7 Divergent Origins and Destinies: Children of Asian Immigrants

Min Zhou

Americans of Asian origins have family histories in the United States longer than many Americans of Eastern or Southern European origins. However, their numbers have become visible only in recent decades, rising from 1.4 million in 1970 to 11.9 million (or 4% of the total US population) in 2000. Before 1970, the Asian-origin population was largely made up of Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos. Today Americans of Chinese and Filipino origins are the largest subgroups (at 2.8 million and 2.4 million respectively), followed by Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese and Japanese (at more than one million). Some 20 other national-origin or ethnic subgroups, such as Cambodians, Lao, Hmong, Thai, Indonesians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis have been officially counted by government statistics only since 1980. Because of the historical circumstances of legal exclusion and contemporary immigration, Asian Americans have just begun to mature into the second generation in large numbers since the late 1980s, and for the Japanese, into the fourth generation.[1] As of 2000, approximately two-thirds of Americans of Asian origins is foreign born (the first and 1.5 generation), another 27% is U.S. born of foreign-born parentage (the second generation), and less than 10% is U.S. born of U.S.-born parentage (the third generation or higher).[2]

There has been relatively little concern with whether or not the children of Asian immigrants can make it into the American mainstream, partly because of their comparatively high socioeconomic status (SES) upon arrival and partly

[1] The 1.5 generation includes the foreign born who arrived in the United States as young children, mostly prior to age 13. As of 1990 the third-generation (the children of U.S. born parentage) represented barely 10 percent, of the Asian American child population. Japanese American children were an exception: 54.3 percent of them are members of the third or higher generation, compared with 9.2 percent of Chinese, 10.7 percent of Filipinos, 1.2 percent of Indians, 2.8 percent of Koreans, 1.2 percent of Vietnamese, and 5.3 percent of other Asians.

[2] Based on estimates from the 1998–2002 Current Population Survey of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

because of their extraordinary educational achievement. The general perception is that a great majority of the children, even those from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, will succeed in school and later in life, and that the "model minority" image represents a reality rather than a myth. This chapter examines the problems and limitations of the homogenized image of Asian Americans based on the analysis of the U.S. census data and my own ethnographic case studies in Asian immigrant communities. I argue that Asian immigrants and their U.S.-born or U.S.-raised children are living in a society that is highly stratified not only by class but also by race. This reality, combined with unique cultures, immigration histories, family and community resources, has shaped and, to an important extent, determined the educational outcomes of the children of Asian immigrants. The chapter starts with a discussion about intragroup diversity impacted by contemporary Asian immigration. It then explains how diversity creates opportunities and constraints to affect the trajectories of second-generation mobility. Finally, the chapter extracts lessons from two ethnographic case studies, Chinese and Vietnamese, to illustrate how culture interacts with structure to affect unique social environments conducive to education.

7.1. Contemporary Asian Immigration and Intragroup Diversity

The phenomenal growth of Asian Americans in the span of 30 odd years is primarily due to the accelerated immigration and the historic resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees after the Vietnam War. Between 1970 and 2000, nearly 7 million immigrants were legally admitted to the United States as permanent residents from Asia. The share of immigrants from Asia as a proportion of the total foreign-born population to the United States soared from 5% of all arrivals in the 1950s, to 11% in the 1960s, to more than one-third since the 1970s. While the majority of contemporary Asian immigrants are either family-sponsored migrants (more than three quarters) or employer-sponsored skilled workers (nearly 20%), those from Southeast Asia are primarily refugees. Between 1975 and 2000, nearly one million refugees arrived from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as a direct result of the failed U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. Overall, 76% of all foreign-born Asians entered the United States in the past two decades (43% entered between 1990 and 2000) (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Table 7.1 shows the ethnic composition and pertinent information of these ethnic populations.

7.2. Diversity in Socioeconomic Backgrounds

Unlike earlier immigrants from Asia or Europe and contemporary immigrants from Latin America, who were mostly low-skilled laborers looking for work, today's immigrants from Asia have come from more diverse backgrounds.

TABLE 7.1. Selected Characteristics of Asian Americans.

	Percent distribution	Percent under 18	Percent foreign born	Percent English Less than very well	Percent bachelor's degree or more	Managerial & Professional occupations	Median family income ($1000)	Percent in poverty
Chinese	23.8	21.4	70.9	49.6	48.1	52.3	60.1	13.5
Filipino	18.3	22.1	67.7	24.1	43.8	38.2	65.2	6.3
Indian	16.2	24.8	75.4	23.1	63.9	59.9	70.7	9.8
Vietnamese	10.9	26.9	76.1	62.4	19.4	26.9	47.1	16.0
Korean	10.5	24.3	77.7	50.5	43.8	38.7	47.6	14.8
Japanese	7.8	12.1	39.5	27.2	41.9	50.7	70.8	9.7
Cambodian	1.8	38.6	65.8	53.5	9.2	17.8	35.6	29.3
Hmong	1.7	55.2	55.6	58.6	7.5	17.1	32.4	37.8
Laotian	1.6	34.4	68.1	52.8	7.7	13.4	43.5	18.5
Pakistani	1.5	32.8	75.5	31.7	54.3	43.5	50.2	16.5
Thai	1.1	15.3	77.8	46.9	38.6	33.4	49.6	14.4
Other Asian	4.7	31.6	56.5	32.7	41.4	39.8	50.7	15.6
All Asian	100.0	25.6	68.9	39.5	44.1	44.6	59.3	12.4
All U.S.	3.9	23.9	11.1	8.1	24.4	33.6	50.5	12.6

Source: U.S. Census of the Population, 2000 (reconstructed from Reeves & Bennett, 2004).

Contemporary immigrants from Asia have arrived in the United States for a variety of reasons: reuniting with families, investing in businesses, fulfilling the demand for highly skilled and low-skilled labor, and escaping war, political or religious persecution, and economic hardship. Chinese, Filipino, and Indian Americans tend to be over-represented among scientists, engineers, physicians and other highly skilled professionals, while Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong Americans, most of whom entered the United States as refugees, tend to be disproportionately low-skilled workers. Overall, however, Asian Americans appear to fare better than the general U.S. population on key socioeconomic status (SES) measures.

As shown in Table 7.1, 44% of adult Asians, as opposed to 24% in the total US adult population, had at least a bachelor's degree, and 45% of workers were in managerial or professional occupations, as opposed to 34% among U.S. workers. The median family income for Asian families was $59,000 in 1999, as opposed to $50,000 for average American families. Poverty rates for Asian families were at the same level as that for other American families (12%). These averages, however, mask the vast heterogeneity among Asian-origin groups. While highly skilled and professional Asians boast high SES, Southeast Asians, especially Hmong and Cambodians, trail far behind. Less than 10 percent of Hmong and Cambodian adults had a bachelor's degree. The median family incomes for Hmong and Cambodian families were $32,000 and $36,000, respectively. Poverty rates for Hmong families was 38% and for Cambodian family, 29%.

Asians also suffer from a severe lack of English proficiency even among some relatively high SES subgroups. While 79 percent of Asians spoke a language other than English at home, reflecting the recency of immigration, 40 percent spoke English less than "very well." The sub-groups that had a majority of people who spoke English less than "very well" included Chinese, Koreans, and Thai (50%); Cambodian and Laotian (54%); Hmong (59%), and Vietnamese (62%) (Reeves & Bennett, 2004).

7.3. Diversity in Settlement Patterns

Despite the geographical concentration in historically gateway cities, settlement patterns among Asian Americans are more diverse than ever before. While Asian Americans have continued to heavily concentrate in the West, they have become more dispersed geographically and suburbanized. Not surprising, California alone accounts for 35 percent of all Asians (4.3 million) in the United States. California is also home to the largest number of each of the six largest national-origin groups—Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese. Second behind California is New York State, which accounts for 10 percent, or 1.2 million, of all Asians. Chinese, Indians, and Koreans are heavily concentrated in New York, but not Filipinos, Japanese, and Vietnamese.

Several other states are home to large populations of specific Asian-origin groups. For example, Texas has the second largest Vietnamese population, next to California. Illinois has the third largest Filipino population, next to California and Hawaii. Washington has the third largest Japanese population, next to California and Hawaii. And New Jersey has the third largest Indian and Korean populations, next to California and New York. Among cities with populations that exceed 100,000, New York City, Los Angeles, and Honolulu have the largest number of Asians, while Daly City, California and Honolulu are Asian-majority cities. Some smaller cities in California such as Monterey Park (the first city in America that reached an Asian majority in 1990 and remained an Asian-majority city in 2000) have also reached Asian majority status.

Traditional urban enclaves such as Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Manilatown, Koreatown, Little Phnom Penh, and Thaitown continue to thrive or have recently emerged in gateway cities. However, they no longer serve as primary centers of initial settlement for the recently arrived since many new immigrants, especially the affluent and highly skilled, bypass central cities altogether and settle in the suburbs immediately after their arrival. For example, as of 2000, only 8% of the Chinese in San Francisco and 12% of the Chinese in New York live in inner-city Chinatowns. Likewise, only 13% of Vietnamese in Orange County, California, live in Little Saigon, a mere 14% of Koreans in Los Angeles live in Koreatown, and only 27% of Cambodians in Los Angeles live in Little Phnom Penh. The majority of the Asian American population has spread to the outer areas or suburbs in traditional gateway cities as well as in new urban centers of Asian settlement across the country (Lai & Arguelles, 2003).

7.4. Diversity in Language and Religion

Asian American cultures have diverse origins and different ways of incorporating itself into American society. Each of the national-origin or ethnic groups has brought its own respective cultural traditions including language and religion. Linguistically, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants came from countries with a single official language, but with many local dialects. Filipino immigrants, in contrast, came from a country where Tagalog and English are both dominant languages, and most of the Filipino immigrants are fluent bilinguals prior to emigration. Most Indian immigrants are proficient in English, but there are also 16 other official languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Urdu, and others. Moreover, there are many local and regional dialects spoken within each group. For example, immigrants from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan share the same written Chinese language but speak a variety of dialects—Cantonese, Mandarin, Fujianese, Chaozhounese, and Shanghainese—that are not easily understood within the group.

In the Asian American community, there is no single religion that unifies a pan-ethnic identity, but religion serves as one of the most important ethnic institutions in the community. Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese come primarily from non-Judeo Christian backgrounds where Confucianism and/or Buddhism and its variations are widespread in the homelands. Western colonization in the homelands and immigration to the United States have led to a trend of conversion to Christianity prior to or after arrival. For example, only 20% of the population in Korea is Protestant, but the majority of Koreans in the United States is Protestants. Existing research also suggests Protestant Koreans are more likely than others to emigrate (Min and Pyong Gap, 1995). In Vietnam, only 10% of the population is Catholic, but nearly a third in the United States is Catholic. Many Vietnamese refugees were converted to Catholicism after they fled Vietnam as a way to obtain U.S. sponsorship, largely due to the active role the Catholic Charities played in resettling Vietnamese refugees in the United States. Conversion to Christianity is also noticeable among immigrants from Taiwan, but at a smaller scale among those from Mainland China and Japan. Many Filipino Americans are Catholic since 80% of their homeland population practice Catholicism. Indian Americans come from more diverse religious backgrounds with Hindus dominating, followed by smaller numbers of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists (Zhou, 2004).

7.5. The Asian American Second Generation Coming of Age: Opportunities and Constraints

Diversity in origins, socioeconomic backgrounds, settlement patterns, and immigrant cultures has profound implications for the educational prospects and identity formation of immigrant offspring. The U.S.-born Asian American

population is still disproportionately young and of immigrant parentage. Unlike their immigrant parents, many children of immigrants lack meaningful connections to their parents' homelands. Thus, they are unlikely to consider a foreign country across the Pacific as a point of reference, but are likely to evaluate themselves or to be evaluated by others by the standards of their country of birth or the one in which they are raised. Today, children of Asian immigrants (1.5 or second-generation) encounter a more open America transformed by the civil rights movements and thus aspire to become incorporated as part of mainstream America. However, the outcomes of their incorporation may indicate upward, downward, or horizontal mobility because American society is highly segmented by class and race (Gans, 1992; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Zhou, 1997).

First, the prospects of social mobility are complicated by divergence along class lines that lead to fragmentation within the Asian American community. Middle-class immigrants are able to start their American life with high-paying professional jobs and secure a comfortable suburban living for their families. Working-class immigrants and refugees, in contrast, often have to endure poverty and low-paying menial jobs and live in economically deprived inner cities. Their children's chances of getting ahead in society are often constrained by residential segregation and other structural disadvantages associated with low SES and inner-city living, such as economic deprivation, inadequate schools, and unsafe neighborhoods.

There are also other possibilities. Some immigrants from high SES backgrounds in their homelands may find themselves living and/or working amongst their working-class counterparts or poor native minorities in underprivileged inner cities in America because they lack transferable job skills or English proficiency. Other immigrants from low SES backgrounds in their homelands, however, may find their way into middle-class suburbs through family, friendship, or co-ethnic employment networks. They may live and work in immigrant "ethnoburbs" with thriving co-ethnic economies and those who work for middle-class families as live-in housekeepers.[3] Also, because of the global movement of people and capital, some ethnic communities develop viable ethnic enclave economies that create tangible and intangible benefits for low-SES co-ethnic members to move ahead in society, while others lack social, cultural, and financial capital to do so. Thus, class bifurcation may not always naturally reproduce itself in the second generation. What is at issue is *how* to ensure desirable educational outcomes normally associated with high SES while countering negative outcomes associated with low SES.

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[3] "Ethnoburb" is a term developed by the geographer Wei Li to capture the emerging phenomenon of immigrant concentration in middle-class suburbs in the United States, representing a reversed trend of ethnic concentration and succession (the normal trend being suburban dispersion) in predominantly white middle class suburban communities (Li, 1997).

Second, race is likely to interact with class to affect the Asian American second generation more profoundly than their parent generation. Despite a more open host society and the relatively high SES of the group as a whole, racism and racial stereotyping are the long-standing issues relevant to today's Asian American community. Although Asian Americans have made extraordinary achievements and are celebrated as the "model minority" and even the "honorary white," they are still perceived as "foreigners" and are targeted against with derogative terms and racial slurs. Moreover, Asian Americans have continued to receive unequal returns to education. They often find themselves in situations where they have to score exceptionally high in order to get into a good school and work twice or many more times as hard in order to achieve occupational and earnings parity with their non-Hispanic white counterparts. They often feel that doing just as well as everybody else is not enough. They often hear their parents or themselves saying: "you've got to stand out, and you've got to work much harder and do much better." Moreover, professional Asian Americans have constantly faced the glass-ceiling barriers. For example, they are often considered hard workers, competent scientists, engineers, and technicians, but not good managers or executives.

The dual image of the "honorary white" and "forever foreigner" can be a source of frustration; it can also serve as the basis for empowerment in the second generation. Unlike their parents who appear all too ready to appreciate the opportunities in their new country, to swallow the bitter fruit of unfair treatment, and to bear the blunt of racism, the children feel entitled to equal citizenship rights as all other Americans. They may consciously resist the unequal system of racial stratification, but such resistance is often constrained by class. For example, like their native-born minority counterparts in the inner city, US-born children of working-class Asian immigrants may internalize their socially imposed inferiority as part of their collective self-definition (Bourgois, 1998; Fordham, 1996; Gibson, 1989). Consequently, they may adopt an "oppositional outlook" toward the dominant group and mainstream institutions, regarding doing well in school as "acting white" or "selling out" to the system that functions to oppress them. They may also look down on their immigrant heritage as obsolete and old-fashioned and detach from and the support and control of their families and ethnic communities" (Zhou, 1997). Ironically, such symbolic expressions of empowerment may hinder, rather than facilitate, social mobility. However, Asian Americans have generally gained remarkable inroads into mainstream America. In their collective struggle to fight for equality in citizenship, civil rights, and representation, they have often adopted collective strategies to muster family and community resources for self-help and to move along the paths with least resistance, including ethnic entrepreneurship, overwork, and over-education.

Third, the immigrant family continues to play a significant role in structuring the lives of second-generation Asian Americans. Despite their diverse origins, children of Asian immigrants share certain common family experiences. Most prominently, the unduly familial obligation to fulfill the extraordinarily high

parental expectations for educational and occupational achievement is a way to repay their parents and honor their families.

Many Asian immigrant parents migrate to provide better opportunities for their children even when they expect significant initial downward mobility. They are all too aware of their own limits in ensuring socioeconomic mobility for their children, and hence, turn to education as the surest path to move ahead. Thus, not only do they place an enormous amount of pressure on their children to excel in school, but they also provide the material means to assure success. For example, they move to neighborhoods with strong public schools, send their children to private after-school programs (including ethnic language programs, academic tutoring, and enrichment institutions in the ethnic community), spend time to seek out detailed academic information, and make decisions about schools and majors for their children (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Although the parents feel that they are doing what is best for their children, the children—whose frame of reference is "American"—consider their parents unacculturated, old-fashioned, and traditional disciplinarians who are incapable of having fun and unwilling to show respect for their individuality. The children view the immigrant family and ethnic community as symbols of the old world—strictly authoritarian, severely demanding, and overwhelmingly stifling. At the same time, the children also experience their parents' daily struggles as new immigrants surviving in America, and consequently, develop a 'unique respect and sensitivity toward them.

In sum, opportunities and constraints go hand-in-hand. Second-generation Asian Americans have to straddle two social worlds unfolded by the dual processes of immigration and racialization (Zhou & Lee, 2004). On the one hand, they are intimately influenced and often intensely constrained by their immigrant heritage even though ethnic distinctiveness associated with homeland traditions and cultures blur with each succeeding generation (due to acculturation and rapid and high rates of intermarriage). Research has illustrated how the immigrant family and ethnic community have been the primary sources of support as well as the primary sites of conflict (Zhou & Bankstons, 1998). On the other hand, the lived experiences of second-generation Asian Americans are intrinsically linked with racialization. Race complicates intragroup dynamics and intergenerational relations. Because about two-thirds of the Asian American population is first generation, native-born Asians must now confront renewed images of Asians as "foreigners" while battling their unequal social status as racial minorities. Resembling the new immigrants, the more "assimilated" native-born find that they must actively and constantly distinguish themselves from the newer arrivals. For instance, comments about one's "good English" or inquiries about where one comes from are often taken as insensitive at best, and offensive or even insulting at worst, to native-born Asian Americans. By stark contrast, similar encounters may tend to be interpreted or felt more positively among foreign-born Asians. Different lived experiences between the generations are thus not only generational, but also cultural (Zhou & Lee, 2004).

7.6. Moving Ahead in Society: Culture Versus Structure

Like most Americans, the children of Asian immigrants regard education as the most important means to social mobility, and they have actualized the educational value in some remarkable ways. The higher than average levels of Asian American educational achievement are publicly known. The children of foreign-born physicians, scientists, and engineers and those of disadvantaged backgrounds, Chinese or Hmong, girls or boys, repeatedly appear on the lists of high school valedictorians and in competitive academic decathlon teams, and win prestigious awards and honors at the national, state, and local level (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Xiong, 2005).

The children of Asian immigrants are also gaining admissions to prestigious universities in disproportionate numbers. For example, Asian Americans comprise roughly 12% of California's population but make up over one-third of the undergraduates at the University of California campuses at Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Irvine (UCB, 2004; UCI, 2004; UCLA, 2002). The nation's leading universities have also reported a dramatic increase in enrollment of Asian Americans, who make up 28% of the undergraduates at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 25% at Stanford, 19% at Harvard, and 17% at Yale (GoldSea, 2005). As of 2000, Asian Americans have attained the highest level of education of all racial groups in the United States: 44% of Asian American adults have attained bachelor's degrees or higher, and the ratio for those with advanced degrees (e.g., master's, Ph.D., M.D. or J.D.) is one in seven. Although some ethnic groups, such as Cambodians, Lao, and Hmong, still trail behind other East and South Asians in most indicators of achievement, they too show significant signs of upward mobility (Zhou & Xiong, 2005).

What contributes to the school success of Asian Americans? The cultural argument emphasizes the effects of an ethnic group's traits, qualities, characteristics, or behavioral patterns with which the group is either inherently endowed or which it develops in the process of immigrant adaptation (Fukuyama, 1993; Sowell, 1981; Steinberg, 1996). One view of the cultural argument regards an ethnic group's high achievement orientation, industriousness, perseverance, and ability to postpone immediate gratification for later rewards to be the cultural inventory facilitating social mobility. Another view of the cultural argument posits that cultural traits and related behavioral patterns are not intrinsic to an ethnic group but can exert an independent effect on social mobility once transmitted from the first generation and reconstructed in subsequent generations through interaction with the structural conditions of the host society. For example, urban ghettos gave rise to a particular way of living constrained by poverty, which in turn generated particular value systems that encourage fatalism, a lack of spiritual concerns and aspirations, and a present orientation fostering the desire for instant gratification. Poor families may rely on these values and behaviors as a means of coping with poverty, and gradually absorb them.

As a result, researchers holding the cultural argument tend to attribute the low achievement of Black, Hispanic, and Native American children to “deficiencies” in the home or the lack of cultural skills necessary for school success due to residential segregation and poverty (Coleman et al., 1966; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Lewis, 1966).

The structural argument, on the other hand, explain intergroup differences in educational and mobility outcomes by emphasizing the role of broader social structural factors, including a group’s position in the class *and* racial stratification systems, labor market conditions, and residential patterns in the host society. These factors interact with individual socioeconomic characteristics and ethnic social structures to define the meaning of success, prescribe strategies for status attainment, and ultimately determine a group’s chance of success.

For example, the children of Jewish immigrants fared better academically than their Italian counterparts who arrived in the United States at the same time. The Jewish success was not simply accounted for by the value Jews placed on education, but by their more advantageous class background — higher literacy, better industrial skills, and greater familiarity with urban living — and by the fact that they typically immigrated as families with the intention to settle, not to sojourn (Perlmann, 1988; Steinberg, 1981). Furthermore, because of middle-man minority status in the homelands, Jews had already developed a complex array of ethnic institutions and organizations, which allowed them to maintain extensive Jewish networks, synagogues, and other ties to cope with adversity and settlement problems (Goldscheider & Zuckerman, 1984). Upon arrival in the United States, the value Jews traditionally placed on education was activated, redefined, and given new direction when Jewish immigrants saw compelling social and economic rewards associated with educational achievement (Steinberg, 1981). In explaining Asian American school success, scholars holding the structural view argued that, because of the greater entry barriers into noneducational areas such as politics, sports, and entertainment, Asian Americans had to rely on education as the only effective means of upward social mobility. As a result, they devoted more energy to education and disproportionately succeeded in it (Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

I argue that cultural and structural factors constantly interact. The value of education must be supported not only by the family but also but the larger social environment. For immigrant children, this social environment is often formed by ethnic-specific social structures manifested in various economic, civic, socio-cultural, and religious organizations in an ethnic community as well as in social networks arising from co-ethnic members’ participation in these organizations. Therefore, an examination of specific ethnic social structures, namely ethnic language schools and afterschool establishments that target children and youth, can provide insight into how the community is sustained and how recourses are generated to support education. I illustrate this point through two ethnographic cases.

7.7. Ethnic Social Environment Conducive to Education: Suburban Chinese Language Schools

In my UCLA Chinese Immigration class of 120 undergraduate students, I asked, "What is unique about growing up Chinese-American?" My Chinese American students (65% of the class) almost unequivocally responded, "Going to Chinese school." As in the past, going to Chinese school is a quintessential experience of the people of Chinese ancestry in the United States as well as in other parts of the world. Immigrants and their communities often consciously work to maintain their ethnic languages in the second generation as the basis for carrying on their cultural heritages (Fishman, 1980). In my view, what determines a child's development is not merely parental, racial, or socioeconomic status or other broader structure factors, such as neighborhoods and schools, but also the immediate social environment in which the child grows up. Chinese language schools, for example, constitute an important part of the immediate social environment that shape Chinese American children's educational experience. (Zhou & Li, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Many Chinese immigrants today are from middle-class backgrounds and have achieved high levels of residential and occupational mobility, almost immediately upon arrival. More than half of Chinese immigrant families now live in white middle-class suburbs (Xie & Goyette, 2004). For Chinese immigrants, raising children in middle-class suburbs poses a set of challenges different from doing so in Chinatowns. The parents find it hard to simply impose the exceptionally high educational expectations upon their children, since the children's reference group is their middle-class American peers. A suburban Chinese mother in an interview stated, "My daughter was very resistant to my telling her to study more than she needed to. She seemed to have made up her mind of going to a community college with her other white friends. Whenever I mentioned the names of some prestigious colleges, she would talk back, 'what's wrong with going to community college.' I don't know what to say. I guess it would be alright, but how would I face other [Chinese] parents who boast about their children's Ivy League schools." In contrast, both parents and children in Chinatown look up to suburban whites as their reference point rather than native minorities in their neighborhoods.

In some ways, parental values and expectations regarding educational achievement needs the support and control of ethnic social structures even among middle-class Chinese immigrants. It is perhaps in this context that suburban Chinese language schools have developed since the 1970s and particularly rapidly since the early 1990s. First started by educated Taiwanese immigrants and then by international students and well-educated professional immigrants from mainland China, new Chinese schools emerged in suburbs rather than inner cities. For example, the majority of suburban Chinese schools affiliated with the Southern California United Chinese School Association were initially established by Taiwanese immigrants in the mid- or late 1970s. The Hua Xia Chinese School was established as a Saturday school in a northern New Jersey

suburb in the early 1990s by immigrant Chinese from the mainland. It has now expanded into 14 branch campuses in suburbs along the northeastern seaboard from Connecticut to Pennsylvania, serving more than 5,000 students and shifting its admission to "everyone, regardless of his or her gender, race, color of skin, religion, nationality and blood ties." Similarly, the Hope Chinese School started as a small weekend Saturday school in a Washington D.C. suburb for professional Chinese immigrant families from mainland China in the early 1990s. The school has now grown into five campuses in suburban towns in Maryland and Virginia, enrolling more than 2,000 students (Zhou & Li, 2003).

Today's Chinese language schools are distinctive compared to those prior to World War II. First and foremost, the primary goal is to assist immigrant families in their efforts to push their children to excel in American public schools, to get into prestigious universities, and to eventually attain well-paying, high status professions that secure a decent living in the United States. Parents are enthusiastic about sending their children to Chinese language schools not because learning Chinese is the only goal. Rather, many parents are implicitly dissatisfied with American public schools. They believe that Chinese language schools and other ethnic supplementary institutions are instrumental in ensuring that their children meet parental expectations and academic success.

Second, unlike traditional Chinese schools that focused on Chinese language and culture, Chinese language schools today have a more comprehensive and well-rounded curriculum. In addition to the Chinese language, schools now offer a variety of academic programs and *buxiban* in such subjects as English (including English as a Second Language), social studies, math and sciences, as well as college preparation (i.e. SAT). They also offer extracurricular programs, such as youth leadership training, public speech, modern and folk dancing, chorus, music (piano, violin, drums, and Chinese string instruments), drama, Chinese painting, calligraphy, origami, martial arts, Chinese chess and Go, and sports (i.e., tennis, ping-pong ball, and basketball being the most popular).

Perhaps most importantly, today's Chinese language schools serve as an ethnic community, supporting immigrant family values that may often be regarded by the children "as stuff from the old world." When schools are in session, these institutions provide a cultural environment where both parents and children are surrounded by other Chinese people and cultural expectations. They may feel the external pressures to act Chinese and conform to the values and norms prescribed by the Chinese family. The spillover effects on children are also profound. First, Chinese language schools and other relevant ethnic institutions offer an alternative space where children can express and share their feelings of growing up in immigrant Chinese families. Moreover, these ethnic institutions provide unique opportunities for immigrant children to form a different set of peer group networks, giving them more leverage in negotiating parent-child relations at home. Furthermore, these ethnic institutions function to nurture ethnic identity and pride that may be rejected because of the pressure for assimilation. In Chinese schools, they are exposed to something quite different from what they

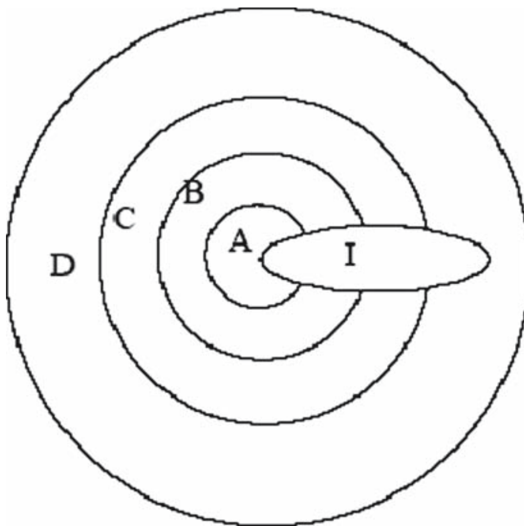
learn in their formal schools. For example, they recite classical Chinese poems and Confucian sayings about family values, behavioral and moral guidelines, and the importance of schooling. They listen to Chinese fables and legends and learn to sing Chinese folk songs, which reveal various aspects of Chinese history and culture. Such cultural exposure reinforces family values and heightens a sense of "Chineseness," helping children to relate to the Chinese "stuff" without feeling embarrassed.

Together with other ethnic institutions specialized in academic and extracurricular programs for children, Chinese language schools have grown into an ethnic system of supplementary education which is complementary to formal education. Despite diversity in form and curriculum, Chinese language schools, non-profit and for-profit alike, have one thing in common. That is, they are Chinese language schools only in the name. They compete more and more intensely with one and other in offering services to immigrant families that are directly relevant to children's formal public education. This case study illustrates how the value of education is supported by an ethnic community's social structures and highlights the important effect of the immediate social environment between a child's home and formal school. As a Chinese school teacher remarked, "when you think of how much time these Chinese kids put in their studies after regular school, you won't be surprised why they succeed at such a high rate." It is this ethnic environment with enormous tangible and intangible benefits to the immigrant family that helps promote and actualize the value of education.

7.8. Multilevel Social Integration: Bifurcation of Vietnamese Refugee Children

In my collaborative work with Carl Bankston III on the children of Vietnamese refugees, we argued that popular, and seemingly contradictory, views of Vietnamese children as "valedictorians" and "delinquents" were rooted in actual social tendencies (Bankston & Zhou, 1995a; Bankston & Zhou, 1995b; Zhou & Bankstons, 1998). Although this research was primarily based on a case study of a Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans, it sheds light on the understanding of this new ethnic group in the United States. The Vietnamese enclave that we studied in the mid-1990s was predominantly low-SES refugees from rural Vietnam, and most were new arrivals at the time of the study. They were settled as a group by Catholic Charities in a low-income black neighborhood. Despite their extreme disadvantages as refugees, the group reconstructed their community and reorganized their American lives under the support and direction of the Vietnamese Catholic church. Many children managed to make it through inadequate inner-city schools with great success owing not so much to the individual family but to the interconnectedness of families. But there was a visible number of children who became high school dropouts, gangsters, and delinquents and were excluded from the ethnic community.

This case study allowed us to develop a model of multi-level social integration to illustrate our argument that success was not a simple matter of culture, individual effort, or family SES, but involved social integration at various structural levels. Figure 7.1 shows a model of multi-level social integration. Note that the individual overlaps all of the systems that surround him or her, indicating that the individual simultaneously participates in his or her own family, ethnic community, the local social environment, and eventually the larger society. In this ideal representation, however, the family is at the very center of each level of social systems in which the individual participates, and each larger circle symmetrically contains each smaller circle. In this ideal case, the family is well integrated into the ethnic community, the ethnic community is well integrated into the local social environment, and the local social environment is well integrated into the larger society (Zhou & Bankstons, 1998). Successful integration into the larger society depends on the fit between familial and ethnic social systems, on the one hand, and on the fit between the ethnic social systems and the larger society, on the other. The local social environment, including both American



I individual

A family

B ethnic community

C local social environment

D larger society

FIGURE 7.1. Model of Multilevel Social Integration: The Ideal Case.
Sources: Zhou & Bankstons, 1998, p. 204.

and Americanized peer groups, pulls young people toward orientations that may be at variance with those of the larger society. In order to avoid deviation from normative orientations, families function to pull young people into the ethnic community and the ethnic community steer them toward normative orientations consistent with those of the larger society.

In the case of the Vietnamese in New Orleans, problems in adaptation occurred either because an individual was insufficiently integrated into an effective family system, or because the family was insufficiently integrated into the ethnic community, or because the local social environment was at odds with the larger society. Living in a low-income neighborhood with high rates of crime and juvenile delinquency put children at a great risk of downward assimilation. In this situation, integration into the family and ethnic community systems was especially important because family and community could join forces in steering young people away from the marginal local social environment and helping them to bypass the problematic neighborhood to integrate to the mainstream society. In our earlier work, we found a direct correlation between individual and/or family disengagement in the ethnic community and delinquency. That is, the Vietnamese young people who moved toward the local social environment of the oppositional youth subculture and became delinquent were likely to be those who were from single-parent families or families that had little connection to the Vietnamese community (Zhou & Bankstons, 1998).

Recently, we have reexamined behavioral and attitudinal trends among Vietnamese youth, contrasting recently gathered data with data collected nearly ten years ago from the same Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans (Zhou & Bankston, 2006). This recent cohort of Vietnamese adolescents is mostly U.S. born and is growing up in an ethnic context quite different from the older cohort of the mid-1990s. We found that the trend of bifurcation continued but the ranks of "valedictorians" or "high achievers" were getting smaller, while those of "delinquents" were growing. Meanwhile, we found correlated trends of out-migration of more affluent families, less dependence of families on the ethnic community, and greater acculturation among children. Moreover, Vietnamese families living in the low-income neighborhood, despite longer length of US residence and greater familiarity with the US society, are less able than previously to channel their children through systems of ethnic social relations. The ethnic community is less unified than before because of the middle-class out-migration. This examination led us to conclude that delinquency is likely to become a more serious problem among Vietnamese adolescents living in low-income communities. While the media celebrated "Vietnamese valedictorians" in the earlier years, it appears they will become less common. The parents of Vietnamese youth today are likely to face similar kinds of problems that affect other low-income minority communities in the United States. As one resident of the Vietnamese enclave remarked in a recent interview, "it's so hard to keep up our culture and traditions when you've been in this country so long. Our children think that Vietnam is very far away and sometimes we just can't pass things onto them." Even with intact families and with an existing Vietnamese

community, it is increasingly difficult for families or communities to function as sealed subsystems (Zhou & Bankston, 2006).

These results suggest that we should see acculturation and assimilation into American society as neither purely positive, nor purely negative. However, we do think that our findings suggest that the acculturation of new immigrant groups is interacting with family's SES and neighborhood contexts. While the children from high SES immigrant families in suburbs may likely achieve similar levels of educational success to those of their native peers, the children from low SES immigrant families in inner cities are likely to be attended by serious difficulties facing the children of their neighboring native minorities. In the latter case, an ethnic social environment with significant amount of community resources conducive to education may be particularly beneficial for upward social mobility.

7.9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Like other immigrant families in the United States, Asian immigrant families set high expectations and instill in their children that educational achievement secures future livelihood and upholds family honor. Tremendous family and community pressures on achieving have yielded positive results. Compared with the general U.S. population, the children of Asian immigrants generally fare better in school regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. The educational achievement of Asian Americans appears to extend beyond secondary education into higher education. Indeed, the nation's best public high schools and universities have seen rapid increases in the Asian American enrollment in their freshmen classes.

However, the Chinese and Vietnamese cases show that the "right" cultural values of Confucianism is not enough to ensure educational success. In order to produce desirable educational outcomes, the intersection of culture and various structural factors, including ethnic social structures must occur. The family's educational goal is reinforced not by the individual family but by the entire ethnic community. In some ethnic communities, as in the case of Chinese, educationally-oriented ethnic language schools have constituted a key component of the Chinese immigrant community transcending geographic boundaries. These ethnic institutions serve as community centers for those who have seemingly assimilated, offering various after-school academic and extracurricular activities (i.e., tutoring, college preparation, music, art, ports) and developing supplementary education to assist families and children. In other communities, as in the case of Vietnamese, the ethnic community that once served as the locus of support and control has become weakened as a result of changing immigration dynamics, out-movement of co-ethnic middle class, and rapid acculturation.

There is also a downside of over-achievement. Because of family and community pressures for achieving and the burden of honoring the family, many children of Asian immigrants have to sacrifice their own personal interests to pursue what their parents think is best for them—a career in science, medicine,

or technical professions. For example, a Chinese American college student gave up his promising singing career to enroll in medical school just to make his parents happy. The children of Asian immigrants also suffer from mental health problems that often go unnoticed until symptoms become chronic. For example, a Korean American high school senior made multiple suicidal attempts because she was not selected the valedictorian of her graduating class and was not admitted to the college of her parents' top choice. These undesirable outcomes should be given greater attention in future research.

Drawing on the Asian American educational experience, I offer the following recommendations:

First, "Asian" is a heterogeneous category that not only includes various national-origin or ethnic subgroups but also entails tremendous inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic differences in socio-economic status. Educators and policymakers should respect cultural diversity and be mindful not to homogenize all students of Asian origins.

Second, for the children of Asian immigrants, as for all other immigrant children, ethnicities based on national origins (i.e., a Chinese or Vietnamese identity) will recede under the pressure of assimilation. But assimilation may not lead to uniformly desirable outcomes. Educators and policymakers should be aware of "segmented" assimilation—into the middle-class mainstream, into the urban underclass, or into segregated ethnic enclaves. Ethnic enclaves may sometimes facilitate, rather than hinder, the assimilation of immigrant children into the middle-class mainstream. In ethnic communities with strong socio-economic recourses, various ethnic social structures (i.e., ethnic language schools, churches, private after-school programs) emerge to serve as a source of support for children's education. In socio-economically unprivileged communities, however, assimilation may mean downward social mobility (i.e., high school dropout, youth delinquency, gang affiliation, and oppositional cultures) because these communities lack resources necessary to help poor families to steer children away from local peer pressures and oppositional cultures. Educators and policymakers should look beyond the family into the social structures of the ethnic community and pay special attention to how these local social structures support or constrain the prospects of educational success.

Third, most immigrant families, Asians and non-Asians alike, place high value on education and consider it the most important path to upward social mobility. However, value cannot be actualized without the support of the family *and* the ethnic community. But the ability of the family and that of the ethnic community to influence children vary by national origins and generations. National-origin groups that constitute a significant middle-class with valuable resources (i.e., education, job skills, and financial assets) upon arrival in the United States have a leg up in the race to move ahead in their new homeland, while others lacking group resources trail behind. Educators and policymakers should be careful not to attribute school success or failure

merely to culture, or to structure, but to the intersection of both cultural and structural factors.

Last but not least, the extraordinary levels of educational achievement seem to reaffirm the "model minority" image in the American public. But the model minority image implicitly casts Asian Americans as different from other Americans, white or nonwhite. In fact, much of the Asian success is due to selective immigration and community development. It remains an empirical question of whether the third or later generation Americans of Asian origins, who may not have the same family or ethnic community pressures or resources as today's second generation, will continue to stand out as the "model minority," or simply melt into mainstream America with little meaningful ethnic distinctiveness, or assimilate into a racial minority caught at the bottom of American racial hierarchy. So it is unfair to hold Asian Americans to higher standards and expect all of them to be good at math and science. Educators and policymakers should evaluate and judge Asian Americans by the same standards as they do other Americans.

In sum, while most immigrants, Asian, Latino or other alike, share the educational value of the American middle-class, not all have the same access to structural and cultural resources conducive to education. Even among children of Asian immigrants, access to both socio-economic and ethnic community resources vary. Educational policy should be attentive to variations on the intersection between culture and structure.

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