

# ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW



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# ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

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## From the Editors

We were fortunate to receive a record number of submissions this year—the highest in the eleven-year history of the *Asian American Policy Review*. This unprecedented phenomenon, coupled with the acute need of scholars, activists, and policymakers to reflect on and critique relevant issues following the terrorists' attacks of September 11, have enabled us to feature some of Asian America's best and brightest in this volume.

We are pleased to present an exclusive interview with two of the country's most renowned civil rights advocates and winners of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, **Stewart Kwoh** and **Julie Su**. The interviews recount not only their past contributions to empowering Asian Americans, but also the major challenges that lie ahead.

**Helen Zia**, a prominent journalist and author of Wen Ho Lee's biography, refutes arguments in favor of racial profiling and emphasizes the importance of raising awareness and establishing undergraduate ethnic studies programs to explore the complexity of race relations in America.

The hate crimes report by California State Assembly Member, **Judy Chu**, is a comprehensive document that records, organizes, and analyzes incidents of hate crimes in the state of California that targeted minorities in the aftermath of September 11.

The advent of U.S. military intervention, an increase in defense spending, and growing anti-immigrant sentiments following September 11 prompted us to address the well-being of Amerasian children with American G.I. fathers living in South Korea; concerns over public funding of social service organizations serving Asian-Pacific Americans in New York City; and innovative ways in which successful Asian-American entrepreneurs have leveraged and trained its predominantly immigrant workforce. We also include an empirical study that challenges conventional measures of acculturation and offers a more useful assessment of the quality of life of various Asian-American groups.

In addition, we review *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*, a seminal book by leading advocate and law professor, **Frank H. Wu**. The book provides a fresh perspective to the traditional race debate and does so convincingly by extracting from the author's personal experiences. We also examine *The Making of Asian America through Political Participation*, by esteemed scholar and political scientist **Pei-te Lien**, which probes into the formation of the Asian-American pan-ethnic identity and its implications for political dynamics within and outside of the community.



## From the Editors

This is a solid collection of articles encompassing a wide range of topics, views, and interests. *AAPR*'s own staff has authored significant contributions, including original research papers and interviews of key figures in the Asian-American community. We hope that Volume XI will enrich current debates and promote awareness of policy perspectives and interests unique to Asian Americans.

Omar Brownson

Namju Cho

Anne Im

Eijean Wu

*Editors*



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# Hate Crimes in the Aftermath of September 11

## California State Assembly Member Judy Chu

In June 2000, the speaker of the California Assembly, Robert M. Hertzberg, established the Assembly Select Committee on Hate Crimes. Never before had the state legislature taken such a bold step to address hate crimes in California's communities. In spite of extreme concern in affected communities, policy makers seemed to treat hate crimes as an anomalous phenomenon instead of an expanding epidemic. Misleading declining reports of hate crimes further diminished legislative interest in addressing hate crimes as a statewide problem. As such, the legislative response to hate crimes has been sporadic and focused on remedying specific issues related to individual incidents. The patchwork approach to hate crimes in the state has resulted in varying levels of enforcement and prevention depending on the aggressiveness of each individual locality. The terrorist attacks on the nation on September 11, however, would inadvertently refocus the state and the nation on the issue of hate crimes and the adequacy of current efforts in combating hate crimes.

In response to my request for the legislature to address the disturbing prevalence of hate crimes in communities throughout the state, Assembly Speaker Robert M. Hertzberg established the Select Committee on Hate Crimes and appointed me to chair the diverse bipartisan committee. The committee consists of men, women, Democrats, Republicans, Latinos, African Americans, Jewish Americans, Asian Pacific Islander Americans, Lesbians, and Caucasians. Specifically, the committee includes Assembly Members Gilbert Cedillo, Marco Firebaugh, Jackie Goldberg, George Nakano, Bob Pacheco, Anthony Peschetti, Darrell Steinberg, Carl Washington, and Charlene Zettel. The committee was charged with the responsibility to review the growth of hate crimes in the state and to review programs and efforts directed at preventing, prosecuting, and suppressing hate crimes. In addition, the committee is empowered to consider and develop legislative options for addressing hate crimes on a statewide basis. In response to the September 11 terrorist

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*Judy Chu is a California State Assembly member and was elected to office on 15 May 2001. She represents a Southern California district that includes Alhambra, City Terrace, parts of East Los Angeles, El Sereno, Monterey Park, Rosemead, and San Gabriel. She graduated with a B.A. from University of California, Los Angeles, and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology. She served as a faculty member in the psychology department in the Los Angeles Community College District for twenty years.*

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attacks, the committee co-authored an open letter denouncing racial profiling and hate crimes directed at Muslims, Arab Americans, Americans of Middle Eastern descent, South Asians, and Indian Americans. To further develop ideas to fight hate crimes, the committee planned to convene hearings throughout the state to give victims a voice and to find successful existing anti-hate programs that the state could replicate and promote.

I began planning the first hearing on hate crimes in Southern California months before the September 11 tragedy on the East Coast. The aftermath of the terrorist attacks increased the urgency to address efforts to prevent hate crimes and brought attention to an entirely new community of hate crime victims. Prior to September 11, legislators focused on hate crimes that targeted African Americans, Asian Pacific Islander Americans, Jewish Americans, Latinos, gays, and Lesbians. After September 11, the hate crime paradigm changed to include Muslims, Egyptians, Sikhs, and Hindus. Sadly, this new paradigm was punctuated by the slaying of a Coptic Christian Egyptian American that is under investigation for determination as a hate crime in my assembly district several days after September 11. Other September 11 precipitated hate crimes included the shooting death of a Sikh gas station owner in Arizona; the shooting death of a Yemeni grocer in central California; the shooting death of a Palestinian door-to-door salesman; more than seven hundred anti-Muslim incidents since September 11 reported by the Council on American Islamic Relations, and more than one hundred other hate incidents targeting Sikhs since September 11.

These slayings and the eruption of violence against other Middle Eastern and East Indian immigrants throughout the nation added yet another panel to the numerous panels planned for the hearing prior to September 11. The wife of the grocer slain in my district testified to the irreparable damage of the crime and the difficulty with which to prosecute the crime with the perpetrators at large and with only circumstantial evidence implicating racial hatred as the motivation for the crime. Additionally, law enforcement testified to the difficulty and complexity of investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. According to law enforcement, hate incidents and hate crimes often lack substantial evidence, and perpetrators can have multiple motivations for an attack. Both of these complicate the pursuit of a criminal case. Law enforcement agencies further bemoan the lack of resources necessary to adequately track and investigate hate incidents and hate crimes. Notably, community-based organizations, victims, and law enforcement pointed to the difficulty that new immigrant communities and non-English-speaking victims have in reporting hate crimes and participating in hate crime prosecutions. These new immigrants and non-English speakers are often reluctant to work with law enforcement agencies for a variety of reasons, including difficulty in articulating the facts of a crime in English and fears that their immigration status may be called into question during the investigation of the crime.

In total, the first hearing featured panels of community-based organizations, local government commissions on race relations, law enforcement, families of victims, and state agencies. And for the first time, a legislative committee included Planned Parenthood in a panel to discuss clinic attacks as a part of the hate crime

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epidemic. The six-hour hearing produced a disturbing yet hopeful picture of the state of hate crimes in California. Panelists cited statistic after statistic of hate incidents and hate crimes in communities as diverse as the victims themselves. More disturbingly, a theme of underreporting hate crimes persisted throughout the hearing. Many things, ranging from the victim's fear of retribution to the negative impact of hate crimes on local property values, were blamed for low reporting of hate crimes and hate incidents. On the other hand, education persisted as the most effective weapon in the fight to suppress and prosecute hate crimes. The education of law enforcement officers, victims, potential victims, and potential perpetrators predominated as a key to fighting hate crimes in the testimony of panelists throughout the day. Panelists did agree that education programs that involve law enforcement, community-based organizations, and schools have been the most effective at reducing hate and intolerance in the community. The second hearing was convened in the heart of Silicon Valley, which is home to a significant population of Indian Americans, South Asians, and Americans of Middle Eastern descent. In spite of the difference in demography and geography, the testimony from the Northern California panelists was very similar to the testimony of Southern California panelists. Arab Americans and East Indian representatives recounted numerous incidents of hate following September 11. These incidents ranged from simple hate speech to actual threats of physical violence. Law enforcement agencies took the opportunity to educate the public about programs that were available to address hate crimes. Again, education took center stage in the effort to stem hate-motivated crimes. The county of Santa Clara unveiled a comprehensive campaign to educate and recruit youth in the effort to fight hate in the community.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of hate crimes in California is their continued presence in some of the most diverse communities in the state. Southern California and Silicon Valley are among the most ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse areas in the state. Long-term exposure to different ethnicities, cultures, religions, and lifestyles should have provided a passive foundation for fostering tolerant communities. Instead, panelist testimony from the committee hearings suggested that collaborative education programs and aggressive promotion of tolerance are keys to preventing the precipitation of hate crimes and prosecuting perpetrators. Case in point: The public response to September 11 could have been much worse without aggressive government and community efforts to prevent a backlash. Japanese Americans know the bitter taste of war-inspired racism. The unlawful internment of nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor is probably the best example of the worst way that government can respond to public hysteria and wartime anger. More recently, anti-Chinese sentiment and government-sanctioned investigations of Chinese American scientists at Los Alamos Laboratories following the Wen Ho Lee case and the downing of a U.S. surveillance aircraft in the South China Sea illustrated what happens when the government and community do not act aggressively against wartime hysteria. Unlike the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and the recent issues involving China, government officials and community organizations immediately called for calm and restraint following September 11. Key leaders ranging from the president of the United



States to state legislators urged the public to refrain from acting out in anger against Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and East Indians. Even though incidents of racial profiling such as the Arab American Secret Service agent who was detained at an airport are still reported, the larger public response has been fairly muted and rational.

In fact, a survey by the Pew Research Center found that the image of U.S. Muslims improved significantly in the eyes of fellow Americans after September 11, contrary to the expectation of the exact opposite reaction. According to the research by Pew, 59 percent of Americans had a favorable view of U.S. Muslims in November 2001, compared to 45 percent in March 2001. The most significant change in perception was among conservative Republicans, who showed a 64 percent favorable opinion toward U.S. Muslims in November 2001 compared to only 35 percent in March 2001. The delivery of a clear and consistent message by government officials and community groups clearly contributed to the reduction in large-scale acts of hate crimes perpetrated in the aftermath of the September attacks. The report's authors are quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as saying that "the survey finds clear evidence that Americans are heeding President Bush's call for tolerance."

The California State Legislature has a tremendous opportunity to seize upon the current heightened awareness of hate crimes and the unique lessons on community race and religious relations following September 11 to propose and enact comprehensive solutions to the current epidemic of intolerance and hate afflicting communities in California and the nation. The fundamental principles of an effective public policy response to hate crimes will include the establishment of programs to increase awareness of the threat by communities and law enforcement agencies, the unambiguous collective disapproval of hateful and intolerant behavior, and the promotion of intra-organizational collaboration in anti-hate programs. Unfortunately, the greatest challenge to developing this comprehensive statewide effort to combat hate crimes will be in the current lack of available state and federal funding. Ideally, the legislature would pass a state budget that would include funds that could be distributed in the form of competitive grants to local law enforcement agencies that work with schools and local community-based organizations to develop and implement programs that promote tolerance and diversity. With California facing a multi-billion dollar budget deficit, any fully funded comprehensive hate crime grant program is unlikely to be passed in the current legislative session. Nevertheless, the Assembly Committee on Hate Crimes will continue to research and develop ideas for legislation that will and will not require funding to improve the suppression, investigation, and prosecution of hate crimes in California.



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# Notes of a Journalist: Racial Profiling, Scapegoating, and the U.S. Media in 2001

Helen Zia

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*This article is adapted from a speech delivered by Helen Zia to Tufts University in Medford, Mass., on 24 October 2001. The speech, entitled "Notes of A Journalist: Racial Profiling, Scapegoating, and the U.S. Media in 2001," was sponsored by the Asian American Curriculum Transformation Project.*

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Today we find ourselves in another war, the first war of the new millennium, a different kind of war—a war against terrorism. Because it is a different kind of war, we are seeing changes every day in the relationship between the government and the people, between the government and the news media, and most definitely changes among us, among “we the people.”

Each day's news brings some new revisioning of the principles that have made our country great. Yesterday it was the compelling argument of Peggy Noonan, a *Wall Street Journal* columnist and former speechwriter to President Reagan, that we must “accept the necessity of racial profiling.” She said that all Americans have to sacrifice some of our liberties now, and that if it turned out that blond women in blue jeans like her were profiled as terrorists, she wouldn't like it but she would “suck it up” and accept it. Such *noblesse oblige*, so generously offered by someone who would never expect such a thing to be asked of her.

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*Helen Zia is the co-author with Wen Ho Lee of My Country Versus Me, published by Hyperion Books in January 2002. Dr. Lee is the Los Alamos scientist who was falsely accused of being a spy for China. Her previous book, Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in March 2000, was a finalist for the prestigious 2000 Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize. President Bill Clinton quoted from Asian American Dreams at two separate speeches in the Rose Garden. Ms. Zia is an award-winning journalist and a contributing editor to Ms. magazine, where she was formerly executive editor. A second-generation Chinese American, she has been a longtime activist for social justice on issues ranging from civil rights and peace to women's rights and countering hate violence. Her work on the Asian American landmark civil rights case of anti-Asian violence is documented in the Academy Award nominated film "Who Killed Vincent Chin?" She is a graduate of Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and a member of the university's first graduating class of women. She quit medical school after completing two years and found more satisfying work as a construction laborer, an autoworker, and a community organizer; then discovered her life's work as a writer.*

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I wondered how she would respond if her teenage son were subjected to special profiling at high schools because law enforcement finally noticed the pattern of teenage mass killers at suburban high schools like Columbine. What if her sons were subjected to the same police scrutiny that young men of color have experienced for years? I wondered if she would just "suck it up" if every blond family was rounded up and imprisoned indefinitely, forced to live in horse stalls for several years the way Japanese Americans were during World War II.

The day after that, I read that the government is considering using torture to obtain information from some of the estimated one thousand prisoners who, at this time, are in detention for unnamed charges. Officials say that it may be necessary to drug them or to use force or other torture to force them to talk. If the American people can't accept the use of torture by American officials, then one idea is to ship the prisoners to another allied country, like Israel, where torture is used in interrogations. This is our government talking, not some military dictatorship.

The White House warned news media executives against publishing or broadcasting "propaganda" from the enemy including possibly "coded messages," from Osama bin Laden. The implication was that the news media is playing into the enemy's hands. Within hours, network executives promised more judicious editing (read: self-censorship) in the future. None of them want to be seen as unpatriotic or as refusing to cooperate with the administration's crusade against terrorism.

This last news about "coded messages" from Osama bin Laden was all too reminiscent of the accusations made against Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee. Dr. Lee is the Chinese American scientist who was born in Taiwan and accused of passing nuclear secrets to the People's Republic of China. Until September 11, Wen Ho Lee was the foremost example of excessive government law enforcement powers and racial profiling. It has never been established that any secrets from Los Alamos were actually given to China, but there were dozens of other scientists on an initial Department of Energy security list who had the same access to the nuclear secrets in question and the same opportunities to pass the information in question to China. None of those scientists were investigated. The difference was that Wen Ho Lee was of Chinese descent, and the others were white.

Federal officials and politicians in Washington described the unfounded accusations against Dr. Lee as "worse than the Rosenbergs." According to FBI agents who were leading this highly politicized, front-page investigation, Dr. Lee was so dangerous that he needed to be imprisoned—pretrial—in solitary confinement under maximum security. These were conditions reserved for a handful of the most dangerous prisoners in the federal penitentiary system. To convince a judge that such terms of imprisonment were a national security imperative, the FBI concocted a scenario of a sinister and devious Dr. Lee, whose mere "hello" or "how's the weather?" could transmit secret information to China that would result in the development of an advanced nuclear warhead. The FBI warned that ninja warriors from China might arrive in black helicopters at the mountaintop laboratories of Los Alamos to spirit Wen Ho Lee away. Never mind that ninjas are Japanese warriors, not Chinese, or that it would be very tough for helicopters of any kind to go



unnoticed in this highly secured laboratory town that sits on top of a secluded mesa.

These accusations were accepted as fact and reported very seriously by no less than *The New York Times*, and much of the news media followed suit. Yet the media has restrained itself from attributing generalized racial characteristics to teenagers who might commit a Columbine-like massacre. They have scrupulously avoided suggesting that there is a pattern to the terrorism of Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City bombing, or the self-described white supremacist activities at Waco and Ruby Ridge. It is noteworthy that 94 percent of newsroom editors are white males. Unfortunately, it is also likely that such stories would have evolved quite differently had the high school killers or domestic terrorists all been young men of color.

In fact, where Asian Americans are concerned, there has been a reflexive willingness to accept uncritically the view that Asian Americans are predisposed to spy for China, regardless of how many generations their American heritage spans and what their Asian ethnic heritage is. We have witnessed in the investigations of campaign finance violations that anyone with an Asian surname was hauled in for questioning, threatened with an FBI investigation, and told that their names would be released to the news media. It didn't matter whether their ancestry led to India, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, or Korea. In the eyes of the Democratic Party, the GOP, members of Congress, and the news media, they were all suspected conduits to the People's Republic of China.

One of the most dramatic examples of racial profiling took place during World War II, with the imprisonment of 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent over a period of four years—on the assumption that they all might be spies. Most of those 120,000 prisoners were children, and not a single case of spying by a Japanese American was ever found. Back then, people were so convinced that Japanese Americans were dangerous that there were even stories in the newspapers accusing Japanese American farmers of growing tomato crops in a manner that the tomato stems could point to U.S. airbases. The accusations of such clever evil deeds were incredible—yet people believed them enough to support the Roosevelt administration's policy of racial profiling and incarceration of 120,000 ordinary, innocent Americans.

Today there seems to be a national exuberance for racial profiling and an increasingly popular notion that the government should officially adopt such measures.

According to a widely publicized news poll, one-third of the people surveyed favor establishing internment camps for "individuals who authorities identify as being sympathetic to terrorist causes." The poll didn't describe those who are thought to be "sympathetic to terrorist causes," but it's clear they weren't thinking of blond women, news columnists, or members of the Aryan Nation. But we know the poll meant people who "look" Middle Eastern or Muslim because other recent news reports attest to this:

- Mesa, Ariz.: An Indian American gas station owner named Balbir Singh Sodhi was shot to death as revenge for September 11. As a member of the Sikh



faith, Mr. Sodhi wore a turban. Sikhs, however, are not Muslim, nor they are they of Arab descent.

- Ceres, Calif.: Searchers found the body of a 69-year-old American of South Asian descent in an irrigation ditch near his home, two days after his family reported him missing. As a Sikh, Surjit Samra wore a turban. His wallet hadn't been touched, but his turban was gone.
- Los Angeles, Calif.: Adel Karas, 48, of Arcadia was struck in the upper body and killed at point-blank range. He was shot in the store he and his family owned. Karas was an Egyptian American.
- San Diego, Calif.: A South Asian woman was in her car, stopped at a traffic light, when two men on a motorcycle pulled next to her. They jumped off their motorcycles, opened her car door, and yelled, "We're going to slit your throat just like the hijackers did!" She dropped her head down to protect her neck, but the assailants slashed at her head several times. Another motorist called 911. At the hospital, she said, "Anyone who is brown-skinned or foreign-looking, be on guard for your life!"

Nor is the anger limited to those who may appear to be Arab or Muslim. In Los Angeles, two women were speaking Spanish as they waited in a doctor's office. A Caucasian woman yelled, "You *foreigners* caused all this trouble," and then started beating one of the women.

Unfortunately, hate incidents continue to multiply. To the list of victims killed by *international* terrorists, we now add those killed by our own *domestic* terrorists. In the weeks following September 11, there were more than seven hundred reports of hate crimes against our fellow Americans. Make no mistake, hate crimes are acts of terrorism too.

Racial profiling differs from racial stereotyping. It is *government-sponsored and government-sanctioned*. With racial profiling, representatives of the government—such as police, politicians, bureaucrats, or security personnel in airports—are authorized to treat people differently based on their race or ethnicity, with the full approval and backing of the government.

Up until the post-September 11 powers were granted to law enforcement officials, racial profiling was considered unlawful. Where racial profiling had been challenged in the past, the government has had to admit that it didn't work and it violated people's constitutional rights. There's the form of racial profiling that is well-known in relation to African Americans: DWB, or Driving While Black. This has been documented in many parts of America. In Maryland, for example, a survey found that while 17 percent of drivers on the highways were black, more than 70 percent of the drivers who were pulled over for alleged speeding were African American.

In Dr. Wen Ho Lee's case, the FBI couldn't find any evidence that he had spied or passed secrets to the PRC. Instead, they prosecuted him with the "mishandling of classified information" because he had improperly downloaded some nuclear weapons computer programs onto an unsecured lab computer and computer tapes. Downloading classified information was exactly what former CIA director John



Deutch did. But Dr. Lee was the only person ever to be criminally prosecuted for this "crime."

John Deutch downloaded blueprints of the CIA's security apparatus, took them home on floppy disks and other media—which he subsequently could not account for. He reportedly downloaded this highly classified information onto his home computers, which were connected to the Internet. John Deutch got a slap on the wrist and is now teaching at MIT; Wen Ho Lee was threatened with thirty life sentences and thrown in solitary confinement for nine months without a trial, during which time he was kept in chains and manacles. All based on the unfounded suspicion that he might be a spy.

Unfortunately Wen Ho Lee wasn't the only one who was affected by this failed investigation. Numerous stories of workplace investigations and mistreatment of Asian American scientists and engineers have been reported since the debacle. Many Asian American students have switched their majors out of the basic sciences because they know their career potential will be limited by racial profiling and that they might be targeted the way Dr. Lee had been. In the period following Dr. Lee's highly publicized persecution, virtually no Asian Americans applied for research fellowships at national laboratories like Los Alamos, possibly in response to the boycott that was called by Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education and the Association of Asian American Studies. As a nation, we all lose from this tremendous waste of creativity. Moreover, the real perpetrators of terrorism and destruction go undiscovered while intelligence efforts are engaged in racial profiling.

Today, it is estimated that some 78 percent of the American public gets their information about the world from TV news or from the Sunday paper. The average American citizen's worldview is shaped from "eight minutes of evening news" and factoid journalism—what gets crammed between commercials. There is a great danger, then, in the calls and comments from the White House and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice requesting the news media to restrict information to the public and to increase the self-censorship that takes place in the newsroom.

The media is losing what arguable independence it had before September 11. This is also the opinion of twenty national journalism organizations that have criticized the government's overt efforts to limit what the media makes available to the public. Back in the 1700s, Sir Edmund Burke of England declared the Church of England, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons to be the "Three Estates"—the country's most powerful institutions. The "Fourth Estate" referred to the Reporter's Gallery—in clear recognition of the media's importance as an institution.

There is no lack of examples of the media's power in our own nation's history. In news magazines of the 1800s, numerous political illustrations and cartoons lumped African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and Asians together—all were depicted graphically as nasty, baboon-like people who lacked even the basic elements of humanity. Poor working class immigrants from Europe didn't fare much better. This was the news media's conception of people of color and the working poor. And at varying times, each group would take turns as the whipping post for society's ills.



Sadly, the media images of today aren't much different from those of the 1800s. Those factoids, the eight minutes of evening news, and other media portray black people as the primary welfare recipients, even though the majority of people on welfare are white; Latinos and Asians are believed to comprise the nation's "illegal aliens," even though majority of "illegals" are Europeans and Canadians. Inner city people are portrayed as drug abusers, not white collar suburbanites who are hooked on cocaine, amphetamines, and Ecstasy. These are but a few of the media representations that are all too widespread.

Asians Americans know this pattern all too well, where stereotypes of one group were manipulated in the media to pit one Asian ethnic group against another. The following article appeared in *Time* magazine during World War II:

How to Tell Your Friends from the Japanese (*Author's Note: The actual title uses the racial slur.*)

Virtually all Japanese are short. Japanese are likely to be stockier and broader-hipped than short Chinese. . . . Japanese eyes are usually set closer together. The Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant.

Indeed, the media miracle of the twentieth century was how Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and other yellow people were transformed from the Enemy Scourge of America to become the Model Minority.

The secret to that miracle can be found in another article from *US News & World Report* entitled, "Success Story of One Minority Group in the United States":

At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities, one such minority, the nation's 300,000 Chinese Americans, is winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work. . . . Still being taught in Chinatown is the old idea that people should depend on their own efforts—not a welfare check—in order to reach America's 'Promised Land.'"

This article was published on 9 January 1966—at the height of the Civil Rights movement.

These are but two examples of why Asian American studies are so critical to understanding the America of the twenty-first century. As famed historian George Santayana said, those who do not study history are doomed to see history repeat itself. One reason the Fourth Estate is so powerful is because it is the front-line chronicler of history. As we can see from these and many other examples, it is a faulty chronicler at best, one that is limited by its own filters. That's why it is critically important to have chroniclers, historians, and teachers from a multiplicity of backgrounds, who can open up new lenses and widen those limited filters.

Yet there has been little progress in diversifying the news media. In the year 2000, only about 10 percent of journalists in the United States were of color, while 94 percent of all news managers were white and male. This percentage is worse than twenty-two years ago, when the demographics of newsrooms were first recorded. Meanwhile, even today, some 40 percent of American newsrooms don't have a single person of color working in them.

Given this picture, where are the chroniclers of history going to learn about these diverse American communities—about African Americans and Asian Ameri-



cans, Latino Americans and Native Americans, about gender and sexual orientation issues, about Muslims and Sikhs, about Middle Eastern Americans and South Asian Americans? They won't learn it from factoid news or from Hollywood. They're going to have to learn it in schools, in libraries—from the teachers and students of history and society. This is why it is so critical for universities to continue the ethnic and cultural studies courses and programs—the academic programs that Asian American and Pacific Islander students have fought for on campuses across the country.

Until we have a better-informed and better-educated citizenry, demands for racial profiling and this terrible rash of hate crimes will surely continue. And Americans will be susceptible to those who advance their own brand of fundamentalism—as the Rev. Jerry Falwell did when he immediately blamed the ACLU, gays and lesbians, feminists and pro-choice people for the attacks on September 11. I wondered, where is the outrage about the hundreds of “anthrax letters” that are being sent to women's clinics around the country? Why aren't people concerned that newspapers like the *Houston Chronicle* censored the obituary of Mark Bingham? Mark Bingham was one of the heroes of Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania. Yet many papers edited his obituary to delete the fact that he was openly gay and left behind a life partner. That's why I make a point of acknowledging my life partner, Lia, in my work, because I know that the people who chronicle history are subject to such censorship.

The problem is that even if we don't personally subscribe to racial profiling, we will all be affected by the creeping intolerance that it represents. No one on a college campus should ever forget that in times of intolerance, it is the intellectuals who are among the first people to be rounded up: the scholars and teachers, the writers, students—the people of conscience. This was true with Japanese Americans during World War II, it was true during the McCarthy era of the 1950s, and it was true in Afghanistan under the Taliban. I suspect we will one day, when all the secret arrests are made public, find that this is true for the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of “Middle Eastern-appearing” people being held in detention now.

In this conversation, I am reminded of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's statement, “Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that.” Students and scholars have a special light to share, for you are the writers, the teachers, and students of history—and perhaps some of you will be the makers of history. Remember that you are the ones who will be shaping the America and the media of tomorrow and with the conscience and voice you raise today, even as we enter the first war of this millennium. Never forget the words of the great humanitarian Mahatma Gandhi, who said: “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” Each one of us must be the change we wish to see in the world.



## Lives Ignored: Amerasians in Korea

Lana Zak

As the children of two remarkable nations, it seems impossible that innocent Amerasian<sup>1</sup> children are so often abandoned, undereducated, and socially persecuted—victims of both Korean and American neglect. Their stories give a face to serious problems in the United States-Korean military partnership and similar partnerships around the world.

The stories of three of these children, recounted to me while in Korea on a Fulbright fellowship, provide a snapshot of the problem. Their everyday strengths in dealing with racism, poverty, and other obstacles in their young lives demand enormous respect—not pity. Their lives are not unlike those of thousands of other Amerasian children in Korea and elsewhere in Asia; they point out the need for an end to our policy of neglect.

### THREE AMERASIAN FACES<sup>2</sup>

#### *Young-Jin: A Mask to Hide Understanding*

Young-Jin's seven-year-old face emits a deep blank stare, an expression he has learned from years of denial. He barely recognizes my presence. He is a smart boy. He understands what is going on in his life and is aware of realities no child should have to face. He is alone at night while his mother works as a "bar hostess" to pay the rent on their one-room apartment. Young-Jin knows what "bar hostess" means, and he knows that he is an offspring of her work.

When Young-Jin was two years old, he almost drowned in severe flooding. His mother had left him sleeping on the floor of their basement apartment when she went to work. The bar manager would not let her leave early to get her son. When she finally got home she found Young-Jin struggling in a pool of rising water, but she "rescued him just in time." Young-Jin understands that his mother cannot leave work to take care of him, so he takes care of himself. Still he registers no emotion.

She would like to send him to the United States, but he was born after 1982, making him ineligible to immigrate under the U.S. Amerasian Immigration Law.<sup>3</sup> "The only way Young-Jin could leave is if we can find his father and get U.S. citizenship for him," she tells me. Young-Jin can overhear our conversation, but he

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continues to play, blank-faced, with his puzzle. He knows that his father, an American GI, has never written or seen him and probably never will.

### *Kil-Yung: The Face of Humility*

Kil-Yung respectfully argues with his mother. His manner is strong, shy, and peaceful. Despite his mother's insistence, he does not intend to go to college next year. He dreams of becoming a computer programmer and has the grades for admission to a good school. His leadership and class rank are exceptional given the tremendous difficulties that a black Amerasian faces in Korean public schools

— "I can go later," he says, sinking his lanky brown body into the only chair in the room.

His mother explains in a tone of exasperated pride, "He thinks he should work now and make some money for me."

Last month, their house and all of their possessions were destroyed in a fire set by local hoodlums. They are living temporarily in one room of a flimsy shack; the entire complex appears on the verge of collapse. Most rooms have dirt floors, and stray dogs run in and out of the bleak entryways. Kil-Yung's room is kept immaculately clean; a task made less difficult given the few donated items they have received since the fire.

Their argument is set aside as we walk up the street toward the site of their former house. We climb a hill to look through the top of the burned-out frame. The roof collapsed, and we see blackened papers, blankets, furniture, clothes, and school books. It's a gray day, and the drizzling rain fits our somber mood. Kil-Yung's mother tells me that she tried to rescue some things from the fire but succeeded only in burning her face. She watched helplessly from this hill as the plastic roof curled and melted away. As we discuss the tragic fire, I hear the U.S. national anthem being played by a military band at the U.S. airbase just a few hundred yards away. Kil-Yung and his mother seem to take no notice.

As we retrace our steps, Kil-Yung seems confident that he will win the argument about college. Kil-Yung grew up without knowing his GI father; his mother has always been his only family. Her relatives are embarrassed to have a black Amerasian in the family. This is why he is so insistent on setting aside his dreams of college and computer programming to help his mother. The question of college and his long-term future seems indefinitely on hold. Approaching the bus station for my departure, Kil-Yung's mother squeezes my hand.

### *Yun-Hyang: Even the Lucky Suffer*

"Miss Mushroom" is her nickname. With a small frame, medium-brown hair, and an incredibly cute smile, twelve-year-old Yun-Hyang looks remarkably like a forest mushroom adorned with charming round glasses. She is the happiest of the Amerasian children I have met. Bouncing into the room, Yun-Hyang snuggles into her mother's lap, and her mother wraps her arms tightly around her. Their hands intertwine, and they laugh, swaying back and forth.



We finish lunch, and Yun-Hyang goes off to play on the Internet with her friends. With her daughter away, Yun-Hyang's mother is now ready to confide in me. "When Yun-Hyang put her little arms around me for the first time, I knew that I had to be her mother because I loved her." She and her husband took in Yun-Hyang when the child was eight months old. They know little about her biological parents other than that her father was a white American GI.

Yun-Hyang's adoptive mother already had a son and a daughter by birth and agreed to raise her until she reached middle school, when her natural mother promised to take her back. Shortly after the adoption, the birth mother married a Japanese man and moved to Japan. Yun-Hyang saw her birth mother for one day—her fifth birthday. Then her birth mother returned to Japan, and communication slowed. "She will not take Yun-Hyang back, not anytime soon anyway. But that's better. I don't think she is ready to be the mother my Mushroom deserves."

Nevertheless, the woman tells me that she is considering sending her daughter to the United States for adoption. Though she is a likeable girl with Korean friends in her public school and a relatively good student, she wets her bed regularly and has stomach problems that doctors attribute to "psychological problems." Her mother explains, "She has a sharp mind. She notices things." What she does not say is that the girl knows she is "an outsider in Korea," even though the meaning is the same.

Considering this is her only physical problem and that she has such a supportive home life, I cannot understand why her mother would want to send her to the United States. I ask her about this. "It's not now that worries me; it's the future. What kind of job can she have?" Yun-Hyang wants to be a veterinarian, but in a society where the racism is overt and legal, no amount of education, hard work, and love can ensure the desired job, the desired life. Yun-Hyang is much better off than most Amerasians in Korea—she is the exception—but even in the best scenario, the limitations placed on a biracial woman in Korea's monoracial society provide a formidable hurdle for Yun-Hyang to jump.

### AMERASIANS IN KOREA

There are more than 4,500<sup>4</sup> Amerasian children who have been abandoned by their American servicemen fathers since the beginning of the U.S.-Korea military partnership. At least one thousand of these children, like Young-Jin, Kil-Yung, and Yun-Hyang, are still living in Korea today<sup>5</sup> while the rest have left Korea as immigrants or international adoptees.<sup>6</sup> After being abandoned by their American fathers, they are often neglected or rejected entirely by their Korean mothers.

These children are never fully accepted by Korean society while often fully rejected by their only link to American society. Racism persists but is not the only source of troubles for these children. Much more challenging is overcoming the cycle of poverty that led their mothers to prostitution in the first place.



### **Education**

Education is often the only hope for an Amerasian child to break out of this cycle of poverty, but a sufficient education is not guaranteed. Students who wish to study beyond elementary school are required to pay tuition in the Korean education system.<sup>7</sup> The base price of public middle school tuition is approximately US\$720/year and public high school is US\$880/year.<sup>8</sup> Six years of elementary education are free and compulsory, but poor Amerasian children who cannot afford the tuition will not be guaranteed even a middle school or high school diploma.

The children who are fortunate enough to afford the small tuition fees often have a difficult experience in school. The racism of fellow students against Amerasians is often unpunished by teachers, who share their discriminatory views. Last year, an Amerasian middle school student living in Songtan, Korea, committed suicide related directly to this hardship.<sup>9</sup> The conditions are usually better in schools for foreigners, but the cost of tuition, approximately US\$4,000/year, is out of reach to most former or current prostitutes.<sup>10</sup>

Previously, the Korean government and a few nonprofit organizations provided an education stipend for needy Amerasian children. In recent years, however, both governmental and nongovernmental support for Amerasians has plummeted due to financial, political, and administrative changes. For example, the national office of Pearl S. Buck International (PSBI) in Philadelphia, a leader in the field, is planning to completely eliminate funding for Korean-Amerasian programs.<sup>11</sup> Affiliates of PSBI Korea worry that, in the transition into a self-sufficient regional office, the largest organization for Amerasians in Korea will stop providing necessary education assistance, leaving many children behind.

### **Immigration Policy**

The "American Homecoming Law" passed in 1982 achieved little for the program.<sup>12</sup> Under the law, only Amerasian children born between 1 January 1951 and 22 October 1982 are allowed to immigrate to the United States. Amerasian children born after 1982 are not given any special immigration status. The homecoming law only applies if the mother can certify that the child's father is American and if a specific U.S. citizen is willing to take on the responsibility of becoming their financial guarantor.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the law does not allow the children to immigrate with their mother or any non-U.S. family members. This policy often forces Amerasian children to choose between staying with the only family they have known or leaving for what they hope will be a better life in the United States.

## **PROSTITUTION IN KOREA**

Although prostitution is officially illegal in Korea, the law is seldom enforced. The U.S. and Korean governments choose not to aggressively limit the sex trade on either the supply or the demand side. Prostitution persists despite the 1996 revision to the Anti-Prostitution Law Enforcement Ordinance, which charges both suppliers and consumers of prostitution with crimes. Prostitution is punished almost exclu-



sively when another crime is involved. For this reason, many prostitutes choose not to report crimes committed against them by pimps or GIs for fear of greater recrimination.

Medical problems are common in "Kijichon," the Korean word for military [sex] towns. Sixty percent of prostitutes have had at least one sexually transmitted disease, and 77 percent have had at least one abortion.<sup>14</sup> "Certified" prostitutes must be screened for STDs once a week and carry a medical card in order to engage in sexual activity. There are no such requirements for the consumers of sex.

While the U.S. military has a policy of zero tolerance for sexual violence and harassment, involvement in prostitution is not equally condemned. Participation in prostitution is common by male U.S. military personnel, with 84 percent admitting to being with a prostitute.<sup>15</sup>

### THE GREATER PROBLEM

More than ten thousand Korean women work in the U.S. military sex industry.<sup>16</sup> Ninety-five military bases house 37,000 American soldiers stationed in Korea, but this is just one of many locations abroad where the U.S. military has left a legacy of abandoned children.

Currently in Japan and previously in Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines, Amerasian children and their prostitute mothers are considered collateral damage, providing men with pleasure and relaxation while far from home. In Thailand, there are five thousand to eight thousand Amerasians.<sup>17</sup> In the Philippines alone, it is estimated the presence of U.S. servicemen contributed to approximately thirty thousand Amerasian children a year; approximately 30 percent were abandoned by both parents and ended up living in the streets.<sup>18</sup> Many of these children were "left behind to fend for themselves when Uncle Sam made a hasty retreat."<sup>19</sup>

By not addressing these problems, lives are destroyed and our relationships with other countries are jeopardized. The United States cannot continue to be complicit in Kijichon without bearing some of the burden caused by its actions. We should not continue to tolerate children who are born and abandoned. The United States is faced with serious military objectives in Korea and throughout Asia, but this does not excuse the nation from taking responsibility for the lives of children fathered by our servicemen abroad. The human consequences of their actions must not be ignored if our interests and policy objectives are to maintain the integrity of and respect for the United States abroad and at home.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. and Korean governments must take tangible and significant steps to eradicate prostitution camps, especially those directly outside U.S. Army bases. They must work together to change the military culture that accepts sex-workers as part of military life. The outlawing of prostitution or enforcement of punishments on prostitutes will not successfully accomplish these objectives.



### ***Job Training for Kijichon Prostitutes***

Most women who enter the Kijichon life do so out of financial necessity. Cracking down on prostitutes will not improve the lives of Amerasian children unless their mothers are able to make a living in another market. Korean community centers have successfully used job training to move women out of prostitution.

### ***Target the Market for Sexual Services***

Fortunately, the United States has previously been successful in deterring military personnel from becoming involved in the sex trade. Military leaders were able to keep a tight leash on their men in missions in Saudi Arabia.<sup>19</sup> Leadership commands were better heeded, and no sex camps sprung up around U.S. missions. Of course, the cultural situation in Saudi Arabia is different from that of Korea or Japan, but nonetheless, there is a remarkable difference in the U.S. military attitude towards involvement with local women. Simply put, if the military is required to pay for the costs of Amerasian children, there will be a powerful incentive for the military leadership to alter the behavior of their personnel.

### ***Update the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and Immigration Laws to Accommodate Amerasian Children Born after 1982***

The arrangements should be consistent with actions taken by other governments to provide automatic citizenship to the children of U.S. servicemen. For example, French law guarantees French-Asian children French citizenship "...at any time, up to and including the attainment of the eighteenth year."<sup>20</sup> Measures must also be taken to assist the mothers of Amerasian children in collecting child support from servicemen fathers through all legal means afforded to U.S. citizens. While the numbers of Amerasian children born in Korea are decreasing, the amount of support each child is granted has plummeted.

### ***Guarantee Education through the End of High School***

If the child is educated in Korea, both governments must guarantee that financial assistance will be provided to help pay for school tuition and supplies. If the child wishes to be educated in the United States, immigration arrangements should be made to allow the child to partake in the U.S. public school system.

Education is the essential tool in breaking the cycle of poverty and prostitution that exists among Kijichon residents. The United States and Korea must make an effort to provide services to Amerasian children and their mothers.

Implementing these initial policy recommendations will take a great deal of effort. This article hopes to take the first step by calling attention to the plight of Amerasians in order to help ensure that their lives are no longer ignored.



## Endnotes

- 1 The term "Amerasian" refers to a person who has one parent that is Asian and another that is American.
- 2 To protect the children, some details (such as names) have been changed.
- 3 Amerasian Immigration Act. U.S. Public Law 97-359. 89th Congress, 2nd session. 22 October 1982.
- 4 Estimates vary, the actual number may be much higher.
- 5 Pearl S. Buck International. *Facts About Amerasians in Korea*. Seoul, South Korea: Pearl S. Buck International, 2.
- 6 Saewoomtuh. 1999. "Situations of Amerasian Children in Korea." Dongduchon, South Korea: Saewoomtuh Press, 5 May, 39.
- 7 The British Council. 1999. "Global Education and Training Information Service—South Korea." Available at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/promotion/getis/skoreaedu.htm>.
- 8 Director of *Chun Min Soo, Community Care Center*. 2001. Interview with author, 27 April.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 PSBI employees. 2001. Interview with author. 15 June and 10 July.
- 12 Goniwiecha, Mark C. 2000. Postbag: Amerasian Orphans a Bigger Shame. *Bangkok Post*, 5 March.
- 13 Kim, Joo Young, and Hyun Sun Kim. 1999. "Actual Condition of Kijich'on." In *Lives in Kijichon*, 5 May. Dongduchon, South Korea: Saewoomtuh Press, 43.
- 14 Kim, Joo Young, and Hyun Sun Kim. 1999. "Conditions Facing Prostitutes in U.S. Military Camptowns." In *Lives in Kijichon*, 5 May. Dongduchon, South Korea: Saewoomtuh Press, 30.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Kim, Hyun Sun. 2000. "The Problems Facing Women and Children at Kijichon (U.S. Military Camp town [sic]) in Korea." In *Redefining Security*, 11.
- 17 Goniwiecha 2000.
- 18 Moon, Katherine. 1997. Partners in Prostitution. In *Sex Among Allies*, 16. Currently the U.S. military has no formal, large-scale presence in the Philippines, but the condition for Amerasians in the Philippines has not improved with the removal of U.S. troops.
- 19 Goniwiecha 2000.
- 20 *Ibid.*



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# Fighting for Asian American Civil Rights: An Interview with Stewart Kwoh

Omar Brownson and Yi-Ru Chen

## INTRODUCTION

As president and executive director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, Stewart Kwoh leads the largest Asian American legal advocacy and civil rights organization in the country. This interview presents Kwoh's long-standing commitment to advancing social justice for Asian Americans locally and nationally. Over the course of this interview, we discuss how critical it is for Asian Americans to build institutions like the Legal Center to fight for civil rights in the United States in an era marked by hate crimes, sweatshops, and post-September 11 injustices.

We asked Stewart Kwoh to remark on how he began his career in public interest law and what he sees as the power and limitations of the law. Also, this interview highlights how Kwoh has built an organization that uniquely brings together political, organizational, and media-focused strategies to strengthen legal cases for Asian Americans and other minority groups.

Stewart Kwoh has been widely recognized for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Asian American community. In 1998, he received the MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" for his civil and human rights work. Notably, Kwoh is the first Asian American attorney to receive this prestigious distinction. Julie Su, who is also interviewed in this publication (see pages 26-28), is the second attorney at the Legal Center to be awarded this grant.

In 1966, Kwoh began his studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he participated in many civil rights activities and actively supported local Asian American causes. Kwoh went on to law school at UCLA, where he co-founded the Asian Law Collective, a legal services clinic.

In 1982, Kwoh started the Legal Center as its first executive director and only staff member. Today, the Legal Center has forty-three staff, more than seven hundred volunteers, and serves more than 15,000 clients annually. In addition to his leadership at the Legal Center, Kwoh serves on the board of directors of several non-profit organizations and companies.

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## INTERVIEW WITH STEWART KWOH

*AAPR*: Why did you get involved in civil rights work? What have been the key developments in your life as a civil rights activist?

KWOH: Why did I get involved in civil rights work? I have two reasons. One, my parents are Christians, and they always had a socially active Christian philosophy in serving the community and believed that the mission of a Christian is to help others. Two, I went through a more civil rights/activist phase [in the 1960s]. Martin Luther King Jr. and later Malcolm X and Caesar Chavez affected me; the whole period influenced me. The radical-ness of the Civil Rights movement, the anti-war activities, the changes in Asia, all motivated me to establish something.

I have two stories in terms of why I started the Legal Center. I have a relative by marriage who was interned in the camps in World War II. Japanese Americans lost their liberty, property, and dignity for many years. At a family gathering, I asked him if he had foreseen what was going to happen during the war, what was missing in the community, and what could have been done [to prevent the internment]? He answered that we didn't have any lawyers to defend us. We didn't have any strong organizations to fight for our rights. That story always stayed with me.

The second story is the Vincent Chin case. Vincent was killed in 1982; the sentencing of the two killers was in 1983—both received three years probation and \$3,000 fines. They never served a day in jail.

This was a horror story in some ways and extremely motivating in others. It was a horror story in the sense that Vincent's killers never spent a day in prison for his murder. The initial guilty verdict was overturned for technical reasons.

The story was extremely motivating because of Mrs. Lily Chin, Vincent's mother. She said, "There is nothing I can do to bring back Vincent, but I don't want any other mother to go through what I've gone through." After the conclusion of the second federal civil rights case when the jury acquitted the two killers, I realized we needed to establish an institution to defend people and fight for our rights. While the Legal Center is certainly part of that, in 1991 with the Asian Law Caucus and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, we built a national organization, the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC). Based in Washington, D.C., NAPALC is the first pan-Asian American national civil rights group. The Legal Center is the largest organization, the Law Caucus is the oldest, and AALDEF is the main East Coast affiliate.

I realized in my career, [APAs] are missing a strong institution. From the early immigration restrictions and exclusions, through the internment of Japanese Americans, through the rising number of hate crimes and "Vincent Chin" cases, we have not had the capacity to defend our community. These issues were historically motivating to help build institutions.

*AAPR*: How do you see the relationship between law and politics, and where does the Legal Center fit in?



KWOH: At the Legal Center, we have three major program areas: legal services for the poor, civil rights/advocacy, and pro-active race relations improvement, led by the Leadership Development and Inter-ethnic Relations Program. In total, we are trying to strive to become a leading organization for the community. In that sense, we have multiple uses of the law, both in terms of direct legal services, advocacy (both litigation and policy advocacy), and [to] build bridges with different communities—not just Asian America. Certainly, inter-ethnic work with African Americans, Latinos, whites and Jews helps us in our goals of supporting other people and other communities, as well as building allies in the struggle for equality and justice for all of our communities. This is an overall concept, rather than just using the law in terms of litigation. Litigation is very important, but it is only one of a number of tools.

While we try our best to serve or represent our community, we also try to empower them, so they can be their own spokespeople.

The Legal Center's work with the Thai and Latino garment workers in El Monte is an example of the law and beyond. We were told not to take the case for several reasons. Firstly, we were told that we were not going to win any money. Also, California [law] at that time did not hold the manufacturers and retailers liable. Finally, the eighty Thai workers, who were all undocumented because they were all brought in on this scheme, would be deported, and the twenty-two Latino workers in the front shop would not communicate or get along with the Thai workers. However, four and a half years later, we were able to get \$4.5 million from the manufacturers and retailers, and legal status for the detained Thai garment workers. The Thai and Latino garment workers really united and have gone on to support other sweatshop workers.

In 1999, several of the workers testified in Sacramento, which led to one of the strongest anti-sweatshop laws in the United States. It is still not strong enough, but it holds manufacturers responsible and liable for unpaid wages by contractors. [This case] is an example that it wasn't just the litigation, but it was the organizing, political influencing, media work, community support, and, above all, workers being able to speak out on their own.

So that was a good, positive example of our philosophy to empower the community, to empower our clients, to have broader alliances with many people—Latino workers and Thais, community groups and lawyers—to work together for a common purpose. We also worked with UNITE, the labor union, to build broader support as well. The El Monte workers spoke at union gatherings to encourage those workers because out of the 150,000 garment workers in Los Angeles, less than 2,000 are unionized.

We co-started a Garment Worker's Center. An attorney at CHIRLA [Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles] said that under this new anti-sweatshop law, the state labor agency has claimed that it has gotten \$20,000 in back-wages for workers, and the Garment Workers Center had gotten about \$100,000. It is a really needed garment workers center because you need something that the workers can really trust. We realize this industry is not just the contractors, but making sure those on the top making the most money are held accountable. This is

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an example of law and politics at work. You can use the law, but you have to have the ability to bring a legal case.

Notably, you would think this case would be popular to support, however, only one foundation in the United States supported the litigation itself, the Rosenberg Foundation. There were a couple of others who funded the volunteer development and organizing, like the California Community Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, but the foundations didn't want to fund the litigation. This was about a broader community struggle and issue, which is sweatshops and how workers are treated in the industry.

*AAPR:* How has September 11 affected the Asian American community, particularly in immigration and civil rights?

*KWOH:* The September 11 tragedy was a huge one for the country. Certainly, the aftermath has proven quite difficult and traumatic for many parts of the Asian American community. In particular, South Asians have been quite brutalized and victimized. In the last three months, the [Los Angeles] County Human Relations Commission has found the number of hate crimes against Middle Eastern- and South Asian-looking people has been seven times more than all of last year. Around the country, as well, there have been many Pakistani Americans, Indian Americans, and a lot of South Asians who have been pointed out, killed, beaten up, and had their businesses vandalized. There is growing evidence of discrimination on the job, in housing, and via racial profiling on airplanes.

We have started gearing up towards addressing this. We are considering a case on behalf of an Indian American man who was beaten up by another group of Asians who were calling him out because he is "Middle Eastern"-looking. His jaw was so shattered that they had to wire it together. He was attacked in Anaheim, and the family says they gave the license plate of the perpetrators to the police. A month after the incident, no arrests have been made, and the family is worried that the police were not treating it as a very serious case. [The Legal Center] has been trying to push the police [to follow up with the victim].

Cathy Fung, Bonnie Tang, Arlene Doss, and about twenty-five staff have been trying to build a legal response network to respond to these cases, work with community groups to get the word out, and lend support to these victims.

With immigration, we were quite dismayed with some of the restrictions that have come up in the month or two. The indefinite detentions are quite a concern. The optimism has faded, and the opportunity has passed by to really do something for undocumented immigrants and try for some legalization program. All that has been shelved for the foreseeable future. Even one of our U.S. senators (Diane Feinstein) wanted to stop student immigration for the next six months.

We are concerned on two fronts: firstly, hate crimes and the discrimination that is being discovered in terms of employment, housing, and other racial profiling; and secondly, the broader immigration problems of detention, increased scrutiny, and even greater restrictions on entry and legalization.



We are hopeful to build more relations with South Asians in this difficult time period. This is another challenge, however, because historically the traditional Asian American community has not been inclusive enough and not built enough strong ties with the rapidly growing South Asian community. This is another major opportunity and need that we have in this coming period.

*AAPR:* Similar to the post September 11 scrutiny and injustice that many South Asians and Middle Easterners face, the Wen Ho Lee case from two years ago foreshadowed the same scrutiny and injustice in the name of national security, except that Dr. Lee's treatment did not receive the early condemnation or criticism of civil rights violations from groups like the APALC. How did the Legal Center respond to Dr. Lee's case?

*KWOH:* We tried to do a lot of public advocacy in terms of due process and fair treatment. We held a rally that got very good coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and on television. We joined a number of press conferences. Our basic position was that he was innocent until proven guilty. The terrible media coverage, especially in the beginning, and the outlandish comments made by elected officials claiming that he was guilty before he was even charged was really out of place. The community really needed to know about human rights for Asian Americans, which I wrote about in an op-ed piece discussing hate crimes and Wen Ho Lee.

The lesson there was to speak up. Obviously, nobody knew all of the intricacies of whether he was guilty or not, but he needed to be treated as an innocent person until proven guilty. Actually, as it turns out, the case fell apart, and he wasn't proven guilty except for the one count that he pled guilty to. He wasn't charged as a spy, yet why would he been in solitary confinement with shackles on for nine months [if] he wasn't being treated as a spy? There is something wrong with that picture. We were trying to get that picture across. In that same period of Wen Ho Lee's case, about eight or nine Asian Americans were killed across the country in hate crimes with barely a ripple in the media.

In another case, we were working with Joseph Illeto's family. Joseph was a Filipino American U.S. postal worker in the North Valley of Los Angeles who was [killed by Buford O. Furrow]. There was not that much attention to his case. While America talks a lot about human rights violations in Asia, why not talk about the human rights violations of Asian Americans right here in the United States? People don't like to hear that. Well, I say, what better place to talk about improving the situation?

We need to speak up and advocate for our rights. Sometimes you need to bring a lawsuit, but oftentimes it's a voice that we have to get out there loudly, convincingly, persuasively, but not all the time confrontationally. It doesn't have to be just us. Oftentimes, we encourage other groups to be the spokesperson, whether they are workers or other organizations that work much more in that community. For example, we have been working with the South Asian Network post-September 11, which is an important organization in the South Asian community.



*AAPR*: In an interview from the early 1990s, you predicted that the decade would be characterized by either empowerment or political impotence, which one do you think we came closer to? Also, what is your one-liner for the next decade?

*KWOH*: [Laughs.] I would say there was some headway, but also major steps backwards in the '90s. The steps forward: Certainly, some of our agencies and institutions made headway in growth and in their activities. [As Asian Americans] we won some major battles like in El Monte and Wen Ho Lee (when he was finally vindicated). There were some clear setbacks with the level of hate crimes and the growing intolerance towards Asian Americans and Chinese Americans with being suspect in the campaign finance scandal. In terms of image, I think that suffered more.

The Committee of 100 survey indicated that still-significant percentages of Americans view Asian Americans negatively.<sup>1</sup> In the survey, 25 percent of the respondents saw Asian Americans very negatively, but a majority saw us negatively. It wasn't that we don't work hard or are not succeeding or getting education, but that we were seen as separate and sometimes suspect. A significant percentage thought we would be more loyal to China or some other Asian country than the United States.

I think that our image suffered more than the reality of our economic and social progress, however, the image is very important. While Asian Americans are concerned about poverty and civil rights abuses, the total population is concerned about the broad base affect of being suspect foreigners. Asian Americans have never been able to control their image since the immigration restrictions and exclusions or internment of Japanese Americans or stopping the hate crimes of the '80s and '90s. There was economic progress, but when traumatic situations occurred, it proved to be too much for the American ideals of equality, justice, and due process to carry the day. There is this edge in the Asian American experience.

There were some townhall meetings that we co-sponsored after September 11. There were some questions by South Asians wondering if they should get ready for internment camps. While this was a concern by a few people, it is a concern because we don't control our relations with China, our relations with South Asian countries. Asian Americans have to build increasingly strong alliances and have to have a clear, articulate voice. We need to be less fragmented and more unified than we have been in order to ensure more prosperity and peaceful developments.

I do think the '90s did show some headway, which came in 2000. We worked very hard on redistricting. In San Gabriel and Rosemead, there were three separate assembly districts. Working with the Latino leadership, we built one district. This helped Judy Chu to win the 49th Assembly District. Another assembly district in Torrance was built, which is held by George Nakano. Through the '90s we only had one or two Asian Americans; we now have four, which is not ideal, but without the redistricting activities, there would still only be two. With the recent redistricting, however, we will see more seats available for Asian Americans at the end of this decade.



Sometimes you can't see the product until much later. However, we are patient and dedicated, and we know that the hard work will pay off in the end. In sum, I would say it was a mixed review. I think we are better prepared to face the 2001 decade. It still remains to be seen whether we have the sufficient strength, strong enough voice, and cohesive organization to be able to continue our forward progress. I do think we, as a community, have made forward progress, not without struggle and fights for justice.

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## **Endnotes**

1 Committee of 100. 2002. Committee of 100 Survey. New York: Committee of 100. Retrieved from <http://www.committee100.org/Published/C100survey.pdf> on 27 March 2002.



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# Pushing the Limits of the Law: An Interview with Julie Su

Omar Brownson and Yi-Ru Chen

## INTRODUCTION

As director of litigation for the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), Julie Su combines legal and other public advocacy tools to affect public policy and advance social justice. In recognition of Su's groundbreaking legal and political organizing efforts to protect immigrant garment workers, the MacArthur Foundation awarded her one of the twenty-three "genius grants" in 2001.

Our interview highlights this young public interest attorney and her strategy to build the power and voice of garment workers to protect their own interests. Also, we discuss how Su's organizing strategy calls for multiracial coalitions among garment workers, which has further strengthened the ability of immigrant laborers to fight exploitation.

A year after graduating from law school in 1994, Julie Su represented a group of seventy Thai garment workers in a landmark federal lawsuit. The undocumented laborers had worked in a sweatshop eighteen hours a day under armed guard in El Monte, Calif. As a result of the lawsuit, the federal court held retailers and manufacturers responsible for garment workers' conditions, which expanded the scope of legal liability beyond subcontractors who hire workers. Moreover, by having deliberately included Thai and Latino workers in the litigation strategy, Su helped the clients become their own public advocates.

Julie Su graduated with a B.A. from Stanford University in 1991 and a J.D. from Harvard Law School in 1994. She is the co-founder of Sweatshop Watch, a coalition that addresses labor abuses with the garment industry. Su is the recipient of several human rights and public service awards.

## INTERVIEW WITH JULIE SU

*AAPR*: How did you get involved in civil and human rights issues?

*SU*: I have long been interested in issues of racial and economic justice. I am the daughter of Chinese immigrants, and I was acutely aware from the time I was young that because we looked different, my parents spoke with accents, and we otherwise didn't always "fit in," we were looked down upon. When I went to high



school, the community in which I grew up was found to be the most ethnically diverse in the country. This diversity had a profound effect on me.

In college, I became even more aware of economic and racial disparities. At Stanford, the wealth (and primarily whiteness) of the university contrasted sharply with our surrounding communities, including East Palo Alto and many areas of San Francisco. Such experiences made me increasingly interested in doing work that could fight racism, poverty, and other forms of oppression. I felt that law was a language often used to keep marginalized people from access, which is why I chose to go to law school, to learn to be a “translator” of the language of power to the disenfranchised and to translate back the experiences of the poor and people of color so that our legal system would reflect their experiences and struggles.

*AAPR:* What is your role as director of litigation at the Legal Center?

SU: APALC has a holistic approach to civil rights and social justice work. We believe that litigation is only one tool in a broad-based strategy to try and effect change and empower communities. Litigation must be combined with organizing—that is, helping community members to realize and to exercise their own power. My role as litigation director is to try and find ways in which litigation—i.e., the courts and the legal system—can be used to change power dynamics. Specifically, in representing garment workers, our goal is to see that workers get paid and that corporations take responsibility for sweatshop conditions.

*AAPR:* What was unique in your legal strategy for the landmark federal lawsuit on behalf of the Thai and Latino women? Relatedly, do you see future opportunities for building coalitions between the Asian American and Latino communities?

SU: I think the most unique part of that strategy was the organizing we did. We were also willing to push the limits of the law, to demand that it listen and be responsive to the needs of our poor, non-English-speaking, immigrant, women-of-color communities. Finally, as your question suggests, we were deliberately cross-racial in our approach, bringing together Asian and Latino workers to fight for their common interest: an end to sweatshops. There are tremendous opportunities for future collaborations.

In many of our cases, we have either directly brought workers together (i.e., joined them in one case) or brought them together to discuss their separate cases and to engage in collective action (e.g., supporting each other when they leaflet in front of retail stores). Although it’s hard work—it forces us to confront pre-existing stereotypes, prejudices, language barriers, and it just takes more time—it’s well worth it, since none of our communities will truly advance at the expense of each other.

*AAPR:* What do you see as the limitations of the law and the relationship between law and politics?



SU: The law is definitely limited. Litigation specifically is an extremely crude tool for social justice work. It's too unpredictable, expensive, slow, and reliant on people and systems that are designed to be inaccessible. It also depends, of course, on the existence of laws that recognize the kinds of rights that value justice; our laws are not usually written that way (despite how we might imagine our society).

As a nonprofit with limited resources, we have difficulty pursuing litigation—our opposition consistently outguns us. Therefore, our work always has to be substantively better than theirs. Despite the problems inherent in litigation, [the law] is the most effective tool I have found for forcing corporations to the table and giving workers a concrete reason to come together and try and achieve recognizable results.

*AAPR*: How does the MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” help further your work and the work of the Legal Center, particularly institutional building within the Asian American community?

SU: The MacArthur grant is tremendously helpful for two, probably very obvious, reasons. The first is that it is incredibly difficult to fund-raise for workers' rights struggles, especially litigation. So for one, it relieves some of our financial constraints (although definitely not all). The second reason is that the publicity helps to raise the profile of anti-sweatshop work. Corporations in the garment industry are extremely sensitive to public pressure; indeed, they spend billions of dollars on advertising precisely to cultivate a good public image.

I guess a related reason that the MacArthur grant has been valuable is that it explicitly recognized that workers' rights, particularly that of poor immigrants of color working in solidarity with others, are an integral part of the civil rights struggles today.



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# Asian American Entrepreneurial Leadership — Helping New Immigrants Learn English: A Conversation with John Tu, David Sun, and Helen Le of Kingston Technology

David D. Kwan

## PREFACE

American companies hiring non-native English speakers are increasingly finding they must address limitations in communication skills to retain valued employees, meet safety standards, and compete in the national and international marketplace. Company-sponsored English as a Second Language (ESL) training programs are emerging as an effective strategy for improving an organization's system of communication—a critical aspect of a company's internal integration and efficiency.

Ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity in the workplace broadens the perspectives a company can bring to bear in corporate decisions and in serving a broad clientele. Linguistic diversity, however, can hamper transparent internal communication. Companies that decide to invest resources in basic language training will benefit from the reduction of costly miscommunication errors, customer complaints, and other factors that affect profit and competitiveness.

## INTRODUCTION

Six years ago, Kingston Technology, a computer memory module manufacturer based in Southern California, gained worldwide acclaim for the extraordinary generosity it showed to its largely blue-collar, immigrant, and minority workforce.

Earlier that year, Japanese software and publishing giant Softbank Corporation, at the time a majority owner of Yahoo and E-Trade, bought an 80 percent stake in Kingston for \$1.5 billion. Kingston's two founders, John Tu and David Sun, decided to share the Softbank windfall by distributing an unheard-of \$100 million in bonuses to their five hundred employees. For many Kingston employees, the first

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bonus checks were as much as three times their annual salaries and enabled them to buy houses and set up college funds.

The first time Kingston gave out bonuses, employees were deluged with inquiries from journalists. "The founders tried to make a point about generosity," said Peggy Kelly in a 1999 *Wall Street Journal* article, "and all the media wanted to know was how much did you get and how were you going to spend it."

The bonuses played a major role in Kingston's election to the number two spot on *Fortune Magazine's* 1998 list of "The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America," placing this small technology firm ahead of such companies as Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, and Mattel. As public knowledge of Kingston's bonus program spread, the company's small human resources staff became so overwhelmed with job applicants that they posted "Not Hiring" signs on Kingston's office doors.

Employees would say that there is much more to Kingston's generosity than bonus checks. One notable program that employees often point to is the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. The program began as an informal gathering of immigrant employees practicing English with native speakers over their lunch hour. Kingston's human resources staff hired two ESL instructors and formalized the gatherings into a training program free to all Kingston employees.

Kingston's ESL program provides a useful case study for other companies interested in adopting a policy of training and support for immigrant populations. For a diverse workforce, this policy not only enables employees to perform better on the job, but also enhances their experience outside of the workplace. A Q&A discussion with founders John Tu and David Sun, as well as Helen Le, human resources representative, follows an overview of Kingston's history and company culture.

### **A RARE BLEND OF SKILL, TENACITY, PERSONALITY—AND SOME ADMITTED GOOD LUCK**

Kingston Technology and its founders embody the quintessential American Dream. Tu, born in Shanghai, China, and Sun, a native of Taiwan, were penniless from bad stock market investments when they started Kingston in 1987 by selling computer chips out of their garage. As luck would have it, there was a shortage of a certain type of memory-chip used in computers the same year. Sun and Tu realized they could alter another chip that was in ample supply to produce a similar product. Computer distributors who desperately needed memory-modules started beating a path to Kingston's garage door. "These chips were like gold at the time," recalls Tu. "People were offering to pay us in cash."

By 1988, Kingston's first full year of business, sales rose to over \$12 million. In 1992, a mere five years after the company's founding, Kingston's success earned it the number one spot on the Inc. 500, *Inc. Magazine's* list of the fastest growing private companies in America. The attention and accolades continued. In 1994, *The Economist* observed that Kingston's \$2.7 million in annual revenues per employee, had bested "such models of high-efficiency" as Exxon (\$1.3 million), Intel (\$0.3 million), and Microsoft (\$0.3 million).



Kingston soon became the world's largest independent supplier of memory products, generating well over \$1.2 billion in annual revenues, with offices in the United States, Taiwan, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. To Masayoshi Son, Chairman of Softbank Corporation, Kingston represented an extremely attractive cash cow. Son was initially interested in acquiring total ownership of Kingston, but Tu and Sun refused. The company's two founders said they felt uncomfortable giving up all ties to the people who had helped them build Kingston. Softbank settled for an 80 percent stake in the company for \$1.5 billion. As a result of the purchase, Tu and Sun found themselves on *Forbes'* 1998 list of the four hundred wealthiest individuals in the United States. In 1999, the two reacquired their company and remain in active leadership today.

### **CULTURE IS THE CORE COMPETENCY OF THIS COMPANY**

Even more remarkable than Kingston's financial success is their unique corporate culture. Thomas Yuen, who co-founded AST Corporation and is currently chairman of SRS Labs, called the Kingston chronicle the consummate blend of family values and opportunity.

Press accounts of the company's story consistently highlight the essential role that the founders and their values have played on the company's success. "The real secret of the company's success is its unique brand of corporate organization," wrote *Newsweek*. Everything about Kingston's organizational structure implies fluidity and speed. There are no assistants or neckties. Employees sit in open cubicles and those who have offices keep an open door policy. Job titles are simple and straightforward. "Everything comes down to culture," Tu told *Newsweek*. "Without that, we are just like our competitors. The challenge is not to lose that."

The company's mission statement, "Courtesy, Compassion, Modesty, Honesty, and Respect," has been exemplified in the way it treats workers, customers, and corporate partners. Kingston does not pressure suppliers on price, pays suppliers ahead of schedule, and never cancels orders. As a result, Kingston has built strong, trusting relationships with vendors. When chip supplies are tight, Kingston's allotments from Hitachi, Toshiba, and Samsung are guaranteed. *PCWeek* reported, "This seeming naiveté has its practical effects. Because they don't have to wait around for contracts to be signed, Sun and Tu can move more quickly than competitors."

### **FROM DAY ONE, THE FOUNDERS TOOK EMPLOYEES IN AS FAMILY**

The high ratio of revenues (\$2.7 million) per employee, "the cut-throat commodity nature of the computer business, and Kingston's location in the faceless suburb of Fountain Valley, south of Los Angeles, conjure up a picture of a silicon sweat-shop. Not so," *The Economist* wrote. The article chronicled Tu and Sun's efforts to import a family-style approach to the notoriously rough computer-components business. For the founders, "this meant instilling such [values] as trust, loyalty, and mutual support in a notoriously ruthless industry."



From the outset, Kingston's philosophy has been to treat employees well. Salaries are 20- 30 percent above industry norms, the 401k consists of a dollar-for-dollar matching program, and the company health insurance plan exceeds what is customarily offered at other companies. The founder's conservative management of the company's finances also reflects a focus on employees. If the company were to go out of business tomorrow, it would have enough capital to distribute a year's salary to every employee. To this day, Sun and Tu eschew the trappings of executive offices. Instead, the two sit in open cubicles along with the rest of the staff and regularly move to different cubicles in an effort to keep employee relationships fresh.

Kingston has set itself apart from many private firms with its commitment to employee training. Of the one hundred companies on *Fortune's* 1998 list of the best companies to work for in the United States, Kingston ranked second with one hundred training hours per employee per year, behind Shell Oil (120 hours), and ahead of Cisco, Deloitte & Touche, and others. At "Kingston University," employees are able to, in addition to ESL, take a broad range of technical, managerial, and administrative classes.

### *The Kingston ESL Program*

Kingston's ESL program is an important example of a private firm embracing cultural and linguistic diversity in the workplace. Instead of dismissing what in other settings might be considered a handicap, Kingston has embraced early immigrants who do not speak fluent English. The company's workforce consists of 70 percent minorities and immigrants hailing from Europe, Asia, and South America, and whose native languages include Spanish, German, Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Mandarin. In letters to Kingston Human Resources, employees repeatedly thank the founders for offering the classes:

- "I was very confused and shy when someone came to ask me about something, but now I feel confident because I've learned a lot from this class." (Son Huu Tran, testing team leader)
- "I'm really proud when I tell my friends that I'm studying English at my company, and I'm happy when they tell me that my English has improved . . . . This is the nicest gift that I have received from the company." (Hong-Lan Phan, return merchandise authorization processor)
- "An important part of this class is being able to gain good relationships and learn among friends from different [corporate] departments. We are working together better, helping each other . . . . It is making our jobs go much more smoothly and quickly." (Jindaporn Tumsongrusmee, quality assurance inspector)
- "I would like to thank all of you, especially Mr. John Tu and Mr. David Sun, who brought up this [idea for ESL], for giving me the opportunity to learn English . . . . Because of your kindness, I promise to improve my English and perform my position well." (Brenda Nguyen, IBM sales)



Below, John Tu, David Sun, and Helen Le discuss the ESL program.

*AAPR:* What prompted you to start this program?

*SUN:* In late 1996, several of our employees requested ESL training. I agreed immediately because when I came to this country, I quickly realized that if I wanted to get anywhere and be successful, it was important that I learn to speak and read English well. Without it, I would have never been able to get to where I am today.

*TU:* I remember feeling like a second-class citizen when I first came to the U.S., mostly because I couldn't communicate with them in a way that I felt was equal.

I think many blue-collar workers don't have the time, money, or the resources to take language classes. And often they don't have an understanding that language can help to upgrade one's positions. The first step is acquiring the language.

*AAPR:* What is the ESL Program?

*LE:* The program is run every three months, similar to a college quarter system. Only regular full-time employees of Kingston or any Kingston-affiliated company may participate. On our first year of the formalized program, two hundred workers registered for classes.

The classes are taught on-site by instructors certified to teach college-level ESL. Because the classes are on-site, our employees do not have to drive to school and find parking, or spend time and energy registering and enrolling. The company also provides books, exercise manuals, and audio equipment.

All participants must take an assessment test to determine their level of English competency, and they are placed in beginning, intermediate, or advanced classes.

*AAPR:* What types of employees take part in the program?

*LE:* Most of the program's participants are Vietnamese—about 60 percent. The rest are a split between Chinese- and Spanish-speakers. They are mostly low-wage production workers from Kingston's manufacturing plants. Some are team leaders and production supervisors. Most of the clerical workers are in the advanced classes because they should be able to communicate in English with suppliers.

*AAPR:* How effective has the program been in increasing English proficiency?

*LE:* Learning a new language takes a lot of time. Since the program's formalization last year, employees meet more often—every day for an hour, four days a week. It may take longer because these people tend to speak their own native language at work and at home. We try to have them speak English every day to expedite their learning process



*AAPR:* How is it that workers speak their own language at work?

LE: They speak their native language at work because people are surrounded by similar ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. This is because a lot of the groups and departments at Kingston have constructed themselves based on language and culture.

That's good and bad at the same time. Good because they understand each other, communicate easily, and can get things done very quickly without knowing the English language. By working in groups that speak the same language and have the same cultural backgrounds, our employees who are new immigrants don't have to worry about language barriers and can function well without speaking fluent English.

The downside, however, is that they're not able to improve their English while at work. The challenge is that culturally, speaking English among your own people can be looked down upon. When they go to the classroom they speak English, but when they get out and back to the manufacturing plant, they speak Vietnamese. There is a lot of peer pressure to speak one's native language.

*AAPR:* How has the ESL Program benefited the company?

TU: The benefit is the practical, business side. Improving our employees' communication skills improves our company's general level of competency. If our employees talk on the telephone in broken English, our customers and suppliers might think, "Maybe this is not a company I want to do business with." Our employees *are* the company; they represent Kingston.

SUN: It is very important that we embrace our cultural differences, but at the same time we need to learn to communicate from common ground. There is great potential for [on-the-job] mistakes from miscommunication from language barriers and cultural differences in interpretation.

*AAPR:* In addition to improved language skills, how has the ESL Program affected the participants?

TU: This program is a first step in giving our employees the tools to move on. Some of them will probably continue on as blue-collar workers for the rest of their lives . . . but language will enable others who wish to seek new opportunities to learn a new trade or go to school. It's a starting point to improve their lives.

LE: People feel more confident conducting themselves in business settings as well as their daily lives.

*AAPR:* What are some other benefits for the company, besides increased communication between groups? Is it not sufficient to have managers who can speak



English and communicate with other managers? Why is it important that plant workers speak English?

LE: The vision for this program is to make sure we have a very well-trained workforce. When people are able to communicate understand, read, and write English, we can train them better. The other training and development classes that are offered on technical and management skills are taught in English, so many manufacturing workers would never get the chance to learn new job training skills if they don't learn English first.

SUN: In order to train people to become better managers and supervisors, and fully understand the safety rules, knowing English is essential.

AAPR: Why does Kingston want to invest the time and resources in such a long and arduous process?

LE: As a company we must have the patience to oversee the progress. In the business world, when you invest in something, you want to see the results *now*—or as soon as possible. Learning a language, on the other hand, can take anywhere from one to three years. Becoming proficient takes even longer. It took me fifteen to twenty years to speak and understand at the level I am at today. It's a very slow process.

SUN: A sense of community builds up. People from different departments take the classes together and start to communicate with each other.

TU: Once they have better mastered that [language] skill and built up confidence . . . they begin to mingle more often with native English speakers. That's when the process of bringing different cultures together starts . . . Some of our [other American employees] have invited people to their house for barbecues and introduced them to American customs.

[We want to] provide our employees with opportunities, resources, and time to help them merge into this culture. If we don't do that, we are just treating people as labor. There's no deep philosophy to it: if you can, in your capacity, help another person, you just have to do it. It's very fundamental.

LE: We are very much an employee-oriented company. The majority of people here are immigrants, most of whom are good, well-disciplined workers. They do very well on the job regardless of the language barrier, and we're willing to invest in them.

AAPR: Are you concerned that that the program will make your employees more marketable and prompt them to leave for higher-paying jobs? In other words, that you don't get a return on your "investment"?



TU: Yes. For those whose potential is much more than what they are doing now, they might have left anyway, however, those who feel good about their relationship with the company will not leave.

LE: Some employees may take that opportunity and move forward, which is great for them. However, I don't think we have that kind of fear [of losing employees]—it's not even thought of or mentioned. This is because we are good company with an excellent benefit package.

*AAPR*: Should other companies adopt a similar program?

TU: Many companies, regardless of industry, would agree that it's a good idea, but not a priority. Executives probably feel there are more urgent things they can do that will improve their bottom line in the short-term.

It depends on the population and their needs. If they have a similar population and have similar business needs, then I can see it working. But if you have a company that is made up mostly of professionals, in engineering development or high technology, I don't think it's necessary. In our case, we have the need and I'm glad that we're able to do this for our employees.



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# Acculturation and Quality of Life: A Comparative Study of Asian Indians, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans in Los Angeles, California

Snehendu B. Kar, Jasmeet Gill, Armando Jimenez, Liane Wong, Felicia Sze

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*Objectives:* The two objectives of this paper are, first, to compare three Asian American samples (Indian, Japanese, and Korean) with African Americans, Hispanics, and whites on selected indicators of quality of life; and, second, to examine the effects of acculturation on quality of life and health among three Asian American samples.

*Methods:* The study samples consisted of 418 Asian Indians, 509 Japanese Americans, and 411 Korean Americans from Los Angeles County. Self-administered surveys measured eight

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domains including socioeconomic status, acculturation, quality of life (QOL), health status, and health-related beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes and practices (BVKAP) of the Asian American samples. Bivariate analysis (Pearson's R correlation coefficients, cross-tabulations, and comparison of means) and multivariate analysis (stepwise linear regression) were performed on the data. Secondary data from non-Asian groups are used for comparison.

**Results:** Significant differences between Asian and non-Asian groups are identified on key measures. Within Asian Americans, the three groups varied significantly in terms of socioeconomic status, acculturation, quality of life (QOL or subjective life satisfaction), health risks, health behavior and service utilization, and social and political participation.

**Conclusion:** Cultural factors that have an independent and direct effect on health outcomes beyond socioeconomic status and access to health care are identified. Conventional measures of acculturation (language spoken and birthplace as proxy measures) alone do not measure acculturation as well as these two measures, augmented by several behavioral measures (identity, ethnicity of friends and preferred dates or marital partner). Seven significant implications for policy and research are discussed.

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## OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This paper has two objectives: 1) to compare Asian Americans as one group with African Americans, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites on selected indicators of health and quality of life (QOL) using secondary data; and 2) to examine the effects of acculturation on health and QOL among three samples of Asian Americans in California: Asian Indians (or Indo Americans, originating from Indian subcontinent), Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans. The term "Asian American" covers a broad array of ethnic groups that originated in Asia and are currently residing in America. They are the most diverse of all ethnic groups, representing every major religion in the world and speaking more than thirty different languages. Economically they include the most affluent as well as the most impoverished.

The 1990 median household income for Asian American subgroups in Los Angeles County ranged from a high of \$46,912 for Asian Indians, to a low of \$17,343 for Cambodians<sup>1</sup> (U.S. median \$30,056).<sup>2</sup> In 1996 there were more than 9.7 million Asian Americans; the 2000 U.S. Census reports an increase to more than 12.7 million (about 3.7% to 4.5% of the national population, respectively). This amounts to a 23% increase in four years, or 5.7% increase per year, compared to the annual growth rate of 0.88% for the general U.S. population. At this rate, Asian Americans are the fastest-growing ethnic minority in the nation. As a minority group, Asian Americans also have the highest proportion of foreign-born and recent immigrant populations.<sup>3</sup> In Los Angeles County, Asian Americans were estimated to account for approximately 10.3% of the population in 1990.<sup>4</sup> Available literature shows that on selected indicators of health status and QOL, significant differences appear between populations across nations; furthermore health status and QOL vary significantly within each nation by socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Historians, social scientists, and economists have long recognized the importance of durable belief-value systems of various cultural groups as major driving forces

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(often referred to as “cultural capital” or “human capital”) that profoundly affect their social systems, QOL, and economic and industrial progress.<sup>6</sup>

One authoritative source cites that among the ten leading causes of mortality in the United States, half of the deaths are due to lifestyle<sup>7</sup> and personal behaviors that are, in turn, culturally conditioned. These observations have led the Department of Health and Human Services to conclude that “special population groups often need targeted preventive efforts, and such efforts require understanding the needs and the particular disparities experienced by these groups. General solutions cannot always be used to solve specific problems.”<sup>8</sup> Available statistics show significant ethnic differences in mortality, morbidity, health risks, and health-related behavior in the United States.<sup>9</sup> And yet, except for limited morbidity and mortality statistics on a few established groups (Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans), almost nothing is known about the cultural and psychosocial factors associated with health and QOL of major Asian American groups.<sup>10</sup> A recent online search failed to identify a single population-based study of health status and psychosocial correlates of health and QOL of major Asian American groups.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, there is another justification for studying psychosocial correlates of health status and QOL in ethnic minorities. Global trends show that populations with higher income and better standards of living tend to have lower mortality and morbidity rates than poorer and disadvantaged populations.

Among the top twenty economically developed nations, in spite of its relative affluence, the United States ranks lowest on several indicators of positive health (e.g., life expectancy) and highest on several negative health measures (e.g., infant mortality).<sup>12</sup> A major contributing factor to these negative outcomes is the disproportionately higher health risks and lower access to health and human services among large segments of the underprivileged and mostly ethnic minorities.<sup>13</sup> Acculturation stress is also a risk factor affecting intergender and intergenerational conflicts, psychological distress, and health-compromising behavior such as substance abuse.<sup>14</sup> Conventional wisdom and epidemiological lessons suggest that lower acculturation, combined with lower access and cultural barriers to the use of health and human services among Asian Americans and Hispanics, would result in higher morbidity and negative health outcomes, including infant mortality, but Asian Americans and Hispanics do better than whites and African Americans on several measures of health status (see Table 1). For instance, in Los Angeles County, Hispanics have the highest percentage of medically uninsured—a measure of lack of access to health care, and yet they have a lower infant mortality rate and a higher life expectancy than whites and African Americans, who have higher rates of health insurance coverage.<sup>15</sup> One hypothesis of this “cultural paradox” is that unique cultural buffers or protective mechanisms moderate the negative effects of social stressors and lack of access to health care among several ethnic minorities. A better understanding of “cultural buffers” and paradoxes may help to develop better policies and programs for other groups as well.



## STUDY METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on three Asian American populations in Los Angeles. We chose one long-established group (Japanese Americans) and two recent immigrant groups (Asian Indians and Korean Americans) in this study. True random and probability sampling was impossible for these three groups, especially for the Asian Indians. Due to this limitation, our choice was either to conduct this exploratory study with a feasible sample or not to do the study. Since a systematic population-based study of these three groups is practically non-existent, we believe that the benefits derived from this exploratory study outweigh its limitations. Consequently, a convenience sample with specified criteria for inclusion of eligible respondents was used. Several steps were taken to reach all eligible respondents in each group. These steps included multiple endorsements by local leaders, mass mailing, distribution of questionnaires in major social and cultural events, distribution of questionnaires by community-based agencies providing health-related services to these groups, and multiple publications of full questionnaires and announcements in local ethnic newspapers. To increase response rates, several lottery awards ranging from \$50 to \$500 were announced and given to randomly selected respondents. On key measures of socioeconomic status and acculturation, these three samples are similar to 1990 national averages for these groups. Since all educated Asian Indians are fluent in English, they were able to complete a written questionnaire with ease. For the sake of comparability, educated respondents were included from the Japanese American and Korean American groups; however, they had a choice of responding either in English or in their respective native language. The questionnaire for Asian Indians was published in English in the most widely circulated weekly, *India West*. The questionnaire for Korean Americans was published in Korean and in English in the *Korean Central Daily*, and for Japanese Americans, in Japanese and English languages in the *Japanese Orange Network*. For all three groups, questionnaires were also distributed at health clinics and cultural events.

The samples are composed of respondents over eighteen years of age and from both genders. The study subjects include 418 Asian Indians, 509 Japanese Americans, and 411 Korean Americans. The survey questionnaire consists of 124-135 items measuring the following domains:<sup>16</sup> (1) *demographic and socioeconomic status*; (2) *QOL and subjective life satisfaction* (Cantril's Self-Anchoring Scale);<sup>17</sup> (3) *acculturation and assimilation*, including ethnic identity, language used at home, cultural practices, and immigration history; (4) *health status and behavior*, including knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) related to the behavioral risk factors; (5) *health access*, including health insurance coverage, usual source of care, satisfaction with available health services, and preference for traditional and modern medicine by health problems; (6) *mental health*, including items on measures of depression (Beck Depression Inventory—Short Form);<sup>18</sup> (7) *intergenerational conflicts and gender dynamics*, including areas of congruence and conflict between parents and adult children affecting their QOL with special reference to identity, gender roles, dating, career choices, and marital preferences; and (8) *communication and social relations*, including personal network, media



utilization, and major sources of health-related communication and information. In addition, open-ended items are used to collect data on their concerns and priorities. These samples are further compared with African Americans, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites using secondary data from the *Los Angeles State of the County Fact Book*<sup>19</sup> (see Table 1). Multivariate statistical analysis of the three samples is done to compare selected variables across ethnicities (see Table 3). A means test compares the Asian Indians, Japanese Americans, and Korean Americans on continuous variables (e.g., age, years of education, Cantril's QOL scale scores). The chi-square test compares responses on categorical variables (e.g., gender and intergenerational comparisons, subjective ratings of quality of care, and health status).

### MAJOR FINDINGS

Table 1 shows several significant differences across study groups on key indicators of health and socioeconomic factors affecting quality of life including poverty, birth rate, infant death rate, heart disease, and percent uninsured as a proxy to access to health care. Table 2 presents data for the three Asian American groups separately and compares them with three non-Asian American groups with data from the Los Angeles Behavioral Risk Factor Survey. The data shows that African Americans and Hispanics were more likely to live below the poverty line (30.9% and 26.3% respectively) than whites and Asian Americans (12.8% and 14.1% respectively). African Americans were at the highest risk on almost all indicators, including infant mortality, deaths from all causes (789.6 per 100,000 population), and deaths from heart disease, homicides, and AIDS; they also had the lowest life expectancy (68.18 years). Asian Americans, on the other hand, had the highest life expectancy (81.76 years) and the lowest rates of infant mortality, deaths from all causes (318.3 per 100,000 population), and deaths due to heart disease, homicides, and AIDS. They also had the second-lowest birth rate and percent of families below poverty. Whites had the lowest rates of families below poverty and uninsured. Compared to Asian Americans and Hispanics, however, whites had higher rates of several negative health indicators including infant mortality (a critical indicator of overall health status of populations), heart disease, AIDS deaths, and lower life expectancy at birth. Hispanics had the highest birth rate, had highest proportion of families without health insurance (39%), and ranked second in proportion of families below poverty (next to African Americans). However, Hispanics had the second-highest life expectancy (80.27 years) and ranked second lowest in infant mortality (Asians outranked all groups on these measures). Both African Americans and Hispanics had significantly higher homicide deaths (64 and 29 per 100,000 population) than Asian Americans and whites (7.6 and 8.1 per 100,000 population respectively).

On measures of education and income (see Table 2), Hispanics ranked last; almost one-half of Hispanics and more than 43% of African Americans had an annual income below \$15,000. Nearly 84% of Asian Indians and 46% of Japanese Americans were in professional or managerial occupations; Korean Americans had



the highest proportion of self-employed (43%). Asian Indians and Hispanics were the youngest in age (medians 33 and 32 years respectively). Whites had the highest rates of smoking, and Hispanics had the lowest; following in descending order of prevalence of smoking were African Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, and Japanese Americans. Although a significantly lower proportion of Asian Americans as a whole were below poverty when compared to African Americans (14.1% and 30.9% respectively), almost equal proportions of these two groups do not have health insurance (20% and 19% respectively). While Korean Americans were not poorer than Hispanics, more Korean Americans were uninsured than Hispanics. Similarly, 53% Korean Americans did not have health insurance, compared to only 16% of African Americans. Lower acculturation and higher self-employment (meaning non-availability of employer-sponsored group health insurance) have a significant effect on lower health insurance coverage among Korean Americans.

Table 3 compares the three Asian American groups on several measures, including acculturation, health, and subjective QOL. Table 4 displays correlation coefficients (Pearson's R) for QOL and health status variables across all three groups. Due to time and space constraints, statistically significant differences in items in Tables 3 and 4 are indicated by asterisk marks (\* =  $p < .05$  level; and \*\* =  $p < .01$ ). These results show that contrary to popular belief, higher education and affluence do not guarantee better health outcomes, and culture and lifestyle have direct effects on health and QOL.

### *Acculturation and Assimilation*

Asian Americans represent a largely immigrant population, and the level of acculturation (foreign/U.S.-born and English language use) varies significantly across the three study groups. About 69% of all Asian Americans were foreign born, compared to only 9.3% of the U.S. foreign-born population. Japanese Americans had the lowest rate of foreign born (31%); Korean Americans had the highest rate (82%), and Asian Indians had the second-highest (77%) foreign-born population. Only 37% of Korean Americans spoke English well, while most Japanese Americans and Asian Indians (72% and 77% respectively) spoke English well/very well. In spite of their relatively higher levels of education and occupation, nearly one-half of the Japanese Americans and Asian Indians did not "always speak English at home," and had "most friends of the same ethnicity." Asian Indians were the most heterogeneous; they maintain a highly diversified ethnic self-identity with over 60.5% continuing to identify themselves as monocultural or Indians, and only 11.7% as bicultural or Asian Indian (or Asian American). Thirty-four percent of first-generation parents still retain their Indian provincial identity (Gujrati, Punjabi etc). This diversity in identity appears to be a major factor contributing to the lack of ethnic cohesiveness, lack of political participation and influence, and the near-invisibility of the Asian Indians in their adopted society.<sup>20</sup> Japanese Americans least often identified themselves as monocultural (Japanese) and most often as bicultural (Japanese Americans). One study reports that only 16.7% of Asian Indians were registered voters, compared to 43% of Japanese Americans, 35% of Chi-



nese Americans, and 27% of Filipino Americans. Due to their longer immigration history, Japanese Americans, in comparison to the other two groups, appear to be better adapted to mainstream political and social organizations while retaining their important cultural attributes.

**Access to Health Care**

More acculturated Asian Americans tended to have greater access to health insurance and health services. More than 90% of Japanese Americans and Asian Indians reported having health insurance; in contrast only 47.3% of Korean Americans have health insurance. For Los Angeles County as a whole, about 70% of the population has health insurance.<sup>21</sup> Despite their relatively lower level of acculturation, Asian Indians had a high rate of insurance coverage, perhaps due to higher educational and economic achievements, and yet, although they reported high rates of insurance, 50% of Asian Indians also said they do not have a regular source of health care. This suggests that the level of acculturation may affect access to and regular use of health services even when they are available. Across all three groups, women reported less access to health care than the men do. Except for Asian Indians, women rated their health status as better than men did. Findings also show a significantly higher use of traditional medicine among several groups, in comparison to the use of traditional or alternative medicine by about one-third of the Americans as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Korean Americans reported using traditional healers (72%) four to five times more often than Japanese Americans (17%) and Asian

**TABLE 1: A MULTICULTURAL COMPARISON BY SELECTED INDICATORS**

Los Angeles 1994: Ethnicity, Health, and Quality of Life by Ten Indicators

	Los Angeles	African Americans	Asian Americans	Hispanics	Whites
<b>Population:</b>					
1990 Census	8, 863,164	10.6	10.3	37.8	40.8
1999 Estimate	9,727,841	9.6	12.4	44.8	32.8
<b>% Families</b>					
below Poverty	18.9	30.9	14.1	26.3	12.8
Birth Rate (per 1,000)	22.3	22.3	18.8	36.7	10.1
<b>Infant Death Rate</b>					
(per 1,000 LB <sup>o</sup> )	7.2	16.2	4.6	6.3	6.9
<b>Percent</b>					
Uninsured '92	31.0	20.0	19.0	39.0	15.0
Heart Disease**	149.7	239.2	97.0	113.6	151.8
Homicides	22.9	64.0	7.6	28.7	8.1
AIDS Deaths	23.6	39.2	3.0	17.9	29.0
Deaths (All Causes)**	509.3	789.6	318.3	420.6	598.6
Life Expectancy (Yrs)*	75.46	68.18	81.76	80.27	74.96

Source: United Way of Greater Los Angeles, 1994

<sup>o</sup>= per 1,000 live births.

\*\*= Age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population.

\* = Chan, Charles M. and Oreglia, Anthony; California Life Expectancy: Abridged Life Tables for California and Los Angeles County 1989- 1991. California Department of Health Services, Sacramento, California; August 1993.



Indians (14%). These findings might have important implications for public policy and provisions of health and human services to Asian Americans as the subgroups vary significantly in terms of access and use of modern and traditional medicine. An integration of traditional therapies (acupuncture, acupressure, etc.) into health organizations could affect utilization patterns for some of these groups. While the three Asian American groups rated the availability of health services as acceptable or better, they were also dissatisfied with cost, quality, and insufficient time with their doctors.

**Health Status, Risks, and Quality of Life**

Data in Tables 1 and 2 show differences across various ethnic groups by selected indicators. Using secondary data, Table 1 compares all Asian Americans as one group with African Americans, Hispanics, and whites (disaggregated data by Asian American subgroups and Native Americans is not available). Table 2 compares the three Asian American samples of our study with secondary data on

**TABLE 2: CROSSCULTURAL COMPARISON BY SELECTED INDICATORS: PACIFIC RIM IMMIGRATION PROJECT AND THE LOS ANGELES BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEY**

Indicators	Asian Indian	Japanese American	Korean American	Hispanic	African American	White
<b>I. Demographics</b>						
Median age (yrs)	33	43	44	32	56	54
Median yrs education	17	16	16	10	12	15
Median yrs in U.S. (foreign-born)	16	11	12.5	13	N/A	N/A
<b>II. Income</b>						
Income (% less than \$15,000)	1.7	13.6	12.4	48.3	43.2	20.7
<b>III. Access to Health Care</b>						
% w/o health insurance	9.8	7.9	52.7	41.1	16.0	12.7
% w/ regular source of care	50	76	67	61.6	84.5	88.2
% always use Western medicine	52.4	46.2	57.2	N/A	N/A	N/A
% sometimes or always use traditional healer	14.1	17.1	72	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>IV. Health Behavior</b>						
% Currently smoking	15.8	10.6	18	12.1	19	22.2
<b>V. Health Problems</b>						
% reporting diabetes	9.2	5.9	16.4	4.6	8.5	5.8
% reporting hypertension	11.8	3.9	8.6	11.3	37.5	26
<b>VI. Subjective Health Status</b>						
% responding fair or poor	4.3	10	20	22.7	20.9	23.5
% currently suffering from any health problems	17.5	30.8	14.6	14.6	23.5	28.6

Sources: Los Angeles Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, Los Angeles Department of Health Services, 1994  
 Acculturation and Quality of Life Project, 1996.



African Americans, Hispanics, and whites. Asian Americans have the lowest rates of infant mortality, deaths from all causes, heart disease, AIDS deaths, homicide, and the highest life expectancy (see Table 1). They also rank second lowest on measures of birth rate, families below poverty, and uninsured for health care coverage. These data on Asian Americans as a group may support the "model minority myth," which holds that Asian Americans are doing very well and do not have special problems that require major policy interventions. Table 2 compares three Asian groups separately with non-Asian groups. The data in Table 2 contradicts the model minority myth. Table 2 shows that among all ethnic groups, Korean Americans have the highest proportion without health insurance coverage and the highest diabetes rate. Japanese Americans have the highest proportion suffering from a current illness. Furthermore, only one-half of Asian Indians have a regular source of health care. These findings, along with several additional problems discussed under the implications section of this study, should help to dispel the model minority myth. Additional problems include intergenerational and gender-role conflicts, mental health concerns, racial prejudice, exclusion from mainstream sociopolitical organizations, and negative portrayal and absence of positive role models in the dominant media which cultivate negative stereotypes.

The rankings of greatest health concerns of the three Asian American groups were similar. The top five ranking problems were high blood pressure, diabetes, heart conditions, back pain, and mental health problems. Diabetes was most frequent among Korean Americans (16.4%), and they were twice as likely to report it as a major health problem than other ethnic groups (see Table 2). Hypertension was highest in Asian Indians, with 11.8% reporting it as a current health problem. Japanese Americans had lower rates of diabetes and hypertension. Korean Americans had the highest tobacco-smoking prevalence at 18%, followed by Asian Indians at 15.8% and Japanese Americans at 10.6%. These rates are lower than whites (22%) and African Americans (19%, see Table 2). Asian women have much lower rates of current smoking: Japanese American and Korean American women smoked about equally at 6.3% and 6.9%, respectively, while Asian Indian women report the lowest rate at 4.8%. Alcohol consumption is higher among Asian Indians, with 64.2% reporting as alcohol drinkers, versus 55.1% and 50.6% in Korean Americans and Japanese Americans, respectively. As with smoking, alcohol drinking is lower in women as compared to men. Forty-eight percent of Asian Indian women drink, compared to 78.8% of men. For Japanese Americans, 43.6% of women are drinkers while 65.8% of men are drinkers, and 38% of Korean American women drink versus 74% of the men.

Both subjective (five-point scale: excellent to poor) and objective health status (currently suffering from a diagnosed illness) of the respondents were measured. The subjects reporting negative subjective health status were in this order (fair or poor, see Table 2): Hispanics (22.7%), African Americans (20.9%), Korean Americans (20%), whites (11.1%), Japanese Americans (10%), Asian Indians (4.3%). Respondents most frequently reporting a current illness were Japanese Americans (30.8%), whites (28.6%), and African Americans (23.5%).



For the Asian groups, mental health was a major concern; nearly one out of three Korean Americans and one out of five Japanese Americans respondents had feelings of depression in the past week.<sup>23</sup> Korean Americans also reported the highest percent (3.9%) of respondents feeling suicidal one or more times a week. Asian Indians were close behind with 3.1%. Despite having the highest level of educational and economic achievements among all Asian American ethnic groups, psychological problems were a major concern among Asian Indian community. Asian Indian women were more often depressed than men, possibly due to serious gender-role conflicts. One service agency in San Francisco reports that Asian Indian women are the most frequent help-seekers on their suicide prevention hotlines.<sup>24</sup> It is unclear whether this is because Asian Indian women speak better English, because they suffer from psychological distress more frequently, or both. Older Korean American women also expressed high levels of depression, perhaps due to isolation as a result of lower acculturation.

On Cantril's scale of subjective life satisfaction (QOL), the three Asian American groups rated their subjective QOL for the present in this order: Japanese Americans, Asian Indian, and Korean Americans (mean scores are 6.9, 6.7, and 5.7, respectively; significant at  $p < .01$ ). On the measure of expected QOL after five years, the groups ranked in this order: Asian Indians (8.3%), Japanese Americans (7.9%), and Korean Americans (7.7%). The last three differences, however, were not statistically significant (see Table 3). The results indicate that, in general these groups are moderately optimistic about their future. Implications of the above findings, including the importance of increased social and political participation by Asian Americans, culturally responsive health care and human service systems, the role of mainstream media in dispelling stereotypes and myth, and the promotion of inter-ethnic relationships, are discussed in greater detail in the concluding section on implications.

### ***Health Communication***

There are significant differences between these three groups in terms of their health-related communication and social interactions. The three highest-ranking sources of health information for Asian Indians are magazines (40%), doctors (38%), and family (32%). Japanese Americans use the following sources: doctors (55%), family (32%), and books (27.6%). For Korean Americans, the health information sources are newspapers (51%), books (29%), and family (27%). Across all groups doctors, family members, and friends are top sources of health information. The groups differ significantly in terms of how frequently they depend upon various sources for information: television (primarily Asian Indians at 51.2%), radio (primarily Korean Americans at 38.8%), nurses and pharmacists (primarily Japanese Americans at 55.8%). Given the high level of literacy and use of printed media among the Asian Indians, both mainstream printed media and those specifically aimed at Asian Indians could serve as important communication sources for health information. In contrast, for Japanese Americans, physicians, nurses, and pharmacists are the primary sources of health information. This implies a greater importance in involv-



**TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF THREE ASIAN GROUPS BY SELECT INDICATORS, 1996**

Indicators (n=419)	Asian Indians (n=509)	Japanese Americans (n=411)	Korean Americans
	Total	Total	Total
<b>I. Occupation/Education (%)</b>			
Professional**	67.3	29.9	21.0
Managerial**	16.8	16.5	7.3
Sales**	3.7	5.8	8.7
Semiskilled/service**	3.3	4.1	11.5
Service**	1.4	4.5	3.1
Self-employed**	6.1	11.5	43.6
Years of Education (median)	18.0	16.0	16.0
<b>II. Acculturation (%)</b>			
English spoken at home always/ almost always**	55.0	54.4	1.7
All/most friends in ethnic group**	48.8	43.8	86.6
Celebrate ethnic festivals**	48.1	30.8	24.8
Eat ethnic food**	59.6	37.1	73.7
Ethnic self-identification**			
à Native ethnicity**	60.5	36.1	46.0
à Ethnic American**	11.7	29.9	-
à Pan-Asian**	1.4	12.4	50.1
<b>III. Intergenerational Conflict (%)</b>			
Career choice**	20.2	19.9	35.6
Ethnicity of marital choice/partner**	18.4	20.6	12.5
Parental authority/control**	25.5	29.0	15.0
<b>IV. Marital Criteria (%)</b>			
Same ethnicity**	20.6	10.6	60.6
Same religion**	19.4	21.6	48.6
Same language**	10.0	8.6	52.6
<b>V. Mental Health (%)</b>			
Depressed (1+ times/week)**	N/A	19.8	29.9
Suicidal (1+ times/week)**	3.1	1.4	3.9
<b>VI. Access to Health Care (%)</b>			
Always use Western medicine	52.4	46.2	57.2
Sometimes or always use traditional healer**	14.1	17.1	72.0
<b>VII. Subjective Quality of Life (%)</b>			
Present: Mean**	6.7	6.9	5.7
Standard Dev.	1.7	2.0	2.2
Future: Mean	8.3	7.9	7.7
Standard Dev.	1.8	1.9	1.9

Source: Acculturation and Quality of Life Project 1996.

\*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05

ing physicians and their staff in the dissemination of health-related information to the Japanese Americans community. For Korean Americans, there should be increased emphasis on Korean language ethnic media, particularly Korean newspapers. These results underscore the importance of culture-specific, appropriate communication strategies for different groups.



### *Relationships among Key Variables*

Table 4 displays Pearson's correlation coefficients used to examine relationships among six key independent variables (education level, income, ethnic lifestyle, native language spoken at home, depression, and intra-ethnic marriage) and two important dependent variables (current subjective health status and present life satisfaction). There are some similarities in the correlation coefficients across three groups. For each group, there is a significant positive correlation between four pairs of variables: (1) household income and education level ( $p < 0.01$ ), (2) ethnic lifestyle (maintain native cultural practices) and frequency of native language spoken at home ( $p < 0.01$ ), (3) ethnic lifestyle and intra-ethnic marriage ( $p < 0.01$ ), and (4) frequency of native language spoken at home and intra-ethnic marriage ( $p < 0.01$ ). The data also show that there is a significant negative correlation between (1) frequency of depression<sup>25</sup> and life satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ), and (2) frequency of depression and health status for all groups. Respondents with higher present life satisfaction reported less depression. People reporting better health status also had fewer self-reported depression days. Depression was not significantly correlated with the other five independent variables for the Korean American and the Japanese American groups. In contrast, there was a significant negative correlation between depression and education and income in Asian Indians ( $p < 0.01$ ). Table 4 shows that Asian Indians who are more educated and have a higher income show less depression and psychological distress. There was a positive correlation between acculturation and income and three variables in Japanese Americans: lifestyle most comfortable with ( $p < 0.01$ ), frequency of English spoken at home ( $p < 0.01$ ), and importance of same ethnicity marriage ( $p < 0.05$ ). Among the Japanese American group, current health status was significantly correlated with all six independent variables.

A stepwise linear regression (not shown in tables) was done to determine which of five independent variables (education level, income, ethnic lifestyle (acculturation), native language spoken at home and place of birth (foreign-born versus U.S.-born)) would be significant predictors of subjective life satisfaction and QOL. Overall, educational level was a significant predictor of life satisfaction or subjective QOL. Among the Japanese Americans, acculturation and education accounted for the largest variance in subjective health status. For the Korean Americans, income, education level, and acculturation were significant predictors of their subjective health status. For Japanese Americans, place of birth (foreign-born versus U.S.-born) accounted for the largest variance in present life satisfaction; those born in the United States showed a higher life satisfaction. Among the Korean Americans, income was the independent variable that most significantly contributed to present life satisfaction. Among Asian Indians, however, none of the key independent variables (education level, income, ethnic lifestyle, native language spoken at home, depression, and same ethnicity marriage) were significant predictors of subjective health status.



**TABLE 4: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SELECTED VARIABLES FOR THREE ASIAN AMERICAN GROUPS**

Correlation Coefficients—Pearson's R

	EDLEVEL	ETH_LIFE	HOME_ENG	INCOME	DEPRES	MAR_ANCE
EDLEVEL—Indian	1.000	0.061	-0.014	<b>0.299**</b>	-0.216**	-0.014
EDLEVEL—Japanese	1.000	0.156**	0.222**	<b>0.241**</b>	0.051	0.071
EDLEVEL—Korean	1.000	0.019	0.109*	<b>0.254**</b>	0.062	-0.040
ETH_LIFE—Indian	0.061	1.000	<b>0.393**</b>	0.079	0.034	0.476**
ETH_LIFE—Japanese	0.156**	1.000	<b>0.387**</b>	0.185**	0.025	0.348**
ETH_LIFE—Korean	0.019	1.000	<b>0.291**</b>	-0.023	-0.035	0.293**
HOME_ENG—Indian	-0.014	0.393**	1.000	0.122	-0.060	0.369**
HOME_ENG—Japanese	0.222**	0.387**	1.000	0.232**	0.028	0.277**
HOME_ENG—Korean	0.109*	0.291**	1.000	0.084	0.085	0.180**
INCOME—Indian	0.299**	0.079	0.122	1.000	-0.337**	-0.009
INCOME—Japanese	0.241**	0.185**	0.232**	1.000	0.063	0.106*
INCOME—Korean	0.254**	-0.023	0.084	1.000	-0.019	-0.031
DEPRES—Indian <sup>#</sup>	-0.216**	0.034	-0.060	-0.337**	1.000	0.066
DEPRES—Japanese	0.051	0.025	0.028	0.063	1.000	-0.011
DEPRES—Korean	0.062	-0.035	0.085	-0.019	1.000	-0.118
MAR_ANCE—Indian	-0.014	<b>0.476**</b>	<b>0.369**</b>	-0.009	0.066	1.000
MAR_ANCE—Japanese	0.071	<b>0.348**</b>	<b>0.277**</b>	0.106*	-0.011	1.000
MAR_ANCE—Korean	-0.040	<b>0.293**</b>	<b>0.180**</b>	-0.031	-0.118	1.000
HLTSTAT—Indian	0.118	0.089	0.092	0.077	<b>-0.176*</b>	0.115
HLTSTAT—Japanese	0.242**	0.201**	0.157**	0.131**	<b>-0.139**</b>	0.116*
HLTSTAT—Korean	0.160**	0.101	0.115*	0.149**	<b>-0.193**</b>	0.012
LIFENOW—Indian	0.190**	0.065	0.003	0.151*	<b>-0.287**</b>	0.021
LIFENOW—Japanese	-0.025	0.099*	0.044	0.026	<b>-0.291**</b>	0.082
LIFENOW—Korean	0.131*	-0.052	0.067	0.221**	<b>-0.425**</b>	-0.133

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

# For the Indian population the variable is how often think about suicide.

EDLEV: Education level

ETH\_LIFE: Lifestyle and culture most comfortable with (1=ethnic lifestyle, 5= American lifestyle)

HOME\_ENG: How often speak English at home (1= never, 5= all of the time)

INCOME: Household income

DEPRES: How often feel depressed (1=never, 5=every day)

MAR\_ANCE: Importance of same ethnicity marriage (1= extremely important, 5= not at all important)

HLTSTAT: Current subjective health status (1= poor, 5= excellent)

LIFENOW: Present subjective life satisfaction (1=worst, 10= best)



### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH

The key findings presented have several implications for policy and research. Due to space limitations, we present only brief highlights of each and hope to generate further interest in these issues among the readers.

First, Asian Americans are the most diverse ethnic group in the nation; variations within this group often exceed variations between Asian and non-Asian groups. Asian Americans vary significantly on important dimensions including: socioeconomic status, languages, religion, acculturation, self-identity, health risks and determinants, health care utilization, communication behavior, subjective and objective QOL, and social and political participation. Therefore, combining such diverse groups into one Asian American aggregate for policy analysis and research hides large differences and defeats the very purpose of the study or policy analysis. There is also a serious lack of reliable empirical information about major Asian American groups on several important dimensions, including those discussed above. In the absence of systematic and population-based studies of these groups, we will be unable to undertake sound evidence-based policy analyses. Consequently, there is a serious and urgent need for population-based comparative studies in multiple sites for developing a better understanding of the relative risks, determinates thereof, needs, and social capitals across these groups.

Second, due to the important differences identified above, it is imperative that social and health policies designed to address the special needs of these populations are culturally appropriate. A "one size fits all" program is not likely to be effective across all groups. A case in point is the variation in culturally influenced definitions of meanings of health and illness, beliefs about their causes, and norms about prevention and treatment. According to Western disease etiology theories, deaths and diseases are caused primarily by four causal factors: germs, genetics, toxins, and trauma. In contrast, Eastern etiological systems are based upon a theory of single or cosmic causal force (e.g., "chi" in Chinese and "prana" in the Indian Ayurvedic systems), and the importance of an optimal balance between the elements within a single cause (e.g., "yin and yang" in Chinese and "tridosas," or three conditions, in the Indian system). These differences lead to different definitions of problems and normative responses or prescribed preventive and curative practices. Our data suggest that groups with lower levels of acculturation and higher preference for traditional medicine would be less responsive to the mainstream health care system and preventive interventions (e.g., Korean Americans). Therefore, it is important that policies and services are based upon a working understanding of how modern and traditional cultures in a larger society affect the health and quality of life of its subgroups.

Third, while intergenerational conflict/gap is a universal phenomenon, it is most severe between the first- and second-generation immigrants. For instance, the less acculturated and foreign-born recent immigrants (e.g., Asian Indians and Korean Americans) and their children born and raised in the United States have significantly greater parent-child differences than the fifth- or sixth-generation Japanese Americans or Chinese Americans. In addition, gender-role conflicts and gender



equality vary significantly across cultures. Immigrants from cultures (Korean and Asian Indian) that condone or promote gender-role segregation and gender inequality are likely to experience greater parent-child conflicts (especially parent-daughter conflicts) than those who are more acculturated (Japanese Americans and Chinese). Our data supports this contention: Asian Indians, despite having the highest educational and occupational achievements, report significantly higher levels of intergenerational and intergender conflicts than Japanese Americans. Clearly formal education and occupation do not override the influence of parental cultural norms and expectations. First-generation youths, especially females, are subject to greater psychological stress and conflict as their culture demands that they remain submissive to parents and men. The most frequent causes of conflicts are children's preference for dates and marital partners, career choice, and obedience to parental decisions. With successive generations and increasing acculturation, immigrants tend to adopt the norms of the host culture. At the same time, through this acculturation process, they also acquire new risks (e.g., increased smoking and drinking), and abandon their native normative behaviors (e.g., in-group marriage, arranged marriage, compliance with parental authority and decision making). Previous studies show that alcohol, tobacco, and drug use are associated with intergenerational and intergender conflicts, and poor parent-child bonding.<sup>26,27</sup> These family conflicts may increase children's dependence on their peers, who are likely to be similarly distressed, for social and emotional support. Thus they become more vulnerable to peer pressure for substance abuse and other risks. Though substance abuse is less common among less-acculturated Asian American youths, they may suffer serious psychological distress in silence. The extent is unknown. Systematic study and support for communities to address family conflicts and distress is much warranted.

Fourth, because of the diversity in Asian cultures, health and human service providers would have to be trained at two levels: cultural competency in general, and familiarity with Asian health-related beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes, and practices (BVKAP) that affect health and QOL. One study reported that Asian Americans rarely communicate emotional and interpersonal problems to others.<sup>28</sup> They tend to suppress and somatize these as physical symptoms (e.g., pain, insomnia). The stigma attached to mental illness and fear of loss of family name in the community lead many to deny mental illness or to avoid using mental health services. In addition, Asian American immigrants often face linguistic and cultural barriers between themselves and providers who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of their way of life.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, health topics that are openly discussed in Western cultures are often forbidden in Asian cultures. These include issues related to sex, sexual orientation, and sexually transmitted diseases. National health statistics show that Asian Americans have the lowest rates of STDs.<sup>30</sup> It is not clear, however, if this represents a truly lower risk or underreporting. In addition to proper training of professionals, it is also important to establish community-based support groups and service units for both youths and their parents. Such support groups are especially important for women, who suffer a dual burden of intergenerational and intergender conflicts.



Fifth, the cultivation theory in communication studies holds that the dominant media selectively constructs and depicts images of reality that do not always truly represent our social reality. By repeating these distorted or virtual realities, over a period of time, the media cultivates stereotypes and distorted beliefs and perceptions. These stereotypes and distorted beliefs and perceptions affect our lives.<sup>31</sup> The dominant media do not portray Asian American realities and needs accurately; they often reinforce negative stereotypes (e.g., Chinese gangs, Indian cow-worshippers or 7-11 employees) and may perpetuate mistaken identities and misperceptions including the model minority myth that all Asian Americans are succeeding and doing well. For example, in the aftermath of the World Trade Center tragedy, a turban-wearing Asian Indian was the first casualty of a hate-crime because the perpetrator of the murder did not know the difference between an Indian Sikh and an Arab (hundreds of hate crimes due to mistaken identities have been reported since). Korean American shop owners have also been victimized, as they became misguided targets of hostility during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Popular perceptions of Asian Americans as a "model minority" may lead policy planners to conclude that Asians Americans do not have major problems and hence divert much-needed resources elsewhere. In addition, the conspicuous absence of Asian American role models and voices in agenda setting and media programming mean that Asian American needs and positive attributes remain unrecognized. Consequently, Asian Americans do not see their true reflection in the media and non-Asian Americans do not gain an understanding of the Asian American community. Not only does the public lack knowledge about Asian American cultures and realities, there is a serious lack of Asian American presence in social and political forums. Asian Americans themselves need to be more involved in political processes, develop a cohesive group identity, perhaps a pan-Asian identity, as Asian Americans for social participation, and empower themselves by building coalitions with other ethnic groups so that their collective voices are heard by the mainstream (such an identity does not preclude retaining personal and cultural identities and uniqueness). This "political acculturation" is a prerequisite for Asian American influence in government and policy arenas.<sup>32</sup>

Sixth, there is a need for a sound conceptual framework for studying how culture affects Asian Americans' beliefs, values, actions, and interactions with other ethnic groups in multicultural populations. Based upon our findings and literature reviewed, we propose a framework consisting of six dimensions by which culture may affect health-related behavior and outcomes. These dimensions are elaborated in our previously published materials.<sup>33,34</sup> The six culturally influenced dimensions are (1) disease etiology or beliefs about causes of illness (e.g., yin and yang versus germs, genes, toxins, and trauma), (2) treatment modality (e.g., Western or alternative medicine), (3) locus of control and decision (e.g., individual versus collective locus of decision), (4) communication and information media network (e.g., ethnic versus mainstream media), (5) accessibility and acceptability of health care services, and (6) identity and ethnic relationship including social and political participation. Empirical research is needed to identify and verify these and other important cultural dimensions that affect quality of life.



Finally, Asian American youths are often deprived of the opportunity to study their rich cultural heritage and immigration experience in our schools, colleges, and universities. Many students across the nation do not have the opportunity to learn about Asian American cultures and realities. The youths in our study (mostly college students) by an overwhelming majority emphasized a strong need and desire to learn more about their cultural heritage and realities. Lack of support for population-based research among Asian Americans perpetuates our collective ignorance and our inability to address serious problems effectively. For instance, the University of California, Los Angeles, is a major university and has a truly multicultural student body. No single ethnic group has the majority among the freshman class, but Asian Americans are the largest ethnic group. The South Asian students at UCLA have been pressing for the establishment of South Asian studies degree program with permanent curriculum and faculty dedicated to this program. Such a program has yet to become a reality. A lack of programs and courses in Asian American studies that focus on Asians immigrants in the United States (distinct from Asian studies, which focus on Asian nations) deprives all students, both Asian and non-Asian, who are our future leaders, of an opportunity to understanding Asian American realities, issues, and options. The uninformed public and their leaders cannot effectively participate in evidence-based policy debates, and, collectively, we remain unprepared to understand each other and to initiate social reforms. This is a major need that deserves attention from academic administrators, faculty, donors, parents, and students alike. Proactive social participation and political organization are essential for opening dialogues within and across ethnic groups, to break the spiral of silence about serious but invisible threats (e.g., family-conflicts, mental and sexual health), to raise public awareness, to influence public policy, and to mobilize resources to address serious needs.

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# An Analysis of Public Funding Provided to Social Service Organizations Serving the Asian American Community in New York City

Shao-Chee Sim

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*Using ten years of social service contract data provided by New York City's Comptroller's Office, this study confirms a number of long-held concerns regarding the declining public resources to support social services in the Asian American community over the past decade. While Asian Americans make up more than 10% of New York City's population, social service organizations serving the Asian American community currently receive less than 0.30% of the total city's social service contract funds. Moreover, the Asian American share of social service contracts has never surpassed more than 1.50% over the past decade despite dramatic Asian American population growth and increasing social service needs. For example, the areas of elderly care, day care, health, and mental health have been severely underfunded. Furthermore, many social service contracts awarded by city agencies have not addressed the growing ethnic diversity in the Asian American community. Instead, most of the social service contracts targeted to serve the Asian American population have been awarded to a few, large social service organizations. After analyzing these trends, this report sets forth a broad public policy agenda for Asian American community leaders and social service organization executives to influence future decision-making in city hall.*

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## BACKGROUND

The Asian American population in New York City has experienced dramatic growth over the last decade. According to a U.S. Census estimate, the Asian American population in New York City grew by 54.3%<sup>1</sup> during the past decade. Along with its overall impressive population growth, the Asian American population remains one of the most ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups in the city. While many Asian American community leaders and social service organization executives have long lamented that Asian Americans have not received their fair share of social service funds from the city government, they have not been able to offer credible data to support their contentions. Moreover, policy makers have seldom examined the relationships between the growing and diverse Asian American population, the trend of government social service funding provided to the Asian American community, and the existing infrastructure of social service organizations serving the Asian American community.

The overarching objective of this study is to conduct a systematic inquiry of the following questions to try and fill a critical gap in understanding public funding of social services in New York City's Asian American community. More importantly, this research effort marks an important attempt to develop an institutional knowledge base of social service funding for Asian American social service organization executives, community activists, and public decision makers in New York City.

To what extent are city government resources dedicated to the social service needs of the Asian American community? Has the city government increased its resources to address social service needs of this community, especially in light of the dramatic population growth and the continuing influx of Asian immigrants and refugees over the past decade? Which city departments tend to do better in allocating their resources to the Asian American community? Does the trend of government funding support reflect the growing ethnic diversity and social service needs of the community? To what extent have the smaller and newer Asian American social service organizations succeeded in obtaining the needed city resources to carry out services?

By examining the social service expenditure data over the past decade, this paper assesses the extent of city governmental support in addressing social service needs of the Asian American community, identifies key social service areas in the community that lack governmental support, and offers concrete recommendations to improve opportunities and access for Asian American social service organizations to apply for future government funding.

It should be noted that the nature of this study is *exploratory*, as we intend to identify patterns and trends in social service funding provided to the Asian American community. Further, we do not seek to establish a *causal* relationship between funding support and service impact. For instance, we do not assess the quality of social services provided to the Asian American community or evaluate the impact these services have had on Asian American participants. We hope the finding of this analysis will inform and shape future discussions in City Hall surrounding the



development of policies and programs that are addressing the social service needs of the Asian American community.<sup>2</sup>

### RESEARCH APPROACH

We use a two-pronged approach to assess the extent of social service funding provided in the Asian American community. During the first stage of the analysis, we identify the changing demographics of the Asian American population in an effort to provide *prima facie* evidence on the changing social service needs of the community.<sup>3</sup> On an aggregate level, we analyze the growth of the Asian American population in New York City for the period of 1990-1999. On a disaggregate level, we examine the Asian American population growth by borough as well as by particular age cohorts (elderly, children, and teenagers). The 1990 and 2000 population figures are derived from the PL-94 171 series released by the U.S. Census Bureau. The 1991-1999 population data are derived from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program.<sup>4</sup>

In the absence of recent data, we will analyze a select set of demographic characteristics from the 1990 Census as well as other more recent statistics that point to the increased need for social services in the Asian American community. While the patterns or changes exhibited by these population subgroups may not accurately reflect the changing reality of social problems confronting Asian Americans, their findings offer useful insights in assessing the changing social service needs of the Asian American community.

After examining the Asian American population data, we turn our attention to the city's social service contract data. Using the data compiled by the Procurement Office of the city's Comptroller Office, we assess both the aggregate and disaggregate levels of the social service funds provided in the Asian American community for the city's most recent completed fiscal year period and over the past decade.<sup>5</sup> The social service data cover contracts awarded by Human Resources Administration, Administration for Children Services, Department of Homeless Services, Department for the Aging, Department of Youth and Community Development, Department of Employment, Department of Health, and Department of Mental Health.

In selecting social service organizations that have been awarded city contracts to be incorporated in our analysis, we include both Asian and non-Asian community-based social service organizations that serve the Asian American population in New York City.<sup>6</sup> Due to the aggregate nature of the dataset, however, we will not be able to differentiate multiyear contracts from single-year contracts, inhibiting our ability to discern changing funding patterns in the Asian American community. Instead, in assessing whether the government has increased its resources to support social services in the community over time, we focus our analysis on the change in the Asian American share of all social service contracts during the past decade.<sup>7</sup>

The aggregate data do not provide specific information on how a particular city agency fares in allocating social service funds to Asian American organizations. Similarly, it does not offer any insights on the level of city funding used to



address social service needs of a particular ethnic Asian American community. Therefore, during the second phase, we will conduct disaggregate analyses on the social service contract data for both agency and ethnic community levels. Such detailed analyses will permit us to identify a specific social service area or a particular ethnic Asian American community that has been lagging in government funding support over the past decade. However, due to the lack of disaggregate information in the earlier years, its analysis is focused on the period from FY1994 onward.

The analyses of population and social service funding data are presented in the following sections: 1) the changing demographics of the Asian American population in New York City; 2) an aggregate analysis of public funds received by social service agencies; 3) a departmental analysis of public funds received by social service agencies; 4) an organizational analysis of public funds received by social service agencies; and 5) recommendations to improve existing service needs and funding gaps.

## FINDINGS

### *1. The Changing Face of the Asian American Population in New York City*

According to the latest U.S. Census, the Asian American population in New York City has experienced a 54.3% increase, from 509,955 in 1990 to 787,047 in 2000. During this same period, the Asian American share of New York City's population increased from 7.0% in 1990 to 11.1% in 2000. Among the different boroughs, Brooklyn has experienced the greatest increase (68.2%) during the past decade, followed by Queens (64.8%), Staten Island (48.7%), Manhattan (31.0%), and Bronx (14.6%). Notably, nearly half of all Asian Americans reside in the borough of Queens. According to the 2000 Census, Queens has a total of 391,500 Asian Americans, which is 50% of the total Asian American population in New York City. This is followed by Brooklyn (24%), Manhattan (18%), Bronx (5%), and Staten Island (3%).

In comparing the change in age group by cohort,<sup>8</sup> Asian American elderly (who are age 60 and above) have experienced the greatest increase in population size (68.6%) during the past decade, from 50,424 in 1990 to 85,012 in 1999. During the same period, the number of Asian American children ages 5 to 14 has risen by 48.7%, while the number of Asian American youth (between ages 15 to 19) has increased by 21.1%. In comparing the settlement of Asian immigrants by borough, 44% of Asian immigrants resided in Queens for the period of 1990-1996, followed by Manhattan (25%) and Brooklyn (23%) as the next two boroughs with the largest Asian immigrant population.<sup>9</sup>

Even in the absence of systematic statistics on Asian Americans collected by government agencies, the scant evidence continues to reveal a disturbing pattern. For instance, more than 50% of Asian American children were born into poor or nearly poor families in 1999.<sup>10</sup> Also, one out of three Asian American students in New York City's public high schools did not graduate with their class.<sup>11</sup> Given ongoing immigration from Asia and the diverse makeup of the Asian American community in New York City, it is reasonable to expect that the various subgroups



of the Asian American community will continue to experience poverty, limited English language proficiency, and failure to complete a high school education.

All together, the impressive population growth of Asian Americans over the past decade, coupled with a continuing high rate of poverty, limited English language proficiency, and failure to complete high school among certain Asian ethnic subgroups, suggest an increased need for social services in the community. Because 90% of Asian Americans currently reside in the boroughs of Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, more funds should be allocated to the social services and assistance programs that serve the Asian American communities in these boroughs. With the overwhelming presence of Asian immigrants residing in these boroughs, social services such as language classes and employment training should also be expanded.

As the number of Asian American elderly has increased by nearly 70% over the past decade, the need for social services and programs for the Asian American elderly population should increase. To a lesser extent, the population data for Asian American children and youths during this period exhibit a similar increased need for additional day care services and after-school youth programs.

## ***2. An Aggregate Analysis of Public Funds Received by Social Service Organizations***

During FY2000, the Asian American community received a mere 0.24% of the total amount available in New York City's social service contracts. Social service organizations that serve the Asian American community received \$7.67 million out of a total social service contract of \$3.22 billion. While the total amount of social service contracts increased by 87.7% from FY1991 to FY2000, the Asian American share of social service contracts declined from 1.17% in FY1991 to 0.24% in FY2000, close to an 80% reduction. This declining share of social service contracts occurred during a decade of steady increases in the Asian American population in New York City.<sup>12</sup>

During the period of FY1994-2000,<sup>13</sup> the total number of contracts awarded to social service organizations serving the Asian American community dwindled from thirty-five in FY1994 to twenty-five in FY2000. In particular, the unduplicated number of city contracts awarded to social service organizations serving the Asian American community decreased from sixteen in FY1994 to twelve in FY2000. On the other hand, the average contract amount received by the Asian American community marginally increased from \$323,087 in FY1994 to \$403,903 in FY2000.

## ***3. A Departmental Analysis of Public Funding Received by Social Service Organizations Serving the Asian American Community***

A review of the detailed social service contract data reveals that social service organizations serving the Asian American community continue to receive an insignificant amount of funding from major city agencies that administer different types of social service programs and funding. Among the major findings are:



### **Human Resource Administration (HRA)**

During FY2000, social service organizations serving the Asian American community received a total contract amount of \$3.00 million from the Human Resources Administration (HRA),<sup>14</sup> reflecting a mere 0.14% of all HRA contracts. During the past decade, while HRA has increased its social service contract amount by 64.6% over the last ten fiscal years, the Asian American share of HRA contracts has been reduced by nearly 84 percent.

### **Department for the Aging (DFTA)**

During FY2000, social service organizations serving the Asian American community received a total contract amount of \$373,316 from the Department for the Aging (DFTA). Out of the total contract amount of \$128.48 million awarded by DFTA, the Asian American share of DFTA contracts is insignificant, at 0.29%. While DFTA has increased its total contract award amount by 37.6% over the last ten fiscal years, the Asian American share of DFTA contracts has decreased from 3.36% in FY1991 to 0.29% in FY2000. Remarkably, the Asian American share of DFTA contracts has experienced a 91.4% reduction over the past decade despite a nearly 70% increase in the Asian American elderly population.

### **Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)**

During FY2000, social service organizations serving the Asian American community received a total contract amount of \$1.79 million from the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). However, the Asian American share of the DYCD contract funds was 1.61%. Over the past decade, while DYCD increased its contract award amount by 109.2%, the Asian American share of DYCD contracts increased from 1.08% in FY1991 to 1.61% in FY2000, which corresponds to a period when the Asian American youth population increased by 21.1%.

### **Department of Employment (DOE)**

During FY2000, social service organizations serving the Asian American community received a total contract amount of \$1.79 million from the Department of Employment (DOE). The Asian American share of the DOE contracts was 3.30%. While DOE increased its contract amount by 15.5% over the past decade, the Asian American share of DOE contracts declined from 7.35% in FY1991 to 3.30% in FY2000.

### **Department of Health (DOH)**

During FY2000, social service organizations serving the Asian American community were not awarded any contract funds from the Department of Health (DOH). Over the last ten fiscal years, Asian American social service organizations have never received more than 1% of DOH contract funds.

### **Department of Mental Health (DMH)**

During FY2000, social service organizations serving the Asian American community received a total contract amount of \$611,160 from the Department of Mental

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Health (DMH). However, this amount reflects a mere 0.45% share of the total available DMH contract funds. While DMH reduced its contract award amount by 19.6% over the last ten fiscal years, the Asian American share of DMH contracts declined from 1.23% in FY1991 to 0.45% in FY2000.

Consistent with the finding of the aggregate analysis, the Asian American share of human service contracts in different city agencies is negligible during FY2000, ranging from 0.29% to 3.3%. This strongly suggests that Asian American social service organizations receive little public funds to address social service needs of the community. Further, Asian American social service organizations have not successfully secured critical public funding for the areas of health, mental health, day care, and elderly care. In fact, Asian American social service organizations have received fewer city funds over the last ten fiscal years while the total available contract amount in these areas have experienced increases during the same period.

Elderly care service in the Asian American community has been severely underfunded despite the dramatic growth of Asian American elderly population over the past decade. The level of public funding to support elderly services in the Asian American community has been reduced by almost 100% during the past decade. On the other hand, youth service is the only area in which the Asian American community has actually experienced an increase in public funding support over the past decade. Nevertheless, the Asian American share of total available DYCD contract amount is still insignificant.

#### *4. An Organizational Analysis of Public Funding Received by Social Service Organizations Serving the Asian American Community*

Chinese American social service organizations receive the bulk of the city's contracts.<sup>15</sup> In FY2000, Chinese American organizations received sixteen out of the twenty-five social service contracts awarded to the Asian American community. This is followed by Korean American social service organizations, non-ethnic-specific social service organizations,<sup>16</sup> and Vietnamese American social service organizations. Despite their increasing prominence in the Asian American community, only one South Asian American social service organization and no Filipino American social service organizations have been awarded government funds to support their activities.

Given the fact that only a few large, established, and multipurpose social service organizations have succeeded in obtaining funding from different city agencies regularly, the smaller and newer organizations have not been able to obtain city funds. These organizations include the newer and smaller ethnic communities, such as South Asian American and Filipino American. More technical assistance, such as grant writing, should be provided to these social service organizations to help them gain access to more funding.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: THE NEXT STEPS

### *Funding Agencies: Social Service Contract Procurement Issues*

The contracting process, which is based on geographical areas, creates a barrier for obtaining funds for Asian Americans because they have substantial poverty rates and are highly mobile across three boroughs (Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan). Consequently, Asian Americans are not concentrated enough in any one area to qualify for city contracts. Instead, city agencies should look at "communities of shared interest" in developing guidelines for request for proposals. For instance, Chinese immigrants living in Brooklyn but working in Manhattan's Chinatown have a shared interest in daycare programs in either location.

Another more flexible funding criteria is that Asian American social service organizations fare better when city agencies consider foreign-born populations and the number of "Limited English Proficient" (LEP) persons as important factors in assessing proposals. For instance, the Asian American community benefited when the Department of Employment adopted LEP as one of the criteria in selecting job-training contracts. Other city agencies should begin exploring the use of alternative criteria in its selection of contractors.

Since there are substantial variations among the different Asian American ethnic groups in terms of poverty rate, educational attainment, and English proficiency, city agencies should consider new ways to target funding to communities that exhibit greater need for social services. In other words, instead of relying on aggregate indicators of the overall Asian American population, city agencies should consider disaggregate demographic data of different Asian American ethnic subgroups in their funding decisions. Further, city agencies should increase community outreach and provide information about city services in Asian languages so that these resources are more accessible.

### *Community Leaders and Organization Executives*

**The following are four recommendations to improve New York City social service programmatic areas:**

- 1) Seek additional funding support to expand social services in Queens and Brooklyn to support the burgeoning Asian American communities in these boroughs.
- 2) Explore ways to increase public funding for elderly services in the Asian American community.
- 3) Assist newly formed social service organizations in the South Asian American and Filipino American communities in applying for public funds.
- 4) Improve organizational capacities, such as grant writing and budgeting analysis, in preparing grant proposals.



### *Funding Agencies, Organization Executives, Policy Researchers*

#### **Areas for Future Research:**

An important public policy question that has not been addressed is to what extent have important changes in federal and state legislation affected the manner in which city agencies allocate funds to Asian American social service organizations (i.e., welfare reform and workforce development legislation). Future research should focus on individual-level case studies of the experiences of particular Asian American social service organizations. These types of studies would reveal important insights into the various external and internal factors that drive individual organizational decisions in applying public funding.

More research is also needed to assess the extent to which the social service needs of the Asian American community in Queens have been met by the existing network of social service organizations. This study also relies heavily on population data as the primary indicators of social service needs. However, there should be a more systematic and long-term effort to develop social service need indicators of the Asian American population. A detailed analysis is needed to survey the experiences of Asian American social service organizations in applying for city funds (i.e., the problems they face in dealing with city's procurement process). This could be a potential factor that discourages the social service agencies from applying for city funds.

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## **Endnotes**

1 Since respondents are given the option to report one or more race categories to indicate their racial identities in the 2000 Census, there are various ways to define and calculate the Asian American population figure. This paper reports population data for only "Asian Alone" (one Asian group selected) category. It is derived from the PCT 5 table in Census 2000 Summary File-1 data release. It corresponds to the respondents who marked exactly one Asian category and no other selection. It represents the minimum number in any calculation of population size or growth rate. Alternatively, one can also use the more liberal interpretation, "Asian Alone or in combination with one or more races, and one or more Asian groups" category (the maximum number of Asians combined with other races). These two categories represent the low end and high end of the population figure.

This range of population figures, however, cannot be directly compared against the API population figure reported in the 1990 Census since it did not contain the detailed racial questions in the 1990 Census. Therefore, the Asian American population growth rate reported can only be inferred as close estimates of the actual Asian American population growth. Nonetheless, the population figures reported here give a more complete indication of total population size for respondents that self-identify as wholly or partially belonging to any particular Asian group. For a detailed breakdown of the Asian American population in New York City, please see the Web site of the Census Information Center at the Asian American Federation of New York: <http://www.aafny.org/cic/table/nyct.asp>.

2 From a research perspective, the findings of this analysis will have important ramifications on future evaluation studies and causal inquiries.

3 This approach is not a rigorous methodology to identify the social service needs of the Asian American community. A more rigorous research approach is needed to either collect existing



administrative data from different human service agencies (if available) or conduct a large scale, longitudinal need assessment surveys on the Asian American population that would meet the different statistical assumptions and criterion. Nonetheless, both approaches could only be realistically carried out under different research frameworks and environments.

4 The Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP) produces July 1 estimates for years after the last published decennial census (1990), as well as for past decades. Existing data series such as births, deaths, federal tax returns, Medicare enrollment, and immigration are used to update the decennial census base counts. PEP estimates are used in federal funding allocations, in setting the levels of national surveys, and in monitoring recent demographic changes.

5 The most recent completed city's fiscal year period is FY2000, which started on 1 July 1999 and ended on 30 June 2000. The data set used in this study covers the city's fiscal year period from FY1991 to FY2000.

6 These organizations were selected based on their client population—Asian Americans in New York City. We compared this list with the annual human service directory published by the Asian American Federation of New York (available at <http://www.aafny.org/directory/directory.asp>; last retrieved on 10 April 2002). Then, a number of social service agency senior executives reviewed the organizational list for accuracy.

7 By analyzing the longitudinal data in terms of a change in the Asian American share of all social service contracts awarded (includes both single-year and multiyear contracts), it tells us whether the government has increased its financial resources to support the social services in the Asian American community while taking into account the overall change in total social service contracts.

8 Age group data for 1991-1999 are derived from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP). PEP produces 1 July estimates for years after the last published decennial census (1990), as well as for past decades. See footnote 4.

9 Taken from Hum, Tarry. 2000. "A Demographic Analysis of the Asian American Population in New York City." Unpublished paper submitted to the Asian American Federation of New York. Source originated from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1990-1996.

10 Office of Vital Statistics, NYC Department of Health. 1999. Summary of Vital Statistics. New York: NYC Department of Health. According to the report, 51% of Asian American families used Medicaid to pay for the associated hospital expenses incurred with the birth of their babies.

11 The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. 1999. *Half-Full or Half-Empty? Health Care, Child Care, and Youth Programs for Asian American Children in New York City*. New York: CACF.

12 Although the expenditure data are collected on the city's fiscal year cycle (i.e., FY2000 reflects the period of 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000), which is different from the way population data are estimated in a calendar year (i.e., 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000). We did not seek to adjust for these differences because it is difficult to determine the timing of contracts. Also, we only use the expenditure data for descriptive purpose and not for further analysis.

13 For the period of FY1990-1993, the Asian American Federation's 1994 report does not include contract data by detailed information (i.e., number of contracts, amount, and awarded Asian American organization) on individual departmental breakdown. Due to a major change in its database system, the Comptroller Office does not maintain contractor information for the earlier period.

14 The data for Human Resource Administration (HRA) also includes contract information from Department of Social Services (DSS), Administration for Children Services (ACS), and



Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Both ACS and DHS used to be part of HRA and were created as independent agencies during the mid-1990s.

15 For some of these Chinese American social service organizations, they offer social services to non-Chinese Asian American clients. However, most of these organizations are located in different Chinese neighborhoods. A detailed analysis on the particular Chinese American social service organization is needed to assess the extent of their services offered to Chinese American versus non-Chinese American clients.

16 "Non-ethnic-specific social service organizations" refers to those social service agencies that serve all Asian American communities across New York City.



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## Book Review: Pan-Asian American Identity and Cross-Racial Coalitions

Pei-te Lien, *The Making of Asian America through Political Participation* (Temple University Press 2001)

Andrew L. Aoki

Is there an Asian America? Have the hopes of the Asian American movement foundered on the shoals of the new immigrant? In her valuable new book, Pei-te Lien undertakes a rigorous examination of Asian Americans' political participation and its role in building a pan-Asian American political community. Lien argues that an Asian American identity is once again taking root although its future growth remains uncertain. Like racial identity in general, a pan-Asian American identity will probably remain situational, emerging strongly only under certain circumstances, she concludes. The same holds for cross-racial coalitions, where Lien finds that Asian Americans seem likely to continue to find themselves placed as the "middle-man minority," neither fully accepted nor rejected by whites or by communities of color.

Perhaps Lien's most important theme is that political participation has played an important role in helping to build Asian American panethnic identity. The development of Asian American panethnicity, "the idea that people of divergent ethnic origins can identify with each other based on certain common characteristics or shared experiences and interests" (48), might seem to be unlikely, given the tremendous differences between Asian American subgroups. Lien shows, however, how issues such as voter registration or racial stereotyping have drawn together activists from different ethnic groups—e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino—helping to build an Asian American panethnic coalition.

In addition, Lien argues, Asian American government officials have often functioned as panethnic representatives. Most Asian American members of Congress have at times advanced the interests of Asian Americans beyond the boundaries of

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their districts or states. Generalizations must be limited, however, since Asian American elected officials are still fairly few outside of Hawaii.

Lien acknowledges that the development of a panethnic identity probably lags at the mass level, however. While political activists and other elites often engage in cooperation across ethnic lines, the majority of Asian Americans may develop strong bonds only with their co-ethnics. One of the great strengths of this book is that it goes beyond the case studies and anecdotes about coalition-building by activists, and looks at data which can shed some light on the views of less politically active Asian Americans.

The evidence presents a mixed picture. While Asian Americans of different nationalities strongly opposed California ballot measures 187 (which made undocumented immigrants ineligible for public social services, health care services, and education) and 209 (which prohibited discrimination or preferential treatment by the state and other public entities, ending affirmative action), they are not united along party lines. Both Democratic and Republican candidates have been able to win substantial majority support from Asian American voters, many of whom do not identify with either major party. When asked about the importance of other Asian American groups, majorities of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian respondents agree that their lives will be affected by what happens to other Asian Americans, but the strength of agreement varies greatly across these groups.

The argument is hampered by the paucity of data. Lien has an exhaustive knowledge of relevant surveys, but she readily acknowledges the problem facing every student of Asian American politics: There is very little survey data compared to what has been collected for whites, African Americans, and Latinos (one of the valuable aspects of this book is an appendix that describes the limitations of the available data and the challenges of surveying Asian Americans or other small subpopulations). This leaves her unable to assess the degree to which Asian American panethnicity may be undermined by disagreements over policy and ideology.

Ideological differences may run deep. Published accounts of Asian American activists have usually focused on liberal groups, and Asian American elected officials have usually been liberal or moderate, but there may be a substantial strain of Asian American conservatism, particularly among immigrants, as Lien notes. Among Korean Americans, there appears to be significant support for conservative social policies, and many Vietnamese brought staunch anti-Communist views when they immigrated to the United States. Even among third-generation and later Asian Americans, there are probably significant concentrations (e.g., Japanese Americans in business and the professions) that favor economic policies considerably more conservative than those embraced by the prominent activist groups. Insufficient data makes it very difficult to estimate the extent of these views, however.

Policy concerns may also divide Asian Americans. Immigrants are often deeply concerned over developments in their country of birth, which are unlikely to capture the attention of Asian Americans of other ancestries. But even domestic politics is not guaranteed to draw Asian Americans together. Given the tremendous economic diversity within Asian America, disagreements are likely over issues



such as social welfare and taxes. Affirmative action may also erode panethnic unity, given the trend to restrict Asian American eligibility (e.g., based on income or parental educational achievement) for affirmative action programs. Here, too, the lack of survey research leaves Lien able to make only a limited assessment.

So will Asian Americans develop a sense of common identity? It depends on the circumstances, Lien argues. A shared identity "should be considered as situationally defined and politically constructed" (196). In other words, a shared identity may be strengthened under certain circumstances, but may wane in others. When confronted by developments that threaten Asian Americans of all ethnicities—the paramount example is probably anti-Asian American violence—panethnic identification is likely to be strong. When common interests are not as obviously present, as appears to have been the case for the "80-20" effort to build unified Asian American support for a single presidential candidate, a panethnic unity is less likely to take hold.

What we may have, in a sense, are Asian Americans as exemplars of classic pluralism, participating in shifting coalitions as their interests dictate. Even if this does represent a rather weak sense of panethnic identity, Lien may be right to view the occasional pan-Asian American efforts as a significant development. Compared to, say, Arab and Jewish Americans or Greek and Turkish Americans, Asian Americans have been fairly successful at building coalitions that overcome ancestral enmities and other substantial differences.

But what of Asian American relations with other communities of color? Lien also addresses this important question, and again gives a cautious assessment, arguing that coalition building is likely to vary by issue. Her analysis concludes that measures of interpersonal friendship, partisanship, and ideology suggest that Asian Americans are more likely to build coalitions with whites than with African Americans or Latinos, although Asian Americans may be closer to the latter two groups on "race-related social redistributive issues" (168). Asian Americans seem likely to remain a "middleman minority," tugged both by white and nonwhite groups, and not allying consistently with either. The future seems likely to bring more cooperation, such as that between Latinos and Asian Americans in suburban Los Angeles, and more conflicts, such as clashes between Asian Americans and African Americans over race-based student admission policies at San Francisco's Lowell High School.

Here too, though, the shortage of data forces Lien to give a very partial summary. We simply do not have much information about Asian American relations with other communities of color outside of California, e.g., our knowledge of relations between South Asian Americans and African Americans or Latinos in New York and New Jersey is limited largely to anecdotes and case studies. Lien does as much as she can with the available information, but a considerable part of the story remains untold.

Although the future of interracial and pan-Asian American political ties is uncertain, the growth of Asian American political involvement is not. Using a vast array of published sources, Lien reviews Asian American political history and ef-



fectively demolishes the image of politically passive Asian Americans, showing the long struggle for justice in the face of daunting opposition.

She also finds that the more recent low voting rates of mainland Asian Americans is due to the electoral and political structure, rather than to the disinclination of Asian Americans to participate. Lien is one of the leading analysts of Asian American political participation, and she makes a convincing argument that the more supportive and responsive Hawaiian political structure accounts for the much higher levels of Asian American political participation there, compared to the mainland.

Another distinguishing feature of this book is its sensitivity to gender-based differences. Lien analyzes several surveys and finds that gender gaps are smaller among Asian Americans than for whites. Nevertheless, she identifies some significant differences between Asian American men and women. Interestingly, Asian American women appear to be less likely to be strong supporters of the Democratic Party or affirmative action.

As is the case throughout the book, however, data limitations are a problem. We know that there are some significant political differences between Asian American groups, but most of the datasets on Asian American women are too small to allow analysis by ethnicity. Much remains unanswered, but the study of Asian American women has been greatly advanced by the pioneering work done by Lien in this book and her other writings.

This book deserves a wide readership and can serve as a standard reference for anyone concerned about Asian American politics. Important questions—such as the efficacy and prospects for panethnic political coalitions—frame the succinct historical overviews and discussions of recent issues and controversies. Tables and figures are presented in ways easily understood by an educated generalist—although some figures would benefit from a little more explanation, which would make it easier to interpret them quickly. More complicated statistical analyses constitute a small portion of the book, making it accessible to advanced undergraduates as well. Lien concludes that she has only laid the groundwork for addressing many of the pressing questions of Asian American politics, but she has prepared the ground well. In this compact volume, she has made a major contribution to the study of Asian Americans.



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## Book Review: Asian American Identity Performances

Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (Basic Books 2002)

Pat K. Chew

Professor Wu's new book, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*, is the latest contribution to the field of critical race theory. Additionally, he offers intriguing personal narratives that remind us of the marginalization of Asian Americans beyond theoretical ruminations. His book is also a useful source of information on the ways that Asian Americans perceive themselves and are perceived by others. He alludes to "identity performance" theory, which is appropriate to better understanding the myriad identities that Asian Americans assume in the United States. Finally, he emphasizes that without the inclusion of the Asian American experience, the race debate in this country would be incomplete. Professor Wu's book helps place Asian Americans in a broader context of race relations and begins to sort through the complicated interrelationships between various racial and ethnic groups.

In recent years, Asian American jurisprudence has undergone a dramatic evolution. Prior to the mid-1990s, it would have been difficult to identify a body of research that could be called "Asian American jurisprudence"—the study of the relationship between law and Asian Americans, including the historical and social context in which that relationship has developed. Since that time, however, Asian American jurisprudence has simultaneously followed and differentiated itself from critical race theory and the analysis of black-white paradigms. Frank Wu has been a leader in the development of this newly emerging field. He is not only a prolific scholar, but also a political activist, media personality, and law school professor.<sup>1</sup>

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## I.

To begin *Yellow*, Professor Wu uses his own life to illustrate the various themes in the book. Recounting his childhood television hero, Johnny Sokko, who was an Asian character in a science fiction show, Wu wrote:

My hero was the other children's enemy. Even if I did not consciously see him—or myself—as Asian, [the other children] saw it clearly. They saw me as both more and less than Johnny. To my surprise, I learned I was not white. By birth, I was yellow. My aliases included Chinaman, chink, jap, gook . . . . I was a joke, the object of a ubiquitous sing-song chant that meant everything and nothing, "Chinese, Japanese, dirty knees, what are these?" It was shouted with fingers pulling back eyes into slits by classmates running in a circle around me, laughing so hard that they would fall down, as their parents supervised the playground (4).

Like many other Asian Americans,<sup>2</sup> I identified with his story, recalling my own ambivalent realization of my minority status in American society.<sup>3</sup>

## II.

Elements of *Yellow* remind me of "identity performance theory." As Devon Carbado, Mitu Gulati, and others explain, we are constantly negotiating different roles, determining which identities we will "perform" depending on the context.<sup>4</sup> While the theory is not explicitly mentioned in the book, Professor Wu conveys the ways in which Asian Americans and he himself negotiate various identities in American society.

Given the history and stereotypes Asian Americans have faced, they have unique influences and pressures both external and internal to their community. Consider the case of Chang-Lien Tien, who would become the first Asian American to head a major research university, University of California, Berkeley. When he boarded a bus in Kentucky back in 1956, he pondered whether to sit in the back with the blacks or in the front with the whites, asking: "Just where exactly did an Asian fit (19)?"

The negotiation between an Asian American's sense of self and the society in which she or he lives may easily produce conflict. To highlight these conflicts, I have distinguished the following five identities based on the Asian American profiles in the book:

Firstly, the political activist: Illustrations are Yuri Kochiyama, a close associate of Malcolm X whom the press called "Harlem's Japanese sister"; Grace Lee Boggs, a longtime union organizer in Detroit; Harold Hongju Koh, a law professor and chief litigator of Haitian refugee cases; and Angela Oh, spokesperson for Korean Americans after the Los Angeles riots on 29 April 1992, following the Rodney King incident. As Professor Wu advocates:

We cannot be reticent about race or shy about civil rights. Each of us who has the opportunity to make an appearance at the podium or to see a byline in print should remember that if we do not speak for ourselves, someone else will speak for us . . . . We must give voice to our many views (38).



Secondly, the victim: Victims such as Vincent Chin, a Chinese American engineer who was murdered in Detroit after being mistaken for a Japanese amid anti-Japanese sentiment in 1982 are targets of violent bigots. Many others do not even realize they are victims. They assume they are at fault for unfortunate life circumstances or simply do not acknowledge the discrimination that may be manifested in a subtle manner.

Thirdly, the assimilationist: My parents are representatives of this group,<sup>5</sup> which attempts to assume the apparent American values of success through hard work and education. Historically, Takao Ozawa, a Japanese immigrant, argued to the Supreme Court in 1922 that he was assimilated. He purposefully rejected Japanese traditions, lived in the United States for twenty-eight years, was educated at an American school, and he and his family spoke English. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, found that because Ozawa was not a "free white person;" under the 1906 Naturalization Act he was not entitled to U.S. citizenship,<sup>6</sup> underlying the challenges of racial integration in America.

Fourthly, the model minority: The "model minority" Asian American stereotype is hard-working, academically successful (particularly in math and science), and externally reserved. While stereotyping all Asian Americans into this profile is, at the very least, faulty, there are some Asian Americans who do possess these attributes. Given assimilation-oriented Asian American parents and their coping strategies, it is not a surprising outcome. Consider, for example, the case Wu highlights of law professor Harold Koh. Koh's father advised him to study physics "because in a profession where you work with numbers and not words, they can't discriminate against you (333)."

Assuming a model minority identity is consistent with societal expectations of Asian Americans, one may discover that what may be perceived as positive attributes (hard-working, focused, good at math and science) in some settings may be reframed as negative (not a well-balanced personality with limited ability in creative and artistic endeavors). Moreover, one's success may be perceived as a threat to others or as a way to "shame" other underperforming minority groups. The model minority myth has been selectively used to position Asian Americans in opposition to other minority groups, while simultaneously marginalizing those Asian Americans in greatest need. For example, when we disaggregate poverty rates in the Asian American community, data shows that most recent Asian immigrants and refugees have higher poverty rates than Asians who have lived in the United States for generations. Nevertheless, in the current race debate, the struggles of these immigrant groups are not fully recognized because the success of earlier Asian American immigrants is used as a blanket statement for all Asian Americans. When Asian America is discussed in the black-white race debate, its inclusion is oversimplified and unrepresentative of the complexity of this population.

Fifthly, "non-Asian" Asian Americans: Some individuals of Asian ancestry may not be considered Asian Americans for physical or cultural reasons. Actor Keanu Reeves, for instance, is considered white, as society chooses to perceive him as white. Meanwhile, 93 percent of all children whose fathers are white and mothers are South Asian checked "white" as their race or ethnicity, according to the



1980 Census. These children (or their parents) may have chosen a white self-image, but society may not necessarily perceive them that way. Finally, there is Tiger Woods, who reportedly identifies with his multiracial background despite being perceived by society as primarily African American.<sup>7</sup>

As outlined, the process of negotiating one's Asian American identity can be complicated, which poses many critical questions of self and race. How does one reconcile one's sense of self and an identity imposed by others? Should one be drawn toward identities that protect one against discrimination, even though they are contrary to one's authentic sense of self? How does an Asian American woman's negotiation process differ from that of her male colleague? One needs to weigh various considerations when choosing one or more identities that may conflict with society's expectations, including discrimination and gender dynamics.

### III.

*Yellow* is a significant contribution to the interdisciplinary discourse on race relations in America. Wu begins the book by exploring the social phenomena that is captured in the remarks: "You Asians are doing well," and "Where are you *really* from?" He defines the model minority myth, describes its origin, and analyzes its implications. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the perpetual foreigner syndrome—the perception that Americans of Asian descent are, and will always be, foreigners—noting its history in legal cases and its pervasiveness in American society. Wu highlights well-known examples of negative Asian profiling in the media, notably Wen Ho Lee, the nuclear scientist falsely suspected of espionage, and John Huang, the Democratic party fund-raiser accused of campaign finance law violations in the 1996 presidential elections.

In subsequent chapters, Wu expresses his views on affirmative action, multiculturalism, and discrimination. He is an unabashed advocate of affirmative action, having debated its merits in various public forums. Wu finds fault with both the principles of color blindness as well as affirmative action. For instance, he emphasizes the difficulty in measuring "merit" or determining the relevant skills and attributes that need to be measured. A recent study of Michigan Law School graduates, for instance, showed that the grades and scores on the entrance examination did not predict subsequent salary, job satisfaction, or civic contributions.

Discussing the stereotype that all Asians eat dogs, Wu addresses problems with assimilation and multiculturalism as the answers to society's increasing diversity. He cited both the works of Horace Kallens and Randolph Bourne from the early 1900s to remind us that the concept of multiculturalism is not new. Nevertheless, challenges to multiculturalism persist. Would it destabilize the common cultural core? Would diversity include accommodation to all perspectives, including those advocated by those in the ultra-militant right?

The book is a useful source to answer these and other questions. Professor Wu taps into a large array of references, drawing from research in history, law, political science, psychology, and the arts. (Examples include the origins of the term "melting pot" from a play of that name, or how those with ancestors from India



became "Asian Americans.") Interspersed throughout the book are numerous biographical sketches, offering an important collection of Asian American profiles. He also describes notable Americans who contributed to advancing Asian Americans' interests, as well as those who disparaged Asian Americans or uttered racial slurs. Professor Wu's background as a journalist and teacher are evident in his well-investigated, highly readable and substance-packed book.

Also, by recounting his own stories, he illustrates how Asian Americans have struggled and continue to do so with identity. The range of Asian American identities is diverse; consequently, some identities contradict others. These alternatives pose challenges to Asian Americans as individuals and a political group. Professor Wu's book informs us of the development, multiplicity, and complexity of Asian American identities. At the same time, he encourages Asian Americans to locate themselves within the broader racial landscape and to take an active role in timely issues, such as affirmative action and multiculturalism. He stresses that the race discourse cannot afford to ignore the interrelationships between Asian Americans and larger society.

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## Endnotes

1 Frank Wu is the first Asian American faculty member at Howard University Law School, a historically black institution.

2 Chon, Margaret (H.R.). 1995. On the Need for Asian American Narratives in Law: Ethnic Specimens, Native Informants, Storytelling and Silences. *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 3:4. (Explaining importance of such recollections.)

3 Chew, Pat K. 1994. Asian Americans: The "Reticent" Minority and Their Paradoxes. *William and Mary Law Review* 36:1-94. (Offering my personal narratives.)

4 Carbado, Devon W., and Mitu Gulati. 2000. Working Identity. *Cornell Law Review* 85:1259. (Describing how outsider groups, such as women, minorities, and homosexuals, negotiate their identities in the workplace. Also notes 7 and 8 cite on other works that explore role selection and identity performances.)

5 My parents chose to teach their children to work hard, learn the American system for success, and build "good" lives by at least ostensibly incorporating American values (but not forgetting traditional Asian values).

6 Despite this evidence of cultural assimilation, the Supreme Court denied Ozawa entitlement to U.S. citizenship. *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922).

7 Tiger Woods is a self-described "Cablinasian," as in Caucasian-black-Indian-Asian. "Woods has a black father (or to be precise, if I am interpreting Woods' reported ancestry correctly, a half-black, one-quarter American Indian, one-quarter-white father) and a Thai mother (or, with the same caveat, a half-Thai, half-Chinese mother)." See Kamiya, Gary. 1997. Cablinasian Like Me. Salon.com. Retrieved from <http://www.salon.com/april97/tiger970430.html>.







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Journal: Biller, R. 1976. Understanding the Effects of Restrictive Zoning: Some Observations. *Housing Policy Sciences* 7(2): 133-149.

Newspaper: Peterson, William. 1966. Success Story, Japanese-American Style. *The New Haven Times*, 9 January, sec. 1A, 21.

Interview: Nguyen, Steve. 1997. Associate Director of the Vietnamese Community Center. Telephone interview by John Kim. Los Angeles, Calif., 27 January.

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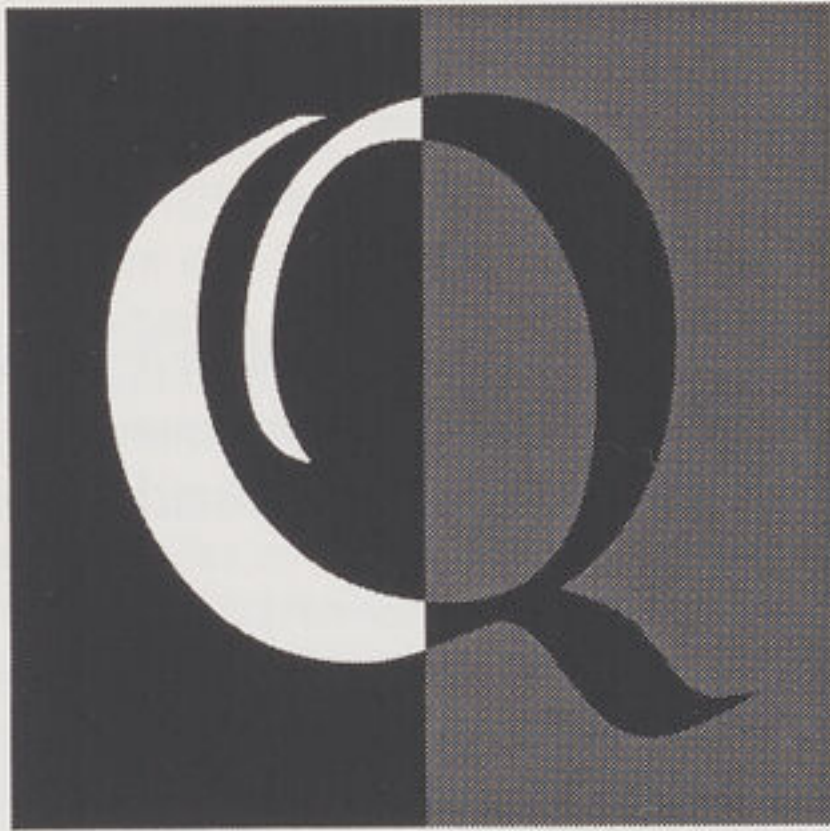
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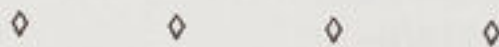
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