

Impact on Chinese Immigrants by Assimilation Education in America

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to reviewed studies on the assimilation in U.S.'s education systems, specifically how assimilation and assimilation policies have impacted immigrant students' academic trajectory. This article begins with the review for assimilation education in America. Teachers in America have different academic expectations and interaction with students of different races. Some affirmative action policies are based on the concept of racial discrimination, which may lead to a kind of structural discrimination. Assimilation is on the opposite side from diversity which aims the stability of society. Therefore, national identity is involved to cultivate the sense for immigrants. The differences between Chinese and American classroom models and languages may result in the problem of Chinese immigrant students' culture identity in the United States. Occupation as a final product of education can be used to judge the quality of assimilation education. Some figures are used to indicates the influence of this type of education intuitively.

Keywords: *Academic Expectation, Model Minority Myth, Structural Discrimination, Culture Identity, Class Mode, Language Barriers, Diversity, National Sense, Immigrant Generation, Mainstream, Racism, Career Barrier*

1. INTRODUCTION

Assimilation slows down the speed of this society to be more advanced and diverse. Specifically, assimilation also exist in formal schooling and education particularly in the U.S. According to data collected by U.S. Department of Education, racial or ethnic minority students are the demographic majority of students attending public schools in the United States and they comprise the large majority of urban school students [1]. Research on the education for minority and immigrant students indicated there is discrepancy in the educational content compared to mainstream content. The purpose of such discrepancy is to standardize the behavior and national identity which will be mentioned in following sessions. Despite recent improvement of measures to address educational inequality, the gap in educational performance across racial groups persists [2]. Therefore, this study aimed to reviewed studies on the assimilation in U.S.'s education systems, specifically how assimilation and assimilation policies have impacted immigrant students' academic trajectory.

2. ASSIMILATION IN THE CLASSROOMS

2.1. TEACHERS VARIED ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

Teachers in the United States have different attitudes towards immigrants, which are considered minority groups as of those native students. Teachers' different attitudes toward immigrant students might cause negative impacts on immigrant's self-awareness and learning efforts. Farkas [3] mentioned that possible racist attitudes of teachers would affect the learning efforts of immigrant students. Research showed that teachers' judgments on students' academic performances often varied according to their own and students' racial identity. Specifically, White teachers generally believe that white students perform better than immigrant students, so their expectations for immigrant students will be relatively lower than white students, which leads to their lack of encouragement for immigrant students and then further leads to the lower level of learning efforts and lower school achievements of immigrant students.

On the contrary, minority teachers are more tolerant of minority students' behavior than white teachers. Minority students usually feel more supportive from minority teachers and will thus devote more energy and efforts into their study [3]. Therefore, the teachers' varied attitude towards minority students is likely to be related to minority students' academic performance.

2.2. TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND MODEL MINORITY MYTH

Cherng [4] investigated the effects of teacher-student relationships on academic achievements of students and they found that as the adults who accompany young students for a long time during their intensive years at school, teachers not only impart students specific knowledge and skills, but also play as role models and spiritual mentors. A strong teacher-student relationship can provide students with significant emotional help and thus enhance their interests in learning and boost classroom engagement. However, these teacher-students relationships vary across student's ethnic groups. Chang and Gordon [5] indicated that the long-existing Model Minority myth may affect teachers' views and interactions with students. That is, teachers usually would tend to form a stereotype that minority students are independent and diligent, so they don't need as much academic help or spiritual encouragement from teachers [6] as of white peers. Therefore, compared with white students, teachers would usually end up not interacting much with minority students, and their relationship with minority students is relatively weaker. Since a strong teacher-student relationship can be of great help to the development of students overall, the teacher-student relationship has become a social capital that cannot and should not be ignored. However, immigrant students do not equally enjoy this type of social capital as much as compared with majority groups and thus their academic achievements would be impacted in the long run.

2.3. STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Although the United States has introduced affirmative action policies and programs in the field of education [7], which aimed to combat discrimination against minority groups and promote diversity. However, Goldstein [8] pointed out that these education policies may lead to structural discrimination. Many anti-discrimination education policies are based on the concept of racial discrimination, which might cause minorities' lack of confidence in their own abilities and thus further reducing their efforts in academic learning. For instance, a minority named Ji had been rejected by Harvard University when he was mistaken for a white man. However, after investigation that revealed he was actually a black man, the administration of Harvard University immediately apologized to him and accepted

him [9]. This so-called anti-discrimination education policy indeed increases the proportion of minorities entering top-tier universities by reducing the academic requirements for minorities [10], which seems to encourage diversity and contribute to the realization of equal educational opportunities for minorities and the majority. However, this education policy itself reflects racial discrimination that believing minorities have worse intelligence than non-minorities. Only by lowering the academic standards of schools can minorities enter the same school as the major groups. Consequently, people in the American mainstream society and even minorities themselves may all form a stereotype that minorities are indeed inferior to non-minorities, which is not conducive to the cultivation of minority groups' self-confidence. In addition, since the requirements for minorities are relatively low compared with mainstream groups under the Affirmative Action, minority people are considered more likely to reduce their efforts in academic learning. This may result in the academic performance of minorities being lower than that of mainstream groups and further strengthen the existing stereotype that minorities are inferior to mainstream groups.

3. NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ASSIMILATION EDUCATION IN AMERICA

3.1. DIVERSITY PROBLEM

America is a typical ethnically integrated country, which means diversity of population is one of the most predominant characteristics. However, there are problems related to diversity as well that could even threaten the stability of a country. For example, Syria and Afghanistan are very diverse places, but their diversity has yielded to violence and conflict rather than creativity and resilience [11].

National identity is defined by political scientist Rupert Emerson as "a body of people who feel that they are a nation". It can be divided into two sides: individual and emotional. Specifically, the former means that a person's identity is a part of one country, and the latter one points that the attitudes and emotion toward the country one belongs to. Both represent that national identity is a crucial index to appraise how strong the relation between country and its citizens. A central path to defending and securing the value of one's group is to strengthen one's identification with that group [12].

Therefore, national identity is considered as a factor needed when there is threat brought by the diversity. The double-edged characteristic of national identity often refers to its capacity to define who is a member of the community but also who is a foreigner [13]. In short, the double-edged characteristic of national identity means national identity has functions of being inclusive and also being exclusive, and this usually depends on whether

people are originally born in the country or not. Immigrants are in this complex situation that they usually have to face the difficulty of being excluded from the native group. Thus, they have to be assimilated in order to be treated fairly by the majority of people. However, people often resist being homogenized into mainstream cultures, particularly if they were not born into these cultures. Diversity exists in every nation, and national identity is always a powerful tool to ensure the stability of one country. Enforcing national identity of immigrants seems to be necessary to ensure they can be included rather than excluded. In this case, assimilation education is an effective way to cultivate national identity for immigrants.

3.2. INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS

The immigrant children first face these complexities in educational system since primary school where the national identity of the receiving country is forced upon the child through the language of schooling, as well as the curriculum. The language of school and the school curriculum usually failed to take into account the immigrants' experiences [14]. The education provided by receiving nation is always based on the mainstream culture, therefore, the cultural conflicts or religious conflicts are inevitable to some extent. However, under the mainstream influence and exclusive functions by national identity, immigrants are more likely to find a moderate way to native population, which is through assimilation. Research showed that many immigrants, and in particular the children of immigrants, often actively seek assimilation. Such assimilation often implies a rejection of their culture of origin [14]. Specifically, for these immigrant children who receive education, a negative emotion would be likely to be generated from the schooling: the repulsion from their origin national identity and enthusiasm for the new existing national identity. Saenz also indicated that students with a foreign background, often perform an aggressive attitude for cultural identity, which is associated with "social reject" they received. Immigrants are certainly different from the native population, and they have different cultural ideologies since they are in closed contact with two cultures. School and the society are often advocating diversity. However, it is still possible that teachers and other students still do not understand the values of these foreign culture and religion which could end up discrimination against immigrants.

3.3. GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Due to the differences between western and eastern education system, today's world suffers from a significant population migration movement, indicating people's desire for overseas educational opportunities. The new Asians and Latins, on the other hand, were both young

families with many members to eager to leave their poor or war-torn countries [15].

America first generation immigrants are defined as the immigrants born in foreign countries but come to America at a later time. These people are the population who often desire for the American education and assimilation the most. While first-generation immigrants receive little or no education in the United States, second-generation immigrants receive almost all their education in the United States [16]. Therefore, the assimilation level for first and second generations are often different. For example, immigrant students who entered U.S. education system received relatively less assimilation education than their second generation who were born in the U.S. and started receiving assimilation via education early on. To conclude, the second generation often tend to behave more passionate towards to the native national identity and exclude their origin culture as they lacked contact with their origins and received more assimilation education.

4. DISTINCT EDUCATIONAL MODELS AND CULTURE IDENTITY

4.1. CLASS MODE

Typical class mode in China emphasizes order and overall balance [17]. Students are often expected to abide by classroom discipline and obey the arrangement of teachers, instead of overemphasizing their own ideas. This is in line with Chinese traditional culture, which focuses more on collectivism rather than individualism [17]. In contrast, American culture highlights personal personalities and heartens self-expression [18]. Thus, American classrooms tend to encourage students to actively participate in the classroom activities and freely express their views, even if these behaviors are not conducive to classroom discipline [18]. In this case, Chinese immigrant students in the America will realize the obvious difference between the current American classroom model and the Chinese classroom model they once accepted, and clearly feel the conflict between the American culture and the Chinese culture [19]. It is challenging for them to have a sense of cultural identity and adapt to the American classroom environment.

Moreover, since American culture and classrooms pays more attention to students' personality and self-expression, many of American school rules also praise this classroom model. For example, many American schools list classroom participation as one of the important performance evaluation criteria [20]. This means that if Chinese immigrant students want to obtain higher academic achievements, they have to accept American classroom culture and try to adapt to this classroom model [21]. Under the influence of the mainstream culture of the United States, which is completely opposite to Chinese culture, Chinese

immigrant students are likely to have a doubt about their own culture, and even conflict with the original Chinese culture and blindly worship foreign American culture.

4.2. LANGUAGE BARRIES

Language barriers can be divided into two types: actual barrier, and perceived barrier. The actual barrier is easy to understand. Chinese immigrants are not native English speakers after all, so their oral English may not be as fluent as compared to native English speakers. Therefore, in classroom communication, which is a complete English speaking environment, Chinese immigrants are likely to have difficulty expressing their opinions and feel uncomfortable [22].

Additionally, American students may subconsciously perceive that all Chinese immigrant students will have language barriers and thus isolate Chinese immigrant students [23]. Although Chinese immigrant students are not native English speakers, their oral English fluency is likely to be at similar proficiency level to that of native speakers. However, American students may have a presupposition in their mind that their oral English is not so fluent when seeing Chinese faces in the classrooms. Therefore, American students are likely to try to avoid communicating with Chinese students and prefer to communicate with their own people. As a result, Chinese immigrant students feel isolated and lack a sense of identity and happiness.

In order to overcome the language barrier, whether actual or perceived barriers, and integrate into the mainstream American society as much as possible, Chinese immigrant students may take the initiative to speak English and deliberately avoid speaking Chinese [23]. Gradually, they might actually consider that those American cultures and languages are the better, and Chinese and Chinese cultures are not desirable, which is not conducive to them to establish cultural confidence in their own culture and treat both cultures reasonably.

5. INFLUENCES ON FUTURE OCCUPATIONS

Education immigrants received from their country of origin may be less relevant to the productive opportunities they received from the United States than their native-born Americans received [24]. Immigrants' original educational outcome is less evident in America, which means assimilation education is more crucial since it can influence and even change people's future career decisions. In other words, the existence of assimilation education is related to the occupation the immigrants are likely to choose in the future. Specifically, assimilation schooling or education as a derived product of the mainstream's tools to alter foreign ideology directly indicates racism is one of the reasons why assimilation education is vital to immigrants.

Even though assimilation education is based on racism, it is not absolutely negative. The greater social distance between Chinese immigrants and the dominant White European groups served as the foundation for the nature and extent of the social and career barriers experienced by the former group [25]. Chinese immigrants especially need to be supported to assimilate to the American mainstream, not only for their desire. It also generates more benefits for their long-term career considerations. In some cases, assimilation can be seen as a tool to intensify the relationship between the native mainstream American and Chinese immigrants for their jobs. If there are no similarities between these two kinds of people, the possibility of conflict happening will soar. According to Leong and Tang's review, several reasons caused that and Chinese is a sensitive group of people that can easily receive prejudice or discrimination. As a result, assimilation education is demanded in some cases.

A survey done by Migration Policy Institute indicated that one-fourth of Chinese-born men's jobs are related to modern information and technology. This report showed that a specific population works in relatively advanced departments in America, and it gave a positive comment on the outcome of American assimilation education. Besides, Chinese immigrants are a particular population that they have unique and extraordinary characteristics. Leong and Grand observed that the stereotype of the efficient, hard-working, and productive Asian American has even had a lasting impact in the workplace. Therefore, it shows that Chinese immigrants also keep some qualities that are different from the mainstream American population.

Generally, assimilation education is an essentially important factor that resulted in the future career. Chinese immigrants face many difficulties when they need to work in different career, but assimilation is a precaution that can prevent the conflict to some extent. Also, there are pieces of evidence that showed assimilation is necessary. Assimilation is not completely implanted in Chinese immigrant's minds; they keep something special from the country of origin.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has explored the influences of assimilation education on immigrant students in America. The current condition of assimilation education in America has been firstly clarified, and assimilation education in classrooms including varied academic expectations of teachers and teacher-student relationships as well as structural discrimination has been secondly analyzed. In addition, this paper has investigated national identity of immigrants in America society, and has discussed the effect of distinct education models such as class modes and languages to the culture identity of Chinese immigrant students in America. Finally, the impact of assimilation education on the

immigrants' future occupation has been explored. The situation of immigrant students under assimilation education is of importance and deserves more attention. It can be predicted that with more attention and help, immigrant students in America will better integrate into American society.

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