



IN MEMORIAM

Tamotsu Shibutani
Professor of Sociology
UC Santa Barbara
1920-2004

On August 8, 2004, Tamotsu (Tom) Shibutani died quietly in his sleep from heart failure at age 83. Tom wrote several very influential books and his contributions to sociology are immeasurable. Although his intellect was impressive, he was a humble man, giving unstintingly to others while assiduously avoiding the limelight. We have lost one of sociology's stellar contributors.

Tom was born in Stockton, California, in 1920, as the only child of two first-generation Japanese immigrants. For many, the American Dream is for children of immigrants to take advantage of a free public education and reach positions of respectability, and Tom did. He entered Stockton Junior College at age 18, where he was deeply impressed with John Dewey's work, and he became a pragmatist for the rest of his life. At the age of 20, Tom transferred to the University of California at Berkeley, where he further broadened his intellectual horizons. As Tom finished his undergraduate degree, W.I. Thomas and Dorothy Thomas (his mentors) encouraged him to enter graduate school at the University of Chicago, where he found Louis Wirth's courses to be especially impressive, along with courses from Everett Hughes, Herbert Blumer, and others.

During World War II, Tom spent two years in the Army, and then continued his education at University of Chicago on the GI Bill. (Later he wrote *The Derelicts of Company K* [1978] to reveal the absurdities he experienced during the War.) He earned his Ph.D. in 1948 and was given an instructorship at the University of Chicago. In 1951, Tom moved to the University of California at Berkeley and began to synthesize many of the ideas he had been developing for years. His famous first book, *Society and Personality* (1961) became a major success and was translated into Russian and Spanish. The book presents a conceptual scheme developed from the work of Dewey, Mead, and the Chicago School.

In 1961, Tom came to the University of California at Santa Barbara and began working with Kian M. Kwan on ethnic relationships. Together they published *Ethnic Stratification* in 1965, presenting a theory based on data drawn from around the world, covering 5000 years of history. Extensive data support their conclusion that most ethnic groups that initially experience hostility eventually learn to live with each other over time.

Tom's next book, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (1966), demonstrated that rumors are not merely the result of faulty communication. In ambiguous situations, people often respond like pragmatic problem-solvers, pooling their intellectual resources, including accurate data, guesses, beliefs, speculation – constructing consensus from whatever sources that are available. Since much of life is filled with ambiguity, this book is of much greater importance than is suggested by describing it as a study of rumor. Many of the most crucial personal, group, governmental and international decisions has to be made with inexact information. The increasingly rapid pace of social and environmental change necessitates increasingly rapid decision making amidst a flood of information, making the study of collective information processing in ambiguous situations critical.

Social Processes (1986) reflects the sophistication of a maturing scholar in synthesizing macro and micro theoretical perspectives. This book blends Tom's expertise in social psychology with observations about

whole social systems to generate empirically testable propositions for solving many problems of current social interest.

In 1984, Tom was elected a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and in 1986 he was honored with the George Herbert Mead Award from the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction.

Tom loved grappling with ideas and writing, saying of his own work: "The pragmatic search for answers to questions is not always an orderly process. Side projects have frequently intruded that disrupted current projects. Some of these looked like they could be handled in several months or a year; but took five or ten or fifteen years to complete." This is why Tom Shibutani has a succession of different books on disparate subjects and different areas of specialization. When asked why he has written few articles, he replied: "The books say it all."

Tom is survived by his wife, Sandra Uyenton, along with countless friends, colleagues and former students. He is greatly missed for his wise and caring ways, which leave wonderful memories for all of us who knew him.

John D. Baldwin