

Do All Asians Look Alike?: Asian Canadians as Model Minorities

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There are rich Chinese and Koreans in Los Angeles. But many others are doing menial jobs for low pay. For the most part, the Chinese you see in California are not the typical ones you see in Vancouver (Canada), the ones who are buying up the big houses.

*Edward Yang, a dual U.S.-Canadian citizen,
on the income disparities between Asian
Americans and Asian Canadians*

Introduction

This quotation distinguishing well-off Asians in Vancouver, BC from the apparent greater income discrepancies in Los Angeles, CA comes from an August 2013 *Vancouver Sun* newspaper article that featured a story on “The Asian experience in America: New study outlines some of the successes and challenges faced in Canada and the U.S.”¹. The piece discussed the controversial findings from the 2012 Pew Center Report “The Rise of Asian Americans” and attempted to apply its results to the Canadian context. Despite the report’s widespread criticism amongst various Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) groups, scholars, and activists in the U.S. as being one-

¹ Douglas Todd, “The Asian experience in America: New study outlines some of the successes and challenges faced in Canada and the U.S.,” *The Vancouver Sun*, August 24, 2013.

dimensional portrayals of AAPIs as model minorities with the highest income and educational attainment among racial groups, the *Vancouver Sun* author nevertheless characterized Asian Canadians as similarly successful. In fact, citing statistics that proportionately three times as many ethnic Asians reside in Canada than south of the border (i.e. almost 15% of Canadians have Asian ancestry compared to just 5.8% of Americans), the article implies that the Pew study has even greater implications for Canada – that their larger representation and their unbridled achievements have a profound effect on everything from housing prices and unemployment rates to university admissions.

That Asian Canadians are feigned to be such ‘model minorities’ in public discourse whose issues have warranted such underwhelming national attention unsurprisingly speaks to a collective paucity of available model minority literature in a country that is commonly regarded as one of the most accepting, tolerant, and multicultural societies in the world. As ostensibly uber-successful, affluent, and high-achieving, Asians in Canada are ascribed the same inherent high status as their U.S. counterparts.

This article examines how the model minority myth influences Canada and the insidious effects it has on Asian Canadians. It will discuss the concept’s colonization outside US borders and its continued reproduction in Canada that sways public policy and discourse. By tracing its historical development and examining two pivotal examples of how this issue has received national attention, it will provide a better understanding of how these racial assumptions remain as destructive and oppressive to Asian Canadians as they do to other Asians worldwide. Analyzing the parallels and divergences with the U.S. situation will help to further complicate our current assumptions and parochial understandings of how the model minority myth operates across nations.

The Legacy of the Model Minority Myth

As a growing body of literature demonstrates, perhaps the most challenging ideological problem afflicting Asian American and Pacific Islanders is the notion of the ‘model minority myth’, the erroneous assumption that AAPIs are a monolithic group who are highly successful in all of their endeavors (including education, work, and in political and social pursuits). Although an in-depth analysis of the concept will not be provided here², it is useful to review some of its central tenets before discussing its applicability to Canada. The idea that Asian Americans (the original term used did not include Pacific Islanders) have been a successful minority in the US through a combination of hard work and determination emerged as a popular depiction in the mid-1960s.³ After a century of negative stereotypes as “unassimilable foreigners” and “Yellow Peril,” this group found themselves placed in an increasingly positive light by the mainstream media who depicted Asian Americans (AAs) as a model minority group that had triumphed over racial obstacles to reach economic, educational, and professional success – the quintessential American Dream. The image was widely embraced and was perpetuated

² For a more detailed discussion of the model minority stereotype in the U.S., see Rosalind Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (2008); Karen K. Indelas and Echo Blackwell, *Racial Attitudes and Asian Pacific Americans: Demystifying the Model Minority* (2006); Samuel D. Museus, Dina C. Maramba, and Robert T. Teranishi, *The Misrepresented Minority: New Insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and the Implications for Higher Education* (2013); Stacey J. Lee, *Unraveling the “Model Minority” Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* (2009); Guofang Li and Lihshing Wang, *Model Minority Myth Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Demystifying Asian American Educational Experiences* (2008).

³ Ki-Taek Chun, “The Myth of Asian American Success and its Educational Ramifications,” in *The Asian American Educational Experience: A Source Book for Teachers and Students*, ed. Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Y. Nishida (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 95-112.

through media as well as the social science literature.⁴ Since the 1960s, the model minority stereotype has not only survived, but has arguably flourished. High profile politicians, prominent commentators, and news media continue to praise AAs for their educational and economic success.⁵ As a result, the model minority image of AAs has been firmly ensconced in the American public's mind, and, despite much criticism and protest, is still prevalent today.

The model minority myth is based on statistical data on the overall educational, economic, and social achievements of AAs, though this concept has been criticized as overly simplistic, masking extreme inequalities within and between different Asian American groups, as well as diverting public attention from the existence of discrimination.⁶ In fact, opponents of this stereotype argue that contrary to widespread opinion, AAs face an ever-growing list of problems: growing poor and working poor populations, considerable numbers of students who fail in school, and the adversities and family issues that small business owners who are unsuccessful in American society must cope with.⁷ The myth is also critiqued as a politically divisive tool that pits AAs against other minority groups.⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rosalind Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

⁶ Deborah Woo, *Glass Ceilings and Asian Americans: The New Face of Workplace Barriers* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2008).

⁷ Glenn Omatsu, "The Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation," in *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jean Y-W S. Wu and Thomas C. Chen, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 298-330.

⁸ Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism*; Ki-Taek Chun, "The Myth of Asian American Success and its Educational Ramifications," in *The Asian American Educational Experience: A Source Book for Teachers and Students*, ed. Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Y. Nishida (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 95-112.

The stereotype also contains contradictory themes. On the one hand, AAs are supposed to embody traits of determination and resourcefulness that allows them to transcend racial barriers and structural inequalities. On the other, they are also viewed as polite conformists who are politically and socially passive. That is, AAs are presumed to be good, law-abiding minorities who know their place within society and do not challenge their place in it. This is particularly evident when comparing the historical pitting of AAs against African Americans and the emergence of Black Power in the 1960s that conflated Black representations with activism in the Civil Rights Movement while concomitantly characterizing AAs as political wallflowers.

With this construction of the AA subject as universally successful, how does it affect their educational experiences? AAs have traditionally seen education as a way to reduce the effects of racism and racial discrimination and to achieve personal success.⁹ This view helped to increase the number of AAs in schools and is used by AA researchers to explain their large numbers.¹⁰ Ongoing racial discrimination has continued to motivate scholars to problematize the structural and institutional barriers this group faces in educational settings.

AAs have long been viewed as well-behaved, diligent, high achievers who attain success despite socio-economic and language obstacles; in effect, they are ‘whiz kids’ – super achievers with soaring GPAs who spend hours on homework. They also make narrow

⁹ Tae Chang, "Factors Affecting Asian American Students Choosing a College Major," in *Asian American Education: Acculturation, Literacy Development, and Learning*, ed. Clara C. Park (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2007), pp. 197-213.

¹⁰ Shirley Hune and K. Chan, "Educating Asian Pacific Americans: Struggles in Progress," in *Asian Americans: Experiences and Perspectives*, ed. Timothy Fong and Larry Shinagawa (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), pp. 141-168.

academic choices specializing in mathematics, sciences and engineering.¹¹ Of course, many AA students do not fit this image.

The model minority stereotype often causes more harm than good. If students fail to live up to the stereotype, teachers may become frustrated and blame the students for their poor performance. This may lead students to internalize these stereotypes, feel unworthy, and begin to think that they are unintelligent.¹² Commonly, many AA children feel pressured to achieve academic excellence or risk losing face or shame the family. Other minority groups who are viewed as less successful are held responsible for their failures, and this pits AAs against other racial minority groups. Those who accept the stereotype therefore underestimate the discrimination that AAs face, since it is seen as easily conquered through determination and perseverance.

However, the model minority myth causes other problems in education. As Hune¹³ has noted, in higher education AAs are both highly visible and invisible. They are highly visible in their record numbers on US campuses when flaunted as the model minority, while simultaneously they are frequently invisible in campus policies and programs as well as in administrative positions. Their over-representation at many highly-selective college campuses have antagonized and angered many non-Asian students who blame them for 'stealing' all the spots at highly-selective schools.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Russell L. Young, "Becoming American: Coping Strategies of Asian Pacific American Children," in *Struggling to be Heard: The Unmet Needs of Asian Pacific American Children*, ed. Valerie O. Pang and Li-Rong L. Cheng (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 61-73.

¹³ Shirley Hune, *Asian Pacific American Women in Higher Education: Claiming Visibility and Voice* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, Program on the Status and Education of Women, 1998).

But this blame is nothing new. AAs have long been criticized for taking over US higher education for a littany of reasons. However, a 2008 National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE) report argues that Asian American and Pacific Islander students parallel comparable increases that other student populations have experienced and that the AAPI student population is concentrated in only a small percentage of institutions, giving the fake impression of high enrollment in post-secondary education overall.

Furthermore, this same report also dispels the myth that AAPIs are concentrated only in highly selective four-year universities. In actuality, AAPI students are evenly distributed in two-year and four-year institutions, with most attending public institutions. AAPIs have a wide array of standardized test scores, which allow different levels of eligibility and competitiveness in selective admissions. AAPI enrollment in public two-year community colleges is increasing at a faster rate than their enrollment in four-year colleges, and AAPI community college enrollment is growing fastest in the Midwest and the South.¹⁴

A couple of other issues in higher education are currently emerging, though these issues are what are known as ‘hidden indicators’—issues that usually lack sufficient data to warrant attention or resources—that have significant implications for policy, practice, and future research.¹⁵ The first is the effect of selective college admissions and affirmative action. AAs and Pacific Islanders have historically been excluded from discourse on affirmative action, equal opportunity, and college admissions. They are seen as the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders – Facts, not Fiction: Setting the Record Straight* (New York: College Board, 2008).

biggest benefactors of schools without affirmative action. This allows AAPIs to “become ‘racial mascots’ to camouflage an agenda that, if presented by Whites on their own behalf, would look too much like self-interest”.¹⁶ In other words, they are positioned as middlemen in the cost-benefit analysis of wins and losses in the affirmative action debate.

Secondly, cultural competency and mentorship is also an emerging issue. In short, there is a dearth of attention paid to the issues related to AAPI faculty, staff, and administrators (what Hune again calls an “invisible” existence). With such a large focus on AAPI college students in higher education, there is little questioning of the AAPI presence in other parts of the academic community. Sadly, few faculty and administrators come from this racial background and therefore do not take part in important decision-making processes. For instance, AAPI women are the most underrepresented group of college presidents with only 13 female presidents in the all of the US compared to 768 White women, 87 African American women, and 58 Hispanic women in 2004.¹⁷ It is crucial that AAPI role models and mentors exist at every level of a student’s school experience (from elementary to post-secondary education) in order to properly train and encourage the next generation of leaders.

As the burgeoning critical literature in Asian American Studies attests, the model minority myth has had a long and far-reaching effect since its inception in the late 1960s. William Petersen’s 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article had unknowingly launched an international cascade of racist Asian depictions that reached far beyond American borders and has adversely framed the Asian diaspora worldwide with damaging stereotypes and

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁷ Ibid.

misrepresentations. The U.S.-born concept started gaining traction through popular American publications, including *Time* magazine and *Newsweek*. By the 1990s, it became so entrenched within mainstream media that the depictions of AAs and Pacific Islanders became inextricably linked to notions of over-achieving, overly successful, and ultimately prosperous racialized people.¹⁸

Asian Canadians as Model Minorities

With Canada's close relationship to the United States through trade, interrelated economies, and mass media, it is no surprise that the concept of the model minority has traversed north of the border. As the U.S.'s largest trading partner and due to its close geographic proximity, Canada has held a longstanding inter-connectedness with its southern neighbors since the formation of the country. Hence, the notion of the model minority myth as a colonizing force dominating discussions about Asians in Canada is not a surprising one.

Though contestation of the model minority concept in the US has been consistent since its inception in the 1960s, awareness and resistance to it in Canada has historically been more muted and limited. The absence of research and literature on the topic has been a surprising mainstay in Canadian academia¹⁹, despite highly transformative immigration patterns which have resulted in huge

¹⁸ Chiung H. Chen, "Outwhiting the Whites?: An Examination of the Persistence of Asian American Model Minority Discourse," in *Race, Gender, Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers*, ed. Rebecca A. Lind (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2004), pp. 146-153; Guofang Li and Lihshing Wang, *Model Minority Myth Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Demystifying Asian American Educational Experiences* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008).

¹⁹ Gordon Pon, "Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education," *Canadian Social Work Review* 17, no. 2 (2000): pp. 277-291; Kyo Maclear, "The Myth of the Model Minority: Re-thinking the Education of Asian-Canadians," *Our Schools/Our Selves* (1994): pp. 54-76.

waves of Asian migrants moving and settling in the nation post-1967 (when the 1967 *Immigration Act* admitted immigrants based on a points system). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, major newspapers and magazines including the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Fortune Magazine*, and *Toronto Life* continued to depict Asian Canadians as model minorities, including the use of such expressions as “math whizzes,” “academic giants,” and being “extremely wealthy.”²⁰ The issue had continued, for the most part, to escape widespread recognition as being problematic, and generally continued down a linear path that excluded its importance in the national spotlight, save for two major critical incidents: the 1979 “Campus Giveaway” and the 2010 “Too Asian?” article.

“Campus Giveaway” – The Beginning of an Asian Canadian Movement?

There are two pivotal historic moments that elevated the awareness of Canadian model minority issues. The first is a 1979 feature on a television program called ‘W5’, which reports on the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘why’, and ‘when’ (hence ‘W5’) of issues that are deemed of importance to citizens across the country. Aired by the Canadian Television Network (CTV), the show still airs its weekly current affairs broadcast from coast to coast (it has been running for 48 years). On September 30, 1979, the program televised a report called ‘Campus Giveaway’, which accused foreign students from China of occupying a large number of Canadian university spots. Among the many misguided claims, the foreign students shown selectively displayed Chinese faces as representing all foreign students and gave distorted statistics to demonize Chinese students as taking over “Canadian” institutions (a claim similar to historic discourses of

²⁰ Pon, “Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education.”

‘yellow peril’ and ‘Asian invasion’).²¹ The show attempted to affirm that the federal government was subsidizing their education and disavowing (white) “Canadian” students the opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions. Further, their footage at a University of Toronto campus that claimed to show that almost all of the students in a pharmacy class were Chinese international students was simply incorrect; every one of the students were (Chinese) Canadian citizens since no foreign students were allowed admission to the pharmacy program. This shoddy journalism with such disparaging accusations of the displacement of white students from the program was irrefutably unsubstantiated and clearly racist.

Amidst the slew of controversy and outrage came a rallying point for Asian Canadians: student groups wrote protest letters and were joined by vocal Chinese and Asian community leaders to denounce CTV’s inaccurate and racist portrayals. Within the next few months, momentum built and vocal demonstrations became more prominent. Of significance was the support and coalition building across various racial and ethnic groups eager to challenge the discernably offensive television programming. Such growing opposition across Canada became a watershed moment in the nation’s history – its own civil rights moment which signaled a racial awakening and a call to action. Eventually, under mounting pressure, CTV ultimately issued an apology and fired the producer responsible for the transgressions.

Though *W5* had caused much racial tension and incensed anti-racist activists, the national campaign resulted in the creation of the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC), a Toronto-based organization that to this day continues to be champions of the equality of all Chinese Canadians and other minority groups across

²¹ Hayne Wai, *Vancouver Chinatown 1960-1980: A Community Perspective* (Seattle, WA: Canadian Studies Center, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, 1998).

the country. The activism of the Chinese Canadians, along with other groups, produced a strong sense of collective organization and racial identity and proved to be the most politically significant event in Chinese Canadian history.²²

‘Too Asian?’

The second pivotal moment in Canadian history to spark national consciousness about the model minority myth occurred over three decades later. In the fall of 2010, Canada’s leading national magazine *Maclean’s* published the highly-controversial article ‘Too Asian?’, which explored how the nation’s top universities are being inundated with an invasion of industrious Asian students and their proclivity for studying and eschewing socializing. The article demonized these students for their reputation as being high-achieving hard workers who, unlike their white peers, had a penchant for academic success at the cost of fraternizing and partying.²³ The authors, Stephanie Findlay and Nicholas Kohler²⁴, focused on apparent racial imbalances on Canadian campuses and the predicaments of privileged ‘white’ private school students who shunned applying to particular Canadian schools for their “reputation of being Asian”.²⁵

²² Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain: the Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver, BC: New Star Books, 1983).

²³ Richard J. Gilmour, Davina Bhandar, Jeet Heer, and Michael C.K. Ma, *‘Too Asian?’: Racism, Privilege, and Post-secondary Education* (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2012).

²⁴ Stephanie Findlay and Nicholas Köhler, “Too Asian?,” *Maclean’s*, November 10, 2010.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

There were numerous erroneous assumptions and stereotypes that were perpetuated in the ‘Too Asian?’ article. True to the tenets of the model minority stereotype, the ‘Asians’ referred to were of East Asian descent (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) and not South, Southeast, or other Asian nationalities. They were not differentiated based on generational status, citizenship, or as international students. The homogenizing effect therefore implied that all Asians are monolithic, share similar characteristics, and lack diversity. Of course, in over 150 years of Asian migration to Canada, there is a multiplicity of immigration patterns and types of Asian diasporic settlers who have come to this country under different immigration laws and restrictions. The notion of common characteristics as a collective racial group makes little sense, as each Asian ethnic group is highly affected by gender, race, and class in addition to their transnational forays and engagement in global economies.

If casting all Asian Canadians as a uniform group was not repugnant enough, the authors proceeded to categorize all white students as party-loving youth who seemingly would only attend universities in which they can fraternize and socialize unfettered by the presence of Asian students who would not facilitate their penchants for having a good time. Using upper-middle and upper class youth as the norm frames exclusionary discourses of who is really “Canadian” and who is not.²⁶

The controversy received nationwide attention, sparked heated debates, and became a catalyst to re-examine the racist depictions of Asian Canadians in the mainstream public arena. These types of repeated misrepresentations in mass media throughout the past three decades have reified them as wealthy, math geniuses, and academic

²⁶ Jeet Heer, “Introduction,” in *Too Asian?: Racism, Privilege, and Post-secondary Education*, ed. Richard J. Gilmour, Davina Bhandar, Jeet Heer, and Michael C.K. Ma (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2012).

superstars.²⁷

Since 2010, cities from across Canada, including Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Markham, and Richmond Hill, all successfully passed motions denouncing the piece and called for the magazine to make an official apology. However, despite much negative publicity, Rogers Communications – the parent company of *Maclean's* magazine – has consistently refused to apologize for the xenophobic article and claims that it was never offensive from the outset. Online debates continued to occur, with several conservative journalists and pundits openly supporting the magazine.²⁸ Even though community groups, academics, and politicians spoke out against the discriminatory piece, Rogers would only revise the content, make clarifications about the article, and modify the online title. The title was changed from ‘Too Asian?’ to ‘The enrollment controversy: Worries that efforts in the US to limit enrollment of Asian students in top universities may migrate to Canada’.

Both the ‘Campus Giveaway’ and ‘Too Asian?’ incidents, despite being separated historically by 31 years (1979 to 2010), exhibit a remarkable series of commonalities characterized by model minority stereotypes and rooted in xenophobic and anti-Asian racist sentiment. As ‘perpetual foreigners’ whose demarcated outsider status has excluded them from inclusion in the nation state, Asian Canadians have always been a marginalized and invisible community

²⁷ Maclear, “The Myth of the Model Minority: Re-thinking the Education of Asian-Canadians.”; Pon, “Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education.”

²⁸ Jeet Heer, “Too Brazen: Maclean’s Margaret Wente and the Canadian Media’s Inarticulacy About Race,” *The Walrus*, November 24, 2010.

in Canadian society.²⁹ In the next section, I will explore how this exclusion compares to the AA and Pacific Islanders south of the border and how the model minority concept is differentiated in Canada.

Do All Asians Look Alike? Cross-border Similarities and Differences of the Model Minority Myth

The remainder of this article will focus on Canada-US comparisons in how the model minority myth affects Asian Canadians versus AAPIs. As we have seen, there are many similarities in how the notion gets played out in both countries: Asians are mostly viewed as smart, ultra-successful, highly educated, wealthy, and highly accomplished; they are nerdy, quiet, shy and obedient. The educational, economic, and social achievements of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Asian Canadians have been lauded as the ideal to which all minorities should strive, regardless of social-economic status, immigration history, length of time in North America, or personal background. As proof of the results of hard work, determination, and strong work ethic, the Asian subject is seen as the ultimate success story that should be emulated by all racial minority groups. Taken as a whole, even though the intent and meaning of the model minority myth originated in the US, the construct ultimately retains most of the same meanings and has little variation in Canada, particularly as we have seen with the *WS* and 'Too Asian?' examples.

However, I argue that there are four main lenses we can use to analyze AAPI and Asian Canadian model minority usage. The first involves disparities in state integration strategies between the U.S.

²⁹ Peter S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada*. (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1989).

and Canada. In other words, American *melting pot* ideology – the longstanding national strategy which posits that immigrants to the US must “melt together” to form a common culture – has been the official approach to assimilate members of the minority group into the dominant mainstream.³⁰ Under this approach, the traditional cultural heritages that minorities have are deliberately supposed to be supplanted (or “melted away”) in favor of prevailing American values and customs.

This contrasts greatly with Canadian multiculturalism, an official state policy that guarantees that all citizens can keep their identities, cherish their cultural ancestries, and maintain a sense of belonging. Canada’s policy of multiculturalism promotes the preservation of one’s cultural heritage concomitantly with full participation and acceptance in the larger society.³¹ The rationale behind such an approach is that by feeling accepted to the nation-state that Canadians are, in turn, more receptive to diverse cultures, thereby boosting racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural awareness.

As a pioneer in multiculturalism policy and the first country in the world to adopt this approach, Canada has since 1971 been a leader and a model for nations to emulate for decades. Though not

³⁰ Jeffrey Reitz and Raymond Breton, *The Illusion of Difference: Realities of Ethnicity in Canada and the United States* (Toronto, ON: C.D. Howe Institute, 1994); Joseph F. Healey, *Diversity and Society: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, 2011/2012 Update* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).

³¹ Kimberly A. Noels and John W. Berry, "Acculturation in Canada," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, ed. David Sam and John W. Berry (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 274-293; Carl E. James, "Multicultural and Anti-racism Education in Canada," *Race, Gender & Class* 2, no. 3 (1995): pp. 31-48; Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, "Canadian Multiculturalism: Global Anxieties and Local Debates," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2010): pp. 43-72.

without its own problems and controversies³², it has been hailed as arguably the most successful integrationist strategy of immigrants to a new country.³³ Without the pressures to assimilate and renounce their culture, their individual rights are protected and they are free to identify with their specific ethnic/racial group if they so choose. Not surprisingly, then, Canada has become a major destination of choice for immigrants who seek to escape the anxieties and difficulties of moving to less tolerant countries. Accordingly, as Derouin³⁴ points out, there is evidence to show that Asians from a variety of ethnic ancestries feel a strong attachment to Canada.

Although these two distinct strategies seem to have separate consequences for ethnic and racial minorities who choose to migrate to the US and Canada, when it comes to the model minority myth, both countries suffer very similar outcomes. Asians on both sides of the border are racially framed and stereotyped in such parallel sinister ways that they are almost indistinguishable from each other in their treatment by the dominant group. Despite highly divergent state integration policies, the fact that there are such analogous stereotypes of Asian Americans/Canadians is a disturbing and troublesome finding. The implication is that the model minority concept can

³² Jodey Derouin, "Asians and Multiculturalism in Canada's Three Major Cities: Some Evidence from the Ethnic Diversity Survey," in *Our Diverse Cities*, ed. Caroline Andrew (Ottawa, ON: Metropolis, 2004), pp. 58-62; Mirella Stroink and Richard Lalonde, "Bicultural Identity Conflict in Second-Generation Asian Canadians," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 149, no. 1 (2009): pp. 44-65; Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, "Canadian Multiculturalism: Global Anxieties and Local Debates," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2010): pp. 43-72.

³³ Will Kymlicka, "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies," *International Social Science Journal* 61, no. 199 (2010): pp. 97-112.

³⁴ Derouin, "Asians and Multiculturalism in Canada's Three Major Cities: Some Evidence from the Ethnic Diversity Survey."

traverse national boundaries and still have the same destructive effects; this provides little comfort in the supposed benefits of multiculturalism and its perceived advantages over a melting pot ideology. With the highly globalized and integrated world in which we live, mass media, social media, and technology are often used as vehicles to spread these ideas. If neither multiculturalism nor melting pot strategies are effective in minimizing the harms of the stereotype, then are there other national approaches left that can prevent this myth from encroaching upon state borders?

The second way we can analyze the US-Canada model minority usage involves immigration policies and migration patterns. It is not surprising that the ways in which America and Canada act as receiving countries for immigrants differ, as their immigration policies used to accept foreign nationals is highly dependent upon state desires for economic growth, monetary capital, highly trained and educated workers, and the creation of jobs by both transnational and independent companies. For instance, until February 2014, Canada's Investor Class Immigrant Program became a convenient way for immigrants to be accepted into the country, since under the program applicants with a net worth at least \$1.6 million (all figures in Canadian dollars) could lend \$800,000 for five years in return for permanent residency. This underpricing compared favorably to other countries, which usually required more capital investing and had greater restrictions to obtain a legal pathway to citizenship.³⁵ The relative low costs of the program over the years has resulted in it becoming one of the most successful immigration programs in the world and created a backlog of tens of thousands of applicants.³⁶

³⁵ Don J. DeVoretz, "The Economics of Immigrant Citizenship Ascension," in *International Handbook on the Economics of Migration* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), pp. 470-488.

³⁶ Iain Marlow, "Chinese Investors' Immigration Cases Fail," *The Globe and Mail*, June 28, 2014.

Such success has subsequently led to a national public backlash from many concerned about an easy pathway to Canadian permanent residency; the criticism resulted in the federal government cancelling the Investor Class program by the summer of 2014.³⁷

One of the consequences of investor-class immigration over the past few years was its elevated numbers of mainland Chinese and other Asian applicants³⁸, which to qualify under the program, necessitated their wealthy backgrounds and access to high levels of financial capital (transnationals Aihwa Ong³⁹ famously calls “flexible citizens”). Of course, it is unsurprising then that their presence in Canada as affluent one-percenters helped to reify Asian immigrants’ status as model minorities, displaying levels of economic prosperity relatively few Canadians could attain. Under such an immigration program, the encouragement of the wealthy Asian migrant helped to further entrench stereotypes of model minorities in Canada. Therefore, instead of seeing a diversity of Asian immigrants come to Canada from numerous socio-economic backgrounds (including from family reunification and refugee-class programs), the affluent become the de facto face of many of the migrants from the Pacific Rim.

The third type of analysis we can apply to our understanding of how the model minority myth involves Canada’s lack of

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Shuguang Wang and Lucia Lo, “Chinese Immigrants in Canada: Their Changing Composition and Economic Performance,” *International Migration* 43, no. 3 (2005): pp. 35-71; David Ley, “Does Transnationalism Trump Immigrant Integration? Evidence from Canada’s Links with East Asia,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, no. 6 (2013): pp. 921-938.

³⁹ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

disaggregated, ethnic-specific data collection about Asian Canadians and Asian international students. Because only in rare cases do federal and provincial bodies collect this specific type of data, researchers have few datasets in which they can determine race, ethnicity, gender, class, generational status, religious affiliation, sexuality, and levels of disability for people of Asian descent. For instance, as a general rule, universities and colleges in Canada do not collect or request their student applicants' particular racial/ethnic background, how long their families have been in the country, or other social variables. This shortcoming obfuscates concrete and empirical ways in which to debunk the model minority myth, making it extremely difficult for instance to change public policy, create/reinforce/fund student affairs initiatives, and generally make the case that Asian Canadians have unique sets of needs that require attention and social supports. In short, despite numerically being a major presence within Canada, Asians in Canada are consigned to the peripheries of research and scholarly attention, especially in the field of education.⁴⁰

We can contrast this greatly with the United States, which have a long and impressive history of researchers who often use specific disaggregated datasets to study their Asian American and Pacific Islander subjects. Many scholars have deconstructed, analyzed, and tested the model minority myth in great detail, using data focused on particular AAPI groups and not just general AAPI groups. Samuel Museus,⁴¹ Robert Teranishi,⁴² Stacey Lee,⁴³ and

⁴⁰ Roland S. Coloma. "Theorizing Asian Canada, Reframing Differences," in *Reconsidering Canadian Curriculum Studies: Provoking Historical, Present, and Future Perspectives*, ed. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and Jennifer Rottman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 119-135.

⁴¹ Samuel Museus, Dina C. Maramba, and Robert T. Teranishi, ed., *The Misrepresented Minority: New Insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and the Implications for Higher Education* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013).

Nicholas Hartlep⁴⁴ are but a few of the leading scholars in recent years exposing and demystifying the stereotype. This work is even more impressive given the sheer volume of robust scholarship that they have produced even within the last half a decade alone using solid data collection, literature reviews, and strong theoretical/conceptual analyses to thoroughly debunk the myth. Sadly, access to similar levels of empirical evidence and critical scholarship on the topic north of the border has severely limited the effectiveness of countering—both in academic circles as well as in public discourse (e.g. *WSJ* and *Maclean's*)—the destructive nature of the concept and the propagation of its harmful messages.

Finally, we can analyze model minority myth usage in both countries through the lens of the politics of resistance. Resistance to oppression can take on many forms, and the different routes that have been appropriated throughout both nations' histories have embodied myriad practices and formations. Perhaps one of the most pivotal distinctions in dealing with racial problems has been the establishment and proliferation of US ethnic and Asian American Studies departments in higher education institutions nationwide. Born out of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the Asian American Movement helped spark the institutionalization of academic departments and programs specifically targeted to deal with

⁴² Robert T. Teranishi, *Asians in the Ivory Tower: Dilemmas of Racial Inequality in American Higher Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

⁴³ Stacey J. Lee, *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996, 2009).

⁴⁴ Nicholas D. Hartlep, *The Model Minority Stereotype: Demystifying Asian American Success* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013). Nicholas D. Hartlep, *The Model Minority Stereotype Reader: Critical and Challenging Readings for the 21st Century* (San Diego, CA: Cognella Publishing, 2014).

Asian American and Pacific Islander history and experiences.⁴⁵ They precipitated generations of students and graduates with the racial consciousness to challenge their own oppression, provide racial and ethnic solidarity, and to deconstruct and critique anti-Asian sentiments.⁴⁶

In contrast, similar Asian Canadian Studies departments have failed to materialize in the same manner as in the US. The only institutionalized departments in Canada to offer minor degree programs for undergraduate students have been Simon Fraser University's Asia-Canada Program and the more recent additions (within the last two years) of Asian Canadian Studies minors at the University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto. These minors have helped to address racial issues, and while commendable and important, their presence can be viewed as 'late'⁴⁷ and do not yet match the sheer breadth and comprehensiveness of their American counterparts. The lack of such vital programs in Canada help to constrain widespread social activism and scholarship during nationwide struggles against racism and serve to limit coalition-building amongst various racial and ethnic minority groups.⁴⁸ Of course, this is not to claim that resistance to racism need be only

⁴⁵ Sucheng Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies: The Politics of Teaching and Program Building* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Glenn Omatsu, "'The Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation," in *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jean Y-W S. Wu and Thomas C. Chen, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 298-330.

⁴⁶ Keith Osajima, "Replenishing the Ranks: Raising Critical Consciousness Among Asian Americans," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): pp. 59-83.

⁴⁷ Christopher Lee, "The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies," *Amerasia* 33, no. 2 (2007): pp. 1-18.

⁴⁸ Donald Goellnicht, "Outside the U.S. Frame: Asian Canadian Perspectives," *Concentric: Literacy & Cultural Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): pp. 83-100.

institutionalized as a formal program of study at a university or college, but their absence in the Canadian context prohibits certain collective and targeted ways to address these issues.

It is important to note, however, that Canadian politics of resistance vis-à-vis the model minority myth historically did not necessarily originate from critiques of the stereotype itself but rather of broader racial/ethnic relations within the country, including the state policy of multiculturalism and related integration strategies. Indeed, there has been and continues to be a coterie of Asian Canadian scholars in numerous academic fields who question the racial formation⁴⁹ and racializations of immigrant, naturalized, and domestically-born Asians in Canada that does not necessarily specify a targeted model minority construct. In fact, we should also be mindful then not to decree the US as the normative standard that defines activism and resistance, while rendering Asian Canadians as apolitical and lacking opposition to oppressive forces. Grassroots struggles across the nation have for decades continued to work to disrupt state and social power.

Perhaps, with this analysis in mind, it is more precise to refer to the model minority myth or stereotype as more of a 'model minority discourse', which more accurately reflects the social, historical, and political breadth of model minority dynamics in Canada and the US.⁵⁰ This terminology better captures the contradictory and fluid nature of the issue while being more encompassing and inclusive than a 'myth' or 'stereotype'.

The model minority concept has long been an insidious construct that has perpetuated harmful stereotypes on AAPIs since the 1960s. Its expansion through mass media, popular culture, and

⁴⁹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵⁰ Pon, "Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education."

social media throughout the decades has spilled into Canada to essentially reproduce similar outcomes for Asian Canadians. As a result, Asians in Canada suffer particular forms of racialization which essentialize them as over-achieving, widely successful, and highly intelligent perpetual foreigners. The stereotype's export from the US has demonstrated that the notion's migration north of the 49th parallel can be seen as what I refer to as a 'conceptual colonialism' that dominates discussions about Asians in Canada, thereby leaving behind a trail of collateral damage in which Canadians are still attempting to address and redress.

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