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## ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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Asian studies and Asian American studies are two closely related interdisciplinary fields of study. Both draw on a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, political science, anthropology, history, literature, and language studies. In some universities in the United States, the two are part of the same program, while at many others, they are completely separate. Asian studies is considered one of the area studies in academia, and its concentration is on a geographic region. Other area studies include Latin American studies, African studies, and European studies. Asian American studies is considered one of the ethnic studies along with black or African American studies, Native American studies, and Hispanic or Latino studies. These fields of concentration take ethnic groups, rather than regions, as their subject matters. Since Asian American studies deals directly with ethnicity, an implicitly sociological concept, sociology tends to play a more central role in it than in Asian studies.

In the following sections, we first describe the origins of Asian studies and the growth of this field since World War II, paying particular attention to the role of sociology in Asian studies. We then turn to the more recent emergence of Asian American studies out of the expansion of the Asian American population and the development of ethnic studies. Since sociology has been even more closely linked to Asian American studies than to Asian studies, we devote somewhat more attention to the former. In addition, as we attempt to make clear, while Asian studies has

become a fairly well-defined and accepted program within universities, Asian American studies continues to be the focus of debate and controversy, with sociology playing a particularly important part in discussions over this emerging concentration.

## ORIGINS OF ASIAN STUDIES

The origins of Asian studies may be traced to the European tradition of Orientalism. This tradition grew out of the desire of European countries to acquire information and understanding about the lands to the east that the Europeans had either colonized or intended to colonize. One of the earliest formal institutions for orientalist activities was the Dutch Asian Learned Society, founded in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1778, about a century after Indonesia had been gradually colonized by the Dutch. Soon after, in 1784, the British founded their own Asian Learned Society in Calcutta, India. The French established the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris in 1795.

The Palestinian born scholar Edward Said (1979) criticized Orientalism, and to some extent modern Asian studies, as a tool of European colonialism. Although Said was concerned primarily with the European and later American study of the Middle East, his critique extended to Western thinking about other regions known as Asia. Said held that

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Asia or the Orient was itself the product of a Western society that made broad generalizations from contrasts between European and Euro-American states and cultures and the vast stretches of land to the east. "Orientalism," according to Said, "is a style of thought" based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (p. 2). In addition, Said argued that Western scholars turned this broad idea of the Orient into an object of study to impose their own intellectual categories on it. Said maintained that modern area studies were simply a softer version of Orientalism. In part, as a response to the objections of Said and others, contemporary sociologists and scholars in other disciplines focusing on Asia have been sensitive to historical issues of colonialism and power.

### Growth of Asian Studies

Asian studies, and other geographic area studies, took off in the United States during and after World War II, as a result of U.S. involvement in Asia (Pye 2001). The Social Science Research Council (SSRC), in particular, became a major actor in social scientific approaches to postwar Asian studies. Although the SSRC was founded in 1923, it was really during the 1950s that it became a supporter of social research around the world, including Asia (Fisher 1993). By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the SSRC was promoting social science in Asia through its East Asia Program, South Asia Program, and Southeast Asia Program.

On the eve of the American entry into World War II, scholars interested in Asia founded the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) in 1941. Originally established as the publisher of the *Far Eastern Quarterly*, later renamed the *Journal of Asian Studies*, the AAS expanded rapidly in membership and organizational scope in succeeding years. By 1970, its subareas had developed to the point that the AAS organized itself into four elective area councils: the Northeast Asia Council, the Southeast Asia Council, the China and Inner Asia Council, and the South Asia Council. The AAS created a Council of Conferences in 1977 to communicate and coordinate with conferences of Asian studies scholars throughout the United States. The AAS has become the primary organization for this field of study in North America (Berger 1987; Hucker 1973).

The 1940s and 1950s saw the creation of many of the major Asian studies programs at American universities. The University of California, Berkeley, had long maintained courses and directed faculty research toward Asia due to the university's location on the Pacific coast. However, Berkeley first established its interdisciplinary Asian studies undergraduate program in 1949. Ten years later, Berkeley changed the name of the program to the Group in Asian Studies.

Despite offering an Asian studies program from 1949 on, Berkeley did not begin to offer an undergraduate group major in this area until 1975. By the beginning of the

twenty-first century, Berkeley's Group in Asian Studies held more than 70 faculty members from 15 different departments. These faculty members included four sociologists, with research and teaching concentrations in Japanese business, Chinese civil society, emigrants from Korea, political sociology, and social movements (University of California, Berkeley 1997).

Harvard University's connection to Asian studies began in 1928 with the foundation of the Harvard-Yenching Institute. Initially funded by the estate of inventor and Aluminum Company of America founder Charles M. Hall, the Harvard-Yenching Institute has been legally and administratively separate from Harvard but closely associated with Asian activities at the university. Dedicated to the promotion of higher education in Asia, the Institute helped to support universities in China and elsewhere in Asia throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Since the expansion period of Asian studies after World War II, the Institute has offered hundreds of fellowships for overseas study to faculty members of Asian universities. At Harvard, the Institute has supported Asian studies by publishing books through Harvard's Asia Center and by publishing the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*.

Despite the relatively long history of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, the Asia Center at Harvard is a new development. Created only in 1997, the Asia Center supports interdisciplinary research and study projects primarily in East Asia and also in South and Southeast Asia. The Asia Center also oversees Harvard's Regional Studies Program in East Asian Studies (Hanan 2003).

Cornell University is home to some of the most extensive Asian studies programs in the United States. Cornell has offered courses on Asia since at least 1879 when the university first began teaching the Chinese language. However, as in many other institutions, the growth of the program occurred mainly in the years following World War II. One of the most important events occurred in 1950 when Chinese language Professor Knight Biggerstaff and five colleagues founded Cornell's China Program.

The Southeast Asia Program at Cornell was established in the same year as the China Program. Since then, the SEAP has become one of the foremost centers in the United States for the study of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In 1953, Cornell established the South Asia Program, concentrating research and teaching on the Indian subcontinent, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

### NEW SOCIOLOGICAL ACTIVITY IN ASIAN STUDIES

Economic growth in China and elsewhere in Asia at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries spurred a new expansion in social scientifically based Asian studies. The Urban China Research Network, led by American sociologist John Logan and founded in

1999, has been particularly active in studying social change in China. The network established two ongoing research networks, a group on Spatial Restructuring, Urban Planning, and politics, and a group on Urban Transformation in China and Reorganization of the State in an era of globalization. The first group has aimed at documenting neighborhood level changes associated with urban change and at understanding the political decisions and planning processes affecting urban change. The second has aimed at looking at administrative and political changes in China, understanding the impact of globalization and resistance to globalization in local, urban areas (Logan 2001; Ma and Wu 2005).

### Origins of Asian American Studies

Sociology has been one of the disciplines represented in Asian studies in the United States, and it has formed a particularly important part in the study of social change in Asia undertaken by researchers such as those associated with the Urban China Research Network. Nevertheless, sociology has been even more closely related to ethnic studies programs in Asian American studies, a field that has developed more recently than Asian studies. While Asian studies grew out of the involvement of the West in the continent of Asia, Asian American studies was the product of movement from Asia to North America, resulting in scholarly concerns with people of Asian origin on the American continent.

Asian American studies, as a derivative field of sociology and other disciplines such as anthropology, political science, and history, became a matter of interest to sociologists because of both scholars' and students' urgent need to take part in and produce work that spoke to Asian American lived experiences (Loo and Mar 1985–1986; Nakanishi and Leong 1978; Omi and Takagi 1995; Wat 1998; Zhou and Gatewood 2000). These particular and diverse experiences were not addressed by the prevailing university curricula.

Both teaching and scholarship in Asian American studies began to attract attention around the 1960s. One of the key figures in the development of the discipline was Stanford M. Lyman, often said to have been the “father of Asian American studies.” Lyman is believed to have taught the first Asian American studies course at Berkeley in 1957, when he began teaching a course titled “The Oriental in America.”

As Lyman continued his own teaching and research in the field, the growth of Asian American studies throughout American colleges and universities was spurred by the Asian American movement and by a new interest in ethnic studies in general. The first ethnic studies program was founded at San Francisco State College in 1968, following the efforts of the Third World Liberation Front, “a coalition of African Americans, Latino Americans/Chicanos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans” (Zhou and Gatewood 2000:2). In November 1968, students of this coalition went

on strike, demanding a curriculum more reflective of their own lives and experiences. Zhou and Gatewood list three central goals of the movement as follows: (1) students wanted to “redefine education and to make their curriculum more meaningful to their own lives, experiences, and histories and more reflective of the communities in which they lived”; (2) “they demanded that racial and ethnic minorities play a more active role in the decision-making process and that university administrators institute an admissions policy to give minorities equal access to advanced education”; and (3) “they attempted to effect larger changes in the institutional practices urging administrators to institutionalize ethnic studies at San Francisco State College” (p. 2). In sum, then, the three main goals of the movement consisted of a redefinition of the nature of education at San Francisco State College and other universities, equal access to education for minorities, and the normalization or institutionalization of ethnic studies to general university curricula. Within 10 years of the inception of ethnic studies at San Francisco State College, University of California at Los Angeles, San Francisco State University, and the University of Washington provided students with graduate programs; thus, for some universities, the development of both academic programs and graduate programs was quick and generally successful. By the early twenty-first century, Asian American studies programs had been established at all of the University of California and the California State University Campuses (p. 4).

The body of scholarship that began to emerge from these activist currents drew on a number of earlier pioneering works. Frank Miyamoto's (1939) *Social Solidarity among the Japanese in Seattle* was one of the first community studies to apply sociological thinking to an Asian community in the United States. Later, in 1953, Paul Siu wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the Chinese laundryman that extended the thinking associated with the Chicago School in sociology to an Asian group. Many of the early works on Asian Americans, such as Rose Hum Lee's (1960) *The Chinese in the United States of America*, were works of history. Stanford Lyman (1986), in addition to teaching what may have been the first Asian American course, also drew together the sociological traditions of Robert Park, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel to write his 1961 Ph.D. dissertation analyzing the social organization of Chinese and Japanese communities in the United States during the nineteenth century. The dissertation was later published as *Chinatown and Little Tokyo: Power, Conflict and Community among Chinese and Japanese Immigrants to America*. Along with Lyman's other work, this helped to establish Asian people in America as an important topic for sociological study.

With the rapid increase of the Asian American population in the years following 1970, questions of how Asians were adapting to American society and Asian American ethnic identity began to dominate the literature. The comparison of Asian Americans to other groups became a

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major method. Along these lines, sociologist Ivan Light published an influential comparative study of business enterprise among Chinese, Japanese, and blacks in the United States in 1972. Matute-Bianchi (1986) applied the comparative approach to student achievement in an article "California Mexican American and Japanese American Students." With the development of new Asian American communities, the issue of how ethnic communities might affect adaptation and identity became central. Studies such as Hurh and Kim's 1984 book on Korean immigrant communities began to examine how ethnic residence and ethnic cohesion might shape the lives of Asian Americans.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the arrival of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos brought new groups into consideration by scholars concerned with Asian American issues. Scholars such as the anthropologist David W. Haines and James M. Freeman began to explore issues of immigrant adaptation among these newly arrived Southeast Asians. During that same period, scholars began to show an interest in Asian Americans in general, as a category, in addition to specific Asian groups. For example, authors such as Harry H. L. Kitano and Roger Daniels (1988) began to describe America's growing Asian populations as "emerging communities."

### Current Status of Asian and Asian American Studies

Asian studies and Asian American studies are both connected and separate as university fields of study. Both have resulted from increasing linkages between the West and Asia. The great expansion of Asian studies came with the shrinking of distances between continents in the years following World War II, and the expansion continued to increase with American involvement in Asia. Asian American studies also resulted from that shrinking of distances, since the growth of the Asian American population followed from the American involvement.

Despite the connections, though, there are clear differences. Asian studies has become accepted and well established at universities throughout North America. While individual scholars within this field of regional studies may have activist projects, political activism is not one of the primary currents driving scholarly activities. Asian American studies, by contrast, is still striving for recognition as a distinct field of study, with some of the most notable objections coming from sociology departments. Moreover, this newer academic field, as part of the ethnic studies movement, often tends to display a strong activist orientation, and a number of its scholars maintain ties with various forms of identity politics.

### Scholarship in Asian and Asian American Studies in the 21st Century

Asian and Asian American studies are extremely broad fields, and scholarship in both will be diverse over the

course of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some trends in scholarship that are likely to continue into the future. Within Asian studies, China has been a major geographical area of concern and the largest number of sociological studies concerned with Asia have concentrated on this large nation. Studies of China, moreover, are likely to become increasingly central as China grows in political and economic importance on the world scene.

The topics that will be of greatest concern to sociologists working on Asia will most likely be the social consequences of rapid urbanization, the movement from socialist or traditional economies to market economies, and internal migration from rural to urban areas. In addition to the articles in the book edited by John Logan (2001), China's urban society has been dealt with in detail by other works. Wenfang Tang and William L. Parish (2000) have analyzed national surveys in China to provide a portrait of changing life in Chinese cities. The articles in the collection edited by Thomas Gold, David Guthrie, and David Wank (2002) consider whether "guanxi" or interpersonal connections are growing less and less important as China moves toward an urban, market economy. The chapters in Martin King Whyte's (2003) book look specifically at the topic of how family relations have changed as China first transformed itself into a socialist society and then moved toward a market economy. Yusheng Peng (2004) considers how family relations affect China's economic transition, by examining how kinship solidarity and kinship trust have protected the property rights of entrepreneurs during China's rural industrialization. In looking at family relations, one of the major points of interest is what these changes mean for relations between older people and younger people. Thus, many of the basic questions of sociology, stemming from the work of theorists, such as Ferdinand Tönnies and Émile Durkheim, are likely to continue as matters of key interest for students of Asian studies into the foreseeable future.

Social change in Japan has received less attention from sociologists than social change in China. Japan went through its modernization much earlier than other Asian nations and is arguably in many respects more similar to the economically developed nations of Europe and North America. However, there is some sociological evidence that Japan is just beginning to resemble Europe and North America in values and behavior related to the family (see, e.g., Rindfuss et al. 2004).

Questions of political and social change have drawn the attention of social scientists working throughout Asia. Handy analyses of changes in specific countries can be found in the January/February 2004 issue of the journal *Asian Studies*, which provides country by country surveys of trends in individual countries throughout Asia. The rapid transformation of many of these nations has had particular consequences for relations between men and women. Consequently, as Asian societies have modernized, sociologists have shown a growing concern with

gender issues in those societies. For example, Jianghong Li's (2005) article in *Rural Sociology* looked at housework sharing among spouses and women's power and autonomy in Yunnan Province of China. In November 2004, the entire essay section of the review journal *Contemporary Sociology* was devoted to the rise of the women's movement in India.

If issues of modernization and urbanization are the major issues in Asian studies, those of social adaptation and ethnic identity have tended to dominate writing on Asians in America. Socioeconomic adaptation was one of the earliest and most persistent areas of research on Asian Americans. Among studies of socioeconomic adaptation, scholars have been concerned with explaining why different Asian groups adapt differently to the American economic environment (see Zhou and Bankston 1992), the role of ethnic communities and enclaves in shaping adaptation (see Zhou 1992; Zhou and Logan 1989), and how Asian Americans used small business ownership as a means of socioeconomic adaptation (see Min 1984; Yoon 1991), and whether Asian Americans are socioeconomically disadvantaged compared with the rest of the American population (Zeng and Xie 2004).

From the perspectives of both adaptation and ethnic identification, Asian American studies at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries focused heavily on youth. This was understandable, considering the rapid growth of the Asian American population. Education was a particular matter of concern. In works such as *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States*, by Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston III (1998), sociologists sought to account for the apparent relatively high rates of educational success of Asian American young people. Related to this issue, other sociologists concerned with youth in the Asian origin groups attempted to deal with the so-called model minority stereotype of Asians. This was the idea that Asians provide a model of achievement in education and economic life to which other American minority group members should aspire.

The topic of Asian religions in America began to attract growing attention as the new century began, and this topic will probably become a major area of research in Asian American studies. As Bankston and Zhou (1996) pointed out in one of the early studies of the new interest in Asian American religions, this is a topic that touches on both matters of adaptation and ethnic identification. Religious institutions often provide support networks to Asian groups in the United States and these institutions help adherents express and maintain ethnic identities. Key articles examining the role of religion in the lives of Asian Americans can be found in volumes by Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang (2004) and by Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim (2001).

The marriage of Asians with non-Asians in the United States has received some attention from researchers.

Because this is a matter that is closely connected to both adaptation and ethnic identification, this will probably develop into an even more important field of inquiry in the future. Lee and Fernandez (1998) have also provided a useful examination of changing trends in Asian American intermarriage, although their comparison of 1980 to 1990 census data was already somewhat dated by the early years of the twenty-first century.

While Asian and Asian American studies emerged as distinct, although related, areas of study, a growing literature on transnationalism will probably bring the two more closely together over the next few decades. Although *transnationalism* remains a contested term in the context of Asian American literature, it is usually used to refer to the idea that immigrants to a new country do not cut ties with an older country but create linkages between the two or multiple countries. Further, it is used to highlight how relations of inequality cut across national boundaries. Along these lines, Yen Le Espiritu (2003) has offered a discussion of Filipino American life, based on interviews, that portrays Filipinos as moving between two countries and maintaining friendship and family ties in both. Among the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans who arrived in the United States as refugees, transnationalism has often been found to have created worldwide ethnic communities (see, e.g., Carruthers 2002). Transnational connections among ethnic Chinese, throughout Asia and other parts of the world as well as in North America, have been a major area of Asian transnational research (Tseng 2002).

The Internet has arisen very recently as a means of transnational communication, creating fairly easy and continuous linkages across national boundaries. As the prominence of Internet contacts grows, more scholars will look at how this new technology maintains connections among members of national origin groups in North America and in Asia and how this shapes communities and politics in all locations. On this matter, Guobin Yang (2003) has looked at the growth of an online cultural sphere, in China and in America.

In future research, issues such as economic modernization and social change in Asia will probably be ever more closely linked to issues such as the ethnic identification of Asian immigrants and their descendants to other parts of the world and the social and economic adaptation of Asian immigrant groups to their new homelands. In terms of disciplinary structure within universities, Asian studies and Asian American studies will probably continue to be distinct programs and departments and may even grow more distinct in the future. Ironically, though, as transnational approaches and new emphases on global connections play a greater part in studies of international relations and international migration, the distinction between the sociological study of Asian nations and societies and the sociological study of Asian communities within North America is likely to become steadily weaker.