Asian-American

The Utah Asian Festival began in 1977 when an influx of Southeast Asian refugees began settling in the Salt Lake Valley. In the years to come, the more established Utah Asian groups, such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean communities also began to pool their resources together for this event. This year’s annual pageant offered a performance stage for up to 15 different Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Other activities included costume making, calligraphy, art exhibits, and bonsai tree planting.

The term "Asian" refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. For example, it includes people who identify their race or races as being Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Hmong, Pakistani, or Thai (Census 2000 definition).

Because Asians total less than 5% of the entire U.S. population, the diversity of the group is often disregarded in the media and the news, but in fact, Asian Americans differ in their nationalities, languages, religions, and cultures. Current estimates indicate that about 14.9 million people in the U.S. report themselves as having either full or partial Asian heritage, with the largest subgroups being Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. As of 2000, Asian persons make up 3.6 percent of Salt Lake City’s population, totaling 6,579 people. Recently, refugees from Burma, Bhutan, and Nepal have added to the diversity of Salt Lake City. In fact, the Asian American population is heavily urbanized across the nation, with nearly three-quarters of the group living in metropolitan areas.

The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) conducted a 2008 study that shows that no religion claims a majority of followers in the Asian American community. Those who claim no religious affiliation are the largest group, with Eastern religions and Catholicism as the second and third largest groups.

Despite the great diversity of the Asian American population, some common cultural values stem from the three main Eastern philosophies: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

Buddhism provides a spiritual structure for some Asians, and many believe in the concepts of reincarnation and karma. Karma refers to the belief that the full effect of one’s thoughts and deeds are inescapable, and will become fully manifest.

Family unity is an important goal in most traditional Asian cultures. By observing the Confucius value of filial piety, or showing love and respect for one’s parents, interdependency becomes the key relation between family members. The individual is expected to submerge individual goals to further the welfare of the family. Sibling rivalry is discouraged, and older children are socialized to set an example for younger siblings in politeness, gentleness, and unselfishness. As in most immigrant groups, the extended family also holds a prominent place among Asian Americans.

Taoism seeks to define one’s relationship with nature, and upholds that the maintenance of harmony and balance is the utmost factor in enhancing one’s spiritual wellbeing. The goal of many of the traditional healing practices, such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, coining (gua sha, a practice of scraping away diseases), and cupping (placing cups on the skin), is to restore this harmony in the human body.

Organizations

Asian Association of Utah
Utah Asian Chamber of Commerce
Utah Asian Festival
Eastern Trends Newspaper