

What Have We Demystified and What Remains to be Demystified in Model Minority Research?

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the other papers in this Special Issue and identifies three directions for future research on Asian American students' academic success. These include: (1) the need for developing theory and empirical models of the stereotype of Asian American students; (2) the needs for looking into the dynamics of student learning and achievement over time; and (3) the need for rigorous research designs and analyses.

Keywords: model minority, Asian American education, research design

摘要

本文總結前面四篇文章的論點，並深入評析其中某些關鍵議題。本文並指出三個研究方向供亞裔教育研究者參考：(一)模範少數族裔刻板印象的理論模式及實證基礎，(二)亞裔美國學生學習成就的原因互動及長期追蹤，(三)嚴謹的研究設計及資料分析。

關鍵字：模範少數族裔、亞美裔學生、研究設計

Introduction

A recent U.S. Census Bureau report indicates that 45 percent of all children under age 5 are minorities¹. These statistics have a lot of implications for society, but for educators, the major concern is whether they can provide educational services to these children effectively at the early ages. Minority students, except for Asians, in general, do not perform as well as White students in school. Some educators believe that other minorities could learn from Asian American students and are looking for the Asian "formulas" for academic success. Other educators are skeptical about the Asian ways of educating children and warn people about the downsides of the Asian approaches

(Kuhn, 2006)². Many are also worried that the success has created the stereotype of Asian Americans as a model minority, which they believe, not only impedes needy Asian American students' access to educational services and opportunities but also causes anti-Asian sentiment among the majority and other minority groups (Chang, 2003).

As a result, the formula for Asian American students' academic success is not simple but a complex research issue. Demystifying the formula requires careful study of the "formulas" from multiple perspectives and rigorous research designs. The four preceding papers presented in this Special Issue are the first attempts of such a research effort. This paper summarizes major findings of the four papers, describes the lessons learned, and identifies critical issues that need further research.

What We Have Learned

Admittedly, the four preceding papers presented in this Special Issue do not cover all issues concerning the model minority stereotype; nevertheless, as a group, these individual papers provide a useful framework from which to examine different issues underlying the model minority myth.

Beckett's paper has two parts. The first part identifies an extensive list of factors found to be influential on Asian American students' academic success and the second part presents findings from the author's own ethnographic research. Factors identified include basic demographic and family characteristics such as parental education, socioeconomic status, and family structure. Also identified and discussed are students' attitudes and actions towards schoolwork, students' cultural and linguistic factors as well as students' access to community resources and human and social capital. Moreover, the case studies of five Asian American students in Canada presented in the second part of the paper provide insightful illustrations of why an

¹Data from U.S. Bureau of Census report are available on May 11, 2006 at the following website:
<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/006808.html>.

²Kuhn (2006) found Asian American students have distaste for disagreement and an instrumental motivation for success, which are due to the ways they were educated by their parents. Kuhn's research methods, however, are problematic. For a discussion on the method, see Wang & To (2006).

ecological approach is valuable. For example, it shows how individual students with the same family characteristics but different personal characteristics reacted to the environment and resulted in different learning outcomes.

Tang's paper complements Beckett's paper by addressing the mental problems that Asian Americans experience as a model minority. The paper identifies several important issues in the Asian American research literature. These include diversity of Asian Americans; the negative mental and social effects of the stereotype on all Asian Americans; and the impact of the identity crisis and acculturation process on Asian American students' success in school. For instance, Tang describes how certain Asian American student subgroups (e.g., Cambodian and Lao immigrant students) are doing poorly in school but receive little or no assistance because of the stereotype of Asian American as model minorities. Moreover, Tang describes how Asian Americans of different generations have different views of their identities; and that acculturation has positive effect on school performance for Asian Americans.

In contrast to Beckett's and Tang's papers, Hemmings' paper identifies methodological issues and problems pertaining to researchers' roles, relations with research objects, and representation in ethnographic studies of Asian American studies. The author illuminates her discussions with an ethnographic study that she conducted with an Asian American male student as part of a larger study. Most of the issues and problems are not unique for ethnographic studies of Asian American's academic success but common to all qualitative research on educational issues. Hemmings' paper is important in that it clearly describes and illustrates how researcher's perceptions, perceived conceptions, and predisposition theories could distort the neutrality of the qualitative analysis unintentionally.

Pan and Bai's paper provides an empirical investigation of the findings from the previous papers. They estimate a regression model that includes many factors identified by Beckett (this Special Issue) as explanatory variables for student academic achievement. Findings from the regression analysis identify important new factors that help explain why Asian Americans do better than other students in school. Pan and Bai's paper stands out for its use of data for estimation. Instead of using the whole survey sample, it randomly drew two smaller sub-samples from the whole survey and used results of the second sample to verify those from the first one. This two-sub-sample validation approach is interesting as it tests the internal consistency of data for regression

models and supports the inferential findings of the study.

Where Do We Go from Here?

By examining the model minority phenomenon through multiple lenses, this Special Issue is a first step toward a deeper exploration of the model minority phenomenon. In addressing the question of where do we go from here, future research need to address the following three critical knowledge gaps in the model minority literature:

1. The need for developing theory and empirical models of the stereotype of Asian American students

As describes by the papers in this Special Issue, the stereotype of Asian Americans as model minority students is an important issue that needs to be further investigated. Much existing research addressed the issue at a surface level without rigorous theoretical and empirical support. More empirical evidence documenting the existence of stereotype and the observed negative consequences (e.g., low level of educational services, anti-Asian American sentiment) would strengthen the overall literature, for instance, comparison of perceptions of people of other races and ethnicity towards Asian American students (Kohatsu et al., 2000; Leong & Schneller, 1997) in showing discrepancies and biases.

Furthermore, much attention should be paid to a careful construction and testing of a stereotype theory that explains how the model minority stereotype is formed and the factors that contribute to the development of the stereotype. Such a theory will help educators and parents understand not only why stereotype happens but also who are more likely to form stereotypes, and how to correct or eliminate the stereotype. Perhaps, a stereotype theory could be developed by building upon some existing theories in economics, such as the theory of signaling or screening, and theory of discrimination (Coate & Loury, 1993; Spence, 1974). For example, in the signaling theory, the relationship between education and ability is perceived to be different for different groups. Since employers do not have perfect information on the individual job applicant or worker, the perceived ability of an individual by the employer is simply the "average" of the group that he or she represents. As people obtain more and better information, the likelihood and extent of stereotype decreases.

2. *The needs for looking into the dynamics and for observing changes over time*

Although many factors affecting the academic success of Asian American students have been identified, most existing studies, including the ecological studies, failed to describe the dynamics – i.e., how factors are interacting to affect student learning and achievement. Instead, they tend to be oversimplified or unclear. Some unanswered questions include: (a) What is the ecological system guiding the model minority myth? (b) How does the system work? (c) Could such a system and its process be captured in a model and tested empirically?

Moreover, current qualitative studies on the model minority myth rely on static data collection and research methodology. Despite improvement of certain qualitative data collection strategy, e.g., development of interactive coding systems for classroom observation (Stodolsky, 1988; Huang & Waxman, 1997), as a field, qualitative research remain static and cannot be used to track student's academic and social growth over time. For example, while identity and acculturation are found to be important for Asian American students' academic success and mental health, most studies are one-shot studies. The field could benefit from a longitudinal investigation of Asian American students' academic success by defining the ecology (environment or context) of students' growth; collecting data to observe how factors in the ecological system interact to nurture individual's growth over time; and examining the dynamics of the whole system, beyond the relationship between a factor and an outcome.

3. *The need for rigorous research designs and analysis strategies*

Future research on Asian American students' academic success should consider the following methodological designs: (a) cross-validation of findings from qualitative analyses using quantitative methods; (b) controlling potential researcher bias in qualitative studies through the use of theoretical framework and triangulation of data sources; (c) generating *a priori* hypotheses in guiding model specification in quantitative analysis; (d) comparing Asian American students' academic success with students of other races and ethnicities; (e) disaggregating Asian Americans into meaningful subgroups; and (f) careful consideration of the following technical issues in conducting quantitative analysis: (1) treatment of race/ethnicity variables in the model and the analysis; (2) treatment of school, family, and community as intervening or control

effects in models and analysis; (3) addressing the validity and reliability limitations of self-reported data; and (4) separating out low-performing Asian American subgroups when subgroup data are available.

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