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## Articles

AMOS YONG	THE FUTURE OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY: ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN INTERROGATIONS	3
JONATHAN TRAN	IDENTITY AS MISSIOLOGY	8
SHARON STANLEY	THEOLOGY FROM BAMBOO, BORDERS, AND BRICKS	15
JERRY Z. PARK	ASSESSING THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY	24
RACHEL Y. LEI	SAVING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CROSS IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN CONTEXT	38

## Book Reviews

REBECCA Y. KIM	KELLY H. CHONG DELIVERANCE AND SUBMISSION: EVANGELICAL WOMEN AND THE NEGOTIATION OF PATRIARCHY IN SOUTH KOREA	103
ANDREW LEE	SAM GEORGE UNDERSTANDING THE COCONUT GENERATION: MINISTRY TO THE AMERICANIZED ASIAN INDIANS	107
TIMOTHY TSENG	SOONG-CHAN RAH THE NEXT EVANGELICALISM: FREEING THE CHURCH FROM WESTERN CULTURAL CAPTIVITY	111
RUSSELL MOY	JONATHAN Y. TRAN INTRODUCING ASIAN AMERICAN THEOLOGIES	115

# Assessing the Sociological Study of Asian American Christianity

## ABSTRACT

In the following I review the extant literature on the sociology of Asian American Christianity which has grown exponentially since the 1980s. While some studies continue to offer complications to linear assimilation theories in explaining the role of religion among first and second generation Asian Americans, more recent research has employed other theoretical frames including supply-side religious economies, symbolic boundary formation, organizational fields, and contemporary racialization. Methodologically, the vast majority of these studies consist of regional comparisons of congregations, most of which are Chinese and Korean Protestant. In addition to a call for greater inclusion of non-Protestant Asian American Christians as well as South and Southeast Asian American Christians, I suggest substantive and methodological considerations for further research in the sociological study of Asian American Christianity.

The appearance of a journal such as SANACS suggests that Asian American Christianity is increasingly gaining attention by many academics whose work focuses on religious research. In the following, I provide an extrapolation of the basic sociological and demographic features that make up the world of contemporary Asian American Christians. Then I review the extant research on how Asian American Christianity serves as a model for other social identities (such as immigrant status and gender) and processes (such as assimilation and religious transmission). This summary will make evident the heavy reliance on the Chinese and Korean American Christian cases with little attention to the Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, and Japanese populations and the Asian American Catholic and Orthodox cases in general. Based on these comparative and theoretical absences, I draw several conclusions and suggestions for future directions in social research of one of the fastest growing racial populations in contemporary America.

**ASIAN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN DIVERSITY: A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT**

According to the latest public release of Census data, in 2007 there were over 15 million Americans who reported at least one Asian background in their ancestry which amounted to five percent of the US population (Bernstein 2008)<sup>1</sup>. This racial classification encompasses no less than 16 different nationalities from Pakistan to the Philippines with the majority falling within six in particular: China (23.5 percent)<sup>2</sup>, India (18.6), Philippines (17.8), Vietnam (10.5), Korea (10.3), and Japan (6.9). Together these six groups take up about 88 percent of the Asian population (US Census Bureau 2007). Since the Census Bureau is not allowed to collect information about religious affiliation, we must rely on surveys conducted by private firms. The most recent estimate can be imputed from the report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008). According to these results, approximately 78 percent of the US adult population affiliates with a Christian faith tradition, and more specifically, about 44 percent of those who identified themselves as “Asian” could be classified as Christian as seen in the following table<sup>3</sup>:

**TABLE 1. EXTRAPOLATED PERCENTAGES OF ASIAN AMERICANS ACROSS MAJOR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS (U.S. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY, 2008)**

	% OF ASIAN RESPONDENTS (N = 990)	% WITHIN EACH CHRISTIAN TRADITION	% OF ASIAN CHRISTIANS (N = 434)	N
EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT	19.0 (17.0)	2.0	43.3	188
MAINLINE PROTESTANT	7.5 (6.7)	1.0	17.1	74
CATHOLIC	16.1 (14.4)	2.0	36.6	159
MORMON	0.6 (0.5)	1.0	1.4	6
ORTHODOX	0.7 (0.6)	2.0	1.6	7
TOTAL CHRISTIAN	43.9 (39.2)		100.0	
BUDDHIST	13.1 (11.7)			129
HINDU	22.6 (20.3)			224
(MUSLIM)	(10.4)			(116)
OTHER FAITHS	0.4 (0.4)			4
NONAFFILIATED	20.0 (17.9)			198
TOTAL	100.0			990

1 The vast majority of those who selected “Asian” in the US Census were exclusively Asian (e.g. “Asian alone.”) at 4.4 percent (US Census Bureau, 2007).

2 The US Census makes a distinction between those who report Chinese ancestry and Taiwanese ancestry. The figure reported here refers to this distinction. The Taiwanese constitute less than 1 percent of the Asian population based on the 2004 American Community Survey.

3 The report notes fairly large margins of error for smaller religious groups such as Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims (up to 7.5 percentage points)

Unlike any other national survey available we can determine the specific religious tradition within Asian American Protestantism. About 19 percent of the Asian respondents affiliated with Evangelical Protestantism while 8 percent affiliated with a Mainline Protestant denomination. Another 16 percent were Catholic and less than two percent considered themselves either Mormon or Orthodox. However, if we limit our analysis to Asian American Christians, we find that a full 43 percent were Evangelical Protestant, 17 percent Mainline and 37 percent Catholic<sup>4</sup>. If these estimates are accurate we can confirm some claims made by scholars of Asian American Christianity. Foremost among these is that the largest religious plurality in Asian America is Christianity (Lien and Carnes 2004).<sup>5</sup> Based on my extrapolations, evangelical Protestantism is proportionally both the largest Protestant affiliation and the largest Christian affiliation. This confirms reports that conservative religion dominates among Christian Asian Americans (Carnes and Yang 2004; Yang 1999b; Alumkal 2003).

Without further access to these data, we cannot make any other assertions with regard to the Asian ethnic makeup within Asian American Christianity. For this we turn to an earlier study by political scientist Pei-Te Lien (Lien 2004a). This survey consisted largely of a multi-city survey of the largest six Asian ethnic groups and yielded a large and systematically derived sample. Lien and Carnes reported that 46 percent of this sample was Christian which is fairly similar to the Pew survey. But their proportions for Protestants (26 percent) and Catholics (20 percent) differed to some degree. Given this disparity, caution should be taken when considering the subgroup differences available only in this survey. When we look at the largest six Asian ethnic groups, Christians take up the largest religious plurality (Chinese, Japanese) and sometimes the majority (Filipino, Korean) in every subgroup with the exception of South Asians (i.e. Indian and Pakistani, 2.8 percent) and the Vietnamese (33 percent). Taken together then, while Asian American Christians take up a religious plurality, this plurality is unevenly distributed within each Asian ethnic group.

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4 If we specify further still, about 72 percent of Protestant Asian Americans were affiliated with Evangelical Protestantism, and the remaining 28 percent Mainline Protestant.

5 Even when incorporating Asian American Muslims drawn from a separate study, Asian American Christians continue to take the largest share of religious adherents in Asian America.

**TABLE 2. PROPORTION OF ASIAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANS, OTHER FAITH TRADITIONS, AND NONAFFILIATION WITHIN EACH ETHNIC GROUP (PILOT NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICS SURVEY N = 1218)**

	CHINESE	FILIPINO	SOUTH ASIAN	VIETNAMESE	KOREAN	JAPANESE	ALL
PROTESTANT	20.1	18.4	2.1	13.1	68.5	36.9	26.3
CATHOLIC	2.9	68.0	0.7	19.7	11.3	6.1	20.4
TOTAL CHRISTIAN	23.0	86.4	2.8	32.8	79.8	43.0	46.7
OTHER RELIGIONS	19.5	7.2	77.3	49.7	7.7	26.2	26.4
NONE/REF	57.5	6.4	19.9	17.5	12.5	30.8	26.9

ANALYSES USING THE PNAAPS 2001. COLUMNS ADD UP TO 100.

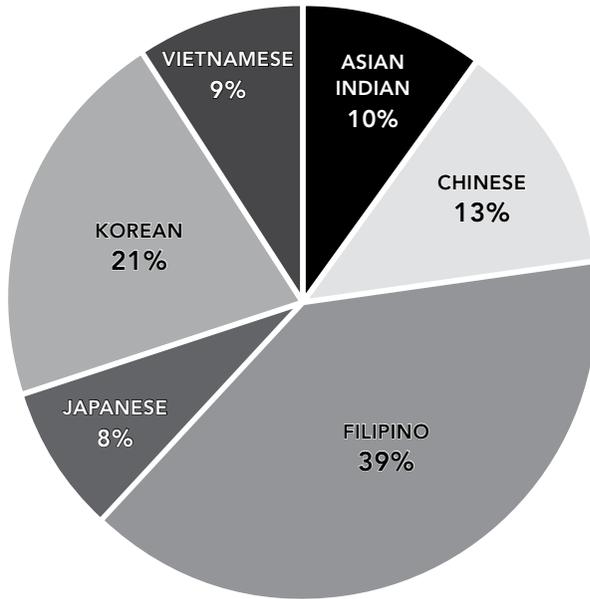
According to sociologist R. Stephen Warner, migration is a self-selecting process that tends to draw religious adherents that resemble the dominant religion of the receiving country. Thus he notes “three-quarters of Korean Americans are church members, compared with one-quarter in Korea” (13) (Warner and Wittner 1998; Warner 2001). Based on the findings shown here from a sample of Asian Americans (most of whom are first generation immigrants), this statement is accurate with respect to the Korean case. More precisely, it is not only that there is a self-selection of Christian immigrants from Asia but also a specific migration of Protestant Christian immigrants. In the Philippines for example, less than 6 percent of the population is reportedly Protestant (San Buenaventura 2002), whereas over 18 percent of Filipino Americans claim this affiliation. A report by the Government of Vietnam states that Protestantism takes up around 1 percent of the population (Government Committee For Religious Affairs 2007) whereas 13 percent of their American counterparts report the same.

But the same may not hold for South Asian Christians in the PNAAPS sample. Indian Christians represent about 2 percent of the Indian subcontinent population, whereas less than 3 percent of South Asian respondents in this survey report a Christian affiliation. Part of this disparity is due to the absence of an “Orthodox Christian” category in the PNAAPS.<sup>6</sup> Scholars generally agree that estimating the Christian Asian Indian population in the United States is difficult (Joshi 2006; Williams 1996). Religious studies professor Raymond Williams estimated about 110,000 to 125,000 Asian Indians in 1995 were of Christian heritage (Williams 1996: 39). Based on this figure and the mean difference in the Asian Indian population between 1990 and 2000 (approximately 1,247,106), Christian adherents should be about 8 to 10 percent of the Asian Indian population. If this is the

<sup>6</sup> Due to the diversity of religions in India, it is difficult to ascertain the proportion of Asian Indian respondents who are Orthodox in the “Other religion” category of the PNAAPS.

case then Warner's claim of Christian overrepresentation would still apply. Using these figures we can roughly estimate the size of each of the largest Asian ethnic groups as a proportion of the Asian Christian subset as seen in the following figure:

**FIGURE 1. ESTIMATED ASIAN ETHNIC CHRISTIAN DISTRIBUTION OF THE SIX LARGEST ETHNIC GROUPS**



Since the PNAAPS was taken near the 2000 Census, I estimated that 4.1 of the 8.8 million Asian Americans in the largest groups were affiliated Christians. Given the problems with estimating the Asian Indian Christian population, I tried several different assumptions to obtain the best approximation. Using the strict figures derived from PNAAPS, Asian Indian Christians took up about 1 percent of Asian American Christians among the 6 largest groups. But when we tally the individual estimates for each ethnic group, the sum does not match the same figure as multiplying the percent of Christians in the top six groups (i.e. 3.8 million compared to 4.1 million). This is approximately an 8 percent gap; even using Williams' largest estimate of the Asian Indian Christian population, the gap was still about 5 or 6 percent. I imputed these missing figures within the Asian Indian Christian population, and derived an estimate of 10 percent for this group among the Asian American Christian population (again only on the largest 6 groups). The figures for the other groups did not vary considerably with each change in assumptions. Filipino Christians took up the largest share of Asian American Christians, followed by Koreans and Chinese. Depending on the assumptions, Asian Indian Christians are either the 4th largest or 6th largest group of Asian American Christians. As such, Vietnamese (9-10 per-

cent) and Japanese (8-9 percent) Christians either follow or precede Asian Indians. The differences in rank orderings based on our initial assumptions underscores the need for more accurate surveys of the Asian American population as a whole. Given what we do know, Asian American Christianity is highly diverse, unevenly spread across ethnic groups, and does not resemble the ethnic proportions mix found in the general Asian American population.

### **ASIAN AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY AS CASE STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN RELIGION**

These estimations provide a backdrop in evaluating Asian American Christian research. As with most scholarship on marginal and marginalized groups, Asian American Christianity is often viewed as a subset of other identities and social processes that are considered more relevant to mainstream scholarly communities. There are at least three overviews of Asian American *religion* which includes a heavy focus on the Christian case (Carnes and Yang 2004; Min 2002; Yang 2000b). In the years since, there has been an exponential growth of scholarship in this area but little change in the major themes covered. To avoid revisiting these same topics at length, I will briefly describe them and draw attention to the main conclusions and the prevalent imbalance of ethnic groups considered in this research.

With regard to this ethnic imbalance, if scholarship was proportional to the populations of each ethnic group we would expect a fair amount of research on Protestant Chinese, Korean and Japanese Americans, as well as Catholic Filipino and Vietnamese studies. In my review of over 160 articles and books published between 1975 and 2008, I found an overwhelming emphasis on the Korean Protestant case, followed by research on Chinese Protestantism, and less than 25 studies on Asian Indian Orthodox Christians and Japanese Protestants combined. I found even fewer sociological studies of Asian American Catholics and almost no treatment of Asian American Pentecostalism which is reportedly the fastest growing segment of Christianity all over the Asian continent (Cox 1995; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2006; Yang and Tamney 2006). This disproportional focus on some groups and a near absence of other groups can leave scholars who are unfamiliar with Asian American Christianity with a skewed interpretation of the dynamics among the various communities that make up Christian Asian America. And it is all the more reason for scholars to address these problems with greater attention to comparative analysis.

### Asian American Christianity as Immigrant Spiritual and Social Resource

Much of the social research on Asian American Christians could easily fit into a

two-part frame where half of the research is focused on the significance of religion for the first generation of Asian immigrants and the other half which touches on the children of these immigrants or the second generation (Zhou 1997a). For the first generation, religion is conceptualized in organizational terms and serves as a haven to meet the social, material and spiritual needs of these immigrants. In most respects, Asian American first generation congregations continue to reflect the work of immigrant churches historically. Historian Timothy Smith noted that immigration is a theologizing experience wherein many immigrants leave their home countries fleeing war, famine, political and economic instability—this leads often to feelings of uprootedness and alienation. Religion as a cosmic meaning system is well suited to address these concerns and as such religious communities are often an important source of moral and spiritual support for immigrants (Ebaugh 2003; Smith 1978; Warner and Wittner 1998). Recent Asian histories contain many if not all of these push factors that have helped drive immigration to the United States. The Chinese Communist revolution, the Korean and Vietnam Wars brought thousands of escapees, military spouses, and adoptees to American shores, and in numerous cases, Christian churches helped facilitate the transition to life in the United States not only materially but spiritually as well (Kim 2002; Pak et al. 2005; Tseng 2003; Yang 2002; Zhou, Bankston, and Kim 2002).

More prominent than spiritual support in the literature on Asian American religion are the various material and cultural functions of immigrant churches or congregations. Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese Christian congregations provide a support system and space for meeting with co-ethnics. As with most immigrant minorities, the daily struggle to speak a non-native language and overcome cultural differences in their relatively new circumstances makes gatherings in an ethnic congregation highly welcome (Hurrh and Kim 1990). But additionally, the opportunity for intra-ethnic networking in turn leads to entrepreneurial opportunities, or access to health-related and legal services (Min 1991; Min 1992; Yoo 2002; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Zhou, Bankston, and Kim 2002). For example, Victoria Kwon's ethnography of a Korean church in Houston noted the importance of cell group ministries as a means by which Korean immigrants obtained same-ethnic business contacts (Kwon 1997; Kwon, Ebaugh, and Hagan 1997; Kwon 2000).

#### Asian American Christianity as Immigrant Site of Cultural Expression and Negotiation

The cultural functions of immigrant religion range from expressing ethnic language, practices and norms as well as transmitting these to the next generation. It comes as no surprise that ethnic congregation worship services are often done in the native language of the immigrants. But importantly too, it is not too surprising that multiethnic or pan-Asian immigrant churches do not exist. This is also because each ethnic group contains

a variety of cultural practices that differ with other Asian ethnic groups and sometimes from other ethnic groups within the same national identity. Korean culture for example is homogeneous and ethnic expression is fairly uniform (Min 1991); Chinese culture on the other hand consists of a wide range of subcultural groups with different dialects and histories which complicate the possibilities for unified and shared expressions of ethnic culture (Yang 2002).

Unique to the Asian American Christian experience is the historical legacy of Christian missions in Asia and the varied roles it played among Asian immigrant communities. The presence of Christianity in Asia dates as far back as the 4th century A.D. in places such as Kerala, India where many of today's Indian Christian immigrants today originate (George 2005; Kurien 2004; Williams 1996). Specific feast days are celebrated by different Asian ethnic groups that have this type of history as seen among the Vietnamese and Filipino Catholics (San Buenaventura 2002; Zhou, Bankston, and Kim 2002). Korean and Chinese Christianity dates back at least to the 14th and 15th centuries (Kim, Warner, and Kwon 2001; Yang 2002) and their presence in the United States reaches at least a century or more (Jeung 2005; Kim 2002; Kim, Warner, and Kwon 2001; Pak et al. 2005; Tseng 1996; Tseng 1999; Yang 2002; Yi 2007). Nevertheless, Christianity of any variation did not thrive nor was it integrated into these cultures in the way that Catholicism intermixed with Filipino and Vietnamese society. In addition the overwhelming majority of Chinese and Korean Christians arrived to the US with little access to the historic ethnic congregations which were largely found in Hawaii and California. As a result, ethnic renderings of their faith that emerged<sup>7</sup> were a result of more recent encounters with Christianity. For many Koreans, Christianity was an understood identity since it was one of the largest religions in that country; specific practices and beliefs transferred over for many of them when immigrating. But for many Chinese, religion, much less Christianity, was not a facet of mainstream life. So for many of them, conversion to Christianity was a very American experience.<sup>8</sup>

What are the consequences of these different historical trajectories for Asian American Christianity? The main ramification deals with the interaction of ethnicity and religion among minority immigrants. Sociologists Phillip Hammond and Kee Warner presented a

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7 Anthropologist Erika Muse labels this "ethno-Christianity" (Muse 2005)

8 It comes as no surprise then that there is an absence of conversion literature for Korean American Christians while there is a growing body of such research for Chinese Americans (Abel 2006; Cao 2005; Chen 2005; Chen 2008; Hall 2006; Ng 2002; Wang and Yang 2006; Yang 1998; Yang 1999b; Yang 2002; Yang and Tamney 2006; Zhang 2006). In Warner's review of Korean American religious research he noted a study that Korean conversion had a reversed effect in the United States. Whereas Korean Christian converts arriving in America were very motivated to support the church, immigrants who converted in the US were less enthusiastic due to their more practical motivations for conversion (i.e. to gain greater social access to a local Korean church body) (Warner 2001). Sociologist Kenneth Guest observed that some Fuzhounese Christian converts did so as a way of seeking asylum in the US as a religious refugee (Guest 2003; Guest 2004).

typology of three ways that these interactions might appear. *Ethnic fusion* refers to a complete overlap of religious and ethnic identities. To be Jewish is both an ethnicity and a religion. *Ethnic religion* by contrast is one of several cultural foundations of an ethnic group. Orthodoxy in Russian culture makes Russian culture unique from others. Finally *religious ethnicity* refers to ethnic groups that are closely associated with a global religion such as Polish and Irish Catholicism. These concepts provide us with a useful way of looking at what Asian American immigrant Christians do when they bring their faith to the US.

The Asian American Christian case reveals an important problem with this ethnic-religion typology. Of the major six groups we discuss here, there is no instance of ethnic fusion; Christianity even for the Indian Orthodox is the result of missionary efforts drawn from the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Only Filipino Catholics could be described as an example of religious ethnicity as this is the dominant religion in that nation. Based on this typology then we might conclude that the other Asian American Christian faiths are examples of ethnic religion where Christianity is a facet of an ethnic culture. But this is not the case. The typology reflects only a majority religion in a given ethnic culture. Yang and Ebaugh allude to this when they add to this typology the *adoption of religious identities* that are not indigenous to an ethnic group (e.g. Vietnamese Catholicism) (Yang and Ebaugh 2001). In the case of Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese histories, Christianity has not been a majority religion. As a result these ethnic groups are not characterized by nor associated with Christianity in a way similar to Filipino Catholicism.

When Asian American immigrant Christians (with the exception of Filipino Catholics) form communities in the US, they bring their minority faith to a host country that shares this faith in the majority. One would expect that cultural assimilation would be easier for them relative to non-Christian Asian Americans practicing their faiths. But as Yang and Ebaugh showed in their comparison of a Chinese Buddhist community and a Protestant evangelical immigrant church in Houston, two factors complicate the process. Since the Chinese Christians were now in a majority Christian nation, they do not foreground their religious identity. Instead their daily experience focuses more on their ethnic and racial minority status. This then changes the emphasis in the congregation from religion exclusively to both religion and ethnicity (in the case of Chinese Christians, a "Sinicization of Christianity") (Yang and Ebaugh 2001). This is a fairly unique pattern for Asian American immigrant Christians. Filipino Catholics may experience this as well due to the racial emphasis of the United States, but they are exceptional in that their ethnic culture is closely tied with Catholicism (a "Philippinization of Catholicism") (San Buenaventura 2002). As of this moment however, this dynamic has only been demonstrated empirically in the case of Chinese immigrant Christians. As we will see later, this emphasis on ethnicity has important implications when the immigrant generation socializes their children.

### Being More Chinese by Being Christian:

#### The Role of Conversion in Immigrant Congregations

The foregrounding of ethnicity in Asian immigrant churches may help explain why Christianity may be somewhat more attractive than the faith traditions that dominate the home countries of these new Americans. In Protestant (and sometimes Catholic) circles this amounts to a religious conversion. In the case of Chinese Christian communities, conversion to Christianity often occurs through the efforts of other Chinese Christians. Their emphasis on ethnicity makes this environment highly welcoming for recent immigrants that are not fluent in English and American ways of living. But once they are drawn into the church, Chinese Christians draw on the symbolic resources that help congregant members understand their Chinese, American and Christian identities. Fenggang Yang's studies of Chinese immigrant churches shows that many Chinese Christian communities try to balance their American, ethnic, and religious identities, but it is their religious identity which acts as a filter to retain aspects of Chinese and American cultures that are compatible with their faith (Yang 1998; Yang 1999b; Yang 2000a; Yang 2002).<sup>9</sup> In this review of the literature, the pervasiveness of religious conversion appears to be unique to the immigrant Chinese Christian case; however, the use of religious identity and theology to negotiate the meaning of one's ethnic identity and one's American identity appears universal<sup>10</sup>.

#### Gendered Faith: Sacralizing Confucianism and Indian Orthodox Patriarchalism

One particular ethno-cultural characteristic, patriarchalism, is the subject of several studies in Asian American Christianity. Female subordination is cited as both a characteristic of traditional Christianity as well as traditional ethnic cultures. This is highly evident in the case of Asian American immigrant Christian communities (Kim 1996). Some scholars point to Confucian culture as the main source for Asian American preservation of gender inequality (Kim 1997; Kim 2002; Pak et al. 2005). In order to preserve their ethnic culture the circumscribed roles of women must be maintained. Immigrant religious communities serve as a site in which this ethnic belief and practice is embodied.

Other scholarship points to religious traditionalism as the source of patriarchalism. In

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9 In one study, sociologist Andrew Abel described how Christian theology introduced different interpretations and practices to traditional Chinese culture. This was exemplified in the act of helping and expectations of reciprocity. Whereas Chinese culture sought reciprocity for any act of help (creating a relationship of obligation), Christian theology maintained helping as an act of service but removed the expectation of reciprocity (Abel 2006). This exemplifies the adhesive nature of Christianity for many Chinese Christians as certain traditional practices are reinterpreted through a religious lens.

10 Sociologist Pyong Gap Min argued similarly that activity in a Korean church bolstered one's ethnicity relative to not participating in it (Min 1991).

one Chinese church, Yang finds that the second generation used gender patriarchy as a way to leverage power and gain influence in a first generation dominated environment. Yang asserts that this tactic is not borne of Chinese Christianity nor of Confucian culture, but rather American fundamentalism (Yang 2004). In the case of Indian Orthodoxy, sociologist Sheba George reminds us of the important gendered migration experienced by many Asian women in the late 20th century. The need for highly skilled nurses opened the door for many Asian Indian, Filipina, and Korean women to enter the United States. In the case of Asian Indian women, the occupation of nursing was almost entirely the domain of Christian women (George 2005; Williams 1996). Christian religious identity is held in low regard in India as a minority religion, and nursing is viewed as “dirty” since it involves touching men regardless of background. As a result of cultural marginalization, Christian Indian female nurses migrated to the United States in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families from the 1960s onward. Patriarchy becomes an issue when families migrate with these nurses. Many Indian Christian men find employment in the service sector or other forms of work that usually pay less than the salary earned by their wives and are not equivalent in prestige to the work they once had in Kerala. For these men, as with many families in the United States, this dynamic reflects a reversal of gender status which poses social dilemmas for these men and their communities. It is at this point that the church becomes a place for men to compensate their lost social standing. While the Indian Orthodox faith is patriarchal in practice, male leadership takes on a new meaning in the American context. Leadership roles that were once the domain of wealthy and socially prominent men are now the exclusive purview of any man in these churches. In some cases leadership roles are created (such as Christmas carol leader) for the purpose of granting more men leadership opportunity (George 1998; George 2003; George 2005).<sup>11</sup> In this case, religious patriarchy changes some of its characteristics while still maintaining status inequality within the bounds of the church.

In both of these perspectives, religion is either indirectly or actively maintaining gender inequality in these immigrant Asian Christian communities, but recently some scholars posit a dynamic view of religion which both subordinates and liberates women in these religious contexts. Some Asian American Christian immigrant congregations evidence an ironic pattern where women take on positions of leadership such as teachers and yet they pass down traditional values which form the basis for their subordination (Ebaugh and

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11 According to Sociologist Pyong Gap Min, Korean Christian immigrants gain a certain degree of social status that was lost in the transition from being part of the cultural mainstream in Korea to being a cultural marginalized minority through leadership positions gained in church (Min 1992). However, given the patriarchal nature of Korean culture one might arguably infer that this desire for social status is more significant for Korean immigrant men than for women. This in turn may support Jung Ha Kim's arguments about the subordinating experience felt by many Korean immigrant women (Kim 1996; Kim 1997).

Chafetz 1999). Sociologist Jung Ha Kim in critiquing the absence of women's voices in Korean American religious research articulated that women in these contexts are well aware of the gendered and subordinate nature of their roles in the community. But their personal theology provides a liberating discourse that challenges the patriarchal emphasis in the congregation's theology (Kim 1996). Sociologist Carolyn Chen provided an in-depth look at the specific ways that Taiwanese immigrant women construct their identity through Buddhism and Christianity. Both faith traditions supply new lenses in which to interpret their identities as women such that they can spiritualize their familial responsibilities or challenge those expectations by articulating a religious defense for their independence (Chen 2005; Chen 2008). Asian American Christianity stands apart in this regard as its theology works in complex ways to help support patriarchy via sacralizing ethnic culture or disregard patriarchy in constructing an adhesive identity of Christian-filtered Asian and American cultural values.

### Asian American Christianity as Second Generation Cultural and Religious Identity

The story of Asian American Christianity contains a second frame that focuses on the children of immigrants or the second generation. Work on religious, ethnic and gender identity among Asian American immigrant Christians along with understanding the basic structures and functions of Asian immigrant religious communities embeds the sociology of Asian American Christianity firmly in immigration research as an important set of case studies. Where research on this group diverges to some extent occurs with the children of the immigrants or what scholars dub "the new second generation" (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Foner and Kasinitz 2007; Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997a; Zhou 1997b). Whether born in the United States or arriving at a very young age, the second generation faces a different set of challenges as they navigate between the culture they inherit from their parents and the mainstream culture that confronts them daily.

When speaking of this second generation it is important to bear in mind that all scholars here typically refer to youth and young adults that make up the second generation.<sup>12</sup> This is due in part to a demographic reality that the rapid growth of Asian America was a result of high immigration rates and normal birth rates of adult immigrants from the 1960s onward. The stories of the second generation consequently emerge in the mid 1990s and are focused on the earlier stages of the life course. In the case of Korean Americans, the

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12 The main exception in this second generation research is the Japanese American second generation or Nisei. The Nisei generation in most research on Japanese American Christianity spans multiple eras due to their longer documented history in the US. As a result, "Nisei" depends on the particular era under consideration, and the influence of this generational status varies with each circumstance experienced by the Japanese Americans as a whole.

second generation is of particular importance as the stream of immigration has leveled off since the 1990s, and as a result, the dominance of the first generation will soon be matched by the new rising cohort of second generation Korean Americans (Warner 2001). Other Asian ethnic groups are not reportedly experiencing this immigration dynamic, but all groups will see a sizable presence of the second generation as they come of age in the same time period. These changes will further complicate the social forces that influence the contours of Asian American life in the decades ahead.

Religion plays a significant role for many in the second generation. Given the mixed assimilation patterns for immigrant Asian Americans, the second generation need for material and social support is not as universal as that of the immigrant generation. Greater facility with English and American customs and adopting a middle class lifestyle (based on the efforts made by the first generation) make ethnic group participation less an issue of survival and more a matter of identity construction (Kim, Warner, and Kwon 2001; Kurien 1998). However, in the case of Asian refugees, the church becomes a site for survival for the second generation. Min Zhou and Carl Bankston's analysis of Vietnamese Catholic and Buddhist communities in New Orleans show that parish or temple participation helps teen immigrants adjust by cultivating their ethnic identity (Bankston and Zhou 1995; Bankston and Zhou 1996; Bankston and Zhou 2000; Zhou and Bankston 1998). See also (Zhou, Bankston, and Kim 2002). Nanlai Cao's study of working class Chinese immigrant youth (Cao 2005), and Kenneth Guest's ethnography of Fuzhounese youth all show a protective effect that Catholic and Protestant Christian communities and networks have for younger immigrants as evidenced by improved educational outcomes, and avoiding gang participation and illegal practices (Guest 2003; Guest 2004).

For many second generation Asian American Christians (SGAAC onward), religion continues to function in certain ways that parallel their immigrant forebears due to the active religious socialization efforts of parents, relatives, and congregant members (Park and Ecklund 2007). Paralleling the first generation, ethnic traditions, language, and cultural attitudes are passed down to the second generation through the context of religious communities. However, the success of this cultural transmission is perceived by immigrants as uneven at best and highly doubtful at worst. Indeed these interpretations are made based on the trend of SGAACs not returning to the congregation of origin. For some this has been such a matter of great concern that it has been described as a "silent exodus" most especially into disaffiliation (Lee 1996). What might explain this perception?

Empirical research on SGAACs suggests that rather than an exodus into religious disaffiliation, the second generation is taking diverse trajectories away from the first generation. While it is probably the case that some SGAACs drop completely out of religion, we have no research to date about the prevalence and experience of disaffiliation among

Asian American groups. The only example appears in Prema Kurien's case study of an Indian immigrant Orthodox church where she mentions in passing that while more women than men in the second generation leave the immigrant church, more men discard their faith tradition rather than join another church (Kurien 1998). Apart from this, if there is a "silent exodus" it is not an exodus out of religion altogether but a journey toward other religious groups and approaches to religion.

### The Asian American Parachurch Evangelical Influence

The most evident starting point of this movement away from immigrant churches is the college religious experience. The oft-cited ubiquitous presence of Asian Americans on college campuses has recently received attention from journalists with regards to religion, particularly evangelicalism (Stafford 2006; Hua 2007; Richards 2008, April 2; Xiong 2006; Lum 2007). On some college campuses, parachurch evangelical groups are now predominantly Asian American in constituency. The growth has been so prominent and rapid that national organizations like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Campus Crusade for Christ are forming ministries targeted specifically to Asian Americans.

The pressing question sociologists have asked in this literature is the racial significance of parachurch groups that were at one point predominantly white and now are predominantly Asian American. According to religious studies professor Rudy Busto, the evangelical influence in the early socialization of SGAACs (and the influence of these groups in the home countries of their parents) provides a familiar cultural milieu for those looking for support through the college experience. According to Busto, this couples together (or sacralizes) select aspects of Confucianism (read "Asian values") such as traditional family norms, industriousness and educational attainment, with evangelicalism (Busto 1999). This in turn has the effect of reinforcing the model minority stereotype that places expectations of over achievement and success for SGAACs (marginalization via minority exceptionalism). At the same time however, to the extent that evangelicalism is one part of the American mainstream, SGAACs can paradoxically also be more integrated into American culture (see also Alumkal 2004).

### Gendered Faith Revisited

Not only are the Confucian values that promote the model minority image sacralized in parachurch and second-generation churches, but also those values that typify patriarchy. By employing evangelical religious hermeneutics to gendered leadership, SGAACs create a set of boundaries that helps bolster their sense of uniqueness apart from the immigrant generation as well as their secular peers. Take for example, Fenggang Yang's

observations of a Chinese congregation that was considering hiring a woman in a position of church leadership. The second-generation Chinese members appropriated fundamentalist Protestant theology to argue against this decision as a way to leverage power in a congregation dominated by leaders exclusively in the first generation (Yang 2004; see also Muse 2005). Alumkal found a similar pattern in a second-generation Korean church in the New York area (Alumkal 1999). In the attempt to build distinction from the first generation, the second generation reinforces traditional ethnic gender norms under a broader religious frame drawn largely from white evangelical theology.

However, in the parachurch experience of some second-generation Korean American evangelicals, the creation of symbolic religious boundaries with the first generation becomes an opportunity to also break from gender norms prescribed by Korean immigrants. Sociologist Soyoung Park's study of Korean American evangelicals bears this out (Park 2001). Second-generation Korean American evangelical women use this religious identity to distinguish themselves from their secular second-generation Korean peers. Within the context of second-generation parachurch circles these women experience more opportunity and gender equity relative to their first generation predecessors. However, their religious identity also constrains their identification with the feminist movement which they distinguish as a secular and non-Christian (i.e. non-evangelical) movement (Park 2001). Gender roles continue to be a significant form of symbolic boundaries in which SGAACs can distinguish themselves from the first generation and "American secular culture" without completely disengaging with it via modifying gender roles. This reflects the kind of dynamics sociologist Christian Smith noted regarding white evangelicals. Religious identity he notes is stronger among evangelical Protestants in part because of their engagement with relevant outgroups (Smith et al. 1998). Here again, SGAACs engagement with culture is drawn largely from white evangelical theology which forms part of the tools obtained in their church experiences growing up in second-generation ministries (Gallagher 2004a; Gallagher 2004b).

### Cultural Preferences and Racial Structures in Asian American Evangelical Parachurch Groups

Given the use of conservative white Protestant resources and theology, one wonders then why SGAACs are not joining white evangelical parachurch groups? Sociologist Rebecca Kim introduces an important observation drawn from the "supply-side religious markets" approach to religion. This perspective assumes that religious participation varies considerably based on actual available options for participation (Stark and Finke 2000). Kim posits that Korean American Evangelicals on college campuses often opt for same-ethnic religious organizations even while holding to religious beliefs of ethnic and racial

inclusivity. This is so for structural and personal reasons. Structurally, second-generation Korean American evangelicals face a wide number of evangelical parachurch groups for participation. Second the proportion of Korean Americans on the campus she studied was quite large. The availability of multiple religious group options and a critical mass of Korean American evangelicals give second-generation Korean American evangelicals opportunities to select a group they prefer. Their preferences are based on the familiarity of the religious subculture in which they were raised. While their communities of origin utilized white evangelical resources, these churches were dominated by Korean Americans. This experience is paired with the understanding that the American mainstream marginalizes this ethnic minority. These factors form the criteria for choosing a religious group among several that appear identical in resource and theology but differ in their cultural and symbolic significance (Kim 2004a; Kim 2004b; Kim 2004c; Kim 2006). Likewise, participation in these groups serves to enhance or integrate the multiple identities of SGAACs ("Asian", "American", "evangelical") (Park 2004). If exposure to white evangelical resources in early religious socialization is an important facet in understanding the growth of SGAAC congregations, the experience of racialized parachurch evangelicalism helps decouple the immigrant church from their conception of spirituality. This in turn sets the stage for their choices in religious community after college.

### Second-Generation Christian Community: From Ethnic to PanEthnic to Multiracial

The experience with parachurch evangelical organizations sometimes leads to (or is accompanied by) continued traditional religious community. As noted earlier, this traditional form of Christian collective identity does not usually entail a return to the immigrant-dominant congregation of their earlier years. Rather SGAACs turn to the wide array of church choices surrounding them near the college campus or their place of employment. In some cases this leads to joining a predominantly white church, a pattern which has not received any attention at all in social research. Another and more popular option is the continuance of mono-ethnic English-speaking religious community as experienced in college, sometimes called a second-generation church. Still others enter into a pan-ethnic Asian church populated by non-first generation Asian Americans. And in some other cases, SGAACs are found in multiracial churches.

Often with the assistance of a first-generation congregation, SGAACs form new second-generation congregations (Alumkal 2001; Alumkal 2003; Chong 1998; Ecklund 2005a; Ecklund 2005b; Ecklund 2006; Kim and Pyle 2004; Kim 1998; Kim 2001a; Kim 2004; Min and Kim 2005; Yang 1999a). In doing so these churches perform the same function of retaining ethnicity, but create symbolic boundaries that distinguish it from the

first generation. For example, Kelly Chong described the core values that one second-generation Korean church retained: filial piety, traditional family structure, sexual morality, gendered behavior, and authoritarianism (Chong 1998). The second-generation congregation replicated a number of practices of the first generation (as an outgrowth of these ethnic values) but symbolically identified their approach as foundationally different. According to this congregation, the first generation's ethnic practices are based largely on ethnic grounds (e.g. Christian values reflect Korean values) whereas their basis is theological (some Korean values reflect Christian values). Similar to the pattern noted in evangelical parachurch campus groups, the second generation forms symbolic boundaries from the first generation using a theological frame; effectively this results in continually reinforcing the same organizational pattern while maintaining an identity that is distinct from the immigrant generation. As Karen Chai Kim noted, this boundary differentiation ironically creates what the first generation sought all along: maintenance of the ethnic culture (Kim 1998).

Implicit in these studies of boundary distinction is the role of race in adopting an SGAAC identity. While SGAACs have distanced themselves from the first generation through theological reasoning, they are not employing a faith tradition that is predominantly developed by members of their ethnic or racial group. Their theological framework is largely borrowed from white evangelical theology where particular hermeneutics guide the primacy of some teachings over others. Studies of Chinese and Korean second-generation Protestants note that the main cultural resource from which most of these congregations draw on is white conservative Protestantism (Alumkal 2003; Kim 2004; Yang 1999a). From contemporary worship music, casual style of dress, less rigid and formal leadership, SGAACs are "nearly indistinguishable" according to Antony Alumkal, from their white conservative Protestant counterparts (Alumkal 2003).<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, this theology is utilized by a racial minority which is aware of its particular place in contemporary American society. This racial awareness is evident in the creation of pan-ethnic and multiracial churches among SGAACs. As with the college campus experience, pan-ethnic Asian American churches form as a result of a critical mass of SGAACs, a felt distinction from the first generation, and a felt racial marginalization from the American mainstream (Jeung 2004). The existence of these pan-ethnic churches calls into question earlier linear assumptions about second-generation assimilation and integration into the cultural mainstream by pointing out the social realities of race as a

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13 Apart from resources, some SGAAC congregations experience a change in theological practice. In one study of a multigenerational Indian Orthodox Church, Prema Kurien noted that the second-generation had rejected an ascriptive faith that flows from centuries of followers to an achieved faith that must be renewed with every believer. This is coupled with a less exclusive ethnic view of their faith indicates a highly likely withdrawal from the immigrant generation church in which they were raised (Kurien 2004).

salient social identifier.

While racialization can be seen as a creating division where unity is expected, scholars also view this as a culturally entrepreneurial process (Jeung 2002a). Sociologist Russell Jeung points out in his analysis of over 50 pan-ethnic Asian American churches in the Bay Area that SGAAC evangelical and mainline church leaders and congregations define "Asian American" in different ways often implying different orientations toward class and status differences in society (Jeung 2002b). SGAAC evangelicals are particularly middle and upper class, and the formation of pan-ethnic churches helps maintain the lifestyle that many of them have grown accustomed to. Indeed their perceived racial and class similarities allow Chinese and Japanese third and fourth generation Christians to expand through the evangelical "homogenous unit church growth strategy." Unlike previous research, Jeung introduces Mainline Protestant Asian American Christianity which provides an alternative image of how race functions in pan-ethnic religious community. These pan-ethnic churches focus on shared group histories of resistance to racial oppression and as a result form a pan-ethnic identity with a social justice orientation. Thus mainline Asian American pan-ethnic churches often identify with the working and lower classes as well as other socially vulnerable groups (Jeung 2003; Jeung 2005). Asian American pan-ethnic congregations point to the relative fluidity of racial identity for SGAACs.<sup>14</sup>

### Proving American Identity Through Religious Performance

Currently the influence of religion in civil society has been an important dimension in the social scientific study of religion. In recent decades this has received attention in part because of the rise of government funding for faith-based initiatives, and to the decline of social capital in America (Putnam 2000; Pipes and Ebaugh 2002). Asian American Christians play a part in these trends whether as a subspecies of immigrant congregations or as unique players in second-generation pan-ethnic and multiracial congregational settings (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Ebaugh and Pipes 2001). But current research paints a mixed picture. Linear assimilation theories would suggest that Christian Asian Americans would be most likely to participate in civil society relative to their non-Christian Asian American peers since their religious identity is that of the majority in America. Work by Elaine Howard Ecklund and Jerry Park shows this to be the case for Protestants in their analysis of non-religious volunteering behavior using the Social Capital Benchmark Survey. Indeed

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14 Not only is the label "Asian American" associated with middle-class lifestyles and social activism, it can also change the meaning of mainstream religious identity such as "evangelical." Alumkal for example found that SGAACs appropriated the evangelical identity as a way of responding to the racial stigma of the model minority stereotype (Alumkal 2004).

they suggest that Asian Americans in non-Christian religions may face a double-minority stigma that inhibits their voluntary behavior (Ecklund and Park 2007; Ecklund and Park 2005). However, Carolyn Chen's ethnographic field work comparing an evangelical Taiwanese evangelical church and a Taiwanese Buddhist temple suggested just the opposite. As a result of being non-Christian, Taiwanese Buddhists feel compelled to prove their acceptability in American culture through religious engagement with society, particularly through charity endeavors. Taiwanese evangelicals on the other hand face no such stigma and engage society through evangelism. Due to language and cultural barriers, the evangelicals were less effective in reaching out to the larger community around them (Chen 2003; Chen 2002).<sup>15</sup>

In the case of SGAACs, the intersection of faith and civic engagement is also inconsistent. As noted earlier, Jeung finds that Mainline pan-ethnic Asian Americans have a social justice orientation while Evangelical pan-ethnics have a middle class focus. But Ecklund's comparison of second-generation Korean American evangelicals presents further complexity in this relationship. She finds that theological orientation varies even within the fold of second-generation Korean American evangelicalism. Similar to Jeung's findings on panethnic Evangelical churches, those second-generation Korean American evangelicals who attended an exclusive second-generation church were less apt to volunteer in their local community due to an emphasis on a sacralized understanding of the model minority stereotype which attributes poverty to a lack of effort on the part of an individual. However, second-generation Korean American evangelicals who attended a multiracial church were more apt to volunteer. Ecklund argues that this difference is due in part to the various ways that the same conservative theology can be used in a congregational setting. It can be used to create distinction from the first generation, but at the same time it can also limit identification with other vulnerable and needy Americans. Evangelical theology can be used to remove or overcome racial barriers but it can also have a limiting impact on collective efforts to reach out to the community (Ecklund 2005a; Ecklund 2005b; Ecklund 2006). Discrepancies such as this warrant continued investigation in understanding how Asian American Christians engage the civil sphere.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the sociological study of Asian American Christianity has witnessed tremendous

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15 One possible explanation for this discrepancy may include the types of civic engagement analyzed. Chen's research focused on religious forms of civic engagement (e.g. evangelism) or religiously-based civic engagement (e.g. charitable activity) while Ecklund and Park's work focused on non-religious civic engagement. In this way, perhaps Christian affiliation is a more acceptable conduit into secular civic participation while non-Christian affiliation constrains individuals and congregations to be more selective and strategic in their religiously-based outreach.

growth over the last 10 years, certain patterns are evident in how such research is structured. I suggest the following avenues for consideration in future studies of this diverse and racialized religious body:

### Greater Inclusivity of non-Korean or non-Chinese Asian American Evangelicals

In terms of defining "Asian American Christianity," Korean American evangelicalism is highly overrepresented in research relative to other Asian American believers. It is certainly the case that there are several substantive characteristics that make them a suitable group for analysis, but future research should consider case studies and comparative studies of Filipino, Vietnamese, and Indian Protestants (whether evangelical or mainline, if such categories are relevant), Catholics, and Orthodox. Comparative studies here can also include Korean and Chinese American evangelicals due to the ubiquity of insights derived from studies of these groups. Additionally, scholars should consider the diversity of the first and second generation. Arguably the immigrant experience contains certain universal characteristics, but the mode of immigration, the social and cultural capital available to each group can vary considerably. How might these sociological differences interact with distinct cultural practices and beliefs when comparing different Asian American Christian groups? Similarly, while religious transmission is a universal practice, we have little understanding of how Christianity in its multiple forms is experienced in the second generation who are not Korean or Chinese. Accounting for other Asian American Christians will bring greater parity to our understanding of Asian American Christianity in a broader and more inclusive way.

### Comparisons Between Asian American Christians and other Religious Asian Americans

To a limited degree, religious research that includes Asian American Christians has compared them with Asian Americans of other faith traditions. For example, Pyong Gap Min has studied the similarities and differences in social processes between Indian Hindus and Korean Protestants in New York City (Min 2003; Min 2005) (see also (Khandelwal 2002; Joshi 2006; Bacon 1996). In several other studies, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese Protestants (sometimes identifiably evangelical) have been compared to Buddhists within the same ethnic group (Fugita and Fernandez 2002; Chen 2008; Guest 2003; Kim 2001b; Okihiro 1984; Yang and Ebaugh 2001; Yoo 2002; Zhou, Bankston, and Kim 2002). As the second largest religion in the world, Islam is well represented in some nations in South and Southeast Asia; however we have yet to see any comparisons of Asian American Muslims to their Christian counterparts. How might the immigrant experience differ between these two groups and the religious culture they employ? How do

these religious identities change in the second generation?

#### Comparisons Between Asian American Christians and Non-Religious Asian Americans

Even more striking than the absence of comparisons with Asian American Muslims, is the absence of comparisons with the non-religious counterparts in Asian America. Asian American Christians, particularly Chinese American Christians have experienced large numbers of religious conversions in the immigrant generation. How do non-religious Chinese immigrants fare when they are not exposed to the social support of religious organizations? Due to the popularity of Christianity during the immigration experience, what is their reaction to this religious change experienced by close family and friends and other social networks? While I have argued that most second generation Asian American Christians remain religious, we cannot dismiss the reality that some disaffiliate altogether. At what point did the process of religious transmission fail? What are the consequences in terms of integration and social support for the non-religious children of immigrants in comparison to their devout counterparts?

#### Comparisons Between Asian American and non-Asian American Christians

The vast majority of religious research on religion is focused on the white Protestant experience, particularly those who are defined as evangelical and mainline. We have much scholarship that suggests evangelicalism is the preferred tradition of Asian Americans but many participate within the traditions of the mainline as well. To date there are no existing studies comparing white and Asian American evangelical and mainline Protestant experiences and how their faith informs (or fails to inform) their views on racial identity and racism. Evidence on the second generation and civic engagement among them suggests that white evangelical theology plays an influential role in mode of worship, gender expectations, and outreach. Direct comparisons will shed new light on these patterns.

Some studies on Asian American Christianity have pointed out the prophetic or liberating ways that Chinese and Japanese Protestants have served Asian American communities especially in the face of racial intolerance and discrimination in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The African American Protestant tradition has played a similar role in hundreds of communities throughout the US. How then do Protestants of these two major racially-identified groups understand their theology with respect to social activism and political participation (Lien 2004b)? Again we can at best make limited inferences based on separate studies of each group and direct comparative research will allow us to understand the similarities and differences between these two groups better. In light of the racial tensions between Korean merchants and African American communities, understanding how faith informs or fails to inform religious individuals and congregations will have vital application for activists and scholars alike.

While the study of Hispanic American Christianity has also witnessed tremendous growth over the past decade, we have no knowledge of how the experiences of the first and second generation Catholics and Protestants are similar to/ different from their Asian American peers. Both groups have experienced different trajectories as a whole in the immigration experience, and both groups employ different types of cultural and religious capital as they work their way into the American mainstream. Both groups have met varying levels of acceptance and discrimination from the white American Christians. As with other research, no direct comparisons exist at present between these two fast-growing segments of the population.

### Asian American Christian Intersections with Class and Gender

Immigration scholars have noted the segmented assimilation patterns of the post-1965 waves of arrivals to the US (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1999). While traditionally most immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries were low-skilled upon entry, today, many immigrants enter because of their skills in nursing, science and technology. Scholars of immigrant religion and Asian American Christianity have not considered in much detail the significance of religion in influencing the outcomes of different classes of immigrants in various cases. A few studies have noted the influence of religiosity, particularly as a protective force, on Vietnamese and Chinese adolescent outcomes in urban areas (defined largely as non-participation in gangs and greater educational achievement), but we have no comparative research on these influences between different Christian Asian ethnic Americans nor do we know how religion apart from church participation (e.g. prayer, religious practices at home) affects these outcomes.

The study of Asian American Christianity has yet to engage the many facets in which gender plays a role in religious communities and intimate relationships. Most studies on gender and sexuality focus on leadership and the intersection of conservative religion and Confucian patriarchy. We know nothing else in terms of gendered differences among Asian American Christians which have been relevant in studies of white Christians. For example, gender is relevant and intersects with religion in the following ways: health outcomes (Krause, Ellison, and Marcum 2002), risk-taking (Freese 2004; Stark 2002), marital infidelity incidence (Burdette et al. 2007), marital quality and household division of labor (Bartkowski 1999; Denton 2004; Ellison and Bartkowski 2002; Gallagher 2003), parenting styles (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Gunnoe, Hetherington, and Reiss 1999; Nicholson and McMorris 2006; Wilcox 1998), discussions over teen sexuality (Regnerus 2005), intergenerational financial assistance (Myers 2004), and educational attainment (Beyerlein 2004; Darnell and Sherkat 1997). Each of these subareas in religion and gender is relevant to

scholarship on Asian America, particularly Christian Asian America.<sup>16</sup>

### Active Faith Beyond the Sanctuary

Sociologists of religion have recently turned to the experience of religion outside of the congregation. While it is certainly the case that religious communities provide the central plausibility structure that helps reinforce beliefs and practice (Berger 1967), research has also shown that religious practice in the home affects the religious outcomes of children (Bader and Desmond 2006). Additionally, religiosity itself includes a variety of forms such as popular material goods (e.g. Christian film, popular music, devotional and inspirational reading) that do not require a church community (Park and Baker 2007). What kinds of religious material goods and practices are consumed and performed by different Asian American Christians? To what degree and in what ways do these Christians vary in practice and use in terms of ethnicity, Christian tradition, generation, gender, and class? In what ways are non-religious outcomes such as educational attainment, non-religious social capital, affected?

### CONCLUSIONS

In each of these suggestions for future research there is an implicit call to integrate the sociology of Asian American Christianity with the mainstream in the sociology of religion, the sociology of Asian America, and the sociology of race, class, and gender. Comparative research that focuses on identity and assimilation remain important and much work is needed here as well, but utilizing theories that apply to white Americans, or white Christian Americans should increasingly be considered in the study of Asian American Christians as well. In doing so, the scholarly community not only benefits from understanding the unique sociological characteristics of Asian American Christians, but also in understanding how assumptions made of the white majority are more universal or limited.

The sociology of Asian American Christianity has grown impressively over the past 30 years. Based on a review of that research we see familiar patterns that have affected immigrant religious groups in earlier generations of non-Asian Americans; and we find unique social and cultural characteristics that reflect some of the specific differences that challenge our original assumptions about assimilation and integration. Our current understanding of "Asian American Christianity" is built on important contributions that are notably reflective of only one segment of this religious mosaic. As the Asian American population grows and diversifies, a variety of research avenues have yet to be explored,

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<sup>16</sup> Scholarship has emphasized the important intersection of class and gender of which we have little research even in the mainstream of the sociology of religion.

not least of which includes the members of America's largest religious body.

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