

# It is Not Just About Scoring Points: Asian Americans and Interracial Relations in US Education Policy Debates

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the controversy around race-related topics in US education policies and their relation to the Asian American identity. Asian Americans are often viewed as the model minority among ethnic minority groups in US society. The myth is especially prominent in education, where Asian students in the US are often seen as hardworking, ambitious, and acing the standardized tests. Nevertheless, Asian students and Asian families often found themselves in awkward positions in debates around US education policies, especially regarding racial politics. They perceive that affirmative action in the higher education admission process discriminates against Asian students, who are often omitted by such policy, albeit their identity of color. The continuing debate on whether critical race theory should become part of the US curriculum also attracts discussions in the Asian community, some of them contending that the achievements of Asian Americans disprove the existence of systematic racism. The analysis of discourses on educational policy debates relevant to racial relations in the U.S. demonstrates the inability for the model minority myth to capture the demographics of Asian Americans. Moreover, through the rhetoric of meritocracy and utilization of misinformation and emotional appeal, the model minority myth within conservative narratives functions as a reactionary forces in racial activism through hindering the solidarity among ethnic minorities.

**Keywords:** Asian Americans, Model minority, Affirmative action, Critical race theory, Solidarity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans have often been represented in mainstream discourse as the model minority, with comparatively high economic and education status among ethnic minorities in the US and perceived as hardworking and disciplined. Nonetheless, the image of the model minority is a relatively newly constructed one in terms of the history of Asian immigrants. Before its appearance, Asian immigrants had endured a history of active discrimination and exclusion in the US and were perceived as "yellow peril" by the mainstream racial view. The immigration of Asians into the US started in the mid-19th century as the Gold Rush created a demand for labor in California that local workers could not fulfill [1]. As a result, the Chinese labor force was brought to the US as "coolie" to perform laborious works in various fields, such as construction and commerce. The importation of Chinese labor also led to the dissent of local white workers as it would cut their

wages and opportunity. In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted, which forbade almost all further Chinese immigration and prevented those already in the US from attaining citizenship [2]. Asian immigrants from different countries and backgrounds were also treated collectively as "inassimilable foreigners" and "Orientals" in the Western perception [3]. The model minority myth, in this case, was a turning point in the mainstream representation of Asian Americans born in a specific historical and social context in the US.

The perception and associations with the model minority label have been influential during the decades. It has also been significantly prominent regarding education. Research studies demonstrate that students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds believe that Asian Americans have better academic performances and are expected to have higher achievements in following careers than other students, including Whites [4]. Other common stereotypical media portrayals of Asian Americans picture the group as industrious, technology-savvy, and talented in mathematics [5]. The

positive stereotypes, however, are frequently shown to have negative impacts on the group. Previous studies have criticized the effects of stereotypes in education from various perspectives. For instance, such images prompt the public to ignore psychological issues faced by Asian American adolescents [6]. Students are also likely to be negatively affected academically due to the stress of underachievement [7]. While the positive stereotypes and model minority myth regarding Asian American students in education have been extensively discussed and critiqued, this article attempts to associate the model minority label with education policy controversies and interracial relations in general. It relates the current debates to the historical context of the birth of the model minority myth in the 1960s and aims at revealing how the perception affects the position of Asian Americans within racial politics. At a time of political polarization and turbulence in racial discussions, the mobilization of Asian Americans as an ethnic identity is an issue of great significance worth reflecting upon.

## **2. HISTORY OF THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH**

Asian immigrants in the US have been subjected to official discriminations enabled through various legislations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and were portrayed by the mainstream White culture as a perennial outsider and Oriental threat. The entry of US into the World War II (WWII), however, marks a shift in the configuration of racial groups, as the fact of Asian and Pacific countries such as Japan and China took opposite sides of the war suggested that it would no longer be feasible to racialize them into a homogenous ethnic group [8]. The war guaranteed an improved treatment of Chinese Americans as US citizens with the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 while incarcerating and removing a mass of Japanese ancestry. The diverging paths of the different groups of "Orientals" converge again when after WWII, the opportunities to become model American citizens were granted to ethnic Japanese due to resettlement programs and policies designed by the government [8]. Job opportunities opened up after the war also allowed Asian Americans to rise to hold white-collar jobs and become middle class, assimilating into the US society and taking up a different position in the economic status.

However, the chapter of the story of Asian Americans took another turn in the US political discourse during the Cold War era. With Japan transforming into the most important ally of the US in Asia, the goal became to picture Japan as an Asian counterpart of a successful capitalist country and construct it as "America's 'bulwark' against communism in the Far East" [9]. The trace of imperialist rhetoric in American portrayal of Japan as a non-Western country

in need of assistance from the US to "mature" into modernity also overlapped with the rising role of the US as a global superpower and leader [9]. Meanwhile, as the US went into war in North Korea, the Chinese fell back into the foreign enemy of the US in the Cold War political landscape. In this sense, the US Cold war agenda made a distinction between the images of the "docile" friendliness in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan and the "communist" authoritarian regime in mainland China and North Korea [10].

This situation was also reflected in the representation of Asian Americans in the US media, in which the image of "model minority" began to be constructed. In the 1966 article "Success Story: Japanese American Style" by William Peterson in New York Times Magazine, the author celebrated Japanese Americans' family values, focus on education, and image as law-abiding citizens. He went as far as stating that "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites". Thus, Peterson suggests that the story of how Japanese Americans managed to overcome racial discrimination and prove their own abilities "challenges every such generalization about ethnic minorities" in the US [11]. Another news article from the same year titled "Success Story of One Minority Group in the US" painted a similar picture for Chinese Americans in California, praising them for thriving against discrimination as "thrifty, law-abiding and industrious people—ambitious to make progress on their own" [12]. Both articles created the impression of Asian Americans as successfully assimilating into mainstream US values despite prejudice from society. They also both contrast Asian Americans with African Americans, the latter being represented as the "problem minority" in this scenario, without concerning about the different historical backgrounds of the two ethnic groups. It also served to stigmatize African Americans' racial activism in the civil rights movement by putting forth the "colorblind" narrative of social mobility myths and a self-made success. In this sense, the construction of the model minority story of Asian Americans served a reactionary function in history in more than one way: it poses the liberal, market-oriented vision of the US as superior over authoritarianism and communism in the Far East, and at the same time attempted to disintegrate the struggle against racism in the US by dividing among the minorities.

Fundamentally, this narrative forced Asian Americans into either the mold of apolitical, hardworking model citizens or of Oriental enemies, in a way similar to the political landscape during Cold War. Moreover, it can also be seen as changing the definition of Asian American identity from "not-whiteness" into "not-blackness" [8]. While the image of "yellow peril" worked on casting Asians away from the majoritarian

white US society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> century, the identity of Asian Americans after the 1960s was defined against African Americans. Scholars remind that the concept of race in the US was defined at its beginning not as white and people of color but as the white and black binary. They contend that "White supremacy is a powerful force, but one that is circumscribed by anti-Blackness" [13], and that blackness is "the point from which the greatest distance must be forged" [14]. The undertone of the model minority discourse is to offer a deal for Asian Americans to distance themselves from African Americans in a way that allows the US society to exculpate from its entrenched anti-black racism.

Among the many aspects of contemporary US society where the model minority myth of Asian Americans has injected itself into, the realm of education has often borne popular debates regarding this issue. It is at the same time an area where Asian Americans are often expected to thrive in and a place where the idea of meritocracy can be clearly stretched out. In the following sections, I will examine two discourses regarding race and educational policies in the US, including the dissent of Asian Americans towards affirmative action in higher education admission and Asian Americans in the debate over critical race theory in the curriculum.

### 3. CASE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC DEBATE

#### 3.1. *Affirmative Action in Higher Education Admission*

Affirmative action policies in higher education have been the topic of discussion throughout its existence. The debate's manifestation in the court system is most importantly shown through the *Bakke v. Regents of University of California* case when in 1979, a white plaintiff sued the University of California for denying his admission to the University of California, Davis medical school [15]. The decision of the Supreme Court ruled it illegal for state universities to set "racial quota" the number of colored students. But at the same time, the decision supports the legality of race-conscious admission policies in general, the rationale behind which is represented by Justice Powell's conclusion that "the goal of achieving a diverse student body is sufficiently compelling to justify consideration of race in admissions decisions under some circumstances" [15]. The argument of diversity has been taken by many proponents in defense of affirmative action policies. Another case heard by the Supreme Court that is particularly relevant to the issue of Asian American students and affirmative action is *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, where the white plaintiff Abigail Fisher sued the University of Texas at Austin since she believed that the University's consideration of race as

part of its admission process unfairly disadvantaged her and other Caucasian opponents. While the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the University's admission policy, in Justice Alito's dissenting opinion, he believes that the evidence collected showed that Asian American students were neglected in the race-conscious process of admission decision-making [16]. As a result, Justice Alito's opinion was followed by a wave of legal challenges against affirmative action, where Asian plaintiffs used the idea to back the claim that Asian American students with high achievements were discriminated against by such policies [17].

Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard case received high attention among the challenges that made them to the court. Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) was an organization led by anti-affirmative action activist Edward Blum that opposes the existence of the race-conscious policy in higher education admissions. In 2014, SFFA filed suit against Harvard University, representing a Chinese American student rejected from admission to Harvard. The plaintiff claims that Harvard is engaging in discriminatory policies in their admission process "by strictly limiting the number of Asian Americans it will admit each year and by engaging in racial balancing year after year", which violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 [18]. In other words, SFFA argues that the admission process of Harvard University is engaging in the form of racial quota, which was considered unconstitutional by the decision of the *Bakke* case. They believe that Harvard limits the number of Asian students admitted each year and thus unfairly judges "high-achieving Asian American applicants" by a stricter standard [19]. The Massachusetts Federal District Court and Court of Appeals for the First Circuit ruled in favor of Harvard, while SFFA has petitioned the Supreme Court of the United States to hear the appeal in 2021. Meanwhile, the Harvard case was only the first of the several lawsuits filed by SFFA against universities and a fraction of the larger discourse of Asian Americans' dissent towards affirmative action programs.

For example, in these federal lawsuits, the number of Chinese anti-affirmative organizations and media exposure have increased [20]. They are seen as representing an emerging new phenomenon, which means "the mobilization of conservative, affluent, first-generation Chinese Americans into a formidable anti-affirmative-action fighting force on a national scale" [13]. Such organizations backed by conservative Chinese Americans' grass-root efforts also played an important role in withdrawing the California Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5 (SCA-5), which, upon passing, would be able to overturn California Proposition 209's ban of affirmative action policies in public schools in the state [21]. After the bill was passed in the state Senate in favor of Democratic supermajority votes, some of the Chinese-speaking communities in

California were mobilized to protest SCA-5, fearing its negative impact on Chinese American students' prospects of college admission, through rallies and petitions. One petition on Change.org against SCA-5 has received more than 114,000 signatures [22]. Even though studies have suggested that such oppositional moves do not represent the attitude of Asian Americans towards affirmative action in general, as the majority of Asian Americans still showed support to the subject [23], the eventual suspension of the bill is a strong demonstration of how the status of affirmative action in education can depend on public opinions, which have the power of swaying legal actions and the overall discourse.

Several general observations can be made about the insurgent opinions of opposition to affirmative action in education from Asian Americans. The first is that they often employ the colorblind narrative based on the assumption that racial equality suggests neglect of the factors of race and ethnicity in making decisions throughout the society and same treatment of all ethnic groups "regardless of history, context, or social structures" [24]. The introduction on the official website of SFFA states that its mission is "to support and participate in litigation that will restore the original principles of our nation's civil rights movement: A student's race and ethnicity should not be factors that either harm or help that student to gain admission to a competitive university" [18]. It is highly doubtful if the stated objective was in line with the original purpose of the civil rights movement, but it is worth noting how the statement defines all actions that directly address the topic of race as a form of discrimination. Inevitably, the argument also relies on claims of meritocracy as the objective of the education process. The summary of the *SFFA v. Harvard* case on the website of Project on Fair Representation, the broader project run by Edward Blum, emphasizes that the members of SFFA consist of "highly qualified students" from the Asian American communities that have been denied admission to colleges with high prestige [18]. The argument held by Chinese American activism against affirmative action follows a similar pattern. In one article published on the website of Silicon Valley Chinese Association Foundation, a nonprofit organization that aims at promoting political engagement of the local Chinese communities, the author argues against the efforts to restore affirmative action in Californian public schools by stating that "racial preference passes over better-qualified candidates for schools or government jobs based on innate characteristics a person cannot change" [25]. In such arguments, the opponents of affirmative action envisioned themselves, or the Asian American group in general, as the classical "model minority" in the sense that they can thrive and compete with others equally based on their own efforts.

Somewhat paradoxically, the anti-affirmative action

efforts of Asian Americans also picture themselves as underactive discrimination and "maintained a narrative of Asian Americans as a racially marginalized population" [26]. In the complaint against Harvard filed by SFFA, an analogy is drawn between the impact of affirmative action on Asian students and the historical exclusion of Jewish students from US colleges, as the plaintiff argues that Harvard is "using racial classifications to engage in the same brand of invidious discrimination against Asian Americans that it formerly used to limit the number of Jewish students in its student body" [19]. The complaint also accuses that Harvard had a long history of discrimination against Asian American students in its admission policy [19]. In this scenario, the race-conscious factors in the college admission process were imagined to be designed to exclude Asian students specifically, and contemporary racial discrimination against Asian Americans is thought to exist and act as an impediment for higher achievements of the group in the society.

Another important element in the narrative against affirmative action is how Asian students were often pictured competing against other racial minority groups in the US or competing among themselves due to race-conscious policies. The title page of Harvard University Not Fair, a website set up by the Project on Fair Representation, features a photo of a studying Asian student, side by side with the words "Were you denied admission to Harvard? It may be because you are the wrong race" [27]. It throws out the question of what it would mean to be "the right race", presumably those who benefit from the support of affirmative action policies. Thus, it can be read as implicitly suggesting that ethnic groups including Black, Latino, and Native Americans take the seats away from the "deserving students".

In contrast, White and Asian American students become the collective victims of affirmative action in education. At the same time, SFFA's complaint against Harvard University also asserts that by using "racial balancing" in its admission policy, Harvard essentially judges Asian American students through a higher standard and "forces them to compete against each other for admission" [19]. It again suggests a determined outcome of affirmative action in higher education: that underrepresented racial groups benefit from it at the cost of Asian American students.

This perception fostered by the rhetoric of pitching Asian American students and other students of color against each other, however, is to a large extent a misconception. An alternative argument that undermines this narrative is that when Asian American students became disadvantaged in the US educational system in history, its interest has often been in opposition to White Americans instead of other racial minorities. Jerry Kang defined the term "negative action" in 1996 as

"unfavorable treatment based on race, using the treatment of Whites as a basis for comparison". He further defines that negative action against Asian Americans exists when "a university denies admission to an Asian American who would have been admitted had that person been White" [28]. As mentioned in the SFFA complaint against Harvard University, the accusation that elite universities in the US maintained a racial quota for the number of Asian American students admitted has existed since the 1980s [19]. Universities including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton denied such charges, and there was no definitive evidence to prove the conscious design of such quotas.

Nevertheless, findings suggest that when grades and standardized test scores are equal, Asian American students are still less likely to be admitted into selective universities than White students [29]. Under this condition, Asian American students' disadvantage in college admission would cause more likely rise from the possibility of being "replaced" by the White student instead of by other minorities, and "nothing requires that there be a fixed percentage of 'minority' slots for which all racial minorities must battle in a zero-sum game" for affirmative action policies [28]. The choice between the interests of Asian American students and other colored students, thus, is a false dichotomy. The narrative of dividing interests between Asian Americans and other racial minorities also bears another danger: the White majoritarian voice might again use Asian Americans as a weapon to scapegoat struggles for racial equality. Moses, Maeda, and Paguyo cast this strategy in their essay as a "politics of resentment", through which right-wing movements set different groups of color against each other to conceal the original agenda of dismantling affirmative action and preserving white privilege [24]. It is perhaps worth being cautious towards the parallel between Edward Blum as a White conservative activist who chooses to represent Chinese American students as a part of his larger plans of opposition to affirmative action and the use of the "model minority" success story of Japanese and Chinese to place blame on Black activism in the civil rights movement. It is uncertain whether a negative action specifically against Asian American students exists in the situation of *SFFA v. Harvard University*, but either way, it should not be confused with the effects of affirmative action in admission.

The debate about affirmative action in education also exposes another downside of the model minority generalization in that it fails to capture the existence of diverse ethnic groups within the definition of Asian Americans. Asian Americans as a category cover a wide range of ethnic identities with distinct cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The demographic of the population included under the name of Asian Americans also went through a considerable shift in the past half-century. While before 1965, the category referred

predominantly to Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans, changes in immigration policies and global political structure have attracted Asian immigrants from much more diverse backgrounds, with the number of ethnic groups included in the Asian American category growing from 3 in 1950 to 24 in 2010 [24]. As a result, the image of Asian Americans as prevailing in education and "overrepresented" in selective institutions cannot be viewed as an accurate representation, as the aggregate statistics risk ignoring the plights faced by many of those subgroups in accessing educational resources. For instance, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians in the US are statistically disadvantaged in their educational status, with more than half failing to complete secondary school [30]. Thus, it counters the argument that Asian Americans are overachievers in education and are equally victims of race-conscious policy in higher education admissions. It also suggests that different subgroups in the Asian American category can have vastly divergent opinions on affirmative action. For example, a 2018 survey suggests that among Asian American respondents, Vietnamese Americans have a high rate of supporting affirmative action in education, while Indian Americans and Chinese Americans show a less favorable attitude in comparison [23]. Therefore, consideration of the specific ethnic groups of Asian descent in the US further reveals how the model minority myth is a construction that compels people to ignore the role of socioeconomic status in educational and social achievements in favor of simple generalizations of the inherent "characters" of a racial group.

### ***3.2. The Debate Over Critical Race Theory in Education***

Asian Americans are also frequently featured in debates surrounding US educational policies in more intricate ways. The controversy surrounding teaching critical race theory as part of the national curriculum, for instance, involves the voice of conservative Asian Americans in unexpected ways. In order to analyze the Asian American's participation in the debate, it is worth reexamining the implementation of policies and the media discourse regarding the issue of critical race theory in education.

In early 2021, a number of states passed Republican-supported state legislatures that control the teaching of critical race theory in public schools. Several of these bills specifically address critical race theory (CRT) in their diction, while others utilize a more subtle language. For instance, the House bill 377 signed by Idaho's governor Brad Little claims that elements "often found in 'critical race theory' would "exacerbate and inflame divisions on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, or other criteria in ways contrary to the unity of the nation", and prevents

teachers from making students adopt beliefs that individuals "are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past" by the groups they belong to [31]. Other states, including Utah, Arkansas and Tennessee, have also passed bills banning the teaching of such materials framed in a similar language [32]. The Republican attention against critical race theory started with Trump's executive order in September 2020 that advises the federal government to suspend funding of programs that instruct "divisive concepts", the definition of which includes ideas that claim "the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist" [33], a framing that can be associated with criticism against systemic racism in the US.

Critical race theory (CRT) first emerged among legal scholarships in the 1970s and 1980s as an alternative to the mainstream discourse based on liberalism in legal studies after the civil rights movement [34]. CRT scholars argue that racism is entrenched in the US legal system and remains present in contemporary social mechanisms as a tool that actively preserves White prejudice instead of a relic of history. It rejects the liberal narrative of colorblindness and the idea that progress in the civil rights movement promised to eliminate racism through gradual improvement. Such scholarships also embrace storytelling and traditional policy analysis methods and encourage using race as a lens of examining the power dynamics in US laws and institutions [35]. Over the decades, CRT has grown out of the original framework based on racism against African Americans and the black and white opposition to develop subfields addressing other ethnic, gender, or marginalized social groups, such as Latino critical race theory and Asian critical race theory [36]. Despite its growing popularity in popularity in disciplines beyond legal studies such as sociology, CRT scholarships are primarily taught in the law and graduate-level courses, and there is little evidence of it being directly brought up in the K-12 curriculum, as a result of both its complexity and the debates existing around it [37]. There are, indeed, growing efforts to push CRT near the line of K-12 education. For instance, *New York Times Magazine's 1619 Project* was initiated in 2019 to publish a collection of essays, photography, and creative media aiming to reframe US history, with slavery as the starting point and with the African Americans' struggle towards freedom and equality as the center of the American story. The *1619 Project* also plans to partner with the Pulitzer Center to introduce a curriculum that brings its material into the classroom [38]. Based on the argument advanced by CRT that racism is an inherent part of American social mechanism, the *1619 Project* expects to bring the materials into high school classrooms and enrich the perspectives discussion around race and racism in schools.

*The 1776 Report* published by the Trump administration in September 2020, which aims at

promoting education of a patriotic history of the US [39], is viewed as a reaction towards New York Times magazine's project. Meanwhile, the attack on critical race theory by the Trump administration and Republican politicians around the same time can also be interpreted to be a move diverting attention from the criticism of racism in the US criminal justice system elicited by the death of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. However, the uses of CRT as a target of blame in such arguments and policies are largely based on misrepresentation of the theory. Not only is CRT hardly invading the K-12 curriculum at the moment, its major focus on institutions and structural racism also means that it does not fit with the characterization of "divisiveness", hate, and stereotypes on an individual level. In this sense, the idea of critical race theory in the public discourse was constructed to become an imagined enemy of conservative politics with the heated discussion nowhere near the theory and its impact itself.

The Asian American identity is inserted into this conversation in a particular way. News articles noted how "Asian-Americans, in particular, have argued that critical race theory will undermine merit-based admissions, advanced learning programs..." [40]. Some have criticized critical race theory from the perspective that it supposedly vilifies the identity of Asian Americans, blaming them for trying too eager to assimilate into whiteness and enjoying white privilege. In an article titled "Asian American students have a target on their backs thanks to critical race theory" on USA Today, the author Asra Q. Nomani, claiming to be speaking on behalf of Asian American parents, argues that critical race theory as an "ideology has swept through America's educational system at every level" and has the effect of marginalizing Asian American students [41]. She also suggests that the circulation of critical race theory led to educational policies that seek to barricade Asian American students from elitist education institutions. Resorting to the rhetoric of upward social mobility, she states that "Asian American families have worked to teach their children that academic achievement and intellectual labor will earn rewards", which should not be harmed by race-conscious policies in the system.

On the other hand, communities and organizations that claim to represent the identity of Asian Americans and embrace the image of the model minority are mobilized against the topic of critical race theory. In July 2021, the book *An Inconvenient Minority: The Attack of Asian American Excellence and the Fight for Meritocracy* was published by Kenny Xu, the leader of Color Us United, a group founded with the mission of "advocating for a race-blind America". He argues that "It is not a historical privilege, systemic bias in favor of Asians, or white assistance. It is a meritocracy" [42]. Once again, the model minority and meritocracy myth

create the effect of denying the existence of structural racism in the US.

The discourse of animosity towards critical race theory is also evident in media in another language. On Weibo and WeChat, the Chinese ethnic, social media platforms, conservative Chinese Americans were mobilized to support the banning of teaching critical race theory in school. The phrase critical race theory is often reduced to the acronym "CRT" without any specification of its meaning in mentioning the subject on Weibo discussions [43]. As a result, the keyword CRT is automatically established as an enemy of Chinese Americans' order, freedom, and rights, with many of its opposers having misunderstood or never learned about its actual theory. Meanwhile, research on the discussion of US politics on WeChat demonstrates a landscape of polarization, with "conservative content leading the scoreboard in volume and reach, as well as narrower and more aggressive in its ideological expression" [44].

Moreover, news sources on Chinese ethnic media serve another function for Chinese immigrants in the US as they disseminate useful local information for living in an American city and strengthen social ties for local communities [44]. As a result, the fear and anxiety in the news on WeChat have a more powerful effect on their audience. News articles on WeChat associate the controversy around critical race theory with the recent education policies in the US, such as the cancellation of the Gifted & Talented program in New York state. An article titled "Chinese American parents are considering moving out because of the cancellation of gifted programs" claims to reform education policies result from the growingly popular critical race theory [45]. Its play on the worry and anxiety of Chinese American parents has a strong ability to shift their opinions and mobilize them to protect the "prospect" of their children. Zhang's study also demonstrates how news on WeChat focuses on disseminating sensational misinformation that propagates Islamophobia and racism. In this case, immigrant issues and other ethnic minorities project a stronger threat to conservative Chinese Americans than White supremacist policies. Due to the perception that Asian Americans are "persistently less advantaged than Whites and more advantaged than Blacks in the American racial order" [46], such political affiliation attempts to maintain their advantage over African Americans rather than unite against persistent racism of the social system.

Thus, the ongoing controversy around critical race theory and relevant education policies further reveal how the self-representation of Asian Americans as the model minority and supporters of meritocracy can hinder the collective efforts of ethnic minorities for advancing racial equality. It also shed light on how right-wing political campaigns and grass-root conservative activism mobilize support around

misinformation the sentiment of fear, anger, and victimhood. By constructing critical race theory as the straw man target of its attack, conservative racial politics is able to create animosity towards race-conscious educational policy in general and cite Asian Americans as the evidence of its argument. At the same time, the debate also evokes anxiety in local communities who believe they are targeted as Asian Americans, and their disbelief has extended onto more forthcoming changes in education policies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The summer of 2020 witnessed the police brutality against African Americans in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests following George Floyd's death and pandemic-inflicted racism towards Asian Americans. While many draw the connection between the two forms of resistance and hope for catalyzing changes to the racial order in the US, it also reminds of the difficulty of achieving solidarity between these two ethnic minority identities. Video footage of Asians being attacked by black Americans during the Covid outbreak is circulating widely online [47], while some pro-police Asian Americans choose to side with the rhetoric of "law and order" instead of against white supremacy. However, the activism of Asian Americans in support of the BLM protests was also visible. A poster designed by Seattle-based artist Monyee Chau repopularized the phrase "Yellow Peril Supports Black Power" to connect the causes of resisting racism against both communities. The phrase's origin was rooted in the 1960s when Asian American activists such as Richard Aoki and Yuri Kochiyama participated in the civil rights movement along with the Black Panther Party and Black activists. It is important to reimagine the possibility of breaking the current racial hierarchy by recalling how a moment of interracial solidarity had occurred during the civil rights era when the Black Liberation Movement looked towards the Chinese socialist revolution as inspirations for leading social movements, while internationally, both Asian and African countries envisioned a future of Third World revolution against imperialism [48].

The model minority myth has grown in the cold-war political landscape cast Asian Americans into the modes of either apolitical, hardworking model minority or Oriental enemies. It also diverges the interests among identities belonging to racial minorities and impediments racial groups in the US from achieving solidarity in supporting the cause against racial inequality. An examination of the recent and ongoing debates around educational policies and the Asian American involvements illustrates how the public discourse employs the Asian American identity and the model minority myth as a weapon in the effort of promoting "colorblindness" and preserving the status quo, and how the largely middle-class image of the

Asian American identity and its association with meritocracy failed to evolve with the changing demographic of ethnic groups covered under the name itself. As a result, it serves a reactionary function in racial politics and prevents the convergence of the collective interests of ethnic minorities. In the emerging disputation around Asian American identity, racial equality, and education system, it is important to reflect upon the possibility of racial minorities not pitched against each other for competition but recognizing their converging interests in the long term, as well as the forces of resistance present in this process.

Through the analysis of relevant discourses, the essay demonstrates the mechanism through which the rhetoric of model minority and meritocracy alienates Asian Americans from other ethnic minorities in the US and hinders the possibility of racial solidarity. The analysis also serves as a miniature of the interracial power dynamics in contemporary US society, and the characterizes the problematic dilemma of the future of the Asian American identity.

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