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## *Contemporary Asian Communities: Intersections and Divergences.* Linda Trinh Vo and Rick Bonus (Eds.).

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research methods and planning technologies can be employed to generate the evidence on which sound policy making can be based. The book concludes with an assessment of how evidence based policy making will evolve in the future and hopefully play a more significant role in decision making.

This is a useful book which should be widely read and prescribed in social policy classes. Students will appreciate the book's jargon free approach and explication of a straightforward message. Although the message is a positive one, this does not mean that the editors and authors are sanguine about the prospects that research evidence will now actually determine policy decisions. They point out that despite the Blair government's pragmatic insistence that "what matters is what works," Labour Party leaders still fall back on ideological preferences when making social policy decisions. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties involved, the current emphasis on evidence based policy making is an important one which may reinvigorate previous efforts to transcend ideology, personal preference and tradition in formulating and implementing policies designed to enhance human welfare.

Linda Trinh Vo and Rick Bonus (Eds.), *Contemporary Asian Communities: Intersections and Divergences*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. \$69.00 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

Much of the social science literature focusing on ethnic minorities in the United States has been concerned with the cultural dimensions of ethnic life suggesting that unique cultural characteristics can be associated with different groups. The purpose of much of this literature has been to document and describe the attitudes, beliefs, values and other cultural characteristics of these different groups and to examine the social problems and challenges they face. This is particularly true of introductory textbooks in social work which have sought to expose students to the cultures of different ethnic groups in the hope that they may be more sensitive to culture realities when they encounter members of these groups in practice settings.

The editors of this interesting and readable volume contend that this approach is of limited value in seeking to understand the complex realities of culture in contemporary American society. Based on the papers presented at a conference held in California in 1998, the book provides a far more nuanced account of the many

interwoven and intricate dimensions of the cultural experiences of Asian American communities living in the United States today. The book's editors also points out that it is not only a matter of providing a deeper understanding of the complexities of the cultural experiences of Asian Americans, but of normatively transcending the ghettoization of cultural images. There is, they point out, no empirical basis for identifying a unique or unitary Asian American culture. There are major differences in beliefs, attitudes, languages among different Asian communities. Differences of this kind are to be found within ethnic groups from different countries and regions. Clearly, a far more sophisticated account of culture is needed.

The book delivers on its promise to demonstrate the diversity of Asian American culture by offering a veritable fest of material dealing with many aspects of the cultural experiences of Asian Americans. Its fifteen chapters range over topics as diverse as South East Asian youth gangs in Oakland, California; Gay Asian Americans in Los Angeles; internet discussions among immigrant Filipinos; participation in Japanese American beauty pageants; entrepreneurial Asian American children; domestic violence in the South Asian community and much more. The individual preferences and interests of readers will no doubt decide which of these contributions are the most interesting and informative but, as a collection, the book takes debates about culture well beyond traditional concerns. Its arguments about how popular stereotypes obscure complex realities apply equally to accounts of cultural and ethnic groups. The book's final chapter which deals with the intersection of public policy and the subjective experience of cultural life is particularly important. Although this is not a textbook for entry level undergraduates, its engaging style and range of interesting material should appeal to many readers interested in understanding the complex issues attending people's experiences and expressions of culture today.

Sheldon H. Danziger and Robert H. Haveman (Eds.), *Understanding Poverty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. \$55.00 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

Social scientists have long been aware that the incidence of income poverty is susceptible to economic trends, rising when