Cramming It In: Origins and Impact of Korean-American Cram Schools

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Overview

1. Korean-Americans: Immigration & Education
2. Looking Back
3. Preeminence of Culture
4. A New Paradigm: Structure & Agency
5. Hakwons
6. Looking Ahead
Three Waves

1900-1905
- Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
- Laborers work in Hawaii

1951-1965
- Korean War: “brides”; adoptees
- Visiting students

1965-present
- Family unification
- Professionals/managers
- “push” and “pull” factors
- Immigration Act of 1965
Hart-Cellar Act, 1965

Approximately 1.7 million Korean immigrants in the US, making them the fifth-largest Asian American community in the nation

Moynihan Report, 1965
- American sociologist, Assistant Sec. of Labor under Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson
- Culture of poverty: “tangle of pathology” $\rightarrow$ moral deficiencies $\rightarrow$ blaming the victim

Coleman Report, 1966
- American sociologist, commissioned by US Department of Education to write on educational equality
- “Equality of Educational Opportunity”
- Socioeconomic status of students and their families paramount in determining educational outcomes
January 9, 1966
The New York Times,
William Petersen’s
“Success Story, Japanese-American Style”

Romanticizing the “exotic” culture of Japanese-Americans that enabled them to triumph and overcome oppression, unjust treatment, racism in comparison to black Americans.

The Model Minority
Asian Privilege, Asian Advantage, etc..

- The O’Reilly Factor, August 26, 2014
Asian-American: Monolithic Category

Obscures poverty rates, education gaps within and among Asian groups

Poverty rates among different Asian-American nationalities

This chart illustrates the stark difference in how different Asian-American groups experience poverty. It shows the poverty rate among Asian-Americans for whom the government measures poverty in 2014.

- Filipino: 6.70%
- Asian Indian: 7.30%
- Japanese: 8.50%
- Indonesian: 13.4%
- Korean: 14.1%
- Vietnamese: 14.9%
- Chinese: 15.8%
- Cambodian: 17.7%
- Pakistani: 17.9%
- Laotian: 18.0%
- Thai: 18.1%
- Bangladeshi: 26.0%
- Hmong: 28.0%

Education gaps among Asian-Americans

This chart shows the portion of second-generation immigrants who have attained only a high school education or less. There is a clear gap between Cambodians/Laotians versus other Asian American groups. 46% of Cambodians and Laotians stopped their education after graduating high school versus 6% of Chinese.

- Cambodian/Laotian: 46%
- Chinese: 6%
- Filipino: 16%
- Vietnamese: 13%
- Other(Asian): 9%

Notes

Source: Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study III/Immigrant America: A portrait
Credit: Huizhong Wu/Mashable: http://mashable.com/2015/12/14/asian-american-poverty/#f_znwgYQHqqm
Pitfalls of Cultural Explanation

- Propagates belief that traits, behaviors, values are uniformly, inherently endowed amongst all Asians-Americans, disregarding inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic distinctions.
- Sets up misleading comparisons between racial minority groups, with one as superior and another as deficient.
- Stereotypes


http://highexpectationsasianfather.tumblr.com/
## Explanations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Structural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confucian Values</td>
<td>Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for authority</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
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<td>Hard-working</td>
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<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Institutional Supports</td>
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<td>Quiet, Submissive</td>
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All students need **structural resources** to support achievement in school.

Rather than relying on supposed cultural advantages or superiority, it is important to look at how ethnic social structures create environments conducive to success in school.
Social Process

Structure
- Socioeconomic status
- Residential patterns: enclaves; ethnoburbs
- Community resources, organizations, networks

Actor
- Individual choices, values, expectations re: education
- Barriers/discrimination
Residential Shifts

Ethnic Enclaves
- 1990s: majority of Koreans in NY’s metropolitan area live in Queens
- Flushing, Bayside, Elmhurst

1990s-2000s
- New arrivals settle directly in suburban counties, outpacing population growth of Koreans in NYC

Ethnoburbs
- Bergen County, NJ; Nassau County (Long Island, NY)
Agency

Middle-class Korean parents structure an academic environment for their children by:
- Moving to areas with prominent schools
- Enrolling children in hakwons
Hakwons
• “Where the Smart Get Smarter”
• Not temporary
• Not to “fix” or “improve”
• Workbooks, homework

Unlike Title I and other supplementary education programs in the U.S., hakwons are viewed as providing enrichment rather than remedial education.
Targeted advertising
The SHSAT

- Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT)
  - A sole determinant for admission into New York’s specialized high schools
  - Math, Verbal Reasoning

- Getting into the one of the “Big 3” of the eight specialized high schools in NYC is viewed as a “golden ticket” in gaining admission to elite colleges and universities
Asian “Explosion”

New York’s fastest-growing racial-minority group, from less than 1% to approximately 13% of New York’s city population

**Stuyvesant**
- 1970 -- 6% of student body
- 1994 – 50% of student body
- 2014 – 73% of the student body

**Bronx Science**
- 1970 – 5% of student body
- 1994 – 41% of student body
- 2014 – 62% of student body

**Brooklyn Tech**
- 1970 – 6% of student body
- 1994 – 33% of student body
- 2014 – 61% of student body

Despite the city’s efforts to encourage more black and Hispanic students – who make up 70% of the overall school system in NYC – to take the exam, 500 fewer students sat for the exam this year compared to 2015.

In 2016, 9 black students and 14 Hispanic students offered seats at Stuyvesant.

178 white students and 682 Asian students were accepted.
The (Asian) American Dream

- Education can lead to a life and lifestyle that overcomes a legacy of discrimination and racism

Reality
- Asian-Americans viewed as perpetual foreigners
- Affirmative action – quotas
- Bamboo ceiling – heavily represented in elite colleges, yet underrepresented in executive positions, political leadership

Looking ahead

• Reflecting on formative influences in your own education, broadly understood, to counter mainstream understanding, presumptions of achievement and success

• Recording your own educational past to preserve it in our collective memory before it can be written off as a foregone conclusion in the “model minority” narrative