# Diversity and Chinese American Leadership: A Contextual and Experiential Approach to Theories with Reality Checks


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## 1 Introduction

The rise of minority leaders in US higher education may be viewed and understood through the lens of diversity and related social mechanisms such as affirmative action (AA). Yet, the fundamental concepts, underlying ideas, and policy practice/programs including diversity, minority, affirmative action, etc. cry for a critical review and reexamination in changed and changing sociopolitical contexts. Of particular interest is the case of Asian (especially Chinese) Americans in relation to visibly increasing racial happenings and social sentiments in recent years.

As a former leader or partner in diversity undertaking at several educational institutions, it took me many years of learning, observation, and reflection to arrive at a deep understanding of related societal efforts and the meaning of individual and group successes including those of Chinese Americans. The roadmap for my journey spans institutional and national borders in terms of an experiential approach to relevant theories with certain reality checks.

## 2 Personal and Professional Background

My early dream, if any, was somehow a scholarly one. As one of the too-young "sent-down youths" in China, I was deprived of the right to schooling in barely reaching teenage during a historical period of politicalization culminating in the infamous, brutal Cultural Revolution (Chen, 2018). After my laboring in the

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countryside for 4 years (while a minor) and then in an urban factory for 5 years along with a persistent struggle for self-learning and formal education (still missing a Bachelor's degree for life), China opened up and began economic reform by ending extreme politicization of the society and desperate plight of individuals like my family (Chen, 2002). As one of the first, bold, and strategic changes made, a national exam for college admissions was reinstituted, and I got into a junior college by taking the equal opportunity granted without regard to political status and family background. After graduation, I worked as a technical manager for 4 years before gaining entry into a graduate school by passing another tough national exam for graduate school admissions. Whether in school or at work, I devoted myself to learning with a scholarly ambition (no matter how remote it was) in mind. And I benefited from invaluable real-life experiences in addition to all kinds of reading materials I could hardly find at the time.

My scholarly career was eventually launched when I was picked from a large class of high-achieving graduate students to become an instructor and graduate studies coordinator at Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) in Guangzhou. A charge I took was to pioneer the rebuilding of the social work profession since it was canceled over three decades ago shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Chen, 2021). My public lecture series helped to launch a national community service movement when few Chinese people even heard about the term community. I also led the study and planning of a new social security system (the umbrella term for an overall safety net) for Guangdong, the most adventurous and advanced province in China at the time. From policy exploration to practice research and from top design to grassroots implementation, such hands-on experiences and insights laid a solid foundation for my scholarly development afterward.

I was fortunate to be able to cross the borders first to the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and then to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) for my pursuit of advanced studies (accepted also by Ivy League and some other top universities, I made my choice based on a need for and conviction in the resources of public institutions as an international student). I obtained my PhD along with an MSW (my second master's, ever missed at HKU) degree from UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research in 1996, as the first-ever recipient of such credentials from mainland China. That year my academic career started all over again as an assistant professor of social work (and sociology) at the City University of New York (CUNY). An exceptional case at CUNY, I became a full professor and chair of a multidisciplinary department (while program director) in 2001, then I continued advancing to administrative leadership roles at another institution in 2004.

My personal and professional growth in terms of both formal schooling and self-learning was a journey I took wildly with no set or rigid boundaries. Traversing through the kingdoms of natural and social sciences and humanities, I even joined fierce competitions for graduate studies in such specialized fields as engineering mechanics, technology and history and philosophy of science, sociology, social

work/welfare, and public policy. Besides my father (a graduate of Whampoa Military Academy in the Anti-Japanese War and then self-taught engineer turned chief engineering craftsman in a large PRC factory) and my eldest brother (one of the first admitted into graduate studies after the Cultural Revolution) who influenced me in personal and informal ways, some of the academic mentors I had the fortune to actually follow in advanced studies include: Dr. James Lubben, a prominent social health scientist/gerontologist and my doctoral advisor at UCLA, who also exerted a subtle influence on me with administrative insights as Associate Dean and Chair at the top-ranked public university; Dr. Rosina Becerra, Dean of UCLA School of Social Welfare, who personally retained me from doctoral graduation to help launch the unprecedented California welfare reform research project in collaboration with multiple schools on UCLA and Berkeley campuses and later collaborated with me on diversity management writings as Associate Vice Chancellor of Faculty Diversity at UCLA; Dr. Fernando M. Torres-Gil, first-ever US Assistant Secretary on Aging, then White House–appointed Vice Chair of the National Council on Disability, who taught me policy analysis and later, as Associate Dean and Acting Dean at UCLA School of Public Affairs, collaborated with me on research writings on aging and social policy; Dr. Harry H.L. Kitano, an internationally renowned expert on race relations and the first incumbent of the national Endowed Chair in Japanese American Studies, who was also my mentor and doctoral committee member at UCLA; and Dr. Stanley Sue, Professor of Psychology and Director of the National Research Center on Asian American Mental Health at UCLA, who served on my doctoral committee and provided invaluable feedback as well. Dr. Mitchell Maki also served on my doctoral committee at UCLA before assuming deanship at California State University (CSU), first at Los Angeles, then on the Dominguez Hills campus, and eventually became Acting/Vice Provost there. I also worked for Dr. Ailee Moon, who later became the PhD Program Director (to succeed Dr. Yeheskel "Zeke" Hasenfeld, an influential figure "of our time in the social work field"); Dr. Stuart Kirk, former Dean of the School of Social Welfare at SUNY-Albany and Professor at Columbia University School of Social Work before joining UCLA (as the Crump Endowed Chair and then PhD Program Director/Department Chair), who challenged DSM (diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders), the foundational document of the psychiatric enterprise (or "psychiatric bible"), from a social work perspective; Dr. A.F. Singleton, Assistant Dean for the Drew/UCLA Medical Education Program; and other faculty in Schools of Public Affairs, Public Health, Nursing, etc. Many of my fellow doctoral students (including true friends like Herb Shon) also provided me with invaluable support at the most challenging, exciting, and rewarding time in my personal and academic life (academic wise, within 5 years of studentship and research assistantship, also gaining experiences as a research scientist, adjunct professor, data manager, and computer lab assistant at once while a doctoral candidate, producing two books in English before filing paperwork for two degrees at UCLA). Earlier during my research study at HKU, I received kind collegial support from Drs. Cecilia Chan, Iris Chi, and K.W. Boey, among other academics, in addition to the guidance of my advisor Professor Richard Nann (Dept. Chair) with the help of Dr. Joe Leung.

Numerous people in my native land assisted with my early development, including Professor QIU Shijie (Dept. Vice Chair), my MA thesis advisor turned senior colleague at SYSU, and Mr. ZHOU Lanchu who encouraged me to stay on the path of learning during a rough stint of my post-primary schooling in the Cultural Revolution. In addition, the elders and peers in my support networks whose care and high expectation held me up all along (in professional encounters such as formal job interviews, people sometimes privately asked me about my religious belief out of curiosity; I had to honestly say none and they're surprised in wondering about my perseverance and resilience).

## 3 Taking Academic Leadership as an Ethnic Chinese in the United States

Looking "foreign" and preoccupied with scholarly work, I never imagined that I would step into administration in the United States someday. After completing my studies at UCLA, I landed my first formal job in the States, a tenure-track position at CUNY, by chance. Having turned down an offer to teach doctoral courses at a university in Washington, DC, I was attending the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)'s Annual Program Meeting (APM) in 1996; passing by a posting board in the conference hotel lobby, I stopped to take a look out of curiosity and found a handwritten note for me. A bit of surprise, it was left by Dr. Tom Bucaro, Director of the Social Work Program at the College of Staten Island (CSI), after checking out my CV deposited with the APM career services. He invited me to apply for an assistant professor opening they had. At that time, New York City (NYC) was most attractive to me, so I applied without giving it a second thought. I was offered the position after going through a full recruitment cycle (I didn't know how competitive it was until I led a search committee after becoming the department chair, when over 100 applicants jumped in the pool including even an associate professor from Harvard, for an assistant professor opening we advertised). One of CUNY's senior colleges, CSI is the largest university campus in NYC. Its landscaped Willowbrook site is formerly the largest psychiatric institution in the United States, which shocked the nation into changing its laws toward deinstitutionalization (from the 1970s until the mental hospital's overdue closing in 1987), with a related story of NYU's Dr. Saul Krugman using patients as human experiments for the treatment of hepatitis for about 20 years (which also became one of the most remembered American cases of bioethics).

In my first couple of years on the tenure track, I was given major college- and university-wide awards, named one of the first three recipients of the Feliks Gross Award for Scholarly Achievement, and approved by the US immigration authorities for Outstanding Professor permanent residency almost immediately (while still on student visa). In 2002, shortly after attaining tenure in September 2001, I was promoted to full professor without spending time on the associate rank, which was rare

among CUNY's 6000+ faculty (with a number of them preparing to retire as associate or even assistant professors) at the time. Administration-wise, there were issues within our outsized department (which housed multiple disciplines including a usually large program in psychology), with tensions running so high that the chairperson (a very capable sociologist) eventually had to resign from the chair's position (tragically, she died of cancer later with still high stress from work). The election of a new chairperson was highly contested. I originally had no intention to run for it but was finally convinced by the majority of my colleagues who voted for me. My election sent waves across campus; apparently, such a large and troubled unit to be headed by a person of my look and background was something quite unusual. Provost Mirella Affron took me, along with Dean David Podell, to lunch with a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* as a gift, in celebration of my election as the chairperson, and later collaborated with me on institutional and community research including the Staten Island Project (SIP).

Looking back, the main motivations in my decision to assume the departmental leadership roles were the trust that my colleagues placed in me and my confidence in the new leadership required to bring the large academic unit to new heights. As predicted, things changed dramatically within the department, showing many desirable and productive outcomes of a new consensual approach. Thanks to a wonderful team of great colleagues (including Dr. Sondra Brandler in social work, colleagues in sociology and anthropology for which I also functioned as the program director, and others in the behavioral and social science disciplines), they were also amazed by the positive changes, with some joking to me "you're an administrative genius." There were, of course, many issues to deal with and hard decisions to make; however, I've cherished to this day the team support that would make one forget that I was the only ethnic Chinese (not even an American citizen yet) in the department. Outside the department, Dr. Ming Xia of Political Science shared academic interests in hosting Chinese visiting scholars, etc., while Dr. David X. Cheng of Institutional Research collaborated with me on publications on heated issues in higher education and later became an assistant dean at Columbia University and then an associate vice president at the City University of Hong Kong. I learned a lot from my teams, particularly the multidisciplinary faculty of our department, many of whom were senior academics in the "mainstream" but provided me with almost unconditional support. Some colleagues further believed that I could make a good dean and urged me to go for it if there was an opening somewhere (CSI didn't have such a vacancy at the time).

Consequently, I was named the dean of a major college, which was an amalgamation of three professional schools (formerly colleges), in 2004 at the University of Guam (UOG), a US land grant institution. A flagship university in the western Pacific, the campus context was somewhat similar to my CUNY experience. The "super deanship" was faced with different units and disciplines pulling toward different, sometimes conflicting, directions. Also similar to the dramatic changes after I took the departmental leadership at CUNY-CSI, this new, multischool college quickly moved out of chaos thanks to the support of the faculty and staff as well as a capable, collaborative team of school directors. Not distracted by Guam's military

significance, I learned a great deal about the Asian Pacific Island cultures, which had not been very familiar to me as an ethnic Chinese, originally from mainland China and then from mainland United States. On the other hand, the extensive self-learning in my early years had prepared me with a broad and solid foundation for bringing the different schools to new heights, including specialized accreditation (e.g., NCATE).

Two years later, I was offered a tenured professor and associate vice chancellor position at Indiana University Southeast (IUS). I took charge to lead faculty development, student success, and diversity efforts, among other duties as a member of the campus leadership team. As a part of the university-wide undertaking, diversity was highly valued and became an overarching theme for our campus mission encompassing teaching, research, and service. This was quite remarkable given that the campus had relatively small percentages of minority populations compared with many institutions in Louisville just across the Ohio River. The ethnic group of Chinese and Chinese Americans was especially small-sized in contrast to some institutions on the West and East Coasts. However, I was able to accomplish several important initiatives with my colleagues before moving back to NYC 4 years later to become a tenured professor and the associate provost for academic affairs at Pace University. A note to my continued lifelong learning, this experience in America's heartland opened my eyes wider not only with deeper insights into "American culture" but also with the unique (somewhat centralized) organizational and management operations model of Indiana University. I benefited from the strategic vision of IUS Chancellor Sandra Patterson-Randles' cabinet (particularly my immediate "boss" and partner Dr. Gilbert W. Atnip, who allowed me valuable professional development opportunities including leadership training at Harvard and showed me how to balance work and life as a mature academic administrator), as well as my dear colleagues of deans, directors, faculty, and staff who made the workplace truly unforgettable (believe it or not, similar to Guam as a strategic place in geopolitical matters, the small but beautiful campus adjoining the Border South is a must-stop campaign site for the US presidential candidates, including George H.W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton who was represented by her daughter Chelsea Clinton on the campus while I was there).

## 4 Focusing on Diversity: A Sample of Accomplishments

Progressing through the ranks of a department chair, college dean, and campus associate vice chancellor/university associate provost for academic affairs, I had a full range of administrative responsibilities to support institutional missions in teaching, research, and service. Sometimes explicitly cut out for me as a part of my job responsibility and other times inherent in the work I performed, diversity was essential to the official activities and programs I helped to configure, organize, and implement. It also became more and more a marked scholarly interest that could be traced back to my years as a faculty member and then a department chair. Later as a

dean, I had much more formal responsibilities in handling diversity-related issues, with also professional development opportunities to learn about the managerial and legal implications of the matters I had to deal with as an executive. With responsibilities similar to a chief diversity officer (CDO) on the academic side, my position as the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at IUS was all the more notable in promoting diversity.

It was a long way to truly appreciate diversity and take action to implement the fundamental ideas to respect differences and ensure equal opportunity for all. Some of my progressive efforts and accomplishments included:

- Participating in early professional development and obtaining a diversity management certificate at CUNY while chairing a department at CSI
- Continuing professional development in legal training in diversity-related subjects as a college/campus/university executive
- Assuming affirmative action roles as a faculty member or training search committees as an administrator
- Securing internal funding and acquiring external grants to support diversity initiatives
- Creating a diversity academy and supervising postdoctoral diversity fellows
- Leading international and interdisciplinary teams of academics and academic administrators to collaborate on publications on academic administration and diversity management

## 5 Understanding Diversity: Conceptual and Realistic Notes

With a national origin from China, diversity represented a major step in my learning as opposed to uniform national identity as a major context for shaping the worldview of Chinese people under Communist rule. In my crossing from collectivism and nationalism to individualism and group disparities, diversity opened a new way of thinking in understanding social relations and governance with different sorts of dynamics.

Diversity as a theoretical breakthrough and a public policy undertaking is also relatively new in the United States. Against the worst possible cases of genocide and slavery and other worse types of race relations (such as population transfer/removal and involuntary segregation) in world history, America was then hailed as an ideal "melting pot," with the study of assimilation, acculturation, etc., ever flourishing. Later, the notion was challenged with the dismissal of a dominating group belief/characteristic, that is, the "mainstream," as a universal yardstick for others. The so-called salad plate became the alternative, which has replaced "melting pot" as the metaphor for a new, more desirable race relations paradigm, that is, diversity, or pluralism (Chen & Brackett, 2011). Instead of looking for commonality/similarity as the sole or main interest, diversity recognizes and respects differences as a better way of achieving individual and group benefits. It is also believed to result in complementary and, thus, enhanced common strength for the larger or entire society.

Under the novel idea, different groups differentiated on any individual and social characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and age) would be considered as created equal and should be treated as such in terms of equal opportunity for all. The reality, however, kept showing prejudice and discrimination against disadvantaged people in every aspect of social life. In addition, it was most notable concerning resource allocations, etc. To counter and rectify the negative/regressive impact of racism, sexism, ageism, etc., various social programs have been instituted including a highly consequential (and increasingly controversial) affirmative action (AA) program.

## 6 Managing Diversity: Theoretical and Practical Topics

I was fortunate to be part of a diversity leadership with a scholarly interest while being an executive team member on several campuses. To meet the need for guiding administrative practice with a better theoretical understanding, I initiated a research/reflective writing project by convening and collaborating with an international team of contributing authors. It resulted in a valuable collection that provides insights into several important topics in diversity management for the pursuit of excellence (see book that contains Chen & Brackett, 2011).

The first part of the work provides a theoretical foundation that comprises biological, psychological, economic, legal, and other social dimensions of diversity and pluralism. Racial and gender issues are highlighted as examples to gain a deeper theoretical understanding of applied studies. Specifically, there are chapters entitled "Physical and Environmental: Human Biology and Diversity," "Mental and Behavioral Health: An East-West Perspective," "Social Psychology of Stereotyping and Human Difference Appreciation," "The Economics of Diversity: The Efficiency vs. Equity Trade-Off," "Protection and Legal Compliance," "Understanding Race and Ethnicity," and "Violence Against Women: Implications for the Workplace."

The second part of the work tackles practical issues and explores approaches to promoting diversity. Some of the chapter titles/topics are: "Academic Leadership and Diversity," "Why So Few? Faculty of Color in Higher Education," "Diversifying the Curriculum: Leadership to Overcome Inertia," "International Education in the Context of Multiculturalism," "Unpacking the Personal and the Social: The Process of Developing Transformative Leaders," and "Trust, Community Care, and Managing Diversity: Britain as a Case Study."

As a collaborative effort, academic leaders on the author team took the opportunity to share multidisciplinary knowledge and varied experience relevant to diversity and pluralism. The topics they chose demonstrate that diversity has many different but equally important aspects that require a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. As the book editor, I also contributed a chapter on race and racial issues; some of the major points and observations are recapped below (Chen & Brackett, 2011).

## 7 Racial Diversity

Racial diversity recognizes, appreciates, and celebrates differences among racial groups to achieve racial equity and justice. This aspect/dimension of diversity is extremely important since race is one of the defining (and often polarizing) features of the American society (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). Racial issues permeate politics, business, education, and other aspects of our social life. The main theme of this book, that is, *Chinese American leadership in higher education*, is also best understood in this large context.

My earlier publication dealt with the subject from both social and humanistic viewpoints, including fundamental conceptual issues (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). It reviews historical patterns of race relations leading to diversity and pluralism as the prevailing approach since the late twentieth century. Common racial/ethnic categories are examined along with various special issues facing each minority group; implications to diversity management and related tasks are also discussed. As indicated in that systematic review, the United States had been proud of itself as a "melting pot," a metaphor to describe the process of assimilation of immigrants in seeking their American dreams. The melting-together metaphor symbolizes a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous in the hope of a harmonious whole with a common culture. Yet, there are real issues with such an ideal, particularly about the rights of minority groups.

During the 1970s, the "melting pot" model was challenged with the dismissal of a dominating (or "mainstream") group belief/characteristic as a universal yardstick for others. Critics asserted that cultural differences within society are valuable and should be preserved. An alternative metaphor of the "salad bowl" (or "salad plate") was introduced to represent the mix of different cultures that would remain distinct. Such an approach is called pluralism, cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism. The ideal of pluralism is for different ethnic and racial groups to coexist with equal status and tolerance, maintaining unique cultures and lifestyles without developing positions of subordination.

Note diversity means plurality, which does not add up to pluralism (Eck, 1997). Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). A pluralist society is characterized by recognition and tolerance of cultural and ethnic diversity. After the world experienced a full spectrum of models of race relations, pluralism has emerged as a leading approach to diversity since the late twentieth century, even though assimilation still carried its weight in immigration studies including an argument about segmented assimilation (Healey, 2009).

## 8 Minority

A minority means being smaller in number or being a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subject to differential treatment. In the latter sense, a minority is a category of people who lack power and privilege, subject to prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, women are often considered a minority in the American society. New immigrants, in general, could also be viewed as in a minority status, especially before they are granted citizenship and the rights associated with it.

Minority also means nonmajority. So far, whites, particularly those born in the United States or of WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) origin, have been deemed the majority of the American society, both in number and in status, who are different from new white immigrants or original non-English "White Ethnic Americans" (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). Many in the latter group suffered from prejudice and discrimination such as anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism (Healey, 2009). Note that while Hispanic or Latino Americans (recognized as the largest ethnic minority in the United States, with African Americans being the second most numerous racial group) are also predominantly white, they have also faced issues against their identity. It is predicted that with a steady pattern of fertility and immigration rates, white European (non-Hispanic) Americans will be outnumbered by other racial/ethnic groups by the mid-twenty-first century, while many of them are unprepared to become a future minority (Keen, 1995).

One of the greatest achievements of the novel race relations paradigm, that is, diversity and pluralism, is the protection of the rights of minority groups against prejudice and decimation as a major social undertaking for equity, justice, and equal opportunity. The nation has invested enormous amounts of effort and resources in institutionalizing such a social ideal. It has become a new tradition that may be traced back to the point Martin Luther King, Jr., made that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Since the late 1960s, minority-focused thinking has greatly reshaped political dialogs in the United States, stemming from and going far beyond the field of race relations. It has become an American core value that "injustice to one person is injustice/threat to all." The policy attention and socioeconomic resources paid to the undertaking of minority protection have become a distinguishing feature of contemporary American society, in sharp contrast to not only its history but also the reality of such other countries as China where majority interests may still prevail at the cost of minority welfare in many people's (including some helping professionals') favored but oversimplified pattern of thinking.

To address/redress historical inequity and injustice and to ensure equal opportunity for all US citizens, affirmative action programs are also set up to provide various types of benefits to victimized minority groups. Of no doubt, such program benefits have achieved certain goals by playing a positive, important role in compensating for the disadvantages and vulnerabilities of protected categories in the US population. On the other hand, however, they have caused controversies and

conflicts as to who should receive the benefits and whether the benefits would jeopardize the opportunities of others (nonrecipients). Consequently, the so-called reverse discrimination" (particularly that against white males) has become a serious concern, resulting in outcries in public policy space with many lawsuits filed in the court (and eventually a ban on AA provisions in school admissions etc.).

## 9 Asian Americans

Are Asian Americans a minority group? The answer may appear very straightforward, though their situation could be rather complicated when it comes to various diversity program benefits. We may discuss the issue by focusing on Chinese Americans as a subgroup later. Here let's gain a bigger picture of Asian Americans first.

Asian Americans comprise the third largest minority group in the United States. Data from the 2020 US Census Bureau show that there are approximately 20.7 million Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States—comprising 6.2% of the US population (Lim, 2022). The Asian American population is also the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the United States, growing by 81% from 2000 to 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2021).

It is important to note that Asian Americans are a diverse category with distinct ethnicities and immigration histories despite their sharing of some physical attributes and cultural traditions (USA Facts, 2021). People of East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian descent are considered part of the Asian race, while people from Siberia, Central Asia, Western Asia, and any Caucasians from East Asia are typically classified as white. There is another category of Pacific Islanders (also known as Pacific Islander Americans or Oceanian Americans) including Native Hawaiians; the 1980 census first combined several individual ancestry groups into "Asian or Pacific Islanders" (or API) (Chen & Brackett, 2011).

Except for native Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans share the story of immigration in modern times with other racial/ethnic groups. The Chinese were among the first Asians to immigrate to the United States, with Chinese sailors first arriving in Hawaii around the time when British Captain James Cook came upon the island (which marked the discovery of Hawaii by the Western world in 1778). Larger numbers of Chinese and Japanese began immigrating to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century to work as laborers on the transcontinental railroad. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants also came to Hawaii to work on sugar plantations. Their labor was crucial to those vital elements of the economy at the time (Chen & Brackett, 2011).

Being descendants of Asians (or "Orientals" in a derogatory sense), Asian Americans might be treated as aliens in insensitive or hostile ways (e.g., Kim, 2022; Hutchinson, 2021). Historically, their increase in numbers, while relatively small compared to those from other parts of the world, and concentration in the West caused mainstream America to fear the so-called yellow peril. To restrict Asian

immigration, a federal law called the Chinese Exclusion Act was first passed in 1882, succeeded by an Asian Exclusion Act as part of the Immigration Act of 1924 (Andrew, 1998). It was not until 1965 that a new Immigration and Nationality Act (the Hart-Celler Act) was passed to abolish quotas for immigrants based on national origin, and Asian America was no longer subject to legal exclusions (Lee, 2007). It was not until the 1970s that immigration from Asia increased significantly, accompanied by urban poverty, ethnic enclaves, and assimilation. The widespread discrimination faced by Asian Americans until the mid-twentieth century is an important part of American history, which may continue to impact race relations in the country, in increasingly significant ways.

## 10 Chinese American Leadership in Context

Asian Americans have been referred to as a "model minority" since their educational attainment and household income on the whole appear to be the highest of all major racial/ethnic groups (Jin, 2021). However, they are often discriminated against for their "alien-like" look. On the other hand, being labeled as a high-achieving "model minority," they may be excluded from such programs as affirmative action, which are meant to benefit only vulnerable, disadvantaged, "underrepresented," or "protected" categories of minority people. For Chinese Americans, they no doubt are of a minority group but whether they are considered vulnerable or disadvantaged and, thus, belong to formally protected categories could become a real question. In college admissions, for instance, the usual criterion used for affirmative action is the so-called over- or underrepresentation, judged by their share/percentage in the general population as a weight for a potential quota system regardless of their academic achievements. The result is ironic in that as a minority group Chinese Americans may be treated along with whites in a similar way of "reverse discrimination," which has been the reason for several lawsuits brought against some top universities in the United States. In general, when such great ideas as diversity and pluralism become political correctness and are deemed as over-pushed in benefits programs, there may come grave consequences in splitting rather than uniting the society which is what we see in today's reality (including arguments surrounding critical race theory, or CRT; see Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

In terms of Chinese American Leadership in higher education, despite their accomplishments, data show that Asian Americans face the lowest "glass ceiling" compared with other racial/ethnic groups in the sense that they have by far the worst chance to rise to managerial levels in private industries, universities, and federal government (see http://www.80-20initiative.net/action/equalopp_glassceiling.asp#1, retrieved December 1, 2022). Therefore, it seems that the theory of diversity and pluralism is great, but the reality of affirmative action may not be that rosy for Chinese Americans. It is particularly true about some potential and subtle factors affecting their chance for leadership opportunities in higher education (and elsewhere).

Competing for a leadership position may be tougher than many could imagine without the insights and not always be a pleasant experience (especially for Chinese males according to some informal assessments). Nonetheless, I have made some really good/understanding friends/colleagues just by going through some of the interview processes. Chinese Americans as a whole have continued to make impressive achievements and demonstrate leadership as exemplified by the stories shared by the contributors to this book. This is due to their efforts and struggle and also the contemporary American core value of diversity and pluralism as well as a full set of social mechanisms with tremendous resources invested against racial injustice or inequity.

My personal experience attests to the above observation. For example, the culmination of my administrative career was an offer from Norwich University for its second-ranked vice president position, with potential professional development into a presidency within a few years. Although I finally turned down that offer for personal reasons, I held the institution, and American institutions for equal opportunity as a whole, in the highest regard in addition to my indebtedness to President Richard W. Schneider, RADM, USCGR (RET.). In terms of any regrettable moments in my career advancement, I would have taken up the job offer at that military university if my father, an anti-Japanese war veteran, were still alive. Instead, I chose to accept an offer from Dr. Geoffrey L. Brackett, then provost and executive vice president (EVP) for Academic Affairs at Pace University, with shared excitement. We hoped to bring the academic excellence of the institution to new heights by working closely together (including coauthoring a chapter for the *Diversity Management* book). Unfortunately, Geoff soon left to become executive vice president at another institution closer to his family. I had to shoulder a major responsibility to keep pace in the Doctoral/Research Universities class by dealing with the Carnegie Foundation and mobilizing academic units internally, among other urgent tasks and important initiatives on multiple fronts. Two years later when a new provost was hired, I returned to faculty devoting myself to teaching, research, and service on our NYC campus, located in the heart of the world's financial capital in Downtown Manhattan.

## 11 Conclusion

The rise of Chinese American leaders in US higher education needs to be understood in a large social context, with diversity and pluralism being the most relevant and helpful background. A historical perspective on race relations leading to the rise of diversity and pluralism in recent decades is therefore very important.

An international perspective will also help to engage in thinking about diversity versus unity/uniformity. Different nations have different stories of treating differences, particularly those between majority and minority groups. The contemporary American story is one pushing hard toward minority protection, to the extent that some affirmative action program measures may appear to be reaching the extreme of "reverse discrimination" against members of historically majority or

"advantaged" groups. Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans, have benefited from institutional arrangements for diversity and pluralism and are protected by equal opportunity laws and regulations. On the other hand, they have distinguished themselves from other minority groups to appear "advantaged" in certain aspects and thus suffered from "reverse discrimination" as if they were in the majority/mainstream in certain ways. In a broader view embracing the adverse impact of rapidly deteriorating and increasingly confrontational relations between the United States and China, Chinese American academics have suffered even more than their usual "alien-like" experience. They have become the subject of potential or obvious scapegoating as exemplified by the so-called "China initiative," which has upended hundreds of lives and destroyed scores of academic careers (Mervis, 2023).

In general, racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. How to achieve racial equity, however, will require more thoughtful and evidence-based policy design and debate rather than simply sticking to some age-old programming with far-reaching consequences threatening the integration of the American society. In a sense, Chinese Americans today still face the issue of exclusion, even if it is potential or subtle, which has been manifested by visibly increasing happenings and sentiments against them in recent years. When it comes to Chinese American leaders in US higher education, the issue of glass ceiling may have been felt by many. Fighting racist prejudice and discrimination is a call of duty, particularly for Chinese American leaders.

With such a determination and joint effort, America is still a land of opportunity for all including Chinese Americans as a minority, despite the persistence of such issues as "Asian (particularly China) hate" (Hutchinson, 2021). The author's personal story and roadmap of professional advancement attest to this statement that joining forces against prejudice and discrimination is the only way to safeguard racial justice/equity and equal opportunity for all. This requires a full display of leadership and a deep understanding of societal efforts and the meaning of individual and group successes. Chinese American leaders are elites with extraordinary skills, hard work, and a sense of commitment. Theoretical and experiential learning in this regard will certainly help with the continuing professional development of current and future leaders.

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