

Research on the Loss of Human Rights for Asian Americans

-The Failure of Group Identity

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Abstract: After WWII, the formation of group identity had become an efficient solution for vulnerable groups to protect human rights. Asian Americans, as other minority groups in American society, were suffering from racial discrimination in different social areas, such as education, employment, and welfare, especially in the 1970s California, which was regarded as the biggest settlement of Asian Americans at that time. However, when other minority groups achieved the unique identity of themselves to defend basic human rights against structural discrimination. Asian Americans failed to do so. This paper intends to argue that under the excluded social integration and self-weakness, deviation in recognition for both inside Asian Americans and outside American Society was the main reason not to form their own identity, which made Asian Americans suffer from human rights violation.

Keywords: Asian Americans, group identity, human rights

1. Introduction

From the last decade until recent violent and discriminated issues happened in minority groups in the U.S, racial inequality in human rights achievement is always regarded as the core problem for improving justice in American Society. However, more research focused on the relations between African Americans and White people but less concentrated on Asian Americans, which is treated as another minority group in America. Group identity has offered a valuable angle for scholars to explain the reason why human rights have failed to be protected and justified. In this paper, I firstly clarify the relation between group identity and human rights by presenting the facts of African Americans' unification and single group identity. After listing the fact of spilt inside Asian Americans to present unavoidable failure of internal group identity formation, I argue that following the previous research in their human rights loss, the external identity was lost based on two prospects analysis: one is for alliance with African Americans and another is for the white, which both relates to the stereotype of Asian Americans.

2. Identity Unification for Human Rights

After experiencing holocaust and imperialist war, human rights protection was regarded as the highest priority for various stakeholders. Individuals were seeking the way to balance the maintenance of

self-recognition and belongings to different groups in human rights areas. Depending on the clause in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and historical facts in the civil rights movements, human rights could only be verified and achieved in group recognition instead of individual efforts.

The explanation of UDHR specifically identified the importance of general individual human rights. “All human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights, without any distinction in race, color or other issues, especially based on political and international status of the country or territory the person belongs to” [1]. However, the power of individual efforts was too weak to challenge the structural discriminations caused by traditional order. Taking the event of Little Rock Nine as example, when nine African Americans students intended to apply for higher institutions in Central High School, President Orval Faubus refused to approve their normal request based on academy performance. Instead, they encountered serious racial discrimination from their classmates and local political parties with the consequence that only one of them made successful graduation [2]. The reason why nine black students failed to justify their rights is the unbalanced force comparison between themselves and traditional color discrimination ideology. Representing the interest of racial segregation in Arkansas, there is no reason for President Faubus or other local parties to recognize the sharing benefits of advanced academic resources or other privileges with other races, which indicates that structural inequality needs strong support from common identity in communities.

Situations became improved in the coming civil rights movement in Birmingham when black people sought to find common interests. With the previous unnecessary sacrifice due to inconsistent protest targets, black people in Birmingham further confirmed the small objective that abolishing the racial segregation in business areas was necessary so that it mobilized different social classes to fight against the unfair treatment of black business holders [3]. In that case, what made their non-violent measures powerful enough was that they realized the importance of becoming the same political members, even for students and disabled people in black. Apparently, once the requirement on rights protection is mobilized by the common interests of certain groups, there will be the basis to achieve the individual rights because they share a similar identity with the group ones [4]. For most black people at Birmingham in 1963, only if the protest would be successful can their normal living schedule not be disturbed, which became the key for the temporary success in against racial discrimination in 1963.

Generally speaking, the establishment of new national modern countries requires more mature cohesion in ethnic conflicts and there will always be the possibility of hostility between different races. Developing trend in the 1960s for Black Americans expresses that without common identity recognition, human rights of minority groups will be always under threat of current social order.

3. Asian Americans in California—Self-separation

Following the trend of unification on group identity mentioned above, black civil right movement adapted to a mature model by sharing the political interest of resisting oppression and violence from white people. Until the launch of Mississippi Free Summer, African Americans had established well-organized institutions in vote and education [5]. However, there was no similar trend that happened in California for Asian Americans, as another minority group, which led them to be isolated by different backgrounds and interests.

3.1. Historical Background

Composed with different ethnic groups from various cultural and economic backgrounds, Asian Americans are often referred as American citizens who have Asian ancestry, among which most of them come from East Asia such as China, Japan, South Korea and Philippines [6]. When the U.S

Government published The Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, U.S Congress abolished the principle of ethnic distribution in dividing the Black, the White and the Oriental. Instead, the principle of nationality distribution enabled citizens from different countries to enter America, including Asian immigrants from different levels [7]. On the one hand, many professional Asian technical talents chose to move to America and occupy the possession of education, employment, and social welfare. On the other hand, Asian Americans' images was described in stereotype as the special group that is hardworking but less outgoing to communicate. Besides, the gap of quality of Asian Americans immigrants was so enormous it leads to both the conflicts of themselves and with American Society.

3.2. Case Study

So, the reason why Asian Americans living in California were concluded as two points. First, there were many Asians people settling here before the launch of the New Immigration Act, which offered them different chances for cultural adaptability. Second, there were various chances to work here as professionals [8]. According to a 1965 report prepared by the California government, most Japanese in California despite their gender had already obtained one or more years of experience of high school education and half of them finished the university degrees which was even beyond the percentage of White people. But for Chinese and Filipinos, nearly 40% of them didn't even finish the Grade Eight level and 20% of male didn't have any experience in literacy education [9]. Despite Education, Asian Americans also shared different cultural orientations due to historical reasons. For Japanese in California, there were natural decades from their last generation who moved to America after the failure of WWII and the interactions with U.S Military. Therefore, their children could more easily obtain an advanced education degree and achieve self-adaptation. But Chinese people arrived in California to make short-term money in the period of promotion on local anti-sino emotions of Americans, so it's less likely for them to find a common interest with Japanese and make long-term habitation [10].

3.3. Conclusion: Internal Failure in Identity Formation

Therefore, under the restriction of the same geographical unit, Asian Americans in California were presented as the separated and non-collaborated state in sharing the common interests. Unlike African Americans who shared the same history and value system, Asian Americans were believed as the incompact alliance with different even contrasting interests inside, which let them lose the ability of stable unification and cooperation. However, Asian Americans were facing the same structural discriminations under the fixed class struggle of the United States, which made them less powerful to form a unified recognition as an integral ethnic group.

4. Common Sense: Destroy of Unified Identity

There isn't much exploring academic results of further internal identity of Asian Americans identity. However, from prospects of outside identity for Asian Americans, scholars have offered their research angles in explaining the failure of group identity formation. Undoubtedly, due to their traditional values influence, Asian Americans were unable either to make sufficient recognition with traditional power structure, specifically, native White Americans, or fight against them.

4.1. Successful Self-disorganization

As a Japanese living in California, Ron Tanaka had explained the reason for the self-disorganization of Asian Americans themselves under the effects of value crashes by using the model of information control system in Asian Americans' communities, which indicated that the information shared in the

community is formed by the unique cultural influence. Therefore, in the information system, when the majority obtains the advantage in ideology, the weak minority will be eliminated in thoughts. Therefore, Ron Tanaka used the example of Japanese identity elimination for new decades Japanese born in California: “ We both want to live better lives in this country and learning Japanese won’t give you much advantages... We were not willing to be taught Judo and Tea Ceremony because it somehow represents the history of Fascism in Japan” [11].

From this dialogue, the perception of White living style has destroyed the common features of Asian Americans' own identity. Japanese who wanted to survive in the U.S and adapted themselves into elitism showed hostility towards their own cultural recognition, which means that their thoughts had been changed and permeated by American ideology. When they start to have negative emotions towards their own heritage, they are more likely to be involved into “Americanization” due to the strong wish of success and honor. Therefore, for Ron Tanaka, the positive effects had inevitably gave negative effects on Japanese’s new generation on their own traditional culture and finally finished the cultural occupation in wearing down previous identity.

4.2. Unsuccessful Acknowledgement from Outside

Targeting from another prospect of resources distribution, Jenny Nguyen, J. Scott Carter and Shannon Karter also described another form of harm towards Asian Americans from White people, which enabled them to make suppression on the common values of Asian Americans. They described white people as “Superior groups” in the hierarchy of races while Asian Americans as the subordinated ones to be put under the White people in social status. A model named Group Position Theory was mentioned in their research project “Prejudice among races is the process that formed the images of targeted race itself and others. The dominant group fears the possibility of losing power by the threat of a subordinated group...” [12]. Therefore, white people, as the dominant group, raised the fear of resources losing by the continuous immigration of Asian Americans. When their identity of group position was under threat by Asian Americans competitive quality and large numbers of population, which enabled them to raise jealousy towards Asian Americans to make further suppression on different prospects of their lives.

To conclude, scholars thought that on the one hand, Asian Americans achieved self-disorganization under the influence of American ideology while on the other hand, they also must face the suppression of white people to challenge their group position as the competitor, among which the white people often actively eliminated specific unified identity of Asian Americans.

5. Case Analysis in External Identity Recognition

Following the research conducted and analyzed above, scholars generally held the view that in the process of external identity recognition, white people were trying to make suppression on Asian Americans, no matter in the prospect of culture battle or resources possession. But by analyzing two cases for Asian Americans, I argue that no matter for which prospect mentioned above, the failure of external identity recognition of Asian Americans most resulted from their stereotype

5.1. With the Black: Red Guard Party

Since 1968-1969, there were native Chinese teenagers born in the U.S in San Francisco focused on the double exploitation of race and class in Chinatown, along with its residents’ appalling living conditions and problems in employment, crimes and lack of social welfare. Therefore, a Left-Wing dramatic political party called Red Guard Party was established to strive for basic benefits of Chinese people. Following the similar target of challenging the existing hierarchy with the ones African American held, the stereotype of Chinese people seriously harmed the common interests of alliance

of “Third World Category” and failed to form a unified identity with them.

First, mental ideology from Socialism China purposefully separated the Red Guard Party from being allied with the majority ideology from the Black. During the late 1960s, the Cultural Revolution in China became the dominant guiding thought for their world people to fight against the unfair social system of Capitalism. With the purpose of striking down the rightists, Mao would like to present the cultural revolution as “controlled mayhem”. The purity of Socialism politics motivated the split of internal force of their alliance [13]. Inherited the essence and purpose of cultural revolution, Red Guard Party in San Francisco also performed in a dramatic state to output the superiority of Socialism China and indicate its unique symbol “During the exhibition of the Movie “The East is Red”, some radical Chinese students advocated the Mao’s political propaganda in public and screamed to those who were unwilling to listen ‘Recognize China and Mao!’” [14]. As I examined from this description, Red Guard tried to use multiple ways, even including coercive ones, to persuade their followers to recognize every unit of their thoughts. However, African Americans who had their own ideology in eliminating the racial discriminations and structural inequality, found no justification in recognizing the dramatic political specific ideology from “Red Chinese People” Although the performance of advocating Mao’s thoughts was purposeful, including learning Mao’s books and exhibiting The Five Star Red Flag in communities, it still attracted worries and hostility from witness holding other religious and political beliefs [15]. Advertising Mao’s thoughts and political propaganda is the stereotype of the Red Guard Party and this unique tendencies forced them to show their own identity in communities but lost the chance to interact with other minority groups like the Africans Americans to form a unique group identity.

Despite the conflict in ideology, the stereotype of fixed Asian People’s images had also led to the crash of alliance with African Americans. Formed by passionate Chinese young students who intended to achieve their American dreams within their efforts to change the unfair situations of their communities, they let white people perceive the opportunity to assimilate with them by advocating their stereotype to isolate Asian Americans with other minority groups. For a long time, Asian Americans had been recognized as the most intelligent and hard-working group who could make outstanding achievements both in academia and employment due to their traditional value of obedience towards authority. White people preferred to use medias to broadcast the excellent performance of Asian Americans in grades and job market. Moreover, comparison between the wealth of Asian Americans and African Americans was described as the principle that if Asians can achieve something by working hard, so as for others [16]. Myth of harder working and forbearance was also shown in the regulation of Red Guard Party to express their insistence on Asian tradition “ We require the transformation of houses and lands into cooperatives and move extra means of production to communities to let us people take advantages” [17]. From the regulation analysis, members of Red Guard had strong passion in doing labor work to create more welfare to their communities. This indicated that the images of Asian Americans, especially passionate young teenagers in the Red Guard Party, had some common sense in American values to create as much wealth as people could to fulfill their American Dreams. Within the closer recognition of economic value, there would be the possibility that white people would establish a common ideological platform for Asian Americans to let them accept the justification of racial hierarchy existence and only emphasize the importance of personal virtue such as working-hard to cover the effects caused by unreasonable policies. “We used to be kicked around but that’s history brother. Today we have jobs, good pay and we are lucky... They must acknowledge their place in racial hierarchy, as the Lone Ranger orders them to kiss his ass and know... That would be White” [18]. In this dialogue from one unknown official of Red Guard, Asian Americans had great risks in adopting the current unjustified hierarchy in race set by white people with even negative curses towards other races whose social status were temporarily below them. Apparently, the unclear self-position would definitely make

African Americans hesitant to make collaboration with them and lose confidence to recognize Asian Americans, as the same suffering minority group as them.

Generally speaking, due to the analysis of Red Guard, there would be two prospects in stereotype for them to fail to make unified group identity with African Americans. Both the emphasis of oriental Socialism political thought and the interpretation of hard-working minority would decline the common interests for the third party to organize together.

5.2. With the White: Korean Medical Professions

For Asian Americans aboard in California, many of whom recognized themselves as professions to get good salary and enormous respect in local communities. However, scholars mentioned that due to the maintenance of group position, white people used different suppressions to prevent them from doing so. By analysis of Korean Medical Professions in California, I conclude that Asian Americans themselves failed to recognize Elitism in American society instead of bearing unfair treatments of others.

As the professional dentists and other medical staff were admitted in South Korea, many Koreans moved to California during the 1960s-1970s to seek another career development chance. However, they encountered serious difficulties that the medical institution and local hospitals didn't officially admit the justification of their certificates. In other words, Korean doctors couldn't get sufficient permission to conduct legal medical activities. Taking the example of Kong Mook Lee, what he described was that most Koreans coming to U.S are middle class even poor people, when they cut off their relations with original country but found that their profession can't be proved by non-technique reasons, most of them had no chance or financial support to go through another medical test or obtain another educational degree in American collages, as what the local institution required. Because the necessity to support their family in U.S wouldn't allow them to participate in such competitive and less hopeful investigation [19].

It actually described the difficulty of Korean medical professions faced in their career beginning in the U.S. losing the certificate of doing medical activities forced them to do other lower-income jobs unrelated to their knowledge, such as gardener and servants, However, more evidence has been found to prove that Koreans didn't have a stable basis to make themselves justify to be placed in the higher social status. According to the data there were more than 100000 Koreans who immigrated to California to find better living conditions for their family, which had made the limited resources of communities into shorter supply. Besides, even if the state government of California changed the law in 1972 to allow foreign doctors to obtain official certificates in their cities by passing the examination, there were still numbers of Koreans who were not qualified to be legal doctors because they nearly had no knowledge in English. For Mrs Yuh, an employee working at Immigration Office in California, there were 85% above Korean immigrants who did not speak any English but there were rarely Korean students who took bilingual classes to study the basic language skills [20]. Therefore, as the previous research result, under the situation of limited resources distribution, races in group position will be challenged. For Koreans who moved to U.S, English should be regarded as the necessary survival skills to conduct any activity in their community. When White people recognized Asian Americans as the eligible model group closing to their values, behaviors of Korean Professionals strictly broke the conception of them. The great contrast between ideal Asian Americans and what happened destroyed the previous stereotype and enabled white people to obtain the moral high ground: there is no justification for useless immigrants to share the limited resources without any potential of re-making wealth. Meanwhile, those Koreans Professions also failed to build a unified identity with White people as the elite in American society.

6. Conclusion

Similar to any other group intending to protect their human rights and basic privileges, Asian Americans needed certain group identity formation during the 1960s-1970s in California. However, the internal split of Asian Americans based on different reasons such as culture and family backgrounds made it difficult for them to unify as the complete minority group called "Asian Americans" as African Americans did. For external identity formation, they both failed in achieving common recognition with African Americans and the White to categorize themselves into certain political alliances. By losing all chances to form a unique identity, it was undoubted that their rights were under serious violation by different prospects and lack protection of certain groups.

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