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A Model for Academic Success: The School and Home Environment of East Asian Students

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This article reviews the findings of a field-based study that compared the academic performance of East Asians and Anglo elementary school students. Variations in academic performance are viewed as the result of the relationship between sociocultural factors and interpersonal interactions. Results link the academic success of East Asian students to the values and aspirations they share with their parents, to the home learning activities, in which they participate with their families, and to the expectations and interactions they have with their teachers and classmates. CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS OF MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT, MINORITY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, EAST ASIAN ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Concern with the low academic performance of some minority students has dominated the research activities of scholars over the past twenty years (special theme issue of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 1987; Matute-Bianchi 1986; Trueba 1988). Explanations for differences in academic achievement among America's minority students have tended to be driven by theories that place the responsibility for school failure on a variety of factors which include student cognitive abilities, communication style, home environment, or the socializing and academic influences of the school and society. Although numerous studies have been conducted to examine academic failure, only a limited number of investigations have identified those factors that seem to contribute to the academic success of particular minority groups (Ogbu 1987). For example, the mathematics achievement of Asian Americans in secondary schools is higher than that of Anglo-American students (Peng, Owings, and Fetters 1984; Tsang 1988). Yet, few investigators have attempted to explain what accounts for these differences in academic performance.

More recently, some scholars interested in explaining academic success or failure among certain minority groups have stressed the role of culture at the collective (ethnic group) macrolevel as the primary factor for interpreting variations in academic performance and educational attainment (Gibson 1988; Ogbu 1974, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1987;

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Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi 1986). While recognizing the role of culture, others have argued to also consider microlevel interactions and instructional activities when examining differences in school performance between dominant and minority groups (Erickson 1987; McDermott 1987; Moll and Diaz 1987; Trueba 1986, 1988). Incorporating the major themes of both of these arguments, a field-based study was designed to examine the relationship between macro sociocultural factors and micro interpersonal interactions to explore why some East Asian students experience school success (Lee 1987). This article reviews the findings of that study which compared East Asian American students with Anglo-American students in grades six and seven in two schools with respect to: (1) family background characteristics, (2) child and parent attitudes and values toward education and future occupational choices, (3) academic performance, (4) classroom behavior (e.g., time on task, participation in class discussions, completion of assignments), (5) relationships with parents, teachers, and peers, and (6) use of time outside of school. Results clearly link the academic success of the East Asian students to the values and aspirations they share with their parents, to the home learning activities in which they participate with their families, and to the expectations and interactions they have with their teachers and classmates.

East Asian Academic Success: Some Explanations

The lives of East Asian students at home and in American classrooms have received limited attention in the literature (Ogbu 1987). In contrast to the myriad of studies that describe the educational experiences of minority students, the in-school experiences of East Asian students, beyond their test score performance, remain uncharted. Despite the absence of empirical data on the lives of East Asian students in school, various often contradictory theories have been invoked to explain East Asian academic success. Such theories tend to emphasize either student cognitive abilities, communication style, home environment, or the socializing influences of society as the primary determinant of East Asian academic success.

Student Cognitive Abilities. Some of the earliest explanations for the low academic performance of poor and minority children were based on genetics. Jensen (1969), perhaps the most widely recognized proponent of this perspective, argued that variations in student achievement were the consequence of inherited differences in cognitive abilities. According to Jensen, Chinese and Japanese I.Q. test scores (which are similar to those of Anglos) result from inherited conceptual and problem-solving skills, which improve one's ability to grasp relationships and engage in symbolic thinking (Jensen and Inouye 1980). Blacks, he contended, do not perform as well as Asians in school because they inherit fewer of these types of cognitive skills which are emphasized in traditional methods of classroom instruction.

Bridging the cognitive style of the student to the home environment, Vernon (1982) concludes that poverty and limited exposure to English experienced by some Chinese and Japanese Americans during childhood does not have the expected negative effect on academic performance because of specific cultural and personality characteristics. Superior motivation to achieve academically and personality characteristics such as docility and industriousness are seen as the major reasons for Asian academic success.

Home Environment. In the 1960s, several scholars dissatisfied with genetic and other explanations advocated placing the main responsibility for school failure on the home environment. Low academic achievement of blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians was seen as the result of their "deprived" home environments (Hess and Shipman 1965; Moynihan 1965). According to this perspective, low performing minority children lacked the cognitive, linguistic, and other skills necessary for school success because their parents did not provide a home environment that was conducive for learning formal school-related attitudes and tasks.

Cultural deprivation theorists received considerable criticism within the research community for being too narrow and limiting in their explanations (Baratz and Baratz 1970; Boykin 1980; Dillard 1972; Valentine 1968). Expanding the scope of the problem, others suggested that low minority academic achievement should be attributed to differences in cognitive, linguistic, and other cultural characteristics not recognized in school. Viewed as cultural conflict theorists, Valentine (1968), Burger (1968), and Dillard (1972) emphasize that minority children fail to do well in school because they are socialized into a life-style that is different from that of the mainstream culture. Minority children acquire attitudes, values, and learning styles within their cultures that are different from and in conflict with those required for success in public schools and in the wider society.

To explain the high educational achievement of Japanese Americans, the concept of cultural conflict has often been transposed to cultural compatibility or cultural similarity (De Vos and Caudill 1973; Kitano 1969, 1971). Kitano (1969) stresses that assimilation has created similarities between second-generation Japanese-American culture and middle-class American culture. Japanese Americans strive to be assimilated into the dominant culture to avoid discrimination. De Vos and Caudill (1973) maintain that there seems to be a significant compatibility (not identity) between the Japanese and American middle-class value structures. These value structures emphasize respect for authority and parental wishes, duty to community, diligence, cleanliness, personal achievement, and the importance of keeping up an appearance.

Socializing Influences of Society. These explanations attribute academic success to the institutional structures such as schools, in American so-

ciety that perpetuate racial and class inequalities. Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Lindbloom (1977) argue that education is not the equalizer of society but instead reflects the inequities that exist throughout all institutions in society. This structural explanation is also offered by Ogbu (1987:319), who maintains that, "schools contribute to the academic problems of minority children intentionally and unintentionally because they operate according to the norms of American society and according to the norms of the communities in which they exist." Variability in school performance reflects not only the home, school, and classroom but also the relationship of the minority community to society at large.

Ogbu defines two types of minority status, involuntary and voluntary (or immigrant), each of which has its own distinctive sociocultural characteristics. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Americans would be representative of voluntary minorities, because these groups of people have immigrated voluntarily to the United States assuming that their life opportunities would improve. Ogbu's study of Chinese in California (1974) and Gibson's (1988) study of Punjabi Indians in Valleyside, California, are representative of this type of explanation.

Communication Styles. Another explanation of variability in academic performance can be traced to differences in communication styles (Erickson 1987). Erickson (1987) describes a situation in which teachers and students misunderstand the verbal and nonverbal communication styles of one another. Conceptions of appropriate classroom behavior will differ depending on the cultural background and socioeconomic characteristics of the individuals. What a student considers proper classroom conduct may be interpreted as being anything from withdrawal to disruption by the teacher. This results in the child being evaluated by the teacher as a poor student. Scholars who have focused on using communication styles to explain academic performance include Heath (1983) and Hymes (1974).

While researchers have argued the appropriateness and validity of each of these perspectives (Erickson 1987; Ogbu 1987; Trueba 1988), it is more likely the case that variation in academic performance is the result of the relationship between sociocultural factors and interpersonal interactions. By maximizing the relative strengths of each of these types of explanations, we developed a holistic model that explains the academic achievement patterns of East Asians.

A Model of Academic Achievement

Our model combines both a macro- and microlevel approach to explaining differences in academic performance among East Asians. At the macrolevel, we link and trace the economic and cultural history of East Asians in their country of origin as well as in the country to which they have immigrated. This conceptual frame is supplemented by a microlevel analysis of the process of interaction among the children, their parents, their teachers, and their peers.

The rationale for including a microlevel analysis in our model is based on similar assumptions made by the Spindlers (1987a and 1987b), in which they argue that culture operates both at the collective macrosocial, and micropsychological levels. From our perspective, microlevel analysis provides an opportunity to examine how individuals transfer their experiences, thoughts, and feelings into behaviors. However, as Ogbu (1987) suggests, microlevel school ethnographies that neglect to examine the wider society cannot show how education is linked with the economy, political system, local social structure, and belief systems of minority groups served by the schools.

The model developed for this study is dynamic and interactive. East Asian academic success and educational aspirations are viewed as the result of a multilevel process of interactions among parents, children, teachers, and peer groups. These interactions are examined in light of socioeconomic and cultural factors. For example, how a family structures and monitors the learning activities of its children at home is dependent upon family members' expectations that are formed through their cultural and economic experiences, the expectations of the school and community, and family resources such as the amount of time parents can devote to an activity.

Figure 1 displays how we conceptualize the relationship between macro sociocultural factors and micro interpersonal interactions to explain East Asian academic success.

Considering macro sociocultural factors, we assumed that the value a minority group placed on education was historically determined and interfaced with the groups' socioeconomic position in the host society. East Asians have traditionally placed a high value on education as a means for achieving upward mobility, social respect, and self-improvement (Lee 1987). However, the economic rewards for investing in education among East Asians in America have been lower than they have been for whites (Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos 1990; Gibson 1988; Lee 1987). Even though East Asians receive relatively low economic returns from additional schooling, they encourage their children to acquire more education beyond high school. Thus, it would seem that noneconomic cultural values such as self-improvement and upholding family honor may mediate the perceived economic benefits of education.

We expected that the sociocultural factors would be transmitted and visible in the microlevel relationships East Asian children have with their parents, teachers, and peer groups. We hypothesized that children develop academic self-expectations based on their parents', teachers', and peer groups' educational expectations for themselves and their past experiences. Aware of others' expectations, it appears that children set certain self-expectations or standards for their own achievement and translate these standards into performance through their efforts and persistence in coping with particular learning situations or tasks.

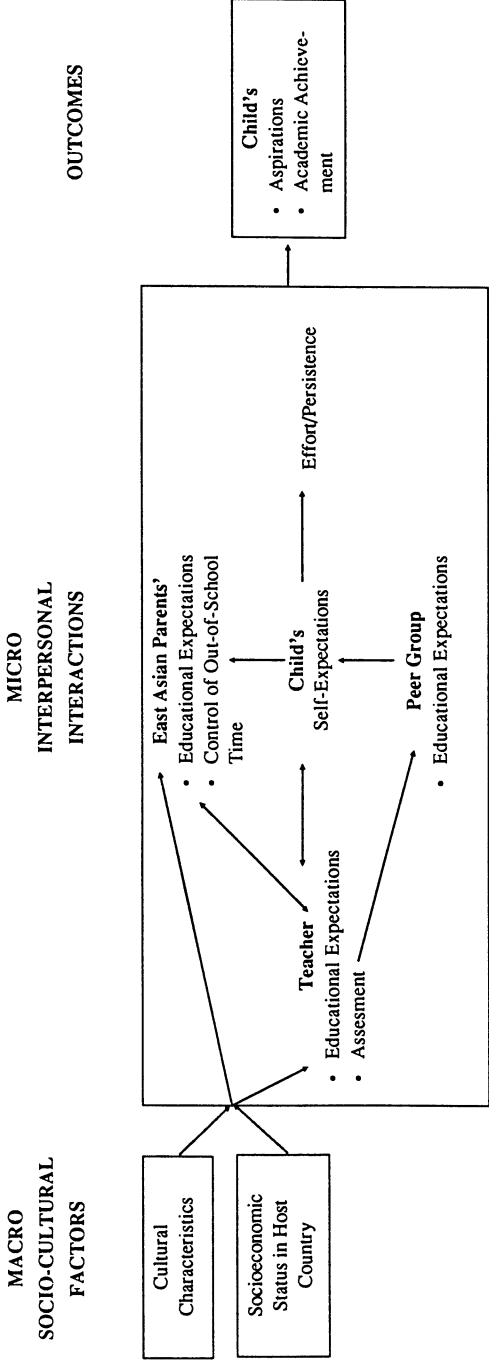


Figure 1
A Model to Explain East Asian Academic Success

In addition to cultural and socioeconomic factors, the academic expectations parents had for their children were likely to be influenced by self-evaluation and teacher assignments (Wong 1980). Teacher expectations that we perceive as formed in part by societal views of East Asian success would be affected by interactions with East Asian students and their parents. We suspected that teachers' attitudes toward East Asian students would be expressed openly in the classroom. Such teacher perceptions frequently communicated to East Asian children at school, coupled with high parental expectations at home would have a strong positive effect on the children's expectations for their own academic achievement.

Influenced by their teachers and by their parents' attitudes toward other children, as well as through their own observations, children formulate educational expectations for their peers. Students are accustomed to having their academic performance judged by their teachers. If they observe that their teachers consistently give high grades and make positive comments about the performance of certain groups of children, such teacher behaviors are likely to affect the opinions students have toward those classmates. We assumed that the behavior of East Asian students in school would be influenced by the expectations of their peers which would be consonant with the views held by the teachers.

We also hypothesized that East Asian parents were more likely to stress certain norms such as industriousness, diligence, and respect, which reinforce particular behaviors highly valued by teachers. The closeness of East Asian families and the clearly delineated lines of parental authority would enhance the parents' ability to control their child's behavior, regarding particular activities such as the use of time. Thus, East Asian parents would closely monitor and control their children's use of time on academic and social pursuits. The children would be unlikely to resist such control and would conscientiously fulfill parental expectations because of certain cultural values and norms that relate academic achievement to family honor.

Study Design

To explain differences in academic performance between East Asians and Anglo students, a field-based study using ethnographic interview and observation techniques was conducted in two public elementary schools. Thirty potential schools that had a substantial number of Asian-American students were identified using enrollment reports issued by the state of Illinois. Contacts with thirty schools that met the initial criteria revealed that only two schools had at least twenty or more Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students in grades six and seven. After the cooperation and support of the school district superintendents and principals were secured, two public schools were selected as field sites, a suburban junior high school (grades six

through eight) and a Chicago city school (grades kindergarten through eight).

The student sample included all of the East Asians and a purposively selected group of Anglo-American students in grades six and seven. Anglo Americans were defined as whites whose ancestors immigrated from Western or Northern Europe. Excluded from both groups were students in special classes who had learning disabilities or physical handicaps, and other minority groups such as blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and East Asians who had immigrated later than September 1978. The final sample included 46 East Asian and 49 Anglo students. Among the East Asian students, 27 were Korean American, 15 were Chinese American, and 4 were Japanese Americans.

Five methods of data collection were used: (1) student census, (2) review of school records, (3) participant and nonparticipant observations, (4) semistructured, in-depth interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators, and (5) collection of student essays.

The student census was conducted through questionnaires distributed by home room teachers in both schools to all students in grades six and seven. The questionnaire was designed to collect data on family demographic information, immigration history, language use at home, and language study. Students were instructed to have the questionnaire completed by their parents. Many of the questions in the student census were also included in the parent interviews so that the socioeconomic status of the family could be verified. Ninety percent of all distributed questionnaires in both schools were retrieved.

Three kinds of school records were obtained for all students in both schools: I.Q. test scores, achievement test scores, and report card grades. Achievement test scores from 1981–82 and 1982–83 were gathered for all six and seventh grade students. First quarter and cumulative grades for the 1982–83 academic year were also extracted from report cards. For those students attending the city school, the report cards also provided additional information on days absent, requests for conference with parents, and school-determined student English language proficiency levels.

From September 1982 through June 1983, 90 days of participant and nonparticipant observations of school activities were conducted. On the average, four hours per day were spent observing in classrooms, talking (informal interviewing) with teachers and students during recess and lunch periods, and participating in special school activities. Observations were conducted for all subjects in both schools at least once. However, focused observations were conducted in reading, language arts, mathematics, and social studies. Although the two schools had a similar number of students in each grade, the suburban school had more classes for each subject. Therefore, there were 53 days of observation in the suburban school and 37 days in the city school to balance the number of observations across subject areas.

For the first three months, the observations were primarily descriptive. However, over time, several key areas emerged which seemed appropriate for more intensive focused observations. These areas included teacher and student use of time, student attentiveness to class tasks, and interactions among students and teachers. Beginning in December, focused observations were conducted. Data from both the descriptive and focused interviews were kept in field-note form. Both the observations and interviews were conducted by an East Asian female anthropologist, who spoke fluent Korean.

Interviews with teachers, administrators, parents, and children were also conducted over the school year. Teacher and school administrator interviews were conducted in classrooms, offices, and occasionally in the teachers' lounge. Most of the parent and student interviews were conducted at home, however, several parent interviews were conducted either at work places or over the telephone. Each interview lasted at least an hour (except for telephone interviews which took less than an hour).

The total number of teachers and administrators interviewed was 16; 5 city school teachers, 7 suburban teachers, both principals, and the suburban superintendent, and school counselor. All of the school personnel were Anglos except for two city school teachers who were black. Because none of the teachers were East Asians, short informal interviews were also conducted with a Japanese-American teacher who taught a special class in the suburban school and one Korean-American bilingual teacher in the city school.

The total number of East Asian students and Anglo-American students interviewed was 73 (43 East Asians and 30 Anglos). At least one parent of each student was interviewed except for the parents of four East Asian and two Anglo students. Among the students interviewed, there were two pairs of Anglo siblings and three pairs of East Asian siblings. Therefore, the total number of parents interviewed was 62 (36 East Asians and 26 Anglos). When the interview was conducted with both parents of a student, the number of parents was counted as one rather than two. Parents, rather than the interviewer, determined which family member would be interviewed.

The interviews were free-flowing and as informal as possible. All of the interviews were recorded except for those conducted over the telephone. In most cases, 40% of each interview was transcribed. Transcription priorities were given to reports concerning the informants' perceptions and explanations for certain school-related behaviors.

The short student essays on three subjects: "my home," "my school," and "my future" were written by all of the students in the city school where the teachers agreed to help collect the compositions. At the suburban school, the superintendent would not allow the teachers to be involved in the preparation of essays. Although all the students agreed to write the essays only ten students submitted essays to the interviewer.

Results

Data collected in the two schools indicate that East Asian academic performance on achievement tests and report card grades was higher than that of the Anglo students. (Detailed discussion of these differences are reported in Lee 1984.) In the remainder of this article, we attempt to explain these results by examining two levels of social interaction that appear to support academic achievement among East Asian students: (1) the formation of academic self-expectations, and (2) the actualization of these expectations at home and in the classroom.

Formation of Academic Expectations: Parent, Teacher, and Peer Group Perspectives

Results of the student census and parent interviews reveal that overall the East Asian and Anglo families had similar income levels but that East Asian families had lower occupational levels (see Table 1). As shown in Table 1, in the suburban school, 71% of both East Asian and Anglo parents reported having an annual income of more than \$30,000. However, in the city school, 63% of the East Asian parents

Table 1
**Family Income of the East Asian and Anglo American
Student Sample by School Location**

Family income ^a	Suburban school		City school	
	East Asian	Anglo	East Asian	Anglo
Over \$40,000	5	3	7	5
\$30,000–\$40,000	5	12 ^b	8	5 ^b
\$20,000–\$29,999	4	5	6	1
Below \$20,000		1	3	3
Missing	(6)	(11)	(2)	(3)
Total ^c	20	32	26	17

Source: Student Census and Student and Parent Interviews.

^aIn the case of divorced parents, the family income is the income reported by the parent with whom the child currently resides.

^bAmong the Anglo-American parents in this category, nine out of twelve suburban school parents and three out of five city school parents did not provide income information. In these instances, estimates were made based on occupational information from student and parent interviews.

^cThe total reflects the number of students sampled (East Asians $N = 46$ and Anglos $N = 49$, see page 365). Percents in the text were calculated on the total number of observations excluding those in the missing category. Percents in the text were rounded to the nearest tenth.

and 71% of the Anglo-American parents had an annual income of more than \$30,000.

The similarity of income levels can be attributed to the number of hours East Asian parents were willing to work rather than to similarities in occupational levels as there are considerable occupational differences between the two groups. As Table 2 indicates, in the suburban school 32% of the East Asian fathers had managerial or professional positions compared to 41% of the Anglo fathers. Thirty-one percent of the Anglo-American mothers were professionals, teachers, or nurses whereas 21% of the East Asian mothers were similarly employed. Forty-seven percent of the East Asian parents were employed in small-scale businesses such as restaurants, laundries, or other retail stores. In the city school, 9% of East Asian fathers and 8% of working East Asian mothers were in managerial or professional positions compared to 50% of the Anglo fathers and 15% of Anglo mothers.

We suspected that differences in occupational levels between the East Asian and Anglo parents would be reflected in the manner in which East Asian families transmitted educational expectations. Results of the parent interviews seem to show that East Asian parents have higher educational expectations and standards for their children than do Anglo parents. Some explanations for these differences can be traced to: (1) the East Asian cultural tradition which places a high value on education for self-improvement, self-esteem, and family honor, and (2) the determination by some East Asian families to overcome occupational discrimination by investing in education.

The high value East Asian parents place on education is evident in the following quotations from several East Asian parents:

I think education is most important because if you have education, you have a more satisfied life with your family and society. . . . I think college is the least education a person should have.

The goals of education are to be a better human being, to have a valuable and content life. . . . We have to know. Without learning we can't know good things.

There is nothing without education. Education is more important than money.

Contributing to East Asian parents' high educational expectations were their perceptions of their children's economic opportunities in this society. Recognizing that there is discrimination in the job market, these parents use education as a strategy to overcome this situation. Among the East Asian parents interviewed, 24 out of 35 reported that they encountered serious occupational discrimination whereas 6 parents indicated that they have the same occupational opportunities as whites.

There is discrimination for Asians, the salaries are a little bit lower. . . . If you graduate from a notable college or you major in fields which are important to the United States, then you have more opportunities.

Table 2
Occupations of the East Asian and Anglo-American Parents in the Student Sample by School Location

Occupation	Suburban school			City school			
	East Asian Father	East Asian Mother	Anglo Father	East Asian Father	East Asian Mother	Anglo Father	Anglo Mother
Administrator/manager	2		8		1	1	
Professional/engineer	4		4	2	1	5	2
Teacher/school counselor					3	1	
Nurse		4			4		
Family business ^a	8	9		8	15		
Technician/mechanic	1	1	5	8		3	
Sales			1		1	1	
Clerk/secretary	1	2	2	1	9		6
Policeman/fireman			2				
Cook				1		2	
Laborer ^b	1	1	5	1	4		
Student							1
Homemaker		2		1			4
Unemployed	2		2	1	3		
Retired						1	
Missing	(1)	(1)	(3)	(1)	(1)	(3)	(3)
Total ^c	20	20	32	24	26	17	16

Source: Student Census and Student and Parent Interviews.

^aFamily business includes ownership of small restaurants, laundries, gift shops, and jewelry stores.

^bLaborer includes truck drivers, assemblers, welders, and taxi drivers.

^cTotal number reflects the study's student sample (East Asians $N = 46$ and Anglos $N = 49$, see page 365). Deceased parents are not counted. Percents in text are calculated on total number of observations excluding those in the missing category. Percents in text have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

I think there will be discrimination against my children because they are minorities. . . . Therefore I tell my children to study for two hours when white children study for one hour. If they ask me the reason, I tell them I will let them know later.

I tell my son, "You have to study hard. To study hard is the only way for Orientals to get a good job."

I always tell him, "You are a foreigner, You have a different face. So you should work harder to survive here."

East Asian parents tended to have clearer and higher educational expectations for their children than Anglo parents. Interviews showed that 67% (18 out of 27) of the Anglo parents compared to 100% of the East Asian parents stated that "C" or "satisfactory" grades were not acceptable. A common belief among East Asian parents was the "if a person studied hard, he should not get a 'C,' " whereas Anglo parents expressed the view that "I cannot complain too much about Cs because it is average."

The high expectations for excellent grades among the East Asian parents are revealed in the following comments:

His grades are not good. He was scolded by his father. He got four As and three Bs. I don't push him too much I think a good personality is more important. However, my husband is not satisfied if he does not have the first place in the class.

His grades were not good because he transferred to this school in the middle of the academic year. He got only two As. Others are Bs and Cs. . . . I am not satisfied with his grades. It has to be As in general. . . . Good grades are especially important to Koreans.

She got three As last time. I asked her if she could get five As the next time, and she said yes. However, she got three As again this time. I praised her. But she said she was sorry because she could not keep her promise with mommy.

Most East Asian children were well aware of their parents' expectations for high grades. Interviews with East Asian children indicated that in most instances their perceptions of their parents' expectations for their grades matched the comments of the parent interviews. Examples from three different students illustrate this point. "I got seven As and two Bs last time, but my parents still told me to try better. I cannot believe it." "If I get a 'B' my parents say it isn't that good. They get mad. They want all As." "My parents say B is not very good. And now you can imagine what they would say if I got a C."

East Asian children also associated good grades with their parent's honor, pride, or happiness. Eighteen out of 35 of the East Asian students compared to 5 out of 23 of the Anglo students stated that they try to achieve good grades to please their parents. For example:

When I get good grades—As—I feel happy because that makes my parents happy. . . . When I get a C grade, I feel very bad because I let myself and my parents down.

My parents are always happy. My parents are the happiest when I study a lot. That is the only thing they want me to do.

My parents are always happy. But if I get straight As they are really happy.

East Asian childrens' high academic self-expectations were reinforced by their teachers. Responses from the teacher interviews indicated that most respondents had high educational expectations for their Asian students. When asked to classify students into five groups based on their academic achievement (1 = highest, 5 = lowest), 15 out of 16 teachers stated that East Asian children most often belonged to the first or second group. Teachers expressed positive attitudes toward Asian students, who they perceived as being industrious, quiet, organized, and respectful. Some of the teacher perceptions of East Asians' academic performance were as follows:

Students from the Eastern Hemisphere bring many skills with them. Their mathematics are excellent. They grasp it immediately. . . . Oriental minds easily grasp concepts and rules of mathematics and apply them to new situations. It is a joy to work with them. . . . They are patient, very obedient, and cautious with their work. Their work is neat and they listen attentively.

Asian students are more serious, better prepared, and have higher aspirations. . . . Teachers tend to expect them to do well. And what teachers expect, students tend to do.

Most Oriental children are eager to learn—do well—appreciate going to school, are happy in school, and usually do all the work.

Although the teachers held very positive perceptions of the East Asians, they did comment that they seem to lack social skills. American teachers are reported to have stereotyped images of Asian children as being too quiet and passive to be successful in any kind of profession that involves verbal skills (Duong 1977; Koh 1979; Uyematsu 1971; Wong 1980). Teacher responses in this study support this image.

He (East Asian) is extremely quiet, seems to be a bright boy. . . . He is also very polite. . . . He gets along with other kids. He should end up in college somewhere. His math skills are very good—I don't know about language and social studies. Probably he will get a math-oriented job.

He (East Asian) is very apprehensive, extremely worried about his academic progress. He will work himself to death. He works very, very, hard! He is an overachiever. Academics is everything to him. He is very quiet. He is very nervous when he speaks. He will get into college. He needs a job which does not deal with people, like . . . an accountant.

East Asian students' high self-expectations were also reinforced by members of their peer groups. Interestingly, Anglo students had higher educational expectations for East Asians than the East Asians had for themselves. The Anglo students, like the teachers, perceived the East Asians to be the top students and the highest performers in the reading and mathematics groups.

Actualization of High Expectations at Home and in School

High educational self-expectations of East Asians become actualized through the behavior of their parents outside of school as well as the way they are treated in school. East Asian parents' interest in their children's education is reflected in how they structure the learning environment, not in the amount of time they spend tutoring their children on academic matters or the number of visits made to school.

Interviews with parents and children show that fewer East Asian than Anglo students received tutorial assistance from their parents. Even though most East Asian parents indicated they were unable to tutor their children at home, they reported teaching their children mathematics skills before they started school. Twenty-two out of 37 of the East Asian parents reported that they had spent time teaching their children reading, writing, and simple arithmetic skills before entering kindergarten. Four out of 25 Anglo parents indicated that they engaged in similar types of activities.

Some of the effects of this instruction were evident in the results of the *Metropolitan Readiness Tests* obtained from the suburban school for the students who had attended kindergarten in the same district. East Asian students had higher mean test scores than Anglos in all areas, with the exception of language skills. Differences in language performance can be attributed to the fact that many of the East Asian students were at a disadvantage because their parents did not speak English. This language problem might have influenced some of the East Asian parents from giving tutorial assistance in the later grades.

The interest East Asian parents take in their child's preschool educational experiences appeared to continue through the primary grades. East Asian parents reported in the interviews that teachers usually did not give homework in the primary grades, so to compensate for this, they made sure their children studied for more than one hour per day by giving them extra homework problems from workbooks purchased outside of school. Eighty percent (16 out of 20) of the East Asian parents compared to 13% (2 out of 16) of the Anglo parents stated that their children studied at home at least an hour a day in the primary grades.

As the East Asian students progress through the grades, parent interest and control are sustained. Among the East Asian parents interviewed, 47% (17 out of 36) compared to 7% (2 out of 28) of the Anglo parents reported that they strictly controlled their children's use of

time outside of school. Parent interview transcripts indicated that the majority of East Asian parents establish a specific period of time for study and nearly half of them carefully monitor children to ensure that their standards are met. For example, three parents did not allow their children to watch TV except for a few hours on the weekend. Though other parents did not go to this extreme, they did report making their children study after finishing their homework and also limited the time spent playing with friends or watching TV. Those parents who worked long hours outside of the home reported that they occasionally monitored their children's use of time.

In comparison to Anglo parents, more East Asians paid tuition for their children to have private lessons in music, computer science, martial arts, or languages. Ten of the 39 East Asian children took more than one of these types of lessons per week. Lessons that were the most popular among East Asians were school related and required practice at home. On average, East Asian children who took music lessons spent 5.4 hours per week practicing with their instruments compared to 3.5 hours for Anglo students. Twenty-one of the East Asian students attended language schools and spent anywhere from ten minutes to two hours a week on language school homework. With such a full schedule, it is not surprising that Asian parents and their children report fewer hours for recreational activities than Anglos and spend more time on homework or other activities associated with school, such as leisure reading or mathematics games.

Study habits of East Asian students were reinforced at school. The majority of the Asian students in both schools tended to be grouped in top-level classes. For most of the students, this tracking into the high reading and mathematics groups began in the primary grades. Classroom observations indicated that these top-level classes were quite different from other level classes. Teachers tended to challenge students with interesting, explanatory topics in the top-level classes while in the low-level classes they concentrated on mastery of basic skills and on disciplining students. Moreover, teachers gave more creative and interesting homework assignments to the top-level students. The intellectually stimulating work encountered in the top-level classes seems to have had a motivating effect on the Asian and Anglo students' interest in school assignments. Students in top-level classes tended to distract each other much less often than those in the low-level classes. Consequently, there were fewer opportunities for students in these groups to be off task because of the disruptive behavior of their classmates.

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that East Asian academic success is related to cultural and socioeconomic characteristics, and interactive relationships among children, parents, teachers, and peer groups. The

use of a holistic research methodology made it possible to uncover several important explanations for why East Asians succeed in school. From an academic perspective, the findings are very positive: Asians do well in school because their parents expect it, their teachers expect it, and their peer group expects it. Parent expectations are extremely powerful and are transmitted through a cultural context in which education is highly valued because it leads to self-improvement and increases self-esteem. But it is not expectations alone that contribute to Asian academic success. Parents help Asian students succeed by carefully structuring their out-of-school time so it is directed at academic-related skills. Furthermore, the quiet, industrious, disciplined, and orderly behaviors emphasized in East Asian cultures are rewarded at school, where teachers tend to interpret these behaviors as traits of a good cooperative student.

Although East Asians do succeed in school, their accomplishments are achieved at certain costs. One of the major findings of this study is that East Asian students spend much of their time studying rather than playing with their friends or participating in organized group activities. Consequently, they have less opportunity to develop social skills. Because of occupational discrimination against Asians, East Asian parents have encouraged their children to pursue medical and technical professions, which are relatively less language based than other kinds of high-level professions. This strategy of investing in science-oriented professions forces Asians to become what some have termed a "middleman minority" group (Kim 1981; Kitano 1976). According to Blalock (1967), the middleman minority group acts as a buffer between the dominant group and minority groups at the bottom. Such middleman groups are able to rise above the status of other minorities because of a competitive advantage or high adaptive capacities. But the middleman minority group soon reaches a ceiling imposed by a combination of dominant group discrimination and the cultural values of the ethnic group.

Educators can help East Asians break through the middleman "ceiling" by providing educational opportunities that can assist East Asian students acquire social and language skills. Teachers can be a valuable asset by structuring learning situations where these skills can be developed, such as urging East Asian students to participate in class discussions, requiring oral presentations in class, and constructing team projects where East Asians have sustained interactions with Anglo students. East Asian students could also be encouraged to join student extracurricular activities where social skills can be refined, such as social service clubs, debate teams, and school newspapers. Finally, teachers can help shape career aspirations by exposing East Asian students to occupations other than those that are strictly technical or science oriented. Racial and ethnic stereotyping cannot be eliminated through schooling, but educators can assume certain social responsi-

bilities and undertake specific actions that can help East Asians overcome some of the vestiges of discrimination.

Note

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