

## ***Demography***

### **MS# 2021-314, "Patterns of Panethnic Intermarriage in the United States, 1980-2018"**

This paper uses data from the 1980 decennial census and annual files from the American Community Survey (2014-2018) to examine trends in ethnic endogamy and exogamy among Asians and Latinos. The study separates Asians into two separate “melting pots” – East/Southeast and South Asians. The goal is to identify new patterns of panethnicity. The study, according to the author, confirms with updated data the findings of previous studies: Asians are more likely than Hispanics to experience panethnic intermarriage. An interesting feature of the study is the application of a counterfactual model (i.e., conditional logit models) that considers local marriage markets, which are defined at the county group level in the 1980 census data and with PUMAs in the 2014-2018 ACS data.

The author does not make a particularly compelling case for this study, finding similar patterns of endogamy as those reported in earlier studies by Qian et al. (Demography 2012). What’s potentially new and different are results showing that East/Southeast Asians and South Asians have low rates of intermarriage with each other. The author was unable to “explain” this result, only saying that these patterns are not due to differences in birthplace and language endogamy. In the end, the author speculates, based on previous studies, that South Asians are phenotypically different from other Asian populations, which reduces panethnicity as measured by intermarriage (i.e., skin color matters). Religious differences may also play a role. These are plausible explanations but cannot be established with census-based data products. The author also claims that “only Qian et al. (2001) have analyzed panethnic intermarriage using data that includes South Asians.” This is technically accurate (because of the groupings used in the paper), but also a bit misleading. For example, in one recent example using ACS data, Lichter et al. (The ANNALS 2015) showed that Asian Indian immigrants had the highest incidence of intermarriage. Nearly two-thirds of Asian Indian men and a quarter of Asian Indian women married their foreign-born co-nationals. Marriages with other Asians were very low—only about 5-10 percent. It is well known in the demographic literature that South Asians in general and Asian Indians in particular display much different marriage patterns than other Asian groups. Again, the authors will need to clearly differentiate their findings and conclusions from previous studies.

The trend data also are not especially convincing, in part because the study includes only 2 data points separated by more than 35 years. In my opinion, trends are not observable with only two data points. In fact, it could be that patterns of among Asians increased during the 1980s but then declined over the subsequent 25 year period. We just don’t know how trends are fluctuating over the last several decades. This interpretative problem is compounded by the fact that the racial and ethnic data are not strictly comparable between 1980 and 2014-2015 and the spatial units from which “choice sets” are drawn are not the same. It is not clear how this might affect the marital opportunities of Asians or Latinos (and their various nationalities). At a minimum, it would be good to know the percentage shares of all U.S. Asians and Latinos that are actually included in the metropolitan areas identified in this study. Whether it is 50

percent or 90 percent matters when drawing inferences about changing patterns of ethnic intermarriage.

#### Other issues

1. The author should indicate the basic and specific objectives of this study and identify its main contributions to the literature much earlier in the paper. Simply reporting that “I refresh our understanding of panethnic intermarriage using recent data from the 2014-2018 American Community Survey” is not enough, nor is it enough to say that you use a counterfactual approach or control for a few additional variables in the models. How do these technical issues fix or adjudicate (competing) claims in the literature?
2. The author claims that the results have important implications for the future salience of panethnic categories. If so, the paper should include some additional discussion about why this is so. Much of the introduction seems to be focused generically on panethnicity or on particular technical issues (e.g., using log-linear model) rather than on describing exactly why the author expects differences in panethnic marriages among Asian and Latino populations, or why panethnic marriages may have increased or decreased. The introduction is without any hypotheses of this sort. What does the author expect to find, and why?
3. It is never completely clear in the paper how outmarriage to Whites or Blacks are treated in the paper. For example, if Asians experience changing shares of outmarriage with other Asian co-ethnics, then questions arise about whether this is due to changes in outmarriage to these other groups. Quite mechanically, panethnic marriages may decline if there are growing shares of Asians or Hispanics who outmarry with Whites or Blacks. As a starter, how are Whites and Blacks treated in evaluating Asian or Hispanic exogamy in figure 3?
4. Relatedly, the language of ethnic exogamy is sometime unclear. Does this mean that Indians, for example, are marrying out to other Asians or that they are outmarrying with non-Asians? It also seems that endogamy sometimes refers to national origin groups and other times to panethnic groups. This make it difficult to fully understand or appreciate the more nuanced results.
5. As I understand the pooling of different national origin groups, it seems that the author has already lumped different national origin groups into panethnic categories (i.e., South Asians, East/SE Asians and Hispanics). What is the empirical justification for making these groupings a priori? In fact, later the author looks at national origin group-specific affinities (p. 17) using the ACS and finds that social distance remains between East Asian groups (e.g., Chinese and Japanese) and the Vietnamese and Filipino ethnic groups (e.g., other East Asian populations). This entire section (p. 17-20) has a wandering character that is difficult to reconcile with the earlier results reported for the 3 panethnic groups.
5. The author makes this claim: “Rather than treat panethnicity as a form of assimilation/acculturation, I treat it as a form of ethnoracial boundary expansion.” But how in practice does this conceptual claim actual influence the modeling approach used in the paper? I can’t tell that it does.