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# Asian American Elders in the Twenty-first Century—Key Indicators of Well-Being (review)

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to the field of the AAM studies. Scholars and activists searching for an account more attuned to the centrality of radicalism to the movement will applaud its publication. Hopefully, it will open the conversation on Asian American activism to many more participants, viewpoints, and interpretations.

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***Asian American Elders in the Twenty-first Century—Key Indicators of Well-Being***, by Ada C. Mui and Tazuko Shibusawa. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. Xii + 208 pp. \$40.00 cloth. ISBN 978-0-231-13590-0; ISBN 978-0-231-50974-9 e-book.

Ada C. Mui and Tazuko Shibusawa's book on Asian American immigrant elders is an important contribution to our knowledge of this growing and diverse group of seniors in the United States. Using the broad brush of a survey instrument, the authors document the similarities and differences on a variety of social indicators and quality of life issues among the diverse groups comprising the Asian American and Pacific Islander population living in New York City.

Chapter 1, using a life course perspective, provides a background to historical and political events experienced by Asian elders in their native countries and in the United States. Understanding the impact of these historical events is not only useful in working with these groups but may also illuminate the dynamics of intercultural relationships between groups of Asian American elders. As the authors note, life events and pre-immigration factors such as socioeconomic status can significantly influence not only the aging experience of elders but also how they manage acculturating to a new environment.

Chapter 2 describes the nature of the sample and provides comparisons between the study sample and the 2000 Census to give readers the context for understanding the specific findings. The sample consists of 407 Asian American elders and includes Chinese, Indian, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, and Vietnamese. All seniors in the sample are foreign born, with an average age of seventy-three years. The majority reported family reunification as the primary reason for immigrating to the United States, limited English proficiency, and a relatively low median household income (\$6,000–\$8,500 a year). The portrait of issues faced by older immigrants from different Asian countries is one of the important contributions of this study, but the small sample sizes for each group and the single geographic location of the study limits the generalizability of the findings. It is

important to grasp the nature of the sample as this study primarily focuses on an important segment of Asian American seniors who have migrated later in life but does not address Asian American seniors who immigrated as young adults, as professionals to work or study, who have now aged in this country.

Chapters 3 through 8 focus on individual topics related to well-being. Each chapter begins with an overview of the literature specific to Asian American elders, a conceptual or theoretical approach to understanding the issues, the measures used, the main findings, and a discussion of the implications of the findings for practice and policy.

Chapter 3 examines health status and health-related quality-of-life indicators using a healthy aging and health disparities perspective. Although a sociocultural framework to understanding health beliefs and practices among Asian elders is described, the study does not specifically measure sociocultural variables related to health beliefs and behaviors. For example, on pages 49–50, the authors discuss cultural values and beliefs related to health care but do not directly test these ideas. Instead, differences between groups on a variety of indicators are highlighted. Limited English-language proficiency is shown to have a significant relationship with poor health-related quality of life, and the authors make a case for reducing communication barriers in health care settings to increase access to health services.

Chapter 4 focuses on psychological well-being using a life stress model and a sociocultural framework that examines family interconnectedness, harmony, and perceived generation gap as major variables. Findings show higher rates (40 percent) of mild depression in the sample as compared to other studies (15–20 percent). Sociocultural variables such as harmony and perceived generation gap were important correlates of depressive symptoms. Surprisingly, however, elders living alone reported better life satisfaction than elders living with their children. Implications discussed include the need to understand and address specific sociocultural variables to promote psychological well-being.

Chapter 5 draws upon descriptions of differences in family structures and filial expectations and uses an acculturation framework to assess the nature of relationships between traditional cultural values, extended family, parental authority, filial responsibility, and life satisfaction. Gaps between elders and their children in traditional values lead to increased dissatisfaction among elders. Considerable variations were noted between groups on adherence to traditional values and expectations of family, and the authors recommend that practitioners should understand both the strength of these traditional values and the different dimensions of these values when addressing family conflicts.

Chapter 6 examines social support networks and intergenerational exchanges between seniors and their adult children using social exchange and modernization theories. The majority of elders had small social networks, and they were connected to their children through intergenerational exchanges such as grandparenting, fixing things around the house, helping with money, and so forth.

Chapter 7 uses the health behavior model of service utilization to examine formal service use. Contrary to other studies, enabling factors such as health insurance, English proficiency, religiosity, and attitudes toward nursing home use appear to play a greater role in predicting service use as compared to need factors. Thus, the authors argue that interventions targeting enabling factors may encourage elders to use services when needed.

Chapter 8 addresses the concept of productive aging by examining grandparent caregiving and volunteering. Grandparent caregivers were likely to have lower English proficiency, shorter residence in the United States, coresidence with adult children, and greater religiosity. On the other hand, those who volunteered had better English proficiency, higher socioeconomic status, and better self-rated health. The discussion of grandparent roles, family relationships, and attitudes toward volunteering among Asian communities provides the reader with an excellent overview of factors that may be important to understanding the unique characteristics of Asian immigrant elders. These include traditional roles of elders, acculturation, and individual resources that enable elders to give back through volunteering.

The final chapter provides an excellent summary of issues that remain to be addressed for future research such as more in-depth study of these groups, and practice and policy recommendations such as providing income security and culturally and linguistically competent community services.

One of the main challenges of using a single study to focus on broader issues is that the findings do not always specifically address the larger issues discussed in the introductory sections (see earlier description of chapter 3). However, these sections may help the reader better situate the study in the context of the larger literature, and can also be used as teaching devices where students can generate ideas on how these issues might be addressed in future research. The findings also provide a fertile ground for a discussion of alternative explanations and how they might be tested. This makes the book an excellent reference for courses in social work research, courses in social gerontology, and courses that focus on culture, race, ethnicity, and immigration.

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