

## Introduction to Disability/Rehabilitation with Asian/Pacific Islander Americans

Topic: Major Asian Beliefs and Cultural Values

### GOALS:

- Become familiar with the major cultural beliefs and values of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI)
- Identify strengths and limitations of Asian beliefs and values with regard to rehabilitation

### READINGS:

Cho, Y., & Hummer, R. A. (2001). Disability status differentials across fifteen Asian and Pacific Islander Groups and the effect of nativity and duration of residence in the U.S. *Social Biology*, 48, 171-195.

Hampton, N. Z. (2000). Meeting the unique needs of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities: A challenge to rehabilitation counselors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 31(1), 40-46.

### LECTURE OUTLINE:

In this session, we will talk about the major religious and philosophic beliefs and cultural values among AAPI. In the long history of civilization in Asian Countries, many religious beliefs or cultural values were developed from and are still centered on an agricultural background. To begin with, I would like to ask you to do an exercise:

**Please jot down your perceptions of AAPI and their cultural beliefs of health, disability, rehabilitation, education, work, family, etc. When you finish writing, proceed to the lecture notes below.**

Now, I would like to introduce the major forces that shaped many Asian cultures. These forces include Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islamism, and Taoism.

### Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion founded by Shakyamuni (624 - 544 BC.) about 2,500 years ago in India and spread across many Asian countries such as Burma, Cambodia, China, Japan, Korea, Lao, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. It aims at individual salvation in nirvana, a goal attainable by meditation and doing good deeds. The major principles of Buddhism include Karma, four noble truths, and five concepts. The practice of Buddhism is characterized by nuances in ritual, liturgy, and dogma stemming from various schools of teaching and the local transformation of basic precepts and traditions, much as the practice of Christianity varies by denomination, time, and place. Just as the belief in Jesus Christ and the validity of the New Testament, so, too, do the various schools of Buddhism share certain basic beliefs.

According to Buddhism, Karma is the pervasive force in the world. Karma operates inexorably to reward good deeds with meritorious rebirths, and evil deeds with rebirth in one of the evil modes of existence. The law of karma dictates that individuals who perform good actions will earn merit or favorable rebirth, while those who perform wrong actions will earn demerits or unfavorable rebirth.

Karma has also been referred to as a law of causation, whereby every effect has its cause and corresponds with that cause. The accumulation of these merits and demerits in the individual's present and past lives, will determine the extent to which the individual must suffer in this lifetime. The degree of an individual's economic security, for example, is a reflection of this accumulation of merits and demerits.

An individual may attempt to change his karma by performing deeds that will earn merits. Such deeds can include supporting one's family and providing gifts to monks or Buddhist temples. In a sense, one's karma is not wholly dependent on one's deeds but is also a function of both the individual's motive at the time of performing the deed and the end result of the action. The law of karma has been interpreted as a psychological law because of this emphasis on motive.

The Buddhist's four noble truths are: All life is suffering, suffering comes from desires, the cure for suffering is the extinction of desire, and the extinction of desire can be obtained by following a path of right. The five concepts are very similar to the Christian teaching, they include: not to kill, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to drink intoxicating, and not to tell lies.

Buddhism in its bare essentials is a comprehensive transpersonal and trans-cultural philosophy that can be effectively applied in the effort to understand human behavior and to provide help or counsel to those who seek it. The Buddhist concept of nirvana has been compared with the Christian concept of salvation in that both represent a form of reward for proper conduct albeit quite different ones. Because an individual has the ability to exercise free will through the choice of alternative moral actions, there exists the possibility of behavior change. Because an individual's karma is dependent on both behavior and intent, he or she may be willing to modify behavior in order to modify the resultant karma.

The psychological attitude of Buddhism addresses the problems of birth, old age, disease, disability, and death, which humans universally experience as imperfection (e.g., disease and disability), impermanence, emptiness, insubstantiality, and dissatisfaction.

### Confucianism



Confucian was born in China in 551 BC. Confucian philosophy was primarily concerned with the matter of interpersonal relationships. The major principle of the Confucianism is Ta Tong – the great harmony in the world. In order to achieve the great harmony, there should be an order or a hierarchical structure within which people act according to certain rules. Confucianism also holds that five Virtues - Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, Xin are the moral standards that people should follow.

In the United States, we have heard that Confucianism emphasizes social order and hierarchical society, which is the concept of Li (propriety). Li is the rites for functions and rules of conduct or a method of regulating social behavior of people. However, little has been discussed about Confucian's other major concepts, including Ren, Yi, Zhi, and Xin.

Ren means goodness, benevolence, humanity, and kind heartedness. Related concepts include respect and consideration, reciprocity, neighborliness, and love. Yi refers to righteousness, uprightness, and a sense of justice. Zhi means wisdom/knowledge, and Xin refers to honesty and trustworthiness. According to Confucian, human beings are morally good by nature, and it rests with the individual to remain so. Human beings err from ignorance and the force of bad example. The remedies are education. An individual must rectify him or her self before he or she can rectify others.

These concepts have something in common with the fundamental philosophies of rehabilitation counseling in the United States, that is, they emphasize values and membership of every human being. As we know, one of the philosophies of rehabilitation counseling is “every human being has an inalienable value and is worthy of respect for his or her own sake and every person has membership in society, & rehabilitation should cultivate his or her full acceptance”. This philosophy is the foundation upon which the concept of equal rights and opportunities derived.

Similarly, from the perspective of Ren (benevolence & humanity) and Yi (uprightness & a sense of justice), an individual with a disability should be treated as an equal member of society like anyone else. Helping those who have special needs is Ren. Discrimination against fellow human beings violates the virtues of Ren and Yi. As Confucian states “What you do not wish upon yourself extend not to others”. This should be the basic principle in dealing with one's fellow human beings, including people with disabilities.

Furthermore, by nature, human beings are nearly alike. It is learning and training which leads people to become so different in terms of their attitudes toward people with disabilities. Those who hold a negative attitude towards individuals with disabilities are good people by nature. However, they err from ignorance and bad examples in their environments. Education and learning from good examples will help these people cultivate Ren and Yi and eventually change their attitudes.

### Hinduism

Hinduism was originated in India. About 83% of population in India is Hindus. Hinduism does not have a single founder, a specific theological system, a single system of morality, or a central religious organization. It consists of thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in

India since 1500 BC. Hinduism was introduced to the U.S. by Swami Vivekanand in 1893, many Vedanta Centers were established later in the U.S., & there are 1.1 million Hindus in the U.S.

The philosophical foundation of Hinduism is Vedanta which is based on the Vedas, the sacred scriptures of India. Vedanta affirms the oneness of existence, the divinity of the soul, and the harmony of religions. God is infinite existence, conscious-ness, and bliss. God can be personal as well, assuming human form in every age. The greatest temple of God lies within the human heart and human nature is divine: pure, perfect, eternally free.

### Vedanta Seal



Water represents unselfish work. Lotus symbolizes love of God. Sun represents knowledge. Serpent represents awakening of spiritual power. Swan symbolizes the Supreme Being or Godhead.

### Islamism

A fundamental proposition of Islam is that it teaches people to respect all human lives. Islam sees disability as morally neutral & disability is accepted as being an inevitable part of the human condition. Here I would like to share a story about the Prophet Muhammad & a woman with epilepsy.

One day, Muhammad met a woman who had epilepsy. The woman was afraid that she might expose herself to strangers when she had an epileptic attack in a public place and she would not be able to go to the paradise because of the exposure. She asked Muhammad to help her. Muhammad said that he had two options: (a) he would ask Allah to heal her so she would not suffer, and (b) she continued baring her condition and he would pray for her so she would be able to go to the paradise regardless of the exposure. The woman chose the option B.

What does the story tell us? I see at least two points: (a) all people have access to paradise regardless their disability, and (b) endurance and patience is important. What is your opinion?

### Taoism



Taoism refers to “the way” – an inner, spiritual liberation based in retreat from the world. Taoism is both a philosophy and a religion. It emphasizes simplicity and harmony with nature

and the wholeness of the mind and body. One of the major concepts of Taoism is Yin and Yang developed by Lao Zi (Tzu) who lived from 604 to 514 B.C.

According to Lao Zi (Tzu), the universe was regulated by two primal forces: Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang wax and wane alternately and flow endlessly into each other. It should be noted that, in Western thought, the balance of Yin and Yang could be interpreted as conflicting opposites. Yet, in Asian thought, there is no absolute duality. Without Yin, Yang cannot exist, vice versa, without Yang there will be no existence of Yin. It is important for many Asians to find a balance between Yin and Yang in everyday life. By the same token, when we discuss influences of Asian cultures on rehabilitation processes, we may need to explore both Yin and Yang perspectives and how do they flow into or influence each other.

Additionally, shamanism and ancestor worship are common among certain Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. For example, Hawaiians believe in a continuation between this life and the next. People in this life are expected to have cared for those who are dead, and those who have died watch over the currently living (McLaughlin & Braun 1998).

Derived from the aforementioned religious beliefs or philosophies, the following values were developed and cultivated among many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders:

### Collectivism

Collectivism refers to the importance of giving high consideration to the implication of individuals' behavior for others, sharing material and nonmaterial resources with others, emphasizing harmony within the in-group, sharing both good and bad outcomes with others, viewing one's own achievement as the family/group achievements, and feeling that individual is a part of his/her in-group life. Because of this tradition of emphasizing group interests, AAPI may tend to be more interdependent, collective, flexible, and conventional. For many AAPI, friendship is a great resource for seeking help, support, information, and guidance.

### Conformity to Norms

Conformity to norms refers to the importance of conforming to familial and social expectations, following the role of expectations (gender, family hierarchy), not deviating from familial and social expectations, being concerned about bringing disgrace to one's family reputation, and reciprocating other's gifts.

### Family Values and Filial Piety

All Asian cultures emphasize the importance of the family and reciprocal obligations, harmony or value of smooth interpersonal relationships in the family. Everyone in the family has a responsibility to make the family proud. Failures in school, business, and marriage; or misbehavior are considered an embarrassment, shame, and loss of face to the entire family. Sacrificing interests or desires of the individual for the good of family is highly regarded. The willingness to sacrifice individual interests for familial and group priorities reinforces the collective identity. Exclusion from the family is described as the worst imaginable punishment.

Filial Piety has been a cardinal cultural norm institutionalized over a long period of time in China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, etc. It refers to serving one's parents unselfishly in a wide range of the parents' needs or wishes, including physical care, social-psychological comfort, respect for and consultation with parents concerning important family and personal matters, honoring and glorifying parents through personal achievement, etc. It also includes the concept of "Ti", meaning older siblings care for younger siblings & younger siblings respect older siblings.

Filial Piety is a virtue everyone must practice since the love and affection of a child for his or her parents or the love and affections among siblings is the prototype of goodness in interpersonal relationships from which the virtue of Ren (benevolence & humanity) may emerge (Tseng, 1973). Because of this belief, Adult children often live with their parents and provide financial support to their parents and siblings who cannot support themselves. When their parents or siblings become disabled, they often provide personal care for the parents or siblings. Because of this belief, Adult children often live with their parents and provide financial support to their parents and siblings who cannot support themselves. When their parents or siblings become disabled, they often provide personal care for the parents or siblings.

For instance, supporting and taking care of one's elder parents and/or disabled children is included in the Chinese Constitution, reinforced by the establishment. The Chinese media such as newspapers and TV programs often report stories of individuals who sacrifice one's own interests in order to help or take care of one's parent or sibling with a disability. Those who have done extremely well in this regard are honored as the models for others.

However, this kind of value and practice is not in line with the mainstream culture in the U. S. As we know, independent living is one of the corner stones of the rehabilitation system in the U. S. One of the major goals of rehabilitation is to help an individual with a disability live independently. The conflict of these values may have an impact on the rehabilitation process of Chinese Americans with disabilities.

### Emotional Self-Control

Emotional self-control refers to the importance of having the ability to control one's emotions, having sufficient inner resources to resolve emotional problems, and implicitly understanding and not openly expressing emotions such as love.

Within some traditional Asian cultures (e.g., Chinese and Japanese), emotions are usually understated or expressed indirectly. AAPI from such a culture tend to view explicit expression of affection and the complaining of worry, despair, or pain as a sign of weakness (Chan et al., 1988). Emotions may be communicated obliquely through such modes as substitution. Shame, for example, is a commonly expressed substitute for depression, anxiety, grief, and trauma.

However, other AAPI may do not have problem expressing pain within the family. For example, Filipinos expect family members to care for them in the event of illness, and within the family, it is quite common to freely express pain and suffering (Frank-Stromborg & Olsen, 1993).

### Harmony & Modesty

'Ren' is a central notion of Confucian ideology that served as a basic principle to maintain peace, harmony and social order. In order to maintain harmony, one needs to be humble and modest. This means to treat oneself strictly and others leniently.

Great value is placed on preserving harmony, or at least its appearance, within the family. Mediation and negotiation are often employed to resolve any acknowledged conflict, rather than direct confrontation. The needs of the family are generally considered to take precedence over those of the individual family member.

### Education

Many Asian cultures emphasize education. It is believed that education is an essential means to success and improvement in the quality of life, a result of a long history. Traditionally, in most Asian countries, education was the only way to change family status.

For instance, following Confucian's teaching, China established a civic exam system in the Sui Dynasty (581AD-618AD). Civic officials were selected based on their success on the imperial examination, or Keju. Taking the imperial exam was a foremost event for every educated person in ancient China, because it was the only way to enter the empire's bureaucracy. Success on the exam promised a bright future, but such achievement did not come easily. Most examinees studied for a few years; the truly outstanding participants dedicated several years to the effort. This system encouraged common people to become court officials through education. The system lasted for almost 1,500 years (ended in 1905) and had strongly influenced Chinese people's beliefs in education. Up to date, Chinese and Chinese American parents are still using those who worked hard and succeeded in the imperial examinations as examples to encourage their children to study hard. Also, the title "Zhuang Yuan", which was given to the person who received the highest score on the imperial examination, is still used to name those who obtain the highest score on the annual national college admission test in China.

Other Asian Americans such as Asian Indian, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese Americans have the similar values to the Chinese when it comes to education. Parents from these cultures often encourage their children to pursue college education and would sacrifice many things in order for their children to go to college. Academic excellence is one means of bringing honor to the family and is generally expected.

### Industry and Endurance

Many Asian cultures emphasize that the way to improve family status is through hard work and saving money. Working hard means working long hours, keeping busy, sacrificing personal life, and contributing to the family honor. In the eyes of many AAPI, endurance and patience are good virtues that will help them deal with the hardship of life and achieve goals or meanings in life. Here is an example:

Yong is a 19 year old Chinese American. He came to the U.S. when he was 10 years old. At that time, Yong's parents were graduate students at a state university in Northeast America. Yong were placed in ESL and regular classes for two years. However, he still had problems in class, particularly, in the math class. He lived in a small college town. Many students in Yong's school were children of faculty and graduate students. Teachers were used to having "smart" Asian students and thought Yong had an attitude because all Asian boys were supposed to be math genius. Fortunately, Yong's mother had a friend who was a special education teacher. The friend suggested that Yong get an assessment for learning disabilities. After a series of testing and assessment, Yong was diagnosed as having a learning disability in mathematics. It was not easy for Yong and his parents to accept the diagnosis. However, with the help of his mother's friend, Yong and his parents were able to face the challenge.

Yong's mother told him a story about Li Bai. Li Bai was the most famous poet in the Chinese history. He lived in the Tang Dynasty (618AD-907AD) of China. When he was young, he was not a hard-working student. He always escaped school and went out to play. One day, he went cross a creek and saw an old lady sharpening a big iron stick by the creek. The next day, he saw the lady again and she was doing the same thing. On the third day, he saw the same scenario.

Li Bai became very curious. He finally asked the old lady what she was doing. The lady said that she was making a sowing needle out of the big iron stick. Li Bai was so surprised and he asked the lady how long it would take to do that. The lady said that it did not matter how long it would take and the key was being persistent. The lady further explained that a person could achieve whatever he or she aimed if he or she is persistent and patient. What the lady said made Li Bai realized that learning and study was like sharpening the big iron stick. If he was patient and persistent, he could achieve as well. From then, Li Bai studied hard and became the most famous poet in the Chinese history. Even now, students in Chinese schools still study Li's poems.

Yong's mother told him that, regardless his limitations, he could achieve his goals if he worked hard and was persistent. Yong was encouraged by the story of Li Bai. He worked hard, graduated from a high school, and went to a college that had an excellent program for students with learning disabilities.

What does the story tell us? It tells us that cultural values can help individuals with disabilities and their families cope with difficulties. Building upon strengths of cultural values, Asian Americans with disabilities will be able to adjust and adapt to disability. Yong's mother did an excellent job teaching Yong about the cultural values and these values helped Yong achieve his potential.

### Acculturation and Generation Differences

It is important to note that there is a difference in values and beliefs among AAPI. The difference is related to acculturation and socialization processes of each individual. Acculturation refers to a process of reconciling the cultural differences (e.g., beliefs, practices, values, and behaviors) between an immigrants' country of origin and their adopted country or between an America-born Asian American's ethnic culture and the mainstream American culture. This reconciliation often involves discrepant beliefs, practices, behaviors, and values.

There are also generation differences in values and beliefs. For example, many studies of Japanese Americans have emphasized generation differences among first (Issei), second (Nisei), third (Sansei), and fourth (Yonsei) generation members. Although the first-generation Asian Americans tend to maintain more cultural unique values and beliefs than the second-generation Asian Americans do, it is not correct to assume that ethnic identity is a linear and sequential process. Determination of ethnic and cultural identity can be determined through both formal and informal clinical assessments, including clients' self-nominations, multicultural profile scales, attitude scales, and behavior checklists.

## **ASSIGNMENT 2**

**Based on the lecture notes and required readings, write a short-essay that identifies any of the aforementioned AAPI cultural beliefs/values that may facilitate or hinder the rehabilitation process. Provide rationales and/or examples to support your opinion. The essay is expected to be logically organized, grammatically correct, proofread, and neat. It must be typed, double-spaced (approximately 2-3 pages), and in APA 5th edition style (see Attachment A for details).**