Major Issues Related to Asian American Experiences

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This chapter analyzes major issues relating to Asian American experiences. Some are practical issues with policy implications, such as anti-Asian violence. Other issues concern Asian American experiences that have both theoretical and practical implications. For example, Asian Americans' degree of socioeconomic success is a question of interpretation, using a particular theoretical perspective, as much as an empirical question concerning the economic welfare of Asian Americans. Therefore, whenever necessary, I will introduce a theoretical orientation useful for explaining the issue under consideration.

Depending on our ideological and/or theoretical position, we can have different views about which issues are important for the experiences of Asian Americans. As stated in the introductory chapter, this book emphasizes structural factors, such as institutional barriers, discrimination, and class differences, rather than their cultural mechanisms, for Asian Americans' successful adjustment. This structural approach and its related theoretical perspectives are presented in this chapter. Since the publication of the first edition of this book, several issues have been subjected to active research in Asian American studies. They include three interrelated topics pertaining to 1.5-generation and second-generation Asian Americans' adaptation to American society: school performance, socioeconomic adjustment, and ethnic and panethnic (racial) identities. Chapter 4 has examined Asian Americans' socioeconomic attainments and Asian American children's school performance by treating all Asian Americans as a whole, but the native born and the foreign born separately. This chapter also examines the same topic in connection with the model minority thesis but treats Asian ethnic groups separately. It also covers ethnic and racial identities among 1.5-generation and second-generation Asian Americans. Other topics that have emerged as popular in Asian American studies as well as immigration and ethnic studies in general are Asian Americans' positioning in the U.S. racial hierarchy, Korean-African American conflicts, gender and domestic violence in Asian America, and the effects on South Asians of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. These timely topics and issues have been included in this chapter.
THE CRITIQUE OF THE MODEL MINORITY THESIS

Probably the most frequently cited thesis or concept in the Asian American social science literature over the past two decades is the model minority thesis. It is not a popular thesis among Asian American scholars and activists because it is probably the least popular thesis they have criticized. Beginning in the 1960s, the U.S. media described Asian Americans as having achieved high socioeconomic mobility through their cultural mechanisms such as hard work, frugality, family ties, and sacrifice for children’s education (Kasindorf, 1982; Peterson, 1966; Williams, 1984). Several scholars offered similar cultural explanations for the achievements of Chinese and Japanese Americans, focusing on their cultural mechanisms for adaptations and neglecting to examine their problems (Kitano, 1969; Kitano & Sue, 1973; Marden & Veysey, 1973).


Median Family Income Not a Good Measure of Asian Americans’ Economic Well-Being

The success image of Asian Americans is partly based on the fact that the median household or family income of Asian Americans is higher than that of white Americans. However, many Asian American social scientists have pointed out the problems of using the median family income as an indicator of the economic conditions of Asian Americans (Cabezas & Kawaguchi, 1988; Cabezas, Shinagawa, & Kawaguchi, 1987; Hurh & Kim, 1982, 1989; Kwong, 1987; S. Lee, 1989). They have argued that the median family income is not a good measure of the economic success of Asian Americans because they have more workers per family and residentially concentrate in large cities, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC, where living costs are very high.

The critics of the model minority thesis have also indicated that this thesis, which is based on the median or mean family income of Asian Americans, distorts their economic condition because of their socioeconomic diversity. While many college-educated Asian immigrants make high earnings from professional and managerial occupations, many others struggle for economic survival trapped in low-level, service-related jobs. A number of researchers have documented poverty among Asian immigrants to highlight their economic problems (Ching-Louie, 1992; Endo, 1980; Kwong, 1987; Ong, 1984; Toji & Johnson, 1992). They have shown that although many Asian immigrants become poor due to their joblessness, many employed Asian immigrants encounter poverty due to their concentration in the secondary labor market or the ethnic market. Table 5.1 shows that all foreign-born Asian groups, but the Filipinos, and even the most native-born Asian groups, have higher poverty rates than white Americans, although all major Asian groups have higher median individual earnings. These statistics prove a greater diversity in class among Asian Americans than among white Americans.
Table 5.1  Indicators of Asian Americans’ Socioeconomic Attainment by Nativity and Ethnic Group, and Compared With Non-Hispanic Whites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Educational Level (%)</th>
<th>Occupational Level (%)</th>
<th>Economic Conditions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Advanced Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>69.6</td>
<td>39.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>96.4</td>
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<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign Born</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Asian American</td>
<td>82.2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>78.5</td>
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<td>Japanese</td>
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<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Native Born</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>51.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>92.1</td>
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<td><strong>Native-Born</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Whites</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NOTE: People are restricted to those who were 25–64 years old in 2000.

Issue of Lower Rewards to Human Capital Investment

The critics of the success image do not consider Asian Americans successful mainly because Asian immigrants do not get rewards for their educational investments equal to white Americans (Cabezas et al., 1987; Cabezas & Kawaguchi, 1988; Cho, 1993; Hirschman & Wong, 1984; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Tienda & Lee, 1987; Tsukada, 1988; Wong, 1982; Zhou, 1992; Zhou & Kamo, 1994). For example, using 1980 Census data, Hurh and Kim (1989) compared the earnings of major Asian
immigrant groups to those of the white U.S.-born population with gender and nativity controlled. Their data analyses revealed that all Asian groups, with the exception of Japanese Americans, earned less than white Americans under the equivalent conditions of human capital investment, and that the white-Asian earnings disparity was much greater for Asian immigrants than for native-born Asian Americans. Asian immigrants’ earnings were about 75% of native-born white Americans’ earnings when education was controlled. Based on these results, they concluded, “As long as this inequity exists, the success image of Asian Americans remains largely a myth rather than a reality” (Hurh & Kim, 1989, p. 529).

Many college-educated Asian immigrants engage in low-status, low-paying occupations as taxi drivers, gas station attendants, or cleaners. Many Korean immigrants engage in labor-intensive small businesses to avoid low-paying service and blue-collar jobs (Min, 1984). Some studies have indicated that even Asian immigrants who hold professional and government jobs are concentrated in periphery specialty areas or less influential positions (Ishi, 1988; I. S. Kim, 1981; Shin & Chang, 1988; Taylor & Kim, 1980). Asian Americans are overrepresented in science and engineering, in which professional skills are supposed to determine job performance. Yet, Tang has documented that Asian American engineers are disadvantaged compared to white engineers in managerial representation and upward mobility (Tang, 1993).

In evaluating Asian Americans’ underemployment and unequal returns for their human capital investments, it is important to examine foreign-born Asian Americans separately from native born, because the latter have a language barrier and other disadvantages for employment in the United States. Studies by Sakamoto, Xie, and their colleagues have examined Asian Americans’ labor market outcomes by breaking down Asian American workers by nativity (Sakamoto & Furuichi, 1997; Sakamoto & Kim, 2003; Sakamoto, Liu, & Tzeng, 1998; Xie & Goyette, 2004; Zeng & Xie, 2004). Their studies have found that native-born Asian American workers receive more or less equal rewards from their human capital investments to white Americans, while Asian immigrants get much lower returns.

In chapter 4, Sakamoto and Xie have presented a table (Table 4.6) that shows the Asian-white earnings ratio for native-born workers for men and women separately using 1960 and 2000 U.S. Censuses after eliminating the effects of differences in education and work experience. In 1959, Chinese and Japanese male workers and Filipino male and female workers did not get equal returns for their human capital investments. However, in 1999, all native-born Asian groups, with the exception of Filipino men and Vietnamese men and women, gained greater returns for their human capital investments than native-born white Americans. Native-born Asian American men acquired earnings 4% more from their human capital investments than native-born white American men, while their female counterparts gained earnings 17% more than white women. Sakamoto and Xie have suggested that native-born Asian Americans’ advantage over native-born white Americans in return for their education and work experience is due mainly to their residential concentration in large cities with higher living costs and their occupational concentration in lucrative fields such as science and engineering (see also Xie & Goyette, 2004). I speculate that when living costs in the cities of their residential concentration and salary scales in the fields of their occupational concentration are taken into account, native-born Asian American men may get slightly lower returns for their human capital investments. An analysis of the 1990 Census by Cheng and Yang (1996) showed that native-born Asian Americans in Los Angeles had a slight disadvantage compared to native-born white Americans. Nevertheless, the major findings from these studies support the view that native-born Asian Americans are not significantly disadvantaged compared to native-born white Americans in translating their education and work experience into earnings. Accordingly, the argument that Asian Americans cannot be said to be successful
because they do not get returns for their human capital investments equal to white Americans does not seem to hold true for native-born Asian Americans any longer.

In chapter 4, Sakamoto and Xie have also compared foreign-educated Asian immigrants with native-born white Americans in annual earnings and the background variables based on the 1990 U.S. Census (Table 4.5). Although the two groups had the same mean years of schooling (14 years), foreign-educated Asian immigrants had substantially lower annual earnings ($24,000) than native-born white Americans ($29,000). In another study, Zeng and Xie (2004) compared Asian immigrants with native-born white Americans by separating Asian-educated (to the final degree) Asian immigrants from American-educated Asians. They showed that American-educated Asian immigrants derived annual earnings comparable to native-born whites when the effects of human capital investments were eliminated. These pieces of evidence support the view that foreign-educated Asian immigrants’ language barrier and their lack of job market information, along with the difference in quality of education between Asian countries and the United States, are mainly responsible for their lower returns for human capital investments. However, they in no way support the view that Asian immigrants do not experience discrimination, whether based on racism, nativism, or both, in the U.S. labor market. The fact that foreign-educated Asian immigrants pay penalties that their American-educated counterparts do not pay suggests that Asian immigrants with strong Asian accents are subject to more discrimination in the labor market than those with less obvious accents. Since foreign-educated Asian immigrants’ language barrier and other disadvantages for the U.S. labor market are inseparably tied to both racism and nativism, it is impossible to separate the effects of one from those of another. But many studies based on in-depth personal interviews, including some cited in different chapters of this book, have shown that Asian immigrants have experienced different types of discrimination in the U.S. labor market (Min & Kim, 1999; Wu, 1997). Mar’s study based on the 1990 Census (Mar, 1999) shows that foreign-born whites in California and Hawaii do not have a disadvantage compared to native-born whites in translating their human capital investments into earnings, whereas foreign-born Asians have a big disadvantage. This finding suggests that Asian immigrants have a disadvantage in translating their education into earnings compared to white immigrants due to racism.

The Issue of the Glass Ceiling Problem

Another important issue with regard to the success image of Asian Americans is their underrepresentation in upper-level administrative, executive, and managerial positions in corporate and public sectors. Asian Americans are well represented in professional occupations mainly because they are typically highly educated and obtain professional certificates. However, several researchers have indicated that Asian Americans are underrepresented in high-ranking executive and administrative positions and that they encounter the glass ceiling problem in attaining upper-level executive and managerial positions (Dunlop & Sanders, 1992; Hirschman & Wong, 1981; Liu-Wu, 1997, pp. 166-172; Ong, 2003; Tang, 1993, 1997; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1988, 1992, pp. 131-135; Woo, 2000; Wu, 1997). For example, according to the results of a 1994 survey of Fortune 1,000 industries and Fortune 500 service industries, only 0.3% of senior-level managers were Asian Pacific Americans (Wu, 1997, p. 166). This is a good piece of evidence that Asian Americans encounter a racial barrier in reaching upper-level managerial positions in the labor market.

Asian Americans may be at a disadvantage for these upper-level administrative positions because they lack communication and leadership skills, a result of more authoritarian child socialization techniques practiced in many Asian immigrant families. But it is also true that some well-qualified Asian Americans are not given these desirable positions because Asians are stereotyped as lacking leadership skills (Ong, 2003). However, as native-born Asian Americans have come of age,
more and more of them have been able to move into high-ranking positions during recent years. For example, several Asian Americans have been appointed as deans at major universities throughout the United States since 1995 when the first edition of this book was published. Asian American upper-level administrators are still severely underrepresented in proportion to the Asian American faculty and student body in colleges and universities. But their number is likely to continue to increase. As more and more Asian Americans occupy upper-level managerial and administrative positions, the stereotype of Asian Americans as lacking leadership skills will change too.

**Asian Americans' High Academic Achievement**

The model minority image assumes that nearly all Asian American children are successful in school performance and that Asian cultural norms emphasizing children's education are mainly responsible for their educational success. The critics of the model minority thesis have challenged both of these assumptions (Endo, 1980; Hu, 1989; Kao, 1995; S. J. Lee, 1996a). As presented in Table 4.2 in chapter 4, Asian immigrants as a group have a much higher college completion rate than white Americans, with native-born Asian Americans outperforming whites in the rate of college degree attainment almost two times. Also, Asian American students outperform white students in GPA scores and the math part of the SAT by a significant margin. These statistics may have led many mainstream reporters and some researchers to overgeneralize Asian Americans' educational success. But the same table also shows that Vietnamese Americans, especially foreign-born Vietnamese, have a substantially lower level of education than white Americans. We note from Table 11.2 in chapter 11 that Laotians and Cambodians have much lower educational levels than Vietnamese. Native-born Chinese Americans have the highest rate of college degree attainment among all Asian ethnic groups, but even for native-born Chinese Americans, approximately one third did not have a college degree in 2000 (see Table 4.2). This shows we could embarrass a non-college-attending native-born Chinese American by asking him or her what college he or she graduated from.

The model minority image includes the assumption that the Asian immigrant parents' cultural norms emphasizing their children's education are mainly responsible for the high academic achievement of Asian American students. This assumption is problematic, although it has some element of truth. As we noted in chapter 2, contemporary Asian immigrants include a significant proportion of highly educated people who held professional and managerial occupations prior to immigration. Because of their parents' highly educated background, Asian American students have a huge advantage in school performance over other minority children and even white students. This background of Asian immigrants should be emphasized as the most significant determinant of Asian American students' academic success. Moreover, as discussed by Sakamoto and Xie in chapter 4, not only Asian immigrants, but also all other immigrants are self-selected in that those who are more mobility-oriented and achievement-oriented have taken the risk of immigrating to the United States, an alien country to them. This means that Asian immigrants tend to put more emphasis on their own social mobility and their children's academic success than those in their home countries with a similar socioeconomic background.

However, in addition to these class and self-selection effects, cultural factors contribute to Asian American students' academic success, and this is why I have indicated that the Asian cultural norms interpretation has some element of truth. People in other countries, especially Asian and Caribbean countries, tend to put more emphasis on education as the main channel for social mobility than people in the United States and Western European countries (Chung, 1991; Min, 1998; Ross-Sheriff, 1991; Vickerman, 2001; Waters, 1999; Wong, 1990; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). I have seen many students from Asian and Caribbean countries at Queens College working exceptionally hard to advance to a graduate school despite their
financial difficulty and language barrier, while many native-born white American students with excellent writing skills and high intellectual ability were attending college simply to get a college degree. The high achievement orientation of Asian and Caribbean students in the United States reflects the values in their home countries that stress the importance of education.

Because I am more familiar with the situation in South Korea, I like to introduce an episode that occurred in Korea. When I visited South Korea about 10 years ago, I had a chance to meet with a well-known painter in his early forties. He asked me about getting an admission to Queens College for a college education. I asked him why he needed a college education in the United States in his stage of life. He said that he had had all kinds of difficulty maintaining his career as a painter in South Korea because he had not obtained a college degree. As an example, he said, one day, a businessman selected one of his paintings for purchase at an exhibition and asked him from what fine arts college he had graduated from. When he told the businessman he had finished only high school, the man changed his mind and did not buy the painting. I believe this kind of episode is common in other Asian countries where children's education is accepted as a kind of religion. Korean and other Asian immigrants have transplanted the zeal for children's education to the United States. There are more than 100 after-school programs in the New York-New Jersey area; Korean children have little free time after school and on weekends because most attend one or more of these after-school programs.

No doubt, Asian immigrant parents' emphasis on their children's success in school and even the perception of Asian American children as model students have positively affected their academic performance. But they also had negative effects on their psychological well-being by putting too much pressure on them. Although academically successful children are well rewarded in the family and the community, the students who perform at below-average or even average levels are not rewarded and are sometimes neglected by their parents. A Korean college senior told me how her parents' low expectations of her performance affected her:

She (my older sister) was always good at school and went to a better high school and a better college than I. They (my parents) focused on her academic development and made me spend more time for housework and going on errands. Until my college sophomore year, their different expectations influenced my academic performance negatively. (Min, 1998, p. 70)

As discussed by Wong in chapter 6, many Chinese and Korean immigrant students who have a language barrier take SAT preparatory courses for more than one year and get an admission to a prestigious college or university. However, unable to catch up with other students, some of these students quit school. In extreme cases, under the weight of too much competition and pressure, some commit suicide (Wong, 1990).

Negative Effects of the Success Image on Asian Americans' Welfare and Other Minority Groups

Asian American critics of the model minority thesis have argued that the success image of Asian Americans is not only invalid but also detrimental to the welfare of Asian Americans (Crystal, 1989; Dakaki, 1989, pp. 478–482; Gould, 1988; Hurh & Kim, 1989; Osajima, 1988). The critics point out that because of the image as successful and problem free, Asian Americans have frequently been eliminated from affirmative action and other social service programs designed for disadvantaged minority groups. For example, the poverty rates of Chinese residents in New York Chinatown and Korean residents in Los Angeles Koreatown in 1990 were 25% and 26%, respectively (Ong & Umemoto, 2000, p. 238). Yet, those poor Chinese and Korean residents were not eligible for many welfare programs for which poor African Americans were eligible. The critics have also indicated that the success stories of Asian Americans stimulated anti-Asian sentiment and violence on college campuses.

Asian American social work and mental health professionals in particular have been concerned about the negative implications of the success image for various social services to Asian Americans (Crystal, 1989; Gould, 1988; B. L. Kim, 1973, 1978; Snowden & Cheung, 1990; Sue & McKinney, 1980). Because of their success image and their low level of dependency on formal social services, policymakers and non-Asian social workers tend to assume that Asian Americans generally do not have serious juvenile, elderly, and other family problems. However, Asian American social workers have argued that Asian Americans' underuse of social services does not imply that they have fewer social and psychological problems than the general population. In their view, Asian Americans' underuse of social services reflects their help-seeking behavior patterns rather than the level of their social and psychological well-being. As Sue and Morishima (1980, p. 25) indicated, moderately disturbed Asian Americans are reluctant to seek help from mental health services because of their cultural norms emphasizing shame and family integrity. Several studies reveal that Asian immigrants have a higher rate of stress and other mental health problems than white Americans (Guillermo, 1993; Hurh & Kim, 1990; Kuo, 1984; Ying, 1988).

Finally, Asian American scholars and activists have been critical of the model minority thesis partly because it negatively affects other minority groups as well (Chun, 1980; Crystal, 1989; Hurh & Kim, 1989; S. J. Lee, 1996a, 1996b; Osajima, 1988). By emphasizing the importance of cultural factors for the successful adjustment of Asian Americans, the success image in effect blames other less successful minority groups for their failure. It thus legitimates the openness of American society and leads people to fail to recognize social barriers encountered by other minority groups. As Hurh and Kim (1989, p. 530) comment,

The dominant group's stereotype of Asian Americans as a model minority also affects negatively other minorities. Since the Asian Americans' "success" may be considered by the dominant group as a proof of openness in the American opportunity structure, there is a constant danger that other less successful minorities could be regarded as "inferior" and/or "lazy." These less achieving minorities could be blamed for their own failure and becomes victims of scapegoating ("Japanese have made it. Why can't they?").

ETHNIC SOLIDARITY VERSUS CLASS CONFLICT

Social scientists who did research on the Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century emphasized ethnic solidarity or ethnic ties as an important aspect of Chinese and Japanese communities (Light, 1972; Miyamoto, 1939; Montero, 1975). However, since the late 1970s, researchers have increasingly focused on class division and conflict in Asian immigrant communities. As noted in chapter 2, Asian immigrants admitted between 1965 and 1975 included a high proportion of professionals, managers, and technicians, but their educational and occupational levels went down after 1975. As a result, most Asian immigrant communities involve class diversity. A great class diversity within each Asian immigrant population led to this shift in research focus.

As already pointed out in chapters 2 and 4, the Chinese immigrant community is more socioeconomically polarized than any other Asian immigrant community. While a higher proportion of Chinese immigrants than white Americans were engaged in professional occupations, a much higher proportion of them were also involved in low-level service occupations (Wong, 1995). This class polarization among Chinese immigrants had led a number of researchers to apply a class analysis to examining Chinese communities. In a 1975 study of class analysis, Light and Wong (1975) highlighted the class division and conflicts between Chinese business owners and coethnic employees in New York's Chinatown. Based on his study of the Chinese community in Toronto,

There are many other studies that have examined the class conflict between Chinese business owners and Chinese employees and the labor movement in Chinatown (Kwong, 1997; Mar, 1984; Ong, 1984; Sanders & Nee, 1987; Zhou & Nordquist, 2000). In their view, business owners in Chinatown—garment subcontractors and owners of Chinese restaurants in particular—survive or achieve economic mobility largely by exploiting Chinese employees. Chinese workers in Chinatown are vulnerable to exploitation partly because they have a severe language barrier and partly because many of them are illegal residents (Kwong, 1997). Sanders and Nee (1987) showed that whereas Chinese business owners in the San Francisco Chinese enclave achieved economic mobility, Chinese employees did not benefit from the enclave economy. This finding sharply conflicts with the enclave economy thesis that emphasizes the economic benefits of the enclave businesses to both business owners and their employees (Portes & Bach, 1985; Wilson & Portes, 1980; Zhou, 1992).

Since Light and Wong (1975) exposed picketing by Chinese workers against Chinese restaurants in New York’s Chinatown, a number of researchers/labor activists have continued to analyze labor movements among Chinese workers in Chinatowns in New York and other cities (Ching-Louie, 1992; Kwong, 1987, 1997; Lin, 1998; Lowe, 1992). Chinese immigrants employed in Chinese-owned garment factories and Chinese restaurants have been involved in labor organizing. Not only Chinese but also other Asian immigrant employees are subjected to exploitation—often by co-ethnic garment subcontractors, who, in turn, are subjected to exploitation by white manufacturers.

Social scientists such as Edna Bonacich and Paul Ong, along with Glenn Omatsu, a labor activist, have dedicated their professional energy to exposing the levels of labor exploitation involved in the garment industry (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000; Bonacich, Cheng, Chincilla, Hamilton, & Ong, 1994; Bonacich & Modell, 1980; Ong, Bonacich, & Cheng, 1994). In her editorial forum published in a special issue of *Amerasia Journal* focusing on “Asian American Labor,” Bonacich (1992) recommended that Asian American studies should adopt more working-class than middle-class issues. The exploitation of Asian immigrant garment workers has a gender implication because the vast majority of them are women (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000; Ching-Louie, 1992; Loo & Ong, 1982; Woo, 1989).

### ISSUES RELATED TO ASIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND WOMEN

Asian countries from which Asian immigrants have originated are more conservative in their family systems and women’s role and status than the United States. Thus, Asian immigrants experience major changes in the United States in their family system and women’s role. This section examines a number of issues related to Asian immigrant families and women.

#### Immigrant Women’s Increased Economic Role and Marital Conflicts

Traditionally, both the mainstream media and academic researchers took the cultural approach to Asian immigrant families in that they interpreted Asian immigrants’ family ties, transplanted from their home countries, as contributing to the economic adjustment (Kitano, 1969; Light, 1972). However, since the early 1980s, researchers have taken the structural approach to Asian immigrant (American) families, focusing on how Asian immigrants’ adaptation to the United States affected their family system. In her 1983 article, Glenn (1983) tried to show how the structural constraints encountered by Chinese American
strongly influenced the structure of Chinese American families in different historical periods. A number of researchers have recently used the structural approach to study Asian American families (Chow, 1995; Glenn & Parrenas, 1995; Kibria, 1993; Lim, 1997; Min, 1998, 2001; Wong, 1988).

The increase in Asian immigrant women's economic role serves as the major structural factor for changes in Asian immigrant families in general and marital relations in particular. Few Asian immigrants in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century were women, with few of those immigrant women participating in the labor market. By contrast, slightly more Asian women than men immigrated to the United States in the post-1965 era (Barringer, Gardner, & Levin, 1995, p. 102). More significantly, post-1965 Asian immigrant women, like other Third World immigrant women, actively participate in the labor market (Agbayani-Siewert & Revilla, 1995, p. 149; Barringer et al., 1995, p. 221; Foner, 1999; Min, 1998, pp. 37–38). For example, according to 1990 Census data, about 73% of Filipino immigrant women and 58% of all Asian immigrant women participated in the labor force, compared to 57% of the native-born female adults (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, pp. 106–121). Many Asian immigrant women immigrated through occupational preferences, often either as nurses or as housemaids, and later invited their marital partners from their home countries (I. S. Kim, 1981, p. 148; Ong & Azores, 1994; Tyner, 2000). Many other Asian women did not work in their home countries, but they need to work in the United States for economic survival (Khandelwal, 2002; Min, 1998). Asian immigrant women's gender role and family have experienced significant changes for economic adaptation.

The increased economic role of Asian immigrant wives and the concomitant decline in their husbands' economic power and social status have contributed to marital conflicts. In the 1970s, a few researchers described marital conflicts in Vietnamese refugee families created by the change in the traditional gender role orientation (Liu, Lamanna, & Mirata, 1975; Suzuki, 1979). In her book based on ethnographic research, Kibria (1993) showed how Vietnamese men's reduction in the economic role and patriarchal authority, along with their wives' concomitant increase in the economic role and marital power, contributed to marital and intergenerational conflicts in Vietnamese immigrant families. In the introduction to the book, she said, "Immigrant families must be studied in relation to the external structural conditions encountered by immigrants in the host society" (p. 22).

Using a similar ethnographic research method, I (Min, 1998, 2001) showed how the discrepancy between Korean immigrant women's increased economic role and persistence of their husbands' traditional patriarchal ideology caused marital conflicts and tensions. In particular, Korean immigrant husbands not helping with housework while their wives work full-time inside and outside the home has become an important source of marital conflicts. The following complaint by a 41-year-old Korean woman to her husband (both of them working in a family retail store) tells us the nature of the problem:

I work in the store as many hours as you do, and I play an even more important role in the family business than you. But you don't help me at home. It's never fair. My friends in Korea work full-time at home, but don't have to work outside the home. Did you bring me to this country for exploitation? (Min, 2001, p. 312)

In her book on the Indian community in New York, Khandelwal also discusses how Indian women's increased economic power and their husbands' low-status jobs have created marital problems. An Indian woman she interviewed commented,

My marital problem started early on. My husband needed the income I brought to the house but did not appreciate my working outside. He would oppose all my decisions.... I think he developed a complex about me. He knew I was smarter than him. I was liked [more]
even in our social circle. So he started avoiding going to parties with me. He would make some excuse, generally that he was busy at work. When he did go, we would almost always fight on returning home. (Khandelwal, 2002, p. 134)

**Domestic Violence**

Family violence is another major gender-related issue in Asian immigrant communities. Domestic violence is common to all American families (Straus & Gelles, 1990). But, for two reasons, we expect Asian immigrant families to suffer from a higher level of family violence than American families in general. First, due to more patriarchal traditions, physical violence against women and children is accepted in Asian countries to a greater extent than in the United States. Second, the decline in many Asian immigrant men's social status and economic role with a concomitant increase in Asian immigrant wives' economic role serve as a major stress-evoking factor for family violence.

There are many studies that discuss wife beating and wife abuse in Indian or South Asian immigrant families (Abraham, 1995, 2000; Bhattacherjee, 1992, 1997; Khandelwal, 2002; Segal, 1998). Frequent references to wife beating in the social science literature about Indian and South Asian immigrant families suggest that wife abuse may occur more frequently in South Asian immigrant families than in other Asian immigrant families. The frequent occurrence of domestic violence among Indian and South Asian immigrant families appears to be irrefutable with the fact that the Indian and South Asian immigrant group has the lowest divorce rate and lowest proportion of female-headed families among all Asian immigrant groups, who, as a group, enjoy more family stability than white Americans or other minority groups (see Table 8 in chapter 4). However, the two social phenomena—a low divorce rate and frequency of domestic violence—may be interrelated in that they are influenced by the same factor, a strong patriarchal tradition.

Domestic violence among South Asian immigrant families has received a great deal of scholarly attention partly because there are many feminist scholars and feminist activists in South Asian communities. The Indian/South Asian community has many women's organizations, probably more than any other Asian community (see J. Vaid, 1999–2000). They include several organizations established to provide protection and services to the women victims of domestic violence, such as Manavi, Sakhi, and ASHA.

The fact that domestic violence has not been frequently mentioned in the literature on other Asian immigrant groups does not necessarily mean that other Asian immigrant communities are immune from the problem of domestic violence. Few studies of Korean immigrants have mentioned domestic violence (Min, 1998; Song, 1997). But results of a survey study based on a nonrandom sample suggest that wife beating may be prevalent in the Korean immigrant community. Sixty percent of the 150 Korean respondents (married or divorced women) reported that they had been battered by their husband/partner (Song, 1997). This is an extremely high rate of wife battering, compared to results of studies of the U.S. population in general. For example, according to a survey of about 8,000 adult women conducted between 1995 and 1996, 22% of women reported having been physically assaulted by an intimate partner (Cherlin, 2002, p. 392).

**Intergenerational Mobility in Women's Education**

Under the impact of patriarchal customs, they put more emphasis on sons' education than on daughters' in Asian countries. Thus, there is a big gender gap in education there. As shown in Table 5.2, for all Asian immigrant groups but the Filipinos, there is a substantial gender gap in the rate of college degree attainment. Three East Asian groups ('Taiwanese, Japanese, and Koreans) in particular show extremely high levels of gender gap in the college graduation rate, probably because they have been strongly influenced by Confucian cultural traditions emphasizing gender hierarchy.
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<th></th>
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<td>23.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
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NOTE: Asian Americans are restricted to those who were 25-64 years old in 2000.
Asian immigrants who came to the United States during their childhood or adolescence completed their final schooling in the United States. Eliminating these 1.5-generation Asian immigrants should result in a bigger gender gap in the Asian immigrant population.

Looking at native-born Asian Americans’ educational level, however, we find that women have a slightly higher college graduation rate than men for most Asian groups. For some groups, the reversal in gender gap in education is substantial. For example, whereas 79% of foreign-born Taiwanese men completed a college education compared to 61% of their female counterparts, 87% of native-born Taiwanese women graduated from college compared to 76% of men. Native-born white American men have a slightly higher rate of college graduation (30.4%) than women (28.7%). But when we focus on the younger white adult population (the 25- to 34-year-old group), a higher proportion of women completed a college education than men. More women than men going to college is a recent trend in the United States. Because native-born Asian American adults, with the exception of Japanese Americans, consist mainly of young adults (25–34 years old), a slight reversal in gender gap in education among them is consistent with the contemporary American trend.

However, the reversal in gender gap in education among native-born Asian Americans is an interesting issue because their parents immigrated to the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s from Asian countries where women’s education and social role were not considered important. How is it possible for Asian Americans to completely eliminate gender gap in education over one generation? I can point out two factors to answer this question. First, since Asian immigrant parents see far more opportunity for women’s careers in the United States than in Asian countries, they put as much emphasis on their daughters’ education as on their sons’ education. Asian immigrant mothers in particular seem to put a great deal of emphasis on their daughters’ education here because they suffered gender discrimination in their home countries. Second, Asian immigrant parents’ use of the traditional sexual double standard, which imposes greater control on daughters than on sons, may have resulted in second-generation Asian women’s greater academic success. As Zhou and Bankston (1998, pp. 184–185) have suggested with regard to Vietnamese immigrant parents, Asian immigrant parents are less likely to allow their female youngsters than male youngsters to hang out outside at night. Thus, Asian American female youngsters are protected from the wild outside world associated with drugs, sex, and juvenile delinquencies to a greater extent than male youngsters. Also, because Asian American girls spend more time with their parents at home than boys do (Hong & Min, 1999), they are likely to be influenced to a greater extent by traditional values emphasizing work ethic, academic success, and respect for adults.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG SECOND-GENERATION ASIAN AMERICANS

Social scientists have conducted research on the children of post-1965 Asian immigrants since the late 1980s. Interestingly, most studies on second-generation Asian Americans, largely conducted by 1.5- and second-generation Asian Americans, have focused on issues directly or indirectly related to ethnic identity. Several books (Gibson, 1988; Kibria, 2002; S. J. Lee, 1996a; Min, 2002; Min & Kim, 1999) and a number of journal articles and book chapters (Alsaybar, 1999; Bacon, 1999; Espiritu, 1994; Hong & Min, 1999; Katrak, 2001; Kibria, 1997, 1999; Min & Kim, 2000; Park, 1999; Rudrappa, 2002; Thai, 1999) that focus on ethnic identity among second-generation Asian Americans have been published. Several articles cited above were published in a special issue (the No. 1 issue of 1999) of Amerasia Journal, focusing on ethnic identity among second-generation Asian Americans.

Many studies cited in the previous paragraph are based on personal interviews with and personal narratives by second-generation young Asian Americans (Alsaybar, 1999; Bacon, 1999).
Espiritu, 1994; Kibria, 1997, 1999; Min, 2002; Min & Kim, 1999, 2000; Park, 1999; Thai, 1999). Results of these studies reveal that during their childhood and adolescence, second-generation Asian Americans usually felt ashamed of their ethnic culture and nonwhite physical characteristics and "acted white"—pretended to be white and associated mainly with white students. As one Vietnamese interviewee in Thai's study said, "I thought I was one of the white girls. I tried dying my hair blonde once and I put on makeup to look like one of them" (Thai, 1999, p. 65). But in young adulthood they grew increasingly conscious their ethnic culture and nonwhite racial background and felt increasingly comfortable with them. Their recognition of the fact that as racial minority members, they are not fully accepted as American citizens is the crux of their ethnic and racial identities.

Although their premigrant ties, cultural traditions, and homeland become the major sources of ethnic identity for Asian immigrants, their experiences with prejudice and discrimination may be more important than their retention of ethnic culture for development of ethnic and racial identities for second-generation Asian Americans. Despite the positive image of Asian Americans, many Americans still tend to view them, regardless of the level of acculturation and generation, as foreigners, or aliens, who cannot be fully assimilated into American society (Kibria, 2002; Min, 2002; Min & Kim, 1999). Second-generation Asian Americans who are fluent in English are often embarrassed by such remarks as "What country are you from?" or "Go back to your country." In 1999, Wen Ho Lee, the then Los Alamos nuclear scientist of Chinese ancestry, was investigated as a suspected spy and detained for 9 months, although there was no evidence of his spying for China (Zia, 2001–2002). Despite his long residence in the United States as an American citizen, he was accused mainly because of his Chinese, or Asian, background. According to results of a survey conducted a few years before the Wen Ho Lee case, 42% of Americans believed that Chinese Americans are likely to pass secrets to China (Zia, 2001–2002, p. 6).

Third- and fourth-generation white Americans have an option to choose their ethnic identity or not because they are accepted as full American citizens (Alba, 1990; Waters, 1990). However, an ethnographic study of third- and fourth-generation Japanese and Chinese Americans shows that these multigeneration Asian Americans do not have the same option (Tuan, 1999). The study reveals that although most Japanese and Chinese respondents are thoroughly acculturated to American society, they are forced to accept their ethnic and racial identities by societal expectations.

Many other studies focusing on ethnic identity have taken the postmodernist or postcolonial approach (Bonus, 2000; Katrak, 2001; Revilla, 1998; Root, 1998; Rudrappa, 2002; San Juan, 1994; Shankar & Srikanth, 1998; Strobel, 1998). The authors of these studies are mostly anthropologists and other cultural study scholars of Filipino or Indian ancestry. Both the Philippines and the Indian subcontinents have a long history of Western colonization. Given the combination of cultural studies and the colonial history of their home countries, it is not surprising that the scholars of both Filipino and South Asian Americans have often used postcolonial or postmodernist theory.

Although the postcolonial thesis has marked historical studies of Filipino Americans, it has also inevitably influenced the limited social science studies dealing with Filipino Americans (Bonus, 2000; Espiritu, 1994, 1995; Pido, 1986; Root, 1998). As far as the ethnic identity issue is concerned, Maria Root's edited book *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity* (1998) deserves a special mention. It was a byproduct of the centennial anniversary of the 1896 revolution that challenged the 350-year Spanish rule of the Philippines. In the introduction to the book, the editor comments, "The pages of this book, filled with pride, sorrow, anger, and courage, analyze and interpret the far-reaching impact of the insidious traumas euphemistically called history on contemporary Filipino Americans" (p. xii).

South Asian postmodernist analysts stress not only South Asians' collective memory of colonial
India, but also three other factors as major sources of Indian ethnic or South Asian panethnic identities. They are the experiences of South Asians with racial discrimination, their transnational ties with homelands, and their perceptions of “authentic Indian culture” (Dave et al., 2000; Katrak, 2001; Radhakrishnan, 1994; Rudrappa, 2002; Shankar & Srikanth, 1998; Shukla, 1999-2000). The last point has significant gender implications. To resist a racial categorization in a racialized society, Indian community leaders, dominated by upper-class professional and religious male leaders, have presented “the figure of the chaste, nurturing, and self-sacrificing Indian women” as the center of the Indian family values and work ethic (Kurien, 1999, p. 651). However, 1.5- and second-generation South Asian women activists and academicians have contested the presentation of women’s subservience and other patriarchal values as the core of the “authentic Indian culture” (Abraham, 1995; Bhattacharjee, 1992, 1997; Katrak, 2001, 2002; Lynch, 1994; Maria, 1999/2000; Rudrappa, 2002). In reaction to a “one-sided emphasis” on patriarchal customs and values by South Asian immigrant community leaders, many younger-generation South Asian women have turned into feminist activists (DasGupta, 1998; Das DasGupta & Das Gupta, 1996; Gupta, 2002; Kukke & Shah, 1999/2000; Shah, 1999/2000; J. Vaid, 1999/2000; U. Vaid, 1999/2000).

PAN-ASIAN ETHNICITY AMONG YOUNGER-GENERATION ASIAN AMERICANS

A topic closely related to ethnic identity that has gained a great deal of popularity in Asian American studies over the past 13 years is pan-Asian ethnicity or solidarity. Espiritu (1992) defined pan-Asian American ethnicity as “the development of bridging institutions and solidarities among several ethnic and immigrant groups of Asian ancestry” (p. 14). A book that has influenced pan-Asian research probably most significantly is *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, by Omni and Winant (1986). In the book, they criticized culture-, class-, and nation-based theories of race relations and racial inequality and offered the racial formation theory. Their racial formation theory “emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories” (p. 4). Omni and Winant noted that the U.S. government’s racial policies, including the Census Bureau’s racial classification in the post-civil rights era, led members of various Asian ethnic groups to frame their common (pan-Asian) identity.

In a major work on pan-Asian ethnicity, Espiritu (1992) showed how different Asian groups in Los Angeles and other cities established coalitions to protect their common interests in politics, social services, and Asian American studies, and for physical security against anti-Asian violence. For example, in chapter 4 she described how various Asian American groups in Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities created pan-Asian social service agencies to effectively compete with other ethnico-racial minority groups for influence with funding agencies. In *Race and Politics* (1998), Saito showed how Chinese immigrants and U.S.-born Japanese Americans in San Gabriel Valley, California, made a political coalition to get Japanese or Chinese American candidates elected as city councilmen and councilwomen.

The pan-Asian studies cited above have focused on the pan-Asian coalitions building at the collective level for common interests. With a few exceptions (Kibria, 1997, 1999; Min & Kim, 2000), they have neglected to examine pan-Asian attachment among members of various Asian ethnic groups at the individual level. While political identity is central to pan-Asian coalitions, private identity figures prominently in panethnic attachment at the individual level. Asian Americans with activist orientations usually participate in pan-Asian politics. Pan-Asian politics are most salient on college campuses (Kibria, 1999), but even for second-generation Asian American college students, most do not take the activist stance and thus are not affiliated with any pan-Asian club (Kibria, 1999).

Because Asian American communities are marked by a great deal of diversity in language, religion, immigration history, and physical characteristics, they have difficulty maintaining panethnic attachment at the individual level in friendship, dating, and intermarriage. However, East Asians—Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans—and South Asians—Indians, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi—have significant similarities in culture, physical characteristics, and premigrant historical experiences within each cluster and significant differences between the two clusters. Thus, a number of studies have indicated that second-generation East and South Asian Americans maintain a moderate level of panethnic attachment within each cluster but rarely interact with each other in their private domain (Dave et al., 2000; Gupta, 1998; Kibria 1996, 1997; Min & Kim, 1999, 2000; Prashad, 1998; Shankar & Srikant, 1998).

For example, Kibria’s study (1997) reveals that while Chinese and Korean informants adopted their ethnic identity as their primary identity, they had a moderate level of pan-Asian identity based on their personal racial history. Significantly, the Chinese and Korean informants did not include all Asian-origin groups in the Asian category; they included largely East Asian Americans who they believed shared a common culture and race. Explaining why South Asian students at Brown University left the Asian club, Gupta (1998) made a comment on the differences in culture and physical characteristics between East and South Asians: “However, despite these inclusionary efforts, a segment of South Asian American community still feels that the substantial differences (of religion, appearance, and experiences), between South Asian Americans and other Asian Americans . . . are reasons to insist on the organization’s speaking as its own advocates” (p. 134). Several other second-generation South Asians have made similar comments to indicate the East and South Asian differences (Dave et al., 2000; Prashad, 1998).

ASIAN AMERICANS’ POSITIONING IN U.S. RACE RELATIONS

Traditional theories of race and ethnic relations in the United States had been developed before 1970, when African Americans composed the only significant minority group. As a result, they focus exclusively on white-black relations. However, the influx of new immigrants from Third World countries since 1965 has considerably complicated race relations in the United States. Many researchers have indicated that the traditional theories based on white-black, majority-minority relations do not capture the dynamics of race in contemporary America (Chang & Leong, 1994; Hune, 1995; Min, 1996; Omni & Winant, 1986; Rumbaut, 1994; Saito, 1993). At present, conflicts between minority groups are as serious as majority-minority conflicts (Chang & Leong, 1994; Johnson & Oliver, 1989; C. J. Kim, 2000; Min, 1996; Oliver & Johnson, 1984).

All minority groups but Asian Americans lag far behind white Americans in all three indicators of socioeconomic status (education, occupation, and income). For example, other minority groups have poverty rates about four times as high as white Americans, while their college degree attainment rates are less than half that of white Americans. But Asian Americans outrank white Americans in education and occupation. As previously discussed in chapter 4 and this chapter, there
are both interethnic and intraethnic class variations in Asian American communities. Nevertheless, most Asian Americans enjoy a high standard of living and high social status, whereas a large proportion of other minority members suffer from poverty.

Minority members in the United States emphasize their group categories in claims-makings in the post-civil rights era (Omni & Winant, 1986). Asian Americans need to take collective actions to protect their ethnic and/or pan-Asian interests. But it is also important for Asian Americans to do things to moderate racial inequality by helping other minority groups to fight against racism.

There are two important reasons why Asian Americans should help other minority groups improve their conditions. First, post-1965 Asian immigrants and their children need to help other racial minority groups fight against racism partly because they have immensely benefited from various civil rights laws established through the struggles by other minority groups, especially by African Americans, in the 1950s and 1960s. Once laws are passed to protect rights of minority groups, all minority groups in the United States, including Asian Americans, benefit from them. Second, they need to participate in cross-racial coalitions and support measures created to remedy racial inequality for social justice (C. J. Kim, 2000-2001, 2004). In this connection, it is important to remember that Asian Americans occupy much higher socioeconomic status than other minority groups, but not because they have overcome the same barriers encountered by other minority groups, as many white and even some minority conservatives have claimed. The selective migration of heavily middle- and upper middle-class Asians over the past 40 years is mainly responsible for contemporary Asian Americans' high socioeconomic status, whereas the legacy of slavery, conquest, colonization, or a selective migration of lower-class immigrants and illegal residents is the main cause of other minority groups' plight. White and even many minority conservatives have tried to use the success stories of Asian Americans to blame other disadvantaged minority groups for their socioeconomic problems (McGurn, 1991; Sowell, 1978). Therefore, when comparing Asian Americans with other minority groups, Asian American activists and scholars need to recognize the significant differences between the two groups in the context of contact with white Americans.

As previously noted, many Asian American scholars, educators, and activists have criticized the model minority thesis on the ground that because of the success image, policymakers have eliminated Asian Americans from affirmative action programs. But an important justification for affirmative action is that the legacy of past discrimination has negatively affected the socioeconomic conditions of minority members. Because the vast majority of contemporary Asian Americans are post-1965 immigrants and their children, the legacy-of-past-discrimination argument cannot be persuasively applied to Asian Americans. Moreover, multigeneration Asian Americans, whose grandparents and great-grandparents suffered formal discrimination at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, seem to have achieved a high level of social mobility (see Tables 4.3 and 4.6 in chapter 4).

Because of their high socioeconomic status, Asian Americans can lose more than gain in school admission and other areas if affirmative action is consistently applied. For these reasons, Asian American community and academic activists tend to take an ambivalent attitude toward affirmative action. The majority of Asian Americans seem to reject affirmative action because, like many other white Americans, they consider it a kind of “reverse discrimination.” Many others seem to accept it only when they gain against white Americans and reject it when they lose for the interest of other minority groups. Few Asian Americans seem to support affirmative action for racial justice, to help members of other disadvantaged minority groups move up the ladder.

The much-publicized 1994 Chinese parents’ lawsuit against San Francisco Unified School District to overturn a long-standing desegregation
court order is a typical case in which Asian Americans rejected affirmative action based on self-interest (Hing, 2001; Robles, 2004). Chinese students composed 43% of the students at Lowell, whereas Latino and African American students composed only 15%. But the Chinese American Democratic Committee vigorously pursued the lawsuit to help more Chinese students be admitted to the high school, despite the possibility of further reducing the proportion of disadvantaged minority students. Chinese parents may have had difficulty accepting the fact that the school board set a slightly higher bar for Chinese applicants than for white applicants. But they have lost more than gained from winning the lawsuit because it has contributed to a further reduction of the proportion of African American and Latino students. African American and Latino students' low academic performance is due mainly to the effects of past discrimination and their parents' lower-class background at present. Race-based preferential treatment may be the only way to offset the negative effects of past discrimination and family disadvantage to narrow the racial gap in education.

If Chinese Americans want to fight against African American communities to raise the number of their students in one high school beyond the 40% cap, how can they legally challenge the numerical dominance of white Americans in upper-managerial positions in private companies? The proponents of affirmative action have indicated that racial and ethnic diversity in school or at the workplace is good not only for minority members, but also for white students/workers. If Chinese students compose the majority of the students at Lowell High School and the proportion of African American and Latino students shrinks to less than 10%, white, Chinese, and other Asian American students would lose more than gain by losing racial diversity in the school (Hing, 2001).

Asian and African Americans can have conflict not only over affirmative action, but also over other issues. As widely publicized by the media and well documented by many scholarly publications, Korean immigrants' commercial activities in black neighborhoods have led to severe Korean-black conflicts in the form of boycotts of Korean stores, physical violence against Korean merchants, and destruction of Korean stores during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Results of Joyce's systematic survey of local news sources in 39 major American cities demonstrate the intensity of Korean-black conflicts (Joyce, 2003). He identified all "public confrontations" between Koreans and blacks that occurred in the 1980s and the early 1990s. He located 40 boycotts that occurred in 39 cities and 66 incidents of interracial violence that involved 16 cities.

Korean immigrants' language barrier and other disadvantages for employment in the general labor market have led them to establish labor-intensive small businesses, especially in lower-income black neighborhoods. As discussed in chapter 10, the higher crime rate and lower spending capacity of the residents in black neighborhoods discouraged white-owned corporations and independent white business owners from investing there. This has created small business vacuums in black neighborhoods, which have been filled by Koreans and other immigrants. Korean grocery and liquor storeowners in low-income black neighborhoods play a typical middleman minority role in that they distribute products made by white corporations to minority customers. Black Nationalists have organized boycotts of Korean stores in black neighborhoods because, from their points of view, outsiders' commercial activities in black neighborhoods involve exploitation. Some black community leaders have used boycotts and other anti-Korean activities as a means to enhance their power and influence in the black community. Like middleman minorities in other societies, Korean merchants in black neighborhoods, sandwiched between white corporations and minority customers, encountered boycotts and other forms of rejection. Because economic survival is the most basic thing for any group, Korean merchants have maintained strong solidarity in responding to blacks' boycotts of Korean stores or other forms of rejection of Korean merchants (see chapter 10). This is an interpretation of Korean-black conflicts that Korean immigrant sociologists, including
myself, have provided (H. C. Kim, 1999; H. Lee, 1999; Min, 1996).

However, other interpretations are possible, and protecting their economic interest should not be the only concern of Korean merchants in dealing with their business-related conflicts with the African American community. Blacks in low-income inner-city neighborhoods have to deal with many disadvantages deriving from institutional racism. They have to accept underfunded schools and more expensive housing facilities (for their quality), pay higher prices for groceries, and walk on narrower and more dangerous streets than residents in middle-class white neighborhoods. It is difficult for Korean immigrants or members of any other immigrant group to run businesses in lower-income black neighborhoods without understanding these problems. Korean immigrants point out that many Korean business owners and employees of Korean businesses in black neighborhoods had been killed in armed robberies. But many more innocent black residents have been victimized by street crimes in black neighborhoods. As noted in the previous paragraph, the high crime rate and low spending capacity of the residents in black neighborhoods have discouraged white corporations and white independent business owners from investing in black neighborhoods. This, in turn, has enabled many Korean immigrants to run businesses there without encountering strong competition.

There are too many liquor stores in low-income black neighborhoods for the population, which is a major source of the high crime rate there. After the 1992 Los Angeles riots, local African American political leaders demanded that those liquor stores destroyed during the riots be allowed to reopen only upon meeting certain important conditions. Working with liberal white and Latino leaders in the Los Angeles City Council, they succeeded in getting a new law passed that made it very difficult to reopen the destroyed liquor stores. Because Korean immigrants owned the vast majority of the destroyed liquor stores (Min, 1996, p. 92; Park, 1998, p. 51), the Korean immigrant community strongly opposed the effort to add additional conditions for reopening them. Turning to conservative Republican leaders in the California legislature, the Korean-American Grocers Association made an unsuccessful effort to get a state law passed to nullify the bylaw to be passed by the City Council (Park, 1998). However, liberal second-generation Korean community leaders in Los Angeles, such as Angela Oh, Bong Hwan Kim, and K. S. Park, supported the effort of African American community and political leaders to create a law that made it almost impossible to reopen the destroyed liquor stores in South Central Los Angeles. Moreover, the Korean Immigrant Workers Alliance, a liberal second-generation Korean organization in Los Angeles, helped Latino workers fight against Korean or Korean-American business owners to protect their labor interest (Park, 1998). These two examples illustrate how second-generation Korean Americans and Korean organizations have taken actions to support other minority groups even at the sacrifice of Korean business interests. Protecting ethnic and pan-Asian interests is important. But, when it collides with protecting the interest of other minority groups, consideration of social justice should be the main criterion for our social actions.

VIOLENT AND DISCRIMINATORY REACTIONS TO THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON SOUTH ASIANS

In times of war, the U.S. government and the general public have oftentimes tried to scapegoat and attack the enemy-like people within the United States. Following the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack, the U.S. government incarcerated approximately 120,000 innocent Japanese Americans, including many native-born citizens, in relocation camps, which led to their great financial losses and humiliation. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on four American airplanes by Al Qaeda, an international terrorist network organized by Osama Bin Laden, resulted in the deaths of more than 2,800 innocent men and women. Immediately
following the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. government initiated the war on terrorism. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians have suffered violent and discriminatory reactions by both the U.S. government and the general public. South Asians have been targets of physical violence, prejudice, and discrimination, partly because Muslims compose a large proportion of them and partly because they share physical characteristics with Arabs. Moreover, Sikhs in particular have been targets of physical violence because their turbans and beards make them look like Osama Bin Laden. A Sikh American in Arizona became the first victim of murder in the racist backlash after the September 11 terrorist attacks (Sikh Media Watch and Resource Task Force, 2001/2002).

The FBI found an increase of 1,600% in hate crimes against Muslims and people who are believed to be Muslims between 2000 and 2001, from 28 cases in 2000 to 481 in 2001 (Bozorgmehr & Bakalian, 2005). Hate crimes include hate speeches; vandalism; arson; assaults on individuals; harassments; incidents of prejudice in public schools, inside subways, and on the street; threatening phone calls; and murder. Airport and airline cases of discrimination against Middle Eastern–looking individuals have increased, causing humiliation and monetary damages due to lost airline connections. The cases of job discrimination against Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians have also risen phenomenally.

In October 2001, the U.S. Congress passed the USA Patriotic Act to ensure the security of the land and its citizens. The enforcement of the act has led to detentions and deportations of many innocent Muslim immigrants and American citizens of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African ancestries (Bozorgmehr & Bakalian, 2005; Yamamoto & Serrano, 2001–2002). The government initiatives after September 11 also included profiling men from Arab and/or Muslim countries and interrogating many of them. As the case of an Egyptian father of four U.S. citizens demonstrates (Yamamoto & Serrano, 2001–2002), the Immigration and Naturalization Service and other government agencies have often secretly detained Muslim immigrants. Moreover, the government initiatives that singled out Muslims of Middle Eastern and South Asian ancestries have further enflamed the suspicions and stereotyping of the general public against them.

As noted above, the discriminatory and violent reactions by the general public and the government to the September 11 attacks have led to violations of civil rights of and physical threats to many Muslims and others who look like them. The majority of native-born white Americans may feel that Muslim and other immigrants should be ready to sacrifice their freedom to some extent to ensure the security of American citizens. But, just as no white American's freedom and justice should be compromised at any time, no Muslim or other minority immigrant should be victimized in the name of national security. Throughout the hysterical reactions to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the mainstream U.S. media and the general public have kept quiet about the unjustifiable U.S. military attacks on Muslim countries and violations of civil rights of many Muslims and Muslim–like immigrants in the United States. All Asian Americans, regardless of their religious or national background, should join fighting against the racial profiling and abuse of Middle Eastern and South Asian immigrants in order to protect not only the victims' but also their own civil rights. For any Asian nationality or religious group can be the target of scapegoating in the case of political tensions between the United States and any Asian country. We remember not only the internment of Japanese American citizens during World War II, but also the Wen Ho Lee case in the late 1990s. In this sense, it is meaningful that Amerasia Journal devoted a double special issue (2001–2002) to discriminatory and violent reactions to the September 11 attacks.

NOTES

1. They include Harold Koh, the dean of Law School at Yale University; John Lie, the dean of the School of International Studies at University of California, Berkeley; and Shirley Hune, the provost at UCLA.
2. The California Civil Rights Initiative (California Ballot Proposition 209) that aimed to eliminate affirmative action programs in college admission, employment, and contracts was passed in 1996. According to results of a poll taken by the Los Angeles Times in March 1995, 54% of Asian American respondents supported it, compared to 71% of whites (see Hune, 1995, p. 31).

3. To enforce the Consent Decree's school desegregation plan, a settlement from the 1979 lawsuit filed by the NAACP, the San Francisco Unified School District used racial caps and different admission criteria for admission to Lowell High School. To get an admission to the high school, Chinese students, who were overrepresented in the school, were required to get a higher score than even white students, whereas African American and Latino students could get admission with the lowest scores. In 1994, three Chinese students who did not get admission to Lowell High School in the 1993 fall term filed a lawsuit, complaining that they were rejected from the school mainly because of the racial cap used against Chinese students. The plaintiffs attacked the "race- and ethnicity-based quota system," the heart of the affirmative action issue.

4. Large grocery chains do not want to invest in lower-income black neighborhoods because of higher crime rates and lower spending capacity there. For more detailed information, see chapter 10 of this book and Min (1996, pp. 67-68).

5. The bill stipulated that the store should be approved by the residents at a public hearing, that the owner should hire two security guards to lower crime around the store, that the store should close before sunset, and that the store should have a parking lot for customers.

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