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# hardboiled

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AMY CHUA | ASIAN AMERICAN  
STUDIES RESTRUCTURING

14.3

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MAR 2011

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hb meetings

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julian fong

### ABOUT THIS COVER

Extracting from the notion of a "Tiger Mom," this cover illustrates how certain topics discussed in this issue have in many ways, threatened the strength of the API community. However, at hardboiled, we believe there is a way to fight back and hopes that the articles in the latest issue can facilitate discussion.

## editor's note

Endemic to our community is an unfortunate plague of what I call "progressive sheepism," or the unquestioning obedience to an unwritten progressive Bible. Fueled by what I suspect to be a rampant fear of being labeled "problematic," members of the progressive API community often marginalize perspectives that may not entirely concur with the holy guidebook of political correctness without even entertaining their arguments. Even worse is when these individuals silence themselves when potentially problematic questions arise, chastising themselves for ever interrogating our spaces and the expectations under which they operate.

Progressive sheepism is so frequently encountered but rarely called out. It occurs when people intimidate others into using the term "Durant Food Court" without explaining why they find "Asian Ghetto" offensive. It occurs when people throw "check your privilege" at anything that makes them uncomfortable. I see it even more so when "check your privilege" is used as an alternative to articulating botheration and to silence people. When community agreements becomes a competition of who can regurgitate the most cutesy lines for "don't dominate the conversation, and step up if you feel you have something to say," even our discussion creates an environment of uncritically examined expectations that detrimentally guide progressive APIs.

Organizing shouldn't be about getting together a myriad of people who think exactly like you. Rather, it should be about communicating our struggles and making people realize why social change is necessary.

Now, one may argue that there are advantages to herding progressive sheep, as people power is indubitably vital to engendering social change. After all, isn't that largely why the Tea Party and anti-immigrants' rights movement has gained so much leverage? However, progressive APIs often forget we are a critical minority. Our principles will be questioned not only by those who attack our agenda, but those who have never encountered them. How the hell is some trite adage about privilege going to help our cause when we can't even explain it to potential allies who have never heard this language? While it is doubtless that their hearts are in the right place, well-intended mindless conformity is still mindless conformity. And when is the last time anything good ever came from that?

This is precisely why I love hardboiled: since attending my first meeting as an Angry Asian Freshman, I've learned to never accept anything at face value (including what's presented to me by the leaders of my community). However, no space is immune to progressive sheepism. I challenge you to express something in public that you previously feared to do because it made people uncomfortable, and to problematize an utterance that may make you feel safe. Education, and not indoctrination, is the key to liberating our community. Make sure you check yourself before you snap to agree.

always in bold,

denise wong  
publicity director

Liked what you read? Feel like joining our staff? Want to send us angry letters? Then contact us!

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# FINDING DIRECTION

LOOKING TO THE FOUNDATIONS OF  
ASIAN AMERICAN & ASIAN DIASPORA  
STUDIES COULD HELP SHAPE THE  
MAJOR'S FUTURE DIRECTION

by casey tran

"You hadda be there.  
The Sixties and Seventies, I mean.  
You had to be there, sensing the world turning upside down."

The introduction to Stand Up: An Archive Collection of the Bay Area Asian American Movement speaks to the political awakening of the 60s and 70s. It was a time when young people across the country began questioning their world. At UC Berkeley, students formed their own Third World Liberation Front to demand a more inclusive curriculum and to fight for their space in the university. Asian American Studies came out of that struggle.

When the program was first established, the Asian American population was a little under 900,000. Today, the Asian American population has grown to 12 million, with 70 percent being foreign-born. The Immigration Act of 1965 can account for the large influx of immigrants in the past 40 years that changed the demographics of our community. Filipinos, Chinese, and Koreans are among some of the groups that came in the post-1965 immigration. The Vietnam War and the Refugee Act of 1980 also created the conditions for the migration of Southeast Asians into the U.S.

According to Asian American Studies Chair Elaine Kim, the changing demographics of the population have sparked the need to restructure Asian American Studies. For the past two years, the program has worked on creating a curriculum that would address the new diversity and issues of the community. As of this month, Berkeley students have the chance to major in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies (AAADS).

AAADS provides a new framework for understanding our community. It situates the historical and contemporary experiences and issues of the community within a transnational and diasporic framework. It recognizes that there is a dialectical relationship between the homeland and the diaspora – Asian America is informed by Asia, but Asia is also shaped by Asian America.

Under the program, students will be required to take five core classes and four electives from three areas of focus: history, community studies, or cultural studies. Students can substitute electives with courses from outside of the program as well, including Asian language courses or Southeast Asian Studies. AAADS also requires that students complete four units of fieldwork in the community.

The new diasporic framework will allow us to better understand our communities. Considering the changing demographics of the community, it makes sense. The Asian American Studies conceived in the 1970s was for a community that was predominantly Japanese American and Chinese American. Today, however, Japanese Americans are no longer the largest ethnic group, and 70 percent of the Chinese American community is foreign-born. Southeast Asians and South Asians are the fastest

growing ethnic groups. Shifting demographics have led to a shift in power relations among and within ethnic groups, there are differences in socioeconomic statuses that factor into privilege and power.

The issues of the community have changed since the establishment of Asian American Studies. It no longer makes sense to study the community without examining the transnational and diasporic context in which communities are formed. In an age of globalization and technological advancement, transnational ties inform the Asian American identity and thus shape contemporary issues.

We can apply this transnational and diasporic framework to our work in the community. One of the pillars of Asian American Studies is its commitment to the community. When Asian American Studies was first established, it had an Asian Studies Field Office on Kearny Street, San Francisco which served as a direct liaison between students and the community. Students would bus to Manilatown to attend classes on topics such as health care in the community. They would also participate in community projects.

## NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR ASIAN AMERICAN AND ASIAN DIASPORA STUDIES

- AAS 20A: Introduction to the History of Asians in the U.S.
- AAS 20B: Introduction to Contemporary Issues in Asian American Communities
- Either ES 10AC: A History of Race and Ethnicity in Western North American, ES 11AC: Theories and Concepts in Comparative Ethnic Studies OR ES 21AC: A Comparative Survey of Racial and Ethnic Groups in the U.S.
- ES 101A: Social Science Methods in Ethnic Studies OR 101B: Humanities Methods in Ethnic Studies
- AAS 131: Asian Diasporas from an Asian American Perspective

Forty years after Asian American Studies was first established, the Asian Studies Field Office no longer exists. Instead, we have 97/197 fieldwork units. According to Associate Professor Emeritus Ling-Chi Wang, the de-emphasis on community engagement arose in the 1970s when the university challenged the learning benefits of undergraduate fieldwork. They believed that only graduate students in fields such as law and city planning could benefit from fieldwork. Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies were reshaped and 97/197 units were introduced.

If we are to remain true to the foundation of Asian

American Studies, we need to ensure that our commitment to community engagement is just as rigorous as our commitment to history and theory. We need to further develop our community fieldwork component and reach out to local community organizations.

One of the challenges we face in developing our fieldwork component is that local organizations are hesitant to take in college students because we're a flight-risk. We stay for one semester to get our units and then we leave. Often we leave because we do not build strong connections with the organization and the community that they serve. The potential of our fieldwork is limited due to our short-term commitment.

If we are to truly engage in our communities, however, we need to start by changing our relationship with organizations. We're not there just for the fieldwork units; we're there to learn, to incorporate theory with practice, and to better our communities. We're there to be a resource to the organization and hopefully be the bridge between the university and the community.

Professor Kim recognizes the importance of community engagement: "The other thing some people are saying is 'What about all our projects in the community? What about all these really important projects against racism or against economic exploitation or racial injustice?' But the way we can look at it is these communities are diasporic and transnational communities. Most of the people being served are migrants, recent immigrants, and people who speak different languages so all of the issues that face any diasporic community are exasperated in these communities of need. You go to Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, for example, and they're all different Asian nationalities who don't speak English and they go back and forth a lot. It isn't like you're deserting your commitment to these local communities when you're taking a diasporic framework."

In the last month, AAADS has taken concrete steps to develop its field studies. AAADS majors will be allowed to receive fieldwork units from classes that already incorporate fieldwork in its curriculum. In addition, a subcommittee of faculty members was formed to further develop the field work component. This is a strong start to building AAADS to its full potential.

AAADS will provide us with the tools to better understand ourselves and our communities in a world that is becoming increasingly porous and transnational. As the father of multicultural studies, Ronald Takaki said, "In our very comprehending, we are in fact changing the world." Our comprehension need not stop with the classroom. We can learn so much more through our engagement and activism within the community. Asian American Studies was never meant to be an ivory tower, distant and disengaged from the community. Let's continue to be active participants in our communities and reclaim our place in this world.



Mentors and mentees play a game during Let's Rise, a mentorship program under REACH, the API Retention and Recruitment Center. Let's Rise is an example of fieldwork Asian American Studies majors can do.

# UNCOMFORTABLE MONUMENT

## the troubling legacy of fred korematsu

by zarko perovic

The first Fred Korematsu Day was celebrated this Jan. 30th in our very own Wheeler Hall. Attendees included Rev. Jesse Jackson, Korematsu's daughter Karen, several Congressmen, as well as other dignitaries and students. All had gathered to honor the memory of Fred Korematsu, to discuss the ordeals that he faced on account of his ethnicity during World War II., and to remind people of the grave wrongs committed against Japanese Americans during that turbulent time. All of this was very admirable.

However, in the eyes of the law, little has actually changed. He was cleared, but the court's decision has never been officially overturned. We may have a Korematsu Day. Yet, this man is still technically a criminal. He is a monument to the fact that individuals can still be racially profiled during times of emergency.

The U.S. Supreme Court Case, Korematsu v. United States is still on the books. The case revolves around President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, which forced all people of Japanese descent to move to internment camps. Under the law, it did not matter whether they were American citizens or not. All people of Japanese descent were viewed as potential insurgents and as security threats. For his part, Korematsu had been born in Oakland to Japanese immigrants and had spent his entire life in the United States. He defied the order and was apprehended by the U.S. Army. In his defense, Korematsu argued that he was a fully fledged American citizen entitled to the rights of the U.S. Constitution. But the Supreme Court disagreed.

The U.S. Supreme Court, led by Justice Hugo Black, decided that Korematsu did not have those constitutional rights that he claimed – at least not during the war anyways. The court claimed that in times of crises the government can suspend certain rights. If military necessity calls for it, the government can justifiably engage in racial profiling. As a result, Korematsu was taken and sent to an internment camp until the end of the war.

After almost 70 years, some could argue that we have moved past this type of racial discrimination. We do after all now have things like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Brown v. Board of Education, and general improvement in relations between people of different races. Despite all of these things, however, Korematsu is still a loaded gun – potentially able to go

off at any moment.

It may not be used against Japanese Americans anymore, but the case could find a target. The events after 9/11 were probably the biggest scare. There was a fear that individuals of Middle Eastern descent might be apprehended or detained much like their Japanese counterparts in the 1940s. Of course, nothing on that scale happened. However, there were a few flare ups. Hamdi v. Rumsfeld was a notable one. In 2001, Yaser Hamdi was an American citizen who was apprehended in Afghanistan and taken to Guantanamo Bay. His rights as a U.S. citizen were stripped, and he was held indefinitely without any hope of a trial.

True, Korematsu and Hamdi are different in many ways. Korematsu was a regular citizen going about his daily business. Hamdi was involved in terrorist activity. Yet, despite the technicalities, the question still remains the same. Can the government strip American citizens of their rights under the U.S. Constitution? Whether they are Asian or Middle Eastern, a working-joe or a suspected militant, do these individuals as American citizens retain certain rights at all times? And more importantly, can an individual's ethnic or racial background be used as a basis in depriving them of certain rights?

The law is unclear – something which is quite unsettling. It is easy to imagine some dark future where Threat Level Orange finally ends up meaning something really big. In such a case, would the United States, equipped with a conservative bench on the Supreme Court and a Republican Congress, stay true to the principles of the United States Constitution? Is there even a slight chance that we could swing back to the old days of Korematsu?

If anything, I hope that was the one achievement of Korematsu Day – to ensure that something as severe as internment never happens again. To ensure that in the United States, we need to stick to at least some sort of principles. Principles that can assuage us of fear during times of war – principles that can ensure we do not commit grave wrongs to our fellow citizens again. And principles that make sure we do not abandon the ideals of tolerance that have guided us for the past 50 years.

*photo courtesy of slavesofacademe.blogspot.com*

# WHAT IS OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE?

by margaret zhou

## WHAT:

Operational Excellence (OE) is a program designed to reduce the cost and size of on-campus administrative operations/offices, with the proposed mission to "ensure that the excellence of UC Berkeley's administrative environment matches its research and teaching, and to direct the maximum level of resources to our core mission of teaching, research, and public service." OE is lead by a steering committee and is staffed by about 40 campus leaders and sponsors.

## WHY:

To save money in the face of California's \$500 million cut to the budget of UC; UC Berkeley expects to take 15% of the \$500 million cut

## HOW:

The input of OE staff lead to Chancellor Birgeneau's hiring of Bain & Co., a business consulting firm. The combined advising of Bain and OE has lead to decisions to cut administrative staff positions and consolidate campus programs and departments, to raise tuition by 8% in 2011-2012, and to increase the admission rate of out-of-state students in order to cash in on non-resident fees. In addition, the OE program is implementing strategies that have been developed over the past several years to increase privately obtained income through investments and donations, in order to decrease dependence on State funding.

## THE NUMBERS:

Chancellor Birgeneau estimates that OE efforts to date will reduce expenses on campus by \$30 million annually. He also estimates that, if all the strategies suggested by OE are implemented, expenses will be reduced by \$75 million annually.

UC Berkeley is paying Bain & Co. \$3 million.

280 positions have been eliminated as of January. Of those, 150 employees were laid off. Only one quarter of the eliminated positions were salaried at \$100,000 or more. Chancellor Birgeneau's email on the 2011-2012 budget sent out on Feb. 1 spoke warmly of his investment in faculty recruitment and retention, and mentioned that 70 new staff positions are being recruited this year.

2011-2012 tuition will go up by 8%

Non-resident admissions increased by 30% last year as compared to the year before. This year, that rate is expected to increase again.

\$500,000 of the money raised from increased tuition fees and increased non-resident admission will be allocated to add about 30 foreign language courses and sections, as well as to accommodate about 500 more students.

# CUTTING THE FAT

Following Arizona's pioneering footsteps, Indiana emerges as the newest state to crack down on people of color who speak limited English illegals

by denise wong

The United States' present political and sociocultural climate of anti-immigrant jingoism is indubitably escalating to alarming heights, given that the new and improved sequels to Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 are becoming increasingly blatant in their racism. Even more disconcerting is the fact that these newly proposed anti-immigrant hate laws, which make no effort to conceal their legislative racism, are becoming gradually more accepted around the nation.

The case of Indiana is an aptly emblematic instance. Following Arizona's precedent, Indiana is one of the newest states to introduce a law intended to fix the problem of what is said to be illegal immigration. Latest data from the Pew Hispanic Center estimated Indiana's undocumented population consists of only 85,000 to 150,000 people.

Looking at the bill's provisions, however, that statistic is not as stirring as the fact that Latinos comprise the largest non-white racial group and fastest-growing ethnic group in the state, according to a 2007 article from the Indiana Tribune Star.

Introduced in January, Indiana's Senate Bill 590 would mandate law enforcement officials to ask for the documentation of any individuals in violation of a law or ordinance if there is "reasonable suspicion" that the offender is neither a citizen nor a legal visitor. If this virtual legalization of racial profiling wasn't enough, the bill goes even further to require the exclusive use of English in most government meetings, transactions, and documents, as well as the termination of the state's Spanish language portal, and ballots and other printed materials in other languages. Moreover, the bill would deny financial aid to undocumented students at the University of Indiana and require them to pay out-of-state tuition, prohibit the establishment of Sanctuary Cities, and allow the closing of any business that employs undocumented workers.

That a single bill combines the denial of educational opportunities for immigrants, the legalization of racial profiling, and English-only legislation in one package demonstrates that lawmakers are getting more comfortable passing laws that promote racism and xenophobia. All three legislative tactics, particularly the English-only provision, have been continuously used to disenfranchise communities of color. After all, even if it were true that all immigrants magically learn English upon attaining legal status (as apparently assumed by proponents of this policy), they would not necessarily get to the level where they can be civically engaged without translation assistance. Believe what you will about unauthorized immigrants, but it is undeniable that the law targets legal immigrants as well.

The racist motives behind SB 590 are thinly veiled in the flimsy excuses given

## Senate Bill 590

SB 590 is a thirty page proposal that includes:

- requires state and local law enforcement officers who stop anyone for violating a law or ordinance to ask for proof that the person is here legally if the officers have "reasonable suspicion" that the person is not a citizen or legal visitor
- Businesses that hire illegal immigrants can be shut down.
- Most government transactions, documents and meetings would be in English. The state would shut down their Spanish language portal and printing forms, ballots in other languages
- The state will bill to Congress for reimbursement of all costs for undocumented residents in Indiana.
- No financial aid, scholarships or grants for education at U of I and would have to pay out of state tuition.
- Cities and counties would be barred from limiting the enforcement of federal immigration laws. (No Sanctuary Cities)

by policymakers who support this law. In an article published by Hispanically Speaking News, Indiana Senator Mike Delph (R-Carmel), who filed the bill, said: "We're taking the handcuffs off of law enforcement. We're holding employers who are thumbing their noses at the law accountable. And we're lifting up the English language." A Jan. 18th press release by the state of Indiana published additional commentary by Delph: "It's time that we put an end to press one for English and two for Spanish in our state."

According to a Feb. 18th editorial in the Indianapolis Star, the office of Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels acknowledged that Daniels may authorize the legislation if it appears on his desk, but claimed the law would have negligible practical effect.

Assuming no practical effect, then, why pass a piece of legislation that would do little other than let everybody know Indiana hates people of color? The arguments in play here appear to be, "Illegal is illegal," and "You're in America, now speak English."

The latter point is self-explanatorily racist and xenophobic, even if one ignores how English-only mandates have historically targeted communities of color.

The former point, which completely disregards past and present injustices within the U.S. immigration system, is essentially akin to "because I said so." That is, illegality is a crutch for policymakers so they don't have to explain themselves, especially since the exhausted anti-immigrant adages are so easily refuted (according to the Immigration Policy Center, undocumented immigrants in Indiana paid \$255.9 million in taxes in 2009, and contributed \$7.1 billion to the economy of Indiana in 2009). Considering how mass media has racialized illegal immigrants and how the federal government has historically excluded immigrants based on race (Chinese Exclusion Act, anyone?), the bill becomes suspect, if not obviously racist.

As of this writing, the Indiana senate

has passed the bill and it is now headed to the governor's desk; this is an unsurprising extension of Indiana's history as a Ku Klux Klan stronghold, where racial backlash has frequently followed threats to white political hegemony. Nonetheless, Indiana is by no means the only state considering SB 1070 copycat legislation. According to Voto Latino, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and South Carolina have already introduced SB 1070-esque bills into their state legislature, while Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah are considering adopting the measure.

We now get to the elephantine question in the room: given that 1070-esque legislation is now on the table for many states with significant Asian American communities, how will Asian/Pacific Americans be implicated in this new period of structural discrimination against immigrants?

While APAs share common histories of racialization, discrimination, and exclusion with the targeted Latino community that should already prompt the outrage of the APA community, it seems only a matter of time before anti-Asian sentiment becomes a more explicit part of anti-immigrant sentiment.

As stated above, English-only laws have been used in the past to target and disempower communities of color, particularly APA communities. For example, English-only laws passed in Monterey Park, California in the 1980s were the culmination of an intense climate of racism against new Chinese immigrants in the area.

Significant APA communities, however, exist in many of the copycat states. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Florida and Texas are among those with the highest Asian populations in the country. Moreover, many of these states are home to "gateway cities" for Asian immigrants, or cities where newly arrived Asian immigrants tend to cluster. Asian American Studies Professor Michael Omi states that Miami is an established gateway city for Asian Americans, while Charlotte (North Carolina), Fort Worth (Texas), and Atlanta (Georgia) are emerging gateways for Asian immigrants.

"There are significant APA communities in several of the copycat states. For example, in Minnesota, one of the largest Hmong communities in the U.S. resides in that state," said Connie Choi, staff attorney at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California (APALC).

"In Pennsylvania, there are significant

Asian American Pacific Islander numbers – including Koreans, Cambodians, Chinese, etc. In Texas, there are large Vietnamese and Chinese communities. In Georgia, there is a growing Korean community, and a prominent Filipino community in Nevada."

Naturally, Asian immigrants in gateway cities have created burgeoning immigrant enclaves, which have prevailed as cultural and commercial centers for APA immigrant residents. Given the fervent climate of anti-Asian xenophobia all over the country (everything from video games that arouse anti-Korean hatred to petitions against Mandarin language classes) and the fact that immigration is a hot-button issue across the nation, the passage of copycat laws makes these communities even more vulnerable to racial harassment.

A factsheet on SB 1070 put out by APALC and the Asian American Justice Center before the bill was passed stated, "As a result [of SB 1070's passing], AAIs [in Arizona] will be afraid to emerge from their homes out of fear that they will be stopped. They will be deterred from speaking or engaging in other expressive conduct in languages other than English in order to avoid unwanted scrutiny by law enforcement, violating the fundamental right of free speech and expression. They will be unable to celebrate their cultural traditions and commune freely with members of their own community, because doing so may invite unwarranted attention. For example, the law makes it illegal for certain people to transport or live with undocumented immigrants. SB 1070 would also apply to AAIs that are traveling through or visiting the state."

According to Choi, "In Arizona, even before SB 1070 was signed into law, AAIs were discriminated against, harassed, and ultimately made to feel like they were outsiders in their own home state (even if they had lived there all their lives)."

It thus follows that the pattern set by Arizona will probably carry over to its copycats, with even more devastating effects on APAs there, unless the communities fight back. APAs were the original "illegal immigrants" and targets of the first and only explicitly racist exclusion law. Now, the APA immigrant community is again at a place where it is in danger of legislative targeting and marginalization, in the name of "national security," "taxpayer dollars," or whatever bullshit excuse they've concocted this time.

To reiterate a statement I made in a previous hardboiled article (Issue 13.2, "The Nebulous Masses"), immigration within the APA community cannot be considered epiphenomenal to any other struggle. It is an issue that continues to affect APAs, and must be prioritized by our communities before the attack on Americans of color intensifies. By voicing our resistance before we are implicated as targets, APAs can bring hope to our communities and work toward ending Arizona SB 1070's legacy.

- WHAT YOU CAN DO**
1. Keep calling your state senator to express your opposition for SB590. Look up your legislator: <http://district.iga.in.gov/DistrictLookup/> and call today.
  2. Sign the Indiana Compact, a declaration of five principles to guide our state's discussion on immigration reform. The Compact was introduced by the Alliance for Immigration Reform in Indiana. Statewide leaders like the Attorney General, Butler President, lawyers, religious leaders, business professionals, the Indiana Methodist Church, unions, and more have taken an official stance against it (photos of Capitol gathering here).

# Reflections on EAP Vietnam 2010

## Back (T)Here to American and Vietnam

by son chau

Dentist: You're going to Vietnam? For how long? Are you going there for vacation?

Me: No. I'm actually going to be studying abroad there for a semester...5 months.

Dentist: Really? What in Vietnam will you be studying about? The education there is not good as the U.S. There's nothing there besides tourism.

Me: I've realized that it's time to go back to my family's homeland. I think this is my perfect chance to do it. The education in the classroom may not be the best, but I think when it comes to my identity, family history, and culture, it may be worthwhile.

Dentist: Oh, that's good. Just make sure you don't get STDs. The girls there are vicious!

Me: Oh my. I'll be sure to watch out for that.

Dentist: Hehe. Be very careful!

After getting my braces off this past summer, I stopped by the dentist to get my teeth cleaned. We had a little discussion about my Education Abroad Program (EAP) plans for fall semester, so we talked about Vietnam.

Shortly after, I had a conversation with my friend about break dancing in Vietnam. I shared with him the trailer of the first Vietnamese hip hop movie coming out in March called "Saigon Electric" on YouTube.

In response to the trailer, he said, "It's awkward seeing Vietnamese people practice hip hop because they aren't as modern like South Korea or Japan."

He elaborated, "Their style...it's just a replication of more advanced Asian countries. It just doesn't feel 'right.'"

Thereafter for at least 15 minutes, we had a long discussion about "Who really is qualified to practice hip hop?" Where did these feelings come from? Why is it okay for other East Asian countries to be like us and our friends in America, and not Vietnam? Although I was yet again defending Vietnam, in the back of my mind I did feel somewhat the same way too.

This conversation, like many other talks about Vietnam with my family and friends, often revealed our perceptions of Vietnam being backwards: filled with hungry thieves, poverty, shady vendors, seduction for American citizenship... the list goes on. Tons of negative sentiments and stereotypes toward Vietnam. Up until departure, I continued to defend Vietnam in my conversations and in my personal motives for going, even though I hadn't been there yet.

As a child going to a Vietnamese Sunday school close to my home, there was little to no mention of the country of Vietnam. When it did get mentioned, the war would automatically be brought up as though Vietnam was isolated in time. Up until high school, I thought that the yellow flag with three red stripes was in fact the flag used by the Vietnamese community

here but also used in the homeland. I later found out that the school was actually using the South Vietnamese flag the whole time, as the current official flag of Vietnam is red with a yellow star at its center representative of the Communist Party.

Although I was attached to the Vietnamese community in San Jose, I was also detached. Throughout these years, I developed a self-definition in opposition to my parents. Home and the outside were to be separated. Vietnamese was spoken only at home and at Vietnamese school. If it was spoken anywhere else, it would be awkward. Even until college, I felt weird speaking in Vietnamese with friends. Often my Vietnamese American friends would not feel comfortable or competent enough to do so as well.

I can see why my Vietnamese American friends today still have a similar mindset regarding the separation of the Vietnamese culture and an American lifestyle. "What are these Vietnamese people echoing my parents, uncles, and aunts doing what I like to do...? They should stick to their Paris by Night and karaoke discs. All those things are not me because they are not me. I am modern, they are traditional. I am Vietnamese American...not a F.O.B. (fresh off the boat)."

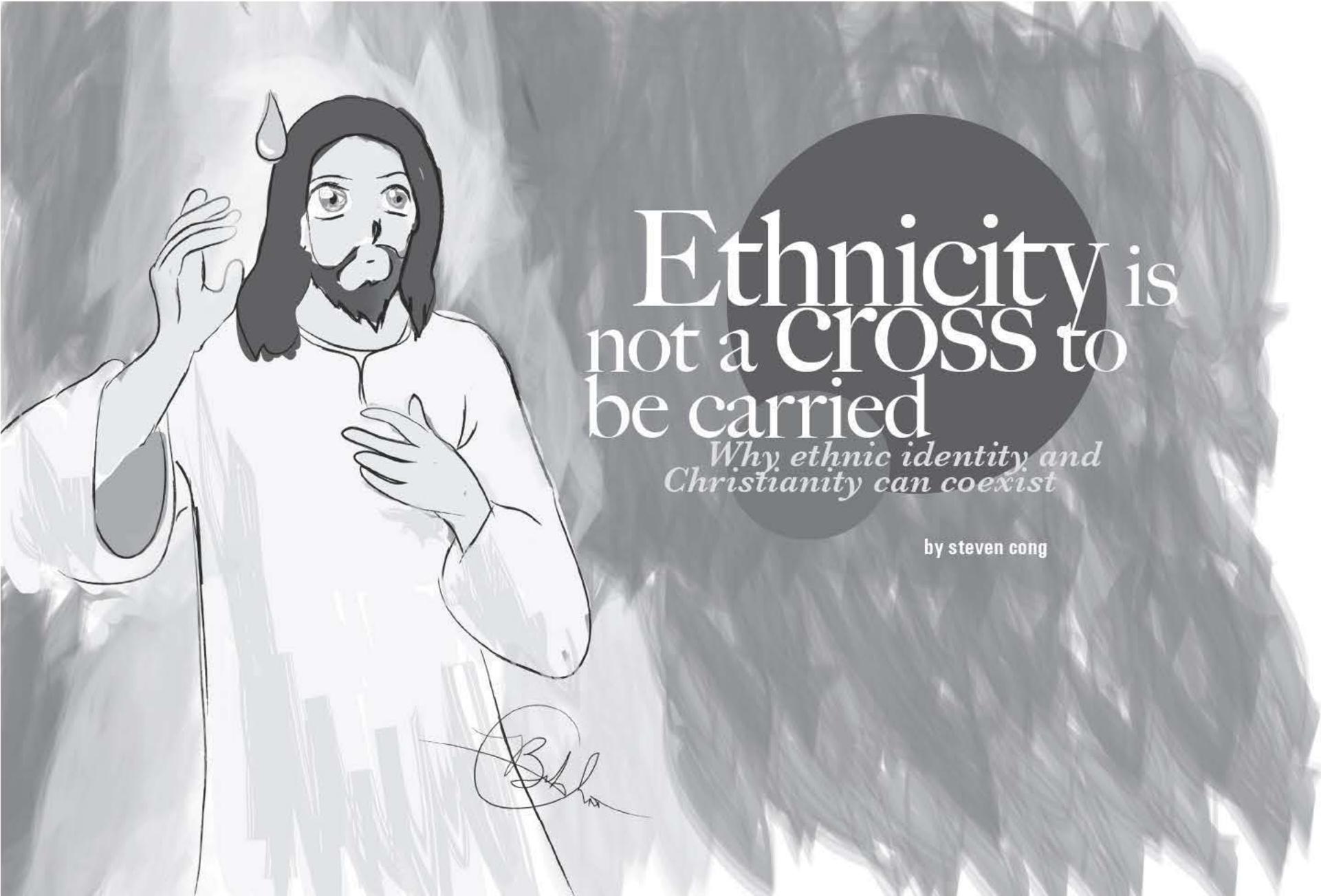
I cannot put into words how my perceptions have changed drastically – my perception of Vietnam, of my family, of having an accent, of "coolness," of time, and most importantly, of myself in retrospect.

In Vietnam, I was able to transcend my traditional "linguistic spaces." By circumstance, I had to speak Vietnamese everywhere I went. I was finally able to think in Vietnamese. I was able to meet and relate to young people like me. I was able to meet family I had never met until then. I was able to discover the depths of my family history. I was able to grow a deeper love for Vietnamese food. Indeed, I appreciate my mother's cooking more now; my taste buds have shifted. I wish I could let her know how sorry I am for preferring fast food over her cooking over the years. Vietnamese food got way more soul than a \$1 McChicken.

Studying Vietnamese music history also helped me appreciate Vietnamese music a lot more. Now I know why karaoke and sad, nostalgic songs are so deeply significant for the older Vietnamese generation. Just as hip hop or any contemporary music speaks to our generation's nuances and struggles, Vietnamese "misery pop" music – whether pre- or post-1975 – speaks not only to their mundane day-to-day lives, but also to their memories of days past in a homeland that once was.

Most importantly, I've learned to be less selfish, to be more mindful of my family and friends. Not everything is about politics; it shouldn't be. I learned to think and act a little bit more with my heart. Of course, I still have a lot to learn about the traditions and norms of Vietnam.

Lastly, even though I am finally back in the U.S. and to my regular, everyday life, I believe the connection will be there forever. Each and every person that I've met in Vietnam has reshaped my views – not simply in terms of school, but in real life terms. My understanding of "home" has transformed. I used to reflect upon my position in Vietnam as an overseas Vietnamese "traitor coming back." In the beginning, I felt like I did not belong in Vietnam. You could say I had a kind of "guilt" rooted in the residue of war, but I think I've taken a few more steps past it. As I have learned inside and outside of the classroom, Vietnam is changing, the world is changing. Indeed they are changing quickly.



# Ethnicity is not a cross to be carried

*Why ethnic identity and  
Christianity can coexist*

by steven cong

When you think of church or Christianity, an image that might immediately come to mind is that of a man with fair hair and blue eyes whom everyone worships. You might also think of conservative (mostly white) politicians, and European pilgrims seeking asylum for their religious beliefs. For the longest time, these were the images I subconsciously associated with Christianity as I professed my faith to Christ.

It is not surprising then that for much of my life I just felt so culturally disconnected from the Christian community. After Jesus Christ was nailed to that cross, his message spread throughout the Roman Empire, and his legacy was mostly in Europe. In Asia, aside from the sporadic presence of people like the Nestorian monks during the Tang Dynasty, Christianity did not leave much of an impact until the era of European colonialism.

Asia and the missionaries were not exactly a match made in heaven (pun intended). The indigenous culture of many Asian ethnicities was condemned as "heathen" by foreign missionaries, and the absence of Christianity was part of the reason many Asian countries were seen as barbaric. It was exactly through instances like French imperialism in Vietnam that the seeds of Christianity were sown into the fabric of various Asian cultures.

The actions of some "Christians," however, are not always reflective of the doctrine of Christianity itself. For me, the missionaries who decided to trample upon Asian culture and impose Christianity as the standard for civility did not reflect the spirit of the Bible. They did not love their neighbors as themselves. It is very much analogous to how President Bush inserted American imperialism into the Middle East under the guise of democratization. While it doesn't mean that democracy is bad, it does make democracy look bad.

So why am I a Christian? As a Chinese American, shouldn't I be rubbing the belly of some golden Buddha and burning incense? Or, to go with the ideology of Communist China, shouldn't I be an atheist? One's ethnic identity does not and should not translate directly into any specific religion. I do believe, however, that Christianity is something that can accommodate my Asian American identity. When the Eurocentric history of Christianity and its politically charged contemporary reputation are all swept aside, what remains is a religion remarkably capable of adapting to different cultures.

*"The answer is that I don't, and nobody should be able to spiritually guilt-trip me into thinking otherwise."*

From its inception, Christianity was a religion catered to Jewish males. Yes, Jesus was not Aryan with fair hair and blue eyes. Instead, he was from Israel in the Middle East. However, the religion that formed around him grew to adapt the culture of the West. Elements of Christianity, such as the Ten Commandments, easily consolidated a Western culture that stressed the rule of law. Then, in America, blacks embraced the concept that all men were equal before God to pursue emancipation from slavery. Blacks also heavily contributed to modern Christian culture through the rhythmic nature of genres like gospel music.

*"If there was a door that is specifically designed for Asian Americans, then why would I have to wholly adopt the Western culture to be Christian?"*

Wendy Hu-Au, Team Leader for the Black Campus Ministries fellowship in Berkeley, said that Christianity is like a house with many doors. If there was only one door, then only a Jewish man can be accepted by the Christian God. However, Hu-Au believes that there are numerous doors that serve the specific needs of a diverse and multicultural society. When I heard her say that at the Sunday Night Live event last semester, I realized there was a very specific door for me. If there was a door that is specifically designed for Asian Americans, then why would I have to wholly adopt the Western culture to be Christian, like one of my former pastors had implied? The answer is that I don't, and nobody should be able to spiritually guilt-trip me into thinking otherwise.

So Christianity doesn't need to be Western. But does that necessarily mean it could actually accommodate everybody? According to Erina Kim, Intervarsity fellowship staff member, some of the most popular terms used to describe Christians in a survey included "hypocritical,"

"sheltered," and "judgmental." That does not sound like the kind of people who would tolerate those who are different, or be a Good Samaritan when they see someone in need. Admittedly, some Christians are like that. However, is that reflective of all Christians, or more importantly, what Christianity dictates a Christian should be?

The story of Christ showed that he spent most his life in the company of people the mainstream community considered to be inadequate and failures; he appealed to the ones society had often excluded. Wait, excluded? That sounds familiar. In a way, when I reflect on the people Christ chose to represent and how Asian Americans were treated for most of American history, it just makes sense to see Christ as someone who would care about Asian Americans.

Nate Lee, a senior in Intervarsity, said, "I hope that the Asian Church in America more fully embraces its mission as a group who have been marginalized in society. Jesus came to set the oppressed free and as Asian Americans...we need to identify as people set free by Jesus. We also have to make a commitment to freeing others, getting involved in social justice rather than building up our own complacent and safe enclaves."

I once heard a song by Asian American rapper Bambu called "Misused." He made several derogatory references to Christianity, and I was saddened by how much his thoughts on the practice of Christianity rang true. In the song, he claimed to be a "heathen who'd rather see the present be fair than to pray to a white man on a cross instead," and that he "used to sit in church and look at the stained glass and wonder why none of them looked like [him]. And [he] just don't want his son to go through that kind of shit."

For Asian American Christians not raised in ethnic enclaves, this sense of ethnic displacement due to religious affiliation is not uncommon. Yet the story of Christ is so much more than just the narrative of one dominant culture. In fact, Christ's story was meant for people like Bambu, and if the Asian American church wants Christianity to be accessible to the Asian American people, that fundamental belief needs to transcend common misconceptions of what Christianity is, and who it's for.

# AMY CHUA IS ‘GARBAGE’

## Dissecting Amy Chua’s assumptions about Chinese motherhood

by yifan zhang

See, Amy, I can use hyperboles too! For those who don't know, Professor Amy Chua wrote a book which prompted an inflammatory article “Why Chinese Mothers are Superior” in the Wall Street Journal. Yes I heard, those were just excerpts of the most controversial quotes from her book “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother.” Even though I may question the accuracy of the “excerpt,” it was one scary window into the mind of a scary person.

Her book describes the narrative of her own personal absurdist/sadistic mothering techniques. Her caring, motherly behavior obviously stems from a “foundation of love and compassion.” I mean if she doesn't make you play violin and piano for six hours a day, then she really does not love you. Of course, threatening to burn stuffed animals, name-calling, and not letting your kids in partake in a phenomenon called “fun” doesn't cause depression; it builds character. \*bs\*. From strict parenting, she implies that parents can have total, conscious control over the futures of their children.

Even more disturbing is how this article spread like wildfire across the internet! The New York Times, the Atlantic, Times Magazine, and every bloody Chinese American with a blog from Lena Chen to Vienna Teng commented on the topic . . . and so will hardboiled. Most of mainstream media has focused on how Amy Chua is some sort of cure to docile, “Western” parenting. The “Mommy Wars,” they decried. The Mommy Wars doesn't describe the totality of the discourse. We must always remain vigilant about what those articles are actually implying.

Mainstream commentaries on Amy Chua parallel the classic depictions of Yellow Peril. Time Magazine cites standardized tests scores and economic growth in China in the same cover article as Amy Chua's parenting to describe the impending takeover by the Chinese overlords. There is a difference between a Chinese American and Chinese national; one salutes the stars and stripes while the other salutes the hammer and sickle. Why can't people get this right?! “Amy, we the losers [Amy Chua] is talking about?” commented Time Magazine. Who the hell is “we?” Can we join? To continue the implicit fear

mongering, Time quoted former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell. He commented, as a response to a postponed Philadelphia Eagles game: “The Chinese are kicking our butts in everything. If this was in China, do you think the Chinese would have called off the game? People would have been marching down to the stadium. They would have walked, and they would have been doing calculus on the way down.” I called my cousins in China: they can't do calculus. If you wanted a proper sports riot, go to England, not China. So to Ed Rendell: fu/du.

However, Amy Chua and mainstream commentary both stem from the assumption that parenting techniques influence a child's future, or at least parenting techniques correlates with offspring success. Although in the end Amy Chua “moderated” her parenting, she still maintains the assumption that she can have control over her children's future. To the shock of all parents, there is no correlation between parenting techniques and a child's academic success. There is no “optimum” parenting technique for Amy Chua or any other overbearing parent to obtain.

According to *Freakonomics* by Chicago economist Steven Levitt and New York Times journalist Stephen Dubner, parental behavior is negligible. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Levitt concluded that parental behaviors such as spanking a child, moving to a new neighborhood, limiting television use, or even reading to a child has no effect on standardized test scores. Thus, the quest for the best parenting technique is analogous to the search for El Dorado and unicorns. It may be true parents cannot be too lax. Yet according to Levitt's research, most modifications

optimal parenting strategy? I expect more from a Harvard educated economics major.

What does influence success for children then? According to Levitt and his research, socioeconomic status is more of an influence on academic success than anything a parent does. Moreover, parental education, English as a household language, and having books all influence a child's success. Having books demonstrates both an emphasis on learning and purchasing power. Non-English speaking households are less well off socioeconomically, and thus their children are generally less successful in school. A child's success “isn't a matter of what you do as a parent; it's who you are.” In short, indelible social class is the main determinant of intelligence and future success.

Time Magazine cites the school success in China and other East Asian countries is because of an intensively rigorous academic environment. They used the standardized testing scores from Shanghai to backup their arguments. However, that data must be taken with a grain of salt. Urbane Shanghai students are not a fair representation of China's population, as they are wealthier and more educated than their rural and migrant brethren. Remember, socioeconomic status correlates with high test scores. Round up a bunch of prep school kids from Philip Exeter, and I'll bet these American students can rival the teens from Shanghai. Additionally, China is known for “saving face” to the international community (watch the Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony if you don't believe me). The Chinese government often tries to portray the People's Republic as modern and developed as possible, no matter how biased this portrait might be. Who says the government did not specially select a group of high achieving students? Plus, the students were probably given a speech about how the honor of the Motherland depended on this international test. “Traditional” Chinese culture has nothing to do with selection bias.

The same concept of selection bias explains why Chinese American students are doing well academically. The bias stems from the Immigration Act of 1965 and its seven point preference system. One of these preferences was reserved for educated, skilled professionals. Educated ethnic Chinese like Amy Chua's parents (one of whom taught electrical engineering here at UC Berkeley) came into the country through this preference. These aren't the “wretched refuse” but the sons and daughters of aristocracy. Because of their high socioeconomic status, education, wealth, and often an emphasis in technical fields, their children (like Amy Chua) entered the school system and succeeded academically. The success of this portion of the Chinese American community is not solely due to “Asian values” as Amy Chua would like us to believe but their relatively high socioeconomic status.

Most frightening, Amy Chua's narrative illustrates that the Chinese American community has internalized the “model minority” stereotype. We think our “values” somehow gives us a competitive advantage academically and economically. The belief of these “values” gives many Chinese Americans the excuse to perpetuate often mentally scarring parenting techniques. Furthermore, our internalization of the stereotype perpetuates the “model minority” mainstream media. We let ourselves “peril.” We dug our own graves. We drank need to pump our stomachs.

# Who's Your Mama?

## A Dragon Daughter Takes a Look at the Tiger Mother

by lauren chang

"Aren't you glad I'm your mother?" asked my mom after I ranted about "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother." Written by Amy Chua, a Yale law professor, "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" is an account of how Chua raised her two daughters, Sophia and Louisa "Lulu," using the strict "Chinese" model of parenting. When the book was released, it became the hot topic of the nation.

At this point, I'm sure everyone has some idea of the book's content—the rules Chua imposed on her daughters during their childhood: no sleepovers, nothing less than straight As, no personal choice in extracurricular activities and no computer games or TV, just to name a few.

I thought I knew what I was getting into—a hardcore Chinese mother who essentially bullies her children into doing what she thinks is best for them, claiming she is doing it for the benefit of their futures, only to have it all backfire on her. Then she lightens up, learns a lesson and everyone is happy.

It literally took everything I had to not throw my mom's new Kindle out the window.

As an Asian American Studies major and a Chinese American, I was outraged at every stereotype and overgeneralization Chua made about the Chinese and those she deemed "Westerners." If an outsider read this book hoping to find some rhyme or reason for the supposedly overzealous nature of Asian parents (immigrant or otherwise), one would automatically chalk it up to the "Chinese method" for churning out more superior children compared to the Western style.

Chua claims to use the terms "Chinese mother" and "Western parents" loosely, since not all women of Chinese heritage are "Chinese mothers" and not all western people are "Western parents." You can't help but feel, however, slapped in the face when this woman, who doesn't even know you, is insulting you. Hell, I don't even have kids and I'm offended because she is essentially insulting my mom.

My mom is anything but a Tiger Mother. According to the Chinese zodiac she is a Rooster, often characterized as loyal, trustworthy individuals who offer their blunt opinions without being mean-spirited.

Many people, including Chua, don't believe in astrology (western, Chinese or otherwise), but those qualities do describe my mom. She will tell you her honest opinion because you need to know the truth. She can keep secrets, so Harry Potter's parents would probably still be alive if James and Lily had chosen her as their Secret Keeper instead of Peter Pettigrew.

Throughout the entire book, Chua keeps saying, "Chinese people do this," "Chinese people do that," "Chinese people believe this," and it was infuriating because I don't know why this woman thinks she has the right to speak for an ENTIRE nation of people! Just because she is an "insider" does not mean she has all the insider information.

Chua writes in her book, "What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences. This often requires fortitude on the part of the parents because the child will resist; things are always hardest at the beginning, which is where Western parents tend to give up..."

She manages to uphold that Chinese parents are hardcore about everything in life, and also to insult Western parents who "give up" at the slightest hint of hardship. In the movie

"Black Swan," Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman), compelled by her overbearing mother, pushes herself to the point of self-destruction in order to perfect her dual lead role. Chua, however, would probably say that Nina's mother was a "Chinese mother" and not the typical "Western parent."

As I was growing up, my mom did encourage me to try to find a hobby. It was partly finding something I liked, as well as something to add to my college application. But my mother was only adamant about my sister and I learning how to swim. She said it was a useful skill that could save my life or someone else's some day. It wasn't really hard to get me or my sister to swimming lessons—we were practically fish and swam our way through all the levels offered by our community center.

In high school I made my own choices regarding my extracurricular activities, and was involved in journalism, water polo and badminton for four years, and soccer for one. My mom never forced me to do anything I didn't want to do because she felt there was no point in wasting money on something if I wasn't going to enjoy it. Chua would probably say my mother was a "Western parent" despite her being of Chinese descent, but I ended up at Berkeley, so my mom must have done something right.

Chua also engages in overgeneralizations and stereotypes to explain her daughters' aptitude in certain areas. "She [Sophia, the eldest] was probing and questioning, from the Jewish side. And from me, the Chinese side, she got skills—lots of skills..." Wait, let me get this straight: all Jewish people are probing and questioning and all Chinese people are incredibly skilled?

Maybe this was meant as some sort of joke, but this kind of writing only helps to reinforce the stereotypes people in Ethnic Studies are trying to erase. It doesn't matter whether these are "good" stereotypes, as even admirable representations can be harmful. "Model minority," anyone?

Yes, the model minority is detrimental to Asian Americans as well as other groups. This term was originated by dominant society to describe Asian Americans as being able to achieve the kind of success America claims anyone can accomplish when they come to America. It was their way of chiding other minorities, "Why can't you do it? They did it."

That image is also damaging to Asian Americans as it creates a high pressure environment where achievements are the only way to evaluate worth. Instead of embracing individuality, it forces Asian Americans into a stereotype: good at math, plays piano, always gets good grades, etc. The model minority also masks problems within our community, as some groups are not as successful as others because they face different sets of issues.

While Chua churned out very skilled and disciplined children, she only reinforces the image that Asian Americans don't value independence—that children are "automatons" to be programmed into "perfect" people. She actually mocks her husband when he brings up the fact that people are different, that Lulu is not Sophia, and Chua cannot force her to do exactly what Sophia did.

This was the most infuriating book I have ever read. Yet, it did make me appreciate my mother more. I'm not a master at anything, but I am happy, and the arguments between my mom and I are nothing compared to Chua and Lulu's. We're practically best friends and I'd take that relationship over dictator and the dictated any day.

# Ed Lee, Jean Quan, and Our Asian Generation

## an APA GenY Perspective on the New Bay Area Mayors

by adrian lee



On Feb. 15th, former Cal Superstar and Superbowl XLV Defensive MVP Desmond Bishop tweeted about receiving an honorary certificate from San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, who designated Feb. 15th as Desmond Bishop Day in San Francisco. The commendation of Bishop is yet another act of civility that has defined Lee's reputation as the first Asian American mayor of San Francisco.

Meanwhile on the other side of the Bay, Mayor Jean Quan cut her pay by 25 percent in her ongoing effort to fix Oakland's budgetary woes. While it might seem like a political gesture to some, Mayor Quan's act is impressive considering her predecessor refused to cut his budget and even asked for a pay raise when he first entered office. Mayor Quan, the first female and first Asian American mayor of Oakland, came from humble beginnings eating only bok choy for most of her childhood in Livermore.

Both Mayors Lee and Quan are not just known around political circles in San Francisco and Oakland for breaking racial trends as the first Asian American mayor for their city. Mayor Lee, for instance, has already made it clear that he intends to tackle the \$380 million deficit in San Francisco by holding accountable the city's numerous non-profit organizations that receive a total of \$500 million a year in funding. While it seems rather minuscule, C.W. Nevius of the San Francisco Chronicle posed the question as to why San Francisco had not done this in the past.

"Many of the programs provide overlapping services, aren't required to prove they are making an impact, and don't always need to account for how they've spent the city's money," Nevius wrote. "That's unacceptable."

Mayor Lee has also promised to focus his energy on improving businesses in San Francisco. On Feb. 24th, he walked with Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi around Japantown to explore possible options of helping revitalize businesses by engaging one-on-one with local business owners. True to his reputation as an engaging and civil Mayor, Lee has also made his schedule public, and his office in City Hall holds open and public office hours.

Meanwhile Mayor Quan has strived to improve relations with the Oakland Police Department in an effort to make Oakland safer. On her first day as Mayor, she met with officers one-on-one in order to gain a more personal understanding of the police force. She also assigned city technicians to focus solely on fixing broken police equipment. As part of her ultimate goal to fix Oakland's budget, Mayor Quan's long-term goal for the Police Department is to negotiate a cut in their pension plan in exchange for a city parcel tax for more police funding.

Of course the story has been told countless times before – these mayors are different from the rest. But what personal implications do the two mayors' achievements have on our generation? Lee and Quan represent a new age of politics for Asian Americans – people like our parents can realistically aspire to be politicians, and good ones at that.

Growing up in a Chinese American family, I saw my parents struggle with the same issues that Lee and Quan have experienced. Let's start with Lee.

Other than sharing a surname, Mayor Lee and my father share the same economical sensibility. When Lee was announced as Gavin Newsom's successor, John Cote of the Chronicle contrasted how Newsom drove a nice luxury SUV while Lee drove an old Toyota Camry to work. Similarly to Mayor Lee, my father always drove a 2000 Corolla to work, parking alongside his coworkers' luxury cars in the building's garage. And despite owning a Benz that just sits in the garage gathering dust, my father always preferred to drive the Corolla because of its superior gas mileage. Rose Pak describes my father and Lee perfectly, as being "very frugal, bordering on cheap."

My mother, on the other hand, shares a common background with Mayor Quan. According to an Oakland Tribune article, during Mayor Quan's childhood in Livermore, she lived in cramped homes, and every penny was sent to her older sister in China. Quan had to eat the same meal every day growing up in order to save money. Moreover she faced racial discrimination for being Chinese

in a predominantly Caucasian area.

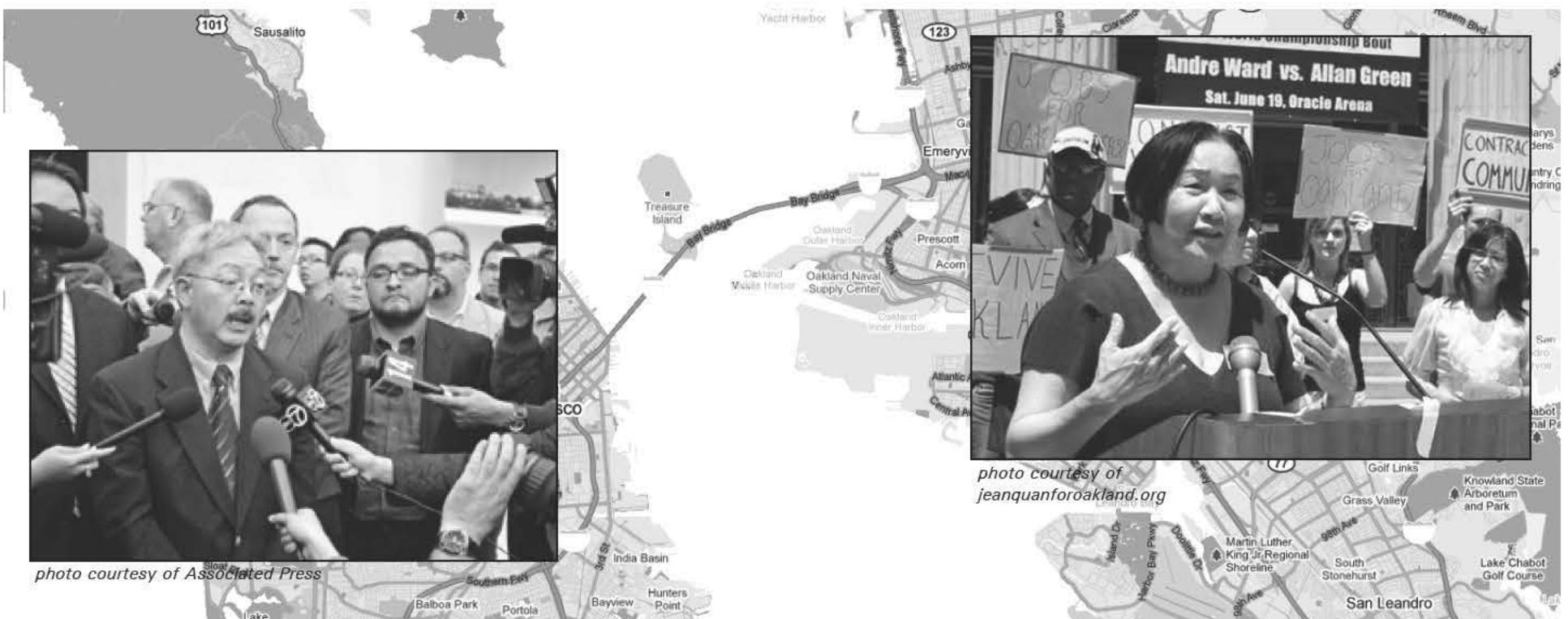
As the only daughter in a traditional Taishan family in Chinatown, my mother was in the same position as young Mayor Quan. My mother lived in a cramped apartment and slept on the living room couch, while her brothers slept in one room and her parents slept in another. Whenever my mother did leave Chinatown to help on the family farm, she faced discrimination on the basis of her ethnic background.

But unlike Mayor Quan, my mother was unable to receive a higher education due to the struggles of providing for a family. My mother worked to provide for my father's education and never spent money on herself. Meanwhile, Quan graduated from UC Berkeley and went on to fight for civil rights and an Ethnic Studies department at UC Berkeley and SF State.

While our generation may often laugh at how "Asian" our parents are, as exemplified by websites like "My Mom is a Fob," we sometimes forget to put the humor aside and look at the root cause of our parent's supposedly peculiar characteristics – their sacrifice for our sakes. Our parents act the way they do in order to provide for our generation.

And while Lee and Quan are unique for being the first Asian American mayors of San Francisco and Oakland, they too sacrifice a lot for our generation. Whether it is driving old, broken down cars or cutting their pay, Mayor Lee and Mayor Quan use their frugal, humble backgrounds to create a new culture in politics in cutting excessive spending on non-necessities. Like our parents, they continue to fight to provide benefits for all of us, especially the next generation. And while my father and mother might not be politicians themselves, they too share the same value of sacrificing for others to provide us with what they didn't have.

Although Mayors Lee and Quan still have a long way to go in achieving all their goals, perhaps one day, we will celebrate their achievements with a special day designated to them.



# THE PROBLEM WITH BUSINESS AS USUAL

how corporate media has been treading on the toes of communities



*photos courtesy of tpmlivewire.talkingpointsmemo.com*

by crystal sitt

Every year, the Super Bowl draws in a large enough audience to justify its baseline asking price for advertisements of \$3 million dollars. From a company's perspective, running an ad during the Super Bowl is equivalent to having a stock ticker symbol or a store on Rodeo Drive – it amps up the legitimacy and, hopefully, increases profit margins. For Super Bowl XLV, Groupon's Tibet themed advertisement was one of three ads for their Super Bowl marketing campaign and it garnered a lot of controversy.

This 30 second spot starts off with a documentary vibe, explaining, “the people of Tibet are in trouble. Their very culture is in jeopardy...But they still whip up an amazing fish curry.” The ad carries a nonchalant tone in its reference to China's takeover of Tibet in 1950 and subsequent erosion of Tibetan culture, language, natural resources, and human rights.

Given that Groupon was only founded two years ago and is headquartered in Chicago, this Super Bowl campaign is a big visibility booster. They wanted to create buzz with their Tibet advertisement. In fact, they called on mockumentary director Christopher Guest to lead the whole project. Even if their intentions weren't rooted in offending viewers and potential Groupon groupies – after all, Groupon's chief executive Andrew Mason put it best when he said that “the last thing we wanted was to offend our customers. It's bad business” – this is exhibit A in demonstrating the insensitivity and juvenile approach that many American businesses employ today.

What was most interesting during this ordeal was the “apology” that Groupon released in response to the uproar. Many upset individuals who emailed Groupon received this reply: “We certainly don't mean to offend with our advertisements. We think renting celebrities to promote our 'Save the Money' campaign is pretty funny, but we understand if it doesn't tickle you the right way.” In other words, the burden is on the viewer to enjoy the humor of the ad, and Groupon is sorry that particular individuals don't “get it.” Not once did the company address the issues in Tibet and encourage some sort of call to action. Understandably, it is not always the place for businesses to take a political stance. However, if Groupon wanted to risk being controversial, it should be for pushing the envelope and enlightening fellow Americans of this foreign policy issue, not for exploiting a historical event of oppression.

Surprisingly, when individuals went to Groupon's website to purchase their fish curry coupon, they found a link to a donation page to support the Tibetan people. If Groupon wanted to do more than just trivialize the conflict in Tibet, they definitely needed to have copy at the end of their ad referencing their donation website. That logical disclaimer, however, was not implemented. Thus, a paradox is created where Groupon claims to be trying to put a spotlight on Tibet while their Super Bowl ad upstages that serious consideration with cheap fish curry.

Even though there was a donation page on the website, this advertisement was not a humbling education experience and I would say that individuals who visited that page obviously weren't offended by the advertisement. If one truly understood the capacity of Tibet's deeply-rooted oppression, however, it would be hard not to resent

the ad. Customers donating to Groupon's philanthropic Tibet fund aren't educating themselves on the implications of this situation. If Groupon truly had sincere intentions with their offer, they shouldn't have juxtaposed such an intense social issue with humor.

Apparently, Groupon isn't the only company resorting to tasteless methods to fulfill their profit-oriented bottom line. Take for example, Kenneth Cole, who decided to piggyback on Egypt's people power to draw attention to their Spring 2011 collection release. Using the trending hash tag “#Cairo” on Twitter, Kenneth Cole tweeted: “Millions are in uproar in #Cairo. Rumor is they heard our new spring collection is now available at http://bit.ly/KCairo.” Apparently “satire” and “wit” are things Kenneth Cole's Twitter account isn't lacking. They clearly have such a strong grasp on contemporary social and international issues that they felt it appropriate to use these current events as publicity vehicles. Twitter account KennethColePR has previously blasted tweets like, “People from New Orleans are flooding into Kenneth Cole stores!” and “Our new looks are dropping faster than the World Trade Center.”

Kenneth Cole himself, the chairman and Chief Creative Officer of the company, released a statement saying, “I apologize to everyone who was offended by my insensitive tweet about the situation in Egypt. I've dedicated my life to raising awareness about serious social issues, and in hindsight my attempt at humor regarding a nation liberating themselves against oppression was poorly timed and absolutely inappropriate.” Chronologically, the Cairo tweet succeeded the New Orleans and World Trade Center tweets. I guess the PR department didn't get enough of a backlash before because this apology to their most recent social issue tweet makes it sound like this was the very first time this kind of incident has happened.

These new tricks of the trade to get consumer attention aren't the only tactics flying in this media storm of controversy. There are still companies like MetroPCS, who employ stereotypes in their recent Super Bowl ad with two Indian characters who host “Tech & Talk.” The ad exploits stereotypes that are extremely demeaning to the Indian population. The connotation is not empowering and it should not be taken lightly. The Indian tech support stereotype has been used and reused endlessly, but it still garners much controversy. We need to continue fighting these racial stereotypes, while companies are going the extra mile, adding more to our already overflowing plate of API issues we need to tackle, by trivializing significant social problems.

Businesses exploit heavy social issues for profit. In fact, MetroPCS reported bigger-than-expected profit levels for their fourth quarter. Obviously, bad publicity is still publicity and, for some companies, the point of stirring up controversy is to get their name out. “Going green” and “corporate social responsibility” aren't just publicity stunts – they're profit-driven actions. As an Asian Pacific American, these ad campaigns hit closer to home, and an apology just doesn't suffice. Big corporations need to stop seeing social issues and people of color with dollar signs. If they aren't willing to instigate or help propel positive social change, they can at least not step on the toes of those who need it the most.

# The Invasion of

by jeffrey pu

Upcoming video game "Homefront" could be the newest addition to a lineage of anti-Communism/anti-Asia war games. Developed by Kaos Studios and published by THQ, the game is currently scheduled for release on March 15th. As a first-person shooter, "Homefront" centers on gun combat from the first-person perspective.

I've always been a huge geek and have been enjoying video games since I was a kid, so I sometimes find it hard to critique video games simply due to my fond memories of them. Yet, I readily threw out my qualms about critiquing video games after learning about the premise of "Homefront." The action takes place in 2027 when Korea is reunified under Kim Jong-il's son Kim Jong-un, and the U.S. economy collapses due to a dramatic increase in oil prices. Sounds bad? It gets worse.

With American global presence diminished, the unified Korea annexes a number of countries in Asia, including Japan. Finally, taking advantage of a pandemic that has swept through the U.S., as well as employing a strategic military strike against U.S. communication systems (the Koreans actually trick the Americans into believing that they are sending a "message of peace"), the Korean People's Army invades American soil.

There's so much wrong with this premise that I almost don't know where to start, but let's just begin with the story overview. Its game developers have labeled "Homefront" as a work of "speculative fiction," and great lengths have been taken to ensure that the premise is a "plausible" one. The game was written by John Milius, co-writer of "Apocalypse Now" and "Red Dawn" (the 1984 film in which the Soviet Union invades the United States and is beaten back by a team of teenagers). Furthermore, former CIA field agent Tae Kim was hired as a consultant.

According to Kim, "from the very day the invasion starts in the game, if you combine everything, the odds are very, very slim this becomes true. But when you look at the storyline step by step, every step is a coin flip but a plausible step. So once you get there, it's plausible. And from there the next step is plausible as well. Even though the whole thing is fictional, it comes with plausible baby steps."

While it may seem presumptuous of me to question the words of a former CIA agent, there is a lot of what he says that is simply hard to buy. It's easy to say that every part of the story is "plausible" without thinking through each portion critically, and therefore oversimplify the story pieces that you put together. This is exactly what the storyline of "Homefront" does. The most problematic piece of "Homefront's" story is obvious: the reunification of Korea. To suggest that within the next couple of years (In the game, Korea is reunified in the



[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

year 2013) Korea can be unified, seemingly without any outside intervention, dramatically oversimplifies the issue of both the conflict between North and South Korea, and the international relations of the region as a whole. The fact that the mi-

disturbing. And while a video game's ability to draw out angry and violent emotional responses is not uncommon, it is more often that games are used as a form of catharsis. When I play shooter games, I do so because I want to release the anger or bloodlust that I'm feeling at the moment.

On the other hand, "Homefront" aims to recreate and reinforce that anger and bloodlust.

Furthermore, we all understand the ability of media to shape public perception (as supported by the correlation between increased media animosity toward Muslim and Arab

"The xenophobic tendencies of the media... make it easy to see the negative implications of the game."



*photo courtesy of www.youtube.com*

Two types of Koreans presented in Homefront: the evil oppressors from North Korea (L) and the sole Korean American ally Hopper (R).

raculous reunification and essential takeover of Asia by Korea can be seen as a "plausible step" speaks to me of a severe lack of understanding of the political landscape of East Asia.

Some may take a look at the issues I've raised and dismiss them on the grounds that I am over-analyzing what is only a fictional storyline to be used in a fun action game. However, this leads to the next issue I have with "Homefront," which is the emotional reaction that the developers are trying to elicit with this game. While action games in which the main goal is to run around and shoot as many enemies as virtually possible are by no means rare, the developers of "Homefront" have attempted to set their game apart from other first-person shooters by emphasizing emotional response, which is generally hard to accomplish with the detached medium of video games.

With most games lacking the high-quality visuals of film and the creative capacity of literature, few games are immersive enough to allow the audience to invest themselves in the characters or plot development. The developers at Kaos Studios, however, may have gotten it right with "Homefront."

According to an article by Stephen Totilo of video game blog Kotaku, "I have little animosity for the virtual people I shoot in video games. They are cardboard targets. The worst they can do is kill the virtual me. My 'death' lasts a few seconds. I can't hate them for that. This changed last week. I played the beginning of the upcoming first-person shooter Homefront and I felt a burning urge in the game to do right with the trigger of a virtual gun."

I don't think I need to spell out why such sentiments are deeply problematic and

countries and the continuous rise in hate crimes against Muslim and Arab Americans). The xenophobic tendencies of the media, which are directed not just at Arab Americans but also at Asian Americans with discussion about "threats in Asia," combined with the fact that too many people don't bother to make a distinction between Korean, Japanese and Chinese or any other Asian (the murder of Vincent Chin comes to mind here), makes it easy to see the negative implications this game has on the Asian American community. The developers at Kaos Studios should have understood the ramifications of portraying all Koreans as unrepentant killers of mothers and children, especially to an audience that is becoming increasingly hostile to those with "Oriental" faces.

Now, it's here that I have to include a disclaimer, and I'm not just doing this to cover my own ass and appear "objective," but as an honest gesture of hope. Considering the fact that "Homefront" has yet to be released and the only previews of the game cover the first level, it's a little bit too early to pass such scathing judgment on the game. One of the great things about video games is their length, and with most games lasting at least 10 hours long, there is plenty of room for plot development and change. It can very well be possible that the developers over at Kaos Studios have foreseen the controversy around this game and have addressed it within the game's storyline.

Preview articles have mentioned the inclusion of a Korean American internment camp within the game's narrative. If used properly, the game could very well send a strong message against the use of racial profiling and remind us why Japanese internment was such a shameful period in our history. Other factors such as the inclusion of a Korean American protagonist could even redeem the game in my eyes. Nonetheless, given the steady increase in displays of anti-Asian sentiment (the planned remake of "Red Dawn" where the invader is no longer the Soviet Union, but Communist China, is a testament to this) as well as an overall poor track record for first-person shooter storylines, I'm not going to hold my breath.



*photo courtesy of www.youtube.com*

Homefront's premise is based on a unified Korea that annexes Asia and a military growth that outpaces that of the US.