

Women's Studies 295b

***Asian American Women: Gender, Race and Immigration***

**Course Information**

<b>Professor</b>	Miliann Kang Women's Studies Program, UMass Amherst
<b>Office Location &amp; Number</b>	Bartlett 73 (basement), 577-0710 or 545-1922 (Women's Studies office)
<b>Office Hours</b>	Tues and Thurs, 12:30-1:30 and by appointment
<b>Email</b>	mkang@wost.umass.edu
<b>Class Info</b>	Fall 2003, Tues and Thurs, 11:15-12:30, Bartlett 127

**Course Description**

*An Asian American feminist movement is vital for the larger project of uncovering the social structure, with its built-in injustices and inequities, that affect us all. In today's global economy, in which nothing is certain for anyone save the most elite of the elite, this is a project that vitally concerns the majority.*

Sonia Shah, Introduction, *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire*, p. xix

*Chinese-Americans, when you try to separate what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?*

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, p. 5-6

What are the categories of "Asian American" and "woman" and how are these cross-cutting social positions integrated in the lived experiences of women who claim these identities? How do the experiences of Asian American women vary by ethnic group, and how do they compare to those of white women, other women of color, and Asian American men? What can we learn about broader systems of power and inequality by examining the historical and contemporary locations of Asian American women? In exploring these questions, this course examines Asian American women's identities, educational achievement, economic incorporation political participation, and social positions within their ethnic communities and the U.S. mainstream. Analyzing the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, nation and sexuality, we will examine Asian American women's immigration experiences, families, work and sexual politics. Topics will include: immigration and settlement; labor history and contemporary employment patterns; dating and marriage; family and career choices; inter-generational relations; the representation of Asian female bodies; violence against women; militarized prostitution and sex tourism; and movements for social change. The course material will incorporate social science research, literature, political essays, film, poetry and art. The course has a strong comparative focus between women in the U.S. and women around the world, emphasizing transnational linkages and the processes of globalization.

**Readings**

**Required Texts:** Books are at Food for Thought Books, 106 East Pleasant St. 413-253-5432 in Amherst Center and are also on reserve in the library. Additional readings will be distributed or are on e-reserve or Web CT.

- Kim, Elaine, Lila V. Villanueva, and Asian American Women United of CA. 1997. *Making More Waves*. Beacon Press. ISBN: 0807059137
- Vo, Linda Trinh and Marian Sciachitano, eds. 2004. *Asian American Women: The Frontiers Reader*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. ISBN: 0-8032-9627-4
- Keller, Nora Okja. 1998. *Comfort Woman*. Penguin Books; ISBN: 0140263357
- Parrenas, Rhacel. 2001. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. ISBN: 0804739226

## Goals & Organization

### **Goals**

- 1) to gain an understanding of the major concepts and debates in the study of Asian American women
- 2) to apply the insights of an Asian American feminist analysis to comprehend the social forces that shape economic, political, social and cultural life in the U.S. and globally.
- 3) to master the basic tools of feminist inquiry - including the ability to identify gendered processes, to pose theoretical questions, to understand current debates, and to learn methods of research, criticism and advocacy.
- 4) to engage actively with concerns in the college and local community related to Asian American women.
- 5) to gain a deeper understanding of yourself and your interactions with Asian American women in your own life.
- 6) to envision social institutions, policies, relations, ideologies and practices that foster respect, health, safety, equality, esteem and empowerment of all women.
- 7) to develop written and verbal skills for developing ideas, exchanging them with others, and presenting them effectively to a broader audience
- 8) to create a learning environment that instills confidence in your abilities to articulate and interpret your own experiences, and to empower you to take action as agents of personal and social change.

### **Organization**

This course aims to give you an understanding of Asian American women's experiences through an integrated feminist perspective that acknowledges numerous cross-currents and debates across interdisciplinary boundaries. There are two readers for the course, *Asian American Women: The Frontiers Reader* (referred to as *Frontiers*), which introduces a broad array of theories and topics and *Making More Waves: New Writing by Asian American Women* (referred to as *Waves*) which includes essays, poetry and fiction. The book, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*, will provide background of historical patterns of labor migration and globalization as well as an in-depth case study of Filipina domestics. We will also read a novel, *Comfort Women*, an award-winning Asian American feminist novel and relate it to arguments in other readings regarding the impact of war and militarization on women in Asia. Rather than completing one section and moving on to another topic, we will weave and layer the many different strands of feminist thought, drawing connections and contrast between different authors and analytical approaches.

## Requirements

We all have intense feelings about our gender, racial, ethnic, sexual and class identities and the social practices and institutions that shape them. Thus, I ask that we work together to create a space that honors the sensitivity and privacy of the issues we will discuss. I ask each of you to take responsibility for building a classroom environment based on mutual trust, confidentiality and a sense of community while at the same time engaging in intellectually rigorous and challenging discussions.

This course follows a seminar format, which means that it is based mostly on class discussion and interactive learning exercises rather than lectures. This requires that you come to class prepared to think critically, articulate ideas coherently, listen attentively and respect the diversity of experiences and perspectives of your classmates. Because active class participation is so important for the success of this class, I have designed the assignments to facilitate deeper engagement with the readings and richer discussions. The class is structured around frequent, shorter assignments which allow me to provide you with regular feedback. In other words, you will not be able to "cram" for this course. In order to do well, you must take time to read, digest and integrate the course material.

- **Class participation, Web CT Discussion Board and In-class assignments (15%)** Class participation will include regular attendance, informed and thoughtful contributions to discussion, in-class writing, participation in group exercises, posting to the electronic discussion board and discussion of homework assignments. You are expected to keep up with the readings and come to class prepared with comments and questions. You are expected to attend every class session and to let me know the reason for absences, preferably ahead of time. Students who miss more than three classes (regardless of excuses) will have their grades penalized. The attendance sheet will be passed out at the beginning of class.
- **Homework Assignments (6 assignments, 2 pages each, 40% total)** I will assign short (hopefully fun and thought-provoking) homework assignments designed to enrich understanding of the readings through applications to your current social world. (eg. I may ask you to interview a roommate or friend, observe social interactions in your dorm, or collect data from the TV or Internet and then report your findings to the class). You need not do every assignment but you must submit at least six (approximately every other week), three of these during the first half of the semester. Two of these assignments (roughly at midterm and final time) will be required, slightly longer and count for more points.
- **Class Discussant Presentation and Paper (15%, 2-3 pages)** You will sign up to be a class discussant for one class session. This will involve writing a short paper (roughly 2-3 pages) analyzing and critiquing (not merely summarizing) the assigned readings, presenting your arguments briefly to the class (roughly 5-10 minutes), generating discussion questions and engaging your classmates in discussion. There will be one or two other discussants who will present on the same readings and I encourage you to meet together and with me to find ways to collaborate (eg. One of you can address the strengths, the other focus on the weaknesses; one of you can agree, the other disagree with certain key debates). You will each, however, submit your own written memo, which you must post to Web CT by Wed. at 5 pm. Discussants will present on Thursday each week and focus on Thursday's assigned readings, while making connections to earlier readings.
- **Poetry/Creative Writing Assignment (15%, 3-5 pages)** In conjunction with a guest speaker and film event, you will submit original creative writing that examines issues and topics related to Asian American women we have studied. Novices need not fret - this is an opportunity to explore your voice and you will have guidance and feedback in the process.
- **Critical Autobiography/Life History Paper (15%, 3-5 pages)** Drawing upon autobiographical texts in the readings, I encourage you to write about significant experiences in your own life or of someone you interview and how they demonstrate the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality.

### **Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University's official policy on academic honesty <http://www.umass.edu/umhome/policies/honesty.html> >:

If an instructor finds that a student has violated the University's Academic Honesty Policy, the instructor has the right to lower the student's grade, or even to fail the student for the course. Students have the right to appeal such a grade penalty by an instructor. The University Academic Honesty Board, which must

be notified by instructors of any grade penalty, reviews all student appeals. The Board may sustain or recommend modification of the penalty given by the faculty member, or may recommend sanctions exceeding those originally given, such as suspension or expulsion from the University. The Board may also recommend sanctions for offenders who have committed multiple violations of the Academic Honesty Policy but who have not appealed the faculty members' decisions.

### Course Schedule

( I reserve the right to make changes in the schedules as I see appropriate.)

## Part I – Frameworks for Studying Asian American Women (Weeks 1-4)

### Week One

#### Sept. 9 Introduction to the Course

What can I learn from studying Asian American women? What is Asian American feminism? Why should I study it?

- Overview of course content, assignments and expectations. Self-introductions.

### Week Two

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Sept. 14 Re-imagining Asian American Women

Does it make sense to even speak of a category of "Asian American women" when there are as many differences as commonalities? What are the tensions between expressing loyalty to family and ethnic identity and defining one's own identity? What aspects of these tensions are particular to Asian American women and which are universal to all women?

- Film: *My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha*
- Vo and Sciachitano, Introduction, pp. ix-xxv (*Frontiers*)
- Forward, Preface, and Tajima-Pena, "Cinemaya" pp. 102-108 (*Waves*)
- Nam, Vickie, Introduction to *Yell-Oh Girls!*, xxi-xxxv (handout)

#### Sept. 16 Asian American Feminism: Local, Transnational and Global Linkages

Does Western feminism address the needs of Asian American women? How have Asian American women articulated their own experiences and organized themselves as feminists? What are the incentives and obstacles to creating an Asian American feminist movement?

- Iiyama and Tsuchitani, "Speaking Out: Memories of a Nisei Activist" (*Waves*)
- Shah, "Redefining Home" pp. 46-56 (handout)

### Week Three

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Sept. 21 Race, Gender, Class and Nation and Asian American Women

How have the experiences of Asian American women been shaped by the structures of race, gender and class in American society? How do Asian American women challenge existing models of race, gender, class and national formations? How do national identities and transnational linkages with countries of origin influence Asian American women's lives?

- Espiritu, "Race, Class and Gender in Asian America," 135-141 (*Waves*)
- Mohanty, "Defining Genealogies" pp. 119-127 (*Waves*)
- Lowe, "Work, Immigration, Gender: Asian 'American' Women" pp. 269-277 (*Waves*)

**Sept. 23 Deconstructing the "Model Minority"**

How do second-generation Asian American women respond to the expectations and pressures of their parents? How do they negotiate the contradictory messages to assimilate and hold on to their cultural identities? What are the challenges facing young Asian Americans, and how are these concealed by stereotypes of high-achieving students and devoted families?

- Part 1: Memory, pp. 3-37 and Part 2: 65-71 (Waves)

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**Week Four**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sept. 28 Asian American Women's Poetry**

- Yunah Hong film "Between the Lines: Asian American Women's Poetry" and speaking event, class will not meet at regular time and will meet from 7-9 pm

**Sept. 30 Articulating Asian American Women's Experiences**

- Herschini Bhana "How to Articulate the Inarticulate III"
- Myung Mi Kim, "Thirty and Five Books"
- Mei Mei Berssenbrugge, from "A Context and a Wave" (handouts)

<b>Part II – Asian American Women's Histories and Identities (Weeks 5-8)</b>
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**Week Five**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct. 5 History of Labor Migration, Immigration and Settlement: Chinese American Women**

How have gendered patterns of international migration influenced the position of Asian American women with regard to Asian American men, families, and ethnic communities? What are the specific experiences of women within the Chinese community?

- Yung, "A Bowlful of Tears" and
- "It is Hard to be Born a Woman but hopeless to be born Chinese" pp. 1-34 (Frontiers)

**Oct. 7 War, Relocation and Resistance: Japanese and Vietnamese American Women**

- Matsumoto, "Desperately Seeking 'Deirdre'" and
- Ito, "Japanese American Women and the Student Relocation Movement," pp. 55-92 and
- Travis-Robyns, "What is Winning Anyway," pp. 125-142 (Frontiers)

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**Week Six**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct. 12 Military Prostitution and Sex Trafficking**

How have the legacies of war in Asia contributed to the sexual exploitation of Asian women?

- Film: *The Women Outside*
- Villapando, Venny. "The Business of Selling Mail-order Brides." (handout)
- Kim-Gibson, "The Story of a Korean Comfort Woman" pp. 177-183 (Waves)
- Thoma, "Cultural Autobiography...in the 'Comfort Women of WWII' Conference" (Frontiers)

**Oct. 14 Re-discovering Homelands: Women Narrating Mother/Self**

How are our stories tied to our mothers and our homelands?

- *Comfort Woman*, Introduction, pp. 2-12 (at end of book), Chapters 1-7, pp. 1-72

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**Week Seven**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct. 19 Transplanted Families and Identities**

- *Comfort Woman*, Chapters 8-12, pp. 73-141

**Oct. 21 Talking New Stories, Charting New Paths**

How do Asian American women claim their own identities, write their own stories and direct their own futures? How do our pasts constrain, define and empower us?

- *Comfort Woman*, Chapters 13-18, p. 142-213

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**Week Eight**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct. 26 Forging New Identities, Resisting Labels: Adopted and Multi-racial Women**

- Lee, "Summer of My Korean Soldier" pp. 55-61 (Waves)
- Divakurni, "The Babies I and II" pp. 62-64 (Waves)
- Keller, "The Brilliance of Diamonds," pp. 94-101 (Waves)
- Ito, "Hambun-Hambun," pp. 128-132 (Waves)

Film: *Daughter from Danang*

**Oct. 28 Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Identities and Communities**

How do lesbian, transgender and bisexual Asian American women define identity and community? What factors explain homophobia in Asian American communities, and how can they be confronted? How is the Asian American community responding to people living with HIV/AIDS?

- Takagi, "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America" pp. 142-152 (Waves)
- Thompson, "Fence Sitters, Switch Hitters, and Bi-Bi Girls" pp. 337-345 (Frontiers)
- E'der et al, "Living Today: HIV, AIDS and API Women" pp. 223-228 (Waves)

<b>Part III – Representations, Culture, and Media (Weeks 9-10)</b>
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**Week Nine**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov. 2 Representational Practices and Artistic Production**

How has Hollywood depicted Asian American women, and what are the social consequences of these stereotypes? How have Asian American artists and filmmakers constructed their own images?

- Liu, "Asian American Women and Hollywood" pp. 258-268 (Waves)
  - Kim, "Bad Women: Asian American Visual Artists," pp. 184-194 (Waves)
  - See, "Anna May Speaks," 195-201 (Waves)
  - Minh-ha, "It Went By Me," pp. 242-257 (Waves)
  - *Film: Slaying the Dragon*
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**Nov. 4 Beauty Culture: Commodifying the Body**

Why do Asian American women seek “double-eyelid” surgery and alteration of “flat” noses? How do the motivations and consequences of cosmetic surgery for Asian American women compare to those for other women? What are the politics of Asian American beauty pageants? (handouts)

- Kaw, “Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery.”
- Morgan, “Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women’s Bodies.”
- Lieu, “Remembering ‘the Nation’ through Pageantry” pp. 312-336 (Frontiers)

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**Week Ten**

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov. 9 Autobiography and Life Histories of Asian American Women**

How do the narrative forms of autobiography and life history capture the experiences of Asian American women? What are the challenges of writing in each of these forms?

- Chin, *Doing What Had to be Done* (handout)
- Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces* (handout)
- *The Woman Warrior*, pp. 1-16 (handout)

**Nov. 11 Veteran’s Day – No Class**

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**Week Eleven – Examining Ourselves, Sharing Experiences**

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov. 16 Pedagogy and Ethnic Autobiography: Studying Asian American Women’s Lives**

- Fowler et al, “Negotiating Textual Terrain” pp. 240-285 (Frontiers)

**Nov. 18 The Politics of the Classroom: Self Examination of Our Course**

- Chu, “Asian American Women’s Studies Courses” pp. 201-212 (Frontiers)
- Chatterjee, “De/Colonizing the Exotic” pp. 214-239 (Frontiers)

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**Week Twelve – Violence, Resistance and Change**

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov. 22 Sexual Harassment and Anti-Asian Violence**

**(Thursday schedule)**

- Cho, “Asian Pacific American Women and Racialized Sexual Harassment” pp. 164-173
- Zia, “Violence in Our Communities: Where are the Asian Women” pp. 207-215 (Waves)

**Nov. 23 Domestic Violence**

What are the various causes of domestic violence in Asian American families? How have Asian American women organized against violence in their lives, and what obstacles confront them?

- Bhattacharjee, “A Slippery Path: Organizing Resistance to Violence” pp. 29-45
- Purkayastha et al, “Empowering Women” pp. 100-107
- Tan, “Building Shelter: Asian Women and Domestic Violence” pp. 108-120 (handouts)
- Film: *Bhaji on the Beach*

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**Week Thirteen – Globalization, Migration and Work**

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Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

- Nov. 30**     ▪ **Globalization, Migration and Contemporary Asian Women’s Work**  
              ▪ *Servants of Globalization*, Intro, Chap. 1 and 3, pp. 1-36, 61-79
- Dec. 2**       ▪ **Transnational Families: Intergenerational and Gender Relations**  
              ▪ *Servants of Globalization*, Chap. 4-5, 80-149



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**Week Fourteen**

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- Dec. 7**       **Domestic Work, Class Mobility and Dislocation**  
              ▪ *Servants of Globalization*, Chap. 6, Conclusion, pp. 150-196, 243-254
- Dec. 9**       **Movements for Social Change: Linking the Local and the Global**  
              How have Asian American women contributed to movements for social change? What factors encourage or inhibit their involvement? How are they transformed by participation in collective political action?  
              Advani, “Against the Tide: Reflections on Organizing ...” pp. 215-222 (Waves)

**Course Summary and Evaluation**

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