

## Asian/Pacific Islander – American Psychology

### I. Introduction to Asian American Psychology

#### B. Defining and Describing Asian Americans

- Politically Correct Terms = Asian Americans or Asian/Pacific Islander Americans
- Coined during 1968-1969 Student-Faculty Strike at San Francisco State University, for the first Ethnic Studies program in U.S.

- Oriental = Any area away from the center of Europe.

Ethnocentric. Assumes that Europe is center of universe.

- Asia = Far East
- Middle East
- Jesus would be Oriental

- (Hall & Barongan) at least 29 culturally distinct Asian American communities:  
e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Burmese, Vietnamese, Laotian, Kampuchean (Cambodian), Mien, Miao, Asian Indian, Malaysian, Thai, Indonesian, Hawaiian, Fijian, Samoan, Guamanian, Okinawan, and East Indian.

- 1960 : fewer than 1 million Asian Americans in US (.5%)
- 1990 : 7,272,662 Asian Americans in US (2.9%)
  - 43% live below the poverty line.
- 2000 : 11.9 million Asian Americans in US Pop (4.2% of US population: 2000 Census Report --  
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf>  
Found On  
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html>
  - 3.6% report only Asian/ Asian Am. Parentage
  - .6% report multiple ethnicities.
  - .3% (874,000) report Pacific Islander Ethnicity
    - .1% only Pacific Islander Parentage
    - .2 % report multiple ethnicities.
  - 2.5% (156,036) of Population in Virginia is Asian.
    - 3,017 Virginians are of Pacific Islander Decent.
  - 2050 : 9% of U.S. pop = Asian Americans  
(Assuming no new immigration)

#### B. Universal or Unique?

1. Typical Western Dichotomy = Universalism vs. Uniqueness
  - Universalism = Asian Americans = White Americans
  - Uniqueness = Asian American Psychology totally unlike Psychology of any other culture
2. Tong proposes that Asian American Psychology is both Unique and Universal.
  - “basic symptom picture” of trauma is same for U.S. and Cambodia (universal).
  - Depression in Cambodians looks like psychosis to western mental health workers (e.g. visitations from a dead relative) (uniqueness)
  - Individuals of Asian descent tend to be more sensitive to many Psychopharmacological Agents (e.g., antidepressants)
3. There is no Universal Asian Culture (inter-ethnic differences)

### C. The "Either-Or" Perspective

- Asian Americans often find that their ethnicity is either completely disregarded (they are viewed as "American") or they are treated as foreign immigrants (regardless of how many generations have lived in the U.S.)
- Focus on Korean and Southeast Asian Immigrants has lead to 3 Questionable assumptions.
  - 1. Asian and Asian American means the same thing (interchangeable categories).
  - 2. Asian Americans are essentially foreigners in their own country.
  - 3. Asian immigrant's culture clashes with the mainstream white culture resulting in issues of acculturation and assimilation and resultant identity problems.

- Chin & Chan (1972) - essay "Racist Love"  
Asian Americans have 2 options for answering questions of identity
  - 1. Asians = Perpetual Aliens
  - 2. Americans = Imitation Whites
- assumes that Asian Americans are foreigners that don't belong in US.
- assumes that "real" Americans are white
- assumes that Asian Americans do not have a viable culture of their own.

- Asian Americans viewed as the "Model Minority"
  - ideal racial pets that should be imitated by other minorities.
  - passive, industrious, non-complaining, meek and mild servants, compliant, and generally invisible.
  - Model Minority, ornamental oriental, token Asian, yellow house n\*\*\*\*\*.
  - A disparity exists between educational achievements of Asian Americans and their SES and workplace status.

### D. Racism and the Psychology of Asian America

- 1. Collectivist Racist Trauma - shared trauma of dif. Asian American groups resulting from racism
  - U.S. Gov.
    - 1790 U.S. Law - Only whites can become Naturalized Citizens
      - Repealed in 1952
    - Chinese exclusion acts
    - Foreign Miners Tax
    - 1913 - Alien Land Law- Non Citizens can not own land

- Chinese Americans = Anti-Chinese Movement (1785-1943) e.g. Chinese Exclusion Acts - initiated in 1882 (repealed in 1942)
  - Chinese males can't vote
  - Can't own property
  - Can't testify in court on own behalf
  - Wives can't immigrate
- Filipino Americans = 1900, brutal colonialization of Philippines.

- Japanese Americans = Japanese internment of WWII.  
WWII, feared that anyone of Japanese descent could be a potential terrorist/spy. 120,000 men, women, children sent to inland concentration camps away from coastal areas.
  - 60% of the Internees were U.S. citizens
  - No formal charges were filed and no one was afforded a trial.
  - Given one weeks notice, had to sell all property and possessions.
  - First sent to local horse race tracks and fair grounds with animal stalls as temporary assembly centers.
  - Average of 2-3 years in internment.
  - Japanese-Ams in other parts of the country not incarcerated, nor were Americans of German or Italian descent (Countries we were also at war with)
    - Suggests that Internment was really the result of pressure by California's white agriculturalist finding it difficult to compete with highly successful Japanese farmers

- Vietnamese Americans = French and US interference in civil war.
- Asian American hate motivated violence has increased in recent times (from whites and other minorities).
  - The Anti Japanese Movement of the 80's
    - The Murder of Vincent Chin
  - L.A. Riots (Aggression against Korean Store Owners)
- Only nuclear bombs dropped on people were dropped on Asians.

## II Asian - American Cultural Values

- A. Individualistic Vs. Collectivist Cultures (P. 14, L&M)
- **Individualistic Cultures:** Rugged Individualism (e.g. U.S. , Western Europe). The critical task in life is to become self sufficient and independent of society and family.
    - 1. Social Skills: Self promotion, being interesting, putting others at ease, having good conversation skills.
    - 2. Distribution of Rewards for group effort: Reward are distributed equitably (each according to their inputs).

- **Collectivist Cultures:** Group orientation is emphasized. The need of the group come before one's own needs (e.g. Asia, Africa, Central & South America, Pacific Islands). Identity is largely in terms of the group (family, village, organization).
  1. Social Skills: Group loyalty, cooperation, contributing to the group w/o expecting rewards, public modesty about abilities, deference to higher status individuals, distribution of resources to low status individuals who defer.
  2. Distribution of rewards for group effort: Equality (all get equal share). Group effort is rewarded not individual effort.

- B. Other Values (H & B, p 206 - 210)
- Patience, Gentleness, Being well-mannered, Cooperation, Being Accomodating, Conciliatory, and Cooperative rather than confrontational
- Blending in with the group rather than distinguishing oneself for either good or bad behavior
- Humility and Modesty
- Withholding free expression of feelings
- Suppression of conflict
- Avoiding potentially divisive arguments and debates
- Communicating indirectly
- Refraining from openly challenging other's perspectives
- Nonverbal Communication
- Conformity to Conventional Behavior

## III. Transgenerational Impact of Japanese Internment

- At least 3 Generations of Japanese Americans have been affected.
  - Issei - first generation Japanese-Americans (immigrants)
  - Nisei - second generation Japanese-Americans (born in america)
  - Sansei - third generation Japanese-Americans (not interned, many are children of internees)

- Based on Donna K. Nagata "The Transgenerational Impact of the Japanese American Internment: Clinical Issues in Working with the Children of Former Internees"

### A. Short term impact

- All internees - economic loss, loss of dignity (living in communal conditions/harsh).
- Nisei - feel victimized and rejected by their own country of birth. Feel that citizenship is conditional and can be taken away. They lost all civil rights.

### B. Long term impact

- Comparable to the transgenerational effects among holocaust victims.
- Severe trauma serves as an "unconscious organizing principle for future generations" where "subsequent generations may construct inner psychic representations which are reflective of this external massive trauma."
- Sansei Research Project = 700 Sansei participants and 40 Sansei giving in depth interviews.
- Report that parents maintain silence about experiences in camps.
- Instills a sense of foreboding and secrecy about internment.
- Children of internees report feelings of vulnerability, the belief that future internment is possible, and the belief that one's civil rights could be violated by the government.
- Also Children of internees show greater group preferences for Japanese Americans compared with Caucasian Americans.

### C. Therapy Issues

#### 1. Presenting Problems

- Marital problems, job conflicts, depression, low self-esteem, and child management problems.

#### 2. Self-esteem

- Nisei's internment experiences threatened their identity and self-worth. Develop a strong drive to prove their self-worth to self and others both through their own actions and the accomplishments of their children.
- Sansei often report feelings of low self-esteem for never living up to the expectations of their interned parents.
- Nisei & Sansei felt obligated to become "Super-Americans' worthy of their citizenship"

### 3. Family Communication

- Parents are evasive, cryptic, and non-communicative about internment experiences.
- Sansei develop sense of foreboding, like a "skeleton in the closet"
- Sansei reluctant to push the interned parent to talk about experiences for fear of causing the parent pain.
- Sansei confused by parents willingness to discuss experiences with others but not with their children.
  - e.g. individual first heard father talk about internment experiences at his High School assembly.
- Sansei may interpret parents reluctance as a deliberate rejection rather than as a coping mechanism (e.g. repression).
  - Results in feelings of anger, exclusion, confusion, and sorrow over barrier of silence.

## III. Religion

### A. India

- Hinduism <http://www.religioustolerance.org/hinduism.htm>
- Sikhism <http://www.religioustolerance.org/sikhism.htm>
- Jainism <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/jain/intro.htm>
- Islam [http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl\\_intr.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_intr.htm)
- Buddhism (<http://campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/India/Buddha.htm>)

### B. East Asia

- Three Dominant Religions
- Confucianism
- Buddhism
- Taoism

#### 1. Confucianism = Based on the writing of Kung Fu-Tse.

- His writings addressed ideas of person, family and nation
- To establish universal harmony one must fulfill obligations to nation (Emperor), family (filial piety), and authority (teachers/Elders).
- The Authority of the Spiritual world (Heaven & Earth) are vested in the son of heaven (the Emperor).

a) Basic Tenets:

- Man is basically good, but we have not always been able to develop our innate goodness.
- This failure caused disharmony in society and interpersonal relationships which affected the harmony of heaven and earth.
- Kung Fu-Tse taught the moral virtues that would help individuals become righteous and moral.
- Foundation of harmony can be found in Filial Piety, a hierarchy of relationships: son and father, wife and husband, citizens and emperor.
- Subordinates express complete obedience to superior. Fulfilling these obligations is a personal achievement (e.g. self-esteem).

b). Imperial Confucianism vs. Traditional Confucianism

b1. Imperial = the modified "some would say 'distorted' or 'maligned'" version of Confucianism instituted by ruling elites in following the passage of Master Kung. Effective for social control.

- Focuses on social control suited to a hierarchical state.
- emphasizes respect, humility, docility, obedience, submission, and subordination to elders and betters.

Imperial Model is dominant in Chinese American ideology at present. Reinforced by the Racist Love model.

b2. Traditional = original writings of Master Kung Fu Tse.

- in addition to deference, demeanor, and kindness, emphasis was put on individual independence and integrity.
- "Love your father, love your teacher, love your emperor, but love the truth even more.
- "The authentic person is not an implement"
- "The mature individual can see a question from all sides without bias. The small man is biased and see a question only from one side."
- "Good people can stand alone without fear and can leave society without distress"
- The Heroic Tradition = fierce, arrogant, independent sense of self. Si hah "high risk, adventurous" = e.g. Ngok Fei, warrior general; Fah Muk Laan, the woman warrior (Disney's Mu Lahn).

2. Buddhism = Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (560-480 bc). Indian prince who would be king, but did not desire it. Ran away and Practiced Acetic Meditation for six years. Discovered the Four Noble Truths.

- The Four Noble Truths

- a. Life is suffering
- b. Suffering is caused by insatiable desires (food, sex, pleasure, materialism).
- c. To end suffering, desires must be suppressed.
- d. To achieve this one must follow the 8 fold path.

- right views, right aims, right speech, right action, right livelihood, self-discipline, self-mastery, and contemplation.

<http://campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/India/Buddha.html>

3. Taoism = based on writings of Lao Tsu and Chang Tsu.

- The search for Tao (the way: the eternal nature: mystical supreme universal principle) begins with an examination of nature.
- Do not try to improve self through social legislation. Seek to achieve harmony with nature.