depicted misleadingly [1]. However, not only western people are intentionally describing Asian people in the wrong and opposite way in comparison to themselves, the term “internal orientalism” has gradually entered people’s visions. Instead of being demonized in western people’s ideology, internal orientalism refers to Asian people’s behaviors, both intentionally or inadvertently, impeding the process of showing their diversity to the western world. According to the past research conducted by Yana Maliyana, “using typical stereotyping in representing the East in the novel such as untrustworthy, rude, barbaric, and traditional and also exposes the issue of patriarchy which is usually pinned into the East Culture” [2]. Apart from orientalism present in the Western culture, in terms of internal orientalism, another researcher named JiaoJiao Sun once put forward, “The images used to promote Tibet characterize its culture as a weakened and feminized one, resulting in problems for the locals’ identities, especially for the children—they are belittled to satisfy outsiders’ will for

generosity” [3]. However, they suffered the disadvantage that they did not test whether there are some elements of western other than political subjectivity resulting in Western people’s misperception, and they did not collect enough data on internal orientalism in China. The current paper is going to talk about examples of internal orientalism emerging in China and how it affects Western people’s perception of Chinese American diversity. In this paper, I will use sources om Chinese movies, Chinese literature work, and other Chinese artwork to showcase the internal orientalism in China. I will use qualitative research methods in the part discussing cases of internal orientalism in China, and the part discussing the effects of internal orientalism on western people’s perception of Asin Americans.

2. Research

2.1. Research: Internal Orientalism Results from Chinese Movie Production

In terms of Chinese movies that present internal orientalism, it is important to talk about the *I am what I am*, a very popular Chinese movie that is made by a Chinese producer last year. As the picture shows, all Chinese characters in this movie are depicted as skinning boys with small eyes. When comes to words like small eyes and skinning body, corresponds to the depiction of Chinese American characters in many American movies. *Mulan*, is a movie that is made by Disney and discusses a Chinese woman who replaced his old father and joined the army to combat the Mongolian invasion, the heroine character, Mulan, is depicted as a girl with tiny eyes. To further prove that slanted eyes are inappropriate in the depiction of Asian women, there is a quote from Whang Junghum from the University of New York at Buffalo, “In the discourse of racism, the slanted and small eyes are notable signifiers representing the stereotypical Asian figure as the racial Other.” [4]. Thus, in *I am what I am*, by depicting all Chinese characters with tiny eyes, the author intensifies the internal stereotype of the Chinese, and so do the Chinese Americans.

2.2. Research: Internal Orientalism Results from Chinese Art Production

In aspect of the artwork, a famous Chinese designer named Chen Man, who is China Central Academy of Fine Arts, has published a controversial work named *Whatever Weather* in a contemporary international exhibition. In this artwork, twelve different Chinese women are depicted with slanted eyes and heavy blush. Admittedly, in many ancient pictures of the Chinese in the Song dynasty, women always do heavy makeup including heavy blush, and women are depicted with small eyes in the old paintings. However, that was Chinese women several centuries before and it does not correspond to any current generation of Chinese women. In an exhibition that is centering on showing contemporary art of different countries, this depiction of Chinese women is misleading, which might intensify the misunderstanding of Chinese woman’s image as slanted eyes and heavy makeup.

2.3. Research: Internal Orientalism Results from Chinese Tourism Sector

In addition to the artwork that is about Chinese culture and shown in a worldwide exhibition, local tourism also plays a role in terms of leaving misperception of Chinese people’s real image. When it comes to tourism in China, some places where minority live like Xizang is gaining people’s attention. When it comes to Xizang, many people will recall a Chinese race called Tibetan. The example of the last sample is a person that is belonging to this race. His name is Dingzhen. A few months before, a documentary called Dingzhen’s world went viral on the internet. Almost everyone is caught by Dingzhen’s innocent appearance, and the beauty of his hometown called Litang. Indeed, Litang in this documentary is a perfect example of internal orientalism. In the video, Litang is depicted as a sacred place that has nothing but blue sky, and a clear lake. People all are living in a Mongolian yurt.

However, most areas of Litang were heavily changed by local tourism through these years. For example, unlike the sacred place where has grassland, traditional buildings, blue sky inclusively, because of the modernization, many recreational institutions as well as small shops are constructed in Litang. By beautifying Litang, it misleads foreign tourists who have only watched this documentary about the real image of Tibetan and Litang. Not only can local people choose to graze their animals like Ding Zhen in the documentary, they can also choose modern forms of entertainment. For example, using smart phone, computer to play games with friends, go to the bubble tea shop to buy bubble tea, or go to KTV to sing with friends. Even if the documentary does cover Litang's traditional culture, it reinforces the stereotype that people in remote areas only know how to graze cattle and farm. This stereotype is bound to cause a lot of trouble for any resident who travels from the local area to the foreign area.

2.4. Research: Internal Orientalism Resulted from Chinese Government's Policies

However, Litang's documentary actually reflects the over-promotion of culture leading to a stereotype of local people, but it still retains the culture of ethnic minorities. A more serious problem within China at present is that the government has yet to implement a policy of promoting the traditional culture of ethnic minorities. Even though the Chinese government clarified that it would dedicate itself to unifying all 56 races in China, instead of constituting civic nationalism, it is aiming at building up ethnic nationalism. It is not right or wrong in terms of applying ethnic nationalism to the general's ideology, but it does accelerate the process of internal orientalism. Owing to the application of ethnic nationalism, the government did not set up the limitation for tourism as it intended to "modernize" the area where minority races lived. Also, it advocates for these minority races to use mandarin as their first language, and use their traditional language as second one. Starting from Uyghur, by 2020, the XUAR government pursues that more than 90 percent of local students to receive "bilingual education," which refers to local residents will learn most of knowledge in Mandarin, and they will also learn their home language as a subject rather than study knowledge via their home language. And for those Chinese who are not belonging to minority race, none of them even have a subject that teaches them the language and culture belonging to Chinese minority races. All these things finally result in the gradual assimilation and disappearance of minority races' cultures, which results in more and more serious internal orientalism [5].

3. Effect

In contemporary American Society when orientalism still exists, internal orientalism poses difficulties for the transmission of authentic Chinese culture and Asian Americans in the United States, not limiting to Chinese Americans. In terms of traditional culture, in many movies, TV production in America, characters are still depicted in the stereotyping way. Not only Mulan that is released by Disney depicts the woman as the figure with small and slanted eyes, but it also appears in TV productions like Mr. Washee in *Family Guy*. Compared to the main character Peter, Mr. Washee has tiny, slanted eyes, a tight fringe and looks very slight, which is a typical example of Chinese man in Orientalist stereotype [6]. Also, most Americans still don't know that China has 56 ethnic groups, just as in Orientalism the Japanese American, Chinese American, Korean American and other Asian Americans with different origins are treated as one entity. From many examples from the past and now, it is obvious that Orientalism is unhealthy. In Chinese American writer Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, she mentioned when she grew in Hudson City, even though she was Eurasian, she was ridiculed for her Asian part by some foreign kids, who used insulting terms such as "chinky" and "rat-eater" to laugh at Far and her brother [7]. The discrimination suffered by Sui Sin Far was definitely the negative product of the past Orientalism. Only by completely eliminating the internal orientalism,

these phenomena can be less likely to happen, and Chinese culture and value can be correctly spread out.

4. Solution

For each of these problems, there are corresponding solutions. First, in terms of movie production, it is good to include the Chinese traditional culture and value. However, in the portrayal of Chinese characters. Instead of blindly catering to the international market, Chinese movie production companies should promote the correct image of Chinese people as the core, and depict Chinese people in a correct and accurate way. The same thing applies to Chinese art production. When it comes to the drawing of Chinese, not only it should emphasize the diversity of Chinese, but it also needs to paint Chinese in an authentic way, for example, not with slanted and small eyes and heavy makeup on the faces of Chinese women. In terms of the local tourism department in region where Chinese minority group living in, it is necessary for them to avoid overtourism, in order to preserve the local culture, and show the real appearance of the place to foreign tourists while preserving the traditional local culture. For example, Litang should not only show its culture and beautiful scenery, but also directly reflect the modern side of Litang. This will not only preserve the traditional culture but also show the diversity of the area to visitors, like residents there also play video games, drinking bubble tea and do modernized things. Furthermore, the local government should take a series of actions to strengthen the indigenous cultural study for those minority race people. For example, instead of Uyghur students learning modern knowledge only through Mandarin, make Uyghur a subject. The government should invest more money and time in integrating all subjects into Uyghur and other minority languages for local people to learn. In addition, China's education authorities should include minority languages and cultures as additional subjects in high school subjects. All students can choose whether to join the subject in the college entrance examination, and add additional points to the total score according to their performance on the section of minority language and culture.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing some Chinese movie production, art productions, tourism in the region where Chinese minority race living in as well as some policies set by local government, internal orientalism does exist in the current Chinese society, and it results in the formation of a strong stereotype of the Chinese image, which veils the diversity of Chinese Americans. To gradually eliminate the accelerating internal orientalism, I believe the Chinese should do a list of acts. First, Chinese producers in any media should avoid homogenization in terms of Chinese s' images. In China, we consist of 56 race groups with different characteristics and historical and cultural backgrounds. When making any art forms that possibly convey Chinese images to the external world, producers should find ways to express the diversity of Chinese instead of keep doing homogenization. In addition, in terms of tourism corporations in China, they should not be permitted to change the natural state of the place where the minority race is living, and the Chinese government should strengthen its policy of protecting the minority culture. Furthermore, there are some actions that Chinese government can take to promote the spread of the culture of minority race, such as setting up elective courses to let students to master one minority language during the high school or college. This paper is written to show the fact that the internal orientalism unintentionally resulted from Chinese media, tourism business, government is existing, and it poses the threat to the inheritance of traditional culture and aggravates the stereotype of Asian Americans in America. By applying corresponding solutions mentioned in the paper to different problems, the internal orientalism will get eased, and the culture and image of real Asian American will get recognized by people with other races in the near future.

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