

ASIAN AMERICAN VOICES



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Asian American Voices

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1.

Note from the Editors

Asian American Voices continues to grow as a vibrant forum where students from across the CUNY system reflect, create, and share meaningful personal experiences. What began in 2019 as a modest initiative at LaGuardia Community College has evolved into a collaborative, cross-campus publication that brings together diverse voices, academic disciplines, and lived experiences from throughout the university. This volume stands as a testament to that continuing growth, showcasing the richness and breadth of our expanding community. We are excited to welcome new members to the editorial board this year: Varsha Adibhatla, Maunia Arbabi, Padmini Biswas, Lily Susman, Reza Haque, and Jin Wang. We are grateful for the time, care, and commitment that each editor brings to this collective effort, and we look forward to growing this journal together.

This volume also comes at a historic moment for New York City with the election of Mayor Zohran Mamdani, an AAPI milestone that reminds us how visibility, representation, and civic participation shape the broader context in which our students are writing, learning, and imagining their current realities and futures. While this journal does not exist to document politics, it is inevitably shaped by the times we are living in and the stories our communities are navigating.

We are honored to feature a compelling essay from Frank H. Wu, President of Queens College, reflecting on his experiences growing up as a child of Asian immigrants. His writing examines the tensions between cultural expectations of conformity and achievement and the American ideal of individualism, while offering thoughtful insights into how racism and systemic barriers have shaped his identity, aspirations, and approach to leadership. We hope that his experiences can serve as an inspiration to the student-readers of the journal.

The personal essays explore the profound ways in which family, culture, faith, and adversity shape identity, resilience, and one's understanding of belonging. Through the diary narrative of "Chair Turned East," Alif Kazi reflects on immigration, separation, and the enduring bonds between generations; in "Finding the Voice," Xin Joy Cheung traces the search for an authentic self through the experiences of daughterhood and motherhood; "Embracing the Change" by Patel Noble recounts a family's journey after the diagnosis of a chronic illness in a young child; and in "Lucky," Amna Hussain describes a life-changing pilgrimage to Iraq that deepens her faith while reshaping her understanding of gratitude, identity, and resilience.

The submissions devoted to the visual and performing arts showcase a rich diversity of artistic expression across multiple genres. The collection opens with Lubaba Nahin's acrylic painting "Swal-

low' s Saree," continues with Hadia Amin' s essay "Nature' s Symbolism Across Asia," which explores the cultural meanings embedded in traditional Asian art, and concludes with Sanya Ghosh' s presentation "The Visual Style of Life," an engaging introduction to the Japanese artistic movement known as Visual Kei.

The second set of personal essays explore the complex relationship between language, culture, identity, and belonging from distinct yet interconnected perspectives. In "Giddha and the Art of Being Seen: Quiet Freedom on a Loud Dance Floor," Akampreet Kaur reflects on her mother' s experience as an immigrant, using the traditional Punjabi dance *giddha* as a powerful symbol of resilience, self-expression, and the quiet freedom women find within cultural traditions. "Am I Really Chinese If I Can' t Speak Chinese?" by Min Zeng examines the emotional struggle of growing up disconnected from one' s heritage language and asks whether cultural identity can exist beyond linguistic fluency. "Good English, Bad Chinese" by Sylvia Lee offers a complementary perspective, tracing the author' s journey from bilingual education to becoming an English major while confronting expectations about what it means to be authentically Chinese American. "Word Power" by Annie Huizhen Chen explores how language shapes identity, confidence, and social relationships, reflecting on both the challenges of learning English and the responsibility of using words thoughtfully and respectfully across cultures.

The critical essays examine Asian American experiences through the lenses of migration, memory, language, politics, education, and emerging cultural phenomena, demonstrating the breadth of contemporary scholarship. In "Migration, Language, and the Reconfiguration of Home," Maunia Arbabi draws on the works of philosophers and psychoanalytic thinkers to argue that migration reshapes identity not by severing one' s roots but by redefining belonging through memory, language, and everyday practices. "Rain and Resilience: Memories of Manila" by Noel Frigillana reflects on the symbolic role of rain in Filipino life, using personal memory and literary analysis to explore how climate, migration, and collective resilience shape both individual and national identity. "Citizenship Test: The Meaning of Intersectionality and Community in Men' s Hockey" by Eunice Yeung offers an original interdisciplinary study of North American hockey, examining how race, nationality, and gender intersect within sports. "Esports Careers: Opportunities and Risks" by Yulong Zhuo investigates the rapidly expanding world of esports, presenting a balanced analysis of its professional possibilities alongside the economic, social, and health challenges faced by aspiring players and content creators. Finally, "Current and Past Driving Protest to Praxis: Interracial Solidarity and the Evolution of the Asian American Studies Movement at Hunter College and San Francisco State University" by Joanna Ng traces the history of Asian American Studies from the Third World Liberation Front to the present day, emphasizing the enduring significance of interracial solidarity, student activism, and community engagement in shaping the field.

Asian American Voices remains, at its heart, a student-centered publication. This volume is made possible by students from across the CUNY system who have generously shared their personal stories, reflections, creative works, and critical perspectives. We are honored to provide a space where these voices can be heard and celebrated, and to continue fostering a platform that recognizes the richness, diversity, vulnerability, and resilience of Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences within our university community.

The Editors of Asian American Voices
New York
April 2026

New Editors' Bios

Varsha Adibhatla is an educator, sociologist, and assessment specialist based in Goa, India, dedicated to fostering critical thinking, inquiry, and social awareness through education. She teaches Cambridge A Level Sociology and IGCSE Global Perspectives at Paradise School, where she also serves as a Subject Mentor and SOLE Ambassador, promoting self-directed learning inspired by Sugata Mitra's educational model. Varsha holds a Master's degree in Sociology and Anthropology from Manipal Academy of Higher Education, where her research focused on patriarchy in modern India. Her interests include critical pedagogy, cultural studies, educational leadership, and curriculum development, with a commitment to meaningful social impact.

Maunia Arbabi received her Ph.D. in French from the CUNY Graduate Center, where she also completed a Certificate in Women and Gender Studies. Her research focuses on exile, migration, autobiographical writing, and identity construction in contemporary Iranian Francophone women's literature. Her work examines the intersections of memory, language, displacement, and gender in the writings of authors such as Négar Djavadi, Chahdortt Djavann, and Maryam Madjidi. She has taught French language and culture at the college level and holds previous degrees in French Literature and Agricultural Engineering. Her broader interests include diaspora studies, women's writing, human rights, and intercultural narratives.

Padmini Biswas is a lecturer in urban studies at Queens College and serves on the advisory board of the Asian American Community Studies minor there. She teaches courses in urban diversity, labor and globalization, global cities, and cities and diasporas. She was the founding editor of SALT: South Asian Literary Things, a community-based literary journal funded by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and a former board member of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective.

Md Rezaul Haque teaches in the English Department at LaGuardia Community College, New York. He received his PhD from Flinders University, Australia, where he also completed an Endeavour Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in 2016. Reza co-edited *The Shadow of the Precursor* (2012) and guest edited along with Gillian Dooley a special issue of *Gitanjali & Beyond* on Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (2020). He has published internationally on Indian English fiction, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Hasan Azizul Huq, and writers from the South Asian diaspora. Reza is also a poet and Translations Editor for *Transnational Literature* (Australia-UK). He has published three books of Bangla poetry to date.

Lily Amelia Susman is the Collections & Acquisitions Librarian and an assistant professor at CUNY Hunter College. She holds an MSLIS from the Pratt Institute School of Information and an MA in East Asian studies from Stanford University. Grounded in technical services librarianship and memory work, her research frequently integrates diaspora, area, and adoption studies. In 2025, she co-curated *CRAASH in Focus: Revitalizing Asian American Studies*, the first exhibition on Asian American activities at the Leon & Toby Cooperman Library.

Jin Wang is a PhD candidate in Art History at the CUNY Graduate Center. She specializes in modern and contemporary art and architecture in global contexts with a focus on transcultural and intercultural exchanges. Her dissertation examines artworks, artists, and exhibitions that were produced, traveled, and circulated between Egypt and China during the Cold War. Her broader interests include Afro-Asia, global socialism, transnational modernisms, and decolonization. Jin is the co-founder of the Inter-Asian Perspectives Work Group at the CUNY Graduate Center. She has taught at Baruch College and Brooklyn College and was the 2025-2026 Helen Frankenthaler Curatorial Fellow

and the 2021-2022 Mellon Global Programming Fellow at the Amie and Tony James Gallery. She has also held various positions at the Museum of Modern Art, International Studio and Curatorial Program, Grey Art Museum, and Cleveland Museum of Art.

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Part I

Recognizing the AAPI Leader

2.

Everything My Asian Immigrant Parents Taught Me Turns Out to Be Wrong

Frank Wu

1 The Dilemma

I must explain that my title is facetious. I would be a wicked child and for that matter a contemptible human being if I failed to appreciate the sacrifices my parents made, willingly, for the benefit of the next generation and to acknowledge the standards that they set to ensure the prosperity of their progeny. I would not have achieved anything without them. As I surpass an age at which I considered them old when I was young, I have come to understand and respect the context in which they grew up and then undertook a journey to a new land that beckoned with opportunity but was fraught with the betrayal of its allure.

I grew up in Detroit in the 1970s. My parents were Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, scholarship students. My father was an engineer at one of the “Big Four” automakers back when everyone drove an American car or fantasized, they could afford that mighty V-8 engine symbolizing upward mobility. My mother was a librarian, devoted to her children. I was born in the United States.

Like many, I would stay away from the uneasy subject of race, except that Vincent Chin was killed, and it came together for me, accelerating into abruptness. I did not know Chin, but I knew he could be an uncle, a cousin, or me, and I was emphatically of the same time and place, during the 1980s recession which had further devastated the magnificent wreck of Detroit. A Chinese American, out for a bachelor’s night celebration, he was bludgeoned with a baseball bat, his head cracked open. The guests who would have attended his wedding went to his funeral instead. The killers, white autoworkers who shouted racial epithets and obscenities before blaming him for the success of imported cars (as witnesses swore: “it’s because of you motherfuckers we’re out of work”), never denied they had carried out the act. They repeated as a mantra that it was a bar brawl, which had gotten out of hand.

It was mistaken identity twice over. Chin was Chinese, not Japanese; an American, not a foreigner. He was like his assailants, working class. The color of his skin, the texture of his hair, and the shape of his eyes triggered them. Under a plea deal, they were sentenced to probation for 3 years and a fine of 3000 dollars. In the death of an Asian American individual was the birth of the Asian American movement. He became an icon. I gave up my goal of becoming an architect. I knew I had to be an advocate.

Thus, this essay can be summed up through representative proverbs. Asian cultures, with their collectivist orientation, have aphorisms of duty such as the Japanese “the nail that sticks up is pounded down.” That precept expresses elegantly the demands of conformity, deference to one’s elders, fidelity to tradition, and not making a fuss; it is a paean to disappearing into the crowd, with genuine relief at the prospect. In Chinese, the warning is “the loudest duck is shot first by the hunter.” Compare the American adage of dissent, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease” or the exhortation to “march to the beat of a different drummer.” Those epigrams exalt the individual who stands up and speaks out, a defiant loner who is compelled to fight the system, from Tom Cruise’s “Maverick” as the protagonist of the Top Gun movies to Thoreau in retreat at Walden Pond. It is all about context. What works for one generation in one era in one place might not be adapted for another generation at a later time within another society. Consider champion figure skater Alysia Liu. She has become beloved. She happens to be Chinese American. Her father escaped the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Social scientists have studied her. She is “exuberant.” That would be anathema in China. It is consistent with norms in America.

In the Asian immigrant household, at least the one I lived in, there is to be no “to thine own self be true” or “I gotta be me” or “you do you” or “let your freak flag fly.” Otherwise the child is classified, as I was in Chinese, as *bu ting hua*, which can be translated inertly as “disobedient.” That fails to depict the severity of the situation. For if you are not only oblivious to the mandate of filial piety but also romanticize rebellion, you cannot comprehend the breach of norms. The rules are more than edicts private to a family. A child’s ability to be integrated into the mainstream corresponds to the parents’ failure to uphold authority and sustain discipline, which is vital for status within the ethnic community. A child, who is too American and too liberal, dishonors the ancestors with the selfishness of independence. The child may be heedless of the affront, which the parents regard as an obvious disgrace. To those who hail from a similar setting of extra homework, music lessons, and weekend language school, then this is an effort to come to terms with my own inadequacy.

2 The Shame and the Embarrassment of Racial Discrimination

So to continue toward confession, I am ashamed to admit it now, but as a child, I was always embarrassed of my own parents and a bit angry at them. All teenagers are humiliated by their parents of course, and they are afflicted by mutual exasperation. Those with unsurpassed credentials in the occupations Asian Americans are reputed to dominate. For those who are born overseas from the perspective of their elders, the difference in cognitive dissonance is in kind and not in degree. The second American president, the curmudgeon John Adams, was attributed the quote that he is a soldier so in turn his son may be a merchant so in turn his son may be a poet. The Asian immigrant counterpart would substitute an infinite series of doctors, engineers, professors, and scientists. Various populations have undergone kindred schisms over Americanization, as documented in the coming-of-age canon. It is the “generation gap” with a vengeance. In the hit movie and source novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, the plot centers on not the clash of civilizations envisioned by demagogues but among Asians: the Asian Asians versus the Asian Americans (in the mahjong scene, the American born interloper must lose, not win, to convince the matriarch who opposes her marrying into the family that she can be Asian enough to fit in).

I blamed my parents, too. I figured it was my lineage, which subjected me to the casual bigotry of the playground for being different before diversity was celebrated. My parents were not reckless, but the harassment was relentless. “Do you eat dogs? Are you Communist? How can you see with eyes like that?” I suspected my parents had consigned me to the *clichéd* cruelties of childhood, the teasing and taunting, the bullying of racial slurs, in the care of the teachers and administrators who were unconcerned or recommended to respond, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but

words will never hurt me.” Even as a kid, I knew that retort was for perennial losers. The sticks and stones are revealed and produced by those fighting words, the violence instigated by the rhetoric. The words themselves pack their own punch, an accumulation of microaggressions that add up to motivate suicides. The adults on the scene, such as volunteers who were the parents of those who would inflict the torment, visibly wished not to have the headache, as if they were the ones aggrieved, put upon. My parents, not so much ingratiating as idealistic, would scold me to “try harder to fit in,” like applying myself academically; that endeavor rendered me pathetic. Your classmates resent how you show them up with higher grades and revile your attempts to imitate them. No amount of “try harder” overcomes racial prejudice. Try harder for its own sake; however, it is a futile strategy to defeat racism, especially for Asian Americans who, as the late historian Ronald Takaki pointed out, are punished for virtues rather than vices, as the Yellow Peril of unfair competition

My parents made assumptions as well, that they had brought unto themselves the mistreatment on account of their accents and lack of cultural fluency, and their children being born in America would be accepted automatically by other Americans. My parents ate funny foods (my father urged me to try chicken feet for the medicinal qualities), they did not laugh at quite the right moment watching television sitcoms such as *Happy Days* (featuring restaurateur Arnold as the rare Asian American character albeit in the background), and if there was a dispute with the bank, they had to call on their child to serve as a translator in an awkward role reversal. I anticipated that once I shaved in the morning like my father, dressed in a suit, and drove away to an office, I would not have to endure such abuse. I was not acquainted with the adult version of these antipathies, sometimes more sophisticated, sometimes not, which my parents encountered daily and could not fight effectively either. What neither they nor I reckoned with was the hostility, not to what we had done but to who we were. I did not speak the language of civil rights because I was a child, and they did not speak it either because they spoke another language, literally. Our family was not disruptive. President Jimmy Carter spoke of the imperative to dial down the thermostat to 55 in the winter due to the energy crisis and don a sweater. My parents obeyed. We shivered at night.

My parents and their cohort had been able to come to America thanks to their skills or their apparent potential. Their mindset was well suited for the era and their origins. Whether they were able to obtain visas depended on whether they were attractive to a reluctant host as additions to the labor pool under the post-Sputnik policies that boosted what are now termed STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) areas of study as patriotic priority. If you aspired to improve your lot in life by departing what was still a “developing” nation, you would favor a field of study based on marketplace dynamics and not individual desires. My parents carried their convictions with them that those who were too dimwitted for the preferred majors would be relegated to the liberal arts. They also, without alluding to bias, were compensating for it. They were mitigating the risk that any subjective factors would adversely affect evaluations by the bosses at work, selecting professions that relied on numbers and formulas rather than words and literature. They had the best interests of their offspring at heart by guiding them away from what was confusing and arbitrary, livelihoods in which you had to pick up the proper fork at a fancy luncheon, command a vocabulary that was both studious and vernacular, and appeal to those who as the majority would judge if you were eligible to join their club.

The confidence in standardized testing as a fair measure of moral worth is as characteristic as it is problematic. From the civil service regime of imperial China to the after-school cram programs of contemporary Japan and South Korea, the ideology of tests as a fair instrument for assigning a station in society surpasses any American creed of “meritocracy.” The assessment is interpreted not as a predictor of future performance but esteemed as the Platonic form of merit itself. An Asian American who asserts he deserves to be hired or promoted due to a score would be dismissed as displaying the

hubris of impending downfall, but ambitious Asian Americans bewail their predicament to their ethnic confidantes along these very lines.

To avoid being misconstrued, I hasten to add that the SAT, LSAT, GRE, MCAT, and so on are reliable indicators if utilized *sans* exaggeration, of how students will do at the next stage of their education, students plural, approximately and in the aggregate, with no guarantees as to any student singular. Even then, they could be characterized as polite proxies for parental education and family wealth. Whatever your score, to be a leader your abilities across your domain of activity are necessary but not sufficient. Although you must be competent and diligent, you need to cultivate “soft skills” and grit. If you are certain your top percentile test result entitles you to the bounty of the nation or technical expertise suffices to acquire it, you will be disillusioned and embittered. Asian Americans seem to overestimate what is due to them for their SAT. They belittle the advantage of being a “people person.” That is to their detriment.

Despite the pop culture which would conspire against my forebears, I have internalized the lessons of my upbringing. I have been nudged by those who report to me not to divulge my self-image, that I am a wretched slacker, and if I had applied myself I would have amounted to something. As by definition, every immigrant is an emigrant from elsewhere, so too assimilation is perforce alienation from that place, literal or metaphorical, a land or a memory. To be estranged from Asia confers no defense from being reviled in America. The immigrant parents are prevented from returning from whence they came because the American-born children are deficient to adjust backward.

3 The Reconciliation of Civil Rights

The most far-reaching decision I made as a fledgling professor was to join the faculty of Howard University Law School. I was humbled to be the first Asian American law professor there, at the institution that trained almost all of the legal team who prevailed against de jure Jim Crow racial segregation. I learned as much as I taught, what was not available to be gleaned from books. I could witness, if only in glimpses confirmed by repetition, the disparities of white over black which exceeded by far any insult to my dignity. Each of us, as if a solipsist, knows our own suffering and slights. The challenge is to progress from agitation to remedy those personal offenses toward advocacy for universal principles. The historic struggle for Black equality set the precedent, even as others contribute as partners with their own claims. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was a prerequisite for the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The passage of protections for African Americans was the impetus for the repeal of the racial quotas against Asian immigrants. Absent African Americans campaigning for social justice, Asian immigrants would be prohibited from even entering the country. Both enactments, homage to the slain President John F. Kennedy, were expansive in spirit. They had primary beneficiaries, but they were unlimited in scope.

That is why it pains me so much, the uninhibited anti-Black racism of more than a few Asian immigrants and the indignation over any solicitude for African Americans. In the absence of others, except their own children who have been willing to call out the issue, their invective about biological inheritance and pathological culture echo what alt-right white supremacists would utter: if only those people would behave themselves, like us, they insinuate . . .

The above essay is an abridgement of a chapter that appeared in a peer-edited volume published by Springer, *The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in U.S. Higher Education: Stories and Roadmaps*.



Figure 1. Author with the late Jesse Jackson at a rally to support students in the University of Michigan affirmative action litigation, circa 2000. Photo by Gregory Fox.

Part II

Personal Essays

3.

Chair Turned East

Alif Kazi

June 26, 2010

Fatema massaged her grandson's feet carefully. On her rocking chair, the boy was restless, providing more motion than the chair itself. It was as if his body could not decide whether to move left, right, up, or down. Her grandson had just begun to enjoy walking and boy was he fast! It became part of her routine to see him whoosh through the flat, under many upward feet and oblivious in-house workers. And at times, when her legs weren't feeling too weak, she would join, trying to walk alongside him.

"Nani, ami chai kelte, Grandma I want to play" Nabil cried. At three years old, he was very active and wanted nothing more than to keep moving.

"Let me finish," Fatema said. She continued to lather oil on her hands and spread them all over her grandson's soft feet.

"Nabil, you will explore worlds with your feet. They will take you far, farther than I have ever gone, let me take care of them for you," she said as she pressed them.

Soon, her grandson will be leaving her along with her daughter Ruby and son-in-law, Mansur, to America, over 13,000 kilometers away.

Don't leave me all alone here. Please come and visit, she had told her daughter the night before.

"Maa, we'll try. But please don't get your hopes up, this trip may be for nothing and we will come right back" Ruby had told her mother. Mansur was sick of his banking job in Dhaka, he wanted a change of pace and more for his family. His older brother, Mutazim, had already made the move five years ago, living in a Queens apartment as a waiter.

"Bhai, I make so many tips in Manhattan! I live very comfortably waiting on these rich folks" Mutazim had told his brother.

And with that small, but powerful message, Mansur had a feeling that the U.S. is where he was meant to go. It would be a family reunion, he said to his wife. He hadn't seen his brother in years. Nabil

could finally meet his *boro chacha*, elder uncle. Ruby reluctantly agreed, not knowing how to fight against her husband's impulse. But what about my mom? She lives with us now. Where will we put her? What about our family here? Why do we need to go? What work will you do there? These were all questions that ruminated inside her, questions that she never bothered her husband with.

Instead, she told her mother what unfolded the next morning.

As Fatema continued reflecting on her son-in-law's impulsive behavior and her daughter's lack of authority, she looked down to see that Nabil was fast asleep on the floral bedspread. She picked up and cradled the small watermelon-sized bundle of life in her arms gently. Thankfully, he took after his mother, Fatema thought.

September 20, 2010

Dhaka, Bangladesh

The tickets were ready. Fatema joined her daughter and son-in-law at the airport, watching carefully as they began to board. She watched as they flashed their passports at the gate.

When will they return? She thought.

Will they come back American or Bangladeshi citizens? She asked herself thoughtfully.

What else will divide her from her only child?

September 21, 2010

Queens, New York

When Mansur Ahmed and Ruby Rahman moved into their homely apartment, they brought some things with them and other parts came furnished; The chair was one of them.

"We don't know why, but there is a chair in the dining area of the apartment and we can't seem to get it to budge!" the landlord had told them.

Mrs. Ahmed, wearing a bright pink dupatta, seemed unwavering by it.

The chair was beautiful, she thought. The chair was reminiscent of one that could have been made by Duncan Phyfe.

"We'll take it," she said in her best English. The apartment was all the couple could have asked for. Bangladesh was still fresh in their minds, America a foreign concept.

As the Ahmed's moved in, slowly but surely, their apartment was built around the chair: it molded their home. The single chair anchored to the elevated ground like a plant marking its territory, struck to the ground.

Mrs. Ahmed made sure that a table surrounded the chair. She swapped between multiple floral patterns to put on top of the table, yet none of them fit – the chair stood out like a sore thumb.

Begrudgingly, she removed the floral patterns and exchanged them with matte black covers and matching black chairs.

Good enough, she thought.

As the months passed, the Ahmeds began to become acclimated to their new home. Mrs. Ahmed grew to tolerate the thorn on her side, the same object that became her son Nabil's favorite spot in the apartment.

At seven years old, Nabil considered the chair his best friend. He refused to budge from the chair at times and at others, it took both Mr. Ahmed and Mrs. Ahmed to remove their stubborn child from the seat.

On his birthday, Nabil sat on the chair mighty and proud as the cake was brought to him. The Ahmed's had few relatives in New York, let alone America, and the Bangladeshi adults and children were friends they accumulated from a short time abroad.

"Ki chow, beta, what do you want?" Mrs. Ahmed asked.

For your birthday, she continued, nodding at the lit candles.

Nabil closed his eyes and thought long and hard.

"I wish I could go home," he said finally, blowing the candles long, hard, and breathlessly.

"Maa, can we go to Bangladesh again" he asked earnestly.

Mrs. Ahmed, wanting to save face in front of her guests, nodded, but her eyes told a different story.

That night, Mrs. Ahmed went to tuck her son in.

“Baba, janno keno ami tumar nani ke onek call kore, Dear do you know why I call your grandmother so often on the phone?”

Nabil shook his head.

“Amra to parena jaite. Amader oi beshe taka nai baba, I’m sorry, we can’t afford to go, we don’t have much money,” she said, tears welling in her eyes.

“It’s okay, Maa. I love you” he said attempting to comfort his sad mother.

Mrs. Ahmed brushed her teary eyes away and left to go to bed.

The next night, at dinner, the couple had a surprise for Nabil. They told him to close his eyes and as he did, they covered the space in front of the table across from his chair with a white curtain. They projected scenes of Bangladesh as he ate. And when Nabil opened his eyes, he saw as he ate on his special chair, his parents created scenes of Bangladesh – the visual and material to bring Nabil back. The Bangladeshi song for independence rang through in low decibels and images of geckos, *tik tikki*, and rickshaw drivers paraded through the white screen with the help of Google Maps.

But it was his Nani he cared about most. His parents ensured Fatema was on a laptop screen, via Skype, to talk to her grandson.

“Baba, the chair you’re sitting on. It’s turned towards Bangladesh!” Mansur showed his son after the call ended. He showed his son a map on his phone, of Bangladesh and the U.S. with thousands of miles in between the two geographic landmasses.

“See, Baba? The chair is turned East, towards Nani!”

And soon dinner became a time and the chair became a space that Nabil connected with his nani.

Inspired by her grandson’s enthusiasm for his chair facing east, Fatema played along with the boy.

“My rocking chair is turned West, Nabil! Towards you!” Nabil’s face shined through the phone, unable to hide the excitement. Fatema rocked her chair as she spoke to him, ultimately ensuring that the entire chair never touched the ground at once.

Soon, dinner did not only become a part of his daily routine, but it became a space of worship for Nabil: A space to return home. And the chair was his throne. He spoke with Nani every night, on the dot. They spoke about what he did for the day and his friends in Pre-K. He spoke English to his friends, a language that was alien, shy, and shaped his tongue in wildly uncomfortable forms.

Meanwhile, Bangla flowed loosely and his voice carried miles when he spoke to Nani. He could only hope that this communication was enough.

December 24, 2010

Queens, New York

Phone calls with Nani were far less frequent. As Nabil spent his first winter in New York, Fatema suffered a heat stroke in Dhaka.

Phone calls with Ruby were more frequent, but for circumstances neither wanted.

“If you don’t come back, what will I do here? Do you want me to die without you nearby?” Fatema asked endearingly to her daughter over the phone.

Ruby held tears and choked up.

“No Maa. It’s just....” Mansur’s financial problems were not her mother’s business.

“Maa, Nabil misses you. Call again sometime please. You will get better” the words came out along with the hollow truth behind them.

But the final call never came. The next call Ruby got was from the coroner.

Her mother died. Dead, alone, and her family miles away unable to return back to see her once more. And that night, Nabil asked to see his Nani.

“Maa, when will Nani call again? It’s been such a long time, and it’s dinner time now! Why not call her now? Is she better?” he asked earnestly, innocently, naively, sitting on his chair.

Ruby did not know what to say.

How do you break a child’s heart for the first time?

The chair was turned East, but it made no difference. Her chair no longer had a body to move, no body to face West. We’re here, not there. And she is no longer in either place.

4.

Finding the Voice

Xin Joy Cheung

They are strong; They are loud; Some come from others; Some come from me. They are criticisms, expectations, and passing opinions. Too many and too heavy, at once and many times. Should I rebel or just follow? A familiar voice is whispering to me. It's saying something important; Something I should know. Where is it coming from? I am on my journey to finding the voice now.

I flash my way to my childhood.

A small town up north in China, home to many Chinese Koreans. A concrete fence high up, the door swinging open; a little girl with those almond eyes full of curiosities. That is me with inkbrush hair and golden-tanned skin. I run to the yard and play with my dog. I peek at the sight of my mom's back; she is always busy cooking and cleaning like all other moms. It is one of the most cheerful days of my life. Maybe the voice is from mom! From her loving expectation that I still do not understand. The voice guides me to a soccer game; I am sitting on the bench waiting for the coach to call; Finally, I am in the field, battling with the "enemy." My duty is to protect the kingdom as a warrior with my buddies. My blood is boiling, and my heart is in my throat. Yeah, we win! The excitement run through my body. Amazing! I want to go home; I want to share the news with the most important person in the world. The upbeat words slip out of my mouth "I won! I won the soccer game!" In exchange for an emotionless response, "You did well but it is not a ladylike activity". I never understand why she is not happy for me. Maybe I am not enough; maybe I am just a girl who needs to become a lady and then a mom. Yet, the voice whispers to my ears, cheers me up and slowly fades away. It is not from my mom. I need to return to the road to find where it comes from.

It brings me to my "sweet" 16 fishing date with my dad. Perhaps the voice is from him, the pillar for mom, brother and me. I raise my head and ask "What is it like to be a fish?" He replies "You will have a 10-second happy memory and life goes full circle again." I wish I could turn into a fish when I lose him forever. A sobbing voice is comforting me vividly. It is somewhere near; somewhere inside of me. Help me to be strong and help my mom to move on, I beg. If it is not from my dad then where it comes from. I am lost in the air, in the ocean on that 13 hour-long flight to New York, where I find something else instead.

Daze in the dream of finding the voice; marrying the love of my life and becoming a mother. Just like all the other loving birds, we share stories, watch movies. The lovely voice is humming lovely songs; Petals are flying in the air. Soon, I am pregnant; It is like icing on the cake! After 10 months of misery, finally, on an unforgettable day in April, I hold my daughter for the first time. Her forceful

crying is demanding and high-pitched. My heart skips a beat, and the voice of my heart tells me to protect this little human with all my power and more. The voice is my daughter's mumbling words perhaps.

To find the voice, I fast forward many years in a second just to understand the sight of my mom's back, to understand my dad's happiness of the fishing date; While in many happiness, I lost myself to become a strong mom and a wife to be loved; I am not enough just to be me; I must be the lady who my mom expected. Who am I? What do I want to become? It is howling in my ears. It is from my heart; it is pounding; it is still strong. The voice is from my heart all along.

It is there when my boiling blood pushes through my throat; when a girl loses herself and tries to be my mom; when I cannot turn into a fish just to remember only 10 seconds of happiness; when I am a wife and a mom. Now it is leading me back on the road to find my voice that others can hear; where I can only be me and dream about the high fence, a little girl humming a song no one understands.

5.

Embracing the Change

Patel Noble

I recall a life changing experience I had a year and two months after my first son was born. This unfortunate situation was about to change the lives of my wife, my son, and mine forever. It all began after my son contracted a viral infection. As new parents, my wife and I noticed that our son, normally an active child, was not behaving like his usual self. He was always full of energy, running around the house, climbing anything he could, often putting himself in danger. But on this day, to our surprise, this lively little boy was suddenly dull, sitting by himself. His joyful, playful spirit was gone, replaced with weakness and unusual inactivity. This change immediately alarmed me. No matter what I tried, I could not lift his spirits. His eyes were glossy, his skin pale, and he hardly wanted to walk. At that moment, I realized something was seriously wrong and rushed him to the Doctor. This was but the beginning of how our lives would change forever.

At the doctor's office, my wife and I described our son's unusual inactivity, paleness, and glossy eyes. After a quick examination, the doctor told us he was very sick. The Doctor gave us a letter and instructed us to take him straight to the hospital without stopping for anything. Unlike the United States, Jamaica had limited ambulance services, and those available were costly. We had no choice but to drive ourselves to the hospital. On the way, we were overcome with worry. The doctor's urgent instructions made us even more anxious. I tried to comfort my son during the drive, pointing out cars as I usually did, saying, "Car, baby." With a weak voice, he responded, barely whispering, "car." My heart sank as I fought back the tears. At the hospital, we quickly handed the letter to a nurse, who was already expecting us. Our son was rushed into an examination room, immediately surrounded by doctors and nurses. We were frantic, anxious about what was about to happen. The doctor explained that they needed to perform a spinal tap because they suspected meningitis. My son cried for me as I stood there, trying to stay strong, but I was overwhelmed and broke down in tears. I felt disappointed in myself for not being able to stay composed when he needed me most. I left the room so he would not see me crying.

I joined my wife in the waiting area, and we held each other and wept bitterly. The night dragged on as though it would never end, while we waited with bated breath for news. By morning, our son was wheeled out with IVs in his hands and feet, fast asleep. He looked peaceful, but we still had no answers. Later in the day, a middle-aged man introduced himself as the endocrinologist assigned to our case. I did not even know what that word meant at the time. He explained that he specialized in pediatric diabetes. My wife and I sat on edge, our hearts pounding, clinging to every passing second, as we awaited our son's diagnosis. He told us that a virus had triggered our son's diabetic gene, causing his blood sugar to skyrocket. That accounted for his weakness and inactivity. He was now diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes and would need insulin for the rest of his life. My heart dropped. "But he was born healthy, how is this possible?" I asked. The doctor explained that it was

a rare case, but it does happen. Our son was only fourteen months old. Our world turned upside down that day. Before we could take him home, we had to learn how to administer insulin injections, test his blood sugar, and manage his diet. For three weeks, my wife and I were trained by doctors and nurses, to recognize the signs of high or low blood sugar and to adjust his care accordingly. It was a heavy burden for young parents, but we knew we had no choice. During this time, I met another parent in the hospital whose story gave me a new perspective. Her nine-year-old son had a complete renal failure and required weekly dialysis while waiting for a kidney transplant. The treatment was expensive, and she explained that they were willing to sell everything they owned just to keep their son alive. Then she said something I will never forget: "If I had to choose a medical condition for my child, I would choose insulin over dialysis."

Her words were impactful. This changed my whole perspective. As devastating as our circumstance was, I realized it could have been worse. That moment gave me and my wife a new lease on life and the strength to embrace this change with gratitude, knowing that our son was still alive. Though his life and ours would never be the same, we resolved to do whatever it took to care for him and to ensure he lived a full and joyful life. My son is now twenty-six years old, navigating his health condition on his own. The life lesson I took from this experience is that no matter what changes occur in life, even the unwanted ones, there is always the possibility of a positive outcome. This has since changed the way I view life, making me more open to embrace change, rather than fearing it.

6.

Lucky

Amna Hussain

Everyone talks about what an honor it is to go to Iraq and how lucky I should feel to visit such a holy place. People always said that I would return feeling more connected to God. They were right. Going to Iraq was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. The shrines were beautiful, built to honor those who sacrificed their lives for us. However, no one in America talked about the constant threat of Daesh (ISIS) that still existed in Iraq. Every few miles there would be a checkpoint where soldiers scanned vehicles and physically searched for weapons. Even with all of these security measures, Daesh still found ways to terrorize innocent people. I will never forget the day I became trapped in the middle of an attack in Iraq.

At the time, I was twelve years old, and it was my last day in the city of Karbala. My mother and I went to Imam Hussain's shrine one last time. Millions of people from all over the world gathered there, united by one purpose. Entering the shrine was always a long process. We had to pass through at least two checkpoints before reaching the courtyard. We also had to store our shoes and phones away before entering the final checkpoint inside the shrine itself. But once the curtains opened, it felt like stepping into another world. Massive crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling, golden walls were covered with beautiful Arabic calligraphy, and the strong scent of jasmine filled the air. The sight alone could bring someone to tears.

Inside the shrine, we sat quietly, praying and reflecting on life. It was one of the few places where I felt complete peace, where people openly shared their worries with God and searched for comfort and guidance. Sadly, we had to leave because our tour guide instructed us to return to the hotel before traveling to the next shrine. We were traveling in a group of about thirty people, most of whom I knew from my mosque. Since I was the youngest person in the group, everyone looked after me. During the trip, we became like a family, sharing the same spiritual journey together.

We boarded the bus for the next shrine, which was about three hours away. Since arriving in Iraq, my father had been very sick. It was his first time traveling overseas in almost thirty years, and during the bus ride his condition became much worse. By the time we reached the shrine's parking lot, he could barely stand up. My mother and I decided to stay behind with him while the rest of the group walked to the shrine, which was nearly a mile away.

My father fell asleep while my mother and I sat on our phones, bored and waiting. Suddenly, the bus driver ran onto the bus yelling, "DAESH! DAESH!" while quickly pulling down the curtains over the windows. Everything became loud at once – inside and outside the bus. My father shouted

for us to get down on the floor while I heard screaming and explosions outside. Even though I knew it was dangerous, I pulled the curtain slightly to the side and looked outside. I remember seeing clouds of sand and smoke from explosions, though I could not tell exactly where they were coming from. I saw a frightened man wearing a checkered scarf over his face running toward his car.

The bus jerked forward as the driver spoke quickly with a soldier through the window. My parents and I barely understood what was happening because our Arabic was limited. We kept asking what would happen to the people who had gone to the shrine, but the driver was too focused on escaping. My thoughts were racing. Where were we going? Were we safe? Where were our friends? Was I even going to survive? Eventually, the bus stopped in front of a school about a mile away, and we waited there. I do not remember how long we stayed. My mother said two hours, while my father insisted it was four. To me, time felt unreal. It could have been a few minutes or an entire day.

While we waited, I noticed young children in school uniforms calmly walking home together. They could not have been older than nine years old, yet there were no parents with them. Even with an attack happening less than a mile away, they walked home as if it were normal. That moment shocked me more than anything else during the trip. In America, children my age could not even walk home alone safely in many neighborhoods, especially during an emergency. Yet these children had grown up surrounded by violence and instability, and somehow they carried on with daily life.

Watching them made me reflect on my own life in the United States. Although my family is not wealthy, I realized how many privileges I had always taken for granted: safe transportation, security, and the ability to live without constant fear for my family's safety. For the first time, I understood how differently people around the world experience childhood. Eventually, the rest of our group returned safely. They rushed onto the bus, anxious and emotional, explaining that the attack had happened in the parking lot while they were locked inside the shrine believing that we had died. During the ride back to the hotel, none of us spoke much. We were exhausted, overwhelmed, and silently thankful to God for surviving.

The next morning, we watched the news and learned that two Iraqi soldiers had died in the Daesh attack.

Returning to the United States after that experience felt strange. At first, everything seemed too quiet and normal. I remember looking around airports, streets, and stores with a completely different perspective. I became more aware of safety in ways I had never thought about before. At the same time, I also felt more grateful for the life I had in America and for the opportunities available to me here. The trip also changed my relationship with my faith. Before Iraq, religion felt more like tradition and routine. After experiencing the shrines, the prayers, and even the fear of that attack, my faith became more personal and meaningful. I understood why so many people risk traveling there despite the dangers. The spiritual connection people felt was stronger than fear itself.

As an Iraqi American Muslim, the experience also changed how I saw my identity. Growing up in America, Iraq was always something I heard stories about from older relatives, but during that trip I saw the reality for myself - the beauty, the suffering, the resilience, and the deep faith of the people. I returned feeling more connected to my culture and more aware of how fortunate I was to live between two worlds. Even years later, I still think about those children walking home during an attack and the soldiers who lost their lives protecting others. That trip taught me that being "lucky" was not just about visiting Iraq safely. It was about learning gratitude, faith, and empathy in a way that changed me forever.

Part III

Visual and Performing Arts

7.

Swallow's Saree

Lubaba Nahin

This piece depicts a male Tree Swallow perched on a branch. It was completed on an 11x14-inch canvas using water-based acrylic paints.

Tree Swallows are not native to Bangladesh. This raises the question: why did I choose this bird to represent Bangladesh? The answer is simple. The Tree Swallow is as vibrant and striking as the cultural sarees Bengalis wear every day. It reflects freedom, resilience, and a quiet confidence that longs to be recognized and appreciated for what it truly is.

My decision to paint a Tree Swallow was not based on geographical accuracy, but rather on symbolism. The bird serves as a metaphor for Bangladesh's rich and vibrant cultural heritage. Male Tree Swallows are known for their saturated, iridescent feathers that shift between shades of green and blue depending on the light. Each feather appears carefully layered together with a luminous sheen, much like the intricate fabrics and patterns found in traditional Bangladeshi sarees.

Among the most treasured forms of Bangladeshi textile art are Jamdani sarees, which hold deep historical and cultural significance. Jamdani is traditionally woven using fine cotton muslin associated with the historic Dhaka muslin tradition, celebrated for its delicacy and craftsmanship. The detailed motifs woven into the fabric reflect patience, artistry, and generations of cultural memory. In many ways, the shimmering feathers of the Tree Swallow mirror the elegance and intricacy of these textiles.

Both the saree and the bird symbolize endurance and identity. The Tree Swallow is migratory, constantly moving across borders and adapting to new environments. Bengalis share a similar history of resilience and movement, shaped by struggles for independence, migration, and the preservation of cultural identity across generations. Despite challenges, Bengali culture continues to flourish and carry its traditions forward.

In an almost poetic way, the Tree Swallow appears to wear its own saree through its vivid plumage, embodying the same beauty, pride, and grace reflected in Bengali heritage.



Figure 1. Artwork

8.

Nature's Symbolism Across Asia

Hadia Amin

Nature has inspired artists across cultures for centuries, not just as a subject but as a way to express values, beliefs, and identity. In Chinese, Japanese, and Korean art, nature often goes beyond its physical appearance to represent deeper meanings such as resilience, spirituality, and national identity. Representations of nature function as visual expressions of moral philosophy, spiritual belief, and historical and political identity.

In Chinese art, nature frequently symbolizes moral virtue, particularly perseverance and inner strength. The *Carpet with Plum Blossom*, created during the Yuan dynasty, features blossoms that bloom in winter, long associated with resilience. Because the plum flower survives harsh seasonal conditions and emerges before other plants, it became a metaphor for endurance in the face of adversity. This symbolism aligns with Confucian ideals that emphasize moral integrity and steadfast character. During the Yuan dynasty, when China was ruled by the Mongols, many artists used natural imagery to suggest the resilience of Han Chinese culture under foreign domination. As scholars note, artistic production under Mongol rule often carried layered meanings shaped by the political conditions of the period ("Art Under the Mongols"). The plum blossom therefore functioned not merely as decoration, but as a quiet expression of cultural survival and moral endurance.

In Japan, nature is often portrayed as powerful and spiritually significant, which is evident in Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*. The towering wave dominates the composition, emphasizing nature's overwhelming force, while Mount Fuji in the background provides a sense of calm stability and permanence. As *Smarthistory* explains, Hokusai's dramatic use of scale heightens the tension between human vulnerability and the vast power of the natural world ("Hokusai – Under the Wave off Kanagawa"). This contrast reflects Shinto beliefs that regard natural forces as sacred and spiritually animated. At the same time, the frozen moment of the cresting wave evokes the Japanese aesthetic concept of *mono no aware*, an awareness of the impermanence of all things and the bittersweet beauty found in transient moments. By capturing the wave at the instant before it crashes, Hokusai emphasizes both the awe-inspiring force of nature and the fleeting quality of existence.

In Korean art, nature often symbolizes the connection to the homeland. Jeong Seon's *Entire View of Mt. Geumgang* is a realistic, true-view painting of one of Korea's most celebrated mountains. The work reflects pride in Korea's natural beauty and emphasizes a spiritual bond with the land. As UNESCO notes, the mountain contains numerous key sites of mountain Buddhism, with traditions dating back to the fifth century, and the cultural landscape includes ancient hermitages, temples, stupas, and stone carvings ("Mount Kumgang – Diamond Mountain from the Sea"). Because the mountain has long functioned as a site of pilgrimage, meditation, and spiritual retreat, it represents

more than scenery; it embodies religious devotion and cultural memory. Unlike Chinese landscapes, which are often idealized, this painting focuses on accurately portraying Korea's unique scenery, reinforcing the idea that national identity is rooted in specific, sacred places. At a time when Korea was historically positioned between powerful neighboring states such as China and Japan, Koreans felt like Korea was "a shrimp between two whales." Emphasizing the accurate depiction of the mighty Mount Geumgang was a way to gain cultural identity away from China and Japan by showing its powerful natural landscape. By focusing on the mountain's sacred and cultural significance, the artist strengthened a distinct sense of national identity rooted in Korea's own land and traditions.

Together, these artworks demonstrate that nature in East Asian art is far more than decorative scenery. In Chinese art, it becomes a symbol of moral endurance under political upheaval; in Japanese art, it embodies both spiritual reverence and the fleeting beauty of impermanence; and in Korean art, it anchors cultural identity in sacred geography. Although each tradition interprets nature differently, all three use the natural world as a visual language through which philosophical, spiritual, and political values are expressed. Through these works, nature emerges not as backdrop, but as an active force in shaping cultural memory and national identity.



Figure 1. *Carpet with Plum Blossom.*
Yuan Dynasty Rug with prunus branch, Yuan dynasty (1271-1368)
13th century pile carpet, ca. 68 x 74 in.
Naginata Boko Preservation Association



Figure 2. Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)
Great Wave off Kanagawa from *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*.
Edo period, 1831.
Woodblock print, ink, and color on paper
10 1/8 x 14 15/16 in. (25.7 x 37.9 cm)

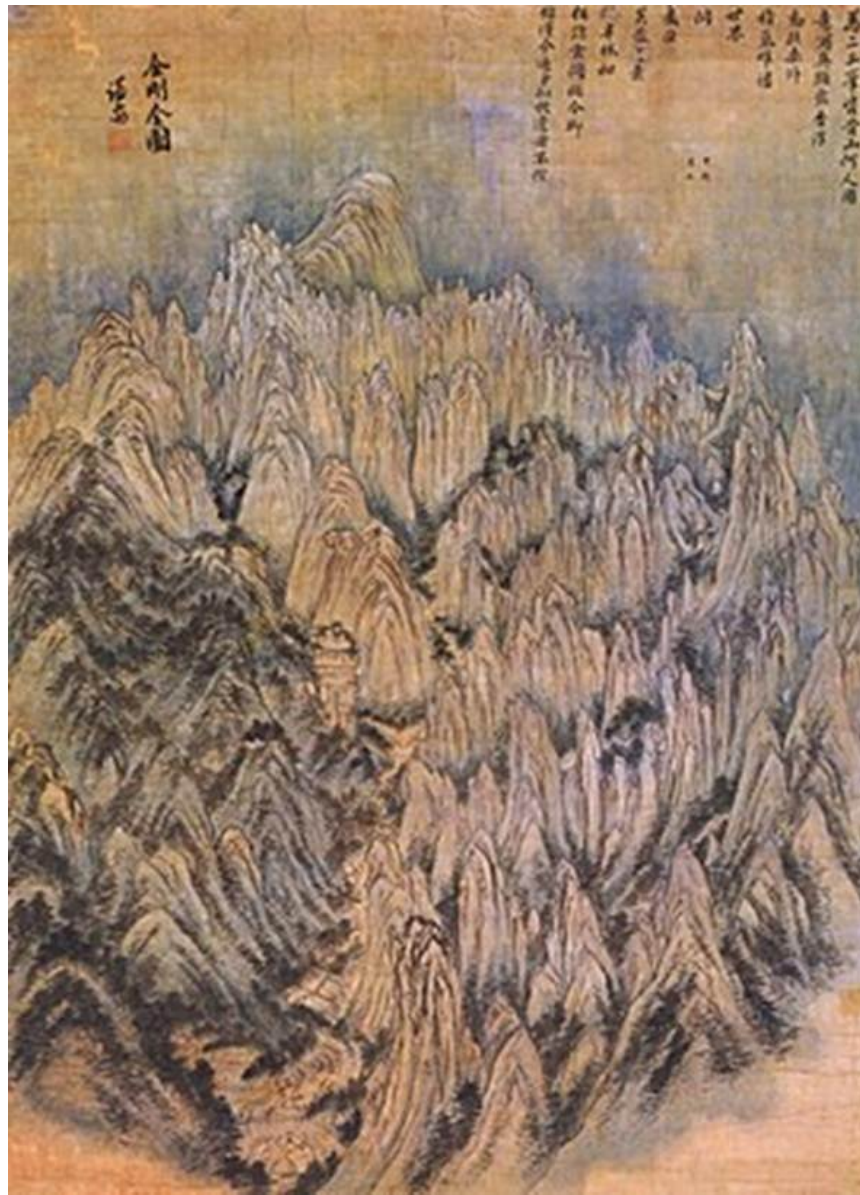


Figure 3. Jeong Seon (1676–1759)
Entire View of Mt. Geumgang (1734)
 Ink and color on paper, true-view landscape painting
 130.7 cm × 94.1 cm (51.5 in × 37.0 in)

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9.

The Visual Style of Life

Sanya Ghosh

Visual Kei is a subculture that originated in Japan that blends the likes of the world of music, fashion, and theatrical flamboyant performances to showcase individual artistic style and expression. Coined by the band X Japan's slogan "Psychedelic Violence Crime of Visual Shock," Visual Kei is a bold movement dominated and drawing inspo both musically as well as visually from the 70s and 80s." The actual term itself directly translates to "visual style." When I was younger, I didn't really know much about anything, like most if not all children, and I spent years trying to find my own "style" and my own way of doing things without conforming to what society thought I should be based on my background, while still trying to fit in. It was honestly exhausting. After presenting the styles, I will explain what impact they had on me.

The Visual Kei subculture comprises so many different substyles, some having existed for decades and others being far more recent to be considered official "categories." Some of the most prominent ones to be recognized in the scene are: Oshare Kei (お洒落系), Angura Kei (アングラ系), Eroguero Kei (エログロ系), Nagoya Kei (名古屋系). Tanbi Kei (耽美系). Kote Kei (コテ系). Kuraifu Kei (クラブ系). When it comes to the substyles of Visual Kei, there really are no limits to how one can choose to express themselves creatively, the many substyles emerging from the movement are nothing if not a prime example of that.

Starting off with Oshare Kei (お洒落系), Oshare Kei is a substyle that literally translates to "Fashionable style." It is a substyle that blends music with the themes of "soft-core" elements and pop-punk while also maintaining cheery music and overall light-hearted vibes. Usually when it comes to this substyle, the lyrics themselves will not only carry a positive tone, but positive messages as well on life. This substyle is also categorized by slightly sharp visuals and features that are appealing to the eye. Usually this substyle is geared towards teenage girls or young adult women, but it's a substyle that anyone can be a fan of. For this specific substyle of Visual Kei, I'd like to reference An Cafe (アンティック-珈琲店-) otherwise known by its full name: Antic Café. Antic Café was an Oshare Kei Visual Kei band that was active from and had its height of popularity during the years of 2003 to 2019. As of right now, they are on indefinite hiatus.



Figure 1. Antic Café (An Cafe), a representative **Oshare Kei** band known for its colorful fashion and upbeat visual style.

The second type of kei I would like to take a look at is Angura Kei (アングラ系). Angura Kei is a substyle that translates to “Underground style.” This substyle is one that is most in line with Japanese tradition, ideals, and visuals and often is used to indirectly (or directly) express a dissatisfaction with the politics of the political climate of Japan. This is also a substyle that is often linked with another known as “Eroguro Kei.” With various looks, Shironuri makeup (which is essentially makeup that’s main focal point is white foundation being paired with “psychedelic” type looks) is one that is often quite popular amongst this substyle. For this specific substyle, I would like to reference a Visual Kei band by the name of Cali≠gari, a band whose music focused on the genres of alternative rock, punk rock, new wave, and post-punk.



Figure 2. Cali≠gari, a leading **Angura Kei** band blending underground aesthetics with experimental rock.

After that is Eroguro Kei (エログロ系). Eroguro Kei is a substyle that literally translates to “Erotic Grotesque Nonsense.” As the name implies, while the actual substyle itself is not exactly explicit, the subcategory of Visual Kei focuses much more on shock value through its sensual/fetish-esque vibes and experimental artistic messages. Due to this, a good portion of Visual Kei artists or bands that find themselves aligning with the label of Eroguro Kei will also have hard rock be one of their main genres of music. A prime example of Eroguro Kei is the Visual Kei band MERRY (メリー), which is known as a self-proclaimed Eroguro Kei band as well as one that aligns with the category of Angura Kei as well. This band is specifically known for specializing in Punk rock, Jazz Rock, Alternative Rock, as well as Heavy Metal. The band itself formed in 2001 and to this day is still releasing music and going strong.



Figure 3. MERRY, an influential **Eroguero Kei** band noted for its theatrical grotesque imagery.

Following that is Nagoya Kei (名古屋系). Now Nagoya Kei translates to “Nagoya Style” and unlike the other substyles previously mentioned, this is the first one to actually be based on a geographical location rather than a certain vibe. As the name suggests, this substyle originated based off of the fashion in Nagoya, Japan. With this substyle, much of the clothing was black and or white, giving a much more toned-down sort of visual shock and appeal. Instead of metal, this type of substyle instead adheres to more traditional methods. With this being said, the band that I’d like to reference for Nagoya Kei is in fact a metal band known as Lynch, a band that formed in 2004 and just like MERRY, is still going strong to this day.



Figure 4. l'Arc~en~Ciel., representing the darker, minimalist aesthetic associated with **Nagoya Kei**.

Additionally, we also have Tanbi Kei (耽美系). Tanbi Kei translates to “Aesthetic Style,” however it’s important to note that most Tanbi Kei fans don’t exactly refer to this specific style by the term “Tanbi Kei,” instead choosing to call it “European-based” or “European-inspired” style instead, since that is precisely what it is. Tanbi Kei, or European-Inspired Style, is a substyle that leans more towards the romantic and stunning aspect of various European period-based costumes and outfits. With this substyle, various artists and bands will frequently dive into music genres that align with Baroque, Symphonic Metal, and Neo-Classical. For this specific substyle, I would like to reference L'AREINE, a Visual Kei band that was reminiscent of another prominent band during the 90s by the name of Malice Mizer. L'AREINE formed in 1994 and disbanded in 2007, their music often consisting of Visual Rock, Neo-classical, Gothic Rock, and Synthpop.



Figure 5. LAREINE, exemplifying the European-inspired elegance of **Tanbi Kei**.

Let us also not forget Kote Kei (コテ系). Kote Kei translates to “Over the top/extreme style.” With this substyle, much like Nagoya Kei, it comes bearing slight restrictions. In order for a band or artist to be considered Kote Kei, they must have existed during a time period or be reminiscent of a time period that to our current society would be classified as “old school” (80s to 2000s usually). With this specific substyle, it is very common to see band members sporting wild hair paired with bright grunge-type visuals and outfits. For this specific substyle, I would like to reference NéiL. NéiL was a Visual Kei band that formed in 19996 however made their official debut during 1999 and then ceased activity the following year. Their main focus and concept consisted of Rock as well as obscure-type music.



Figure 6. NéiL, an example of the dramatic **Kote Kei** ("old-school") style.

Last but certainly not least, is Kurafu Kei (クラブ系). Kurafu Kei translates to "Punk Style." This substyle is often associated with "hell-raising" type attitudes, and is often rebellious in nature with music genres often being Thrash, Hardcore, and Heavy Metal. This specific substyle is unique in the sense that it mainly was created indirectly as a by-product of punk bands rather than used as a category to define specific substyles of Visual Kei. For this specific substyle, I would like to reference the Visual Kei band THE PIASS. THE PIASS was a band that formed in 1990 and is still going today, with its music blending Hardcore Punk with Trashcore, Deathcore, and Metalcore.



Figure 7. Malice Mizer, one of the most influential bands in the development of Visual Kei.

While I have mentioned quite a few substyles that encompass the visual kei movement and scene, there are still many more. When it comes to style, just like the various styles that bandmembers in the Visual Kei scene have tried out, I too have tried out different ways and methods of expressing myself as an individual. In terms of visually, I have experimented with clothes, my hair, accessories, and so much more. In terms of internally, I have experimented with who I choose to surround myself with and what they bring out in me individually.



Figure 8. My own design when going to a concert.

The history of Visual Kei is long and extensive, with X Japan being known as essentially the “god-fathers” of the movement. With that being said, they weren’t the only ones that played a role in the bringing about of Visual Kei, since key bands like Malice Mizer, COLOR, and SHAZNA as well as many more rightfully deserve a certain level of credit and recognition as well. I am still quite young, as I am a high-school teenager currently just going through the motions of life as one does. I am still very much finding my own individual style and my way of life, but I figure that while I am trying to decide that for myself, I might as well do it whilst looking up to the example that is Visual Kei.



Figure 9. X Japan, widely regarded as pioneers and "godfathers" of the Visual Kei movement.

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Note: since Visual Kei is a very niche subculture that deals less in facts and more in feeling, it is acceptable to use blogs and websites that aren't certified (such as .orgs) for information as long as the information aligns with one another in a percentage close to around 75%.

Part IV

Personal Essays

10.

Giddha and The Art of Being Seen: Quiet Freedom on a Loud Dance Floor

Akambreet Kaur

As I watched a Bollywood movie, one late afternoon with my mother, a scene transports me to a particular moment. The scene captured a grandmother figure telling her granddaughter about the lack of freedom she has within the walls of her household. Her eyes sparkle as she explains how a dance floor is the only place a woman can enjoy a small moment of freedom. The dance floor transforms into a place in which she can celebrate herself. There is no worry about her role of being a homemaker. I tend to always look at my mom in a side glance just to yell at her to stop crying over dramatic scenes. As I layed there with my hands in the half-empty popcorn bowl, I reflected on the significance of this scene. A memory with my mother came forward, so vivid to ignore.

The memory is a small moment I shared with my mother when I was 14 years old which I know I might never get to glimpse at with awe of a curious teenager. Moving to a new country as immigrants, we stay connected through family functions. My mother would often take me among my siblings as I would never turn down an opportunity to eat good food. This one particular party was thrown by her first workplace. She didn't speak much English at that time and it was the first group of friends she made since we had immigrated from India. I sat with my mothers' friend's daughter, whom I had just met. I was looking at my mother as she spoke with someone on the dance floor. Then, my mother started to dance. My eyes expanded as I stared straight at my mother in complete shock. It was as if the spotlight of a theater was right above her. She was the main character and it felt as if she was giving a monologue yet through the art of dance. In a rhythmic "Clap, Clap," my mother moves gracefully in a circle as she does the *giddha* (cultural folk dance) with other women. They perform the *giddha* gracefully with a huge smile on their faces, which radiates genuine happiness to the people around them. In Indian parties, Indian men usually perform the *bhangra* while women perform the *giddha*. My culture often tends to divide things between genders in different approaches, whether it's dance or responsibilities. As my mother danced in full joy with her friends, I was able to look at the world through the lens of my mother.

As a child, I was free-spirited like the wind, pushing myself from one space to another. Space given to women in immigrant cultures is in a bubble of invisibility. The culture is loud, in volume or dance or food, yet women are the threshold of "honor." Being born a daughter, I was not loved in the same way my twin brother was. I remember learning how to walk quicker than my brother. My family got worried that my brother wasn't walking as quickly as I was. The doctor had to advise them not to pick up my brother so often, and magically, he did learn to walk. As my father lived in NYC, my mother had the responsibility of more than just a housewife. She had to attend to various household chores and help with the farm. She had no time to sit to watch TV series then. Her access to the world was within the walls of her husbands' house.

In my culture, women are often told that their maternal home is “temporary” and that their “real” home is the one they get married too. I have heard this said to me from the many women in my family as they show me suitable marriage proposals. The idea of being called temporary has always left me with questions; Do Indian women have a place they can truly call theirs in the grand scheme of this vast world, or will they forever be seen as people who belong somewhere only with permission? Do they have a voice that doesn’t dictate the notion of family honor and reputation? We call the Earth “Mother Earth,” yet why are women so often treated as second-class citizens? Why are they made to feel like an afterthought that isn’t their own thought anyways? Much like how I viewed my mother on the dance floor as the main character differs how Indian women are expected to perform as second-leads. Society doesn’t want women to know they are beautiful or worthy; they are supposed to wait for others to say it aloud which rarely some women experience. The daily routine of their homemaking ends up defining the whole them. Participating in a culture like this, I am able to observe how women are needed to transform a house into a home. They are expected to do so while following rules that are often unspoken but deeply present. Much like the decorated walls, they are also molded to become what others want. They are present as the structure of the house yet the individuality will be unknown, even to themselves.

Moving to NYC allowed my mother the opportunity to become resilient and find an identity of her own. Living in NYC has granted me a nuclear family in which I was able to bond with my mother as her responsibilities of being a homemaker got narrowed to her children. My mother came to America with no knowledge of English, yet somehow, she navigated me and my siblings in this unfamiliar place. I asked my mother, “Didn’t you ever get scared?” My mother told me, “I was, but I knew I had to put on a brave face for the sake of my children as I held onto your tiny hands.” My mother’s transition to a place that has become a home to us showed me how brave she is. I never realized until now in my 20s that my mother is everything I hope to be: invincible.

I am not sure why it surprised me, but was it really because I had never seen my mother dance before? The vision of her dancing that day allowed me to see her beyond just my mother. I have seen home videos of my mother dancing in India in various family functions. I wonder if parties are her escape. Perhaps it is a place where she is able to become a part of what she had to leave behind in India. The comfortability of being around people with similar clothes and language allowed her to breath. Or was it a moment where she was simply her in every possible way she could be, a woman who knows how to have a good time.

11.

Am I Really Chinese If I Can't Speak Chinese?

Min Zeng

18th Ave Chinese Preparatory School, 2014

Underneath my little wooden desk, I snapped my #2 pencil in half. The characters written on the sheet in front of me made no sense. How could this possibly be a language? It didn't resemble English in the slightest. I ended up handing in a blank test, returned the next day with a "0" scrawled on the top in bright red marker and followed by a humiliating spiel announcing to the entire class that I would be demoted back to "the first level." I had already flunked the ascension test three times before finally being promoted to the second level, so I decided the logical move would be to drop out of Chinese school. Surprisingly, my parents didn't protest against this idea, but my mom did leave me with a scathing remark.

"How will any Chinese person take you seriously in the future when you can't even speak Chinese?"

I didn't have any response to her statement, but I was beginning to question my Chinese identity at the mere age of 7.

IS 187 The Christa McAuliffe School, 2017

I was simultaneously nervous and giddy with excitement as my homeroom teacher came to the end of her welcoming speech. It was the first day of middle school and introductions were about to begin. An Asian boy with thick-rimmed glasses sat on the other side of the two-seater. I wasn't actually certain if he was Chinese or not, but I immediately held the assumption he was, since I hadn't met many non-Chinese Asians in my life. I eagerly greeted him, but he returned my enthusiasm with a brief glance.

"Are you Chinese?" he asked. His voice had a thick accent.

"Yes! I was born in China, actually."

"你会说中文吗? (So, do you speak Chinese?)"

I paused, unsure of how to respond to his unfamiliar words, but my silence was enough for him to write me off. He scoffed at me before turning away. My 10-year old self wasn't sure exactly why he treated me so coldly, but I was certain of one thing: telling others my birthplace was a mistake. I had to hide the fact that I was born in China.

Brooklyn Technical High School, 2023

The entirety of my class, including myself, was engaged in meaningless conversation with one another as the substitute teacher carelessly scrolled on her phone. My friend was talking nonstop about the exam we just took in the previous class, and I was pretending to listen by throwing in the occasional *mhm* and *uhuh*. Suddenly, he broke off his rapidfire rambling with a singular line spoken in Chinese. He stared off into space for a moment before turning to face me, as if he was expecting a response. I glanced at him, bewildered. He proceeded to repeat his words, but in a questioning tone this time. I continued on with my confused act.

His expression shifted into a grimace. "Don't you know how to speak Chinese? You should be able to understand what I'm saying."

"I-I...can't really speak or understand Chinese..." I said. When we first met, he asked me about my ethnicity, and after I responded with "Chinese," he would randomly blurt out sentences in Chinese, but he never directed a question at me until this time. He also never asked whether or not I could actually comprehend Chinese.

A reasonable person would've taken this as a simple misunderstanding, but I was a 16-year old running on hormonal anxiety. I instantly came to the conclusion that our friendship was dropped due to my inability to understand Chinese. For me, this was confirmation that no Chinese person would want to remain friends with me once they discovered my lacking Chinese skills.

Bensonhurst, 2025

I quickly trotted down the rusting stairs leading out of the train station, humming to myself as music blasted from my AirPods. My quick pace continued even after stepping onto the pavement. I was ready to engulf myself in the warm comforts of my bed after a long day of classes. A sore tightness began creeping up my lower legs from my speedwalking, but I decided the pain was worth it once I began approaching the last crossing to my house. The streets were empty besides myself and an elderly Asian lady pushing a rickety cart filled with groceries. The two of us were initially on opposite ends of the street, but she suddenly began veering off to her left before coming to a halt in front of me, stopping me in my tracks. She spoke to me in what sounded like Mandarin, but I wasn't certain.

I responded with one of the few sentences I knew how to say. "我不知道中文。(I don't know Chinese.)"

Her tone shifted to a more aggressive one as she began spewing sentences I couldn't comprehend, with several tongue clicks and *tsks* in between words. I bowed my head in apology and quickly ran off towards my house. I could still hear her yelling behind me, gradually increasing in volume as I drew further away.

I finally made it inside my house a minute later. Instead of following my initial plan to collapse in bed, I sat down at the kitchen table without even taking off my backpack. In the center of the table was a box of mooncakes, one of my favorite Chinese desserts. I placed my hand on top, gently tracing the Chinese lettering on the lid. I thought back to the elderly Asian lady on the street, who visibly expressed her disappointment and frustration with my Chinese. I couldn't help but wonder; would I ever be accepted by the Chinese-American community with my poor Chinese skills? At the age of 18, the age of a grown adult, I still didn't know the answer to this question, and all I could do was blankly stare at the mooncake container.

12.

Good English, Bad Chinese

Sylvia Lee

Born and raised in Queens, New York, I have always been surrounded by Chinese speakers. My parents are Chinese, my parents' friends speak Chinese whenever they are around, and even my friends are Chinese. For me, Chinese is about as common as the oxygen we breathe. In fact, when I was younger, I believed that Asian people were the majority in America and everyone else were minorities. Now, everyone knows that particular statement isn't true, but it just went to show how smothered I was in the Chinese community, especially in elementary school. I was a part of a dual language program where I learned to speak, read, and write in Chinese. So, if Chinese was on the page, in the air, and all around me, how did I manage to become someone who is fluent in English and not Chinese?

I was born surrounded by Chinese people. My mom and dad were from Hong Kong and Taiwan respectively, so they are fluent in written and spoken Chinese. When my mom came to America, she was a fully grown adult, and she came to attend Baruch College in New York City. When my dad came to America, he was also a fully grown adult, and he also came to America to attend college. Both of them grew up in a country that spoke and still speaks Chinese, so they brought their language to America. When they got married and had me and my sister, they spoke Mandarin and some Cantonese. Basically Chinese. My parents' friends were and still are frequent visitors in our home, and they speak either Mandarin or Cantonese to us. My sister speaks Chinese pretty well, some of my friends speak Chinese, and that just leaves me. A child, a younger sister, a product of two Chinese parents, a product of my environment...and I can barely speak Chinese. I know basic words, like "Hi" or "Goodbye" and colors. I can feign my fluency and have a simple conversation with people in Chinese. But when it comes to talking about something important or complicated, my facade falls flat and everyone realizes that my Chinese is trash.

What about my education? During my time in elementary school, I was in a dual language program in P.S. 173, and I learned how to read, speak, and write Chinese. Or should I say, I almost learned Chinese. I had to write journal entries and a story, and most of the books that were supplied to me were Chinese. I was taught calligraphy, pinyin, Chinese characters that I didn't know existed and had meanings that I didn't understand even when translated into English. Even though I had classes from Monday to Friday and teachers that taught me Chinese from first grade to fifth grade, my Chinese just never improved. Even though everyone around me were Chinese people and spoke Chinese on a daily basis, my Chinese was so bad it was like I was never taught the language. But how could that be? I was a product of my Chinese parents, and a product of my Chinese environment.

Every time I speak Chinese, I think about this. It's not like I even had a penchant for writing and speaking English when I was younger. If anything, I was ridiculed for things I had written in

English. In elementary school, I had to write a story in English. I was sitting on the floor with the rest of the class learning something else when my teacher called for me when looking over everyone's stories. I had to get up in the middle of the lesson, go over to my seat where she was, and listen to her lecture me about how I only wrote two pages of material. Even before that, I had to write a 'research paper' on parrots. I was standing at the front of the class and only said the phrase "The parrot is a kind of bird" before the teacher said "Yeah, we all know that a parrot is a bird" out loud and the whole class laughed at me. I couldn't tell, but I knew that my face was red after that. You would think that after that moment, I would never write again. But I did. Three books, countless papers, and a major in English.

How did this happen? Middle school.

I had a friend that had been with me for quite some time. We went to the same elementary school and middle school. During lunchtime, she showed me that she was writing a story in a binder on looseleaf paper. Me being the follower and desperate to fit in, I wanted to do the same things as her. I pulled a binder out of a hidden box in my closet, filled it with looseleaf, and began to write a story that had popped into my mind. This story became fully developed, and it would become the first book I had ever written.

Pause. Where did my Chinese go?

Here's the thing: The only times I was obliged to speak Chinese was with my mom's friends, who only spoke Chinese. But those people barely came around in recent years. Sure, maybe we bumped into each other, but those encounters were rare. When I did have to talk to them, all I had to say was "你好 (Nǐ hǎo)". I would talk about "我读的东西 (Wǒ dú de dōngxī)" and "我现在在做的东西 (Wǒ xiànzài zài zuò de dōngxī)". But I never had to speak Chinese to my friends or anyone my age when I transitioned from elementary to middle school. I didn't feel the need to. Everyone around me spoke English. As the ratio of Chinese people dwindled in my classes as I got older, I was more inclined to speak English because that was the language that everyone spoke. Even when I met up with a classmate in high school who originally only spoke Chinese in elementary school, I didn't speak Chinese with her because she had become fluent in English. She may not have been my friend, but she was a crucial piece of history that led me to realize and discover my distance from Chinese. Her transition from Chinese to English was a metaphor to my transition from elementary to middle school. The change is stark, but also misleading. If you had met either one of us without knowing our histories in language and judged us by the way we spoke English, you would have never guessed that I was once learning Chinese in school and that she was once a Chinese-only speaker.

Now that I am an after school teacher and some of the students are learning ESL because they only know Chinese, I can only think about the years that have passed where I did not use my ability to speak Chinese. My ability has diminished into almost nothing; only a few scars filled with regretful words remain. I have used Google Translate more times than I wish to admit, and hearing other teachers speak Chinese to the students fluently only forced me to remember that I was losing my language abilities. How much easier would my life have been if I was able to speak Chinese fluently? Learning how to speak Chinese consumes time, time that I don't have and at this rate, will never have. Over the years, I have become insecure of my lack of ability to speak my family's language. As an Asian girl, there is always that expectation that I speak both English and my family's language, an expectation that comes from my family and peers, Chinese or not. Since I can't meet that expectation, do I have to wallow in despair over the fact I can't speak Chinese?

I felt like I was the only one to not be able to speak a language that my family could. Then, I met up with my mom's friend's daughter. We had met before, but we were young then. Now, we go to the same college, and we have met up a few times. One day, the following question popped into my head for no real reason: How does my friend communicate with her mom? From what my mom told me, her mom speaks only Chinese, and my friend only speaks English. I asked my mom the question in the car, and she didn't have an answer so she told me to ask my friend directly. So the next time I went to work with my friend, I clarified their language barrier, and I asked her finally, "How do you two communicate?"

She said, "Oh, my sister has to translate for us."

At first, I was flabbergasted. First of all, I couldn't imagine the stress of having to be a human translator between family members. Secondly, how can a mother and daughter not speak the same language and be so okay with it that they have a supposed solution for that? I couldn't answer that question, and neither could my mom. But then I had a revelation: It doesn't matter. Just because we are Chinese women, doesn't mean that we have to know how to speak Chinese. Am I a disappointment because I don't speak a certain language? Am I not considered as smart as any other Chinese person in New York just because I don't speak Chinese fluently? Is my friend not considered smart because she doesn't speak Chinese at all? She's a computer science major; I would say that she's smart simply because I couldn't do what she does.

I feel like people expect that because I am Asian, I fit in that demographic of people that do not speak English and speak an Asian language fluently. People expect that because I am Chinese, I belong with my Chinese community when in reality, I couldn't be further away from them. I speak English fluently, and I think I should be proud of that because I can put that skill to good use. I may not be able to speak Chinese fluently, but that doesn't mean that I'm uneducated or useless.

13.

Word Power

Annie Huizhen Chen

The patriarchal century makes many words more casual, and people give them new definitions and usages. These informal words help people start using a foreign language more quickly, even if they aren't in the dictionary. However, language is a double-edged sword; it also includes words used to insult and curse people. I chose the title "Word Power" because I believe words are not just sounds – they have the power to shape how we see ourselves and others.

As an Asian who was raised in China, I've seen many girls shamed by men using curse words, especially slurs specifically designed to insult females. Men often bully those who look weaker through mean words and microaggressions. In my opinion, some Asian men have less consciousness about feminism; they may show less respect to younger women or minorities because they assume females can be humiliated by "default." This is reflected in serious statistics: UNFPA in Asia and the Pacific pointed out that many women in Asian countries face physical and sexual violence. For example, a survey in Fiji found that 64.1% of women had experienced intimate partner violence.

As a Chinese speaker, I traditionally learned English in school, but I never attended intensive after-school programs. English and Chinese have very different systems. For example, in Chinese, verbs don't change for "I," "he," or "they," but English grammar is much more complex. At the beginning, I couldn't figure out the difference between "isn't" and "aren't," so I learned the slang term "ain't" from hip-hop songs. This reminds me of Aurora Levins Morales' essay, where she says, "I ain't gonna say ain't no more, cause ain't ain't in the dictionary" (112). Using "ain't" made my spoken English feel more fluent and helped my confidence. Listening to hip-hop music and using words like "gonna" or "wanna" helped me sound more like a native speaker and expressed my personality. It made speaking simpler so I wouldn't stumble over basic verbs.

In the United States, there seems to be more consciousness about avoiding insults toward women, but the problem still exists. I interviewed three of my classmates from Latin America, and they all had strong reactions to the word "whore" because it is so targeted at women. In my oral history interview, my classmate Carlos said that while he doesn't use it, "Certainly, there was somebody who called his girlfriend with that word." From my perspective, some men use a "smart strategy" to avoid being labeled a "bad boy" – they use the word "for fun" or as a "nickname" to show "closeness." However, calling an intimate partner such a word is still a form of misogyny, even if they claim it is just a joke.

When it comes to formal writing, I try to use the most professional language. I often struggle with grammar, tense, and punctuation – especially comma splices. To improve, I have learned to check my work carefully for informal words that slip in when I’m typing quickly. To enhance our English skills, we must be sensitive to these differences. Words have power; using precise and respectful words makes the reader trust your message more. It is a skill used to convince people and influence their lives.

In conclusion, words are not just words. They are tools to express feelings and thoughts. Culture builds our variety of words, and knowing the difference between formal and informal language helps our brainstorming become more intensive. Words are powerful. They are the ultimate expression of human intelligence.

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Part V

Critical Essays

14.

Migration, Language, and the Reconfiguration of Home

Maunia Arbabi

Migration is not simply the movement of a body from one place to another; it marks a more elusive transformation, one that unfolds over time and resists full articulation. What is displaced is not only geography, but also the very conditions through which identity becomes legible to itself. This understanding stands in tension with the philosophy of Maurice Barrès, for whom the self remains inseparable from its rootedness in land, ancestry, and historical continuity. His notion of *la terre et les morts* situates identity within an organic relation to place and lineage. Within this framework, uprootedness (*déracinement*) does not merely signify loss; it threatens the coherence through which the self understands itself. Identity, in this sense, cannot be conceived as freely portable. It presupposes a continuity between past and present, self and soil, and becomes fragile when that continuity is disrupted.

Migration does not erase identity; it alters the terms through which it can be sustained. What is displaced, then, is not identity itself, but the conditions under which it once appeared stable. The lived experience of migration thus complicates Barrès's model. What Barrès understands as rupture does not necessarily result in the disappearance of identity. Rather, displacement initiates a more complex process, one in which identity persists, not as continuity, but as transformation. It is rearticulated across languages, memories, and shifting forms of belonging. While Barrès grounds identity in territorial and ancestral continuity, Simone Weil reframes rootedness as an ethical and spiritual need, sustained through active participation in a living community that carries both memory and aspiration. Rootedness, in this sense, is not reducible to place alone; it depends equally on forms of belonging that are enacted and maintained over time.

Home, in this context, can no longer be reduced to a fixed location. It is not always a country, a city, or even a house. At times, it takes shape in more fragile forms: a memory, a sound, a gesture that lingers unexpectedly. What is lost is not only a place; it is often a former version of the self, suspended somewhere between departure and arrival. Sometimes, what disappears is not a place at all, but the person who once knew how to belong without reflection. Barbara Cassin approaches identity not through rooted continuity, but through displacement itself. In *La Nostalgie: Quand donc est-on chez soi?*, she unsettles the assumption that home must be anchored in territory. It may instead emerge through language, memory, and forms of belonging that shift depending on where one stands, and in which language one speaks. Drawing on classical narratives such as *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, she demonstrates that exile and return are not solely spatial experiences, they are also narrative ones. The longing for home becomes, in part, a longing for coherence, for a story in which one can still, however briefly, recognize oneself. Yet migration also carries a quieter emotional tension: the sense that distance does not dissolve attachment but complicates one's relation to it.

While Cassin approaches language primarily as a space of belonging and exile, Lacan shifts the focus toward the way language structures subjectivity itself. If displacement unsettles place, it does so equally through language. As Jacques Lacan suggests, the subject is structured through language. When language shifts, so too does the narrative through which the self is understood. The migrant thus occupies a fractured position, suspended between multiple linguistic and symbolic systems, never entirely severed from the first, yet never fully at ease in the second. What Barrès understands as rupture may instead be experienced as a gradual reassembly. This reassembly, however, does not restore coherence in its original form; it produces a more unstable, negotiated continuity.

What migration alters most profoundly may not be identity itself, but the experience of spontaneity. What once felt immediate, speaking, responding, belonging, recognizing social codes – becomes newly conscious and deliberate. Many migrants begin to observe themselves from a distance, as though ordinary gestures had acquired an unfamiliar weight. This heightened self-awareness can produce disorientation, but also reflection. The self no longer moves through the world with the same invisibility it once possessed. In this sense, migration does not simply fracture identity; it transforms selfhood into something more visibly constructed, something continuously shaped through attention, adaptation, and memory.

What is carried across borders is often not immediately visible: a photograph, a key, a piece of cloth, objects that may seem insignificant yet hold entire worlds. As Vamik Volkan describes these “linking objects” function as fragile bridges between past and present. They do not merely recall what was lost. They participate, quietly yet persistently, in the slow work through which a sense of self is reconstituted.

The effects of migration extend beyond memory alone. It disrupts the habits, places, and certainties that once made the self feel coherent. The familiar recedes. In its place emerges a subtle, persistent disorientation, often registered first in the body. Restlessness. Insomnia. A heightened attentiveness to one’s surroundings. At times, even the simplest sentence feels slightly misaligned, as though it belonged more fully to a life no longer inhabited. The loss of stability is not only symbolic. It is lived, physically, daily, and still, something else begins to take shape. Not all at once. Not in any definitive way. Gradually. A walk repeated each morning. A café returned to. A greeting that becomes familiar. These gestures accumulate. The unfamiliar does not become entirely known; it becomes livable.

If Barrès anchors home in soil, and Cassin in language, it may be better understood as rhythm, a series of returns that do not necessarily lead back to an origin yet still create a sense of continuity. The self begins, quietly, to take root again. Not in a single place, but across a set of practices, habits, and relations that remain in motion.

If memory sustains continuity across displacement, it can also produce an affective tension often experienced as guilt. Not the guilt of wrongdoing, but of displacement, of moving forward while remaining attached to what was left behind. The migrant may experience the uneasy sense of moving forward while others, places, or histories remain suspended elsewhere. Distance can create not freedom from attachment, but a heightened awareness of it. Even across distance, part of the self remains oriented elsewhere, shaped by memories, obligations, and forms of belonging that do not disappear with departure. Leaving does not sever attachment. What persists is not only longing, but an ongoing relation to place, history, and collective experience. In this sense, departure becomes another way of remaining connected, not through presence, but through memory and continued identification.

Even this tension becomes part of the ongoing negotiation through which identity persists across displacement.

Yet none of these frameworks fully capture the instability migration introduces into the experience of selfhood. Barrès cannot entirely account for identities that persist beyond territorial rootedness, while Lacan's emphasis on language risks reducing displacement to the symbolic alone. Cassin, in turn, illuminates the fluidity of belonging, though exile itself may not always remain as philosophically coherent or transformative as such frameworks sometimes suggest. Migration does not simply transform identity; at times, it also exposes the fragility of continuity itself.

Migration is not an ending, but an ongoing negotiation, one that exposes the limits of rooted models of identity while revealing both the persistence and fragility of continuity. The question, then, is perhaps not where home is, but how one learns, through the smallest and most ordinary gestures, to inhabit displacement without entirely surrendering the desire to belong.

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15.

Rain and Resilience: Memories of Manila*Noel Frigillana*

In *Istanbul, Memories and the City*, Orhan Pamuk explains how snow plays an important role in his childhood and in shaping the identity of the city he grew up in. Snow to him is not simply a weather condition but a powerful force that transforms Istanbul – bringing people together and uniting them as a community. As I read the excerpt, I was transported back to my childhood in Manila, Philippines. While we do not have snow, we do have rain – and plenty of it. My home, according to Wikipedia, is the twentieth country in the world with the highest rainfall.

Unlike children in colder countries who dream of endless summers and unlimited scoop of ice creams, I reminisce about my childhood through the seasons of rain, sipping hot *sinigang* soup – my mother’s special dish. I am a boy with a love-hate relationship with rain, sometimes delighted by it, sometimes annoyed – but always defined by it. Rain, just like snow in Istanbul, is both a blessing and a curse, boon and bane, beauty and tragedy.

I wait for the wet season, not because I want to run outside and get drenched, but because it transforms my hometown drastically in many different ways. Rain has the power to make dust disappear, tone down the scorching heat, and make even the dirtiest streets sparkle. Rain-soaked pavements become mirrors reflecting colorful jeepney lights and street buntings while people wade through puddles. After a downpour, coconut trees take on a more vibrant hue – almost refreshingly glowing. I love how the rain blurs the annoying billboards along the hectic Guadalupe bridge, softening the harshness of the cityscape. I love how it cleanses the polluted air of Manila and deepens the colors of the Pasig River. I love how the rain slips into everyday pauses, as commuters, unbothered by time, sing karaoke near a small eatery in Recto while waiting for it to subside, turning idle hours into something warm and alive. I love how the rain turns simple moments, like sharing an umbrella with a loved one while walking along Rizal Park, into something special, or even romantic. Above all, I deeply cherish how it gives hope to young Filipinos like me, quietly reminding us that even after the heaviest storm, light and warmth will return – a radiant symbol of resilience, courage and renewal for my countrymen.

Even though the rainy season is a normal part of life in the Philippines, like Istanbul under snow, Manila is always caught sadly unprepared. When heavy rain comes, drainage systems overflow and roads disappear under murky floodwater. Transportation is delayed, and everyday routines are disrupted. Flooding and landslides leave entire neighborhoods drowning. Damaged homes, contaminated water and diseases make life a living hell for many. I hate how the rain damages every bike, leaving mine unusable and often costing me expensive repairs. I hate how it paralyzes the Manila Light Rail Transit system and slows traffic on EDSA Expressway to a crawl. I hate how the rain

soaks the Mapua Institute of Technology, turning our campus into something like a filthy swimming pool. Above all, I abhor how it destroys lives of innocent Filipinos, shatters families, and turns ordinary days into heartbreaking tragedies – a painful symbol of suffering, destruction and death for my countrymen.

But rain is more than just water falling from the sky, it is a testimony to Filipino resilience and our strong sense of community. In Manila, we stand together under storms created not only by nature but by a highly corrupt government whose mismanagement of the flood-control budgets has left families stranded, neighborhoods submerged, and, in worst cases, caused countless preventable deaths. Still, through all this, Filipinos show up for one another in both small and big ways, finding strength in unity. Recent tragedies have made the call for transparency louder and more unyielding than ever. We demand that corrupt politicians be held accountable for the suffering endured every rainy season. As harsh as it can be, rain has become a reminder to us that survival is only possible through our collective effort. That even in the darkest of storms, hope always shines through. That resilience is not just endured, it is us building our capacity as a people to grow in adversity. That rain and resilience are a big part of who we are.

Rain, in my personal point of view, is more than just a change in weather – it is a quiet storyteller that carries memories, emotions, and pieces of home. It follows me through every stage of my life. As a young boy, the rain felt magical. I enjoyed playing with paper boats in the floodwater as I watched them drift along Dapitan Street as if the city were a river. As a student, it became more complicated. It soaked my shoes as I rushed to class, flooded the roads and turned long commutes into exhausting waits. Yet I still found moments of unexpected peace and bliss – walking with friends in Intramuros, bags held overhead, laughter shared, and feeling a strange sense of calm amid the noise and stress. As an engineer, the rain felt heavier. It was a massive inconvenience that affected my time, my productivity and my responsibilities. A single downpour could disrupt my entire day, delay site visits, and even cancel meetings with clients, reminding me of how fragile daily life in Manila could be. Now as I go through the seasons of my life, I've realized that rain has grounded me. It has reminded me of where I come from and how deeply the city and I have been shaped by the same storms. Through childhood, college, and work, rain remains a constant presence in my life. It frustrates me, yet comforts me. It defines my connection to my home – loving and hating it at the same time. Rain is not just part of my city; it is part of who I am.

Even as I cross borders and rebuild fragments of home in new places, that realization remains with me, like rain held gently in memory. Now that I live in New York City, it takes on a different tone – it falls first on the rooftops of tall Manhattan buildings, then spills down brick walls and glass façades. Around Times Square, glowing billboards and massive advertisements shimmer through wet reflections as tourists pause beneath umbrellas, cameras lifted toward the skyline. Beside them, New Yorkers move through the rain without slowing, coffee in hand, shoulders angled into the storm, some lifting a newspaper over their heads as if it could briefly shield them from both the rain and the urgency of the day. Taxis and buses move across the city, horns breaking through the constant downpour, wheels gliding over the slippery pavement. Rain does not quiet New York. It reveals the city as it truly is – fast, restless and always in motion.

This is what makes it different from rain in Manila. There, rain is collective – it interrupts and gathers people at once, with floods that slow entire neighborhoods, laughter shared while waiting for water to recede, neighbors calling out across rising streets. Even in inconvenience, there is presence, connection, and *bayanihan* – a sense that no one is facing the moment alone. Migration has made this difference clearer, reshaping how I understand myself. In New York, I have learned independence, the ability to keep moving even in isolation. But in remembering Manila, I realize I still carry a longing

for collectiveness, for the kind of shared experience that turns struggle into connection. I exist now between these two ways of being – motion and individuality on one side, memory and community on the other. And somewhere between them, I have come to understand that home is not only a place I return to, but something I carry within me, defined by every storm I have lived through.

16.

Citizenship Test: The Meaning of Intersectionality and Community in Men's Hockey

Eunice Yeung

In *There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension* by Hanif Abdurraqib, sports exist as a connecting thread between aspects of life. Sport is a vessel for discussion and self-reflection, which can be a valuable medium for considering its interactions and relationships with the viewer. The sports-watching experience could be described as biblical or religious, where watching the performances of athletes in a stadium, rink, or on a screen is no different from witnessing miracles. This is to say, there is meaning to be found in the stories that stem from sports, and extend beyond itself, allowing space for critical analysis.

As more traditionally unconventional hockey markets, ranging from Los Angeles on the West Coast to Dallas, Raleigh, and Sunrise down South, gain significant popularity and success, a common point of contention is whether hockey belongs in these cities, far removed from where the sport originated in the North. By examining the current state of North American men's hockey, primarily the National Hockey League (NHL) and American Hockey League (AHL), and how discrimination exists in the sport and across different fanbases, this essay will explore how ethnicity, nationality, and cultural background shapes the identity of hockey players within rigid boundaries, and by extension, the political implications of growing the sport in more diverse markets like in the South, and the meaning found in the creation of such sports communities.

Conditional Acceptance: Race vs Ethnicity vs Nationality

As much as sports function as an artificially constructed form of entertainment, they are no less removed from the real world in which they exist. The following will examine the marginalization of non-North American and non-white hockey players by understanding how the hegemonic construction of the North American hockey environment interacts with perceptions of race, ethnicity, and nationality, specifically in the NHL.

"Hockey player" is a physical identity legitimized by rituals created in the sport (Yeung, 2025), which primarily draws from aspects such as ability, race, and nationality. Robidoux (2001) describes the hockey identity as "definitively North American, Caucasian, and ... prejudicially English-speaking" when discussing how the discriminatory environment of the sport challenges ethnic distinctions. Players often claim that ethnicity makes no difference in how they view their teammates (Robidoux, 2001, p. 145). However, this acceptance is conditional and mostly based on how well a player can assimilate and fit into the existing hegemonic structures of hockey. Yet there is further distinction between being

a *non-North American* and a *non-white* player in the NHL, and this marginalization is evident when reflecting on how players of certain races and nationalities are perceived and stereotyped.

Being Non-white

The pipeline into the big leagues begins at the NHL Draft Combine held near the end of every season, where team executives, managers, scouts, and other front office members evaluate incoming draftees based on physical test performances or responses to interviews (Robinson, 2025). The futures of a large group of 18-year-olds hinge on how organizations project their talents, leadership abilities, mental fortitude, personalities, and cultural fit, among other physical attributes that can be evaluated. Robinson (2025) mentions that he was told a story where an NHL GM looked into a room at the Combine and said that the player he was pointing to was “not going to physically mature enough to excel at the next level”, and that “mentally he’s not going to be an NHL leader” (para. 22). That player, Nick Suzuki, went on to become the captain of the Montreal Canadiens. Such comments are usually not surprising to hear from front office members at the Combine. However, the confidence the GM had in his visual assessment is rather alarming given the fact that the player in question is Japanese-Canadian.

Though not directly admitted, racial stereotypes influence these projections, which is evidence of the “standard hockey player” identity that is deeply ingrained in hockey culture and is still sought after (Allain, 2008, 2012, 2019; Robidoux, 2001). A lot of projections for players at the Combine are indeed based on first impressions and surface-level predictions about on- and off-ice skills, but it is extremely difficult to believe that there is no bias towards players who appear white, and no unspoken prejudice against players who are visibly not. The assertions that a player is not built to become a leader – someone presumably strong-willed and confident – or physically able to excel at the NHL level, only based on visual first impressions, seem inconspicuous. However, when learning that these comments were made about a player who looks Asian, it cannot be ignored that it feeds into the stereotype that Asians are viewed as “weaker” or more “docile”, and that Asian masculinity is seen as physically inferior compared to white masculinity (M. Park, 2013). Stereotypes as such can become heightened in a space as fundamentally discriminatory as hockey. Despite the continuous efforts toward making the NHL a more accepting and diverse league, the sport is undeniably built on hegemonic structures, and BIPOC individuals are always at a higher risk for targeted criticism or violence (Allain, 2008, 2012, 2019; Robidoux, 2001).

Another example of visibly non-white (in this instance, Asian) players being more likely to receive criticism or harsher judgment than their white peers is the evaluation of Jason Robertson of the Dallas Stars, who is Filipino-American (De Pacina, 2024). In the 2024-2025 season, his postseason ended on a 3-game goal streak, scoring four goals in total, when the team was eliminated in the Western Conference Final (*Jason Robertson Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Title | Hockey-Reference.com*, n.d.). Trade rumors have been circulating about Robertson due to his performance, even though he ended the regular season with an MCL sprain (Baird, 2025), missing the first round of the playoffs entirely, and still playing through the last stretch of games injured (Kralik, 2025b).

In light of these discussions, people have characterized his game as being not as well-rounded as the other forwards on the team, describing him as a pure goal scorer who does not bring as much versatility outside of it, because most of his time-on-ice is spent on the power play and even strength (Assimakopoulos, 2025). However, statistics show the opposite (Kralik, 2025a). Robertson’s defensive and playmaking skills are demonstrably undervalued, and his ability to elevate the performances of his linemates is often overlooked. This season, he was ranked second in points on the team with 80 in 82

games, barring teammates who scored most of their points elsewhere before getting traded (*2024-25 Dallas Stars Roster, Stats, Injuries, Scores, Results, Shootouts* / *Hockey-Reference.com*, n.d.), which defies the perception that he is not as well-rounded as the others on the team.

Similar to how Nick Suzuki was deemed not “physically mature enough” (Robinson, 2025), Jason Robertson has also been described as “not physical” enough or “small” in online discussions. Granted, these comments are, more likely than not, made by people who do not closely follow the team or watch his on-ice performances, because he is 6’3 and at least 200lb (*Jason Robertson Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Title* / *Hockey-Reference.com*, n.d.; Zararis, 2025). These critiques are common and usually harmless in the hockey space, but they are still reflections of the standard for hegemonic hockey masculinity. When directed at visibly non-white hockey players, without any regard to evidence that suggests otherwise, it exposes the additional biases that people consciously, or subconsciously, have towards certain stereotypes (Allain, 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Robidoux, 2001; Yeung, 2025).

Being Non-North American

The status of being a hockey player is akin to being a citizen of a country (Mata Verdejo, 2020). Similar to the connection between race and the hockey identity, demonstrated by how non-white hockey players are racialized, nationality is closely linked to the perception of hockey players in North America. Players from different countries may not understand hockey the same way, but the sport becomes a unifying factor by supporting ideas of what it means to be “appropriately masculine within particular national contexts” (Stark, 2001, as cited in Allain, 2019, p. 518).

In North American hockey, being “appropriately masculine” refers to an aggressive and violent style of play. In Sweden and Finland, it refers to the “non-hegemonic” aspects of the game, such as stickhandling, passing, and skating skills, due to the larger rinks used in European hockey (Alsarve, 2021; Wueest, 2023). Hockey critics such as Don Cherry celebrated what he characterizes as “old-time hockey”, being the era of hockey before the introduction of European players into the North American game (Allain, 2008, p. 472). His resistance against Europeans in hockey centered around degrading players who do not conform to the other “good ol’ Canadian boys” who play an “appropriately masculine” game, leading to stereotypes such as “chicken Swedes” (Allain, 2008; Alsarve, 2021). He regarded Canadians as “warriors” for fighting and playing through injuries, and often “purposefully mispronounced the names of French Canadian and European players, suggesting that their play is second rate, and as a result, there is no need to learn their names” (Allain, 2008, pp. 472-473).

These perceptions of European players were criticized and rejected by the public, but have still bled into current-day hockey culture. Hegemonic masculinity is always subject to change, but the bodily punishing, and punished, image of North American hockey masculinity has been firmly cemented, despite constant adaptations to incorporate elements of European playstyles (Alsarve, 2021; Robidoux, 2001; Yeung, 2025). Many players conform to the Anglo-Canadian standard to find success playing in North American leagues, which mirrors the experiences of immigrants who are encouraged to assimilate into the culture and lifestyles of a host country for survival. In many cases, it is also a coexisting process for international players who move to North America for playing opportunities.

The conditional acceptance of hockey players with different national backgrounds can be correlated to Connell’s (2005) understanding of sports competition as “a test of masculinity” (as cited in Alsarve, 2021), and how “the homogenized male is the product of players attaching themselves to a predefined team/ group identity” (Robidoux, 2001).

In recent times, there have been many online discussions about the leadership group of the Dallas Stars, specifically about who could become the next captain (Newby, 2025). While members of the young core on the team are considered, online users have taken different approaches when explaining the reasons why certain players are more favored for captaincy (*Who Is the Next Dallas Stars Captain? [Online forum post]*, 2024). Being skilled, physical, outspoken, and leading by example seem to be the main attributes for an ideal leader, especially considering the legacy of past Dallas Stars captains being players who have been “tough-as-nails”, perfectly fitting the traditional mold of the hegemonic North American hockey identity (Allain, 2008, 2019). Despite the large group of veteran European, specifically Finnish, players on the team who have long been a part of the current leadership group, many online users believe that they are not suited for captaincy because they are “more reserved” or “not assertive enough” on and off the ice. These perceptions are, consciously or not, based on the stereotypes that European players are “more subservient” compared to the “harder-hitting” North American players who “put their body on the line”, disregarding their proven skills, success, and individual attributes (Alsarve, 2021; Allain, 2008, 2019).

Similarly, while the postseason becomes an unforgiving war of attrition for every player, European players tend to receive more criticism for “not showing up” in the playoffs compared to North Americans. Due to an unexpected trade from Colorado to Carolina before signing in Dallas earlier this year, Mikko Rantanen became the center of attention in the postseason (Lazerus, 2025a). Though, as of the end of the 2024-2025 season, he is ranked fourth on the list of active all-time playoff points-per-game leaders, he received backlash for underperforming early in the first round against his former team (*Active NHL Players - Playoff Points per Game Leaders*, n.d.; Lazerus, 2025a). It is undeniable that the spotlight shines brightest on superstar players like Rantanen, but there is a difference between how his struggles are viewed as “unacceptable” (Lazerus, 2025a) compared to his North American teammates, who were still spoken highly of despite underperforming significantly (Cotsonika, 2025).

The Intersection

Combining the above discussions about being non-North American and non-white in men’s hockey, it can be understood that as long as non-North American players adapt to the playstyle of their North American peers, and non-white players assimilate to the predominantly white, hegemonic masculine standard in addition to the existing on-ice expectations, they will be seen as “doing the right thing”, “made of the ‘right stuff’”, and “one of the boys” (Alsarve, 2021; Robidoux, 2001). “Ethnicity – and as already discussed, masculinity – is accepted if it is expressed within the pre-existing homogenous framework” (Robidoux, 2001, p. 146). The same can also apply to nationality. Any experiences or attributes that do not fit inside this hegemonic paradigm will be discriminated against (Robidoux, 2001, p.148).

The discrimination faced by non-North American and non-white players can be further complicated based on varying intersections of identity. Players of color who are visibly non-white, for instance, Black, are more likely to be judged for their “character” and “off-ice problems” based on racial stereotypes, such as being publicly criticized or being traded for clashing with management for transgressions that seem relatively minor (Yolo_Pinyato, 2020). Similar to how Hanif Abdurraqib writes about (white) America seeming to be attached to narratives of struggle in sport, where the Black athlete is portrayed as a singular, once-in-a-lifetime talent who uses sports as a vehicle to leave the bad neighborhoods they came from to “better their lives” (Abdurraqib, 2024), the commodification of the Black hockey player image in North America denies the legitimate representation of their Black American or Black Canadian identity. They are scrutinized through a distorted lens, framed by stereotypes that are deemed the acceptable embodiment of a “textbook Black athlete” to the white dominated spheres of sport media (Andrews, 1998, p. 214). Conversely, players who are visibly white

are more likely to be criticized for their on-ice performances instead, such as being “physically weak”, “soft”, “quiet”, or “feminine”.

Non-North American players on Canadian teams may also experience marginalization differently compared to those on American teams due to the strong association of hockey with the formation of Canadian identity (Allain, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2019). For example, a European player on a Canadian team who has assimilated into North American culture, such as speaking with minimal or no foreign accent, or understanding North American social norms, is almost seen as having been granted citizenship (Mata Verdejo, 2020). They are no longer held to the standard of other white, non-North American players who may face accusations of “faking it” when playing through injuries, or be called “soft” for missing games as a result (Lazerus, 2025b). Instead, they are granted the benefit of the doubt, receiving praise and being described as a “warrior” for playing through unimaginable pain (Parsons, 2025), as if they were also one of the “good ol’ Canadian boys” (Allain, 2008).

For non-North American players on American teams, it is similar, where sports are idealized into forms of “battle” or “war”, becoming parodies of the concepts of “America” and the “American dream” (Abdurraqib, 2024; Andrews, 1998; Slome, n.d.). The belief that it is righteous to sacrifice and suffer for your country as a soldier, or in this case, as a hockey player for their team, becomes the ideal measurement of success despite the empty promise of meritocracy. For instance, a European player on an American team may face harsher criticism for underperforming or becoming injured, instead of being shown leniency and praise for their efforts (Lazerus, 2025b). Despite their soldier-like sacrifices, they are not granted the “citizenship” a player on a Canadian team would have been for doing the same. Instead, they are seen as “worthless” when they cannot productively contribute to their team. American hockey hinges less on the establishment of national identity like in Canada. Rather, it reflects the uniquely American ideals of being the rebellious, opposing force to counter another, which in this case is Canadian hockey culture.

Thus, the baseline of acceptance for both non-North American and non-white players is generally the same. As long as they have assimilated, are skilled enough, and minimize the aspects of their identity that deviate from the hegemonic mold of North American hockey masculinity, their non-North-Americanness and non-whiteness can be overlooked, because they have successfully met the standard of becoming “just a guy” (Robidoux, 2001).

Growing the Game: Finding Diverse Communities

With the increasing popularity and expansion of hockey teams across North America, questions arise about how and why such a sport managed to find success in unconventional markets such as the South. The following will explore the relationship between the ascent of Southern hockey and the civil rights movement, the meaning of sports, and the importance of non-traditional hockey through analyzing *White Ice: Race and the Making of Atlanta Hockey* by Thomas Aiello.

Regulation: The Beginnings of Southern Hockey

White Ice: Race and the Making of Atlanta Hockey by Thomas Aiello begins by introducing the political climate of Atlanta during the 1930s. Plagued by the malaise of post-Depression recovery, Georgia experienced its worst drought on record in 1930 and 1931, amplifying the dire living conditions of the state's most rural counties (*Great Depression - New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2024). It was impossible to sustain minimal education standards, health facilities, and accessible infrastructure for

water, electricity, and housing. The Black Belt of the South was impoverished, marred by depleted soil, inadequate farm equipment, crude agricultural practices, and crippled institutions (Raper, 1936, as cited in *Great Depression - New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2024). Rural migration to the city created strain on the struggling urban economy, only worsened by the racism among working class white people who believed Black migrants were taking available jobs (Aiello, 2024). The first form of hockey that appeared in post-Depression Atlanta was roller-rink hockey, which was framed as the “southern alternative to a northern sport” (p. 2). It was introduced as a competitor to basketball, at the time still considered “a segregated affair that contained none of the racial coding it would later acquire”, which allowed roller hockey to become its winter alternative (p. 2). Despite the lack of ice in roller hockey, it served as a precedent for the arrival of ice hockey more than 30 years later.

Outside of Atlanta, leagues such as the American Hockey Association grew out of other pre-existing leagues, such as the United States Amateur Hockey Association, that took advantage of relatively new hockey markets to avoid threatening NHL franchises (Aiello, 2024, pp.8-12). The league brought teams to Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas before play was suspended for World War II. In the years following WWII, new hockey teams were introduced to North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida through various professional and minor leagues, including the Eastern Hockey League (EHL) and Central Hockey League (CHL). The steady growth of the sport in Southern cities led to the development of NHL-controlled farm systems of minor league teams that bolstered local interest. The NHL did not expand into the South until 1972, when the Atlanta Flames were introduced alongside the Islanders in New York (NHL, 2020).

It must be understood that the existence of hockey in the South in the 1960s was closely linked to the political and racial climate (Aiello, 2024). As the “northern sport”, hockey became a compensatory function for white southerners, and it acted as an escape from the integrationist politics present in baseball, football, and basketball (p. 10). It was reflected in the names of hockey teams that followed the white Confederate aesthetic, and logos that were reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan (pp. 10-11). Hockey, the “white game”, allowed white leaders to boost their civic involvement without racial baggage, becoming a tool to improve the publicity of southern cities that were dominated by urban racism (p. 11).

Hockey, or sport in general, does not exist as a “separate ‘world’”, and is rather intertwined with other aspects of social life (Messner, 2007, p. 165). Against the backdrop of the civil rights movement and continuous political turmoil in the South, the white, hegemonic, Canadian-centric brand of hockey functioned differently compared to its northern counterparts or other major league sports.

Overtime: The Importance of Southern Hockey

With the above discussions in mind, a similar approach can be taken to understand the importance of Southern hockey, where diverse communities emerge despite the overwhelming rigidity of hockey culture itself, both on and off the ice.

Since the introduction of hockey into Southern states, the sport has grown immensely through various leagues and programs. On the collegiate level, examples include the American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) and College Hockey South (CHS) (Wire, 2025). CHS now comprises 50 teams from 30 schools across eight states, and it is set to expand its Women’s Division from ten to thirteen teams for the 2025-2026 season (Pfitzner, 2025). In 2023, Tennessee State University made history by announcing the formation of a men’s hockey team, becoming the first historically Black

college or university (HBCU) to do so (Guerriero, 2023). It has collaborated with the NHL's Nashville Predators to work towards the goal of becoming the first HBCU to field an NCAA Division I team. In 2024, Duanté Abercrombie, an inaugural member of the NHL Coaches' Association's BIPOC Coaches Program, was hired as the team's first head coach (Tennessee State University, 2024). Raised in Washington, D.C, he was mentored by notable Black hockey figures like Neal Henderson, the first Black and third person of color inducted into the US Hockey Hall of Fame, and Graeme Townshend, the first Jamaican-born player in the NHL who works with NCAA and NHL prospects (para. 6). Abercrombie has also been involved with other NHL BIPOC initiatives such as working as a guest coach for the San Jose Sharks training camp in 2023, the Boston Bruins scouting mentorship program in 2021-2022; the Toronto Marlies (the Toronto Maple Leafs' AHL affiliate) and Newfoundland Growlers (East Coast Hockey League affiliate) in the 2022-2023 season.

This initiative to diversify the game is a significant milestone for the HBCU community and a promising step in the right direction for hockey culture (Guerriero, 2023). Currently, TSU has recruited most of its inaugural roster, aiming to begin play for the 2025-2026 season despite the school's financial instability (Wodon, 2025). There is hope that the program will be funded by the school in its first year of operations.

On the NHL level, there has been substantial development in hockey on the grassroots level, with improved access to facilities in the South than there were in decades prior (Hawkins & The Associated Press, 2025). "Learn to Play" programs have provided hockey equipment and the construction of rinks across North Carolina, Dallas, and Florida with ties to their NHL franchises. This rapidly growing interest can be attributed to the success of NHL teams like the 1999 Stanley Cup-winning Dallas Stars, and, in recent years, the Florida Panthers.

Off the ice, as discussed earlier, the meaning of sports extends beyond the game – an experience that exists alongside real life. Sports create subcultures and identity, such as the aforementioned "hockey identity", that is closely linked to intersectionality (Mata Verdejo, 2020). Removed from the "citizenship-like" elements of traditional hockey markets, such as in Canada, non-traditional hockey can seem more attractive to younger, BIPOC, or LGBTQ+ fans, because of how the non-traditional aspects of these markets exist as a counter to what is considered "traditional" (Aiello, 2024). This can be, conceptually speaking, similar to the lived experiences of marginalized communities, which may seem more appealing in comparison to traditional market teams. In a way, being a fan of a non-traditional market team also acts as a form of counterculture (Mata Verdejo, 2020). By extension, this can encourage the growth of new fanbases that incorporate different aspects of "non-traditional" culture into their hockey-watching experience. In essence, Southern hockey becomes a unique medium that can negotiate the boundaries of history, identity, politics, and culture (Robidoux, 2001; Pronger, 1998).

Conclusion

The analysis of the hegemonic structure of North American Hockey provides insight into how race, ethnicity, and nationality intersect within the system. In this space, discrimination functions differently for players who are non-North American, non-white, or playing for non-Canadian teams respectively, and is further complicated when these aspects of identity overlap. This is reflected when analyzing the advent of Southern hockey, and how factors such as political climate and systemic oppression shape the sport's expansion into non-traditional markets.

Hockey culture is flawed and deserving of criticism, but there is potential for improvement. It is a difficult sport to become involved in due to the high cost of equipment and access to rinks, especially in the non-traditional markets of the South. However, there is a steady increase in facilities, learn-to-play programs, and different professional or collegiate-level playing opportunities that have taken steps towards diversifying the game (Guerriero, 2023; Hawkins & The Associated Press, 2025; Peters, 2011; Salomon, 2025; Wire, 2025). Meaning beyond the game can be found when viewed through a critical lens, and it can become a vessel for intersectional, political, and sociological analysis. As teams continue to develop and find success, this growing interest in hockey will reach new, diverse audiences where the non-traditional aspects of these markets can create new subcultures and countercultures as a result (Aiello, 2024; Mata Verdejo, 2020).

Non-traditional hockey and its emerging communities are not going anywhere, anytime soon. In the words of Hanif Abdurraqib (2024): “They will burn down or build over a neighborhood for nothing.... But trust: there are more of us, always.... We never make it out, and we never disappear. Permanence is the greatest stunt of them all.” (sec. CITY AS ITS FALSE SELF).

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17.

Esports Careers: Opportunities and Risks

Yulong Zhuo

Video games have become part of many young people's daily lives, including mine. In the past, many people saw video games mainly as entertainment or even a waste of time. I used to hear this kind of opinion a lot too. However, esports has changed the way some people think about gaming. Today, gaming can be connected to professional competitions, livestreaming, content creation, coaching, event management, and business. As someone who plays games, I do not think gaming should only be judged as a waste of time. At the same time, I also know that turning gaming into a job is not simple. I chose this topic because I want to understand how esports can become a real career path and why this path has both opportunities and risks. Esports can create new chances for some people, but it also brings problems such as strong competition, unstable income, health pressure, short career length, and market saturation.

Esports has become a global industry with large audiences and many professional events. Around the world, esports includes professional teams, sponsors, tournaments, livestreaming platforms, and fan communities. Different games are popular in different regions, such as League of Legends, Valorant, Honor of Kings, Counter-Strike, and Dota 2. Recent viewership data makes this growth easier to see. The 2025 League of Legends World Championship reached about 6.75 million peak viewers, and the BLAST.tv Austin Major 2025 for Counter-Strike 2 reached over 1.78 million peak viewers ("2025 World Championship"; "BLAST.tv Austin Major 2025"). These numbers surprised me because they show that esports is not just a small hobby anymore. It has become part of global entertainment and competition. The Esports World Cup is another example of this change. In 2025, the Esports World Cup returned to Riyadh with a prize pool of more than \$70 million, with more than 2,000 players and 200 clubs expected to compete across many games ("EWC 2025 Kicks Off"). Events like this connect gaming with media, sponsorships, branding, and international business.

One major opportunity in esports is becoming a professional player. Professional players train for long hours, join teams, compete in tournaments, and represent clubs. This career can look exciting because players can win prizes, gain fans, and become part of a professional team. Many young people may imagine that being a professional gamer is fun because they can do what they like every day. Bányai et al. explain that more young gamers now see esports as a possible career opportunity, not only as a recreational activity. Their study focuses on gaming motivations and career plans to become professional esports players. I think this source is useful because it supports the idea that esports is not only a hobby for some young people. It has become a serious dream. However, this dream is not easy to reach. Only a small number of players can actually reach the professional level. Players need

strong skills, discipline, teamwork, fast decision-making, and emotional control. In my opinion, liking games is only the first step. It does not mean a person is ready for a professional esports career.

Esports also creates jobs outside of professional competition. Not everyone in esports needs to be a top player. The industry needs coaches, commentators, event workers, video editors, livestreamers, content creators, team managers, marketing workers, and business staff. Livestreaming is one of the most common examples. Streamers do not only play games. They also entertain viewers, talk with fans, explain strategies, make jokes, and build online communities. A successful streamer needs communication ability, creativity, personality, and consistency. This is why livestreaming can be harder than it looks. Some people may think streamers just sit in front of a computer and play games, but they also need to keep the audience interested for a long time. Esports companies are also becoming more connected to business and investment. For example, NIP Group's ADSs were approved to trade on the Nasdaq Global Market in July 2024 under the ticker symbol NIPG ("NIP Group Inc. Announces Pricing"). This example helps show that esports careers can include business operations, not only gaming itself.

Another special example is gaming companion services, which are especially visible in China. In this service, customers pay someone to play games with them, teach them, talk with them, or make the gaming experience more enjoyable. This job is different from professional esports because the goal is not always winning. Sometimes customers are also paying for communication, companionship, or emotional support. This kind of service may not be as common in many other countries, so I think it is an interesting example of how China's gaming market has created some unique job forms. Huo's study on gaming companion services found that professionalism, interactivity, and popularity can increase users' perceived entertainment and sociability, which then affects their intention to use these services. This source connects well with my topic because it shows that gaming-related jobs are not only about technical gaming skill. They can also include social skills, patience, and emotional value.

However, esports careers also have many risks. The biggest risk is that esports can look easier than it really is. Many people see successful players and streamers, but they may not see the long practice, unstable income, pressure, and competition behind them. A professional player's career can also be short because performance pressure is high and younger players keep entering the scene. Livestreaming has a similar problem. A few years ago, some streamers entered the field early and had more chances to grow. Today, many people want to become streamers, so it is harder to stand out and build a stable income. There are also ethical problems in gaming, such as boosting, where stronger players get paid to improve another person's rank. This can hurt fair competition and make rankings less meaningful. These problems remind me that esports is not just about passion. It is also about rules, pressure, and long-term planning.

Health is another serious concern in esports. Yin et al. explain that esports may have both risks and benefits, but the digital and competitive nature of esports makes it important to study possible adverse health effects. Long hours of practice and screen time may affect sleep, eyes, posture, and mental health. Players may also face stress from competition, team expectations, and public attention. This is one reason why I do not think esports should be seen as an easy career. People who want to work in esports need balance and health awareness. They should not only focus on gaming skill. They also need education, communication skills, and a backup plan. Esports can be a career for some people, but it should not be the only plan for most young people.

In conclusion, esports careers offer real opportunities in professional competition, livestreaming, content creation, gaming companion services, and esports business. The growth of events like

the Esports World Cup and the large viewership of games like League of Legends and Counter-Strike show that esports has become a global industry. At the same time, esports should not be treated as an easy way to make money. The industry is exciting, but it can also be stressful, unstable, and very competitive. Success requires skill, discipline, communication, personal branding, health awareness, and risk management. My opinion is that esports can be a real career for some people, but young people should understand both the opportunities and the risks before choosing this path. After doing this project, I still wonder how esports careers will change in the future and whether more schools or companies will provide support for young people who are interested in this field.

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18.

Current and Past Driving Protest to Praxis: Interracial Solidarity and the Evolution of the Asian American Studies Movement at Hunter College and San Francisco State University

Joanna Ng

Introduction

Since the founding of Asian American Studies in the United States, the development of the field has been intrinsically tied to the leadership of African American students and the grassroots organising of the student Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strikes at San Francisco State University from 1968-1969. Similarly, Asian American Studies at Hunter College remains rooted in African American socialist traditions, emphasizing pan-ethnic solidarity and self-determination; however, in the modern era, it's critical to reflect on the foundations and compare the differences produced by changes over time. This paper compares Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University and Hunter College to examine the shifts in the field through student activism, Third World solidarity, and institutional struggle. Asian American Studies continues to emerge from the ongoing political project of Asian American coalition-building and resistance within academia.

A core tenet of the student movement for Ethnic Studies included developing economic and political allocation of power to oppressed peoples, with self-determination being a major developing factor for most of the students demanding change. Self-determination, a central demand in the Black Panther Party's Ten-Point Program, became foundational to the push for ethnic studies. As Abdullah (2020) notes, the Panthers called for education that would "expose the true nature of this decadent American society... [and] teach our true history and our role in present-day society." Ethnic Studies, then, was not simply a request for courses about ethnicity; it was a demand for an education that required struggle and risk so that people of Third World or colonized backgrounds, such as Asia, Africa, South America, and Native Americans, could strive and achieve political and economic investment. Students and faculty often faced retaliation, making community protection and solidarity essential. Organizing alongside the Black Panther Party meant engaging in collective struggle despite differences among ethnic groups, even in the face of aggressive university opposition (Abdullah 2020).

Over time, however, the movement has shifted away from its radical tradition of grassroots organizing with groups like the Panthers. While much of Asian American Studies continues to draw on the intellectual lineage of African American scholars, the program at Hunter College lacks strong ties to community organizing. Unlike the earlier years of Asian American Studies in New York City, current students appear largely disconnected from local struggles – whether through nonprofits, unions, political organizations, anti-imperialist groups, or other grassroots formations. Institutional structures have not facilitated these connections; students must develop them independently. This disconnection has limited the transformative potential of Asian American Studies at Hunter.

It is also important to recognize that broader structural changes between the 1960s and the 2020s – shifts in racial formation, political realignments, immigration demographics, and institutional pressures – have reshaped the nature of Asian American and African American solidarity within the ethnic studies movement.

Once a radical movement built on community organizing, today's Asian American Studies, specifically at Hunter College by the Coalition for Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter (CRAASH), founded in 2007, faces ideological shifts due to the constraints on the institutionalized and formalized field of Asian American Studies. Direct action against the university, such as student walkouts in the 1960s, played a crucial role in advancing the ethnic studies movement. At San Francisco State University – where thousands of students refused to attend classes in what became the largest college strike in U.S. history – students demonstrated that they would not stop until their demands were met. Through boycotts and sustained organizing, they succeeded in establishing the first School of Ethnic Studies from the creation of the Third World Liberation Front as means to access the working class people of color's power.

These actions required not only bravery but also a commitment to self-determination as a means of building the collective power of working-class Third World communities. The concept of the "Third World" was further shaped by students of the era, who, influenced by thinkers like Frantz Fanon, recognized the shared struggle of peoples resisting Western and European colonial domination and sought to define themselves outside of those imperial frameworks.

Unlike TWLF, which engaged in direct action against structural exclusion, CRAASH fights to expand representation of Asian American studies in an institution that acknowledges racial diversity but limits the scope of activism through bureaucratic policies. The institutional setting of Asian American studies allows for advocacy, but it also restricts coalition-building outside of the intellectual bounds that house Asian American studies.

As Omi and Winant argue, race is not static but constantly changing due to political, economic, and institutional forces. In the 1960s, student activists understood race as a site of resistance, mobilizing in a greater solidarity front with the TWLF, not just Afro-Asian solidarity, to challenge U.S. imperialism and systemic oppression. Today, racial formation operates within a neoliberal framework, where university bureaucracies and colorblind policies redefine the objectives of Asian American studies, limiting coalition-building and radical political action. Neoliberal policies have ensured that most fields of study must be financially beneficial to institutions of power in order to survive. While these policies allow for the inclusion of ethnic studies, this inclusion often serves only to placate the public and generate profit within the capitalist system. This stands in sharp contrast to the original goal of liberation movements, which sought to cultivate critical consciousness and empower people to become leaders in struggles for racial solidarity and anti-racism.

Nakatsu and Juanita, both leaders in the Third World Liberation Front – one from the Asian Student Caucus and the other from the Black Student Union – emphasized the importance of building an entirely new concept of self in a colonized space, a self shaped through direct involvement in community movements. This redefinition of identity was radical because it rejected the frameworks imposed by colonial and institutional powers, insisting instead on self-determination as the foundation for solidarity across oppressed groups.

By contrast, CRAASH reflects the current era of Asian American student organizing. Rather than constructing identity primarily through grassroots struggle, CRAASH encourages students to

understand themselves through frameworks already developed by scholars. While less community-led, CRAASH still grounds its work in the revolutionary ideology of the TWLF, particularly the principle of self-determination. The coalition incorporates political education about the founding of Asian American Studies and invites activists from the wider New York City community to speak on issues of national liberation and anti-imperialist struggle. For instance, its collaborations with Anakbayan, a Filipino youth organization committed to national liberation, demonstrate how CRAASH seeks to reconnect students to transnational struggles for self-determination.

This leads to the second component of contention, the shifts of self-determination as coined by Okiihiro for new immigrants and new students entering the movement for Asian American studies. There seems to be a new focus on the individual's benefit, rather than a communal treatment of Asian American studies with the community outside the institution, and a heavier reliance on discussing education rather than building new relationships and developing new ideas of self-determination for the pan-Asian community, Afro-Asian unity, and interracial solidarity. Abdullah reflects on these ideas by stating that the institution frankly does not get the institution of ethnic studies, by having area studies Professors (mostly of European American descent) representing the Ethnic studies, rather than community members and ethnic studies professors. Though limited by the institution new ideas of Pan-Asian and interracial solidarity are understood as racialized groups putting forth their counterscripts by linking with each other's racialization, creating alliances that acknowledge each other's struggles as described by Molina.

Though it is important to note, CRAASH still engages with anti-imperialism and coalition-building ideas, though not at a wider scale, due to limitations within their current bureaucratic structure of Hunter College towards making pan-ethnic unity and solidarity. CRAASH is operating in an institution that favors symbolic inclusion over radical transformation, reflecting that Omatsu's concept of activism is restricted to the institutional frameworks rather than grassroots organizing strategies. CRAASH's activism must navigate the institutional definition of Asian American success as described by Omatsu's understanding of neoliberal inclusion and limit the radical potential of movement-building seen in TWLF's revolutionary coalition, as words have been sanitized to fit new racial scripts.

Through the comparison of two primary accounts from the TWLF and CRAASH, Asian American Studies changes in its origins of coalition building and grassroots activism are due to radical shifts in racial formation, new immigration demographics, and neoliberal academic structures. These shifts complicate the field's ability to sustain the movement for racial and political liberation. By comparing the activism of Third World Liberation Front members like Penny Nakatsu and Judy Juanita with the contemporary organizing of CRAASH at Hunter College by students like Asim Khan and Saira Khan, this paper examines how self-determination has changed, moving from community organizing developing their own identities to one increasingly shaped by institutional frameworks which complicates coalition building of Pan-Asian and interracial solidarity.

Historical Foundations of Asian American Studies

The emergence of Asian American Studies must be credited to the movement of black studies at San Francisco State and Hunter College, mainly from community members who emphasized Afro-Asian solidarity, radical student activism, and the roots based in community grassroots activism. The Third World Liberation Front can be best described as an extension of the black liberation movement, helmed by Malcolm X and the black panthers, to give access to education for African Americans by third world politics written, by the likes of Mao, to reshape self-determination, but also politicizing

many Asian Americans to fight for their struggle in America (Omatsu 57). Understanding this context for the importance of the underlying structure of education and politicization that the Black Power Movement gave to Asian Americans is extremely important because it led to the creation of a new idea of Asian American racial formations and self-determination. These are critical to the movement of Asian American studies because the label of Asian American was developed at that time by learning to connect struggles from Filipino farmworkers to “Chinese immigrant garment and restaurant workers” to “Japanese American concentration camp resisters” (Omatsu 60). Putting this into the context of the student movement for Asian Americans to be also deeply rooted in their organizing in their communities outside of student organizing.

Similarly, the history of Asian American studies at the City University of New York, which Hunter is a branch of, has undergone similar movements where the demand for Third World Studies, studies in Black, Puerto Rican, and Asian, especially due to an increase in underrepresented students in these colleges (Luu). This shows that Asian American studies was rooted within the community because it became a field of study at CUNY and Hunter College from students’ demands to the institution. Asian American studies during March 1972 drew community members of different Asian Americans, like I Wor Kuen, inspired by the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, much like the Asian Americans in the TWLF (Luu). It has been important since the beginning of the fight for Asian American studies at CUNY and Hunter College, the first institutionalization of the Asian American Studies minor, to draw from the black power movement. CRAASH members have seen these principles since organizing in 2007, where students helped revitalize the Asian American Studies Program at Hunter within a year of shuttering (Luu). Though CRAASH has operated within the academic system. The first interaction of CRAASH worked hard to “circulate a petition with over 1000 signatures” (Luu). According to the Hunter Envoy, a student-run newspaper in Hunter from the CUNY Digital History Archive, CRAASH and the Asian American Studies Program hosted an event with the director Justin Lin, and actors Roger Fan and Sung Kang by reaching out to the Asian American community in New York City. This is a clear connection back to the community by drawing in creatives from student-led activism. Still, it also shows a way to adapt to the strict bureaucracies by having to rely on entertainers rather than overtly political community members. CRAASH works within the boundaries of institutional boundaries in different ways, similar to the TWLF, while continuing to expand Asian American studies despite these obstacles.

The Institutionalization of Asian American Studies and CRAASH’s Adaptation

The Asian American Studies Program was institutionalized as a minor program in 1993, leading to the engagement of studies with the institution since the founding of the student group CRAASH. Due to shifting from community-led to emphasizing changing the institution of Asian American studies as the shift away from the political interpretation of Asian American identity to neoliberalism identity of Asian American hinging mostly on cultural clubs. Omi and Winant identified this contradictory relationship of neoliberalism where there’s an understanding civil rights has achieved most of people of color’s protections that people must be colorblind to race in order to achieve equality whereas the system of capitalism hinged on oppressing people of color the way race is projected as a concept that is not fixed, but real world consequences (Omi and Winant 112). This idea refers to racial formations on how the race of people is understood through making ideas on race and its impact on society (Omi and Winant). These two ideas are really important to understand the differences between the environment CRAASH organizers had to endure to achieve their goals. Luu reflects that the first interaction of CRAASH had to appeal to the university with a thousand signatures, the racial formation of Asian Americans at the time contributed to the manner of organizing because students are not engaged with the idea of Asian American as a pan-ethnic solidarity, rather as a category in the US census according to Omi and Winant. It must be stated that CRAASH was working without the collective history of

Asian Americans as a political identity; rather, they used the same racial formation created by those in TWLF to achieve this win. In the interview in the collection *Voices of Truth to Power*, Nakatsu reflects that there were already spaces where Asian Americans of different ethnicities to interact naturally, such as Filipinos, Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese in school. During this period, the Asian Americans had political spaces. Nakatsu gives an example of Japanese Americans responding in the Redress Movement as a response to Japanese incarceration during World War II. When looking at 2008, Olivia Lin, a founding member of CRAASH, says in a publication of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), “Someone says the N-word and the whole African American community is in your face. The same is done to the Asian American community and nothing happens” (Aorangi-Storm 13). It is really important to interrogate why Asian Americans did not care in the 2000s because the racial formation of Asian Americans has shifted due to the neoliberalism of the institutions, especially in the education of Asian Americans. Currently, CRAASH is working with these frameworks to expose more Glen Omatsu presents relevant analysis in the relationship between the neoliberal institution and the state of Asian American studies compared to its beginnings.

The Transformation of Self-Determination from TWLF to CRAASH

The Third World Liberation Front operated during an era of multiple revolutions happening around the world, therefore, their act of self-determination, of taking back the campus to provide education for Third World Students, was a new revolutionary form of resistance. Whereas CRAASH has to operate after the quelling of student organizing and movements, necessitating adapting the self-determination of Asian Americans, taking back their identities from their colonial masters by educating on the knowledge of white supremacy. Okihiro analyzes self-determination as students acknowledging the Third World of Asia, Africa, and Latin America’s struggles for revolution against European empires to connect the struggles of African American, Asian American, Latinx American, and Native Americans to use this history in these communities to organize together and empower people in these communities. Juanita reflects in an interview about San Francisco State University’s TWLF that “Ok, so we were out there, fanned out there, running these centers and having relations, making relationships with people in the community”. TWLF emphasized the building of new student ideas leading to self-determination, and Nakatsu reflected on developing ideas of Asian American identity. In the interview on San Francisco State’s TWLF she said, “I think coalescing worked because we had a common, very deeply held belief that Asians needed to become more active and we needed to have a vehicle to encourage more Asian American political activism and develop a pan-Asian consciousness rising beyond cultural nationalism.” This comes from a clear understanding of race as a relational framework, as described by the scholar Molina that is important to “analyze different racial projects happening at the same time or across time and shows why we need to examine how they are connected”. CRAASH organizers fundamentally understand the underlying importance of connecting the struggle of Asian American studies with black liberation and in organizations beyond the university. Asim Khan from CRAASH states, “Education does to our collective psyche, ethnic studies inherently tied to organizing, the fight for black studies and TWLF. Asian Americans and students who wanted Third World studies want to take control on their education. Those type of stuff is important to Asian Americans because socialized to be quiet and submissive to [the] power structure. No critical consciousness, you will lose them over time if not constantly fighting for them”. ^[1]He understands this relational race consciousness through the work of CRAASH, understanding the TWLF and black liberation movement to inspire the field of Asian American Studies, which is to educate students during a moment in time where Omatsu puts it as the rise of the “harshes opponents of affirmative action have been Chinese Americans and Korean Americans who define themselves as political conservatives” (Omatsu 71). CRAASH members have to intellectually engage students against this normative manner the neoconservatives had worked to discount the Asian American movement of the 1960s and 1970s as destructive and hinged on cultural differences for the discrimination of other groups Omatsu 71). Asian Americans in contemporary times are in a comparative framework of race where their race is

used against other people of color, instead of building coalitions. This is important to understanding why TWLF leaders were capable of greater unity because at the time, there was no underlying ideology against the racial frameworks that built unity with each other. The changing formations of institutionalization reflected the current-day movements of Asian American spaces, particularly the Asian American Studies movement at Hunter College.

Neoliberal Activism in Asian American Communities

In the Asian American Studies in the past, particularly in TWLF, fought within the framework of self-determination in solidarity, understanding the Third World struggle; however, Asian American Studies in modern day come from a context along with institutionalizing activism within Asian American community building. Omatsu brings a reflection that many young professionals create community; however, moving away from the struggle against racism and discrimination, to the emergence of neoconservatism born from “Reagan-Bush era of supply-side economics, class and racial polarization, and the emphasis on elitism and individual advancement” (Omatsu 71). These neoconservatives have politics surrounding “personal career advancement-and not poverty and violence” (Omatsu 73). This is the current background of the Asian American studies movement, particularly emphasized by Saira Khan in an interview about CRAASH, “important to show Asian Americans has a presence in organizing space, not model minority, and not to be framed as such. CRAASH exists to be a thorn in the side of the institution”.^[2] Defining these barriers is so important because Nakatsu reflected that a lot of these students at the time “a lot of those were very deeply influenced and immersed to varying degrees and studying dialectical materialism, Mao Zedong thought, which is a variant of traditional Marxism, and it gives you a common language”. In comparison, the racial projects of Asian Americans changed dramatically, namely in the benefit for a white supremacist society, as put by Kim in the Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans “the norms of colorblindness have expurgated overtly racial claims from the “public transcript” during the post-civil rights era, talk about group’s culture often serves to disguise what are fundamentally racial claims” (Kim 117). In addition, Junn argues, immigration policies transformed Asian American identity from “coolie laborers” to “model minority professionals”. Asian American student movements must constantly negotiate between advocacy and academic legitimacy. A CRAASH organizer, Saira Khan, explains: “CRAASH raises awareness. People think we are an authority on Asian American issues.”^[3] This reflects a major shift: students today position themselves as educators within existing academic structures, rather than revolutionaries outside of them, because Asian Americans no longer have this overt understanding of their political and racial self. Rather, CRAASH is needed in the work of raising critical consciousness in this era of Asian American activism, which is radically disenfranchised and inserts the upper-class Asian Americans into roles of leadership, rather than looking to organizing people.

Both the TWLF and CRAASH have responded to the racial conditions of their time, understanding that the evolution of the Asian American studies movement is important to liberation and coalition-building for racial equality. CRAASH is occupying a necessary space in the Asian American community; however, to continue advancing the struggles of the Asian American community, it is so important to involve the community, much like the TWLF. Though CRAASH is reliant on the Asian American community within the university’s setting, there needs to be a grounding within the movement of Asian Americans that are most affected by the racialization of Asian Americans outside of the setting of college and the professional class of Asian Americans. The call for CRAASH to continue the legacy of building an “anti-imperialism, interracial solidarity, being a part of community, genuine community based on love and trust and respect,^[4]” a reflection by Saira Khan, must also be connected to the outside community. The community must support other people of color in their politics, and as Omatsu puts it, “Asian Americans must cast off the images imposed on us by others” to advance in their politics beyond the Asian American current politicization (Omatsu 85). In comparing the

two institutions, San Francisco State University and Hunter College, this paper shows that Asian American Studies remains deeply tied to political struggle and student organizing. It is important to continue the legacy of bringing the institution's resources to the community and vice versa.

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[1] Asim Khan (CRAASH Leader), interview by author, zoom, May 2025

[2] Saira Khan (CRAASH Leader), interview by author, zoom, May 2025

[3] Saira Khan, zoom interview

[4] Saira Khan, zoom interview

Part VI

Authors

19.

Authors' bios

Hadia Amin is a transfer student from Borough of Manhattan Community College and currently studies Cell and Molecular Biology at John Jay College. In her free time, she enjoys experimenting with different art mediums, cooking, and watching anime.

Maunia Arbabi is of Persian origin and has recently (2025) received her Ph.D. from the CUNY Graduate Center. She also completed a Certificate in Women and Gender Studies.

Annie Huizhen Chen is an undergraduate student at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, majoring in TESOL. Born in Wenzhou, China, she moved frequently during her childhood, which shaped her interest in language, culture, and identity. Her writing reflects her experiences as an international student navigating diverse cultural landscapes and celebrating Asian heritage.

Xin Joy Cheung is a student at LaGuardia Community College, majoring in Nursing. She was born in China, to parents who migrated to China from Korea. She came to The United States fifteen years ago to pursue further education however, life events have redirected her path. Luckily, she has all the support from her family to move forward with her passion.

Noel Frigillana, born and raised in the Philippines, is currently an international student at LaGuardia Community College, studying Nursing. He moved to New York in 2023 and aspires to become a registered nurse, serving communities in need worldwide. In his free time, he enjoys traveling, exploring new cuisines, and capturing life through photography.

Sanya Ghosh is a creative high school student whose interests span literature, visual arts, fashion, and storytelling. An aspiring author, Sanya enjoys writing, reading both classic literature and contemporary web fiction, and exploring artistic forms of self-expression inspired by diverse cultures and communities. Their curiosity is reflected in a love of music, manga, webcomics, and the Visual Kei movement, as well as an appreciation for creators who tell authentic and meaningful stories. Sanya values individuality, personal growth, and the ability to connect with others through creativity while maintaining a strong awareness of online privacy and personal safety. With a passion for learning and artistic expression, Sanya hopes to continue developing as both a writer and a creator, sharing stories that inspire and resonate with others

Amna Hussain is a student at Queens College. Her Iraqi American Muslim roots motivate her to explore questions about faith, culture, and belonging. Growing up in the United States while maintaining strong ties to her Iraqi heritage, she reflects on the experiences that have shaped her understanding of both worlds.

Akampreet Kaur immigrated from India and grew up in Queens, New York City. Her writing explores belonging, identity, and womanhood. Currently pursuing a master's in TESOL, she hopes to support immigrant communities. Her nonfiction story "The Dance Floor" reflects cultural resilience through dance and highlighting her reconnection with her Punjabi roots.

Alif Kazi is a senior at Hunter College double majoring in English Literature and Sociology. He is also double minoring in Asian American Studies and History. Alif is a Mellon Mays Fellow and Mellon Public Humanities Fellow. His research interests lie in migration studies, migration literature, South Asian diasporic cultural identity, and object-subject identity.

Sylvia Lee is a senior undergraduate student at Queens College. Her major is English and she is studying to become a teacher. She was born in New York, and her hobbies include reading, writing, and cooking. She was born to a mother from Hong Kong and a Taiwanese father.

Lubaba Nahin is a first-generation student whose family immigrated from Bangladesh. She is a psychology student at Queensborough Community College who enjoys giving back to her community through volunteer work and childcare. She is passionate about art, writing, and learning.

Joanna Ng (she/they) is a community organizer and artist. She grew up in a Chinese and Malaysian-Chinese immigrant family. They organized with the Coalition for Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter to help establish an Asian American Studies major. She aims to be a critical history educator and pursue a Masters in Asian American Studies.

Patel Noble is a student at the LaGuardia Community College, majoring in Radiology Technology. Patel is a 30 year veteran in Law Enforcement from the Police department in his home country in Jamaica to landing employment in the Security and Safety Service department in the United Nations. Patel has decided to transition into a new career venturing into the field of Rad Tech as a change prior to considering early retirement from the UN. He was motivated to share his Personal Essay of a life changing experience. His hobbies are singing and playing Soccer.

Eunice Yeung is a Chemistry major at Kingsborough Community College. Born and raised in Hong Kong, they moved to New York City in 2023. Their writing blends sociology, sports, queerness, journalism, and prose poetry. They enjoy making illustrations, film photography, and creating zines.

Min Zeng is a second year student at Borough of Manhattan Community College, majoring in Writing & Literature. On campus, she is a Senator in the BMCC Student Government Association, a University State Senate Delegate, and a Media Assistant in the BMCC Office of Public Affairs. Outside, she is an avid writer and photography hobbyist. Min moved from China to New York City as a young child, and having experienced two distinct cultures in a short span of time, she hopes to offer a unique cultural perspective in her writing.

Yulong Zhuo is originally from China and values personal growth, resilience, and meaningful connections with others. He is an avid reader of Chinese online literature, particularly inspired by the

works of Tiancan Tudou, whose stories of perseverance have shaped his outlook on life. Yulong enjoys capturing beautiful moments through photography and video, sharing his interests on the Chinese platform Bilibili, and hopes to explore the world of art more deeply in the future.

