

Extended Abstract

The Effect of Immigrant Settlement among Asian Americans on Occupational Disparities in Management

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Background

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Asian population comprises approximately 4 percent of the total U.S. population. It is well established that Asian Americans are fairly represented in professional occupations due to their high educational attainment. However, they are less represented in managerial positions. Particularly, the representation of Asian Americans in influential high-ranking corporate executive roles is still small. The glass-ceiling phenomenon may continue to persist for the 1.5-generation and the native-born Asian Americans in corporate setting. This research examines attainment among Asian Americans and across Asian ethnic groups in managerial occupations. Despite this dramatic increase of Asian Americans as a percentage of the population over the decades, very few studies have been conducted on an association between immigrant settlement and occupational disparity in managerial occupations among Asian Americans by their ethnicities.

Theoretical Focus

The specific aims for this research are: (1) to examine what characteristics influence Asian Americans, by Asian ethnicity, embarking on managerial occupations as compared to other occupations; (2) to compare trends of the native-born Asian Americans with those of native-born non-Hispanic whites to examine whether an occupational disparity has been approaching convergence (assimilation based on the straight-line theory) or divergence (otherwise); (3) to examine differences of trends in managerial occupations between males and females; and (4) to substantiate the social determinants of immigrant settlement into American society by nativity and length of residence in the United States and how it influences Asian ethnic groups.

I hypothesize the traditional straight-line assimilation theory applies to upward organizational mobility among Asian Americans. Miller (1992) suggests several possible key explanatory factors that impede Asian Americans from advancing in organization: (1) language barrier, strong verbal communication/presentation skill is emphasized and expected in American society in particular; (2) difference in the social norms (possibly based on Confucianism) that Asian Americans grow up being, and this type of thought is deeply ingrained among Asian Americans; (3) self-imposed – personal preference to stay with the current job (documented in Tang (1997) that Asian Americans are less likely to change jobs (in engineering, science, and social science), leading to lack of aspiration to be leader/getting into supervisory management positions, not willing to take risks because of evaluations toward administrative positions. That is, as Asian Americans spend more time in the United States and gradually surmount the challenges over generations, they are likely to be able to enter managerial occupations with only few constraints just like the non-Hispanic white counterparts as the consequence of adaptation and assimilation to the American societal norms. And furthermore, specious logic constructed based on the assimilation thesis leads to no discrepancy in occupational attainment; rather, they should theoretically surpass non-Hispanic whites given generally high educational attainment level for Asian Americans.

In professional occupations, this argument definitely follows and is well documented in various studies that Asian Americans dominate engineering and information technology industry

in the United States. It would be expected that Asian Americans show some presence and smoothly succeed in managerial occupations as they have achieved in professional occupations. However, in reality, even among scientists and engineers who are categorized as engaging in professional occupations, it is not true once Asian American managers seek promotion to managerial positions with supervisory authority (Tang 1997a; 1997b). Therefore, I hypothesize that the effect similar to the glass ceiling phenomenon in corporate ladder may exist in this country's occupational stratification. Now let us consider Asian Americans engaging in middle- and upper-level management positions in corporations and financial institutions, particularly those supervisory positions that require execution of strong leadership to subordinates in comparison with non-Hispanic whites. What about representation of Asian American managers compared to other minority groups? What about across the Asian ethnicities?

The Duncan socioeconomic index is used to estimate the likelihood of engaging in high prestige occupations and what kind of explanatory factors account for the outcome. To investigate the mechanism behind the gender, I also examine how immigrant generation plays a role in the magnitude of occupational disparity of Asian Americans to detect any significantly distinctive patterns between males and females. For statistical analysis, I select only Asians and non-Hispanic whites and eliminated all other groups, so as to isolate the effect of being Asian Americans as relative to the majority group (non-Hispanic whites). A comparison between native-born non-Hispanic whites and native-born Asian Americans captures effect of race, physical cost of being Asian American. Then another set of comparison between native-born and two different types of foreign-born Asian Americans (the first- and the 1.5-generation populations) measures effects of nativity as well as lifestyle, culture, socioeconomic characteristics (place, quality, and years of education).

Data and Methods

This research takes advantage of bountiful data on the 2000 U.S. Census from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) to obtain information on most of the topics for the occupational attainment portion. I extracted the IPUMS 5% samples. The most recent datasets hold sufficient sample size of native-born Asian Americans and provide a researcher a unique opportunity to capture intergenerational trends. I use three different categories to distinguish Asian American individuals based on their nativity and immigrant generation status. Rather than dividing them into the traditional dichotomy of foreign-born and native-born populations, I categorize them into the following: (1) the first-generation; (2) the 1.5-generation; and (3) the native-born Asian Americans. Those categorized as the first-generation Asian Americans were born abroad and arrived in the United State at the age of thirteen or later. Those belong to the 1.5-generation category were born abroad but came to the United States early in their childhood, specifically from ages 0 to 12. The U.S.-born or the native-born Asian Americans are clearly those who were born in the United States. In light of evidence that there is a substantial heterogeneity among Asian Americans, I distinguish Asian ethnicities to the extent possible. Individuals between 25 and 84 years of age are included for the research on occupational attainment.

Occupations are divided into seven groups: (1) Managerial, Business, and Financial; (2) Professional; (3) Support; (4) Service; (5) Sales; (6) Laborers; and (7) Operative. Individuals not in labor force and who last worked more than 5 years ago are excluded. In the first portion of the analysis, I select managerial, business, and financial occupations based on an occupation code to collect number of people in managerial positions. Then I select only individuals who hold

management positions to capture the possible glass ceiling phenomenon. These outcomes become the dependent variable for statistical models. Also, I select people in other professional occupations, for comparison purposes. In the second portion of the analysis, I use the Duncan socioeconomic score (SEI) to measure and determine occupational prestige for each occupation (Duncan 1961).

The individual-level characteristics to be considered for occupational attainment analysis are race, gender, age, educational attainment level, region of residence, metropolitan residence, years of residence in the United States, nativity, immigrant generation status, U.S. or other citizenship, English language ability, and whether English is spoken at home. The race and ethnicity categorizations are as follows: (1) Hispanic; (2) non-Hispanic white; (3) non-Hispanic black; (4) Chinese; (5) Japanese; (6) Filipino; (7) Asian Indian; (8) Korean; (9) Southeast Asian; (10) Other Asian; and (11) non-Hispanic Native American, Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, Mixed Races, and Other Race. As the category (11) does not reflect the samples of my interest, these particular racial and ethnic groups have been dropped from this research. There are a total of 238,445 Asian Americans in the sample for occupational attainment, which consists of 183,732 first-generation Asian Americans, 22,351 1.5-generation Asian Americans, and 32,362 native-born Asian Americans. For Asian ethnic subgroups, the percent of each group in the total Asian population samples is also listed in parentheses: All Asians (n=238,445); Chinese (n=59,272; 24.9% of the entire Asian samples); Japanese (n=20,973; 8.8%); Filipinos (n=48,968; 20.5%); Asian Indians (n=37,633; 15.8%); Koreans (n=23,976; 10.1%); Southeast Asians (n=32,718; 13.7%); Other Asians (n=14,905; 6.3%); and native-born non-Hispanic whites (n=4,934,680).

The first portion of the statistical analysis focuses on examining what kind of characteristics influence engagement in managerial occupations among Asian Americans. The dependent variable has two categories by occupations, (1) individuals who engage in managerial occupations and (2) individuals who engage in any other occupations. Business owners are included in the models. If those entrepreneurs including motel/lodging operators and store owners considered and reported that they were in managerial occupations within the 2000 Census occupational classification system, they are counted to engage in managerial occupations. Because I am interested in finding out whether Asian Americans are in positions that have supervisory authority, I assert that it is appropriate to include them as managers for this project because they are more likely to have employees working for them. Since the dependent variable has dichotomy, the multiple logistic regression analysis technique is appropriate to estimate the log-odds of the possible effects and to capture any distinctive differences in each of the socioeconomic and demographic factors included in the models for Asian Americans to select managerial occupations. The samples are age-adjusted to reflect national population estimates. The similar statistical models are established to capture the effects on professional occupations with the dichotomous dependent variable, (1) individuals who engage in professional occupations and (2) individuals who engage in any other occupations. Also, the comparison of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics between those in managerial occupations and professional occupations is made.

The second portion deals with occupational prestige scores to substantiate the research questions that an occupational attainment level of Asian Americans are actually better off or worse off than non-Hispanic white group, and that what kind of social determinants greatly influence to engage in high status occupations. The Ordinal Least Square (OLS) multiple regression models are constructed with the Duncan Socioeconomic Index as the dependent variable. Four pairs of tables are prepared. Each pair presents the multiple regression models to

estimate the occupational prestige scores of Asian Americans in comparison with native-born non-Hispanic whites. The regression models consider to refine the measure of different occupations and to estimate how much each socioeconomic and demographic factor affects individuals advancing to high scored positions, which may lead to measuring the degree of the glass ceiling.

Expected Findings

Chinese and Japanese Americans have a long history of settlement as established immigrants in the United States. The first wave of immigration to the United States for these two groups occurred in the late 19th century, and they currently form different patterns of socioeconomic characteristics from the relatively new immigrants arrived from other Asian countries that did not experience a large number of U.S. immigration until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. However, there is still a consistent flow of immigration to the United States from China and Japan in recent decades. The number of immigrants from China have significantly increased, although an increase in the number from Japan has been not as many as it used to. Therefore, for Chinese and Japanese Americans, it is meaningful to compare between the relatively new immigrants and the traditional immigrants. Groups that belong to the former tend to be foreign-born and some second-generation Asian Americans, while the latter consists of all native-born Asian Americans, high proportion of second-generation and later-generation Asian Americans.

The traditional old immigrants have higher chance of possessing more extended social network among themselves or across ethnicities than new immigrants. Also as one or both of the parents of new immigrants are predominantly foreign born, language spoken at home is, therefore, much more likely a non-English language. As a deficiency of strong English verbal communication skills is one of the critical factors to lead to the glass ceiling (Miller 1992), native-born Asian American are more likely to have grown up surrounded by English-only environment and to possess native-speaker level English language ability, which is certainly a great benefit in managerial occupations in the context of the American society. In addition, the new immigrants tend to have completed college education abroad. According to Zeng and Xie (2003), place of college education received is very important because higher education received in foreign countries tend to be devalued in the United States.

The findings from this research may reveal implications stemming from the development and transition in assimilation among Asian Americans over generations. I, then, intend to thoroughly explore areas in which little research has been done among Asian Americans. I provide descriptive tables by various Asian ethnic groups, as well as by their geographic region of residence in the United States. I also discuss the social, political, and economic implications of the changes for the occupational attainment in managerial positions of Asian Americans.

References

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