

The multifaceted American experiences of the children of Asian immigrants: Lessons for segmented assimilation

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Abstract

This article aims to problematize the model minority image of Asian Americans. We argue that America's racial and class systems of stratification have shaped and, to an important extent, determined second-generation Asian Americans' multifaceted experiences and life chances. Consistent with the existing research, we find that assimilation outcomes among children of Asian immigrants are diverse but not random, depending on the interplay between individual, family, community, and societal factors, which are linked to unique contexts of exit and reception. We also find that, even though most children of Asian immigrants hold firm to the ideology of assimilation and aspire to achieving parity with the society's dominant group, they are still keenly aware of their inferior racial status and are likely to internalize the disadvantages associated with it.

Keywords: Asian American; model minority; segmented assimilation; identity; linguistic assimilation.

Asian Americans are among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States, comprising 4 per cent of the total US population as of 2000. The group's exponential growth, from 1.4 million in 1970 to 11.9 million in 2000, in the span of thirty odd years is primarily due to post-1965 immigration and to the historic resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees after the Vietnam War in 1975. According to the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service), the United States admitted 20.9 million legal immigrants between 1971 and 2000. More than three-quarters of

the new arrivals were from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America, which differs vastly from the earlier waves where over 90 per cent of the newcomers were of European origin. Foreign-born immigrants, or the first generation, now comprise about 10 per cent of the U.S. population, and 7 per cent of them are non-Hispanic black, 45 per cent Hispanic, and 22 per cent Asian. Their U.S.-born children, or the second generation, comprise another 10 per cent, and 5 per cent of them are non-Hispanic black, 36 per cent Hispanic, and 10 per cent Asian. Compared to immigrants from Latin America who are mostly uneducated, low-skill labourers, Asian immigrants are more diverse, including numerous highly educated scientists, engineers, healthcare professionals, and entrepreneurs on one end, and uneducated peasants and penniless refugees on the other.

Perhaps because of their relatively small size, or because of their comparatively high socio-economic status [SES] upon arrival, or because of their public image as a model minority, there has been relatively little concern about whether or not children of Asian immigrants can make it into the American mainstream. The general perception is that a great majority of them, even those from poor socio-economic backgrounds, will do so, and that the 'model minority' image represents a reality rather than a myth. This article aims to problematize this homogenized image of Asian Americans, addressing the following three issues in particular: (1) How diverse are Asian Americans and how may this diversity affect the trajectories of second-generation mobility? (2) How are children of Asian immigrants navigating American society? (3) Are there any lessons that can be drawn from the Asian story regarding segmented assimilation? We explore these issues using 2000 U.S. census data and the San Diego portion of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey [CILS] data. Before proceeding with the empirical analyses, we revisit the concept of segmented assimilation and discuss how it may be relevant to Asian Americans.

Segmented assimilation and the model minority

Contemporary immigration, coupled with the high visibility of undocumented immigration, has driven much of the heated public and scholarly debate over immigrant assimilation. Although conceptions of assimilation have changed over time, classical and revisionist models seek to predict either intergenerational mobility — the extent to which descendants of immigrants will progress beyond their parental generation, or convergence to the norm — the extent to which immigrants and their offspring will become indistinguishably American, melting into society's mainstream (Warner and Srole 1945; Park 1950; Gordon 1964). The current concern has centred more on

convergence than on intergenerational mobility, arising from the fear that today's predominantly non-white, Third-World, non-English-speaking, and low-skilled immigrants and refugees are unable or unwilling to assimilate. As a result, these immigrants may unAmericanize Americans and erode American's national identity (Huntington 2004).

The doubt about immigrants' assimilability today may be beside the point, however. Immigrants are, after all, a transitional generation, caught between here and there. Despite their initial disadvantages and sometimes horrendous circumstances of departure and/or reception, the vast majority are willing to work their way up from the very bottom of their host society and likely to rate their current life as far better-off than the one they left behind back home. If they are deemed undesirable, they can be repatriated by law or by newly erected barriers that target them directly. Their U.S.-born or U.S.-raised children, however, are unlikely to be mollified by reminders of how much worse things were in the 'old world', wherever that might be, and are instead likely to evaluate themselves and be evaluated by others by the same standard that other Americans aspire to. More importantly, they have the uncontested citizenship right by birth to protect themselves from the precarious legal circumstances that their parents face, or from the danger of being sent back to their ancestral homelands. Since successfully assimilating into the American mainstream hinges on individual and family resources as well as contexts of exit and reception unique to different national-origin groups, it is highly unlikely that all children of immigrants would follow a relatively straightforward, unidirectional path to assimilate into society's mainstream, and at the same pace if they do at all (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Thus, many students of immigration and race/ethnicity have challenged the classical theory of straight-line assimilation (see Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Alba and Nee 2003 among others).

In their seminal work *Rethinking the American Mainstream*, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) develop a new theory of assimilation that builds on the behavioural assumptions of the new institutionalism in sociology. They argue that institutional changes, from civil rights legislation to immigration law, combined with individualistic incentives and motivation, have profoundly reshaped the context of immigrant reception, making it more favourable for the assimilation of newcomers and their children than in the past despite persistent racial discrimination and economic restructuring. Instead of assuming a single, unilateral white middle-class mainstream into which immigrants are expected to assimilate, Alba and Nee re-conceptualize the American mainstream as one that encompasses 'a core set of interrelated institutional structures and organizations regulated by

rules and practices that weaken, even undermine, the influence of ethnic origins *per se*' (p.12). This mainstream may include members of formerly excluded ethnic or racial groups, and it may contain not just the middle class or affluent suburbanites but the working class or the central-city poor. For immigrants, their individualistic experiences of intergenerational mobility are thus not dissimilar from those in the mainstream. Thus, upward, horizontal, or downward social mobility is possible for immigrants and their offspring just as much as for those in society's mainstream.

However, the process of assimilation varies from individual to individual and from group to group depending on two causal mechanisms according to Alba and Nee. One is a set of proximate causes that involve an individual's or a group's purposive action, social networks (particularly exchange mechanism of social rewards and punishments within a primary group and community), and the forms of capital (human, social, and financial) the individual or group possesses. The other is a set of distal causes that are embedded in larger social structures such as the state and the labour market. Alba and Nee suggest that all immigrants and their descendants will eventually assimilate but not necessarily in a single direction as predicted by the classical theory. They believe that 'an expectation of universal upward mobility for any large group is unrealistic' (p. 163). Alba and Nee's theoretical framework helps to explain how immigrants, particularly those of non-European origin and working-class background, incorporate into the mainstream at different rates and by different measures. However, their theory overlooks the continued significance of race and ethnicity on the social mobility of immigrants and their children. Despite the so-defined inclusive mainstream, their own notion of successful assimilation still explicitly refers to incorporation into the middle class, not the working or lower classes.

Compared to the grand theory of assimilation developed by Alba and Nee, segmented assimilation theory conceptualizes a less broadly defined American mainstream. While rejecting the classical vision of an undifferentiated, unified white middle-class core, segmented assimilation conceives the mainstream as shaped by systems of class and racial stratification. It emphasizes the interaction between race and class, between group membership and larger social structures that intentionally or unintentionally exclude non-whites (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997a; 1997b; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). As a middle range theory, segmented assimilation theory attempts to delineate the multiple patterns and divergent outcomes of assimilation and address the ways in which particular contexts of exit and reception affect outcomes. From this perspective, the process of assimilation may take multiple paths, sometimes with different turns. Most notably, today's

children of immigrants are likely to assimilate upwardly, downwardly or horizontally into an American society that is highly segmented by class and race, and to do so in different ways (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Perlmann and Waldinger 1997). One way is the old-fashioned path of severing ethnic ties, unlearning 'old world' values, norms and behavioural patterns, and adapting to the culture of the Anglo-Saxon core associated with the white middle class. Another way is the path of adapting to native subcultures in direct opposition to the core Anglo-Saxon culture or of creating hybrid oppositional subcultures, associated with the downtrodden groups trapped in society's bottom ranks. Still another way is the path of selective acculturation or deliberate attempts to preserve immigrant values and motivation and rebuild ethnic networks for socio-economic advancement into the middle class (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Into what segment of society the immigrant or ethnic group assimilates is determined by unique contexts of exit and reception. The context of exit entails a number of factors, including pre-migration resources that immigrants bring with them, such as money, knowledge, and skills, social class status of the immigrants in their homelands, and means of migration. The context of reception includes positions in the system of racial stratification, government policies, labour market conditions, public attitudes, and the strength and viability of ethnic communities in the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Segmented assimilation theory focuses on the interaction of these two sets of factors, predicting that particular contexts of exit and reception can create distinctive social environments and cultural patterns of adaptation for the group and give rise to opportunities or constraints for the individual, independent of individual socio-economic and demographic characteristics. While unique contexts of exit and reception lead to distinct modes of incorporation for immigrant or refugee groups, different modes of incorporation explain variations in the *contexts* within which individuals strive to 'make it' in their new homeland.

Anxiety over the assimilability of today's immigrants and their children has prompted as much ideological debate as scholarly research. Numerous qualitative and quantitative works have produced evidence in support of segmented assimilation predictions — multiple paths and varied outcomes of assimilation (Gibson 1989; Fordham 1996; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Waters 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Kansinitz *et al.* 2002). Downward assimilation is one possible outcome. Curiously, segmented assimilation has often been misinterpreted as suggesting a single outcome, downward assimilation, and thereby criticized as being overtly pessimistic about the future of the children of contemporary

immigrants (Kasinitz *et al.* 2002; Alba and Nee 2003; Waldinger and Feliciano 2004).

We believe that the system of class stratification has a tendency to reproduce itself in succeeding generations. Thus, we argue that the direction of intergenerational mobility — upward, downward, or horizontal — is sociologically meaningless if it is compared only to parental status and not to the degree of convergence to the norm. Sometimes upward or downward intergenerational mobility may just be horizontal mobility. For example, levels of educational and occupational achievements of second-generation Filipino Americans are significantly lower than those of their parent generation but similar to those of non-Hispanic whites and higher than those of the general American adult population. Although they seem to move in a *downward* direction, the children of Filipino immigrants benefit from their parents' exceptionally high level of human capital and are assimilated to the mainstream middle class in a pattern of *horizontal* mobility (Zhou 1999). In contrast, the levels of educational and occupational achievements of second-generation Mexican Americans are significantly higher than those of their parents (they cannot possibly drop any further since their parents' SES is already the lowest) but still trail far behind the mean (Waldinger and Feliciano 2004). Their seemingly *upward* mobility is also *horizontal* mobility, which reinforces the disadvantages encountered by Mexican Americans as a group.

In reality, both the public and the research community have repeatedly treated success as the extent to which immigrants and their offspring become more like non-Hispanic whites, who comprise the majority of the American middle class and are used as the frame of reference against which non-white individuals or groups are judged. It is no wonder that Asian Americans have been applauded a success story because they have approximated or even surpassed non-Hispanic whites by many observable socio-economic measures. As shown in the 2000 Census, 44 per cent of adult Asian Americans aged 25 to 34, as opposed to 30 per cent of whites, had a college degree or more. The adjusted Asian-to-white earnings ratio for men was 1.04 and for women 1.17. Seventy-three per cent of Asian Americans lived in husband-wife families, as opposed to 67 per cent of whites. Median family income for Asian American families was \$61,000 in 1999 dollars, as opposed to \$55,000 for white families.¹ Since Asian Americans are more similar to non-Hispanic whites in most of these observable socio-economic measures, can they be considered assimilated? Is there a story about segmented assimilation here? In our view, observable measures of achievement may not accurately capture the process as a whole and that the 'model minority' image itself functions to homogenize the group, while setting it apart from the rest in society.

In the following pages, we illustrate the internal diversity of Asian Americans, using both the U.S. census data and the CILS data, to extract lessons relevant to segmented assimilation theory.

Diverse origins and divergent destinies: A demographic profile

Asian Americans can trace their footsteps on the American soil back to the late 1840s, long before the mass immigration of southern and eastern Europeans to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Unique historical circumstances and forces leading to contemporary immigration have shaped the Asian American community, marked by very rapid population growth, tremendous internal diversity, and the dominance of the first generation. Before 1970, the Asian American community was largely made up of three national-origin groups: Japanese (41 per cent), Chinese (30 per cent), and Filipino (24 per cent). After 1990, in contrast, Asian-origin population expanded to include at least twenty-four national-origin groups officially tabulated by the census. Chinese and Filipinos are the largest groups (at 2.8 million and 2.4 million, respectively), followed by Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Japanese (at more than one million each). Some twenty other national-origin and ethnic groups, such as Cambodians, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistanis, and Thai have been officially counted in government statistics only after 1980, and together their numbers amount to more than two million. If it had not been for various measures of legal and social exclusion prior to World War II, Asian Americans would have evolved into the fourth or fifth generation by the new millennium. With the exception of the Japanese, however, all Asian-origin people in the United States (including the Chinese and Filipinos) are disproportionately made up of first-generation immigrants (64 per cent).² Another 27 per cent belong to the second generation (U.S.-born of foreign-born parentage). Less than 10 per cent belong to the third-plus generation (U.S.-born of U.S.-born parentage).³

Asian Americans are diverse not only in origins but also in some of the key demographic and socio-economic characteristics, underlying their differences in contexts of exit and reception. Unlike earlier immigrants from Asia, who were mostly male unskilled labourers with the intention of eventual returning to their homelands, today's Asian Americans are a more settled group showing a fairly balanced gender ratio as Table 1 shows. The higher proportion of females among Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans may have been due to war brides and the importation of nurses (Glenn 1988; Choy 2003). Asian Americans are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to live in married-couple and multigenerational families with larger average family size. They also have higher proportions of children under 18 and lower proportions of

Table 1. *Selected Demographic Characteristics of Asian Americans in the United States: 2000**

	% Female	% In Husband-Wife Families	% In Multi-Generation Families	Mean Family Size	% Children Under 18	% Elderly Over 64	% Foreign born	% College 4 Years or More**	Median Family Income (\$1000)	% In Poverty
Chinese	52	73	15	3.9	21	10	72	67	63	13
Filipino	57	73	22	4.4	22	9	70	43	70	6
Japanese	55	65	5	3.2	12	20	41	57	74	9
Asian Indian	47	80	14	4.0	25	4	76	76	70	10
Korean	56	74	10	3.7	24	6	79	59	53	15
Vietnamese	50	72	16	4.7	27	5	77	27	52	23
All Asian	52	73	15	4.2	27	7	64	53	61	13
Non-Hispanic White	51	67	5	3.5	23	14	4	30	55	8
Non-Hispanic Black	52	40	14	3.9	31	8	6	15	35	25

* For single-ethnic identification only.

** Aged 25-34 only.

Source: U.S. Census of the Population, 2000, retabulated from Table 2 & 8 in Xie and Goyette 2004.

elderly over 64 with the exception of the Japanese. Unlike their earlier counterparts, today's immigrants from Asia also show a wide range of skill levels. Highly educated and skilled professionals tend to be overrepresented among Chinese, Indians, and Filipinos, while poorly educated, low-skilled workers tend to be over-represented among Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians, most of whom have entered the United States as refugees. As a whole, Asian American average levels of education are exceptionally high. College graduates among those aged 24–34 are more numerous than among non-Hispanic whites. Asian American median household income reached \$61,000, much higher than among white families. But Asian American poverty rate is 13 per cent, which is higher than for whites.

Asian Americans tend to settle in large metropolitan areas and concentrate in the West. California is home to 35 per cent of all Asian Americans. But recently, other states such as Texas, Minnesota and Wisconsin, which historically received few Asian immigrants, have been new destinations. Middle-class immigrants are able to start their American life with high-paying professional jobs and comfortable suburban homes, while low-skilled immigrants and refugees, like immigrants in the past, have to accept low-paying menial jobs and ghettoized inner-city living. Ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Manilatown, Koreatown, Little Phnom Penh, and Thaitown, persist or have emerged in gateway cities, helping new arrivals to cope with cultural and language difficulties in their initial stage of resettlement. However, affluent and highly skilled immigrants tend to bypass these inner-city enclaves and settle in suburbs upon arrival, belying the stereotype of the 'unacculturated' immigrant. Today, more than half the Asian-origin population is spreading out in suburbs surrounding traditional gateway cities, as well as in new urban areas of destination across the country.

Differences in origins, histories and timing of immigration, pre-migration SES, and settlement patterns profoundly affect the formation of ethnic groups and identities. Diverse origins evoke drastic differences in languages and dialects, religions, foodways, and customs. Many nationalities also brought to America their histories of conflict (such as the Japanese colonization of Korea and Taiwan, the Japanese invasion in China, and the Chinese border disputes with Vietnam). Those who are predominantly middle-class professionals, such as the Taiwanese and Indians, or those who are predominantly small business owners, such as the Koreans, share few of the same concerns and priorities as those who are predominantly uneducated, low-skilled Southeast Asian refugees. Recent arrivals are less likely than those born or raised in the United States to identify as 'American' or 'hyphenated American'. All these inter-group differences within the Asian American umbrella, combined with each group's encounter with

the host society, create varied meanings of identity as well as obstacles to fostering a cohesive pan-Asian solidarity.

San Diego was not a traditional gateway city for Asian immigrants. The only visible Asian-origin group settled there prior to 1970 were Filipinos because of the historical colonial relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines and the continued Filipino connections to the U.S. navy (Espiritu and Wolf 2001). Since the 1970s, Asian immigrants have started to settle in this Southwestern metropolis in large numbers, making it the sixth largest urban destination for Asian Americans (following New York, Los Angeles, San Jose, San Francisco, and Honolulu). As the upper panel of Table 2 shows, Filipinos are by far the largest Asian-origin group in San Diego (also in California), growing eight-fold from 15,000 in 1970 to 122,000 in 2000, which is now nearly four times the size of the second largest Asian group: Vietnamese. While Filipino concentration in San Diego is largely due to their historical and current connections to the US navy, Vietnamese settlement there has to do with the location of Camp Pendleton, one of the four major military camps to which 1975 refugees were evacuated from Vietnam (Rumbaut 1989). Prior to the fall of Saigon, hardly any Vietnamese lived in the area. Since then, however, Vietnamese grew to outnumber the Chinese as the second largest Asian-origin group, and their resettlement in the area ushered the arrival of other Southeast Asian refugees, Cambodians and Lao in particular.

The age distribution of Asian Americans in San Diego is uneven. Noticeable are the Southeast Asians who are disproportionately young. For example, nearly a third of Laotians, close to 40 per cent of Cambodians, and over half the Hmong are under 18 years of age. As refugees, Southeast Asians, including the Vietnamese, also tend to be socio-economically more disadvantaged, with lower median family incomes and lower levels of education than other non-refugee Asian groups. Chinese, Koreans, and other Asians (mainly Japanese and Indians) are very well-educated. Existing studies show that non-refugee Asian immigrants who have settled in San Diego tend to be disproportionately professionals working in the region's emerging high-tech industries as well as in research and development in industries and universities (Rumbaut and Portes 2001). It is interesting to note that the Hmong's median family income is relatively high (\$46,600), given their low proportion of college graduates or attendees (26 per cent) and that the median family income for Koreans is quite low (\$36,400) given their relatively high level of education (76 per cent). This discrepancy suggests that the adaptation story of Asian Americans is not clear-cut because of tremendous inter-group and intra-group diversity.

Compared to California's Asian American population, San Diego's Asian Americans are relatively younger with higher proportions of

Table 2. Asian American Population: San Diego County and California, 2000

	N	%	% Aged under 18	% Aged 18–24	% Aged 65 or older	% Speaking English Well or Very Well	% College Graduate or Attending College (Aged 25 or over)	% High School Dropout (aged 16–19)	Median Family Income (\$1,000)
San Diego									
Chinese	27,543	11.1	19.9	13.2	8.0	83.6	85.8	4.7	\$55.9
Filipino	121,640	49.2	22.9	11.2	9.7	92.1	54.1	2.9	\$59.8
Korean	10,348	4.2	19.3	15.4	6.3	68.3	75.8	0.0	\$36.4
Vietnamese	32,283	13.1	25.5	11.2	6.7	65.7	62.2	6.5	\$42.0
Cambodian	4,533	1.8	38.9	16.6	3.4	63.6	31.1	13.8	\$24.3
Laotian	7,170	2.9	31.3	13.3	4.6	73.4	35.8	16.4	\$45.0
Hmong	1,399	0.6	51.7	17.6	2.3	75.9	26.4	3.0	\$46.6
Other*	42,280	17.1	18.6	12.9	10.0	83.7	79.4	3.3	\$50.0
Total	247,196	100.0	15.7	12.1	8.7	83.0	63.3	4.4	\$54.5
California									
Chinese	917,215	24.8	20.6	9.5	12.0	70.3	54.4	2.2	\$60.5
Filipino	923,533	24.9	23.0	10.5	9.9	92.0	54.5	3.3	\$67.0
Korean	347,020	9.4	22.6	10.2	8.1	66.1	55.7	1.4	\$44.4
Vietnamese	445,648	12.0	26.3	10.3	6.1	67.5	36.8	4.3	\$48.5
Cambodian	72,191	1.9	41.2	12.2	4.5	68.0	19.2	7.5	\$27.5
Laotian	60,829	1.6	38.1	13.2	4.5	68.3	13.9	8.9	\$32.0
Hmong	66,928	1.8	56.6	12.3	2.9	68.6	13.9	4.7	\$26.2
Asian Indian	309,708	8.4	25.5	10.4	4.6	90.5	69.1	3.4	\$69.4
Japanese	291,207	7.9	11.8	7.6	20.0	77.1	56.7	2.1	\$57.4
Other**	267,869	7.2	27.4	13.7	4.4	79.4	58.1	2.3	\$55.0
Total	3,702,148	100.0	23.6	10.3	9.4	77.0	52.9	3.2	\$57.3

* “Other” include mainly Japanese, Indian and other South Asians.

** “Other” include the rest of the Asian American population.

Source: U.S. Census of the Population, 2000.

college graduates, higher proportions of high school dropouts, and lower median household incomes, as shown in the low panel of Table 2. San Diego is a new destination for most Asian-origin groups, but this metropolitan context entails unique modes of incorporation that affect national-origin groups differently. Coming from a group made up primarily of refugees (such as Vietnamese and Cambodians), or one of English-proficient professionals (such as Filipinos and Indians), or one of mixed-class immigrants (such as Koreans and Chinese), has profound implications for the type of resources the group can muster and the kind of societal reception that it may encounter. These group-level characteristics interact with societal-level and family- or individual-level characteristics to influence children's mobility prospects. For example, post-1965 Filipino immigrants were highly acculturated and highly-skilled professionals (e.g., nurses) unlike their coethnic peers who arrived earlier as unskilled labourers. Their English-proficiency and U.S. style education enabled these immigrants to secure professional jobs in the mainstream U.S. labour market without much tangible assistance from a pre-existing ethnic community. The first generation's achievement of middle-class status would thus facilitate the second generation to move on to a normative path to social mobility, which resembles the first pattern noted by segmented assimilation theory.

Post-1965 Korean immigrants, in contrast, were mostly from middle-class backgrounds but lacked English language skills, which caused many to suffer from downward mobility. They chose entrepreneurship as a preferred route to combat their initial disadvantages, which required not only financial capital but also ethnic capital in the form of a strong ethnic community. In this case, the immigrants' initial downward mobility, in spite of their middle-class backgrounds, would heighten the need for collective ethnic resources for themselves as well as for their children. For the children, rejection of the ethnic community and wholesale absorption of American culture would possibly lead them to reproduce their parents' disadvantages. This scenario would be exacerbated in the case of Vietnamese, Cambodian, or Hmong refugees who arrived with practically nothing and had to start their American life on public assistance. Without the support of a strong ethnic community oriented towards upward social mobility, the children would also face the prospects of downward mobility, which resembles the second path outlined by segmented assimilation theory.

Of course, not all Filipino immigrants are professionals, not all Korean immigrants are entrepreneurs struggling to get over their initial downward mobility, and not all Vietnamese are penniless refugees. There are always atypical cases in which the child from a middle-class professional family ends up in jail and the child from a poor refugee family becomes a success story. We should be cautious

that the interpretation of group mobility patterns (or group means) and individual outcomes should not be confused even though they are intrinsically related. With that in mind, we now turn to look at some of the more significant adaptation outcomes of second-generation Asian Americans.

Variations in the patterns of second-generation adaptation: Evidence from San Diego

An overview of the CILS sample of Asian Americans

Asian Americans in San Diego are by no means representative of all Asian-origin people in the United States, but a close look at some of the adaptation outcomes in the second generation can illustrate our arguments about internal diversity and variations in the patterns of making it in America. We base our analyses on the San Diego portion of the CILS data. The original survey of CILS, which was conducted in 1992, contained an over-sample of Filipinos, Vietnamese, and other Southeast Asians and an under-sample of East and South Asians (including mainly Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indians) to a total of 1,598. It revealed that over 90 per cent of the Asian respondents were under 15 years of age, a third were born in the U.S. while the rest immigrated at a young age (who are referred to as the '1.5 generation'), 55 per cent had college-educated fathers, 54 per cent lived in their own homes rather than in rental homes, and 81 per cent identified their families as middle class. While respondents showed enormously heterogeneous socio-economic characteristics, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians leaned disproportionately towards the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder and East and South Asians towards the higher rungs. The original Asian sample dropped to 1,415 in the second survey, which was conducted in 1995, and dropped further to 1,030 in the third survey (2001–2003). The sample attrition rate was thus 35 per cent over the span of nearly ten years, which was much lower than that for Latin-origin groups in the same study (45 per cent). Taking into consideration the sample attrition problem, we are mindful that the CILS should not be taken as random or representative of all children of Asian immigrants in the U.S., as the original sample was drawn from those attending the San Diego Unified School District, excluding those attending private schools in the area.⁴

Table 3 presents descriptive data of the children of Asian immigrants from the 2001–2003 follow-up survey. Filipinos comprise the largest, and Vietnamese the second largest, group of immigrant children. Reflecting the timing and recency of US arrival among several national-origin groups, most of the respondents in the sample belonged to the 1.5 generation. About 42 per cent were U.S. born, and

Table 3. *Demographic Characteristics of Adult Children of Asian immigrants in San Diego: 2001–2003*

National Origin Groups	Filipino	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Laotian	Hmong	Chinese	Total*
N	582	189	65	90	30	33	989
%	58.8	19.1	6.6	9.1	3.0	3.3	100.0
% U.S. Born	58.8	20.1	1.6	2.2	6.7	51.5	41.9
% U.S. Citizens by Birth or Naturalization	92.6	86.8	54.4	50.8	30.0	93.9	83.9
Median Age	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0
% Living with Parents	59.8	53.4	46.2	56.7	43.3	45.5	56.3
% Married	14.3	5.8	23.1	21.1	33.3	3.0	13.7
% Intermarried (to non-Asian)	34.9	—	—	11.1	—	—	23.9
% Having Children	19.6	9.0	24.6	22.2	36.7	0.0	17.8
% Single Parent	3.6	3.7	4.6	6.7	6.7	0.0	3.9
% Completing 4 Years of College Education or More	27.3	42.0	3.3	23.6	6.7	46.9	29.1
% Currently Attending College	83.3	87.9	79.4	72.4	70.0	95.5	84.3
% High School Dropout	1.2	2.7	9.7	4.4	3.3	0.0	2.3
% Working Full-Time	53.4	48.7	69.2	58.9	90.0	39.4	54.5
Median monthly earnings	\$2,000	\$2,100	\$1,400	\$1,800	\$1,600	\$2,300	\$2,000
% Satisfied with current earnings	46.6	51.1	31.7	35.8	55.6	46.2	46.5
Mean occupational prestige score	44.3	46.7	41.0	42.8	39.7	45.2	44.1
% Satisfied with current occupation	70.6	71.7	56.1	67.9	44.4	61.5	68.1
% Unemployed	7.9	13.9	6.3	14.6	0.0	15.6	9.4
Median Family Income (Living with parents)	\$62,500	\$42,500	\$20,000	\$32,500	\$32,500	\$37,500	\$62,500
Median Family Income (Not living with parents)	\$42,500	\$32,500	\$17,500	\$27,500	\$27,500	\$32,500	\$32,500
% Having Been Incarcerated	3.7	6.5	3.2	5.7	0.0	0.0	4.1

Source: CILS-III, 2001–2003.

* Other Asians (N = 41) are omitted from the table because of the small number of each of the remaining national-origin groups.

— Not calculated because of small sample size (less than 15).

by 2003, 84 per cent either U.S. citizen by birth or by naturalization. Comparatively, Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong were the newest of the new immigrants in town, with an overwhelming majority coming after 1980. Now in their mid-20s, about half of the Cambodians and Laotians and only 30 per cent of Hmong were US citizens, including those born in the United States. The median age for all respondents in the sample at the time of the last interview was 24 years with the youngest being 23 and the oldest 27. Because the majority of Southeast Asian refugees have only been in the U.S. for 20–25 years, it is not surprising that these ethnic groups consist predominantly of the foreign-born and first generation, rather than second generation. Also the majority of the first generation have not yet reached adulthood. So the young people in our sample at the time of the survey were still going through transition to adulthood, having just graduated from college or having entered an early stage in their careers. By the mid-20s, a relatively high proportion (56 per cent) of second-generation Asian Americans (and 60 per cent of Filipinos) were still living with their parents.

The children of Asian immigrants reported a diverse range of religious affiliations that did not diverge too far from their parents (not shown). Filipinos were predominantly Catholic (80 per cent) with 10 per cent reporting 'no religion'. Chinese were mostly non-religious (more than 70%) with 15 per cent Protestants, 9 per cent Catholics, and 3 per cent Buddhists. Nearly half the Vietnamese were Buddhists and other 19 per cent Catholics with 29 per cent reporting 'no religion'. The majority of Laotians and Cambodians were Buddhists (more than three-quarters) with 12 per cent reporting 'no religion'. Among the Hmong, 42 per cent reported 'no religion' and 43 per cent 'other religion', which were likely to mean various forms of traditional folk religions, such as ancestor worship, spirituality, and shamanism.

Marital status for these young adults differs quite significantly across groups — a third of the Hmong and more than one in five Cambodians and Laotians were already married at the time of the survey. The proportion of married Filipinos was also high and so was their rate of intermarriage to other ratio-ethnic group members.⁵ Related to marital status, those groups that had high marriage rates also showed higher rates of having children as in the case of Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong. Single parenthood was more common among Laotians and Hmong than among other groups. Fewer Chinese and Vietnamese were married than others, and none of the Chinese had children by their mid-20s. As noted in the existing literature, having children in adolescence and single parenthood have negative effects on upward social mobility.

The educational profile of second-generation Asian Americans is not as straightforward as generally portrayed. There are vast inter-group

differences in the attainment of a college degree (completing at least four years of college). By their mid-20s, college graduates were more numerous among the Chinese, at 47 per cent, than other groups in the sample. Notable is the contrast between Filipinos and Vietnamese. Filipinos trailed far behind the Chinese and approximate the Laotians on this measure despite their high family socio-economic status. Vietnamese seemed to be catching up with the Chinese despite their disadvantaged refugee status. As expected, Cambodians and Hmong fared poorly with less than 7 per cent having earned college degrees by their mid-20s. The lower average levels of education among children of Southeast Asian refugees is primarily due to factors associated with contexts of exit, such as immigration selectivity and limited access to formal schooling in former homelands, and factors associated with context of reception, such as selective testing, classification, tracking, disadvantaged neighbourhood schools, and poverty that discourage or deny access to equal educational opportunities. The bright side is that high school dropouts were generally low among all groups except for Cambodians. Also, a large majority of these young adults, regardless of national origin, continued to pursue higher education. Considering the recency of immigration, a significant proportion (70 per cent or higher) of the children of Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants are currently attending colleges.

The pursuit of higher education for young adults would require tremendous human capital and financial resources and often the delay of marriage and family formation. Those who were already trailing behind would have to surmount extra hurdles to succeed. One of the hurdles may be related to the overall group SES. An immigrant group's low SES, coupled with this group's negative educational selectivity, has been found to negatively affect the educational outcomes of individual group members (Feliciano 2003). Another hurdle may be having children in adolescence as noted earlier.

Current work status could prolong or derail young adult's pursuit of a post-secondary education for immigrants and young people, especially among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, many adult immigrants lacking English proficiency and job skills rarely have the time and money to go back to school to get themselves retrained for better jobs, which causes them to be trapped in the rank of the working poor. Their children are at a much higher risk of being caught up in this vicious cycle than those from high SES families. Here, the much higher rates of full-time workers among Cambodians, Laotians and the Hmong, who were from low SES backgrounds, could be interpreted as a constraint rather than a stepping-stone towards higher education. In comparison, the children of the Chinese and other Asian immigrants had much lower rates of full-time employment, which matched up their very high rates of current college

attendance. In fact, 70 per cent of the Chinese, compared to just 7 per cent of the Hmong reported that they had never held a job since graduating from high school.

Among full-time workers, Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong received lower monthly earnings, but only Cambodians and Laotians, not the Hmong, reported lower satisfaction with their current earnings. Furthermore, average occupational prestigious scores and occupational satisfaction were both lower among the Hmong than among others. Although Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Chinese and other Asian had higher occupational scores than Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong, their full-time jobs ranged equally widely, including waiters and waitresses, cooks, cashiers, receptionists, secretaries, machine operators, bank tellers, marines, mechanics, health aides, health technologists, computer programmers, engineers, accountants, teachers, supervisors, managers, and administrators. Unemployment rates were relatively higher among Chinese, Vietnamese, and Laotians than others. While reasons for unemployment may vary across groups and unemployment at this time may be temporary, the current high rates should signal possible labour market barriers that these young people encounter, which requires further investigation.

In terms of overall family incomes, those living with parents were much better off than those living by themselves, but there were inter-group differences in this outcome as well. Filipinos living with parents or by themselves had the highest median family incomes, and Cambodians the lowest. Other Asians living with parents also had high median family incomes but those living alone did not, most probably due to the fact that so many of them were still attending college. Last but not least, incarceration rates, the strongest measure of downward assimilation in these data, were generally low among second-generation Asians. Family SES and incarceration rates were highly correlated generally among low status refugee groups, but insignificant among generally high status non-refugee groups. This implies that a group's generally low status exacerbates the risk of downward assimilation for its younger members.

Our findings so far have suggested that, because of the internal diversity in Asian Americans as an ethno-racial group, the process of becoming assimilated, or making it into the mainstream, for the second generation would tend to be as multifaceted as segmented. Next, we examine the longitudinal patterns of this process, zooming in to some key outcome measures. We examine both the attitudinal dimension of adaptation, as in language, ethnic identification, and sense of belonging, and the behavioural dimension of adaptation as in actual educational achievement. For purpose of brevity, we present longitudinal data from a series of figures, in which we re-categorize the CILS Asian sample into four main groupings: Filipino, Vietnamese,

other Southeast Asian (Cambodians, Laotians and the Hmong), and other Asian (Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and Indians).⁶

Patterns of linguistic assimilation

As Table 4 shows, while almost everyone has achieved full English proficiency, not everyone prefers to speak English, especially among the children of Southeast Asian refugees. Group variations in preference for English may be due to varied English skills in the parental generation and to the need to speak a language other than English at home. Even though inter-group differences in current English proficiency may not be significant, a closer look at the longitudinal patterns enables us to see a more nuanced picture. Figure 1 shows patterns of linguistic assimilation among second-generation Asian Americans over the span of ten years. Each line chart contains three measures, English proficiency (speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English very well), parental language proficiency (speaking, understanding, reading and writing a parental language well or very well), and preference to speak English most of the time. For all Asian-origin groups, the general patterns of language shift only partially conformed to what would be predicted by the classical assimilation model. While there was a significant increase in English proficiency, the proficiency in the parental language dropped only slightly with the exception of other Southeast Asians. The preference to speak English also dropped only slightly from 1992 to 2003. Gender differences were insignificant on preferring to speak English and proficiency in the mother tongue, but females were more likely than males to report proficiency in English.

Notable is the significantly lower level of English proficiency among other Southeast Asians (and Vietnamese to a lesser extent) at the early time points. Less than a third of other Southeast Asians, and less than half of Vietnamese, reported being fully proficient in English during their middle and high school years, compared to over 70 per cent of Filipino and other Asians. Even though other Southeast Asians' English proficiency had improved drastically over time, it still remained significantly lower than that of other non-refugee groups. Other Southeast Asians were also less proficient in their mother tongue than other groups. While mother-tongue proficiency was generally low, less than one in five of our respondents reported being proficient, children of other Southeast Asians seemed to be doubly disadvantaged with greater difficulty in both English and mother tongue than other Asians. Another interesting pattern is that as other Southeast Asians improved their English, their preference to speak English also dropped significantly. This may be due to the need to

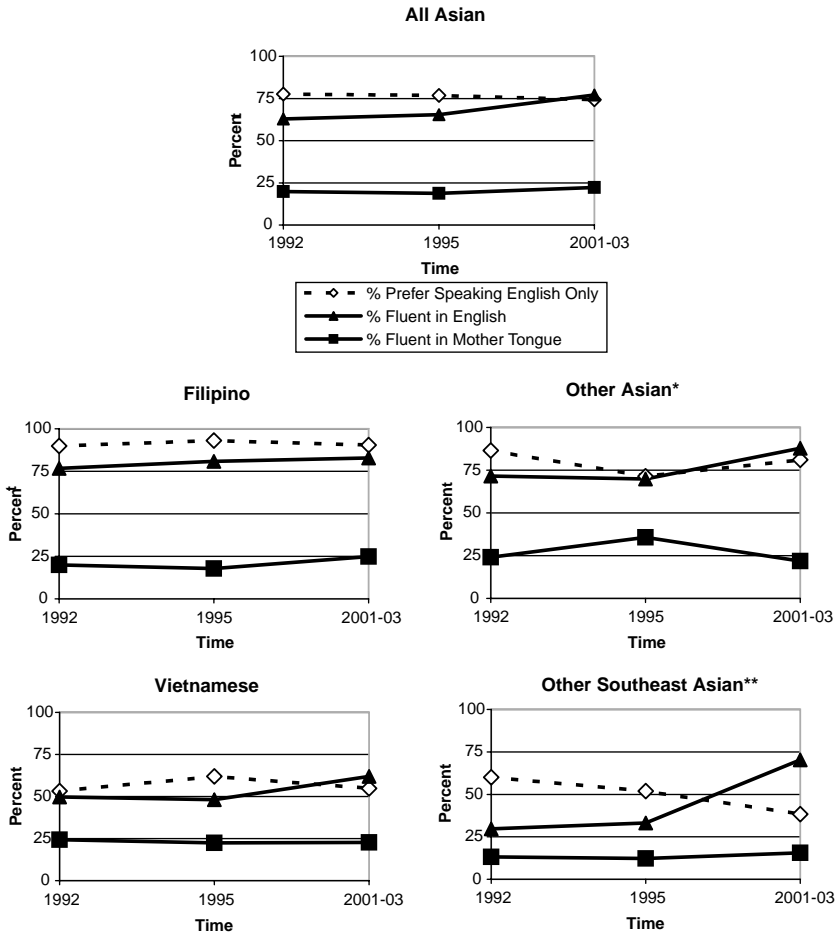
Table 4. *Adult Children of Asian immigrants in San Diego: 2001–2003*

National Origin Groups	Filipino	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Laotian	Hmong	Chinese	Total*
% Speaking English Well or Very Well	99.8	97.3	100.0	98.8	100.0	100.0	99.3
% Preferring to Speak Only English	90.4	54.9	41.4	40.0	27.6	72.7	74.3
% Identified as American	1.4	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7
% Identified as Hyphenated American	57.3	43.7	29.8	37.7	42.3	54.5	50.7
% Considering this identity as very important	57.4	50.0	56.3	48.3	72.7	38.9	55.4
% Perceiving the U.S. as Home	90.0	88.4	95.4	88.9	93.3	78.8	89.6
% Feeling Discrimination because of Race/Ethnicity	63.2	67.9	50.0	56.3	37.9	69.7	62.1

Source: CILS-III, 2001–2003.

* Other Asians (N =41) are omitted from the table because of the small number of each of the remaining national-origin groups.

Figure 1. *Language Patterns of Second-Generation Asian Americans*



* Other Asian includes mainly Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Indians.

** Other Southeast Asian Includes mainly Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong.

Source: CILS-III, 2001-2003.

maintain bilingualism in their predominantly non-English-speaking homes.

As the existing literature has found, fluency in both English and mother tongue positively influences academic outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2001). So it is not unreasonable to infer that lack of proficiency in both languages among children of Southeast Asian refugees in their early years had hampered their academic performance. Our findings suggest that those respondents who were proficient in English were significantly more likely to continue to college after high school graduation, particularly among Filipinos

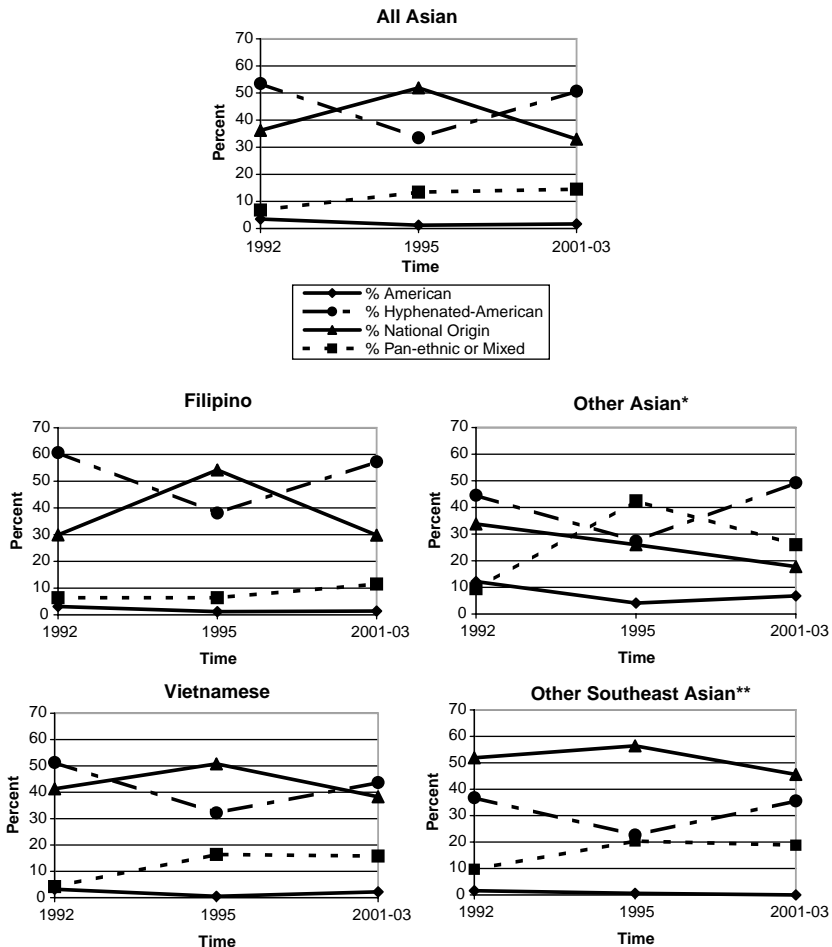
(86 per cent v. 16 per cent) and other Southeast Asians (76 per cent v. 24 per cent), but that the relationship between proficiency in mother tongue and educational attainment was not significant. Another important finding is that more than half the respondents (and more than 80 per cent of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians) preferred to raise their children bilingual, rather than English monolingual, even though they themselves, in the majority of cases, were not fluent bilingual. Several respondents indicated, in the face-to-face interview, that doing so was very important because they did not want their children to forget 'who they are'.

Patterns of ethnic identification

The process of ethnic identification is more complex than that of linguistic assimilation and does not follow the linear assimilation model of gradual de-ethnicization. At their mid-20s, almost no respondents identified themselves as unhyphenated 'American' as shown in Table 4. Rather, they considered themselves hyphenated American by national origin such as Filipino-American or Vietnamese-American or simply unhyphenated ethnic by national origin, such as Filipino or Vietnamese. Also shown in Table 4, more than half of the Filipinos and Chinese considered themselves hyphenated American by national origin, and most were serious about this ethnic identification albeit with some inter-group variations. Southeast Asians, especially Cambodians, are less likely than Filipinos and Chinese to report hyphenated identity; when they did, however, they generally took it seriously.

Longitudinal data in Figure 2 reveal that few Asian Americans identified themselves as unambiguously 'American' from day one of the study, and this pattern changed very little over time. Note that the relatively higher proportion of reporting an 'American' identity among other Asians (from 12% in 1992 to 7% in 2003) was perhaps due to the inclusion of Japanese Americans who were mostly third or fourth generation since none of the Chinese respondents reported so (see Table 4). The unpopularity of the 'American' identity label was not unique among Asian Americans. Children of all racial minority groups tend to develop a heightened sensitivity of race and ethnicity, a fact that is probably linked to their own encounter with American cultural and political processes that racialize them and even discriminate against them. Like other non-white racial minorities, Asian Americans often equate 'American' with 'white', even though they are relatively acculturated, share the same neighbourhood or intermarry with whites, and continue to strive for the privileged status associated with middle-class whiteness, just like their parents (Zhou 2004). Moreover, the phenotypical characteristics of Asians often reinforce

Figure 2. *Ethnic Self-Identification of Second-Generation Asian Americans*



* Other Asian includes mainly Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Indians.

** Other Southeast Asian Includes mainly Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong.

Source: CILS-III, 2001-2003.

the stereotype of the ‘forever foreigner’, leading frequently to attitudinal discrimination, or at least to be identified as non-American (Tuan 1998). Thus, rejection of an un-hyphenated ‘American’ identity, or preference for hyphenated or national identities, is a reactive response rather than a voluntary option (Kibria 2003).

The majority of the children of Asian immigrants did not readily choose a pan-ethnicity at any time point either, except for other Asians who experienced a major surge in pan-Asian identification — from 10 per cent in 1992 to 43 per cent in 1995 — but then dropped to 26 per cent in young adulthood. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in high

schools 'Asian' or 'Asian American' were often considered East Asian in the eyes of both Asian-origin and non-Asian groups and that Filipinos and Southeast Asians seldom saw themselves, or were seen by others, as Asian for that reason. As a group, the self-identification pattern appears bi-modal, shifting between hyphenated American (such as Filipino-American or Cambodian-American) and national origin (such as Vietnamese or Laotian); about 54 per cent of respondents chose the hyphenated American identity to describe themselves and 36 per cent chose the national-origin label in 1992. Gender differences were insignificant in reporting any form of ethnic self-identification.

Noted was the back and forth shift between the two predominant forms of ethnic identification: hyphenated American and national origin. This should not be simply discarded as haphazard. Even though self-reporting among adolescents might be unstable, the current choice of ethnic identification indicates a relatively established social identity in American society, because a majority of respondents regard their chosen identity as very important to them. Nevertheless, young people's ethnic self-image is by no means fixed and their identity choices are often situational. In some settings, a show of hyphenated American identity may indicate reactive ethnic consciousness and a sense of empowerment on the part of a minority group (Espiritu and Wolf 2001; Kibria 2003), while in other situations the same identity choice may be symbolic. In any case, ethnic identification is likely to be a social psychological expression of the process of group formation, which can persist indefinitely because of group members' ancestry, history, and current lived experiences (Alba 1985). However, compared to white ethnics chronicled by the earlier immigration literature, the choice of a particular identity among Asian Americans and other racial minorities is constrained by the system of racial stratification and societal stereotypes imposed upon them. For example, Asian Americans' daily encounter with such seemingly innocent questions as 'where are you from', or 'how did you acquire such perfect, unaccented English', reminds them of being the 'forever foreigner' and invokes a process of reactive ethnicity. Ironically, this ethnic reaffirmation is quintessentially American since it is provoked by processes internal to this society.

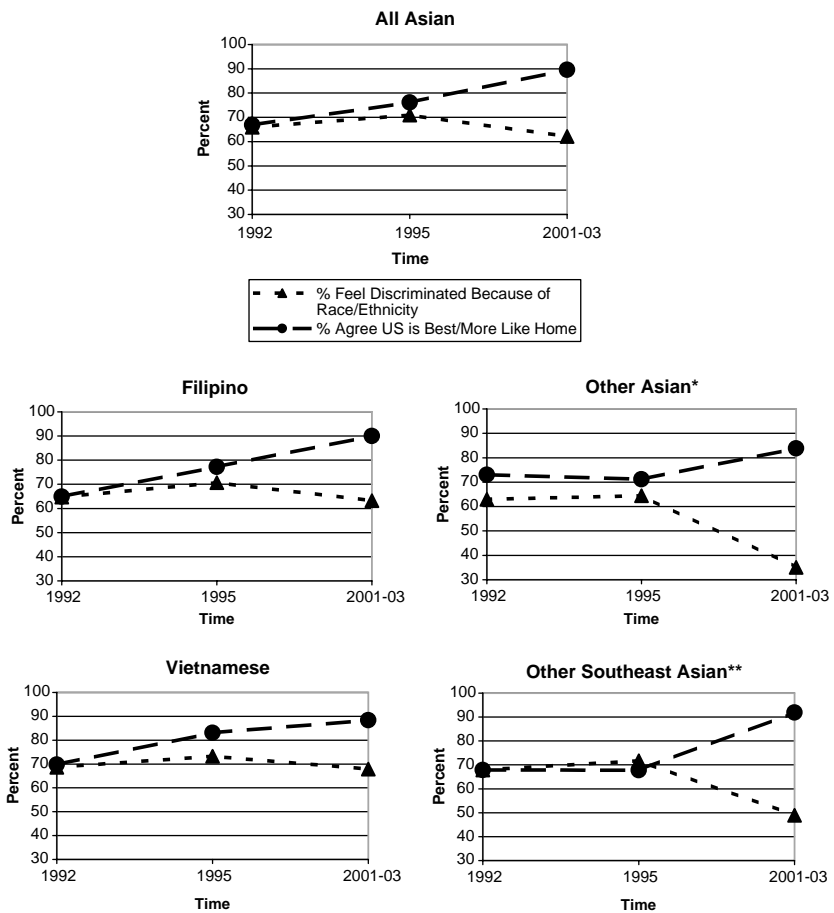
The sense of belonging

Another attitudinal outcome is measured by the sense of belonging to the host country. About 90 per cent of all CILS respondents in their mid-20s perceived the United States, rather than their parents' country of origin, as their home as shown in Table 4. The Chinese appeared a bit off the norm and more 'transnational' in orientation, with nearly

20 per cent considering their parents' home country or both as home. This measure points to high levels of acculturation among children of Asian immigrants. However, as illustrated in Table 4, more than 60 per cent of the young adults felt fairly intense discrimination against themselves because of their racial or ethnic traits, with the exception of the Hmong.

Figure 3 presents patterns of change in the perception of U.S. society as home and of the feelings of racial or ethnic discrimination. As we have noted in the previous section, over half of Filipino and Chinese respondents and fewer than one in five of Southeast Asian respondents were born in the U.S., but as time went by, a majority of

Figure 3. *Perception of the US and Felt Discrimination by Second-Generation Asian Americans*



* Other Asian includes mainly Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Indians.

** Other Southeast Asian Includes mainly Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong.

Source: CILS-III, 2001-2003.

the foreign born had become naturalized U.S. citizens. So it is not surprising to find that children of Asian immigrants generally regarded the United States, rather than their parents' countries of origin, as their home. The increase of this view over time is quite noticeable — from about 70 per cent to about 80 per cent in the span of ten years. Meanwhile, the feelings of being discriminated against because of racial or ethnic membership became less intense over time, but still remained very substantial, at about 60 per cent for the group as a whole. However, Filipinos and Vietnamese did not experience significant change in their feelings of racial discrimination. Other Asians experienced a significant drop (from 63 to 35 per cent), and so did other Southeast Asians (from 68 to 49 per cent) to a lesser degree. Again, gender differences were insignificant. The lower intensity of felt discrimination (35 per cent as opposed to 60 per cent) should not be taken lightly.

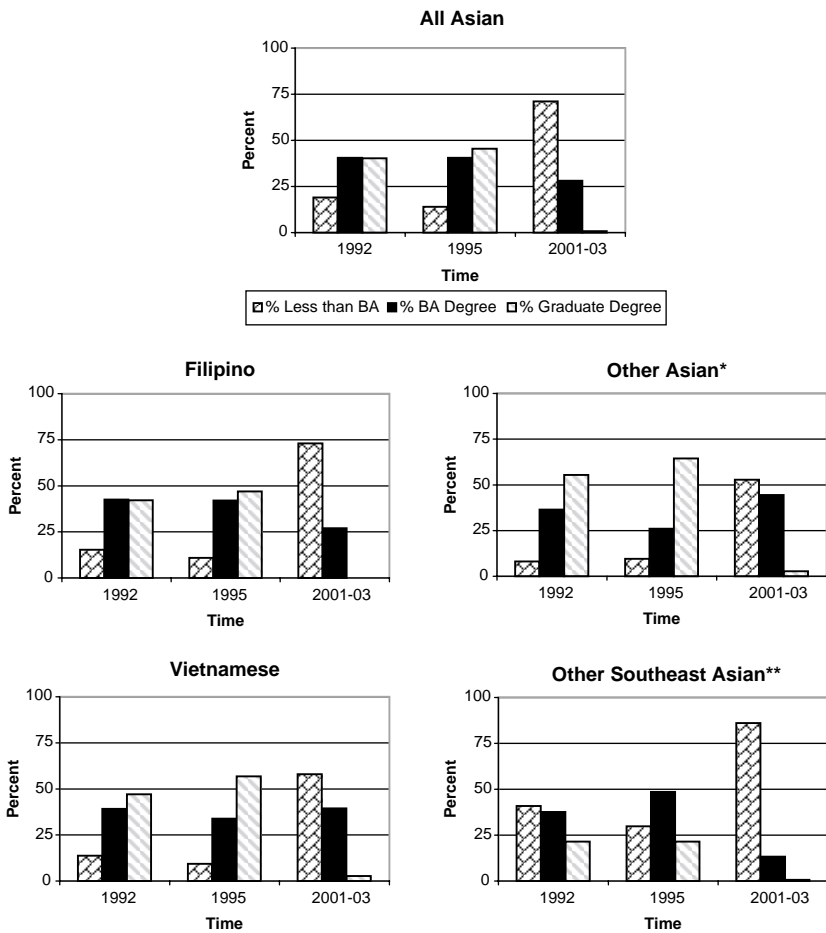
The existing literature has shown that children of immigrants felt racial discrimination more intensely and were more sensitive about and less tolerant of any form of racism than their immigrant parents. Prior research also notes that the least educationally successful group is least prone to feel discriminated against, probably because of their relative social isolation, which is consistent with prior research (Portes *et al.* 1980; Portes and Bach 1985). In general, young people born or raised in the U.S. usually considered the United States as their home, so they should not be expected to carry the burden of racism or to be treated unfairly simply because of their racial or ethnic traits. The inter-group differences in felt discrimination suggest that the intense feelings are due to a variety of interactive processes. For some groups, such as Filipinos and Vietnamese, visibly large group size and high ethnic concentration may galvanize group-based discrimination against individual members. Yet, despite felt or experienced discrimination, Asian Americans were also less likely than other racial minority groups to take collective action against unequal treatment and instead more likely to buy into American individualism and take a normative path to success (e.g., through working *twice* as hard), just like their immigrant parents (Zhou 2004). If assimilation into the mainstream meant that immigrants and their offspring 'do not sense a rupture between participation in mainstream institutions and familiar social and cultural practices' (Alba and Nee 2003, p. 11), Asian Americans still have some way to go.

A closer look at the success story

Asian success in the eyes of the American public has stemmed from the educational achievements of Asian Americans. But the celebration of the group as a model minority has been politically motivated to

buttress the myths that the United States is devoid of racism, according equal opportunity to all, and that those who lag behind do so because of their own poor choices, lack of effort, or an inferior culture. While the U.S. census data show that both foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian Americans have displayed superior levels of education relative to other Americans, a closer look at the CILS educational data generates a more complex picture. As Figure 4 shows, the children of Asian immigrants showed extremely high self-expectations for educational achievement in 1992 and 1995, but a much smaller number of them were able to actualize their expectations by their mid-20s.

Figure 4. *Educational Expectations and outcomes of Second-Generation Asian Americans*



* Other Asian includes mainly Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Indians.

** Other Southeast Asian Includes mainly Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong.

Source: CILS-III, 2001-2003.

During 1995, for example, 41 per cent of the respondents expected to attain at least a bachelor's degree, and nearly half expected to attain graduate degrees, with females being more likely than males to expect a graduate degree. By 2001–03, however, only 28 per cent reported having bachelor's degrees, and less than one per cent reported having graduate degrees. Gender differences were significant: females were more likely than males to have achieved bachelor's degrees (35 per cent v. 21 per cent) and to achieve graduate degrees (1.1 per cent v. 0.4 per cent). Inter-group differences were also significant. If we put aside those who had expected and actually achieved graduate degrees, since they were too young to have earned a graduate degree, we can see that only Filipinos and other Southeast Asians showed a large gap between expectations and actual outcomes (shown in solid colour bars). This finding is in itself interesting given that Filipinos came from relatively high SES backgrounds and other Southeast Asians from very low SES backgrounds.

Whether they had earned a bachelor's degree or not, a great majority of the children of Asian immigrants were currently attending college (data not shown). Sixty-seven per cent of Filipinos and 51 per cent of other Southeast Asians with less than a bachelor's degree were currently enrolled in college, compared to 77 per cent of Vietnamese and 90 per cent of other Asians. This trend indicates that many more of them would be achieving their educational expectations in the long run. However, of those who were enrolled in college but had not earned a bachelor's degree, a large number were in junior colleges and vocational training programmes — 66 per cent of other Southeast Asians, 45 per cent of Filipinos, 30 of Vietnamese, 23 per cent of other Asians — which would call into question their eventual attainment of bachelor's degrees or the lengthy process of doing so. Moreover, of those who had earned a bachelor's degree and were currently enrolled in college, only about 27 per cent of other Southeast Asians and 36 per cent of Vietnamese were enrolled in graduate programmes or professional schools, compared to 52 per cent of Filipinos and 63 per cent of other Asians.

These findings imply that while a majority of the children of Asian immigrants would eventually attain college degrees, college may not be a direct route out of high school for all children of Asian immigrants. Furthermore, a good number of those who managed to continue on to college directly out of high school may have to take longer for various reasons. Earlier CILS data provide some hints as to why some children of Asian immigrants failed to attend college or failed to earn bachelor degrees in a timely fashion. The 1995 survey showed that 71 per cent of the respondents who did not expect themselves to attend college listed finances as their main reason. Some respondents reported in face-to-face interviews that they attended junior colleges with the intention of

transferring to four-year colleges in order to save money. One respondent said that she had spent too much money at a four-year college and had to switch back to a junior college just to get some sort of certificate. Finances also seemed to be the main cause for college attendance. When they were in high school, more than 95 per cent of those who were currently attending college considered having lots of money and finding stable jobs as important.

For many children of Asian immigrants, a college education was undoubtedly imperative in order to get a good job, and they pursued it primarily for fulfilling their own occupational aspirations, not just out of parental pressure. In the long process, however, they experienced obstacles and even disillusionments, which are already reflected on the CILS data. Regardless of family SES and ethnic backgrounds, children of Asian immigrants displayed very high occupational aspirations. For example, when asked in 1992 what jobs they would like as adults, a quarter of them aspired to be physicians, 8 per cent athletes (mostly males), 6 per cent lawyers, 6 per cent registered nurses, and 4 per cent engineers. When asked the same question during their senior year in high school, a comparatively high percentage of Asian children again reported they aspired to become physicians (19 per cent), lawyers (3 per cent), registered nurses (8 per cent), and engineers (4 per cent). Females aspired more frequently to become nurses while males wanted to be engineers. These young people also felt they had good chances of securing the occupations they desired — 92 per cent of young women and 87 per cent young men felt that their chances of getting their desired jobs were good or very good.

It is probably not by accident that both young men and women consistently aspired to achieve high-prestige, high-paying occupations, such as physicians and lawyers. As they entered adulthood, however, their occupational aspiration became more realistic. The data showed that the children of Asian immigrants, indeed, altered their occupational goals and expectations. Less than three per cent of the respondents expected to hold jobs as physicians by 2001–2003, a sharp drop from 19 per cent in 1995; only 2 per cent expected to become lawyers and one per cent to become engineers. Such changes in occupational expectations might have been affected by labour market demands. But as these young people became more aware of the limited means and opportunities and the status hierarchies in American society, they grew more and more anxious and worried about whether they could secure a job that they had desired. As a Filipino young woman, who had just earned a bachelor's degree, remarked in a face-to-face interview:

I guess just now that I'm done with college, there's nothing else, there's no more like schooling, like, you know, not as much hanging

out with friends at school kind of thing. And now I actually have to worry about making sure I get a good job that can, you know, will support me for the rest of my life.

Discussion and conclusion

So far, both the census and CILS data reveal that Asian Americans are anything but homogeneous. The highly celebrated model minority image does not seem to capture the group as a whole, much less its larger or smaller sub-groups, such as Filipinos and Cambodians. True, relatively few children of Asian immigrants from the San Diego study showed signs of downward assimilation, as indicated by teenage pregnancy, high school dropping out, unemployment, and incarceration, and a great number of them seemed to be on their way to making 'it' as indicated by education and family income measures. But average group-level data often blur internal differences. As our analyses show, Asians in America came from more than 20 national origins, each with its own distinct languages, religions, cultural heritages, human capital resources, and modes of incorporation into the host society. Their children, born and raised in America, are inevitably influenced by the first-generation experiences prior to immigration and after arrival. So they naturally would experience neither a single nor automatic path towards socio-economic mobility. Rather, they tread multiple paths and counteract disadvantages, and even advantages, in multiple ways. Drawn from the Asian experiences, we highlight a few important lessons, which are relevant to segmented assimilation theory.

First, inter-group differences that lie behind the Asian success story have a lot more to do with a group's unique contexts of exit and reception than with an individual group member's own skills, motivation, and hard work. Obviously, high family SES backgrounds of the children of Filipino, Chinese, Korean, and Indian immigrants help to set the stage for a very advantageous context of reception and adaptation. In comparison, low family SES backgrounds of the children of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees create obstacles in addition to common immigrant disadvantages. However, there is no guarantee that those of a high SES group would be moving further up, while those of a low SES group would be heading downward. Take educational achievement as a case in point. Second-generation Vietnamese show remarkable educational achievement and are moving closer to their Chinese counterparts than to other Southeast Asian counterparts, despite their initially lower family SES and refugee status. Second-generation Filipinos, in contrast, lag quite far behind their Chinese counterparts and show a tendency of becoming just average, despite their higher family SES. While the Filipino pattern simply represents a natural regression towards the

mean, the Vietnamese pattern seems somewhat unusual—converging more towards the exceptionally high levels of educational achievement that approximate that of the Chinese, Koreans and Indians.

Even though more research needs to be done, these findings confirm our argument that a group's high SES status facilitates success but does not guarantee it. Dissonant acculturation — rupture of ethnic ties, loss of immigrant culture, and assimilation to American way — may be a possible factor countering the positive effects of advantageous family characteristics. By the same token, a group's low SES may exacerbate class disadvantages through dissonance acculturation but can possibly be buffered through strong family ties and ethnic community resources. Thus, while high family SES status can help to prevent downward assimilation and facilitate natural regression towards the mean as in the case of second-generation Filipinos, low family SES needs to be backed by family and ethnic support in order to prevent class reproduction as in the case of children of Vietnamese refugees (Zhou and Bankston 1998). These complex interaction effects are precisely what segmented assimilation theory aims to tackle.

Second, linguistic assimilation is a multifaceted process, of which language acquisition is only a part. The acquisition of English proficiency, which should be measured in the ability to speak, understand, read, and write the language, is extremely important for immigrants and their offspring as they attempt to incorporate into the middle-class American mainstream. For example, we found that the educational attainment of Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong was seriously hampered by a lack of English proficiency in their early adolescent years, despite substantial improvement in young adulthood. But the high level of English proficiency among children of Filipino immigrants did not lead them to comparably high levels of educational attainment. These findings suggest that language is a tool for, rather than a source of, success. Language is, however, more than just a tool as it connotes symbolic and cultural meanings. It can bring an immigrant child closer to the American mainstream while also detaching him or her farther away from the immigrant family. Likewise, the mother tongue is not simply a tool but has significant symbolism. Even though children of Asian immigrants tend to lose their mother-tongue proficiency rapidly, they still express emotional attachment to it and link it to family, heritage, and even self-identity.

Third, the process of ethnic identification is inherently constrained by the society's racial hierarchy. Most 1.5- or second-generation Asian Americans prefer to identify themselves as hyphenated American rather than 'American' while perceiving the United States as home. This choice of ethnic identity is not random; neither is it merely symbolic. It reflects second-generation Asian Americans' ambivalence towards the first generation and their resentment of unequal treatment

by the system of racial stratification in America. On the one hand, because more than two-thirds of the Asian American population is still the first generation, children of immigrants must now confront renewed images of Asians as 'foreigners'. Resembling the new immigrants in phenotype, but not necessarily in behaviour, language, and culture, the more 'assimilated' U.S-born or U.S. raised Asian Americans find that they must actively and constantly distinguish themselves from the newer arrivals, often derogatively referred to as "FOB" (fresh off boat). The "immigrant shadow" looms large for Asian American youth and can weigh heavily on the formation of identity, ethnic or racial (Kibria 2003). In this sense, the second generation's choice of hyphenated American or national-origin identity is qualitatively different from the first generation, and such a choice is a symbolic as well as lived experience, reflecting the 'situational ethnicity' that is affected by varied interethnic interaction in time and place (Keefe and Padilla 1987).

Similar to other Americans in speech, thought, and behaviour, second-generation Asian Americans are more sensitive about their racial minority status than their parents' generation, and are far less likely than their parents to tolerate derogative racial stereotyping and racial discrimination. Even though they hold firm to the ideology of assimilation, aspire to achieving parity with the society's dominant group, and have been indeed regarded at times as 'honorary whites', they are still keenly aware of their inferior racial status, internalizing the disadvantages associated with it (Tuan 1998; Zhou 2004). Consequently, they would tend to invoke ethnic identity for empowerment and even be inclined, in some cases, towards assimilating into a minority culture of mobility (Neckerman *et al.* 1999). How this form of assimilation affects socio-economic mobility, as currently defined, remains an important empirical question.

In sum, we reiterate what segmented assimilation theory has posited. That is, assimilation outcomes are diverse, but not random; into what segment a group is likely to assimilate depends on the interplay between individual, family, community, and societal factors, which are directly or indirectly linked to unique contexts of exit and reception. Asian immigrants and their children are living in a society that is highly stratified not only by class but also by race. Their success depends disproportionately on family *and* ethnic community resources, while the failure of some is due largely to low family SES exacerbated by the lack of ethnic community resources. This reality has shaped and, to an important extent, determined their multifaceted experiences and life chances. In their pursuit of the American dream, whatever that may be, they would probably still have to work 'twice as hard' as other Americans if they expect to succeed.

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Notes

1. Calculated by Xie and Goyette (2004).
2. The per cent foreign born were calculated for all single Asian-origin people. Even among Chinese Americans, the oldest Asian-origin group, more than 70 per cent were immigrants. Japanese Americans were an exception. As of 2000, only 41 per cent of them were foreign born. In fact, the majority of the group's young people have entered the third or even fourth generation. Inter-marriage rate of this group was also exceptionally high; 20 per cent of married men and 41 per cent of married women had a non-Japanese spouse, compared to married 12 per cent of men and 23 per cent of married women among all Asians (see Xie and Goyette 2004 for detail).
3. Based on estimates from the 1998–2002 Current Population Survey of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
4. The first CILS survey was conducted in 1992 on 8th and 9th graders who either are US born with at least one foreign-born parent or who immigrated at an early age attending school in the San Diego Unified School District and in the Dade and Broward County School Districts (Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida) as well as a few private bilingual schools in Miami. A follow-up survey was conducted three years later, in 1995, on 82 per cent of the original respondents who were about 18–19 years old. The third survey was conducted in 2001–2003 on 70 per cent of the respondents who participated in the previous survey. Our analyses were based on the respondents who participated in all three surveys.
5. Including those who cohabited as partners.
6. The San Diego portion of CILS-III contain 582 Filipinos, 189 Vietnamese, 185 other Southeast Asians (including 65 Cambodians, 90 Lao, and 30 Hmong), and 74 other Asians (including 17 Chinese, 7 Hong Kongese, 9 Taiwanese, 9 Koreans, 16 Japanese, 8 Indians, and 8 other).

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