

The Chinese Diaspora in the American Melting
Pot Prior to the Twenty First Century:

A Historical Review of the Assimilation Model

二十一世紀前華人在美國熔爐中的離散經驗。 同化模型之歷史回顧





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「離散」這個概念廣泛被應用在文學、跨文化研究、文化人類學、以及族群社會學上。這是指某一族群的人們因爲大環境的因素,被迫離開祖國,像種子一般飄散到異邦去短期紮根,或長期開花結果。學者們常認爲勞力輸出與帝國主義剝削是造成離散的主因,因此隨離散概念導引而來的相關研究主題常會包括殖民主義、資本主義、國家主義、族群認同、歧視、仇外,與白人至上論等意識形態不一而足。這些都是直間接造成離散社區高度同質性,以及與祖國形成臍帶連結的主要因素,而「同化」或「異化」的程度正是檢視離散者與寄主社會或主流人口之間互動的最佳指標。本書本於這樣嚴謹的學術觀點,致力研究始於十九世紀末,大量窮困、教育程度低下,並被政治動盪所苦的華人如何離鄉背井,被招募至美洲新大陸,投入勞力最欠缺的「苦力」工作;以及歷經了一百多年的奮門,這些華人移民的後代子孫如何在新環境立足並融入主流社會。此外,作者還將美國的亞裔與其他族裔做一概觀性的比較,輔佐以各項社經指標,以突顯前者在美國熔爐中身爲「模範少數民族」的小小成就。書中許多統計數字取材於二十世紀的美國人口普查資料,冀望「同化」的學術定義與每一階段的程序都能夠以最清晰的概念呈現在讀者的面前。

2012 年 2 月寫於 高雄應用科大應用外語系暨專業溝通所研究室

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#### INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity in America symbolizes a primordial phenomenon featuring a belief in a shared past and a common destiny on the part of racial minorities. Nash (1989: 113) believed that ethnicity is formed overtime on the axes of history, culture, and structure. In his view, the sense of ethnic difference, evolving around the existing social and cultural elements in the historical process, will be finally fused into an imagined community of shared past and a common future (Anderson, 1983). consciousness as though it was in a Marxian sense (Montville, 1990: 56), ethnic ideology can sometimes approximate a political class in pursuit of economic ends. In a larger context, ethnic consciousness, though built out of social elements, emerged in the domains that define meaningful world and valuable life. In addition to the economic ends, ethnicity helps lodge social actors in their personal identity as deemed appropriate by themselves. the core of personal identity can be found a deep personal component to a refuge against the hostility of the uncaring dominant group in the host society. In this identity dimension of ethnicity, fellow members are considered more orthy than are outsiders. claims on loyalty and sacrifice ethnics who ha for hurting the group.

It is natural for r to distinguish themselves from others through the perceived common group interests marked by ethnic identity. Although this mode of solidarity determines the competitive status, opportunities, safety, and advancement opportunities of the ethnic group collectivity, Marxists believed that using ethnicity as a differentiator of group membership is not geared towards the spirit of modernism. Ascriptive and anti-modern in nature, ethnicity is, they argued, only a residue of less enlightened stages of historical Since relying primarily upon the traditional societal structure development. characterized by parochial group allegiance and sentimental and folk memories toward inherited communities, ethnicity has run counter to modern trends of nationalism. patriotism. universalism and cosmopolitanism. Restated. industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and bureaucratization will increasingly erode the ethnic identity along with the emergence of modern states (Montville, 1990: Considering the economic class as the sole objective basis of social differentiation, Marxists believed that ethnicity would only weaken the productive classes on the grounds that ascriptive loyalties would obscure the vision of free

standing individuals and their class consciousness. Once class consciousness and the objective criteria of individual achievement no longer remain to be appropriate moral units, the progressive social force would grind to a halt.

Nowadays, the explicit expression of biological inferiority in connection with a certain race is discredited. In its place, research places increasing emphasis on the ongoing disadvantages suffered by many racial minorities. There is an extreme limitation to the explanatory power of race and ethnicity in view of the existing divergence of the economic status within one ethnic group. The extent to which that racism is a major determinant of ethnic conflict varies with the degree of class differentiation and exploitation. It is conceivable that one ethnic group does not necessarily consist of a homogeneous population. Nor do all members occupy a common economic position. As a matter of fact, members are distributed among various different class positions such as the bourgeoisie, the working class, or the petite bourgeoisie. For example, while most blacks in American suffer from economic disadvantages, some black ethnics possess enormous power. As many blacks are plagued by the unemployment problem, quite a few are not. There is little doubt that collective disadvantage is not necessarily the determining factor of individual disadvantage. If this is true, ethnicity is not absolutely the only structural and conjunctural determinants of unemployment. Even among whites, those avid supporters of Fascism are mostly recruited from the working class. racism is not the only factor contributing to the economic exploitation that takes place at an intra- or inter- ethnic level. And, according to Marx, the existence of class divisions and conflict within the same ethnic group should never be downplayed.

Even if the foregoing statement is true, immigrant communities have nevertheless become a permanent feature in the American landscape. As these pluralist communities flourish, it has thrown into doubt the Marxist assumption that ethnicity in the diaspora is merely a transitory stage of the social and political development and is destined to disappear along with the establishment of a classless society (Sheffer, 1986: 4). Nor has ethnicity disappeared along with the increasing tolerance of the ethnic diversity on the part of the dominant group. Van den Berghe (1981: 242) indicated that ethnicity and class are the two principal modes of collective organization, with ethnicity being more permanent and basic than class. Therefore, it is not atypical to witness ethnic minorities struggle against assimilatory policies with little regard to class differentiation existing in the ethnic community. In contrast, the melting pot notion presents a perspective not far removed from the underlying assumptions that the ethnic diaspora is doomed to disappear through assimilation and that any conditions leading to integration and assimilation will inevitably wreak havoc upon the building blocks that constitute an immigrant

diaspora.

It has been taken for granted that, through immigration, many foreign workers have found themselves scattering in a new country as racial minorities. There is little doubt that ethnic diaspora is a disadvantaged product of a racial encounter. Many guest workers in early stages of their existence have suffered from social stigma and deprivation in their status. Armstrong (1976: 343) calls this the proletarian and mobilized diaspora. In their constant contacts with the dominant group, they are likely to confront a dual authority and dual loyalty problem in conflicts with the norms and laws established by the host society. Pertaining to the feelings of being a minority are the constant contacts among the activist elements who are apt to create an environment in which ethnic members can both preserve their cultural identity and command solidarity inside ethnic communities.

An ethnic diaspora is defined as a community populated by ethnic minorities with a migrant background who retain strong sentimental and cultural links with their After settling down, members of the ethnic group start homeland country. mobilizing and organizing activities in response to the changing attitudes towards them in the host country. They maintain group identity through communal organizations and incline themselves towards continuous and organizational existence. While preserving cultural, educational, or religious legacy, ethnics in the diaspora intensify solidarities to form strength and resilience. As their cultural and economic activities expand, they have developed new inclinations towards new modes of ethnic identity. The same could be said for the possibility that cultural ingredients contribute to an ideological or emotional identification that immensely differentiates this diaspora from circumstances outside. Namely, immigrant communities have commanded powerful loyalties, controlled significant ethnic resources, and exercised influence on community insiders, thereby resulting in higher rates of participation by the rank-and-file in the activities of the diaspora. Jews and Hispanics in the U.S., Palestinians in the Middle East, and Turks in Western Europe are all cases in point.

In the immigrant diaspora, co-ethnics collectively seek a usable past, group loyalties, and a meaning based upon an agreed trajectory (Nash, 1989: 3). Out of this psychological base of identity and selfhood there arises a "we-they" difference with ethnic ties bundling members together. This psychi appeal is characterized by primordial ties as markers of humanity with which to mark off "we" from "they." Similar to a filter of rejection or acceptance, this ethnic consciousness forges a boundary to set off others as conditioned by the cultural images of the past. As a result, one's identity becomes historically continuous in the sense that one has found an anchorage after being uprooted from the homeland and transplanted to a new

country. Once reconstructed as a category, ethnicity in the diaspora is invoked to function as a rallying point so as to explore the conflicts of human worth attendant upon the racial interaction. Namely, in the process of cultural dynamics, moral and value components are given significance as a form of group persistence. Furthermore, closely related to this group persistence is the merging of individuals in a group so that redress can be exacted from members against dominant outsiders for either self-protection or the perpetuation of the ethnic culture.

Also exhibited is the reality that immigrant communities in diaspora have undeniably become cultural markers of difference among races. Talcott Parsons (Rex, 1987: 118 from Nash) stated that primordial or ascriptive ties in the racial situation, in contrast to transient social identities, cannot be volitionally assumed or cast off. As a form of social differentiation, the building blocks of ethnicity encompass shared common elements of body imagery or physical features, language, nationality, dress, religion, and shared history and origins. Subsidiary indices of ethnic association include less visible physical features such as customs, rituals, the use of calendars, housing, interior arrangement, specific medical practices as well as specific taboos in joint social participation, etc. The impact of these involuntary aspects of social markers on the racial dynamics in the United States becomes the foremost interest in the study of the continuum between assimilation and pluralism. At this point, ethnic diasporas functioning as a carrier of the varied cultural heritages of ethnicity have become a boundary-maintaining mechanism to placate the traumatic vicissitude for the transplanted racial minority.

At this point, readers should be reminded of the American creed as reflected by the United States as a "new nation." Symbolic of the spirit of enlightenment are the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution serving as the political and cultural foundations of that nation. Envisioning that country as both a refuge for the embattled and a republic of civil rights, immigrants came here, bringing with them such a world view and cultural vista to seek liberty, happiness, and the joy of life (Nash, 1989: 128). After early immigrants of the Anglo-Saxon Protestants had this land settled, they expected succeeding immigrants to emulate and perpetuate their notion of the melting pot. There is no denying that the mounting trend of Americanization has indeed transformed the immigrant ghettos, foreign languages, and strange dress and customs into the mainstream culture. However, despite the general aspiration for the immigrants to be shaped in the White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP)-like image, another facet of human nature still persists that tenaciously clings to the traditional remnant of the Old World.

In opposition to the nostalgic notion of the American citizen eating apple pie, playing baseball, and celebrating the Fourth of July, the seething elements of ethnicity