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The Model Minority Stereotype and the National Identity Question:

The Challenges Facing Asian Immigrants and Their Children[1]

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ABSTRACT:

One of the central issues in contemporary debates over immigration concerns national identity, that is, how immigrants from diverse origins integrate into their host society and become American. The children of Asian immigrants in the United States often give the impression of fitting neatly into American society and therefore into the American nation as a model minority. We argue, however, that such perception is a misleading overgeneralization and can bring about simplistic interpretations. The apparently successful integration of Asian Americans is not due to intrinsic cultural characteristics, but to the positive modes of incorporation juxtaposing unique patterns of selective acculturation. Moreover, the model minority image renders the continued distinctiveness and diversity of the Asian American population invisible and often has unanticipated consequences for individual group members. The seemingly positive outcomes result in new stereotypes, which serve as mechanisms of social exclusion for even the highly integrated immigrant groups and create new complications for understanding the national identity question.

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Introduction

Numerous social forces shape negative attitudes toward immigration in receiving countries in the past and at present times, including the perceptions that immigrants would depress wages, take jobs away from native-born workers, and "eat" up social welfare; worries about the importation of global inequality and crime; and concerns about the threat to national sovereignty in a world with increasingly porous borders. Across all of the social forces, though, runs the problem of a cultural threat to national identity in a society experiencing rapid demographic change (Card et al. 2005; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Some influential scholars and pundits, such as Brimelow (1995) and Huntington (2004), hold the idea that American national identity is primarily Anglo-European. They are concerned that the immigration of large numbers of immigrants of Asia and Latin American origins would pose a serious problem for national identity because these immigrants are not easily absorbed into the Anglo-European culture. In fact, the popular appeal of such worries became evident in the 2016 presidential election when Donald Trump made opposition to immigration from Mexico and Muslim countries a signature issue and drew on the emotional appeal to national identity to galvanize voter support.[2]

Since most of the overt opposition to immigration has concentrated on immigrants from Mexico and Central America and Muslim immigrants, one might imagine that national identity concerns of the era of hard borders and deportation do not affect Asian immigrants and their children because of their seemingly successful integration. Indeed, some evidence suggests that Asian Americans are well-integrated socioeconomically. The 2010 census data show that Asian Americans have the highest median household income ($66,000) of all racial groups, even

[2] See, for example, the *New York Times* report on the political impact in nationwide local elections of the president's portrayal of immigrant minority group members as cultural threats to national identity (Herndon 2019a and 2019b).

surpassing native-born White Americans ($54,000); that they have the highest levels of education with 49 percent of them (aged 25 and over) having a bachelor's degree or more, compared to 31 percent of White Americans, 18 percent of African Americans, and 13 percent of Hispanic Americans; and that about half of the employed Asian Americans are in managerial and professional occupations (Pew Research Center 2013). Asian immigrants also are resettled away from ethnic enclaves and in non-traditional destinations across the United States (Frey 2014).

Since the 1960s, an emerging positive stereotype has recast Asian Americans from the uncivilized "yellow peril" to the successful "model minority" (Brand 1987; Petersen 1966; *U.S. News and World Report* Staff 1966). The more contemporary, pan-ethnic view of exceedingly high-achieving "whiz kids" applies to both the children of East and South Asian immigrants who are mostly well-educated and professionally trained and those of Southeast Asian refugees who are of lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Brand 1987). This model minority stereotype—family oriented, self-reliant, hardworking, resilient, and problem-free—has a powerful influence on Asian American life, especially the U.S.-born and U.S.-raised second generation (Kiang et al. 2017; Lee 1994; Ngo and Lee 2007; Wu 2014). Zhou (2004) considered whether Asians in the United States were disappearing into a slightly expanded version of an American ethnoracial identity several years ago in an article that posed the question: "Are Asian Americans becoming White?" (Zhou 2004). In the same year, Bonilla-Silva (2004, p. 932) argued that most Asian Americans had reached the status of "honorary whites" in an American racial hierarchy. Similarly, in their review article on what they term the "racialized assimilation" of Asians in America, Lee and Kye (2016, p. 254) commented that from one perspective, "[r]ather than being relegated as racialized minorities, Asian Americans appear to be approaching "near white" status …"

Moreover, consistent with the idea that Asians in the United States are folding neatly into the larger national identity, is the fact that "Asian Americans have among the highest rates of interracial marriage in the United States (Lee and Kye, 2016: 257). Analyzing patterns of intermarriage, Hidalgo and Bankston (2010) have argued that the relatively large numbers of mixed race children with Asian ancestry necessarily means that if the boundaries between white and Asian identities have not disappeared, these have at least become increasingly blurred.

Whether and how are Asians in the United States affected by the national identity question? The answers that we offer to this question are more nuanced than a simple equation of socioeconomic outcomes with identity would suggest. In the following sections, we argue, first, that the relative success and apparent invisibility of Asian Americans is a product of changing migration contexts and hyper-selectivity. We argue, further, that this relative success does not make ethnoracial national identity irrelevant for Asian immigrants and their offspring, but that it places them in an ambiguous position in relation to national identity that may work in their favor or against them and creates special challenges of ethnoracial distinctness and social exclusion.

Recent Trends in Asian Immigration

Changing contexts of exit

In the contemporary world, people move faster and on a larger scale than ever before. Asian migration has changed greatly since 1970. Of the Asia-born migrants living outside Asia in 2015, 40 percent were in North America (UNDESA 2016). Although there are some countries still plagued by poverty, war and ethnic conflict, the region has become much more developed. Even war-torn countries in Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam, experienced profound economic transformation. Globalization and development give an impetus for emigration not only among

the poor and low-skilled who are displaced or outcompeted in domestic labor markets, but also among the wealthy and highly skilled who have already attained and secured middle- or upper-middle class statuses. Meanwhile, the large exodus of refugees from Asia has subsided. The UN estimated that there were about 3.5 million refugees in the Asia and Pacific region with the majority originating from only two countries—Afghanistan and Myanmar—fleeing from ethnic conflict and violence between 1990 and 2010 (UNHCR 2017). The United States has received only a small number (10 percent) of these Asian refugees since 2000 (UNHCR 2017).

Asian immigrants in the United States are diverse in both national origins and socioeconomic characteristics. The largest six national origin groups (with populations over one million, such as Chinese, Indians, Filipinos, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Japanese) and many small groups (such as Cambodians, Thais, and Bangladeshis) are mostly positively selected, meaning that the average level of schooling (in years) of the immigrant group is higher than that of the general population in the home country (Feliciano 2005). Some groups, such as Chinese, Koreans, Indians, and Filipinos, are even hyper-selected, meaning that the percentage of college graduates of the immigrant groups is higher than that of the general population not only in the home country but also in the host country (Lee and Zhou 2015).

The largest number of immigrants from Asia coming to the United States arrived from relatively high human capital countries with substantial middle classes. For example, China sent more immigrants than any other countries in Asia. During the years 2015-2017, 17 percent of immigrants from all of East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East came from China (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2018). The second largest number of immigrants from these three regions came from India, making up 14 percent of the total; and third largest from the Philippines, constituting 12 percent. Thus, even following the Department of Homeland

Security's practice of including the Middle East in the Asia category, immigrants from these three relatively high human capital countries accounted for 43 percent of Asian immigrants. As a result of the recent history of immigration, Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos make up the largest portions of the Asian population within the United States, both native-born and foreign-born. In 2017, according to *American Community Survey* statistics, Chinese constituted the largest category of Asians (24 percent), followed by Asian Indians (21 percent), and Filipinos (16 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Changing state policies as context of reception

State policies in immigration and refugee resettlement in the United States affect how immigrants are received and resettled, what kinds of receiving environments surround the immigrants, and what kinds of communities they form. Since the passage of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, US immigration policy has oriented to a humanitarian goal of reuniting immigrant families and an economic goal of bringing in skilled labor needed by the increasingly globalized US economy. In the past three decades, H-1B visas, nonimmigrant visas for highly educated foreign workers in specialty occupations with predictable pathways to permanent residency and citizenship, have been disproportionately issued to Indians and Chinese who have advanced degrees in science and engineering, as well as to Filipino physicians and nurses. In 2011, 55 percent of the H-1B visas went to Indians, 8 percent to Chinese, and 3 percent to British. In 2016, 70 percent and 12 percent went to Indians and Chinese, respectively (U.S. Department of State Visa Office 2011 and 2017).

Refugee resettlement has been another source of Asian immigration. From 1980 onward, U.S. refugee policy aimed to disperse refugees, leading to the growth of new destinations for newcomers from Asia, mostly from war-torn Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In *Growing Up*

American, we described how the U.S. government initially tried to spread Vietnamese refugees around the country (Zhou and Bankston 1998). However, the locations of non-governmental organizations, housing availability, and the desires of immigrants to live among co-ethnics led to the formation of interconnected Vietnamese communities across the country. The presence of active voluntary agencies in Minnesota during this same period led to the emergence of a large Hmong community in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region (Fennelly and Palasz 2003).

State policies have played an important role in shaping the dispersion of contemporary immigrants, giving rise to suburbs dominated by the influx of non-white immigrants, including "ethnoburbs"—affluent suburban ethnic communities (Li 2009)—as well as concentrations of disadvantaged immigrant populations in new destinations. Studies have found that restrictive immigration policies force circular labor migrants and undocumented migrants to permanently resettled in the United States (Durand et al 2005; Hernández-León 2008; Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000; Massey and Capoferro 2008; Massey et al. 2003). However, the outward spread of immigrants has occurred across nearly all immigrant groups of different national or ethnic origins.

Changing context of reception: The U.S. economy and public attitude

Since the 1980s, the U.S. economy has shifted from labor-intensive industries to capital- or knowledge-intensive financial, information and communications technology (ICT), and service industries (Alba and Nee 2003). Manufacturing industries have moved offshore in disproportionately large numbers to the Global South (the so-called developing world), and those that remain must compete with low-wage labor around the world (Best 2011; Portes and Walton 1981).

The growth in both ends of the American economy means that immigrant workers in the labor force are increasingly bifurcated into either the low-paid, low skilled positions on one end or high-skilled, high-paid positions on the other, with some into entrepreneurial positions created by the immigrants themselves. Responding to the change in economic structure, most contemporary immigrants fall into one of three occupational categories. First, there are low-skilled or semi-skilled, labor-intensive jobs taken up by labor migrants, including those engaged in agricultural work and labor-intensive industries, such as construction work, meat-packing, poultry and seafood processing, and textiles (Durand et al 2005; Griffith 2006; Hernández-León 2008; Massey and Capoferro 2008). Second, there are highly skilled professional or service jobs taken up by highly educated migrants and those with relevant training and credentials, such as physicians and nurses, engineers and technicians, scientists and academics. Third, there are entrepreneurial immigrants, occupied in businesses such as small groceries, restaurants, and lodging establishments (Zhou and Bankston 2016).

Low-skilled labor migrants disproportionately come from south of the U.S. border. Geographic proximity and long-standing social networks tend to channel Mexican immigrants — the largest contemporary immigrant group in the U.S.— across the border into occupations at the bottom of the U.S. labor market. Distance, the rise of Asian nations, and selective migration tend to channel many Asian immigrants, especially those from China, India, and the Philippines, into the professional sectors of the U.S. labor market. Asians who fit into neither category rely neither on the established demand and social networks of supply of the labor migrants, nor on the credentials and qualifications of the professional migrants. Instead, their primary resource consists of family and kin relations that enable them to create employment opportunities in ethnic economies.

For the children of immigrants, this segmentation means that they grow up in highly stratified social settings, ranging from schools, neighborhoods, and peer groups. Their outcomes depend not just on their own advantages and disadvantages, but also on the connections to their co-ethnic or other immigrant group members and to the larger American society that shape the uses they make of their advantages and disadvantages. For example, the children of Asian Indian physicians, often with abundant family resources, frequently enjoy high-performing schools in suburban middle-class communities. They are able to maximize the advantages of these schools with the additional support and encouragement of social resource-rich families and ethnic communities. In contrast, the children of Hmong refugees who were displaced and resettled in the totally unfamiliar cultural environment and extreme cold climate of Minnesota faced tremendous hardships in all aspects of life (Hein 2006). Since their families have come from a largely non-literate background in Laos, young Hmong Americans face greater challenges than many immigrants and also have fewer social resources from their families and ethnic community to overcome those challenges. Between these two extremes, the fates of the children of immigrant entrepreneurs often depend on the social and cultural resources those in their parents' generation can generate by their own efforts, just as immigrant businesses often depend on the mutual assistance and collaboration of group members (Bankston 2000; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

When the size of the newcomers into an American community is small and the local economy is good, public reception may be generally positive and welcoming. But as the immigrant population becomes visible in a locale, exacerbated by economic distress, anxiety and hostile attitudes may ensue. Hostility toward immigrants emerges from a perceived threat as well as ethnoracial prejudice. In a study of public reception of the Hmong in Wisconsin, Ruefle and

associates found that the Hmong were initially welcomed but later concerns grew about their resettlement, not so much the fear that they would take jobs away from local residents but rather due to cultural differences and a generally negative attitude toward a culturally strange outgroup (Ruefle et al 1992).

Although discomfort with immigration may exist in any part of American society, it has been greatest in places where natives are experiencing economic difficulties and come into contact with immigrants in the bottom part of the nation's bifurcating economy. Hernández-León and Zúñiga (2006), for example, have detailed the intergroup strains created by the arrival of Mexican laborers in Appalachia. We can take this as the opposite side of the favorable "model minority" stereotype described above that has met immigrants in professional groups. At the same time, an ethos of multiculturalism has become widespread in many professional and educational circles and many businesses have become dependent on immigrant labor (Zhou and Bankston 2016). Thus, the children of immigrants today grow up in a polarized setting, in which societal views of immigrants are deeply divided.

The polarization of attitudes toward immigrants has been part of a more general sociopolitical polarization. In the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, immigration became a major issue, and this issue played a large part in the rise of the ultimately successful candidate, a political outsider who initially drew political attention by broadcasting concerns about Muslim immigration and about undocumented immigration from Mexico. President Trump's two signature campaign issues, re-industrialization through economic protectionism and much more restrictive immigration policies, both appealed to segments of the population who felt that they had suffered from openness to foreign connections, the economic re-structuring that had

encouraged immigration, and the presence of people of new and unfamiliar national origins (Herndon 2019a).

Public attitudes toward immigrants are both more favorable more hostile than they have been in the past, depending on the part of the general U.S. public that immigrants come into contact with and on the specific social location that each immigrant group occupies in society. Hyper-selectivity of some Asian-origin groups and favorable contexts of reception for immigrants from Asia by state policies, labor market, and the general public have neutralized the negative impacts of immigrant disadvantage through the concentration of human capital in the family and social capital, or patterned social relations, in the ethnic community (Bankston 2014; Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Lee and Zhou 2015).

Changing context of reception: Geographic distribution and variety of ethnic communities

The residential settings surrounding the children of immigrants in today's new immigrant destinations are characteristic of both diversity and structured inequality. Children of low-skilled immigrants tend to concentrate and grow up in central cities, plagued by poverty, drugs, crime, and poor schools, alongside other urban problems (Zhou, 1997). Their counterparts face similar disadvantages in dispersed suburbs, where their social environments are likely to consist of native and immigrant families of low SES and similar problems associated with extreme poverty (Hein 2006). Others scattered about in ethnically diverse and decentralized clusters of various socioeconomic levels, but retain ethnic communities by focusing their social lives on an ethnically based center, such as a temple, church, or institutions in an older symbolic urban village (Bankston 2000). Still others find themselves in affluent ethnoburbs, where ethnic identity and economic advantage are not opposed, but closely associated (Zhou et al. 2008).

Generally associated with middle-class whites, suburbs are where immigrants are expected to move as a measure of residential assimilation. However, in recent decades, some suburban communities have become initial places of immigrant/refugee resettlement or have drawn secondary migration of immigrants of relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds (Zhou and Bankston 1998). The pull of suburban employment lays behind the development of a Lao suburban village in southwestern Louisiana (Bankston 2000). The availability of housing and employment drives the suburbanization of many other immigrant groups as well, not just the Southeast Asian refugee groups, notably Latino immigrant groups (Donato et al. 2010; Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000; Massey and Capoferro 2008).

New migrant destinations are often in the urban fringe or suburbs, which are stratified by race and class. However, the rise of ethnoburbs as a common residential pattern indicates that ethnic residential segregation is no longer as disadvantageous as it was in the past (Jiménez 2017; Logan and Zhang 2013; Wen et al. 2009). Having generally high levels of education and income, ethnoburban families may concentrate advantage, rather than disadvantage. Because of immigrant selectivity, every Asian nationality except Japanese is more segregated from whites than expected, and such residential segregation persists over time; but unlike the case of Hispanics and African Americans, Asians tend to live in neighborhoods that are generally similar to, or even better, than those of whites, leading to a unique Asian pattern of "separate but equal" (Logan and Zhang 2013). In California, where the automobile has created vast stretches of suburbs, suburbanization has been a prominent feature of the lives of all immigrant groups. In Silicon Valley, for example, there was a rising concentration of Asian immigrants with the development of high-tech industries (Jiménez 2017; Saxenian 2006). In Orange County, Koreans established many small ethnic clusters in suburbs such as Anaheim, Buena Park, Fullerton, and

Irvine (Vo and Danico 2004). Visible Chinese residential clusters emerged in almost all suburbs around the Los Angeles metropolitan region (Li 2009; Zhou et al. 2008). Before 1980, immigrants were barely visible in many of today's typical ethnoburbs in California.

The fact that many Asians do not live in ethnically identifiable locations can be consistent with the image of Asians as assimilating, or disappearing, into the larger American society. However, as Lee and Kye (2016, p. 260) observe, "the fundamental mechanisms of spatial assimilation are not coupled with residential outcomes in a clear linear fashion," and "the spatial assimilation model may underestimate the extent to which Asian Americans, as a nonwhite minority group, continue to face discrimination and social distance in the locational attainment process." Ethnic communities resulting from immigration can mean that even when group members are not concentrated in a single location, network connections can maintain distinctiveness (Bankston 2014). In her study of Asian Indians in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Brettell (2005) finds a variety of interlocking Asian Indian ethnic communities organized around primarily religious institutions. Although they are residentially dispersed, Hindu temples and voluntary associations become centers for different Asian Indian groups. Dhingra (2012) finds yet another variation on the immigrant ethnic community, the predominantly Gujarati population that dominates the U.S. motel industry. Geographically spread around the nation because of the nature of their work, the motel owners, their co-ethnic employees, and their families do constitute genuine communities because they maintain communication and cooperation, even though they are clearly physically dispersed.

Asian Diversity

Asians are often referred to as a single group by the academic community and the public. Yet, they consist of multiple national origins, and within each national origin group, there is significant internal diversity, such as Chinese and Indian. Statistics from the 2001-2017 *American Community Survey* show that among the different Asian-origin groups, only Japanese, Indians, and Filipinos had lower poverty rates than non-Hispanic whites (8.5, 6.1, and 8.1 percent, respectively, compared to 9.9 percent among non-Hispanic whites). Chinese and Koreans, despite relatively high median household incomes and educational levels, showed higher rates of poverty (13.9 percent and 14.1 percent, respectively) than the non-Hispanic white population.

One of the biggest distinctions is between Asian nationalities who have consistently arrived and grown in numbers as legal immigrants and those who initially arrived as refugees. While the Vietnamese, the largest of the Southeast Asian refugee groups, were able to achieve relative economic success, in part through the use of tight-knit family and ethnic social networks (Zhou and Bankston, 1998; Bankston, 2014), other Southeast Asian refugees and their children have continued to face greater challenges. The Vietnamese, despite being the most successfully integrated group among Southeast Asian refugee groups, still had a higher poverty rate (14.8 percent) than other major Asian national origin groups, as well as a higher poverty rate than non-Hispanic whites. Other Southeast Asian refugee groups, the Hmong (28 percent) and Cambodians (21 percent), showed much higher poverty rates.

The issue of diversity within and among groups also involves the interracial marriage issue. Although rates of outgroup marriage are generally high for Asians as a whole, these rates are far higher for some groups, such as Filipinos, than others (Hidalgo and Bankston 2010; Lee

and Kye 2016). Moreover, there is a sharp gender distinction in out-marriage, since the majority of these involve Asian women and white men (Lee and Kye, 2016). As marriage between members of different Asian groups has risen in recent years, there has arguably been a blurring of distinctions among people of different Asian national origins, rather than between Asians and the majority population (Lee and Kye, 2016). Thus, marriage patterns indicate a diversity of modes of incorporation, rather than a single trajectory of assimilation.

The issue of gender raises another source of diversity hidden by broad stereotypes, connected to the mobility trajectories of the children of immigrants. Examining the role of gendered expectations on educational achievement, we found that Vietnamese ideas about gender control actually promoted among women the kind of educational performance associated with the model minority stereotype, while simultaneously reinforcing restrictive gender roles (Zhou and Bankston 2001). Park and associates (2015) found that among children of both Latino and Asian immigrants, women achieved greater educational advancement than men, with Asians benefitting from the selective migration characteristics we have identified here, while women from immigrant backgrounds also paid heavy child-bearing penalties in occupational mobility. The socioeconomic paths of immigrant women and their female children, moreover, vary according not only to the group position in the US society, but also to the gender roles of source countries (Blau, 2015).

One of the most commonly overlooked aspects of Asian diversity, an aspect that has special relevance for the question of how Asians fit into the national identity concerns in an era of deportation, is that the Asian American population includes a substantial number of unauthorized immigrants. A report by the Pew Research Center has noted that: “Asian unauthorized immigrants made up about 13 percent of the 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants

who live in the U.S. Unauthorized immigrants from four nations in Asia were among the top 15 origin groups for unauthorized immigrants – India (500,000), China (325,000), the Philippines (180,000) and Korea (160,000)" (López et al. 2017). Thus, although Mexican and Central American immigrants occupy the center of popular attention in the issue of unauthorized immigration, well over a million people from Asia and their American-born family members stand to be affected by any crackdown on undocumented immigrants.

In a time in which the idea of national identity has become a key factor in shaping popular attitudes toward immigrants, the perception that Asians are "becoming white" depends on overlooking not only the continuing social, cultural, and residential distinctiveness of many Asians, but also the fact of diversity within and between groups. Part of this distinction involves the continuing socioeconomic marginality of many Asians, a marginality that is often hidden by broad economic and educational statistics. Underlying the obscuring of this diversity is a persistent stereotyping of Asians relative to sociocultural perspectives on national identity.

The Model Minority Stereotype and the National Identity Question

The role of education

Education plays a central part in popular views of Asians as an immigrant-origin minority group and makes Asians in the United States a reference group for how many Americans think of immigrants fitting in to national identity. On a nation-wide level, the children of Asian immigrants tend to outperform Hispanics, non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites on national achievement tests, in grades, and in levels of educational attainment. Although wide variations among the Asian sub-groups exist, higher academic performance has become a distinctly Asian pattern (Jiménez 2017). Asian American students, on average, have scored

higher than all other groups, including non-Hispanic whites, on the mathematics portion of the SAT test and in overall scores on the ACT test, and the gap between Asians and all other groups has been steadily rising. Asian scores of the reading portion of the SAT have been going up, and have reached the level of non-Hispanic whites (Caldas and Bankston 2015).

Moreover, the standardized test scores actually under-measure Asian school performance. The mean grade-point averages of Asian students have long been higher than those of all racial and ethnic categories (Caldas and Bankston 2015). In a study undertaken to determine whether a referendum to eliminate affirmative action in Washington State would have an adverse effect on the college enrollment of minorities, Charles Hirschman found that standardized test scores actually understated the high school performance of most Asian groups, since in grade-point averages Asians "...exceeded their potential as assessed by test scores" (Hirschman with Pharris-Ciurej 2016, p. 114).

As a consequence of their socioeconomic locations, meanwhile, Hispanics, who constitute a major part of contemporary immigration to the United States, not only show lower levels of school performance than Asians or non-Hispanic whites on test scores and grades, they also continue to have high, if declining, high school dropout rates (Bankston 2014). Influences on white school decisions, then, include concerns about poor educational quality in schools dominated by Hispanics and concerns about excessive competition in schools dominated by Asians (Jiménez 2017). Thus, selective patterns of immigration result in contrasting stereotypes for the two major immigrant categories, Hispanics and Asians, each with a specific distinctiveness relevant to national identity. The extraordinary educational achievement of the children of Asian immigrants has created a model minority threat, which has led to a "new white flight" (Hwang 2005; Jiménez and Horowitz 2013). Whites do not flee from poor schools, but

from good schools that are seen too demanding or too Asianized. For Asian American students, such white flight can result in greater ethnic isolation and an ethnic stereotyping that constitutes an additional source of school pressure.

The educational achievement of Asians, defined as a broad, undifferentiated category, has long placed them in a particularly problematic position in debates over affirmative action. When affirmative action policies at the University of Michigan came before the courts in the early twenty-first century, opponents of affirmative action argued that such policies discriminated against high-achieving Asians. However, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Schmidt 2003, p. A24) reported that pro-affirmative action Asians argued that this broad generalization further disadvantaged some Asian groups. "Taking umbrage with the stereotype of Asians as an academically over-achieving 'model minority,'" a legal brief filed by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center "argues that Americans from Asia and the Pacific Islands still face serious discrimination and should be beneficiaries of affirmative action in some cases." More recently, the stereotype has placed Asians at the center of controversy over affirmative action at Harvard University, with those on both sides of the issue using a generalized image of Asians to support their positions (Hackman 2018).

Ambiguous consequences of the stereotype and the national identity problem

How do the stereotypes of Asians affect how they fit into a country reacting to demographic change through immigration and intensifying concern with national identity? The answer to this question involves a complicated and nuanced mix of positive, negative, and unintended consequences. Portes and associates developed a typology of consonant, dissonant, and selective acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2014; Portes and Zhou 1993). Dissonant acculturation refers to immigrant children's loss of parental language and cultural ways, which

often lead to intergenerational conflict and role reversal. Consonant acculturation indicates that children and parents learn and adapt to host society's culture at about the same pace. Selective acculturation is a process where immigrant children learn host language and cultural ways selectively without abandoning ethnic culture or detaching themselves from the ethnic community (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2014). Each type of acculturation is consequential with significant implications for segmented assimilation. In particular, selective acculturation is generally associated with desirable outcomes for children's outcomes of education while dissonant acculturation leads to negative outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). Waters and associates (2010) use survey data from the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York to test the association between acculturation and socioeconomic consequences. Interestingly, they find that neither any type of acculturation nor the degree of ethnic embeddedness account for mobility patterns among children of immigrants. They thus raise questions about the mechanisms considered important by segmented assimilation theorists. However, one limitation of Waters and associates' study is that it operationalizes acculturation types largely in terms of parental languages and their impacts on socioeconomic outcomes, but that it does not address the question of how varied socioeconomic outcomes may or may not be connected to continued ethnic distinctiveness. Although it may not be the intention of these scholars, this can contribute to the impression that those who achieve upward structural mobility are absorbed into a mainstream national identity.

High rates of educational success can come at a cost. In a classic theoretical study, Robert Merton (1936) explored the ways in which purposive social action can have unintended, or unanticipated, consequences. The racialization and stereotyping of Asian Americans based on general trends of successful selective acculturation by members of some of the larger Asian

groups can be taken as an instance of unanticipated consequences. The same process of selective acculturation to specific segments of American society that has produced generally high rates of success among young people in many Asian national origin groups also have negative side effects. One such side effects is to give rise to new stereotypes that mask variations across groups and individuals. The children of Asian immigrants in the professional and technical occupations have the most predictable mobility trajectory through education and the greatest security for the future. For example, Asian Indian immigrants have the highest socioeconomic scores among all Asians. U.S.-born Asian Indians on average retain the same level as their foreign-born coethnics. Chinese immigrants and their children also show high socioeconomic scores across generations.

However, averages do not tell individual stories. The children of the professionals and entrepreneurs almost certainly grow up in better neighborhoods and attend better and safer schools than the children of low-skilled and semi-skilled laborers. Many children of foreign-born Indian and Chinese professionals start out from much more privileged positions and face fewer obstacles to school and the labor market than the children of working-class coethnics but may still have difficulties finding advantageous places in society. But what about those children whose immigrant parents lack initial social class advantages, either because the parents did not have the human capital or because parental human capital did not respond to the current demands of the American labor market? Here is where the ethnic community can play an important role. More specifically, this is where the second path, via selective acculturation, is effective for successful adaptation of the second generation predicted by the segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Portes and Zhou 1993). For hyper-selected immigrant groups, strong group-based human capital can facilitate the reproduction of social capital and production of

ethnic resources via ethnic entrepreneurship and the preexisting ethnic community (Lee and Zhou 2015; Portes and Rumbaut 2014). For example, the ethnic system of supplementary education available in Chinatown and Koreatown in Los Angeles create additional educational resources that help not only the children of middle-class families but also those coethnics of working-class backgrounds (Zhou 2009).

Asian American youth often have a strong sense of familial obligation to succeed in school and, at the same time, parents exhibit a sense of immigrant optimism in expecting their children to do so. However, when combined with the expectations and pressure around the model minority stereotype, highly integrated Asian Americans appear unable to leverage their reported higher levels of social support in an effective way. Rather, the model minority stereotype can create unrealistic standards of success and hinder Asian-American youth from benefitting fully from their social support networks (Cherng and Liu 2017).

Consistent with the literature on stereotype threat, some experimental work has shown that the model minority stereotype can cause people to "choke" and perform poorly on a test because of the burden of actually meeting the expectations (Cheryan and Bodenhausen 2000). Jennifer Lee (2012) coined the term "stereotype promise," which refers to the promise of being viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype. The students who are viewed favorably by their teachers would likely perform in such a way that confirms the positive stereotype and show positive academic outcomes as a result. Stereotype promise focuses more broadly on the way in which positive stereotypes can boost performance both in schools and in real world settings such as workplaces.

Lee and Zhou (2015) further elaborate how "stereotype promise" can become a double-edged sword, however. First, expectations of success can create uncomfortable pressure to

achieve and to live up to the image, which further reinforces potentially unrealistic and unreasonable expectations. Second, teacher favoritism and other positive societal perceptions can also become source of bullying and negative attitudes toward Asian Americans as perpetrated by African-American and Latin-American peers (Liang et al. 2007; Qin et al. 2008). Third, the subjective experience of being stereotyped can feel restrictive, wrong, and damaging to social relationships (Lee 1994; Wang et al. 2011). Fourth, in the labor market later on, the positive stereotype can lead a "bamboo" ceiling to deter Asian Americans from attaining leadership positions (Zhou and Lee 2017).

The model minority stereotype also goes hand-in-hand with the forever foreigner stereotype. A recent research shows that nearly 100 percent of Asian American youth who were surveyed reported having some prior experience with the dual stereotypes (Thompson and Kiang 2010). Empirically findings are mixed whether the putative benefits of the stereotype outweigh its damaging effects (Kiang et al. 2017; Wong and Halgin 2006). More significantly, if Asian Americans could be cast as models of success, then the whole idea of inequality could be upended and other racial minorities could be dismissed as complaining and disruptive (Kiang et al. 2016). Thus, the unanticipated consequences of Asian success actually steer even the socioeconomically integrated Asian Americans into the disadvantaged rungs of the racial hierarchy, which ironically prompts them to form pan-ethnicity for self-empowerment that heightens their ethnoracial distinctiveness (Zhou 2004).

Conclusion

The ambiguous position of Asians in the contemporary United States does not lend itself to easy characterizations of them as uniformly oppressed and disadvantaged or as fully

incorporated into a widely accepted image of national identity. The perception of the children of Asian immigrants as high achievers has some basis in statistics. However, this perception is an overgeneralization that overlooks the wide variations among individuals and across national origin groups of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and the importance of cultural practices and ethnic formations. Both the general pattern of achievement and the group variations are results of selective acculturation to different segments of American society through ethnic relations and practices that are shaped by contemporary contexts of exit and reception. The overgeneralization, moreover, has unanticipated consequences. Even though native-born whites often develop friendly relations with individual immigrants, in many cases they still hold broad stereotypical and prejudiced ideas and feel threatened (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013).

Contemporary immigrants from Asia are tremendously diverse in origins and socioeconomic backgrounds. Yet, they are often received in host communities as a homogeneous group with two extremes, either as the poor, uncivilized, and burdensome strangers or as the wealthy, high-achieving, and problem-free newcomers (Hsu 2015). These stereotypes not only hinder a full understanding of the diversity in adaptation across Asian origin groups, they also create burdens for the relatively advantaged, as well as the relatively disadvantaged. Selective acculturation and conditional acceptance of Asian Americans into American society may be understood as a valid qualification of segmented assimilation.

The ambiguity of being Asian and American leaves a range of questions for future investigation. How is the diversity of Asians in America related to views of their distinctiveness in relation to national identity? To what extent do those who assimilate into the more advantaged segments of the society in some sense "become white" in their own eyes? Under what

conditions do the more advantaged see their own opportunities threatened by policies and programs, such as affirmative action, intended to benefit less advantaged groups?

The diversity of Asian Americans also means that researchers should give more attention to how subgroups and individuals may experience different modes of incorporation into American society. To suggest that some form of racial assimilation may affect Asians as a general category may be true at a broad level of aggregation, but the diversity means that some are approaching "becoming white" or the status of "honorary whites," while the ethnic boundary lines continue to be sharp and distinct for others. On this point, the public perceptions and self-perceptions of people of varied Asian ancestry backgrounds require more attention. What are the different ways in which those of inter-ethnic Asian backgrounds, white-Asian, and black-Asian backgrounds, for example, are seen by others and themselves?

One of the most serious gaps in the literature concerns the situation of the hundreds of thousands of undocumented Asians in an era of deportation. The stereotype of Asians as fitting neatly into American society, as well as the problem of studying people who are, in the Tagalog slang term "TNT" (*tago ng tago* or "hiding and hiding") tends to result in invisibility for this substantial portion of the population.

The issue of how contemporary concerns about national identity may affect the self-identification of members of Asian-origin groups, finally, requires investigation. To what extent do Asians in the United States respond to ethnonational pressures by attempting to quietly blend in and become versions of "honorary whites"? Does this differ by generation or by groups, with immigrant generations welcoming model minority invisibility for their children and their descendants reacting against this or with members of the more advantaged groups seeking that

invisibility while the less advantaged assert distinctiveness? Or might categorical advantage work in the opposite direction?

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