

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

SPRING 2006

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Spring is in the air! Not only is this a time for love, birds, and corny metaphors, but it's also time for the Spring 2006 issue of VISIONS—time to celebrate Brown's Asian American community through incredible works of prose, poetry, articles, and photography.

Now about those corny metaphors...think of VISIONS as a tree, forever growing and regenerating. With several new faces on the VISIONS staff this semester, we are also proud to finally call ourselves an official student group, having gained Category I status. But let's take the metaphor even further and think of VISIONS as bringing together all the branches of the Asian American community. As the meaning of the term "Asian American" constantly changes, these new pages reflect the shifting definition of the Asian American identity.

In keeping with this atmosphere of change, we dedicate this issue to Brian Lee '06. Longtime editor and contributor, Brian has spent countless hours working to make VISIONS the publication it is today, and we will miss him tremendously next year.

We also thank our contributors and staff members for making this issue possible, and most of all, we thank you—for taking part in our mission of Envisioning and Building a Stronger Asian American Community.

Yours Truly,



Erin Fraunhofer '09

Karynn Ikeda '09

Juhyung Harold Lee '06

MISSION STATEMENT

VISIONS is a publication that highlights and celebrates the diversity of Brown's Asian American community. We are committed to being an open literary and artistic forum for Asian Americans, as well as other members of the university community, to freely express and address issues relating both to Asia and the Asian American experience. VISIONS further serves as a forum for issues that cannot find a voice in other campus publications. As a collaborative initiative, VISIONS attempts to strengthen and actively engage Brown's vibrant community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, as well as the larger Providence community.

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BROKEN CHAIN
KARYNN IKEDA '09
Digital Photograph

WOMAN WARRIOR

VANESSA HUANG '06

In my wildest dreams
I call on Woman Warrior
Dressed to kill
A shaven head, my helmet, unleashing fear
Costumed not as man
But woman
Playing with expectation
Dressed in black
Invisible
Passing
Prison guards and concertina wire
To laugh and cry with the sisters they took away from us
To listen
To unsilence their stories

The words squatting in my head refuse eviction
To avoid becoming spectacle
The words squatting inside my hands
Scream to be unknotted and bled out as dark red blood that dries into
Dark black steel to be welded and rewelded
Dark black steel, black enough to not get caught train hopping in the dark of the night
Black enough to mirror back truths untold by the blackness they criminalize on TV

In my dream life
I trace and untrace the knots tying together the stories I hold
Map and unmap the boundaries between barbed wire and bedroom
I dive into sparkling seas
To find pattern books to uncrack their codes
Old wooden keys to unlock their gates
Recipe books to melt their steel
To re-fashion into a cannon to fire notes of liberation
A pirate-radio transmitter on the fly to dispatch directions to freedom

In my dream life
I harness the power of creation
Breathe fire into word
To transform reality

VANESSA HUANG '06 dreams of a world beyond this global lockdown.



WINDOWS
ARIANA BALESTRIERI '06
Digital Photograph

CENTER FOCUS

JESSICA MAR '08

While based on personal experiences and memories this piece has the fluidity and flexibility of some fictionalized elements. Some details and facts have been blurred and key players and perspectives have been omitted to capture a child's perspective and understanding of the events and situations depicted.

The flash went off, and with that blaze of light the moment was forever memorialized. A feeling of accomplishment and celebration hung in the air. Dr. Loni's inspiring words accepting her honorary doctorate from Stony Brook University were still ringing in my ears. More than simply acknowledging her work, this was an educational victory, a step to claiming and demanding a more accurate and inclusive history. Her award-winning film documentaries on the history of the Chinese in America had introduced me to a legacy that had never been taught in my Christopher Columbus imperialized textbooks. Ancestors in the Americas went beyond the iconic legends of Gold Mountain and the transcontinental railroad and told a story neither of faceless masses of drones or of superhuman models of individual feats. She wove a rich texture of stories and overlapping lives that testified to the complexity and diversity of the Chinese in America and validated those experiences by allowing their stories to be heard.

An unlikely hero, Auntie Loni was petite, with short, wiry black hair and a face covered by glasses possibly left over from the '80s. She exuded a gentle strength that wasn't afraid to speak truth to power. Her grandmotherly absentmindedness and colorful outfits couldn't mask the fighter inside. I loved riding in the car with her, listening to stories about the freedom rides during the Civil Rights Struggle. I admired the courage she had, supporting her daughter as she pursued journalistic dreams, even in war-torn Iraq.

This celebratory event in December was connected to a tragic event on a December day nine years earlier—a shocking

suicide pact carried out by a South Asian girl and an East Asian girl from my high school—the youngest double suicide in the history of the Long Island Rail Road. These two girls had met in elementary school in the gifted program that I was about to enter as a third grader. These suicides were a warning to many in the community, including my parents.

To my parents, this cry for help was an indication of the lack of resources, support or concern for Asian American students. The suicides became the catalyst that mobilized them and eventually led to the opportunity for Dr. Loni to receive her honorary doctorate.

There were no guidance counselors of color in our high school, and existing structures failed to acknowledge cultural differences when addressing difficult issues such as suicide, depression, or alienation. There wasn't a support system in place for these students, and my parents weren't content to let them slip through the cracks. My eight-year-old mind could not fathom the tragedy of these suicides or foresee the impact it would have on my family and the community.

My father, a professor of philosophy at Stony Brook, was one of the few faculty members who identified himself as Asian American. The University's supply of "multicultural" professors was concentrated in Engineering, Physics and Asian Language Studies. While many of these faculty members brought an international perspective, they were largely apathetic towards Asian American issues, which they didn't see as their own. As a result, my father became the advisor and mentor for a multiplicity of Asian and Asian American student groups; from fraternities, sororities, the Asian American Journal and struggling political activist groups. He noticed how students hung out in the hallway near his office, holding informal meetings, creating unofficial coalitions and facilitating planning sessions. Realizing that there was no place on campus for these

discussions, he envisioned creating an Asian American Center, an educational space to address the neglected needs of Asian American students.

At a public meeting a year after the suicides, armed only with plans donated by my architect grandfather and an ambitious vision, my father bravely approached Mr. Wang, the then CEO of Computer Associates, asking him to donate \$25,000 to convert an unused hallway into an Asian American Center.

The hallway was on the second floor and bridged the Physics and Humanities buildings. Dad thought it was perfect, because it could bridge the students and the larger community, bridge the divides between the different factions within the Asian American community, bridge generational divides. He began to affectionately refer to it as “the bridge.”

Long and narrow with windows on both sides, the hallway was filled with residue of chalk dust, broken chairs and old storage boxes with dissertation research that some graduate student had probably stashed and then forgotten about. Compared to the \$1.15 that I got twice a month from my mom to buy lunch at the school cafeteria on pizza or chicken nugget days, I couldn’t understand the magnitude of a \$25,000 request. My dad told me that it was worth asking for and that the worse that could happen was that Mr. Wang would say no. During walks home from school, we would take turns thinking of ways we could use \$25,000 to transform the hallway. Dad was clever about getting me to do math problems; he always seemed to be able to make it into a game. But it changed from an after-school game into a reality when Mr. Wang made a commitment to build an Asian American Center bearing his own name.

Seven years and \$75 million later, the vision for a refurbished hallway has been transformed into the most magnificent building on campus. Indoor fish ponds, a large garden with fountains and

spiral staircases lend an aura of elegance, but my father loves the tower that the architect calls “The Tower of Light.” To my dad, that tower signals a beacon of hope for social justice on campus and for the future. The goal in creating the Asian American center, however, was to do more than simply change the landscape of the University.

Working to raise awareness of Asian American issues in the university and larger community was a family project. My sister and I were recruited to carry food, put up posters, and hand out programs. During all this “schlepping,” I gained a behind-the-scenes vantage point where I witnessed the sacrifices, the frustrations, and the victories.

I saw the meetings that would go late into the night, ending in explosions of hot air and angry words. I saw my mother cry for my father, when a huge symposium, representing months of work, fell through. I saw my father’s logic book, the key to advancement in academia; go unwritten, pushed aside, the few pages, dusty and forgotten on a shelf. I saw unsteady coalitions degenerate into warring factions. I saw student leaders emerge, realizing that they had a voice and a right to be heard. I saw people from different backgrounds coming together to find common ground. I saw my father’s frustration in battle after battle with university administrators. I saw apathetic Asian Americans who simply didn’t care. I saw funding problems. I saw the same people, at every meeting, burning out. I saw the thin sliver of light underneath the door to my father’s study shimmer late into the night. I saw this all, but it was many years before I began to see the results.

Despite my mother’s valiant attempts to create a “normal” home environment, by the age of ten, I was making distinctions between documentaries and films, having nightmares about Vincent Chin and the Japanese American internment and throwing around terms like “white privilege” and “race

consciousness”, traits that distinguished me from the rest of my fifth grade class.

I was incredibly privileged to meet activists, filmmakers and professors. I talked to Professor Noam Chomsky, often an outsider because of his Jewish background, about his childhood, while I helped him open a tin of Sour Citrus Altoids. I found an adopted auntie in Dr. Loni and discovered a multifaceted American history in her documentaries, which I had never learned in history class. I met Alberta Lee and listened to her speak courageously about the struggle that her family went through when her father was unfairly imprisoned on the accusation of spying for China. Wen Ho Lee, a nuclear physicist at Los Alamos, had been imprisoned for nine months in solitary confinement pending trial. Later, the FBI acknowledged the probe was flawed, and the allegations of spying collapsed. Lee pleaded guilty to a single felony charge and was freed. Slowly, I realized that if people are not willing to fight, constitutional rights hold no power.

No progress occurs without struggle. I saw how this struggle to create an educational space for Asian American studies and a viable Asian American community cost my family. In the beginning it was the little things: my mom was too busy to chaperone our class field trip to the Science Museum; my dad didn't have time to talk about my book report. But one night it was just too much.

My sister and I heated up week old leftovers in the microwave once we realized that our parents weren't going to be home in time for dinner. As the big sister, I was the one to take the smoking remnants of crusty stew out of the microwave with the oven mitts; I was the one who made sure my sister didn't eat too much ice cream, finished her homework and brushed her teeth. We cleaned up to delay the inevitable bed time and to avoid looking too closely out the windows, darkened into

reflective mirrors. At the proud age of ten I would never have admitted that I was scared going to bed without my parents in the house, but I was. I tucked by sister in just a few minutes after her nine o'clock bedtime, assuring her that mom and dad would be home by the time she woke up.

I sobbed myself to sleep that night. More than anything I wished that my parents could be at home, tucking my sister in, kissing me on the forehead or turning off the lights, instead of driving a speaker back to the airport.

For several years I was bitter. Sometimes greater opposition came from within the Asian American community than from without. There were plenty of people who didn't want to rock the boat and blamed my family for speaking out. Many of the people that attended the New Year's Celebration would never be at the planning meetings. They never came to help us set up chairs, deliver food or fold programs and they never stayed to help clean up the littered cups, crumpled napkins and discarded fliers. I learned to delineate between social and political events based on the people who showed up.

Around that time I began to identify myself as Asian American. In my child's mind it was a statement, enough to distinguish me from the international students, apathetic yet snobby classmates and to distance myself from the nasty cultural politics of infighting between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese people.

I was angry at the community who didn't care. I was angry at the stubborn administrators and endless bureaucracy. I was angry at my parents for caring too much. I was angry at myself for being ungrateful.

Every parent tries to give their children lives better than their own. My parents have given me the Asian American Center.

The cutting editorials and vicious rumors, the transient and unstable coalitions, the misunderstood artists, the angry university administrators, the militant poets, the plethora of Asian American books scattered around the house, the scathing social critics, the cultural New Year's celebrations, the erudite academics, the burning controversies, the burnt-out political activists, the bitter fighting within the Asian American community, the student leaders awakening to claim a distinct identity—these are my inheritance. The term Asian American is a broad one, fluid and flexible, encompassing the people who choose to claim it.

JESSICA MAR '08 turns on her internal radio whether or not you are listening and sings to herself anytime, anyplace.



NYC NEW YEAR
MAY MARK '08
Black and White Photograph

THOUGHTS LIKE SMOKE

ARIANA BALESTRIERI '06

Thoughts like smoke
Suddenly

Realizations
Self-evaluations
Trails of the past
Woven through my

Present
Mind

This is the stuff
Of dreams:

Late nights
And cigarettes

Lonely songs that
Make me feel romantic

Slow dancing
To my own worries
And hopes

Interrupted by a long conversation
With an old friend
Reminding me
Of my past self

Air waves
Refracting the sounds of my friend's voice
Into an echo in my ears
Transmitted from the receiver
Sounding to me
Like

A familiar song

Drawing laughter
From my throat

Makes me wish
For

Soft sunlight

Hands on my back

Makes me wish for spring
For moments

When

Mid-
Nights,

The moon is not
My only friend
But a beautiful fixture in the sky

Reminds me of

Nights
Spent

In a tiny place

A white-walled
One room
Apartment

And the stars outside
That cold glass window

And all those

Slow

Slow thoughts

Dripped through me
Heavy like smoke

Their thick smell

Left all over me

Before I closed my eyes

To sleep

ARIANA BALESTRIERI '06 is a New Yorker who likes to keep
her head in the clouds and her feet on the ground.

ASIAN AMERICAN FRATERNITIES ARE CARVING OUT A HYBRID CULTURE

WHITNEY ENG '08

I went back home to New York City for winter break and was swarmed with letters. No, not kind messages from high school friends, but rather a bombardment of Greek letters strewn across everything from party flyers to mugs to basketball jerseys. Lambda Phi Epsilon! Kappa Phi Lambda! My friends wore their new letters with pride, but I guess you could say it was all “Greek” to me. Across the nation, a new definition of Greek life on college campuses is taking rise in the form of Asian American fraternities and sororities. Think of it as your typical Chinese Students Association on caffeine: the members of these groups party, drink, and haze just like members of predominantly-white Greek organizations do. These Asian “cultural” organizations are popping up at college campuses from coast to coast, including schools such as Stanford, UC Berkeley, UPenn, Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, NYU, and Columbia. Despite their growing numbers, these exclusively Asian American organizations are receiving little attention from the media.

At first I thought the lack of literature on the subject was a result of the ‘newness’ of such ethnic fraternities. While the tremendous upsurge of Asian American fraternities seems to be a relatively new one, these organizations, in fact, have been a part of college life for quite some time. Asian American fraternities have been in existence for almost 90 years. The first Asian American fraternity was founded in 1916 at Cornell University as Rho Psi, which now exists as an alumni club with chapters in New York, Hawaii, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Hong Kong. Today, close to 40 different Asian American fraternities and sororities exist, 27 of which were founded in California and New York. With dozens of local chapters of these existing groups forming every year, we have to wonder why these groups are becoming so popular.

In order to answer this question about Asian American fraternities, I decided to go directly to the source. I chose to

focus primarily on active and alumni members of the national fraternity Lambda Phi Epsilon, which is the largest and fastest growing Asian American fraternity on the East Coast and is also the only nationally recognized Asian American fraternity in the United States. After conducting numerous interviews with Lambda Phi Epsilon members from campuses across the United States, both at large public universities and small private colleges, I found that the role of Asian American fraternities is a complicated one.

The truth about Asian American fraternities is that they straddle labels such as “Black” and “White”, “gangster” and “model minority”, “fobby” and “whitewashed”, traditionally “Asian” and contemporarily “American”—in other words, they are cultural hybrids. Asian American fraternities have in essence, carved out a cultural space distinctly their own. Asian American fraternities have created a hybrid identity that manifests itself in three main ways: (1) the development of a unique Asian American identity that combines elements typically seen to be part of other cultures, (2) a means to assert masculinity and change the image of the Asian American male, and (3) an avenue for Asian American empowerment, social mobility, increased visibility, and political activism.

CREATING A COLLECTIVE ASIAN IDENTITY

Asian American fraternities provide a cultural space for Asian-Americans to construct a Pan-Ethnic community, one that encompasses a larger group of people who may identify as Asian American rather than specifically East Asian, Southeast Asian, Korean American, Chinese American, or other more restrictive terms. The umbrella term of “Asian American” is more inclusive than cultural organizations common on college campuses—such as a Chinese Students Association or a Korean Cultural Club—that may be divided across specific ethnic lines.

In this way, a collective “Asian” identity can be formed. While Asian Americans differ greatly in regard to national origins, immigration status, class, and generation, institutions such as Asian American fraternities may help to foster a sense of shared community, values, and ideas that can be categorized as being “Asian American”.

Richard Hsieh, a student at NYU, says that he did not initially want to join an Asian American fraternity because he was familiar with many negative stereotypes of members of such groups. Now an active member of NYU’s Lambda Phi Epsilon, Hsieh thinks that Asian American fraternities may help to unite people who share common interests and core values, saying, “What I notice about Asian American fraternities is that a lot of elements of what’s seen to be part of “Asian culture”—loyalty, family piety, respect, it’s all there. Just growing up as a member of Asian culture seems to lead to common threads among members.”

The brotherhood that is created among members is different from the nature of the relationship that many typical college cultural clubs have, often creating a sense of family kinship based on shared cultural identity. Robert Jang, a current senior at Columbia explains, “The brotherhood aspect of a fraternity is the most important, but it is also the most difficult to explain. Asian American fraternities provide a means for Asians to unite together, to form close personal bonds with people that they will call ‘brothers for life’. People go to college far away from where they’re originally from. You know what a fraternity is? It’s really just a second home.”

The extension of this idea of home can also be applied on a broader scale to fitting in not only as a college student, but as an American. All of the fraternity members interviewed identified themselves as immigrants or children of immigrants. Thus, Asian American fraternities may be a means of acceptance

for foreign-born Asian Americans, who may otherwise not feel that they have an Asian American identity. These groups on college campuses may provide a place for co-ethnic support, empathy, companionship, and connection to their culture.

The Asian American identity is a complicated one. It can be argued that Asian Americans are constantly straddling a predominant White-Black color line, occupying a position somewhere in-between. The institution of Asian American fraternities is an example of “carving out” a unique cultural space and creating an American identity of their own. Asian American fraternities combine elements of institutions and practices typically seen to belong to other racial groups, and in effect, have created a hybrid identity that combines the worlds of being “Asian” and “American”.

Asian American fraternities have adopted the fraternal system, which has typically been known as a white institution, and have made it their own. Asian American fraternities possess all the characteristics of older, more traditional fraternities. They possess the charm and mystery of secrecy, a ritual, oaths of loyalty, a grip, a motto, a badge for external display, a background of high idealism, a strong tie of friendship and brotherhood bond, and an urge for sharing their values through nationwide expansion.

More recently, Asian American fraternities are beginning to resemble older, traditional fraternities in another important respect: alumni connections. Many chapters of Asian American fraternities began forming in the 1990s, and thus these institutions are just beginning to form a strong alumni base for personal and business networking purposes.

In this way, Asian American fraternities are no different from traditionally white fraternities. The successful adoption of the fraternal system by Asian American males, and more recently

by Asian American females in the form of sororities, may suggest that Asian American “Greek life” may be a means by which Asian Americans are actually assimilating into mainstream White culture.

At the same time, however, Asian American fraternities also adopt practices that are typically seen to be a part of Black culture. It has been suggested that Asian Americans do not have a “style” of their own, and thus have to “choose between opposite extremes of the ‘Abercrombie-whitewash-look’ or the ‘Black-thug-gangster look’,” according to Hsieh.

The same can be said in regard to Asian American arts, such as dance and music. Instead of participating in traditional “Asian” performing arts, many chapters of Lambda Phi Epsilon perform step, a form of dance typically thought to belong to Black culture. Stepping, which involves a tremendous amount of coordination, complex hand movements, and a great deal of rhythm, is an example of a practice which Asian Americans have adopted from another cultural group and made their own.

Besides carving out an identity that is neither Black nor White, Asian American fraternities also make a mark that is neither strictly social or exclusively academic. While the fraternities boast of their boisterous parties and social events, members of Asian American fraternities also manage to achieve excellence academically. According to Jang, “This may not be true of other fraternities, but here at Columbia academics are our first, second, and third priority.”

ASSERTING MASCULINITY AND HYPER-HETEROSEXUALITY

Social scientists generally agree that masculinity, like race, is a social rather than a biological category. Asian American fraternities provide a means for Asian American males to

form a distinctly masculine social identity. Historically, Asian American men have been depicted through a variety of negative stereotypes—as weak, effeminate, nerdy, asexual, or sexually deviant. In everything from mainstream TV sitcoms to kung-fu films, Asian American men continue to be portrayed as unappealing, forever-foreign or “fresh off the boat” (FOB).

But party flyers and promotional publications from the fraternities seem to bolster an image that is very masculine and often hyper-heterosexual. For example, on the home web page of NYU’s chapter, five current actives pose with scantily clad women in front of a shiny sports racecar. Carnegie Mellon’s media gallery features pictures of the Asian American fraternity members at a “Hooters” bar. Biographies of the men boast athletic skills and cheer “Lambdas for Lyf !” Cornell’s Lambda Phi Epsilon attracts rushees with “events like paintballing, snow football, and our annual super bowl party” .

For Asian American men, Greek letters are a symbol of masculinity, and in the case of Asian American fraternities, a source of ethnic pride. Greek letters may be instruments for acceptance and empowerment. Thus, the institution of Asian American fraternities may become a vehicle through which the image of Asian American males changes. Asian American fraternities may provide an opportunity for Asian American males to form a collective pan-ethnic identity and reclaim their masculinity.

However, with this sense of acceptance that comes along with membership to these groups, there is also a great deal of exclusion. This exclusion operates in two directions. It can be argued that Asian American fraternities are a byproduct of Asian Americans being excluded from traditionally white fraternities. At the same time, however, the recent growth of Asian American fraternities shows that Asian Americans are also active agents of exclusion, as the nature of fraternities is

that not just anyone can join.

VISIBILITY AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Asian Americans are generally considered to be the “invisible” race. Asian American fraternities may be a vehicle through which Asian Americans become “visible”, both on college campuses and on a broader national scale, also changing the nature of that perception.

This evolution of the Asian American image can be considered a negative one in many regards. “A lot of people think that we’re a gang, just because we have strong bonds with one another. A lot of the general public only sees our parties; they don’t see what we do behind-the-scenes,” said John Kim, President of Lambda Phi Epsilon at NYU.

And for members of Lambda Phi Epsilon, a lot of that behind-the-scenes work includes community service projects such as Habitat for Humanity, a project that NYU Lambdas, for example, participate in twice a year. What is rarely seen (and is also rarely projected in the images publicized by the groups themselves) is a strong commitment to community service.

In fact, Asian American fraternities participate in various forms of philanthropy. On a national level, Lambda Phi Epsilon is the leading donor to the Asian American Bone Marrow Donor Program and every year raises thousands of dollars for the Cammy Lee Leukemia foundation. Asian American voter registration drives are held by most of the chapters every election year. The community service events are rarely publicized, but they make up a great deal of what it means to be a fraternity brother. From donating to the New York Asian Women’s Center by NYU to holding blood drives at Cornell to arranging carnivals at Carnegie Mellon, Asian American fraternities are active agents in improving the communities

around them.

American fraternities often face the same stereotypes that are attached to Asian Americans as a racial category. According to Ta-Wei Wang, “Lambda Phi Epsilon is a microcosm of Asian America. People will look at a group and stereotype the whole group; they rarely try to look deeper. It’s easier to hold onto your preconceptions about that group than to try to really understand them. In that way our organization is analogous to the way people view Asians in general.”

These stereotypes may be furthered by the images that the Asian American fraternities choose to place on public forums. “Gangster images” are incongruous with the idea that these Asian American men succeed academically as undergraduates and go on to hold high positions in the corporate and business worlds. These differences in the images these groups project and the truth about their commitment to service and scholarship reflect that what the fraternities truly are and how they want to be perceived may be two entirely different things. Asian American fraternities represent a dramatic change in the way Asian Americans want to see themselves, and how others want to see them.

CONCLUSION

As the Asian American population becomes increasingly more diverse with respect to ethnicity, class, and immigration experience, one of the challenges that Asian Americans face today is how they choose to define themselves in regard to other racial groups. The history of Asian American fraternities, the diversity of their present affairs, and their bright ideas for the future seem to suggest that these groups will only continue to carve a larger and more influential space for themselves.

Could an Asian American fraternity exist at Brown?

Only time will tell. Whether or not the Brown community joins this latest trend in ethnic institutions, Asian American fraternities will undoubtedly continue to redefine what it means to be an Asian American. By questioning the model minority, creating a collective Asian identity, dispelling racialization, reclaiming masculinity, questioning authority, and continuing eternal brotherhood, Asian American fraternities are engraving a space that is truly hybrid and unequivocally their own.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lee, Jennifer. "Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity". New York: Routledge, 2004., 167.

² <http://www.culambdas.com>

WHITNEY ENG '08 lives for oranges, apple juice, and the thrill of the chase.



WATER DRAGONS
SIQING HE '08
Digital Photograph

FOR UMMA

JUHYUNG HAROLD LEE '06

sudden sparks give breath to fire
and we are lost to it again
pushing through locked doors
and lighting the air with our charged voices

this, it seems
is the only language we are both fluent in.

we
take words wrapped knowingly in callous intent
and raised volume
carve them deep into the bark of each other's skins
we
reach into each other now
extract our own versions to fit narrow truths
or reach for whatever our limbs can hurl
when words
even
are not enough.

but when the air in our lungs is exhausted
we retreat back into friendly corners
replay anger until it ceases to carry us
and our reckless tongues grow heavy with regret

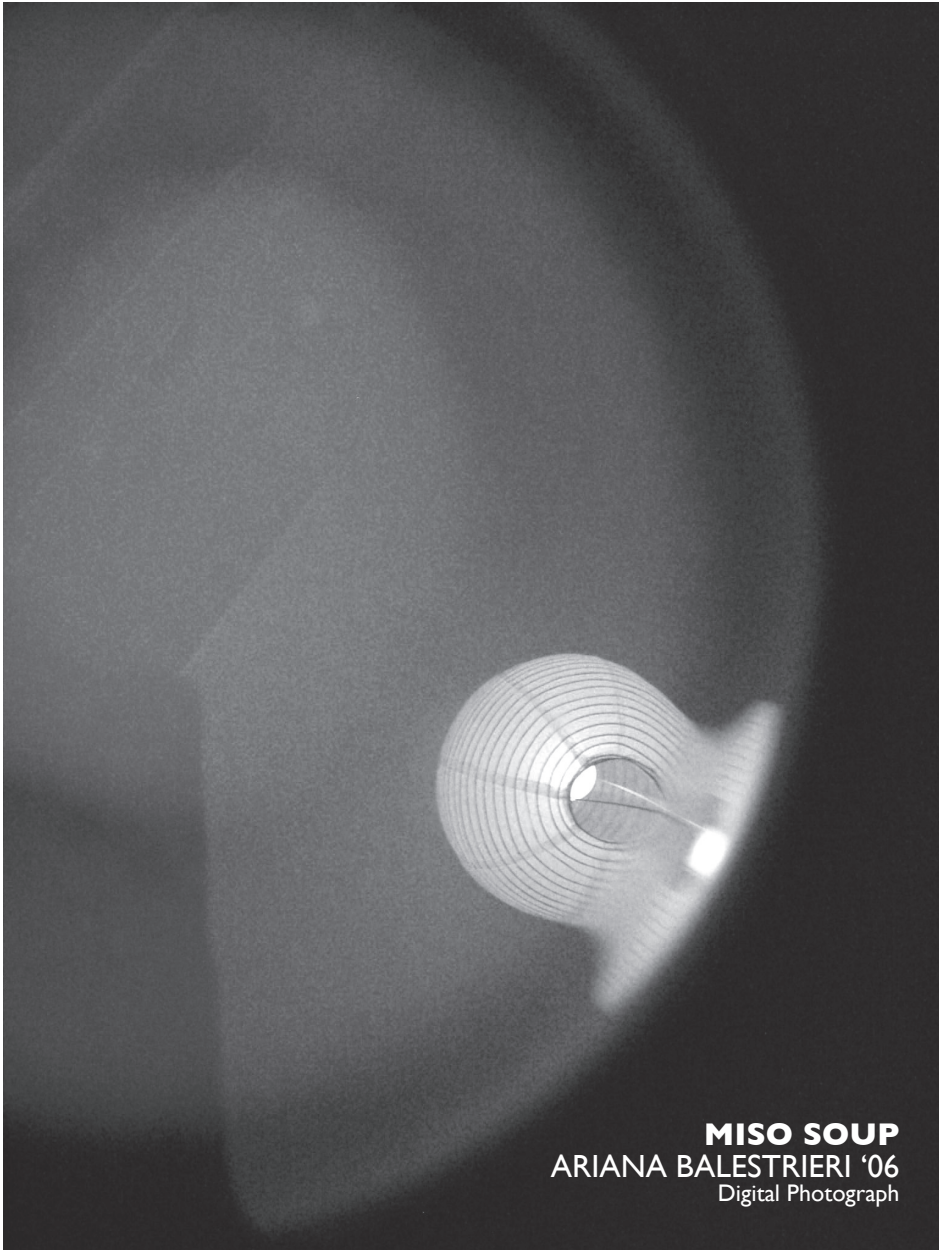
later
when my pride can bear it
i knock gently
seeking shelter from weary arms
we smooth away the rough talk
with language we leave unspoken
and as both sides admit defeat
to this struggle that consumes us
we begin to unlearn this bitter-edged love
that the memory
of our broken golden mountain dreams

has taught us.

we clutch hard to these moments

and hold our breath.

JUHYUNG HAROLD LEE '06 will miss y'all. Keep lovin', keep
fightin'.



MISO SOUP
ARIANA BALESTRIERI '06
Digital Photograph

DOG LOVER

JANE TANIMURA '07

My dad waits in line at a liquor store on a Saturday afternoon to buy a lotto ticket. Born and raised in Inglewood, a notoriously dangerous neighborhood glamorized as the birth place of gangster rap, this Japanese American man stands five-feet, eight-inches tall and wears his weekend outfit as if it's a part of his skin—a white nylon Members Only jacket with a discolored white t-shirt underneath and baggy navy blue Dockers that barely touch the top of his stained beige tennis shoes. He slouches over the counter and looks the clerk straight in the eye. “Give me a Super Lotto Plus.”

Every Saturday morning when I was little, my dad whisked me away to his old neighborhood in his broken down, dog-fur-infested SUV, for a quick stop to the Seven Eleven and then to Baskin Robbins for ice cream. While we waited in line, my dad would hold my hand loosely and self-consciously. Although I squeezed his massive hand—beautifully wrinkled and tanned, dry and warm to the touch—as tightly as I could, he would never reciprocate the grip.

On the car ride to, we always and only talked about our dogs Momo and Yuki, both female Shiba Inus, a Japanese breed best known for its puffy tail that curls like a cooked shrimp.

“They are descendants of the coyote,” my dad would convincingly say to me. “That’s why they howl so much.”

Momo was the younger of the two. Like me, she had a gentle, but mischievous spirit. Having grown up together, we resembled one another in many ways—ingenuous, obedient and a little ditsy. Though loyal to Momo, I sometimes clashed with her because of her incessant demand for my affection. She would chase me all over the house and garden, never relenting until I'd let her lick my hands. For hours afterwards, I would refuse to play with her. But while Momo obsessively pursued my attention, I was busy chasing Yuki, who always outran me

and hid underneath my dad's bed when I got too close.

Although of the same breed, Momo and Yuki could not be more different than a poodle and a pit bull. Momo was thin, of mostly white and reddish brown fur with big black sweet eyes. Yuki was tough, a bit chubby and darker colored. By the time she was around seven years old, her eyes were becoming grey and cloudy, devoid of pupils because she was going blind. On rainy days when they had to sleep in the doghouse together, Yuki would often start a fight with Momo if she came too close. I could hear the whimpering and growling from outside my bedroom window and would yell to my dad for help. My dad would rush to the crime scene and separate the two with a broom.

During the Saturday car rides I would ask my dad why Yuki could sometimes be so violent and detached. I wondered why I could never win the same affection she always showed my dad. “Daddy, why doesn't Yuki love me?” I whined. “She never wants to play with me.” Tears often followed the whimper. He would respond with a sympathetic nod. Although technically Momo belonged to me, and Yuki to my older sister, neither of them saw either of us as her master. My dad was the real leader of the pack.

It's a warm, typical southern California day, and for his amusement my dad has brought Momo and Yuki to my grandmother's place. As my dad mows the lawn, the dogs romp around the huge, meticulously arranged Japanese garden. My grandmother, or Bachan, and my mom and I watch them from inside the house. We sit drinking tea in the living room, a tacky space that is completely decorated with trophies my dad won for his talents in tae kwon do, fishing and skeet shooting in his teens and twenties. Occasionally Bachan picks up a trophy and elaborates on some of my dad's past accomplishments,

but mostly she talks about the past and remarks upon how much Inglewood, where she still resides, has changed. My mom tells Bachan that it's too dangerous for her to live in a neighborhood like this at her age. But Bachan doesn't listen. She clings to the image of Inglewood as it once was—before the run-down apartment buildings and grimy mini-malls, the Inglewood of acres and acres of open rural land that begged for nourishment.

My grandparents, like thousands of other Japanese, had immigrated to America because they couldn't succeed in the homeland. They were drawn by this ideal of an untamable but bountiful West, an image projected in fuzzy black-and-white American cowboy films at cramped movie houses in Yamaguchi prefecture. That decision to abandon Japan to pursue a better life in America, however, met with fierce disapproval from this militaristic and jingoistic nation that subscribed to work ethic and national pride as its top values. These migrants or *inakappe* (literally, “country bumpkins” in English) couldn't make it in the homeland because they were uneducated and lazy, claimed the social and political elite of Japan. If they wanted to leave, then good riddance.

It was equally impossible for my grandparents to embrace America, a nation that despised Japanese people's “yellow” ways. These immigrants were invading California with their strange customs, stealing jobs from hard-working white Americans by working for lower wages. These narrow-eyed Japs were not to be trusted.

After Pearl Harbor, white Americans finally had the excuse they needed. According to Earl Warren, the California Attorney General in 1942, Japanese Americans were “the Achilles' heel of the entire civilian defense effort.” At the age of four, my dad—a boy who liked playing cowboys and Indians, liked feeding and petting the farm animals—was labeled an enemy

of the state.

By August of that year, my dad, his three older brothers, my grandparents and ten thousand other Japanese Americans were transported to Manzanar, a relocation camp in Owens Valley, California, 224 miles north of Los Angeles. For months they had endured curfews and an endless barrage of hateful remarks by their Caucasian neighbors. This last step only seemed inevitable. On the second day of spring in 1942, they were forced to leave everything—even the family dog, my dad's best friend—behind.

When my grandmother is done with her story, she cups my hands within her hands. She tells me that I should be proud of my heritage and my family. Japanese Americans like us are the best kinds of Americans, because having been subjected to our own country's cruelty, we still remain loyal citizens, she says.

Outside, my dad has finally finished mowing the lawn and is sweating profusely. Under the burning sun, he smiles, watching Momo swiftly retrieve the ball he just threw. Yuki, who is now fifteen years old, rests against my dad's feet. My dad leans down to massage her back. I go outside to join the fun.

I have never asked my dad about his internment experience. I can ask him about our dogs but not about his trauma. I fear that my questions will break his chiseled heart, or worse, that I will find out it's incapable of breaking.

Instead I take the second-hand knowledge route and try to understand my dad's history by looking at photos depicting the Japanese American internment experience. There is one famous black and white picture by Ansel Adams that depicts a pensive Japanese American named Tom Kobayashi, leaning against a wooden fence on the right side of the photo. Overgrown

dried-up weeds and snow-capped mountains are all behind this one man, who stands in the same position as Rodin's sculpture "The Thinker." The man faces but does not stare at the camera. The left side of the photo and all that is behind him depicts a picturesque barren Californian desert and a cloudless sky. The only thing missing is the rolling tumbleweed.

At Bachan's funeral two years ago, my uncle described more tangibly the experience of being interned. Surrounded by his brothers, their wives and their children, my uncle sat at the head of the table, piecing together Bachan's history. When Bachan first saw the bunker where she was to live for the next three years, she stopped suddenly, let go of the hands of her sons and walked around the wooden shack to examine every inch of it. After she was done, she dropped to the ground, in the fetal position, and sobbed.

I sneak through my dad's closet, looking at his high school yearbook and old albums for more clues. There is one photo of him standing in his army uniform, leaning against the railing of the Eiffel Tower. All of Paris surrounds him. He looks dashing, handsome and young, so much so that I can't believe it's my dad, and I start to laugh.

Having heard my giggles, my mom immediately suspects mischief. She walks in the closet and scolds me for the mess that I've made. She nags at me in Japanese, but when she looks at these photos more closely, her curiosity is also piqued—she neatly puts one album back where it belongs, but then takes out another. One picture particularly intrigues us. It depicts my dad as a child holding Bachan's hand, while his three older brothers and his father, my Ojichan, stand beside them against a massive truck that reads, "I & T Produce." It's the family business my dad has now taken over. The family business Ojichan founded when my dad was seven years old, right after the war ended.

They were expected to start from scratch.

Socializing himself back into a country that still hated him was a shocking immersion, intensified by his father's harsh discipline and his mother's nonchalance. Confined by the indoors—the cramped, the restricted, the chaotic—he sought sanctuary in the open land, the acres of blank space where his kinder kin, the farm animals, resided. Though familiar with all types of animals, dogs were his specialty, his best buddy being Boots, a cocker spaniel whose namesake was born from his infamous shoe-eating habits.

By the time my dad was in his late teens, he was being pressured to either go to college or join the army. The no-no boys of the generation before him—Japanese Americans who chose jail over fighting for a country that imprisoned their families—could barely face "the disgrace" that resulted from their actions, let alone a Japanese American community that labeled them as cowards. My dad couldn't risk such humiliation. To save himself the trouble, he became a yes-yes boy, a patriotic Japanese American who joined the army with the intent of fighting in the Korean War, like my uncle did, or in Vietnam, like my dad wanted to do. He enlisted in the army soon after his eighteenth birthday.

As my mom and I put the photos back where they belong, I hear my dad calling for me.

"Jane, help me wash the dogs!" he yells from the bathroom. By the time I get there, my dad is already preparing the warm water in the bathtub. I close the doors to prevent Momo and Yuki's escape. Instinctively, I gather the dog shampoo and bucket from the cabinets. Yuki goes in first. She hysterically flails in the shallow water, acting as if she's about to drown. She splashes water everywhere, drenching both of us completely. I laugh and laugh at my dad whose forehead and hair is now entirely

covered in soap bubbles. My dad becomes a bit panicky. “Bring me the shampoo. Get me the bucket.”

Yuki continues to whine, as if begging my dad for mercy. My dad calms her. “It’s okay girl. It’s okay.”

Silence has always permeated our relationship, during our Saturday outings when I was five and even now at dinnertime, when I am twenty-one. Other than off-hand jokes, we are incapable of communicating deeper emotion. It’s not that we don’t care or don’t want to know. We’re just afraid, hyper-sensitive. To him, I am still a fragile little girl—one wrong move and I may never speak to him again. To me, my dad is a statue of a great hero—even though he’s massive, one push could easily break him. Why take the risk when the outcome might shatter everything?

Instead, we take the safe way out. We talk about the mundane, the familiar, the tangible. The dogs.

“We should get another dog.”

“No. NO. NOOO!” my mother always interjects.

My dad smiles, then winks at me.

“Remember Yuki! Kawai-sou-ni-ne-e. (In English, “poor thing”). No more. No more dogs!” My mom ends the discussion abruptly, but when she leaves, my dad and I resume it.

By the time Yuki died, she was blind, deaf, epileptic and physically immobile. She took a vitamin-sized tablet of Prozac every morning. She was spoon fed twice a day. She drank Pedialite instead of water from a baby’s bottle. She wore diapers with a hole cut in the back for her tail and a plastic cone around

her head to prevent her from scratching her skin off. She slept on soft sheepskin, which still could not prevent the bedsores that completely covered her back. She weighed eight pounds when a typical dog of her breed weighs at least fifteen. My dad refused to put her to sleep.

I remember Yuki’s agonizing whimpers at all hours of the day. She would spin around and around for hours and hours, chasing the ghost behind her that she couldn’t see, hear or catch. She cried until she exhausted herself completely and then collapsed. But my dad refused to put her to sleep, not out of spite but determination. He was the one who tended to her every move and spent tens of thousands of dollars of his own money to keep her alive for just one more day. She died peacefully in my dad’s arms, while he was sleeping.

Once when my dad was making out a check at the front desk of a pet hospital, the vet took me aside to speak to me alone. “Why does your dad insist on keeping her alive? Sometimes I think he’s crazy and selfish, but that’s not it. It’s the opposite.”

I can’t remember if my dad ever said he loved Yuki, but I can remember the one and only time he said he loved me. My sister had run away from home, and I was lying alone in the dark in my mom’s bed, waiting for an update. My dad came in to ask me if I was okay. Instead of answering the question, I spurred up all the courage that my seven-year-old self could muster and said what I had always feared saying because I did not think it would be reciprocated.

“I love you daddy.”

“I love you too,” he said and gently shut the door behind him.

JANE TANIMURA '07 is a dog lover too and desperately misses her puppies Mari and Lulu.



THE ESCAPE
ARIANA BALESTRIERI '06
Digital Photograph

OUT THE WINDOW

ANDREW AHN '08

i look
out the window.
it bleeds out to the sides.
sky stretches careful
not to tear.

You look
and as the camera pans out,
take the scene in whole.
my body slowly fades to focus;
understand that light
plays tricks.

the music fades in
and the theater comes into focus;
try not to confuse me for an actor
realize that I am afraid and
alone.

You wish me to sit here
and drip life from my toes
pool under me to stagnate.
watch me watch You in slow
disbelief.

the credits roll and Your name is
on screen. credit Yourself, applaud.
but understand that I am Yours.

please do not show Your vulnerability
today. let the sky wash purple
with slight confidence.



CHRIS 3 YEARS OLD
CHRISTOPHER LEE '09
Color Photograph

LIFE

CHRISTOPHER LEE '09

“Can I play one more time?” I pleaded.

“No!”

I had heard the word “no” many times in my life, but this particular “no” echoed in my mind. I felt powerless; I wanted to fight against it, but I couldn’t.

The aging Dr. Micheli walked into the examination room with a grim look on his face. “It doesn’t look good,” he said. “You won’t be able to play again for at least a year, perhaps longer.”

I could not believe what I was hearing. My athletic career had been shattered within seconds. For the first time in eleven years, I would not be able to play the game I loved—not tomorrow, not a year from now...maybe never again.

At the tender age of fourteen, when my tennis game was just beginning to mature, I was diagnosed with bilateral stress fractures in my lower spine. These fractures were the result of poor technique on my serve, which caused me to severely arch my back. The physical pain that I was suffering from, however, cannot compare to the emotional distress that had consequently seized me. When I was told that I would not be able to play tennis for at least a year, I was consumed by an overwhelming sense of anger and frustration. Without tennis, my future was uncertain. Like the metaphorical racket that had been snatched from my hands, my dreams of Grand Slam titles were slipping away before my eyes.

Though upset, I refused to waste my time sulking and feeling sorry for myself. During my recovery, my parents encouraged me to try different activities that I might not have normally pursued, and I took them up on the offer. I began working with Mr. Pan, a specialist in various therapeutic techniques, who introduced me to Qi Gong, the ancient Chinese art of self-healing. As I learned to control my internal energy, or qi, by focusing on my breathing, I increased my capacity to manage

stressful situations effectively. Practicing Qi Gong provides me with an immediate sense of calmness and allows me to enter a heightened state of consciousness.

Besides exploring the “eastern” art of self-healing, I also experimented with the “western” style of self-realization. I began working with Tim Stoll, a renowned sports psychologist who had previously worked with professional athletes including members of the Boston Bruins. After working with him, I discovered that almost all of my weaknesses are within my control. For example, when I used to compete in close matches, I would develop severe stomach cramps. Once, when Tim helped me simulate a close match through visualization, I felt that familiar pain in my gut even though I was not actually playing tennis. I began to understand that my cramps were self-induced; they were a physical manifestation of my overwhelming fear of losing. Furthermore, my stomach cramps provided me an excuse if I could not win the match, a possibility otherwise too difficult to accept. Through visualization, however, I learned to harness the power of the mind and maintain an optimistic outlook in the face of a challenge.

In retrospect, my back injury was a blessing in disguise, as many blessings tend to be. It taught me that when confronted, even the most disheartening of setbacks can yield to positive outcomes. Through the process of my recovery, I learned to look at life from a different perspective. If one road in my life is blocked, there will always be another avenue—a fresh route—waiting for me to explore.

I transformed the state of my well-being so much with Qi Gong and sports psychology that, after only one year, I was able to storm the tennis scene again. This time, not only was I completely healthy physically, but I was mentally and emotionally stronger as well. Within another year, I had reached a career high ranking of number 24 in the country.

No matter what unfortunate events life may throw at me, I am confident that I can always gain something from them—it is just a matter of finding out what that something is. I had thought that my injury was the end of the world, but ironically enough, I ended up improving my game the most during the year I was forced to spend off the court.

It was a sweltering summer day and my first conditioning session as a member of the Brown University Men's Tennis Team was only one hour deep:

"I hope we're done with all this shit," I thought to myself.

"On the line boys. You guys can't be tired yet!"

"Fast feet..."

...sprint to me and back..."

...sprint to me and back!"

Though conditioning sessions are very physically demanding, I can only smile when I realize that I will hear these words from Coach's mouth many more times over the next four years. As they say, that's sports. That's life.



PLAYING WITH NATURE
AH-YOUNG SONG '08
Digital Photograph

JUAREZ FUCKS, AND SO DOES SINGAPORE

JANE MEE WONG '06

these panting men in white collared shirts and
thick business suits their foreheads damp
with sticky odor of clogged sweat pores wading
through rolls of cash like
rolls of fat stroking
a callous sky swelling
with incessant columns of heaving
high rises

these panting men in white collared shirts and
thick business suits with polished skins of cow hide they trample
on pock-marked pavements blistering beneath sultry sun
sucking chastity dry,
stuffing hard cash up canals:
fresh and docile women
make good laborers for
dexterous and light work needing feminine attention

these panting men in white collared shirts and
thick business suits like knights on albino horses they
squirt doses of cyanide with labels of liberation
down brittle throats and chapped lips of hunger:
clogged voice boxes make good workers.

like boiling water steam she roars,
a masseuse releasing tension trapped in scorched earth.
spurned lovers,
these men in ragged collared shirts
business suits threshed beneath stomping feet
pant

JANE MEE WONG '06 would like to magically transform pizzas
into roti prata for 800 years.

TIRED

CANDICE SUN '06

How dare you question me?
You don't know who I am
Or what I'm about

How dare you question why I'm offended
By what I see
And what I hear
In the media
On television
In film
In song lyrics
In the very hurtful words
That roll off your very tongue
And onto my wounded pride

The p r o l o n g a t i o n
E l o n g a t i o n
P r o p a g a t i o n
P r o l i f e r a t i o n
of a false stereotype that should be buried
beneath
the yellow
that is
my skin

It's not your prerogative to ask my name
My race
My ethnicity
Where I'm really from

It's not my responsibility
To teach you
And to make you understand
Why I feel the way I do
So figure it out
Yourself.

Because I'm tired.
Tired of trying to explain
To you
And everyone else,
The feelings that I try so hard to contain,
That I've broken down
And the only way I can rise
is to wash these words down.

CANDICE SUN '06 enjoys dancing to good tunes with good people.



FOOD
SHEENA SOOD '06
Digital Photograph

HALF BAKED: A CONFLICT OF IDENTITY

JACQUELINE FLORES '09

“Hi guys!” Nhut cheerfully entered my room, with a plastic bag in his hand.

“Hey, what’s that?” I asked.

“Lotus buns.”

I ogled one of the bag’s tiny, white mounds. “Ooh, may I have one?”

I have to admit, I am not the most persuasive person in the world. Nevertheless, I managed to get what I wanted this time. At first, I was ecstatic and eager to try this Chinese delicacy—in my opinion, there’s no better way to become immersed in a new culture than sampling its dessert. Unfortunately, my bliss was doomed from the start.

My roommate, Hong, gave me instructions: “Jackie, dampen a paper towel and wrap it around the lotus bun. Then, heat it for a minute.”

It sounded simple enough. Unfortunately, I soaked the towel, so I had to squeeze out the excess moisture and unfurl the bunched-up wad of paper. And the worst was yet to come. After wrapping the lotus bun with the paper towel, I gently placed it in the microwave and added heat for the required minute.

“Hong, is the lotus bun supposed to be hard inside?”

“No, heat it up.”

“Okay!” I was determined to salvage the white rock in my hand with microwave radiation.

Twenty-five seconds later, my spirits began to sink as a waft of smoke reached my nose. I chose to eat the lotus bun anyway, since the smoke was nowhere in sight. But as I bit into the confection, I instantly regretted my decision: I realized why I could not see the smoke—my dessert had absorbed it all. Adding insult to injury, it had hardened, so the experience was

equivalent to eating a mouthful of charcoal.

Resignedly, I threw the lotus bun towards the trash can. Everything in the room was still and quiet as the trajectory followed its path. But the equilibrium was suddenly disturbed as the bun hit its mark and loudly sang: “Clunk!” My friends burst into peals of laughter as they realized just how hard the lotus bun truly was.

I won’t lie, I was also laughing. It’s not everyday that a miniature dessert makes a noise that sounds like a ship colliding with an iceberg. Nonetheless, an overwhelming sense of sadness took over me as I ate Ben & Jerry’s Half Baked—my consolation prize. Usually, Half Baked has a ribbon of vanilla ice cream with chocolate cookie dough pieces and brownie chunks in the midst of chocolate ice cream. This time, the pint was nearly devoid of brownie chunks. I couldn’t help but not notice how similar I was to this alien batch of ice cream.

Though it is not obvious from looking at me, I am Filipino. My lightly brown-tinged skin, slanted eyes, and Hispanic last name have people guessing if I am from many places – Mexico, China, Hawaii, Japan, and Colombia, to name a few. The identity mistakes have gotten me into funny situations, such as a stewardess speaking to me in Japanese while addressing the rest of my family in English. Laughs aside, I understand everyone’s confusion. I have to admit: I feel it too.

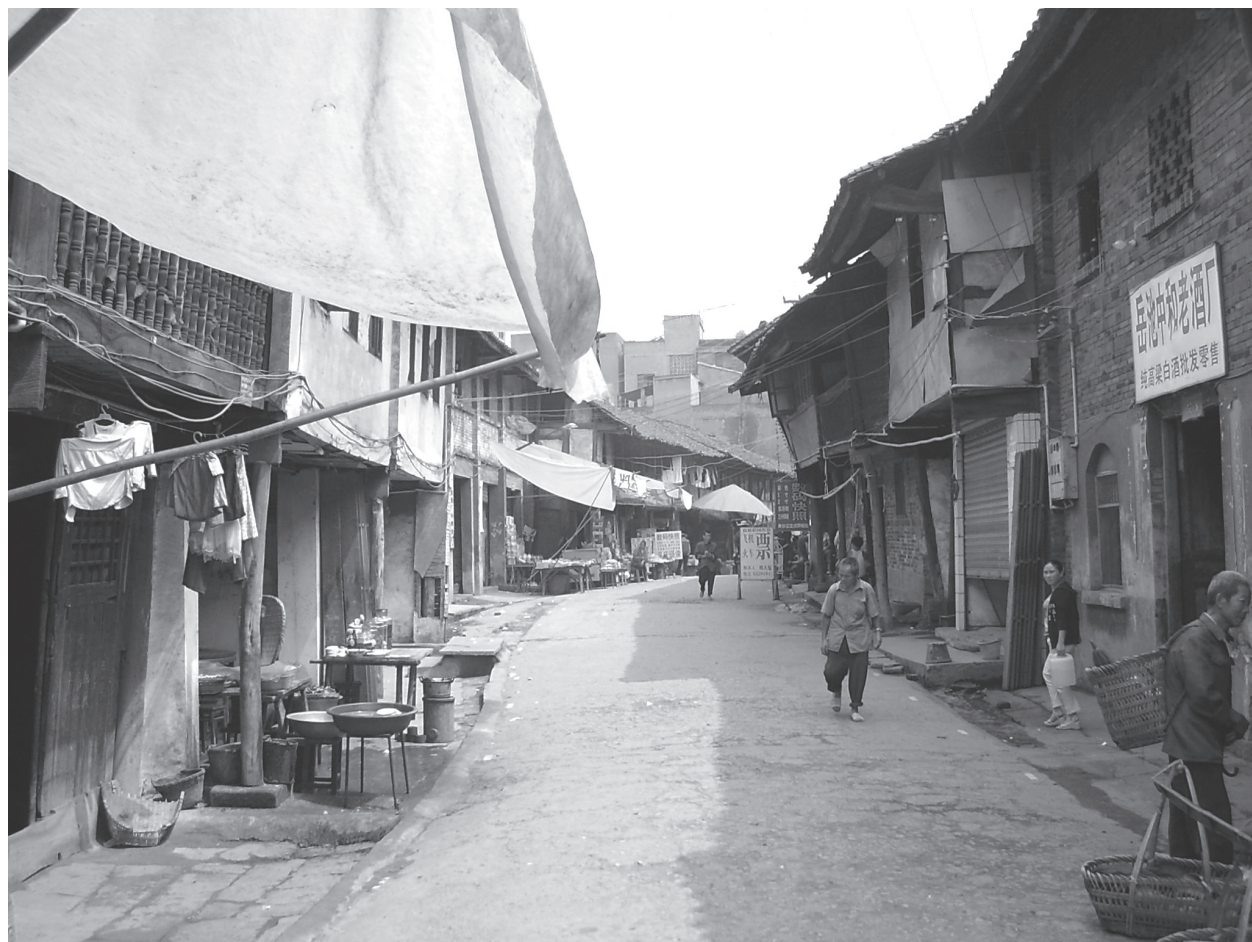
I know that the Filipino culture exists in me even though I have had more difficulty finding it than the Half Baked brownie chunks. I think my upbringing caused this problem. When I two years old, I was diagnosed with autism. Along with recommending special therapy sessions, the psychologists suggested that my parents use only one language in the household. They were unsure if I was capable of learning one language, let alone two. Understanding the importance of assimilating into American

society, they chose English over their native Tagalog.

Not only did my parents sever language ties, they also unintentionally cut the cultural ones as well. While they struggled at work to make ends meet on minimum wage salaries, my older sister and I struggled to do our part by getting good grades at school. My mother especially felt the strain as she raised us while working at a supermarket and studying to complete a ten-month program giving her a bachelor's degree of science for nursing. When my parents split, she was the obvious candidate for gaining custody of my sister and me. Needing the extra income, she often came home so late—if at all—that our sole interaction would be through microwave-heated dinner.

Reflecting on the past, I feel no bitterness towards my mother for her role in my lack of Filipino culture. On the contrary, I thank her for raising me to be the strong, independent woman that I am today. Yet, I cannot help but feel as if I am not “Asian enough” when my culture-deprivation manifests itself in incidents similar to the lotus bun fiasco. My friends sympathetically downplay the awkwardness and try to make me feel better by telling me that I am just as Asian as they are. Although I truly appreciate their efforts, I won't be satisfied until I can speak to my parents in their native tongue—the way my friends can speak to their parents—no matter how horrible my attempts may sound.

JACQUELINE FLORES '09 won't stop until she finds those brownie chunks and eats them.



COUNTRY LIFE
SIQING HE '08
Digital Photograph

A SONG OF ROAMING PULSES

TAO RUGKHAPAN '08

Pressure.

It seemed like no matter how hard I pressed, my attempt was to no avail.

Rub and smear. I wished it had been a little bit of black dirt from the soil, so it could have rinsed off easily. The weather didn't help, either. April heat in Bangkok was suffocating, to say the least. The humidity caused my hands to sweat, tears welling up in my eyes as I sat fixedly staring at my right foot I wish hadn't been mine. The surrounding skin I'd been rubbing was reddening. Yet, I kept up the work. My five-year-old fingers were pained and peeling. But I earnestly scrubbed at the transparency of it. Why me? Well, why mine? All I was praying for was for her words, her prophecy to be untrue. But it was there to stay: a tiny black mole on my sole. Maybe she was right.

Standing around impatiently in Bangkok International Airport, I couldn't wait for Brown. I couldn't wait to see myself looking through the puffy American clouds, flying in, touching down, and finally arriving in Providence. To breathe in the ample New England breeze in late summer, to see the fall foliage unfurl, and to live my freshmen year in this foreign land for months on end. My feet stamped around as I hurriedly checked my passport and plane tickets, waiting to be checked in. My fingers started to run through each of the US dollar bills I had in my wallet. The world was oh so big! I had never thought I would get to have even a small bite of it, much less to conquer each and every part of it in any given lifetime. But at that moment, while this little chubby girl was leaving for Paris and that middle-aged couple behind the check-in counter might be seeing their son off to London, I among the countless others was going to cruise half way around the globe.

"What are you doing?" Aunt Yu paused in the middle of her cooking and asked me in a curious tone.

"But couldn't it be rubbed off?" I stopped and looked up, waiting for a hopeful answer from her, instead of providing her with one.

"No, I told you. That's what it's meant to be. You're meant to be. I remember old people saying that if somebody has a mole on one of his soles, it means he has a 'pulse down to his foot.' That person will travel a lot. Will journey the world. Mile after mile in all directions. And he—"

"But I don't want to travel!" I screamed in a desperate, cracked voice and cut her short from her ancestral chant. I feared being away from the sure comfort of home. I felt an awkward lump building up in the back of my throat. My eyes were wet and warm, not in the least understanding how one's pulse could be "down to the foot." For the time being, my nose was blind to the clear fragrance of her warmly cooked peppery stir-fry.

"You are what, five years old? Your feet are still young. The mangoes have yet to ripen. You haven't seen the colors of the world," she answered, but I interpreted her quiet answer as an elder's condescending remark to an immature child.

Smear and push. My stomach felt so empty and mad. But I rubbed on with all the intense solemnity a young pair of hands could to its foot, not caring whether the pulse of the black mole, if it had any, was beating faster than that of my heart. The tears falling from my eyes down to the sole, I thought, would help erase the little black satanic spot, which other people would have dismissed as a mere birthmark. If only I had known that the harder I pressed, the deeper the birthmark might be sinking in. The apprehensive ring of my voice that afternoon is still so crisp and precise in my head today. The picture of me

hating myself on the day when the confusion of oil and garlic smells was floating effortlessly onto the thick Tropic air.

“Xpvndh...ytghur...jevhg...oxgyi”

Pause. An unfamiliar tongue from an old woman abruptly filled the airport departure lounge and woke me from the bittersweet childhood memory. I was quick enough to rise and look for the source. And I was downright wrong. They were many, of all ages and sexes. All of them were dressed in scruffy black shirts and black pants, embroidered with threads of assorted colors, slurring words of a foreign note. The older exotic men seemed so tired and sat quietly. The older kids were running around, as excited and expectant as I was of boarding the plane and seeing a new place, while the younger ones were simply toddling or groping around on their knees, the airport now their modest playground. They were beautiful children. The humble color of their eyes was that of the dark winter rain. Dewy and wavering. Their grimy faces were adorable, yet saddened in an inexplicable way. I overheard that these were Hmong refugees who would fly to and seek asylum somewhere in America. I began to walk back to my seat and reach out for my boarding pass in the bag. But no sooner had I unzipped the bag than I heard the same drawing female voice, this time mingled with a young boy's incessant sobbing.

“Xpvndh...ytghur...jevhg...oxgyi,” the woman, who I took to be the boy's grandma, repeated the same message as she mumbled softly to her grandson who was embraced in her careful arms. Her brown, wrinkled face was quiet and composed as she hummed the tunes without fail. Caress and whisper. But the motherly warmth of her bosom, the sureness with which she held his fragile back and legs could not stop this four-year-old-looking boy from crying. Who in the world would know what he was crying for? He shook his feet with all his inadequate might several times as if to let loose and free.

As his feet were pushing hard against his old grandma's lap, the beautiful little silver bracelets around his ankles chimed as deeply and as loudly as her parallel reassuring lullaby. I just sat right there facing the two, peacefully appreciating the pure innocence of surrounding circumstance.

“Does she know where she's off to though?” I caught my numbing consciousness asking out of the blue. Coming from a preliterate culture, would the English language ever make any sense to her? Pea coats instead of dark lived-in clothes. Caesar salad instead of vegetable soup and watery boiled rice. The culture shock, weather shock and life shock in general that she would be facing was plainly overwhelming to her, yet never understandable to all other American walks of life, the owner of the land. I was taken aback as I found myself posing those questions. I felt an urge to go and look closely at the boy, unsuspecting and unknowing that he was, and see where his pulse was actually beating. So, I quickly got up back on my feet, grabbed my backpack and walked right toward the gate as I heard the boarding call. Without even remembering to breathe in a last surge of the country's damp air.

“International” is a euphemistic term referring to non-Americans in America. However, if roughly deconstructed, the term simply points to a person caught in between nations. Broad as it is, the term has yet to capture the impossible diversity of experiences and hues, of a million stories and accents. International, as a generalized label, simply means nothing beyond a denationalized person whose identity lies neither here or there but in the middle of both space and time.

Today, America is no longer a far-off, foreign land to me. Not that it has really been so to begin with. Although I have no part in this nation, the sign \$, instead of the Baht, has now come to register in my head as referring to money. I have begun to

replace many Thai words with their English counterparts when speaking. I now measure my world in terms of mile, Fahrenheit, and inch. My weight in pounds. I have become slave to time, calorie-free health, and hardcore hygiene. I now think I can't live without a low-carb diet and Canada represents another neighboring state to the north. I no longer divide states along geographical lines as my teacher in Thai high school would make me do; they are now neither bigger nor smaller, but Red or Blue. I am now used to eating an American-sized Pad Thai without complaining and being shocked by its massive quantity as I would have been in the past. I can swim in the American current of thought and culture with relative ease and peace. Over the years I have become more comfortable with the blatant questions Americans ostensibly force me to answer on a regular basis.

"Did you ride an elephant to school?"

"Is Bangkok bigger than Providence?"

"Is it that easy to find hookers in Thailand?"

"Did you go back to Taiwan over the break?"

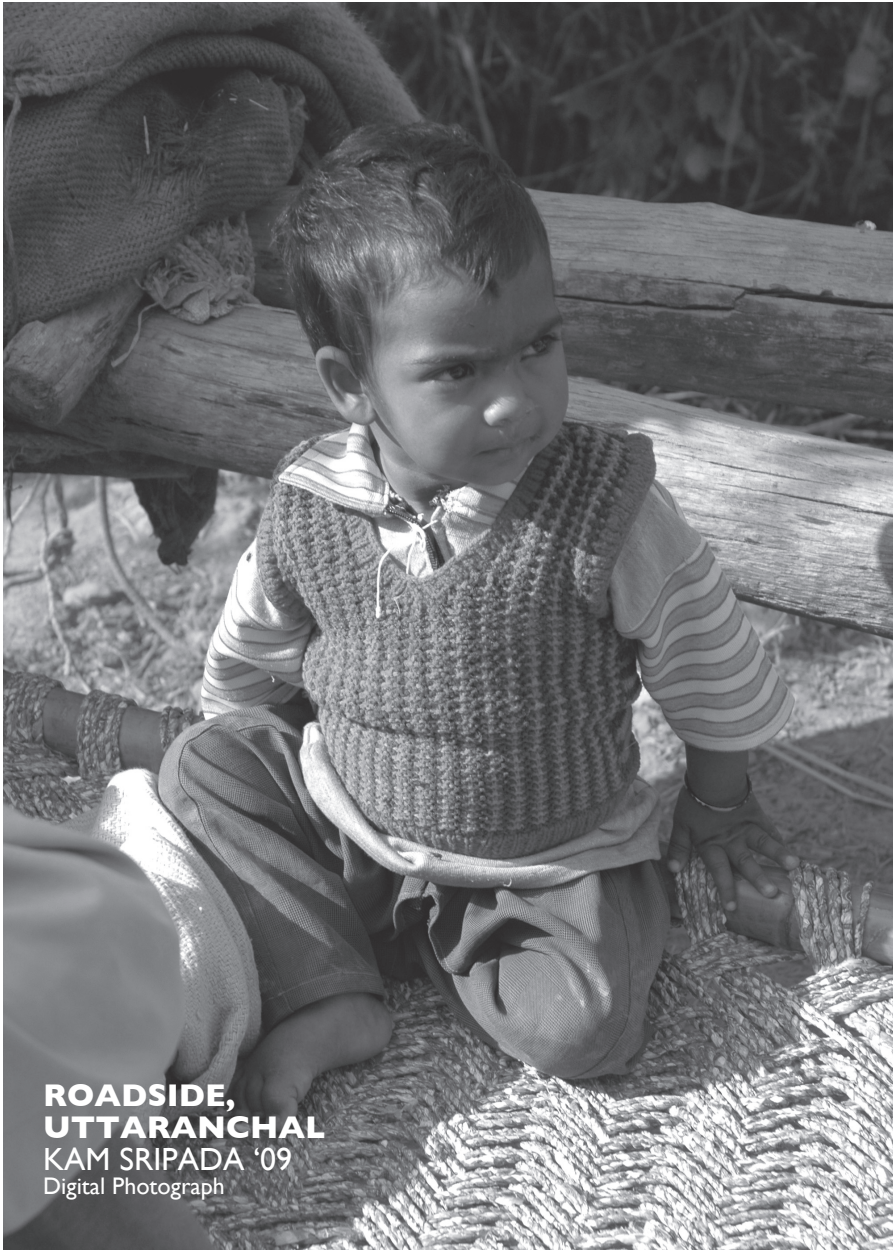
"Oh wait, where is Thailand again?"

Whether he is now in Colorado or Wisconsin or any other place, today my feet and the Hmong boy's feet are set on the very same piece of land. One definite thing is that the exotic Hmong boy I met some two years ago can no longer be wearing the same black outfit, dirty with fine grains of Oriental sand and his tears of blamelessness. He probably no longer wears those silver bracelets tapestried with the limitless unlearned stories of his people. The song his grandma sang to caress him, which had appeared to be an unintelligible gibberish to me, could very well be the same to him now. As his ears grow more receptive to English, he will slowly forget the echoing lullaby of his grandma's fading past. Now that his pulse is down to his own feet. Aunt Yu cannot be more precise. Breathe and roam.

One fact of my life is true. The black mole is not engraved on my sole anymore. It must have come off and disappeared altogether as I dragged my feet across the globe. Still, every now and then I try to look for a mole—any mole—on my right sole only to find the transparent trail of bygone existence, of yesterday's nostalgia. This doesn't herald the end of my globetrotting, however. After Brown and America, I cannot see where my feet will take me. I still wish to remain just as footloose and mobile as I have always been. But at some point in my life and my feet's life, I shall call it history and home. I don't yet know when and where. So many dreams to write, so many songs to sing.



**FLOATING MARKET,
BANGKOK**
MYRA PONG '06
Digital Photograph



**ROADSIDE,
UTTARANCHAL**
KAM SRIPADA '09
Digital Photograph

HERSTORY (MOTHER:CHILD:FATHER)

LAM PHAN '07

Caressing your coconut head—
buttressed by rampant flies,
buttressed in slimy snot—
I picked spoiled greens
by the graveyard and its ancient dirt,
you and I,
full of dreams from
our glossy Saigon adventures.

Where was he?

He was red: midday sun heating
blue rice paddies across monkey bridges.
Flailing about, never mind the time,
he was busy, even after seven glasses too many.
We fell flat when you first walked,
he didn't know freedom and I didn't
want broken eggs and fish spilled for
the neighbors to see.

What happened?

(We grew apart. Her bubble grew,
and I was afraid of the explosion.)

Never loved me; he never
loved me. His fingers fond of finding
familiarity around my neck.
I found a pot over my head, hot
rice streaming down my face,
that one day he went that way.
I wanted to scream. I wanted heaven
to see recycled betrayal. But you were
there, and he wanted to kill you:
said you weren't his. You were.

I'm not: he was never here.

We ran like scattered marbles,
tripping over truths, and hid
in the arms of family men; he waited
but I was too cold to return.

(I apologized. Stopped pouring. I wanted us.)

You and I, we slept under full
blankets of black sky, spotted with
stars like Saigon lights. Guarding
our rice—ants thick on silver mushrooms—
we prayed for health and happiness.

Did you love him?

(I loved her.)

When you called from within me,
he answered.

LAM PHAN '07 shivers when the phone rings.



JI-MIN
KARYNN IKEDA '09
Digital Photograph

BALANCE: A STORY IN TWO PARTS

GOWRI CHANDRA '08

I. Autobiography

sky blue walls of paint peeling,
a lizard slowly creeping
towards the incandescence:
my first memory

in the house where i was born,
twenty four years after my mother,
who grew up wearing jasmine flowers in her hair,
thick and straight.
this was the diamond: 1986.

the jewel of the earth,
my mother once told me, some time after we'd left,
pointing to the map postered above my desk.
i was beginning to try to lose it,
then-

to perhaps drown it in a river
or pawn it off somewhere,
to throw dust over the glittering
but the shimmering was so bright
i shut my eyes:
when in class,
around a boy

i finally became quite skilled
at ignoring the brightness,
my retinas adjusted to the light.

II. Apology

dust and pollution creep up my legs
in walking the streets of mumbai; my eyes

follow constellations of street vendors
and chappal vendors who look at me
with the easy conclusion:
it was never really mine-

this jewel that i tried so hard to lose,
like a fool- and now, oh
it must be rolling somewhere beneath the
footsteps of these girls, churidar clad,
engineering books in hand,

or perhaps landing beneath the heel of a slipper
that walks to a stone temple,
where the drip of water smells of rose petals
and sugar, i can taste it on my tongue.

to stand still for a moment,
it's all too much, and it's futile to try and escape
the gravity of the earth,
this place i come from;

they continue to brush past on their daily trajectories,
in this cosmos of dust and smog,
not strangers, but ghosts of who might have been:
of my parents, of my friends,
living their lives in alternates states.

and i wonder if, in some universe,
there also exists the ghost of a girl,
a soul of the past conditional:
a person who otherwise might have been,
now on these streets wandering
aimlessly, jasmine flower in her braid,
smelling sweet and hanging straight.

GOWRI CHANDRA '08 secretly listens to Bone Thugs-N-Harmony on her iPod.



OLD DELHI STREETS
KAM SRIPADA '09
Digital Photograph



AFTERNOON
ARIANA BALESTRIERI '06
Digital Photograph

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