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Fall/Winter 2019 **ADVOCATE**

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OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates is a national membership-driven organization of community advocates dedicated to advancing the social, political, and economic well-being of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the United States.

To fulfill its mission, OCA has adopted the following goals to:

- Advocate for social justice, equal opportunity and fair treatment;
- Promote civic participation, education, and leadership;
- Advance coalitions and community building; and,
- Foster cultural heritage.

Founded as the Organization of Chinese Americans in 1973, OCA has grown to be a robust national advocacy organization to advance the civil and human rights of AAPIs and aspiring Americans. The organization presently has over 50 chapters, affiliates and partners, impacting more than 35,000 individuals across the country through local and national programming. The organization's headquarters remain in Washington, DC, allowing OCA to directly engage in critical public policy issues on a macro level, it continues to largely remain as a grassroots constituency of lay advocates from all walks of life and diverse ethnic identities addressing uniquely local level issues impacting over 20 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the country.

OCA takes no collective position on the politics of any foreign country, but instead focuses on the welfare and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

IMAGE

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From the Board



Dear AdvOCAtes,

As the year draws to a close, we start writing our New Year's resolutions. These resolutions, though, should be formulated from reflections on the past year. It is important that we remember the lessons we learned and think about how we want to change and move forward.

Going into 2020, it is more crucial than ever for us to work together and ensure that our community is fully educated and aware of the 2020 Census and committed to participating. The Asian American and Pacific Islander population is considered a hard-to-count population, and the undercount of AAPIs would result in devastating loss of funds for our community. Being counted in the Census means that our friends and family will continued to be served in public schools, healthcare, and our communities will not be left out in infrastructure development.

As an OCA member, I hope you are able to continue your dedication through Get Out the Vote/Count work for both the 2020 Census and Elections. Besides volunteering on the grounds, you can lend your support through other hard or soft skills for your local chapter. As always, your financial and personal contributions to OCA National and locally is also tremendous in enabling us to continue our work.

I look forward to our continued collaboration in advancing the sociopolitical and economic well-being of AAPIs!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon M. Wong".

Sharon M. Wong, OCA National President

Dear Friends,



Since May, I've had the pleasure of getting to know the second oldest Asian American civil rights organization in the country as the new executive director of OCA. Notably, I'm also the first Southeast Asian American executive director that the organization has seen since the rebranding to OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates in 2013. Although OCA has been a pioneer and champion in advocating for the political and socioeconomic well-being of all Asian Americans, I am excited for the challenge of ensuring that we fulfill our mission and vision of advocating for all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

I look forward to meeting you at a future OCA event, and thank you for your continued support of OCA.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rita Pin Ahrens".

Rita Pin Ahrens, OCA National Executive Director

Chapter Updates



2nd Annual Las Vegas Asian Night Market

For the second year in a row, OCA Las Vegas--in collaboration with the Asian Community Development Council (ACDC)--hosted its Asian Night Market on Oct. 19 at the St. Rose Dominican Hospital - San Martin Campus, where at least 6,000 people attended to celebrate Asian culture through food and entertainment. Over 30 food vendors, small businesses, and performers were featured, promoting the best our local community has to offer. In 2018, this was the first time an Asian Night Market was brought to Las Vegas by OCA and ACDC, and the goal is to continue growing this event for many years to come. Learn more at asiannightmarketlv.com.



Special Recognition Award from the International Institute

OCA St. Louis was one of the exclusive 13 Special Recognition Award recipients at the International Institute's 100th-year celebration this week. This is to honor our longstanding work in the Asian community in St. Louis - mentoring program, advocacy, etc. As you can guess, we are very thrilled!

AAPI Womxn's Initiative (we promoted it as Women's Leadership Summit)

The session was opened with an inspiring remark from Dawn Higgins of Purina, followed by our keynote speaker, Sara Yang Bosco of Emerson. Each panel speaker brought value to the discussion. We already received several requests to host this again!

Tech training for the Korean speaking elderly

Thanks to Han Ko, our board member, who took the initiative to train the elderly on the best way to keep their mobile phones safe and secured. It was a huge success and we plan to host the next session for the elderly who speak Mandarin.



The 21st annual Utah Asian Pacific Islander Community Awards Night Honored:

- The Ohana Association at Weber State University (*Youth Moving Mountains Award*)
- Ratsamy Bing Vilaiphanh (*Spirit of the Community Award*) from the Laotian Cultural Organization of Utah and Wat Lao Salt Lake Buddharam
- Feagaiga O Ali'i (*Living Treasures Award*)
- Nepalese Association of Utah (*Organization of the Year Award*)
- Councilmember Jacob Fitisemanu, Jr. (*Pillar of the Community Award*)
- S. Floyd Mori (*Lifetime Achievement Award*)

OCA Utah also welcomes the newly-inducted OCA Utah Board of Directors 2020: Aaran Afalava, Anna Nguyen, Christina Souknarong, Emilio Manuel Camu, FeliAnne Soriano Hipol, Jimmy Chen, Karl Garcia Ramirez, Kehau Folau, Lita Sagato, Lola Akeripa, Merosa Uiagalelei, Monique Ho Ching, and Verona Sagato Mauga.

It was a historic night of firsts: the first Lao and South Asian recipients of OCA Utah awards and first Director of Micronesian descent to be elected into the OCA Utah Board of Directors. We thank our community partners present: Asian Association of Utah - Refugee & Immigrant Center, Chinese Railroad Worker Descendants Association, Feagaiga O Ali'i, JAACL Mt. Olympus, JAACL Salt Lake, National Tongan American Society, Nepalese Association of Utah, Samoana Integrated Language Initiative, Utah Asian Chamber of Commerce, SLCC Pacific Unity Association, SLCC Asian Student Association, The Ohana Association at Weber SU, Asian Student Involvement Association at Weber SU, Pacific Islander Students Association U of Utah, Asian American Student Association U of Utah, Kulturang Pinoy Ensemble of Utah, Pilipino American Association of Utah, Utah Micronesia Community, Indonesian Community of Utah, Wat Lao Salt Lake Buddharam, Wat Buddhikaram Utah Cambodian Community Buddhist Temple, Khemera Dance Troupe, Mana Academy Charter School, Utah Pacific Islander Civic Engagement Coalition, Utah Pacific Islander Health Coalition, Mabuhay Filipino American Association of Davis County, Karen Community of Utah, Bhutanese Community of Utah, Karenni Community of Utah, Vietnamese American Community of Utah, and many others.



OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates Greater Seattle Encourages Voters to Approve Referendum 88

Seattle, WA – OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates Greater Seattle (OCA), formerly known as Organization of Chinese Americans, encourages voters to approve Referendum 88 – allowing Initiative 1000 (I-1000) to go into effect. I-1000 will promote equal opportunity and shared success to everyone in Washington State through better wages, jobs, and affordable, quality higher education by amending a 1998 state ban on equal opportunity programs.

I-1000 will help us create an inclusive Washington State by allowing programs that ensure all racial, ethnic, and other groups real access and participation in our public institutions. Such programs are strategies to undo a history of discriminatory practices that prevented equal access to public employment, educational opportunities and contracting opportunities. I-1000 allows for public entities to consider race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, age and veteran status for public employment, enrollment in public universities, public colleges, and for contracting opportunities. However, it bans “preferential treatment” since those social characteristics cannot be used as the sole or determining factor in the selection process.

In the two decades that state agencies have been prohibited from implementing fair opportunity programs, government contracts with people of color and women-owned businesses have decreased from 10 percent in 1998 to just 3 percent in 2018, totaling \$3.5 billion in lost funding. Local government entities have done no better in providing contracting opportunities. Furthermore, most of our state universities and colleges fall short when it comes to having a fair and representative enrollment as well as having a diverse workforce. The same is true for local governments, who also fall short when it comes to representative employment of racial groups and others. Without I-1000, people of color, women, and other underserved communities are consistently left out and left behind.

Washington’s Asian and Pacific Islander Americans are a diverse community with over 50 ethnicities and 300 languages, many who support the equal opportunity measures that I-1000 has brought back to the State of Washington through our legislature’s action.

“We have community members who have been in Washington for 4 or 5 generations and community members who are new immigrants and refugees, members who are wealthy and educated, and members who are poor and do not have a high school diploma,” said OCA Greater Seattle President Bruce Huang. “We refuse to be used as a wedge against other communities of color. I-1000 is an important first step that will benefit not just Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, but all Washington communities by providing opportunities and shared success.”



On October 25, 2019, Association of Chinese Americans (ACA), the Detroit Chapter of OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates (OCA National), held its 47th Anniversary Banquet at Glen Oaks Country Club in Farmington Hills, Michigan.



A capacity crowd of nearly 300 filled the banquet room. The theme titled “Going the Distance: A Collective Vision on Hope, Unity, and Progress,” was a celebration of 47 years of service and advocacy by the ACA with highlights on the 150th Anniversary of Transcontinental Railroad and the recent signing of the Chinese American WWII Veterans Congressional Gold Medal Act. The railroad helped to unify the country and the Chinese American veterans helped to pave the way for all Asian and Chinese Americans to be a part of Mainstream America post-World War II - the ACA 47th Anniversary made a memory!

Keynote Speaker Major General Bill Chen, a third generation descendant of Chinese American railroad workers, a graduate from University of Michigan in aerospace engineer as was his father and the first Chinese American to become a two-star Major General in the U.S. Army, gave a speech that put a clear spotlight on the evening’s themes from three perspectives: First, his father story (aerospace engineer from University of Michigan, who gained a pilot license, fought WWII along with General Chennault in China through the Flying Tigers); Second, the Chinese railroad workers (their hardship not well recognized on their achievements, later faced the Chinese Exclusion Act and yet struggled and accomplished much in their lives amid prejudice and discrimination such as his father); and Third, WWII veterans (a very high percentage of Chinese Americans volunteered to join during WWII despite the historical backlash of the Chinese Exclusion Act.)



On Sunday, October 20, the Association of Chinese Americans held its 36th High School Scholarship Award Banquet at the Chinese Community Center.

In the past 36 years, Association of Chinese Americans has recognized over 700 local

outstanding Chinese American high school students and awarded more than 250 scholarships to a total of \$170,000. All donations from sponsors are 100% distributed to the scholarship recipients. ACA is proud to have this long history of meaningful youth education-related program and deeply believes the investments are worthy and expect very positive impacts on our future generations for a greater cause.

Allyship for Educational Equity

By Jeannette Soon-Ludes, Ph.D., Director of Institutional Support at Themis Insight



Each September, as students are getting back into the swing of coursework, communities of color celebrate and support those colleges and universities that serve our children, sisters and brothers, families and friends. Known as Minority-Serving Institutions or MSIs, these schools provide critical opportunities to life-long learners who may not otherwise have access to the certifications and degrees of higher education. For the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, our MSIs are given the long but fun-to-say designation of AANAPISI. Otherwise known as Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, AANAPISIs are critical to the retention, graduation, and language-access of low-income AAPI students. Nearly half of all AAPI students attend an AANAPISI.

With a rhythm as dependable as the changing of the seasons, this year we celebrated AANAPISI Week from September 22nd to 28th, on the heels of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Weeks and just before Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) Week. As the newest federal Minority-Serving Institution

designation, the place of AANAPISIs within this lineup is tremendously significant. It is both a privilege and responsibility for AANAPISIs to be recognized alongside other MSIs: A privilege to share in the task of serving historically underserved students and a responsibility to advocate for continued federal support for all Minority-Serving Institutions.

The commemoration of AANAPISI Week this year was – and continues to be – significant because legislatively mandated funding for Minority-Serving Institutions expired on September 30th. The urgency of this crisis was felt across the country. But the story of AANAPISIs and the good they create is larger than this crisis in federal funding. It is a story of meeting AAPI students where they are, with culturally relevant programming that provides holistic support as they move through the college experience. It is a story of creating possibilities.

This year, as we reflect, let's imagine for a moment that AANAPISI Week captured a series of images that can tell us a lot about Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences in higher education. These images, taken with a camera whose lens adjusts to capture both the

landscape and portrait, help us to see exactly what is at stake with the expiration of federal funding and the continuing need for advocates at every level of governance.

The Landscape

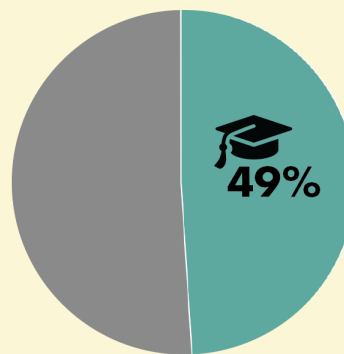
In 2007, the federal government established eight Minority-Serving Institutions programs and mandated funding for these programs through the 2008 Higher Education Act. Beginning with the premise that we can and should do better to serve communities that have been historically underrepresented in the nation's colleges and universities, the MSI program has channeled resources into institutions committed to innovation toward educational equity. Over the course of the past twelve years, the federal AANAPISI program has directed roughly \$8 million a year in both mandatory and discretionary funding for AANAPISIs, funding roughly 20 institutions since 2011 with the average grant award ranging from \$300,000 to \$350,000 per year for a maximum of 5 years.

AANAPISIs are charged with an incredible task: To provide quality higher education opportunities to a population that is more heterogenous than any other racial group in the country. AANAPISIs embrace this diversity by attending to the needs of a population with more than 48 ethnicities, over 300 spoken languages, various socioeconomic statuses, immigration histories, cultures, and religions. With nearly fifty percent of AAPI students enrolling in community colleges, AANAPISIs contend with the challenges within our community. This includes a rising number of AAPIs experiencing poverty, with an overall increase of 38% between 2007 and 2011 and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders experiencing a 60% increase. Yet, far from a cookie-cutter approach to serving AAPI students, these campuses engage local communities through tailored programs and services. AANAPISI innovation creates success, including a graduation rate that exceeds the national average at one-third of

AANAPISIs.

This year there was an added urgency to AANAPISI Week. The U.S. House of Representatives had just passed the FUTURE Act, which provided for two years of extended mandatory funding for the AANAPISI Part F program. With so much at stake, campuses turned toward Rita Pin Ahrens, Executive Director of OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates, for ways to showcase the impact of AANAPISIs on a national stage. From a bird's eye view, dedicated stakeholders drew inspiration from the advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C. to engage local communities in support of the FUTURE Act, now sitting in the hands of the U.S. Senate.

President Rowena Tomaneng, Berkeley City College, was activated and shared the urgency within her network, "It is critical that AANAPISI voices are heard on issues that are important to our communities, such as ensuring ongoing AANAPISI funding." To that end, President Tomaneng spearheaded a resolution by Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education which was passed on to American Association of Community Colleges' National Asian Pacific Islander Council members. She also received approval of a Resolution Urging Senate Approval of the FUTURE Act from the Peralta Community College District Board of

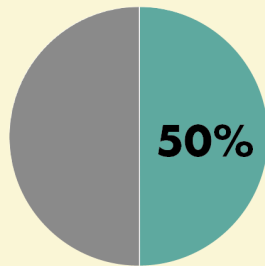


Of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are enrolled in an AANAPISI

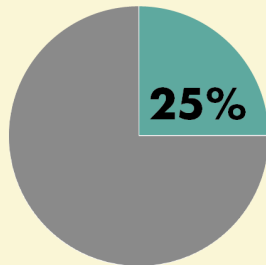


#AANAPISIWeek

Received by AAPI students at AANAPISIs



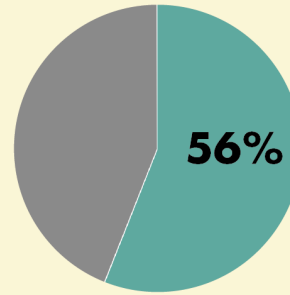
Associate Degrees



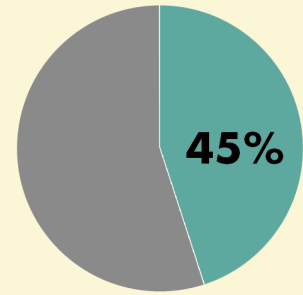
Bachelor Degrees



#AANAPISIWeek



Pacific Islanders



Southeast Asians

Started college but left without a degree



#AANAPISIWeek

Trustees.

The Portrait

With Ahrens and Tomaneng providing leadership at the national and regional levels, AANAPISI programs across the country stepped up to do what they do best: Bring the stories of AAPI students front and center in a growing national narrative on the significance of federal MSI funding. With the hashtag #AANAPISI, students shared the ways their lives have been impacted by AANAPISI programs. From identity exploration to holistic supports to equity as institutional practice, AAPI students used their digital voices to provide an up-close-and-personal perspective on the impacts of AANAPISI funding.

This looked different from coast to coast. At Hunter College AANAPISI Project in New York City, AANAPISI Week was an opportunity to showcase the impact of their relatively young AANAPISI program. Caitlin Ho, Program Director, shared, “For us, this was a wonderful way to join a vibrant community of fellow AANAPISIs in sharing our stories ... We asked HCAP students to share their own thoughts— it was powerful to hear from them, in their own words, how programming that

centers and affirms the diverse experiences of our AAPI students matters.”

On the west coast, the Sacramento State AANAPISI program was living up to its name. Among a flurry of social media activity, the Full Circle Project helped Hnou Lee share her own AANAPISI story. Lee, who graduated from Sac State and received a master’s from CSU Fullerton, went from unsure of her abilities to highly engaged through the FCP AANAPISI program. Today, Lee has come full circle in the AANAPISI world. Now serving on the Coastline College Title III AANAPISI grant, Lee was able to reflect on the impact of AANAPISI funding for newer cohorts of AAPI students, noting that AANAPISI funding works “to create a community of allyship that is invested in the success of AAPI students.”

Whether your lens is focused on the landscape or portrait, the expiration of mandatory federal funding for AANAPISIs is a crisis for educational equity nationwide. Let us strive toward a community of allyship by advocating for passage of FUTURE Act in the Senate, for the AAPI community and all students who benefit from the Minority-Serving Institutions programs ■

THREE COINS:

A 19th Century Romance and Adventure Featuring a Transcontinental Railroad Worker and a Chinese Slave Girl

By Russ Low, M.D.

A new historical novel entitled *Three Coins*, by Russell N. Low, recreates the world of Tong Yan Gai or Chinatown before the turn of the century. It is a world where old traditions and family values are set against the unwelcoming attitudes of the American West. Ah Ying's determination to survive her life as a child slave is only surpassed by her desire for love and her hope for the future. *Three Coins* teaches and il-



lustrates early Chinese American history through the stories of the people whose lives shaped this history. The story is compelling because it is told by the great grandson of Lai Wah, the railroad worker, and Ah Ying, the child slave or mui tsai.

Finding a previously unknown 100 year old Hong family photograph amongst the belongings of his great uncle Kim, Low embarked upon a decades-long search to find the stories behind the 1903 photograph. In *Three Coins* he masterfully weaves family stories and real-life characters with the historical and political events of 19th century America. *Three Coins* is meticulously researched and documented with over 100 newspaper articles, photographs, and photographs. It is a text of Chinese American history brought to life by the drama, romance, and intrigue of his rich family story.

The saga of Ah Ying and Lai Wah is intertwined with the history of the American West. It begins with the building of the transcontinental railroad, a project only made possible by the heroic actions of 12,000 Chinese men, including Low's great grandfather, Hung Lai Wah and his brother Jick Wah. Their story recreates the hardships of building the railroad through the mountains, the bitterly cold winters, and the blasting accident in the Great Summit Tunnel that claimed Jick Wah's right eye. What these young Chinese railroad workers accomplished with simple hand tools and black powder was nothing short of miraculous as they built a railroad through some of the harshest landscape in North America.



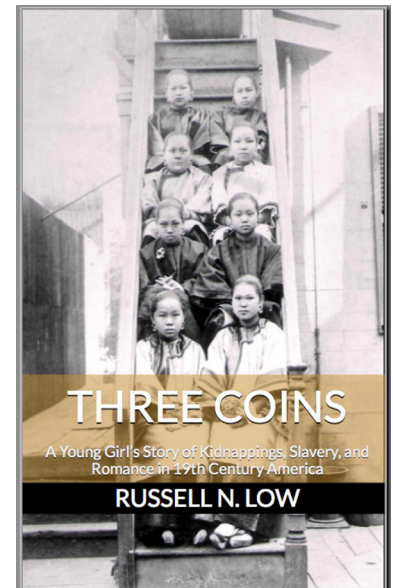
The story then explores the devastating effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the subsequent trafficking of young Chinese women as part of the illegal slave trade. Three Coins sheds light on the role of the Presbyterian church and the Occidental Mission Home for Girls, who boldly rescued thousands of these Chinese women giving them a new life in America. Ah Ying is a 9-year-old girl when she is brought to America as a child slave in 1880. She refuses to be held down by slave owners, missionaries, or Tong high binder thugs, who kidnap her. With the help of her romantic interest, the heroic railroad worker, Lai Wah, she escapes and takes control of her life. Against great odds she survived, found romance, and started a family that to this day continues to shape the world.



The heroic role of the early Chinese women is often overlooked. Yet, these courageous women who came to America under the worst of circumstances, became the foundation of early Chinese American society. These women were bold and courageous, and above all else they knew how to survive.

Together Low's great-grandparents overcame countless obstacles to make a life for themselves in America. Their tale of triumph over hardship is truly an American story. Three Coins touches upon the themes of immigration, discrimination, human trafficking, and romance that are as relevant today as they were 140 years ago. Three Coins celebrates all the immigrant stories that make us uniquely American.

Three Coins is available on Amazon and more information can be found at www.russlow.com ■



The Hierarchy of Taste:

Does Vietnamese Food Have To Be Cheap?

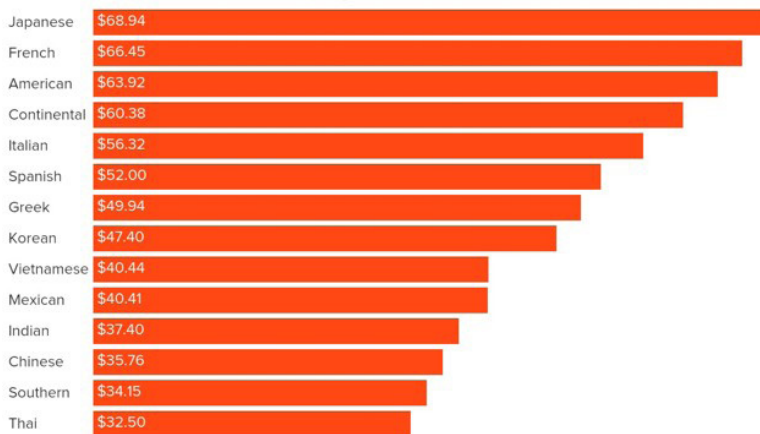
By Kent Tong, OCA National Programs Associate



Several years ago, I randomly thought, “Why are so many Asian cuisines expected to be cheap in America, but white foods are considered more prestigious?” Think about it: If you wanted to celebrate a special occasion, you’d go to a 4-star French restaurant, but if you wanted something after a long day’s work, you’d order Chinese takeout.

Growing up in American society, I was taught to expect certain ethnic foods, like Vietnamese or Chinese, to be cheap. Until then I had never questioned it. Why should I accept this as the status quo? What about these Asian foods make them any less worthwhile than French, Italian, or Spanish ones? Krishnendu Ray, the Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health at New York University, believes the answer lies in how we view migration patterns and a country’s wealth. In other words, the dominant society’s acceptance and enjoyment of ethnic cuisines are linked to their acceptance and inclusion of the immigrant and ethnic groups.

The Average Price of a Meal for One at a Zagat-Listed Restaurant in New York, by Cuisine



Source: Krishnendu Ray; Zagat

Migration and Economic Status

In his book, *The Ethnic Restaurateur*, Ray presents the idea of the “global hierarchy of taste.” This hierarchy is one that privileges nations with economic power and military might, and one that correlates inversely with migration rates of poor people. That is, the higher the migration rate from a country, the poorer that country probably is, therefore the lower their respective cuisines appear on the hierarchy. You can see this hierarchy clearly in America with its diverse demographics and

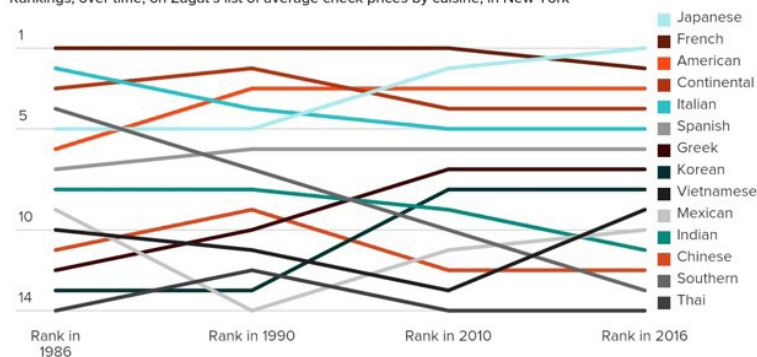


large immigrant population. The ways in which different ethnic groups and their respective cuisines are viewed are not equal across the board; rather, people's responses to different cuisines are influenced by their perceptions of migrants and their origins.

Historically, the United States has been known to view the cuisine of immigrants negatively, particularly the poorer and more recent they are. For example, when poor Italians first immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s to escape from poverty in their home country, their food was not held in high regard; people complained that there was too much garlic and their dishes were over-spiced. It wasn't until Italians climbed up the socio-economic ladder, and migrant flows to the U.S. slowed down, did their cuisine start becoming more respected, in turn, demanding higher prices for their once-derided dishes. Today, Italian immigration to the US is very low and Italian cuisine is regarded as the most popular ethnic cuisine in America.

How Have Cuisines' Statuses Changed in 30 Years?

Rankings, over time, on Zagat's list of average check prices by cuisine, in New York



Source: Krishnendu Ray; Zagat

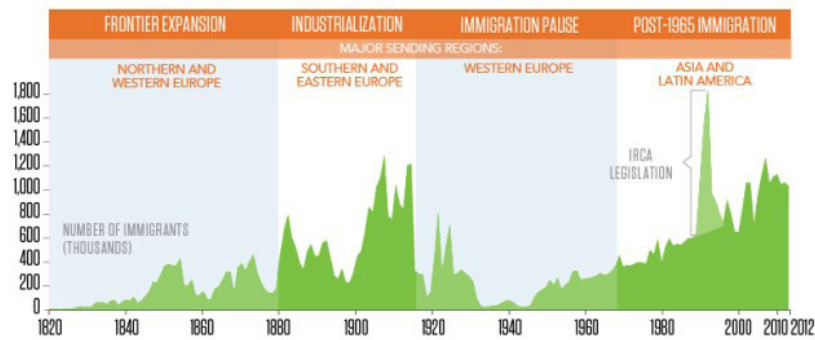
The popularity of Japanese cuisine is a more recent example of this phenomenon. In the early 1900s, Japanese migration was at its highest point in the United States and anti-Japanese sentiment was rampant. The Asiatic Exclusion League was formed to push for legislation against Japanese migration. During the Second World War, Japan allied itself with the Axis powers, such as Nazi

Germany. As a result, the US perceived individuals of Japanese origin, regardless of whether they were long-term US citizens, to be enemy aliens and sent them to internment camps. Since Japanese immigrants were viewed negatively, there wasn't a demand for Japanese cuisine in American society. Fast forward to today, as Japanese migration to the U.S. has slowed down and the country became wealthier, Japanese culture and cuisine, specifically, have gained increasing respect in the U.S. This is reflected in the higher price tags they're able to demand at restaurants and in which we're willing to pay. In 1986, Japanese cuisine ranked sixth in expensiveness. By 2016, they had overtaken French cuisine for the top spot. Ray says, "I see that Japanese chefs are valued because Japanese culture is valued in the Western world because of its economic power."

Economic decline, famine, war and conflict are major causes of global migration, so it makes sense that many immigrants do not come from countries that are rich and stable. In addition, the most recent migration wave to the United States is mostly populated with people from Latin America and Asia. The freshness of these immigrant groups, and the fact that they come from poorer countries, means they arrive to the U.S. where many Americans may have pre-conceived notions that they are less well-off, therefore their dishes are viewed lower on the totem pole. This helps explain why you'll often see Latin American and Asian cuisines on the lower end of the price hierarchy of ethnic cuisines.

Stereotypical Views of "Foreign" People

Now that we understand the link between a country's wealth and our perceptions of its cuisine, we need to consider why some cuisines are still expected to be cheap despite



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (2012)

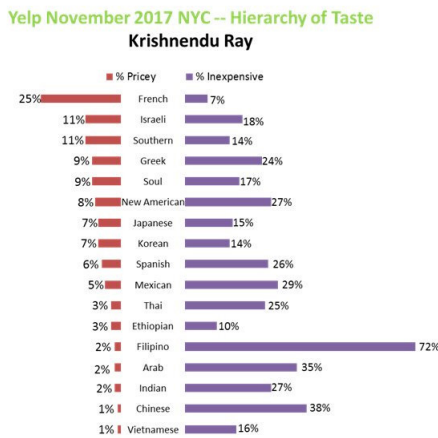
their growing economic power. If China is considered an economic power-house, and Vietnam has one of the fastest growing economies in the world, why aren't they considered haute cuisines? Unfortunately, a country's wealth is not the most important factor influencing people's perceptions and responses to different ethnic groups and their cuisines. What mainstream America considers to be foreign, and their misconceptions about "foreign" people, can determine whether or not a cuisine's prestige is elevated or demoted in the hierarchy. To elaborate this point, Ray explains in the podcast *The Sporkful* that, "Most of the Japanese we are familiar with are business folks, are executives. But right now, most Americans associate Chinese food with relatively impoverished Chinese immigrants." Similarly, because the dominant American society still associates Vietnamese people with the Vietnam War, they think of them primarily as poor refugees. Negative perceptions of Vietnamese people may also still exist because of America's loss in the war and the scars remaining from the war that still haunt American society.

Similar stereotypical expectations apply to Native American food and why, despite being the most truly American food you can get, it is struggling to gain cultural appeal or prestige. At Tocabe, one of the few Native American restaurants in the U.S., patrons "come in expecting what they've seen portrayed on

television or in popular culture; their expectations are often based on stereotypes." They even ask why the employees are not wearing braids. Unless your nation and people are relatable to Western culture, mainstream America will brand you as "foreign." These stereotypical expectations of a group, and the misguided perceptions of their respective economies, affect the way we view their cuisine in the hierarchy.

The Catch-22 of Selling Expensive Ethnic Food "Immigrants can't sell anything full price in America," Taiwanese-American author and restaurateur Eddie Huang remembers his father telling him. We've tied our views of ethnic cuisine to their respective migrant groups' capital, resulting in the expectation that food from poor people must be inexpensive, therefore expensive versions of said food are not authentic. I've certainly been guilty of going to a contemporary Vietnamese restaurant and thinking, "Wow, I can get this for so much cheaper at the other Vietnamese place!" (Ironically, French influence has been in Vietnamese cuisine ever since they colonized the country, yet Vietnamese foods cannot afford the same prestige as their colonizer.) I used to always accuse expensive Vietnamese restaurants of being inauthentic, which I understand now is a problematic thought. I'd been conditioned to expect Vietnamese food to come cheap because that's what mainstream America expects. When we demand "authentic" ethnic food, Ray explains, what we really want is "a true copy of our expectations."

Even when we do try to promote Vietnamese cuisine as high-end affairs it can come off as pandering to a white audience. Take the up-scale Vietnamese restaurant Le Colonial as an



Source: Krishnendu Ray; Yelp

example. With locations in New York City and Chicago, they're promoted as "a celebration of the seductive spirit and vivid flavors of 1920's French Colonial Southeast Asia." This supports the idea that Le Colonial can sell expensive Vietnamese food and be considered high-end because of its French connection. It's not enough that these establishments serve Vietnamese food, but their colonial history must be celebrated and acknowledged because of its association to whiteness.

Even though Vietnamese food is yet to be considered haute cuisine, its rising popularity is already opening the door to cultural appropriation. There's been an instance where white restaurateurs tried to trademark the word "phở," or when a white chef tried to educate people how to "properly" eat phở. One can only imagine the various forms Vietnamese food may take once, if ever, the restaurant world deems it prestigious enough to warrant high prices, thus encouraging outside influences to put their own stamp on it.

Vietnamese Food Doesn't Have to be Cheap

Although they may use the same ingredients or require the same amount of work and cooking techniques as other types of cuisines, there seems to be an accepted mindset across most Americans that there is a ceiling when it comes to paying for certain ethnic food. I do not know what the solution to tackling this perception about Vietnamese, Chinese, Mexican, and other ethnic foods in America may be because there are so many factors in play. However, I believe we can only progress the more we talk about this issue and challenge the narrative that certain ethnic cuisines must be inexpensive. In addition, the more immigrants and ethnic groups are willing to tackle this negative perception and charge higher prices for their foods (though, I understand not everyone will have the privilege to do so), the more it may be accepted as the norm 20 years from now.

We can do our part as consumers, too. Many of us are children of immigrants, so we know how much work goes into our food. We understand racial minorities in the U.S. get paid less despite doing equal work as their peers. We should be willing to support minority and immigrant-owned restaurants that are determined to charge higher prices for their food (if you have the means to do so, of course). My challenge for you all now is, the next time you walk into a Vietnamese-owned establishment that sells Vietnamese food and see premium prices, support it! Don't accept the narrative that has been given to us that says Vietnamese food must come cheap. We should demand the same level of respect as other cuisines.

In his efforts to subvert this narrative, Eddie Huang proclaims, "I sell Taiwanese gua bao for a full [freaking] price in America."

We should sell Vietnamese phở for a full freaking price in America, too ■

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