

REFLECTIONS ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN DIASPORA

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Much of the research on immigration experiences of Southeast Asians is concerned with the risk factors that account for their maladjustment. Whereas understanding risks are important in examining individuals' vulnerability to stress or adversity, understanding resilience or protective factors might point to interventions that reduce the impact of risk factors. With this guiding principle, this issue of *Reflections* presents a collection of individual narratives that illuminate both risk factors and protective factors for their adjustments. By linking the past and the present, these authors provide the contexts and the processes that foster their strengths and shape their work with Southeast Asian populations.

For the Southeast Asian immigrants in the United States, the route to adaptation involves assimilation while maintaining a connection to their ethnic roots. This process impacts their senses of self and career choices. My narrative presents two polarizing situations where the conflicting pressure of independent self of the American society and interdependent self of the Vietnamese culture lies at the heart of interpersonal relationships. By embracing "the multiple selves," I illustrate the process of resolving this sense of ambivalence and self-doubts, which shaped my social work research and teaching agenda. Triggered by the September 11th tragedy, Phu Phan reflects on his personal journey to America as a refugee from a war-torn country to help students challenging their fear of being a victim. Phu also gives a personal account of the stereotypes that impact the professional life of a bilingual social worker, and seeks to understand the limitations of social work with Southeast Asian populations.

Several narratives address social injustice. Contending that "to be beautiful can be both a blessing and a curse," Dia Cha shares her personal experience with gender inequality among Hmong women, which led her to advocate and promote leadership for them. Doctoral students Mythu Chiem and Alma Trinidad provide personal accounts of racial and class conflicts. Mythu shares the experience of accompanying her aging father to a doctor's visit, and of her work helping refugees maneuver in a health care system where evidence of racial insensitivity still exists. Alma grieves of being displaced and reveals memories of her community and of derogatory comments about the people of her community. Through their personal and work experiences, both provide insights for social work practice.

The important roles of spirituality and of family and friendship networks in coping with tragedy are explicated in the works of two authors. Phil Tan shares his discovery of how Cambodian immigrants and their family members search for meaning through spirituality to deal with the traumatic experiences of the Killing Fields. He also shares a personal story of how spirituality helped his family members cope with their distress. Marissa Perez, a social work doctoral student, shares her family experience with the care-giving process and death and dying. She recounts how her father's illness consumed family energy and how her source of strength in such stress draws not only from a sense of spirituality, but also from support circles.

Several authors chart their involvement with the Southeast Asian population from two different perspectives. Doctoral student Duy

Nguyen and his colleague present challenges in working with their own community. They discuss how their young age and second-generation status impede the process of gaining credibility with clients and staff. Jayashree Nimmagadda and Mary Bromley present their indigenous approaches in working with the Southeast Asian population. These approaches rely on local knowledge—specifically, Buddhist teaching—and the value of interdependence.

In addition to the nine narratives described above, Bradley Ackerson reviews the recent book, *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States* by Sucheng Chan. He reports on its insights into sources of stress and individual struggles and strengths in searching for a sense of coherence when adapting to the American mainstream. Agathi Glazakos reviews two recent films, *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *Brokeback Mountain*, for their portrayals of gender and sexual discrimination, the effects of oppression on individuals, and their fight to redefine societal norms.

The themes illuminated in this special issue might share some universal knowledge. However, these accounts help us to understand differing approaches to challenges and the contexts in which these challenges arise. These narratives are not just about pain and grief, but also about finding strength to safeguard against distress and disillusionment. The authors' experiences also opened up career pathways in the helping profession to advocate for vulnerable populations.

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