

Asian Model Minorities Outside of the United States: New Perspectives and New Frontiers

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Introduction

There are three articles in this second issue of *Studies on Asia* that provide new perspectives and present new frontiers for interrogating the model minority stereotype. This scholarly work is incredibly important, especially since the myth does not appear to be going away.¹

The first article, by Helen Kaibara, is entitled “The Transpacific Origins of the ‘Model Minority’ Myth of Japanese Americans.” It traces efforts of Japanese elite organizations on both sides of the Pacific Ocean to mold early twentieth-century Japanese immigrants to the United States into a “model minority” through a series of reform campaigns. As Japanese on the American West coast faced myriad forms of discrimination and ill treatment, organizations run by Japanese elites sought to mitigate the situation by entreating workers to conform to American normative cultural practices and refrain from engaging in vice. In this way, these organizations sought to minimize the Otherness of Japanese in America, and to present them as a group exemplifying values of the dominant Christian society.

Also significant for Kaibara is the international climate in which this construction of Japanese identity took place. As Japan became increasingly more powerful in Asia and tried to position itself

¹ Nicholas D. Hartlep, *The Model Minority Stereotype Reader: Critical and Challenging Readings for the 21st Century* (San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2014).

as an equal alongside Western powers, the discrimination of its people abroad could not be tolerated. The unofficial methods of trying to end the poor treatment of Japanese in the United States worked in conjunction with official diplomatic efforts. In sum, Japanese elites believed that the presentation of Japanese abroad could be a key to elevating the image of Japan in the eyes of the world.

In the second article, Nobuko Adachi investigates the social, economic, and political issues that are associated with the Japanese Brazilian “Model Minority.” Adachi begins by depicting how the domestic and global political situation contributed to Japanese immigration to Brazil. She examines the reasons why a majority of these Japanese migrants moved into hinterlands of Brazil to create Japanese-style farm villages rather than assimilating into mainstream Brazilian society. Because of their economic success in the isolated hinterlands, without direct competition and confrontation with local Brazilians, Japanese Brazilians came to be seen as a successful “Model Minority.”

But Adachi then shows that things were not so perfect, and that second and third generation Japanese Brazilians do indeed experience problems and discrimination. Although Japanese Brazilians had maintained their Japanese language and many of the traditions of agrarian Japan—while largely accommodating successfully to a Brazilian agrarian lifestyle—by the 1970s many Japanese Brazilians tried to assimilate and urbanize. Young Japanese Brazilians started leaving the villages to receive Brazilian higher education, and some actually did contribute to establishment of a fledging middle class. Adachi argues this social change caused tensions with both traditional Japanese farmers and an increasingly nationalistic Brazilian government. The story of the Japanese Brazilians, then, is in many ways an example of where global and local racial tensions might be heading, as an increasingly

internationalizing economy develops in the twenty-first century. As such, this account has both theoretical and practical importance.

The third article, Rob Ho's "Do All Asians Look Alike?: Asian Canadians as Model Minorities," extends our thoughts on the model minority stereotype by further developing our current understanding of the concept's continued impact in North America. Through a comparison of Canada and the U.S. and their separate historical model minority trajectories, Ho examines its detrimental effects on Asian Canadians. Ho traces the stereotype's conceptual colonization outside U.S. borders and its reproduction in Canada where it influences public policy and discourse.

By investigating two pivotal examples of how this issue has received national attention, Ho provides a better comprehension of how these racial assumptions remain as damaging and disparaging to Asian Canadians as they do to other Asians globally. Analyzing the parallels and divergences with the U.S. situation promotes the reframing of our current assumptions of how the model minority myth functions across nation states. Ho's analysis is an important one, especially given that it builds upon and updates Pon's seminal article "Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education."

This is the last installment of this special issue that has pushed back against the model minority stereotype of Asians. I appreciate the contributors' diverse perspectives and am thankful to Dr. Riaz for granting me the opportunity to guest-edit *Studies on Asia* for the purpose of interrogating this deleterious myth.

References

Hartlep, Nicholas Daniel (Ed.). *The Model Minority Stereotype Reader: Critical and Challenging Readings for the 21st Century*. San Diego, CA: Cognella, 2014.

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