



Folks:

You must listen to the radio podcast of this program and then read the material below. As you listen to the podcast think of the basic question I raise in my courses when we deal with the general subject of social injustice in a society like this one (a capitalist democracy): to what extent the causal issues are one of *personal agency* (a favorite position of conservatives) and to what extent the causal issues are one of *structural factors* (a favorite position of progressives/liberals). The podcast is available here: <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2014/02/04/tiger-mom-amy-chua-triple-package>

February 4, 2014

## ‘Tiger Mom’ Talks Culture and Success in America

“Tiger Mom” Amy Chua and her husband, Jed Rubenfeld, are back, this time with their take – an explosive look — at what makes some ethnic and cultural groups successful in America.

Tiger mom Amy Chua drove half the world crazy with her last book, “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mom,” about “the Chinese way” of child-rearing – tough, unbending, demanding. Critics called it “abusive,” “insane.” It was a bestseller. Now Amy Chua, with husband Jed Rubenfeld, is back with advice for the whole society. Learn from the Chinese, the Jews, the Mormons, the Nigerians, the Cubans who are succeeding in America. Feel superior. Feel insecure. Control impulses. Win. Critics call this one a “new racism.” Chua makes no apology. This hour On Point: talking success in America.

– Tom Ashbrook

### Guests

[Amy Chua](#), co-author of “[The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups In America](#).” Also author of “[Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother](#).” Professor of law at Yale Law School. (@amychua)

[Jed Rubenfeld](#), co-author of “[The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups In America](#).” Also author of “[Freedom and Time](#)” and “[Revolution by Judiciary: The Structure of American Constitutional Law](#).”

[Richard Alba](#), professor of sociology at the Graduate Center at City University of New York. Author of “[Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America](#)” and “[Remaking the American Mainstream Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration](#).”

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### Authors’ summary of their book

## The New York Times

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/opinion/sunday/what-drives-success.html>

# What Drives Success?

By AMY CHUA and JED RUBENFELD JAN. 25, 2014

A SEEMINGLY un-American fact about America today is that for some groups, much more than others, upward mobility and the American dream are alive and well. It may be taboo to say it, but certain ethnic, religious and national-origin groups are doing strikingly better than Americans overall.

Indian-Americans earn almost double the national figure (roughly \$90,000 per year in median household income versus \$50,000). Iranian-, Lebanese- and Chinese-Americans are also top-earners. In the last 30 years, Mormons have become leaders of corporate America, holding top positions in many of America's most recognizable companies. These facts don't make some groups "better" than others, and material success cannot be equated with a well-lived life. But willful blindness to facts is never a good policy.

Jewish success is the most historically fraught and the most broad-based. Although Jews make up only about 2 percent of the United States' adult population, they account for a third of the current Supreme Court; over two-thirds of Tony Award-winning lyricists and composers; and about a third of American Nobel laureates.

The most comforting explanation of these facts is that they are mere artifacts of class — rich parents passing on advantages to their children — or of immigrants arriving in this country with high skill and education levels. Important as these factors are, they explain only a small part of the picture.

Today's wealthy Mormon businessmen often started from humble origins. Although India and China send the most immigrants to the United States through employment-based channels, almost half of all Indian immigrants and over half of Chinese immigrants do not enter the country under those criteria. Many are poor and poorly educated. Comprehensive data published by the Russell Sage Foundation in 2013 showed that the children of Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese immigrants experienced exceptional upward mobility regardless of their parents' socioeconomic or educational background.

Take New York City's selective public high schools like Stuyvesant and Bronx Science, which are major Ivy League feeders. For the 2013 school year, Stuyvesant High School offered admission, based solely on a standardized entrance exam, to nine black students, 24 Hispanics, 177 whites and 620 Asians. Among the Asians of Chinese origin, many are the children of restaurant workers and other working-class immigrants.

Merely stating the fact that certain groups do better than others — as measured by income, test scores and so on — is enough to provoke a firestorm in America today, and even charges of racism. The irony is that the facts actually debunk racial stereotypes.

There are some black and Hispanic groups in America that far outperform some white and Asian groups. Immigrants from many West Indian and African countries, such as Jamaica, Ghana, and Haiti, are climbing America's higher education ladder, but perhaps the most prominent are Nigerians. Nigerians make up less than 1 percent of the black population in the United States, yet in 2013 nearly one-quarter of the black students at Harvard Business School were of Nigerian ancestry; over a fourth of Nigerian-Americans have a graduate or professional degree, as compared with only about 11 percent of whites.

Cuban-Americans in Miami rose in one generation from widespread penury to relative affluence. By 1990, United States-born Cuban children — whose parents had arrived as exiles, many with practically nothing — were twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to earn over \$50,000 a year. All three Hispanic United States senators are Cuban-Americans.

Meanwhile, some Asian-American groups — Cambodian- and Hmong-Americans, for example — are among the poorest in the country, as are some predominantly white communities in central Appalachia.

MOST fundamentally, groups rise and fall over time. The fortunes of WASP elites have been declining for decades. In 1960, second-generation Greek-Americans reportedly had the second-highest income of any census-tracked group. Group success in America often tends to dissipate after two generations. Thus while Asian-American kids overall had SAT scores 143 points above average in 2012 — including a 63-point edge over whites — a 2005 study of over 20,000 adolescents found that third-generation Asian-American students performed no better academically than white students.

The fact that groups rise and fall this way punctures the whole idea of "model minorities" or that groups succeed because of innate, biological differences. Rather, there are cultural forces at work.

It turns out that for all their diversity, the strikingly successful groups in America today share three traits that, together, propel success. The first is a superiority complex — a deep-seated belief in their exceptionality. The second appears to be the opposite — insecurity, a feeling that you or what you've done is not good enough. The third is impulse control.

Any individual, from any background, can have what we call this Triple Package of traits. But research shows that some groups are instilling them more frequently than others, and that they are enjoying greater success.

It's odd to think of people feeling simultaneously superior and insecure. Yet it's precisely this unstable combination that generates drive: a chip on the shoulder, a goading need to prove oneself. Add impulse control — the ability to resist temptation — and the result is people who systematically sacrifice present gratification in pursuit of future attainment.

Ironically, each element of the Triple Package violates a core tenet of contemporary American thinking.

We know that group superiority claims are specious and dangerous, yet every one of America's most successful groups tells itself that it's exceptional in a deep sense. Mormons believe they are "gods in embryo" placed on earth to lead the world to salvation; they see themselves, in the historian Claudia L. Bushman's words, as "an island of morality in a sea of moral decay." Middle East experts and many Iranians explicitly refer to a Persian "superiority complex." At their first Passover Seders, most Jewish children hear that Jews are the "chosen" people; later they may be taught that Jews are a moral people, a people of law and intellect, a people of survivors.

That insecurity should be a lever of success is another anathema in American culture. Feelings of inadequacy are cause for concern or even therapy; parents deliberately instilling insecurity in their children is almost unthinkable. Yet insecurity runs deep in every one of America's rising groups; and consciously or unconsciously, they tend to instill it in their children.

A central finding in a study of more than 5,000 immigrants' children led by the sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut was how frequently the kids felt "motivated to achieve" because of an acute sense of obligation to redeem their parents' sacrifices. Numerous studies, including in-depth field work conducted by the Harvard sociologist Vivian S. Louie, reveal Chinese immigrant parents frequently imposing exorbitant academic expectations on their children ("Why only a 99?"), making them feel that "family honor" depends on their success.

By contrast, white American parents have been found to be more focused on building children's social skills and self-esteem. There's an ocean of difference between "You're amazing. Mommy and Daddy never want you to worry about a thing" and "If you don't do well at school, you'll let down the family and end up a bum on the streets." In a study of thousands of high school students, Asian-American students reported the lowest self-esteem of any racial group, even as they racked up the highest grades.

Moreover, being an outsider in a society — and America's most successful groups are all outsiders in one way or another — is a source of insecurity in itself. Immigrants worry about whether they can survive in a strange land, often communicating a sense of life's precariousness to their children. Hence the common credo: They can take away your home or business, but never your education, so study harder. Newcomers and religious minorities may face derision or hostility. Cubans fleeing to Miami after Fidel Castro's takeover reported seeing signs reading "No dogs, no Cubans" on apartment buildings. During the 2012 election cycle, Mormons had to hear Mitt Romney's clean-cut sons described as "creepy" in the media. In combination with a superiority complex, the feeling of being underestimated or scorned can be a powerful motivator.

Finally, impulse control runs against the grain of contemporary culture as well. Countless books and feel-good movies extol the virtue of living in the here and now, and people who control their impulses don't live in the moment. The dominant culture is fearful of spoiling children's happiness with excessive restraints or demands. By contrast, every one of America's most successful groups takes a very different view of childhood, inculcating habits of discipline from a very early age — or at least they did so when they were on the rise.

In isolation, each of these three qualities would be insufficient. Alone, a superiority complex is a recipe for complacency; mere insecurity could be crippling; impulse control can produce asceticism. Only in combination do these qualities generate drive and what Tocqueville called the "longing to rise."

Needless to say, high-achieving groups don't instill these qualities in all their members. They don't have to. A culture producing, say, four high achievers out of 10 would attain wildly disproportionate success if the surrounding average was one out of 20.

But this success comes at a price. Each of the three traits has its own pathologies. Impulse control can undercut the ability to experience beauty, tranquillity and spontaneous joy. Insecure people feel like they're never good enough. "I grew up thinking that I would never, ever please my parents," recalls the novelist Amy Tan. "It's a horrible feeling." Recent studies suggest that Asian-American youth have greater rates of stress (but, despite media reports to the contrary, lower rates of suicide).

A superiority complex can be even more invidious. Group supremacy claims have been a source of oppression, war and genocide throughout history. To be sure, a group superiority complex somehow feels less ugly when it's used by an outsider minority as an armor against majority prejudices and hostility, but ethnic pride or religious zeal can turn all too easily into intolerance of its own.

Even when it functions relatively benignly as an engine of success, the combination of these three traits can still be imprisoning — precisely because of the kind of success it tends to promote. Individuals striving for material success can easily become too focused on prestige and money, too concerned with external measures of their own worth.

It's not easy for minority groups in America to maintain a superiority complex. For most of its history, America did pretty much everything a country could to impose a narrative of inferiority on its nonwhite minorities and especially its black population. Over and over, African-Americans have fought back against this narrative, but its legacy persists.

Black America is of course no one thing: "not one or ten or ten thousand things," as the poet and Yale professor Elizabeth Alexander has written. There are black families in the United States occupying every possible socioeconomic position. But Sean "Diddy" Combs — rapper, record producer and entrepreneur — undoubtedly spoke for many when he said: "If you study black history, it's just so negative, you know. It's just like, O.K., we were slaves, and then we were whipped and sprayed with water hoses, and the civil rights movement, and we're American gangsters. I get motivated for us to be seen in our brilliance."

Culture is never all-determining. Individuals can defy the most dominant culture and write their own scripts, as Mr. Combs himself did. They can create narratives of pride that reject the master narratives of their society, or turn those narratives around. In any given family, an unusually strong parent, grandparent or even teacher can instill in children every one of the three crucial traits. It's just much harder when you have to do it on your own, when you can't draw on the cultural resources of a broader community, when you don't have role models or peer pressure on your side, and instead are bombarded daily with negative images of your group in the media.

But it would be ridiculous to suggest that the lack of an effective group superiority complex was the cause of disproportionate African-American poverty. The true causes barely require repeating: They include slavery, systematic discrimination, schools that fail to teach, employers who won't promote, single motherhood and the fact that roughly a third of young black men in this country are in jail, awaiting trial or on probation or parole. Nor does the lack of a group superiority narrative prevent any given individual African-American from succeeding. It simply creates an additional psychological and cultural hurdle that America's most successful groups don't have to overcome.

At the same time, if members of a group learn not to trust the system, if they don't think people like them can really make it, they will have little incentive to engage in impulse control. Researchers at the University of Rochester recently reran the famous marshmallow test with a new spin. Children initially subjected to a broken promise — adults promised them a new art set to play with, but never delivered — almost invariably "failed" the test (snatching the first marshmallow instead of waiting 15 minutes for a promised second). By contrast, when the adults followed through on their promise, most kids passed the test.

The same factors that cause poverty — discrimination, prejudice, shrinking opportunity — can sap from a group the cultural forces that propel success. Once that happens, poverty becomes more entrenched. In these circumstances, it takes much more grit, more drive and perhaps a more exceptional individual to break out.

Of course a person born with the proverbial silver spoon can grow up to be wealthy without hard work, insecurity or discipline (although to the extent a group passes on its wealth that way, it's likely to be headed for decline). In a society with increasing class rigidity, parental wealth obviously contributes to the success of the next generation.

But one reason groups with the cultural package we've described have such an advantage in the United States today lies in the very same factors that are shrinking opportunity for so many of America's poor. Disappearing blue-collar jobs and greater returns to increasingly competitive higher education give a tremendous edge to groups that disproportionately produce individuals driven, especially at a young age, to excel and to sacrifice present satisfactions for long-term gains.

THE good news is that it's not some magic gene generating these groups' disproportionate success. Nor is it some 5,000-year-old "education culture" that only they have access to. Instead their success is significantly propelled by three simple qualities open to anyone.

The way to develop this package of qualities — not that it's easy, or that everyone would want to — is through grit. It requires turning the ability to work hard, to persevere and to overcome adversity into a source of personal superiority. This kind of superiority complex isn't ethnically or religiously exclusive. It's the pride a person takes in his own strength of will.

Consider the story of Sonia Sotomayor, who was born to struggling Puerto Rican parents. Her father was an alcoholic, she writes in her moving autobiography, "My Beloved World," and her mother's "way of coping was to avoid being at home" with him. But Justice Sotomayor, who gave herself painful insulin shots for diabetes starting around age 8, was "blessed" with a "stubborn perseverance." Not originally a top student, she did "something very unusual" in fifth grade, approaching one of the smartest girls in the class to "ask her how to study." Soon she was getting top marks, and a few years later she applied to Princeton — though her guidance counselor recommended "Catholic colleges."

The point of this example is not, "See, it's easy to climb out of poverty in America." On the contrary, Justice Sotomayor's story illustrates just how extraordinary a person has to be to overcome the odds stacked against her.

But research shows that perseverance and motivation can be taught, especially to young children. This supports those who, like the Nobel Prize-winning economist James J. Heckman, argue that education dollars for the underprivileged are best spent on early childhood intervention, beginning at preschool age, when kids are most formable.

The United States itself was born a Triple Package nation, with an outsize belief in its own exceptionalism, a goading desire to prove itself to aristocratic Europe (Thomas Jefferson sent a giant moose carcass to Paris to prove that America's animals were bigger than Europe's) and a Puritan inheritance of impulse control.

But prosperity and power had their predictable effect, eroding the insecurity and self-restraint that led to them. By 2000, all that remained was our superiority complex, which by itself is mere swagger, fueling a culture of entitlement and instant gratification. Thus the trials of recent years — the unwon wars, the financial collapse, the rise of China — have, perversely, had a beneficial effect: the return of insecurity.

Those who talk of America's "decline" miss this crucial point. America has always been at its best when it has had to overcome adversity and prove its mettle on the world stage. For better and worse, it has that opportunity again today.

Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld are professors at Yale Law School and the authors of the forthcoming book *"The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America."*

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## Criticism/commentary of/on their book

Source:

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2163555,00.html>

TIME

Monday, Feb. 03, 2014

# The 'Tiger Mom' Superiority Complex

By Suketu Mehta

**A new book from Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld seeks to explain why some groups succeed in America, and some fail. But when does cultural pride cross over into racism?**

From time to time, every Indian American finds an email in his or her inbox, wearing a font of many colors, like the one my grandfather once sent me: "Take a Pride--Being an Indian. 38% of Doctors in U.S.A. are Indians. 36% of NASA employees are Indians. 34% of MICROSOFT employees are Indians. India invented the Number System. Decimal Point was also invented by India. Sanskrit is the most suitable language for computer software ..."

On my desk now is a book-length version of such an email: *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America*, by Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld. You may remember Chua as the "Tiger Mom" whose 2011 memoir about the rigors of Chinese parenting set off waves of anxiety among aspirational American parents who had been raised with Dr. Spock's permissive child-rearing attitudes. Her new book, co-authored with her husband, widens its aim, purporting to explain why not just Asians (like Chua) but also seven other groups--Cubans, Jews (like Rubenfeld), Indians (like me), Nigerians, Mormons, Iranians and Lebanese--are superior when it comes to succeeding in America.

The book claims that these groups thrive because of three traits: a superiority complex, insecurity and impulse control. The ones lacking the "Triple Package" are African Americans, Appalachians, Wasps and pretty much everybody else.

Does such thinking shock you? If not, it may be because it has become so insidiously commonplace over the past decade as a new strain of racial, ethnic and cultural reductivism has crept into the American psyche and public discourse. Whereas making sweeping observations about, say, African-American or Hispanic culture--flattering or unflattering--remains unthinkable in polite company, it has become relatively normal in the past 10 years to comment on the supposed cultural superiority of various "model minorities." I call it the new racism--and I take it rather personally.

I am an American, Calcutta born. I'm writing a book about immigrants in New York, dedicated to my two American sons. I want them to know why we came here and how we found our place in this new land. I want them to know about the teachers at the Catholic school in Queens who called me a "pagan," and the boy there who welcomed me to the school by declaring, "Lincoln shoulda never let 'em off the plantations," and the landlord who welcomed us to the country by turning off the electricity.

I also want them to know why their family did well in the end. We worked hard, yes, and we read books and went to the right schools and are "well settled," as our relatives back in India describe us. But we also benefited from numerous advantages--from cultural capital built up over generations to affirmative action to an established network of connections in our new country--none of which had anything to do with racial, ethnic or cultural superiority.

When my family went to America, we left behind a system in which people are often denigrated because of their caste, religion, language or skin color. The U.S., of course, has its own deeply troubled history with regard to race, but its path has tended toward more equality.

Recently, though, the language of racism in America has changed, though the plot remains the same. It's not about skin color anymore--it's about "cultural traits." And it comes cloaked in a whole lot of social-science babble. The new racials are too smart to denigrate particular cultures. Instead, they come at things the other way. They praise certain cultures, hold them up as exemplary. The implication--sometimes overt, sometimes only winked at--is that other cultures are inferior and this accounts for their inability to succeed.

### **The Rise of Groupthink**

The U.S.--like Brazil or England--likes to think it has moved beyond race. After all, we elected a black President, twice. But in reality, the terrain of race-baiting has simply shifted. The condescension once aimed squarely at African Americans now also claims as its targets Latinos, Muslims and--in a novel twist--large swaths of whites. And the people doing the condescending might be black or brown themselves.

A Congolese immigrant whom I met in the course of researching my book told me about the African Americans she knows at the supermarket where she works. "We are really different," she said about her community, as opposed to African Americans. "They don't have African values. They don't have the values to be black."

I asked her what that means.

"To be black," she explained, "means you get married and you don't have children before." The American blacks at her supermarket, she said, need to go to college. "They ask if you want to have marijuana. It's just normal for them. It's easy for them to say that 'My ancestors were oppressed.'"

A book like *The Triple Package*, even if it takes pains to argue in nonracial terms, is an example of this sort of ethnocentric thinking writ large. And it is only the latest in a long line of books--spanning more than a century--arguing for the superiority of this or that American group over others. The roots of alleged superiority have changed over time from race to class to IQ to religion and now to culture.

In 1916 Madison Grant wrote *The Passing of the Great Race*, which purported to demonstrate the racial and cultural superiority of Northern Europeans over Southern Europeans. The book was influential in drumming up popular support for passage of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which barred Asians from immigrating to the U.S. and established quotas for Southern and East Europeans, to keep out Jews. Decades later, an influential 1959 article by Bernard Rosen declared that "Protestants, Jews and Greeks place a greater emphasis on independence and achievement training than southern Italians and French-Canadians." They were more successful because of an "achievement syndrome"--which sounds suspiciously like the Triple Package. (Italians, particularly, were portrayed in these works as an immobile ethnicity. But by 1975, they had assimilated, and now, as the sociologist Richard Alba has demonstrated, young Italian Americans have higher than average levels of college and postgraduate education.)

This line of argument expanded in the 21st century. In 2004 Samuel Huntington, the Harvard professor who became famous for his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, warned against Latino culture in a Foreign Policy cover story bearing the title "José, Can You See?" In his book published the following year, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, he explained the differences between Anglo and Latino culture by quoting a Texas entrepreneur on "Hispanic traits ... that 'hold us Latinos back': mistrust of people outside the family; lack of initiative, self-reliance, and ambition; low priority for education; acceptance of poverty as a virtue necessary for entrance into heaven."

In 2009 an article by Jason Richwine, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, caught the attention of my people with its title, "Indian Americans: The New Model Minority." East Asians continue to excel in the U.S., he noted, but Indians are clearly the latest and greatest model. Why? "Exhibit A is the spelling bee." Success in spelling and other similar cognitive tasks, according to Richwine, proves that we

are smarter than whites as well as Ashkenazi Jews--a happy finding for my father, who spent a lifetime in the diamond market, where they have a big presence. Richwine's conclusion: immigration policy should favor these model minorities over, say, Mexicans.

Then there is Stanford University's Thomas Sowell, who in *Migration and Cultures: A World View* identified six model "middleman minorities" who exemplify the entrepreneurial virtues he thinks the U.S. desperately needs. Last year he took the argument to another level, writing that there are some cultures that are just incompatible with Western values, primarily (surprise!) Muslim culture.

These bromides don't just come thundering down from the ivory tower. They're all around us in casual conversation about group accomplishment and group blame. Typical was a recent podcast by the comedian Adam Carolla, in which he interviewed San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom. Newsom noted that half of Latino and African-American families in California don't have access to a checking account or ATM.

"What's wrong with them?" asked Carolla. "I want to know why those two groups don't have access ... Are they flawed? ... Do Asians have this problem? ... They were put in internment camps. Are they at the check-cashing places?"

"Look at the history," Newsom responded. "It's naive to suggest that those things don't matter."

"How about the Jews?" asked Carolla. "No problems in the past? ... Why are the Jews doing well? ... Why do some groups do so much better? I'll tell you why: they have a family who puts an emphasis on education." He may have been speaking lightly, but Carolla's words show how easily the line can blur between cultural praise and cultural denigration.

## **Of Ethnicity and Reality**

The one thing my sons are always amazed by when they visit India is the condescension displayed toward entire groups of people. They hate the way people speak to their maids, their drivers, their waiters--anybody Indians consider socially inferior. I try to explain to them that India has been independent for only 60-odd years and the U.S. for more than three times as long and that while India has made great progress in pursuing democracy, it hasn't yet translated into social and economic equality.

The new American racism, however, is turning the clock backward. While Chua and Rubenfeld are not the only ones peddling this pernicious line of thought, their book is likely to make them prominent spokespeople for it. So it's worth taking a close look at the "evidence" they marshal for their argument. Too often they--and their compatriots--ignore the realities of American history to make their half-baked theories stick.

The authors attempt to barricade themselves against charges of racism by protesting that the Triple Package has nothing to do with race or IQ; it's about ethnicity. So not all blacks are losers--look at Nigerians and Liberians! They are so well represented in the Ivy League! But the authors fail to acknowledge that Africans and Afro-Caribbeans are beneficiaries of affirmative action, won through the civil rights struggles of African Americans. What's more, African Americans are not in a bad way because of lack of racial pride or a problem with their impulses. Their challenges as a community trace back centuries; they were brought here in chains, their women raped and their families deliberately broken. This is what President Obama was talking about in his remarks after the Trayvon Martin verdict, when he said, "I think it's important to recognize that the African-American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away."

Time and again, when examining the claims of the new racialists, we find other, deeper, often more complex explanations for why the children of some groups do better than others.

As Nancy Foner, a leading immigration scholar, points out in an essay, "Today, the way East Asian--as opposed to black or Hispanic--immigrants fit into New York's racial hierarchy makes a difference in the opportunities they can provide their children." Because they are not black, she notes, "East Asian (and white) immigrants face less discrimination in finding a place to live and, in turn, send their children to school." That translates into greater access to heavily white neighborhoods with good public schools. Moreover, even if they attend school with native-born blacks and Latinos, they do not feel a bond of race with native minorities--making them less likely to become part of a peer culture found among some disaffected inner-city black and Latino youth.

Cubans, meanwhile, are in favor over other Latinos among the new racialists, since they appear to do better in America than groups like Mexicans. But as City University of New York's Philip Kasinitz, an expert on ethnic assimilation, notes, "If Mexicans threw out the top 10% of their population into America, you'd be singing a different tune about Mexicans." And among Cubans, there's a subset that hasn't done well: the "Marielitos," who immigrated in 1980 when Fidel Castro emptied the island's prisons and told the inmates they were free to head to America. They were much darker in complexion than the first wave of Cubans, and they have not done anywhere near as well as their light-complected compatriots. What does this suggest? First, that if you were doing well in the country you're leaving, you'll do well in

the country you're going to, and vice versa. Second, that lighter-skinned people tend to fare better than darker-skinned people when they immigrate to the U.S., even if they're from the same country.

What about Jews? Scholars like Stephen Steinberg in *The Ethnic Myth* have pointed out that the success of immigrant Jews was largely due to the fact that they arrived in the U.S. with "industrial experience and concrete occupational skills" well suited to the booming urban economies of the new world. Not, as Chua and Rubenfeld posit, because "Jews maintained for millennia the idea that they were God's chosen people."

Perhaps somewhat uniquely, Chua and Rubenfeld single out Mormons for model-minority status as well. They attribute Mormon business success, for instance, to the group's principles of child rearing. "Mormon teenagers," they write, "are less likely to have sexual intercourse, consume alcohol, smoke pot, or watch X-rated films than teenagers of any other faith." The authors overlook one small point about Mormons, however: they have their own state. Eighty percent of the Utah legislature is Mormon; its entire congressional delegation is Mormon. Utah has had only three non-Mormon governors in its history. This translates to tremendous political and financial clout for the religion, which is an indispensable part of Mormon business success.

Lastly, what shall we make of Indians--who, aside from Chinese, are perhaps the new racialists' favorite model minority? Indians in America are, as Chua and Rubenfeld note, "by any number of measures, the most successful Census-tracked ethnic group in the country."

Well, if Indians are so great, what explains India? The country is a sorry mess, with the largest population of poor, sick and illiterate people in the world, its economy diving, its politics abysmally corrupt. For decades, those who could afford to get out did. The \$1,000 that it takes to purchase a one-way ticket to the U.S. is about a year's salary for the average Indian. If India shared a border with the U.S. and it were possible for its poorest residents to cross over on foot, we would fast cease to be the model minority, and talk-show hosts would rail against us just as they do against Mexicans.

The groups Chua and Rubenfeld and the other new racialists typically pick out as success stories are almost without fail examples of self-selection. Forty-two percent of Indians in the U.S. ages 25 and older have a postgraduate degree. But only about 20% of those they've left behind in the motherland even graduate from high school, and 26% of the population is illiterate. It's the same with Nigerians: the ones who are here represent a vastly richer and better-educated subset of the country's population as a whole.

Further, the authors pay almost no attention to the role of networking, which accounts for so much of the success of groups like Jews, Cubans and Indians. Part of the reason so many immigrant groups thrive is that when they arrive in the U.S., they already have an uncle who runs a store and cousins who are tutors, doctors or lawyers who can help them negotiate the new country.

When my family immigrated in 1977, we didn't do well because of delayed gratification or cultural superiority or a chip on our shoulder. We did well because my uncle in Detroit, an engineer, brought us over on the family-reunification bill, not in shackles or in steerage. When my father started his diamond business on 47th Street in Manhattan, there was a network of Indian diamond merchants who could show him the ropes. My sons, in turn, will benefit from my connections.

Much of *The Triple Package* focuses, naturally enough, on immigrants in New York City--then and now the immigrant capital of the country, if not the world. So you could profitably browse a gold mine of a book just put out by the NYC department of city planning, *The Newest New Yorkers*, a compendium of figures about the diverse groups that make up my hometown.

Chinese Americans in New York City, it turns out, earn less than other groups lacking the Triple Package. The median household income of Chinese in the city (\$42,766) is lower than that of Ecuadoreans (\$46,126), Haitians (\$48,175) and Pakistanis (\$50,912). The New York City group with the highest percentage of high school graduates isn't Chinese or Indians; it's Ukrainians (94.4%). But rarely are we treated to encomiums about the cultural superiority of the Borscht Mom.

### **America's Real Exceptionalism**

The pity is that this book, and this entire line of argument, is taken seriously--among my relatives, for instance--when all the scholars I've consulted laugh at it. "Every one of the premises underlying the theory of the Triple Package is supported by a well-substantiated and relatively uncontroversial body of empirical evidence," the authors assert. "Give me a break," said Foner, who is one of the authorities cited in the endnotes. "There is a large body of literature showing that the most important factor predicting success among the children of immigrants is parents' human capital." That is: skills and education, from family to family and individual to individual.

Which is not to say culture is meaningless--even if "bad culture" is a convenient way to throw blame at struggling groups, as opposed to dealing with the structural causes behind those groups' disparate outcomes. We all have a linguistic, religious, racial, ethnic or national culture that shapes much about us. The cultural values of a group are an important part of the answer to the question of why certain groups seem to do better, at particular times, than others.



But cultural values are never the whole answer--even as we've come to privilege them over all other explanations for success and failure, such as political and economic ones. And culture is rarely either an unambiguously good force or an unambiguously bad one. Thus, Confucian values of education and family fealty certainly are one factor in explaining why Chinese students from low-income backgrounds do better than their peers. But as we've seen, that's not the whole story. Meanwhile, many in China would like to see less conformity in their culture, believing that it inhibits much of the freethinking that powers creativity and innovation in America and that it results in a citizenry that passively tolerates suppression of dissent and censorship of the Internet.

Chua and Rubenfeld make another mistake when they try to set up a hierarchy of good culture vs. bad culture--in which good culture invariably means getting rich. They take their definition of success from that of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.: "the gaining of money and position." Nowhere are cultural traits like kindness, community and public service or martial valor given any value.

Immigrants, claim Chua and Rubenfeld, are wary of "an excessively permissive American culture"--the bogeyman that haunts the dreams of so many who see the U.S. as losing the vigor of a former age. But isn't that permissiveness exactly what makes America work: this messy mix, this barbaric yawp, this redneck rondeau, this rude commingling? Isn't that what permeates its films, movies, books? And isn't that the principal product it can still export? It is American culture's permissiveness, its new world energy, that still attracts the masses to the "golden door."

As it did with my father, who in college in 1950s Calcutta was first exposed to the great rock-'n'-yell of Chuck Berry and Elvis--music the Jesuit deans of St. Xavier's tried to ban because they couldn't stand to see students gyrating their pelvises. My father had never heard such an awesome caterwaul before, and--along with America's decadent movies and books--it seeded the young man's desire to go live there someday.

It's not conformity that makes this country great; it's an individual striking out against the expectations of his culture, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg dropping out of Harvard, Miles Davis coming out of heroin addiction to produce 'Round About Midnight, the 14-year-old Billie Holiday turning the pain of her childhood into the bluest beauty, Sylvia Plath taking on death with pills and poetry, William S. Burroughs writing from the bowels of his addiction in Naked Lunch; it's Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Cheever and Carver drinking and writing, writing and drinking through their demons. Imagine what American culture would be if American artists had kept a tight check on their impulses.

When people dream of moving to America, it's not just so that they can be prudent, studious, restrained. My uncle Vipinmama would tell me a story about his parents, my grandparents, who had emigrated from Ahmedabad in India to Nairobi in the 1920s. All their lives, they denied themselves luxuries in the new country in order to store them for their retirement. They had rented a room in Ahmedabad, which they filled with refrigerators, washing machines, steel cupboards, juicers--all the goods and furnishings of life they abstained from in Nairobi. When they retired they were going to buy a house in Ahmedabad and stock it with their hoarded treasure.

As the room in Ahmedabad bulged with the goods sent from Africa, the ranks of appliances waiting to be turned on one distant day, their lives in Nairobi continued in great simplicity and thrift. One day in her 50s, my grandmother had a heart attack and died--she "went off," as the Gujaratis say. My grandfather left Nairobi then and went to Ahmedabad and bought a house. But he could not bear to live in their dream without the one who was to share it. So within a month, he sold both the house and all the goods they had so patiently saved up, without ever having used them, and left for London.

This had a powerful influence on Vipinmama, and he lived every day of his life in the pursuit of happiness. Every good bartender in Bombay, New York and Antwerp knew him. He played the guitar. He played cricket for his college. He went on vacation, even when it wasn't good for his business. He too went off, following a heart attack at 34 from congenital heart disease--but it was not after a life postponed. Whatever he purchased, he brought home and turned on immediately. If it was a stereo, he danced to its music; if it was a VCR, he invited all his friends over to watch movies that very evening. You might think my grandfather would have wanted my uncle to be more prudent, more restrained. But in fact, my grandfather was very proud of his son--prouder than any of the fabled Indians in the email he sent around--because his life was not spent deferring happiness, waiting for power.

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## Good and Bad News on Jewish Push for Success

Tue, 01/28/2014 Daphna Raskas

If we can identify the factors that lead to success, then we can model educational systems to produce highly successful students. Or can we? In their op-ed, “*What Drives Success?*” (New York Times, Jan. 26), Yale Professors Amy Chua (“Tiger Mom”) and Jed Rubenfeld, identify three traits that are inherent to the most successful groups in America today. They claim that these groups share three traits that, together, drive success: a superiority complex, a deep-seated belief in the exceptionality of members of their group; insecurity, a feeling that you or what you’ve done is not good enough; and impulse control, the degree to which a person can control the desire for immediate gratification.

While anyone can possess these traits, their research suggests that some groups are instilling them more frequently than others and with greater success: every one of America’s most successful groups believes that there is something exceptional about their group; being an outsider has been a source of insecurity evident in all of America’s most successful rising groups; and contemporary American parenting is focused on “feeling good and living in the moment,” while every one of America’s most successful rising groups has inculcated disciplined habits into their children.

Emblematic of the triple package of traits leading to success have been American Jews: “chosen”, quintessential outsiders, raised with strong disciplined habits. Chua and Rubenfeld state that “Jewish success is the most historically fraught and the most broad-based. Although Jews make up only about 2 percent of the United States’ adult population, they account for a third of the current Supreme Court; over two-thirds of Tony Award-winning lyricists and composers; and about a third of American Nobel laureates.” Truly a remarkable record. Can it be sustained?

With greater acceptance of Jews and Judaism in all realms of American culture today, it is clear that Jewish insecurity has faded. Our children have not grown up with the insecurities that we did as the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors and immigrants. Our children are not embarrassed to identify as Jews. In fact, according to the recent Pew Study on Jewish Identity in America, 94 percent of the 6.7 million Jews surveyed said they are proud of being Jewish. Less than a century ago in 1937, Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan described the lowly stature of Jews: “The average Jew today is conscious of his Judaism as one is conscious of a diseased organ that gives notice of its existence by causing pain.”

We have come a long way. Being Jewish is no longer viewed as a stigma. It has become so widely accepted that nearly 40 percent of Americans say they would favor a close relative marrying a Jew, a statistic that would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. With Bar and Bat Mitzvah envy and Chanukah envy on the rise, Jews are no longer outsiders.

Our insecurities have lessened and the digital age has brought with it a marked decrease in emphasis on community and communal superiority along with an increased focus on the individual. This has greatly diminished the relevance of any notions of communal Jewish “chosen-ness.” The Pew study identified most Jews as proud of their Jewishness but most Jews do not associate their Jewishness with any sense of superiority. To the contrary, there is a growing discomfort with the notion of Jewish specialness.

Recent trends in American parenting have also weakened the importance that we attach to discipline and impulse control. At the same time that we have taken a hands-off approach to inculcating impulse control, the digital age has provided our children with immediate online gratification of social, physical and recreational needs further diminishing their impulse control.

And so, American Jewry today is uncomfortable with notions of communal superiority, relatively secure in our status as American Jews and disinterested in instilling impulse control if it means having to say no to our children’s desires. Chua and Rubenfeld caution that to the extent that a group passes on its wealth to the next generation without that generation having to work hard, deal with insecurities and maintain discipline, its future success as a group is likely to be headed for decline. Does this signal trouble ahead for Jewish success?

Chua and Rubenfeld say anyone can develop the triple package of traits by turning the ability to work hard and overcome adversity into a source of personal superiority, pride in one’s own “strength of will.” Pride in one’s own character is one trait our children will need to develop the grit necessary to guarantee future Jewish success. Here are three more: the pride a person takes in the strength of his/her Jewish heritage, compassion for outsiders that comes from having been an outsider and knowing that at any time one’s own status can

change, and the impulse control to make wise, deliberate choices in life. The good news is, we can model educational systems to help develop these traits.

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## The New York Times

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/books/review/the-hybrid-tiger-and-the-triple-package.html>

# Secrets of Success 'The Hybrid Tiger' and 'The Triple Package'

By SANDRA TSING LOHJAN. 31, 2014

Quanyu Huang's new book, "The Hybrid Tiger: Secrets of the Extraordinary Success of Asian-American Kids," may sound like yet another flogging for hapless Western parents, but it's not.

You can't blame American mothers for still smarting from Amy Chua's best-selling 2011 book, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother." In breathtaking and bold calligraphic strokes, she laid out her argument: American parents overindulge their children, allowing them sleepovers, video games and laughable extracurricular activities like playing Villager Number Six in the school play, as they collect trophies for being themselves in a self-esteem-centered culture. By contrast, Chinese parents strictly limit television, video games and socializing, accept no grades but A's and insist on several hours a day of violin and piano practice, regardless of their children's complaints. As a result, Chinese-parented kids play Carnegie Hall at 14, get perfect scores in science and math, and gain early admission to Harvard while their floundering American counterparts wonder what on earth hit them.

Chua did some hasty backpedaling shortly thereafter, but Tiger Mom was forever out of the box. Now Quanyu Huang, a Chinese-born professor at Miami University of Ohio, proposes a kinder, gentler blending of East and West in what he calls the Hybrid Tiger. Because apparently the Chinese have their own educational woes.

As early as the late 1970s, post-Cultural Revolution officials were already comparing American classrooms with their own. In contrast to tightly run Chinese schools (where students had nearly double the class time and much more homework), America's chaotic classrooms were "carnivals" of rude children counting on their fingers and administrators "prattling on about meaningless subjects such as personal growth, self-esteem, individuality and creativity." Triumphant, the Chinese predicted that in 20 years China would lead the world in science and technology, and America would sink like Atlantis, a conclusion horrified American delegates agreed with. But no. Even today, while Chinese students still excel in test-taking, China has yet to produce a single Nobel Prize winner in the sciences or a Steve Jobs or Bill Gates (although, of course, American computer parts are made in China).

From this stunning throw-down, Huang continues his intriguing contrarian analysis, offering a perplexed yet loving native son's humanizing perspective on Chinese culture. Yes, he says, the Chinese invented paper, gunpowder, the compass and printing press — but for what ends? They used gunpowder for fireworks and compasses for feng shui, never thinking to mass-produce books or dreaming that Westerners would eventually attack them with their own inventions. The Chinese's fifth invention, though, was the standardized test. Dating back to the seventh century (Sui Dynasty), it was less punishment than a marvelously democratizing tool through which lowborn citizens were able to advance their position. This is the DNA beneath a centuries-old reverence for education; it's why Chinese children attend school from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. with such fervent dedication.

And it's those sheer hours, Huang argues, with his own parental examples, that make the difference. Chinese kids are not allowed to quit studying when it's not "fun." By contrast, "American children are scared of math, not because they lack the ability to think logically in abstract terms, but because of their attitude toward studying." Is Tiger Mother right, then? Surprisingly, Huang says no, arguing that she is not even very Chinese: "Her harsh, anachronistic methods are out of date and *far* outside of what is acceptable and encouraged in mainstream society in China today" (not to mention that real Chinese parents would insist on their child playing not just piano and violin but Chinese instruments). When he presented mainland Chinese parents with the Tiger Mother's harsh child rearing methods (which readers will recall included threatening to burn her daughter's stuffed animals), they were stunned. "The Tiger Mother is a creature of

confusion,” Huang writes. “She is a mix of Amy Chua’s interpretation of what Chinese mothers do, Western egocentrism and plain, simple sensationalism.”

Regardless of how purely “Chinese” Chua is, though, she’s ba-a-ack. This time she has written, with her husband, Jed Rubenfeld, a fellow Yale law professor and popular suspense novelist, “The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America.” The title refers to psychological characteristics shared by all of America’s overachieving subgroups: a group superiority complex, insecurity about one’s personal worth or status, and impulse control, i.e., the ability to resist temptation, particularly the temptation to surrender when the going gets tough. Aside from Chinese, Indians and Jews, potential surprises on the American subgroup success list include Mormons (except fundamentalists), Cubans and Nigerians. The Triple Package’s flip side is that, taken too far, these qualities can create “deep pathologies” (extreme insecurity, hyper-materialism).

That’s the Triple Package as a thesis. “The Triple Package” as a book is a real head-scratcher, though — its own puzzling triple package. It’s part sociological study, part national call to arms (a once strong, now instant-gratification-addicted America has apparently lost its Triple Package) and even part self-help book (to gain success, we can all create our own Triple Package). Connecting these far-flung dots seems to require, first of all, a lot of repetition of the phrase “Triple Package” (on one page it appears seven times). What’s curious, though, for two authors whose books, savory or not, can be real page turners (Rubenfeld’s novels feature everything from murder to erotic asphyxiation; even Chua’s scholarly work “World on Fire” opens with a hair-raisingly riveting account of her aunt’s throat being cut), is how dull the prose is. “That certain groups do much better in America than others — as measured by income, occupational status, test scores and so on — is difficult to talk about.” “Successful people tend to feel simultaneously inadequate and superior.” “It’s hard to write or talk about Appalachia even if you’re from there.” But, always, the authors somehow heroically surmount these politically correct difficulties by noting that even though the Kentucky-born Diane Sawyer drew heat when covering rural poverty in the state, poor white Appalachians do lack the Triple Package. Impulse control is an issue, and some have termed the region’s inhabitants — and our authors are just the messengers — “pillbillies.”

The continual restatement of the thesis (which is a kind of truism — who actually expects addiction and complacency to be success markers?), and the winners-versus-losers emphasis, makes reading this book feel like being slugged over and over again by a bully wearing kid gloves. While Tiger Mom was ruthless, here the claws are perfectly sheathed. One is tempted to say Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, but there’s a more interesting question at hand. As opposed to Chinese Tigers robotically assembling Apple products, isn’t it more wondrous to behold the specter of two Chinese-Jewish Ivy League law professor/successful author Hybrid Tigers who’ve fashioned Yale student research (from a 2008 project) into a dull but probably lucrative book? Such are the rewards of our American meritocracy. It’s reason enough to prod our own Villager Number Sixes into putting more hours into math and violin, if not those Chinese instruments.

## **THE HYBRID TIGER**

### **Secrets of the Extraordinary Success of Asian-American Kids**

By Quanyu Huang

Illustrated. 264 pp. Prometheus Books. Paper, \$19.95.

## **THE TRIPLE PACKAGE**

### **How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America**

By Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld

320 pp. The Penguin Press. \$27.95.

### **Correction: February 3, 2014**

An earlier version of this review referred incorrectly to the news anchor Diane Sawyer. She is not “Appalachian-born” — her birthplace, Barren County, Ky., is in a rural district of the state, but it is not part of Appalachia.

Sandra Tsing Loh’s new memoir, “The Madwoman in the Volvo: My Year of Raging Hormones,” will be published in May.