



Reappropriate

To Build a Name Brand of Chinese Americans

September 15, 2016



Pedestrians walk by a mural of the American flag in San Francisco's Chinatown in February 2007. (Photo credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#))



Since 2001, Reappropriate has been the web's foremost Asian American activism, identity, feminism, and pop culture blog!

Like 3.6K Share

Follow @reappropriate

Following 118

ABOUT

BOOKING / APPEARANCES

SUBMIT WRITING

ADVERTISE

CONTACT

By Guest Contributor: Steven Chen

This article is dedicated to the first [United Chinese Americans convention](#) which was held at Washington, D.C. on September 8th, 2016. During the convention, Chinese Americans from all over the country gathered to lay out a road map for the future success of Chinese Americans. I wish for the success of the convention.

More than a hundred years ago, people from China came across the Pacific Ocean to America to escape from wars, famine, and poverty. For a very long time, Chinese Americans were discriminated against and treated unfairly. Yet, through the unremitting efforts of many generations, we have achieved remarkable success here in America.

We were hard laborers working in abandoned gold mines, now we are entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley;

We were coolies building the Transcontinental Railroad, now we are the engineers building information highways;

We were illiterates, now we are university professors and Nobel laureates;

We didn't have the right to testify in courts, now we are lawyers and judges;

We didn't have the right to vote; now we are Congress members, Presidential Cabinet members, and Governors;

We were stereotyped as degraded, exotic, dangerous, and perpetual foreigners; now we are highly educated, high-income model citizens.

The successes we have achieved today were due to the progress of American society and, more importantly, the hard work of all Chinese Americans in building up a good Chinese brand over the years.

With its advanced social system and vast undeveloped land, America has attracted people from all over the world. When people of different ethnic backgrounds come to one country, they inevitably entered an ethnic brand name competition. When some brave Chinese arrived to America roughly one hundred years ago, many of them didn't understand English or American culture. Men had long braids. Their lives were confined to their own small social circles. In the eyes of some white people, Chinese were ["degraded, exotic, dangerous, and perpetual foreigners who could not assimilate into civilized western culture"](#). While it is true that their negative view of early Chinese immigrants was caused in part by people who demonized Chinese immigrants, we should not deny that some of the prejudice was also influenced by actual weaknesses.

With such a bad brand name, Chinese Americans had to put in much more effort than white people in order to succeed. Nevertheless, there were some Chinese who were able to overcome these obstacles and become successful in America. Their success improved the image of Chinese Americans and created a virtuous cycle. In later years, Chinese with strong educations came to America from Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China and around the world. This further helped to lift the overall image of Chinese Americans. Old and new immigrants helped each other and worked together to achieve the success we see today.

While celebrating our achievements, we must acknowledge that we still face great challenges. Our career options are still limited; Not many of us have risen to the top positions of large companies, universities, or government agencies; Chinese political leaders are few and far between; Some perceived that it is increasingly hard for Chinese students to get into good colleges; and many Chinese Americans still feel discrimination at various levels. Those challenges seriously affect the further advancement of Chinese Americans, particularly for our next generation. The challenges we face today actually reflect the limitations of our current brand. We need to build a better Chinese American brand to tackle new challenges.

An in-depth analysis of racial discrimination

In a multi-ethnic nation, the image of an ethnic group is very important, because people will intentionally or unintentionally associate a person with his race. If you were helped

greatly by a person of a particular race, you will have a good impression of that race. If you were ever hurt by a person of a particular race, you will have a bad impression of that race. That is human nature. Therefore, each person's words and deeds will affect, directly or indirectly, the image of the entire ethnic group. That is why it is important to have a full understanding of racial discrimination and racial profiling.

The literal meaning of "racial discrimination" is to treat people of different races differently. Historically, racial discrimination has often been used by the dominant race to oppress the vulnerable race. It made the lives of the vulnerable race even harder. That is why members of the vulnerable race are strongly against it. The reasonable people in the dominant race also believe that racial discrimination is wrong.

There are three different kinds of racial discrimination: 1) Explicit Discrimination, 2) Hidden Discrimination and 3) Reverse Discrimination. Explicit discrimination takes the form of discriminatory written policies. Hidden discrimination is prejudice within people's minds. Hidden discrimination can also be subdivided into intended discrimination and discrimination based on prejudices. Reverse discrimination is a phenomenon that has only emerged in recent decades; it describes a negative impact on the dominant race when society tries to help a vulnerable race.

The following analogy illustrates these three kinds of racial discrimination.

Imagine a country is made up of oranges, orange stores and consumers of oranges. In reality, our job seekers are the oranges to be sold, the job market and colleges are orange stores, and employers are consumers who need to buy oranges. But, in our analogy there are different varieties of oranges, distinguished by their different shapes and colors. However, they are all oranges. So, the taste and nutritional value are similar. The real difference lies in the individual quality, mostly regardless of type. For example, a ripe orange in type A is better than the ones not fully grown in type B and vice versa. Different races are just like the different varieties of oranges. They have different shapes and colors, but they are all human beings. In this analogy, variety A represents African Americans, variety C represents Chinese Americans, and variety W represents white people.

First, before the Civil Rights Movement, America had many written policies in favor of whites. In our analogy, this would mean that oranges of variety W were allowed to be sold at any stores, whereas variety A and C were restricted to be sold at cheap stores or not allowed to be sold at all. Thus, the situation for variety A and C is difficult to improve. It also could trigger a vicious cycle and cause the situation to get worse. This is Explicit Discrimination.

Second, because some store owners prefer certain varieties of oranges they like, they just want to sell variety W (intentional discrimination), or they don't want to sell variety A or C because they believe that nobody will buy them (discrimination due to prejudices). This is Hidden Discrimination, because it is not written on paper.

Third, some customers are only willing to buy variety W (intentional discrimination), or they don't want to try variety A or C because they think those are not good (discrimination due to prejudices). This is Hidden Discrimination, too.

Fourth, for many reasons, the overall quality of variety A and C may not be as good as variety W. There are shops which are willing to sell all kinds of oranges. Customers are willing to try different varieties. However, if customers found out that the probability of getting a good orange from variety W is significantly higher than other varieties, they probably will be willing to buy variety W. This is a brand name issue.

The Civil Rights Movement aimed to eliminate overtly discriminatory policies, which addresses the first point above. Chinese Americans have suffered greatly by policies discriminating against Chinese and people of color in general. The Civil Rights Movement is a great step forward. However, it was not enough, since the Hidden Discrimination and brand name issue mentioned above are very important too. The introduction of Affirmative Action (AA) was intended to deal with Hidden Discrimination. Affirmative Action requires some shops to sell and maybe promote variety A and C. It also requires some customers to try variety A and C.

Affirmative Action provided people with different ethnic backgrounds a chance to prove themselves. With the help of AA, government agencies, schools and some large companies recruited African American, Hispanic, Chinese and other minorities. In turn, those people demonstrated that they are capable of handling these jobs. After the implementation of AA, the percentage of workers and professionals with different ethnic backgrounds has increased. As a result, the proportion of white people in these areas has decreased, which some describe as reverse discrimination. Some white people are strongly opposed to affirmative action because on the surface white people appear to be victims of AA. However, this is not necessarily true. When other races rise up, society's opportunities increase as a whole and opportunities for white people are increased as well.

The effectiveness of AA for different ethnic groups is not the same. Some minority groups have benefited more from AA because it is easier for them to prove themselves than others for some reasons. Because of AA, the situation of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Indians here in America has greatly improved. However, African Americans, Hispanics and some other ethnic groups did not benefit from it as much as we did. The gap between them and other minorities may even have increased.

For the Chinese, we are in a good position in the areas of higher education and high tech jobs. This means that in these areas, the "shops" and "customers" in the orange analogy have recognized our brand. In those areas, AA is not necessary to help many of us today. That is why some Chinese Americans are against AA nowadays. However, Chinese Americans are not in the dominant status in many other areas. In those areas we still need the help of AA. That is the dilemma.

The Civil Rights Movement and Affirmative Action were only designed to address the external negative impact on a race. However, in order for “customers” to continue to buy a certain product, the product needs to satisfy them. For example, imagine that a manager of the company has hired ten people from ethnic group A and another ten from ethnic group B. After one year, he found that eight out of ten from ethnic group A are productive, while only two are not. At the same time, he found that only two out of ten from ethnic group B are productive. In the future, he most likely will want to hire people from ethnic group A, even though he knows that ethnic group B not a complete loss. He just does not want to take the risk. It is the same as in our analogy regarding customers who want to buy oranges. If a customer tries variety B a few times and the results are not good, he probably won't buy variety B for a while. This is the brand name issue. That is to say that if a brand is strong, the external negative force will be weakened creating a virtuous circle. On the other hand, if a brand is weak, the external negative force will be stronger, creating a vicious cycle.

Chinese Americans are a minority in America. We must firmly oppose any form of racial discrimination. At the same time, we have to recognize that as long as the racial disparities still exist, racial biases will not go away completely.

How to build a name brand of American Chinese?

1. Participate in American democracy and understand how American democracy works. No matter what political party you support, please vote.
2. Oppose any policy discriminating against Chinese Americans. There are numerous bills coming out of all levels of US legislative bodies. Some bills might have elements of racial discrimination against Chinese Americans. We need to stand up and say no.
3. We need to help individuals who are mistreated because they are Chinese Americans. We need to help them fight politically and in the court system.
4. Allow political difference within the Chinese community. Chinese are a diverse group. It is unrealistic to ask for a unified political stance. We should tolerate different political views among us. It is normal for Chinese Americans to support different political parties and different candidates.
5. Encourage and help Chinese Americans who are interested in politics and support currently elected Chinese American politicians. No one will agree with a politician one hundred percent. If you disagree with a Chinese American politician, you may choose not to support him or her. However, you should not attack him or her mercilessly simply because he or she happens to be ethnically Chinese. If you do so, you will only isolate yourself and discourage our next generation from getting involved in politics.
6. Help Chinese Americans in need, particularly new immigrants.

7. Participate in community services. Community services organized by schools, churches, and nonprofit organizations are very important to the stability and well-being of this country. In America, many volunteers are working hard to make America a better place. Our participation in community services is important to build our brand name.

8. Venture out of the comfort zone of the Chinese community and integrate into American society. America is a country of multi-ethnic groups. Good racial relations are crucial for Chinese Americans in order to have a safe and prosperous life in America. Each and every one of us should be a messenger of peace in race relations. While we oppose racial discrimination against Chinese Americans, we also must oppose any racially discriminatory speech or action against other races.

9. Broaden our career options and our choice of colleges. America has numerous good professions and many wonderful colleges. They desperately need highly qualified Chinese Americans. However, we tend to limit ourselves to a handful of familiar professions and colleges, which results in fierce competition amongst ourselves. It also creates a situation called "overrepresentation." We should respect the dreams of our children, and not force them to choose the professions and colleges we are familiar with. That is the way for Chinese Americans to tap into the vast resources America offers.

10. Break the glass ceiling. When a Chinese American rises up to certain level in large corporations, universities and government agencies, he or she will feel increasing resistance, which is called the glass ceiling. You cannot see it, but you can feel it. There are two main contributors for the existence of glass ceiling. One is a deliberate effort by some people. For example, even if some employers know that a Chinese person is more capable of handling a job compared to another candidate, they might still choose to pick the other candidate. This is malicious intentional discrimination. Fortunately, most companies and universities want to hire and promote high quality candidates. In those cases, the existence of the glass ceiling was largely due to the fact that decision makers do not believe a Chinese American can do well in certain positions. For example, in companies, they might believe that Chinese are good employees, but not good managers. In universities, they might believe Chinese students would not perform well after graduation. The prejudices they have will hinder the further advancement of the Chinese Americans. To break the glass ceiling, we need to have enough successful Chinese Americans to prove that their bias is wrong.

11. Fight for more funding in the areas we care for the most. For example, good education for our children is something very important to us. With the rise in population and a persistent shortage of state funding in education, the competition among students to get into good colleges has become fierce. As a result, different ethnic groups will fight hard to protect their own groups. As a minority, we cannot always win this political battle. The only solution is to increase funding for education.

12. While rising up, we need to help other disadvantaged ethnic groups. It is important to understand that America is a multi-ethnic family. If some ethnic groups are

marginalized, the country will not be stable. When that happens, we will suffer greatly. In the long run, it is in our best interest to help others. Helping others is also a good way to build our brand name and create a win-win situation.

America's ultimate goal is to achieve the dream of Martin Luther King Jr's colorblind society where "People will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." However, we must understand that as long as racial differences exist, people will not completely disassociate a person from his or her ethnic background. In order for us to be respected and successful in this land, we need to work together to improve the brand name of Chinese Americans.



Steven Chen is an IT professional who emigrated from China in 1987. He is passionate about environmental issues and issues that matter to Chinese Americans. He has written several articles related to the political involvement of Chinese Americans.

Learn more about Reappropriate's guest contributor program and submit your own writing [here](#).

Share: <http://www.reappropriate.co/2016/09/to-build-a-name-brand-of-chinese-americans/>