

25th

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW



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25th

ASIAN AMERICAN
POLICY REVIEW

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2014 - 2015 STAFF



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REMARKS FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

DANIEL YOUNGWON LEE

25 YEARS OF THE *ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW*

Since its inception in 1989, the *Asian American Policy Review* has strove to ensure that there exists a space for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community to come together and engage in meaningful discussion and reflection on the public policy issues facing our people.

It is an incredible honor that I introduce *Asian American Policy Review 25*. In this anniversary edition, we continue pushing the boundaries of the traditional academic journal by capturing the diversity of thought and expression that distinguishes the AAPI community.

This edition's Feature article examines how policy making has shaped the Southeast Asian communities and refugees in America. Our first Research piece explores how certain data practices can be leveraged and improved upon to capture the heterogeneity of the AAPI community. Our next piece recognizes how enabling services play a vital role in improving AAPI patients' access to health care. Rounding out our selection of scholarship is an account of the evolution of Vietnamese American political participation in the United States.

Our interviews feature two dynamic voices that represent the creativity and individuality of the Asian American community. Chang-rae Lee, a Korean American novelist best known for his book *Native Speaker*, provides us with an account of his development as a writer and thoughts on his recent work, *On Such a Full Sea*. In our second interview, we sit with Eddie Huang, chef, writer, and producer, to discuss his views on Asian American stereotypes and his memoir-turned-sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*.

We are also excited to include a showcase on art and creative writing from a number of rising Asian American and Pacific Islander artists. Through her provocative ceramic and installation pieces, Ling Chun explores the inherent tension that exists in the American representations of Chinese culture. Jia Sung investigates how identity is transformed through movement and displacement. Through his evocative poem "Yonsei," Sean Miura reflects on the individual and collective memories of the Japanese American experience.

Finally, a number of acknowledgements are in order. *Asian American Policy Review 25* would not be possible without the invaluable guidance from our publisher Martha Foley and our faculty advisor Richard Parker. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Fred Wang and the organizations that continue to support our work through their incredible generosity and confidence. I want to thank our sister journals at Harvard for their warm camaraderie and collaboration. I would also like to thank the editorial staff of the *Asian American Policy Review*. I am extremely humbled to have had the honor of working with such a passionate team committed to Asian American and Pacific Islander causes. Lastly, I want to thank all of the former editors and contributors to the *Asian American Policy Review*. It is the incredible work of the past that helps us move forward.

Daniel Youngwon Lee
Editor-in-Chief



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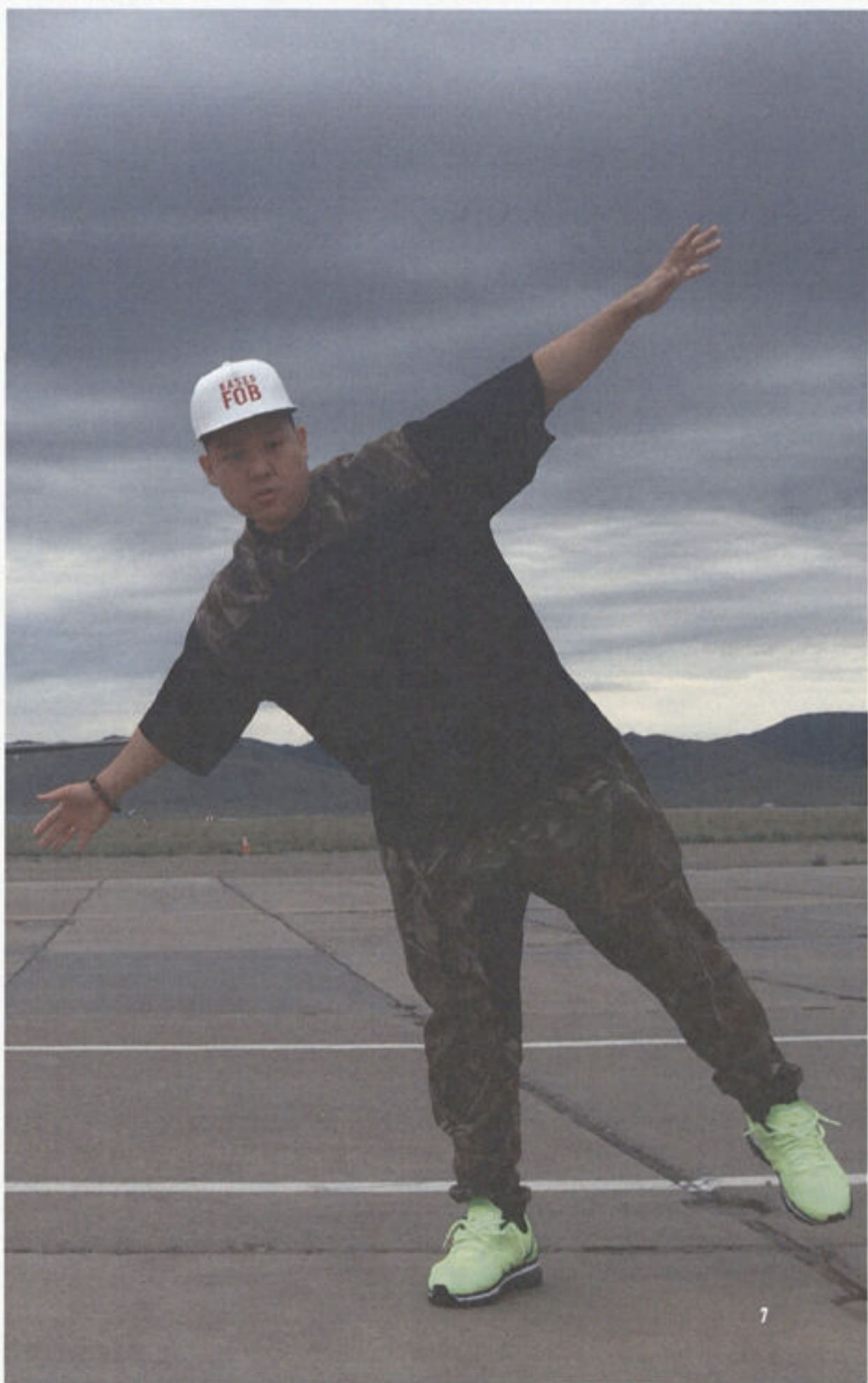
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CALL FOR PAPERS

DEADLINE DECEMBER 4, 2015

The Asian American Policy Review (AAPR) at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government is now accepting submissions for its twenty-sixth edition, to be published in the spring of 2016. Founded in 1989, AAPR is the first nonpartisan academic journal in the country dedicated to analyzing public policy issues facing the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community.

We seek papers exploring (1) the social, economic, and political factors impacting the AAPI community and (2) the role of AAPI individuals and communities in analyzing, shaping, and implementing public policy. We strongly encourage submissions from writers of all backgrounds, including scholars, policy makers, civil servants, advocates, and organizers.

SECTION CRITERIA

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- Relevance of topic to AAPI issues and timeliness to current debates
- Originality of ideas and depth of research
- Sophistication and style of argument
- Contribution to scholarship and debates on AAPI issues

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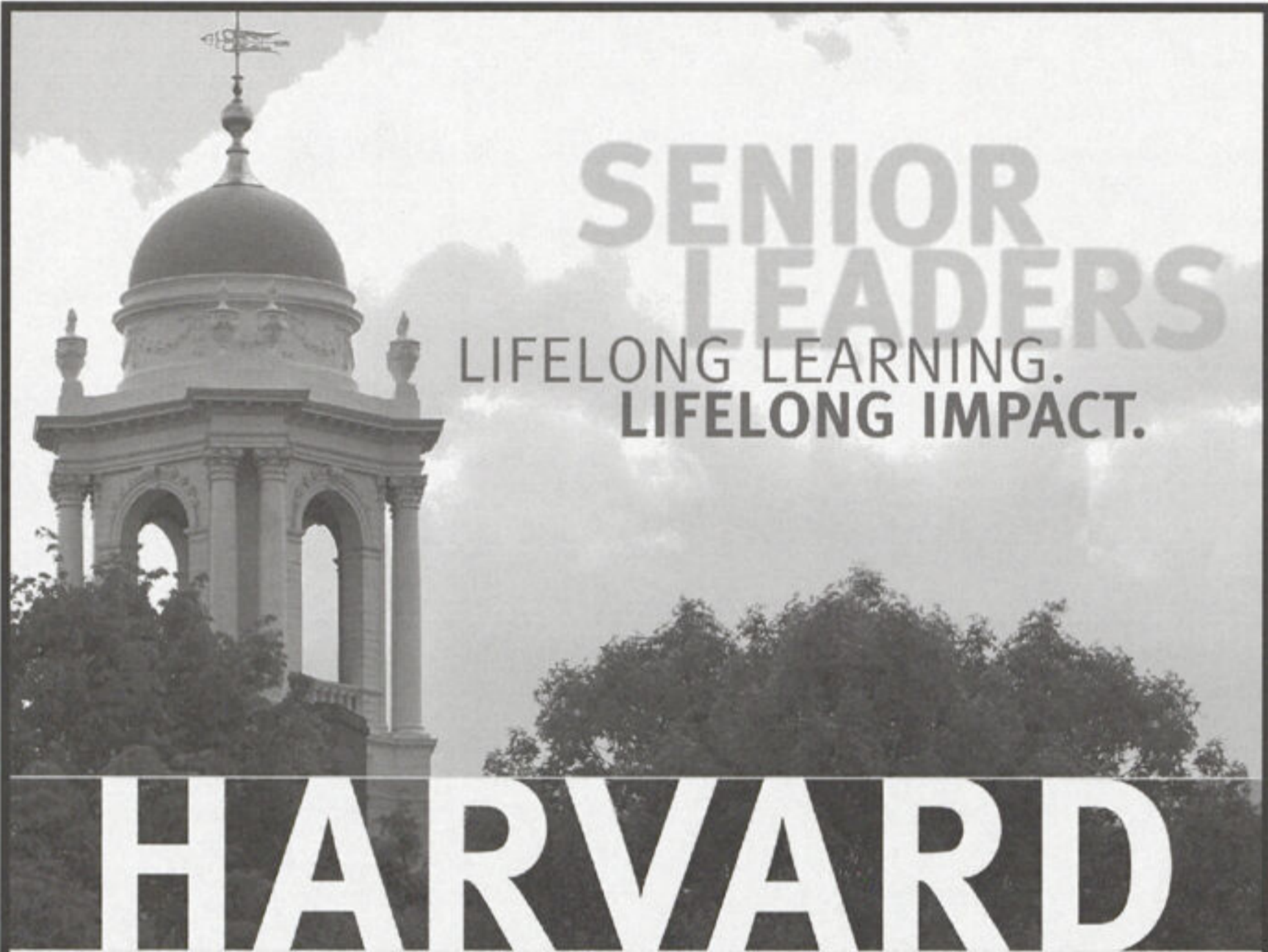
- All submissions must be previously unpublished and based on original work.
- All submissions must be formatted according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Authors are required to cooperate with editing and fact-checking and to comply with AAPR's mandated deadlines. Authors who fail to meet these requirements may not be published.
- All submissions must include a cover letter with (1) author's name, (2) mailing address, (3) email address, (4) phone number, and (5) a brief biography of no more than 300 words.
- Research articles should be 4,000 to 7,000 words in length and include a 100-word abstract.
- Commentaries should be 1,500 to 3,000 words in length.
- Media, film, and book reviews should be 800 to 1,000 words in length.
- All figures, tables, and charts must be clear, easy to understand, and submitted as separate files.

E-mail submissions and any questions you may have to: hksaapr@gmail.com.

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**"IT FALLS INTO
'WHO ARE THEY?':
THE CULTURAL INTERFACE
OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN
REFUGEE POLICY
MAKING, 1975 TO 1980**

VICTOR JEW

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes US refugee policy making from 1975 to 1980 through a lens of *legibilizing*, or state actions that render populations governable. At every point along the *legibilizing* chain, from entry to resettlement, Vietnamese refugees were constantly made the subjects of inquiry. The state collected vast amounts of data on these refugees to fit them into a larger narrative that could accommodate their sudden influx into the country. These processes have served as the backbone of public policy making for Southeast Asian communities in the United States.

SUDDENLY, A MYSTERY

In the late spring of 1975, the population boomed in the southeastern corner of Pennsylvania. In the blink of an eye, thousands of temporary residents flooded into the state. These new Pennsylvanians were refugees who fled South Vietnam after the US-backed government in Saigon fell. Having undergone various "processings," they went, as assigned, to one of four US

“CALLING FOR A NEW CRITICAL STUDY OF “THE REFUGEE” AS A CONTESTED SUBJECT POSITION IN AMERICAN SOCIETY, [YEN LE ESPIRITU] LAMENTED THAT VIETNAMESE AMERICANS IN THE 2006 WERE STILL ONLY KNOWN IN AMERICAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE AS THE HELPLESS ESCAPEE “RESCUED” BY AMERICAN BENEVOLENCE. “IT IS AS REFUGEES ... THAT VIETNAMESE HAVE BECOME MOST INTELLIGIBLE IN THE US PUBLIC IMAGINATION.”

military “reception centers” in four states, the one in Pennsylvania was Fort Indiantown Gap.¹ And then, quietly but expeditiously, many of those newcomers left.²

One person who was not Vietnamese but regularly came to Fort Indiantown Gap in 1975 was Gail Paradise Kelly, a professor of education history and education policy at the State University of New York, Buffalo. Having studied the French colonial education system in Vietnam, she had a grasp of Vietnam’s long history, but despite knowing more about Vietnam than most Americans, she found herself mystified by the new arrivals. She went to Pennsylvania asking, “Who were the Vietnamese refugees? Did they represent a cross section of all of South Vietnam’s society? How would their previous lives in Vietnam help or hinder their adjustment to the United States?”³

Eleven years later, she wrote about how refugees had coped with America. While knowing more about those she met at Fort Indiantown Gap, she bemoaned the continued state of limited knowledge about the Southeast Asians who had resettled. A decade after the first cohort of refugees had arrived in 1975, their recent history could not be told adequately because the sources were fragmentary, thus leaving the entire record fragmented. Sensing that the US government had tired of refugee resettlement, she wrote in 1986 that the “government has consistently tried to make refugees from Vietnam a non issue.”⁴ Doing so meant making scarce the “statistics on family income, residence, and welfare services for Southeast Asians living in the United States,” thus leaving any discussion of the adjustment of Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees “less than comprehensive.”⁵

Twenty years later, Asian Americanist sociologist Yen Le Espiritu, a Vietnamese refugee, wrote about how American public culture continued to be less than comprehensive when the topic of Southeast Asians arose. Calling for a new critical study of “the refugee” as a contested subject position in American society, she lamented that Vietnamese Americans in 2006 were still only known in American public discourse as the helpless escapee “rescued” by American benevolence. “It is as refugees . . . that Vietnamese have become most intelligible in the US public imagination.”⁶

To say that a community as varied as Vietnamese Americans—encompassing a range of migration moments, histories, and transnational dynamics—is most intelligible only when known as when they were most desperate, is to comment on the cultural power of hegemonic public discourses and the preferences that persist in (and through) such discourses. It is also to underscore the power of cultural factors, a social power that goes far to implicate the making of particular subjects, or what Espiritu named as the interpellation of the Vietnamese American subject.⁷

For Espiritu, a powerful source of this intelligibility was the work of social scientists in the mid-1970s who studied the early cohorts of Vietnamese refugees. These scientists’ series of demographic and ethnographic studies inadvertently portrayed Vietnamese arrivals as passive waifs devoid of agency or critical self-reflection, a condition that many social scientists said was only remedied by the refugees’ embrace of the conservative American ethos of self-help and individualistic enterprise.⁸ Affirming traditionalism as these accounts did, their subtexts of American rescue and model minority “success” only cemented the appearance of overarching narrative coherence. This cultural effect goes far to explain the predicament that Espiritu cited in 2006, that Vietnamese Americans could only be “known” by the dramatic moment of escapee trauma in 1975.⁹

Social scientists did much to construct the social intelligibility of the Vietnamese. In other studies, they did the same to other Southeast Asian refugees—today’s Lao, Hmong, and Cambodian communities in the United States. Nevertheless, making intelligibility is not just the activity of anthropologists and sociologists. Policy makers, working across a range of

public policy making arenas, also did this cultural work. This is surprising because more often than not, refugee policy making concerned itself with the nuts and bolts of providing social services. However, constructing the social intelligibility of Southeast Asian refugees was never far off.¹⁰ Whether it was members of Congress deliberating to fund refugee programs, a presidential administration seeking a bipartisan consensus to support its emergency refugee resettlement program, or state-level resettlement offices attempting to manage the challenge of incorporating new arrivals, the problem of making Southeast Asians “known” and “knowable” in particular ways always presented itself, whether those policy makers acknowledged it or not.

Nearly forty years after the first wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived in the United States, we can discern the cultural dimension to refugee policy making and see how rendering intelligibility was a preoccupation of the different decision makers involved in that process. Fortunately, various interpretative tools can make clearer the ambivalent, unstated, and dispersed activities that constructed the knowability of Southeast Asian refugees, the effects of which continue to this day, as Espiritu argued in 2006. One such tool is a metaphor for state actions that render social unknowns into governable subjects. That tool is the study of legibilizing and legibilities.

As used in this essay, “legibilizing” owes much to how the term was used by James Scott, the Southeast Asianist and student of subaltern resistance. In his wide-ranging study of state discourses, *Seeing Like a State*, he spoke of legibilizing as central state actors’ obsession to make communities and domains of existence governable by mapping them on grids of state-made intelligibility. Seemingly incommensurable worlds could be subject to legibilizing, and Scott wrote:

The organization of the

natural world was no exception. Agriculture is, after all, a radical reorganization and simplification of flora to suit man’s goals. Whatever their other purposes, the designs of scientific forestry and agriculture and the layouts of plantations, collective farms, ujamaa villages, and strategic hamlets all seemed calculated to make the terrain, its products, and its workforce more legible—and hence manipulable—from above and from the center.¹¹

For my use of legibilizing, the keywords are “grids of intelligibility,” “organization of the world,” and “made legible.” When policy makers legibilize, they map policy objects onto grids of authorized knowledge so those objects can be deciphered, made “readable,” and hence socially understood. For Scott, something as presumably “natural” and free of human organization as the forest or the natural world is often mapped and thus made legible for the sake of human manipulation.¹² This point can be made more subtle and relevant for refugee policy history by saying legibilizing the refugee made the sudden influx of Southeast Asians into the United States decipherable for the sake of governing their presence in the United States. To state the matter more provocatively, legibilizing was indispensable to policy-making discourse in 1975 and the years thereafter. Legibilizing happened early, it persisted, and it affected all the Southeast Asian refugee formations that became Southeast Asian American communities.

Used this way, “legibilizing” echoes developments in policy studies that focus on “the cultural” or symbolic dimensions of public policy making. The most direct reference to culture as a lens to study policy making is Cultural Theory or CT.¹³ Cultural Theory comports well with the aims of this essay when drawn upon to study such discursive subjects as the cultural bases of policy narratives.

The other concept in policy studies that converses well with legibilizing is agenda setting. Increasingly used since the 1980s, agenda setting has helped policy study scholars investigate the way some problems get attention while others do not. In essence, the study of agenda setting and agenda failure directs attention to how matters acquire salience, how they “get on the agenda,” and how they thereby attract both decision-making resources and public cognizance as something to debate, know, and talk about. Agenda setting resonates with legibilizing when researchers note the deployment of symbolic goods to characterize a matter so it acquires standing as a public issue. For example, this deployment can happen when media organizations render matters as news and newsworthy. Agenda setting overlaps with legibilizing when it studies how symbolic goods take the form of narratives, overarching storylines, and already circulated social and cultural understandings and depictions.¹⁴

Agenda setting provides a way to study the deployment of symbolic goods, but at the expense of analyzing larger institutional and social logics within which agenda setting operates. I suggest that legibilizing is able to capture the wider discursive processes of aggregated and less momentous sense makings because the term implies a wider field of many moments and many institutions attempting to make sense and render as intelligible a matter that needs to be deciphered and thus made governable. For my take on legibilizing, the concept is thus concerned with the general matter of organizing or ordering of what can be understood and thus what needs to be defined, disciplined, and narrated as something socially known. This essay will accordingly approach the legibilizing of Southeast Asian refugees with two conceptual lenses, noting both the intentional moments of the manipulation of symbols and the larger institutional necessity of ordering society through discursive means.

Both intentional agenda setting and legibilizing happened when Southeast Asians dispersed in their global diasporas in 1975. When 130,000 refugees seemed to have suddenly appeared on California's shore in mid-spring of 1975, the Southeast Asians seemed both familiar yet unknown to most Americans. While making refugees "known" or legible happened in earlier Cold War instances, as happened with Hungarian refugees in the mid-1950s and the Cuban refugee inflows of the early 1960s, the Southeast Asian refugees after the Vietnam War presented particular challenges that stemmed from the many layers of meaning that tangled together as a result of the twenty-plus-year investment that the United States had made in Southeast Asia from 1954 to 1975.

Legibilizing Southeast Asian refugees in the 1970s and 1980s differed from the Hungarian refugee arrivals of the 1950s and the Cuban entrants of the 1960s because the Southeast Asians were allies in an extended and maddening war in which the United States had directly and principally participated. Refugee policy making was fraught with the possibility of evoking the ugly legacy of the recently ended war.¹⁵ Moreover, refugees from such a war would need to be understood in radically new ways. Peoples who had been considered allies and protégés "abroad" were now feared to be potential wards and dependents at home and they had to be renarrated and recast. The necessity for their new legibilizing was compounded by the size and suddenness of the refugee arrival, due to the equally astounding and fast collapse of the United States-backed regime in Saigon. Embedded in these matters of size, extent, and shocking surprise were the long-standing and dangerous connotations that accompanied the refugee entrance. Always simmering beneath the surface, and at times manifesting in sudden bursts of public expression, were fears and hostilities attached to the new refugee presence—matters of defeat, ambivalence, recrimination, and uncertainty. Further compounding this crisis was the fact that in 1975 the United States was still mired in a severe economic recession, the worldwide reach of which reminded many of a depression. Legibilizing refugees had to deal with this circumstance because misgivings over the potential costs of resettlement haunted the process from the start and continued unabated for the next four decades, extending across all the different Southeast Asian refugee communities.

Race also haunted resettlement. In retrospect, making the new Southeast Asian entrants intelligible implicated race, but it was a factor that policy makers avoided in 1975. Even if public decision makers sidestepped it, the implications of racialization were far-reaching. Southeast Asians would be incorporated into a racial discourse in the United States that had long denigrated persons and communities of Asian descent and had never adequately grappled with the presence of Asians in the United States due to the inability of mainstream public discussions to deal with race beyond the Black and White binary. Leaving this matter unaddressed while tacitly consigning Southeast Asians to the category of racialized Asians would add to the paradoxes of social intelligibility that would burden those who were constructed as Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, and Cambodian Americans.¹⁶

It is important to emphasize that asserting legibilization is not to say that Southeast Asians passively waited for governing authorities to discursively invent their social beings. Vietnamese, as well as all Southeast Asian refugees, knew themselves and could tell their own stories. They did not shy from stating their perspectives when asked. Reporters who visited the four military reception centers interviewed refugees who gave their names, ages, and impressions of what was happening to them. For example, Le Thi Vi, a twenty-year-old Vietnamese woman told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter about the dreariness of daily life at Camp Pendleton in Southern California. At Fort Indiantown Gap, a thirty-eight-year-old man shared his foreboding that "Our future is dark" in America, and another refugee physically took the notebook from a reporter and began writing his name on her notes, telling her that he had four college degrees

and he needed a sponsor.¹⁷ In addition to stating their opinions to the US news media, refugees also performed other acts of self-fashioning and self-understanding, often bridging the gaps of both time and distance, the former being the times prior to and then after the evacuation, and the latter referring to their traverse across the Pacific Ocean. One South Vietnamese refugee recorded his impressions of leaving Saigon, making his way to Wake Island, and then moving to Camp Pendleton. He preserved his thoughts in what appears to be microscopic handwriting written on equally small two-by-one-inch paper slips.¹⁸

These instances of fashioning their own intelligibility are noteworthy if not heroic, but these moments were not privileged in venues where official legibilizing occurred. For example, in nine hearings before five committees (three in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate) between 15 April 1975 and 5 February 1976, no Southeast Asian appeared to testify, no Vietnamese was invited to speak, even though there was a small but active group of Southeast Asians who had lived and worked in the United States prior to 1975 and worked to help the 1975 cohort negotiate their transition to America.¹⁹ Missing as these voices were, this essay will focus on state legibilizing as enacted by public policy makers. Doing so does not aim to leave Southeast Asians out of the discussion. This essay poses legibilizing as a state preoccupation that can be read critically. When read this way, we are primed to seek moments when Southeast Asians counter-legibilized what had been ascribed to them. While not overwhelming in number, the discovery of such moments is scintillating to the historical imagination. This essay does not take for granted the alternative narratives that Southeast Asians claimed for themselves. However, this essay will focus on the legibilizing that operated alongside and within public policy making on refugee resettlements.

LEGIBILIZING TO DECIPHER

What this essay analyzes as “legibilizing” was indispensable for refugee resettlement. While never acknowledged as such, it was the core matter that framed the legitimacy of refugee entrance and resettlement. Legibilizing was crucial because public approval for this program was decidedly weak. According to a Gallup Poll taken in the spring of 1975, those surveyed opposed refugee entrance 54 percent to 36 percent. *The Los Angeles Times* featured a photograph on its front page that showed White residents of Orange County, California, holding makeshift signs that expressed the sentiment of “Send Them Back.”²⁰

Faced with these odds, congressional advocates of refugee resettlement felt obligated to address the underlying concerns that agitated the 54 percent who disapproved of refugee resettlement. For those congressmen, better information about the refugees could dispel or reduce the hostility, hence throughout the first eight months of refugee arrival and processing, a steady drumbeat called for a particular form of information about the arrivals. Throughout the spring and summer of 1975, this form provoked requests and motivated handlers of refugee information to cast what they knew in its handy way. What policy makers often requested were profiles of the refugees, sorted data that could make the mass of 100,000 appear less massive and more differentiated by categories that could decipher the new entrants. The policy discourse desired profiles because these quick sketches promised knowability and, hence, some measure of control.

Less than a month after the first refugees arrived in the US reception centers, a congressman from Wisconsin asked a question that carried within it these matters of identity, readability, and governability as promised by the profile. On 8 May 1975, the House

Appropriations Committee held a day of hearings to consider the \$125 million price tag for refugee assistance and resettlement. David Obey of the Seventh Congressional District of Wisconsin relayed how his constituents kept asking the same query. “It falls into the ‘Who are they’ category,” and Obey shared the desire of central Wisconsinites to compose a silhouette of who might be arriving in their state. His constituents wanted to know, “How many refugees are former government officials? How many of them were former embassy employees? How many worked for American companies over there? How many are journalists? How many are educators? Labor leaders? . . . And whatever other classifications [they can be broken] . . . down into?”²¹

Obey had to admit that initially, his constituents appalled him— “[it was] a problem in my district . . . I was appalled”²²—but he believed their negative outlook toward the refugees stemmed from “misinformation” about the gross of Vietnamese entrants. If profiles and delineated demographic information could differentiate the mass, then his constituents would be able to grasp the fine details by which to locate the refugees within familiar categories, hence freeing them from their fears and enabling them to “let their best intentions work.” The best result was active sponsorship of Vietnamese in places such as Marathon County and Wausau in Obey’s district.²³

Profiling appealed to Obey because he believed it could help decode the refugees and thus abate the crisis. During such a crisis, with so much at stake and still uncertain, tools such as legibilizing and profiling could also assist the opposite opinion. Those who either opposed the resettlement or wished it slowed down believed profiling to be a useful tactic because it would force refugee policy makers to acknowledge their lack of an adequate profile. For Obey’s fellow Midwesterner, Congressman J. Edward Roush of Indiana, a quick profile could actually foreshadow

problems of adjustment, and the Indiana congressman grilled representatives of the Ford White House to force the issue. Either policy makers lacked knowledge or what they knew showed the possibility of an ill-fitting population, one whose demographic distribution augured more public assistance for a disproportionately young cohort. Accordingly, Roush asked a series of "short, succinct, and to the point" questions of Ambassador L. Dean Brown who was the administration's representative on the Interagency Task Force on Refugees (IATF), the umbrella organization that supervised resettlement:

ROUSH: How many of the 130,000 estimated refugees are children?

BROWN: About 60 percent.

ROUSH: How many of the refugees are sixty-five years of age or older?

BROWN: 4.7 percent

ROUSH: How many of the refugees are heads of households?

BROWN: An assumption is about one-fifth.

ROUSH: How many families are there? Would that be the same figure?

BROWN: That would be about the same. It is an assumption because we haven't checked all the people. They are not off the boats yet, but of the ones gone through—over half—that is what it is.

ROUSH: The average size of a family is how many?

BROWN: Five.

ROUSH: How many of these refugees are dependents of Americans?

BROWN: General, do you have that?

GENERAL CHAPMAN: About 12,000.

ROUSH: How many of the refugees are illiterate?

BROWN: Another unknown at this time because we don't have all the figures. What we have run into on the first 40,000 is practically a nil rate of illiteracy.

ROUSH: How many are college graduates?

BROWN: We don't know, sir.

ROUSH: How many have trade skills?

BROWN: I would say the vast majority of the people we have seen so far have trade skills.

ROUSH: How many speak English?

BROWN: The early census would be again based on people that went through Guam in the first instance, 79 percent of the heads of household speak English. On children and wives we have no figures.

ROUSH: How many have visible means of support or wealth or money that can be used here?

BROWN: We have no figures on that. We are trying to get that and as the people go through the camps in the United States that will be ascertained.²⁴

To Roush, this rough profile, extracted by blunt interrogation, not only clarified how the demographic load was distributed among the Vietnamese, but its apportionment pointed to future dependencies on public assistance. Under those assumptions, profiles would tend to reveal deficits in the arrivals and their lack of fit in American society. Yet under different assumptions, these same profiles could legitimize the refugees as contributors to America. The first report of the Interagency Task Force on Indochina Refugees sent to the White House on 15 June 1975, included a "Refugee Profile" that seemed promising. Of 102,000 refugees who had arrived in Guam by 2 June 1975, the heads of household who were randomly sampled (n=4,978) reported their highest education attainment as follows: 23 percent were university graduates, 1 percent had post-graduate education, and 56 percent had completed secondary education. Of those heads of households, 39 percent had "professional, technical and managerial" employment skills.²⁵

Legibilizing through profiling did more than accumulate facts. Legibilizing to decode "Who are they?" reflected a deep-seated and multiform conundrum that plagued many levels and sites of governance in 1975. The core question of "Who are they?" shook refugee policy making because so many issues imbricated on that point. The Ford administration preferred to have private American citizens and local charitable entities such as churches and church congregations sponsor refugees and incorporate them locally into American life. Negative answers to "Who are they?" would undermine sponsor confidence and thus erode the cornerstone of resettlement. To maintain sponsor willingness and increase the number of American sponsors, the refugee would have to be figured as fit and worthy of American charity. Legibilizing as understanding the refugees in particular Cold War ways posed another crisis. For some policy makers, the best Cold War narrative that could be salvaged from the fall of Saigon was to cast the refugees as uniformly escaping Communism.²⁶ Understood that way, the best refugee was the Vietnamese intellectual or someone like an intellectual. Their flight from Vietnam and arrival in the United States could be elegantly told as escape from totalitarianism. That depiction could validate the United States for having intervened in Southeast Asia, and it could also legibilize refugees as ideologically worthy of sponsorship, resettlement, and incorporation. Policy makers were therefore dismayed when some entrants seemed to defy both the preferred narrative and policy-making assumptions. One executive with a longtime refugee sponsorship agency groped for a way to talk about how actual refugees in May of 1975 seemed to defy the expected Cold War characterization. "I am very much concerned with what I have been calling the 'second wave' of refugees, which are the ones which were picked up at sea. From what I understand from press reports—and I know nothing more than that—a lot of these are fishermen, peasants, street vendors from Vung-tau. They were not political at all . . ." ²⁷ He then sensed a key source of refugee movement: the rational response of panic to war coming close. "The Vietnamese have a finely tuned sense of dealing with danger and with thirty-five years of war, of imminent danger, when danger comes along, they can smell it. They have had to. It has been a survival mechanism and they have fled."²⁸

Knowing the refugee meant decoding not only Vietnamese departures, but also the unresolved and incessantly avoided question of the twenty-plus-year history of the US involvement in Southeast Asia. Embedded deep in that troubling inquiry was a question of the extent of US influence and its social transformation of South Vietnam prior to April 1975. For one student of the refugee resettlement, answering the question of "Who are they?" meant probing such matters as the longer history of refugees having been necessitated during the entire span of the war, the "American hesitancy in planning and executing the

evacuation," and the ways the US prosecution of the war tended to make and militarize civilian panic.²⁹ Given that the political climate in the United States reflected what many called exhaustion or fatigue with crises and hence an unwillingness to probe deeply into its recent history, the odds of raising these questions, much less answering them, were dim. Nevertheless, if public arenas did not privilege historical knowledge, refugee policy makers still sought information about the refugees. Some kinds of data seemed readily accessible and they proved useful to legibilize refugees in ways that could legitimate their entry and resettlement.

LEGIBILIZING TO NARRATE REASSURANCE

As implied in the requests made by Obey and Roush, profiling and legibilizing required information. While specific data may have eluded both congressmen, the actual gathering of precise data had already proceeded for at least a week. Even before Obey and Roush sat at their subcommittee seats on 8 May 1975 to attend to that day's hearing, various arms of the United States government had systematically collected personal data about every refugee making his or her way across the Pacific to the United States. Encompassing, systematic, and comprehensive, the data collected about each individual Vietnamese and Southeast Asian refugee who arrived in the United States was staggering in its comprehensive haul of personal information and bio data. If the congressional calls for "profiles" elicited general characteristics, the data collected at the four military reception centers amassed a small army of bio data specifics.

Data collection ruled two key points in the refugees' experiences at each of the four military reception centers. Arrival and departure from the reception centers began and ended with data collection, forming bookends supervised by two federal entities: the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the US Department of Justice and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). During "initial processing," the INS fingerprinted and photographed each refugee, started an "alien file," and began an examination to determine nationality and track family relationships. HEW did medical screening, assigned Social Security numbers, and identified which families had suffered separation, thus initiating actions to begin family reunification. Both federal entities out-processed the refugees when they left their reception center. The INS supplied security clearances and sponsorship verification as well as a "final interview to determine the presence of excludable factors." HEW issued Social Security numbers and collected data about the refugees' destination outside the reception centers, thus tracking their travel plans.³⁰

The extent of this haul of data is better captured by the fine details of the personal information that the process collected. The INS collected the following information from each adult refugee: family size; last

place of residence in Vietnam; job skills; religion; prior background as to civil service and military service; prior employment history by the US government, American agencies, or American corporations; place of birth; desired destination in the United States; amount of US money possessed; and the existence of friends and family in the United States.

The legibilizing inherent in this data collection becomes apparent when these actions are viewed from another angle. Such a vantage can be had by drawing on a composite story that the United States Army produced for its *After Action Report*, the Army's official accounting of how it participated in refugee resettlement in 1975 to 1976. Compositing a "representative story" that portrayed a fictionalized Vietnamese family of seven ("Nguyen van Thanh," his wife, and five children), the narrative painted a picture of smooth refugee processing. From their first arrival in Arkansas en route to Fort Chaffee ("welcomed by Red Cross volunteers" and later served "refreshments"), the fictionalized Vietnamese experienced "the processing chain" without a hitch. Indeed, they received all their paperwork in twenty-one days and the narrative ended with the Thanh family completing the "reception center phase of their life" in record time. This was an outcome that eluded many actual Vietnamese in the four military reception centers.³¹

However fantasied as a seamless experience, the details in the "Thanh family" story were actual, specifically the details of what the *After Action Report* called "the processing chain." What the Army portrayed as painless was, for actual Vietnamese, an often bewildering series of data draws for personal information, biological imprint, and background information. These data draws processed the refugees but they also legibilized them as entrants into the resettlement system. Beginning with a hailing action whereby the head of a family would be accosted by an Army officer to "identify each member . . . by name," each member of a family would then receive an identification card with a number sequence showing their arrival at the reception center. The reception center identification card was the ticket into further processing whereby an initial interview would fill in the blanks for the "family data form," the completion of which would capture the family's ability to sustain the unit. (Questions on the family data form asked the following: 1) date of departure from Vietnam; 2) job abilities of family members; 3) dates of birth; and 4) familial relationships of each unit member to the head of household.)³² After submitting this information, refugees were ushered to a "New Arrivals" processing center to record identification photographs and "each member of [a] family had fingerprints taken."³³ From having family data processed, the family would then proceed to the Immigration and Naturalization Service where they would receive Immigration I-94 forms (Arrival and Departure documents), which further assigned an "alien number" to each family member. This number legibilized each refugee by processing them as security approved, a clearance that had to leap five hurdles identified with the following five entities: the Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. In addition, all refugees and their family members over the age of seventeen had to sign sworn statements as to the financial assets of the family, a matter explained to them as a way to: 1) determine the ability of the family to pay for their own transportation to meet their American sponsors; and 2) determine if the relevant family members "could be considered financially self-sufficient."³⁴

The many stages of the processing chain and the numerous channels toward which the drawn information would be sent (and then approved) resonates with what a historian of legibilization called the micro tools of state legibilizing.³⁵ If the congressional requests for "profiles" of the refugees could be viewed metaphorically as a way to make refugees socially understandable, the "processing chain" reveals the materialities of actual information extraction and its enhanced circulation into channels of further

state record keeping, approval, and intelligibility for governance.³⁶ As the Army finished its fictionalized narrative of the Thanh family, it noted that from the start, Fort Chaffee had developed a filing system whereby "family data forms, medical clearances, and data processing information of all refugees" at the camp would be maintained and then resent as copies "by HEW courier to the . . . desk at INS" where further "stampings" could occur and thus continue the processing.³⁷

The mountain of data that the process collected in 1975 would not be retabulated (and cross tabulated) until a decade had passed when the former head of the resettlement effort realized that the data might yield valuable sociological insights about the refugees. Prior to when that analysis started, the mountain of data information performed an act of public legitimizing that policy makers deemed essential to legitimate the refugee resettlement program. The medical data collected by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare at the reception centers was tabulated and then generalized to legitimize refugees as appropriate candidates for incorporation into US society. They would be deemed "ready" for incorporation because they did not pose health threats to American society.

As processed, the data found its way to the Interagency Task Force for Indochina Refugees, and that federal umbrella entity declared the new people as having a clean bill of health. Tasked with coordinating the efforts of numerous federal agencies in their partnerships with private, charitable organizations and state governments to resettle refugees, the Interagency Task Force was more than pleased to allay the fears of Americans and encourage American sponsors to sponsor refugees and ease their transition into American society. "The general health of the Indochinese refugees seems to be in every respect as good as that of the normal American population in this country."³⁸

Buttressing their declaration that

the Vietnamese refugees had good health, the Task Force shared other bio-medical generalizations. "Some of the data collected thus far is illustrative," and the following "interesting" facts showed that "of 28,000 x-rays taken and read for tuberculosis in persons age fifteen or older, fewer than three percent have been suspicious." Further tests on those suspicious cases showed "less than three percent of them with positive sputum."³⁹ The Task Force also reported that communicable diseases of a deadlier sort were not prevalent among the refugees. "Initial testing for syphilis among 27,000 of the refugees has shown that fewer than two percent were positive. Follow up tests have been done on the two percent which were positive; three quarters of those tested with an additional test were found to be positive and put under treatment. This figure is below the 3.2 percent positive figure of a comparable US population."⁴⁰

With those words, the Task Force assured Americans that the Vietnamese in 1975 were not public health risks and that their government was going to vigilantly watch the newly arrived population. "Immunization campaigns were begun as soon as the first contingent of refugees came under American responsibility; thus far, more than 90 percent of the refugee children from age one to five have received measles, rubella, and polio vaccinations, as well as one DPT shot."⁴¹ Furthermore, the refugees would not be left to their own devices as far as their public health communicability. "The Public Health Service has assigned personnel from the Communicable Disease Center for surveillance of public health problems, control of communicable diseases and vector surveillance, and to institute immunizations and other preventive health measures as necessary." To that end, the Communicable Disease Center had been:

. . . informing all State and Territorial Health officials of the immigration health status of all refugees destined for resettlement

to that State or Territory and has been publishing periodic health reports for State and local public health officials, as well as the health profession at large.⁴²

Based on these efforts, the Interagency Task Force depicted the Vietnamese refugees as not threatening the public health of Americans, a significant matter since Asians in the United States had long been the targets of moral panics that accused them of harboring diseases.⁴³ Furthermore, these generalizations argued that the refugees could be governed as far as public health, as they were subject to surveillance and the exchange of bio data. This bill of good public health displayed the Vietnamese as orderly objects of governance, but good government also went on display. The details put forth by the Interagency Task Force legitimized more than the Vietnamese in the reception centers. When reported to Congress, the collection of personal data and bio-medical information also displayed the capabilities of the United States government. The very act of data collection by two entities, both connected to Cabinet-level departments, showed that the United States was not overwhelmed (as it was shown to have been by the chaos of departure in Saigon in late April 1975), but rather that it was in control of the "border," or the four military reception centers, of the United States.

LEGIBILIZING TO FRAME THE CONSENSUS

Legibilizing the "healthy refugee" contributed to building the fragile national consensus that both Congressional Democrats and the Ford White House needed for their refugee policy. Data collection could serve that purpose, but legitimized also meant fitting refugees into larger narratives that could mobilize a sense of the singular American civic ideal. Fitting refugees into those narratives would place them into a trajectory that told an idealized version of the American past and a

hopeful vision for the American future. The Ford White House narrativized refugees and thus legitimized them as worthy of American inclusion and therefore deserving of US policy-making efforts to incorporate them.

Just two days after the last US helicopter lifted into the air over Saigon, the Ford White House needed a new way to talk about the unexpectedly large numbers of former US allies who suddenly were making their way across the Pacific Ocean toward Southern California. On 1 May 1975, the president expressed his formal disappointment with Congress for having rejected a bill to assist the Vietnamese exodus. This rejection reflected congressional suspicion that the White House might use humanitarian assistance as a ruse to redeploy US troops to Southeast Asia. Ford had to state clearly that “the evacuation is complete,” meaning the US chapter in Southeast Asian history had ended, but he then spoke to the American present and future. To do so, he reached back seventy years earlier to when the words of a Jewish American poetess were inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. He and his staff found in the words of Emma Lazarus the civic philosophy that could serve to scaffold a national consensus to support the Southeast Asian refugee influx of 1975. Evoking words that were familiar to a fault, the Ford administration nevertheless found shelter precisely in words that were foundational. The president’s message extracted the most-known words from “The New Colossus,” the words that carved in stone the ideals of America as refuge: “tired . . . poor . . . huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . . Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.”⁴⁴

The sentiment of “Lady Liberty” distinguishing herself from the ancient world by pleading for the cast-off of the world to come to her shores was meant to buttress the Ford White House argument that the “cherished values” of the nation were those of a nation of immigrants and thus incorporating refugees would advance those values further. Calling forth one strand within the American civic tradition proved useful, both for refugee policy making that emanated from the White House and for congressional allies such as Senator Edward Kennedy who restated Ford’s use of the poem during deliberations and hearings about refugees. While a simple rhetorical act, the evocation of the hallowed words of Emma Lazarus acquired a discursive life of its own, placing refugees not only on a track of begrudged entrance, but a normativized process of American incorporation, one that did not fit the Southeast Asian refugees precisely, but nevertheless became their master narrative.⁴⁵

LEGIBILIZED TO FIT THE AMERICAN IMMIGRANT NARRATIVE

Being inserted into the civic tradition of a “nation of immigrants” meant a number of things, not all of them as salutary to the Southeast Asian refugee as expected. One such effect would be another legitimizing of Southeast Asians, one that would prove disciplinary as well as enabling. In this legitimizing, the narrative would not remind Americans of their moral obligation to accept refugees, but it would inform both refugees and nonrefugees of the overall trajectory into which Southeast Asians would fit. Refugees need not remain in that legal category of “refugee,” which itself was a kind of hazy limbo that did not hold the same civic standing as “legal resident.” In the narrative that many policy makers expressed from 1975 onward, the Southeast Asian entrants could shift their status and standing by moving “from refugee to immigrant.” If “refugee” was a transitional status that was mired in subtexts of flight and crisis, then “immigrant” would be a more stable transitional category construed in its ideal form as an upward progression to a processual civic identity, one that could make progress toward fuller incorporation—an end result that the immigration tradition seemed to validate if told with a preferred historical narrative.

The shift from refugee to immigrant seemed close at hand in the various

statements the Ford White House made during the crucial first six months of refugee resettlement. From 1 May 1975 to 24 December 1975, President Ford issued statements that always linked refugees to immigrants thus eliding the fine but critical legal difference that lay between the two categories. While Ford never said refugees and immigrants were the same legally, he implied that the two could be understood as being candidates for the same public good, that good being the narrative of “the American Dream.” On 1 May 1975, he spoke of the “values we cherish as a nation of immigrants”; on 19 May 1975, he reminded listeners that “In one way or another, all of us are immigrants”; and on 24 December 1975, on the occasion of the closing of the refugee reception centers, he seemed to go further and suggest that Southeast Asian refugees were on the same path that all immigrants to the United States had trod. “They will follow the example of former immigrants who have so richly contributed to the character and strength of the American system.”⁴⁶

These optimistic statements are not startling, as the commonplace parlance Ford employed testifies to the shared public narrative that refugees and immigrants have access to an upward curve of improved life chances. This itself is a testament to Ford’s allusion to the American system, his term for the American Dream. Less well known and less rosy were statements made in some refugee policy-making arenas, places where staff persons advised superiors with memoranda or where state refugee administrators spoke aloud at regional meetings. Scattered in archival references and generally unknown, these glimpses into local, regional, state-level, and congressional staff-level refugee policy making reveal other ways to interpret the relationship between the categories of refugee and immigrant. For these policy makers, the categories of refugee and immigrant were not fraternal twins but competing kin, with one needing to discipline the other. In a number of Southeast Asian refugee policy

contexts, the preference was for the “refugee” to become an “immigrant,” a transition that was not necessarily for the good of the refugee. Rather, the shift was valued because it could reduce, if not eliminate, the fiscal drag that Cold War refugees seemed to place on state governments, already stressed by budget crises.

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Even before Saigon fell, a staff person for Congressman David Obey of Wisconsin asked the question that nagged many policy makers when they thought about Cold War-era refugees. Jotting a quick list of talking points for the congressman (an “Alert List”) that staff person asked, “Is there a

reasonable end in sight to the assistance of the refugee?” In that vein, he asked, “Do some [refugee assistance] programs provide more to the regee [sic] than others, if so are some possibly giving him too much?”⁴⁷ This staff person feared the Cold War refugee in the United States was on track to be maintained indefinitely, thus prompting the query and the plea: was there a reasonable end in sight to assisting the refugee? Making this historical artifact more sobering is the fact that Cubans and Soviet Jews were the communities that agitated this staff person and provoked the Alert List. At the very end, he had to write a footnote: “By the time hearings are held [sic] this category of assistance may be much larger and more complex as we attempt to cope with refugee problems resulting from a fall of Cambodia and/or South Vietnam.” Southeast Asian refugees arriving in the United States that spring would be entering a policy world that was already vexed about how long a refugee needed to be helped.⁴⁸

Implied in the staff person’s exasperation was the desire for a transition. He wondered aloud whether it was good policy to keep funding assistance to refugees, a conundrum that made him grasp for a policy-making lifeline, one that could define a reasonable end to refugee assistance. How could that end be legibilized and then justified? Five years after that staff person wrote his Alert List, five years after the arrival of Vietnamese to Orange County, California, and five years during which other Southeast Asian communities grew, particularly Hmong in the Midwest, another iteration of that staff person’s question resurfaced. In October 1979, administrators of various state-level refugee resettlement programs met in Washington, DC, to discuss the future of refugee resettlement in the United States. These administrators were dedicated to refugee incorporation into American society and were publicly sympathetic to refugees. They sought a more “rational refugee placement strategy that address[ed]”

the issue in ways appropriate to the “national level scale and scope.”⁴⁹ They sought a more rational resettlement policy, but the matter of construing the refugee also entered the discussion. One participant asked about policy determinations concerning refugees and asked, “What do we ‘owe’ a refugee because of our admittance of him/her as a refugee, and when does a refugee become an immigrant?”⁵⁰

Embedded in the question, “When does he become an immigrant?” lay the desire for a different legitimizing of the category “refugee.” For both the congressional staff person in 1975 and the state refugee resettlement administrator in 1979, the refugee had to be quick-stepped to the more normativized historical category of “immigrant.” When understood as the idealized European immigrant experience, the immigrant narrative read as a success story. The immigrant entered at Ellis Island under the shadow of Lady Liberty and trekked wherever opportunity beckoned, whether to New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, or Los Angeles. The immigrant, narrated by this casting of the European experience, was promised an unencumbered path to success and fulfillment.

While useful as a public narrative that could slough off whatever stigma the term “refugee” had acquired, the “refugee to immigrant” path had its shortcomings. In 1979, William Liu, director of the Asian American Mental Health Center, noted one of these shortcomings. Liu participated early in the refugee resettlement process, visiting Camp Pendleton in Southern California and observing the dynamics of how persons were treated as refugees in a tenuous political climate. Speaking about the process in its earliest stage, Liu observed that the “refugee to immigrant” preference manifested in various resettlement processes such as the quickened pace resettlement took after refugees left the reception centers. Benefiting more the resettlement facilitators than those being resettled, these policy tendencies created “pressures to resettle the refugees as rapidly as possible, however . . . unprepared they were.”⁵¹ For Liu, the pressures to expedite resettlement across the nation had less to do with logistics and more to do with ideology. The rapidity of resettlement, regardless of how it actually affected the Vietnamese, would serve to shift the costs and burdens of incorporation to the Vietnamese themselves. Rapid dispersed resettlement would transform Southeast Asian entrants from the category of refugee to the immigrant narrative of “voluntary migrant,” thus facilitating the retelling or legitimizing of entrants as those who can “take care of themselves” and make it on their own. The costs for whatever success or lack of success they incurred could therefore be shifted to those now renamed and re-told.⁵²

CONCLUSION

Adapting the metaphoric lens suggested by “grid making” and “knowability,” I have argued that the US state in 1975 worked to translate Vietnamese subjects into a new legibility. Sampling a number of different documents derived from different policy-making arenas such as congressional hearings, provisional reports, and local policy making, the range of activities that we can call legitimizing becomes apparent. I have proposed the term legitimizing as a useful lens by which to view these policy acts and their history. Moreover, I sought to demonstrate that legitimizing captures what policy makers find necessary to do when the targets of their policy making shift their presumably known quality and quantity. Legitimizing is a useful term by which to address matters of decipherment, ordering, translating, and (re)narrating policy situations and policy subjects.

The incorporation of Southeast Asian refugees in 1975 was always going to be a process, burdened by the unpopularity of the war and the sudden demise of the Saigon government in 1975. The task of making the refugee intelligible was going to have to walk a minefield of numerous associations and repressions. Legitimizing to govern was easier if it only entailed

collecting data. Legibilizing to fully incorporate Southeast Asians would have called for a full and candid look into the complexities of the US presence in Southeast Asia and the intertwined histories of Americans and their protégés across the Pacific. That type of readability was far from possible in 1975 when so many wanted to leave history faint and barely legible in a nation supposedly exhausted by both the Southeast Asian war and the constitutional crisis known as Watergate. Compounding this problem further was the fact that Southeast Asians were now to be incorporated into a racial order that had long interpellated Asians from all backgrounds into the racial netherzone of being neither Black nor White but governed by hegemonic Whiteness.

This policy history points to the ways that cultural dynamics are embedded in and often constitutive of policy-making processes. This is especially true of Asian American policy history. For Asian American policy practitioners and policy studies scholars, the cultural interface—that frontier or edge where cultural assumptions and policy meet—is especially relevant. Asian American communities come to the policy-making arena with cultural baggage such as legibilizing. Policy makers must acknowledge the historical baggage in Asian American communities, which have been burdened by well over a century of racial depiction and racializing characterization. Studying legibilizing and other cultural interfaces will not dispel more than a hundred years of such baggage, but it can help both Asian Americans and policy makers know that these legacies need to be accounted for whenever policy making makes the conditions for their social and cultural lives.

ENDNOTES

1 Department of the Army, After Action Report. Operations New Life/New Arrivals. US Army Support to the Indochinese Refugee Program 1 April 1975-1 June 1976, I-A-11, 1-A-12. The four military

reception centers were Camp Pendleton (US Marine Corps), Eglin Air Force Base (US Air Force), Fort Chaffee (US Army), and Fort Indiantown Gap (US Army.) These camps held the following numbers of refugees at the peak of their population holdings: Camp Pendleton (50,000), Elgin Air Force Base (5,997), Fort Chaffee (25,055), and Fort Indiantown Gap (16,809.) These totals are drawn from the chronology of events printed in the report.

2 The first group of refugees arrived at Fort Indiantown Gap on 28 May 1975. This reception center closed in December 1975. *Ibid.*

3 Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America. A Chronicle of the Vietnamese Migration to the United States* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), 39-40. Nearly ten years later, she wrote an updated assessment: "Coping with America: Refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487 (1986): 138-149.

4 Kelly, "Coping with America," 140.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Yen Le Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (2006): 421. Describing the limits of how "the refugee" continues to "circumscribe" public discussions of Vietnamese in the United States, she wrote, "Vietnamese become most visible to Americans as successful, assimilated, and anti-communist refugees from 'the Vietnam War.' [Emphasis in original.] In other words, it is as refugees—the purported desperate seekers of US asylum—and not as migrants, transmigrants, diasporics, or exiles that Vietnamese have become most intelligible in the US public imagination."

7 This essay will focus on the Vietnamese experience, particularly in the first eight months of the first wave of entrance and resettlement.

Focusing on this Vietnamese history also throws light on the legibilizing of other Southeast Asian communities because Cambodians, Lao, and Hmong underwent this cultural decipherment as well, albeit in ways particular to those communities. Making Cambodians, Lao, and Hmong "intelligible" varied by how unfamiliar American public discourse was with their backgrounds, situations, and prior histories.

8 Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study," 414-417.

9 *Ibid.*, 421.

10 Two examples of policy analyses from the early 1980s that emphasized refugee policy making as the delivery of social service goods are: 1) Patricia Jenny, *The Administration of the Refugee Resettlement Program in the State of Minnesota*, Office of Refugee Resettlement, US Department of Health and Human Services, 16 July 1982, revised 13 August 1982; and 2) Deborah Kogan et al., *Study of the State Administration of the Refugee Resettlement Program* (Final Report), Office of Refugee Resettlement, US Department of Health and Human Services, 28 September 1982.

11 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2.

12 Scholars from a number of different disciplines have extended the concept of "legibilizing." This essay has drawn from the following writings that have applied and extended the idea of legibilizing: Jane Caplan, "Illegibility: Reading and Insecurity in History, Law and Government," *History Workshop Journal* 68, no. 1 (2009): 99-121; Sita Reddy, "Making Heritage Legible: Who Owns Traditional Medical Knowledge?," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 13 (2006): 161-188; Eugene M. Avrutin, "The Politics of Jewish Legibility: Documentation Practices and Reform During the Reign of Nicholas I," *Jewish Social Studies New Series*, 11, no. 2 (2005): 136-169; Anat E. Leibler and Anat Leibler, "Statisticians' Ambition:

Governmentality, Modernity and National Legibility," *Israel Studies* 9, no. 2 (2004): 121-149; and Michael A. Ervin, "Statistics, Maps, and Legibility: Negotiating Nationalism in Post-Revolutionary Mexico," *The Americas* 66, no. 2 (2009): 155-179. Without using the term, the US policy historian Eileen Boris explores a similar effect in US policy-making history. See Eileen Boris, "On the Importance of Naming: Gender, Race, and the Writing of Policy History," *Journal of Policy History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 72-92.

13 Brendon Swedlow, "Advancing Policy Theory with Cultural Theory: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Policy Studies Journal* 42, no. 4 (2014): 465-483.

14 Works in "agenda setting" include Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little Brown, 1984); Thomas A. Birkland, *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997); Thomas A. Birkland, *Lessons of Disaster: Policy Change After Catastrophic Events* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); and Roger W. Cobb and Marc Howard Ross, eds., *Cultural Strategies of Agenda Denial: Avoidance, Attack, and Redefinition* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

15 Yen Le Espiritu wrote in 2006 that the abjection of the war still lies beneath the surface of its public memory, but for her, this might actually provoke a deeper critique of the systemic impulses that propelled the US intervention. She wrote, "As a 'controversial, morally questionable and unsuccessful' war, the Vietnam War has the potential to upset the well-worn narrative of 'rescue and liberation' [of refugees] in US history and to refocus attention on the troubling record of US military aggression." Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study," 421.

16 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

17 Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems, Part V: Conditions in Indochina and Refugees in the US: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, Appendix III, 203-245*. Appendix III consisted of "Selected Press Reports and Commentaries on Indochina Refugees in the United States." Vietnamese voices, perspectives, or indirect sympathetic portrayals could be gleaned from articles such as: Jonathan Kirsch, "Operation New Arrival," *Human Behavior*, September 1975; Douglas E. Kneeland, "Fears on Refugees Called Unfounded," *New York Times*, 27 June 1975; Bill Richardson and Austin Scott, "Sponsor Abuses, Failings Cited—Refugee Problems Mounting," *Washington Post*, 9 July 1975; Jonathan Kirsch, "'Little Saigon'—Another

Misperception: Vietnamese Refugees Recognize Their Predicament Better Than Their Hosts," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 June 1975; James T. Wooten, "Vietnam Refugee Family Caught Between Two Sponsors in Florida," *New York Times*, 26 June 1975; William Claiborne, "Vermont Town Withdraws Welcome Mat—Refugee Family Rebuffed," *Washington Post*, 4 August 1975; and Tracie Rozhon, "For Refugees in Indiantown Gap, Freedom Means Nothing Left to Lose," *Baltimore Sun*, 13 July 1975.

18 The author has a photocopy duplication of both the original and the English language translation of this evacuation narrative.

19 This sample of nine hearings consists of the following: Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Vietnam Problem, Executive Session, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 15 April 1975*; House Committee on International Relations, *The Vietnam-Cambodia Emergency, 1975 Part 1—Vietnam Evacuation and Humanitarian Assistance, Hearings on H.R. 5960 and H.R. 5961, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 9, 15, 16, 18 April 1975 and 7, 8 May 1975*; House Committee on the Judiciary, *Refugees from Indochina: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law, 94th Cong., 1st and 2nd sess., 8, 9, 14 April 1975; 22 May 1975; 17 July*

1975; 8 October 1975; 18 December 1975; and 5 February 1976; House Committee on the Judiciary, *Indochina Refugees. Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 5 and 7 May 1975*; House Committee on Appropriations, *Special Assistance to Refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 8 May 1975*; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Refugee Legislation, 94th Cong. 1st sess., 12 May 1975*; Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems. Part II: The Evacuation: Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 15, 25, and 30 April 1975*; Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems. Part III: Reception and Resettlement in the US Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 13 May 1975*; and Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems, Part V: Conditions in Indochina and Refugees in the US: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 24 July 1975*. For the Vietnamese community in the United States prior to the 1975 refugee flows, see Vu Pham, "Before and Beyond the Boat People: Vietnamese American History Before 1975," (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2002) and in its published form, "Antedating and Anchoring Vietnamese America: Toward a Vietnamese American Historiography," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 1 (1993): 137-152.

20 Julia Vadala Taft, David S. North, and David A. Ford, *Refugee Resettlement in the US: Time for a New Focus* (Washington, DC: New TransCentury Foundation, 1979), 103-104.

21 House Committee on Appropriations, *Special Assistance to Refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 30*.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid. Interestingly, Wausau became the center for a thriving Southeast Asian presence from the 1980s onward as Hmong and Hmong Americans built their community in Obey's congressional district.

24 Ibid., 27-28.

25 Report to the Congress, Interagency Task Force on Indochina Refugees, 15 June 1975 as Appendix to Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems, Part V: Conditions in Indochina and Refugees in the US: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 102.

26 Ambassador L. Dean Brown who was the director of the Interagency Task Force (later named the Interagency Task Force on Indochina Refugees) expressed some of this sentiment when he testified before the House Appropriations Committee on 8 May 1975. He said, "What you want to remember is who the refugee is . . . There are really two kinds. One is the relative of a family that is here. It is an American family or it is a Vietnamese family who are permanent residents here. That is one group. The other group are these people whom we felt were endangered and would suffer harm, death, or imprisonment at the hands of the present government there. They are the educated people. It is the middle class in many cases. It is our own employees in Saigon, top employees. It is the employees of IBM who ran the IBM center, the American banks that were there, the American airlines and companies. . . . They are the doctors, the lawyers, the professionals of society on the whole." House Committee on Appropriations, Special Assistance to Refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 8 May 1975, 14-15.

27 Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems. Part III: Reception and Resettlement in the US Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 22.

28 Ibid.

29 Kelly, *From Vietnam to America*, 35, 39-41. Oddly, the US Army After Action Report from Fort Chaffee came close to hinting that the US war presence was tied to making refugees during the 1965 to 1969 years. While not saying this outright nor critically reflecting on its implications, the After Action Report was one of the few assessments written by either military personnel or civilian policy makers in 1975 to imply that refugee-making was endemic to the battle zones wrought by US strategic and tactical decisions. The After Action Report cryptically stated that "The awareness of earlier movements of Vietnamese from areas threatened by Communist control in 1945 and 1954, the latter involving almost one million people, as well as the periodic chaos of refugee relocation in Indochina throughout the course of military operations over two decades, provided the vivid historical precedents from which perspective could be drawn on the implications posed by an evacuation." Department of the Army, After Action Report, I-A-2.

30 Report to the Congress, Interagency Task Force on Indochina Refugees, 15 June 1975 as Appendix to Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems, Part V: Conditions in Indochina and Refugees in the US: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 105.

31 Department of the Army, After Action Report, I-C-6. It must be noted that this fictionalized and idealized case came from a draft report written by the Senior Civilian Coordinator at Fort Chaffee.

32 Ibid., I-C-7.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., I-C-8.

35 Caplan, "Illegibility: Reading and Insecurity in History, Law and Government," 101.

36 Ibid.

37 Department of the Army, After Action Report, I-C-9.

38 Report to the Congress, Interagency Task Force on Indochina

Refugees, 15 June 1975 as Appendix to Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems, Part V: Conditions in Indochina and Refugees in the US: Hearings, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 107.

39 Ibid., 107.

40 Ibid., 107-108.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 108.

43 Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

44 Gerald R. Ford, "Statement on House Action Rejecting Vietnam Humanitarian Assistance and Evacuation Legislation. May 1, 1975," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald Ford, 1974-1977, 1975 in Two Books, Book 1* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1977), 619.

45 Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Indochina Evacuation and Refugee Problems. Part III: Reception and Resettlement in the US Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 1975, 1.*

46 Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 619, 689, 1998.

47 Refugee Assistance, 1975 Box 633, Folder 6. David R. Obey Papers. State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

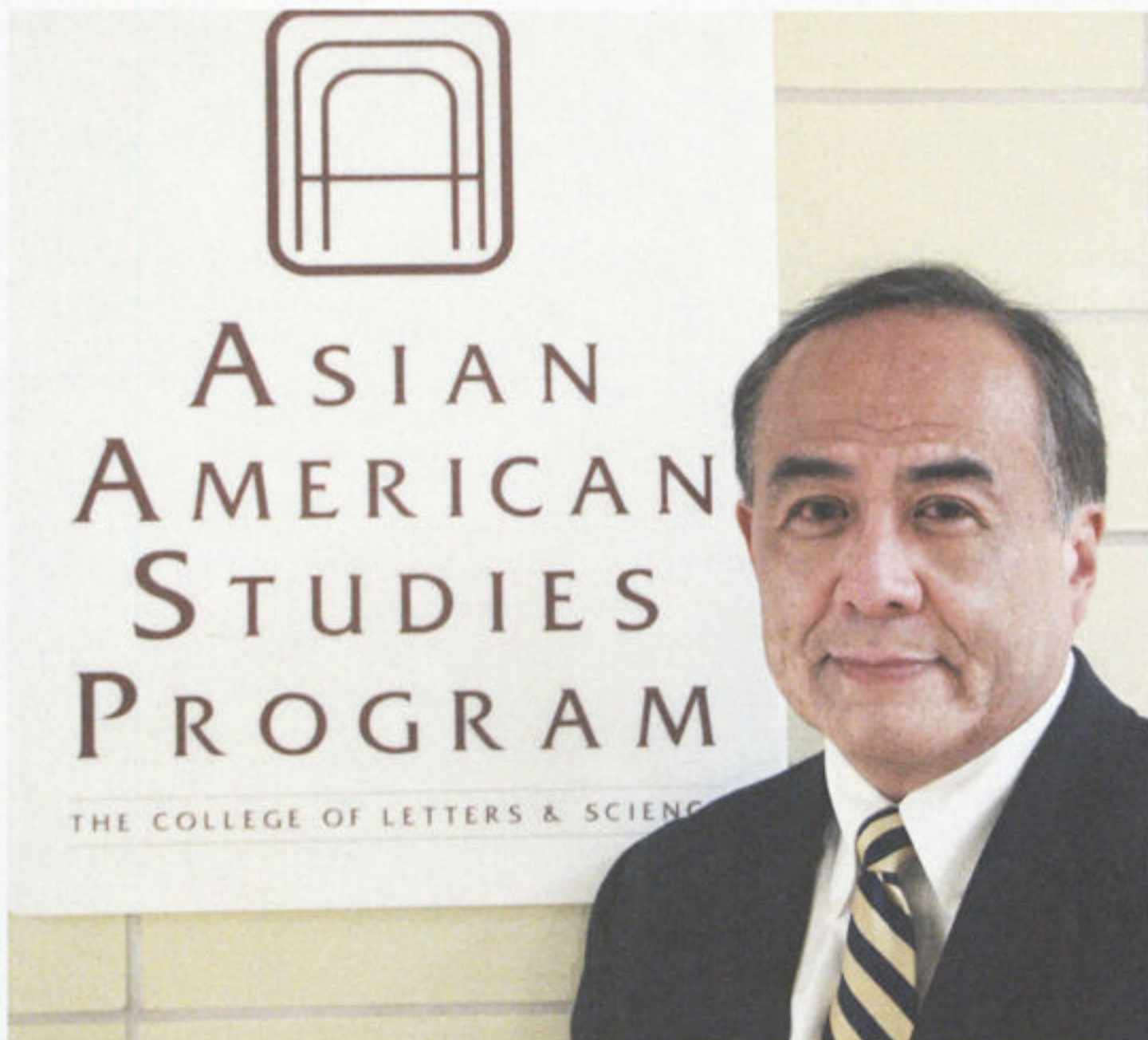
48 Ibid.

49 Meeting of the Indochina Refugee Action Center, 10-11 October 1979. Bureau of Human Resources, Refugee Assistance Program, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Correspondence.

50 Ibid.

51 William T. Liu, Maryanne Lamanna, and Alice Murata, *Transition to Nowhere. Vietnamese Refugees in America* (Nashville: Charter House Publishers, 1979), 171-177.

52 Ibid.



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“FOR THE ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) COMMUNITY, AGGREGATE DATA IS PARTICULARLY PROBLEMATIC AS IT MASKS EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES AMONG ETHNIC SUBGROUPS, IN ADDITION TO DISPARATE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND OUTCOMES.”

THE ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER DATA DISAGGREGATION MOVEMENT: THE CONVERGENCE OF COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND POLICY REFORM

ROBERT T. TERANISHI,
BACH MAI DOLLY NGUYEN &
CYNTHIA M. ALCANTAR

ABSTRACT

The use of disaggregated data is a powerful tool for tracking the changing demography of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, measuring participation and representation, and enabling stakeholders to mitigate inequalities that exist between subgroups. In this article, we explore efforts to promote data practices that more accurately reflect the heterogeneity in the AAPI community. We offer a conceptual model for examining the possibilities for future reform to data practices across three constituents—federal, state, and institutional policy. Finally, we explore the relationship between community activism and changes to educational practices and policies.

INTRODUCTION

There is an inquiry movement in higher education, which is motivated by the need to more

accurately gauge who our students are, how they are performing, and how systems of education can adapt to be more effective and efficient with their resources.¹ While data has been acknowledged as an essential tool for assessing the efficacy of educational resources and programs, it also plays a critical role in capturing gaps in educational participation and representation.² Thus, data disaggregated for individual subgroups—by race, ethnicity, gender, and other demographic distinctions—is important for raising awareness about issues and challenges that impact those subgroups disproportionately.³ Identifying such disparities in attainment and achievement enables higher education practitioners and policy makers to target resources where they are most needed. Accordingly, disaggregated data is an essential tool for advocacy and social justice, shedding light on ways to mitigate disparities in educational outcomes and improve support for the most marginalized and vulnerable populations.

For the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, aggregate data is particularly problematic as it masks educational disparities among ethnic subgroups, in addition to disparate health and economic conditions and outcomes. Educational and economic data presented on AAPIs as a whole, for example, has been the basis for the model minority myth—the misconception that AAPIs experience universal academic and social success, which grossly misrepresents and conceals the educational experiences of particular ethnic subgroups.⁴ However, disaggregated data on academic performance and educational outcomes for AAPIs by ethnicity shows the extent to which aggregation is problematic for AAPIs. What is revealed is a bimodal distribution with large proportions of ethnic subgroups at each end of the spectrum. For example, while a relatively high proportion of East Asians (e.g., Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese) and South Asians (e.g., Asian Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis) who are twenty-five years or older have earned at least a bachelor's degree, other ethnic subgroups (e.g., Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders) have a greater rate of having high school as their highest level of educational attainment.⁵

In this article, we explore efforts to overcome this issue through community advocacy that promotes the disaggregation of data for AAPIs in education and the progress toward this goal to date. We offer a conceptual model for examining the current landscape of change and possibilities for future reform to data practices across federal, state, and institutional constituents to explore the relationship between community activism and changes to educational practices and policies. We conclude with recommendations moving forward.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The misrepresentation of the AAPI population through aggregated data has been identified by AAPI scholars as one of the most critical barriers to policy and program development that advances the equitable treatment for the AAPI community.⁶ Simply put, the data disaggregation issue is one of the most important contemporary civil rights issues for the AAPI community relative to education and social policy. Consequently, the data disaggregation effort has been among the key pillars that shape the efforts of AAPI advocacy and community organizations.

In fact, efforts to disaggregate data to reflect the diverse needs of the AAPI population can be traced back decades. In 1997, the American Council on Education released “Asian Pacific American Demographic and Education Trends,” which discussed the ways in which homogeneity of statistics on AAPIs conceals the complexities and differences in English-language proficiency and socioeconomic backgrounds that affect the treatment of AAPIs in education policies and programs.⁷ In the same year, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) published a report, *An Invisible Crisis: The Educational Needs of Asian Pacific American Youth*, which pointed to how AAPI students are often placed in

the wrong bilingual classroom and how schools are failing the most vulnerable subgroups (e.g., Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders).⁸

Furthermore, in 1997, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) released a report, *Diversity Among Asian American High School Students*, which concluded there was a lack of studies that represent low academic achievement among Asian American students. This shortage of information has prevented counselors, teachers, and policy makers from understanding the difficulties and problems of these students and has ultimately "led to official neglect of programs and services for Asian American students."⁹ In 2003, *A Dream Denied: Educational Experiences of Southeast Asian American Youth*, a report by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), documented how statistics routinely lump Southeast Asian students in with all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, masking the high levels of poverty and academic barriers in these communities.¹⁰ More recently, the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs published *Asian Americans in Washington State: Closing Their Hidden Achievement Gaps*, which found that disaggregated data revealed the newest AAPI immigrants had some of the lowest state test scores, as compared across all racial groups in the state, indicating that aggregated data, "is a disservice to meeting the academic needs of individual students and of particular ethnic group members."¹¹

The common theme in this body of work is that the use of data that treats AAPIs as an aggregate group has and continues to be problematic; doing so conceals the unique challenges faced by AAPIs subgroups in the US education system. Each report makes the urgent call for education systems to collect and report more refined data and frames the aggregate data problem as a critical civil rights issue for the AAPI community that has yet to be resolved. Given this context, we offer a conceptual framework through which we examine progress to date toward addressing this issue and, more importantly, discuss opportunities for furthering the data disaggregation effort.

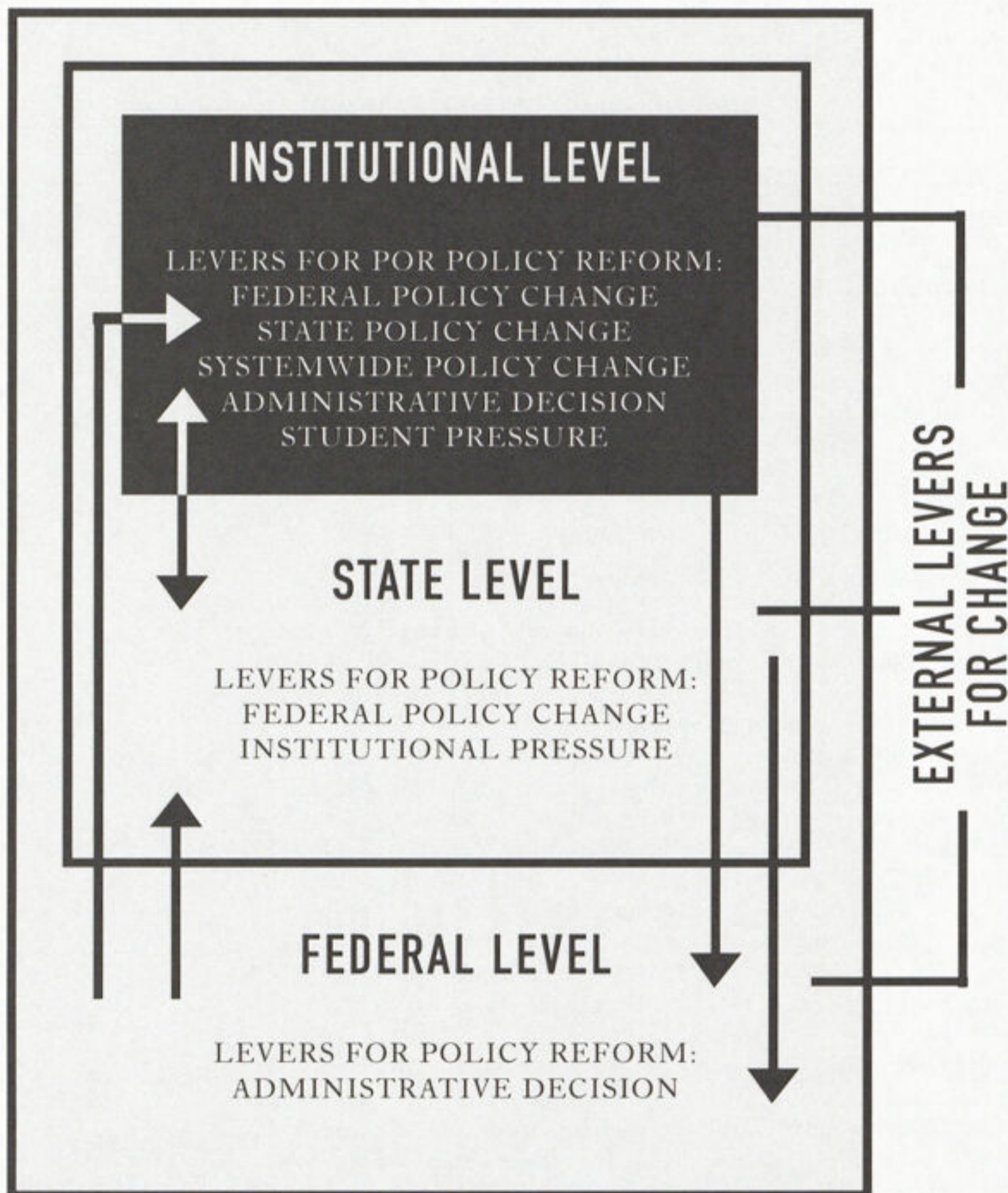
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Although the same rationale for AAPI data disaggregation we have offered has been addressed by a number of community organizations and advocacy groups, the AAPI data disaggregation movement continues to be an unresolved issue. While some strides have been made in localized outlets through institutional or community action, or in more rare cases, a push through state lawmaking, it is important to examine the state of AAPI disaggregation comprehensively, across federal, state, and institutional levels, to assess progress of data disaggregation in education.

Through our proposed framework, the Data Disaggregation Policy Reform Network, we aim to overcome the extent to which efforts to change policies and practices within individual institutions, organizations, or states are siloes isolated from context. According to the framework, statutory and regulatory policies related to data practices can occur at three levels: institutional, state, and federal (see Figure 1). The levers for reform vary, by type and quantity, within each of these levels. Institutional policy reform, for example, can be influenced by a number of changes and pressures including federal, state or system-wide policy changes, as well as internally by administrative decision or pressure from the organization's constituents (community members or students). At the state level, reform can occur due to institutional pressure within the state or externally through federal policy change. The federal level is influenced through internal administrative decisions and potentially through state pressure.

Figure 1. Data Disaggregation Policy Reform Network
(please reference the chart on the right page).

“...DISAGGREGATED DATA IS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR ADVOCACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, SHEDDING LIGHT ON WAYS TO MITIGATE DISPARITIES IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR THE MOST MARGINALIZED AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS.”



According to this model, change at the institutional level occurs more frequently and quickly than at the state or federal level because of the relatively greater number of levers for policy reform. It also highlights that state and institutional pressure can be reciprocal. This spotlights the conundrum that the data disaggregation effort faces today: while institutional—and to a lesser degree, state level—change continues to progress, federal policy has been slow to change. Opportunities for overcoming this stagnation may occur in the form of increased state-level pressure on federal policy reform through a critical mass of states requesting such a practice in order to pursue peer comparisons. Similarly, institutions can surpass gaining state support to directly advocate for federal policy change through a critical mass of institutions that request changes.

Our framework also considers how external levers, such as community pressure, can play a role in initiating data reform at all levels. Legislative and localized efforts by organizations like SEARAC or Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) are critical for propping up the unique needs of the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander communities that are masked by aggregated data. Foundations can play a critical role in stimulating change by mitigating the cost barrier for institutions and organizations. Research organizations and scholars can also be a critical external lever by utilizing disaggregated data in their publications, thus indicating its importance for accurately representing the experiences of all AAPI communities.

A MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE AAPI DATA DISAGGREGATION MOVEMENT

Utilizing the Data Disaggregation Policy Reform Network as a conceptual model, we will now explore specific examples of progress that has been made in the data disaggregation movement. We begin with discussing changes in federal and state policies and conclude with institutional data reform. This brief historical synopsis will not only reinforce where and why stagnation has occurred, it will also highlight opportunities for the continued advancement of the data disaggregation movement.

NATIONAL/FEDERAL LEVEL

In response to the civil rights and equal opportunity movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the Federal Interagency Committee on Education initiated a government-wide racial classification standard that resulted in the 1977 US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Statistical Directive 15.12 OMB Directive 15 classified four major racial categories (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, and White) and one ethnic category (Hispanic) as the streamlined options for all government statistical reporting purposes. Although OMB Directive 15 intended to provide statistical consistency, immediate issues with the racial and ethnic categorization emerged. For example, in addition to “facially apparent problems associated with these definitions, there are cracks in this system of classification in that particular groups cannot be situated within its framework.”¹³ Although not immediately apparent, particular AAPI ethnic subgroups—namely, Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders—began to fall into those very cracks, as the deep reliance on aggregate racial groupings masked their needs and experiences.

As the nation’s demography continued to grow and shift, and with an influx of new immigrants, OMB was prompted to revisit the standards of data collection and reporting. In October of 1997, twenty years after its initial release, OMB Directive 15 was revised. It retained the original one ethnic and four racial categories, but changed the language from “acceptable racial and ethnic categories” to “minimum categories for data on race.”¹⁴

Directive 15 “encourages” organizations to collect more granular data so far as they are able to roll up into the five primary categories. It also allowed the reporting of more than one race per person, but did not include a multiracial or multiethnic category. Although OMB Directive 15 stipulates data classifications for only the federal government, it has become the de facto format for collecting and reporting data throughout the field of education—in K-12 and higher education settings. In fact, OMB Directive 15 is the only federal guideline to date that has been implemented with regard to racial and ethnic data in education.

The US Department of Health and Human Services also issued data standards, which include four additional Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander categories, seven additional Asian American categories, and four additional Hispanic categories.¹⁵ These categories all aggregate to OMB’s standards for reporting purposes, thus reinforcing the durability of racial and ethnic categories as classified by federal policy. This is problematic given that the “government’s interests in identifying and tracking individuals by race and ethnicity compel limitations that fail to acknowledge the nuances of racial identity in reality.”¹⁶ The question remains, how can federal policy be compelled to better represent the heterogeneity that exists within the AAPI community?

There are recent efforts to respond to this question as Congressman Mike Honda (D-California-17) submitted bill HR 5343 entitled “All Students Count,” which would require all State Departments of Education to disaggregate data on AAPIs. HR 5343 was submitted on 31 July 2014. The future of the bill is hopeful but uncertain. Within the Department of Education, there was also a Request for Information in 2013, which sought input on data disaggregation practices. This request points to the possibility that

a critical mass of institutions and state agencies may promote changes to policies at the federal level down the line.

STATE LEVEL

There has been more progress at the state level than the federal level with regard to legislative policy efforts in data disaggregation. In California, Assembly Bill (AB) 295, which called for the disaggregation of AAPI data in various state agencies, was passed by the House and the Senate in 2007, but was ultimately vetoed by then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.¹⁷ Four years later, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law AB 1088, which required the Department of Industrial Relations and the Department of Fair Employment and Housing to collect the same disaggregated data as the US Census, which disaggregates AAPI ethnic subgroup data.¹⁸ The bill was submitted by Assembly Member Mike Eng (D-Monterey Park) and supported by a number of community organizations including the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC). The legislative win ensured that data collected in the health, social service, labor, and civil rights sectors would accurately capture the diverse needs of AAPIs and also require public accessibility to that data. AB 1088, however, did not include educational organizations and no data disaggregation gains have been made on the education front since the 2011 passing of that bill.

In Washington State, Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos (D-37) submitted House Bill (HB) 1680, “Eliminating the Opportunity Gap,” on 4 February 2013. This bill was the result of the 2009 Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee, which encouraged reform of “student discipline practices, cultural competency training for educators, academic accountability for English Language Learners, and improved data collection methods.”¹⁹ HB 1680, which was resubmitted as Substitute House Bill (SHB) 1680, addressed

many of the recommendations (e.g., required cultural competency trainings, reform on disciplinary action), including the disaggregation of data for AAPIs and other racial groups. It passed in the House in March of 2014, but ultimately failed with long-term cost cited as the central concern. It is important to note that HB 1680 was not focused solely on data disaggregation. To date, Tomiko Santos continues to be committed to advancing data disaggregation legislation and seeks opportunities to push Washington State to better its data processes.

More recently, New York has tackled the issue of data disaggregation at both the state and city level. In coordination with the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF) through the Invisible No More Campaign, Assembly Member Ron Kim (D-40) and Senator Toby Ann Stavisky (D-16) submitted Assembly A1186a and Senate Bill S2348, respectively, in 2012. Later that year, Council Member Daniel Dromm (D-25) filed Introduction 937 to the New York City Council. Both A1186a and S2348 were resubmitted in 2013. The bills include the following mandates: require every state agency that collects demographic data to disaggregate nineteen Asian American and four Pacific Islander subgroups; collect data on primary language and place of birth/country of origin and years in the United States; and make data publically available in uniform data sets.²⁰ The bills experienced both support and resistance, having passed the assembly and dropped in senate on a number of occasions. CACF continues to advocate strongly for the bills, which would be the first of their kind to specifically require all state agencies to collect disaggregated AAPI data.

The legislative efforts in California, Washington, and New York demonstrate the realities of the data disaggregation movement in a number of ways. First, each of the state efforts was supported by community organizations, which is critical for thinking about future

state legislative action. It also points to the various ways that data disaggregation can be included within legislation, whether as a standalone issue or included with other issues facing AAPIs. Finally, it highlights the challenging landscape AAPI advocates face in regard to passing legislation and the need for committed champions that will continue to push the legislation despite inevitable hurdles.

INSTITUTION LEVEL

At the institutional level, the University of California system's student-led campaign to disaggregate AAPI data is one of the most recognized. In response to an article printed in the *Daily Bruin*, a student newspaper at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), entitled "UC Accepts Unprecedented Number of Asian Students," AAPI students organized to push back by pointing out the heterogeneity within the AAPI community and the fact that Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students continued to be grossly underrepresented.²¹ This initiated the Count Me In (CMI) campaign, which included a consortium of twenty-one AAPI student organizations at UCLA and was led by the Asian Pacific Coalition student organization. The CMI campaign expanded to include students, faculty, and staff from UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UC San Diego, and the UC Student Association, and eventually gained the support of the University of California Vice President of Student Affairs, Judy Sakaki.²² The CMI campaign advocated for the collection and reporting of data on twenty-three AAPI ethnic subgroups—a remarkable increase from the previous eight ethnic subgroup categories. Beyond the fact that students rallied in opposition to the *Daily Bruin* article, "CMI was not simply an ethnic pride project. It was in fact a highly political campaign to gain recognition of significant educational disparities experienced by different ethnic subgroups within the AAPI category."²³ Like the UC system, the California State University system also collects disaggregated AAPI data; however, the historical timeline for that policy change has not been published.

Unlike the UC system's recent efforts for data reform, the University of Hawai'i (UH) began its data reform movement as early as 1986.²⁴ The release of the *Ka'u Report* from the University of Hawai'i Studies Task Force, made up of eighteen Native Hawaiian faculty, motivated the data reform, as it highlighted the specific challenges Native Hawaiian students faced due to their small representation on campus. The report focused on improving access and persistence through a number of simple, and specific, recommendations, which included the collection of disaggregated data. UH added a specific Native Hawaiian ancestry indicator to better identify native students and target necessary resources to improve academic outcomes. The data that has been collected has been used in a number of ways, across the many UH system campuses at both the two- and four-year institutions. It has also been critical for system-wide strategic planning, as was the case with the UH Hawai'i Graduation Initiative which aimed to increase Native Hawaiian graduation rates by 6 to 9 percent each year.²⁵ Through various targeted interventions like targeted academic counseling, providing space for students to share culture, language, and history, and Native Hawaiian freshman orientation groups, UH has exceeded its graduation targets and has done so by larger margins every year since 2008.²⁶

Similarly, the University of Guam (UOG) disaggregates AAPI data including seven Asian American, two Chamorro, and seven Micronesian, and one Other Pacific Islander in order to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of their native Pacific Islander students.²⁷ Although the timeframe in which UOG began collecting disaggregated data is not specified, the utilization of it to target Pacific Islander students is well demonstrated. For example, the data revealed the need to improve retention among Pacific Islander students. Thus, UOG implemented targeted tutoring services, a mentorship program, and academic advisement

“THROUGH OUR PROPOSED FRAMEWORK, “DATA DISAGGREGATION POLICY REFORM NETWORK,” WE AIM TO OVERCOME THE EXTENT TO WHICH EFFORTS TO CHANGE POLICIES AND PRACTICES WITHIN INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR STATES ARE SILOES ISOLATED FROM CONTEXT.”

to improve persistence. Student satisfaction in courses, use of academic advisement, and completion rates in math courses all increased.²⁸ Like UH, the narrowly focused interventions informed by disaggregated data were successful in improving the outcomes of otherwise underserved students.

Most recently, Washington State's four-year institutions and the Washington State Community and Technical Colleges began collecting disaggregated data in 2010. Reporting to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Educational Research Data Center (ERDC), both commissioned by the state legislature, institutions have followed the state mandate for submitting sixteen Asian American and nine Pacific Islander categories. Both OSPI and ERDC cited OMB Directive 15 as the rationale for collecting this level of granularity. Washington State's K-12 schools also submit these same racial categories; however, the reporting of student-level data is unclear, as some parents may not choose to fill in the information, leaving schools to do so.²⁹

These institutions and systems demonstrate that there are a number of ways in which data reform can occur; however, they also spotlight the tendency for institutions to work in silos. Administrative decisions, student pressures, or external forces can influence the change, but the reform stays within the boundaries of the institution once achieved. To further the data disaggregation movement, it is necessary to consider how we can push the success of these institutions beyond their campus walls to inform the work of others and influence change at the state and federal level.

EXTERNAL LEVERS FOR CHANGE

External pressure from advocacy organizations has been critical in moving the needle on this issue. As mentioned earlier, CACF has been a key partner in the effort to establish data disaggregation practices in New York State. In Washington State, Southeast Asian/American Access in Education (SEAE) has been a key partner in the effort. SEAE has spearheaded the continued effort in Washington by working directly with congressional representatives, the Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA) and other community organizations to advocate for data reform. In fact, SEAE hosts a summit each year that draws Southeast Asian students, faculty, practitioners, and other educational stakeholders from across the state to discuss issues facing Southeast Asian communities. The need for data disaggregation is a central focus at the summit.³⁰

Other organizations, like SEARAC and EPIC, have also been involved in galvanizing community support for disaggregated data. SEARAC has been instrumental at the K-12 level through its advocacy work with school districts and community organizations across the nation. SEARAC works directly with various regional partners to advance the call for data disaggregation and is also a critical partner in the All Students Count campaign, in partnership with Congressman Mike Honda. Like SEARAC, EPIC also contributes greatly to advocacy work related to the data disaggregation effort. Additionally, in partnership with Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC), EPIC released a report, *A Community of Contrasts*, which utilized disaggregated data and demonstrated the disparities across Pacific Islander ethnic subgroups.³¹

An umbrella organization, the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), has also been a key partner in the data disaggregation effort. NCAPA supports and advocates beside many of its organizations, which, in addition to SEARAC, include the Organization of Chinese Americans, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, and the Japanese American Citizens League. NCAPA has also partnered with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Women's Law Center to promote the All Students Count bill. NCAPA is a central hub that brings together various organizations to advocate for shared needs like data disaggregation.³² In addition, community organizations collect

their own disaggregated data and contribute to or self-publish reports that highlight the value of disaggregated data for their communities. Research centers, like the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE) have also promoted data disaggregation efforts. The iCount initiative, for example, is a collaboration between CARE and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI), receiving funding from ETS and AAIP. The project began with the release of the ETS-published iCount report. The 2013 iCount report was released in conjunction with a symposium cohosted by WHIAPPI and the US Department of Education. The symposium brought together leaders from K-12 and higher education as well as experts in demography, institutional research, and philanthropy to engage in an open dialogue about ways to develop data systems that are responsive to the needs of AAPI students and families. The convening importantly revealed that despite the recognition that there is a need for data disaggregation, practitioners, administrators, and community organizers lacked the political will to pursue changes to their data practice.

iCount evolved to address these very concerns in the pursuit of data reform through localized actions. Since the 2013 convening, iCount has developed five partnerships with institutions and community and state organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to improving the academic experiences and outcomes of their AAPI students utilizing disaggregated data. It is the aim of iCount to work collaboratively and intensively with these partners to reform data practices to achieve three goals: 1) help institutions improve their ability to understand and serve AAPI students; 2) demonstrate how institutions, organizations and states can similarly reform their data practices using these "models of success"; and 3) utilize these

models to advocate for data reform at the federal level, thus breaking down the barrier between local effort and federal policy.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The use of disaggregated data is a powerful tool for tracking the changing demography of AAPI students, measuring participation and representation, and enabling stakeholders to mitigate inequalities that exists between subgroups. In this article, we explore efforts to promote data practices that more accurately reflect the heterogeneity in the AAPI community, particularly in education. This article provides examples of institutional, state, and federal efforts for collecting and reporting data and discusses what has been done, how it was done, and the difference it has made. We offer a conceptual model for examining the possibilities for future reform to data practices across three constituents—federal, state, and institutional policy. We also explore the relationship between community activism and changes to educational practices and policies, and demonstrate the critical role of community advocacy to promote data disaggregation as well as the progress of these efforts to date.

While the movement to disaggregate data for AAPI students is built upon a shared rationale that change is necessary, change can originate from a number of sources. There are needs for collaboration across constituents to pursue change that will advance the data disaggregation movement. We believe discussions between constituents about the collection, reporting, and use of disaggregated data must be pursued through formal partnerships and working groups. These efforts should be supported by philanthropy, which can help offset the cost associated with changing systems and being a part of a broader network of support. These networks can play a critical role in providing guidance and technical assistance to institutions and, more importantly, collecting and reporting disaggregated student

population data as models of successful data practices.

As more disaggregated data becomes available, the discussion of the proper racial and ethnic categories will be important to consider. Put simply, there is not a single standard for ethnic subgroup categories to collect data on AAPI students since institutions collecting disaggregated data often use categories that represent the demography unique to their students. Data should be shared across institutions within systems or consortia, across sectors (e.g., K-12 and higher education), as well as across political boundaries (e.g., states and territories), which enables tracking AAPI students throughout the educational pipeline. Similarly, there is a need to discuss how disaggregated data can be reported (e.g., aggregated to the level of race or reporting for individual subgroups). Regardless of the reporting method, it is important for disaggregated data to be accessible for use by institutional researchers, administrators, community groups, and student groups to engage in the assessment and evaluation of institutional services and programs.

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THE IMPACT OF ENABLING SERVICES ON IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES AT COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

BY ROSY CHANG WEIR, HUI SONG, VIVIAN LI, YING-YING MENG, AND NINEZ PONCEI

ABSTRACT

Enabling services (ES) play an important role in improving patients' access to care in health center settings. Four Community Health Centers (CHCs) were selected to carry out a newly developed ES data collection protocol. Adult diabetes control and childhood immunization were selected to test the impact of ES. Results from multivariate logistic regressions showed that for both

outcome measures, ES users are more likely to have desired outcomes. Policy implications are (1) to develop national standards for collecting ES utilization data and implement this protocol at all CHCs, and (2) to ensure adequate and sustainable funding for ES provision at CHCs.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (CHCs) serve vulnerable populations, including those who are disproportionately low income, uninsured, and limited English proficient.^{2,3} Currently, CHCs are the health and medical home for 21 million people, including over 895,000 Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders (AA&NHOPIs).⁴ Nationally, 35 percent of health center patients are uninsured, 42 percent have Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and 93 percent are low income. The Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations' (AAPCHO) member health centers (whose patient population is, on average, 70 percent AA&NHOPIs) have similar rates of uninsurance, Medicaid/CHIP coverage, and poverty.⁵

Health center patients face many challenges to accessing care; for instance, inability to pay, cultural and language barriers, and geographical access were cited as the most common barriers.⁶ Combined with nationwide disparities such as high rates of diabetes and low immunization rates for AA&NHOPIs, the profile of CHC patients is often quite complex with multiple vulnerabilities and barriers to care.^{7,8,9,10,11} Indeed, CHCs are leaders in the national effort to provide health care access to all and to reduce health disparities amongst such diverse and vulnerable populations. Enabling services (ES) provided by health centers break down barriers to care while ensuring that each encounter is addressed in a culturally proficient manner. Defined as "non-clinical services that aim to increase access to health

care, and to improve health outcomes," ES are an integral part of the health center culture and directly linked to the needs of the community served.¹² For example, interpretation services improve timeliness of care for children in Medicaid managed care¹³ and increase limited English proficient patients' satisfaction.¹⁴ Health education improves diabetes health outcomes for minorities.^{15,16,17}

Despite some evidence of the positive impact of ES, health centers are inadequately reimbursed to provide them.¹⁸ Limited data on ES also makes it more challenging for health centers to make a case for supporting these critical services. Given the overwhelming importance of ES provision by AAPCHO CHCs to high-risk populations, we developed a standardized data collection system of ES provided and patient health outcomes. Using ES data linked with clinical data, this study aims to evaluate the impact of ES on the quality of care, specifically on childhood immunization and adult diabetes control. This is among very few studies to examine the impact of ES on health care outcomes at CHCs serving primarily Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders.

METHODS

DEVELOPING A UNIFORM DATA COLLECTION MODEL

In 2002, AAPCHO partnered with the New York Academy of Medicine and four CHCs to develop a uniform data collection protocol for ES, including a handbook, encounter form templates, and data file layout manuals.^{19,20} Adapting findings from a 2000 report by the Medical Group Management Association and the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC), AAPCHO study partners agreed on nine ES categories with common definitions to facilitate data collection, simplify coding, and aggregate data for evaluation and research purposes (see Table 1).²¹

An ES advisory committee,

composed of health center staff and academics, was established to guide project implementation. The committee unanimously developed a standard encounter form with minimum data elements (see Figure 1). During the pilot study period, all ES providers (e.g., community health workers, interpreters) at each participating site were trained on the data collection protocol; their work was validated for comprehensiveness, consistency, and accuracy, leading to changes in the template and workflows to improve the quality of datasets. ES staff members were asked to detail the ES provided and time allocated during each medical encounter.

SITE SELECTION

The CHC sites were selected on the basis of their membership in AAPCHO, their geographic representation, and the diversity of their patient populations. The sites were located in New York City, Seattle, and Oahu (two sites). One site in Oahu primarily served Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, whereas the other three sites served mostly Asian Americans. For this study, we collected data on patient demographics and patient-provider ES encounters from all sites from January 2007 to December 2007. All four CHCs shared similar characteristics with other CHCs nationwide, with high percentages of uninsured and low-income patients.²²

OUTCOME MEASURES AND STUDY POPULATION

We chose to examine the relationship between ES and two common standardized performance measures that were reliably and feasibly collected by CHCs—adult diabetes and childhood immunization. Both measures are standard Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Bureau of Primary Health Care clinical performance reporting measures required of CHCs. For adult diabetes, the outcome measure was HbA1c \leq 7% for adult diabetes. We included adult patients eighteen to seventy-five years of age as of 31

December 2007 with a diagnosis of type 1 or 2 diabetes and who had one or more primary care visits from January 2007 to December 2007, and we collected data on patients' most recent HbA1c values in 2007. For childhood immunization, the outcome measure was whether a patient received all recommended immunizations before he/she turned two. We included children who turned two years of age in 2007 and had one or more primary care visits from January 2007 to December 2007. We defined an ES user as a patient who had at least one ES visit in 2007. A non-ES user was defined as a patient who had at least one primary care visit in 2007 but did not have an ES visit in the previous year. There were 3,068 patients included in the analysis of adult diabetes, and 1,622 patients included in the analysis of childhood immunization.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

We built multivariate regression models to analyze the relationship between ES and the two performance measures. The models used adult diabetes and childhood immunization measures as dependent variables (both binary) respectively. Both models used ES usage as the independent variable while considering possible covariates such as site and patient characteristics (age, gender, payer source, and ethnicity). For both dependent variables, the desired outcomes were coded as 1 (HbA1c \leq 7% for adult diabetes, or receiving all recommended immunizations before the age of two for childhood immunization), and the undesired outcomes were coded as 0. For the binary ES usage variable, ES users were coded as 1 and nonusers were coded as 0. The number of ES that a patient received was omitted, as the focus of the study was to examine whether receiving ES increases a patient's likelihood to achieve a desired outcome. Age was used as a continuous variable and only included for the diabetes model, as all patients for the childhood immunization model were younger than two years old. Covariates, such as site, gender, payer source, and

ethnicity were used as categorical variables. AA&NHOPIs were aggregated into a single category and compared with Whites. Similarly, Medicaid, Medicare, and other public insurance were combined into a single public insurance category and compared to other insurance categories such as uninsured and private insurance. The demographic information of the samples is summarized in Table 2.

We first looked at models with only patient characteristics (age, gender, payer source, and ethnicity). We then built models using site as a fixed effect while controlling patient characteristics. For adult diabetes, the results of models with and without site are different, but the results for childhood immunization are similar.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIONS OF FOUR CHCS AND THEIR PATIENT PROFILES

All four CHCs were located in high-need areas and provide comprehensive health services including ES. As described in Table 1 using data from the HRSA Uniform Data System, the majority of the patients served by the four CHCs were medically underserved populations.²³ In 2007, on average, 89 percent of the patients had annual household incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and 23 percent of the patients were uninsured. Sites varied in size and geographic location. In 2007, the number of medical encounters by site ranged from 31,990 to 177,929. All four CHCs were located in areas with high density of AA&NHOPi populations and serve predominantly AA&NHOPIs, who often have limited English proficiency. At three sites, most patients were better served in a language other than English, and one site served primarily Native Hawaiians who spoke English as a primary language. In addition, diabetes was one of the major disease burdens for all four CHCs. The percentage of diabetes patients at each CHC was 4.1 percent to 7.9 percent, compared to

the national average of 6.8 percent.

ENABLING SERVICES UTILIZATION AND USER CHARACTERISTICS AT THE FOUR CHCS

Quantitative ES data collected by each health center was analyzed individually and as an aggregate. In 2007, the four CHCs provided a total of 88,352 ES to 24,726 patients for an average of 3.6 services per user (see Table 3). ES users were comparable to the overall patient population, with a female majority and mostly publicly insured or uninsured. The average age of ES users varied from thirty to forty-two years old. The breadth of ES providers ranged from social workers and medical assistants to case managers and eligibility assistance workers. The average time devoted to each enabling service differed by health center and ranged between thirteen minutes and twenty minutes in 2007. Each CHC provided a different mix of ES based on the community needs and the populations they served. Data from the site labeled CHC1 in Table 2 represents only a fraction of the ES provided because data collection was not implemented across all departments and sites. Please see Table 2 for more detail.

IMPACT OF ENABLING SERVICES ON PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

We first compared the characteristics of individual users and nonusers of ES and found that similar to previous study results,²⁴ users of ES were more likely than nonusers to be older, female, AA&NHOPi, and uninsured or publicly insured (see Table 2).

DIABETES

We compared health outcomes between the users and nonusers and found that diabetic patients using ES were more likely to have controlled HbA1c levels below 7 percent than nonusers (49.4 percent versus 38.5 percent). Results from the multivariate

logistic models showed that when controlling only patient characteristics, for adult diabetes patients, compared to those who did not use any ES, patients who used at least one enabling service were 1.35 (CI25: 1.16, 1.57) times as likely to have HbA1c results less than 7 percent after controlling for age, gender, payer source, and ethnicity.

When adding site as a fixed effect, the adult diabetes model showed that compared to patients who did not use any ES, patients who used at least one ES were 96.4 percent as likely to have HbA1c results less than 7 percent, given the patients are from the same health center and have the same age, gender, payer source, and ethnicity. However, this odds ratio is not statistically significant (CI: 0.80, 1.17).

CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS

We similarly compared health outcomes between the users and nonusers of ES and found that ES users were more likely to meet well-child immunization measures than nonusers (81 percent versus 64 percent). Compared to children whose family did not use any ES, children whose family used at least one enabling service were 2.2 (CI: 1.58, 3.12) times more likely to have received all recommended immunizations before the age of two given gender, payer source, and ethnicity are the same.

The model of childhood immunization with site as fixed effect showed that compared to children whose family did not use any ES, children whose family used at least one enabling service were 1.97 times (CI: 1.36, 2.88) as likely to have had all recommended immunizations before the age of two, after controlling for site, age, gender, payer source, and ethnicity. The odds ratios of all covariates in the models and their 95 percent confidence intervals are summarized in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

Our results suggest that ES contribute to desirable diabetes and childhood immunization outcomes. Additionally, the type of ES provided did not seem to matter, as all ES had an impact on outcomes. Some CHCs may have primarily provided health education while others may have provided interpretation and financial counseling or other combinations. Our findings support the limited number of studies on the positive impact of ES. For example, previous studies have shown that interpretation services increase timeliness of care for children in Medicaid managed care.²⁶ Additional studies have shown that health education improves diabetes health outcomes for minorities.^{27,28,29}

There was a slight difference in results between the two dependent variables. For childhood immunizations, there was an observed difference in outcomes between ES users and nonusers, both when considering differences between health centers and not. For adult diabetes, when considering that health centers are the same in our fixed effects model analysis, ES users were more likely to have desired outcomes. However, when considering that health centers are different in our random effects analysis, the effect of ES was not significant and there was almost no difference between ES users and nonusers. A possible explanation of these differences in the results between adult diabetes and childhood immunization is that adult diabetes treatment requires long-term, consistent care in order to achieve desired outcomes, whereas childhood immunization only requires patients to come in once (or a few times) to get immunized. Treatments for adult diabetes are more complex as well. Also, different health centers may have different programs and patient populations that can respond differently to adult diabetes treatments, which explains why the effect of ES became insignificant when our statistical analysis accounted for differences in health centers. To better measure the effect of ES on adult diabetes, we need to also consider the intensity and types of ES in future studies.

Our findings also indicate that health centers offer a diverse array of

services that represent the needs of their communities. For example, one CHC is a health center located in a geographically remote area approximately one hour from the nearest city by automobile, thus transportation services account for a significant number of ES encounters. Two CHCs have patient populations that speak a myriad of languages, thereby elevating the importance of interpretation services.

Although ES are expensive and difficult to sustain, health centers prioritize them as critical components of care delivery for their vulnerable patient populations. Despite being inadequately funded, health centers are more likely to expand the scope of ES rather than discontinue its provision, especially as more insured patients obtaining coverage through the Affordable Care Act rely on ES to access the health care system.^{30,31} In addition, health centers with more managed care contracts and more staff tended to provide a broader range of ES, as well as more ES visits compared to other health centers, thereby indicating the importance of Medicaid and other revenue sources in terms of supporting health centers' ability to serve all patients.³² Therefore, it is critical to fully recognize and incentivize ES in new payment models.

DATA LIMITATION

This study is not a randomized controlled study, and patients who used ES may therefore be a select group who might be more motivated to optimize their care experience. Future studies need to account for potential differences using propensity score analysis. In addition, ES could have been underreported at some of the CHCs, leading to possible underestimation of the impact of ES. For instance, ES data at one CHC was only collected at its Social Services Department, due to the data collection model not being fully implemented across the entire health center for the data collection period. Lastly, ES provided were not specifically tailored to each outcome measure; however, they helped to reduce general social determinant barriers to care. Future research is necessary to measure how each enabling service uniquely impacts different types of care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ES are often the critical mechanism by which patients approach health centers to address barriers to care. Despite their impact, ES are often jeopardized by political and budgetary pressures. As a result of many years of work in standardizing ES documentation and studying the impact of ES on health care delivery, we developed the following recommendations:

1. **ADOPT NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED STANDARDS FOR COLLECTING ES UTILIZATION DATA TO CONTRIBUTE TO A NATIONAL DATA REGISTRY.**

Standardization of definitions will ensure that all health centers have the tools available to demonstrate the value of ES. Replicating standardized data collection implementation nationwide will help build critical mass of ES data to contribute to such issues as universal health coverage, maintaining prospective payment systems, and negotiating roles and responsibilities within managed care organizations. Further, the establishment of a nationally recognized standard is an essential step in quantifying the value of ES for health care delivery and outcomes.

2. **ENSURE ADEQUATE AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR ES PROVISION AT COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS.**

Term-limited funding and disjointed registries impede comprehensive data collection and reporting of ES. Additionally, health center budgets are increasingly strained as demand for care increases; reliance on ES grows as more individuals seek services such as eligibility assistance and interpretation to access care. It is of utmost importance for ES to be recognized and adequately reimbursed by all payers as part of the comprehensive medical care that vulnerable

patients require at CHCs.

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TABLE 1: Enabling Services Categories, Definitions, and Encounters Examples*

Name	Definition	Examples
Case management assessment	Nonmedical assessment that includes the use of an instrument measuring socioeconomic status, wellness, or other nonmedical health status.	New patient assessment; Achenbach assessment
Case management referral	Facilitation of a visit for a registered patient of the center to a health care or social service provider.	Arranging for visit to a social worker; linkage to traditional healers
Case management treatment facilitation	An encounter with a center-registered patient or their household or family member in which the patient's treatment plan is developed or facilitated by a case manager. The plan must incorporate the services of multiple providers or health care disciplines.	Crisis intervention; pharmaceutical management
Financial counseling/eligibility assistance	Counseling of a patient presumed to have a family income of 300 percent of poverty level or less that results in a completed application to a sliding fee scale or health insurance program including Medicaid or Medicare.	Development of payment plans; explaining a medical bill from a hospital
Health education/supportive counseling	Provision of health education or supportive services to patients in which wellness, preventive disease management, or other improved health outcomes are attempted through behavior change methodology.	Prenatal care workshops; smoking cessation workshops

	change methodology.	
Interpretation	The provision of interpreter services by a third party (other than the primary care provider) intended to reduce barriers to a limited English-proficient patient or a patient with documented limitations in writing or speaking skills sufficient to affect the outcome of a medical visit or procedure.	Interpreting between a patient and a health plan representative; translating medication instructions to primary language
Outreach	Patient services that result in the conversion of a patient without a primary care provider to one who has been accepted into a provider's panel.	A community health fair with a method for resulting in a patient's kept appointment to the health center
Transportation	Providing direct assistance to a patient by an employee or contractor of a primary care center in which transportation access barriers are reduced for a patient that is assigned to a primary care panel at a community health center.	Van service to and from appointments at a health center; enrolling patients in a transportation voucher program
Other	Any other services provided by an employee or contractor of a primary care center in which access barriers are reduced for a patient that is assigned to a primary care panel at a community	Housing assistance, parenting workshops

	health center.	
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* The patient data source for total encounters by type of enabling services are from all health centers included in the study.

TABLE 2.

Characteristics of Total User and Enabling Service User at the Four Community Health Centers (2007)

	CHC1*	CHC2	CHC3**	CHC4	Total
All Patients					
Medical users, no.	32,290	13,302	8,770	25,651	80,013
Medical encounters, no.	177,929	43,490	31,990	102,173	355,582
Enabling services users, no.	5,043	10,527	3,134	6,022	24,726
Enabling services encounters, no.	23,773	26,267	11,469	26,843	88,352
AA&NHOPIs, %	93%	83%	64%	77%	83%
Top AA&NHOPi subgroups, group (%)***	93%	82%	39%	51%	
Family income at or below 200% FPL, %	96%	91%	95%	75%	88%
Uninsured patients, %	22%	22%	40%	17%	22%
Patients better served in a language other than English, %	99%	64%	30%	0.16%	54%
Diabetes patients, %	4%	7%	7%	6%	5%
ES Users	5,043	10,527	3,134	6,022	24,726
Female of ES users, % of ES Users	71%	61%	68%	62%	64%
Mean age of ES users, year	33	41	41	32	37
Uninsured ES users, %	14%	27%	25%	42%	27%
Average length of enabling services encounter, minute	13	16	20	19	17

Most utilized type of enabling service	Case Management Assessment, Case Management Treatment	Financial Counseling, Interpretation	Interpretation, Outreach	Financial Counseling, Health Education, Transportation
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* Includes only enabling services provided by the Social Services Department of the health center.

** Only includes data from January - August 2007.

*** Top AA&NHOPi subgroups are different racial groups in each CHC. The percentages compared to the row above (AA&NHOPi, %) shows how diverse the CHC's AA&NHOPi patient population is. For example, CHC3 is has the most diverse AA&NHOPi patient population where as all CHC1's AA&NHOPi patient is from one AA&NHOPi group.

TABLE 3.

Characters of Enabling Services Users vs. Nonusers by Diabetes and Immunizations

		Adult Diabetes (N=3068)		Childhood Immunization (N=1622)	
		% in ES Users (N=1337)	% in ES Non Users (N=1731)	% in ES Users (N=291)	% in ES Non Users (N=1331)
Age	18-24 Years Old	0.8%	1.5%	NA	NA
	25-44 Years Old	12.5%	21.5%	NA	NA
	45-64 Years Old	56.5%	58.6%	NA	NA
	65-75 Years Old	30.9%	18.4%	NA	NA
Gender	Female	58.6%	54.5%	43.6%	45.8%
	Male	41.4%	45.5%	56.4%	54.2%
Payor Source	Private	13.4%	4.9%	4.1%	3.2%
	Public	73.6%	66.7%	86.6%	76.0%
	Uninsured	10.2%	25.9%	4.8%	11.1%
	Other	2.8%	2.5%	4.5%	9.8%
Ethnicity	AAPI	92.6%	83.1%	92.1%	85.8%
	White	4.1%	9.5%	2.4%	3.5%
	Other	3.3%	7.5%	5.5%	10.7%

* Pearson Chi-square test for Age p-value = 0.

** Pearson Chi-square test for gender in adult diabetes model p-value = 0.002; for gender in childhood immunization p-value = 0.5.

*** Pearson Chi-square test for Payor Source in adult diabetes model p-value = 0; for Payor Source in childhood immunization p-value = 0.

**** Pearson Chi-square test for ethnicity in adult diabetes model p-value = 0; for ethnicity in childhood immunization p-value = 0.1.

TABLE 4.

Odds Ratios of All Covariates by Diabetes and Immunization

Variable (Reference Category)		Adult Diabetes (N=3068)		Childhood Immunization (N=1622)	
		OR (95% CI)*		OR (95% CI)*	
		Without Site	Site as Fixed Effect	Without Site	Site as Fixed Effect
Site (CHC 1)	CHC 2	NA	1.34 (1.03, 1.74)	NA	1.09 (0.70, 1.69)
	CHC 3	NA	0.2 (0.14, 0.28)	NA	0.22 (0.16, 0.31)
	CHC 4	NA	0.32 (0.25, 0.40)	NA	1.23 (0.90, 1.69)
ES Utilization (Nonusers)	Users	1.35 (1.16, 1.57)	0.96 (0.80, 1.17)	2.20 (1.58, 3.12)	1.97 (1.36, 2.88)
Age**		1.02 (1.02, 1.03)	1.02 (1.01, 1.02)	NA	NA
Gender (Female)***	Male	0.96 (0.88, 1.11)	0.93 (0.79, 1.08)	0.96 (0.76, 1.20)	0.97 (0.15, 0.51)
Insurance Source (Other)***	Public	2.94 (1.78, 5.11)	1.22 (0.70, 2.23)	22.88 (13.36, 42.30)	13.25 (7.51, 25.11)
	Uninsured	2.18 (1.25, 3.97)	0.99 (0.54, 1.85)	6.29 (2.85, 14.26)	9.04 (4.45, 18.61)
	Private	2.06 (1.21, 3.64)	0.77 (0.41, 1.47)	18.46 (9.90, 36.68)	2.75 (1.21, 6.38)
Ethnicity (AAPI)***	White	0.81 (0.60, 1.08)	1.29 (0.95, 1.75)	0.43 (0.24, 0.77)	0.45 (0.24, 0.86)
	Other	0.84 (0.60, 1.16)	0.81 (0.58, 1.15)	0.47 (0.32, 0.69)	0.45 (0.24, 0.86)

* OR = Odds Ratio, CI = Confidence Interval. OR for comparison of a given category to the reference category is statistically significant when the CI does not include 1.

** Age as continuous variable. Age was only included in the Adult Diabetes model, as all patients included for the Childhood Immunization measure were under age of 2.

*** Gender, Insurance Source and Ethnicity as categorical variables.

Service Date 12/16/02	Provider ID 1001	Patient ID 123456	Patient DOB 03/11/1945	Pt. Gender <input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F	Pt. Zip Code 10013
Encounter Type (check only one):		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Face to Face	<input type="checkbox"/> Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site	
Appointment Type (check only one):		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scheduled	<input type="checkbox"/> Walk-in		
Group or Individual (check only one):		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual			

Payor Source at time of service (circle)					
A. Managed Care		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> N	B. Sliding Fee	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N		
C. Carrier at time of service (check only one)					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medicaid		<input type="checkbox"/> Medicare		<input type="checkbox"/> Other Public including Non-Medicaid CHIP	
<input type="checkbox"/> Private		<input type="checkbox"/> Self-pay		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	

D. Primary Language (check only one)			E. Race/Ethnicity (check only one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Mandarin	<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian/Chamorro	<input type="checkbox"/> White
<input type="checkbox"/> Hmong	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan	<input type="checkbox"/> Wicajan	<input type="checkbox"/> South Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino
<input type="checkbox"/> Cantonese	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American
<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese	<input type="checkbox"/> Tagalog	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/> Filipino	<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaskan Native	<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - AAPI
<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Tibetan		<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese		<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Thai		<input type="checkbox"/> Korean		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify):
<input type="checkbox"/> Laotian	<input type="checkbox"/> Tongan		<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian		

F. ENABLING SERVICE	CODE	MINUTES (Circle one or specify in Other if > 120 minutes)	Other
Case Management - Assessment	CM001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Case Management - Treatment and Facilitation	CM002	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Case Management - Referral	CM003	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Financial Counseling/Eligibility Assistance	FC001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Health Education/Supportive Counseling	HE001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Interpretation Services	IN001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Outreach Services	OR001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Transportation	TR001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	
Other: describe services below	OT001	10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120	

G. Job Type			
<input type="checkbox"/> General Enabling Services Provider	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviewer	<input type="checkbox"/> Administrator/Case/Facility Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Nutritionist
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Case Manager	<input type="checkbox"/> Outreach Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Health Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacist
<input type="checkbox"/> Eligibility/Intake Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Provider	<input type="checkbox"/> Counselor/Therapist (licensed)	<input type="checkbox"/> Physician (MD or DO)
<input type="checkbox"/> Health Educator	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer	<input type="checkbox"/> Dental Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Physician Assistant
<input type="checkbox"/> Counselor/Therapist	<input type="checkbox"/> Consultant/Contractor	<input type="checkbox"/> Medical Assistant	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker (licensed)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provider Interservice other than English Mandarin		<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse (RN, APRN, LPN, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Healer
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	

Service Date 12/16/02	Provider ID 1001	Patient ID 123456	Patient DOB 03/11/1945	Pt. Gender <input type="checkbox"/> M <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F	Pt. Zip Code 10013
Encounter Type (check only one):		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Face to Face	<input type="checkbox"/> Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site	
Appointment Type (check only one):		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scheduled	<input type="checkbox"/> Walk-in		
Group or Individual (check only one):		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual			

Payor Source at time of service (circle)					
A. Managed Care		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> N	B. Sliding Fee	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N		
C. Carrier at time of service (check only one)					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medicaid		<input type="checkbox"/> Medicare		<input type="checkbox"/> Other Public including Non-Medicaid CHIP	
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D. Primary Language (check only one)			E. Race/Ethnicity (check only one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Mandarin	<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Guamanian/Chamorro	<input type="checkbox"/> White
<input type="checkbox"/> Hmong	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan	<input type="checkbox"/> Wicajan	<input type="checkbox"/> South Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Samoan	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino
<input type="checkbox"/> Cantonese	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American
<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese	<input type="checkbox"/> Tagalog	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/> Filipino	<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaskan Native	<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - AAPI
<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Tibetan		<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese		<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed - Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Korean	<input type="checkbox"/> Thai		<input type="checkbox"/> Korean		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify):
<input type="checkbox"/> Laotian	<input type="checkbox"/> Tongan		<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian		

F. ENABLING SERVICE	CODE	MINUTES (Circle one or specify in Other if > 120 minutes)	Other
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<input type="checkbox"/> Counselor/Therapist	<input type="checkbox"/> Consultant/Contractor	<input type="checkbox"/> Medical Assistant	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker (licensed)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provider Interservice other than English Mandarin		<input type="checkbox"/> Nurse (RN, APRN, LPN, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Healer
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	

Figure 1. Uniform Enabling Services Data Collection Template

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“OVER THE LAST FORTY YEARS, THE VIETNAMESE AMERICAN DIASPORA HAS GRADUALLY CHANGED ITS STATUS FROM REFUGEES TO POLITICALLY ACTIVE CONSTITUENTS.”

THE RISE OF THE VIETNAMESE AMERICAN POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ADVOCACY ON CAPITOL HILL

CINDY DINH AND BAO NGUYEN

ABSTRACT

Over the past four decades, Vietnamese immigrants and refugees have assimilated into American society, but have yet to realize their full political power. Since 2012, the Vietnamese American community has experienced a surge of political involvement by rallying for human rights issues in Vietnam. This article details the evolution of the Vietnamese American from “refugee status” to “constituent status,” particularly through the annual Vietnam Advocacy Day, which brings nearly one thousand Vietnamese Americans to meet with their Members of Congress in Washington, DC. This article chronicles these new historical accomplishments and places them within the context of nascent immigrant politics.

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the first wave of Vietnamese Americans arriving in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Southern Vietnamese fled their homeland after the Communist North captured Saigon

(now Ho Chi Minh City) on 30 April 1975. Over the next two decades, waves of political refugees breathed new life into the fabric of American society. Laws such as the Refugee Act of 1980 granted opportunities to political prisoners, children of American servicemen, and those who had belonged to or supported the South Vietnamese military and were suffering retaliation from the communist Vietnamese government.¹

Today, the Vietnamese American population has grown to over 1.5 million strong, with the majority of the community living in some of the largest cities in the nation: San Jose, California; Garden Grove, California; Westminster, California; and Houston, Texas.² Various measures of political engagement show signs that many Vietnamese Americans are moving from their refugee status to a more politically involved constituent status. The 2008 National Survey on Asian Americans found that 60 percent of Vietnamese respondents were registered to vote—higher than the overall average for Asian Americans, which stands at 54 percent.³ Some have also run for local or state-level elected positions. Moreover, through identity politics, Vietnamese Americans have partnered with Members of Congress (MOCs) who empathize and champion their causes on issues ranging from human rights to political freedom.

Indeed, many of the survivors and descendants of those who escaped the war have united under one common goal: to honor their cultural heritage and advocate for the interests of the Vietnamese people in the United States, Vietnam, and across the globe. Initiatives such as the annual Vietnam Advocacy Day and the Defending Freedoms Project, where MOCs adopt a prisoner of conscience from Vietnam, have been effective vehicles to establish the Vietnamese American footprint in US politics. “A growing number of Vietnamese Americans realize that being citizens of the United States is our best vantage point from which to effect democratic changes in Vietnam,” Dr. Thang Nguyen (no relation to author), executive director of Boat People SOS (BPSOS) explained. “By influencing U.S. foreign and trade policies, we may exert sufficient pressure on the Vietnamese authorities, forcing fundamental and irreversible concessions on human rights. We understand that such level of political influence can be achieved only if we, Vietnamese Americans across the country, come together, organize ourselves and act in concert.”⁴

VIETNAM HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Human rights issues have been a focal point of Vietnamese American political activism, particularly through legislation such as the Vietnam Human Rights Act. The bill prohibits nonhumanitarian aid to the government of Vietnam until the government has shown “substantial progress respecting political, media, and religious freedoms, minority rights, access to US refugee programs, return of confiscated religious estates and property, and actions to end trafficking in persons and the release of political prisoners.”⁵ While the US House of Representatives has passed the bill at least four times in the past, it has yet to pass through the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate.⁶ The committee chair determines whether a bill will move past the committee stage, and overall, about 11 percent of all bills get passed and onto the floor for a vote.⁷ The effort to gain more MOCs to cosponsor the bill will likely continue until the legislation passes.

UNITED NATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Despite the long list of human rights violations, Vietnam has been an elected member of the United Nation's Human Rights Council (UNHRC) since November 2013 for a three-year term.⁸ For membership purposes, the Council considers the country's “contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as [its] voluntary pledges and commitments.”⁹ Although Vietnam has agreed to adopt the human rights

laws suggested by the UNHRC, it has not shown significant steps toward meeting its obligations. Notably, on Human Rights Day in 2013, peaceful gatherings in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City were violently interrupted by police, citing distribution of government propaganda as the major violation.¹⁰ Similar civil infractions have raised concern for many Vietnamese Americans who have significant ties to Vietnam and have sparked their desire to advocate for changes in fundamental human rights in Vietnam.

VIETNAM ADVOCACY DAY

The annual Vietnam Advocacy Day (VNAD) in Washington, DC, combines grassroots mobilization with political lobbying to bring Vietnamese American constituents and MOCs together to discuss key issues facing the Vietnamese community. Under the leadership of Dr. Thang Nguyen of BPSOS and former Congressman Anh Joseph Cao, as well as key support from popular ethnic media Saigon Broadcasting Television Network (SBTN) on DirecTV, Vietnamese American leaders held the first VNAD in 2012 to “promote the political empowerment of Vietnamese American communities across the United States as well as human rights and democracy for Vietnamese people in Vietnam.”¹¹ Since then, in addition to advocacy on Capitol Hill, VNADs occur alongside leadership and civil society conferences, White House briefings, and rallies that alternate every year.

In its founding year, five hundred members of the Vietnamese American community met on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, to meet their MOCs and brief the legislative staff on Vietnam’s deteriorating human rights record. Through ethnic media and word of mouth, participants were recruited from across the nation, representing between thirty and forty states. For many, VNAD was their first time engaging on this level of the democratic process. To bridge the knowledge gap, participants learned

about the legislative process through bilingual trainings and developed talking points to call on Congress, to ensure that the Vietnamese government improves its human rights record before expanding US-Vietnam relations.¹² Combined, participants visited between one hundred and fifty and two hundred congressional offices in a single day.

According to Nguyen, there is a key difference between the new VNAD model and the previous efforts of the Vietnamese community to affect political change. “In the past, the Vietnamese American community focused mainly on demonstrations, rallies, or petition campaigns, which defined us as ‘outsiders,’” Nguyen said. “With VNAD, we insert ourselves into the policy-making process by educating legislators on issues of concern to us, pointing out the intersection between America’s national interests and the promotion of human rights, and offering practical recommendations on trade, security, and diplomatic policies towards Vietnam.”¹³

26-27 MARCH 2012:

ONLINE PETITION AND WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING

The first VNAD in 2012 advocated for the sponsorship and passage of the Vietnam Human Rights Act. The event was coupled with a briefing at the White House hosted by the Office of Public Engagement, where two hundred VNAD participants met with representatives from the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and the US Department of State. The event was spearheaded by grassroots advocacy through an online petition to the Obama administration on the website Wethepeople.gov. Earlier that year, the administration announced it would respond to any citizen-created petition that reached over 50,000 signatures in one month. On 7 February 2012, BPSOS in collaboration with SBTN launched a petition entitled, “Stop Expanding Trade at the Expense of Human Rights,” which garnered an overwhelming 150,945 signatures and set the record, at the time, for the

most number of signatures since the website’s inception. The petition implores the president to condition Vietnam’s pending membership to trade agreements (such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership [TPP] and Generalized System of Preferences, which remove import and export tariffs among member nations), “upon the immediate and unconditional release of all detained or imprisoned human rights champions. Show the world America puts freedom first.”¹⁴

Michael Posner, then assistant secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the US Department of State, responded with a statement explaining the release of political prisoners and freedom of religion as “a necessary part of improving United States-Vietnam relations.”¹⁵ He urged Vietnam “to release all political prisoners, strengthen religious freedom, ratify and implement the Convention Against Torture, and take other steps to protect and promote universal human rights.”¹⁶

4 JUNE 2013: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS AND WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING

After the first successful VNAD, the community leveraged this momentum to expand on the second annual VNAD. With participant attendance climbing to eight hundred strong thanks to the use of online platforms such as e-mail and social media, BPSOS established committees to identify different areas of domestic concerns affecting the Vietnamese American community. These committees proposed legislative actions centered on improving accessibility of bilingual resources to recent immigrants, pushing for equal economic opportunities for Asian American women, and increasing leadership opportunities for young leaders in the community.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the community continued to press for human rights and political reform in Vietnam, demanding that Vietnam be held accountable to its human and labor trafficking laws as part of

the TPP. Following the 2013 VNAD, providing much triumph and moral encouragement to VNAD participants, the House of Representatives voted to pass the Vietnam Human Rights Act in late 2014.

27-28 MARCH 2014: TRANSNATIONAL PANELS

Digital technology helped bridge the geographical divide during the third VNAD, which featured panels of international human rights experts, researchers, and MOCs at the Vietnam Civil Society Conference. Each panel featured a human rights defender from Vietnam who appeared live via videoconference; for example, panelist Nguyen Van Dai, an attorney and founder of the Committee of Human Rights was under house arrest during the conference. He was arrested in March 2007 on charges for “conducting propaganda” against the state under Vietnam’s vaguely worded Article 88 of the Penal Code.¹⁸ During the panel, Dai shared his views on the current state of prodemocracy activists and bloggers in Vietnam and gave powerful testimony about the unethical treatment he received during his detainment.

DEFENDING FREEDOMS PROJECT: MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ADOPT PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

According to several international human rights organizations, such as the US Commission for International Religious Freedom and Amnesty International, Vietnam has systematically violated basic human rights, particularly freedom of speech, freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of the press.¹⁹ In 2013, the US State Department described Vietnam’s human rights record as “poor” and listed significant problems with the government’s restrictions on its citizens’ political rights.²⁰ In recent years, dozens of vocal activists have disappeared, been wrongfully jailed, or been placed under house arrest with continuous harassment from local authorities. These citizen activists have been considered “prisoners of conscience,” defined as “any person who is physically restrained (by imprisonment or otherwise) from expressing (in any form of words or symbols) any opinion which he honestly holds and which does not advocate or condone personal violence.”²¹

Since December 2012, MOCs have adopted prisoners of conscience from around the world to advocate for more humane treatment, a reduced sentence, or a full release. Through the Defending Freedoms Project, MOCs can elevate a prisoner’s profile by giving one-minute speeches on the House floor, pressing the Department of State and the White House to prioritize the prisoner’s case, holding hearings for relevant legislation, or ensuring that delegations traveling to Vietnam raise concerns about the prisoners.²² As of November 2014, MOCs have adopted thirteen Vietnamese prisoners, more than one-third of all adopted prisoners in the Defending Freedoms Project—and the most of any country.²³

Following the March 2014 VNAD, MOCs adopted six more prisoners of conscience from Vietnam; amongst them was Pastor Duong Kim Khai. After an impactful meeting with Vietnamese American constituents, Representative Ted Poe (R-Texas) adopted Pastor Duong, who has been detained thirteen times since the 1990s for organizing prayer sessions without government permission to worship. Poe delivered speeches on the House floor about Duong’s plight: “If he is guilty of anything, it is of living to serve others and stand up to an oppressive government,” Poe said. “Freedom to worship is a human right, and the Vietnamese government should immediately release him. Furthermore, I call on the State Department to finally recognize Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern.”²⁴

15-16 JUNE 2014: MARITIME SOVEREIGNTY DISPUTES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

In recent years, Vietnam has experienced increased tension with its northern neighbor, China, regarding the sovereignty and control of several small islands in the South China Sea that are rich in natural gas and serve as major global trade routes.²⁵ The dispute over Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands escalated in 2014, when fishermen from both countries claimed sovereignty over the islands. Vietnamese American advocates gathered on Capitol Hill for a two-day event for the Vietnam Freedom and Democracy Day to bring this issue to the attention of Members of Congress and the public. The itinerary consisted of meetings with individual Congressmen and requesting assistance from the US government to peacefully resolve this land dispute while promoting the passage of Senate Resolution 412. Sponsored by Senator Robert Menendez (D-New Jersey), the resolution calls for China to withdraw a strategically placed drilling rig in the disputed waters.²⁶

After bringing this issue to the attention of MOCs, Senate Resolution 412 was unanimously passed on 10 July 2014. In December 2014, the US State Department published its own study examining the maritime claims in the South China Sea, specifically questioning the validity of China's nine-dash line.²⁷ China responded by dismissing the study's conclusions.²⁸ This dispute remains ongoing and will continue to be part of the discussion at future VNADs.

RESULTS

After just three years of advocacy, the Vietnamese American community has furthered its political footprint. Representatives Frank Wolf (R-Virginia), Chris Smith (R-New Jersey), Ed Royce (R-California), Zoe Lofgren (D-California), Dana Rohrabacher (R-California), Loretta Sanchez (D-California), Jim Moran (D-Virginia), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), Gerald Connolly (D-Virginia), and Alan Lowenthal (D-California) and Senators Barbara

Boxer (D-California), and Ben Cardin (D-Maryland), John Cornyn (R-Texas) are just a few of the Congressional leaders who have cosponsored the Vietnam Human Rights Act and its related legislation over the past congressional terms.

Moreover, several Vietnamese prisoners of conscience have been released within the past year. In April 2014, the Vietnamese government released legal scholar Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu and bloggers Nguyen Tien Trung and Vi Duc Hoi within a week after the March 2014 VNAD.²⁹ Later, in October 2014, blogger Nguyen Van Hai, better known by his pen name "Dieu Cay," was released. Many of these bloggers were charged under Vietnam's ambiguous Article 88 of the Penal Code for "conducting propaganda" against the state.³⁰ Both Vu and Dieu Cay were immediately put on a plane to the United States following their release.³¹ Additionally, bloggers Nguyen Tien Trung and Vi Duc Hoi were freed from house arrest. "It was due to international pressure that the government of Vietnam had to release me," Hoi said.³² International organizations contributing to Hoi's release by elevating his profile included Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the US Department of State, and a number of private law firms who performed pro bono work to file petitions to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Despite these releases, "there are still hundreds more political prisoners languishing in Vietnam's prisons, so there is a very long way to go before we can say that Vietnam is making any sort of appreciable progress on human rights."³³

To continue the dialogue with congressional offices after VNAD, participants tapped into their networks to raise funds and sponsor a full-time congressional staffer dedicated to advancing the issues of the Vietnamese American community. Based in Congressman Frank Wolf's office, the staffer acts as a liaison to the MOCs who have adopted prisoners of conscience through the Defending Freedoms Project.³⁴

Furthermore, another successful outcome of VNAD was the establishment of VietAction. Comprising 1.5-generation and second-generation Vietnamese Americans who met at previous VNADs, this self-organized youth group is dedicated to advocating for the political, economic, and social empowerment of Vietnamese communities domestically and abroad.

CONCLUSION

Over the last forty years, the Vietnamese American diaspora has gradually changed its status from refugees to politically active constituents. This is evident in the recent number of Vietnamese Americans running for elected office, whether on the local, state, or national level. For example, Bao Nguyen (no relation to author) became the first Vietnamese American mayor (Garden Grove, California) while Janet Nguyen became the first Vietnamese American state senator (California). Additionally, Hubert Vo was the first and only Vietnamese American to be elected to the Texas legislature thus far, though there have been other Vietnamese American candidates in the race. There has not been another Vietnamese American in Congress since Anh Joseph Cao; yet the community's desire to participate in the US legislative process through organized advocacy has grown exponentially. The annual Vietnam Advocacy Day has played a significant role in developing community leaders and setting an advocacy platform for the Vietnamese American community. Major milestones, such as the passage of the Vietnam Human Rights Act in the House and the adoption of several Vietnamese prisoners of conscience by Members of Congress, are results derived from the teamwork and dedication of community leaders.

In remembrance of the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War forty years ago, VNAD 2015, entitled "Our Journey to Freedom," will include advocacy meetings with MOCs and a celebration at

the John F. Kennedy Center of the Performing Arts to pay tribute to American veterans and veterans of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam who served together during the Vietnam War. The organizers expect a strong turnout from the Vietnamese American community as a symbol of their appreciation to the United States for accepting and nurturing thousands of Vietnamese refugees.

As the Vietnamese American community evolves, so may the issues and concerns of the constituents. However, the framework for grassroots mobilization and political advocacy has been built and tested. Through the VNAD model, "Vietnamese American communities from coast to coast will be well empowered, organized and equipped to assert our political influence by 2016, an election year," Thang Nguyen said. "That way, we will help to consolidate democracy in America in the process of promoting democracy for Vietnam." 35

Further information on the mission and goals of Vietnam Advocacy Day can be found at the Coalition for a Free and Democratic Vietnam website (<http://www.cfdvn.org/>).

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“THE ANNUAL VIETNAM ADVOCACY DAY IN WASHINGTON, DC, COMBINES GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION WITH POLITICAL LOBBYING TO BRING VIETNAMESE AMERICAN CONSTITUENTS AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TOGETHER TO DISCUSS KEY ISSUES FACING THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY.”



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House of Representatives

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE, PASTOR DUONG KIM KHAI

HON TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 8, 2014

Mr. Speaker, Pastor Duong Kim Khai, a prisoner held in Vietnam, has nurtured the spiritual lives of his parishioners and helped those of all faiths that have been victims of injustice in Ben Tre and Dong Thap. He has also served as an advocate for Vietnamese farmers whose land was confiscated by the government. If he is guilty of anything it is of living to serve others and stand up to an oppressive government. I call on the Vietnamese government to release him immediately.

During the 1990s, the Pastor was detained thirteen times, often for organizing prayer sessions. Soon after, he turned his home into a place of worship, as well as a community center where farmers could seek assistance in petitioning authorities. Because he did not have the government's permission to worship, his home was seized by the local government, and he was imprisoned for two years.

On August 16, 2010, he was arrested for supposedly trying to overthrow the Vietnamese government, a convenient charge from a government bent on silencing him. For the next two months, his place of detention and his condition of health were kept secret from his family.

Denied legal representation and with diplomats denied access to his trial, Pastor Duong Kim Khai was sentenced to 2-8 years in prison and 3-5 probation. Unfortunately, his wife, who was never able to visit her husband in prison, has since passed away.

Pastor Duong Kim Khai's trial was a sham and his imprisonment is unacceptable. Freedom to worship is a human right, and the Vietnamese government should immediately release him. Furthermore, I call on the State Department to finally recognize Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern.

And that's just the way it is.

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BAO NGUYEN

BAO NGUYEN is a fourth-year PhD candidate at the University of Maryland, studying bioengineering and is financially supported by the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program. For her thesis, Nguyen is developing bone tissue engineering strategies for regenerative applications. She is also an involved advocate in her local Vietnamese American community in the Washington, DC, Metro area, organizing the annual Vietnamese American Youth Leadership Conference since 2009, and participating in Vietnam Advocacy Day 2013 and 2014 as part of the youth voice. She is greatly motivated by the sacrifices made by Vietnamese immigrants who have found a supportive and accepting home in the United States after fleeing Vietnam. She hopes that with increased awareness and involvement, youth advocates can continue to make a difference in local and national decisions affecting the Vietnamese community in the United States and abroad. After graduating, she intends to contribute to federal policy making by combining her interest in science and public policy.



CINDY DINH

CINDY M. DINH is a second-year law student at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law and in a joint JD/master in public administration degree program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She is interested in voting rights and access to health care, especially among immigrant populations and those with limited English proficiency. Since 2009, she has organized legislative advocacy visits for religious clerics and community leaders to discuss the Vietnam Human Rights Act with Members of Congress and was the youngest and only female panelist at a White House Briefing on Vietnamese American issues in March 2012. Prior to law school, she was an editor of the Asian American Policy Review at the Harvard Kennedy School, volunteered for six years as a teacher at Trong Viet Ngu Hùng Vuong, served on the Board of the Houston chapter of OCA (a national Asian American social justice organization), and successfully petitioned and reinstated an Asian American Studies course at Rice University, which had not been offered in over ten years. Dinh is also the coinventor of the DoseRight Syringe Clip, which was recognized at the Clinton Global Initiative University at UC San Diego.

A CONVERSATION WITH CHANG-RAE LEE

INTERVIEWED BY DANIEL
YOUNGWON LEE



CHANG-RAE LEE IS THE AUTHOR OF *NATIVE SPEAKER*, WINNER OF THE HEMINGWAY FOUNDATION/PEN/HEMINGWAY AWARD FOR FIRST FICTION; *A GESTURE LIFE*; *ALOFT*; AND *THE SURRENDERED*, WINNER OF THE DAYTON PEACE PRIZE AND A FINALIST FOR THE PULITZER PRIZE. SELECTED BY THE NEW YORKER AS ONE OF THE "20 WRITERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY," LEE IS PROFESSOR IN THE LEWIS CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY AND A SHINHAN DISTINGUISHED VISITING PROFESSOR AT YONSEI UNIVERSITY. HIS MOST RECENT BOOK IS *ON SUCH A FULL SEA*.

This interview took place on 23 January 2015.

AAPR: Before becoming a novelist, you worked on Wall Street as an equity analyst. Tell us about your transition from finance to writing.

LEE: I always wanted to write. I always held in the back of my psyche and spirit that it would be nice to be a writer; it would be nice to write both as an activity and as a vocation. But, I don't think I ever held myself the luxury of that thought or at least the sustained thought that I could make a life that way. That's partly because of the way I've been raised. My parents were very generous and in many ways liberal-minded people. However, their conception of what I would do and what we were all doing as an immigrant family, without a safety net or a tradition of a certain kind of cultural life in this country . . . writing just wasn't part of the equation. I took that job not because I really wanted to work on Wall Street. More than anything else, I just really wanted a job and it was the best available job.

AAPR: And it isn't a bad job to have right out of college.

LEE: [laughs] No, it was a very good job. I actually enjoyed the work, and I especially enjoyed my colleagues. They were all incredibly smart. But one of the things about that job that struck me was that many of my colleagues were only at the firm until they could do what they really wanted to do. Some of them even wanted to write novels! During that time, I was living with a close friend of mine from boarding school and he also loved to write. His name is Brooks Hansen and he found early success publishing a jointly written first novel, *Boone*, which got a good amount of attention. That inspired me.

I had written a lot in high school. Not so much in any formal way during college. But again, writing was something that I wanted to do. So once I got to that idea, I felt as if I should give writing a chance and that it would be better to give it a chance now rather than "make millions of dollars and do it when I'm forty-something years old," which everyone says they're going to do. But life is totally different then. Our consciousness is totally different. Our circumstances are totally different. And it's much, much harder to start writing then.

I decided to quit my job just after a year and take the leap, thinking that it would be better for me to try it then. Also, it was probably easier to convince my parents that it was a better moment for me to do it—to try to write for a few years, and if it didn't work out, go back to doing whatever. My parents always hoped I would go to law school because I was an English major or that I would go back to Wall Street. I suppose I didn't have too many worries about that. I, too, thought that could always happen because I was still young. But I wanted to give it a shot then, so I did.

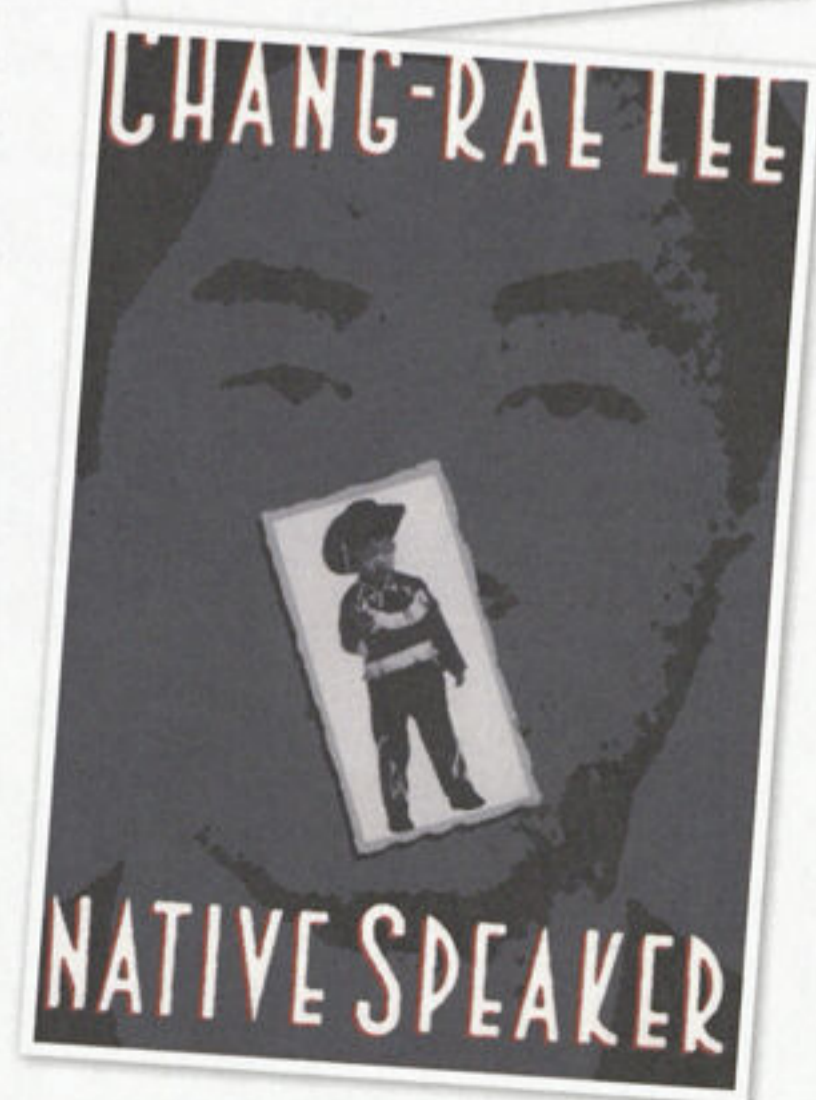
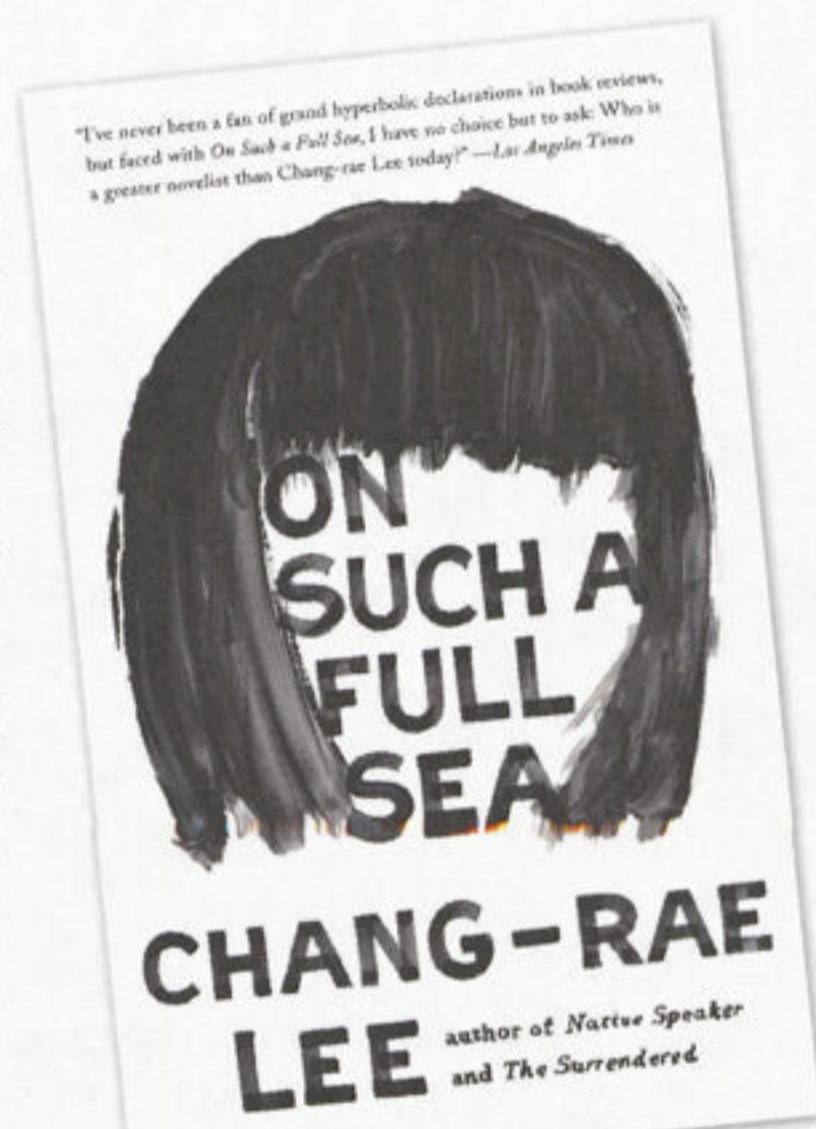
AAPR: After leaving Wall Street, you enrolled in the MFA in writing program at the University of Oregon to pursue your craft. Were there obstacles you faced as an emerging Asian American novelist?

LEE: I think I was very fortunate. I know that many writers of color who go to MFA programs have had a difficult time presenting, discussing, and receiving critique on their work. Junot Diaz has famously written about that, about writers of color having real challenges in MFA programs, whether it's because those programs don't recognize them or that the kinds of way they talk about "ethnic fiction" is often based in ignorance, bias, or other sorts of disheartening or dispiriting kinds of discourse.

AAPR: Were some of these kinds of discourse something that you had

INTERVIEW

“WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT IS THAT I WORK WITH INTEGRITY AND PASSION AND RESPECT TO THE ART.”



experienced or at least overheard?

LEE: I had heard about that, but I was fortunate because the new director of the program at Oregon at the time was Garrett Hongo, a Japanese American poet who grew up in California with deep Hawaiian roots and who was very much conscious of these issues in his workshops. He was a poet and I knew we weren't going to work together in terms of writing technique; however, I felt like he was an artistic mentor for me. And he really was. He helped me situate my work in the context in which I wanted to see it, rather than another kind of context in which I would have to constantly explain myself or have to constantly struggle against. I think this is a problem a lot of writers of color at these programs end up facing.

Writing is hard enough, but when you have to constantly educate or contest the context or language by which that work will be discussed, it can be an obstacle that stops writing. It inhibits creativity. So, I didn't have those feelings. I did have some instructors that weren't that helpful, but the atmosphere and tenor of the program was really inspiring.

AAPR: Things have come full circle for you. As a professor of creative writing at Princeton University, you now serve as a mentor to a younger generation of writers. What led you to pursue teaching?

LEE: I assumed that after my graduate work, I would go back to New York and live the life of a writer—publish a book and do all that. [laughs] I did publish a work, but Garrett asked me to stay on as an assistant professor in the program. I had taught some writing sections as a graduate student and enjoyed it. I thought it would be a nice way to support myself because with the kind of writing that I do, you're not writing to make money. You would like to make money and you'd like to have a large readership, but no one would go into writing literary fiction because they thought they could really support themselves. [laughs] I also thought teaching would give me some stability. I knew I wanted to have a family someday so I thought that would be a good thing.

In reflection, I guess it just turned out to be something that I always did in concert with my writing just from the start. So just in terms of my creative energy and intellectual partitioning, I guess it all developed from the start so that I could do both. And I really enjoyed my teaching over the years.

AAPR: I imagine the challenges of being a writer and the challenges of someone guiding writing are totally different.

LEE: They totally are. When I'm in the classroom, I'm focused on what the creative and intellectual needs of that particular student are. We discuss things that will help them create a more ideal approach to their work. I'm not trying to make my students write like me or think like me. Instead, I'm trying to figure out what they want to write about and how to optimize that. It's really like a therapist in that way. You're trying to listen, trying to observe. Of course, you have your own opinions, but those opinions are in service of helping them as much as possible. Obviously, you have your own set of experiences and knowledge about writing and literature, and you bring that to it, but I hope it's not ego driven.

It is totally different when I'm at my writing desk. It's all about shoving everything else out. It's about a pure kind of focus on what I want to see, hear, and feel in terms of superlatives. Teaching and writing, in fact, they're sort of opposite activities. And I try not to bring my teaching life into my writing life.

AAPR: Do you find that difficult to do?

LEE: I actually don't find it that difficult. Maybe it's because I've always done it, that I'm used to putting up those walls. I know that other writers have said, "I hear myself giving advice, I hear myself giving advice!" [laughs] I don't think artistically that really works. Artists are always exhorting themselves, or counseling themselves, but in a slightly different way than you might as a teacher.

AAPR: The success of your earlier works like *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life* led many in the literary world to appoint you as the next great Asian American writer. What are your thoughts on such a coronation? Were there any burdens or frustrations you felt with this label?

LEE: It's always nice to be recognized and noticed. Different readers and different quarters of the reading public will have different interests when discussing writers. The "leading Asian American writer" moniker, all those kind of things, was always to me more necessary for the reading public than for the writer. [laughs] The reading public, whether it's for commercial, philosophical, or cultural purposes . . . that's how some people are able to

understand or catalog people. It's really more about that than any truth or legitimate position that a writer can take. We can always talk about who are the great American writers, and obviously it's subjective and it's always dynamic, and there's not really one thing, never one set of lists that is definitive.

In the end, I'm not frustrated. Rather, I try to think of it, and I really see it as, something totally outside of me, as something that I do not want to have ingrained in any of my consciousness about myself because I know that such labels really mean nothing. What's really important is that I work with integrity and passion and respect to the art.

AAPR: In your earlier novels like *Native Speaker*, you explore Asian American identities and, to a larger degree, outsider identities. Do such themes arise from your own personal upbringing as a person of color in the United States?

LEE: It does have my experiences in it. I would say that my experience as a private person and what I empirically know is much less dramatic than what I write about. [laughs] When you write about things, there's an accentuation going on, a kind of crystallization that requires certain dramatic and lingual actions that weren't going on in my regular life. So, I don't want to say this is my life and this is what I write. It's not exactly like that. But these are the sets of sensitivities, stances, and positions in the culture that I've had over the years. One of those positions is to be an observer, someone who understands that he's not completely aligned with the context or culture that he inhabits. That there is a sense of difference or certain kind of dissonance between those two entities. So yeah, that's something that I've often written about. Not so much in my last two books, particularly my fourth book, but it's always there. But again, as with any writer, that writer does live life and observe things differently. So again, it's part of what has generated a lot of my thinking. I don't know how much of that will figure into my future work.

AAPR: In your most recent novel, *On Such a Full Sea*, you write of an America afflicted with class struggle, climate change, and health epidemics. It's impossible to not see the parallels with the issues we face today. Are you a keen follower of current events, news, and politics, and do you try to incorporate these things into your writing?

LEE: I would say that I'm a very avid newspaper reader—the political pages, business pages, culture sections . . . I guess I try not to live in the world but instead try to keep abreast of all the things that are happening. If you are a keen reader of this or just an avid reader of a good newspaper or journal, there are a lot of things going on that are deeply, deeply alarming. [laughs] I think that those things are a part of who you are and they certainly a part of who I am. That doesn't mean I sat down with *On Such a Full Sea* and said, "I'm going to write about these issues." But whenever you write about the world, and even if it's a speculative world, that world does include human beings and their pursuits, beliefs, and fears. I guess that all these issues that I've just been anxious and concerned about—class differences, the environment, health care, income inequality—they all just bubbled up to the surface.

AAPR: The society that you construct in your latest book is a rigidly stratified one between the haves and have-nots. Does this come from a personal view or critique you hold on contemporary America?

LEE: I think the book is a critique on a lot of things. It's a critique on American status and its decline. It's a critique on class and the rigid structures that we have in our society. On the ways in which our government and our tax codes reward certain activities and not others. [laughs] It's a critique of a kind of, I would say, deeply neurotic energy that I think all this kind of fraught living is reaching upon us spiritually and emotionally, as so-called civilized people. It's a compendium of all my anxieties and qualms.

AAPR: Would you call yourself an anxious person? Or maybe just someone with many thoughts?

LEE: Well, I think those two things go hand in hand. [laughs] Probably in the scheme of things, I am more anxious than others. I probably don't seem anxious to people, but the run of thoughts is, if you keep thinking about all of these issues and their aspects, it's hard to get out of them. It's hard to look at them and remain calm.

AAPR: Speaking of anxiety, there have been a number of films and books that were released this past year, leading many to see 2014 as the year of the dystopia. I am curious of your thoughts on why our society is obsessed with the end.

LEE: First, I never thought of *On Such a Full Sea* primarily as a dystopian novel. It obviously does have some dystopian features, but I think the book uses it as a backdrop and is more concerned about other things, including some of the issues we discussed.

But to answer your question, I think that we all have a sense, and I don't know if it's just Americans, but also

“developed nation peoples,” that we are profoundly out of balance in our world and in our society in various aspects. Whether we’re environmentally, economically, financially out of balance, we are in precarious positions. We’re always on the cusp of some bubble. And I think that that’s what people are feeling. It’s a feeling that perhaps we’re using both our world and ourselves up at a rate that can lead only to disillusion and disaster. I think people have always worried about the end of the world, but perhaps more so now because we have so much information on things that are going on. We need our imagination to understand how fragile things might be. So I think it’s a natural result of all the information that we have.

AAPR: Is there anything else you would like to pursue besides writing?

LEE: I think it would be fun to write for a television show. Just for something different. Let me take a step back. Maybe create a show and lay it out rather than write one. [laughs]

AAPR: A sitcom or something more dramatic?

LEE: It could be either a sitcom or a dramatic series. There are some funny or screwy ideas that I would like to exercise that I think aren’t particularly great for novel forms, but may be more appropriate for a television format. But that’s just stuff I dabble with and not seriously pursuing because between the teaching and writing novels, I barely have enough time.

AAPR: What do you like to read for fun?

LEE: I read a lot of different things. I read a lot of novels. A lot of novels are sent to me. I read some philosophy, and I read the paper. [laughs]

A novel that I recently enjoyed a lot was *In the Light of What We Know* by Zia Haider Rahman. In fact, he used to be a banker! [laughs] It’s his first novel, but it’s quite a brilliant novel. He’s a South Asian writer who talks about a lot of different things in his book: epistemology, love, race and ethnicity, mathematics, post-9/11. A book about a lot of different things that I think AAPR readers will find particularly gripping.

AAPR: Our journal’s audience is mostly younger Asian American students and readers. As you can personally attest to, many young Asian Americans tend to choose more traditional and stable career paths instead of something more passionate like the arts. Any words of wisdom for our readers?

LEE: We have such talented people with lots of energy and ideas in our community. I just can’t believe that all that talent is meant to be in three or four fields—banking, consulting, law, medicine. [laughs] If you really think about it, right now is an exciting time because our community is really starting to get established. We have to remember we’re still, in the most diverse way, a very young community. I know that there were Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans here from many years ago, but since 1965, the full range of Asian diversity in this country has really blossomed. So I think we’ve now become a little more established. I think it really behooves us to go out into these other fields, including government, maybe especially government.

The one thing that I would say is there are many ways to pursue an honorable, prosperous, and significant life of work, and I think we’re established enough to really believe that.



HARVARD Kennedy School

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THE SHORENSTEIN CENTER analyzes the power of media, in all its forms, and its impact on public policy and politics. Through research, teaching, high-profile events and engagement, the Center plays a leading role in the discussion about media and politics in the 21st century. Digital technology pushes the impact of the Center far beyond Cambridge.



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IF YOU DON'T KNOW,
NOW YOU KNOW:
AN INTERVIEW WITH
EDDIE HUANG

INTERVIEWED BY DANIEL
YOUNGWON LEE



EDDIE HUANG IS A CHEF, WRITER, TV HOST, FASHION DESIGNER, SPEAKER, AND PRODUCER BASED IN NEW YORK CITY AND LOS ANGELES, WHOSE WORK IS RECOGNIZED FOR BRIDGING FOOD WITH MUSIC, CULTURE, COMEDY, POLITICS, AND METROPOLITAN LIFE. HE IS WIDELY KNOWN AS THE CHEF AND OWNER OF THE POPULAR TAIWANESE RESTAURANT BAOHAUS IN NEW YORK CITY'S EAST VILLAGE AND AS AN ADVOCATE FOR THE YOUNG AND CULTURED AND EXPERIENCED FOODIES ALIKE.

HUANG HAS CREATED SEVERAL PROJECTS UNDER THE MONIKER "FRESH OFF THE BOAT," BEGINNING WITH HIS POPULAR BLOG. THE NAME THEN WENT TO HIS INGENUOUS TRAVELOGUE SERIES WITH VICE MEDIA—A "GENRE-BENDING VENTURE OF SUBCULTURES THROUGH THE LENS OF FOOD," WHICH FEATURES HUANG TRAVELING DOMESTICALLY AND ABROAD. HE IS CURRENTLY EXECUTIVE PRODUCING THE SEASON 3 OF THE SERIES. HE ALSO ADOPTED THE FRESH OFF THE BOAT NAME FOR HIS FIRST BOOK AND MEMOIR, RELEASED BY PUBLISHER SPIEGEL AND GRAU, WHICH BECAME A NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLER IN ITS FIRST WEEK OF RELEASE IN 2013. 20TH CENTURY FOX OPTIONED THE MEMOIR AND BROUGHT HUANG ON BOARD TO PRODUCE A SITCOM OF THE SAME NAME, WHICH PREMIERED IN FEBRUARY 2015 TO INCREDIBLE RATINGS FOR ABC.

This interview took place on 6 December 2014.

AAPR: I have a couple of quick question to help get this conversation going. Last meal you ate?

EDDIE HUANG: I went to Peter Luger's last night. I did the steak for four, creamed spinach, German hash, tomato onion salad, Hennessy XO . . . and a coffee. [laughs]

AAPR: Last book you read?

HUANG: Oh, and we had the bacon. I'm currently reading Charles Bukowski's *Ham on Rye*.

AAPR: Last time you voted?

HUANG: 2012. I stopped voting for a reason. I know the more conscious thing, the better thing, is to vote, right? I just don't think this system works. You have to trust these people to remain Jedi and not fall victim to Beltway politics, lobbyists, and all that. But they've all been bought. I don't believe in this system because it makes it easier for people to control our democracy. If all you have to control is the representatives, that's easy.

AAPR: Your favorite city?

HUANG: I just like New York. Favorite city? It's so far New York that the close second is not even close. I would say a very distant second is, hmm . . . I'll tell you that my favorite vacation was always Hawaii. I like fish, man. Fish don't say shit. You could look at them all day and they don't say shit. I like being underwater cause underwater seems like another planet. I would say Hawaii, Taipei, and Paris. Those are the three other places I really like to go.

AAPR: What do you think are some of the bigger issues facing the Asian American community?

HUANG: I don't want to answer any questions that have "biggest" or "best" or whatever because I don't believe in that. I'll give you my opinion, that's all. I think that's important because certain people will ask me about Asian America, and they'll want me to say objectively or cumulatively what things should be. But that's not why I'm here. I'll give my opinion, and I really hope other Asian Americans will speak up with their opinions.

But I will say this. Our community has done very well—done well economically and done well scholastically in America. Our achievements though have been entirely overblown. If you look at the Census, there's a lot of Asian kids who are struggling with school. There are a lot of organizations trying to help illiterate Chinese kids who can't even apply to college. There are some Asians who are very high achieving and they did that on their own merit, but people are always trying to connect this shit. It's like when White people do something well, it's never a result of their race or a result of their privilege. It's always entirely merit based, that they did that themselves. When Asians do something well, it's like, it must be green tea, it must be the antioxidants in green tea. It must be their upbringing.

AAPR: I imagine you have in mind the recent discussions on tiger parenting.

HUANG: Yeah, that tiger mom shit is ridiculous. It's the idea that people are going to explain off Asian achievement in certain areas . . . that's fucking

“PEOPLE LOOK AT US LIKE WE'RE THESE EXOTIC, TEST-TAKING, FUCKING BEAN-COUNTING, GREEN TEA-DRINKING MOTHERFUCKERS. THAT'S NOT US, MAN.”



ridiculous. People do it on their own. Nobody else takes the SAT for us. They take it on their fucking own. The other thing is, nobody asks these questions to White people. If you're a minority, you have to be smart enough to not answer these fucking questions. Don't allow them to frame this conversation. And another thing is, when people in the '80s and '90s noticed that African Americans were dominating professional sports, they thought they must have an extra ligament or extra tendon, they must have better hamstrings. Nah. People work, man. People work.

AAPR: In your memoir *Fresh Off the Boat*, you wrote that as a kid you hated having the expectation of being the representative or the statement of the Chinese people in your community.

HUANG: I don't like it when you're the only Asian person somewhere and inevitably everything that you do becomes the stereotype for all other Asian people. They impress all the expectations of Asian people on you. That is extremely unfair, and that's the shittiest part about America. As the only one, everything you do becomes crystallized as a stereotype or a stigma, and everything that others have seen before, you have to do as well.

I don't like being a token Asian. I don't think anybody likes being a token anything. I definitely believe that I represent a part of Asian America, that there are a lot of kids like me out there. I really enjoy talking about it because when I was growing up, there weren't other people who were. There weren't other Asian people I could relate to. I think that it's important that people talk—and not just accomplished people.

You go to school, you go to classes, you read novels in school, but there's never one from an Asian writer. It's, like, Maxine Hong Kingston and the *Joy Luck Club*, but much love to Maxine Hong Kingston. She's the OG.

AAPR: Are you purposefully trying to fill a gap in Asian American representation in our culture?

HUANG: I never go out thinking, "Oh, I want to fill this gap, or there's a market demand for that." I've never done that. I just lived a very different life. I just want to tell people about the first time I saw mac and cheese and thought it looked fucking weird. I want to tell people about the first time people tried to explain my achievement or success with green tea, or my mom hitting me with a spatula, or my dad telling me to kneel with a rice bucket on my head. The time my mom got a restraining order against my dad because she wanted him to respect her mind. I have a very, very unique family that doesn't fit in the Chinese/ Taiwanese stereotype.

I really like to use my life in specific examples. We're people. We're humans. We're not demographics. We're not a race. At the end of the day, we're people. I really get sick of people talking about us like numbers, demos, and test scores. It's disgusting, man. People look at us like we're these exotic, test-taking, fucking bean-counting, green tea-drinking motherfuckers. That's not us, man.

AAPR: Do you find that certain progress has been achieved by the Asian American community?

HUANG: I think this is a conversation for Asian Americans to have amongst themselves. On a personal level, there are things that I've seen improved. But outwardly, it's not productive for us to say, "Oh it's getting better, let's just stop." There's so much further to go, and we've been tricked numerous times. When you let down and you think things are better, oh we're post-racial. We're not, and it's not even close. Until we're equal, it doesn't matter if things get better.

And I also think that it's not productive for people to think in a silo just for their own community. "Oh, I fight for Black rights" or "Oh, I fight for Asian rights." Man, I'm trying to use our Asian American experience for everybody because everybody can relate to this Asian experience. We all have to get better. If you used to hate on Asians and you watch my show or you read my book and now you like Asian people, well maybe you'll feel the same way about Guyanese people. Maybe you'll feel the same about gay people. We're all ignorant about something. It's all about trying to open your mind and allow things you're uncomfortable with to teach you something.

I'll tell you this. I never understood punk rock, or heavy metal, or hardcore. I never understood any of that music. But since I've started working at VICE, I've hung out with those kids and I party with those kids. You see fucking Karen O from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs perform. I actually like the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, but I'd never seen them live. I would never go to a Yeah Yeah Yeahs show. But I saw her last night. Ghostface Killah was there, Lil Wayne was there. Obviously, I was the most hyped for them to go on. But Karen O was the best performer of the night. Hands down. I would go to a Karen O show any day. And the thing is perspective. When you see it as "the other," and when you see it as different and weird, when you feel like it's not of you . . . but when you are welcomed into the crowd, and they accept you, and they make you part of their fucking shit, you enjoy it with them through their

eyes. You start to understand it through your own perspective.

It takes people welcoming outsiders into their communities and being like, "Look, you may be fearful of this and you may not understand this, but I want you to see this. I want you to enjoy this with me." It's like wine and my boy Michael Madrigale, the wine sommelier. Wine is an intimidating thing. It's stuffy, and it's for old people. But I started drinking wine with him and he taught me about it, what to pay attention to. It's not about how much it costs. It's like, what do you like personally? I believe every culture is like this. There has to be a bridge, there has to be an ambassador of the group. There has to be somebody who reaches out and be like, "Yo, I want you to experience this with me on my terms."

The problem is, a lot of our ambassadors, they are basic. They're fucking mouth breathers. They think that if I want people to like it, I have to make my culture change so they can understand it. You can appease people's fears, but they have to see it our way. Otherwise, it's a gentrification, an appropriation, a co-optation. If you're going to open a modern Chinese or Taiwanese or Korean restaurant, stop changing it, stop changing your culture to fit American tastes. The place where things really go wrong is when the ambassadors of our culture go out into dominant culture and they say, "How do you want it?" It's not like Burger King. You know these motherfuckers are going to want it on bread with mayonnaise. But I found an intersection. They like bread. But the Taiwanese people also make the bao, and it's authentic and it's real and I didn't have to change anything for that. That's the beauty of it. Find something and use that as a gateway. Use that change yourself so they like you for who you actually are. What's your essence?

AAPR: Drawing from your own recommendations for the Asian as they work toward creating that with others?

HUANG: Don't compromise. And way. If you have a point, if you it heard. That's it. Agreeing on mean compromising. You can agree without compromising your point

And there are so many things that all people of color, for all people there's a lot of power in solidarity. should really come together and common and how we can help each other out. And if we have differences, maybe these differences need to be addressed. If we're all being marginalized in singular ways, we should have singular recourse. I just think that the dialogue needs to transcend just isolated communities and that we have to talk amongst ourselves. So much of America is being marginalized for like 1 percent of the world. I just think there's so much work that needs to be done together. When they divide the barbarians, that's when they win.

AAPR: What do you think of the recent tragedy in Ferguson, Missouri, and how it has sparked diverse groups of people to come together for a particular cause?

HUANG: I hate to say it, but the way we protest is so outdated. Why doesn't someone protest by fucking going to law school? Go volunteer at the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], go work at Legal Aid. I fucking volunteered at Teen Court as a kid. It was government mandated because I was on probation at the time, but I went to Teen Court and that really changed my life in a lot of ways because I saw social justice up close. I saw how I could affect it. OK, we're teaching our kids how to march, that's great. I think once or twice, great. You teach them how to march, how to protest, the historical roots of a social movement like that. What are we doing beyond the protest? Write articles, talk to people, force your schools to teach these things. We have to evolve our protest because it's not working.

AAPR: Looking back on your memoir, is there something you wish you had done differently?

HUANG: If there's a flaw in the book, I would say that it's so in the moment. There are certain chapters where

THERE HAS TO BE A BRIDGE, THERE HAS TO BE AN AMBASSADOR OF THE GROUP. THERE HAS TO BE SOMEBODY WHO REACHES OUT AND BE LIKE, "YO, I WANT YOU TO EXPERIENCE THIS WITH ME ON MY TERMS."

you share, that your cultures share, as a jumping-off point, but don't more. They need to appreciate you the point if you have to change

experiences, what are some American community to consider bridge and common understanding

not like in a vigilant, aggressive have a reason, explain it. Make something doesn't necessarily to something and convince people of view. That's just negotiation.

we can do to benefit everybody, for that are weird and different. I think All people who are marginalized think about what we have in

it's so inconsistent. In the early chapters, I write like I'm my twelve-year-old self and then in high school, I try to write like my high school self. I didn't transition it enough. I think there are times when I really nailed the childhood voice and when I really nailed the high school voice, but I should've been more cognizant that that's what I was doing. I mean, I was cognizant that that's what I was doing, but I need to show a growth and it should've been more of a crescendo.

The ability to change the voice right in those moments is pretty dope. But that's about becoming a better writer. When your voice mirrors the growth of a character, that's when you're really dope.

AAPR: Did that realization come from personal reflection or from people you were collaborating with?

HUANG: It takes a while to see it yourself. It was really after I wrote my second book. When I go back and read my first book, I'm like, "Oh Eddie, you were so eager to say . . ." It looks like it was written by a really genuine kid who was in a rush to say so many things because people silenced him for so long. And he fucked up a few times. [laughs]

I said I knew when I wrote it that it wouldn't be perfect because I was really young. I'm still really young. But I wanted to write it when I was twenty-nine years old because if I waited 'til I got older, my appearance would've changed, the way I felt would've changed. I was still really angry when I was twenty-nine, and I didn't have as much respect as I have now. I think it's important to write that because people need works from people in those ages and time periods to relate to. Books can't always come from old people who've seen it all, done it all, and are all calm. I wanted to capture lightning in a bottle so people that age can read how I felt at that age in that time in that space.

AAPR: What do you think about your growing popularity?

HUANG: I don't like it when I'll be walking down the street and people grab me or touch me. That's annoying. When people stop me for a photo, no lie, it's always a really nice thing. People who want to take a photo with you and are excited because they like your work, that's cool. I'm not famous. You only know me if you've been paying attention. My work is niche culture. And that's great because I want people who stop me on the street for a photo that really read my work and paid attention.

There was an old mom from Texas that ran up into Peter Luger's the other day. I was sitting there and eating and she ran over and she said, "I just have to tell you. I fucking love you, you're fucking hilarious. I watch your shows, and I'm an old mom from Texas. I'm gonna leave you alone now. I just had to tell you." I was like, that's great. You can't beat that. Old White woman from Texas. It just shows you that people from all sides want to talk to each other. And we've been kept away from each other too long.

AAPR: Do you have fears about your memoir being transformed into a network television series?

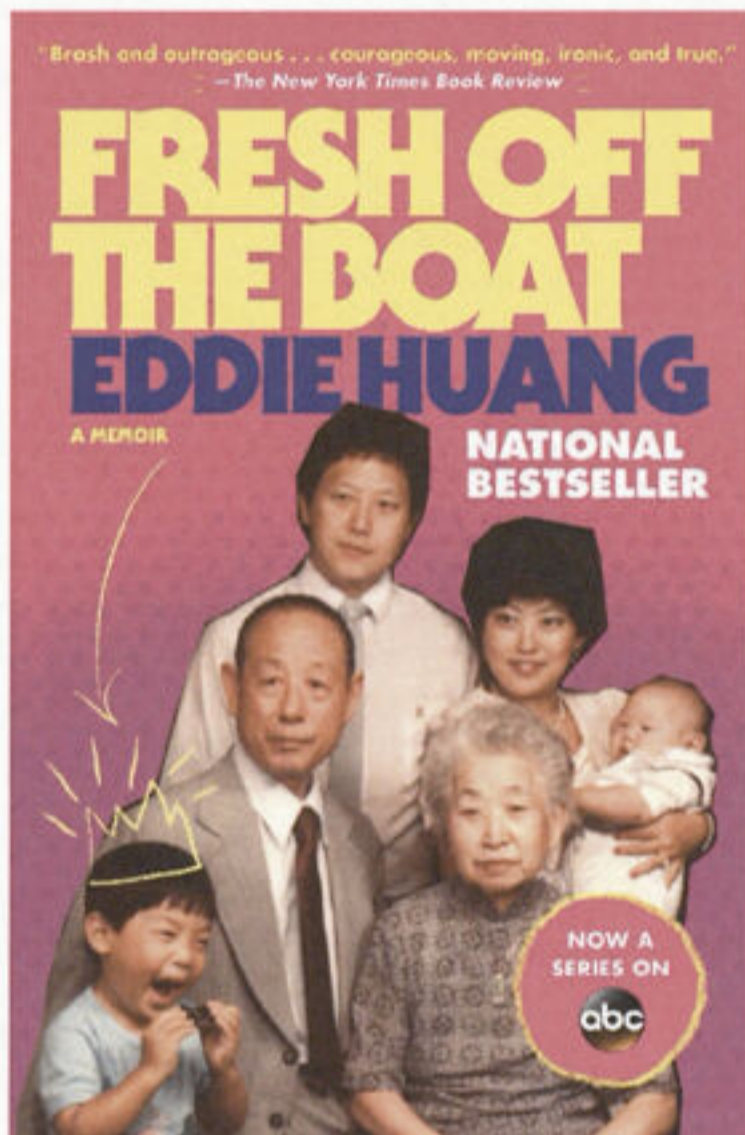
HUANG: My book is very raw and it's very pure, and if the writers on the ABC show stick to the stories of the book and they do it justice, Asian Americans will be represented very, very well. But if they put their own personal stories into the show and disregard the stories of the book, you'll basically be making a White show with yellow faces. And that would suck. That would be no better than yellowface, like Mickey Rooney playing a Japanese man in *Breakfast in Tiffany's*.

Yes, I have fears. Yes, I'm worried, but I've done what I can by writing this book that does not compromise and that's not sutured. I'm under the impression that this show is going to be inspired by the book. In the end, I signed off because there's none of us on fucking network television. I'm aware that there are potential

pitfalls, but I do my best to fight and I do my best to speak up and I speak up every fucking time.

AAPR: What do you want people to know about your show?

HUANG: It won't be perfect. This show will not be perfect, but somebody has to come first. There's a lot of room for another kid to come after me, whether he's Asian, Black, Latino, Arabic, gay, whatever. A person will come after me and say, "Eddie didn't go as hard." But they have to know that I didn't write the show. Judge me by the book and how hard I fought [for] this show. I definitely am open to people questioning how hard I'm fighting and what I'm saying about it, but you have to understand that I have been handcuffed in a lot of ways. But I just want to say that there's an opportunity for someone to come after us and do this bigger and badder and even more uncut, in terms of a sitcom. And that's what people need to do.



We need representation. Asians have no representation in the culture of America. So don't shoot the messenger, just be a better one. Push yourself and do it better cause people didn't just hand it to me. I fought for this and I fought for it for all of us. I did this for all of us. I don't need the money, I did this so that we would be represented, but I'm questioning it all the time, just like other Asian Americans. And I'm trying. If they don't like it and if they think they're being misrepresented, I hope they understand that I'm trying and I didn't get full control of this thing. And that's what scares me. I control the book and I control my restaurant. I control the VICE show. This is the one project I have that is in many ways outside of my control, unless the community supports it and I have the ammunition to go in there everyday and fight them on this fucking show.

AAPR: You were once an attorney. These days, you're a writer, chef, television producer, fashion designer, and musician. Why engage in popular culture to push your causes and perspectives?

HUANG: It's more powerful. When I was a kid, I went to Taiwan and I saw huge billboards for Britney Spears and Kobe Bryant. I just remembered thinking to myself, "Man, American culture is so powerful." People who have never seen America or been to America, never smelled it, tasted it, or lived there, think it's the greatest country in the world. The Chinese name for America is mei guo, which means beautiful country. America has the best marketing of all time!

But soft power is so incredible. I just started to realize that I could continue to be an attorney, go protest, and be a part of these groups or I could sell narratives that endear our communities and our values to other people. I'm a funny person. I know how to tell jokes. I use my humor to open people up, to get them into our world and start to see things from our eyes. "Yo, there's good shit here, some good food, I got good stories. You wanna hear some stories? I got some funny stories about my family. But now I want you to understand our existence about how we feel and where we come from and what our perspective is. Be fam with us."

AAPR: Any parting shots for our readership?

HUANG: I think they have a responsibility to do better than the rest of us. People at the Harvards and the Yales have a lot more resources and opportunities and come into contact with a lot more shit than the rest of us do, so I think there's a duty to fucking do something with it. When I go speak at schools like UPenn or Northwestern, students there are constantly like, "My parents want me to get this job that makes a lot of money, but my heart's not into it. What do I do?" I had the same pressure from my parents, and everybody has similar financial pressures, but the thing was I never questioned what I was going to do. You always have to end up doing what you really want to do and what you care about. You can't leave this earth and not make a difference. You can't go through it passively. Especially when you have so many opportunities.

I just genuinely think that people at these schools need to realize that it's not just about what you need. Go to a third world country. Go to a fucking really shitty city in China. Go to Haiti. People who are born there, it was their dumb luck that they were born there. And it was their dumb luck that there's nothing that they can save them. You will meet people there who will never get out, and they will tell you that themselves. Being born somewhere fucks you the rest of your life sometimes.

If you are in America and you get to go to a Harvard or you get to go to any other college like I did, you have a duty to do something with that. You can't just be self-fulfilling. You have to do something outside or beyond yourself. That's all I would say. You serve something bigger than yourself, man. Every time I say something, I risk something. I think a lot of our problems come from people who are too scared to think for people beside themselves.

DANIEL YOUNGWON LEE is a first-year master in public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. His academic interests include housing, urban development, and the impact of media on public policy. Prior to his studies at the Kennedy School, Daniel served as the communications coordinator for Korean American Civic Empowerment (KACE) in New York City. Daniel has also served as an art director on the advertising accounts of Kmart and Kraft Foods. Daniel is from New York City and graduated from Northwestern University in 2009 with a bachelor of arts in history and a bachelor of music in music performance.



SEAN MIURA IS A WRITER AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZER. HE IS THE PRODUCER AND LEAD CURATOR OF TUESDAY NIGHT CAFÉ, THE NATION'S OLDEST ASIAN AMERICAN OPEN MIC/ART SERIES. AS A POET/PERFORMER, HE PERFORMS AND CONDUCTS WORKSHOPS IN COMMUNITY SPACES AND FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS AND COLLEGE ORGANIZATIONS. HIS ESSAYS HAVE APPEARED IN OUTLETS SUCH AS THE NERDS OF COLOR, REAPPROPRIATE, THE HYPHEN MAGAZINE BLOG, AND MISTHI MUSIC. HE IS CURRENTLY BASED IN LOS ANGELES, WHERE HE WORKS AS A BRAND STRATEGIST.

YONSEI

We remember the smell of ozoni on
New Years and the perfume of our
bachan's hugs
We remember the tongue-twisting burn
of tea in winter restaurant refuge
We remember dinnertime pots of rice
bubbling to the soundtrack of sizzling
fish and crystal
 chiming jars of tsukemono
We remember fragmented Japanese
phrases passed from farmer back-
countries to noisy suburban potlucks
We remember hoods we call Gardena
Torrance
Boyle
Honolulu
Crenshaw
Venice
OC
San Jose
San Francisco

Seattle
We remember too many vowels
We misremember family crests
We do not know how to pronounce our

own names.

We
are Yonsei.

Fourth generation Japanese Americans
Our stories three generations removed
from great-grandparents who
crossed oceans and states of mind to
Mine coal
Conquer seas
Farm land fertile
And plunge thumbs into ground hard with
gentlemanly agreements and inner-city
concrete
Our great-grandmothers
Grand uncles
Passed rice down tables to children who
would become our grandmothers and
grandfathers

Our grandfathers

Slicked their hair back in pool hall mirrors
and farmhouse washbasins
As their issei parents sat in suburban living

rooms
Dream-talking of homelands
Homesteads
And with a blast of radio static
Homefronts.
Our grandmothers
Barely 18
Ran home from school past signposts
branded
"Instructions to all persons of Japanese
Ancestry"
Radio static still floating through the air
as FBI agents arrested their fathers.

Their mothers
Broke dishes
Burned books
Burning spirit compelling their arms
into motion
-They can take us anywhere they want
but they will never have our spirit
Our lives will burn before they will be
sold-

Furiously packing decades into only
what they could carry
Boarding buses
To trains
To deserts
To bunks
My grandmother Manzanar yearbook
committee member
Closed the 1945 yearbook with a full
page photo of the camp barbed wire
And a hand outstretched grasping wire
cutters

She would tell this story then quietly
add
-We made the best of a very bad
situation-

The Sansei
My father
Returned from camp to find schoolyard
bullies and burning palm trees on his
cousins' front lawn
 stoking the smoldering shame he
 held inside

He only wanted to be white

He was told that he would never
achieve
And with a metaphorical middle finger

He rose up and graduated second in his
class
Uprising with a generation of young
folks
Who would self determine their own
names
Building on dictionaries with Panthers
and Berets
Pounding taiko to the rhythm of feet
that protested American imperialism in
Vietnam And American imperialism in
our minds.

My mother
Learned to play Joan Baez and Bob
Dylan on her guitar
Music notes in her bedroom
transitioned to class notes in law school
She argued with an uncle over dinner in
support of redress

She wanted an apology for the injustice
He asked what good an apology serves
for that which will never be forgiven.

It takes years for scars to heal.
It takes generations for the collective
memory to process trauma.

Three generations removed from great
grandparents who crossed oceans
We
are Yonsei.

We were not gifted the language to
name Issei strength
or Nisei struggle
Sansei power
or the feeling that comes when plucking
rusted barbed wire from our veins
But our blood bears clots that we are
learning to dissect
Subconscious blocks compounded by
memories that are not ours
As we walk through the world in
Perpetual Inherited
Recall.

I remember the smell of 9/11 fear that
we would be back in camps
And the realization that while it was not
us
History would repeat itself to our
Neighbors
Friends

Family
I remember the tongue-twisting burn
as I tested names like Manzanar
and
Jerome
then
Abu Ghraib
and
Guantanamo

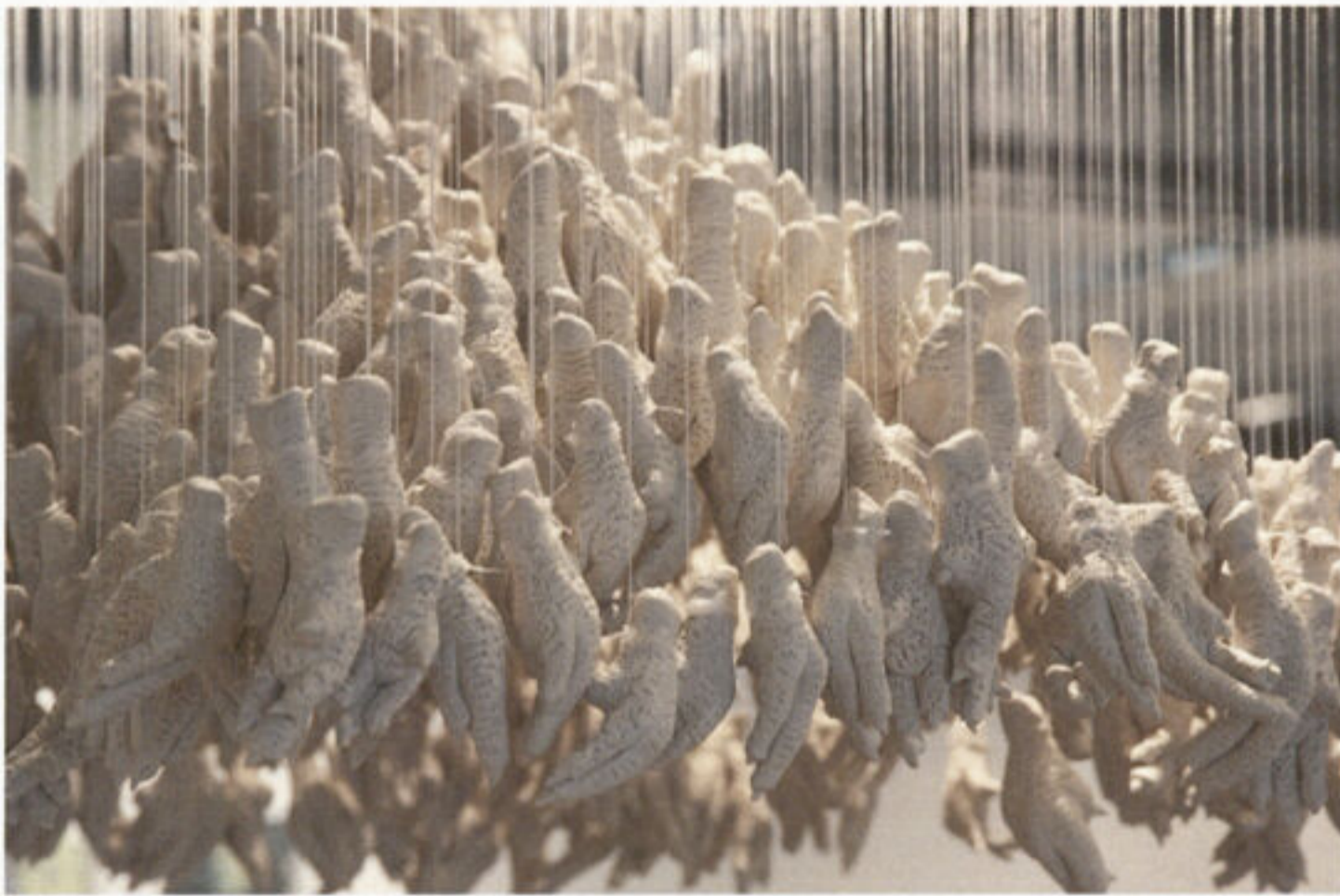
I remember dinnertime conversations
of hyper patriotism
Fragmented moments where words
like
"Racism"
"Islamophobia"
and
"Fear"
Came to life

And in those moments I remember
finding the importance of words like
"Community"
"Family"
and
"Action."

I
am Yonsei.
We are Yonsei.
Our names may not align with our
lineages
Our faces may not align with our
identities
Our wisdom may not align with our
timelines
But we are Yonsei
And we bear scars
And soil
That we will pass down tables like
rice

Yes, we are Yonsei

How could we ever forget?



**TOP AND BOTTOM
MADE BY CHINESE
INSTALLATION,
STONEWARE | 2 FT. X 2
FT. X 6 FT.**

2013

Made by Chinese (2013) is a hand-sculpted installation that features approximately five hundred chicken feet hanging six feet above the ground. The placement of the sculpture creates an uncomfortable sensation to the viewer. The piece challenges one's sense of space, and pushes how far viewers are willing to step out from their comfort zone and step into the sculpture.



**TOP LING LING'S
INSTALLATION, CERAMICS, PORCELAIN,
PLASTIC, PICTURE FRAME | 27"**

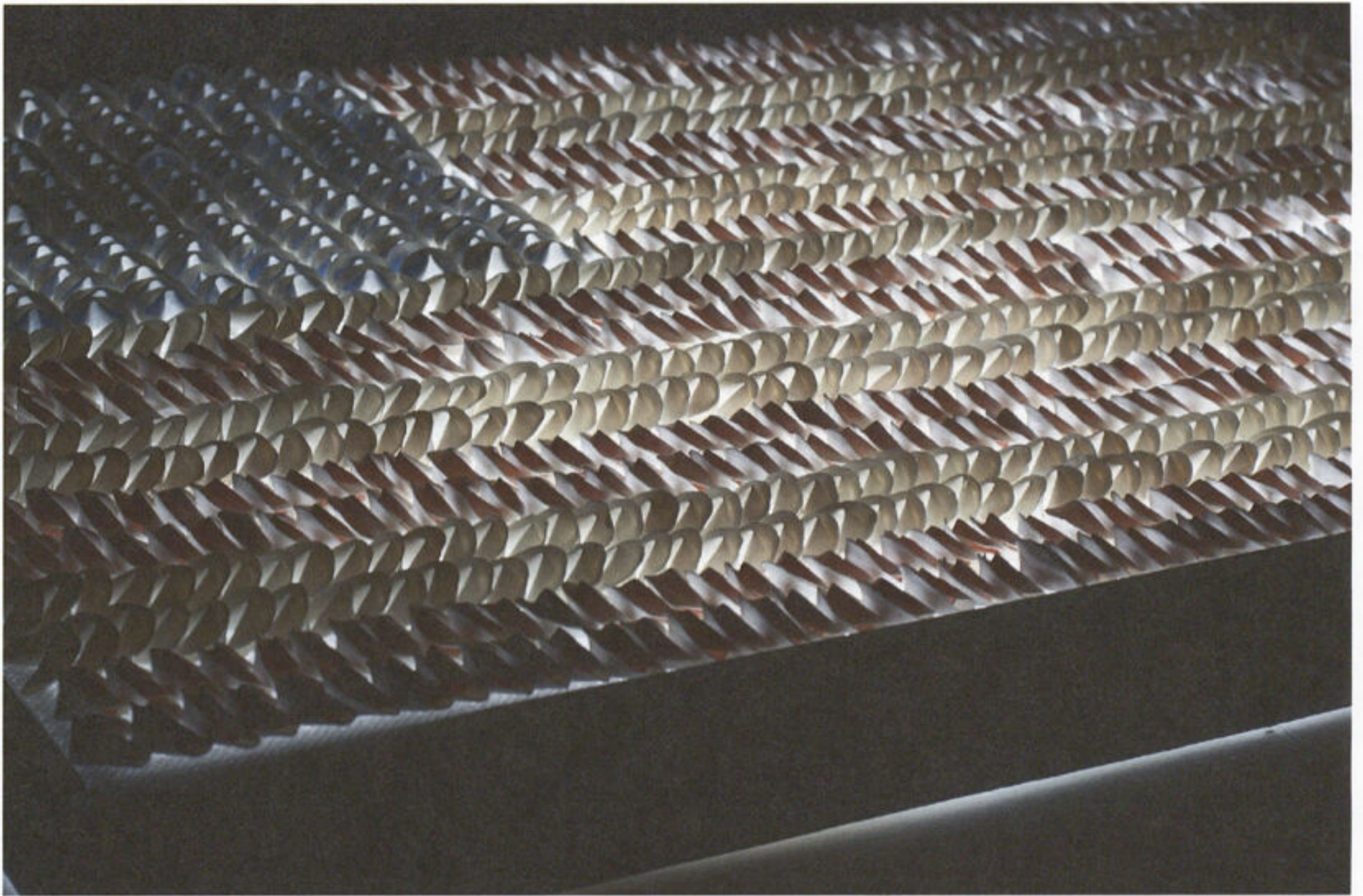
2014

Food and culture have an inseparable relationship. They speak to each other and by changing one we transform it's meaning.

My connection with dumplings is intimate and associated with cherished family moments. My mother always put the upmost care into her dumplings, making them from homemade ingredients and presenting the dumplings in meticulous and delicate fashion. In contrast, Ling Ling dumplings are found in the frozen food aisles at Costco. They are mass-produced and haphazardly thrown in plastic bags. They are made to be cheap and without affection.

My first reaction to Ling Ling dumplings was of curiosity. While we both shared the same name, I found that the dumplings were misrepresenting my ethnic culture. It was like seeing a warped version of what I knew and grew up loving. The form was the same, but the heart was gone; authenticity was nowhere to be found.

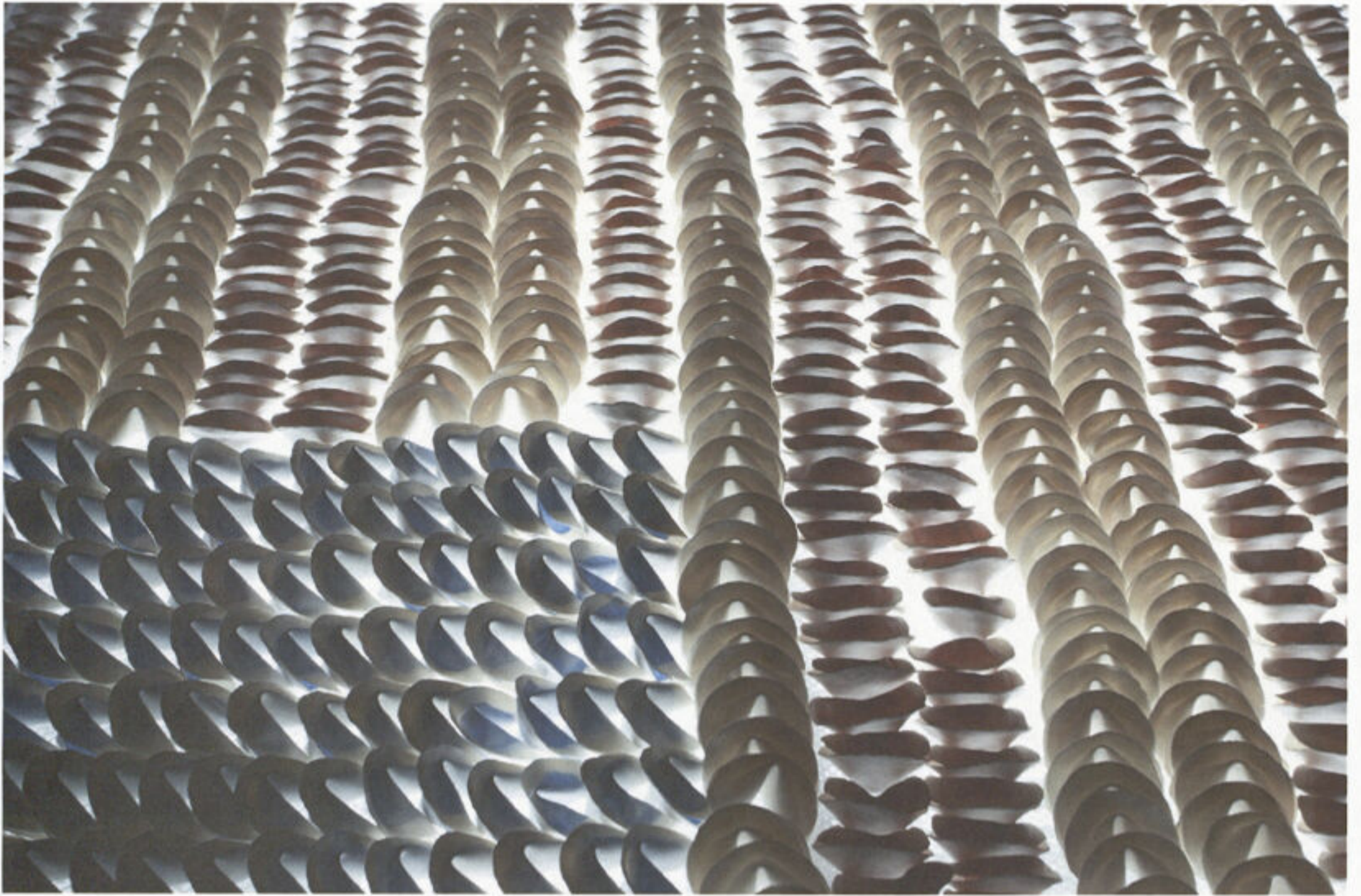
In *Ling Ling's* (2014), I explore that contrast between the soul of my culture and the mass-produced cultural icons that attempt to represent it. The viewer is presented with an authentic representation of my family's traditional dumpling meal using the Ling Ling dumplings. The installation aims to create a contrast between the soul of my culture and the mass produced products the outside world attempts to call Chinese.



TOP AND BOTTOM AMERICAN BORN CHINESE INSTALLATION, PORCELAIN, LIGHT BOX | 4 FT. X 6 FT. X 1.5 FT.

2013

American Born Chinese (2013) is an installation piece that includes over twelve hundred fortune cookies, illuminated from below by a light box that projects the colors and shape of the American flag. The intention of the work is to challenge an imaginary cultural icon – Chinese fortune cookies – that was created in America. This false Chinese icon has become part of a fabricated identity for those of Chinese descent in America. How much of this imaginary authenticity can I accept into my cultural identity while trying to adapt to American culture?



**TOP AMERICAN BORN
CHINESE
INSTALLATION,
PORCELAIN, LIGHT BOX
| 4 FT. X 6 FT. X 1.5 FT.**

2013



LING CHUN EARNED HER B.F.A. AT THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, WHERE SHE STUDIED VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN AND CERAMICS. SHE IS INTERESTED IN CREATING WORKS THAT EXPLORE BOTH AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINESE CULTURE AND HER LIFE AS A CHINESE INDIVIDUAL IN AMERICA. AFTER GRADUATION, LING PURSUED A YEARLONG ARTIST RESIDENCY AT SEWARD PARK CLAY STUDIO, WA. LATER, SHE ACCEPTED A POSITION AS A PROGRAM INSTRUCTOR AT STARLIT ART SPACE IN HONG KONG. SHE IS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN THE M.F.A PROGRAM IN CERAMICS AT THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN.



As an American-born Chinese raised in Singapore, I strive to explore and acknowledge cultural intersections and our shared postcolonial inheritance through my practice. Like so many Asian Americans, my relationship to concepts like 'culture' and 'home' is faceted: estranged to my cultural origins, but in many ways viewed as alien in the place where I have made my adult home, and always privy to a curious simultaneous sensation of going unseen (lost amid the white majority, scantily represented and hugely misrepresented in media) and being on display (how foreign! so different! so exotic! speak in your native tongue. do you have supermarkets?).

On Rupture is an exploration of my struggle to metabolize my experiences of transplantation and their manifold implications, and was motivated by my interest in the relationship between identity and place: how identity shifts with the experience of transplantation, how (dis/re)location forces a confrontation with internalized concepts of what it means to 'belong' to a place, a culture, a tradition. The hybridized terra incognita trodden by cross-cultural outsiders manifests itself through a series of binary oppositions such as male/female, clothed/unclothed, watcher/watched, human/animal scattered throughout the piece, which transitions between exterior and interior as the eye moves along. The long, scroll-like format echoes the narrative tradition as represented by East Asian handscrolls, while the choice to work in oils stems from my practice's roots in the idiom of western observational (ex/im)pressionist painting traditions; a reflection, in many ways, of the combination and permutation of seemingly disparate and fragmented narratives that constitute the identity of a cross-cultural outsider.

*TRYPTIC

TOP
ON RUPTURE (1)
2014

MIDDLE
ON RUPTURE (2)
2014

BOTTOM
ON RUPTURE (3)
2014



JIA SUNG IS A PAINTER AND ILLUSTRATOR. CURRENTLY WORKING TOWARDS A BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS IN ILLUSTRATION AT THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN. IN HER WORK, JIA STRIVES TO EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTITY AND PLACE: HOW IDENTITY SHIFTS WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSPLANTATION, HOW (DIS/RE)LOCATION FORCES A CONFRONTATION WITH INTERNALIZED CONCEPTS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO 'BELONG' TO A PLACE, A CULTURE, A TRADITION. JIA HAS WORKED AS AN INTERN WITH TOON BOOKS AND DP ARCHITECTS. SHE IS ALSO A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE WILD MAGAZINE. JIA WAS BORN IN MINNESOTA AND RAISED IN SINGAPORE.

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