

**Growing Up under the Shadow of the Model Minority:
Diverse Experiences of the Children of Asian Immigrants**

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Abstract: Asians Americans are the fastest growing racial minority in the United States largely due to rapid immigration in the past 40 years. Although they comprise less than six percent of the total U.S. population, they are highly visible in professional occupations, and their children, coming of age since the 1990s, are making their way into the country’s prestigious universities and primary sectors of the labor market. A common perception is that Asians in the U.S. are the “good” immigrants — doctors, engineers, scientists, and prosperous business owners, or that their children are “good” students—academically high achievers and math or techno wizards poised to a successful future. This paper will explain how positive perceptions reinforce the model minority stereotype and how this stereotype glosses over critical issues confronting the children of Asian immigrants, especially those who don’t fit that stereotype and those who live in places distant from their coethnic communities.

Introduction

Asians Americans are the fastest growing racial minority in the United States. Their numbers have increased by 60-percent over the last decade, largely due to international migration. Although they comprise less than six percent of the U.S. population, they are highly visible in professional occupations, and their children, coming of age since the 1990s, are making their way into the country’s prestigious universities and primary sectors of the labor market. They have arguably succeeded in climbing up the ranks of America’s middle and upper-middle classes. For example, Asian Americans have the highest median household income (\$66,000) of all racial groups, even surpassing native-born White Americans (\$54,000); they have the highest levels of education with 41% of them 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 about half of the employed Asia Americans are in managerial and professional occupations (Pew Research Center 2012).

A common perception today is that Asians are the “good” immigrants — doctors, engineers, scientists, and prosperous business owners, or that their children are good students—academically high achievers and math or techno wizards poised to a successful future. Indeed,

since the 1960s, a positive stereotype has emerged that 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” apply to both highly professionally trained South-Asian and East-Asian immigrants and their Southeast-Asian peers 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 US-born and US-raised second generation (Kiang et al. 2017; Lee 1994; Ngo and Lee 2007; Wu 2014).

The 21st- century profile of Asian America is indeed vastly different from the one prior to World War II (WWII) and the one after WWII but before the surge of contemporary immigration. While contemporary immigrants from Asia hail from many different nation-states and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, they also are more likely than their earlier counterparts to be resettled in non-traditional destinations across the United States. Immigrant from Asia, used to concentrate in bi-coastal areas on the West Coast and in the New York metropolitan region, are also found spreading all over the country, as Figure 1 shows. While Asian immigrants are highly concentrated in the states of California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and Hawaii, many are moving to new destinations in Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Texas, Louisiana, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, states where there were few Asians prior to 1970.

The children of contemporary immigrants—the new second generation—have been coming of age since 1990. By now many of them have already moved into adulthood and started to have their own children. Unlike those who hailed from Asia in early times, contemporary Asian immigrants live in the ever-changing contexts, constantly impacted by globalization in the United States, as well as in their countries of origin, and by the ever-tightening inter-connectedness between and across places of origin and destination at the levels of the nation state, diasporic/ethnic communities, and families. As these global and local contexts continue to evolve and change in the years ahead, how are the patterns and outcomes of integration of the new second generation in non-traditional destinations differ from those in traditional immigrant gateway metropolises? What challenges and prospects do the children in new destinations encounter? Will they be able to circumvent racial barriers and disadvantages associated with immigrant status in their quest for upward social mobility? In this paper, we zoom in on the lived experiences of the children of Asian immigrants to explore how positive perceptions reinforce the model minority stereotype and how this stereotype glosses over critical issues confronting the children of Asian immigrants, especially those who don’t fit that stereotype and those who live in places distant from their co-ethnic communities.

Asian Concentration Areas and New Asian Destinations



This map displays 113 metropolitan areas classed as:

- **Asian concentration/modest growth** (20 areas)
Asians at least 5 percent of 2010 population and less than 43 percent 2000–10 growth.
- **Asian concentration/fast growth** (21 areas)
Asians at least 5 percent of 2010 population and at least 43 percent 2000–10 growth.
- **New Asian destinations** (72 areas)
Asians between 1 and 5 percent of 2010 population and at least 70 percent 2000–10 growth.

Source: 2010 U.S. census.

Figure 1: Asian Concentration Areas and New Asian Destinations

Source: Frey 2014.

Changes in Asian Immigration to the United States

Changing Contexts of Exit

Since 1990, there has been more than 150% increase in the number of international migrants in the world. Today, people move faster speed and on a larger scale than ever before, with relatively easy access to advanced transportation and communication technologies. In the new millennium, also, Asia has changed greatly since the decades between 1970s and 1990s. 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. Many countries witnessed rapid economic growth despite setbacks by the 1997 financial crisis, increased standards of living, and the enlargement of their urban educated middle classes. China and India, the two giants, are prime examples. Even war-torn countries in Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam, experienced

profound social and 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 attained and secured middle- and 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 in the past three decades (UNHCR 2017). The United States received only a small number of these Asian refugees—about 10 percent of the total refugee admissions was from Asia in the past 15 years.

The Changing Structure of the American Economy

Contemporary immigrants arrive in the United States in response to global economic restructuring, where the United States occupies a dominant position in a global economy and geopolitical system of the Global North (the so-called developed world). Since the 1980s, the US 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 off shore 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 has a significant effect on the formation of immigrant new destinations. The increasing divergence of the US 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 in the margins. 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).

For the children of immigrants, this means that they grow up in highly stratified social settings ranging from schools, neighborhoods, and peer groups. For example, the children of Asian Indian physicians, often with abundant family resources, enjoyed high-performing schools in suburban middle-class communities. In contrast, the children of Hmong refugees who were displaced and resettled in a totally unfamiliar cultural environment and extreme cold climate in Minnesota face tremendous hardships in all aspects of life (Hein 2006). The fates of the children of immigrant entrepreneurs often depended on the social and cultural resources those in their parents' generation could generate by their own efforts, just as immigrant businesses often depended on the mutual assistance and collaboration of group members.

Changing Immigration Policies

Changing policies in immigration and refugee resettlement in the United States also affect how immigrants are dispersed and how new destinations are formed. The US government, working in tandem with non-governmental organizations, has played an important role in refugee resettlement. From 1980 onward, U.S. refugee policy aims to disperse refugees, leading to the growth of new destinations for newcomers from Asia, mostly from war-torn Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The demands of the American labor market interacted with refugee policy to create dispersed settlements. In Southwestern Louisiana, for example, a new Lao community arose when word of the availability of employment in regional oil-related construction spread through Lao refugee networks initially resettled in various other locations (Bankston 2000). 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, especially those toward refugees and undocumented immigrants, have played an important role in shaping the dispersion of contemporary immigrants. Studies have found that restrictive immigration policies force circular labor migrants and undocumented migrants to permanently resettle 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, and not just among arrivals from south of the U.S. border with Mexico. Moreover, even though the dispersion has become noticeable among Mexicans after 1990, it has actually occurred earlier across immigrant populations in general. U.S. Census evidence that migrant settlement became more diffuse across regions in the New South during the entire post-1970 period, and that proportions of immigrants settled in both the South and the West had risen sharply in the decades after 1970.

Changing Public Attitudes toward Immigration

When the size of the newcomers into a community is small and the local economy is good, public reception is generally positive and welcoming. But as the immigrant population becomes visible in a locale, anxiety and hostile attitudes may ensue. Hostility toward immigrants emerges from 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 in but later there was rising concerns 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 the 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. Support for President Trump came from a variety of sources and we do not mean to engage in political partisanship here or to dismiss all of those who decided he was the preferred candidate. Nevertheless, the Republican nominee’s two signature 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 new and unfamiliar national-origin groups. Part of the intense opposition to Trump, as a candidate and as president, has arisen from those who reject his immigration policies.

Public attitudes toward immigrants, then, are both more favorable than they have been in the past and more hostile, depending on with which parts of the public immigrants come into contact and on the location and national-origin of the immigrants. Even members of the most advantaged groups can experience hostility, though. Indeed, even the very success of young people in groups such as Asian Indians can be a source of resentment and suspicion.

Growing up in New Destinations

The term “new destinations” does not refer only to areas that have historically received few immigrants, but also to traditional immigrant destinations that have until recently not been places of migrant reception (Zhou and Bankston 2016). The residential settings surrounding the children of immigrants in new destinations are characteristic of both diversity and structured inequality as there are vast socioeconomic gaps among immigrants of different national or ethnic origins and variations in the ethnic clusters across the country. Children of low-skilled immigrants tend to concentrate and grow up in central cities, plagued by poverty, drugs, crime, and poor schools, and 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 2016). 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). These new suburban neighborhoods, with their variations, not only maintain distinctions between

the new second generation and native-born American young people, but also reinforce and perpetuate the socioeconomic lines among immigrant groups.

Suburbs and Ethnoburbs

Suburbs, generally associated with middleclass whites, used to be socioeconomically more advantaged than urban communities, to which immigrants were expected to move as a measure of residential assimilation. One consequence of the white flight that occurred in the 1970s was residential segregation by race/ethnicity and class. One of the reasons that suburbs draw immigrants is that these are the types of locations where employment and housing are available. For example, the large Vietnamese community in Versailles in New Orleans East began because the suburban spread of New Orleans had produced large apartment complexes in the ring surrounding the city, which enabled the Vietnamese to move to free-standing housing in the area immediately surrounding the original apartment complex (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

A similar dynamic, but involving the pull of suburban employment to a much greater extent, lay behind the development of a Lao suburban village in southwestern Louisiana (Bankston 2000). In 1980, a firm doing oil-related construction in the area around the small city of New Iberia began offering training, followed by jobs in welding, pipefitting, and other forms of skilled labor. Lao refugees resettled elsewhere in the United States heard through ethnic networks of the availability of employment. The flow of secondary migration through ethnic networks gave rise to a small set of homeland villages, initially in a complex of federally subsidized, low-income apartments on the western edge of the city of New Iberia, Louisiana, and later in the free-standing housing in surrounding neighborhoods. Instead of dispersing, however, Lao refugees formed a number of ethnic pockets, with individuals attempting to buy or build homes close to friends and kin. They later pooled income to create a Buddhist temple complex outside the city boundaries and to build many suburban-style homes around this temple (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. 2000; 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 (Wen et al. 2009, Logan and Zhang 2013). Ethnoburbs refer to affluent, suburban, ethnic communities developed by the influx of non-white immigrants (Li 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 (Saxenian 2006). In Orange County, Koreans establish many small ethnic clusters in suburbs such as Anaheim, Buena Park, Fullerton, and Irvine (Vo

and Danico 2004). Visible Chinese residential clusters emerge in almost all suburbs around Los Angeles metropolitan region (Li 2009; Zhou et al. 2008). Immigrants were barely visible in many of today's typical ethnoburbs in California before 1980.

The suburban and ethnoburb patterns mean that the growing up experiences of the new second generation in new destinations are not the same as those in conventional urban neighborhoods, which are generally poor and racial minority dominant. Being residentially and economically part of middle-class America while remaining within a set of ties among people sharing an ethnic culture may remain a genuine option. Whether members of the new second generation and their own children will remain in ethnoburbs in substantial numbers or use them as springboards to move onto neighborhoods that are not ethnically identifiable remains to be seen. The likely scenario is that that is no single outcome: some descendants of immigrants will remain in ethnically concentrated suburbs or ethnoburbs, some will move to other places but retain substantial contacts with ethnically identifiable suburbs, and still others will break their ties to even the relatively privileged ethnoburbs (Zhou and Bankston 2016).

New Ethnic Formation

Immigrant selectivity shapes the socioeconomic setting to which immigrant families are settled and affects the geographic structures of immigrant communities that in turn influence the lives of the second generation. One might expect that selectivity would push some immigrants into non-ethnic settings, while others, the less advantaged, move into ethnic concentrations. However, the rapid growth in immigrant populations and the rise of new kinds of ethnic settlements, such as ethnoburbs, has driven a new ethnic formation based on new kinds of ethnic residential communities.

There is a trend of ethnic re-segregation in suburbs regardless of family socioeconomic backgrounds. Studying a Lao community specialized in oil industry-related construction in Southwest Louisiana, Bankston (2000) finds that Lao immigrants settle in small clusters throughout suburban neighborhoods because of the need to commute to workplaces and because of housing availability. The Lao manage to build a Buddhist temple complex, surrounded by a Lao residential neighborhood, but limited space means that only a part of the community can live in this neighborhood, with many still scatter about the suburban areas. The extent to which native-born Lao children are integrated into the local Lao American community and identified with it, then, depend on how involved they are with activities at the temple.

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. Living in mainly professional families settled in the suburbs, the children of Asian Indian immigrants appear to be highly communicated ethnic identities to members of the second generation, even serving as centers for finding in-group marital partners. At the same time, these same organizational centers promote concentration on educational performance and on the pursuit of professional careers among young people. 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.

The evolution of white middle class suburbs into ethnically identifiable communities of newcomers of varied socioeconomic levels, can reinforce a sense of ethnic distinctiveness among the children of immigrants, while causing anxiety among long-time native residents. As suburban locations become identified with immigrant-origin ethnic groups, a new kind of segregation tends to emerge. The children of immigrants come into contact with other children of immigrants. Even whites who feel comfortable with diverse neighborhoods can feel out of place in areas that are almost entirely Asian or Hispanic.

Educational Stratification and the New White Flight

The dynamics of ethnically identifiable schools are similar in some respects to those of ethnically identifiable neighborhoods. For the children of Asian immigrants, as well as for other immigrant children transitioning into adulthood, the school continues to serve as the most important social environment. The rapid growth of immigrant populations in new destinations means that the children of immigrants become ever more evident in schools around the country, instead of being concentrated in the schools of immigrant gateway cities in the Northeast and on the West Coast. It also means that the children of Hispanic and Asian immigrants are introducing unaccustomed forms of racial and ethnic diversity to school districts across the country.

Native anxiety arises from the influxes of both low- and high-SES families. Even though the new destinations have more favorable educational contexts in many respects than those in inner cities, they also offer fewer language-support services than traditional urban immigrant communities. Students from low-SES immigrant families generally have lower test scores than other students and therefore pose risks of bringing general school rankings down (Dondero and Muller 2012). The educational needs and cultural or language needs of immigrant students can create serious challenges for schools especially those districts with limited resources.

Students from high-SES immigrant families drive the educational stratification in yet another way. On a nation-wide level, the Asian immigrant groups tend to outperform Hispanics, non-Hispanic whites, and non-Hispanic blacks on national achievement tests, in grades, and in levels of attainment. Although wide variation among the Asian groups exists, higher academic performance is not only a general average, but also a distinctly Asian pattern. 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).

These standardized test scores seem to actually under-measure Asian school performance moreover. 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 not only show weaker levels of school performance than Asians or non-Hispanic whites on test scores and grades, they also continue to have high, if declining, 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.

The concentration of Asian immigrant parents in high prestige, intellectually demanding occupation fields drives much of the achievement of the children. In some upscale suburbs, such as Silicon Valley, students of high-skilled Asian immigrant parentage push up the average level of academic achievement and change the normative standard of achievement in some of the most competitive and prestigious of public high schools, causing a “new white flight” (Hwang 2005; Jiménez and Horowitz 2013), fleeing not from poor schools, but schools that are seen as too demanding. For Asian students, this can result in greater isolation and in an ethnic stereotyping that creates an additional source of school pressure. We turn now to a discussion of this stereotyping and its possible consequences.

Racialization and Stereotyping

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. Even though their children have scores only slightly higher (and thus have achieved little upward mobility beyond their parents), the native born in this group on average retain the level of the newly arrived generation. Chinese immigrants and their children also show high socioeconomic scores across generations. However, averages do not tell individual stories and some of the children of Asian Indian and Chinese professionals may have difficulties finding advantageous places in society. But young people of professionals start out from more privileged positions and face fewer risks than the children of entrepreneurs, who may grow up in a wide range of neighborhoods. The children of the professionals almost certainly grow up in better neighborhoods and attend better and safer schools than the children of low-skilled and semi-skilled laborers. 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?

Omi and Winant’s influential theory of racial formation is based on the idea that “everybody learns some combination, some version of the rules of racial classification” (1994, p. 60). This socialization varies across racial/ethnic or national origin groups, as well as time and place. For the children of Asian immigrants, they undergo a process of resocialization as they encounter new racial and ethnic identities and inequalities in the United States, quite unlike that for African Americans who tend to develop a racial identity associated with slavery and lived experiences of racism and racial hierarchy.

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, 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” to refer to the promise of being viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype that leads one to perform in such a way that confirms the positive stereotype, thereby enhancing performance. Stereotype promise focuses more broadly on the way in which positive stereotypes can boost performance outside of controlled test-taking environments and in real world settings such as schools and workplaces. Like stereotype threat, the relationship between stereotype promise and performance may be mediated by some of the same mechanisms—*anxiety and overcompensating with excess effort*—but produce the reverse outcome.

Lee and Zhou (2015) elaborate how “stereotype promise” can become a double-edged sword. 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 position (Zhou and Lee 2017).

The model minority stereotype also goes hand-in-hand with the forever foreigner stereotype, both are commonly experienced among children of Asian immigrants. A recent research shows that nearly 100% 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).

Discussion and Conclusion

Along with structural challenges, new destinations can also pose difficulties of attitude and reception. Many of the places now receiving large numbers of immigrants do not have extensive experience in dealing with diverse populations or cosmopolitan perspectives on the world. Even though native-born whites often developed friendly relations with individual immigrants, in many cases they still retained broad stereotypical and prejudiced ideas (Kennelly 2008). Since prejudicial or stereotypical attitudes apply to groups, the effect on the new second generation is direct and profound.

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 the wealthy, high-achieving, and problem-free immigrants (Hsu 2015). Many are seen as foreign and not completely “American” despite that they speak English and behave like other Americans. Stereotypes apply with even greater force in newer destinations, where native-born Americans may have even more limited notions of racial and ethnic identifications.

Although settlement in new destinations can pose challenges for children growing up in immigrant families and for the places they call home, it is important to recognize that the ultimate consequences of the spread of new immigrant populations are likely positive. The newcomers help revitalize or boost the local economy that generates new economic opportunities to benefit local neighbors and their children. Many suburban and rural locations that were in decline before they began to receive large immigrant populations have been revitalized. The children of immigrants, like other inhabitants of new destinations, also benefit from the dynamism that new diversity brings. While prejudice or simply tendencies to stereotype non-European origin groups may complicate the lives of young people from immigrant families, the day-to-day interactions of these young people with those around them can serve to soften the prejudices, break down the stereotypes, and inspire broader outlooks in neighborhoods across the country.

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