

California's Asian Population



Presented by Lucie Cheng and Paul Ong

Looking Toward
the Year 2000

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Preface

The rise of California as the gateway of the Pacific Rim has been based on its rich and diverse human resources, of which Asian Americans are a crucial part. Approaching 3.3 million in the year 2000, the Asian population of the state will play an increasingly important role in shaping the region's culture and political economy. Yet, despite their growing visibility, Asian Americans still are not well understood by their fellow Californians. Who are they and what opportunities and challenges do they create for the state?

This pamphlet is a modest attempt to call attention to the potential of California's Asian population in the next decade. It is a collaborative effort of seven Asian American faculty and researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles. Professor Paul Ong organized the project and provided the basic population projections for the rest of the team to reflect and comment upon. Each was instructed to speculate on an area of his or her own expertise. The result is this collection of seven short commentaries on aspects of population growth, economic behavior, and educational, social, and political challenges of Asian Americans in the state. Our effort has been to pose strategic questions and help set an agenda for needed public policies. We hope the result will provide food for thought to those in public and private organizations trying to better situate California in the Pacific era.

The cover photograph is of a Korean Day parade in Orange County, California, October 1989. The photographer is Hyungwon Kang, author of the much acclaimed photographic study *From the Streets to the Olympics: Korea, Democracy and the 24th Olympiad, 1987-88* (Art Space Publications).

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California's Asian Population

PAUL M. ONG

Architecture and Urban Planning

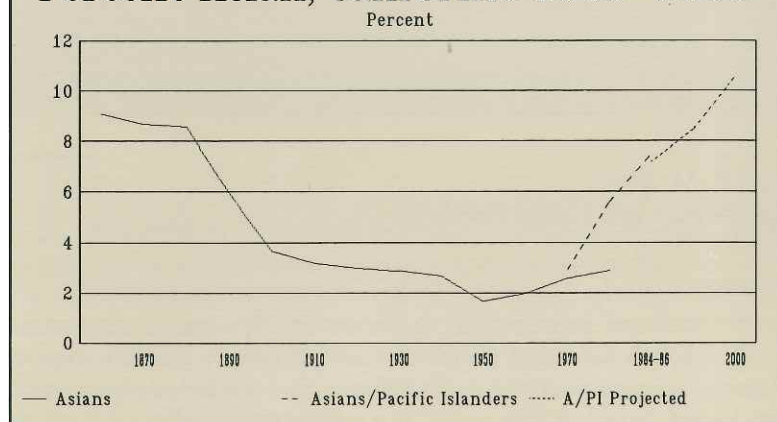
The Asian population in California has experienced phenomenal growth following the elimination of racially biased quotas in America's immigration laws in 1965. From 1960 to 1980, this population quadrupled, from less than a third of a million to 1.2 million; 1.3 million persons if Pacific Islanders are included. If current trends continue, Asians will number over 3 million by the end of the century, comprising about ten percent of the state's population, twice the percentage that existed in 1980.

This growth will be driven by three factors. The first is a birth rate that is higher than that of non-Hispanic whites. There is considerable variation by ethnicity and nativity, ranging from a low of 1.7 for foreign-born Japanese to a high of 3.7 for foreign-born Southeast Asians. The second factor is in-migration from other parts of the United States. For example, between 1975 and 1985, there was a net in-migration of 2,400 Japanese, 2,800 Chinese, 3,300 Filipinos, and 900 Koreans. California has also benefited from secondary migration among refugees, which has added thousands to California's Southeast Asian population. The third and by far the most important factor in promoting population growth is immigration. Each year, California has over 19,000 new Filipino immigrants, 15,000 Chinese, 9,000 Koreans, and 2,000 Japanese. The influx of Southeast Asians has fallen to half its levels in the early eighties, but the annual immigration rate is still high, in the neighborhood of 15,000 persons.

3.33 Million By the Turn of the Century

Given these three factors, the five Asian populations together will grow from 1.15 million in 1980 to 3.05 million in the year 2000, an increase of 166%. If we factor in the other Asian and Pacific Islander (A/PI) groups, which accounted for about 12% of the total A/PI population in 1980,

Percent Asian, California 1860–2000



then California will have about 3.33 million Asians and Pacific Islanders by the end of the century. This means that the growth rate for Asians and Pacific Islanders will be about four times higher than for California's total population.

If the projections hold, the Asian population would exhibit an interesting historical pattern. During the early part of California's history, Asians made up about a tenth of the population. However, through the period of immigration restriction (1882-1965), their share declined dramatically, reaching a low of less than 2% in 1950. With the elimination of racially biased restrictions, the percentage has increased. If current trends continue, the A/PI population will once again comprise about a tenth of the population by the year 2000. It would have taken a century and two scores for Asians (and Pacific Islanders) to regain their position in California's population.

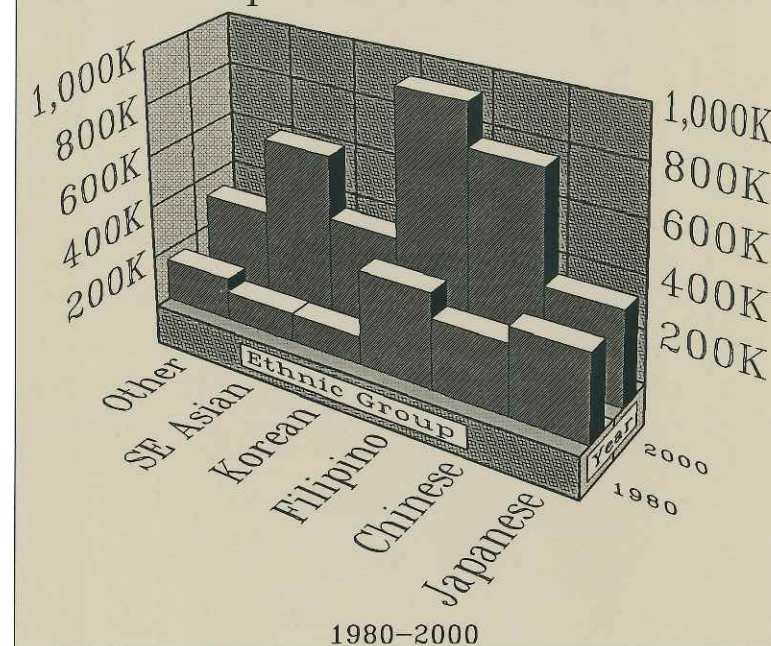
There is variation in growth rates by ethnicity. Among the five largest Asian groups, Filipinos will experience the greatest absolute increase (a net increase of 581 thousand) in the next decade, while Southeast Asians will experience the greatest percentage increase (a net of 516%). As in 1980, Filipinos will constitute the single largest Asian population with a population of 939,000 by the end of the century, and the Chinese will remain in second place with a population of 776,000. However, there will be a reordering among the other three groups. The extraordinary growth rate of Southeast Asians will lift them from the bottom of the rankings to third place with a population of 613,000. Because

of a low immigration rate, the Japanese will fall from the third largest to the fifth largest group with a population of 352,000.

Foreign-born Among Asian Americans

With the exception of the Japanese, the Asian subgroups will remain predominantly an immigrant population. For the five major groups as a whole, foreign-born Asians will increase their share marginally, from 61% in 1980 to 62% in 2000; however, there will be a decline for most of the individual ethnic groups. The proportionate number of immigrants will remain stable for the Japanese at 29% for both 1980 and the year 2000. For the other groups, the percentage will decrease: from 62% to 61% for Chinese, from 67% to 61% for Filipinos, from 84% to 71% for Koreans, and from 94 to 74% for Southeast Asians.

Ethnic Composition of California's Asians



Asians in California, 1980-2000

Native Born and Foreign Born, By Age Group

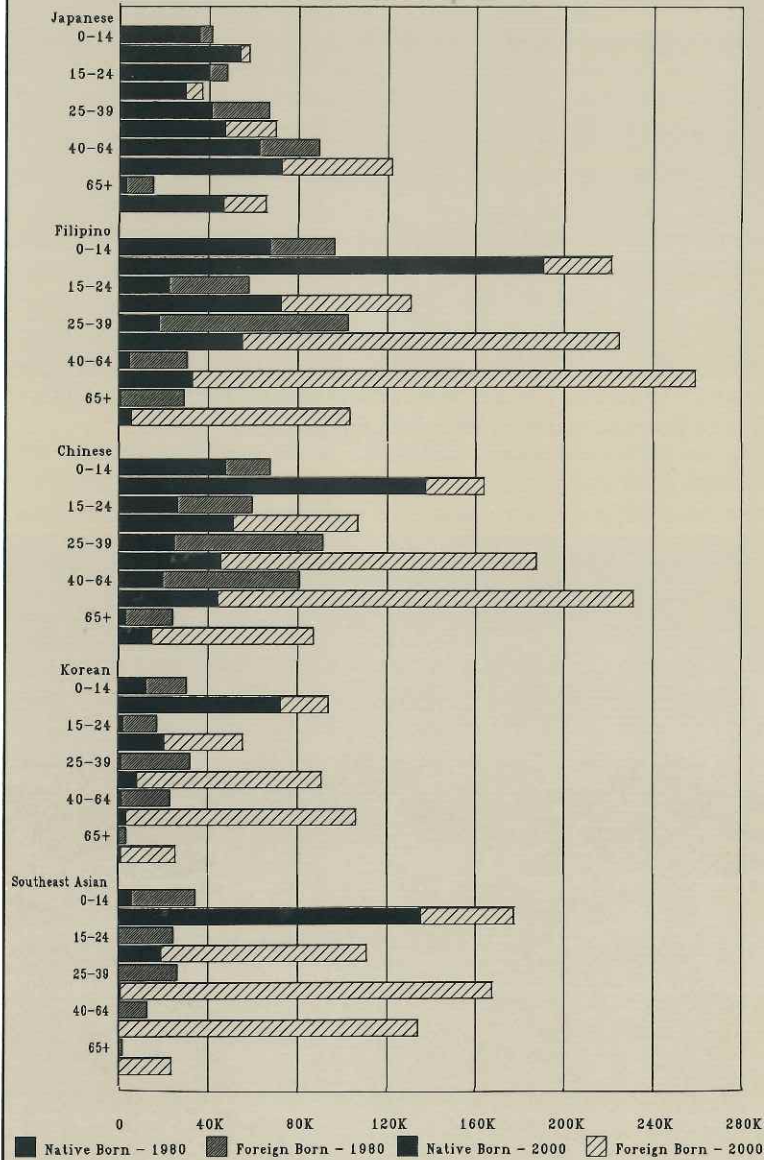


Photo by Hyungwon Kang

Anglo shopper at Vietnamese market in Orange County.

With increased population and the continued dominance of the foreign-born, we expect to see greater internal ethnic cohesion for most groups. The post-1965 influx has revitalized older Asian communities, such as Chinatown and to a lesser extent Japanese American neighborhoods, and has given birth to newer communities, such as Little Saigon in Orange County and Koreatown in Los Angeles City. As local immigrant populations grow, they become more capable of supporting ethnically based organizations and businesses. Thus we are likely to see a strengthening of ethnic institutions and an expansion of nascent enclaves.

The number of Asian children will grow by nearly a half million from 1980 to the year 2000, from 269,000 to 714,000. Over ninety percent of the net increase will come from the American-born. By the end of the century, American-born Asians will outnumber foreign-born Asians by better than four to one. Although the number of foreign-born Asian children will not increase in absolute terms, they will nonetheless be a

sizable population at the end of the century, numbering 125,000. The Asian-youth population (those between the ages of 15 and 24) will gain about a quarter million more persons from 1980 to the year 2000, from 207,000 to 441,000. Unlike Asian children, the majority of Asian youths (56%) will be foreign-born. During this period, there will also be a net gain of a million persons in the prime-working age Asian population, from 596,000 to 1,591,000. The number of immigrants will grow faster than the number of American-born, pushing the foreign-born share up from 70% in 1980 to 81% by the end of the century.

The elderly Asian population will be the fastest growing age group. We project that the 1980-2000 growth rate for those 65 and older will be nearly twice as large as for all Asians. While the elderly comprised 6.6% of the Asian population in 1980, they will comprise 10.3% by the end of the century. This trend parallels a general graying of Californians. By the end of the century, there will be 305,000 elderly Asians. An overwhelming majority of the elderly Asians are and will continue to be foreign-born.

Low Income Workers

A looming problem posed by the enormous influx of new immigrants into California's labor market, particularly those who came to the United States as adults, is a corresponding increase in the number of low-income workers. There is no question that many Asian immigrants have attained middle-class status, both as workers and as entrepreneurs. Those with college degrees or skills useful in a modern economy generally have experienced economic mobility in the United States. However, the Asian population is far from being homogenous. A large group of Asian immigrants are poorly educated or from a rural background. These immigrants have had a harder time adapting to the American economy, with many forced to take low paying jobs within ethnically bounded subeconomies. It would be fair to say that many of the current economic achievements of Asians are a product of selective immigration that has favored the highly educated. Whether this success will continue depends on the composition of the future population by social class.

The indications are that the composition of the adult immigrants will shift away from the college educated and those with a professional background. This can be seen in the 1980 PUMS data: among adult males, 30 percent of those who entered between 1965 and 1969 had at least four

years of college, but only 17 percent of those who entered between 1975 and 1980 did.

The dramatic increase of California's Asian population will offer both promises and challenges. One promise is greater cultural diversity. There is no question that the revitalization of older enclaves and the development of newer ones have enriched the urban landscape. Asians have given breadth and depth to Californian art, theater, and cuisine. Another promise is economic. Asians have provided a disproportionate share of the labor that has made the state the premier high-tech region in the world, and Asians have contributed through the establishment of numerous new businesses. As the United States and California become more integrated into the expanding Pacific Rim economy, Asian Americans will be an important resource in building international bridges.

The growth of the Asian population also comes with challenges. There is no question that better planning and more enlightened policies are needed in the areas of education, employment, and social services. There is, however, a much larger challenge, confronting racial hostilities. It would be a tragedy if there is a revival of the anti-Asian movement that marred the state until the end of World War II. Addressing these societal and political tendencies will be our biggest challenge in the nineties, and perhaps into the next century.

Asian American Economic Behavior: Consumers, Savers, Investors, and Contributors

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Sociology

On projects that by the year 2000, the Asian population in California of prime-working age will reach 1.59 million. If we make the conservative assumption that income will remain at the 1979 level, the last year for which we have detailed data, Asians in California will earn \$24 billion, making the group a major force in the market place. Beyond this earning power, the economic strength of Asians will be further boosted by the arrival of a sizable group of new immigrants with considerable capital, not including the highly publicized investments in California by foreign Asians. As the Asian American middle and upper classes expand, how this population will exercise their economic power is beginning to attract popular, if not scholarly, attention. This brief commentary will explore four areas that are bound to have economic consequences, as well as social, cultural, and political implications for the society.

1. As Consumers

The median individual income of some Asian American groups in California has surpassed that of the white population, and the projection suggests a continuing increase through the rest of this century. Anyone who has lived in large California cities where Asians are concentrated, such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, will note the change in merchandizing aimed at the Asian American consumer. Perhaps the best example is in women's wear. Ten years ago it was nearly impossible for an Asian American woman of a body type typical of her group to find inexpensive fashionable clothing that would fit without alteration. During

the last few years, however, large department stores have greatly expanded their "petite" or "Club 5'3"" sections to meet her needs. Similar adjustments have been made by shoe stores and other businesses. Asian American models also have begun to appear more frequently in fashion magazines and sales catalogs, indicating a deliberate attempt to capture this burgeoning market. Dolls with Asian features have also become more visible in direct response to increased consumer demand.

While one may argue that the consumption behavior of many native-born Asian Americans is similar to that of the general public, the behavior of the foreign-born often is quite different. For instance, some Los Angeles real estate agents have found that home sales are down during the "Ghost month" when buying and selling are avoided by recent Chinese immigrants. Car dealers credit their success in the Asian immigrant market to multilingual sales forces and marketing strategies that emphasize personal interaction within familiar settings such as church picnics, ethnic parades, and waiting rooms of Asian doctors and dentists. Life insurance companies spend considerable time and money developing approaches aimed specifically at subgroups of Asian Americans.

Scholars who write about Asian Americans are bombarded by marketing firms asking for information regarding consumption patterns, tastes and preferences, consumer psychology, and so forth. However, there is more speculation than hard research. To what extent are Asian Americans different from other populations in their consumption behavior after controlling for class? Do they differ by ethnicity, nativity, and generation? Do Asian Americans respond to the same signals in advertising as the population in general? These are areas where research will prove useful. There will undoubtedly be job opportunities in advertising, marketing, and sales directed at Asian American consumers as businesses compete for a share of this market. These jobs will be filled by individuals who are linguistically and culturally prepared to address these questions.

As consumer awareness rises in Asia, immigrants are likely to adopt negative sanctions against poor products and perhaps organize as consumers for environmental causes. This will open up another area for cross-ethnic political alliance.



Photo by Visual Communications

Asian Pacific Women's Network of Los Angeles. Meeting at the Marriott Hotel to discuss women's role in the 1980s and 1990s.

2. As Savers

The rise of several newly industrialized countries in Asia has been attributed in part to high rates of personal savings. Asians, especially Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese, have been reported to have a propensity to save more of their income than most other groups. The reasons are not clear. Some observers attribute the high savings rate to the Confucian value of frugality, others emphasize the underdevelopment of governmental social security, others emphasize structural features of Asian economies that they believe are responsible. Whatever the reason, the fact that these Asian countries have a higher rate of savings than others is well established. Is the same propensity to save found among Asian Americans? Although there is anecdotal evidence and some interviews with first-generation immigrant Asians that indicate this may be the case, little research on this subject has been done. What proportion of an

individual or family's income is put away for a rainy day or for special purposes? What priority does saving have in a household budget?

As the population of Asian Americans increases, a high savings rate is likely to have more economic influence than before. Financial institutions must already be thinking about attracting Asian American clients. Banks that cater to Asians report having to overcome important cultural habits such as an Asian preference for cash transactions rather than checks, for investment in gold rather than in securities, and fear of being visibly better-off than one's neighbors. Where do Asian Americans tend to put their savings? Do they respond to the same motivations and inducements as other savers? What ambience and physical setting is most attractive to Asian American customers?

3. As Investors

As affluent Asians and Asian Americans are in a position to invest, what would they be likely to invest in? The most visible investments have been gold, real estate, and small business and manufacturing. But what about stocks, bonds, and other financial instruments that have not been traditional forms of investment for Asians? How do Asian Americans choose brokers and other financial agents and agencies? When do they decide to invest? Do they tend to emphasize opportunities for short term gains or do they seek security in long-term investments? Do they borrow capital to invest? Do they invest as individuals or prefer to form partnerships? When a family owns a business, does it operate differently than other American family-owned businesses? Is the rotating credit association just a mechanism for capital accumulation, or does it also serve as an investment group? Do Asian Americans have a propensity to invest in Asia, or in things related to Asia?

Here again we know very little. There are some preliminary research findings that suggest that Chinese Americans tend to borrow a smaller portion of total investment capital than majority Americans, and they tend to pay back what they borrow faster. Although much has been studied about Asian American small businesses, there is almost nothing on other forms of investment.

4. As Financial Contributors

A. War Chests of Political Candidates: Asian Americans are reported to be the second largest contributing ethnic group to political candidates in the last presidential election, and every California candidate has developed some strategy to expand his/her war chest with Asian contributions. Limited research on local political campaign contributions shows that Asian candidates are more likely to gain financial support from other Asians, and that Asian contributors tend more to give to Asian candidates than other candidates in the same election. The failure of this financial support to produce anticipated influence for Asian Americans has become a topic of considerable frustration. As Asian Americans become more sophisticated in playing the electoral politics game they will learn to leverage their financial strength more effectively.

B. Philanthropic donations: Robert Lee in a recent speech dispelled the stereotypic notion that Chinese Americans do not contribute to philanthropic organizations. The problem seems to be that few majority organizations have found a way to appeal to Asian Americans, and that only 0.2% of foundation funds are allocated to Asian American causes. A potential Japanese American contributor once remarked that organizations that do not have Asian Americans on their boards should not hope to solicit money successfully from her. What kind of philanthropic work receives donations from Asian Americans? Do potential Asian American contributors respond to the same appeal as majority Americans?

There has long been the view in America that “Asians take care of themselves” through strong family ties. The adverse effect this view has had on the access to and use of public welfare has been discussed in the literature. Few observers have examined its possible consequences for donor behavior. Do Asian Americans tend to give money exclusively to Asian American causes? Or, more narrowly, do Asian Americans give only to their own subgroups? Some fund raisers have observed that campaigns are more successful if they are targeted to specific Asian American subgroups rather than to Asian Americans in general. Is this a common observation?

A traditional stereotype of Asians is that they spend little, save a lot, invest only in real estate, and scarcely contribute to public welfare. As Asian Americans grow in number, there is a need to examine these images. Without well-conceived research, we will not be able to realize the full potential of our economic strength, nor will our needs be met.

The Ten Percent Solution? Demographic Projections and Political and Educational Issues

DON T. NAKANISHI
Education

Projections of California's demographic future raise a number of significant and potentially controversial issues regarding the access, representation, and influence of Asian Pacifics in California's public and private institutions. Two major policy areas of recent concern to the state's Asian Pacific population — higher education and electoral politics — offer provocative, and yet highly contrasting, scenarios of the problems and opportunities of becoming ten percent of the state's populace.

In the year 2000, on the one hand, if Asian Pacific students represented ten percent of the enrollment of California's public colleges, especially those of the selective University of California system, it is highly likely that the current fears over discriminatory admissions quotas will have been realized. Indeed, unless the academic qualifications and motivations of the ever-increasing Asian Pacific college-going sector were to dramatically and unexpectedly decline, this future situation probably would indicate that new and different admissions policies and practices had been established in response to charges made by some current college officials that Asian Pacifics are “over-represented” at their institutions.

On the other hand, if Asian Pacifics became ten percent of California's electorate by the turn of the century, they would probably wield considerable political clout and would be wooed by candidates as much for their votes as they presently are for their campaign funds. Indeed, if Asian Pacifics simply represented a proportion of the electorate that was comparable to their numbers in the total population, they could become a highly influential “swing vote” in local, state, and presidential elections. However, such a rosy political future could only occur if there was a profound reversal of the currently low rates of voter registration among Asian Pacifics.

The following discussion summarizes present-day policy and empiri-

cal knowledge about these two quite different policy issue areas,¹ and then considers how the projected demographic trends offered by Ong will have an impact on those issues.

Higher Education: The Debate Over Asian American Admissions

During the decade of the 1980s, allegations of possible quotas limiting the admissions and enrollment of Asian Pacific American applicants to many of the nation's most selective undergraduate institutions of the Ivy League, Stanford, and the Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses of the University of California have fueled one of the hottest higher educational policy controversies. The so-called Asian American admissions debate has become the focus of extensive news media coverage, unusual bipartisan political intervention, federal and state investigations, and prolonged protests by Asian Pacific students, professors, and civil rights groups. And although some colleges have responded by formally apologizing to the Asian American community, by launching fact-finding studies, or revising admissions procedures that "indisputably had a disproportionate impact on Asians,"² it is highly likely that this dispute will be with us for some time to come.

Although many factors contributed to the emergence of the admissions dispute, the phenomenal demographic growth of the Asian Pacific population in recent years played a critical role. Just as Asian Pacifics are the country's fastest growing group, they also are the fastest growing sector in the American college-going population. Nationally, in Fall 1976, there were 150,000 Asian Pacific American undergraduates. A decade later in Fall 1986, there were almost three times as many—448,000—with close to 45% of them attending an institution of higher education in California. This unusually high geographic concentration of Asian Pacific college students in California underscored the national and statewide policy significance of the disputes over Asian American admissions that occurred at the Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses of the University of California.

Ong's projections that the Asian Pacific college-aged (15-25 years old) and youth (0-14 years) sectors will continue to increase at rapid rates from 1980 to 2000 strongly suggest that the Asian American admissions controversy is far from final resolution. Although all institu-

tions of higher education in California—from the community colleges to the major public and private universities—will probably witness continued increases in applications for admissions from Asian Pacific students, the campuses that are highly selective will be confronted with policy and philosophical issues that are similar to those of the current dispute. For example, to what extent should a public, taxpayer-supported institution select students solely on seemingly "objective" meritocratic criteria such as grades and test scores versus other long-standing institutional goals and practices such as the social engineering of a "diverse" and "balanced" student body? Hypothetically, should Berkeley's entering class of the year 2000 reflect the demographics of California, in which 10 percent of the freshmen would be Asian Americans, or should it reflect the selection of the "best" of those who applied to the college? Last year, 30% of all applicants to Berkeley were Asian Americans, and it is likely that they will represent the same or higher proportion of those who apply in the year 2000. What would be fair and equitable policies for those who apply, and what would be justifiable in terms of the greater public interest? These are some of the tough and complex future educational issues that have the potential of leading to not only further confrontations between the Asian American community and college officials, but also serious inter-group conflicts.

Electoral Politics: Voting and Representation

In recent years, there has been a substantial increase in the political participation of the Asian Pacific population, especially in the American political system but also in the affairs of their ancestral homelands in Asia. With each election, a few more Asian Americans get elected to office, and the image of Asian Americans as the new "political moneybags" of American politics appears to be enhanced with their ever-increasing contributions to the campaign war chests. In the last presidential election, for example, Asian Pacifics were estimated to have given over \$10 million to George Bush and Michael Dukakis.

However, the impact of the Asian Pacific population on electoral politics has been somewhat uneven and limited. One of the most consistent and puzzling findings of recent political studies is that Asian Pacific Americans, even after statistical manipulations have been performed to control for the high proportion of age-eligible individuals who cannot vote because they are not United States citizens, still have lower voter registration rates than whites, blacks, and perhaps even Latinos. The "UCLA

Asian Pacific American Voter Registration Study" estimated that Japanese Americans, who have the largest population and the highest proportion of citizens of all the Asian Pacific groups in Los Angeles County, had a voter registration rate of 43.0%. At the same time, 35.5% of the Chinese Americans, 27.0% Pilipino Americans, 16.7% Asian Indians, 13.0% Korean Americans, 28.5% Samoan Americans, and an extremely low 4.1% Vietnamese were estimated to be registered voters. These registration rates were well below the overall average of 60% for all individuals eighteen years and older in Los Angeles County. As a result of these lower than average registration rates, Asian Pacific voters represented less than 3% of all voters in the county, despite the fact that they were over 6 percent of the county's population. Similar low registration rates have been found for Asian Pacifics in other areas of California and the nation.

The under-representation of Asian Pacifics among California's voters may well exist in the year 2000, and the potential impact that they might have on local and presidential elections might not be achieved. Ong demonstrates that the age cohorts of those who are eligible to register (youths, 15-24, prime working age, 25-64, and the elderly, 65



Photo by Visual Communications

Los Angeles Asian Pacific groups hold rally for Jesse Jackson during 1984 presidential campaign.

and older) will all continue to increase rapidly during the next two decades. This might suggest a highly favorable political future, especially if effective voter registration strategies and activities could be developed and continuously pursued by Asian Pacific organizations, the major political parties, and other groups such as the Southwest Voter Registration Project.³ Ong also cautions, however, that the "Prime Working Age" sector will have even more individuals than now who will be foreign-born and poorly educated, two key factors that are usually negatively related to active political and social participation like voting. Since this particular age group represents the largest pool of potential Asian Pacific American voters, the prognosis of Asian Americans reaching numerical parity in California's electorate in the future may not be positive.

Demographic projections of Asian Pacifics becoming ten percent of California's population should not be simplistically viewed as solutions to long-standing issues of institutional access, representation, and influence. Instead, they should be seen as highly complex and potentially difficult future situations that raise tough questions that do not have easy solutions.

NOTES

1. Due to space limitations, this article will not address other significant higher educational issues facing Asian Pacifics such as student affirmative action programs, faculty and staff hirings and promotions, or curricular reform. It also will not focus on a host of other major issues regarding the electoral participation of Asian Pacifics such as reapportionment, or the election of more Asian Pacifics to public office.

2. Statement by Ira Michael Heyman, Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley, April 6, 1989.

3. The Southwest Voter Registration Project, which is based in San Antonio, Texas, and is geared toward increasing the numbers of Mexican American registered voters, has supported numerous voter registration campaigns and research projects dealing with the Asian Pacific community in Southern California.

Interracial Marriage and Ethnic Identity

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There are a number of reasons why population figures for ethnic groups may be deceptive. Some are familiar — an undercount of culturally different people, problems due to language differences, unfamiliarity with bureaucratic procedures, and the pitfalls of self-identification. One issue that has heretofore been ignored, but has an effect on population projections, is the rising number of Asian Americans who come from racially or ethnically mixed backgrounds. For example, what is the identification of an individual whose father is Caucasian, but whose mother is Japanese? Or a child whose father may be of Japanese ancestry, but whose mother identifies as a Korean? Does the former qualify as “white,” and the latter as Japanese (i.e., taking the father’s ethnicity), or is the identification left up to the individual?

The marital patterns of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are an important area of study, not only for individuals, but also for parents and other concerned members of the community. In Los Angeles, the Japanese-Americans, primarily because of the generational variable — the bulk of the current marriageable population is third (sansei) and fourth (yonsei) generation — have the highest rates of marrying out of their ethnic group, followed by the Chinese and the Koreans. The Japanese outmarriage rates hover around the 50 percent level.

The important variables affecting interracial marriage rates include size of the group; generation; male and female ratios; lessening of racial barriers toward such unions in both the majority and minority community (antimiscegenation laws were in effect until the 1950s); weakening of parental controls; increased opportunities for equal status contact between groups; and integration in housing, in occupations, and in the educational arena.



Photo by Hyungwon Kang

Cambodian bride and groom in Long Beach combine Asian and American traditions in marriage ceremony. Large numbers of immigrant Asians are assimilating still further by intermarriage.

Over the next decade, interracial marriage will continue to be significant and this raises a number of critical issues. In many models analyzing the adaptation of immigrant groups to the mainstream community, intermarriage is viewed as one of the most important “stages” in ethnic acceptance. But is it desirable to have marital assimilation, or will society be better served by maintaining a degree of ethnic distance? Further questions to be explored include the success of such marriages and the adaptation of their racially mixed children. Finally, the need to explore the identity of racially mixed couples and their children, not only in terms of census categories, but also in terms of their racial and cultural heritage.

Least Studied: California Filipinos and Southeast Asians

TANIA AZORES
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YEN LE ESPIRITU
Sociology

Filipinos and Southeast Asians are perhaps the least studied of the major Asian groups in California. This is remarkable as Filipinos are now and will remain the largest Asian American ethnicity, and Southeast Asians are the fastest growing segment, headed for third largest after Filipinos and Chinese in the year 2000. Southeast Asians are a culturally and ethnically diverse group of Asians who have come to the United States under differing circumstances, mostly as refugees. They are a relatively recent group of immigrants and few studies have been made of them. Filipinos, on the other hand, have a longer history in the United States, particularly in California. Yet, like the Southeast Asians, they are among the least-studied ethnic populations in the United States.

Because Filipinos and Southeast Asians are often lumped together with the more established Asian groups, their unique social background and immigration histories tend to be overlooked. Their projected population growth as we enter the twenty-first century raises important questions regarding their adaptation to California as well as California's adaptation to them. In this commentary, we will address three issues of major concern to California and to the Filipino and Southeast Asian communities: education, employment, and social services.

Education

The educational achievements of Asian students are often touted in the media. Less publicized are their struggles. At the end of the



Photo by Visual Communications

PAOLO AGBAYANI VILLAGE. Elderly farmworkers, mostly first wave Filipino immigrants, at United Farmworkers retirement home, Delano, California.

century, there will be a sizable foreign-born population among Filipino and Southeast Asian children and youth. The majority of them will enter U.S. public schools with limited English skills. Coming from an "English speaking" country, Filipino immigrants are expected to have little, if any, language problem. However, Philippine education has been nationalized and English is no longer the universal medium of instruction. Even now, Filipino students are often unable to communicate effectively in U.S. schools. They need bilingual and multicultural education.

Southeast Asian students also face language problems, compounded by the fact that their native languages are from a different linguistic family than English. The acquisition of English is even more problematic for those students who came from preliterate societies. As a result, many Southeast Asian students have deficiencies, ranging from minor to major, in their use of English — especially written English. Southeast Asian students face additional obstacles: Some have had little or no formal schooling in their home countries while others have spent their formative years in refugee camps. More problematic are the unaccompanied minors — young Southeast Asians who arrived alone, who are often unable to fit in socially and academically. For both Filipinos and Southeast Asian youths, a communication gap stemming from a curriculum that has little or no cultural relevance whatsoever to new immigrants, or that negates or

ignores their cultural heritage, has contributed to the feeling of alienation, a high dropout rate, and, in some cases, involvement in gang activity.

Filipinos and Southeast Asians are also under-represented in higher education. Their college graduation rates are low, and their enrollment in graduate school is even lower. Thus, post-secondary institutions need to put greater efforts into the recruitment and retention of these students.

Employment

Filipinos and Southeast Asians in the prime working ages (25-64) will continue to be dominated by immigrants. Until the late seventies and early eighties, Filipinos were coming into the country as professionals or highly skilled individuals. For many Filipino immigrants, however, economic returns to education were maximized only for certain fields of study, e.g., the health professions. Those in other occupational fields were likely to be underemployed. The more recent immigrants tend to be less educated and have fewer marketable skills than the arrivals in the late 1960s. If this pattern continues, more and more Filipinos will need occupational training.

Consisting primarily of professionals and skilled workers, the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees shared similar problems of underemployment with their Filipino counterparts. Subsequent waves of refugees have fared much worse. A large proportion of these later arrivals lack proficiency in English, urban job experience, and adequate education. When they do find jobs, these are usually low-paying, unstable, and dead-end. Many of these refugees are exploited workers in the restaurant, garment, and electronics industries, which pay piecework and below minimum wages.

As their numbers continue to grow, Filipinos and Southeast Asians will constitute a major labor source for California's employers. To make use of this labor force, California first needs to design appropriate manpower training and retraining programs. Furthermore, outreach programs will have to be expanded to reach these under-represented Asian groups.

Social Services

All immigrants experience difficulty adjusting to life in a different world. For Filipino and Southeast Asian immigrants, the lack of

established ethnic institutions makes these adjustments even more difficult. Filipino elderly, for example, have a high risk of chronic physical or mental health problems, due to the circumstances of their immigration. Because of the lack of community-based institutions that meet their social and psychological needs, the elderly need to return to the Philippines periodically to be energized psychologically and physically.

A growing problem in the Filipino elderly community is that of homelessness. Changing lifestyles and values within the Filipino family are leading to intergenerational conflicts that drive the elderly from the homes of their children. There are growing signs of an increasing number of Filipino elderly who are abused, homeless, or at risk of being homeless. Filipinos, among all Asian groups, will have the largest elderly population by the year 2000. Without social security or retirement income, housing for elderly Filipinos could become a major problem.

For Southeast Asians, mental health needs are paramount. These refugees have suffered from the loss of status, of loved ones, and especially of country. Many have also been victims of war, of the Pol Pot regime, and of pirate attacks. The physical and mental health consequences of these traumas are grave and long-lasting. A 1987 California study found that Southeast Asians in the state were four times more likely than the general population to have severe mental health needs because of horrors they had endured before coming to the United States. Southeast Asian families also need maternal and child health care — as well as family planning services. Due to the cultural and linguistic barriers, however, most Southeast Asians continue to underutilize health services.

Conclusion

Given the projected population growth of Filipinos and Southeast Asians, California faces the challenge to ensure that these two groups do not become a burden to society but continue to be active participants in building a healthy economy. A greater challenge, however, will be to stem the rising tide of anti-Asian sentiment. Partly due to their growing numbers, Asian Americans are perceived to be undeservedly utilizing a disproportionate share of scarce resources (e.g., college admissions, social services, federal grants). In the final analysis, the question narrows down to how California will address the needs, not only of Filipinos and Southeast Asians, but of all those who are currently disadvantaged, without resentment from those who will perceive themselves as unfairly bearing the cost of social and economic restructuring.

Organize for Equal Opportunity

STEWART KWOH
Asian American Studies Center

The rapid growth of the Asian Pacific population challenges the society at large to ensure equal opportunity for all. For Asian Pacific Americans this challenge includes building strong political and community-based organizations and coalescing with other ethnic groups, particularly in California.

For our state to enter the next century with confidence as a plural society diverse talents from different backgrounds must be welcomed, not obstructed. There is a danger that if our productive growth slows we will see a growth of racial scapegoating and class polarization that will reduce equal opportunity to an empty phrase.

Scapegoating is not a hypothetical possibility. In past periods of economic or wartime distress, racism has led to exclusion of Asian immigrants or detention of Japanese Americans in camps. Such history can be repeated. We are already seeing this potential loom as attacks against Asian Pacifics grow and anti-Asian sentiments flourish. The Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission has found that Asians are one of the two ethnic groups most victimized by hate crimes. Further, this commission notes that Asians and Latinos often do not report hate crimes because of fear or language difficulties, so the count of incidents is undoubtedly much higher.

Such episodes come from various sentiments. Some Asian Pacific Americans have been killed by whites who blamed them for trade imbalances with Asian countries. Others have been attacked out of resentment of "people who can't speak English." Still other assaults have been in retaliation for alleged unfair competition for scarce resources.

The strength of Asian Pacific Americans has been a self-reliant attitude and strong family support system. With the reduction of institutionalized discrimination against Asians since the 1950s — for example, the amendments in immigration laws in 1965 to allow fair admittance of Asians — these traditions have allowed us to pursue education with a passion and significantly increase family income. However, the family

institution does not provide sufficient depth or breadth to tackle the economic, political, and social issues of the coming century. Measures to secure equal opportunity and to prevent scapegoating will only come with organization. Up to now, few national Asian Pacific American organizations exist. Those that have a national presence are often ethnic-specific (e.g., Japanese American Citizens League, Organization of Chinese Americans) and usually only have a minimal national staff.

Significant Asian organizing did occur against Dan Lungren as state treasurer and against the Kennedy-Simpson bill in the U.S. Senate. These, however, were defensive battles. Asian Americans did not affirmatively present an agenda or candidate.

We need to build networks and alliances around specific issues that tap our emotions and common interests. But we must also look ahead from specific, spontaneous issues, to an agreed upon agenda that has leadership and organizational backing. Unless coalitions among ethnic-specific organizations are built, Asian Americans will not be effective as a political force.

The Jewish American community learned over many years to coordinate their funding appeals. So the United Jewish Appeal raises perhaps

Korean acupuncturist
tidies up sidewalk in Los
Angeles Koreatown.



Photo by Hyungwon Kang

\$50 million per year from its own community and disperses the funds among a number of organizations and agencies. Preliminary attempts to begin a similar federated giving plan are only now being organized among Asian Pacific American groups in Los Angeles.

Finally, no Asian agenda or set of interests will succeed on a large scale without the active participation of other ethnic groups. Asian Pacific Americans in California must develop strong relationships with other groups around common interests and issues.

This process of developing strong coalitions and networks needs a proactive approach. Waiting for crises to occur and then finding groups to work with is common, but ineffective and eventually quite harmful. When Proposition 63, the English-language-only amendment, was presented, it took the coalition months and months to find common ground with other organizations. The lost time and weak finances and strategies resulted in a vote of 70 percent for the English-language restriction, which has now led to many workplaces banning other languages from being spoken on the job.

Building interethnic coalitions also means that Asian Pacific Americans will have to get involved in issues and causes that are not always high on our agenda. Reciprocal support will have to become a common approach; sharing of power will have to become reality.

Conclusion: Asian Americans and the Pacific Rim

The ethnically heterogeneous Asian population of California provides a unique resource for the state as it enters the twenty-first century. Growing economic and political ties between California and Asia create demand for the services of individuals conversant in the languages and cultures of both sides. Many Asian Americans are equipped to bridge the gaps between their countries of adoption and origin, and to train other Californians to play similar roles. It should become a matter of public concern within California how best to utilize this talent and knowledge



BRIDGING THE GAP. Vietnamese teenagers in Orange County adapt quickly to American ways. Bicultural Asians can supply links to their ancestral countries that will promote two-way trade.

Photo by Hyungwan Kang

for the benefit of all. The Asian American communities should consider how to use this unique opportunity for their own advancement. Yet, there are dangers that this chance for social advancement may be converted into a limiting factor narrowing the careers of Asian Americans. Not all Asian Americans are bilingual and bicultural, and not all of them wish or need to be.

Asian Americans also promote closer ties between California and their ancestral countries by contributing to the rise in trade, tourism, and educational and cultural exchanges. Asian governments cultivate both economic and political support among their expatriates. Immigrants also may be a potential force for unification or continued separation for those Asian countries that are still politically divided, such as Korea and China, or rife with political conflict, such as the Philippines.

Within each ethnic community, the coming of recent immigrants generates forces that unite and divide. For California, the new Asian immigration incurs costs, as well as providing new capital and labor. The increased presence of Asians may lead to apprehension within the larger community as some fear the erosion of their national culture while other Americans greet enthusiastically the possibility for a truly multicultural state. What remains to be seen is how the Asian Americans will make use of their abilities to fit in and transform California, and how California, while absorbing them, will make use of their abilities to enhance its role in the Pacific Rim.



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