

ASIAN AMERICA

Sociological and
Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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1 Introduction

Asian Americans are overrepresented among college graduates, with 50 percent of Asian Americans age 25 and older having earned at least a bachelor's degree, compared to a quarter of the US population as a whole.¹ They are accomplished professionals in fields ranging from the sciences to the arts. They have a high rate of small-business ownership. They are seen as model workers. At the same time, a greater percentage of Asian Americans than non-Hispanic whites live in poverty, and Asian Americans are more likely than the US population overall to be uninsured.² A range of Asian Americans rely on public welfare programs, work in low-wage and segregated jobs (often owned by co-ethnics), encounter racial stereotypes as foreigners, suffer from untreated mental health diseases, and are victims of hate crimes.³

Yet, even with all of this variation and contradictions, it is not the multifaceted lives of Asian Americans alone that make them necessary subjects of study. The experiences of Asian Americans speak to more than just this group alone. Their lives provide insight into a host of broader topics that have been key topics of study. These topics include how race shapes people's lives; how immigrants gradually assimilate – or do not – to their surroundings; how transnationalism influences people's social and economic opportunities; how small groups come together or engage in conflict; how people self-identify; what leads to academic success and failure; and more. The goal of the book is to shed light on such general sociological questions through the experiences of Asian Americans.

Learning how Asian Americans experience these and other issues, moreover, tells us about the United States as a nation, for the nation is often understood based on how it treats its newcomers. According to the United States' self-proclaimed national creed as a nation of immigrants, all persons are welcome to make a new life here. But is there true equality in schools, the workplace, media, and elsewhere for all persons, regardless of country of origin, religion, gender, or other social categories? Can the nation become truly multicultural, or will the cultural definition of the United States remain Anglo-Saxon and Christian? How does the United States' pursuit of global capitalist ascendancy impact immigrants and minorities? Do immigration laws give immigrants control over their lives upon entering the United States, or do they privilege the interests of others? Does growing economic globalization create more transnational lives? How have racism and empire been key aspects of American history and contemporary life? In other words, the challenges and opportunities that Asian Americans face inform the true nature of the nation, and these are central issues that this book grapples with.

And of course, the study of Asian Americans matters for Asian Americans themselves and those who are interested in their well-being. A text that centers on the lives of Asian Americans affirms their experiences while also informing the human social condition more broadly.

Table 1.1 *Population size*

Group	Population, 2010
United States	311,591,919
Asian	15,020,419
Cambodian	253,830
Chinese	3,361,879
Filipino	2,538,325
Hmong	241,308
Indian	2,908,204
Japanese	756,898
Korean	1,449,876
Laotian	186,013
Vietnamese	1,669,447
Other Asian	1,079,820

Source: United States Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201⁴

Who are Asian Americans?

The number of Asian Americans has been increasing at a quick pace, due to both continued immigration and children born in the United States. According to the 2010 US Census, "The Asian alone population and the Asian alone-or-in-combination population both grew substantially between 2000 and 2010, increasing in size by 43 percent and 46 percent, respectively. These populations grew more than any other race group in 2010."⁵ There were more than 15 million Asian Americans (not even including multiracial Asian Americans) as of 2010, comprising about 5 percent of the US population. As Table 1.1 indicates, Asian American groups range widely in their numbers, with five groups (Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean) comprising well over a million or even two million individuals each.

"Asian Americans" refers to individuals living in the United States who immigrated from (e.g. first-generation immigrants) or whose ancestors immigrated from (e.g. second-generation immigrants and beyond) Asian countries and Asian diasporas (i.e. settlements in other countries). Asian Americans consist of Bangladeshi, Burmese, Chinese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, and Vietnamese Americans, among others originating from Asia. As will be discussed in chapter 3, Asians have lived in the United States in large numbers since the 1800s. Historically, scholarship on Asian Americans focused on the largest groups to first immigrate, namely Chinese and Japanese Americans. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans drove the Asian-American Movement of the 1960s, which gave rise to Asian American Studies and increased research and writing about the Asian American experience. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 altered the demographics of the United States and precipitated a much larger immigration of Asians. Asian-American demographics have continued to change since then with continued voluntary immigration

and also due to war and imperialism. Southeast Asians have arrived mostly since the 1970s as refugees and as family members sponsored by those refugees.

Defining terms

The term "Asian American" is often extended to be "Asian American and Pacific Islanders" in order to indicate their connections to each other. However, it is important not to conflate these groups. In this book, we use the term "Asian American" and mean it in an expansive way. Pacific Islanders receive attention in this book, although not to the same degree as other Asian Americans. Arab Americans also receive attention, even though they are not traditionally considered to be Asian American. The definitions of racial groups change over time, with some groups included and other groups excluded, depending on social and political contexts. For instance, South Asian Americans were classified as nonwhite in the US Census over the decades until 1970 when they were classified as white, and then in 1980 they were newly classified as Asian American after political lobbying by the community.

When one says "Asian American," it has little resonance for most people beyond some standard stereotypes: Asian Americans are considered hard-working, strong in math and sciences, exotic (for women), asexual (for men), possibly threatening (economically), and foreign. Yet, when one speaks of Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Vietnamese Americans, and so on, more nuanced images come to mind. In this text, we will attend to both pan-ethnic (i.e. referring to trends across Asian American ethnic groups) and ethnic-specific trends. While the differences between groups receive recognition, their similarities are emphasized because they too shape individuals' lives and illustrate how Asian Americans experience key social phenomena (e.g. migration, culture, race, employment, media, etc.) in comparable (not necessarily identical) ways, which in turn illustrates how Asian Americans and other groups are impacted by and in turn influence the nation and global trends.

Sociological and interdisciplinary approaches

To attend to the range of issues that Asian Americans inspire, we need to take a heterogeneous research approach. The book privileges the social sciences, in particular sociology, but also draws from other fields. In particular, it is informed by the interdisciplinary field of Asian American Studies.

Sociology as a discipline refers to the study of the social causes of why and how humans think and behave. Why do we do what we do? Our biological instincts may guide us. Philosophical arguments about ethics perhaps suggest to us certain options over others as morally appropriate. Monetary constraints can often dictate our choices. But sociologists, more so than other social scientists and humanities scholars, focus primarily on social causes of our actions and attitudes. Social causes refer to how individuals, groups, and social institutions – such as one's family, the labor market, groups, the media, the nation, etc. – impact individuals and are impacted by us. Sociologists place us, everyday individuals, within a social context in order to understand how we interact with our environments as well as how our environments came to be in the first place.

As we consider the social dimensions to people's behavior, we build up what noted

sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) called the "sociological imagination." According to Mills, the "sociological imagination" challenges us to see ourselves not simply as unique individuals with particular life histories. Instead, we should recognize that we are part of social groups and spaces and embody certain roles. We experience our families, for instance, through our roles as daughters, siblings, fathers, and so on, rather than as individuals. Once we recognize this, we better appreciate the social environment that is outside of us but which influences our lives, and which we act back on.

A sociological imagination is one that recognizes that individuals' lives are crucially shaped by social institutions (defined below) like media, the government, the family, and the economy. These institutions place individuals in positions of relative privilege and/or disadvantage based on social class, race and ethnicity, and gender. Even though we have distinctive biographies and unique identities, institutions shape our lives and we participate in their transformation. Asian American Studies analyzes how Asian Americans experience institutions and even how the formation of institutions has been shaped by Asian Americans.

Inequalities, institutions, and identities

As we develop our sociological imagination, sociologists concern themselves with three key, interconnected dimensions of social life central to this book: inequalities, institutions, and identities. Social inequality occurs when resources are not distributed equally but instead tend to favor one group over another due in part to historical and/or contemporary unfair treatment or opportunities. Sociologists attend to national, racial, gender, class, sexual, age, (dis)ability, and other bases of inequalities. Asian Americans, like African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, can experience inequalities relative to whites. This can take place in the labor market, such as when Asian Americans encounter limited opportunities for upper management despite ample experience and education (i.e. they face the "glass ceiling"). This can take place in the media, such as with limited and often stereotypical portrayals. This can take place in politics, such as when Asian Americans must defend themselves from being attacked as being un-American by virtue of having Asian roots. And so on. Sociologists and scholars of Asian American Studies are committed to advancing social justice, which requires unearthing the causes and consequences of social inequality.

The ways that Asian Americans experience inequalities depend on their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and other social statuses. Asian-American women encounter different stereotypes than men, for instance. To date, same-sex marriage is not recognized at the federal level, which impacts Asian-American gays and lesbians. Post-9/11, South Asian and Arab Americans have faced greater scrutiny than have other ethnic groups within Asian America. Economic status, such as differences in the labor market and school system, is fundamental to a group's well-being. Asian Americans with different education levels and skill sets will have varying advantages and disadvantages.

The primary way that sociologists analyze inequalities is within social institutions, as noted above. Social institutions refer to a society's publicly agreed-upon ways to take care of its members' needs. One can think of social institutions this way: as an individual, all one needs to survive is food, clothing, and shelter. Yet, for a society

to survive and prosper, there must be a set of established means for individuals to pursue their interests and get along together. For example, there must be a means to raise children in the main norms and expectations of the society. This takes place within the institution of the family. There must be a means to train people for the occupations that the society will need. This takes place within the institutions of education. There must be a means to organize the contrasting needs of large numbers of individuals. This takes place within the institution of politics.

Sociologists analyze how social institutions are constructed, what functions they intend to serve, who wins, and who loses in how they are run, and how individuals engage in them and possibly change them. Because institutions are so central to how individuals relate to their environment, much of sociology is dedicated to understanding them. This book attends to the main institutions relevant to the study of Asian Americans. We attend to possible inequalities but, especially, to how Asian Americans experience institutions generally. We consider how Asian Americans experience family life, how they take part in politics, how they practice religion, how they fare at school, how they are framed by the media, and more. Asian Americans inform how these institutions work from the vantage point of an ethnic/racial minority position. For example, given how Asian Americans practice their religion and are treated as religious people, what do we learn about how culturally tolerant the nation is? From there, we can consider how well institutions are serving society's needs and what changes should be made to address possible problems.

Within institutions, we come to learn about ourselves and develop our self-identities. How one sees oneself as an Asian American is one's identity (or more accurately, one identity). Identity is a significant issue for all persons because everyone is a member of multiple sets of social groups (e.g. a family, school, workplace, political party, church, etc.) but has special relevance for racial minorities because of the ways US society has long categorized people. Asian Americans can identify with their ethnic group (i.e. Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese), their pan-ethnic group (i.e. Asian American), their religious group, and more. We develop our identities based on influences from our families, the media, schools, and other social institutions. So, it is necessary to know how these institutions refer to Asian Americans. Other social categories, such as sexuality or gender, also shape our identities. Queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Asian Americans understand what it means to be Asian American differently than do straight Asian Americans. Our self-identities are central to our major lifestyle decisions, such as whom to befriend, where to live, how to raise our children, what rituals we perform, and so on.

Various complications arise in the identity development of racial minorities. How much choice do visible minorities have in their identity selections? For instance, can a Chinese American choose not to identify with his Chinese background if others keep referring to it? How do people of multiracial background choose to identify and form relations with others? Similarly, how do adopted Asian Americans make sense of their race if it differs from their adoptive parents? Can people (people who are non-Asian as well as those who are) bring together conflicting identities, such as "ethnic" and "American," or are these kept apart? Do Asian Americans identify with only their ethnicity or also pan-ethnically? Answers to these questions inform what motivates individuals and how racial dynamics are shifting. While one chapter in this book concentrates on identity, the issues surrounding identity permeate multiple chapters.

Race, culture, and power

The three key elements of social life – inequalities, institutions, and identity – comprise the major parameters of the sociological study of Asian America. This book will examine how Asian Americans negotiate with and make sense of institutions (like the media, schools, global markets, the government, the family, etc.) while positioned as an immigrant minority group in American society. As the book explores these elements, two main dimensions of Asian America will receive priority: race and culture. Race and culture shape the context through which Asian Americans (and others) experience inequalities, institutions, and identities. Such an examination shows how race works beyond the black-white binary that currently defines race in the United States. That is, though racial power inequalities as typically discussed are only between blacks and whites, in reality race is more complex. This book aims to broaden our understanding to illustrate how race implicates people who are and who are not black or white. This is not to suggest that race more than other factors (e.g. class, gender, etc.) shapes the lives of individual Asian Americans. But across Asian America, common racial background leads to some degree of shared experiences. Elucidating those experiences informs the power of race as it intersects with other social categories.

Tied to race is colonialism and empire. The United States historically and currently has been a colonial or neocolonial state. This is seen in a series of historical acts, including the genocide of Native Americans, slavery of Africans, wars with Latin Americans, recruitment and mistreatment of Asian labor, internment of Japanese Americans, and wars and active colonization abroad (e.g. Philippines, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i). While US laws and institutions have become more equal and facilitated the great achievements of many minorities, including of course Asian Americans, this current state-driven inequality remains relevant.

Also, cultural differences matter greatly within the three topics of inequality, institutions, and identity. Asian immigrants make up the majority of contemporary Asian Americans. They and their descendants often have distinct cultural sensibilities and practices. Culture also matters because the nation is a cultural, not just legal, entity. As such not all groups find equal acceptance of their cultural backgrounds, especially as they stress transnational cultural ties (e.g. in terms of religion or rituals). Culture also informs the extent to which "Asian American" exists as a meaningful entity. While the term "Asian America" suggests a single entity, it is important to keep in mind the significant differences within the population. There are not only ethnic cultural differences but also differences of generation, income, citizenship status, and more. To what extent does "Asian America" really exist, or is it more appropriate to speak of a variety of groups with only a little in common? This book examines this question rather than takes for granted a cohesive population.

Perspectives on Asian America

In studying how Asian Americans and others experience these topics, scholars have devised certain theories to piece together observed trends. The theories explain how the three major topics of inequality, institutions, and identity relate to one another. Reviewing these theories elucidates what kinds of information scholars look for

and what assumptions they bring to the study of Asian Americans. This book draws extensively from these theoretical approaches in order to explain the causes and consequences of the experiences of Asian Americans.

Assimilation theory

Within sociology, the most prominent perspective on immigrants' adaptation to a new environment is assimilation theory. Assimilation occurs when an immigrant group's differences with the mainstream dissipate. This can happen as ethnic items become popular in the nation (e.g. "Chinese food"), so that consuming them does not appear foreign to most residents. More often, assimilation occurs as immigrant communities lose their distinctiveness and become more like the majority as they adopt dominant culture and social structure, akin to Anglo-conformity (Gordon 1964). They become socialized (or re-socialized as adults) within mainstream institutions, such as schools, popular media, civil society, and religion. As immigrant groups learn English, shop at popular clothing and grocery stores, befriend people outside their group, and so on, they gradually assimilate. Descendants of immigrants start to see mainstream culture as "normal" and may conceive of their ethnic background as strange or inferior. This assimilation need not be intentional. Instead, it occurs as immigrant groups seek better opportunities for themselves and their children, which are believed to be outside of one's ethnic group and within the mainstream (Alba and Nee 2003; Salins 1997).

According to assimilation theorists, this integration is possible because race matters less today than in the past, as evidenced by the numerous legal protections against discrimination and the general improvement in racial attitudes (Alba and Nee 2003). So according to assimilation theory, the labor market, schools, restaurants, and other spaces do not treat immigrants differently because of their ethnic origin, which enables Asian Americans to become a full part of the nation. Under these conditions, the main (not only) obstacle preventing assimilation, according to those who adopt the assimilation framework, is groups' own lack of effort to culturally and structurally assimilate.

Assimilation into the host society originally was framed as not only inevitable but also prescriptive (Kivisto 2005). In other words, those who adopted an assimilation standpoint believed that immigrants *should* gradually abandon parochial interests, like their ethnicity, and embrace the modern, American lifestyle in which people supposedly are judged, based on their accomplished categories, such as education level, occupational status, marital status, and so on. Assimilation theory assumes a mostly meritocratic United States. Such an adaptation was seen as in the best interests of the immigrant group in the nation. Today, assimilation theorists have dropped the moralistic tone. Still, there is an implied belief in the benefits of assimilation for immigrants.

Diverse modes of incorporation

Other scholars, however, disagree with both the likelihood and benefits of straight cultural and structural assimilation for ethnic minorities. Instead, immigrants can follow different trajectories based on their "mode of incorporation" into the country

(Portes and Rumbaut 2006). According to this approach, immigrant groups encounter a *segmented* assimilation, that is, they can assimilate into different segments of society beyond simply into the white middle class assumed within assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993). For instance, they may live in inner cities with poorer African Americans or Latinos as neighbors than middle-class whites. Assimilation can look different in this context than normally imagined. According to these theorists, it may be to an immigrant group's advantage not to assimilate if the local group they would assimilate into does not often advance within school or in the labor market. Instead, groups often benefit from maintaining their ethnicity. Ethnic groups can achieve mobility by relying on members' assistance, values, and employment opportunities. Strong ethnic ties also can facilitate children's success within institutions like education, the labor market, and more (Gibson 1988; Waters 1999; Zhou and Bankston 1998). Maintaining transnational ties to one's homeland can help groups adjust to their local surroundings (Smith 2006). Otherwise, groups could be at risk of a "downward" trajectory (Gans 1992).

Despite its differences from standard assimilation theory, this emphasis on groups' diverse outcomes is similar to it in that it expects ethnic groups' gradual "incorporation" into the host society. As Portes and his co-authors write about the second generation, "the central question is not whether the second generation will assimilate to American society, but to what segment of that society it will assimilate" (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, and Haller 2005: 1000). There are few, if any, entrenched barriers, such as racism, that cannot be overcome with the right resources (e.g. community oversight, educational support).

In addition to downplaying race as a pervasive constraint on minorities, these various assimilation paradigms stress the significance of culture in determining economic and social outcomes. Over time, immigrants who culturally assimilate akin to previous European immigrants are expected to become economically stable. They may hold onto certain cultural elements, such as traditional foods on special occasions, but these become mostly "symbolic" and ceremonial, rather than influential on people's lives (Alba 1990; Waters 1990).

According to these first two theoretical perspectives, groups gradually become more like their host society along key dimensions, including educational attainment, residential location, language preference, self-identity, marital partner, and so on. If poor immigrants have access to supportive co-ethnics (i.e. people who share their ethnic background) and do not encounter too many obstacles (e.g. discrimination), they too can achieve mobility. The major difference between the theories is that segmented assimilation stresses that the road to economic stability often drives through strong ties to one's ethnic group, whereas standard assimilation stresses the benefits of letting go of these ties. And as stressed within segmented assimilation theory, without sufficient support from co-ethnics, the second generation may assimilate in a downward fashion, marked by limited mobility (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Racial formation theory

In contrast to these assimilationist perspectives, other sociologists and those in Ethnic Studies highlight the significance of race and inequality facing ethnic minorities. The racial formation perspective argues that race is fundamental to how society

is organized and so continues to matter for minorities, even if they are economically secure (Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Omi and Winant 1994). Whites gain materially and psychologically in all sorts of ways, such as when attaining a mortgage or paying for a car, at the expense of minorities (Lipsitz 1998). Racial formation theory draws attention to how minorities are racialized, that is, how they are socially defined and treated as racial groups rather than as individuals. This racialization changes with historical and contextual circumstances based on political and social circumstances. The way groups are framed suits the white dominant establishment (e.g. government, the military, corporations). For instance, Chinese Americans went from "good" minorities during World War II to "bad" minorities post-World War II as China became increasingly communist and seemed a threat to the government. Japanese Americans switched from "bad" to "good" during this same time period. Our everyday interactions also reflect the power of race. We may talk to someone or even shake the person's hands differently, based on her/his race.

Racism is allowed to continue because racial ideologies make it socially permissible. For instance, even an ideology of "color-blindness," which seems to downplay the relevance of race, limits minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Omi and Winant 1994). It suggests that we should be "blind" to race, should ignore it, and that the real problem is those who keep talking about it, as well as programs like affirmative action. So, minorities who complain about racism become blamed for perpetuating racial differences. Indeed, some might suggest that, since the United States has elected the first African-American president, it has truly achieved a post-racial, color-blind society. However, sociologists and other scholarly critics point out that, even with his election, race continues to organize American life and cannot be ignored (Okamura 2011).

The racial formation perspective helps explain trends that assimilation theory either cannot or that it overlooks. For instance, even as more minorities appear on television, they remain in often stereotypical depictions (Davé, Nishime, and Oren 2005). People's attitudes to race might have become more benevolent, therefore supporting assimilation theory assumptions about a merit-based United States, but that does not mean that minorities have ample opportunities. The US prison population has become overwhelmingly black and brown compared to the general population, for example, and not because those populations started committing more and more crime (Alexander 2010). Meanwhile, even as Asian Americans and Latinos have become more welcome within urban development, welfare laws discriminate against immigrants (Fujiwara 2008). Nor is this mistreatment relegated to poor immigrants. Wealthy Asian Americans experience barriers to full inclusion, due to racist and/or culturally prejudiced attitudes from the majority. According to this perspective, middle-class Asian Americans are "a part" of the mainstream but "apart" from it (Kibria 2002).

The "model minority" stereotype exemplifies this dynamic. It argues that Asian Americans succeed due to their Asian values of hard work and family support. In fact, Asian Americans' success in schools and workplaces may be due in part to such racial stereotypes rather than a sign that stereotypes are fading (Dhingra 2007). But, within this stereotype Asian-American men and women are characterized as sexually deviant (i.e. Asian-American men are figured as effeminate; Asian-American women, as hyper-sexualized), overly passive, and apolitical. White elites within the capitalist structure benefit the most from this institutionalized discrimination. According to

the racial formation perspective, a lack of equality for immigrants is not their problem but that of the state and institutions, which promote inequality.

The broader theme within the racial formation perspective is a lack of trust in the nation-state and its institutions to promote full equality among racial groups. The United States, like other western, hyper-capitalist nations, is neither the "land of opportunity" nor even a benign force relative to ethnic minorities. Instead, according to critics, it is an imperial force that wages wars mostly in Third World nations and also engages in business practices that suit established interests more than minorities at home (Melamed 2006). Moreover, the racial formation perspective recognizes that, from its inception, the United States has been a country that was founded on white supremacist rationale. The fact that naturalization, for example, was restricted to only whites, or that slavery was actually permitted in the US Constitution is evidence that race has organized American society. Even when these laws have changed, it is because of struggles by minorities and/or in response to US foreign and economic interests. Legal reforms do not fully eradicate the racializing logics. Immigrant minorities may do well economically, but they must suffer through greater hurdles and indignities en route. For instance, Filipino-American men have attained a moderate middle-class status through working for the US navy. But, they can be relegated to subservient, emasculating positions in the process (Espiritu 2003).

A racial formation perspective also helps explain how immigrant minorities respond to racist interactions. Asian Americans, even those raised in the United States, accentuate their cultural and social commonalities with one another rather than their ties to the mainstream (Dhingra 2007; Purkayastha 2005; Tuan 1998). Even if ethnic minorities live in mostly white neighborhoods, they often seek out one another for solidarity. People identify with their ethnicity rather than as simply "American." These trends contradict predictions based on an assimilation perspective.

Pan-ethnicity

The growing pan-ethnicity among Asian Americans serves as another challenge to assimilation theory. Pan-ethnicity refers to Asian Americans' increasing collaboration and identification along racial, rather than only along ethnic, lines. As pan-ethnicity occurs, group boundaries start to change, with a new group (i.e. "Asian American") forming. Pan-ethnicity can result from a shared racial formation among ethnic groups but also from a sense of cultural connections, and so is not reducible to racial formation. Asian Americans identify pan-ethnically due to a shared culture (e.g. Confucian heritage), shared categorization by others (e.g. stereotypes of "Asians" as all foreigners), shared institutions (e.g. pan-ethnic student organizations that promote this identification), and shared interests (e.g. to eradicate racism). Understanding why pan-ethnicity happens, when it takes place or does not, and how strong it is informs the process of group identity formation more broadly.

Global political economy

The increasing interdependency between countries also complicates immigrants' adaptation. Globalization refers to the connections between nations economically, culturally, politically, and socially. For example, the fact that we learn about what is

happening on the other side of the planet instantaneously through the internet, or the fact that most of the products we buy are made in another country is evidence that our lives are being shaped by forces beyond our country. A global political economy perspective draws attention to the relations between nations that spurs migration (Baldoz 2011). Because developing countries do not have enough employment opportunities for their population, or the jobs pay too little or options for upward mobility are limited, individuals seek fortunes elsewhere. But individuals rarely just migrate anywhere. One's country's relationship with other nations influences where one migrates to. For instance, colonial histories between countries create lasting pathways of immigration. Also, to develop their economies, countries will train citizens for jobs in other countries. Migrants are then expected to send back money or expertise to their homeland (Rodriguez 2010). Would-be migrants hear of jobs in a particular country through state- or corporate-sponsored advertisements or through their personal networks. In other words, to understand immigration, one must understand the relationships between nations.

A global political economy perspective downplays the assimilationist model of immigration and adaptation. Assimilation theory frames migrants as independent actors who seek out a new country to make their living and settle their families. In contrast, a global political economy perspective highlights the sustained ties between migrants and their homeland. Immigration is not so much an act of pure volition as a consequence of global economic and political factors within which immigrants make calculated decisions. Within this perspective, it makes sense that immigrants maintain transnational ties to their homeland. Transnationalism originated as a topic of study as a critique of assimilation theory's assumption that one's adopted nation defined immigrants' subjective and material experiences. Instead, immigrants can live across borders. For instance, they may both receive and send money from and to a homeland, follow the political and cultural changes of the nation, visit home often, and more. Rather than consider immigrants' adaptation relative to the United States, as is the case within assimilation theory, it may be more relevant to consider it within a broader diaspora or widely dispersed community.

A global political economy perspective is often combined with other ones. For instance, global dynamics connect to racial formation processes. In such cases, analysts frame international relations within a context of global power inequality, with developed nations utilizing immigrants from developing nations to their advantage (Parreñas 2001). Yet more recently, scholars have come to analyze immigrants' transnational lives within an overall assimilation paradigm. Immigrants' commitments abroad need not detract from their general integration within the United States (Levitt and Waters 2002). Transnational individuals can follow both homeland and US politics, for instance. Experiences in the homeland can give individuals the cultural tools, such as pride in their background, to help them feel supported when in the United States (Smith 2006). So, while transnationalism and globalization are receiving increasing attention, what they mean for immigrant groups is not settled.

A case study of theoretical convergence

A single case illuminates how different theories lead to distinct conclusions. Asian-American women are closely associated with garment manufacturing in New York

City and Los Angeles. Perspectives emphasizing assimilation explain that the large number of immigrant minority women working on the production line is due to their typically low human capital (i.e. lack of advanced education or English-language skills). They do not have the capacity to perform many other jobs in that geographic area. Also, their network ties lead them to the industry. From an assimilationist perspective, consideration is given to how people feel about their jobs and whether they gradually move out of them or not, as dependent on their education, skills, family needs, co-ethnic resources, and so on. For instance, many garment workers learn about work through relatives and friends, and they prefer these jobs because the work schedules suit their needs as mothers (Chin 2005). For such persons, the industry works relatively well, even if it does not pay much. Unfair exploitation of the women may take place, but they can leave these jobs as they accrue more education or skills. They face no inherent marginalization.

More critical scholars, such as those who adopt a racial formation and/or global economic perspective, differ in their thinking about this trend. Their questions are: Why are Asian American women seen as "natural" fits for such manufacturing jobs? How does this impression shape how they are treated on the job? Why is migration structured around women's supposedly nimble fingers? In what way do manufacturing firms and general consumers depend on these women to produce cheap goods? People's gender and nationality sharply define their job prospects, which means that people are not treated equally, based on skills, but instead face unequal options. Moving out of a gendered job sector is unlikely. From such a critical perspective, attention is paid to the injustices workers must resist and to the effect of work on power relations within their families (Su and Martorell 2002). In other words, one comes to different conclusions on these immigrant women's adaptation depending on one's perspective and which information one therefore prioritizes. In reality, garment workers experience aspects from both types of perspectives, and their lives are more fully understood as such. We attend to multiple perspectives in this book as we discuss social trends.

Studying Asian America

Social scientists utilize two major ways of studying a population: quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods refer to data-collection procedures that capture respondents' opinions, as well as demographic and socioeconomic conditions through numerical measurement. Surveys are the most common type of instrument for quantitative methods. The most popular national surveys are the US Census (including its American Community Survey). This method provides a wide range of information on large numbers of people. Questions are descriptive in nature. For instance, if one was interested in what enabled poor refugees to become middle class after settling in the United States, one could survey hundreds of refugees, both poor and middle class. Included in the survey could be questions on respondents' education level, English abilities, career background, number of siblings, and other variables that might influence mobility. From there, researchers using statistical procedures could determine which variable, such as English-language ability, most impacted mobility.

Yet, still unresolved by this survey would be why or how these variables influenced mobility. Surveys and quantitative methods generally cannot probe respondents' reasons for their actions to learn why individuals act as they do. What is it about one's

career background, for instance, that leads to different mobility patterns? Qualitative methods are best suited for this latter kind of question.

Qualitative methods refer to a mode of investigation meant to assess people's reasoning and motivation for action, that is, how they feel and think about their lives. Common techniques include in-depth interviews and observations of human behavior (i.e. ethnography). Qualitative methods can answer "why" and "how" people behave, whereas quantitative methods address "what" people do, "how much" they do it, and "with what consequence."

Like quantitative methods, the qualitative approach also has its drawbacks. Interviewing or observing others in depth is very time consuming. For instance, some ethnographers spend years in "the field," that is, within a single community, learning about its members' way of life. Such an approach prevents learning about a large number of people, as surveys allow. Instead, qualitative methods enable a "case study." A case study refers to the study of a single group or individual who is thought to be representative of a broader phenomenon or population. For instance, for the study of mobility among refugees, one could find a group of middle-class refugees and poor refugees of the same ethnicity and living in the same city. Interviews and observations with fifty individuals from each class group would provide detailed information, such as how they perceive the job market, how their lives abroad influence their job aspirations, and the like. Even as this method targets a small number of refugees, it would offer insight into how socioeconomic class affects the refugee experience and vice versa. Such a study, combined with the quantitative approach, would create a robust set of findings. Given the pros and cons of quantitative and qualitative methods, the best research strategy incorporates both types.

The theoretical perspectives frequently – not always – map onto particular methodologies. The various assimilation/incorporation paradigms often use quantitative methods. Because the theories concern how much a group is like or unlike the majority or other minorities, statistical evidence is most useful. In order to ascertain how individuals understand their background and what meaning race and other social categories have for people, it is best to utilize qualitative methods. This is most typical of the racialized minority approach. Having said that, scholarship increasingly uses a heterogeneity of methods and perspectives.

Chapter outlines

The goal of this book is to demonstrate how Asian Americans inform broader topics that impact them, other Americans, and diasporic communities generally. It brings together the various theoretical perspectives when possible. In the process, the book advances the conversation on the direction of studying Asian Americans, rather than just summarizing it. Throughout the book, we are especially concerned with the ways Asian Americans negotiate with institutions, given the kinds of inequalities they experience and the sorts of identities they possess.

Chapter 2: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality

This chapter explains how Asian Americans experience race in particular, along with gender and sexuality, which future chapters then elaborate upon. The chapter first

defines key terms and reviews the dominant Asian-American stereotypes: the "model minority" and "yellow peril" (including the post-9/11 "terrorist"); the geisha and dragon lady; and the effeminate gay and the nonexistent lesbian. Beyond reviewing the stereotypes, the chapter explains how race, gender, and sexuality operate within the larger constructs of nation, patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism. Substantive issues that demonstrate these hierarchies include hate crimes (most notably the murder of Vincent Chin), the exotification of gay Asian men, the treatment of other minorities relative to Asian Americans, and more.

Chapter 3: Arrival and History

Any discussion of the contemporary experiences of Asian Americans must include a review of major historical episodes. The chapter explains the arrival and major changes in each ethnic group, including gender differences between them. In particular, why did Asians come to the United States in the 1800s and later construct bachelor societies? How were Asian Americans treated legally and how did they contest that, including Japanese-American internment? How did Asian Americans move discursively from a despised to an admired minority post World War II? Why did the United States invade the Philippines, and with what impact on Filipino emigration? What were the social protests of the late 1960s? Why did Asians arrive after 1965 and as refugees, tied to US imperialism? And what occurred during the 1992 Los Angeles riots involving Korean Americans? In explaining this progression of topics, the chapter argues that Asian Americans have been brought in as labor, as seen within immigration laws, and often constructed as threats. This is not to say that Asian Americans have not benefited from the process. But this colonial dynamic disrupts the immigrant narrative of the United States having fairly incorporated immigrants.

Chapter 4: Class and Work Lives

Most broadly, this chapter asks how race – along with other hierarchies – matters in the workplace for the economic security of individuals. Employed Asian Americans are professionals, low-wage laborers, and entrepreneurs. How do people end up in certain occupations; how do men and women experience their racial and ethnic differences at work? The chapter explains that professionals and laborers are read as the hard-working "model minority," which helps them at work but contributes to a glass ceiling and worker exploitation (especially of low-wage women). Regarding entrepreneurs, the chapter reviews the causes and types of small-business ownership, along with associated challenges and opportunities. The chapter recognizes that many Asian Americans have achieved considerable success in the labor market and small business while many others have not, and explains how these findings inform broader social trends. A disproportionate number of Asian Americans live in poverty, even while working. Rather than frame the economically secure and the poor as opposite poles on an economic binary, we connect them to see how race, culture, gender, and other forms of social differentiation have impacted both groups.

Chapter 5: Education

This chapter reviews reasons for Asian American successes and difficulties in school within the broader conversation on race and education. Asian Americans have played a major discursive role in the politics of education, whether in the recently popular "Tiger Mom" fascination or when used to argue for the dismantling of affirmative action programs. Yet, in the process, the true story of educational attainment and challenges facing Asian Americans remain overlooked. These measures include college acceptance rates, ESL (English as a Second Language) programs, and more. The chapter argues that many Asian Americans are immigrants and refugees who need educational assistance, but that their incorporation into the racial politics of education limits attention to their needs. The rise of Asian American Studies has addressed this in part but not fully.

Chapter 6: Family and Personal Relations

The concern in this chapter is whether (and how) the systems of stratification (as explained in the previous chapters) affect people's formation of personal relationships. The private sphere links to the public sphere rather than exists separately, which the experiences of Asian Americans illuminate. The chapter reviews the causes and consequences of co-ethnic marriage, intermarriage, gay/lesbian relationships, work-home tensions for women, domestic violence, transnational adoption, and transnational families. The chapter also asks what these family patterns suggest for Asian Americans' adaptation. For example, does interracial marriage or transnational adoption by white families signal Asian American assimilation, or does it indicate the prevalence of racial and gendered stereotypes, or some combination? The chapter argues that Asian Americans' family formations often reproduce, but at times critique, various social hierarchies surrounding them.

Chapter 7: Citizenship

This chapter asks how Asian Americans become full citizens of the United States along legal, social, and cultural dimensions, while recognizing the limitations of citizenship as a means to advance equality. Citizenship pertains first and foremost to its legal definition. More Asian Americans than typically recognized live without full legal status. The United States as a restrictive, neoliberal state becomes more apparent through the lens of legal citizenship. Social and cultural citizenship are also elusive concepts for many Asian Americans, even citizens. How do Asian Americans claim a social and cultural belonging when they are depicted as foreigners, associate primarily with co-ethnics, and join social and cultural associations, most notably religious ones? In the process of elucidating these trends, the broader meaning of citizenship within a global system is explained. The chapter gives significant attention to the institution of religion and to the cultural practices of the second and later generations. It is argued that most Asian Americans become full citizens by performing "American" practices and by embracing their background in a multicultural manner, that is, by showing a respect for those cultural differences that support a dominant (mostly Anglo) culture and neoliberal status in the public sphere.

Chapter 8: Media and Popular Culture

Media, broadly defined, is a tool both for promoting discourses on minority groups and for contesting those discourses. This chapter explains both ends of this issue. The media, for this purpose, consist of film, television, print (i.e. magazines and newspapers), theater, and the internet. These are key institutions for the production, dissemination, and consumption of popular culture. The chapter starts with a sociological discussion of the media as social institutions to appreciate how they function. It then examines key questions within this topic: how have Asian Americans been depicted in the media over time? What have their reactions been to those depictions (e.g. protests or appreciation)? What do Asian-American performers think of their performances? What images are presented within Asian Americans' own artistic creations? These questions inform the relationship of minorities to the media more broadly. The chapter argues that fuller images of Asian Americans today are due to the increased presence of Asian Americans as a consuming market, but that Asian Americans' productions offer more nuanced portrayals.

Chapter 9: Identity

Self-identity is a major topic for all people but in particular for college-age students. Why do people choose one identity(ies) over another (e.g. an ethnic over an American identity); how do they express identities; and how do they deal with multiple identities? These are central issues within the social science literature on identity, which research on Asian America can speak to. The chapter reviews these theoretical topics for the 1.5 and second generation of many ethnic groups. While the chapter is grounded in sociology, it brings in both psychology and cultural studies. Considerable space is given to whether Asian Americans construct pan-ethnic and transnational identities as well. In reviewing the literature, the chapter moves past the notion of a "cultural conflict" or a "marginal man" in describing those with dual identities, and instead argues that individuals bring together their identities in creative ways. The implications of identity styles for adaptation are broadly discussed.

Chapter 10: Inter-Minority Relations

The guiding questions for this chapter are when do people-of-color come together across group lines and when do they engage in conflict? Whereas most of the book focuses on relations between Asian Americans and the majority, this chapter concentrates on pan-ethnic and inter-minority relations. The chapter first studies popular explanations of why ethnic groups do or do not come together, drawing off of sociology and anthropology. Among other examples used to elaborate on these theories, significant attention is given to reviewing the contested relations between Korean Americans and African Americans. In addition, why certain Asian Americans come together more often than others is discussed. The chapter concludes by asking in what contexts groups cross ethnic or racial lines. Blanket statements of solidarity or conflict among Asian Americans and between them and other races should not be made.

Chapter 11: Social Movements and Politics

Social movements and politics share a common cause: to create social change. Regarding social movements, whereas the previous chapter explained when people join groups, this chapter explains when people pursue a cause which may or may not join them together with other groups. Why do people start and join social movements and why do some movements succeed while others fail? This is not only a major sociological question but one of direct relevance to Asian American Studies, given its emphasis on social change. This chapter also asks what major movements Asian Americans have been part of, and what their effect has been. Attention is given to labor movements, the late 1960s, and current episodes. Electoral politics similarly serves as a means of change. How involved are Asian Americans in politics as voters, candidates, and elected officials, and what are the main issues they care about? How are Asia and Asian Americans framed discursively within politics, such as issues like campaign contributions? Finally, how effective will politics be as a means to address social inequalities, given the sometimes conflicted relationship of Asian Americans to the state?

Discussion questions

- Use your “sociological imagination” about some of the social institutions that have influenced your life and some of your group identities. What are some of the inequalities and/or privileges you encountered? On a sheet of paper, write a personal reflection and/or draw an image that represents these institutions, group identities, and inequalities and privileges. Make connections between them and be creative!
- Either in a group or individually, pinpoint a type of inequality, institution, or identity and then suggest how quantitative and/or qualitative methods can shape analysis of this object of study.