



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

Course Information

Professor	Miliann Kang Women's Studies Program, UMass Amherst
Office Location & Number	Bartlett 73 (basement), 577-0710 or 545-1922 (Women's Studies office)
Office Hours	Office Hours: Mon, Wed 1:00-2:00
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Class Info	Spring 2009, MW 2:30-3:45, SPIRE Course #: 17491, Bartlett 319
Ereserves password	295bsp09

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, representations 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, cultural production 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 be on e-reserve (password: 295bsp09).

- 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
- Chang, Lan Samantha. 2000. *Hunger*. Penguin ISBN: 978-0140288483.

Goals & Organization

Goals

- 1) to gain an understanding of the major issues facing Asian American women and their responses to them
- 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, critique 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 significant Asian American women in our own lives.
- 6) to develop written and verbal skills for developing ideas, exchanging them with others, and presenting them effectively to a broader audience
- 7) 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 integrative 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. We will also read a novel, *Hunger*, an award-winning collection of short stories and relate it to arguments in other readings regarding globalization and identities. Rather than completing one section and moving on to another, we will weave and layer the many different topics, 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. Following are guidelines developed by Lynn Weber and published in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 18 (Spring/Summer 1990) which I hope students will incorporate into class discussion and interactions.

1. *Acknowledge that prejudice and discrimination based on race, class, sex, sexual orientation, and physical differences exist.*
2. *Acknowledge that all of us have learned misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups, whether we belong to a majority or minority group.*
3. *Agree not to blame ourselves or others for the misinformation we have learned in the past, but accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.*
4. *Assume that people--both those we study and those in this class--do the best they can.*
5. *Never demean, devalue, or in any way "put down" people for their experiences, backgrounds, or statements. This does not mean that you can't disagree, only that you must do so respectfully.*

The class is structured around frequent, shorter assignments and active engagement. In other words, you will not be able to "cram" - in order to do well, you must take time to read, digest and apply 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 with more than three unexcused absences 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 key debates). Discussants will present on Wed each week and focus on that day's assigned readings, while making connections to earlier readings. You will post your essay on SPARK by noon of the Tues before you are to present so that classmates can read and comment on your essay before class. You must also bring a hard copy to turn in on Wed.
- **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, 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. The main connection I would like students to make is to the 5-Pan Student Conference and other events for Asian American Heritage Month in April. Other possible projects include: organizing an activist event on campus or in the community; proposing a policy for political or social change; creating or displaying 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); interviewing a local community leader; attending meetings of organizations on campus and/or in the community, analyze media and websites). 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 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. 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 your project and its significance for feminist analysis of Asian American women's lives, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and 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.)

Week 1 – Introduction

Mon 1/26 Introduction to the Course

What can I learn from studying Asian American women? What is Asian American feminism? How have Asian American women contributed to feminist scholarship and movements?

- Overview of course content, assignments and expectations. Self-introductions.
- Film: *My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha*

Wed 1/28 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?

- Vo and Sciachitano, Introduction, pp. ix-xxv (Frontiers)
- Forward, Preface, and Tajima-Pena, "Cinemaya" pp. 102-108 (Waves)

Week 2 – Integrative/Intersectional Analysis

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 2/2 Racialized Sexualities and Femininities

- Pyke and Dang, Asian American Women And Racialized Femininities (ereserves)
- Takagi, "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America" pp. 142-152 (Waves)

Wed 2/4 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)

Week 3 – Asian American Feminism(s)

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 2/9 Asian American Feminisms: Local, Transnational and Global Linkages

Does Western feminism address the needs of 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? 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?

- Shah, "Redefining Home" (ereserves)
- Aguilar, "Lost in Translation: Western Feminism and Asian Women" (ereserves)

Wed 2/11 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)
- Iiyama and Tsuchitani, "Speaking Out: Memories of a Nisei Activist" (Waves)
- Check out the following websites: National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum <http://www.napawf.org/>, CAAAV's Women Worker's Project, <http://www.caaav.org/projects/wwp>

Week 4 - Gendered Histories

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 2/16 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)
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Wed 2/18 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)

Week 5 – Legacies of War in Asia

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 2/23 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)

Wed 2/25 Military Prostitution and Sex Trafficking

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

Week 6 – Defining and Writing Identities

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 3/2 Writing Loss and Gains of Asian Immigrant Life

Hunger, pp. 11-114, 120-133

Interview with Lan Samantha Chang

http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/personalities/birnbaum_v_lan_samantha_chang.php

Wed 3/4 *Hunger*, pp. 115-119, 134-191

Sat. 3/7 **Highly Recommended –Extra Credit Available, Five College Asian Pacific American Leadership Conference, Mount Holyoke College, tentatively 10-5PM**

Week 7

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 3/9 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"

Wed 3/11 Gender and the "Model Minority"

- Zhou, Min, "Are Asians Becoming White?" (ereserves)
- Part 1: Memory, pp. 3-37 and Part 2: 65-71 (Waves)

SPRING BREAK MARCH 16-20 – NO CLASS

Week 8 – Adoptees and Mixed Race Asian American Women

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 3/23 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*

Wed 3/25 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)

Week 9 - Representations, Culture, and Media

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 3/30 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*

Wed 4/1 Beauty Culture: Commodifying Asian Bodies

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

Week 10 – Pedagogy and Reflexivity

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 4/6 Politics of the Classroom

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

Wed 4/8 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)

Week 11 – Asian American Women's Health

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 4/13 Physical and Mental Health among Asian American Women

E'der et al, "Living Today: HIV, AIDS and API Women" pp. 223-228 (Waves)
http://channel.creative-capital.org/project_954.html "Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"
<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>

Wed 4/15 OPEN TOPIC to be determined with class input

Week 12 – Violence and Resistance

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

NO CLASS Sexual Harassment and Anti-Asian Violence

MON 4/20 ▪ Cho, "Asian Pacific American Women and Racialized Sexual Harassment" pp. 164-173
CLASS (Waves)

MEETS ▪ Zia, "Violence in Our Communities: Where are the Asian Women" pp. 207-215 (Waves)

TUES 4/21

Wed 4/22 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*

Week 13 – Globalization, Migration and Work

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Mon 4/27 Globalization, Migration and Contemporary Asian Women's Work

- Tung, "The Cost of Caring" (Frontiers)
- Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization* (ereserves)

Wed 4/29 Emotional and Body Labor in Asian-owned Nail Salons

- Kang, "The Managed Hand" and "Manicuring Intimacies" (ereserves)

Week 14

Mon 5/4 Group and Individual Project Presentations

Wed 5/6 Group and Individual Project Presentations

Week 15

Mon 5/11 Course Summary and Evaluation - FINAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS