



Finding a Path Forward

**ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS THEME STUDY**

Edited by Franklin Odo





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Essay 15



Asian Immigrants and Refugees: Demographic Transformations in the United States from World War II to the Present

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Since World War II, especially with the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the refugee flows starting in 1975, the number of Asian Americans has increased significantly. It has become the fastest growing population in the nation, even outpacing the growth of the Latino population. U.S. foreign policy, including U.S. colonization and involvement in wars in Asia, such as the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), Pacific War (1941-1945), Korean War (1950-1953), and Vietnam War (1965-1975), are interlinked to the migration of Asians to the U.S. Unlike the earlier historical period when most Asian immigrants arrived as laborers, Asians in the contemporary period have divergent paths of migration and may enter the United States as refugees, orphans, adoptees, spouses, veterans, professionals, or students, as well as close relatives of U.S. residents. The classification and regulation of immigrants and refugees

Among hundreds of participants in the tenth annual Hmong New Year's celebration in downtown Chico, California, these friends gather for a quick picture. Photo by Carol Highsmith, 2012; courtesy of the Library of Congress.



does not reside with the person as it does with the institutional entities that enact differential treatment based upon selective criteria, such as race, citizenship, and national origin, and these constructions fluctuate according to political circumstances.¹

In 1860, the U.S. Census recorded almost 35,000 Asians in the country, mainly Chinese immigrants in California, and 90 percent were male, accounting for 0.1 percent of the total U.S. population. Due to immigration restrictions, the Asian American population was barely 500,000 in 1960. However, with changing immigration and refugee policies, five decades later in 2010, there were 17.3 million Asians in the United States, representing 5.6 percent of the total U.S. population, an increase of 46 percent from 2000 when they were at 11.9 million. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, over 14.7 million identified as Asian alone and an additional 2.6 million reported Asian in combination with one or more additional races. They resided in geographic regions across the country: 46 percent lived in the West, 22 percent in the South, 20 percent in the Northeast, and 12 percent in the Midwest. The 10 largest concentrations where three-quarters of all Asians live are California (5.6 million), New York (1.6 million), Texas (1.1 million), New Jersey (0.8 million), Hawai'i (0.8 million), Illinois (0.7 million), Washington (0.6 million), Florida (0.6 million), Virginia (0.5 million), and Pennsylvania (0.4 million).²

In the contemporary period, the U.S. continues to be the primary destination for Asian migrants, and Asian Americans have become more diverse in terms of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and geographic distribution. By 2010, in terms of legal immigrants, the foreign born was 13 percent of the total U.S. population, while the foreign-born was 66 percent of the Asian American population, in contrast to 38 percent of Latinos, 8 percent of African Americans, and 4 percent of non-Hispanic Whites. Historically, these immigrants arrived mainly from China, Japan, Korea, India, and the Philippines, but currently major groups originate from China, India, the Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam, with smaller numbers coming from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Laos, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan, while in contrast, immigration from Japan is minimal. In the past, it was mainly males who immigrated; however, Asian women began entering in substantial numbers in the post-WWII years and now make up over half of

the population and, in some cases, are taking the lead in sponsoring the migration of family members. Some immigrants are well-educated and highly skilled professionals with financial assets, while others arrive with limited educational training and monetary resources. Their resettlement and adaptation experiences depend on their work skills as well as access to financial resources and networks. However, they are also contingent on the economic and political circumstances at the local and national level, which can shape receptivity in their new environment and their incorporation into American society. Earlier immigration and naturalization policies impact current Asian migration patterns, providing a perspective for comprehending the significant transformations starting in the 1940s and the following decades that led to the influx of newcomers from Asia.³

IMMIGRANTS

The reasons that Asians left their homeland and chose to come to America are intimately connected to U.S. foreign policies in Asia, as well as America's need for laborers. Western imperialism in China (Opium Wars), Japan (Perry Expedition), and India (British colonialism) forced these nations to open their countries to trade relations with the West, created opportunities for the recruitment of an exploitable labor force from these regions, and led to Christian missionaries finding Asian converts, some of whom were encouraged to relocate to America. In the mid- to late 1900s, Chinese males were recruited through the contract labor system to be employed for below-market wages in the mining, railroad, fishing, and agricultural industries, followed by Japanese and smaller numbers of Korean and Asian Indian laborers; the last group coming across the border from Canada. In 1868, the Burlingame Treaty was signed by the U.S. and Chinese governments authorizing Chinese laborers to enter the U.S. Established in 1910 as a United States Immigration Station, Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay Area processed over 1 million people between 1910 and 1940. This was a major port of entry for Asian immigrants; however, they were also classified as "undesirable aliens" and were excluded from entering alongside those with contagious diseases, polygamists, persons classified as mentally ill or with physical deficiencies, criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and vagrants.⁴

While Asian laborers contributed considerably

to building the nation's infrastructure, nativist sentiments led to xenophobia and an anti-Asian movement that accused them of creating unfair competition for European immigrant laborers. The 1790 Naturalization Act specified that "free, white persons" could become citizens; Asian immigrants were later classified as "aliens ineligible for citizenship," excluding them from full incorporation into American society. This animosity contributed to the U.S. government passing immigration legislation or negotiating treaties that placed restrictions on Asian migrants, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Japanese laborers were recruited to replace Chinese workers until the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907-1908 between the United States and Japan, which resulted in Japan agreeing to cease sending more workers to America. The Immigration Act of 1917 established the Asiatic Barred Zone, preventing further immigration from Asia, except Japan, since it was a World War I ally, and the Philippines, which was a U.S. dependency at the time. The Immigration Act of 1924 was intended to reduce immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, but it also barred entry of "aliens ineligible for citizenship," which specifically targeted Asians. During the U.S. colonization of the Philippines from 1898 to 1946, Filipinos were recruited en masse as laborers to replace other Asians who were barred from immigrating and were allowed to enter as U.S. nationals. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1935 granted the Philippines their independence a decade later and turned Filipino "nationals" into "aliens ineligible for citizenship" and curtailed further immigration.⁵

While the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, known as the McCarran-Walter Act, liberalized immigration laws by eliminating racial restrictions, it was also marred by restrictionist tendencies because it maintained the 1924 national origins quota system, which gave preference to immigrants from northern and western Europe. Since China was a wartime ally during WWII, the U.S. repealed the Chinese Exclusion Acts and passed the 1943 Magnuson Act enabling Chinese to immigrate but allotted them an annual quota of only 105 persons. The 1946 Luce-Celler Act allowed Filipinos and Asian Indians to immigrate, as India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947. However, these Asian nations were assigned minimum quotas of 100 visas each year, with a total of 2,000 annually from Asia.

The 1952 law employed racial factors, dismissing their nationality or place of birth, instead it based the quotas on their ethnic origin; therefore, all Asians were counted under the allotments for the "Asian Pacific Triangle." The law introduced a system that gave preference to skilled workers and relatives of citizens and permanent residents, policies that would be expanded in 1965.⁶

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act created significant shifts from European immigrants comprising the majority to about one-half entering from Latin America and one-quarter from Asia by the late 1990s. Asians in the U.S. were allowed to sponsor the immigration of close family members, which reunited relatives who had been separated for long periods and created a chain migration process. The 1965 Act has been amended a number of times; however, family reunification is still the primary preference, followed by occupational preferences 1) unmarried children of U.S. citizens, 2) spouses of resident aliens and unmarried children of residents, 3) professionals or persons of exceptional ability in arts and sciences who intend to work for American employers, 4) married children of U.S. citizens, 5) noncitizen sisters and brothers of U.S. citizens, and 6) skilled and unskilled workers employed in jobs in which American workers are in short supply. Due to annual visa caps, there is an extensive backlog of Asians waiting to enter the U.S., approximately 18 million people are on the waitlist for family visas.⁷

The Cold War era and Civil Rights Movement forced the U.S. to reflect on its racially restrictive policies and created more equitable immigration legislation and naturalization procedures. Following WWII, the Cold War created fears about competition from communist nations, which played a role in fostering more open immigration policies favoring immigrants who could boost technological and scientific innovation. The incorporation of newcomers was also perceived as a strategy to create patriotic loyalty and prevent infiltration of subversive "unassimilable aliens." Some legislators were also intent on improving U.S. relations with Asia in order to protect national security, leading to a reexamination of domestic laws that could be perceived as offensive to Asian nations. When the U.S. repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, it also authorized Chinese immigrants to become naturalized citizens. The 1946 Luce-Celler Act allowed Filipino and Asian Indian immigrants



A Marine Corps sergeant teaches two Vietnamese women to clean M-14 magazines. Interactions with Vietnamese civilian women occurred in numerous capacities, including food service, cleaning, administration, and military support, and occasionally developed into romantic encounters or long-term partnerships.
Photo by 1st Lt. M.H. Handelsman; courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

to become naturalized citizens and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 granted naturalization rights to Japanese and Koreans immigrants. These procedures provided them citizenship rights and made it possible for them to sponsor relatives under the family reunification policies. After 1965, ethnic Chinese immigrants arrived from Mainland China as well as from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other nations, thus considerably diversifying the “Chinese” community. Adding to the ethnic diversity of the population are sizeable numbers of immigrants from India, the Philippines, and South Korea, as well as smaller numbers of immigrants who are originally from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.⁸

Historically, Asians were recruited as common laborers to work in the railroads, agriculture, and fishing industries and small factories, as well as in service sector jobs as domestic servants with some operating small businesses that catered to ethnic customers. In the contemporary period, many Asian immigrants who arrive through family reunification policies fulfill U.S. labor demands at some of the lowest paid jobs in the U.S. economic structure. However, skilled Asian immigrants are being recruited by industries, which can demonstrate that U.S. workers are in limited supply, such as the medical, technological, and computer science fields. Additionally, the U.S. government also began allotting H-1B non-immigrant visas for temporary, foreign workers in specialty occupations where there is a worker shortage, such as in the high-tech industries. In particular, many

computer programmers and engineers are being recruited through what has been labeled a new “brain drain” from China, India, and Taiwan. While some corporations argue that these allotments should be increased, others who fear displacement argue that these shortages are exaggerated and that hiring foreign workers lowers wages for American workers and creates unfair competition. While policies have fluctuated, currently an annual total of 65,000 H-1B visas are available under the cap and an additional 20,000 visas are set-aside for those with at least a U.S. master’s degree, with some securing permanent employment and allowed to apply for a green card.⁹

Adding to this labor pool are international students from Asia who historically have been encouraged to enroll in American universities, with the expectation that they will return to their homelands and become economic and political leaders who will then implement policies favorable to the U.S. Upon completion of their undergraduate or graduate degrees, a number of them have found employment in the U.S. and eventually become U.S. citizens, contributing to the U.S. economy. With the economic recession and cutbacks in educational funding in the last decade, public and private universities are more actively seeking international students who can pay full tuition, and one-in-three international students selects universities in California, New York, and Texas. In 2014-15, the majority of these students, 1 million annually, are from Asia, with China and India leading the list. Included in the top 10 sending countries

are South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam.¹⁰

Family reunification preferences lead to a socioeconomically diverse immigrant community. Some, who were professionals in their homeland, faced downward mobility when their degrees and skills were not recognized and their English proficiency was limited. Many in this group turned to entrepreneurship to make a living. They have established small mom-and-pop businesses in Asian ethnic communities as well as businesses in low-income African American and Latino neighborhoods, where set-up and maintenance costs are lower. In mini-malls, swap meets, and other retail venues, they fulfill a niche in local economies, which larger, chain retailers have avoided or vacated, and helped revitalize depressed neighborhoods. However, in some cases this perceived encroachment has also created racial conflicts between Asian immigrant entrepreneurs and

local communities of color, who have faced obstacles establishing businesses in their own neighborhoods. For example, the Los Angeles Uprising (aka Riot or Rebellion) of 1992 was sparked by ongoing racial and economic inequities and tension when Korean business owners were scapegoated and accused of exploiting other racial communities.¹¹

The 1965 Act also encouraged larger numbers of Asian women to enter as immigrants. Many then initiate migration flows and sponsor relatives. Historically, male laborers from Asia were preferred and Asian women were only permitted to arrive in limited numbers, mainly as the wives of merchants. This policy was designed to ensure that male immigrants would return to their homelands and discourage them from establishing families in the U.S. In addition to arriving as sponsored family members as mothers, spouses, daughters, and



A class of nurses graduates from Philippine General Hospital, c.1923. Their successors some forty years later became a staple of the American health care industry. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

siblings, Asian women are now entering as skilled workers and as primary breadwinners for their families. For example, the economic and political destabilization in the Philippines, along with the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, led to large numbers of Filipinas migrating to the U.S. to fill the nursing shortage or as medical practitioners. Others, seeking improved economic opportunities arrive as nannies, homecare providers, and live-in domestics; some of these transnational workers send remittances to their families who remain in the Philippines. As a result of U.S. colonization, Filipinos are seen as preferable workers, since they have English fluency and are trained in educational systems that are similar to the U.S. This gender balance has led to a substantial increase in the U.S.-born Asian population and the expansion of Asian ethnic communities.¹²

Also among those who enter as immigrants are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, who were recruited to serve in U.S. war efforts conducted in Asia. During World War II, the Philippines was a U.S. Commonwealth and the U.S. military recruited an estimated 260,000 Filipino soldiers from the Philippines. They fought alongside U.S. troops under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. Despite the promise of U.S. citizenship and full veterans benefits upon completion of their enlistment, President Truman signed the Rescission Act in 1946 that rescinded this pledge. It was not until the 1990s that a mere 26,000 surviving veterans were granted citizenship rights. In 2009, those still alive were provided overdue benefits, U.S. citizens receiving \$15,000 and non-citizens receiving \$9,000. In 2015, the U.S. government established a program for Filipino veterans to bypass the backlogged visa system and more quickly process petitions to sponsor family members who could immigrate to the U.S. Along with advocacy organizations, they continue to fight for the rights and benefits promised to these veterans and their family members, as well as recognition for their valor and loyalty. In 2016, these veterans were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the U.S. Congress.

REFUGEES

During periods of civil and political instability, there have been massive refugee exoduses from different regions in Asia. The U.S. has limited their entrance based

on foreign policy agendas, most conspicuously as a political statement against communist regimes. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951 defined refugees as individuals who flee their country of origin “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” The U.S. government determines exactly who can be classified as a political refugee and each year controls how many refugees will be granted asylum. It also regulates what types of humanitarian assistance or resources are allotted for these displaced populations; those admitted still need to apply for naturalization to become U.S. citizens.

The first refugee legislation was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, a temporary measure intended for dislocated Europeans in the post-WWII period. In 1949, when the communist regime created the People’s Republic of China, this act granted permanent resident status to 15,000 Chinese, many of whom were students and professionals. This political gesture was repeated with special legislation in the early 1960s allocating another 15,000 political asylum status. When the Tiananmen Square Massacre occurred in 1989, the U.S. Congress dispensed green cards to Chinese nationals. It then passed the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992, allowing for an estimated 45,000 Chinese students to remain in the U.S. Overall, this has been a selective refugee process prioritizing educated intellectuals, professionals, and entrepreneurs to enter; their advancement and integration differs significantly from other Asian refugees.¹³

Most notably, U.S involvement in the controversial Vietnam War (1965-1975) led to one of the largest refugee flows to America. Before 1975, there were small numbers of individuals from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in the United States, with the majority being international students studying at high schools and colleges, as well as military officials receiving training and diplomats, many of whom were stranded in America at war’s end. The first large influx of refugees arrived after the “Fall of Saigon” on April 30, 1975, when the U.S. military evacuated by sea and air approximately 130,000 refugees. They were transported to Guam and then flown to four U.S. military bases that served as refugee processing centers at Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, Camp Pendleton in Cali-



A Vietnamese refugee volunteer at Camp Pendleton leads children in a line during play time at the Play-School Center, sponsored by the American Red Cross. Photo by Cpl. J.A. Sweet, published by the U.S. Marine Corps, June 2, 1975; courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

ifornia, Elgin Air Force Base in Florida, and Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. The U.S. Congress passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, allowing Cambodians and Vietnamese to enter the country under a special “parole” status and providing over \$400 million to assist in their resettlement. The act was later amended to include refugees from Laos. They could leave the camps when they found relatives or individuals, religious groups, or charitable organizations willing to sponsor them. Among this group were employees who worked for the South Vietnamese military or U.S. government or military and feared persecution when the new communist regime took over. For the U.S. government, while these policies signified some responsibility for causing their displacement, it was notably employed to condemn the new regime.

During the late 1970s to the 1990s, there was a massive exodus of refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam who escaped by land to refugee camps in Thailand, while other refugees escaped in fishing boats or shipping vessels to countries of first asylum in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Some stayed in refugee camps or detention centers for brief periods, while others languished

for years waiting for sponsorship in resettlement countries, with the majority eventually coming to the U.S. Many individuals attempted to escape numerous times, and those who escaped were susceptible to storms and starvation and preyed upon by pirates in the open waters. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands lost their lives at sea. Ethnic Chinese, many who had lived in Vietnam for generations, had their businesses and properties confiscated and were targeted for persecution by the new regime; they comprised a significant percentage of boat people. The UNHCR estimates that between 1975 and 1995, there were over 800,000 Vietnamese boat refugees. As the number of refugees swelled, compassion fatigue set in, and nations refused to rescue the refugees at sea or allow their boats to land on shore while others classified as economic refugees were repatriated or forcibly returned.

Given the humanitarian crisis and overcrowding in the refugee camps and detention centers, the UNHCR created the Orderly Departure Program to process the departure of Vietnamese immigrants; approximately one-half million people arrived in the United States through this program. The U.S. government negotiated for South Vietnamese veterans or former employees

who worked for the U.S., who had been imprisoned in the reeducation camps after the war, to immigrate to the U.S. through the Humanitarian Operation program. Additional legislation was passed (such as the Refugee Act of 1980), that allowed for more refugees to be admitted and outlined emergency procedures to process refugees in the U.S. These later waves of refugees were more socioeconomically diverse than the ones that arrived in 1975, many with limited human capital and provided fewer resources; many in these groups faced major challenges reestablishing their lives.

The battlefields of the Vietnam War spread into Cambodia and Laos, destabilizing these nations economically and politically, leading to millions of civilian lives lost, in addition to major geographic displacement. Ethnic tribal groups in Laos, such as the Hmong and Mien, who were self-sufficient agriculturalists, were enveloped in the war that surrounded their territories. Boys and men were recruited by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to serve in the U.S. "Secret Army" and assist the U.S. military in covert combat missions in the fight against the North Vietnamese, who were using neighboring countries as pathways to attack South Vietnam. When the war ended, these former U.S. allies and their family members were persecuted by the new regime, forced into hiding, and fled to refugee camps in Thailand, before making their way to America. Many of these fighters arrived as refugees in the post-Vietnam War period but were never accorded equal treatment with other U.S. veterans or provided veteran benefits. When the Vietnam War spread into Cambodia, U.S. bombings in the region caused major disruptions in the country's political and economic system. This chaos led to the rise of Pol Pot and his military. His regime abolished the nation's infrastructure, institutions, and cities and enforced an authoritarian, agrarian society, slaughtering millions of innocent people in the process. This led to massive starvation; those able to escape fled into the jungles where survivors found their way to the refugee camps in Thailand and, subsequently, were forced to locate host countries willing to accept them as refugees.¹⁴

According to opinion polls, the majority of the U.S. public was opposed to accepting these refugees, and U.S. government policy dispersed refugees across the country to force assimilation by preventing the formation of ethnic ghettos; unfortunately, these policies



A letter from President Ford references the resettlement and assimilation efforts of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees, expressing confidence that they will "achieve full citizenship and contribute greatly to our society" in the near future. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

proved to be counterproductive. Many were relocated to remote rural areas with colder climates where there were few fellow Asians, limited job opportunities, and racial animus. They began a process of secondary migration, moving to areas with warmer weather and where they could find educational and employment opportunities and supportive ethnic networks. Some refugees adjusted and were able to rebuild their lives, while others did not fare as well; often their fates depended on their educational background and skillsets. Too often, these refugees were settled in areas with high crime rates, poor performing schools, and intense racial hostility, which led to a number of the younger generation dropping out of school and joining gangs for protection. A number of refugees, especially Cambodian and Hmong, continue to live in poverty and have low educational attainment and high unemployment rates, comparable to African Americans and Latinos. Many continue to be victims of post-traumatic stress disorders.

The Vietnamese created their own large ethnic communities in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties in southern California and in the cities of San

Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose in northern California and Houston, Texas. Ethnic Chinese Vietnamese populations settled in or near Chinatowns, such as in Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Seattle. There are large concentrations of Cambodians in Long Beach, California, where a contingent of Cambodian international students helped to originally resettle them, and also in lower income areas, such as Lowell, Massachusetts, and the Bronx in New York City. For many Hmong, their agricultural skills were mismatched in the urban areas where they were placed, so they remigrated to rural areas in California's central region, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, where they could make a living. Refugee flows from these three nations have ceased and, in recent years, the largest Asian refugee groups are from Bhutan and Burma/Myanmar, where political instability has led to their displacement. They are being resettled in urban areas across the country and encounter some of the same barriers that previous refugees faced.¹⁵

INTERNATIONAL BRIDES, WAR BRIDES, MILITARY BRIDES

During and after WWII, international marriages between Asian women and Asian American servicemen, especially Japanese, Chinese, and Filipinos, contributed to the growth of Asian American families. The 1945 War Brides Act permitted spouses, natural children, and adopted children of members of the U.S. Armed Forces to enter the country; many brides arrived from Europe. This law also benefitted Asian American men, since immigration restrictions were lifted for Chinese in 1943 and the U.S. passed the 1946 Chinese War Brides Act allowing brides to be admitted as non-quota immigrants. The U.S. repealed immigration restrictions for Filipinos and Asian Indians in 1946, allowing foreign-born spouses to enter the country. In 1947, an amendment was

added to the War Brides Act that permitted Filipino, Japanese, and Korean brides admission; the first two groups estimated to be 50,000 each. This process allowed Asian American soldiers to bring Asian wives to the U.S. at a time when there was a high ratio of Asians males to females in the U.S. Additionally, anti-miscegenation laws made it illegal for Asians and whites to intermarry and were not overturned nationally until 1967. Further, Asian American males were highly discouraged from socializing with white women, although some did intermarry with African American, Latina, Native American, and Pacific Islander women. According to U.S. Census records, the ratio of Chinese males per 100 Chinese females was as high as 1,858 in 1860; 1,887 in 1900; 695 in 1920; and 135 in 1950. The entrance of Asian brides led to more of a gender balance, and the birth of their children led to an increase in the Asian American community.¹⁶

Special allotments as non-quota immigrants were allocated for Asian war brides or military brides to enter the country with their American husbands who worked for the U.S. military or government. International brides also married American civilian husbands, specifically those who were non-governmental organization workers, missionaries, and students. U.S. colonization and military presence in Asia, such as in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam led to interracial contact between American servicemen and U.S. civilians based in Asia and native Asian women during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, as well as during postwar recovery and peacetime.¹⁷ These societies were devastated by war casualties, leading to higher ratios of women to men, as well as by displacement and famine. Asian women were thus forced to find various forms of paid labor for economic survival. Many Americans encountered Asian women who worked as prostitutes or in the bars around U.S.



"Americans come as friends. Let's cooperate with them," reads a poster in Vietnamese. It was part of a series of 438 "psychological warfare" posters distributed during the Vietnam War that were meant to undermine the Viet Cong and encourage support for and defection to the American military and Chieu Hoi. Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

military installations and at sites where military personnel spent their rest and relaxation time (R&R). Other military men met these women while they were working in the service industries as servers, maids, cashiers, office workers, or translators. While some were temporary sexual encounters, others developed into romantic relationships that led to marriage, despite the fact that the U.S. military actively discouraged these interracial, transnational unions.¹⁸

For example, during the post-war occupation in Japan, between 1945 and 1952, there were 500,000 U.S. soldiers stationed throughout the country, inevitably leading to fraternization between occupation troops and Japanese women.¹⁹ Even after 1946 when the Philippines gained its independence, the U.S. continued to maintain military bases in the region. The U.S. military presence in South Korea during the Korean War – to the present – has contributed to ongoing interracial encounters between American G.I.s and Korean women. Over 100,000 Korean women have become wives of U.S. soldiers. During the U.S. occupation in Vietnam, over 8,000 war brides intermarried with American soldiers and government personnel. Most of these women

married Anglos, but others married African American, Latino, or Native American men. When these men were stationed in the United States or retired, they brought their wives to the U.S. and often lived on military bases or in the surrounding communities. Increasing rates of domestic interracial marriages in the last several decades combined with international brides from Asia has expanded the number of multiracial families and children. By 2000, the multiracial Asian population rose to 1.7 million, increasing to 2.6 million a decade later. Additionally, many of these Asian spouses sponsored relatives through the family reunification policies of the Immigration Act of 1965, helping to enlarge the overall Asian American community.²⁰

AMERASIANS

The term “Amerasian” is used to refer specifically to a group of children born out of wedlock, and often abandoned, to Asian mothers and American fathers. As result of their parentage, they faced severe ostracization in the homeland and were denied educational and employment opportunities. In homogenous societies, their mothers faced the stigma of having interracial sexual relations and a multiracial child out of wedlock. One result was socioeconomic hardship for the mothers, and as a result, some abandoned their children. In addition to being perceived as the offspring of the enemy, these children of foreign fathers were treated as national outcasts, since citizenship was based on paternal descent. While some Amerasians could hide their non-Asian parentage, it was impossible for those who physically “showed” their interracial ancestry, with Black Amerasians often facing the harshest forms of derision and mistreatment.²¹

As part of the post-war U.S.-Japan security alliance, the U.S. maintains a constant military presence in Japan; over one-half of the U.S. military troops are stationed in the single prefecture of Okinawa, which has an estimated 15,000

to 20,000 Japanese Amerasians on the island.

After the U.S. government left its military facilities in the Philippines in 1992, there were approximately



A P.S. 1 Manhattan schoolteacher poses with students recently arrived from Hong Kong and Formosa, holding up cards with three versions of their name: ideograph, Romanization, and an American name that will be entered into the school records. Photo by Fred Palumbo, published by the *New York World-Telegraph and Sun*, January 24, 1966; courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Amerasian children eat lunch at the St. Vincent's Home for Amerasian Children in Bupyeong, South Korea. Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.

50,000 Filipino Amerasians abandoned there, especially in the vicinity of the Subic Bay Naval Base in Olongapo. Most of these fatherless “G.I. babies” were not provided services such as medical care, education, or child support and a fair number live on the streets or in orphanages. Given the legacies of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, there have been concerted efforts to bring Amerasians from Vietnam to the U.S. When the war ended in 1975, Amerasians in Vietnam were left behind, and it was not until years later when Western reporters highlighted their plight that pressure was placed upon the U.S. government to authorize Amerasians to immigrate. The Amerasian Immigration Act of 1982 permitted those whose fathers were U.S. citizens and whose mothers were nationals of Kampuchea (Cambodia), Korea, Laos, Thailand, or Vietnam and who had been born after December 31, 1950 and before October 22, 1982 to immigrate to the United States. Children under 18 were forced to leave their mothers behind and to find institutional or private sponsors. As a result, relatively few eligible Amerasians left under this law.

To rectify this, Congress passed the Amerasian

Homecoming Act of 1988, allowing Amerasians, mainly the children of Vietnamese women and American fathers, born between January 1, 1962 and January 1, 1976, along with their close relatives, to be resettled in the U.S. But because so few Amerasians had documentation of their fathers or had destroyed them at war’s end to avoid persecution by the communist regime, applicants were permitted to establish mixed-race identity by appearance alone, meaning those who had “Amerasian facial features.” It is estimated that 23,000 to 28,000 Amerasians and 68,000 to 75,000 of their relatives emigrated to the U.S. The program was closed in 1994, partly because of the prevalence of fraud by Vietnamese traffickers and underestimates of the funding needed to resettle Amerasians.²² Arriving in America as teenagers or as young adults after enduring difficult childhoods, many Vietnamese Amerasians struggled with mental and physical health problems and other major challenges during the resettlement process. The Vietnamese American community continues to harbor some of the same animosities as Vietnamese in their homeland and treats them with indifference. Although they may “pass” for white or Afri-

can American, they have difficulty connecting with these groups as a result of the cultural and communications gaps. Barred from receiving an education because of their racial mixture, a number of Amerasians are illiterate and unable to take the U.S. citizenship examination.

As of 2008, about one-half of Amerasians living in the U.S. were resident aliens. Non-profit organizations assist in reuniting Amerasian children with their fathers, DNA testing, and searches for relatives of deceased fathers; in spite of these efforts, few have been reunited with their fathers, and such reunions have had uneven results.²³

TRANSNATIONAL, TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEES

Some Asians arriving in the U.S. are adoptees, a migration process directly related to U.S. military presence in Asia. The first large group came from South Korea, estimated at 200,000, as a result of wartime conditions that produced a substantial orphan population during the Korean War. This adoption flow originated with Bertha and Harry Holt, a religious family who had special legislation passed so they could adopt eight children from South Korea; they then established the Holt Internation-

al Children's Service to encourage other Christians to adopt from Asia. Many of the earlier adoptees were the multiracial children of U.S. military personnel and native women but, in later decades, South Korean babies were of solely Korean parentage given up for adoption by single mothers. During the last days of the Vietnam War in 1975, Operation Babylift, which was supported by the U.S. government, airlifted approximately 3,000 Vietnamese orphans, a number who were Amerasian, to the U.S., where mainly white families adopted them. Stories would later surface that a number of these children were not truly orphans but were only temporarily housed in the orphanages during the chaos of the war. Some of their parents who would later arrive in the U.S. as refugees sought to retrieve their children; however, because the courts sealed their records, they were unable to do so. Like South Korea, this highly publicized event popularized the narrative of rescuing children from a war-torn or poverty stricken country.²⁴

These earlier practices of transnational, transracial adoption that began with a humanitarian mission continued into the post-war period. Circumstances changed beginning in the 1960s when there was a shortage of



A medical staff worker examines a refugee infant inside an ambulance at San Francisco International Airport, following the arrival of an Operation Babylift plane from South Vietnam. Photo published by the White House Photoic Office, April 5, 1975; photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.



President Ford carries an infant from the recently landed Clipper 1742, an Operation Babylift plane carrying 325 Saigonese orphans, at San Francisco International Airport. Photo published by the White House Photoic Office, April 5, 1975; courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

white babies available for adoption after contraception become more widely available and single mothers gained more social acceptance. As a result, American parents wanting to adopt looked overseas for newborn babies and Asian countries created programs to facilitate these adoptions. When China implemented family planning with the one-child policy in the late-1970s, parents preferring a son, who could carry on the family name, left their daughters at orphanages. China formally permitted international adoptions in 1992, and according to statistics from the U.S. State Department, more than 85,000 Chinese children have been adopted in the U.S. The persistent stereotype of Asians as model minorities who are studious, hard-working, and obedient has created perceptions of Asian children as model adoptees. In addition, the U.S. government made it easier to obtain immigrant visas and U.S. citizenship for children adopted from abroad with the Child Citizenship Act of 2000. Although it can cost \$20,000 or more for an intercountry adoption, these new policies have facilitated adoption from additional Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam. These adoption practices are part of a global pattern of migration from Asia as well as from Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.²⁵

Most of the children are adopted by non-Asian parents and are scattered throughout the country, often in states that have minimal Asian populations. While many adoption processes are closely monitored with adoptees being raised by loving parents, other scenarios have been

less than ideal. These adoptions have become controversial because some are operated as for-profit entities leading to charges of corruption and baby selling as a result of poverty in Asia. This has curtailed adoptions from Asia and generated calls for more international oversight of the transnational adoption system. Ethical questions about practices of international adoption across racial groups, similar to concerns regarding adoption of African American or Native American babies by white parents, have led to reevaluations of what is in the best interest of the child. Some adult adoptees of Asian ancestry are advocating for in-country adoption, focusing on making adoption practices more acceptable within Asian countries and providing support for single mothers who want to keep their children. As a result of public criticism or irregularities, adoptions from South Korea and Vietnam have declined, and China abandoned its one-child policy in 2015. As a result, adoptions from Asia are likely to decrease. Many of these adoption cohorts are entering adulthood; some feel an affinity to their Asian heritages, while others question any connection to their heritages or to Asian American communities.²⁶

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

In the past, Asians arrived by steamship; however, the majority of contemporary immigrants and refugees arrive by air and are processed through immigration screening centers at terminals through the Department of Homeland Security, formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Additionally, it is estimated

that there are 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, most seeking improved economic opportunities or to be rejoined with relatives; approximately 1 million are from China, India, South Korea, and the Philippines. Historically, most Asian Indians entered as unauthorized immigrants across the Canadian-U.S. border in the Pacific Northwest, and some Japanese and Chinese immigrants entered through the Mexican-U.S. border. In the 1990s, media attention focused on an estimated 200,000 individuals from the Fujian province of mainland China who were smuggled into the U.S. by land through Canada or Mexico or by cargo ships. Today, undocumented Asians may enter covertly through the U.S. borders, but they may also be tourists, students, or workers who overstay their visas.²⁷

These new immigrants often reside in ethnic concentrations where they blend in and can find employment in the ethnic economy. Economic and political instability in their homeland and high levels of poverty have led some to seek better opportunities and opt for unauthorized stays. Many work in low wage employment, including in factories doing assembly or garment work or laboring in service sector economies, such as the restaurant industries where they can easily be exploited. Given the extensive backlogs with the family reunification immigration policies, which can take 20 years from countries like the Philippines, some decide to find alternative methods to rejoin their relatives. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 imposed criminal sanctions on those who hired undocumented immigrants and provided an amnesty program allowing some to become legal immigrants. Subsequent legislation has tried to amend policy gaps to contend with this undocumented population. While some argue that undocumented immigrants compete for employment with Americans and burden support services, studies indicate the opposite, and that as workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs, they fill labor shortages, pay billions in taxes, and underutilize services. As part of the immigrant rights movement, activists and policy makers have worked to halt deportations and rally for comprehensive immigration reform. In the meantime, President Obama's 2012 Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act provides renewable deferred action for potentially 1.8 million unauthorized youth, or DREAMers, under the age of 30 who meet spe-

cific criteria, such as attending school, graduating from high school, having a GED, or serving in the military.²⁸

In the aftermath of 9/11, fears about Muslims and those perceived to be political extremists have led to intense debates on how religious, cultural, and ethnic biases disproportionately impact immigrants and refugees. The U.S. Congress passed the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act in 2001, which increased the government's ability to arrest, detain, and deport non-citizens. While some argue that this is necessary to protect national security and counter global terrorism, advocates contend that it inhibits civil liberties and unfairly contributes to the racial profiling of immigrants, including South Asian Americans.

The post-9/11 era has led to the deportation or forced repatriation of Cambodian permanent residents as a result of a treaty signed between the U.S. and Cambodian governments in 2002 and made permissible by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. Even with green cards or spouses who are U.S. citizens and with U.S.-born children, over 600 Cambodians who have been convicted of any crime, even a misdemeanor, including those who already served their prison time, have been deported. Mostly males born in Cambodia or the Thailand refugee camps, they are being sent to a country they are unfamiliar with and where they often barely speak the heritage language. Their separation from families in the U.S. is permanent since U.S. law bars them from ever re-entering the U.S.; advocates claim this is an inhumane policy.²⁹

FORMING COMMUNITIES

Asian Americans reside primarily in urban areas, with the greater Los Angeles area (1.9 million), New York metropolitan area (1.8 million), and San Francisco Bay Area (1 million) having the largest concentrations. There are, however, expansive concentrations across the country. Historically, racial covenants created segregated spaces and restricted areas where Asians could reside, farm, and operate their businesses. A number of Chinese communities were destroyed by anti-Chinese discrimination, but there are numerous communities that survived, including sites in Boston, Chicago, Hawai'i, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C., with the



The Friendship Arch in Washington D.C.'s Chinatown, designed by architect Alfred Liu and dedicated in 1986, was the world's largest gateway of its kind and contrasted sharply with the dull, declining neighborhood around it at the time of its construction. After years of development, it now sits in one of the liveliest parts of the city's downtown. Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.

largest centers in Los Angeles, New York City, and San Francisco. New immigrants from Mainland China are revitalizing urban Chinatown areas, and in some cases, ethnic Chinese refugee populations from Southeast Asia are contributing to their growth. While there were once thriving Japantowns in California, many of them were abandoned when Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from the west coast and incarcerated during WWII. Previously, the Alien Land Act of 1913 and subsequent acts in California and other states prohibited “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from owning agricultural land; however, some of the Japanese immigrants were able to acquire land through their U.S.-born children, since the 14th Amendment of 1868 gave them automatic birthright citizenship. Other properties were destroyed during urban renewal projects starting in the 1970s, although remaining communities survived in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose.

With economic and political stability in Japan, there are few Japanese immigrants; because many Japanese Americans have moved to the suburbs, these urban com-

mercial centers struggle to preserve their historical sites in the face of gentrification and redevelopment. Filipinos are dispersed across the country; earlier generations settled in agricultural areas, U.S. military personnel reside near military bases, and medical professionals select areas with hospitals and research centers. In addition, Filipino residential concentrations are growing in commercial clusters in California, New York, and New Jersey. There are now preservation efforts to protect historic Filipinotowns or Little Manilas. For example, although the Filipino population is small, the “HiFi” community in Los Angeles has established a park, monument, crosswalks, mural, and a library attesting to its historical presence in the city, and there are concerted efforts to preserve the remaining Little Manila buildings in Stockton, California.³⁰

The influx of immigrants and refugees arriving directly from Asia has led to the creation of new ethnic concentrations, such as Koreatown, Little Saigon, Little Taipei, Cambodia Town, Thai Town, Little India, and Little Bangladesh. Some were relegated to economi-

cally depressed areas where they faced environmental pollution or gentrification, and they have been advocates for improving and sustaining their communities. Others have already turned these neighborhoods into vibrant centers that incentivized immigrants from other parts of the United States to relocate to these hubs, since they are sites where they can find employment in the ethnic economy, benefit from co-ethnic networks, and share in cultural events. A number are officially designated neighborhoods, with freeway and street signs, as well as ethnic landmarks directing local visitors and tourists to the communities. Although ethnic populations may be dispersed and reside outside these designated areas, they can be significant spaces for co-ethnics to hold community gatherings, such as cultural festivals, thus helping new immigrants feel more comfortable in their surroundings.³¹

As noted, new immigrants often move to urban areas where there are ethnic concentrations and job opportunities; however, in recent decades, Asian immigrants, along with their U.S.-born counterparts, are relocating to the suburbs, including neighborhoods that were once all-white. Suburbs were created in the post-WWII era when U.S. veterans, many of them immigrants or the children of immigrants from Europe, were provided subsidized educational and housing loans, giving them the resources to escape inner cities for safer neighborhoods, better schools, and bigger homes. Some contemporary Asian immigrants bring financial resources with them that allow them to move into suburban neighborhoods. In the San Gabriel Valley in Southern California and around the Silicon Valley in Northern California, for example, Asian Americans of various ethnicities, particularly Chinese and Taiwanese, are building thriving suburban communities. While some spaces are either residential concentrations or commercial clusters, other sites are filled with residents and businesses that cater to their needs. The numbers and reach of Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, Islamic, and Sikh buildings that serve new Asian immigrants have increased rapidly in recent decades, attracting even more migrants. New immigrants are linked to global economies in their homeland and have diasporic connections used to alter commercial and residential urban and suburban regions.³²

CONCLUSION

In 2014, the population of Asian alone or in combination was estimated to be 20.3 million. Barring major immigration policy changes and assuming continuing uncertainties in their homelands, the Asian American populations will continue to increase rapidly in the future. With a median age of 34 years, they are younger than the median American population of 38; thus, a larger percentage are of child-bearing age, and as a result, U.S. birth rates will contribute to demographic growth. This, in turn, will increase the numbers of Asian American youth in school districts. Educational institutions are learning to adjust and accommodate English language learners as well as to work with immigrant parents. In large state institutions, such as the University of California and California State University systems, as well as some elite private institutions, Asian American student populations have increased significantly, causing anxiety about their “overrepresentation” on college campuses. Some wealthy, transnational migrants establish U.S. residences, maintain their jobs or businesses in Asia, and leave their children, referred to as parachute kids, in the U.S. hoping that their children will be admitted into prestigious U.S. colleges. It is expected that younger, U.S.-born generations, from the 1.5 to fifth generations, who are socialized in the U.S., will have more opportunities, and their attachments to ethnic communities or homelands will diminish.³³

While one-half of all immigrants to the U.S. become naturalized citizens, the rate is higher for all Asian immigrants at 59 percent. The percentages of those who elect to become naturalized varies by national group: Vietnamese at 76 percent, Taiwanese at 74 percent, Filipinos at 68 percent, Koreans at 59 percent, Chinese at 51 percent, and Asian Indians at 47 percent. As naturalized citizens, they have the opportunity to become more civically engaged and influence the electoral process, especially in areas where they are highly concentrated. There are a handful of elected officials at the gubernatorial levels and, ironically, except for Hawai‘i, the others hail from areas, such as Louisiana, South Carolina, and Washington, with smaller Asian populations. They have gained congressional seats from states such as California, Florida, Hawai‘i, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. Chinese and Japanese politicians continue to break barriers, but representatives who are Asian

Indians, Hmong, Koreans, Thai, and Vietnamese are also winning elections. Their presence is more substantial at the local and state levels, with Asian Americans running for office and winning elections, especially in California, Hawai'i, and New York. At these levels, large concentrations of Asian Americans create voter mobilization for Asian candidates; allowing them to win local elections and advance to higher office; however, even non-Asian candidates recognize their influence in close elections and are wooing Asian American constituents. While there have been strong historical affinities to the Republican Party, the new demographics point to significant shifts with greater numbers identifying as independent or as Democrats in recent presidential elections, particularly amongst the younger generation.³⁴

Although Asian Americans are depicted as a largely monolithic and homogeneous community, a nuanced disaggregation of the demographics indicates the differentiations within the group by immigration histories, socioeconomic background, residential patterns, religious practices, political ideologies, language proficiency, and rates of naturalization. The Asian American population has increased significantly because of new immigration and refugee flows since WWII, and although the majority is predominantly foreign-born, they are making major contributions to the cultural, economic, and political landscape of this country. Yet they continue to be racialized and experience anti-Asian discrimination in social arenas, the workplace, and the educational context. Anxiety over the expanding Asian American population and the perception that they are perpetual foreigners, no matter how many generations they have been in the U.S., directly and indirectly impacts their treatment, as well as national debates over future immigration policies.

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