Who Supports Burmese Refugee Community-based Organizations and Why?

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF THE INDIANAPOLIS COMMUNITY

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Agenda

- Research background
- Literature review
- Research method
- Research findings
- Discussions
Background
Who is a refugee

Why do the Burmese refugees come to USA?
Why are they settled in Indiana
Major life challenges faced by Burmese refugees
My Involvement in the Community

- The Burmese Project, begun in 2011, is a pilot program initiated by The International Center.
- Two goals: 1) to strengthen partnership between and within the Burmese and broader community and 2) to enhance understanding and awareness of the Burmese community by the community at large.
Major Burmese community organizations

- **BACI - Burmese American Community Institute**
- Burmese Community Center for Education
- Chin Community of Indianapolis
- Chin Evangelical Baptist Church

*3 forms of community-based organizations, including religious-based organizations, registered nonprofit organizations started by Burmese refugees and exclusively serving Burmese community, unregistered informal community groups active in the Burmese community.*
Research Questions

- Who are the supporters?
- Why do they support the Burmese refugee community-based nonprofit organizations?

Importance of the research:
- Help better understand the philanthropic resources that available for the Burmese community organization to enhance the capacity building of indigenous community organizations
Literature review
Literature review on who gives

Religious membership (Bielefeld, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2005; Brooks, 2003; Brown & Ferris, 2007; Eckel & Grossman, 2004; Eschholz & Van Slyke, 2002; Forbes & Zampelli, 1997; Hoge & Yang, 1994; Van Slyke & Brooks, 2005); both to secular giving and religious giving (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2010);

Education level ((Brown & Ferris, 2007; Yen, 2002; Rooney, Steinberg, & Schervish, 2001; Wilhelm, Brown, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2008; Van Slyke & Brooks, 2005)
• Income levels (Bielefeld, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2005; Brooks, 2002, 2005; Schervish & Havens, 2003; Van Slyke & Brooks, 2005; Wilhelm, Brown, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2008; Wu, Huang, & Kao, 2004; Yen, 2002)
• Marriage (Van Slyke & Brooks, 2005; Wilhelm, Brown, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2008; Wu, Huang, & Kao, 2004);
• Number of children (Yen, 2002; Brown and Ferris, 2007; Brooks, 2005),
• Race (Caucasians) (Bielefeld, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2005; Van Slyke & Brooks, 2005; Marx, 2000),
• U.S. citizenship (Brown and Ferris, 2007),
• Volunteering (Farmer & Fedor, 2001).
Literatures on Why Gives

- Public benefits:
  - Efficacy: impact perception, cost of fundraising event (Radley & Kennedy, 1992; Smith & McSweeney, 2007)
  - Awareness of need (Levitt & Kornhaber, 1977; Schwartz, 1974)
- Private benefits:
  - Reputation (Cheal, 1988; Smith & McSweeney, 2007; Muehleman et al, 1976)
  - Psychological benefits (Duncan, 2004; Smith & McSweeney, 2007; Andreoni, 1990)
  - Values (Furnham, 1995; Todd & Lawson, 1999; Bennett, 2003)
  - Cost and benefit analysis: tax incentives (Andreoni, 1993; Brooks, 2003; Simmons & Emanuele, 2004)
$290.89 billion: 35% to religion, 14% to education, 11% to foundations, 9% to human service, 8% to health, 8% to public-society benefit, 5% to arts, culture and humanities, 5% to international affairs, 2% environment and animals, 2% individuals, 1% unallocated

(Giving USA 2011, The Center on Philanthropy, 2011).
Literatures on immigrants giving

- Giving by community and immigrants have studied from colored African American giving (Hall-Russell, Cheryl et al, 1997; Rogers, 1997), Asian American giving (Chao, 1999), and immigrants giving (Osili, 2011)
Dominated by quantitative research;

“Precise quantitative approached that focus on selected subsets of variables necessarily “strip” from consideration, through appropriate controls or randomization, other variables that exist in the context that might, if allowed to exert their effects, greatly alter findings” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.106)

Giving to immigrant / refugee community organizations is rarely studied
Research design
Research method

- Ethnographic study to explore the philanthropic culture of the Indianapolis community in supporting the Burmese community-based organizations

“Ethnography is appropriate if the needs are to describe how a cultural group works and to explore the beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues such as power, resistance, and dominance” (Creswell, 2007, p.70).

- 10 months work with the Indianapolis Community as part of the community supporters
Burmese community groups are identified through natural work networks.

The supporters of these community organizations are identified through the organization’s executive director and program officers.

Supporters include volunteers, funders, board members, and partners that are involved in the Burmese community organizations.
1. Natural observations field notes (e.g. community organizations’ events, board meetings, partners meetings, and volunteer trainings)
2, unstructured, open-ended, in-person in-depth interview (18 people, 30-50 minutes interview per person)
Among the 18 interviewers:
- 4 are board members for 3 different community organizations;
- 7 represent 4 institutional supporters as partners of the Burmese community organizations;
- 3 are donors from 3 different community organizations;
- 16 are volunteers for 4 different community organizations.
Data sources

- 3, internal documents
Who supports

A typical individual supporter is:
white, married with children, have religious belief, active in volunteering and philanthropy, with professional skills and strong supportive network.
• Among the 18 interviewers:
  - 14 are Whites, 4 are Asians
  - 10 are Christians, 2 are Buddhist followers
  - 14 are married with children
  - All have volunteered for community in the past
  - Professions include lawyers, professors, engineers, medical students
The institutional supporters include religious organizations, health care providers, and family foundations with concentration on immigrant. All of the organizations have their own strong supportive network.
The Burmese service-providers survey shows:
Around 15 non-profit organizations in Indianapolis provide services or are engaged in partnership with Burmese community.
Why people support Burmese community organizations

- **They need help**
  “their needs motivated me a lot. Not just for coat, for furniture, rice cooker, rice... motivated by I know they need to deal with a lot of paper works. When you do job searches, do anything with Medicaid systems, it is hard for American doing it, let alone someone who couldn’t read the words” – Lucy

“the need is big in there, which is also a big challenge, the need are too big. There are too many needs and few volunteers. We need more volunteers.” – Harriet
Values (1): Religious believes

“If we say we are Christian, then how come we are not reaching out to this population”. - Lucy

- “we need to go out and get involved. Not sit inside and study (scripture)” - Dr. Zhang from Ciji
“it is kind of like going back in time. .. so I can understand how first generation immigrants assimilate into this culture”.- Antonio
"The only way out of poverty is through education. Or at least, it is a big part of it. That is their emphasis. Their emphasis focuses on the young people" - Robert
Joy of being appreciated

- “The politeness and appreciation is very compelling” - Antonio
Charismatic community leaders

what they indigenous community leaders are doing will “make a difference and make them self-sustainable”.
Broader community also expressed their appreciation and expectation for community-based organization to have better knowledge of the Burmese community, not only knowing the community in the own ethnic groups, but also the community as a whole Burmese community.
Gain understanding

- Cross-culture knowledge
- Expand the world view
- More aware of injustice
- More appreciative of one’s own life
- Perspectives are changed
- Professional services
Professional advancement

• “it is very important for me and my profession to really give a voice to the underserved populations and to provide them health care options that they may not necessarily know about. ..”- Tina

• “I am more aware of more cultural idiosyncrasies with more traditional southeast Asia cultures through working with Burmese refugees. I will be better prepared a better physician. I will be able to better tailor my approach. It is not a one glove fits all approach”- Ron
Spiritual and personal enrichment

“It helps us become a better person, and have inner peace”—Dr. Zhang

“People pray for miracles to happen. I think every day we have the chance to be that miracle for somebody, so let’s be miracle for somebody else”.—Jack Li

“God is working and taking care of these people”. —Doris
Discussions
A review of motivations to support community organizations

- Private benefits
  - Values
  - Joy of being appreciated
  - Gain understanding
  - Professional advancement
  - Spiritual enrichment

- Public benefits:
  - They need help
  - Charismatic leaders in the community organizations
  - Community organization’s distinct advantages
• Consistent with most of literature findings
• Values and psychological benefits stand out in this study
• Community organization’s charismatic leaders and distinct advantages and awareness of need stand out among all the public benefits.
Research limitations

- Participants are recruited through natural network; the broader community may not be fully represented.

- Not all participants for the research necessarily interact with each other.

- The focus groups were not conducted to compare the difference and similarities of different type of volunteers (religious versus professional) or different type of supporters (individuals versus organizations, or religious organizations versus professional nonprofit organizations).
Future research questions

- For the type of nonprofit organizations serving the most underserved populations that call for great compassion, does the supporters care less about efficiency and accountability?


• Minn, T. (2011, September 21). Personal communications conducted at the meetings of the Burmese Advocacy Center, Fort Wayne, IN.
• The State Department. (2011, September 6). [Summary of Refugee Admission]. Copy in
Catholic Charities of Fort Wayne – South Bend.