

## COVER STORY

### CULTURAL SHOCK TREATMENT

An interview with Dr.  
Hsiaofen Hemstock

Interview by Barbara Beebe

*He who knows others is wise;  
He who knows himself is  
enlightened.*

- Lao Tzu

BB: Is this the first time you've taught at an historically Black University?

HH: Yes

BB: Have you had any problems with the students that specifically concern your race?

HH: I've had no problems dealing with the students. I have more problems with the outside society than I do at the university.

BB: What kind of problems do you have with the greater society?

HH: I experience a great deal of impatience in society. For example, if I am in a store and need something explained, the clerks explain things very fast. If you ask too many questions, people assume you are dumb. This happens to a lot of Asians. So, some of them hesitate to ask questions.

BB: Before you came to FSU, you were a student at Ohio State University. What was your experience as an Asian student like there?

HH: Ohio State has a high percentage of foreign students. There are over 500 Chinese students alone. I don't think I stood out there. It was easy to learn. I had more Chinese friends than American friends. It's interesting, because here, at FSU, many of the faculty members are foreigners. I don't have a hard time communicating or getting along.

BB: There's the assumption that all Asians look alike. For many people an Asian is either Chinese or Japanese, and even then most people cannot tell the difference.

HH: There is camaraderie among Asians in America due to how we look. We look Oriental. It's funny when Orientals meet because we do ask each other where the other is from. It's like a guessing game.

BB: What country are you from and how long have you been in America?

HH: I'm from Taiwan and I've been in America for 9 years.

BB: The Asian community in many cities is beginning to organize politically, especially young Asians.

HH: Asians are typically passive politically. The interesting thing about being in America is that I've found that Afro-Americans are more politically assertive. Asians are more concerned with personal achievement. This is a cultural difference; we were brought up to be reserved and it is hard to overcome this conditioning. The second and third generation Asians who are brought up as Americans will be more politically assertive. In America, if you are not politically assertive, no one will do anything for you.

BB: Let's deal with the issue of accents. I often hear students complain about foreign instructors due to their accents.

HH: At Ohio State many students complained about the accents of the TAs (teaching assistants); many of them were Asians. However, I've found that this happens when students fail to deal with their own academic laziness. I try to avoid this problem, though, by practicing English and being well prepared. I personally do not think accents are the problem. Everybody has an accent. They never seem to be a problem until you encounter one that is unlike your own.

BB: In the issue this interview will appear, Broncos' Voice will do a section on stereotypes. What are some of the stereotypes and perceptions of Asians that are false?

HH: Americans perceive Asians as people who study too much, work too hard and are not socially active. These perceptions exist because most Asians come to this country to get degrees. This is what people see.

BB: What about the socially active part. When I venture to clubs or other social arenas, I do not see a lot of Asians, even though there is a large population of Asians in Fayetteville.

HH: Culture and language barriers sometimes mean that one may not get involved in American functions.

Dr. Hsiaofen Hemstock is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at FSU.



*There is an assumption that white people do not take time out to think long and hard about racism. There is also an assumption that the only time white people think of racism is when they are trying to perpetrate it's evils or appear to be on the 'good side' of the African-American community. Kelvin Culbreth, former editor of the Voice, dispels this notion. There are white people who do realize that the institution of racism is dangerous and disadvantageous to whites as well.*

-Barbara Beebe, Ed.

### An Internal Conversation About Racism -in the head of Kelvin Culbreth-

**Racism is a thought pattern.**

Why are we so concerned with the color of a person's skin?

**People of color have never been considered equal in this country.**

What was the first motivation to capture Africans and bring them to this continent to be enslaved anyway? Money, economics?

**Probably. And a prevailing idea that these people were less human than whites, and therefore it was OK.**

But slavery, in its legal form, has been gone for 115 years.

**That's just it - "gone in its legal form". Slavery still exists except in writing. White people would still like to see the people of color occupy a less-than-equal status in this country.**

But that's an unfair statement. How do you account for the white people who do not feel this way, or the fact that people of color refers to many races that were never enslaved?

**Good point. Now it has become an issue of classes. It's no longer an issue of white versus color. It's an issue of the empowered versus the powerless. Color is just a convenient descriptive term.**

So racism is a thought pattern, a lengthy process that has taken 400 years to reach this level.

**Exactly.**

OK. We have established that there are white people in this country that do not subscribe to this belief.

**Given.**

So why is it so difficult for us to free ourselves of the shackles of racism?

**Racism is a thought pattern.**

But there have been many examples of people that were not white excelling in all areas. There certainly have been many examples of white people failing to succeed. So, why do white people continue to think less of people of color? Why, after all these years and generations, do white people hold on to the idea that white skin is superior?

**Racism is a thought pattern.**

Could the sustaining power of racism be.....fear?

**A deep-rooted fear of losing the power they now possess. People without power want to obtain it. People with power want to keep it. That's natural.**

But the fear is not a legitimate one, because one person's success does not automatically mean another's failure.

**True, but how many fears are actually rational? Besides, racism is not about one person's fears. It is about a culture that fears another's intrusion.**

Intrusion? It seems to me that learning about another culture would be interesting and educational, not something to fear.

**To you. We are not talking about you, we are talking about your culture.**

So why doesn't this culture embrace other cultures and try to learn from them?

**Because racism is a thought pattern.**

That took 400 years to get to this point.

**Exactly. Things are not going to correct themselves overnight. It will take an effort that is every bit as concerted and aggressive as the effort that put us in this situation.**

What can I do so that things are better when my son is 25?

**When we talk or write about the problem of racism, we must know who we are trying to reach. We must have an understanding of those people. And we must tailor our efforts so as to touch them in some way. The sentiments of your target audience should always be taken into consideration. And don't forget that racism is a thought pattern that will require a substantial effort to reverse.**

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