Issue Brief #18: Asian American & Minority Religion

Key Words: Asian Americans, Eastern Religions, Christianity, double minority

Description: This brief seeks to discuss the various religious identities of Asian Americans and the affects of practicing a minority religion in the United States. It also focuses on the idea of Asian Americans as double minorities by comparing Hindus and Buddhists.

Key Points:

- Christianity is the majority religion of the US.

- The ethnic/racial profile of people with no religious affiliation shows that Asians are among the three most secularized ethnic origin groups.\(^i\)

- The second-largest religious group among Asian Americans is "Eastern Religions" which includes: Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Baha'i, Shintoist, Zoroastrian, and Sikh.\(^ii\)

- Studies show that Hindus have the most stable religious identity among other Eastern Religions, while Buddhists find it much more difficult to pass on the faith from one generation to the next.\(^iii\)

- Asian Americans attempt to use their religions to form bridges that help them adjust to life in the US, despite their common categorization as double minorities.

Images:

https://qed.princeton.edu/getfile.php?f=Religions_in_Asia_c._1500.jpg


http://www.comparativereligion.com/content/00/cover.jpg
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According to a 2001 national survey of the religious identification of people living in the United States, the US has been classified as the most profusely religious nation in the world. Of the 81% of people that identify with a specific religion, an overwhelming 76.5% identify as Christians, making Christianity the majority religion in the US. Many Asian Americans in the US do not, however, identify as Christians, but instead with the same religions they were committed to in Asia; specifically Eastern Religions.

The religious beliefs and practices of Asian Americans are just as diverse as their community itself. According to a 2008 chart of religious and denominational affiliations of Asian Americans, the results show that no religion claims a majority of followers. Those who claim no religious affiliation, consequently, form the largest group. In fact it is stated that this group has grown significantly since the first study conducted in 1990. Asian Americans are thus considered to be the largest of all other ethno-racial groups to claim no religious affiliations. This fact has the potential to form a bridge between Asian Americans and Whites, as Whites are the second largest group to claim no religious affiliation. The second largest religious group among Asian Americans is Eastern Religions, which include: Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Baha’i, Shintoist, Zoroastrian, and Sikh. In relation to Christianity, all Eastern Religions are considered minority religions in the US.

Since Asian Americans constitute only about 5% of the US population, not only are they an ethno-racial minority, but they also practice minority religions, which gives them double minority status. Their status as a double minority inadvertently serves as a barrier that separates them from mainstream American culture. Asian Americans are not only the most diverse
minority group in terms of linguistics and culture, but they also have many national differences. The many different minority religions within the category of Eastern Religions are a leading cause of the lack of overall Asian American solidarity. This can be seen as one of the causes of their late development of a pan-ethnic identity. Their lack of solidarity therefore weakens their political voice and political participation. It also has the potential to lead to religious isolation, as the percentage of US citizens that practice Eastern Religions is very small.

Another potential barrier facing Asian Americans in the US is the fact that many Hindu Americans are from India and still feel ethnically different from Christians, therefore they tend to continue practicing Hinduism in an effort to stay connected to their country and gain a sense of religious security. As a result, minority religions can potentially isolate Asian Americans, as they attempt to keep their culture alive in the US. Conversely, data has shown that more generations of Hindus have been assimilating and marrying into other traditions. For Buddhist, it is stated that convert Buddhist communities find it very challenging to engage their children in Buddhist traditions. This emphasizes the struggle of Asian Americans to uphold their minority religions in the US as more and more of their generations are born outside of Asia.

The impact that practicing a minority religion has on Asian Americans can be seen from both a positive and a negative perspective. On the positive side, Asian Americans that practice minority religions in the US tend to join churches that help them to adjust to life in the US and deal with the upheavals of immigration, adapting to a new country, and other difficult personal and social transformations. Many churches, temples, and other religious organizations provide their members with important and useful services around practical, everyday matters such as translation assistance. The churches that they join often serve as social service agencies as well, by providing them with information and assistance on issues relating to education, employment,
housing, and health care. These positive impacts of practicing minority religions help Asian Americans to form bridges amongst each other, as they come together for the sake of shared religious practices and beliefs.

• Works Cited
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• General References

i http://b27.cc.trincoll.edu/weblogs/AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS/

ii http://www.asian-nation.org/religion.shtml
