Asian (American) Model Minorities

Nicholas D. Hartlep
Illinois State University

This first issue, in a multivolume special themed series dedicated to exploring the model minority stereotype, intends to broaden the discussion and increase the depth of scholarly study on the model minority stereotype of Asians. Instead of conceptualizing the stereotype in geographical or sociopolitical spaces, this special issue draws attention to the model minority stereotype in different countries and contexts (in the USA and in South Korea specifically).

Central to understanding the model minority stereotype is cultivating an understanding of the historical circumstances that led to its development. For instance, in the United States nativist movements against Asian immigrants, discriminatory Alien Land laws, anti-miscegenation laws barring interracial relations, and the lawful internment of Japanese Americans are simple historical reminders that without contextual and nuanced facts, the model minority stereotype renders oppression, exclusion, xenophobia, and imperialism invisible.

The model minority stereotype is not simply a U.S.-based phenomenon; it even exists in Asian countries such as China[1] and Korea.[2] The model minority myth has been imported by Canadians[3]

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[1] Gao Fang, "What it Means to Be a Model Minority: Voices of Ethnic Koreans in Northeast China." *Asian Ethnicity* 9, no. 1 (2008): 55-67; Gao Fang, "Challenges of Discourses on 'Model Minority' and 'South Korean Wind' for Ethnic Koreans' Schooling in Northeast China." *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 3, no. 2 (2009): 119-130; Gao Fang, *Becoming a Model Minority: Schooling Experiences of Ethnic Koreans in China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

[2] Hyup Choi, "Asian Americans as a Model Minority: Myth or Reality." *Review of International and Area Studies* 11, no. 4 (2002): 127-143; Jiwoo Ha. "A Striking Similarity: The Stereotyping of Asian Americans in the U.S. Media and the Stereotyping of Foreigners in the Korean Media." *Situations: Cultural Studies in the Asian Context* 5 (2011): 102-107. Retrieved from http://web.yonsei.ac.kr/bk21/situations5/Jiwoo_ha.pdf

[3] Gordon Pon, "Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse Into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education." *Canadian Social Work Review* 17, no. 2 (2000): 277-291.

and has also been documented in countries from Germany[4] to New Zealand.[5]

Consequently, this special themed issue of *Studies on Asia* draws attention to a series of important causes and consequences of the increasing ubiquity of the model minority stereotype. The first article, authored by Kannan, considers the stereotype as it applies to post-9/11 vigilante violence in the U.S. In her analysis, Kannan argues that deracialized representations of Indian-Americans in popular media obscure the structural causes of these violent crimes. Historicizing the model minority trope as it applies to Indian diasporas in the U.S., Kannan uses Sara Ahmed's critical emotion studies theory to explore the production of fear, anger, and hatred toward the "ArabMuslim-SouthAsian body" post-9/11. Within this framework, she considers the murder of Indian-American Sunando Sen and the media reporting that followed it.

The second article shares the racialized experiences of Korean newcomer youth through the lens of critical race theory. Choi and Lim discuss the Korean newcomers' inter/intra-racial relationships in U.S. schools and the detrimental effect of the model minority myth on their racial experiences. This article presents

[4] Sylvia Van Ziegart, "Re-appropriating the Model Minority Stereotype: Reflections on the 2000 Organization of Chinese Americans Convention," in *Global Spaces of Chinese Culture: Diasporic Chinese Communities in the United States and Germany,* ed. Sylvia Van Ziegart (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21-58.

[5] Rita Chi‑Ying Chung and Frank H. Walkey, "From Undesirable Immigrant to Model Minority: The Success Story of Chinese in New Zealand." *Immigrants & Minorities* 7, no. 3 (1988): 308-313; Grant Hannis, "From Yellow Peril to Model Minority? A Comparative Analysis of a Newspaper's Depiction of the Chinese in New Zealand at the 20th and 21st Centuries." *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 19 (2009): 85-98; Manying Ip and David Pang, "New Zealand Chinese Identity: Sojourners, Model Minority and Multiple Identities," in *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations,* ed. Manying Ip and David Pang (Victoria, New Zealand: Victoria University Press, 2005), 174-190.

disturbing realities of how the myth is affected, internalized, and reproduced by the Asian newcomer students, and of how this process creates the vicious circle of racism within U.S. school culture. The authors propose to extend the construct of critical race theory to the intersectionality of multiple aspects defining the experiences of immigrants of color, and they call for more research on the reproduction of the myth through the expanded critical race theory.

In the third article, Park and Martinez contribute useful information to the limited research on native and foreign-born Asian American perceptions of and adherence to the model minority stereotype. They argue that much of the existing research has focused on the perceptions of whites. Their conclusions strengthen our understanding of the relationship between model minority complicity amongst Asian Americans and their attitudes toward other racial minorities, as well as individualistic explanations for inequality and a belief in meritocracy. Furthermore, this research is important to college educators/administrators in the U.S. who navigate interracial dynamics in the classroom and on campus.

I authored the fourth article. In "Modern Em(body)ments of the Model Minority in South Korea" I share my analysis of how Korean culture perpetuates the stereotype through a specific, troubling practice: Korean women, responding to idealized Western beauty standards, internalize racism by undergoing body enhancement surgery. I conclude that the culture of South Korea is perpetuating the Asian model minority stereotype. K-pop artists and Korean athletes like Yuna Kim (a world class figure skater) are buying into white standards of beauty. Making matters worse, they are spreading it further through their music videos, promotional materials, and product advertisements.

After reading all of the articles in this special issue on the model minority stereotype, I found myself asking the following questions: So what do we do now? How do we push back against the model minority stereotype?

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I think that asking better questions is one answer. Frankly, another possible answer is to continue to write more. I encourage readers of this special issue to consider submitting their own article for consideration for inclusion in the second issue of this multivolume themed series. Prospective authors ought to consider the questions above when writing their pieces. Knowledge *per se* is not the key to dismantling the myth of Asian success. Rather, understanding *what the lock is*—which allows for the key to be effectively utilized—is most important in anti-model minority stereotype scholarship. I am especially interested in publishing articles that explore the model minority stereotype in Asian and non-North American contexts. This next set of papers will be published in an October 2014 issue.

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Nicholas D. Hartlep
Studies on Asia Guest Editor

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