



Asian Studies Notes

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亞細亞學研究

Wake Up Call for Asian American Studies

Thomas Burkman, Director of Asian Studies Program

For the past decade, Asian American (AA) studies has wandered around the fringes of curriculum and programmatic structure at the University at Buffalo, probing for a point of entry to mainstream acceptance and support.

It is noteworthy that Asian Americans, with nearly ten percent of the undergraduate population, constitute UB's largest ethnic minority. But census data in itself does not constitute cause to establish AA studies. What is more important is the intellectual strength and conceptual vitality evidenced in the inquiry into the Asian diaspora across the world. The field is firmly established, with a set of journals and scholarly associations and Ph. D. programs in leading universities. Increasingly,

thinking America will look to this field for social and cultural critique. It is fitting that Chinese-American author Amy Tan will come to the UB podium in the Distinguished Speaker series on March 26.

The Asian Studies program has been charged with stewardship of Asian American studies in 1999. Attuned to current thinking that Asia is not delimited by geography, the Asian Studies program welcomes this opportunity to live out the phenomena of Asia as a global entity. In addition to staffing those AA courses funded by the College of Arts and Sciences, it has frequently reminded CAS of a decadal promise in 1999 to hire a tenure-track faculty specialist in Asian American studies. Without such an appointment, Asian American studies will never emerge out of its present limbo.

The most significant recent development is the emergence of a nexus of graduate students who are vitally concerned for Asian American studies and whose dissertations reflect that interest. Congealed as the Asian/American Studies Graduate Students Group, they have brought student scholars and faculty together for regular, interdisciplinary presentations and discussions. Also significant is the conceptual thinking they have been doing about AA studies in its UB setting. They have articulated the special role that Asian international students can play in AA studies, and at a national meeting at Columbia University last November this concept caught national attention. UB has recognized the potential of this group by awarding it grants from the Interdisciplinary Research and Creative Activities

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A History of Asian American Studies at UB

Jonathan Stalling, Ph. D. Candidate, Department of English

Like many American universities, SUNY Buffalo has seen a continual growth of its Asian American (AA) population over the last decade, and like many universities it has also seen a shift toward a more inclusive curriculum during the 1990's. However, many have correctly charged that these curricular advances mask the institution's unwillingness to create strong ethnic studies departments and programs. This winter marks the tenth year of UB's struggle for Asian American courses and an AA studies program. The last decade was defined by the hard work and sacrifices of adjunct professors, graduate students, as well as a remarkably active undergraduate population. The frustrating slow

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Locating Asian America

Sooyoung Kang, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, President of A/ASGSG

As a student-motivated organization, Asian American Studies Graduate Student Group (A/ASGSG) since 2000 has been creating an alternative discursive space in the absence of higher level Asian American studies at UB. Through hosting monthly colloquiums and special lecture events every semester for almost three years, the group has promoted academic interest in Asian American studies. A/ASGSG started in Spring 2000 as a casual discussion group of six women Asian students from English and Comparative Literature. Since then, it has tripled in size, ethnically diversified and more interdisciplinary, representing eight departments. The members of the group have worked to expand

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HISTORY (cont. from p. 1) progress and often disheartening realities of emerging AA programs shared by most universities around the country are not a result of local particulars alone but are clearly stifled by systemic patterns of resistance to non-euro-centered educational paradigms in general. However, one of the largest obstacles for campus change simply resides in the lack of institutional memory. It is for this reason that the following narrative has been constructed; though it is important to note that due to the lack of documentation, the following particulars have, by in large, been gathered through conversations with those who have been involved with UB's Asian American studies from its inception.

Ten years ago UB held its first official Asian American course after a number of undergraduates approached the late American Studies Professor Larry Chisolm in hopes of beginning an independent study class focused upon the Asian American experience. Eddie Wong, one of the undergraduates, was elected to facilitate the first such student-developed and student-run course and Professor Chisolm attended the last class session to evaluate the student projects. This peer-centered course increased in popularity over the years until it ended in 1997 when various administrative bodies

began to question both the class's form and content.

In the Fall of 1993 the second Asian American class to be offered came in the form of an introductory American Studies course taught by Shirley Tang, an entering American Studies graduate student. Tang began teaching an Asian American focused section of a 100-level American Studies course titled "American Life and Environment" but subtitled "Asians in the United States." Over the next five years Tang taught a total of eight Asian American focused classes and helped to foster the early stages of an APA academic community at UB.

It is important to note that none of these courses were listed under these titles, but carried their more generic American Studies titles. (This point would resurface as a major concern for undergraduates by 1998.) Throughout the 1990's two to three courses were attended by an average total of 48 students each semester. During the mid-nineties when the peer-centered courses were in full swing, Shirley Tang reported that her classes (held both during the day and night) were literally overflowing with students interested in Asian American issues. It was also during the late mid-nineties that American Studies hired Dr. Zhou Xiaojing as an adjunct professor specializing in Asian American studies. Dr. Zhou helped to build upon these foundations by further developing what would come to be the core AA courses: AMS 115

"Asian American History, Culture, and Literature," AMS 117 "Asian American Literature," AMS 220 "Asian American Experience," AMS 349/AS 448 "Asian Americans and Visual Media," AMS 270 "Asian American Women Writers."

At this time Asian American studies at UB included both Shirley Tang and Dr. Zhou as well as Margo Machida in the Art Department, all teaching Asian American studies at UB leading to an unprecedented student enrollment of over 75 in there combined courses during 1996.

Yet this was also a time of great structural changes at UB as the Department of American Studies was being forcibly dismantled, and the future of Asian American studies (not to mention other ethnic studies programs) was in question. It was at this time that a number of student-activists from other SUNY schools and UB began to politically energize the campus. In 1997 this group of both graduate and undergraduate students initiated campus wide activism in the form of a letter writing campaign, a sit in, and a wide reaching poster campaign expressing the need for an Asian American and Latino American studies program and the need for a closer relationship between UB and the greater Buffalo community. The following year a smaller group of undergraduates followed these demonstrations with a list of four demands presented in person to the Dean of Arts and Letters in a meeting facilitated by both Professor Thomas Burkman of the Asian Studies Program and Manny Wong, an academic counselor. In their presentation the students cited the social and intellectual importance of Asian American courses, and the evidence of student interest through the courses' enrollment statistics. They ended by demanding the following:

- A complete course description of the Asian American courses in the Undergraduate Catalog.
- The establishment of an Asian-American Studies Program to fall under the Asian Studies Program.

SEE HISTORY p. 5

Asia At Noon in Spring 2003

Asia at Noon is a series of brown-bag lunch gatherings at the University at Buffalo, sponsored by the Asian Studies program. They are usually scheduled for a Friday at 12 noon, and dismiss promptly at 1:00. The presenter usually takes about 20 minutes, and the rest of the time is devoted to question and answer and discussion. The audience is comprised of undergraduates, graduate students, interested faculty, and folk from the Buffalo community.

The first Asia at Noon of the Spring

'03 semester took place January 31. The presenter was John Haberstroh, who just finished his law degree at UB. He spoke on "Japanese Wartime Forced Labor: Litigation by Korean and Chinese Victims." He addressed the continuing controversy and legal action regarding compensation and apology. Mr. Haberstroh has lived in Japan for more than a decade, and returns to a job there next month.

A complete schedule can be found on page 6.

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KUDOS

▲ **John Thomas**, professor in the School of Management and member of the Asian Studies Advisory Council, was named Dean of the School in December 2002. In the past, he served as its Associate Dean for International Programs. He has developed UB's Executive MBA program in Beijing in conjunction with Renmin University. The program recently was designated as the best program of its type in China by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

▲ **Dr. Mark Ashwill**, director of World Languages Institute, was awarded a Fulbright Senior Specialists grant from CIES in December 2002. He spent 3 weeks teaching and doing some consulting at the Institute of Linguistics in Hanoi, Vietnam. Dr. Ashwill is the first UBER to win a Fulbright to Viet Nam.

Asian American Students at University at Buffalo - A Survey Report

Jeongsob Nam, Ph. D. student, Department of English

Asian Americans (AAs) are the second biggest ethnic group among both undergraduate students and total students at UB. The number of AA undergraduate students is 1,547, which is 9.57% of the total undergraduate student population of 16,171 as of October 8, 2002. (The White, non-Hispanic population is 70.11% and Black, non-Hispanic is 8.21%.)

In a UB survey I conducted among a sample of 60 Asian American students, all think that AA ethnicity played a significant role in building their identity as Americans. 97% of them have personally experienced racial discrimination—an important cause of their minority identity.

73% of the AA students answered that AAs played a positive role in making America what it is. Only 50% of the students could point to a historical fact to support their positive answers. Those who did cited one of two examples: the construction of the trans-continental railroads, and contribution to cultural diversity of American society by offering Asian food or making Asian enclaves. Most of the students have read a work of Asian American literature, read a book on Asian American history, or seen a movie on Asian American issues. However, they have not received systematic education regarding AA history. 65% of them answered that most history teachers do not devote sufficient attention to the contributions of AAs. 70% of them have not taken any class related to AA issues at UB.

Creating a Study Community Around Asian American Literature

Yasuko Kase, Ph. D. student
Department of English

The teaching of Asian American issues is a challenge to the academy from within. Especially at UB, where Asian American issues are still invisible, creating an active classroom for Asian American issues is crucial for promoting campus awareness of the issues. As an instructor, my mission in teaching a class called "Asian American Women Writers" in fall 2002 was to trace the genealogy of a set of Asian Americans who had generated discussions on Asian American issues and the issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

My class was composed of three white female students, one Asian American male student, one Asian American female student, one

Jamaican American female student, and one African American female student. In this diversified class, my students and I created a learning community where we could think about the issues of "difference." Our discussions always spiraled around one question: "How can we claim a difference, which is distinct from the difference conventionally applied to us by the social mainstream?"

Studying and teaching Asian American literature, which does not fit in the conventional genre of U.S. national literature and English cannon, is to interrogate the academic system or the system of knowledge by critical thinking.

WAKE UP CALL (Cont. from p. 1)

Fund and the Interdisciplinary Reading Group Fund. It is fully appropriate that at a leading research university like UB, activism for this new program is *intellectual* activism with an outspoken graduate student component.

This issue of *Asian Studies Notes* is dedicated to Asian American studies. It contains synopses of papers presented by UB graduate students at Columbia in November at the meeting of Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education. As you read, you will be reminded of the contributions of some of the "saints" of AA history at UB: Larry Chisolm, Charles Bland, Manny Wong, Shirley Tang, Eddie Wong, and Zhou Xiaojing. May their voices serve to stir the University at Buffalo to the opportunity to move deliberately to establish Asian American studies as a field of teaching and research.

A/ASGSG (cont. from p. 1)

the courses and curriculum of Asian American studies by requesting graduate seminars and faculty guidance¹ and teaching undergraduate classes. With the receiving of an IRCAF (Interdisciplinary Research and Creative Activities Fund) grant in November 2002, the group is now stepping up into another stage, equipped to invite major Asian American artists, critics and historians to campus, and to support members' research.

With this brief history of A/ASGSG said, I would like to reflect on the in-between space of 'Asian/American' built into the title of the group since its beginning. This space in between indicates the temporal spatiality between Asia and America, which is simultaneously historical, social, political, geographical, disciplinary, psychical and even imaginary. Although some critics are still suspicious of the diasporic vision that this space evokes², I would argue that diasporic interspaces between Asia and America will open up new loci of critical intervention into nationalism, 'assimilationist' projects, and cultural identities, situating these issues within a global context.

My experiences of organizing and participating in A/ASGSG make me more confident about significance of interspacing practices of Asia/America to Asian American studies and other related disciplines. Not only were the original members Asian international students, but it has continued to attract numerous Asian international students, as well as Asian American and other ethnic students³. Though this phenomenon should not circumscribe the group's format, activities, and visions in any way, and its implication needs more investigation, it represents the current condition of Asian American studies at UB. Without substantial support, such as faculty guidance and seminars for the graduate students, students at UB have seldom been motivated to pursue a higher level of research in Asian American studies. Individual Asian American texts are often read and mentioned in the classes, but the issue of Asian Americans as a group is seldom touched. While the lack of Asian American consciousness in academia is persistent, the huge body of Asian international students present at UB generates and conditions a possibility of Asian American

studies at the graduate level, which A/ASGSG has evidenced.

While the field's major purpose is still to represent Asian American consciousness in the US, Asian American studies also engages with various social and political issues in the US such as immigration, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality, questioning the historical and social construction of "Americanness." Seen through the Asian/American perspective, Asian American studies intersects theory and praxis, responding to its constitutive in-between boundary. Moreover, Asian Studies has opened itself to its 'outside,' continually blurring and remaking borders.

Asian international students' academic intervention at UB radically questions and reconfigures the present parameters of US academia through their emergence and self-identification as "Asian Americanists."⁴ They also engage with institutionalized Asian American studies, since they keep reminding us that Asian American studies and its political communities are formed as flexible, cross-over, and interrelated. Asian international students' 'coming-out' as Asian Americanists at UB is part of the unending history of the making of Asian America. Their persistent claim to be "Asian Americanists," their representing the voices of Asian Americans, their participating in uncovering Asian American experiences and building communities, interate original questions and contentions of Asian America confronting mainstream America.

Asian American studies can become an academic shelter for Asian international students who are beginning to recognize their ambivalent position as perpetual outsiders, and make an attempt to develop Asian/American transpacific imagination through their own academic investment. As for Asian international students' increasing academic interest in this field, they should do their best not to objectify Asian American studies as another 'selling' research object, in that it is only to reify the field itself and recapitulate the self/other binarism. Rather, they need to explore the systemic construction of differences in Asia/America and try to substantialize and in-corporate their own experiences as 'non-resident aliens' in the US in the process of academic research.

NOTE

¹In the result, the members could get credits in Fall 2000 by taking Directed Reading with Dr. Zhou Xiaojing, then a Visiting Assistant professor, and a graduate seminar on Asian American Literature in the department of English in Fall 2001. While teaching almost all undergraduate courses on Asian American Studies, technically Dr. Zhou couldn't teach or guide graduate students then because of her position. Dr. Zhou was the only instructor whose specialty was Asian American literature and related issues. By writing request letters to chairs of various departments and program directors, asking official permission to take credits and research guidance from working with her, the members of the group opened new possibilities in the UB academia. Dr. Zhou is now a tenure-track, associate professor at the University of the Pacific in California.

²For example, Stephen H. Sumida, "The More Things Change: Paradigm Shifts in Asian American Studies," in *American Studies International*, June 2000, v 38-2.

³There are currently 15 members in the group out of which 10 members are Asian international students from South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, 5 members are American students (3 Asian American Students and 2 others).

⁴Related to my argument on the emerging international students' perspective in Asian American Studies, see Lisa Lowe, "Epistemological Shifts: National Ontology and the New Asian Immigrants," in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, eds. by Kandice Chuh and Kared Shimakawa. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001.

FACTOID

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Nov. 22, 2002, in the year 2001-02, the top five countries for sending students to the US are all from Asia.

India: 66,836 (up by 22.3% over 2000-01)
 China: 63,211 (up by 5.5%)
 South Korea: 49,046 (up by 7.4%)
 Japan: 46,810 (up by 0.7%)
 Taiwan: 28,930 (up by 1.3%)

At the University at Buffalo, the case is almost the same, except that Japan ranks six after Canada.

India: 749
 China: 640
 South Korea: 355
 Taiwan: 223
 Japan: 174

Source: *College of Arts and Science, University at Buffalo*, Dec. 2002.

HISTORY (Cont. from p. 2)

- The hiring of a tenure-track professor to teach AA course(s), as well as to head and implement an Asian American Studies Program.

- And ensurance that the American Pluralism classes include Asian American topics, which will serve as an introduction to the Asian American courses.

The results of this meeting were substantial but fell short in several critical ways: first the Asian American courses were officially moved from the endangered Department of American Studies to a new home under the administrative umbrella of the Asian Studies Program. Secondly, the dean committed to offer each semester three courses drawn from the courses listed above. Yet UB is still waiting for a tenure-track faculty hire, which has not only failed to materialize, but seems to have fallen from view.

After this meeting Dr. Zhou regularly taught these courses to a large undergraduate constituency for the next three years. In the fall of 2001 graduate students with an interest in Asian American Studies formed the A/ASGSG (Asian/American Studies Graduate Student Group), which lobbied for a graduate seminar on Asian American literature that came to fruition in the Fall semester of 2001. In the Spring of 2002 Dr. Zhou was asked to teach an Asian American centered American Pluralism course. While having an Asian American course fulfill one of the University's General Education requirements was an important victory for the discipline, unfortunately the Dean withdrew one of Dr. Zhou's standard courses to make up the difference, again minimizing any forward momentum.

Unfortunately for UB, Dr. Zhou Xiaojing left the university last summer for a tenure-track position at the University of the Pacific in California. Her departure marks yet another period of transition since her presence had become the backbone of both undergraduate and graduate scholarship in the field. Her departure may also reveal the University's resistance to the substantial establishment of Asian American Studies at UB. The English graduate students who

make up a majority of the A/ASGSG attempted for the second time to initiate a hiring committee for an Asian Americanist and once again failed, leaving a faculty vacuum in the discipline of English. The head of the Asian Studies Program, Professor Burkman, began a small-scale search for adjuncts to teach the Asian American courses eventually deciding on three members of the A/ASGSG.

While UB's present situation can be seen as an improvement over 1993, the condition of UB's Asian American Studies is anything but secure. The sacrifices, hard work, and student activism have won a set number of semi-permanent undergraduate Asian American courses (this spring UB has only two Asian American



centered courses, American Pluralism and The Asian American Experience), an Asian American course that fulfills a General Education requirement, an active graduate group, and a new degree program in Asian Studies that will require courses from the Asian American curriculum. We also celebrate the recent hiring of the poet MyungMi Kim in UB's already formidable Poetics Program, which presents both undergraduate and graduate students with an interest in experimental poetics and Asian American poetics an unparalleled richness. However, UB has yet to fulfill its promise to hire a tenure-track faculty member in Asian American studies and therefore we are forced to wait for the establishment of an Asian American program indefinitely. And herein lies the clear and present danger. Evelyn Hu-DeHeart and Michell Chang among many others have argued that without fulltime faculty and a solid administrative framework, ethnic studies programs will remain vulnerable, weakened, innocuous, and unable to fulfill their charter functions. How long will SUNY's largest university fail to support these intellectual and educational functions?

Summer Programs

Study Abroad offers two Japanese language summer programs

UB students may increase their fluency in Japanese language through participation in immersion programs held by International Christian University and Konan University this summer. The setting, program design, and requisites for each program are different, so there is sure to be a program that meets your needs and interests!

International Christian University Summer Courses in Japanese

Open to students at any level of ability (even those who have never studied Japanese), the 6-week, 6-credit hour program at ICU provides intensive language study along with an extensive cultural program. Located in a suburb of Tokyo, ICU offers participants the choice of on-campus dormitory accommodations or a homestay with a Japanese family. Application deadline: March 15

Konan University

Intensive Summer Japanese Course for Communicative Competence

Designed specifically for students who have completed Japanese 101 and 102, this 8-credit hour program focuses specifically on speaking and listening to increase participants' communicative competence and cultural awareness. Participants live with Japanese host families throughout their stay in Kobe. Application deadline: March 1

More information and applications are available at Study Abroad Programs, 210 Talbert Hall, North Campus. Web: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/studyabroad>, email: studyabroad@buffalo.edu

Asian Studies Calendar

January

- Jan. 31, Fri. 12:00. *Asia at Noon*. **John Haberstroh**, Law student, UB. "Japanese Wartime Forced Labor: Litigation by Korean and Chinese Victims." Park 280.

February

- Feb. 14, Fri. 12:00. *Asia at Noon*. **Roger DesForges**, Professor of History. "The Changing Functions of Walls in China Today." Park 280.
- Feb. 28, Fri. 12:00. *Asia at Noon*. **Shubha Ghosh**, Associate Professor of Law, and student members of the Asian American Law Students Association. "Beyond Black, White, and Brown v. Board of Education: A Primer on Asian American Jurisprudence from One Initiative." Park 280.

March

- Mar. 21, Fri. 12:00. *Asia at Noon*. **Lawrence Fouraker**, Associate Professor of History, St. John Fisher College. "A Yakuza Recession? Japan's Mafia and the Current Slump." Park 280.
- Mar. 26, Wed. 8 p.m. UB Distinguished Speaker series. **Amy Tan**, Asian American author. Mainstage Thea-

ter, CFA.

- Mar. 27-30, Annual Meeting. **Association for Asian studies**, New York City. www.aasianst.org.

April

- Apr. 4, Fri. 12:00. *Asia at Noon*. **Jennifer Randall**, Ph.D. student in Anthropology. "How Does Globalization Affect Our Health? A Case Study in China." Park 280.
- Apr. 18, Fri. 12:00. *Asia at Noon*. **Seon-Wook Kim**, Professor of Philosophy, Soongsil University, Seoul, Republic of Korea. "Korean Democracy after the Presidential Election: A Philosopher's Viewpoint." Park 280.

May

- May 1, NYCAS 2003 Proposal Submission Deadline.
- May 7-13, Annual Meeting. **Association for Asian American Studies**, San Francisco, www.aaastudies.org.

NYCAS 2003
The New York Conference on Asian Studies
October 17-18, 2003
University at Buffalo
Call for Papers
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/asian/NYCAS03>



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CAMPUS