



# Intergenerational Social Mobility of Asian Americans

by Prof. Xi SONG

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HKT

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An early sociological view in the United States, traceable to Edward Alsworth Ross (1866–1951), was that Asian American immigrants had lower standards for their children’s education than Whites. According to this reasoning, it was not until the Civil Rights Movement that the socioeconomic profiles of Asian Americans began to improve, leading to a new well-educated, “model minority” generation. With recently released linked 1900–1940 full-count U.S. Census microdata, we challenge this view with new evidence on the intergenerational mobility of native-born Asian Americans before the Civil Rights Movement. We find that Chinese and Japanese Americans who grew up during 1882–1943, a period of anti-Asian policies in the U.S. (for example, the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Gentleman’s Agreement), exhibited exceptionally high educational mobility amid these policies. However, their higher educational mobility failed to translate into higher occupational mobility. The discrepancy between educational and occupational mobility suggests labor market discrimination was at work for Asian Americans prior to the Civil Rights Movement.



Xi SONG is an Associate Professor of Sociology and a faculty member of the Graduate Group in Demography at University of Pennsylvania. She is an external affiliate of the Population Research Center and the Human Capital and Economic Opportunity Global Working Group at the University of Chicago and a faculty affiliate of the International Max Planck Research School for Population, Health, and Data Science in Germany. Her research focuses on the patterns and determinants of steps in career progression — through changes in jobs, occupations, employers, organizations, and earnings — that occur over the stages of the life course. Song received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2015, with the dissertation "Social Stratification in Multiple Generations."

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## Upcoming talks from “Intergenerational Mobility Webinar Series”

- Prof. Fangqi WEN @The Ohio State University (December, 2024)
- Prof. Deirdre BLOOME @Harvard University (February, 2025)
- Prof. Hong Wing TAM @CUHK (March, 2025)

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