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## **The Axis of Praxis**

**L**aura and John, get ready to take on Ravi and Xiao Ping. On three consecutive days this past week, President Bush has invoked India and China as new economic competitors to the United States. Maybe one of these days he will add Russia to arrive at a new Axis; not an Axis of Evil but an Axis of Praxis, a Greek word that describes habitual practice of an art or science. There is already a book called *Three Billion New Capitalists: The Great Shift of Wealth and Power to the East* by Clyde Prestowitz, a Reagan administration official, which clubs the three nations whose cachet now seems to be education, just about the time Americans appear to be signing off from school.

So there we are, three billion versus 300 million. The U.S population is now pegged at 297,900,000. With a baby born every 8 seconds, someone dying every 12 seconds and the country gaining an immigrant every 31 seconds, American population is growing by one person every 14 seconds. Which means the 300 millionth American, perhaps just conceived, is due in October this year.

But guess what -- the 300 millionth American might well be a Latino, or any other immigrant offspring, perhaps even an Indian. When the 200 millionth American arrived in 1967, Life magazine positioned 23 photographers to record the moment. The milestone infant was deemed to be Robert Ken Woo, the son of Chinese immigrants who went on to graduate from Harvard, became a model citizen, and lives in Atlanta now with three U.S born children. My money for the 300 millionth American is on a Patel or a Sanchez.

Jokes aside, the threat of China and India as economic adversaries seems overblown. By every metric -- Ph.Ds, inventions, patents, research spending, you name it -- the U.S remains the leader by far. Statistics about the growth of China and India are bandied around ignoring the low base they start from. For instance, someone breathlessly reported that the numbers of patents filed

in the U.S from India is up by 2000 per cent over the last decade. Yeah right, it went up from 70 to 1300. Americans meanwhile file 200,000 patents annually.

Similarly, American scaremongers are crying hoarse over the number of engineers being graduated by China and India on the basis of some very dodgy numbers and without regard to the quality. Besides, they are not even considering that the two countries contribute perhaps 100,000 engineers annually to the U.S pool. Come down sometime to the Bay Area or any engineering school in the U.S and take a look.

Sure, it's true that fewer American students are taking to math and science. It's smart on part of American leaders to blow the whistle on this. You don't remain No.1 by being complacent. But Asians are picking up the slack, both children of new immigrants and second generation kids.

You can see this in the many annual school contests, my favorite being the Intel Science Talent Search. Of the 40 finalists this year, about a dozen are of Indian and Chinese origin. You can see the rise of Asian-Americans at many levels -- from school competitions to college degrees to Ph.Ds. Asians rock -- academically.

So as long as the U.S remains open to immigrant talent and nurtures its melting pot, there's little to fear. Given the growing interdependencies in the world, it's likely that India and China will be allies of the U.S rather than adversaries. If not John and Laura, Usha and Li in the U.S will be collaborating Ravi and Xiao Ping in Asia.

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