

# **ASIAN GANGS**

## **Overview**

Since the late 1970s Asian gangs have long been stereotyped as being present in the "Chinatown" of larger cities. Most Americans believed Asian gangs operated similar to tongs or triads of an earlier period. However, there are now several Asian groups that have immigrated to the United States. There are several Vietnamese, Vietnamese-Chinese, Laotian, Cambodian and Hmong gangs that are active in communities throughout this country (Kodluboy, 1996). Their migration is usually an escape in order to survive the problems in their native land. Once they arrive in the United States they experience severe culture shock as refugees.

The American way of life is a culture barrier for many Asian immigrants due to language, traditions and customs. Therefore, many newcomers reside in communities with people from similar backgrounds. Some Asian teenagers tend to band together for protection from other gangs. Asian gangs are unique in the sense that they adopt traditions from other dominant gangs, regardless of ethnicity. For example, if an Asian gang forms in a predominantly Hispanic/Latino neighborhood, the gang will inherit many of the trends that the Hispanic gangs use such as clothing style and graffiti.

Organized Asian gangs tend to focus on home invasion robberies, auto-theft rings, high tech crimes, burglary, and extortion and sale of weapons. Money, profit, and status are the main focuses of Asian street gangs. Due to the fact that most Asian gang members do not feel any ties to their neighborhood they tend to be more mobile by moving to different locations when compared to Hispanic and African-American gangs.

Asian gangs are known to be ruthless and cunning due to their beliefs. Some Asians believe that certain religious items will protect them from danger. Many enter a confrontation with the mindset that they will not be hurt in any way because they are protected.

## **Structure**

The structure of Asian gangs may be highly or loosely organized. Similar to other gangs, the individual who is considered the "toughest," usually makes the majority of the decisions. Asian gangs may often be unrecognizable in a community. It is not uncommon for these gang members to live a double life. Gang members will attend school or college during the day and at night will be participate in gang related crimes.

## **Tattoos**

Scarring is very common among Asian gangs and is used as a form of tattoo. Asian gang members regularly use cigarette burn marks to demonstrate a willingness to commit a crime for the gang. Although these marks may be placed anywhere on the body, burn marks are typically found on the forearms, upper arms and back of the

hands. Females place the marks on their ankles or feet. Scars can also be seen between fingers.

Some Asian gang members believe that certain tattoos give them power, good luck or protection from harm. One of the most recognized Asian tattoos consists of five dots. The five dots can be made with cigarette burns. Typically this tattoo is seen on Vietnamese gang members. Even though this tattoo is generically gang related, it displays the willingness of the wearer to commit criminal activities. The five dots usually mean, "*A group of good friends*". It is also believed that the center dot symbolizes the same phrase while the additional four dots represent the four corners of the world. Basically symbolizing, "*Me against the world*" or "*All alone and the world against me*".

A tattoo that displays four or five T's is believed to have originated from Vietnam prisons. These tattoos are typically seen among individuals who have been incarcerated in Vietnam. This type of tattoo symbolizes the following:

- T - meaning Tinh (Love)
- T - meaning Tien (Money)
- T - meaning Tu (Prison)
- T - meaning Toi (Crime)
- T - Thu or Tra (Revenge)



Another tattoo that is seen is the three-dot mark. This symbol is regularly seen on other individuals. The three dots mean "*my crazy life*" or "*mi vida loca*" in Spanish. In Vietnamese it translates into "*Toi o can gi ca*"."

Other tattoos such as dragons, country maps, and religious symbols are also seen on Asian gang members. A recent trend for Asian gang members is to not have tattoos done. This prevents them from being documented by law enforcement