**Persistent Stereotypes About Asian Americans**

As many social scientists have noted, there are **two primary stereotypes** that continue to affect Asian Americans. One is that **all Asian Americans are the same**. That is, many people are either unable or unwilling to distinguish between different Asian ethnicities -- Korean American from a Japanese American, Filipino American from an Indonesian American, etc. This becomes a problem when people generalize certain beliefs or stereotypes about one or a few Asian Americans to the entire Asian American population. The result is that important differences between Asian ethnic groups are minimized or ignored altogether, sometimes leading to disastrous results.

The second stereotype is that **all Asian Americans are foreigners**. Although more than half of all Asians in the U.S. were born outside the U.S., many non-Asians simply assume that every Asian they see, meet, or hear about is a foreigner. Many can't recognize that many Asian American families have been U.S. citizens for several generations. As a result, because all Asian Americans are perceived as foreigners, it becomes easier to think of us as not fully American and then to deny us the same rights that other Americans take for granted. Yes, that means prejudice and discrimination in its many forms.

1. Identify and describe the different stereotypes from the reading above.



**There are many elements that make up Asian American culture. Many date back several millenniums ago. Others are in the process of being created. This section describes those old and new elements of Asian American culture and how they interact. This article examines the overall impact and significance of how things normally associated with Asia or Asian culture have influenced American culture. From Chinese take-outs to the recent success of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," many Asian elements seem to have been incorporated into "mainstream" American culture. Does this mean that the melting pot works after all?**

# The 'Asianization' of America

As recent books and newspaper and magazines articles have pointed out, elements of Asian culture seem are becoming more and more mainstream every day. As Olivia Barker's article notes, McDonalds' Happy Meals now come with Hello Kitty toys, Levi's uses karaoke to sell jeans, Budweiser modifies its "Whasssuuup?!" campaign into "Wasssaaabi!," a Mountain Dew commercial does a spoof of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, and of course, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon itself wins four Oscars and becomes the highest-grossing foreign film ever in the U.S.

If you look closer, you also see that Chinese takeout restaurants in almost every city in the U.S., even in the smallest remote towns. Hip bars, cafes, and restaurants in major metropolitan areas such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle are offering the latest Asian-influenced creations -- Tazo Chai tea, wasabi mashed potatoes, boba drinks, and new ["fusion" dishes](http://www.asian-nation.org/asian-food.shtml) that combine recipes from different Asian countries into one, served with an upscale American style.

These material elements coincide with the emergence and growing popularity of Asian and Asian American personalities who are making it big. For example, actors and actresses such as Rick Yune, Nicole Bilderback, Kelly Hu, and Lucy Liu are in high demand right now. [Baseball players](http://www.asian-nation.org/sports.shtml) from Asia, like the Seattle Mariners' former American League Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player Ichiro Suzuki, and most recently, Yao Ming in the NBA, also are international media sensations, following in the recent footsteps of Kazuhiro Sasaki, Chan Ho Park, and Hideo Nomo. In addition, many athletes (and non-athletes) sport [kanji tattoos](http://www.imdiversity.com/Villages/Asian/arts_culture_media/pc_asian_tattoos_0604.asp) that are quickly becoming another fashion trend.

Further, feng shui is increasingly being used in planning new buildings everywhere and even for weddings. Zen Buddhism is still considered chic and cool. Acupuncture is now covered by most health insurance plans. The high-performance compact car subculture popularized by young Asian Americans in southern California, otherwise known as the "[import scene](http://www.asian-nation.org/import-racing.shtml)," has led to the release of the big-budget and heavily-promoted movie The Fast and the Furious.

Multimedia creations from or inspired by Asia are the latest rage among kids -- Yu-Gi-Oh, Pokemon, Digimon, Dragon Ball Z, Nintendo, Sega, Playstation, and Final Fantasy video games, to name just a few. Newsweek even published an article describing how "Asian Guys are on a Roll," suggesting that we are the newest "trophy boyfriends." In short, things that are Asian seem to be quite "hot" right now. What's going on here?

1. Explain what is meant by the “Asianization” of America

# The Dangers of Popularity

On the one hand, many Asian Americans welcome this influx and mainstream integration of Asian American cultural elements as long-overdue and inevitable. They point out that it was only a matter of time before the rest of American society noticed that Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic minority group and that in many of the major metropolitan areas in the U.S., Asian Americans are 10% or more of the population.

They note that Asian Americans have left their mark on the rest of American culture for a while. It's only now that the different elements are being noticed, publicized, and associated with each other. At the least they argue, this promotes more interaction and familiarity with Asian American culture and a greater understanding of Asian American history.

On the other hand, many other Asian Americans are more skeptical and even cynical of this "Asianization" of American culture. They point out that even with the growing popularity of Asian cultural elements, in many ways Asian Americans are still the targets of prejudice and discrimination. They also note that the popularity of some of these cultural elements can even reinforce stereotypes. For example, with the success of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and other martial arts movies starring Jackie Chan and Jet Li for example, many non-Asians may assume that all Asians know martial arts.

Further, Asian American critics also argue that while there are still plenty of shortcomings when it comes to the representation of Asian things or people. For example, a coalition of civil rights groups recently pointed out that the four major television networks overwhelming feature White actors and actresses on their shows and rarely cast racial/ethnic minorities in prominent roles. There are still calls to boycott networks that continuously fail to hire more minority actors and actresses.

Also, many roles that feature Asian Americans conform to old offensive stereotypes that force actors and actresses to play prostitutes, gang members, or for them to fake an "Asian" accent or learn martial arts. In other words, they're supposed to conform to America's superficial stereotypes of how Asians are "supposed" to look, sound, and act. This "exoticization" and "orientalism" does nothing to promote a balanced and fair picture of what Asian American culture is really about.

As with everything else in life, there needs to be a balance between promoting Asian culture just for the sake of increased exposure and popularity and on the other, making sure that it's completely authentic and acceptable to us. These things don't have to be mutually exclusive. In fact, many times they exist quite nicely together -- you just have to look a little deeper.

1. What are the dangers of popularity?



**The Fundamentals of Ethnic Identity**

Scholars from many different academic disciplines have generally categorized ethnic identity formation along two main theoretical frameworks: primordial versus situational. While these two categories ultimately represent a simplistic dichotomy to characterize processes of ethnic identity formation, they are still very useful in framing our analysis of ethnic identity.

The **primordial** (also known as "essentialist") perspective argues that people have an innate sense of ethnic identity -- it is something that people are born with, is instinctive and natural, and is difficult if not impossible to change. This is illustrated by the natural instinct to favor one's kin or co-ethnics over non-kin and non-ethnics. The persistence of ethnocentrism and even outright conflict between different racial/ethnic groups attest to the historical and continuing validity of the primordial basis of ethnic identity.

On the other hand, the **situational** perspective (also known as the "constructionist" or "instrumentalist") states that ethnic identities are socially defined phenomena. That is, the meaning and boundaries of ethnic identity are constantly being renegotiated, revised, and redefined, depending on specific situations and set of circumstances that each individual or ethnic group encounters.

Within the situational perspective, there are several sub-theories about how ethnic identity is formed and reformed, shaped and reshaped. For example, sociologists argue that ethnic identity can resurgent or emergent. **Resurgent** ethnic identity is the idea that traditional or ancestral identities can reemerge through historical events and particular circumstances.

One common example is the ethnic identity of Japanese American after World War II. Many Japanese American adults who were imprisoned during WWII initially discarded their identity after the end of war, to avoid any association, shame, or embarrassment with being imprisoned. However, after movement to demand compensation and redress for this injustice developed in the 1980s, many felt a newly resurgent sense of being Japanese American as they united to fight for an official apology and reparations from the federal government.

Also, many Japanese American children who were born after the end of the war felt a resurgent sense of Japanese American identity after learning about their parents' imprisonment experiences and identifying with their history of perseverance and strength. This idea about resurgent ethnic identity is sometimes represented by the famous quote "What the father wishes to forget, the child wishes to remember."

On the other hand, **emergent** ethnic identity involves the creation of new forms of group identity due to the convergence of particular circumstances. More specifically, because of demographic changes or competition and conflict with other groups, a new ethnic identity based on group solidarity and similarity of experiences might form. Some argue that the identity of "Asian American" is a perfect example of an emergent ethnic identity.

That is, prior to the Civil Rights Movement, virtually no Asian ethnic group considered themselves part of a larger "Asian American" social group. Rather, they identified solely based on their own national origins (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.). But building on the Civil Rights Movement's focus on racial/ethnic solidarity and group consciousness, the pan-Asian identity of "Asian Americans" eventually emerged, emphasizing shared experiences and commonalities of having Asian ancestry.

1. Define and give examples to the types of perspectives on Ethnic Identity (primordial, situational, resurgent, emergent)

**Connections Between Assimilation and Ethnic Identity**

Because ethnic identity among second generation Asian Americans is inevitably tied to the process of assimilation, we should recognize the different forms of assimilation and how different factors can affect assimilation outcomes. Among the most famous conceptions of assimilation is the distinction between behavioral assimilation (otherwise known as "acculturation") and structural or socioeconomic assimilation.

**Behavioral assimilation/acculturation** occurs when a newcomer absorbs the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the "host" society. This may also involve learning English and/or becoming an American citizen. Within this process, Asian Americans may choose to retain much of their traditional Asian culture, norms, and behaviors while still acquiring those of mainstream American society, or to discard his/her traditional forms of Asian culture entirely in favor of complete immersion and identification with mainstream American society.

The second major type of assimilation, **structural or socioeconomic**assimilation, refers to when Asian Americans enter and become integrated into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the host country -- i.e., when they begin to participate as full members of American society. Alternatively, it can also refer to when they attain socioeconomic mobility and status (usually in the form of income, occupation, residential integration, etc.) equal to other members of mainstream American society.

The process of undergoing either behavioral or structural/socioeconomic assimilation can occur in a linear or "straight-line" manner in which the passage of time and the succession of generations lead to increasing economic, cultural, political, and residential integration into American society. Or it can happen in a non-linear, circular, or "bumpy" manner in which Asian Americans revive or retain old cultural traditions, norms, and behaviors and choose to remain somewhat isolated from mainstream American society (the "ethnic resilience" model) or alternatively, to combine elements of both traditional Asian (although they may modify old traditions and values to fit their contemporary circumstances) and mainstream American culture (sometimes referred to as "**segmented assimilation**").

5. Explain the different types of assimilation (behavioral and structural)

**Multiple Factors and Multiple Outcomes**

Other research has focused on why why certain racial/ethnic groups **assimilate faster** than others. One factor are racial differences. White immigrants who came to the U.S. back in the 1800s did experience prejudice and discrimination. But because they were White, they were eventually able to integrate into American society more quickly and easily than non-White immigrants and minorities.

The second factor is the structure of the economy. During times of economic prosperity, there are plenty of economic opportunities to go around for everyone. But in times of economic difficulties, there is more economic competition and therefore, more hostility toward minorities and immigrants who are frequently seen as economic threats. In this situation, groups who are in similar economic situations are likely to be antagonistic toward each other because they're competing for the same jobs and social/economic resources.

The final reason why some immigrants assimilate faster than others is because of class differences. Some ethnic and immigrant groups on the whole have higher levels of education, job skills, and English proficiency than others. This in turn gives them specific advantages in achieving socioeconomic success faster than others by allowing them to get jobs that are higher-paying, more stable, and that offer higher status. As a result, they are able to achieve socioeconomic mobility and success faster than other groups.

Sociological research has also found that the strength of the **child's relationship** with his/her parents, along with the level of his/her attachment to the ethnic community also play important roles in determining ethnic identity among second generation Asian Americans. For example, if child-parent relationship is strong and healthy, the child is more likely to take on the parent's identity, whatever that may be (i.e., national origin, hyphenated American, pan-Asian, or just "American"). However, if the child has conflicts with his/her parents, the more likely the child will identify differently from the parent.

Studies also show that the strength of a child's **ethnic community** strongly affects his/her identity. Those who live within a cohesive ethnic community and who regularly participate in co-ethnic organizations and activities (i.e., peer groups, churches, etc.) are more likely to identify with a national origin or hyphenated-American identity, even if the ethnic group tends to be low-income or working class. In other words, socioeconomic success is not as important in determining ethnic identity as the level of social solidarity within the co-ethnic community.

Perceptions of racism and discrimination can also have influences on Asian American second generation ethnic identity. According to the situational/constructionist/ instrumentalist perspective, for an Asian American to have a strong attachment to traditional forms of ethnic identity, it is not enough to just perceive or experience high levels of ethnic competition, prejudice, or discrimination. It is the person's reaction to these perceptions and experiences that will determine how s/he identifies.

That is, if s/he internalizes these experiences of competition and discrimination and his/her self-esteem is negatively affected as a result, s/he is more likely to be embarrassed to be identified as Asian American. On the other hand, these experiences of competition and discrimination can also lead to a greater sense of unity and solidarity and as a result, greater identification with his/her Asian ethnicity.

6. Identify and describe 5 factors of assimilation.

**The Personal and The Political**

Finally, one of the most famous theories of assimilation comes from sociologist Milton Gordon. He theorized that there are three possible outcomes of assimilation. The first is **Anglo conformity**, which is when the minority or immigrant is taught that the norms, values, and institutions of the majority group are superior and that they should adopt them in order to be accepted. This is symbolized as A+B+C=A.

The second outcome can be the **melting pot,** a term that almost all Americans have heard about. That's when different racial/ethnic groups come together and out of this interaction comes a new culture that incorporates elements from all groups into one. This can be represented as A+B+C=D.

The third possible outcome is **cultural pluralism**, which others have also called the "salad bowl." This is when the different racial/ethnic groups keep their unique cultural norms, traditions, and behaviors, while still sharing common national values, goals, and institutions -- A+B+C=A+B+C. Gordon concluded that up to this point in American society, Anglo conformity has best represented the history of assimilation in America.

In the end, there are many internal and external factors that can affect how ethnic identify among second generation Asian Americans. Research suggests that there can be notably institutional patterns to this seemingly individual process. These identities can also overlap, change over time, and even be one of many simultaneous identities in effect at the same time.

1. Explain the differences between Anglo Conformity, Melting Pot, and Cultural Pluralism.



**What are some of the biggest differences between second generation Asian American culture and first generation culture? Issues of assimilation, Americanization, and respect for the "old" way or traditions inevitably come up in this discussion. The following is a reprint of an article written by Deborah Kong for the Associated Press, originally titled "New TV Show Targets Young Second-Generation Asian Americans," that touches on these issues and how they in turn affect the development of the larger Asian American culture.**

# Out with the Old, In with the New

Sporting blue-streaked hair and a ripped pink mesh shirt, Jeannie Mai sat in the conference room of a TV station that broadcasts mostly Asian-American programing and confessed. She couldn't relate to their "old school" Vietnamese news program, even if her grandmother adored it. All eyes turned to Michael Sherman, the station's general manager, who stayed cool. "I've heard it many times," he told the 24-year-old Mai.

Sherman's facing a common dilemma in ethnic media: How to hold onto audiences that include American-born children of immigrants - young people who speak English and are at once thoroughly Asian and American. One answer may be "**Stir**," a new TV show that will be hosted by Mai and three other hip, energetic young Asian-Americans.

"I think there's a little bit of anxiety on the part of ethnic media right now," said Jeff Yang, the show's editorial director. "People are trying to grope for a way to remain relevant as their community itself expands and changes." Stir, a 30-minute magazine-style show, is scheduled for broadcast early next year, nationally by the International Channel as well as on KTSF, a San Francisco-area station. Shot in a bright, zippy style, the aim is to provide entertaining, Asian-American spins on topics like sports, the gender divide and the meaning of cool.

For the show's co-producers -- the International Channel and KTSF, which devotes most of its programming to Asian-language shows -- it marks the **first foray** into original, English-language programming targeted at 18- to 25-year-old Asian-Americans. And "Stir" is just one example of how broadcasters are trying to entice young, second- and third-generation audiences. Spanish-language network Telemundo recently added closed-caption English subtitles to two of its popular soap operas.

Telemundo cable network Mun2 features music videos, game shows, extreme sports and other programs in Spanglish, a blend of Spanish and English - and in English alone. And Si TV, an English-language network for young Hispanic and multicultural audiences, plans to start up early next year. Together, the efforts represent a rush by broadcasters and advertisers to appeal to rapidly growing groups of minority youth. For example, there are about 12.5 million Asians in the United States, and more than a third are under 25, according to census data.

# It's All About the Bling Bling

"Generally speaking, Asian-Americans are [higher-educated](http://www.asian-nation.org/demographics.shtml) than the norm" and have higher household incomes, said Jim Honiotes, the International Channel's vice president of marketing and communications. "They're valuable eyeballs to be catering to and no one else is doing it." "Stir" is being built around four hosts and two correspondents who span a range of ethnic backgrounds. Mai, a chic, outspoken makeup artist, is Chinese and Vietnamese.

Chinese-American Brian Tong works at an Apple Computer store, shooting hoops and singing karaoke in his spare time. "Obviously I'm a tech head, but I'm a cool nerd," the 24-year-old says. Sabrina Shimada is 18, half Japanese and half German, and jokingly calls herself "the resident It Girl" who loves shopping and dance clubs. Thirty-one-year-old Tony Wang is a Taiwan-born corporate attorney who graduated from Harvard Law School and catches waves on the weekends.

During a recent editorial meeting at KTSF's offices just south of San Francisco, Yang and the hosts bounced around story ideas, touching on the ephemeral nature of cool, Asian rappers, Korean golfers, engineers and Internet babes, Asian tattoos and Chinese restaurant workers. The show is striving to strike the right balance between provocative and political, mainstream and Asian-American.

"It's not about identity politics," Yang said. "It's not going to be about the embattled minority. This is about the **empowered majority**." Beyond interviewing Asian women who model at import car shows (an idea for the gender divide episode) or investigating "the ramen lifestyle" of budget-challenged college students, the hosts also hope to act as a kind of mirror for their audience. Through the International Channel, the show will reach about 12 million households.

# Our Time to Shine in the Spotlight

"I want to be a walking mike for everybody else, every other Asian-American that lives here," Mai said. Tong agrees: "We're playing a huge role in how other people might feel about their community, themselves and how they fit into this whole world." They're also happy to be part of a show that will put more Asian faces on TV."There's nothing else out there for Asian-Americans," Shimada said. "Even just normal sitcom shows, there's the Mexican family, the Black family, the White family. The Asian person is the friend that shows up twice in the show."

All say they were a bit surprised when they first heard about KTSF's involvement. "That's the stuff that my grandmother would knock me upside the head to get me to hush so she could listen to, and I'd be like, 'She's watching that thing again,"' Mai said. "It never catered to me. I never understood it. "When I heard they were making an English-speaking show, I was like, 'Hold up. OK, this is crazy. What are they doing?"'

Sherman said Asian-language programming will always be the station's main focus. But "Stir" is "part of our effort to stay ahead of the demographic tidal wave," he said. "The one piece of the puzzle we always felt we were missing was the English-language show." Noting NBC's acquisition of Telemundo in 2001, Sherman said it's all part of the same trend, "ethnic media becoming kind of **mainstream** in the U.S. just because of the demographic changes."

1. What are some of the biggest differences between second generation Asian American culture and first generation culture?