Assimilation and Identity in the Asian American Experience
Sociology 410/510-Experimental Course
Spring 2005, CRN: 38128/38129
Meets: Tuesday, 2 - 4:50 PM, Esslinger 116

Professor Jiannbin Lee Shiao
Office Hours in PLC 632: Thursdays, 2-5 PM (drop-in or sign-up on my office door).
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Prerequisites: As for all 400-level Sociology coursework, Sociology 310, 311, and 312. Non-majors: Ethnic Studies 101-102 or Sociology 204 AND permission of the instructor. Also recommended: Sociology 345 or substantively equivalent coursework.

Blackboard: Students are required to check the course's Blackboard site weekly for messages from the professor. In addition, selected files for handouts, overheads, and related materials will be available for downloading. The professor will send regular emails to students through the Blackboard system which delivers emails to their official email accounts as registered in DuckWeb. If you need technical assistance with your Blackboard account, please see the staff at the Information Technology Centers at the Knight or Science libraries.

Course Description:

"Our main policy challenge has become, how do we get others to pay attention to significant differences within a population that non-Asians see as on the whole doing better than other communities of color?"
(Henry Der, Chinese for Affirmative Action, San Francisco, CA, 1996)

Who are Asian Americans? Since the 1960s, the Asian American population has multiplied in size, largely from immigration. The new immigrants have joined older communities that date back to the 19th century and even earlier in some locales. Nevertheless most Americans have such difficulty shaking the association between looking Asian and being foreign that being Asian is tantamount to looking foreign.

The children of the recent immigrants and refugees make up a new second generation of "foreign-stock" Americans whose proportion of the U.S. population rivals for the first time the foreign percentage during the heyday of early 20th century immigration. Commentators and scholars alike have debated the future of the new Asian Americans, wondering whether Chinese, Filipino, and Pakistani immigrants will become the Irish, Italian, and Jewish Americans of decades past.

Not always appreciated by non-Asians or even first generation Asian Americans (immigrants) are the effects of U.S. race relations on Asian Americans. Because Americans tend to sort by their looks and often along racial hierarchies, Asian Americans have had to learn to be Asians in order to become Americans. Given historical differences and even antagonisms between the Asian nations from which they have departed, their parallel and even convergent assimilation is all the more remarkable.
This class examines the contemporary Asian American experience. We will consider in depth two sociological contributions to Asian American Studies: the concepts of assimilation and racial/ethnic identity. These issues have been the subjects of intricate debates about the Asian American experience since the early 20th century, though we will focus on recent decades. We are fortunate that since the 1980s, independent film and video became a major arena of Asian American social commentary and expression. Some journalists have even equated its significance to that of early rap music for the African American community, e.g. Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* in 1988. Accordingly, the course materials include in-class screenings of such videos – both essentials and new classics.

We begin with an introduction to Asian American history and its legacy for the Asian American experience today. Then we define and explore assimilation and identity before surveying a range of contemporary issues that challenge the view inherent in the concepts that Asian Americans are best understood as following the path of European immigrants rather than that of colonized minorities, i.e. Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, etc.... We return at the end of the course to adjudicate between two "middle positions": racialized ethnicity and omniculturalism. Each theorizes Asian experiences "between" the paths of Anglo conformity and minority resistance. In fact, the in-class final exam will be mostly essay questions asking you to apply what you've learned in the term to a memoir by an Asian American journalist.

My approach is mainly thematic rather than group specific. Implied in all of the course's topics is the role of (White) America in shaping the "rules of the game" for assimilation and identity, beyond the level exercised on "White immigrants". However, when appropriate, we will attend to the unique aspects of the experiences of individual groups. For instance, given ongoing demographic trends, Japanese Americans will remain the group with the highest proportion of American-born yet with an increasingly smaller share of the Asian American population.

However, this course is not a comprehensive survey of contemporary Asian American issues. Nor is it a class on comparative Asian American experiences or Asian American social movements. Neither is it a substitute for courses that focus on a single ethnic group or courses that might systematically compare the experience of Asian Americans with other racial minorities, i.e. Sociology 345 and 445. However, I will provide you an introduction to two major issues of longstanding debate in the Asian American experience; in fact, without a deep understanding of assimilation and identity, one might miss the broad sociological implications of the more intimate aspects of Asian America.

Course Readings:

• A course packet of excerpted book chapters and articles. All readings that are required for the graduate students are recommended for undergraduates.
• All materials are also on Reserve at Knight Library.

Assignments and Their Assessment:

• During weeks 2-8, you will write and submit 4 reading essays, each covering all of the required reading materials for a given week and a single-spaced page in length for undergraduates and 1-2 pages for graduate students. Extra credit is available for including a recommended reading in an essay. Each essay is due at the start of the class for which the readings were assigned. For example, the essay covering the week 4 readings will not be accepted after the class meeting in week 4. In total, this assignment is worth 15% of your final grade. A more detailed assignment handout will become available.
• 2 Sociological film reviews: 5-6 pp each examining a video or film, applying the relevant readings and other materials. You will have a choice of videos/films for the first paper, and all students will focus on a single video for the second paper. Together, these papers are worth 30% of your final grade.
  a) Review format: The film review papers should each have a cover page indicating, at minimum, the paper's title, the student's name, the course number, and the term & year. Also, these papers should end with a bibliography, but neither the cover page nor the bibliography will count toward the required page length. Each page after the cover should have a footer with the student's last name and a page number. No margins are to be larger than one inch. No typefaces are to be larger (or smaller) than 12 points. All original text must be double-spaced; only long quotes, section titles, and the bibliography may be single-spaced. Papers attempting to reach the page limit through enlarging or shrinking typefaces, margins, or spacing will be graded down.
  b) Review submission: Papers should be submitted to the professor's box in the main Sociology department office or at the start of the preceding class meeting. Papers submitted after the due date and time (see the course schedule) are automatically late and will be discounted a full letter grade. Without advance approval, no papers will be accepted after 4 pm. Anticipate computer failures, disk problems, etc, and plan ahead.
  c) A more detailed assignment handout will become available.
• A cumulative final examination: testing mastery of facts and concepts in the reading materials, lectures, and class discussions. The regular in-class version will be composed of short answer questions and essay questions. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. A study guide will become available in the last week of classes.
  ❖ Graduate students will fulfill their examination by writing an extended review essay, 15-20 pp, analytically comparing An Accidental Asian with Legacies, and situating both in the scholarly field as represented by the course readings and four additional scholarly references from Amerasia Journal and/or the Journal of Asian American Studies. With
advance consultation based on strong performance on the first film review, undergraduates may undertake a shorter version (10-15pp) as a take-home final.

- **Class participation** is worth 25% of your final grade and includes class attendance, preparation for classroom work, participation in the class research project, the homework assignments that prepare you for the research project, and extra credit for participation in the class’s structured debates. I also encourage you to voice your thoughts and opinions as the occasion demands, including during visits to office hours. To be clear, every unexcused absence or incomplete homework will lower your grade.

**Course Policies:**

**Academic Workload:** Following university guidelines, students are expected to spend an average of 12 hours per week on this 4 credit class, including hours spent in class and section meetings.

**Reasonable Accommodations:** Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify me during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for this course.

Also, if your religious beliefs and/or university representation preclude you from attending class, please notify me at the start of the term or as soon as you become aware of the conflict. You are responsible for identifying the specific dates in conflict with the course schedule.

**Attendance:** Each of you is responsible for any material, announcements, assignments, and/or schedule changes made during class. If you miss a class, you will need to ask another student for details of what was covered; I will not repeat information in class for those who have missed classes.

**Academic Integrity:** All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of academic dishonesty, refer to the Schedule of Classes published quarterly. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. If you are in doubt regarding the requirements, please consult with me before you complete any requirement of the course. For more information on University policy regarding academic integrity, see the following website: [http://www.uoregon.edu/~conduct/sai.htm](http://www.uoregon.edu/~conduct/sai.htm).

Nevertheless, I encourage you to study together, discussing the course materials outside of class. After all, it is the dynamic tension between intellectual community and individual achievement that makes higher education possible and enjoyable.

**Academic Etiquette:** Please be respectful to all members of the class. Please arrive in class on time and do not leave early (or pack up to leave early). Both arriving late and leaving early can be very disruptive. In addition, please do not talk while I am lecturing and do not interrupt other members of the class when they are talking. Of course, you should always feel free to raise your hand if you’d like to ask a question or make a comment. Please also
control your cell phones and pagers, and do not allow them to interrupt class. I regard their use during class as disruptive and very disrespectful to both your fellow students and myself. To reiterate some important classroom climate issues from my Sociology 345 class: It is my belief that we must create a climate where everyone feels safe enough to speak about race and ethnicity. We don't have to agree with each other or “convert” others to our way of thinking. We do, however, have to respect that others may have opinions and experiences that are significantly different from our own and which may even trouble us deeply. To promote a safe climate, we will follow a few guidelines for class participation, especially in the workshops:

1. Try to avoid blanket generalizations such as "all you people...", "all Asian people...", "all White people....." Instead try, "I heard you just say...."  
2. Saying, "You can't understand how I feel because you're not White/Black/Asian/Latino/Native American," is a sure way to shut down communication and learning. Instead, try focusing on communicating your experiences or perspective as a White/Black/Asian/Latino/Native American/multiracial American.
3. For the next 10 weeks we are an intentional community of sorts, representing diverse experiences, opinions, and identities. The challenge facing any diverse community is always that of respecting and honoring difference (as opposed to stamping it out) as well as affirming what is common between its members. How successful this class is will largely depend on how successful we are in honoring both the commonalties and differences among us.

Course Schedule:
- Capitalized AUTHORS indicate books available at the UO Bookstore.
- Because we are meeting only once per week, I expect you to have completed the readings by the start of class.
- All videos will be screened in class unless otherwise announced.
- Please note that I reserve the right to change this schedule as necessary. Any changes will be announced in class, on Blackboard, or via email. You are responsible for being aware of any changes whether or not you attend class, check Blackboard, or read your email.

Week 1 (March 29) Introduction to Asian American Issues and History
- The course syllabus, from front to back!
- Video: My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha (video 04337, 85 min), by Renee Tajima-Peña
- ZIA, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2, pp. ix-52.

Week 2 (April 5) The Assimilation Perspective I
- LEE, Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-69.
- TUAN, Chapters 2 and 3, pp. 21-75.
Week 3 (April 12) The Assimilation Perspective II

- Video: *Kelly Loves Tony* (video 04752, 57 min), by Spencer Nakasano.
- LEE, Chapters 4-6, pp. 70-126.

**Required for Graduate Credit**

- ZIA, Chapter 8, pp. 195-223.

Week 4 (April 19) Anti-Asian Violence

- Video: *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (video 04196, 82 min), by Christine Choy.
- ZIA, Chapter 3, pp. 55-81.

**Class Project Assignment 1: Identification of Subject Contacts.**

Week 5 (April 26) Media Stereotypes and Representations

- Video: *Slaying the Dragon* (video 01646, 60 min), by Deborah Gee.
- VO and BONUS, Chapter 9 by Mary Yu Danico: “Internalized Stereotypes and Shame: The Struggles of 1.5-Generation Korean Americans in Hawai‘i,” pp. 147-159.

**Class Project Assignment 2: Question Construction I.**

**Required for Graduate Credit**


Week 6 (May 3) Racial Justice and Asian American Politics (continues on next page)

- Video: *Conscience and the Constitution* (video 05554, 60 min), by Frank Abe.


• Film Review 1 Due by 11:30 AM, Friday
• Required for Graduate Credit
  ✓ ZIA, Chapters 6 and 11, pp. 139-165 and 281-310.

Week 7 (May 10) New Identities and Communities
• VO and BONUS, Introduction by Rick Bonus and Linda Trinh Võ, pp. 1-19.
• VO and BONUS, Chapter 4 by Eric C. Wat: “Gay Asian Men in Los Angeles before the 1980s,” pp. 75-87.
• VO and BONUS, Chapter 7 by Rebecca Chiyoko King: “Eligible’ to be Japanese American: Multiraciality in Basket Ball Leagues and Beauty Pageants,” pp. 120-131.
• VO and BONUS, Chapter 5 by Emily Noelle Ignacio: “Filipinokaba? Internet Discussions in the Filipino Community,” pp. 89-100.
• Class Project Assignment 3: Report on Meeting with Contacts for Subject Recruitment.
• Required for Graduate Credit
  ✓ ZIA, Chapters 10 and 12, pp. 252-280 and 311-319.

Week 8 (May 17) Racialized Ethnicity: Assimilation Revisited
• Video: Yellow (video 04882, 90 min), by Chris Chan Lee.
• TUAN, Chapters 1 and 4-7, pp. 1-20, 76-167.
• Class Project Assignment 4 (in-class): Questionnaire Design I.
• Required for Graduate Credit
  ✓ ZIA, Chapters 4 and 7, pp. 82-108 and 167-194.

Week 9 (May 24) Omniculturalism: Assimilation Revisited
• LIU, read the entire book, pp. 3-203.
• Class Project Assignment 5 (in-class): Questionnaire Design II.
• Film Review 2 Due by 11:30 AM, Wednesday.
Week 10 (May 31) Wrap Up
- LIU, review the entire book.
- Class Project Assignment 6: Interview Subject
- Required for Graduate Credit
  - VO and BONUS, Chapter 15 by Andrew Leong: “How Public-Policy Reforms Shape, and
    Reveal the Shape of, Asian America,” pp. 229-243.
  - VO and BONUS, Chapter 14 by Jiannbin Lee Shiao: “The Political and Philanthropic
    Contexts for Incorporating Asian American Communities,” pp. 216-227.

Exam Week (June 6-10)
- Regular In-Class Final Examination: 1-3 pm, Monday, June 6.
- Review Essay Paper Due: 11:30 AM, Wednesday, June 8.