



## ***WOST 295b: Asian American Women: Gender, Race and Immigration***

### **Course Information**

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| <b>Professor</b>                    | Miliann Kang<br>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>                 | Office Hours: Mon 11:10-noon, Wed 1:10-2:00                           |
| <b>Email</b>                        | mkang@wost.umass.edu  |
| <b>Class Info</b>                   | Fall 2007, MW 2:30-3:45, SPIRE Course #: 43542, Tobin Hall 520        |

### **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, the U.S. mainstream and the global economy. 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; globalization and work; and movements for social change. The course incorporates social science research, literature, political essays, film, poetry and art and emphasizes 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 on e-reserve (password: wost295b).

- 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
- Ozeki, Ruth. 1999. *My Year of Meats*. Penguin ISBN-10: 0140280464
- Nam, Vicki. 2001. *Yell-Oh Girls! Emerging Voices Explore Culture, Identity and Growing Up Asian American*. Quill. ISBN: 0-06-095944-4

## 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 three 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, and *Yell-Oh Girls, Yell-Oh Girls*, writings by young Asian American Women. We will also read a novel, *My Year of Meats*, an award-winning Asian American feminist novel and relate it to arguments in other readings regarding globalization and identities. 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

Intense feelings can arise in discussion 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 and In-class assignments (20%)** Class participation will include regular attendance, informed and thoughtful contributions to discussion, in-class writing, participation in group exercises, and 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.
- **Class Discussant Presentation and Paper (20%, 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 possibly 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). Discussants will present on Wednesday each week and focus on that day's assigned readings, while making connections to earlier readings.
- **Take-home Midterm Essay (20%) (3-5 pages)** You will write an analytic paper synthesizing and critiquing the readings. I want you to demonstrate mastery of the readings while asserting your own ideas and arguments about the topics we have addressed.
- **Research/Action Project** This assignment is designed to help you synthesize and apply the readings toward understanding and shaping own social worlds, to foster collaborative learning, to develop public presentation skills, and to get you out of the classroom and into the streets! I encourage students to work together to design a project based on one of the course topics, but if you strongly prefer not to work in a group you can work alone. Possible projects include: organizing an activist event on campus or in the community; proposing a policy for political or social change; creating collective artwork (mural, sculptures, video, theatrical performance); writing and reading poetry, short stories or other creative writings; researching a topic of local concern (eg. Relations between Asian American students on campus, family history, Asian American politics). You will report and analyze your project in both oral and written form as follows:
  - 1) **Prospectus (5%)** You will write a plan for completing your project, including the topic, goals, implementation, contribution by each individual member, schedule and selected readings.
  - 2) **Group Presentation (10%)** You will work with a group of about five students to organize and lead a class session on a specific topic of your choice. I encourage you to connect with local organizations and/or attend events and activities pertaining to your topic (eg. interview a local community leader, attend meetings of organizations on campus and/or in the community, analyze media and websites). I also encourage you to use visual aids, multimedia, role plays, etc. to make your class presentation original and engaging. You can regard your group

presentation as an opportunity for you to present the arguments and findings from your research project (see below) while drawing connections between your topic and the work of your classmates.

- 3) Research Report (25% total) (5-7 pages)** Your research report will describe the data collected for your project, the strengths and weaknesses of your methods, and how your findings support relate to arguments in the readings. While you should include relevant background sources, I do not expect you to conduct extensive library research, but instead concentrate on synthesizing the course readings and discussions and analyzing your own and your groups' findings and arguments. We are not having a final exam so this research report must demonstrate your mastery of the course readings. Final draft is due the last day of class. You will each receive an individual grade for your paper.

### 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 1-3)

#### Week One

**Sept. 5 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. 10 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, Forward and Introduction to *Yell-Oh Girls!*, xviii-xxxv

**Sept. 12 Asian American Feminisms: Local, Transnational and Global Linkages**

- Iiyama and Tsuchitani, "Speaking Out: Memories of a Nisei Activist" (*Waves*)
- Mohanty, "Defining Genealogies" pp. 119-127 (*Waves*)
- Shah, "Redefining Home" pp. 46-56 (e-reserves)
- Browse Angry Little Asian Girl Sites [http://www.pbs.org/searching/lela\\_main.html](http://www.pbs.org/searching/lela_main.html)

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**Week Three**

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

**Sept. 17 Race, Gender, Class and Nation and Asian American Women**

- Espiritu, "Race, Class and Gender in Asian America," 135-141 (*Waves*)
- Orientation: Finding My Way Home, 8-38 (*Yell-Oh Girls*)

**Sept. 19 Racialized Sexualities and Femininities**

- Takagi, "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America" pp. 142-152 (*Waves*)
- E'der et al, "Living Today: HIV, AIDS and API Women" pp. 223-228 (*Waves*)
- Pyke and Dang, Asian American Women And Racialized Femininities (ereserves)

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**Part II – Asian American Women's Histories and Identities (Weeks 4-8)**

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**Week Four**

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

**Sept. 24 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 American 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*)

**Sept. 26 War, Internment and Resistance: Japanese American Women**

- Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women during WWII" and "Desperately Seeking 'Deirdre'" 35-67 (*Frontiers*)
- Ito, "Japanese American Women and the Student Relocation Movement," pp. 68-92 (*Frontiers*)

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**Week Five**

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

**Oct. 1 Legacies of War in Asia and Sexual Exploitation of Asian Women: Korean Comfort Women**

- Film: *Comfort Women*
  - Kim-Gibson, "The Story of a Korean Comfort Woman" pp. 177-183 (*Waves*)
  - Keller, *Comfort Woman* (e-reserves)
  - Thoma, "Cultural Autobiography...in the 'Comfort Women of WWII' Conference" (*Frontiers*)
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**Oct. 3 Military Prostitution and Sex Trafficking**

- Film: *The Women Outside*
- Villapando, Venny. "The Business of Selling Mail-order Brides." (ereserves)
- Moon, "Sex Among Allies" (ereserves)
- Travis-Robyns, "What is Winning Anyway," pp. 125-142 (Frontiers)

**Week Six**

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

**Oct. 8 Columbus Day – No class**

**Oct. 10 Deconstructing the "Model Minority"**

- Zhou, Min, "Are Asians Becoming White?" (ereserves)
- *Part 1: Memory, pp. 3-37 and Part 2: 65-71 (Waves)*
- Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*, 1-47
- <http://www.ruthozeki.com/meats/conversation.html>

**Week Seven**

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

**Oct. 15 Re-envisioning America through an Asian American Woman's Perspective**

*My Year of Meats*, 49-197

**Oct. 17 Challenging Corporate Injustice**

*My Year of Meats*, 199-366

**Week Eight**

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

**Oct. 22 Forging New Identities: Adopted Asian American Women**

- Shiao et al, "Shifting the Spotlight: Exploring Race and Culture in Korean-White Adoptive Families" (ereserves)
  - Browse <http://www.adoptedthemovie.com/>
  - Lee, "Summer of My Korean Soldier" pp. 55-61 (Waves)
- Film: *Daughter from Danang*

**Oct. 24 Resisting Labels: Multi-Racial Asian American Women**

- Keller, "The Brilliance of Diamonds," pp. 94-101 (Waves)
- Ito, "Hambun-Hambun," pp. 128-132 (Waves)
- Thompson, "Fence Sitters, Switch Hitters, and Bi-Bi Girls" pp. 337-345 (Frontiers)

**Sat. Oct. 27 Highly Recommended –Extra Credit Available**

**Five College Asian Pacific American Leadership Conference, Amherst College**, Merrill Science Center tentatively 12-5PM, <https://cms.amherst.edu/users/V/pvuong09/portal/apacnf>

**Part III – Representations, Culture, and Media (Weeks 9-11)**

**Week Nine**

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

**Oct. 29 (Note: Last Day to Withdraw with "W")**

**Representational Practices and Artistic Production**

- 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)
- *Film: Slaying the Dragon*

**Oct. 31 Beauty Culture: Commodifying the Body**

- Kaw, "Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery" (ereserves)
- Lieu, "Remembering 'the Nation' through Pageantry" pp. 312-336 (Frontiers)
- Dolly Rage 117-142 (Yell-Oh Girls)

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**Week Ten**

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

**Nov. 5 The Politics of the Classroom: Self Examination of the Asian American Women Course**

- Chu, "Asian American Women's Studies Courses" pp. 201-212 (Frontiers)
- Chatterjee, "De/Colonizing the Exotic" pp. 214-239 (Frontiers)
- Fowler et al, "Negotiating Textual Terrain" pp. 240-285 (Frontiers)

**Nov. 7 Asian American Women's Poetry**

- Divakurni, "The Babies I and II" pp. 62-64 (Waves)
- Kim, "From 'Thirty and Five Books'" 202-3 (Waves)
- Hahn, "The Box of Abandoned White Buttons" 3 (Waves)
- Minh-Ha, "It Went By Me" 243-57 (Waves)
- *Film: "Between the Lines: Asian American Women's Poetry"*

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**Part IV: Issues in Contemporary Asian America**

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**Week Eleven**

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

**Nov. 12 Veteran's Day – No Class**

**Nov. 14 Physical and Mental Health among Asian American Women**

Browse [http://channel.creative-capital.org/project\\_954.html](http://channel.creative-capital.org/project_954.html) on Kristina Wong's show "Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"

Browse <http://www.4woman.org/minority/asianamerican/mh.cfm> on Asian American women's mental health – click on Asian American Community Mental Health Fact Sheet

Author described as 'exhausted' before she was found dead <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2004/11/12/MNGTJ9QGVV1.DTL>

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

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

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- Nov. 19      Sexual Harassment and Anti-Asian Violence**
- Cho, "Asian Pacific American Women and Racialized Sexual Harassment" pp. 164-173 (Waves)
  - Zia, "Violence in Our Communities: Where are the Asian Women" pp. 207-215 (Waves)

- Nov. 21      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" (ereserves)
  - Purkayastha et al, "Empowering Women" (ereserves)
  - Tan, "Building Shelter: Asian Women and Domestic Violence" pp. 108-120 (ereserves)
  - Film: *Bhaji on the Beach*

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

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

- Nov. 26      Globalization, Migration and Contemporary Asian Women's Work**
- Tung, "The Cost of Caring" (Frontiers)
  - Lowe, Lisa "Immigration, Gender and Asian 'American' Women" 269-277 (Waves)
- Nov. 28      Emotional and Body Labor in Asian-owned Nail Salons**
- Kang, "The Managed Hand" and "Manicuring Intimacies" (ereserves)

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**Week Fourteen**

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- Dec. 3      Group and Individual Project Presentations**
- Dec. 5      Group and Individual Project Presentations**

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**Week Fifteen**

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- Dec. 10      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)
  - Girlwind: Emerging Voices for Change 241-297 (*Yell-Oh Girls*)
- Dec. 12      Course Summary and Evaluation - FINAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS**