

The World of Transnational Asian Americans

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There has been a significant increase in the number of immigrants from Asia entering the United States in recent years. In what ways is their immigration different to that of the “old immigrants” of the mid-nineteenth century to World War II period? How valid is the claim that these are more flexible, “diasporic” immigrants? These new immigrants are also sometimes praised as “model minorities.” But have they surmounted the “racial barriers” the “old immigrants” faced? Furthermore, do these immigrants, who come from many different nations, really have a common identity as “Asian Americans”?

These questions are the main focus of this collection of papers, which is based on an international symposium, “The World of Transnational Asian Americans,” that was held on September 3 and 4, 2005, on the Komaba Campus of University of Tokyo in Meguro, Tokyo. This symposium was organized by the Center for Pacific and American Studies of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tokyo and was sponsored by “Comparative Studies on Transnationality and Cultural Hybridity of Asian Americans,” a research group funded by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) of Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

The program of the symposium was as follows:

September 3 (Sat), 2005

General Session (open to public with simultaneous translation)

Chair: Yoshiko Takita (University of Tokyo)

Opening Remark: Yasushi Yamamoto (Vice Dean, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo)

Panelists:

Daizaburo Yui (CPAS, University of Tokyo)

“The Changing Patterns of Trans-Pacific Migration: Its Past and Present”

Henry Yu (UCLA, University of British Columbia)

“Then and Now: Comparing Contemporary and Historical Asian Migrants”

Kazuo Yoshihara (Keio University)

“Social Networking among the Ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia”

Eui-Young Yu (California State University, Los Angeles)

“Changing Dynamics of the Korean Community in the US, 1990–2000”

Commentator: Masako Notoji (Director, CPAS, University of Tokyo)

September 4 (Sun), 2005

Invited Session (open to specialists and conducted in English)

Morning Session: “Asian American Immigrants and Boundaries of Race”

Chair: Yasuo Endo (CPAS, University of Tokyo)

Panelists:

Robert Lee (Brown University)

“Christian or Heathen? Late-19th Century Chinese American Intellectuals’ Debate: Religion, Social Ethics and Modernity”

Eiichiro Azuma (University of Pennsylvania)

“A Trans-Border Japanese Immigrant Community in U.S. and Mexican Californias”

Izumi Hirobe (Hokkaido University)

“Naturalization Cases of Asian Immigrants”

Commentator: Evelyn Hu-DeHart (Brown University)

Afternoon Session: “New Asian American Communities and Identities”

Chair: Yujin Yaguchi (University of Tokyo)

Panelists:

Mari Sekiguchi (Asia University, Adjunct)

“‘American Desi’: Multiple Identities among Contemporary Asian Indians”

Hideki Harajiri (Shizuoka University)

“Meanings of Modern and Post-Modern Phenomena: Formation of Transnational Communities of Korean-Chinese”

Miya Shichinohe-Suga (Tokyo Gakugei University)

“Diversity within ‘Nikkei’: the Demographic Background and Multiple Identities of the ‘Japanese Population in the U.S.’”

Hiroko Furuya (Research Fellow, JSPS)

“Being American is to be Vietnamese: Remittances, Homeland Travel, and Anti-communist Activities”

Commentator: Edward J. Park (Loyola Marymount University)

This collection includes all the papers from the above symposium except for the one by Professor Kazuo Yoshihara, who was unable to contribute his work due to personal reasons. The collection also includes papers by Professors Satoshi Nakano and Yoshiyuki Kido, the two members of the research group sponsored by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, who were unable to attend the symposium because of prior engagements.

This symposium was also supported by American Studies Foundation, Department of Area Studies of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Tokyo, the 21st Century COE Program, University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) “The Development and Present Condition of US Cultural Diplomacy in Asia,” which is led by Professor Masako Notoji. I would like to thank them for their generosity.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of Professor Yujin Yaguchi, who managed the logistical side of the symposium and the publication of this collection. Moreover, my gratitude extends to the staff of the Center for Pacific and American Studies, particularly to Mr. Toru Umezaki, the research associate of the center, and to Ms. Rikako Ryo, who provided administrative support for the symposium and other research meetings held over the years. Without the dedication of these people, neither the international symposium nor this collection would have been possible. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all of them.