

A Research Paper on Model Minority Myth as a Systemic Racism Tool of Oppression

Ngee Hooi Thai
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Introduction

Racism in United States of America is prevalent not only to the African American community but also to other nonwhite minorities like Hispanic and Asian descent Americans. Even though nonwhite Americans are citizens, yet they are always subjugated under the White American supremacy, as second-class citizens. In this racial hierarchy created to uphold white supremacy, other people of color are placed subsequently under each other with the African American usually at the bottom. Asian Americans were given the label of “model minority” that implies a kind of honorary white status and therefore are placed above the African American and as well as other people of color. The label “model minority” seems like a praiseworthy label for the Asian Americans, seeming to elevate their status in the racial hierarchy, but history has proven that this label does more harm to the Asian Americans than good and this applies towards other people of color in this country as well. Model minority was created by the White to enforce White supremacy while being used to discredit other people of color and downplay racism as playing a part in hindering their lives in civil rights, humanity, economical, to name a few, in this country.

The Scope of this Research Paper

In this research paper, we will first look at how racism looks like in United States today and how it is systemic and so engrained into society that the good-intent White unintendedly propagate racism despite their view against racism. We will then attempt to tell the history of racism specifically on Asian American starting from the repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act to the current immigration laws that allows Asian to be naturalized as citizens and how racism against Asian American persists all these while and is not something of current happening when a flood

of Asian immigrants enter this country. With this historic background of Asian Americans struggle for settling down in this country, racism continues in a different path for the Asian American when they started to be labeled as “model minority.” This affects not only the Asian Americans themselves but other people of color as well and that “model minority” is a myth and a tool to divide the people of color and to keep White Supremacy untouched. Finally, we will talk about the solutions that has been used to dismantle the model minority myth and to help the healing from racism for the Asian American. As part of the solution, we will also look at how faith and church can play a part in it and why we should continue to advocate against the beliefs of the model minority myth that will result in hindering the path to racial reconciliation and unity among the people of color to fight for equality against the evil and hypocrisy of White supremacy.

Racism in United States Today

Many White Americans believe that racism is the past and is not prevalent today or it is not much of a problem today as we have come a long way to get rid of it. This view stems from a wrong understanding of what racism is. In their minds, racism is a happening created by irrational psychologically deviant people that is characterized overtly in a hostile behavior. People think of racism when they think of happenings like the Ku Klux Klan actions. However, today racism, which is “the collective misuse of power that results in diminished life opportunities for some racial groups,” has changed its form into a more covert matter. Racism is more easily identified if we think of it as racialization.¹ Racialization is happening everywhere in residential integration or segregation, unequal opportunities in jobs, income disparities, medical

¹ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8-9.

access, to name a few. For example, research shown that the more African American in an area, the more segregated the area is, in which other Americans prefer limited contact with them will move elsewhere to live instead. Whereas the better the socioeconomics for a race, the less segregated the residential area, but the African American community remains just as segregated. Another example is that White Americans tend to be in a better paying and more prestigious jobs, while African Americans tend to be in low paying and less prestigious jobs. The average income for African Americans is significantly lower than the average White Americans. White Americans are 89% more likely to be given coronary bypass surgery than African American. Therefore, racism better seen as racialization today is still very prevalent and damaging to people of color living in United States.² Racism is so much engrained in institution, jobs, residential, schools, police precinct, and more, where preference, privilege and prestige are usually given as a first choice to White Americans naturally.

Majority White Americans are oblivious to the racism prevalent today. Choice and freedom that Americans value is used to divide people “along socially constructed racial lines.”³ They fail to see racism in dominant social structures, institution and culture intact since they are privileged and are in the highest level of the racial hierarchy without ever need to experience being racist against and so they are insensitive to racist conditions and happenings in institutions, jobs opportunities, mortgage, and many other life conditions, as well as being ignorant of other racial groups and cultures without having to suffer socially for it.⁴ White Americans do not need to directly and overtly propagate racism because by enjoying naturally the privilege coming from

² Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12-14.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 36, Kindle.

a system that upholds White supremacy, they indirectly has continue in propagating and keeping the evil of racism at the expense of the people of color.

The History of Asian American Racism

With the system in America so engrained with racism and how the deep history of racism between the White and the African American has been, it comes with no surprise that racism is prevalent throughout the Asian American history in this country. In 1882, United States has passed the law for Chinese Exclusion in immigration of Chinese workers to this country. However, Chinese Americans, who are living in this country already as part of the exempted merchant or citizens of Chinese descent, were able to find a loophole to bring their spouse and children from China over. However, with the 1924 Immigration Act that cut off all Asian immigrations, these Chinese American would be indefinitely cut off from their family in China.⁵ The Chinese exclusion Act was in place for fear of changing the demographic of United States from mainly White. In 1943 the Magnuson Act was passed, repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act and allowing 105 quotas for Chinese immigrants yearly and now allow Chinese to have citizenship. However, the reason behind this passing of the Magnuson Act was due to the tension Americans had due to the impending Japanese communism threat to the American power in Asia and so Americans sought to have China as ally. Repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act was a way to show goodwill on the relationship with China, but this Magnuson Act has limitation quotas, thus also fulfill the White Americans fear of having too many Chinese coming into their country. The Magnuson Act is more of a symbolic appeal to kill two birds with one stone –to please China for ally by showing some inclusion but at the same time limit it and so to keep America

⁵ Jane H. Hong, *Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion* (North Carolina: The university of North Carolina Press, 2019), 24, Kindle.

mainly White.⁶ Then, in 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act came into place, now having no restriction on any Asian descent to immigrate and naturalized as citizen and allowing up to 108 immigration quotas yearly but not more than 2000 immigrants yearly. However, the federal government have stronger power to denaturalize and deport anyone in suspect of subversive acts.⁷ There seems to have progress in the inclusion of Asians of different descent to be immigrated and naturalized but the reason again is not out of goodwill and equal treatment for Asians but rather a symbolic appeal again. Americans are afraid of the spread of communism especially from the Chinese diaspora to Southeast Asia and other countries. Also, Americans needed to Americanize the newly won Japan and make it a “subordinate Cold War partner”. So, they do not have a choice since the McCarran-Walter Act is the best option using only nominal quota to convince Asians that the United States was racially inclusive and so to win them over from joining communism.⁸ Finally in 1965 the Hart-Celler Act is enacted that took away all quotas for Asian immigration and replace it with job skill based condition and with the condition of family relationships with citizens and permanent residents already living in United States. Even so, this law is less of “an embodiment of the United States’ commitment to racial liberalism and more so as a measure designed to support American power and prestige in the world while maintaining white dominance at home.”⁹ Even with the progression in immigration law to include Asian, behind was always prioritized with the image and power that America wants to portray to the world and at the same time trying to minimize Asian immigration to keep White dominance in America. These laws were enacted not because of Americans goodwill towards equality in race. It is noteworthy that all these years that the Asian immigration laws

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44, Kindle.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 185, Kindle.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-153, Kindle.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 169, Kindle.

were passed, the quotas are always unfair in numbers, with least quotas, as compared to the more favored and larger quotas for immigration from the countries with Anglo-Saxon roots.¹⁰

Model Minority Impact on Asian American and Other People of Color

With the 1965 Hart- Celler Act passed, despite the White Americans effort for this Act to still limit Asian immigration, the flooding of immigration of Asian of different descent started and has transformed America. In 1966, when the African Americans proposed hundreds of billions to uplift African American and other minorities, the term “model minority” was used to describe first the Japanese, then, the Chinese in their success in “moving ahead on their own – with no help from anyone.” This was published in the news, “Success Story” in 1966. Critics of the model minority stereotypes argue that it was not a coincidence that this term appeared during the civil rights movement and that it was the “attempt to silence the charges of racial injustice being raised by the African Americans.”¹¹

Model minority in the beginning was created by the White American to counteract against racism oppression raised by the African American. It is a way to silence all cries of racist injustice occurring in the people of color. It is used to tell the message that racism is not a problem and it is not what is blocking the people of color from success socioeconomically. African American, Latino/as as well as other Americans of color can achieve the American dream—not by protesting discrimination in the stores and streets but by working as “hard and quietly” as the Japanese and Chinese Americans.¹² Therefore, the White Americans can continue

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145, Kindle.

¹¹ Stacy J. Lee, *Unraveling the Model Minority Stereotype Second Edition* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), Ch 1, Kindle.

¹² Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 14, Kindle.

to ignore racism and not have to deal with it. However, this term has brought the Asian American to pit against other people of color, while holding the White as supreme above all.

Model minority has misled others to think that Asian American are successful and so they do not face any racial barrier in this country. For example, being known as a model minority makes teachers, employers, and even parents into placing a high standard and thus high pressure on one's achievement. An Asian American child will be compared with other Asian Americans in studies and accomplishments and is expected to achieve academic excellence or great work ethics. This gives them unbearable pressure, and studies have shown that Asian American women are overrepresented in rates of suicide and depression and this great pressure also resulted in the shooting of students and staff in 2007 at Virginia Tech University by Cho Seung-Hui, a Korean American student in a historically White institution. Cho Seung-Hui was usually unusually quiet but shown symptoms of mental illness, in which was ignored due to the bias of model minority on Asian student. His parent's success in business and his sister's success as a Princeton graduate may have led to Cho Seung-Hui's struggle to live up to the "model minority" image, which worked against him causing his mental illness.¹³ Being a "model minority" does not shield an Asian American from discrimination and prejudice from other people. Asian Americans often stereotyped as inscrutable, dangerous, docile, dirty, to name a few. They are called "Chinks" and mocked with speaking their own language and language mocking by imitating Chinese accent. In 1896, Justice John Marshall Harlan made a racial argument, "There is a race so different from our own that we do not permit those belonging to it to become citizens of the United States. Persons belonging to it are, with few exceptions, absolutely excluded from

¹³ Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1-2, Kindle.

our country. I allude to the Chinese race.”¹⁴ This negative view is still prevalent today as we hear people calling Chinese or other Asians to “go back to your country.”

Model minority that says that Asian American is successful in areas such as educational and income achievement, creates an invisible veil on the discrimination that the Asian American face in their jobs. Many Japanese and other Asian Americans reports on having a “glass ceiling” in corporations and White executives periodically asserts that in their companies, Asian Americans are best at being technical employees rather than being executives. Researchers also found that Asian Americans with similar jobs, educational credentials, and years of job experience to White Americans, are paid less on average and are less likely to be promoted to managerial positions.¹⁵

Model minority in a sense is stating that Asian American are forever foreigners/minority and will never be equal in citizenship with the White Americans, yet sometimes the White Americans gives them greater privilege than other people of color. Asian Americans have stated their confusion in their identity since the White American gives them a racial middle status between White and other people of color and yet when the White American is targeted with hostility, the Asian American becomes their scapegoat in the crisis.¹⁶ Therefore, model minority has ostracized Asian American from others, dividing the people of color from uniting against White supremacy. This racial middle status also put a high stress on Asian Americans to conform to the White dominant hierarchy and therefore needing the Asian Americans to abandon much of their home culture and national-origin identities. They are pressurized to do this conformity or otherwise face significant emotional and economic punishment.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6,9,11, Kindle.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13, Kindle.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17, Kindle.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19, Kindle.

Studies also shows that when Asian American are being stereotyped with “model minority,” the understanding of their health becomes limited and thus has constrained on the funding, research, healthcare, and more. Model minority stereotype has narrowed the domains of inquiry and thus smaller sample can be studied on their health and this became a bad cycle for Asian Americans because now they have limited research to help in their health. Model Minority stereotyped caused a misrepresentation of Asian American as having better health and so the funding to help them in health is cut down.¹⁸

Solutions to Dismantle Model Minority and to Heal the Wound

Critical reflection is a tool to make one who is oppressed to question internalized beliefs like the model minority myth in Asian American. With the awareness of societal inequality, one can then be empowered to work towards the cause for social change. It can also bring understanding to the history of Black-Asian sociopolitical solidarity that can dispel the model minority myth that erroneously give the idea of Asians who are apolitical and unconcern with racism. Critical reflection can help one to understand that model minority stands to racialize Asians in America and to continue the inequalities of socioeconomic among the people of color.¹⁹

Collective memory and knowing the history of Asian American struggle to repeal the Chinese exclusion can help realize why is it important to fight against racial hostility individually

¹⁸ Jacqueline H. J. Kim, Qian Lu, Annette L. Stanton, “Overcoming Constraints of the Model Minority Stereotype to Advance Asian American Health,” *American Psychologist* (May-June 2021): <https://eds-s-ebshost-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=3ebbf2f8-dd45-48bf-9f7a-2c528ccedf54%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#AN=2021-75787-004&db=pdh>.

¹⁹ Ronae matriano, Annabelle L. Atkin, Hyung Chol Yoo, Abigail K. Gabriel, “Asian American College Students’ Support for Black Lives Matter: Role of Internalizing the Model Minority Myth and Critical Reflection,” *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 12, no. 4 (2020) <https://eds-p-ebshost-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=24a71e2a-90ba-4979-b528-e11938bc8554%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#AN=2022-47454-005&db=pdh>.

and collectively.²⁰ Also, through group interaction within the minority group, we can alleviate the stress of racism by sharing similar experiences and how we combat against it, carrying the burden together rather than being isolated.

Another way to resist mentally against structural racism and the myth of model minority is to construct a counterframe and self-valuation.²¹ African American has been developing well a self-valuation mentality such as “Black is beautiful.”²² Asian Americans can also come up with a counterframe mentality and positive self-valuation to combat against the erroneous downplay of identity by White supremacy.

Asian Americans, who have personal experiences with discrimination and prejudice, can produce a tangible and political change for self and others. There is a research respondent who share that she felt inclined to suggest to a White restaurant owner to put up better lighting in the parking lot that had previous experience of a Chinese American being assaulted.²³ Another respondent shared how she was being hurled with racist remarks by a counter salesperson in the theater and she went to the manager to inform him, who then apologize and said he will better train the employee. These actions may be small but nevertheless will make an impact.

There was a research on how faith and church beliefs can help in the mental health of internalized model minority Asian Americans. The study reveals that a benevolent view of God can lead to a lower depression and better mental health because they feel a secure attachment to God.²⁴ I think that it is important for churches to open up for sharing among people of color on

²⁰ Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 195, Kindle.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 194, Kindle.

²² *Ibid.*, 211, Kindle.

²³ *Ibid.*, 201, Kindle.

²⁴ Paul Youngbin Kim, “Internalized Model Minority Myth, God Representations, and Mental Health Among Christian Asian Americans,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 19411022, 20210715, <https://eds-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=b4ae915c-6d23-4e9e-b270-84b2986d1d64%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU%3d#db=pdh&AN=2021-63319-001&anchor=-IDOECCAA>.

the personal experiences they had with racism and discrimination in life. Therefore, with collective memory, sharing of burden and stress, as well as securing their beliefs in God who cares for them and their lives, Asian American and other people of color can then be healed and able to have better mental lives and satisfaction in life. This share group not only heals their wound, but church can be the prophetic voice for them to fight for equality in every aspect in life and to know that racism and malignant racialization are the evil of society.

Conclusion: Advocating to Dismantle Model Minority

Model minority as a myth that does more harm despite the positivity its name implies, need to be advocated to dispel the misunderstanding and the unnecessary prejudice from other people of color, to not be used by the White American to pit against each other. When people of color work together, the voice and strength are stronger against White supremacy, to undo the injustice of racism so engrained in the system and structure of America. Asian Americans as well as other people of color should understand what Martin Luther King Jr spoke, “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” and if we do not voice up now, then, the evil may come back for us in the future.

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