

Problems of Anti-“Alien” Racism among Conservative Chinese

Part Nine: Intra-Racial Discrimination against New Chinese Immigrants in the United States and Racism against Filipinos and Indonesians in Hong Kong

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The ethno-centric intra-racial discrimination against other ethnic peoples of China including Han-Chinese outside of Guangdong Province by the Cantonese-dialect ethno-centric Chauvinists still exist in Hong Kong and even in the United States within the Chinese-American communities. I remember that 30 years ago, when I

came to the United States, the Chinese-American communities in the Greater Los Angeles Area was by and large controlled by Cantonese-speakers as the predominant majority ethnic group; Cantonese-speaking business owners usually do not speak Mandarin even though they could speak it; and even up to the present time, some of them do not hire Chinese-Americans who do not speak Cantonese; and this ethno-centric Cantonese-dialectic hegemony extend even into public services in the Greater Los Angeles Area; for example, in the Chinatown Branch of Los Angeles Public Library, the speaker announcement was in Cantonese, a local dialect of China, instead of Mandarin, the official language of China including Chinese Province of Taiwan (in fact, Taiwanese today speak better Mandarin than most of Chinese from Mainland, because after Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's government retreated to Taiwan, it immediately started a "Speak National Language Campaign" to promote Mandarin and it went so far as to impose fines if any Taiwanese is found to speak Taiwanese dialect in schools or in public institutions, in a much more stringent or "authoritarian" measure than what has been done in Mao's Mainland China). I spoke to an employee of the Chinatown Branch of Los Angeles Public Library, explaining to her that most of Chinese-Americans speak Mandarin plus their own dialect, such as North Fukienese, South Fukienese or Taiwanese, Hakka or Cantonese; if they used Cantonese, they should also use other Chinese dialects including the official national language or dialect, i.e., the Mandarin; otherwise, there would be a problem of discrimination based on "national origin." This issue so far has not been completely solved yet.

Among the Chinese-American communities in the United States, nowadays, in most of marketplaces, customers are free to communicate in either English or Mandarin, and Cantonese-speaking owners have to learn how to speak Mandarin, because with great revolutionary changes in the population composition of Chinese-Americans, taking place in the last three decades of China's economic reforms towards capitalism and globalization that encouraged immigration to the United States from all over China's Mainland, the overwhelming majority of Chinese-Americans now are non-Cantonese. The above-mentioned cases are typical examples of ethno-centric chauvinism and of intra-racial discrimination among ethnic-Chinese including Chinese-Americans, and the process it is being eliminated by market-oriented globalization.

Another example of Han-Chinese racism against "aliens" could be found in Hong Kong. A news report on the Chinese-language daily Taiwan Times, page A13, Thursday, May 20, titled *Hong Kong's Foreign Domestic Servants Suffer from Systematic Discrimination* (香港外佣面临系统性歧视), reveals serious problems of social and racial discrimination against domestic servants from less-developed foreign countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia by Hong Kong's well-to-do local residents as well as government authorities. These problems include: (1) The Hong Kong Government classifies domestic servants from Southeast Asia as a "high risk" group for COVID-19 checkup and vaccination when in reality, the rate of positive cases of COVID-19 among domestic servants from Southeast Asia is only 50% of the rate for Hong Kong's local Chinese residents, as indicated by Mr. Luo Zhiguang, the Director of the Department of Labor of Hong Kong Government. (2)

Hong Kong police practices “racial profiling” in the enforcement of social distance in public spaces against domestic servants from Southeast Asian countries. (3) Social discrimination against domestic servants from Southeast Asia is rampant even before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic; being one of the area in the world with the highest concentration of foreign workers, Hong Kong has 370,000 domestic servants from Indonesia and the Philippines, who constitute 10% of local labor force, and the majority of them are women; these foreign workers contribute to the growth of local economy but suffer from discrimination and exploitation; they work as domestic servants preparing food, cleaning homes and taking care of people; and they only have one day per week of rest, and are required by law to live in their employers’ homes; the minimum wage for foreign workers is HK\$4,630 or around US\$596 per month (HK\$1.00 = US\$0.13 as of May 21, 2021); but there is no legal limit on the maximum hours they could be demanded to work for their employers; although the majority of foreigners who reside in Hong Kong for over 7 years could qualify to apply for the Right of Permanent Residency, the domestic servants are excluded from this right. (3) During the COVID-19 pandemic, government officers and employers have imposed more restrictions on domestic servants, prohibiting them from leaving the homes of the employers during the one day of break per week; and when these women servants went out, they suffer from harassments of police and pedestrians alike, and discrimination from the general public, for example, a domestic servant named Eni Lestari went to a restaurant serving noodle dishes on a Friday evening, she saw an empty seat by a local woman and sat down; the local woman all of a sudden stood up and said that she did not want to let the foreign domestic worker sit close to her. The first and the only order issued by the Government of Hong Kong for mandatory vaccination is targeted to foreign domestic servants alone but their employers who have daily contact with them are not required to get vaccination; under extensive public opposition to this obviously discriminatory order, the Government of Hong Kong relaxed on its implementation; although most of the residents of Hong Kong are reluctant on vaccination, the Government of Hong Kong imposed mandatory COVID-19 checkup and vaccination on 370,000 foreign domestic servants on April 30, 2021, after only 2 of them had been found positive on the COVID-19 checkup; under pressure from the public, the Government of Hong Kong finally cancelled the requirement of mandatory vaccination but still maintained mandatory COVID-19 checkup, and although the first round only found 3 cases of positive results, the Government of Hong Kong proceeded to conduct the second round last week. Organizations of foreign migrant workers, such as Asian Migrants Coordinating Body and the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers, as well as officers of the Government of Indonesia and of the Philippines condemned Hong Kong Government’s policies as racist and without scientific basis. Although the Government of Hong Kong promulgated an anti-discrimination law 12 years ago, the law has never been seriously enforced by its own Equal Opportunity Commission. Based on this news report, as well as on others, we could conclude that racism from Chinese residents in Hong Kong against migrant workers from Southeast Asia exists at both grass-root and government levels; and based on the fact that the majority of residents of Hong Kong are still Cantonese-speaking, and some of them have been actively engaged in virulent

discriminatory activities against speakers of Mandarin and other Han-Chinese dialects in Hong Kong, as an expression of their xenophobic mentality, this racism against Filipino and Indonesian domestic servants should be considered as an organic part of Cantonese Dialect Supremacism or regionalism, which is spiritually similar to Nazism in Hitler's Germany, or Catalanian Separatism in Spain, and Burma's expulsion of the Rohingya people. Therefore, that Hong Kong still has a long way to go to achieve the goal of social justice and non-racial democracy.

To sum up, although in the modern times, Chinese have been victims of discrimination from Western Powers, they have their own problems of racial discrimination and prejudices against "aliens" especially those from less-developed countries, such as Africans, Indonesians and Filipinos, and these problems are deep-rooted in Chinese history; they are still partially institutional but fairly popular in Hong Kong; they need to be addressed too, in order for the Chinese, especially Cantonese-speakers, to reach a higher level of social progress and social harmony.