Chapter 1

Introduction: Emerging Voices of Underrepresented Asian Americans

Huping Ling

> I'm a first Hmong generation to America. I came to Omaha, Nebraska in July 1979 at the age of 12. I am now living in Fresno, California. . . It is unfortunate that many Americans still refuse to understand us, the Hmong, and the struggles we endured. They must realize that we didn't come to America for economic reasons. We came to America because we had only two choices—go to a third-world country or go back to Laos and possibly face persecution. Which would you choose, especially when you had just fought with the communists for the last ten years?
>
> --Schwa Yang

> In Tibet, my family opposed the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and for that we suffered harsh persecution for many years. . . Because of my activities, the Chinese government arrested and imprisoned me for three years and four months. During those years, they tortured me. Fortunately, I managed to escape to this country, and arrived in November 1995. . . I won asylum in 1997. In 2000, lawyers at the firm of Latham & Watkins helped me to found Song Tsen Tibetan Community Outreach, A Tibetan community organization based in New York. As President of Song Tsen, I work to inform the Tibetan refugee community about the 1996 immigration law's asylum filing deadline. In a survey that Song Tsen conducted with 600 Tibetan refugees in New York City, we found that more than half did not know that it exists.
>
> --Amchok Thubten

The above personal quotes give examples of the specific socioeconomic and political experiences of the underrepresented Asian Americans prior to their immigration to the United

States, and of some of the issues and problems they confronted after their arrival in this country.[1] While a growing number of popular and scholarly works on Asian Americans reflect and interpret the experiences of the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Asian Indian Americans—the first and larger groups of Asian Americans, many newer and smaller groups such as the Burmese, Hmong, Indonesians, Kashmiri, Laotians, Mong, Romani, Thai, and Tibetans, have remained underrepresented and understudied in both popular and academic literature, with the Hmong as the only exception. Even in the case of the Hmong, most work is still in the data collecting stage.[2] Therefore, Americans are not very informed about the critical issues of emigration, ethnic identity, gender, class, work, religion, family, and education as they pertain to underrepresented Asian Americans.

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[1] The first epigraph is from Jeff Lindsay, "The Hmong People in the U.S.," http://www.jefflndsay.com/Hmong_tragedy.html; the second is from Human Rights First, "Asylum in the United States," http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/stories/storie-0.1.htm.

[2] See, for examples of academic works on Hmong, Sucheng Chan ed., Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Nancy D Donnelly, The Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Beth L. Goldstein, "Schooling for Cultural Transitions: Hmong Girls and Boys in American High Schools" (Ph. D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985); Glenn L. Hendricks, Robert T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard. Eds., The Hmong in Transition (Staten Island, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies, 1986); Karen L.S. Muir, The Strongest Part of the Family: A Study of Lao Refugee Women in Columbus, Ohio (New York: AMS Press, 1988); and Ann M. Rynerson and Pamela A. DeVoe, "Refugee Women in a Vertical Village: Lowland Laotians in St. Louis," Social Thought, Vol. 10, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 33-48.

Unlike the first, larger groups of Asian immigrants who came to America, many of whom made this choice to seek better economic opportunities, underrepresented Asian Americans were often forced to make the drastic transition to North America, with little physical and psychological preparations, by the threat of war or political persecution in their homelands. Thus, upon their arrival in the United States, they are frequently faced with questions such as "Why am I here?" "Where is home?" "Who am I?" and "Why am I discriminated against?" Because the population and socioeconomic power of these groups of Asian Americans are growing, it is important to reflect upon the paramount issues that face them today.

The ideas for this volume came to me after years of research and teaching in Asian American studies, during which time it became painfully obvious to me that the newer and smaller groups of Asians in the United States have not been adequately studied and discussed. In 2004 I was editing an encyclopedia entitled Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia (with Allan W. Austin), and this helped me to identify a number of outstanding and dedicated academics specializing in these underrepresented groups. When I approached them with the idea of an edited collection on the topic, they enthusiastically offered to contribute chapters.

Historical and Intellectual Reasons for Studying These Groups

Other than the fact that these groups have been underrepresented, there are multiple significant reasons for studying them. These reasons are closely associated with more profound factors such as how we conceive of "Asian Americans"; the recent demographic changes within these groups; the relationship between emigration and capitalism, globalization, and transnationalism; the connection between emigration and America's foreign policies in the homelands of these groups; and their cry for new identities.

"Asian Americans" as a Dynamic and Evolving Concept

The terminology of "Asian Americans" emerged from the civil rights movement in the 1960s to reflect a consciousness and awareness of Americans of Asian ancestry and their increasing population in the United States since that time. Asian American studies as an academic field consequently developed and has ever since produced a growing body of scholarship. Early on, academic programs in Asian American or ethnic American studies were largely focused on the first and larger Asian American groups--the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Asian Indian Americans. In the recent decades, programs and scholarship have expanded to include the newer groups of –the Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans. Yet many newer or smaller groups—the Burmese, Hmong, Indonesians, Kashmiri, Laotians, Mong, Romani, Thai, and Tibetans—still remain understudied. Emerging Voices: Experiences of Underrepresented Asian Americans is long overdue.

Numbers, Facts, and Beyond

The 1990 census counted 6,908,638 Asian Americans, a 99 percent increase over the 1980 census figure of 3,466,847. While Chinese (24 percent of Asian American population), Filipino (20 percent), and Japanese (12 percent) remained as the largest groups, the newer immigrant groups—Burmese, Hmong, Indonesian, Kashmiri, Laotian, Mong, Romani, Thai, and Tibetan —each accounted for 2 percent or less of the Asian American population.[3] The 2000 census counted more than 11 million Asian Americans including at least twenty-eight ethnic groups, a 63 percent increase over the 1990 census count. Among the Asian American

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[3] U. S. Department of Commerce, economic and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, We the Americans: Asians (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 2.

population, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, and Korea ranked as the largest four groups. Hmong ranked as the tenth largest group, numbering 186,310; Thai as the eleventh, numbering 150,263; Indonesians as the thirteenth, numbering 63,073; and Burmese as the seventeenth, numbering 16,720.[4] These numbers indicate rapid demographic change among underrepresented Asian Americans.

As with the population increase, the geographical distribution of Asian Americans across the United States has been uneven, with approximately 66 percent of Asian Americans concentrated in the five states of California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, and Illinois. While the Asian American population has been highly concentrated in California, New York, and Hawaii, the concentration varies by groups. According to the 2000 census, the top five states for foreign-born Hmong are California, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and North Carolina, and the top five metropolitan areas for foreign-born Hmong are Minneapolis—St. Paul, Minnesota; Fresno, California; Sacramento-Yolo, California; Milwaukee-Racine, Wisconsin; and Merced, California.[5] About half of the 50,000 and more Indonesians reside in California, of which around three-quarters live in Southern California.[6] Kashmiri Hindu Americans largely concentrate in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City, Washington D.C., Fresno, California, along with smaller populations in the metropolitan areas of Atlanta, Philadelphia, Miami, and Houston.[7] The top ten states for Thais are California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Washington, Virginia, Nevada, Maryland, and Georgia, and the top ten cities are Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San

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[4] *U.S. Asian Population.* U. S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

[5] Ibid.

[6] 2000 Census; Clark E. Cunningham's chapter in the anthology.

[7] See Haley Duschinski's chapter in the anthology.

Francisco, Huston, Seattle, San Diego, Las Vegas, San Jose, and Long Beach, California.[8] The top five places in North America for Tibetans in 2000 are New York City and New Jersey, Toronto, Minnesota, Northern California, and Wisconsin.[9]

While the many success stories of Asian Americans have broadly influenced Americans' conception of Asian Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders overall have a higher rate of poverty than other groups. `Thirteen percent of Asian Americans and 17 percent of Pacific Islanders live below the federal poverty line, compared to 12 percent of the general population, according to the 2000 census.[10] Among Asian Americans, many of the underrepresented groups have an even higher rate of poverty. Thirty-eight percent of the Hmong population, for instance, are living below the federal poverty line.[11] Of all Asian Americans, this is the poorest group.

Such statistics have the following implications. First, the Asian American community is becoming increasingly diversified, as the experiences of these groups are far more complex than can be conveyed by the notion of "model minority." This development needs to be documented. Second, this diversity poses new challenges not only to communities affected but also to the academic field of Asian American studies. Third, new directions in the study of fast-changing

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[8] 2000 Census; see Todd LeRoy Perreira's chapter in the anthology.

[9] See Yosay Wangdi's chapter in the anthology.

[10] Asian American Justice Center, A Community of Contrast: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States, Demographic Profile (Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, Asian Law Caucus, and Asian American Institute), 10.

[11] 2000 Census.

Asian American groups will have an impact on federal and local policies, as issues affecting these minorities are negotiated.

Emigration and Capitalism, Globalization, and Transnationalism

Scholars have pointed out the connection between immigration and the development of capitalism. John Bodnar, in his work The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America testifies that "most of the immigrants transplanted to America in the century of industrial growth after 1830 were in reality the children of capitalism."[12] Sucheng Chan, in her synthesis of Asian American history, has also placed the Asian emigration under the context of global imperialism and colonialism.[13] Other academics have also made similar claims.[14]

A growing number of scholars have noted that immigrants are living their lives across geographical borders and are maintaining close ties to their homelands. Many social scientists have begun to use the term "transnational" to describe such cross-national, cross-cultural phenomena since the 1990s.[15] In 1992, anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and

[12] John Bodnar, The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1.

[13] Sucheng Chan, Asian Americans: An Interpretive History (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 1-23.

[14] See for example, Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), 21-75; Huping Ling, Surviving on The Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1989).

[15] Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds., Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered (New York: The New York Academy of Science, 1992), ix.

Critina Blanc-Szanton analyzed and conceptualized transnational migration in more precise language. They defined **"**transnationalism**"** as "the emergence of a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations--familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders."[16] Like other ethnic Americans, emigration of underrepresented Asian Americans has been the product of capitalism, globalization, and transnationalism.

Emigration and American Foreign Policy

The emigration of underrepresented Asian Americans is in part a consequence of American foreign policy, as is mostly evident in the case of the Hmong. Since the end of the Indochina War in 1975, over one million refugees and immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos arrived in the United States. The Southeast Asian refugees are a product of the longest war in modern history—the thirty-year Vietnam War (1945-1975) and its metastasis into Laos and Cambodia in the 1960s and early 1970s. In Laos, the Hmong, an ethnic minority of the mountainous highlands, had originally migrated from southwest China, recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight a "secret war" against the Pathet Lao, and endured most of the war's casualties, with 400,000 Hmong killed, thousands more injured and disabled, and countless people missing. By 1975, about a third of the Hmong population had been uprooted by war. In addition to Hmong, Mong emigrants from Laos also come to the United State under similar circumstances.

Tibetan emigration is also the result of American foreign policy. In 1951, the U.S. government urged the Dalai Lama to renounce an agreement made between his negotiators and

[16] Ibid.

Beijing and encouraged him to go into exile. The U.S. commitment to Tibet had been presented in a series of proposals to the Dalai Lama: "The first concerned the official position of the Dalai Lama and the legal status of Tibet with the consequences this would have for any appeals made to the United Nations; the second provided guarantees for the maintenance and political support of the Dalai Lama and his entourage while they remained in exile; the third was a pledge of support for the resistance hedged by what limitations Indian policy might impose."[17] These guidelines formed the basis of the relationship between the Tibetans and the U.S. government for decades to follow.

America's close relation with the non-Communist nations in Southeast Asia is in part responsible for the exodus from these countries. For instance, Christian organizations, backed by the U.S. government, have penetrated Indonesia and converted natives to the religion. As we'll see from the contributions to this collection, most of the Indonesia migrants, either Chinese Indonesians or native Indonesians, are Christians who were already Christianized in Indonesia.[18]

Ethnic Identity: Old Labeling and New Consciousness

The ethnic identity of underrepresented groups of Asian Americans also challenges the conventional perception. The underrepresented Asian Americans have been previously conveniently grouped in "East Asian" (in the case of Tibetan), "South Asian" (Kashmiri), and "Southeast Asian." In the "Southeast Asian" group, Burmese, Hmong, Laotian, Mong, and Thai are from the states within "mainland region," while Indonesian "maritime region."[19] The Romani

[17] See Wangdi's chapter.

[18] See Cunningham' chapter.

[19] Mary Somers Heidhues, Southeast Asia: A Concise History (London: Thamas and Hudson, 2000), 7-8.

have been excluded from any of the groupings. The inclusion of Romani in this volume is primarily based on the northern Indian origin of Romani who departed from Indian in the eleventh century. Examining the Indian ethnic origin of the Romani people would shed light on the interpretation of their identity—Romani culture may have been more influenced by Indian and more generally Asian culture than by the Middle Eastern and European traits acquired later, as the author of the chapter asserts.[20] Furthermore, the inclusion of Romani also timely reflects the currently heated scholarly debate on the inclusion of Arab Americans of Central and West Asian heritage into Asian American studies.[21] Therefore, either emphasis on their Asian or Middle Eastern heritage would make it worthwhile to explore the Romani identity in the volume. As the field of Asian American studies is steadily developing and evolving, it embraces more previously uncharted areas. Reflecting the trend and representing the new intellectual energy, the contributors of this anthology challenge the general labeling, and propose mind-provoking and refreshing new frameworks on the identity of the underrepresented Asian Americans.

The Meaning of the Term "Underrepresented Asian Americans"

The term "underrepresented Asian Americans" reveals these groups' conditions in America on the multifaceted fronts of ethnicity, education, employment, religion, social class, and scholarship.

Ethnicity. Ethnically, most of these groups are small, each accounting for 2 percent or less of the Asian American population. Furthermore, the countries or regions of their origins have been

[20] See Suzuko Morikawa's chapter.

[21] Ibrahim Aoude, "Arab Americans and Ethnic Studies," Journal of Asian American Studies Vol. 9, no. 2 (2006): 141-155; Sanaina Maira and Magid Shihade, "Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies," Journal of Asian American Studies Vol. 9, no. 2 (2006): 117-140.

economically devastated, politically unstable, and ethnically marginalized. Each chapter of the anthology pays close attention to the diverse ethnic origins and rich ethnic heritage of every ethic group presented in the volume.

Education and Employment. As newer and smaller groups, some of the underrepresented Asian American groups, such as the Laotians and Hmong, have lower rates of educational attainment and employment, while groups such as the Thai and Indonesian Americans have enjoyed more educational and occupational successes. Yet overall their successes and achievements have been overshadowed by those of the earlier and larger groups of Asian Americans. Five chapters (2, 3, 4, 13, and 14) of the anthology closely investigate the situations and issues associated with the educational and employment conditions of the Laotian, Hmong, and Mong. Meanwhile, another five chapters (6, 9, 10, 11, and 12) examine the strategies employed by Burmese, Indonesian, and Thai immigrants in achieving economic successes in America.

Religion. Most of the underrepresented Asian American groups came from countries or regions with strong religious influence, and subsequently religion has been a vital component of their American life. However, there have been limited studies on the importance and impact of religion on these groups. This anthology intends to fill that void by incorporating substantial coverage on the role of religion in the emigration and adaptation of the underrepresented Asian American groups; seven chapters (4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12) significantly or solely devote to the religious practices of the underrepresented Asian Americans.

Social Class. A large number of the underrepresented Asian Americans fall into the underprivileged social classes and are living with limited means. Most chapters of this anthology examine the social conditions and the placement of each group of underrepresented Asian Americans in contrast to those of the general population and the earlier and larger groups of

Asian Americans, in order to depict a fuller and more complex tapestry of the Asian American experiences.

Scholarship. The above factors have contributed to the underrepresentation of certain groups of Asian Americans, but must not be continuously employed to justify such underrepresentation. The essays in this volume represent an effort in bringing about scholarship on the diverse topics of underrepresented Asian Americans in various academic disciplines.

This anthology serves as a pioneering interdisciplinary work to meet the growing need underrepresented Asian American groups. It explores the life experiences of the smaller or less studied Asian American groups: Burmese, Hmong, Indonesians, Kashmiri, Laotian, Mong, Romani, Tibetan, and Thai. It focuses on the themes of assimilation and adaptation, community, education, ethnicity, economic development, family, gender, immigration patterns, marriage, religion, sexuality, and work. The volume represents a collection of original essays on the critical issues of the underrepresented groups, reflecting the most updated and cutting-edge scholarship resulting from long-term research and writing in the academic disciplines of anthropology, Asian American studies, education, English, ethnic studies, history, religion and theology, and women's studies. All contributors have done extensive scholarly work on their respective topics. The volume is conceptualized and structured around the following themes: emigration, ethnic identity, gender, work, religion, and education (in the order they appear in the volume).

Part I. Emerging Consciousness: Emigration and Ethnic Identity

Emigration and American Foreign Policies

The emigration of underrepresented Asian Americans was largely the consequences of American foreign policies in the region, mostly evident in the case of the Hmong in connection

with the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was a tragedy that affected millions Americans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, and Mong alike.

Chapter 2, "From Laos to America: The Hmong Community in the United States," by Franklin Ng, discusses the causes behind the emigration of the Hmong. Ng asserts that the Hmong in the United States are consequences of America's war to contain the Communism in Vietnam. Ng's chapter offers a global view on the burning issues pertinent to the Hmong community in the United States: the identity of the Hmong, their relationship with Laos, the future of their social organization and leadership, their place in a multiethnic society, and the impact of the religious and cultural changes on the Hmong in the United States. Ng's convincing analysis of these issues and his incorporation of the most significant and latest publications on the Hmong make the chapter extraordinarily valuable.

In addition to the Hmong, Mong emigrants from Laos also come to the United State under the same circumstances. However, due to the lack of written information about the Mong, the public generally refers to the Mong as the Hmong. Although the Mong and the Hmong are closely knit ethnic peoples from China in the eighteenth century and settled in Southeast Asia, culturally and linguistically they are classified, respectively, as *Mong Leng* and *Hmong Der*, two distinctive ethnic groups. The two groups also differ in their costumes and social practices. Since 1975, the spelling of the term "Hmong" has misrepresented and overshadowed the Mong, despite their differences.[22] To provide information and to educate the public, academics specializing in the studies of the Mong have diligently researched and written on the Mong.

Chapter 3, "Cultural Transition and Adjustment: The Experience of the Mong in the United States," by Paoze Thao, provides a comprehensive overview of the history, culture, and

[22] Paoze Thao and Chiming Yang, "The Mong and the Hmong," Mong Journal 1 (July 2004).

educational background of the Mong, and the causes of their emigration to the United States. It also focuses on the experience of the Mong from their arrival in 1976 to the present. Thao identifies social and educational problems facing the Mong, among which the sudden unexplained death syndrome (SUDS) caused by cultural shock among adult Mong males proves to be the most appalling and devastating problem. Meanwhile, Thao points out the severity in the low academic achievement of the Mong students in California.

While the Hmong and Mong in California struggle to adjust to the new environment, the Lowland Laotians in St. Louis, Missouri are making progress in adapting to the Midwestern setting thanks to the resilient and resourceful ethnic community leaders. Chapter 4 "The Role of Ethnic Leaders in the Refugee Community: A Case Study of the Lowland Lao in the American Midwest" by Pamela A. De Voe examines a Lowland Lao community in St. Louis. De Voe's research indicates that the St. Louis Lowland Lao community has been quite successful in adapting to its American midwestern environment. This has happened in spite of significant "socio-cultural-economic incongruities" between their home culture and their new urban, industrial environment. The reason for this success, De Voe believes, lies in the Lowland Lao leaders "who exemplified certain essential traits for both assisting their community and for bridging the gap between their community and the larger American multiethnic society."

Unlike the refugees from Indochina, Tibetan immigrants to North America have been legally categorized as "displaced people." In Chapter 5, "`Displaced People' Adjusting to New Cultural Vocabulary: Tibetan Immigrants in North America," Yosay Wangdi analyzes U.S. government policy for Tibetans and the anomalies of Tibetans' status as refugees. The U.S. policies to Tibet were formulated in the 1950s when the U.S. government displayed its concern over the "Tibetan issue." By the late 1980s, the United States made concerted efforts to support

the Tibet case as one of serious humanitarian concern. Wangdi asserts that the United States does not support Tibetan independence but maintains its policy to preserve Tibet's unique religious, cultural and linguistic heritage.

America's close relations with the non-Communist Southeast Asian nations have helped create the exodus from these countries. Christian organizations, with the support of the U.S. government, have actively converted natives and developed religious networks in those countries. In Chapter 6, "Unity and Diversity among Indonesian Migrants to the United States," Clark E. Cunningham examines the role of Christianity among the Indonesian immigrants in America. Although they came as voluntary immigrants, in the late 1980s and especially the 1990s Indonesians of Chinese descent and Indonesian Christians had suffered from discrimination, sporadic violence, and the threat of danger in their homeland that led to their emigration to Australia, Singapore, the United States, and Canada. Religious institutions, Cunningham observes, have long played an important role in the adaptation of new settlers to the United States and have reflected the ethnic backgrounds of their members. Protestant congregations are among the most vibrant community organizations for Indonesians in Los Angeles. The diverse religious institutions as well as secular organizations, Cunningham asserts, all help promote the ethnic unity of the Indonesian immigrants.

Unlike the groups discussed above, the Romani came to the United States under different circumstances. Chapter 7, "Dynamics, Intricacy, and Multiplicity of Romani Identity in the United States" by Suzuko Morikawa traces the Romani American emigrant passage. According to Morikawa, originally from northern India, the Romani people moved westward through today's Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey in the fourteenth century and arrived in Europe in the early fifteenth century. As early as the fourteenth century, the Romani people

experienced enslavement, expulsion from the mainstream economic establishment, and repression in the Balkan principalities and later in western Europe. In the nineteenth century, many European countries sent the Roma as free or cheap labor to their newly acquired colonies in the Americas.

The history of Kashmiri Hindu immigration and settlement in North America is recent in comparison to other communities that form the larger South Asian diaspora. Kashmiri Hindus first began to relocate to the United States in limited numbers after 1965. Chapter 8, "Community Identity of Kashmiri Hindus in the United States," by Haley Duschinski, explores the patterns of the Kashmiri Hindu emigration. Duschinski finds that the Kashmiri Hindu immigrants came to the United States generally through two methods—as students or as family members of the student-turned professionals. The first group of Kashmiri Hindu immigrants were highly educated individuals from affluent families seeking academic training or professional advancement in specialized fields such as science, engineering, and medicine. In the 1980s, these established Kashmiri Hindu Americans were increasingly able to bring their family members to the United States by using the new preference for family relatives as the basis for their visas. This new system of preference based on the principle of family reunification became especially important in light of the conflict that erupted in Kashmir Valley in 1989.

New Ethnic Identity

Challenging the conventional and convenient labeling of "East Asian", "South Asian", and "Southeast Asian" that has lump-summed the underrepresented Asian American groups, authors of the anthology present new interpretations of ethnic identities of underrepresented Asian Americans. In Chapter 2, Franklin Ng points out that the younger Hmong are "blazing new paths and creating a new Hmong American identity," as scholars have realized the danger of

excessively emphasizing the "victimization and alienation" models. The second generation of the Hmong, as Ng observes, are "both local and transnational in their orientation, being able to interact with their communities but also able to connect to the different corners of the globe."

In Chapter 3, Paoze Thao recognizes three new critical contemporary dilemmas facing the Mong: a debate over the Mong/Hmong identity, an emerging radical feminist movement to change the structures of the Mong/Hmong traditional patriarchal culture, and the misinformation, miseducation, and misrepresentation of the Mong. Thao thus advocates a separate identity for the Mong.

In Chapter 5, Yosay Wangdi questions the official documentation of Tibetans as "displaced people" and asserts that "for many Tibetans, one's identity as a Tibetan-American and Tibetan-Canadian are simply pseudonyms that indicate that the Tibetan lives in the United States or Canada. It simply serves the purpose of identification. Essentially, most Tibetans in North America see themselves as cultural ambassadors creating pockets of Tibetanness."

In Chapter 6, Clark E. Cunningham concludes that the identities of the recent immigrants from Indonesia are linked to their being "Indonesian", "Chinese", "Minahasan", "Javanese", "Batak", "Catholic" or "Adventist", and the general terms of "Asian Americans" or "Asian Pacific Americans" are largely meaningless to them.

In Chapter 7, Suzuki Morikawa explores the construction of Romani American ethnic identity through cultural nationalist and assimilation patterns in the United States. Morikawa observes that the "invisible" or "unidentifiable" Romani population in the United States has been often described as "hidden Americans" or "familiar strangers." After investigating their diversity and multiplicity, Morikawa defines Romani Americans as people of "Indian origin with Romani language, lifestyle, exclusivity, and worldviews."

In Chapter 8, Haley Duschinski defines the identity of Kashmiri Hindu Americans as Kashmiri by ethnicity and Hindu by religion. She also notes the close association between the ethnic identity of Kashmiri Hindu Americans and the Kashmiri conflict. Although escaping the military conflict, Kashmiri Hindus are not considered as refugees, as they have not crossed an international border to seek sanctuary in another country. Meanwhile, a significant element of the community's concerns is the peace process in Kashmiri.

Part II. Emerging Contributions: Gender, Work, Religion, and Education

Emerging Gender Equality: Gender, Work, and Religion

In the experiences of the underrepresented Asian Americans, the elements of gender, work, and religion are interwoven within the socioeconomic context of the immigration. The changing meanings of gender are a product of adaptation to American society. The variety of religious practices and strategies to assist American adaptation also reflect the flexibility and creativity of the underrepresented Asian Americans.

American experiences have provided the immigrants new possibilities to explore and expand their gender roles. Living in America has permitted the underrepresented Asian Americans to transform the traditional models of masculinity and femininity or to give the conventional gender models new meanings and interpretations. These transformation and development have helped achieve a greater gender equality among these groups. Jiemin Bao, in Chapter 9, "Thai Americans: Performing Gender," provides a refreshing and nuanced study on the new gender roles for both Thai American men and women. She analyzes how Thai American men tend to conform to a new set of middle-class masculine criteria by rejecting polygyny or distancing themselves from womanizing activities, a previously important indicator of

middle-class masculinity in Thailand. She illustrates how middle-class Thai American women now reject the previous "strong women" model that emphasized enduring a husband's womanizing, and have developed the new meaning of a "strong woman" as one who does not hesitate to display her achievements or to divorce.

Emigration not only permits Thai American women to defy the traditional femininity, but also allows them to play a more significant economic and spiritual role in their families in America and Thailand. Todd LeRoy Perreira in Chapter 10 "The Gender of Practice: Some Findings among Thai Buddhist Women in Northern California" further explores the expanding sphere of the Thai American women. Perreira notes that while the Thai American women negotiate traditional gender roles they have advanced the financial and spiritual welfare of their families situated both in the United States and Thailand. Most of the Thai women are self-employed, typically in the food and hospitality industry, and consequently have achieved a degree of social mobility, personal autonomy, and cultural authority otherwise unavailable to them. Perreira's creative notion of merit-making as an ethic of care, of being responsive to the needs of another, serves as a more "objective" standard to measure what constitutes a "good Buddhist" and possibly overcome what are otherwise insurmountable cultural barriers.

As in the experience of Thai American women, Buddhism has been a central element in the lives of Burmese American women. In the context of emigration, the Burmese American faith community has significantly eased the juggling and struggling of the new comers. Burmese American women have utilized the Burmese Buddhist home temples in the United States to support their ongoing survival. In Chapter 11, "Women of the Temple: Burmese Immigrants, Gender, and Buddhism in a U.S. Frame," Tamara C. Ho examines how Burmese women participate in and construct their sociocultural networks centered on Buddhist beliefs in the

United States, and how their interpretation of Buddhism demonstrates their ability of adaptation. Ho notes that an effective strategy of Burmese American women's adaptation is to syncretize their Buddhist beliefs with other more hierarchical religious paradigms. Ho further notes that "they find an agency and important role in community building and networking through the temple. . . . This close-knit network has helped these women cope with life-threatening illnesses, children with disabilities or chronic illnesses, loss of spouses or parents, and other situations they face as gendered immigrants. Buddhism becomes a useful narrative for positing alternative spaces for subjectivity, community, and resistance."

The function of Buddhism as a "useful narrative" of adaptation is also evident in the monastic and domestic religious practices among the Burmese Americans in the San Francisco Bay area. In Chapter 12, "The Function of Ethnicity in the Adaptation of Burmese Monastic and Domestic Religious Practices in the San Francisco Bay Area," Joseph Cheah examines the California cities of San Francisco, Fremont, and Daly City, which constitute a small ethnic enclave of Burmese Americans, where the Burmese American communities have established eight Burmese monasteries, four Karen Baptist churches, and the Burmese American Catholic Federation. Cheah recognizes the Burmese monasteries' function in preserving ethnic culture and identity. In addition to Buddhist monasteries, Cheah also observes Burmese American Buddhist believers in their domestic setting, where they engage in the practice of deva puja (god homage). Cheah notes that these religious practices are non-exclusive in order to appeal to spirits and deities outside of orthodox Buddhism. Cheah concludes that adaptation of Burmese Buddhism becomes "a way of constructing meanings that shape the perception and practice of monastic and domestic Buddhism."

Emerging Contributions: Concerns and Achievements

Most immigrants move to a strange land more for the better opportunities for their offspring than for themselves. Consequently, the education of their children has always been the top priority of most immigrants, including the underrepresented Asian American groups. Issues concerning education have been the primary focus of many researchers of immigration and ethnicity.

In Chapter 13, "Parent-Child Conflict among the Mong Families," Chimeng Yang investigates causes behind the parent-child conflict within Mong families. Yang documents and analyzes the cultural and emotional conflicts between Mong parents and children. Disagreeing with the notion that education was the main cause of the conflicts between Mong parents and their children, Yang believes that the conflicts are "related to the fact that an old tradition and culture are facing a new culture, language, and environment." Yang finds that the greatest concerns for Mong parents include disciplining children and the loss of the Mong language and culture.

The experiences of Hmong Americans have been viewed as refuting the widely accepted model "minority myth" associated with Asian Americans' educational and economic success. The census data have listed the Hmong as a group having the highest poverty level and the least education among all Asian Americans. According to 1990 federal estimates, 66 percent of approximately 100,000 Hmong Americans lived at or below the poverty level. Ninety-seven percent of Hmong Americans older than twenty-five years did not have a bachelor's degree, while 38 percent of Asian Americans had completed college, twice the percentage of the general

American population. Consequently, most literature on Hmong Americans has focused on their problems more than on their achievements.[23]

[23] Chan, Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America; Donnelly, The Changing Lives; Goldstein, "Schooling for Cultural Transitions;" Hendricks, Downing, and Deinard, The Hmong in Transition; and Muir, The Strongest Part of the Family.

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However, the recent developments among the Hmong Americans have demonstrated the tremendous socioeconomic, cultural, and political progress they have achieved within the decades following their emigration to America. In Chapter 14, "Hmong American Contemporary Experience," Kou Yang divides the Hmong experiences in America into three stages: the Refugee Years (1975-1991), the Turning Point Period (1992-1999) and the Hmong American Era (2000 to present). Yang finds that gender equality in the Hmong American family has been slowly but steadily improving, that Hmong Americans are involved in local politics, and that Hmong American businesses tend to be small and newly developed, with most of their businesses established in the late 1990s. Yang also notes that although there exist many pressing issues related to educational needs and problems, Hmong Americans have had many unusual educational success stories.

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