Respect in Southeast Asian American Children and Adolescents: Cultural and Contextual Influences

Carl L. Bankston III, Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo

People of Southeast Asian ancestry are among the newest and most rapidly growing ethnic groups in the United States. In 1970, Filipino Americans made up the only Southeast Asian national origin category with a substantial representation in this country, with a population of just over 343,000 according to U.S. Census estimates (Bankston, 2005). A 1965 change in American immigration laws helped to promote emigration from a variety of Asian nations to the United States, but the growth of populations originating from several nations of Southeast Asia resulted primarily from the end of American involvement in the war centered in Vietnam. By 1980, the numbers of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Lao in the United States had grown from negligible to 261,729 Vietnamese, 16,044 Cambodians, and 47,683 Lao. Thailand, home to U.S. military bases during the Vietnam War, was the birthplace or ancestral homeland of 46,279 people in the United States by 1980. The Philippines was another location of U.S. military bases, which contributed to a rapidly increasing Filipino American population; it more than doubled in the 1970s, reaching 774,942 by 1980. By the end of the twentieth century, the Southeast Asian American population had grown to well over 3.5 million people, living in nearly every state in the United States.

These rapidly growing national groups constituted a new and substantial presence in American schools by the beginning of the twenty-first
Asian students were a Southeast Asian race or ancestry—primarily from primary through college levels, grew from about 927,000 to an estimated 1.2 million. This group now represents approximately one out of every sixty-four American students. Most of the Southeast Asians (over 1 million in 2000) were enrolled in public schools. As in the population at large, the greatest numbers of Southeast Asians were Vietnamese (112,789 in 1980 and 379,179 in 2000) and Filipinos (270,194 in 1980 and 543,327 in 2000).

American students with Southeast Asian backgrounds came from a variety of cultural traditions. The Thai, Lao, and Cambodians came from societies heavily influenced by Theravada Buddhism and by extensive historical contact with India. The Vietnamese received influences from the Mahayana Buddhism of the North and from Chinese Confucianism, as well as more recent influences from the French and Catholicism. The Filipinos experienced hundreds of years of Spanish and later American colonialism. But for all of their differences, most of the immigrants from Southeast Asia came from village-based societies with cultures deeply rooted in rice farming. All of these societies emphasize age-based hierarchies and conspicuous displays of respect by younger people toward elders and people in positions of authority. As Whiting and Whiting (1975) and Whitinger and Edwards (1988) argued in their cross-cultural studies of children, cultures can be seen as falling into two general types, and similar types of cultures teach children to behave in similar ways.

In this chapter, we suggest that cultural traditions of respect play a large part in shaping how children and adolescents of Southeast Asian backgrounds adapt to life in American schools. We argue that while their Southeast Asian cultural traditions are different from those of most Americans, the traditions generally contribute to positive adaptation at school, although the differences may also result in some negative effects.

There are both similarities and differences running across the respective cultural values of these Southeast Asian national groups. In this chapter, we argue that these variations have less to do with differences among the core traditions of the various homelands than with distinctions in recent historical circumstances. Specifically, we propose that the ways in which Southeast Asian nationalities have expressed orientations such as age and authority hierarchies in the United States differ largely depending on whether they have arrived in the United States primarily as refugee groups or as nonrefugee immigrant groups. The distinction between immigrants as voluntary acculturating groups and refugees as involuntary acculturating groups has been widely recognized in the literature on cross-cultural adaptation (Ward, 2001; Berry and Sam, 1997).

One might at first think that the refugee groups, fleeing from war and social disruption in their homelands, would have experienced substantial disruption of their traditional cultural values and that refugee status would lead to both loss of their original homeland cultures and difficulty fitting into a host society. Indeed, the literature has generally found that refugees experience greater acculturative stress than immigrants do (Ward, 2001). However, our work in this area has led us to conclude, as we detail in this chapter, that in many cases, the refugee groups are actually more likely than the nonrefugee groups to emphasize traditional Southeast Asian cultural orientations in their interpersonal relations and that these orientations can help in adaptation to a host country. We suggest that this occurs, first, because the refugee groups often have a greater need than others to rely on intensive cooperation with coethnics, which can lead refugees to cultivate ties to other group members based on shared cultural practices and values.

By contrast, immigrants often have greater access than refugees to the opportunities and social structures of mainstream American society and have less need to rely on closed social circles of fellow immigrants for support. Second, refugees have generally arrived with national waves of population movement, while nonrefugee immigrants more often arrive in the United States as a result of individual movements, based on their individual personal connections within the larger American society. Immigration through marriage to U.S. citizens and residents, a particularly important source of migration for Southeast Asians from the nonrefugee nations of the Philippines and Thailand, is one of the most notable ways in which country-of-origin cultural connections are weakened.

Research in the schools indicates that values such as the hierarchical respect common among Southeast Asians generally benefit students who hold these values (Bankston, Caldas, and Zhou, 1997; Bankston and Zhou, 1998; Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991; Whitmore, Trautmann, and Caplan, 1989). Respect for teachers, for example, leads to cooperative behavior on the part of students and positive responses by the teachers. While nonrefugee groups often enjoy more advantageous socioeconomic positions than the refugee groups do, the socioeconomic advantages of nonrefugees tend to be counterbalanced by the advantages of the value orientations of refugees. However, as members of the refugee nationalities gradually assimilate into the broader American society over the course of generations, they may tend to lose the values that were initially positive distinctions and advantageous in U.S. schools.

Patterns of Respect in Southeast Asian Cultures

A brief examination of cultural values and practices among Southeast Asians suggests that respect occupies a key part in the value systems of all of the national groups examined here. Cultural values of respect are so deeply embedded, in fact, that these values run through the languages of Southeast Asia (Bankston and Zhou, 1998). Bankston and Zhou found that the value and practice of respect were key signifiers of Vietnamese identity and of positions in the web of Vietnamese social relations: respect for elders and authority, as a set of collectively held ideas about desirable and undesirable forms of behavior, translates into actions that
mark one's position in a hierarchy of social relations” (1998, p. 95). Respect therefore is constructed as both a cultural value and a representation of one’s character and social status.

Vietnamese patterns of social organization developed around the value of respect are implicit in the Vietnamese language. Vietnamese use status pronouns that establish the relative positions of the speaker and the person addressed. First-person, second-person, and third-person pronouns vary according to these social positions. Thus, the word ông is both a title (Ông Carl—Mr. Carl; Ông Mei—“Mr. American,” or “the American gentleman”) and a second- and third-person pronoun used to indicate respect, formality, and a degree of unfamiliarity.

In the context of schools, the word thầy (“teacher”) is one of the most important Vietnamese status pronouns. As a noun, this word is usually used as part of a compound (thày giáo or thày hoc—teacher), and it means both “teacher” and “master”; the latter has the sense of both “schoolmaster” and “master of a servant.” Used alone, however, it is most often a pronoun that conveys the respect a student must show to a male teacher. It may be taken as an aspect of traditional Vietnamese gender relations and of the old association of teaching with masculinity: in cô giáo, the feminine equivalent of thày giáo, the word cô refers simply to an unmarried woman.

Cultural practices of Cambodian communities similarly rely on notions of respect to elders, authority, peers, and self. For example, the common Theravada concept of “making merit,” that is, performing virtuous acts to improve one’s moral and religious standing, extends to social relations. Merit making for Cambodian Buddhists denotes more than accumulating spiritual credits for good acts. Merit-making activities and correct behavior (for example, proper comportment, appropriate attire, and correct use of gendered pronouns) are viewed as upholding the order of the universe. This might even lead one to say that expression of respect is fundamental not only to Cambodian society but also to the spiritual universe of this cultural group. Thus, one’s inability or refusal to follow these sociocultural guidelines is often characterized as an act against the social order, that is, as a moral transgression.

As in the other Southeast Asian languages, Khmer has a wide variety of pronouns and honorific terms, and the choice of pronouns varies depending on the social status of both the speaker and the person addressed. Terms expressing special respect are used to address Buddhist monks. For example, the English word “I” is expressed in Khmer by the word ṭhnyom when speaking politely to someone, ṭhng when speaking to an intimate, and ṭhnyom prah ṭhān when speaking to a monk. The word lokh is equivalent to the English “you” when speaking politely, and the word nek may be used in speaking to an intimate or an inferior on the social hierarchy, such as someone of a lower social class. It is significant that while Vietnamese and Lao language forms were largely undisturbed by political change in 1975, the radical Khmer Rouge attempted to obliterate all status distinctions in the language and enforce neutral equality on all speakers during the Khmer Rouge period in power, from 1975 through 1978 (Marston, 1985, 1988).

Lao culture is quite similar to that of the Thai, described just below. In fact, the language of Laos is almost identical to dialects of northeastern Thai, and even the Central Thai and Lao languages are mutually intelligible to many speakers. Like the Vietnamese, the Lao and the Thai use status pronouns. In Lao, teachers are addressed as khau, a word derived from the Sanskrit guru that indicates high respect for teachers. Within families, age statuses are expressed through pronouns, so that, for example, older brothers are addressed as ai and younger brothers as nauk. Within Lao families, children are expected to be subordinate to parents to a much greater extent than in contemporary American families. While American children will often argue with their parents, children in Laos are expected to obey without question.

Among the nonrefugee immigrant groups, the Thai and the Filipinos, hierarchical respect is also an essential homeland cultural value. In Thailand, Theravada Buddhism predominates; nearly 90 percent of the people are Buddhist (Van Esterik, 2000). Linked to practices of Theravada Buddhism are the practices of body awareness and control closely associated with an orientation toward relations of respect for authority, elders, and one’s superiors. As anthropologist Penny Vau Esterik (2000) has noted, these bodily practices are “built into the socialization of Thai children... Teaching children (and foreigners) to wai correctly and to reproduce the hand motions of classical Thai dance are lessons in transferring body-based skills.” Van Esterik describes the wai as a “graceful Thai gesture of greeting and showing respect by placing raised palms together and bowing the head” (p. 33). Furthermore, Van Esterik describes the Thai practice of kalatesa, or “attention to surfaces and appearances,” where postures, gestures, and talk are always related to time and place or to the social context of an interaction. Therefore, following the practice of kalatesa, one wais with far more deference to a Buddhist monk than a peer, lowering the head with palms raised to the forehead rather than the chest.

Respect directly intersects with Thai kalatesa in that children learn at an early age and throughout childhood that respect for teachers, parents, elders, older sisters, brothers, and friends requires one’s ability to be “Thai” in the world and reflects a child’s embodied familiarity with Thai-ness, and therefore reflects the quality of a child’s upbringing. Finally, elaborate status pronouns express Thai feelings toward authority; as they do among the other Southeast Asian groups. Younger siblings address the older as pi, and the older address the younger as nauk. The words ajarn and krua are simultaneously nouns meaning “teacher,” pronouns expressing a high degree of respect (especially ajarn), and titles placed before an individual’s name.

Filipino Americans share the cultural value of respect with other Southeast Asians and display this value through behavior and physical expressions. Four widely recognized key cultural values are utang na loob (moral debt), hiya (shame), amor propio (self-esteem), and pakikisama (getting along with others). From the Filipino perspective, children owe an eternal
social roles are often thought of in terms of family relations even when they involve people who are not actually family members. Younger people are expected to show respect for their elders at all times. When a child greets an older person such as a grandparent, the child will show respect by taking the elder’s hand and bowing slightly to touch the back of the hand with the forehead.

The pattern of showing respect for elders applies to older brothers and sisters as well. Hence, older brothers and sisters must not be treated as equals but addressed as kuya (“big brother”) and ate (“big sister”). Older friends are often called kuya or ate. Children call unrelated adults tita (“aunt”) or tito (“uncle”). Those who do not seem to recognize or care about these types of social relations are often referred to as walang hiya (“shameless”), a term that expresses very strong disapproval. Direct criticism of inappropriate behavior, however, is also considered inappropriate. Indirect criticism is usually practiced. Therefore, when people violate social expectations, others will be reluctant to criticize them openly, out of fear of offending the sense of amor propio. Like the Thai practice of kalatesa, Filipinos practice pakikisama, or smooth relations among people. This practice dictates that people avoid direct confrontation. In terms of the family, pakikisama means that individuals should always place the interests of the family and the maintenance of relations within the family first, thus considering their own interests and desires as secondary.

The similarities and variations in patterns of respect by extension apply to ideas of disrespect. Because hierarchy is so important in Southeast Asian ideas of respect, treating those who are considered in higher positions on a hierarchy as equals is a serious form of disrespect and a source of conflict within many Southeast Asian families. Women are expected to respect men, and children are expected to respect their elders. SUPERIORS of any sort, particularly teachers for children and adolescents, must be treated with signs of respect. In the American setting, this attitude of hierarchical respect continues to be held, especially by the members of the refugee groups, who are often less accustomed than Filipino and Thai Americans to mainstream American forms of expression.

Body language easily conveys disrespect as a form of nonverbal communication. Among the Vietnamese, it is considered disrespectful and challenging to look someone in the eyes. This conflicts directly with the cultural assumption of most Americans that not looking people in the eyes is a sign of evasiveness. Failure to follow the Thai, Lao, and Cambodian practice of bowing with palms of the hands together strikes members of these groups as disrespectful, while this practice may be regarded as excessively submissive by other Americans. Among the Thai and Lao, pointing the feet at another person, or propping feet up on a chair or table expresses extreme disrespect.

Variations in Historical Background

While there are many cultural similarities among Americans of various Southeast Asian origins, there are also differences in their historical backgrounds. The most notable difference is between groups that arrived as refugees and those that did not arrive as refugees.

**Refugee Nationalities.** U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia produced one of the greatest government-sponsored transoceanic population movements in history. In the spring of 1975, the U.S.-supported governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia fell to communist forces. As a result, an exodus of refugees from these three countries began. In response to the Indochinese refugee crisis, the U.S. Congress passed the most comprehensive piece of refugee legislation in U.S. history, the Refugee Act of 1980. Indochinese refugees began entering the United States in unprecedented numbers; by 2000 the number of Vietnamese in the country had grown to over 1,110,000,000, the number of Laotians to over 167,000, and the number of Cambodians to over 178,000.

**Immigrant Nationalities.** The two main regular immigrant (non-refugee) Southeast Asian nationalities in the United States are Filipinos and Thai. Among all the national groups discussed in this chapter, Filipinos have the longest history of contact with the United States. Large-scale Philippine-American contacts date back to 1898, when the United States intervened in the Philippine war for independence from Spain during the Spanish American War. After defeating the Spanish, the United States continued to occupy the Philippines, and U.S. troops spent several years fighting to put down the Filipino independence forces. The United States established its own government in the Philippines and introduced elements of U.S. law and public education. Although this did result in the adoption of many American political ideals, as well as the spread of the English language in the Philippines, Filipino attitudes toward parent-child and teacher-student relations continued to be dominated by notions of hierarchical respect.

Many of the Filipinos admitted to the United States were women married to American servicemen. By one estimate, about half of all the immigrants who came to the United States between 1946 and 1965 arrived as wives of U.S. military personnel (Reimers, 1985). Spouses of U.S. service personnel who had served in the Philippines continued to make up a substantial portion of the post-1965 immigration, with much of this due to the American buildup in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. In 1980, one out of every four married Filipino American women had a husband who had served in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War period (Ruggles and others, 2004). The United States kept its military bases until 1991, so marriage to U.S. citizens serving in the military continued to be one source of migration. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census showed that Filipinos had one of the highest rates of out-group marriage of any minority group in the nation. Most Filipino Americans in that year were married to non-Filipinos.
This was particularly marked for women. While 47.8 percent of Filipino American men were married to women of their own group, only 22.4 percent of women were married within the group. Well over half of Filipino women (57.8 percent) were married to non-Hispanic whites, as were almost one third (31.0 percent) of Filipino men.

Following a liberalization of immigration law in 1965, the United States became much more open to professionals from Asia. Filipinos, educated in a school system modeled on that of the United States and frequently speaking fluent English, were among the most common professional immigrants to the United States. With high rates of out-group marriage, familiarity with American culture, and heavy representation in white-collar professional occupations, Filipinos have tended to fit into American society as individuals rather than as groups. Filipino migration to the United States increased rapidly in the late twentieth century, with thirty thousand to over fifty thousand people from the Philippines arriving each year during the 1980s and 1990s (Bankston, 2005).

The Thai arrived in the United States much more recently than the Filipinos. Small numbers of Thai immigrants began to arrive after the 1965 liberalization of immigration laws. Many of the early immigrants were highly skilled professionals in areas such as medicine and engineering. During the mid- to late 1960s, a larger source of immigrants came as a result of the U.S. military personnel stationed in Thailand for the war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Marriages between U.S. soldiers and Thai women provided a large source of this wave of immigrants. According to U.S. Census data, women made up 62 percent of the Thai American population in 1980, 63 percent in 1990, and just over 60 percent in 2000. At the end of the twentieth century, the United States was home to about 111,000 people of Thai ethnicity, making them the smallest of the Southeast Asian groups.

Implications of Historical Backgrounds

The historical backgrounds of the Southeast Asian groups have important implications for the adaptation of their children to life in the United States if these backgrounds are interpreted from the segmented assimilation perspective on the children of immigrants. Basically, this perspective, associated chiefly with the work of Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993), suggests that the benefits of immediate assimilation into American society depend on the segment of American society into which immigrant children assimilate. The children of middle-class, professional immigrants can assimilate into relatively advantageous settings. The children of poorer immigrants and of immigrants who have little familiarity with American society face the prospect of assimilating into some of the most disadvantaged segments in the United States. At least one of the reasons that this assimilation can be problematic is that these disadvantaged segments of American society often have ideas about respect and disrespect that conflict with middle-class American views and are not conducive to success in schools (Zhou and Bankston, 1998).

The refugee nationalities, from the segmented assimilation point of view, had both more need for reliance on cultural values such as hierarchical respect, rooted in their ethnic communities, and more access to those values. Located on the margins of American society, their chances for upward mobility depended chiefly on their abilities to do well in school and behave in ways that drew positive responses from their teachers. Generally living in close proximity to coethnics, they had access to support and direction from elders. The Thai and the Filipinos enjoyed greater access to the benefits of mainstream American society. For these two groups, then, respect was a key to upward mobility that it was for young members of the refugee groups.

Southeast Asian American Children, Adolescents, and Families

Throughout the 1980s, Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore pursued a major study of the children of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao refugees in the United States (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989; Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991). They were particularly interested in how cultural values brought from Southeast Asia shaped children's thinking on how life should be approached. Based on their reading of literary and historical work about the relevant nations and on reports by anthropologists and other scholars from this region, the researchers devised a questionnaire aimed at probing the central values that guide the value orientations of Southeast Asian children and their families in the United States. The researchers asked both parents and children to rate a list of items in terms of value on a five-point scale ranging from "very important" to "not at all important." Factor analyses of their results resolved the value systems into six interrelated factors: (1) the cultural foundation (connected to beliefs about religion, tradition, and society), (2) family-based achievement, (3) hard work, (4) the family in society, (5) self-reliance and pride, and (6) coping and integration. Ideas concerned with authority were prominent in three of the six clusters of values. The first element of the cultural foundation these scholars found, which was the factor that explained the greatest amount of variance in their factor analysis, was "respect for authority." "Respect for family members" was found to be one component of family-based achievement. "Respect for elders" was a key to self-reliance and pride. In a rank ordering of children's values, Caplan and his coauthors found that "respect for family members" was the single most important value of Southeast Asian children, since items reflecting this value were most often rated as "very important" or "important" by children (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989; Choy, and Whitmore, 1991).

This value is not necessarily always passed on undisturbed to native-born generations. One of the major predictors of juvenile delinquency
among young members of Southeast Asian refugee groups is the extent to which the minors reject the value of respect toward their elders. The struggle of parents with life in the new country can often lead them to lose their high-status position in the eyes of their children (for examples among the Lao, see Bankston, 2002). Young Thai and Filipinos tend to have much looser connections to family-based values such as hierarchical respect. Cadge and Sangdhanao (2005) report that second-generation Thai Americans show little interest in the Buddhist religion, which is at the heart of their culture. In terms of showing embodied or behavioral respect for elders, Filipino American children often find the practice of placing the hands of elders against their forehead humilitating (Bankston, 2002).

Implications for Children and Adolescents in American Schools

Children in the Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy (1989) study consistently recognized “respect for family members” as their chief value when asked to list the values that were important to them. Zhou and Bankston (2000), in discussing Vietnamese children, remarked that “respect for others . . . rooted in the concept of familial hierarchy, leads children to subordinate their own immediate wishes to family goals and to accept the parental emphasis on achievement through education” (p. 48). They also noted that the children's second highest value of respect was “education and achievement,” symbolizing the compatibility and connection between these two values: respect for elders and educational success.

Although concepts of hierarchical respect rooted in Southeast Asian societies are in some ways inconsistent with American egalitarianism, these concepts promote school success in American schools in at least three ways. First, the subordination of children's wishes to those of their elders places adult goals before the goals of young people. Since adults tend to focus more on the long term, this means that motivations such as immediate gratification and pleasure become secondary to school success. Second, the hierarchical ordering of social relations encourages cooperation aimed at educational achievement. Researchers have described how older siblings help younger siblings with schoolwork in families from Southeast Asian refugee groups, particularly the Vietnamese (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991; Bankston, 1998; Rumbaut and Hino, 1988). Third, although American society in general may adhere in many ways to a consciously egalitarian ideology, American schools are conservative and hierarchical institutions. Teachers and administrators respond well to respectful treatment, and value for respect is part of the ideology of most American school systems.

It is notable that research on the three refugee groups has suggested that Cambodian youth are adjusting to American school environments much less successfully than Vietnamese and Lao youth (Kim, 2002). Among these three, the Cambodians have been the least able to maintain integrated social networks on the family or community level and pass on cultural values such as respect to younger people as a result of the social and physical devastation of their homeland in the 1970s. Cambodian parents have been described as unable to exercise much control over their children (Zhou, Bankston, and Kim, 2002). Among the Vietnamese, on average, the most academically successful of the three immigrant groups, “tight family and community social relations support beliefs about upward mobility . . . that are essential to school success” (Bankston, 2004, p. 177). Close connections to parents and older elders, fostered through respect, lead children to internalize parents’ beliefs about upward mobility.

Within families, hierarchical respect creates both an obligation on the part of older siblings to help in the education of younger siblings and an obligation on the part of younger siblings to cooperate. The role of parents as authority figures, and their limited familiarity with American schools, tends to place parents in the position of establishing general expectations to be fulfilled by children. Within schools, respect for authority works well. Teachers respond well to the respect they receive from Vietnamese students, further developing positive generalizations and stereotypes of Vietnamese American students based on these experiences (Bankston, 2004).

Both Filipino and Thai young people in the United States, living in groups characterized by greater assimilation and looser ties to traditional homeland cultures than the refugee groups, have also displayed high levels of educational attainment. This has been attributed to their favorable socioeconomic positions (Bankston and Hidalgo, 2006; Bankston, 2005). It has been noted, though, that the academic performance of Filipino Americans in major subjects, as indicated by report card grades, are similar to those of whites (as one would expect of a largely assimilated group), while grades of other major Asian groups are generally significantly higher than those of whites (Bankston, 2005). There has been little research on Thai American youth in American schools, but this is precisely because there is so little that distinguishes them from other American youth. In fact, of the estimated 25,487 young people from Thai backgrounds in American schools in the year 2000, 10,047 (over 41 percent) were of mixed racial/ethnic background as a result of the high degree of marital assimilation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Conclusion

Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1991) concluded their book on the academic achievement of children from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos by observing that “the major reasons for the refugee children's success can be attributed to beliefs and family practices that, although non-Western in origin, coincide closely with traditional, mainstream, middle-class American presumptions about the values and means-ends relationships necessary for achievement” (p. 156). This chapter can be seen as a “yes, but . . .” response.
to that statement. In concentrating on the concept of hierarchical respect, which we argue is a central element of the culture system of Southeast Asian groups, we have maintained that this does indeed make a key contribution to academic achievement. However, although this value does fit well in certain American institutional settings such as the school, our description of Southeast Asian hierarchical values raises questions about just how much these coincide with traditional, mainstream, middle-class American assumptions. The situation may well be more ironic than these authors realize. In fact, it appears that value orientations recognizable to middle-class Americans, yet different from the orientations widely held by middle-class Americans, pay off well for Southeast Asian Americans in that most American settings, the school.

Furthermore, the experiences of Southeast Asian children and adolescents and their parents are not simply a matter of coming from a nation with a cultural perspective that emphasizes hierarchical respect. Combining the idea of culture with that of the segmented assimilation argument, we have suggested that having this kind of non-Western value orientation is most important for those who enter in some of its least advantaged segments and need to draw on cultural values from outside the United States to achieve mobility inside it. Furthermore, we have suggested that those who have the greatest need for hierarchical respect to achieve upward mobility in American society (for example, the Vietnamese and the Lao) are precisely the national groups most likely to have preserved it.

Differences between the refugee and immigrant Southeast Asian groups have significant implications for the psychological development and lives of their children. Filipino and Thai American children experience some inter-generational tension, but their families are frequently assimilating into relatively advantageous American settings while the children learn from peers and the larger society in those settings. Children from the three refugee groups, however, must contend with a much greater gap between their families and the surrounding American community. At the same time, their immediate situations within American society offer refugee groups few opportunities for upward mobility. Within the home, this means that children from the refugee groups tend to either develop close ties to parents and siblings or reject their families altogether. In school, the either-or choice between home and surrounding society tends to have an ironic developmental effect. The irony is that assimilation of the value system of the school or peer group (or the hedonistic value system of American society at large) may tend to alienate children and adolescents from their families, who provide them with the value system that emphasizes respect. Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian children and adolescents who retain close ties to their families and to non-American cultures can often adjust better to American society in the long run than those who become alienated from their families' traditions of hierarchical respect.

As new third- and fourth-generation members of these groups appear, we can expect that differences among the groups and differences between them and other Americans will steadily diminish. Young members of all these groups, even the groups that retain the tightest grips on their cultural heritages, are already tending to adopt English as their preferred language and to take up the tastes and outlooks of other American young people.

References


The meaning of respect changed historically in postwar Japan, and respect as a concept is important yet unnoticed in postmodern Japanese society. Contrary to the perception of Japanese socialization as instilling conformist respect and obedience in children and adolescents, this chapter shows why one commentator predicts that Japan may be changing from a “society of respect” to a “society of scorn.”

Respect in Japanese Childhood, Adolescence, and Society
Shuji Sugie, David W. Shwalb, Barbara J. Shwalb

Respect as a social attitude transcends culture, but when we apply the term respect there are various cultural differences in the meaning of the word. In this chapter we consider how respect is understood in Japan, and several influences on respectful behavior and understanding of respect. Citing the results of research studies and based on our interpretation of psychological, linguistic, historical, and societal factors, we will demonstrate two contrasting trends: (1) a historical change of some aspects of Japanese-style respect, and (2) cultural continuities that have made respect central to Japanese human development and human relations. We bring together here the viewpoints of both a native of Japan (Sugie) and that of Americans who have lived long term in Japan (Shwalbs).

We examine respect as manifested in childhood and adolescence, in relation to survey research data and issues specific to Japanese families, schools, and communities. In Japanese culture, there is a strong degree of conformity and little tolerance for uncertainty. Accordingly, interpersonal relationships are based on a sense of security and predictability in daily life. These tendencies coexist with a degree of looseness and lack of strictness in personal relations, resulting in two types of respect in Japanese culture. In the first form of respect, the greatest amount of respect is paid to one’s parents and may be understood as related to affection in a close attachment relationship. A second type of respect is found in more distal personal relations, where there is a status difference between individuals. When this latter type of respect is shown in formal settings, one’s status is expressed in

**Carl L. Bankston III** is professor and chair of the Department of Sociology and co-director of the Asian Studies Program, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara.