



The Analysis of the Overseas Chinese and the Reasons for the difficulty in integrating to the mainstream society

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Abstract: When learning how human beings tend to reject people of other races, I couldn't help thinking about a Ted speech I saw which was given by the physicist Riccardo Sabatini. He said that if a specific human's genome is printed page-by-page and letter by letter, we need 262000 pages of information. What makes everyone different is just about five hundred pages. For the rest, we are all absolutely identical.

Whoever is standing by our side, we are 99.9% genetically identical. However, humankind is categorized into so many races, ethnic groups, and social classes. We reject and even kill each other in extreme conditions. Religious beliefs, race, skin color, and different homelands further divide us. There are multiple reasons for this phenomenon, including the exclusive nature of humankind, economic conditions, limited living space, and resources. The phenomenon of exclusion by the aborigines of overseas Chinese groups who have moved to other countries is particularly serious.

Key words: Overseas Chinese, immigration, exclusion, barriers

1. The barrier between the overseas Chinese and other ethnic groups

According to the analysis of the overseas Chinese's living conditions, it is found that the overseas Chinese can be integrated into the local life and culture in only a few places. However, most of them form a particular social group in the host country. In the era of peace and development, the difficulty in integrating into mainstream society in the host country for overseas Chinese is twofold. The first reason is the prejudice against the Chinese in the host country. The second is the cultural barriers between the overseas Chinese and the local people. On the one hand, the overseas Chinese are prejudiced against by the local people and culture. On the other hand, some of the overseas Chinese also refuse to be assimilated by the host country's civilization. They are confused about their cultural identities and are at a loss when it comes to whether to adopt the motherland culture or adapt to the culture in the host country. In other words, the overseas Chinese face a dilemma in choosing the dominating culture of the west and the weak culture of the east. The difficulty in integrating into the local culture leads to the confusion of the overseas Chinese in their identities. Even though the overseas Chinese become citizens of the other countries, they cannot consider themselves as the local people. Hence, the Chinese diaspora exhibits features that transcend nationality, culture, and ethnicity. The clashes between the culture in their homeland and the host country's culture also reflect a certain degree of uncertainty in their identities.

1.1 The local residents' prejudice against the Chinese

Two reasons account for the prejudice of the local residents against the overseas Chinese. The first reason is their discontent toward the "invasion" of places for living by the Chinese diaspora. The second reason is that the people have stereotypes of the Chinese as people who spare no effort to make money and accumulate wealth.

According to my observation, the Chinese who run small businesses in Spain obtain a decent income. In

Barcelona, the net income of an ordinary Chinese restaurant reaches thirty thousand euros each month. The wealthy Chinese businessmen are extremely diligent and hard-working. Some cafes open on weekends. The wife of a Chinese restaurant boss gets up at 6 am every day to prepare the goods and get ready for the opening. She begins to serve the customers from 9 am and spends a whole day in the restaurant till 10 pm or even later. After the restaurant is closed and everything has been set, they can go home at 12am. A Chinese man in Madrid told me that the bars and stores run by the Chinese open for a whole day. Some places run by the Chinese close for half a day every week while others are never closed even on weekends and public holidays. Those Chinese lack professional skills and could only participate in low-end industries rather than the high-end industries. To obtain a better life, they work extremely hard and sacrifice the time to rest. Admittedly, it is not to conclude that all the Chinese small business owners live their lives like this. However, according to my observation when traveling Europe, the number of Chinese who preserve this kind of lifestyle is by no means small. Most Chinese living conditions are marginalized and isolated, just as what has been described in Amy Chua's book.

There lives, work and social relations are separated from other ethnic groups. Based on my observation of the Chinese around me, it is a prevalent situation in Spain. I once visited the southern city Sevilla in Spain and found that the Chinese who settled there rarely entered the Spanish social circle. They are all confined to the Chinese social circles. There are two factors for this kind of situation. The first factor is the local Spanish's rejection of the Chinese. The second is the dissatisfaction of the Chinese for the white people which transcends different generations. A crucial difference between the Chinese diaspora and the Jewish diaspora is that the Chinese have no prevalent and fixed religion and the living habits which differentiate them from the other local people. What is confusing is that despite the fact mentioned above, the Chinese are still repulsed and confined to their own circles. Therefore, I don't think that the Chinese are prejudiced against for religious reasons.

The portrayal of the rich Chinese is not rare. In Canada, there is even a TV reality show called Ultra Rich Asian Girls which is broadcast in both Mandarin and English. The show features the daughters of affluent Chinese living in Canada. Hence, another reason for the rejection of the overseas Chinese is their enormous economic power which is hugely disproportional to the number of the population. The massacre of the Chinese in Indonesia in 1998 and May, 13th incident in Malaysia also prove this point.

To express the detestation for the "100 yuan only stores" which are seen everywhere on the street and the Chinese restaurants and bars, a black singer in America even wrote a song called Meet the Flockers, which vividly portrays how to rob a Chinese neighborhood. The extreme lyrics also reflect the living conditions of the Chinese. The commercial diaspora comes to the foreign land to work for money. Some Chinese immigrate to other countries through various channels for the sole reason of making money. This group of people is not emotionally attached to the local culture. The Chinese who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy migrate to other countries for mere survival. This type of Chinese immigrant occupies a majority of the immigrants. Their competition with the local people for living spaces and resources results in prejudice against the Chinese immigrants.

1.2The cultural barriers established by the overseas Chinese themselves

The overseas Chinese hold very different views toward the foreign culture and the Chinese culture. The Chinese highly value their motherland culture, and the people in other countries learn the Chinese language. This condition divides the opinions of the overseas Chinese toward the culture of their motherland. Some of the Chinese who are born overseas or migrate with their parents at an early age can only speak a little Chinese or even no Chinese at all. Even though they are still living inside the Chinese social circles, they can't read the Chinese characters and do not identify with the Chinese culture and civilization. Therefore, a barrier is established between them and the Chinese culture. The Chinese with the passports of a different country are Chinese in terms of ethnicity.

However, in terms of nationality, they are no longer a part of the Chinese nation. Major Kurt Chew-Een Lee states that though the Chinese immigrants have the same ethnic interests as the Chinese citizens, the interests of their host

country and China are completely different. They are legally identified as foreigners protected by the host country's laws and have little connection to the motherland. Unable to speak Chinese and identify with the Chinese culture, they lost their rights as Chinese citizens and are not accepted by the homeland people. Through the observation of the second generation of Chinese immigrants, it is found that it is difficult for them to be involved in China's mainstream culture. In the meantime, they cannot identify with the culture of the country they are born in and live in. Even though they have legal identities in the host country, the immigrants are considered Chinese instead of Americans, Italians, or Malaysians. In the eyes of the local people, China is the place where the immigrants belong to. Therefore, the overseas Chinese have deviated from the host country in identity. Some other Chinese born overseas begin to learn Chinese and the Chinese characters at an early age and insist on learning Chinese civilization. As has been said in Joel Kotkin's book, some Chinese have a strong faith in inheriting the Chinese civilization wherever they are. The Confucius culture as a family treasure has been passed on from one generation to another. Regrets for the inability to go back to the homeland are embedded in their minds.

Speaking the Chinese language is for maintaining the social relationship in the Chinese circle and seeking protection and survival when they are living in an environment that isolates them without giving any help. Based on the data released by the Public Security Bureau in Qing Tian county, from the year 1986 to 2000, over a hundred thousand residents were approved to go to Europe. The Chinese in Spain mainly come from Qing Tian county in Zhe Jiang province. According to the existing data, the Zhe Jiang province immigrants accounted for 61.72% of the Chinese in Spain. Among the immigrants from Zhe Jiang province, the people who came from Qing Tian county accounted for 65%. The high percentage of immigrants from Zhe Jiang province is closely related to the Spanish government's amnesty policy. Though the conditions for each amnesty are varied, the fundamental requirements include the following conditions. First, the applicants should be guaranteed by the official residents in Spain. The applicants should provide relative documents, including a working contract signed formally with the Spanish employer, the housing contract, and the water and electricity bills. Therefore, the applicants could prove that they have formal jobs in Spain or have immigrated to Spain before specified by the amnesty policy. Because of the amnesty policy, the early Chinese immigrants in Spain mainly come from Qing Tian county. With their fellow countrymen as guarantors, the new immigrants from Qing Tian county become permanent residents in Spain. In combination with the opportunities brought by the amnesty policy, the ties of the relatives and countrymen lead to the new generation of immigrants in Spain who come mostly from Qing Tian county in China. I know a Chinese girl living in Sevilla who her parents have brought to Spain since primary school. However, after ten years of studying and living there, she never made any Spanish friends. The prejudice against the Chinese by the local people prohibited her from integrating into society. She has to learn Chinese out of the joint wish of her parents and herself. For her, studying Chinese is not the issue of cultural inheritance but the attainment of a basic surviving technique. The new Chinese immigrants in Spain come from places that are geographically close to each other. Therefore, the immigration model, which relies on the help and guarantee of relatives and fellow countrymen, is still the dominating among the Chinese immigrants who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Therefore, the immigrants' bonds are crucial, and Chinese is frequently used as the language for communication.

2. Two reasons why it is difficult for the Chinese to integrate into the country of immigration

The history of being treated unequally exacerbates the sense of isolation and loneliness for the overseas Chinese generation after generation. A typical example is the massacre of the Chinese in Indonesia in 1998. From May 1998, massive slaughter of Chinese in Indonesia occurred. It was not until July 14th did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China declare the Chinese government's concern for the affair. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China also stated that: "as a friendly neighbor of Indonesia, China hoped the Indonesian government could adopt the effective measures to protect people of all ethnic backgrounds including the Chinese and safeguard their rights of property." During that

period of time, the Chinese government and Taiwan Province never initiated any effective sanction of the Indonesian government. Twenty years have passed, and the killers were never sanctioned or punished in any form. This incident aroused a huge and profound influence among the overseas Chinese. They feel that they can not depend on their homeland in times of crisis. Therefore, the Chinese diaspora began to be more dependent on each other. The bonds of social relations are particularly important. The Chinese diaspora establishes the commercial network which suits group survival.

What should not be denied is that whatever the ultimate purpose is, the overseas Chinese need the cultural ties to bond with each other. For example, Chinese education has been preserved in Malaysia. The Chinese in Malaysia try very hard to preserve the Chinese culture, making them different from the local people in the host country. There are Malaysians, not Malays. The overseas Chinese in other regions face similar problems. According to Chinese law, only the people with Chinese passports are Chinese citizens. The Malaysian Chinese face an awkward position because their identities are neither accepted by the Chinese government nor by the Malaysian government. Other overseas Chinese born in a foreign land encounter similar situations of confusion in emotion and identity.

Based on the above description, the Chinese diaspora's difficulty to integrate into the local society is due to two reasons. The first reason is the prejudice and repulsion of the local residents toward the Chinese. Therefore, the Chinese diaspora tends to seek assistance from within. The conservative nature of the Chinese and their tendency to band together result in their unwillingness to integrate into the host country's mainstream society, thus worsening the status of their isolation. Based on this historical condition and national character, the preservation of the Chinese culture and the establishment of the Chinese social benefit the development of the living standards for the overseas Chinese. On the foreign land, the connections of families and different Chinese groups are stable. The uncertain and insecure situation for the overseas Chinese promotes them to seek a stable and unified linkage.

3. The contradictory views concerning cultural identity

As far as concerned, the Chinese diaspora is facing similar conditions with the Jewish diaspora. Even though they have become legal citizens of the host country, they are never a part of the country. The Asian faces and Chinese identities pose great difficulties for them in terms of career and life, and it's difficult for them to be involved in mainstream society. The inability to integrate into the western culture and the existing prejudices against the Chinese diaspora create a deepened cultural barrier for the Chinese in a foreign land. The barrier impedes permanent Chinese residents and the Chinese who only temporarily stay in a foreign land.

It is still a controversial issue concerning whether the overseas Chinese should speak Chinese and preserve the particular national features or be assimilated by the local culture. In the face of this issue, most ethnic groups would encounter the problem of cultural confidence and inheritance. The nationality law in Thailand stipulates that naturalization applicants should abandon their foreign names and take Thai names. They should also send their children to Thai schools. From 1935 to 1958, a total number of 4562 Chinese immigrants were naturalized as Thai citizens.

Today, the Chinese in Thailand recognize themselves as Thai citizens without the Chinese cultural traits. In Burma, the Chinese rarely marry the local people, and they even refuse to marry the Chinese who speak different Chinese dialects. However, in their preservation of the Chinese culture, they also embrace the Burmese culture. The former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew ended the Chinese language education in Singapore and closed Nan Yang University, the only university in Singapore that used the Chinese language to teach students. However, the Chinese in Malaysia preserve their Chinese identities and beliefs, accept education in Chinese and insist on the Chinese heritage without being assimilated by the Malay culture.

As far as concerned, the ethnic assimilation policy is successfully carried out in Thailand even though the policy itself is still contradictory. If no measures are taken to assimilate the immigrants, the local residents would feel uncomfortable for their homelands' occupation by the massive immigrants. They would also be furious when facing the fact that the minority ethnic groups control most of the wealth. If the dissatisfaction is not resolved peacefully, it

will escalate into violence and conflicts, thus resulting in more serious consequences. When it comes to national and cultural conflicts, the assimilation policy can help diminish the conflicts of various ethnic groups. Being assimilated is not necessarily a bad thing for those who stick to the traditional culture. Of the two evils, the least should be taken. The status of marginalization and isolation of the Chinese diaspora is harmful to their development. Admittedly, each country has various national and ethnic conditions. However, just as Joel Kotkin states in his book, the fact that the students and young people choose to learn English does not mean that they would abandon their mother tongue. It means that they are getting in touch with the foreign culture out of their own willingness. As stated in this thesis, the overseas Chinese's inability to integrate into mainstream society is due to both internal and external factors. Therefore, as far as concerned, whether the overseas Chinese would be assimilated by the global culture or stick to the particular Chinese civilization is still a global issue that is worthy of attention and research.

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