On the Education and Culture of Immigrants to the United States

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Abstract: There was an increase in Asian immigration to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries because new policies were implemented, loosening some of the restrictions around immigration for Asian people. As they arrived in the United States, they were subjected to cultural and educational shocks; they had to learn how to assimilate into American culture because they wanted to become a part of American society. The question arises about why many Asian people chose to immigrate to the United States and how they managed to assimilate into American culture, and through an in-depth analysis of the existing literature, it was found that due to the American involvement in Asia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Asian people were drawn to the United States because they wanted to achieve the American dream, and they were able to succeed because of their emphasis on education and collectivistic culture.

Keywords: immigration, culture, belonging, education, Asian, American society

1. Introduction

In the 19th and 20th centuries, restrictions around immigration to the United States were loosened, and as a result, a large number of people from Asian countries started immigrating to the country for different reasons. Some wanted to find new opportunities, while others wanted to escape the difficult situations in their native countries. The American government was also actively involved in Asia due to the emergence of wars in different countries following the Second World War, such as the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The people of those countries immigrated to the United States to avoid the consequences of the war. For them, the United States was the place where they could have better lives and a better future, but they faced struggles adjusting to American society due to cultural and educational shocks. They had to learn how to integrate into the American way of living. The purpose of the present study is to explore the culture and education of the Asian immigrants who arrived in the United States as a result of mass immigration in the late 19th and 20th centuries. There are many misconceptions regarding Asian American experience, and also, there is a lack of literature related to the topic, which is why it is important to explore the history and assimilation process of Asian Americans. The existing literature mainly focuses on the struggles of the first generation of Asian immigrants and does not explain in detail how they managed to assimilate into American culture. The present study attempts to understand how Asian immigrants were able to overcome education and cultural shocks to successfully assimilate into American culture.

2. Asian Immigration to the United States

In the 1960s, the global economy was rapidly changing, and globalization had accelerated immigration; the American government decided to relax its immigration restrictions by implementing the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which attracted professionals in Asian countries who were worried about their future, and others followed them [1]. There was an unprecedented increase in immigration to the United States from Asian countries. Before the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act, it was extremely difficult for Asian people to immigrate to the United States, as there were several restrictions put on them by the American government. However, globalization changed everything, and the American government realized the importance of immigration in the rapidly globalizing world of that time. The American government needed human resources to restructure its economy, and Asian immigrants fulfilled that role. Also, many Asian people wanted to immigrate to the United States because they wanted to escape difficult situations in their birth countries. After the Second World War, the United States became actively involved in Asia to prevent the rise of Communism and support anti-resurrectionist governments; there were wars taking place in countries like Vietnam and South Korea, and the refugees resulting from the Vietnamese and Korean conflicts had immigrated to the United States because they could not live in their countries any more [2]. They did not see their future in their countries because there was the looming threat of war and evident political instability, and also, they believed that the United States would help them create a new life for themselves. It becomes clear that Asian immigration to the United States was not entirely due to the desire of Asian people to live the American dream; many of them were forced to leave their countries due to political conflicts and had to take refuge in the United States, which was possible due to the relaxing of the restrictions of immigration policies after 1965.

3. Assimilation of Asians into American Culture

The first Asian people who arrived in the United States were workers, and they were subjected to extreme racial discrimination, preventing them from assimilating into American culture. The government implemented several laws and legislations to restrict Asian immigration to the United States, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Asiatic Barred Zone Act of 1917, because it was believed that Asians were an inferior race and a potential threat to American society and way of living [1]. They were not allowed to assimilate into American culture, and their population remained small. When the restrictions on immigration were loosened, there was a boom in Asian immigration, and they tried to assimilate into American culture. Those immigrants from Asia faced cultural and educational shocks as they tried to adopt the American way of living because they wanted to become American. They emphasized education and saw it as one of the effective methods of assimilation. Many first-generation Asian Americans worked as laborers as they did not have a good education, but they focused on providing quality education to their children, due to which second-generation Asian Americans were more educated than their parents [3]. They believed that education could provide them with better jobs and help them climb the social ladder. Also, the Asian culture puts too much emphasis on education; Asian parents accept their children to excel academically, which is why the stereotype of a model minority exists in American society; it sets a standard for Asian Americans to be academically successful [4]. The data also shows that Asian Americans tend to be more academically inclined than other racial groups. The comparison between Asian Americans and white Americans in 1990 shows that 24 percent of Asian Americans had a university degree, and it was 14 percent of white Americans; also, American Americans were more likely to be professionals than white Americans [3]. However, it has to be understood that there are different ethnicities with different cultures in Asia, and it is rather a generalization to state that all Asians are good at studying.

Nonetheless, education played an integral role in helping Asian immigrants assimilate into American culture; they excelled at it, and American society started to see them as the model minority.

4. Stereotyping of Asians in American Society

The success that Asian immigrants achieved in the area of education not only brought them appreciation from American society but also led to their stereotyping. The stereotype of a model minority was not always attached to Asian immigrants. Before 1965, they were subjected to a number of restrictions to prevent them from entering the United States. The American government did not want Asian immigrants because their population was increasing, and they were considered uncivilized and immoral; the only work that they could get was manual labor, for which they were paid low wages in spite of working long hours in harsh working conditions, but after 1965, more Asian immigrants were able to excel academically, which led to a significant change in how American society saw Asian immigrants [1]. Asian people were treated as a source of labor when they first arrived in the United States, but then the stereotype of a model minority was attached to them, which was a way to measure their value [1]. The stereotype of a model minority has made things difficult for many Asian Americans. They have to maintain the standards associated with the stereotype of a model minority; their identity has become synonymous with that stereotype. They are also pitted against other minority groups, due to which conflicts may occur; the narrative that Asian Americans achieved their American dream through hard work in the area of education is deployed, and it creates problems for other minorities because it means that the reason why they are unable to achieve success is due to lack of hard work. Although it is indeed an achievement that most Asian Americans tend to be academically successful, it does not mean that they should be judged by the level of their education because it gives birth to racial biases. Calling Asian Americans a model minority is more or less the same as calling them laborers; in the first case, their value is determined by their education level, and in the latter case, it is determined by their ability to work.

5. Role of Education in Assimilation

Although the stereotype of a model minority was detrimental to the identity of Asian people, many of them tried to live up to the standard because they wanted to be treated as Americans; they believed that if they could be successful, they would be considered American [4]. For them, education was the key to their assimilation into American culture. They wanted to become American citizens, and they understood that if they had value, they would be accepted. Education was not just a way for Asian immigrants to improve their social standing in American society. It was also a way for them to build a community. Since they had similar viewpoints on the role of education, they were able to connect and form alliances. The emphasis on education brought them together. Many Asian families that first arrived in the United States formed communities because they were not accepted by the white-dominated communities; for example, the Vietnamese migrant communities in New Orleans survived because of their communities, and they were able to combine their efforts and help their children to adapt to school and life in America so that future generations would be able to easily assimilate in American society [5]. They did not have a good education, which prevented them from pursuing better jobs. The difficulties that they faced helped them understand how they could make things better for future generations. They quickly realized that they needed to be educated to be considered worthy in American society. As a community, they were able to provide better support to their children, and they had the same goal, which was to ensure that their children get the best education so that they can have better lives. It was a common sentiment that bonded many Asian families; they joined hands to achieve their goals. They were motivated by a common goal; they wanted their children to have a better future. It would have been difficult for Asian families to survive in American society if they

did not have a community. It can be assessed that Asian immigrants struggled at first to acquire better opportunities due to their low level of education, but they worked together as a community to support the education of future generations, which not only guaranteed better opportunities for their children but also strengthened their community.

6. Evolution of Asian Cultural Values

There is no such thing as Asian culture because there are many different and unique cultures coexisting in the Asian continent, and combining them into a single culture cannot work. It is important to understand the unique differences in those cultures as it will help to better assess how those cultures survived in American society. Although there are cultural values that are shared by many cultures in Asia, such as collectivism, it does not mean that their cultures are the same. However, the cultural values that they share helped them form communities when they first arrived in the United States. Community is an important aspect of many cultures in Asia because Asian people tend to be collectivistic; they prioritize interdependence, cooperation, and relatedness, and this collectivistic culture does not align with individualism, which is a defining characteristic of American society [6]. The fact that American society promotes and supports individualism created a huge issue for first-generation Asian families. For Asian people, community and the greater good are extremely important, and they do not hesitate to compromise to support the greater good. It was difficult for them to let go of their native culture and completely adapt to American culture. They tried to find a balance between the two cultures because they wanted to assimilate into American culture. They did not want their native culture to disrupt the process of their assimilation. At first, Asian families struggled to align their cultural values with the values of American society, but their children did not struggle as much as their parents because they were able to experience two different cultures as they grew up. Many Asian Americans who were born in the United States tend to be more individualistic than collectivistic in comparison to their parents, which shows the shift in cultural values within Asian communities [6] In comparison to older generations, younger generations are better at navigating their lives between two strikingly different cultures; younger Asian Americans who were introduced to American culture at a young age can easily incorporate it into their lives. However, older generations struggle to maintain a balance between their native culture and adopted American culture. It means that the children of Asian parents are more capable of assimilating into American society than their parents. It can be stated that younger Asian Americans have created their own culture by combining the elements of both cultures as they grew up juggling both cultures.

7. Conclusion

It has been a difficult journey for many Asians to adapt to the American way of living. At first, they were not allowed to assimilate into American culture because they were considered an inferior race and a threat to American society. They had to overcome a lot of struggles. When they first arrived, they were treated unfairly because of their low education level and economic condition; they were forced to work like machines. They were also prevented from successfully immigrating to the United States, but after the American government relaxed its policies, more Asians arrived in the country. After 1965, a large number of Asians immigrated to the United States for different reasons; some wanted to find new opportunities, while others needed to escape the threat of war and political instability in their countries. However, it proved to be extremely difficult for them to assimilate into American culture due to their low education and cultural differences. They focused on education because they saw it as a way to improve their social standing in American society. The stereotype of a model minority was attached to them, which affected the latter generations. The shared emphasis on education also brought Asian families together, and they worked hard to ensure that their children

got a better education. They believed in collectivism, but their children turned out to be more individualistic due to the impact of American society. Therefore, it can be understood that Asian immigrants focused on their shortcomings and worked hard to ensure that the future generations did not have those shortcomings, which allowed the future generations to easily assimilate into American culture. Many Asians have been able to successfully assimilate into American society, but they still face discrimination, and they are losing their cultural values and replacing them with American values.

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