

Empowering Subjectivity with Cultural Diversification by Subverting Ethnic Stereotypes in Eddie Huang's Asian American Reminiscence—*Fresh off the Boat: A Memoir*

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Abstract

The Asian American literary work written by Eddie Huang, *Fresh off the Boat* expounds how the immigrant family pursuits the ideal American Dream in Orlando. Asian American characters can hardly survive in the racist fissure due to ethnic discrimination and denigration in Western immigrant society. Being absurdly imposed with stereotyped images arising from culture collisions, how the protagonist of the reminiscence strives for being a warrior to subvert prejudiced stereotypes in traumatic life experiences is the dominant issue to be analyzed in this paper in accordance with the following steps: First, expound the crisis of uncertain Asian American identity resulting from culture collision; Second, decipher model minority myth imposed with racial bias; Third, probe into traumatic experiences caused by stereotype in various space; Fourth, discuss the formation of Asian American subjectivity through the perspective of cultural diversification, and finally, explore the finding of how ethnic stereotype is subverted for subjectivation.

Keywords: Cultural Diverseness, Subjectivity, Subversion, Asian American, Ethnic Stereotype

All my life people would call me a chink or a chigger. I couldn't listen to hip-hop and be myself without people questioning my authenticity. Chinese people questioned my yellowness because I was born in America. Then white people questioned my identity as an American because I was yellow. (*FOB* p.173)

1. Introduction

The author leads readers to espy the complexity of culture shock by delineating how an individually flipping ethnic stereotypes through racial discrimination cases in this popular Asian American novel, *Fresh Off the Boat*. On account of the existence of culture collision, lacking sense of belonging and possessing uncertain identity become the challenge the immigrant has to take. Born in a Taiwanese immigrant family and growing up in Western society, the collision of the various cultures never ceases in Eddie's Asian American world. As a reluctant second generation of Asian American immigrants bothered by racial bias, the protagonist, Eddie suffers from possessing uncertain identity and constantly prays for the disappearance of boundary which unfortunately produce racial barriers and identity crisis with inferiority complex in immigrant society. Past accumulated traumatic experiences make him tumble to the authenticity that it is "racial issues/ racism" resulting in his impacted subjectivity, as he elaborates, "My entire life, the single most interesting thing to me is race in America.

How something so stupid as skin or eyes or stinky Chinese lunch has such an impact on a person's identity, their mental state, and the possibility of their happiness. It was race. It was race. It was race" (FOB, p. 260). While illustrating how his Asian dining culture innocently ill schoolmates with disgust on campus, the word, "race" has been thrice noted and the repetition greatly reflects the severity of the protagonist's mental injury caused by sensitive and impressionable racial issues coming about in the immigration community. In the following, the essay will examine how the uncertain identity and racial discrimination are interlacing and what can be defined as cultural diversification for deconstructing the hegemonic racial structure caused by ethnic stereotype.

2. The Crisis of Uncertain Asian American Identity Caused by Culture Collision

As an Asian American individual, Eddie Huang can hardly escape the destiny of being marginalized in such growing environment where "racist denigration" has ruthlessly occupied the hero's struggling life history. In his memoir, being called "Chink" and "Ghing Chong" time after time mercilessly hurts and bereaves his dignity affected by the sense of uncertain identity as he mentions,

Every time when Edgar and Billie called me "chink" or "Chinaman" or "ching chong" it took a piece of me. I didn't want to talk about it, and kept it to myself. I clenched my teeth waiting to get even. Unlike others who let it eat them up and took it to their graves, I refused to be that Chinese kid walking everywhere with his head down. I wanted my dignity, my identity, and my pride back; I wanted them to know there were repercussions to the things they said. There were no free passes on my soul and everything they stole from me I decided I'd take back double. (FOB p. 84)

Verbal violence with racial discrimination from the ethnically unsympathetic neighbors Edgar and Bellie gives rise to Eddie's self-awakening regarding how to retrieve the stolen self-esteem and subjectivity.

As to the reminiscence of the protagonist, his Asian American identity has been devaluated in various spaces, comprising domestic, educational and societal ones. In Jerry Park's "Second-Generation Asian American Pan-Ethnic Identity: Pluralized Meanings of a Racial Label," it is delineated that the term "Asian American" has collected the immigrants or their next generations bound with collective experiences, the sense of "Asian-ness" and Asian cultural values—the virtue of hard work and disciplines based on Confucianism. Relevantly, the term "model minority" is equivalent to the cultural skill for making the American Dream come true (2008, p. 544-545). Furthermore, in Western mass media, Asian Americans are recurrently depicted as the owners of convenience store or restaurant, or the model minorities work long hours to achieve the American Dream, or described as the nerd spending countless hours to read science and math (Wong & Halgin, 2006). Yet, Eddie does not play the typical role of so-called "bookworm" in conservative Chinese culture but he makes himself an assertive and life-loving character of the second-generation immigrant coming from Taiwanese/Asian immigrant family. In school time, the rap and hip-hop culture greatly attracts him and this phenomenon has implied how much he yearns for getting involved in typical American life. However, numerous culture-shock experiences still prove his undergoing racial discrimination. Whereupon, running a restaurant bound with Taiwanese/Asian exotic dining culture ingeniously leads to the possibility for reacquiring the lost subjectivity and cultural identification in the Western racial jungle.

As a dilemmatic immigrant descendant agonizing over the tug between the East and West culture, Eddie continuously pursues hip-hop culture and can hardly get rid of his Asian root and culture. The dilemmatic description regarding the uncertain identity constantly confusing him has been revealed in the following contemplation, "All my life people would call me a chink or a chigger. I couldn't listen to hip-hop and be myself without people questioning my authenticity. Chinese people questioned my yellowness because I was born in America. Then white people questioned my identity as an American because I was yellow" (FOB p. 173). Identity pursuing and cultural positioning can be pondered as the most substantial lessons all his life.

Discrimination based on skin color constantly confounds the awareness of identity of the Asian American protagonist. The outward appearance of the colored/yellow face has been a tremendous and confusing problem haunting Eddie Huang. The torture of recurrently being mocked resulting from such vulnerability has ethnically awakened Eddie and let him make a firm resolution to be defensive and even aggressive. Due to such racial-identity resuscitation, he decides to dominate his own life rather than being forced to vulnerably pass the world with desperateness.

Again, the shadow of inquiring for a certain identity by interrogating himself where he authentically belongs to can never be ceased. Embarrassing issues about the dilemmatic identity have numerously twirled in the second generation immigrant's introspection as the hero says, "I learned my lesson from America and didn't want to go back. But in truth, in Taiwan, I was different, too. I had to explain myself to people in Taiwan just like I did in Florida and I realized that if I stayed, I'd have a whole new set of hurdles to face. And I was already bugging out" (FOB p. 210). As mentioned above, when visiting Taiwan in the delighted moment of embracing the same color with others, a philosophical thinking with the sense of uncertainty unexpectedly floods his mind—Why do I have to explain to Taiwanese where I come from? Why am I different in America? Eddie even concludes that "I was sick of explaining myself, sick of being different." (FOB p. 210). As a life-loving individual of the second immigrant generation, Eddie makes effort to integrate into American life but numerous cultural conflicts have frustrated him and brought him another choppy impact pertaining to identity confusion.

3. The Depiction of Model Minority Myth Imposed with Stereotype

The author of the memoir attributes “stereotype” and “model minority” to hegemonic and dominant authorized society’s ideological distortion oppressing the ethnical minority. Pertaining to “model minority,” Chinese Americans are expected to be hard-working, wealthy, submissive, uncomplaining, self-reliant and living the American dream, as he expounds, “We play into the definition and stereotypes others impose on us and accept the model-minority myth, thinking it’s positive, but it’s a trap just like any stereotype” (*FOB* p.159).

Intelligently deconstructing the unjust policy of “model minority,” he also refers to the issue of “stereotype” imposed on Asian American immigrants by intentionally and ironically characterizing his family, who “had a gambling problem, so what money they did have was lost over mah-jongg. This is probably the one time I’ll ask you not to laugh at the fact that my family is a walking stereotype” (*FOB* p.60-61). The term “walking stereotype” is deftly used for portraying the protagonist’s Asian American family who might lose money resulting from playing mahjong—one part of Eastern diverse culture characteristics. In this way, the protagonist tends to unmask the mythical image of “model minority” coined by Western patriarchal society with deliberate sarcasm.

4. Exploring the Ethnic Feature of Language Representing Identity

Language is one of the most apparent manifestation to differentiate one’s ethnic identity. In scenario, the mother’s invariably speaking Mandarin in front of Americans brings embarrassment to dilemmatic Eddie, who struggles between two cultures and it implies that the second-generation Asian Americans are constrained by two major cultural discourses affected by racial diversity, model minority stereotypes, and immigrant experiences (Park P. 542 2008).

Despite encouraging his immigrant mother to actively speak English in Western-culture dominant communities, Eddie recognizes that the effect of “discourse hegemony” arising from language-identity differentiation makes his mother invisible, as he mentions, the older generation of his Asian American family never feels being integrated in society so they don’t care if Americans regard them as the “rude” race in speaking Chinese (*FOB* p.80). Based on the observation, stereotype conceals advantageous characteristics of immigrants and make them invisible in diverse spheres. Expounding the invisibility of immigrant women individuals, in the article, *Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman*, Yamada asserts, “When the Asian American woman is lulled into believing that people perceive her as being different from other women (the submissive, subservient, ready-to-please, easy-to -get-along-with Asian woman) [. . .]. The seemingly apolitical middle class woman and the apolitical Asian woman constituted a double invisibility” (1981, p. 37). Taking Eddie Huang’s mom as the illustration, in Asian society bound with oriental conservative custom, a female is usually instilled with the perspective—being an actively cooperative character possessing scrupulousness and dedicative spirit toward the family authority can be regarded as a virtue with high-mindedness. Such phenomenon resulting in the loss of subjective life autonomy can be interpreted as the first level of transparent self-subjectivity. Further, the instance of the language issue concerning Eddie’s elders mentioned above has led the immigrant to the second level of identity invisibility.

In the author’s cognition, language resembles the password for confirming and maintaining one’s identity. It has been criticized that ABCs (American Born Chinese) don’t speak Chinese and it symbolizes that they are nobody by discarding the native tongue. For asserting how significant speaking Chinese is, the author illustrates that African slaves were forced by threat of physical punishment to abandon their native languages but Chinese American who purposely desert their native tongue to assimilate into the White society despite they celebrate liberty and the right to choose their spoken language. Besides, the author animadverts that ABCs blindly pursue fame and fare in Western world and ignorantly put identity and Asian root in oblivion by asserting, “What they didn’t understand is that after you have the money and degrees, you can’t buy your identity back. I wasn’t worried about degrees, but I cared about my roots. Even if I hated what it meant to be an Asian in the American wilderness, I respected the Chinese” (*FOB* p. 160).

Pertaining to the essential responsibility of ethnicity, the author apparently realizes his duty about how to merely be oneself and encourages himself by speaking to himself, “you know everything about the food, you speak fluently, you been back to Taiwan, you more Chinese than all these cat” (*FOB* p. 161). As an individual of justice to inherit Chinese cultural identity, Eddie evidently indicates the core problem of how the community of Chinese Americans confronts the risk of cultural withering. His utterance manifests the great worry about the future existence of Asian/Taiwanese cultural community:

Even if you wanted to roll with Chinese/Taiwanese kids, there were barely any around and the ones that were around had lost their culture and identity. They barely spoke Chinese, resented Chinese food, and if we got picked on by white people on the basketball court, everyone just looked out for themselves. [...] I just wanted to know there were other people that wanted this community to live on in America. (*FOB* p. 192)

The solicitude for the survival and the extinction of motherland culture is literally reflected in the protagonist’s observation on Asian/Taiwanese posterities who gradually lose their original culture and identity in Western sphere.

5. Traumatic Experience Caused by Stereotype in School, Family and Society

With reference to Asian American literary works, delineations of the protagonists' helplessness, vulnerability and marginalization are frequently disclosed due to the authors' unfortunately undergoing traumatic growing experiences—struggling to survive in the space immersed in culture shocks.

Furthermore, growing up in a family with rigid parents who are conservative in expressing love, in the society without sense of security, and in the environment with being defined as “the other,” literally results in the protagonist's self-abasement, helplessness and misgivings and these traumatic feelings might be hidden unconsciously. For relieving the distressful feeling, traumatized individuals have to undergo repeating and representing traumatic memories to rebuild the psychological order for gradually misplacing displeasure. Expounding one's traumatic experiences to fulfill the requirement of self-construction can be defined as the main reason why Asian American authors compose their works, such as Eddie Huang's *Fresh off the Boat*, which elaborates the protagonist's memoir suffered from ethnic ideology in the space of family, school and society.

Unexpected and uncontrollable trauma signifies being hurt and destroyed that causes spiritual or emotional sufferings and it could be connected with traumatic experiences concerning war, social riots, ethnic discrimination, family events and childhood unhappiness. The relevant affections might let individuals lose sense of security, trust and confidence. As Alcoff interprets in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, “Identities are best understood as ways in which we and others around us represent our material ties to historical events and social structures” (2006, p.296). Accordingly, the uncertain identity of the protagonist caused by traumatic experiences in *Fresh Off the Boat* can be analyzed in the spheres of social structure, childhood unhappiness or family events as Alcoff further expresses, “Those events may be traumatic and those structures may be oppressive, but this indicates that the events need to be carefully understood and analyzed and that the structures need to be transformed, not that the identities themselves need to be left behind. We will always have a material tie to historical events and structures, even under the best of circumstances” (P. 296, 2006). Therefore, the possibility of “transformation” supplies the solution to repair or recover the identity of the protagonist affected by racism in the Western world.

In the following, the traumatized subjectivity will be explored among the space of family, school and society, and the way concerning how the main character's identity regained through cultural and ethnical structure transformation will be examined later.

6. Encountering Traumatic Experience in Family Space

Corporal punishment is not permissible in American society. However, in such conservative Asian family, either committing blunders or getting into trouble, Eddie and his sibling can hardly escape being whipped—a traditional strict way to make individuals “humble” as he depicts, “To Americans, this may seem sick, but to first-or second-generation Chinese, Korean, Jamaican, Dominican, Puerto Rican immigrants, whatever, if your parents are *FOBs*, this is just how it is. You don't talk about it, you can't escape it, and in a way it humbles you the rest of your life” (*FOB* p. 59). Tracing the relationship development among Families bond with the so-called “model morality” in immigrant society, it's a general phenomenon to penetrate that parental discourses result in the tension of power relationship oppressing next generations. (Huang and Thanh, 2018, p. 86). In the memoir, it is recalled that every Friday afternoon, being taken out of the classroom by social workers to be checked if there is any bruise on his body due to frequent domestic violence resulting from his parents' strict education. The protagonist has perceived that in school, there was no one treated in the same way. The incident does bring him psychological shadow as he expresses in the reminiscence, even growing up, whenever dealing with authorities in society, the feeling of being oppressed usually makes him recall ambivalence toward his parents caused by their austere family disciplines. Eddie Huang further conveys that the psychological damage he has suffered can be ascribed to his growing environment: constantly being treated with corporal punishment and being called a piece of shit although the motivation merely resulting from the great parental expectation for the child's future glorious achievement.

7. Traumatic Experiences Caused by Ethnic Predicament in School Space

Concerning the space of the campus, the origin of traumatic occurrence results from the superiority complex of the White dominant culture where Asian American individuals diffidently identify their own Eastern culture, yet commonly being depicted as academic superstars or model minorities. According to the model-minority stereotype, Asian Americans are usually outstanding and successful in school because of working hard and coming from cultures that believe in the value of education (Lee, 1994, p. 413) but there comes another intriguing perspective that the “Asian New Wave American” students don't possess positive attitude toward education as their last generations. To explore more, these second generation immigrants elucidate that conspicuous academic achievement might prevent them from being accepted by the non-Asian mainstream. Instead, these individuals care more about what their companions think, how to having fun, being cooler, which associating with “being American” (Wong & Halgin, 2006, p. 41). Eddie's immigrant identity makes him an unpopular individual at school, as he recounts,

Even though I made a friend in Chris, the other kids avoided me like spinach. When we'd get together to ball after school the kids, led by this older boy named Blake, elbowed me whenever I tried to get rebounds or pushed me to

the ground when I tried to drive the lane. I'm not going to say it's just because I'm Chinese, but it didn't happen to anyone else. I didn't fight it—I was outnumbered. (*FOB* p.39-40)

Here, the hero just points out the phenomenon about being the forever foreigner. Although the protagonist tries to convince himself that it is possible to be educated in an integrated school with classmates of different races and social classes, the actual situation cruelly reveals that he is doomed to be bullied due to his Asian immigrant identity. As the phenomenon of “forever foreigner” discussed by Lee and Vought, in American mainstream society, “Asian Americans of any generation are constructed and perceived by White Americans as Asians-foreigners, non-Americans, Others” (1998, p. 458). Thus, in campus, many Asian American students strive against the issue of identity, especially the Asian-American identity. In less protected environments, they may agonize over who they are and where they belong (Toupin and Son, 1991). This relegation against foreign status is pervasive in mainstream popular and consumer cultures, which means that first and second generation immigrant students must respond to all of these conflicting and multiple messages about Americanness in constructing their identities (Lee and Vought, p.458). Being outnumbered with regard to the yellow color, the protagonist can hardly break the gap caused by ideology arising from stereotype; the idea of the yellow peril refers to the racial stereotype constructed in the West and it has a longer history than the model minority stereotype in the United States (Kawai, 2006, p. 112).

The traumatic experience spreads in Eddie's lunch time as well as he expounds, “Lunch was still a problem. Every day, I got sent to school with Chinese lunch. Some days it was tomato and eggs over fried rice, others it was braised beef and carrots with Chinese broccoli, but every day it smelled like shit” (*FOB* p. 41-42). The author chooses such rude and naked words “shit” and “stinky” to deliver how embarrassingly “no one wanted to sit with the stinky kid” and the White classmates stand across the room pointing at him with their noses pinched, eyes pulled back, telling “ching-chong” jokes which has tragically traumatized the naïve boy who just innocently brings the normal daily meal from the Asian family to school—a space filled with racial discrimination (*FOB* p.42). The smell (*Xiang wei*) of the Chinese food is originally described and defined as “the character a good dish has when it's robust, flavorful, and balanced but still maintains a certain light quality” in the protagonist's family feast gathering (*FOB* p.16). However, such beautiful meaning of “*Xiang wei*” of Chinese food has been undermined and even been distorted in another space packed with White students who brusquely treat the protagonist with “ching-chong” jokes—the ridicule purposely uttered to mock Asian Americans especially in the Western society, as what has been demonstrated in the scenario,

I'd open up the Igloo lunchbox and a stale moist air would waft up with weak traces of soy sauce, peanut oil, and scallions. I didn't care about the smell, since it was all I knew, but no one wanted to sit with the stinky kid. Even if they didn't sit with me, they'd stand across the room pointing at me with their noses pinched, eyes pulled back, telling ching-chong jokes. It was embarrassing so I asked Mom to start packing me some white people food. (*FOB* p.42)

“*Xiang wei*” of the lunchbox should reasonably be defined as the distinctive feature of the Chinese particular dining culture; sarcastically, it is defined as the mocking object causing the schoolmates to repel the protagonist who holds no space with spiritual liberty on campus. For surviving, discarding one's own food culture becomes the only option. In Eddie Huang's remembrances, he feels ready to convert to be “white” as he delivered, “I remember thinking to myself that if I died, I wanted to come back a ‘white man’” (*FOB* p.51). While putting the white mask on the face, one can naturally and peacefully breathe. For flipping such disturbing alien image, milk and macaroni covered with cheese have replaced stir-fry noodles and soy milk in the lunchbox of Eddie—one of the Chinese people who usually are “lactose intolerant and drink soy milk instead of cow's milk and stir-fry noodles instead of covering them with cheese” (*FOB* p. 52). Being an immigrant descendant, the basic right of living could be affected, including being a reluctant diner of the western food.

In addition, the term, “Chink” as a nightmare keeps on haunting the protagonist in school. Being hit and being called “Chink” make him suffered as what he mentioned, “I was shaking like crazy and couldn't even keep my hand still” and “I tried to fit in and get along, but people weren't havin' it” (*FOB* p. 45). Such verbal discrimination really traumatizes Eddie as what his mother complains to the principle about his son's being called “Chink” by stressing that “You think that's OK? Words hurt, too. I hear you people say that words hurt like sticks!” It's apparent that the mental scar has gradually rooted in Eddie's school life. Both “ching-chong” and “Chink” corresponding to the term “yellow peril” constructed in Western immigrant society which has longer history than the term of “model minority stereotype” (Kawai, 2006, p. 112). Notwithstanding the later term “model minority stereotype” has coined by the Western ethnically patriarchal society to substantiate that American society is impartial and generously open for the minority to strive for their racial and social status, to some extent, such term sarcastically consists with the implication of “colorblind ideology” (Kawai, 2006, p. 114).

Growing up in a conservative Chinese American family, Eddie was taught to respect parents and family, to speak Chinese at home, to take off the shoes at home, to be polite at other people's homes, not to borrow money from people, not to fight, but if “someone calls him ‘chink,’ just fight” (*FOB* p. 69). “Chink,” what a sensitive and discriminatory diction against the Chinese American individuals really irritates the minorities in the United States. Additionally, being suffered from the racist neighbor's verbal bullying makes Eddie's childhood a difficult time. In the memoir, it is implied that the neighbor would make fun of his mother by calling her a “fresh off the boat,” and the White boys chip them with elbows and tell mad Chinaman jokes that terrorizing them for years (*FOB* p. 81). The scar of bullying undoubtedly left inerasable marks in Eddie's memory.

Teachers, White parents and other kids look down on Eddie and his younger brother for their listening to hip-hop but these people with racial superiority in Orlando never understood why two Asian kids were rocking Polo and listening to hip-hop, “a black thing” downward assimilation. In chapter four “Rotten Banana” of *Fresh Off the Boat*, the hero delivers his helpless

expression, “We listened to hip-hop because there wasn’t anything else that welcomed us in, made us feel at home” (*FOB* p. 71-72). Listening to hip-hop lets him feel the authentic solidarity with the stories in lyrics sung by the African American singers who suffer similar ethnic humiliation and pain to Eddie’s, and it unquestionably brings him harmonious consonance for spiritual compensation.

On top of listening to hip-hop, reading relevant books with the topic of racial barriers could be another route to soothe the injured soul of Eddie, concurrently and greatly inspired by African American baseball players’ biography about how to successfully make one’s mark in such a racially discriminating society. In a hostile world, to make the oppressed wandering soul become settled, hip-hop and sports work as Eddie mentions, “I was a Chinese-American kid raised by hip-hop and sports with screaming, yelling, abusive parents in the background. If that makes me a rotten banana, well, tell it like it is” (*FOB* p.77-78).

Referring to sport, playing football provides Eddie the sense of belonging. By putting on the helmet, there is no dissimilarity of color, and it literally relieves uneasiness caused by the issue of racial color as what Eddie depicts, “I was part of the team. Instead of being singled out and laughed at for being Chinese, I was being laughed at for totally sucking at football. It was a relief” (*FOB* P. 74). The helmet exquisitely symbolizes a mask to cover his color and it leads him to the temporary phantasmagorical world without racism, classism and prejudice.

8. Predicaments Arising from Ethnic Ideology in Societal Space

As an Asian American student, the sense of belonging in the educational environment is not permanently static or quiescent. In contrast, the “the complex relationship between Asian American student identity and percept icons regarding future opportunity and attitudes toward schooling,” should be redefined through relationships and experiences inside and outside of school, including the space of the society (Lee, 1994, p.413). Vulnerability ethnically caused on campus makes the protagonist constantly obsessed by the annoying issue of color and race. For escaping such dislikeful fact, getting along with Joey, one of his Asian American companions, becomes the most delightful and spiritual unrestrained time.

The color of skin becomes Eddie’s nightmare haunting and be besetting him. As a Yellow Asian job-hunter, the effect of “bamboo ceiling” connected with racial discrimination has frustrated the protagonist with repeated failures. Being defined as “the colored” brings obstacles far and near in job-hunting life, Eddie, whose soul had been injected frustration, as he whispers in his hear, “I touch my face, I feel my skin, I check my color every day, and I swear it all feels right. But then someone says something and that sense of security and identity is gone before I know it” (*FOB* P. 56). Sense of security and identity are suddenly snatched out of his mind. Such traumatized reminiscence influentially motivates the author in encouraging readers to seriously explore the societal troubles caused by racism and discrimination against the colored.

Applying for a job as a writer, Eddie is racially traumatized by the white interviewer whose discriminatory attitude holds him in contempt. The scornful white interviewer disdains Eddie’s yellow face by saying, “But no one is going to talk to you with that face. I’ll try to get you some work, but I just don’t know how we can make this work” (*FOB* p.219-220). Eddie’s long-lasting depression has been impressively released as follows, “Americans. Americans. AMERICANS. They’ve called me chink. They’ve treated me like the Other. They laughed at my food, they laughed at my family, they laughed at my culture, they wouldn’t give me a proper interview because of my face” (*FOB* p.234). Differential treatment has angered the male protagonist who is finally forced to take action to empower himself, and to ignite his strong-willed fortitude to flip the inferior minority status.

9. Formation of Asian American Subjectivity with Cultural Diverseness

In chapter thirteen of the Asian American literary work, “Royal Huang,” the protagonist points out that through visiting Taiwan, the motherland where he acquires the lesson of self-awakening concerning the core value of identity, finding a place for himself in the world or making a new one fortunately lead to the potentiality to straighten out his identity plight which has troubled him for years as he mentions in the memoir, “I saw that my interests in hip-hop, basketball, food, comedy, and writing were symptoms of a larger interest: finding a place for myself in the world or making one. School helped me give that larger interest more precise names—racial identity, social justice—and I was determined to figure it all out. I finally felt free” (*FOB* p.203). The utterance implies that various cultural elements with regard to music, stand-up comedy, dining art effectively make the protagonist liberate his symbolic imprisoned subjectivity caused by ethnical stereotype and the image of model minority.

With reference to the ethnic identity and mass media portrayal of Asian-American male characters, the image of model minority has been defined as what the protagonist/narrator in this Asian American memoir has disclosed—being a highly self-reliant and economically successful individual (Hua & Fujino, 1999, p.392-395). Eddie Huang’s life procedure of being a writer, media personality, gastronome, and an Asian-cousin restaurant runner, provides him the route to unmask the potential ethnic superiority of being an Asian American (Chen, 2017, p.6). Simultaneously, the enthusiasm for exploring how his complete identity bound with cultural and racial elements has been obtained and defined in such racial-biased environment. Fortunately, the ebullience for music work, mass entertainment occupation, and running the business concerning Taiwanese/Asian dining culture has been the pivotal motivation for the main character to empower himself.

As mentioned above, the author probes into the term “rotten banana” in the light of resisting how the minor race is oppressed by the power of the white mainstream. Analyzing the term “rotten banana,” “banana” stands for Eddie Hung’s yellow skin

resulting in his unfairly being discriminated, and “rotten” implies that how he has ever abandoned himself by getting along with the downward assimilating crew and fighting against racists mocking his minor status and colored skin. To explore further, fighting can be considered as the behavior for expressing one’s ethnical defenselessness. When there is no route for one to make voice, fighting could be the inevitable way to express the grievance caused by racial hegemony.

Recognizing the barriers faced by Asian American minorities, developing or strengthening the awareness of cultural sensitivity and value might be the possible direction to call for the practices of the coalition of diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 2016, p.436). For comforting the traumatic soul and reclaiming the oppressed identity, the protagonist takes the elements of diverse culture, African American rap and hip-hop music, as tokens to make himself compatible with the solitariness resulting from ethnic discrimination. Constantly being alienated, “hip hop” becomes the token for Eddie to obtain the sense of belonging from another minority group, the Black regarded as the minor ones with inferior racial position in Eddie’s school. Through loving hip-hop culture, Eddie culturally and ethnically makes himself be one part of the black group that holds the better status than the yellow race in Western society. At least, by enthroning hip-hop music, one segment of the mainstream culture, might make him non-invisible and non-transparent. He even claims that in the presidential election, Obama is his only option due to his different color. By supporting Obama, Eddie reflects that he might not be out of the place. He supposes that if a country originally filled with racism can be led by the colored president then it will symbolically present that the goal of ethnicity equity is possibly attainable.

In chapter sixteen of the reminiscent work, “They don’t love me. They just love my tiger style,” Eddie implies how he successfully opens a thriving Chinese fast food restaurant in New York, and how he favorably flips the stereotyped image of Asian American by running Baohaus, the name of Eddie’s restaurant famous for its big white buns—traditional and convenient Taiwanese dish with characteristics that Americans would accept. In Eddie’s concept, the big white Taiwanese buns can be translated well to Americans who take bread rather than rice as their starch choice. And this discloses the reason why the buns successfully enter the American market (*FOB* p. 267). Symbolically speaking, Taiwanese buns can be figured as the moderate bridge to build relationship with various races. “Baohaus” momentarily represents Chinese American voices given off for constructing the identity and for strengthening the minor social status.

The protagonist has been endowed with the talent for food flavor and taste during childhood. Especially when celebrating his sixth birthday, he has pointed out the wrong flavor of soup dumplings on the dining table and it makes everyone know that he understands flavors. It seemingly foreshadows that his future life can be successfully reversed based on his nature endowment—taking advantage of his understanding flavors. In virtue of fortitudinous personality and being keen on dining art, Eddie has successfully become a cook, a significant role which brings him back the subjective identification that had been lost in his cragged growing process enduring injustice and discrimination. As to his ability in making discourses with the immigrant territory, food has supplied him a significant rostrum to pursue his larger intellectual passion of talking about race and culture in the U.S. (Wilson, 2017, p. 5). Putting it another way, the dining culture and tasting characteristic have become the bridge for ethnical communication, simultaneously crossing the obstructions of racism and stereotype and bringing about the possibility of coalition among ethnicities.

10. Perceiving Asian/Taiwanese Cultural Trip as The Route for Root/Identity Recognition

Taiwanese culture and customs greatly impress Eddie Huang and the accompanied perception from relevant dining culture and experiences in Taiwan supplies pivotal affection to complete the sense of ethnic root which simultaneously brings about what requires to be obtained in his life—subjectivation, the process of completing one’s subjectivity. In the literary work, the protagonist nostalgically defines “the trip to Taiwan” as the way of “soul searching” and Father is the significant character who takes Eddie on “a magical trip to Taiwan, the one that set him on to a huge soul search” (*FOB* p. 66). As a twelve-year-old boy, Eddie goes back to Taiwan to ke-tou (kneel, bow, and pay respects in English) to the grandpa’s ashes (*FOB* p. 62) and visits the Dan-Dan Mian cart with his father to trace the transcendent hometown flavor that brings him immense gratification. The unforgettable taste of Dan-Dan Mian resembles the first time that Eddie heard Lauryn Hill’s voice scratch over ‘Killing Me Softly,’ and felt that he just had a mental breakthrough via sound (*FOB* p. 64). The author delicately associates the journey of seeking roots with Taiwanese traditional etiquette, dining culture and social customs, as what he expounds, “One can never be allowed to forget where you come from” – the main reason why Eddie loves his Taiwanese homes (*FOB* p. 60).

The nostalgic journey to Taiwan can be significantly regarded as the route for tracing the original spirit of one’s sense of complete identity that has been lost in American due to societal oppression and racial discrimination although in this novel, to some extent, the narrator might be too subjective to describe Taiwan as an island filled with bootlegged cheap video and stinky tofu which could be considered to be deviating from the authentic situation in Taiwan.

Remarking Taiwan, where the protagonist’s parents emigrated from, its food culture unprecedentedly leads Eddie to a leaf-turning world where he redefines the significance of his life which had been ever traumatized as being a Chinese American citizen. Coming back to Taiwan with parents symbolizes a root-seeking journey for Eddie, who visits night markets, restaurants and popular sites on Taiwan food map, as what he surprisingly notes, “Taiwan got me into food in a way I’d never experienced it before.” Moreover, “every dish has a basic, foundational technique, but after that, it’s open for the individual cook’s artistic interpretation. By far, the three biggest dishes in Taiwan are minced pork on rice, soup dumplings, and beef noodle soup (*FOB* p. 203-204). Such unforgettable food experience not only occupies his memory but also leads him to a successful life path—being an inspired cook comprising the similar Taiwanese artistic interpretation with triumph in the United States.

While going back to Taiwan as a root-seeking journey, the dining culture containing the street food, the dumpling restaurants, and vendors in the market tremendously affects Eddie, who is good at observing the delicious and wonderful tastes of food. Taiwan impresses him with the incomprehensible sense of familiarity especially after tasting the local cuisine, as he expresses that it is “very difficult to separate race, culture, and food” (*FOB* p. 241). Country or homemade food plays a substantial point to connect Eddie, the family and the Asian Taiwanese root. Mentioning the family memory in Taiwan, the food memory and culture play the segment affecting him most in his memoir. The elements of Taiwanese food culture have been gradually rooted in Eddie’s mind to become the fertilizer and inspiration to construct his sense of culture identity because he asserts that such dining culture with wonderful flavor in the United States will be accepted and unique. The inspiration about bringing the positive Taiwanese food culture into America authentically empowers Eddie who constructs his own subjectivity and identity by subverting the Whites’ stereotype in the light of his broadly recognized Taiwanese food culture.

11. Cultural Signification for Ideology Subversion and Subjectivation

In a multiracial country, discrimination caused by racial prejudice predominantly influences the minor racial citizens’ sense of belonging and identity. However, food and cooking can be redefined as the condition to flip the uncoordinated status like how Eddie has experienced in America. Hence, as a food lover dwelling in New York, Eddie beneficially analyzes the characteristics of cooking by mentioning, “Living in New York I became clear to me what I loved the most was the thing I loved all along: food” (*FOB* p. 257). Because cooking is something that he loves to do on his own and being involved in the world of cooking, he can liberally be himself as it is depicted, “I didn’t agree with people on their interpretations, their favorites, or their preferences and didn’t care because my tastes were mine” (*FOB* p. 258). Communicating with food resembles the ceremony to search for oneself. Eddie stresses that he can taste something one time and makes it himself at home. When everything else falls apart in his life or whenever he doesn’t know who he is, food brings him back and here he is again (*FOB* 261). Food plays a magic role to say more about him to carry every single day and lets him take the helm for living a newly-defined immigrant life.

In the unrestrained cooking world, Eddie realizes that “dining culture” has become “the social equalizer,” spread in his Taiwanese/Asian fast food restaurant which is the “gateway” toward New York’s neighborhoods resulting from the reason he supposes, “What I like about New York was that food took priority. For immigrant families, food drives your daily life, holidays, vacations, everything. You put in work just to maintain your food culture and eat the things you would back home” (*FOB* p. 254). In New York, food plays the necessary character with high priority that effectively drives people’s life and everything. Eddie, an Asian American fan of food culture from immigrant families, strives to maintain the ethnic status. Here, “food culture communicating” becomes the essential connector to help Eddie rebuild his subjectivity and identity because his popular and well-known Chinese fast food restaurant has significantly demonstrated that ethnical communications gap has been crossed and overcome. Huang conveys in precise, “His pathways toward mastering language and rhetoric is claiming a public voice by delivering dining cultural language, and gaining increasing agency and power as an individual in American society” (Wilson, 2017, p.15). In this self-owned restaurant with Asian/Taiwanese culture, the protagonist meaningfully finds and heals himself, as he concludes, “I had done everything I could. I found myself. I rehabilitated myself. I took every bit of Taiwanese-Chinese culture I’d mustered in twenty-seven years, three hundred and sixty days” (*FOB* p. 283).

12. Conclusion

Doing stand-up comedy, writing screenplays, owning a restaurant can be regarded as the symbolic cultural signification to make the protagonist born again to relive the first day in immigrant world. In achieving the great goal of building multi-culture based industries through willpower, he obtains the new essence of life regardless of the issue of “color” and confidently empowers himself by making his dining cultural enterprise thriving and robust. That is to say, in American social structure, the main character confronts the possibility of discrimination and strives to achieve better social status with cultural strategies in accordance with social mobility.

Through owning a popular restaurant and writing prevalent screenplays can be defined as momentous conditions to empower Eddie, the once racially unconfident immigrant. As the point of the matter, the main character not only successfully flips over the ideology but converts to be the American Dream practitioner. For transforming the collision between Eastern and Western cultures, the soft power of cultures is borrowed to dispute the ethnic stereotype, and the protagonist ultimately regains the lost subjectivity by both fulfilling the value defined by his Asian elder family—to be honored with fame and fare, and achieving the goal to make the American Dream come true.

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