

The Cost of Living and the Regional Distribution of Asian Americans

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Abstract: In assessing the extent to which Asian Americans are disadvantaged in the labor market, cost of living and regional distribution remain key factors that have not been directly investigated in the prior research. Using data from the 2000 U.S. Census, this study finds that the majority of Asian Americans tend to reside in the Northeast and West, where the cost of living is relatively high. Using the 5-Percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the 2000 U.S. Census, this research also directly ascertains that the cost of living expense is significantly higher for Asian Americans than for non-Hispanic whites, even after controlling for demographic and class factors including education. This finding of significantly higher cost of living among Asian Americans holds even if the cost of living is examined by major Asian ethnicity. Furthermore, this study finds that 1.5 generation Asian American men do not face any wage disadvantage in the U.S. labor market net of cost of living and other factors, but a 2 percent disadvantage is evident for native born Asian American men. Findings of this research suggest that racial and ethnic discrimination in the post-Civil Rights era has been ameliorated at last for Asian Americans.

Keywords: Cost of Living, Regional Distribution, Asian Americans, 2000 U.S. Census.

INTRODUCTION

In considering the extent to which Asian Americans faced disadvantages in terms of receiving economic rewards that are on par with whites, prior research indicates that region of residence and cost of living play important roles. Compared to non-Hispanic whites, Asian Americans tend to have a different regional distribution and their traditional residential states (i.e., California, Washington, Hawaii, New York and New Jersey) tend to have a high cost of living. As argued some time ago by Hurh and Kim (1989), the wages of Asian Americans may not have reached parity with whites after taking into account the higher cost of living that Asian Americans tend to encounter due to their regional distribution [1].

Table 1 shows regional distribution of white and Asian American populations [2]. In 2000, about 20 percent of both whites and Asian Americans resided in the Northeast. While larger percentages of whites resided in the Midwest (27.0 percent) and in the South (33.8 percent), nearly half of Asian Americans (49.3 percent) resided in the West. As such, there is an obvious difference in regional distribution of these two racial groups. Whites are much more likely to live in the Midwest and South, but almost half of Asian Americans live in the West. The index of dissimilarity for Table 1 is 30.4 demonstrating that the regional distribution of these two racial groups differs substantially. Furthermore, the second largest state population of Asian Americans is in New York (Sakamoto, Kim, and Takei 2010) indicating that Asian.

Table 1. Regional Distribution of Population by Racial Group

Area	Non-Hispanic Whites		Asian Americans	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	198,482,500		11,898,828	
Region				
Northeast	41,117,100	20.3	2,368,297	19.9
Midwest	54,236,600	27.0	1,392,938	11.7
South	66,455,600	33.8	2,267,094	19.1
West	36,673,200	18.9	5,870,499	49.3
Total	198,482,500	100.0	11,898,828	100.0

Source: 2000 1% PUMS for non-Hispanic whites and U.S. Census Bureau (2002:5) for Asian Americans.

Note: Refers to entire populations of non-Hispanic whites and Asian Americans. The index of dissimilarity between the two distributions is 30.4.

Americans who do not reside in the West often face a high cost of living in the areas near the east coast of the U.S. [3].

Table 2 shows the cost of living differentials across the states and regions (Berry, Fording, and Hanson 2000) [4]. In addition to general consumer goods and the cost of housing, the estimates take into account fuel and energy cost which varies by climate. Indices below 1.00 indicate that the cost of living is below the national average while indices above 1.00 indicate that the cost of living is above the national average. The table shows that some traditional residential states of Asian Americans, such as California (1.086) and Hawaii (1.219), are relatively high in living expenses. Moreover, the Northeastern states, where about 20 percent of both Asian

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Table 2. Cost of Living Index for 50 States and District of Columbia, by Region

Region	State	Index	Region	State	Index	
Northeast	Connecticut	1.219	Midwest	Illinois	1.075	
	New Jersey	1.178		Minnesota	1.070	
	Massachusetts	1.172		Wisconsin	1.040	
	New Hampshire	1.126		Michigan	1.037	
	Rhode Island	1.120		Missouri	1.033	
	New York	1.109		Ohio	1.031	
	Vermont	1.063		Kansas	1.025	
	Maine	1.043		Nebraska	1.022	
	Pennsylvania	1.022		Indiana	1.021	
West	Alaska	1.219	South	District of Columbia	1.109	
				Maryland	1.052	
				Delaware	1.035	
				Virginia	0.997	
				Florida	0.958	
				Georgia	0.956	
				North Carolina	0.944	
				Tennessee	0.938	
				South Carolina	0.932	
	California	1.086	Alabama	0.920		
			Kentucky	0.915		
			Texas	0.914		
			Oklahoma	0.912		
			Arkansas	0.908		
			West Virginia	0.908		
			Louisiana	0.904		
			Mississippi	0.898		
			Nevada	0.994	Virginia	0.997
			Washington	0.978	Florida	0.958
Colorado	0.969	Georgia	0.956			
Arizona	0.940	North Carolina	0.944			
Oregon	0.934	Tennessee	0.938			
Wyoming	0.927	South Carolina	0.932			
New Mexico	0.920	Alabama	0.920			
Utah	0.919	Kentucky	0.915			
Idaho	0.910	Texas	0.914			
Montana	0.905	Oklahoma	0.912			

Note: These estimated state differentials are based on the results provided by Berry *et al.* (2000:558).

Americans and whites reside, have consumer price indices above the national level. The table also shows that the Southern states, where a large number of whites tend to reside, overall have lower cost of living. Finally, the Midwestern states have consumer price indices above the national level.

However, these indices are based on 1995 data and the indices for the Midwest might actually be lower today. As such, we can tell from Tables 1 and 2 that whites tend to reside in the Midwest and South where cost of living is relatively low, whereas Asian Americans tend to reside in the high-cost West region. The cost of living in California is not as high as some might expect because, compared to some other states, California has lower home heating costs during

the winter months and lower air-conditioning costs during the summer months.

Hurh and Kim (1989) argue that the wages of Asian Americans may not have reached parity with whites after taking into account the higher cost of living that Asian Americans tend to encounter due to their regional distribution [1]. Similarly, Cabezas and Kawaguchi (1988) contend that the seeming parity between Asian Americans and whites is merely an artifact of regional location [5]. Thus, the unadjusted average U.S. earnings comparisons between Asian Americans and whites are inappropriate comparisons of economic progress (Mar 1999) [6].

Indeed, prior research shows that Asian Americans are adversely affected by their place of residence. Using data from the 1970, 1980, and 1990 PUMS, Snipp and Hirschman (2004:110) note that, “[i]nterestingly, unlike other minorities, Asian men residing in areas with large populations of co-ethnics, namely California and Hawaii, have occupational statuses which are slightly lower than Asian men living elsewhere. In the absence of this liability, the occupational statuses of Japanese and Chinese men in California and Hawaii would be an average of 1 to 6 points higher” [7]. Therefore, Snipp and Hirschman (2004:115) conclude that “at least Asian American men are disadvantaged by their geographic concentrations” [7].

Using 1990 PUMS, Mar (1999) examines the role of location in the earnings disadvantages of three groups of Asian Americans: Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos [6]. Mar’s (1999) findings from the regional comparisons of earnings differentials by race suggest that Asian American (i.e., Chinese and Japanese) men encounter less labor market discrimination in Hawaii than in California [6]. In particular, Mar (1999) finds that earnings for Filipino men are significantly lower than whites in California once differences in human capital are taken into account [6]. Fuji and Mak (1985) find that Filipino men have lower returns to education in Hawaii than the rest of the U.S. [8].

Furthermore, when using data that enable controlling for field of study and college type among college graduates, Kim and Sakamoto (2010) find that controlling for region of residence results in a net disadvantage of about 8 percent for native born Asian American men [9]. Kim and Sakamoto (2010) note that, to the extent that region of residence should be considered to be a necessary control variable, then college-educated native born Asian American men have yet to reach full wage parity with whites [9].

Although Asian Americans tend to live in high cost-of-living regions and states, this may not necessarily derive from a lack of labor market opportunities nationally. Rather, this may be due to personal proclivities and family ties that are associated with being more likely to have previously lived in those areas. In keeping with traditional Asian cultural norms, Asian Americans may be more concerned than are whites with residing near or with aging parents (Kamo 2000; Xie and Goyette 2004) [10, 11]. Asian Americans as a group have been characterized as being more family oriented in the sense of being more likely to marry after completing schooling, less likely to become divorced, more likely to focus on the schooling achievements and related childrearing activities of their children, and more likely to form three-

Table 3. Asian Population for the United States and by Region: 1990 and 2000

Area	1990			2000		
	Total Population	Asian Population		Total Population	Asian Population	
		Number	Percent of Total U.S. Population That Is Asian		Number	Percent of Total U.S. Population That Is Asian
United States Region	248,709,873	6,908,638	2.8	281,421,906	11,898,828	4.2
Northeast	50,809,229	1,324,865	2.6	53,594,378	2,368,297	4.4
Midwest	59,668,632	755,403	1.3	64,392,776	1,392,938	2.2
South	85,445,930	1,094,179	1.3	100,236,820	2,267,094	2.3
West	52,786,082	3,734,191	7.1	63,197,932	5,870,499	9.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2002:5)

Note: For 1990, Asian population includes Pacific Islanders and is based on a single-race classification system. For 2000, Asian population includes both single-race and multi-race, but excludes Pacific Islanders.

generational families (Kamo 2000; Xie and Goyette 2004; Min 1995; Sun 1998;) [10-13]. Because of this Asian American sub-cultural context that places a premium on family functioning, Asian Americans may not maximize their cost-adjusted earnings to the same extent that whites do, but their residence may not derive from a lack of labor market opportunities nationally but rather may reflect the tendency of Asian Americans to prefer to live in places such as California despite the higher costs. The extent to which these characterizations may be systematic is an important topic for future research.

Today, however, an increasing share of Asian Americans resides in nontraditional states/regions, due to regional migration and natural growth. This may suggest an increasing labor market opportunities for Asian Americans. For example, Table 3 indicates that the total population of the U.S. increased from 248.7 million in 1990 to 281.4 million in 2000. Across this time period, the total population of Asian Americans increased from 6.9 million to 11.9 million. This increase represents a percentage growth of the Asian alone population from 2.8 percent in 1990 to 4.2 percent of the total American population in 2000. Table 3 also shows the growing rates of the Asian American population in non-West regions. While Asian Americans were greatly underrepresented in the Northeast, Midwest, and South in 1990, just in a decade, more Asian Americans live in these regions. Although they continue to be proportionately small in the non-West regions, these regions will continue to have high rates of Asian American population growth due to regional migration and natural increase (Sakamoto, Kim, and Takei 2010) [3].

In the following, we will examine the extent to which Asian Americans reside in states that have a higher cost of living than whites. Asian Americans are primarily concentrated in the high wage/high cost of living western United States (Hurh and Kim 1989; Takaki 1998; US Commission on Civil Rights 1988), especially in cities rather than rural areas (Takaki 1998), primarily due to the fact that these were the places of residence after arrival from abroad of the earlier immigrants (Allen and Turner 1988; Barringer, Gardner, and Levin 1993; Hurh and Kim 1989; Lyman 1977) [1, 14-18]. In addition to examining whether the average cost of living

is indeed higher for Asian Americans than for whites, we investigate its differential.

We also investigate the extent to which Asian Americans are disadvantaged in terms of wages in comparison to whites, net of the cost of living. If the regional aspect (i.e., higher cost of living for Asian Americans) does not explain why Asian Americans have socioeconomic parity with whites, then this achievement of parity may represent a historic change for Asian Americans.

DATA AND METHOD

We use data from the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 2000 Census. The 5% PUMS is a random sample from the records of the 2000 U.S. Census and is provided by which the U.S. Census Bureau for the use of researchers. This data set is one of the most recently available that provides an adequate sample size for Asian Americans as well as reliable information on demographic and socioeconomic variables. This study uses the official racial/ethnic classification system stipulated by the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, and in those terms we consider a target population that includes Asian Americans and non-Hispanic whites with positive earnings who were between the ages of 25 to 64, and who were working at least 1,000 hours during the year prior to the surveys. The analysis differentiates Asian Americans in terms of those who were born overseas but who came to the U.S. before the age of 13 in the U.S. (whom we have referred to as the 1.5 generation as is commonly done in the literature on Asian Americans) and native-born generations among Asian Americans. For computational simplicity, our analysis includes men only.

The first dependent variable that we analyze is the cost of living index, which refers to a cost of living adjustment (COLA) that varies by each of the 50 states and District of Columbia and is imputed to individuals on the basis of their current state of residence at the time of the survey. COLA estimates the state differentials in the cost of living as presented by a proportionality factor that varies by state as shown in Table 2. Unfortunately, the adjustment is not available at a more detailed geographic level than the state.

Table 4. OLS Regression Models of COLA Using 2000 5% PUMS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Native-Born Asian American	0.075 ***	0.072 ***	
Native-Born Asian Indian			0.032 ***
Native-Born Chinese			0.061 ***
Native-Born Filipino			0.073 ***
Native-Born Japanese			0.098 ***
Native-Born Korean			0.054 ***
Native-Born Other Asian			0.012
1.5-Generation Asian American	0.043 ***	0.041 ***	
1.5-Generation Asian Indian			0.038 ***
1.5-Generation Chinese			0.054 ***
1.5-Generation Filipino			0.064 ***
1.5-Generation Japanese			0.047 ***
1.5-Generation Korean			0.046 ***
1.5-Generation Other Asian			0.018 ***
Age 30-34		0.006 ***	0.005 ***
Age 35-39		0.008 ***	0.008 ***
Age 40-44		0.009 ***	0.008 ***
Age 45-49		0.008 ***	0.008 ***
Age 50-54		0.007 ***	0.007 ***
Age 55-59		0.008 ***	0.008 ***
Age 60-64		0.007 ***	0.007 ***
Married		-0.008 ***	-0.008 ***
Children Under Age 6		0.003 ***	0.003 ***
Children Aged 6-17		-0.001 ***	-0.001 ***
<u>Educational Attainment</u>			
High School Graduate		0.014 ***	0.013 ***
Some College (Including Associate Degree)		0.016 ***	0.015 ***
College Degree		0.023 ***	0.022 ***
Master's Degree		0.031 ***	0.029 ***
Doctoral and Professional Degree		0.028 ***	0.026 ***
Intercept	1.017 ***	0.999 ***	1.000 ***
R-Square	0.009	0.020	0.028

The sample population includes all educational levels.
 *Significant at the 0.05 level; **Significant at the 0.01 level; ***Significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed tests).

The second dependent variable that we analyze is the hourly wage derived from total labor force earnings and hours worked in the year prior to survey (Petersen 1989) [19]. In order to adjust for the highly positive skew in the distribution of this variable, the log transformation is applied so that the actual dependent variable that is used in the regression models is log-wage (Sakamoto and Furuichi 1997) [20].

The multiple regression functions that we estimate include dichotomous variables to indicate the racial minority group (i.e., 1.5-generation Asian Americans and native-born Asian Americans) with native-born non-Hispanic whites serving as the reference category. Other demographic variables include years of age (i.e., age 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, and 60-64), a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent is married, and the following discrete count variables indicating the number of children that reside in the respondent's household—under age 6 and between ages 6-17. The analysis also includes five dichotomous variables on education—high school graduate, some college (including associate degrees), college degree, Master's Degree, and Ph.D. or professional degree. The reference category is represented by those who have less than high school education.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Table 4 shows OLS regression results for the cost of living. Model 1 indicates that without any control, cost of living expense is 7.5 percentage points higher for native-born Asian Americans than whites, and 4.3 percentage points higher for 1.5-generation Asian Americans than whites, respectively. Even after controlling for other variables, Model 2 indicates that the results are similar to the bivariate model. Thus, both native-born and 1.5-generation Asian Americans appear to be more likely than whites to reside in states that have a higher cost of living.

Model 3 shows some group-specific results for the hypothesis, for the five ethnic groups with an enough sample size for OLS regression analysis (i.e., more than 100 people). The model shows that even if cost of living expense is examined by ethnic group, results hold same. Namely, cost of living expense is higher for all groups except other Asian Americans (i.e., Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean) than whites. Among the native-born ethnic groups examined here, cost of living expense is especially high for Japanese Americans who have the largest proportion of U.S.-born generations, the majority of who tend to reside in California. Among the 1.5-generation ethnic groups, cost of living expense is the highest for Filipinos, followed by Chinese.

Table 5 shows OLS regression results for log-wage. Model 1 indicates that without any control, an average hourly wage is 10 percent (i.e., $e^{0.094} - 1$) higher for native-born Asian Americans than whites, and 4 percent (i.e., $e^{0.041} - 1$) higher for 1.5-generation Asian Americans than whites, respectively. After controlling for COLA, Model 2 shows that there is no statistically significant differential for both the native-born and 1.5-generation Asian American coefficients, indicating that COLA plays a crucial role in accounting for the wage differential across these two racial groups. Further controlling for other variables, Model 4 indicates that the white versus Asian American wage gaps become smaller compared to Model 3, especially in the case of 1.5-generation Asian Americans. In sum, these results well illustrate that COLA, in addition to class and socioeconomic factors, play important role in accounting for the labor market outcome differentials between Asian Americans and whites, because the majority native-born Asian Americans tend to reside in high-cost places including California.

Table 5. OLS Regression Models of Log-Wage Using 2000 5% PUMS

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Native-Born Asian American	0.094	***	0.010		0.039	***	-0.022	***
1.5-Generation Asian American	0.041	***	-0.006		0.054	***	0.020	**
COLA			1.104	***			0.854	***
Age 30-34					0.107	***	0.102	***
Age 35-39					0.218	***	0.211	***
Age 40-44					0.263	***	0.255	***
Age 45-49					0.276	***	0.269	***
Age 50-54					0.298	***	0.292	***
Age 55-59					0.310	***	0.303	***
Age 60-64					0.244	***	0.238	***
Married					0.166	***	0.173	***
Children Under Age 6					0.035	***	0.032	***
Children Aged 6-17					0.033	***	0.034	***
<u>Educational Attainment</u>								
High School Graduate					0.162	***	0.150	***
Some College (Including Associate Degree)					0.314	***	0.300	***
College Degree					0.631	***	0.612	***
Master's Degree					0.751	***	0.725	***
Doctoral and Professional Degree					1.007	***	0.983	***
Intercept	2.839	***	1.717	***	2.126	***	1.273	***
R-Square	0.000		0.015		0.176		0.184	

The sample population includes all educational levels.

*Significant at the 0.05 level; **Significant at the 0.01 level; ***Significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed tests).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Using the 2000 U.S. Census data, the findings of this study indicate that cost of living and regional distribution significantly differ between Asian Americans and whites. This study finds that cost of living expense is significantly higher for both native-born and 1.5-generation (i.e., non-immigrant) Asian American men, in reference to whites, because nearly a majority of non-immigrant Asian American men tend to reside in high-cost states including California. This study also finds that there is no significant wage differential between native-born Asian Americans and whites, as well as 1.5-generation Asian Americans and whites, net of COLA and class and socioeconomic factors.

Based on the findings of this study, some implications regarding the debate on socioeconomic disadvantages of Asian American men may be considered. This research suggests that non-immigrant Asian American men do not face a significant net racial disadvantage in the labor market, as suggested by some research. Prior research shows that non-immigrant Asian American men had faced significant direct and overt racial discrimination in the labor market before WWII (e.g., Boswell 1986; Kitano and Daniels 2001; Okimoto 1994) [21-23]. Then this achievement of parity repre-

sents a historic change for native-born and 1.5-generation Asian American men. Namely, racial and ethnic discrimination in the post-Civil Rights era has been notably ameliorated (Alba and Nee 1997; Farley and Alba 2002), at least for non-immigrant Asian American men [24, 25]. Findings of this research show that the regional aspect (i.e., higher cost of living for Asian American men) does not explain why Asian American men have achieved socioeconomic parity with whites. Although what this conclusion means for the broader U.S. race relations—for example, the lower labor market returns for blacks and Hispanics—remains debatable, the post-Civil Rights era appears to be characterized with the greater acceptance of minorities and multiculturalism, rather than extensive and persuasive occupational discrimination as found in the pre-World War II era. Future research may consider whether particular Asian ethnic groups may deviate from this general conclusion or whether the situation for Asian American women might be somewhat different.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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