



## Chapter 18

---

### **Asian Americans: Achievement Well Beyond IQ\***

Jim Flynn

#### **Abstract**

The problem addressed in this paper is first to thoroughly document, and then to explain, the impressive scholastic, occupational, and income achievements of Asians in America. In the past, some psychologists have cited apparently impressive evidence of a superiority in general cognitive ability. It turns out that that this evidence is seriously flawed – and not merely because of failure to allow for the intergenerational increase in scores but also as a result of seemingly endlessly compounded sampling deficits and corrections and adjustments introduced into the norming studies. Be that as it may, with IQ held constant, the Asian's achievements exceed those of Whites by a huge amount. Once an IQ-based explanation has been discredited, attention focuses on issues rarely discussed by psychologists – such as other psychological characteristics and multiple cultural supports. These are contrasted with those operating in other cultural groups, some of which perform far below what might otherwise be expected.

*Note:* I hope I have excerpted enough from my book, *Asian Americans: Achievement beyond IQ* (Flynn, 1991), to whet appetites. But only the original provides the detail needed to support the argument.

\*\*\*\*

Some 40 years ago, Nathaniel Weyl (1966, 1969) gave Chinese and Japanese Americans a prominent place in his American natural aristocracy. He noted that Chinese Americans had three to five times their proportionate share of college faculty, architects, scientists, school

---

\* An earlier version of this chapter has for some time been available on the Web Psych Empiricist: [http://wpe.info/papers\\_table.html](http://wpe.info/papers_table.html)





teachers, engineers, and physicians and that Japanese Americans excelled in the same fields, although to a lesser degree, and had twice their proportionate share of artists and writers. In 1985, the upper 70% of Asian 18-year-olds took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and matched the upper 27% of Whites (ETS, 1985, 1988). Between 1981 and 1987, Asian American high school students were much overrepresented among winners of National Merit Scholarships, U.S. Presidential Scholarships, Arts Recognition and Talent Search scholars, and Westinghouse Science Talent Search scholars. The last is America's most prestigious high school science competition and in 1986, the top five winners were all Asian Americans.

During the 1980s, there was an explosion of articles about Asian Americans in publications like *The New York Times* and *Time Magazine*. Their numbers at prestige universities had made a powerful impression on the popular imagination. Asian Americans were just over 2% of the population and yet by 1987, they were 14% of the entering class at Harvard, 16% at Stanford, 20% at MIT, 21% at Cal Tech, 25% at Berkeley. When journalists approached Arthur Jensen for an explanation, he endorsed the view that Asian Americans do so well because they are smarter, citing several IQ studies of Chinese Americans (Brand, 1987). However, the real foundation of belief in the high IQs of Chinese and Japanese Americans lay elsewhere: Vernon's great book *The Abilities and Achievements of Orientals in North America* (1982).

Vernon concluded that Chinese American's nonverbal IQ had risen from parity with Whites in 1965 to about 110, 10 points above the White average. I became suspicious when I realized that he had relied heavily on Jensen's testing of children from San Francisco's Chinatown on the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test, and a study by Jensen and Reynolds (1982) of the Berkeley, California, public schools which yielded very high Lorge-Thorndike IQs. I knew from personal correspondence with Jensen that the Berkeley study had actually been done in 1968 and wondered if Vernon had thought it done circa 1980. A 10-point rise in Chinese nonverbal IQ (from 100 to 110) between 1965 and 1980 was unlikely, but such a rise between 1965 and 1968 was quite incredible. Moreover, when the elite Chinese of Berkeley were compared to the elite Whites of Berkeley, the Chinese actually had somewhat lower IQs. And the IQ values for both races looked odd. For example, Berkeley Whites had 118 for verbal IQ and 120 for nonverbal IQ: no school district in America should have an average IQ that high, however elite it might be.





I began to suspect that Vernon was misled by something unknown in his day: that massive IQ gains over time render test norms obsolete and obsolete norms inflate IQs. And I realized that if Vernon was mistaken, we needed a whole new pair of spectacles. Up to now, high IQ and high achievement seemed to reinforce one another as evidence of the superior intelligence of Chinese and Japanese Americans. But if their mean IQ were no higher than Whites, or even below Whites, then their ordinary IQs and extraordinary achievements would dictate that non-IQ factors have a potent role in group achievement. That, of course, has important implications not only for Chinese and Japanese Americans, but also for other ethnic groups and gender groups. A problem that seemed rather humdrum (they do so well because they are smarter) suddenly posed a challenge to the intellect.

### Reassessing Chinese and Japanese IQ

I cannot here indicate the range of studies that had been affected by obsolescent norms but will offer one illustration. Werner, Simonian, & Smith (1968) studied all Japanese children born in 1955 on Kauai Island (the north western-most island of the Hawaiian chain). In 1965 to 1966, they gave these children, now aged 9 to 10 and numbering 253, the SRA Primary Mental Abilities Test, Elementary Form, 1954 edition, and put their mean IQ at 108. Investigation revealed that the norms against which these children were scored suffered from a total of 33.5 years of obsolescence.

Werner had not used the 1962 edition of the PMA test, but the 1954 edition, presumably because a backlog was available. The 1954 test manual and technical supplement tell a sad story. The manual (Thurstone & Thurstone, 1954a, p.1) says that the test has been “improved” by having its norms equated with those of the Stanford-Binet, which refers of course to the 1937 Stanford-Binet whose standardization sample was tested in 1932 (Flynn, 1984, p. 30). The technical supplement (Thurstone & Thurstone, 1954b, pp. 2-4) tells why. In 1951, the Thurstones found that their test was giving lower IQs than the Stanford-Binet and adjusted their norms accordingly.

Actually, assuming the PMA test was normed in 1946 (shortly before the 1948 edition), the score difference was not a product of bad sampling but of IQ gains over time. Flynn (1984, p. 35) showed that IQ gains





in America since 1932 have proceeded at a general rate of .3 points per year. The 14 years between 1932 and 1946 would mean a gain of 4.2 IQ points, and would toughen the PMA norms by that amount, which predicts almost perfectly the 4.3-point deficit that so disturbed the Thurstones (Thurstone & Thurstone, 1954b, p. 3). In 1954, rather than realizing their norms needed to be updated, they projected them even further back into the past, presenting norms that were 22 years obsolete on the day of publication. In 1965-1966, when Werner et al. scored their Japanese subjects against them, the norms were 33.5 years obsolete and inflated the IQ scores by 10.05 points (.3 points per year x 33.5 years = 10.05).

Table 18.1 gives the summary results of my reanalysis of studies of Chinese and Japanese grade and high school children. Between 1960 and 1975, these children had a mean IQ slightly below that of their White counterparts.



### IQ and Occupation



The children in Table 18.1 were born predominately between 1945 and 1949. Therefore, I will focus on the achievements of Chinese and Japanese Americans born between those years. They outperformed Whites at school. Only half as many lagged a grade or more behind their age group, 95% eventually graduated from high school as compared to less than 89% of Whites. At least 50% of them took the Scholastic Aptitude Test, as compared to less than 30% of Whites, and despite this they matched White performance. They maintained the same 5 to 3 ratio when undertaking graduate study. In their early 30s, the Chinese American cohorts out-numbered Whites in high status occupations by 55% to 34%, the Japanese cohorts outnumbered Whites by 46% to 34%.

Table 18.2 uses the ratios of Chinese and Japanese Americans to whites in high status occupations to measure what I call the IQ/achievement gap. The IQ thresholds white American need to exceed to qualify for certain occupations is well documented. You find few whites in high status occupations unless their IQs are at least average (100 or above). I decided to use the superior ratios Chinese and Japanese enjoyed in those occupations to estimate what IQ a white subgroup would have to have in order to achieve such an occupational superiority. For example,



**Table 18.1. Chinese and Japanese Americans: Mean IQs 1938 to 1985**

Study <sup>a</sup>	Year	n	Age (years)	Status <sup>b</sup>	IQ		
					Nonverbal	Verbal	Overall
Coleman Report	1965	3995	8-17	1	99	95	97
Berkeley	1968	234	9-11	2	98	95	96
Kauai	1965-66	253	9-10	2	99 <sup>c</sup>	97 <sup>c</sup>	98 <sup>c</sup>
Wyoming	1943-45	669	17	2	-	96	-
Chinatown	1972	53	9	2	101 <sup>c</sup>	91 <sup>c</sup>	96 <sup>c</sup>
Project Talent	1960	150	17	2	97	96	96
Chinatown	1975	254	9-11	3	101 <sup>c</sup>	89 <sup>c</sup>	95 <sup>c</sup>
Hawaii	1960-63	554	15-17	3	-	96 <sup>c</sup>	-
Los Angeles	1969-70	390	16	3	99 <sup>c</sup>	95 <sup>c</sup>	97 <sup>c</sup>
Ethnic Project	1950-69	929	-	3	-	-	98
Western City	1977	98	25	4	99	92	96
Berkeley (U)	1966	309	18	4	-	94	-
S. California (U)	1975-76	42	18-19	4	102	-	-
Hawaii (U)	1978-79	118	20	4	101	98	99
Honolulu (E)	1938	3008	10-14	(1)	99	86	93
Westown (A)	1985	317	12-17	(1)	94	87	91

*Note.* The studies are fully described in Flynn (1991).

<sup>a</sup>Key to symbols: (U) = university students; (E) = subjects from an earlier period, that is, pre-war; (A) = Asian subjects from a later period with only a minority of Chinese and Japanese.

<sup>b</sup>Key to status categories: 1-3 denote various degrees of reliability; 4 = samples selected by criteria that render them necessarily unrepresentative; (1) = well-selected samples of groups unrepresentative of Chinese and Japanese 1945-1975.

<sup>c</sup>These values were substantially altered to adjust for either obsolete norms or sample bias.

**Table 18.2. Chinese and Japanese Americans 1960 and 1980  
Difference Between Actual IQ and IQ Estimated on the Basis of Occupation**

Occupation	Threshold <sup>a</sup>	Ratio <sup>b</sup>	Estimated <sup>c</sup>	Actual <sup>d</sup>	Difference
	<i>IQ</i>				
	<i>Chinese 1960</i>				
Elite professions	110	2.264	113	99	14
Professions & technical	100	1.766	120	99	21
	<i>Chinese 1980 (resident pre-1970)</i>				
Elite professions	110	2.433	114	99	15
Professions & technical	100	1.793	121	99	22
Professions, technical and managerial	100	1.584	114	99	15
	<i>Chinese 1980 (native born)</i>				
Professions, technical and managerial	100	1.526	113	99	14
	<i>Japanese 1960</i>				
Elite professions	110	1.228	102	99	3
Professions & technical	100	1.299	106	99	7
	<i>Japanese 1980 (resident pre-1970)</i>				
Elite professions	110	1.367	103	99	4
Professions & technical	100	1.236	105	99	6
Professions, technical and managerial	100	1.161	104	99	5
	<i>Japanese 1980 (ages 25 to 44 and resident pre-1970)</i>				
Professions, technical and managerial	98	1.305	108	99	9
	<i>Japanese 1980 (ages 25 to 44 and native born)</i>				
Professions, technical and managerial	98	1.361	109	99	10

<sup>a</sup>The threshold gives an IQ above which about 90% of those in each occupational category would score.

<sup>b</sup>The ratio is the per capita ratio of Chinese or Japanese to White in each occupational category.

<sup>c</sup>Estimated IQ refers to means for Chinese or Japanese Americans in general calculated from the thresholds and ratios.

<sup>d</sup>Actual IQ is the mean for the 12th graders of the Coleman Report (1966).



if a white subgroup had a ratio of 1.793 to 1 compared to whites in general for high status occupations, it would be normal to expect them to have a mean IQ well above white average (121 rather than merely 100). The surplus 21 points stand as the IQ/achievement gap. It means that Chinese Americans could spot whites 21 IQ points and still match them for occupational status.

Table 18.2 gives IQ/achievement gaps (estimated IQ minus actual IQ) for Chinese and Japanese Americans who were aged 16 years and over at the time of the 1960 census, or at the time of the 1980 census. If we take those who had achieved the occupation of their maturity, those aged 30 years and over, the 1960 data give the occupational achievements of people who had left school before 1948. Most of those from the 1980 census, those aged 38 years and over, had left school before 1960. Yet, our estimates for the actual IQs of Chinese and Japanese come from those who were school children during the 1960s. The match between IQ and achievement is poor. In order to get a good data match between school-tested IQ and eventual adult occupations, we will follow the Coleman Report 12th graders through to their 1980 occupations, and compare *their* estimated IQs with *their* actual IQs.

Table 18.3 does this. The Coleman Report 12th graders were aged 17-18 years in 1965 and by 1980, they were aged 32-33. Therefore, Table 18.3 takes the occupational profile of ages 30-34 from the 1980 census and removes all those who arrived in America after 1965. Therefore, it at least simulates following the Coleman Report cohorts from IQ testing as high school seniors to their occupational achievements as adults. It also uses IQ thresholds appropriate to these cohorts, thresholds that take into account the increased number of young adults in high status occupations by 1980. The Chinese total cohort has an IQ/achievement gap of 21 points, one point lower for the native born, and the Japanese total cohort a gap of 10 points, one point higher for the native born. These constitute our best estimates of the Chinese and Japanese IQ/occupational achievement gaps, estimates that I sometimes round off to 20 and 10 points respectively.

### IQ and Income

There is a positive correlation between IQ and income, albeit much lower than that between IQ and occupation. The purpose of the next section is to compare the actual IQs of Chinese and Japanese Americans with the estimated IQs we would posit based on their incomes.

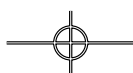




Table 18.4 shows that the mean IQ of Chinese and Japanese Americans badly underestimates their incomes: Chinese earn almost \$2,200 more than predicted and Japanese almost \$1,900. Both groups have had their median incomes boosted by adjustments. The Chinese

**Table 18.3. Coleman Report Cohorts: Difference Between Actual IQ As 12th Graders (1965) and IQ Estimated on the Basis of Occupation 15 Years Later (1980)**

Group	IQ				
	Threshold <sup>a</sup>	Ratio <sup>b</sup>	Estimated <sup>c</sup>	Actual	Difference
Chinese total cohort <sup>d</sup>	97	1.588	120	99	21
Chinese native born <sup>e</sup>	97	1.572	119	99	20
Japanese total cohort <sup>d</sup>	97	1.323	109	99	10
Japanese native born <sup>e</sup>	97	1.345	110	99	11

<sup>a</sup>The threshold applies to Americans, aged 30 to 34 years in 1980, who were in managerial, professional, and technical occupations; it gives an IQ above which about 90% of them would score.

<sup>b</sup>The ratio applies to those members of the groups listed who, in 1980, were aged 30 to 34 years and in the occupational categories named; it gives the per capita ratio of Chinese or Japanese to White.

<sup>c</sup>Estimated IQ refers to mean IQs for the groups listed calculated from the thresholds and ratios (see below).

<sup>d</sup>Total cohort refers to all Chinese and Japanese Americans who were 12th graders in American high schools in 1965.

<sup>e</sup>Native born refers to the American born members of the total cohorts.

Example of calculations, estimated IQ of Chinese total cohort:

- (1) White mean and *SD* = 100 and 15;
- (2) 97.25 (IQ threshold) is .183 *SDs* ( $2.75 \div 15 = .183$ ) below White mean;
- (3) Percentage of Whites above 97.25 = 57.26%;
- (4) 57.26% x 1.5876 (Chinese to White ratio) gives 90.91 as percentage of Chinese above 97.25;
- (5) Chinese mean is 1.335 *SDs* above 97.25;
- (6) 1.335 x 16.74 (Chinese *SD*) = 22.35 as IQ points to be added to 97.25; (7) 97.25 + 22.35 = 119.60 or 120 as estimated IQ.





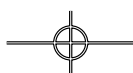


went from parity with American Whites to \$2,000 above, primarily after removal of post-1970 immigrants, but with a small gain from being equated with the White sex ratio. The Japanese went from \$1,100 above Whites to \$1,700 above, primarily because of the sex ratio factor, with some of that gain lost by adjustment for age. The removal of those who arrived between 1970 and 1980 was dictated by the IQ data available but most recent immigrants are at a great disadvantage in terms of income, so their removal has the added benefit of a fairer comparison between Chinese and Whites. The Japanese were not much affected by this because their recent immigrants have been few and elite.

Table 18.4 puts the Chinese IQ/achievement gap based on income at 16 points. This is one point higher than the estimate based on their representation in professional, technical, and managerial occupations in Table 18.2. These two estimates are the appropriate ones to compare because they cover essentially the same age groups: all those 15 years and over as compared to all those 16 and over. The Japanese estimate based on income is 13.8 IQ points. This is greater than all the occupational estimates, even the 10-point estimate from the Coleman Report cohort (Table 18.3). Japanese occupational estimates approach their income estimate only when those most affected by relocation centers are removed from the former but not the latter. Perhaps the World War II evacuation did more to restrict entry into high status occupations than it did to reduce the capacity to make money.

### **The Roots of “Overachievement”**

Our best estimate of the size of the IQ/achievement gap is 21 IQ points for Chinese, 10 points for Japanese. I should add a qualification from the perspective of 2006. Recent studies tend to show that today’s Chinese and Japanese Americans have a modest IQ advantage on whites. They, of course, are children and grandchildren of the Chinese and Japanese Americans I have analyzed, namely, those born between 1945 and 1949. The earlier generation came from homes of average socio-economic status and had average IQs or slightly below. Their high incomes and occupational status have given their offspring advantages they did not enjoy, so it is no surprise that the child has surpassed the parent for IQ. That in itself does not mean that the occupation/achievement gap is any less for today’s Chinese and Japanese Americans. I leave that study to a younger scholar.



**Table 18.4. Chinese, Japanese, and White Americans 1979: IQ and Income**

*Difference between actual income and income estimated by IQ*

Group	IQ	Income in US dollars		
		Estimated	Actual <sup>a</sup>	Difference
White	100	15,704	–	–
Chinese	98.5	15,502	17,668	2,166
Japanese	98.5	15,502	1,364	1,862

*Difference between actual IQ and IQ estimated by income*

Group	Income	IQ		
		Estimated	Actual	Difference
Chinese	103.1	114.6	98.5	16.1
Japanese	102.6	112.3	98.5	13.8
White	100.0	100.0	100.0	–

<sup>a</sup>Median income of full-time workers, Chinese and Japanese resident pre-1970; adjusted in terms of White sex ratio and age distribution -see text.

<sup>b</sup>The actual incomes have been translated into values analogous to IQ scores, that is, the mean for White income was set at 100, the SD at 15.

Examples of calculations:

Chinese estimated income:

- (1)  $100.0$  (White mean) –  $98.5$  (Chinese mean) =  $1.5$ ;
- (2)  $1.5 \div 15$  (White SD) =  $.10$  SDU;
- (3)  $.10 \times .213$  (path coefficient between IQ and income) =  $.0213$  SDU;
- (4)  $.0213 \times \$9497$  (White SD) =  $\$202$ ;
- (5)  $\$15,704$  (White median) –  $202$  =  $\$15,502$ .

Chinese estimated IQ:

- (1)  $\$17,668$  (Chinese median) –  $\$15,704$  (White median) =  $\$1964$ ;
- (2)  $\$1964 \div 9497$  (White SD) =  $.207$  SDU ;
- (3)  $.207 \times 15$  (White SD) =  $3.10$ ;
- (4)  $3.10 \div .213$  (path coefficient between IQ and income) =  $14.6$ ;
- (5)  $14.6 + 100$  (White mean) =  $114.6$ .





Whatever the exact size of these gaps, their existence shows that ignoring ethnic differences, particularly between Chinese and white Americans, does not work. A group of Whites with the same mean IQ as Chinese Americans would fall far below their achievements; a group of Whites with the same achievements as Chinese Americans would have a much higher mean IQ. The path by which Chinese overachieve compared to White Americans is clear. It begins with achievement tests at school, passes through the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and university entrance, passes through the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and entry into graduate or professional schools, and culminates in their high occupational profile. But what factors lie behind that path and play of role of cause?

I am not going to explore the possibility that Chinese have a genetic superiority for IQ. Certainly, their IQs in American do not signal such. It might be argued that those who came to America prior to 1950 were substandard compared to those who remained at home. The facts call this into question. The earlier immigrants were unskilled labourers and few of the students who came to study in America were allowed to remain. The Chinese who became American citizens brought over their own children and, after 1924, these were the main source of immigration. Many of these children were fictitious products of the “slot racket” and insured a fairly random sample of the home village. For example, a Chinese born in America in 1870 had by 1957 brought over 57 of his “sons”, who had in turn brought over 250 of their “sons”, which is to say he was personally responsible for the entry of almost the entire male population of his village. In 1957, it was estimated that at least half of San Francisco’s Chinatown were products of the slot racket or other forms of illegal immigration (Lee, 1960, pp. 78-81, 95, & 302-304; Wang, 1966, pp. 96-98).

If cultural differences are the root cause of Chinese overachievement, let us consider what those might be. The analysis here has more in common with the multi-component historical analyses of eg Braudel (eg 1993) than with those who have searched for “basic” variables, such as, among sociologists, Weber (1930) or, among psychologists, McClelland (1961). I will focus on the origins of Chinese, Irish, and Black Americans.

### Three Histories

The Chinese who came to America before 1950 came predominately from the Pearl River delta. This area has been the home of an intense rice-based agriculture for over 4,000 years. The unrelenting work demanded may be greater than any other area in the world. Two rice crops and one





dry crop are produced each year. Horticulture produces vast quantities of fruit, tea, and silk (from mulberry bushes) are marketed, vegetables and sweet potatoes grown, livestock include chickens, pigs, buffaloes, and fish farms. These conditions engendered a powerful work ethic and Chinese immigrants to America have manifested that ethic from the 1850s right up to the present. Every observer has commented on the pace of work, the hours of work, the propensity to save and invest in their children's education. Lee notes something that adds a fascinating corollary to our thesis. The Sze Yap people have been less achieving than other Chinese Americans: these people came from the periphery of the Delta where soil was less fertile and agriculture less intense (Bodde, 1957, p. 52; Brand, 1987; Butterfield, 1990; Fairbank, Reischaur, & Craig, 1965, pp. 90-91; Lee, 1960, pp. 52, 144-145, & 254-257; Petersen, 1978, p. 75; Tan, 1986, pp. 16-17 & 171-171; Vernon, 1982, pp. 274-275).

Irish immigrants came from a 19th-century rural Ireland in which conditions could not have been more different. Half the rural population lived in mud huts, tilling a quarter to a half-acre farms only one-sixth the size of those prevalent in China. In order to avoid starvation, these farms were given over almost entirely to the optimum crop, namely, potatoes. Potatoes required little more than spading and turning a few weeks of the year. All improvements were the property of the landlord, and tenants could be turned out at will. Irish peasants spent most of the year in enforced idleness. They were not crushed. Travelers remarked on their hospitality, love of music and dance, and gaiety. But no potent work ethic developed. When the Irish came to America, they were often content with a bare sustenance, even this was a welcome relief after famine Ireland. They made a grand thing out of Saturday night, given over to sociability and fighting, and if the best street-fighter on the block died poor, he had moments of glory unknown to a cost accountant. Irish Americans may have lacked a positive attitude toward work but some of them had a very good time. (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970, pp. 238-239, 246, & 259-262; Lee, 1960, pp. 385-386; McAleavy, 1967, p. 31; Woodham-Smith, 1962, pp. 18-37, 268, & 409).

Traditional China gave education an all-pervasive role, indeed, it provided the foundation on which rested the entire political, social, economic, and cultural life of the Chinese people. Confucianism conferred dignity on peasant labor, peasants were ranked second only to the Mandarin class, and the traditional Chinese examination system was the only way a village youth could rise to the Mandarin class. The





periodic examinations were great public events and preparation for them so arduous that it led to a virtual examination way of life. Those who passed the first level were called “budding geniuses”, those who passed the second “promoted scholars”, those who passed the third became high officials, the best often became prime minister and married a royal princess. Those who attained high office were expected to foster the interests of their villages of origin and whole families, clans, and villages pooled their resources to give their brightest boy the leisure to prepare for the exams (Fairbank, Reischaur, & Craig, 1965, pp. 84-88; Hu, 1962, pp. 3 & 13-15; Lee, 1960, pp. 96-97; Menzel, 1963; Wang, 1966, pp. 13-14).

American Chinese from the start emphasized education and looked upon money earned from academic status and professional credentials as more honorable than mere money alone. The Chinese family became one of the most educationally efficient in America, rivaled only by the Japanese and Jews. There was the usual generational strife found in immigrant families, but above the battle certain assumptions were rarely contested. Children were expected to study hard and did so, earning high marks irrespective of IQ, which gave the Chinese unusually low IQ thresholds for entry into high status occupations. The Coleman Report shows Oriental students doing many more hours of homework, having better attendance records and higher aspirations; the National Longitudinal Study adds confirmation, plus showing they spent far less time on athletics and extra-curricular activities. Parents tried to protect their children’s time by discouraging part-time jobs.

Chinese youths identified their self-esteem with academic advancement, targeted themselves for the best universities, and rarely passed up a chance for professional status when they could qualify, which gave Chinese Americans as a group a high capitalization rate on their available pool of talent. An Irish youth might forfeit a promising opportunity so as to attend a Catholic college, stay with kin or friends, marry the girl or boy next door, a Chinese rarely (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 24; Hsia, 1988, p. 78; Lee, 1960, pp. 185-230, 374, 382, & 392; Petersen, 1978, pp. 92-93; Rock et al., 1985).

Ireland was the only European country that did not establish a single university during the Middle Ages. By the 19th century, the mass of people had no educational tradition of any sort thanks to 130 years of the penal laws which forbade Catholics from attending school, running schools, even sending their children abroad to be educated. Even those





few who escaped to Britain and whose children attended college were remarked upon by their contemporaries for their lack of commitment.

When Irish immigrants came to America, there was no presumption that families should sacrifice to educate their young. The first objective was ownership of a family home and everyone was expected to contribute: children dropped out of school, sacrificing education and future skills, to work and augment family capital and income. Devout parents discouraged education as a threat to faith. When the Irish rose out of poverty, they did not identify their worth with professional advancement, but sought status as political orators, singers, entertainers, athletes, military heroes. For many Irish, the ideal was a secure civil service job and real life was lived outside of work, arguing religion or politics or becoming the best raconteur at the local saloon (Kessler-Harris & Yans-McLaughlin, 1978, pp. 114-120; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970, p. 258; Sowell, 1975, pp. 71-80, 127, 146-147, & 205; Woodham-Smith, 1962, p. 27).

Cotton plantation Blacks came from a slavery and peonage at least as devoid of self-motivated work and educational tradition as the Irish, and arrived at urban centers two or three generations later. Certain Irish institutions counterproductive vis-à-vis the Chinese take on the character of priceless assets when viewed against the backdrop of the Black experience. The Catholic Church with its parochial schools and universities may have given the Irish an education mediocre by comparison with the Chinese, for the latter extracted the best education public schools and great universities had to offer. But Catholic schools gave Irish the literacy and numeracy that led toward the middle class, whereas Blacks faced the worst schools the public system offered. The Irish political machines may have encouraged them to be content with modest civil service jobs and discouraged higher ambitions. If so, the numerical and political weakness of the Chinese removed a temptation and encouraged them to rely on that combination of hard work, sobriety, and maximization of educational capital, which eventually led them to the pinnacle of achievement in American society. On the other hand, political patronage did lift many Irish into the middle class, favoring them over Blacks who became politically dominant only later, their freedom of maneuver limited by entrenched groups and a climate unfavorable to patronage.

Despite these relative disadvantages, as late as 1970 it seemed Blacks could hope to follow the Irish path toward parity. However, the years between 1965 and 1990 saw the development of a trend that threatened to divide Black America into a middle class showing excellent





progress in terms of enhanced occupational status, and a lower class whose family structure was becoming less and less educationally efficient. The trend was toward fewer Black males in steady employment. The causes included new conditions in the labor market, thanks to regulation and a shift in the locus of unskilled jobs, and the rise of an alternative economy based on drugs. Other causes as yet unknown are probably operative: the relative success of the children of free persons of color and West Indian immigrants suggests that these are environmental rather than genetic.

### A Last Word

The powerful emotions engendered by group differences in test scores, academic achievement, occupation, and income take place in a certain context. That context is the product of human misery. If America can help almost all of its citizens toward a good life, the obsession with total equality will diminish: whether Chinese or Irish or Blacks have exactly the same occupational profile may still interest social scientists but not the ordinary person.



### References

- Bodde, D. (1957). *China's cultural tradition: What and whither?* New York: Rinehart.
- Brand, D. (1987). The new whiz kids: Why Asian Americans are doing so well, and what it costs them. *Time*, August 31.
- Braudel, F. (1993). *A History of Civilizations*. London: Penguin Books.
- Butterfield, F. (1990). Why they excel. *Parade*, January 21.
- Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, J., Hood, A. M., Weinfeld, L. D., & York, R. L. (1966). *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Educational Testing Service (1985). *College bound seniors*. Princeton, NJ: College Entrance Examination Board.
- Fairbank, J. K., Reischaur, E. V., & Craig, A. M. (1965). *East Asia: The Modern Transformation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Flynn, J. R. (1984). The mean IQ of Americans: Massive gains 1932 to 1978. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 29-51.
- Flynn, J. R. (1991). *Asian Americans: Achievement Beyond IQ*. Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Glazer, N., & Moynihan, D.P. (1970). *Beyond the melting pot* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.





- Hsia, J. (1988). *Asian Americans in higher education and at work*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates.
- Hu, C-T. (1962). *Chinese education under Communism*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Jensen, A. R., & Reynolds, C. R. (1982). Race, social class and ability patterns on the WISC-R. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 3, 423-438.
- Kessler-Harris, A., & Yans-McLaughlin, V. (1978). European immigrant groups. In T. Sowell (Ed.), *Essays and data on American ethnic groups* (pp. 107-137). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Lee, R. H. (1960). *The Chinese in the United States of America*. Hong Kong: University Press.
- McAleavy, H. (1967). *The modern history of China*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- McClelland, D. C. (1961). *The Achieving Society*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- Menzel, J. M. (1963). Introduction. In J. M. Menzel (Ed.), *The Chinese civil service: Career open to talent?* (pp. vii-xii). Lexington, MA: Heath.
- Petersen, W. (1978). Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans. In T. Sowell (Ed.), *Essays and data on American ethnic groups* (pp. 65-106). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Rock, D. A., Ekstrom, R. B., Goetz, M. E., Hilton, T. L., & Pollack, J. (1985). *Contractor report: Factors associated with decline of test scores of high school seniors, 1972 to 1980; a study of excellence in high school education, educational policies, school quality, and school outcomes*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Sowell, T. (1975). *Race and economics*. New York: Longman.
- Tan, T. T. (1986). *Your Chinese roots: The overseas Chinese story*. Singapore: Times Book International.
- Thurstone, L. L., & Thurstone, G. T. (1954a). *SRA Primary Mental Abilities, examiner manual, ages 7 to 11* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Science Research Associates.
- Thurstone, L. L., & Thurstone, G. T. (1954b). *SRA Primary Mental Abilities, technical supplement, ages 7 to 11* (1st ed.). Chicago: Science Research Associates.
- Vernon, P. E. (1982). *The abilities and achievements of Orientals in North America*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wang, Y. C. (1966). *Chinese intellectuals and the West, 1872-1949*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Weber, M. (1930). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Scribner.
- Werner, E. E., Simonian, K., & Smith, R. S. (1968). Ethnic and socioeconomic status differences in abilities and achievement among preschool and school-age children in Hawaii. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 75, 43-59.
- Weyl, N. (1966). *The creative elite in America*. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press.
- Weyl, N. (1969). Some comparative performance indexes of American ethnic minorities. *Mankind Quarterly*, 9, 106-119.
- Woodham-Smith, C. (1962). *The great hunger*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

