

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Racial struggles faced by Asians in America have a long and complex historical backdrop that has significantly influenced their experiences and contributions to American society (Junn and Matsuoka, 2008: 729). One pivotal moment in this history was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which remains a critical point of reference (Liu, 1999: 18). This legislation marked the first time the United States imposed restrictions on immigration based on nationality, targeting Chinese laborers (Chen, 2015: 299). It set the stage for widespread discrimination against Chinese Americans, who faced exclusion, violence, and socioeconomic challenges. The experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II further illustrate the deeply rooted racial struggles (Junn and Matsuoka, 2008: 769). The forced relocation and internment of over 120,000 Americans, with two-thirds being U.S. citizens, represents a glaring violation of civil rights (Junn and Matsuoka, 2008: 759). This period left an indelible mark on the Japanese American community, whose resilience in the face of adversity serves as an enduring testament to their strength (Azuma, 1998).

Contemporary racial struggles facing Asian Americans manifest in different ways. Stereotyping, such as the pervasive "model minority" myth, oversimplifies the diverse experiences of Asian Americans, contributing to the creation of unfair expectations (Paek and Shah, 2003: 226). Employment discrimination, particularly the

glass ceiling, continues to impede access to leadership positions and equitable career opportunities (Aarim-Heriot, 2003: 9). Language and cultural barriers, often faced by non-English-speaking immigrants, can limit access to education, healthcare, and social services, affecting overall quality of life (Min, 2006: 86). However, the idea that Asian Americans face fewer restrictions stemming from negative racial stereotypes suggests the potential for a reduction in their racial group identity and a gradual assimilation into the broader, predominantly white American society (Junn and Matsuoka, 2008: 730).

Asian Americans are often perceived as dual entities within society, serving as subjects of assimilation on one hand while simultaneously being labeled as "contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements" that are relegated to the margins of society (Lowe, 1996). Incidents of physical violence and verbal harassment have become disturbingly frequent, prompting a renewed conversation about racial discrimination and xenophobia in America (Takaki, 1989). Cultural identity and generational differences further compound the experiences of Asian Americans (Weng and Choi, 2011). The dual identity of being both Asian and American poses complex questions of belonging, cultural heritage, and a sense of home. First-generation immigrants often navigate different challenges than second-generation Asian Americans who have grown up in the United States, leading to divergent perspectives on culture and identity (Zhou and Xiong: 2005). However, the Asian American community has not been passive in the face of these challenges (Weng and Choi, 2011). They have actively participated in various civil rights movements, advocating for

equitable policies and justice, and have played an increasingly significant role in the political landscape, with Asian Americans holding elected positions at various levels of government (Hsu and Alden, 2007).

"Being Asian in America," a 2022 documentary directed by the Pew Research Center, provides a nuanced exploration of the Asian American experience. The film delves into the diverse cultural, social, and political realities faced by Asian Americans, highlighting both the triumphs and challenges of living in the United States. Through personal stories, interviews with experts, and data-driven insights, the documentary sheds light on issues such as identity, discrimination. It also examines the evolution of Asian American identity over generations and the role of activism in combating racism. The documentary is a compelling reflection on what it means to be Asian in America today, offering a deep and empathetic look into the complexities of race, culture, and belonging.

In accordance with the explanation provided above, the writer's objective is to depict the Asian community's relentless efforts to combat and overcome racial discrimination when living outside their home countries. The writer will place a particular emphasis on delving into the historical aspects, examining the lasting impacts, and elucidating the strategies that Asians have consistently employed to persevere in the face of pervasive racism that frequently permeates their daily existence.

1.2 Research Questions

There are several issues that will be addressed. They are outlined as follows.

1. How does the documentary “*Being Asians in America (2022)*” depict the immigration journeys, motivations, and settlement experiences of Asian Americans in the United States?
2. What strategies and initiatives have been employed by Asian American activists and organizations to address and combat racial struggles in the United States as in “*Being Asians in America (2022)*” documentary movie?
3. How are the themes of socioeconomic mobility and identity formation among Asian Americans represented in the documentary “*Being Asians in America (2022)*” in the context of their racial experiences?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is done to answer the problems listed in the research questions. The objectives of this paper are as follows.

1. To analyze the effects of the immigration trajectories on the demographic shifts, cultural diversity, and mobility of Asian Americans in the United States.
2. To examine the strategies and initiatives implemented by Asian American activists and organizations in addressing racial struggles and advocating for racial justice in the United States.
3. To assess the thematic portrayal of socioeconomic mobility and identity formation within the context of racialized experiences, and how these

dimensions are articulated in the narratives presented in the documentary movie.

1.4 Scope of Study

This paper will focus on the racial struggles experienced by Asian Americans as portrayed in the "*Being Asians in America (2022)*" documentary film directed by Pew Research Centre. The scope of this study encompasses the film analysis, historical context, themes and narratives, representation, impact and reception, challenges and progress, and last but not least, discussion and implications.

1.5 Previous Studies

In the realm of understanding the multifaceted experiences of Asian Americans in the United States, a collection of insightful articles and research journals emerges, shedding light on their identity, challenges, and cultural significance. These articles and research papers collectively provide a comprehensive view of the Asian American experience, touching on aspects of identity, challenges, representation in media and the arts, education, political attitudes, and strategies for leadership and empowerment. They contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and evolving narrative of Asian Americans in the United States.

The first study is an undergraduate thesis titled "*Racial Prejudice Towards Asian Americans as Reflected in Jamie Ford's Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*" by Hery Listya Purwitasari from the English Literature, Faculty of Humanities,

Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University in 2020. The analysis explores the themes of racial prejudice and discrimination faced by Asian Americans during World War II as depicted in Jamie Ford's novel. Purwitasari's study delves into the historical context of anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, particularly focusing on the internment of Japanese Americans. Through a detailed analysis of the characters and narrative in Ford's novel, she examines how racial bias affects the lives and identities of Asian Americans, as well as how these experiences are portrayed in literature.

The second study is an undergraduate thesis titled "*The Analysis of Racial Discrimination and Inequality in Childish Gambino's This is America*" by Rangga Widharso Prakoso from the English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University in 2021. The analysis explores how the video visually and lyrically portrays the deep-rooted issues of racial discrimination and social inequality in the United States. The study delves into the symbolic imagery, cultural references, and the juxtaposition of violence and entertainment within the video, analyzing how these elements reflect the realities of systemic racism and the African American experience.

The third study is an undergraduate thesis titled "*The Portrayal of Racial Prejudice and Racial Discrimination on Straight Outta Compton Movie by F. Gary Gray*" by Muhammad Faiz Hisyam from the English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University in 2023. This thesis critically examines how the film, based on the rise of the rap group N.W.A., highlights issues of systemic racism, police brutality, and racial inequality in America during the late 1980s. Through an in-depth analysis of the characters, narrative, and historical context, Hisyam's work explores how the movie

reflects the real-life struggles of African Americans in a racially divided society. The study also discusses the film's impact on contemporary audiences and its role in raising awareness about ongoing racial issues.

The fourth study is an undergraduate thesis titled "*Racism Against Mexican Americans Depicted in Life is Strange*" by Muhammad Salman Setiawan from the English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University in 2023. Through an in-depth analysis of the game's narrative and characters, the thesis examines how racism is woven into the storyline, reflecting broader societal issues. Setiawan's study highlights the significance of media representation in shaping public perceptions of minority groups and underscores the importance of addressing racial injustice in all forms of storytelling.

The last study is an undergraduate thesis titled "*Exploring Racial Dynamics: Identity and Perception in Blindspotting*" by Enggal Cahya Rizqina from the English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University in 2024. This thesis offers an in-depth analysis of the 2018 film *Blindspotting*, directed by Carlos López Estrada, focusing on its exploration of racial dynamics and identity in a rapidly gentrifying Oakland, California. Rizqina examines how the film portrays the complexities of race relations, the impact of systemic racism, and the struggle for identity in a multicultural society. Through a critical lens, the study unpacks the characters' experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination, and how these experiences shape their perceptions of themselves and their community. This thesis contributes to the broader discourse on

race and identity in contemporary American cinema, highlighting the film's relevance in addressing ongoing social and racial issues.

1.6 Method of Study

1.6.1 Data and The Sources of Data

The data for this study, titled "Racial Struggles Experienced by Asians in America: A Portrait Through 'Being Asians in America'", is primarily derived from the documentary film "Being Asians in America". The documentary serves as a central source of qualitative data, offering firsthand narratives and visual representations of the lived experiences of Asian individuals in the United States. Through their personal stories, the film captures the complexities of racial discrimination, social exclusion, and resilience within the Asian American community. In addition to the documentary, supplementary data sources include scholarly articles, historical records, and reports from reputable organizations addressing racial discrimination and Asian American experiences. These secondary sources provide context and support for analyzing the broader socio-cultural and historical factors influencing the experiences portrayed in the film.

Interviews and testimonies featured in the documentary are used as primary data, offering qualitative insights into the various forms of racial struggles faced by Asian Americans. The experiences shared range from microaggressions and stereotyping to systemic discrimination and acts of hate. These narratives are essential in understanding the emotional and psychological impacts of racism on individuals and

communities. Furthermore, statistical data from government reports, non-profit organizations, and research institutions are used to provide quantitative context. This data helps to illustrate trends in racial discrimination, hate crimes, and socioeconomic disparities affecting Asian American populations.

Combining those qualitative data sources allows for a comprehensive examination of the racial struggles experienced by Asians in America. This approach not only highlights individual experiences but also situates them within broader societal patterns, contributing to a deeper understanding of the ongoing challenges faced by Asian Americans.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

The thesis titled "Racial Struggles Experienced by Asians in America: A Portrait Through 'Being Asians in America' Documentary Movie" utilizes a library research method to explore the complex and varied experiences of Asians in the United States. This study adheres to the scientific method, involving problem identification, data collection, and data evaluation. As a result, the term "library science" is applicable (Miele, 1979). The scientific method necessitated a qualitative approach, which has been dominant in many disciplines, including social sciences. The goal was to compile, analyze, and publish all relevant information and statistics on various types of libraries in a single document (1979). In other words, primary data refers to information collected firsthand from sources such as surveys, interviews, experiments, or observations, and it hasn't been previously published or analyzed by others. On the

other hand, secondary data includes sources like books, articles, and other documents that offer a second-hand account or analysis of primary data.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

In this thesis, the author employs Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore the racial challenges faced by Asian Americans. CRT emerged in the mid-1970s, driven by the recognition that the progress achieved by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had stagnated, with some advancements even being reversed (Delgado and Stefancic, 1993). The theory was pioneered by influential works from Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. Many CRT scholars argue that a significant barrier to racial reform is the majoritarian mindset which is a set of assumptions, established beliefs, and shared cultural understandings held by the dominant group in discussions about race (1993). Additionally, other scholars examine the intersections of race, gender, and class, questioning whether race and class are distinct forms of disadvantage (1993).

1.7 Organization of Writing

The following are the organization of this writing:

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, previous studies, scope of the study, and organization of writing.

2. Chapter 2: Intrinsic Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter focuses on developing a foundational understanding of racism, examining the concept of race and the historical context of Asian migration to the United States.

3. Chapter 3: Extrinsic Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter dives into the personal experiences and challenges of Asian immigrants, as portrayed in the documentary film. It explores the various forms of racial discrimination they faced and the resilience they demonstrated.

4. Chapter 4: Discussion

This is the main part of the paper depicting the whole Asian struggles and epic stories of each person from the documentary film. This chapter discusses types of struggles and racial treatments of Asian immigrants.

5. Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter summarizes everything presented in the paper. It also highlights the values we may gain after knowing the stories of Asian predecessors in the United States.