

## Regional Discrimination and Stereotypes

### —Taking Northern Jiangsu People (Subei People) Discriminated in Shanghai as an Example

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**Abstract:** Regional discrimination is common in our country. Subei people are discriminated in Shanghai. With those people as a beginning point for further analysis, this paper illustrates the background and reasons of regional discrimination in Shanghai. Regional discrimination mainly results from economic gaps, stereotypes and traditional culture. This article provides solutions and suggestions based on local development, regional images, public opinion environment and some other factors.

### 1. Introduction

Shanghai, an international metropolis, used to be a typical emigrant city. In the 1950s, statistics showed that local Shanghai people only made up 15% of the city's population. In contrary, people from Jiangsu Province made up the largest proportion of the population. When people mentioned Jiangsu Province, they divided it into two parts in their mind, Southern Jiangsu (**Sunan**) and Northern Jiangsu (**Subei**), even though it is actually one province; but it is strange that there is no clear border between them. They are a kind of belief in a certain region of homogeneity of the same kind [1], which is constructed in the history, rather than objectively and clearly defined areas: Sunan represents wealth and civilization, and Subei represents poverty and backwardness.

Similarly, people from the Southern Jiangsu (**Sunan people**) and people from the Northern Jiangsu (**Subei people**) are quite different in terms of work, social status and living conditions in Shanghai. Sunan People engaged in some decent and professional jobs, while most Subei people suffered from poor conditions and low wages, such as wharf workers and feces carriers. Sunan people live as masters of the city, while Subei people can only work at the bottom of the society and work as servants. Sunan people live in luxury houses while Subei people can only live in dark and wet shanty towns. Subei people are also known as "Subei Guys", "Jiangbei Guys", or even "Jiangbei Swine". They lived in the most inferior class of Shanghai society and suffered from discrimination.

The word "discrimination" is interpreted as "inequality" in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, so the so-called regional discrimination refers to a discriminatory behavior [2] based on regional gaps. Nowadays, the phenomenon of regional discrimination is serious. For example, in terms of enrollment, famous schools in Beijing and Shanghai are especially "tolerant" for local students. In the same school, the admission level is much lower for local students than students from other provinces. Employers tend to judge job seekers according to their hometowns and their impression for those places, rather than examine overall qualities of job seekers based on reality. At present, the employers generally require "local residence registration" when they are recruiting people and worse still, some employers clearly declare that "people who come from some certain areas will not be employed" [3]. If Internet media reports that a person from a place has done something bad, it is very likely that the place will suffer from overwhelming criticism. As for urban and rural differences, the city dwellers tend to despise rural people and call them "rural guys" and "rural villagers". All the above reflects that regional discrimination has infiltrated all aspects of our life. According to a poll conducted by Social Survey Center of China Youth Daily, 30.6% people think that regional discrimination is serious [4], and it indicates unhealthy and uncivilized public concepts.

Regional discrimination apparently targets at individuals, but essentially it targets at regions, and it is demonstrated as disgusted or even hostile attitudes against people from certain regions. What is more, slanderous names for some areas, such as "thief village in Northern Anhui", "Anhui nanny", "Guizhou Gang" and other names are prevalent. Those behaviors not only seriously damage images of discriminated areas and hinder development of those regions, but also impact the integrity of our society, and do harm to our building of a harmonious socialist society.

In this article, the present writer explores the origin of regional discrimination based on different development possibilities of Sunan and Subei people, and seeks for ways to eliminate regional discrimination.

## **2. The Causes of Serious Regional Discrimination**

### **2.1 Economic gaps of different regions**

Due to wars, natural disasters and other reasons, economy of Northern Jiangsu was seriously affected, resulting in a large number of refugees who left their homes, heading for Southern Jiangsu and Shanghai. Those refugees were mostly farmers with poor education and few professional skills. In order to make a living, they had no other choice but to do job which locals and Sunan people were reluctant to do. These kinds of jobs usually featured low incomes and pure manual labor. At the same time, benefited from commercial revolution of Song Dynasty and influence of Shanghai, economy of Southern Jiangsu experienced a period of rapid growth. Therefore the economic gap between Southern and Northern Jiangsu was further widened. Sunan people who immigrated to Shanghai took possession of better political and economic resources. The Subei people who first immigrated to Shanghai were unable to work in the above fields because of lack of funds and social networks. Subei people who immigrated to Shanghai latter could not rely on their fellow countrymen to get better jobs and could only resign themselves to inferior industries [5]. In this way, the inferior jobs and life of Subei people deepened people's prejudice against them, and the prejudice further influenced their employment opportunities. For a long time, people thought that Subei people were born poor and foolish, only suitable for most inferior and indecent jobs. Understandably, Subei people were discriminated.

China has vast territory. Because of different natural environments and national policies, economic gap is large between varies in west, central, north and south areas. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are renowned for rapid economic development, while in six provinces in central China, the governments carry out the national development strategy of "protecting agriculture" and the economic development is relatively backward. Underprivileged economy has influenced the image of the people from these six provinces to some extent [6]. People from developed areas believe that those people from underdeveloped areas are inferior in terms of resources, ability, knowledge accumulation, and modern concepts. Thus, the former got a sense of superiority, which strengthened their discrimination against the latter.

### **2.2 Inertia of stereotypes**

The word stereotype, firstly used in the field of printing technology, refers to the printed lead boards. Afterward, Walter Lippmann, a famous journalist cited the word in his book *Public Opinion* to illustrate people's wrong concepts and prejudices, and refer to an incorrect, irrational and stereotyped attitude [7]. Generally speaking, this phenomenon is common in our life. When we know a person, we will probably get a stereotyped, comprehensive and general view for a certain group of people who are related to this person.

Since the early twentieth century, Subei people have been a metaphor for inferior people. If we call a person "Subei guy", we mean he or she is poor, vulgar, and discriminated, even though this person doesn't really come from Subei. Subei people are attached with the uncivilized and backward words. Sunan people's constant impression for Subei people is also absorbed by Shanghai, people who also think that Subei people are of lower status.

After the liberation of Shanghai, discrimination and prejudice against Subei people remained the

same, and the stereotype has been passed down by far, and affecting people's view for marriage and love. There were a couple of lovers who loved each other deeply and came to the point of marriage, but the girl's parents knew that the boy's ancestral home was Subei. So they strongly opposed to the marriage. As a result, the girl got insane and killed herself by jumping from a building, which was a real tragedy [8].

People in different regions have different personalities. In the past, people seldom migrated, so it was easy to form stereotyped impression for people from certain areas. Among that, regional stereotypes between Northern and Southern China are the most typical. As for northern people, people may immediately think of their heroic character, strong physique, good capacity for liquor, and so on. As for southern people, people may immediately think of mild, introverted and implicit temperament. After all, stereotype is only a general view, and it cannot completely represent every individual. Today, some people demonize some provinces only because of the frequent evil behaviors of people from those places. Therefore, they have prejudice against the whole province and cause a lot of unfair treatment to those people.

In everyday life, people should try to avoid the "preconceived" regional stereotypes. We cannot view people in a partial way. On the contrary, we communicate with people from different places with an overall and impartial attitude, so as to truly understand every aspect of others, and thus get correct judgment for others [9].

### **2.3 The inferiority of the traditional culture**

Confucianism is the mainstream of Chinese traditional culture. From the view of individual, Confucianism pays attention to moral cultivation. In order to become a perfect person in conformity with the Confucian standard, people must be strict with themselves and form their personality according to Confucianism standards. This process of traditional-culture-based self-cultivating cause people's self-centering. As a result, Chinese people treat with all kinds of things with a condescending attitude<sup>[10]</sup>. For example, when Emperor Qian Long adopt a policy of in the Qing Dynasty, he believed that China did not need to enhance international trade since China was rich in resources as well as almost everything and he looked down upon weapons and equipments used by the Western. The cultural superiority and self-seclusion were the indication of the self-centered characteristics. Nowadays, the self-arrogance of Chinese people is fully exhibited as hometown complex. Everyone thinks that his or her hometown is the best, because the hometown complex and the sense of identity reject all the outsiders.

On the other hand, with the aim of unifying the world, Confucianism is formed based on the suppression of personal thoughts, which gives rise to the sense of abasement. Self-arrogance and self-abasement, the two contradicting characters, are integrated in individuals. People from the rich regions, with their exclusion and prejudice, think that the people in the poor areas have poor qualities and abilities. However, the inherent superiority of the rich exactly shows their sense of inferiority. As Mr. Lu Xun described, Chinese people had the nation's inherent sense of the inferiority. They got used to fuel the sense of inferiority by insulting degrading and even "attacking" others<sup>[11]</sup>. As a matter of fact, Subei and Subei people would not become what they were in other places. The Subei people could only become what they were in Shanghai. They are cultivated by the people from the south of the Yangtze River with the purposes of defending the superiority of the latter<sup>[12]</sup>.

If we divide people in the society into two classes, with one elite class and one average class, the elite class will think that the average class is an ethnic group of great differences from them. No matter what the differences can be, the elite class hope the average class could understand their own identities, so as to set off the identity and superiority of the elite class<sup>[13]</sup>. However, the so-called average class is actually formed by the elite class, in order to highlight their own differences and hide their inferiority complex, which can explain why there are so many discriminatory phenomena in today's society.

### **3. The Way to Resolve Regional Discrimination**

#### **3.1 Speeding up development**

Economy is one of the important factors for eliminating regional discrimination. Only by speeding up development of the backward areas, narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas and regions, and improving the living standards of the people, can we fundamentally alleviate and eliminate regional discrimination. In recent years, there have been substantial improvements in the economy, culture and transportation in Northern Jiangsu. People with diplomas can also get decent jobs in Shanghai with their own abilities and gradually get rid of their previous poor and backward images <sup>[14]</sup>. Recently, Jiangsu provincial government has also launched a "1plus 3" key regional strategy, aiming at breaking the regional barriers <sup>[15]</sup> between Sunan and Subei. In this way, Sunan and Subei will share resources and benefit from each other, and eliminate prejudices against Subei people to a certain extent.

#### **3.2 Establish a positive regional image**

The current social economic and cultural disparities determine that regional discrimination cannot disappear overnight and can only be properly controlled. Governments, public organizations and media should take action to eliminate regional discrimination. As Rousseau said in *Confession*, "anything, whether it is coarse or noble, tend to lose fairness and axiom if it is evolved in public hatred." Local government should actively guide people to form correct concepts for various regions and treat all people inclusively. In order to truly realize city spirit of "Inclusiveness, excellence, wisdom and modesty", Jiangsu government can also establish a social incentive system to promote people's awareness of equality, tolerance and harmony, and resist inherent stereotypes and regional discrimination [16].

#### **3.3 Create a harmonious environment in terms of public opinion**

The media should report news with professional attitude featuring fairness and justice, rather than lead the public to wrong direction by labeling some areas and even "demonize" people from certain places with personal discrimination. To create a harmonious public opinion environment, governments need to guide public opinions and media propaganda correctly. It is necessary to promote outstanding people and their sorties, so as to deepen people's understanding of these areas and reverse the prejudice and misunderstanding and eliminate the stereotyped impression and one-sidedness [17].

#### **3.4 Strive to improve their own quality**

The elimination of regional discrimination requires joint efforts of the whole society. For people who discriminate others, it is necessary to understand that equality of life and respect others. For discriminated people, they should improve themselves. People should improve themselves by actual actions when the world has negative effects on them. They should improve their own quality, strive to improve their negative images, and actively communicate with the society, so as to eliminate the stereotyped gaps among different social groups [18].

### **4. Conclusion**

Regional discrimination is a common social phenomenon. It is a stereotyped impression caused by social cognitive bias. It comes from the long-term accumulation of prejudices, which could not be eliminated in a short time. However, with the development of society and modern civilization and, as well as the joint efforts of all parts of society, we could definitely eliminate regional discrimination and build a harmonious society through mutual tolerance and understanding.

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