

the grassroots issue

# PACIFIC TIES

ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER NEWSMAGAZINE AT UCLA

VOL. 31 ISSUE 3 | SPRING 2009

## GRASSROOTS

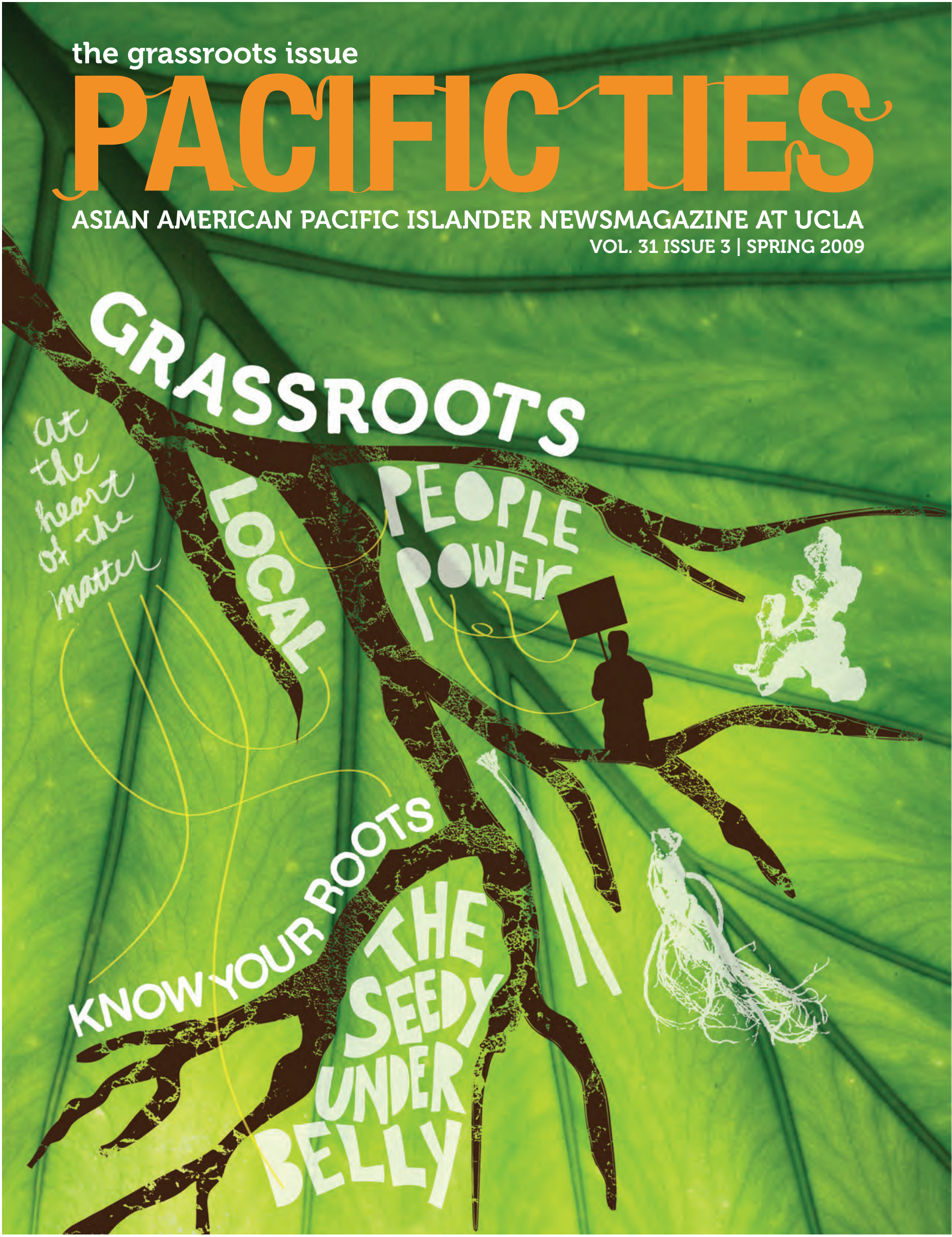
*at the heart of the matter*

### LOCAL

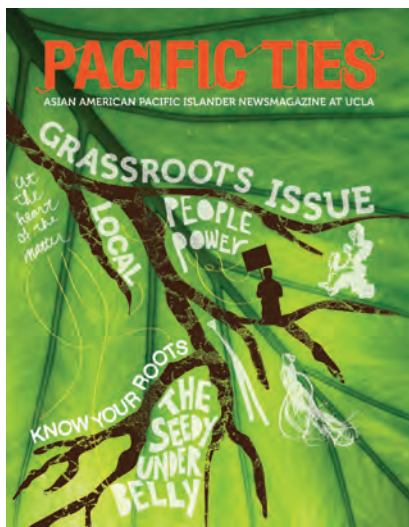
### PEOPLE POWER

### KNOW YOUR ROOTS

### THE SEEDY UNDER BELLY



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This issue's cover is by Maria Lu, a fourth-year Communication Studies major.

Check out her work at [mariaiu.com](http://mariaiu.com).

The cover is a metaphor for the theme of our issue "Grassroots." It's all about the power of the people, digging deep to find the real story, and how we're connect to our local communities.

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PHOTO BY MISHA TSUKERMAN

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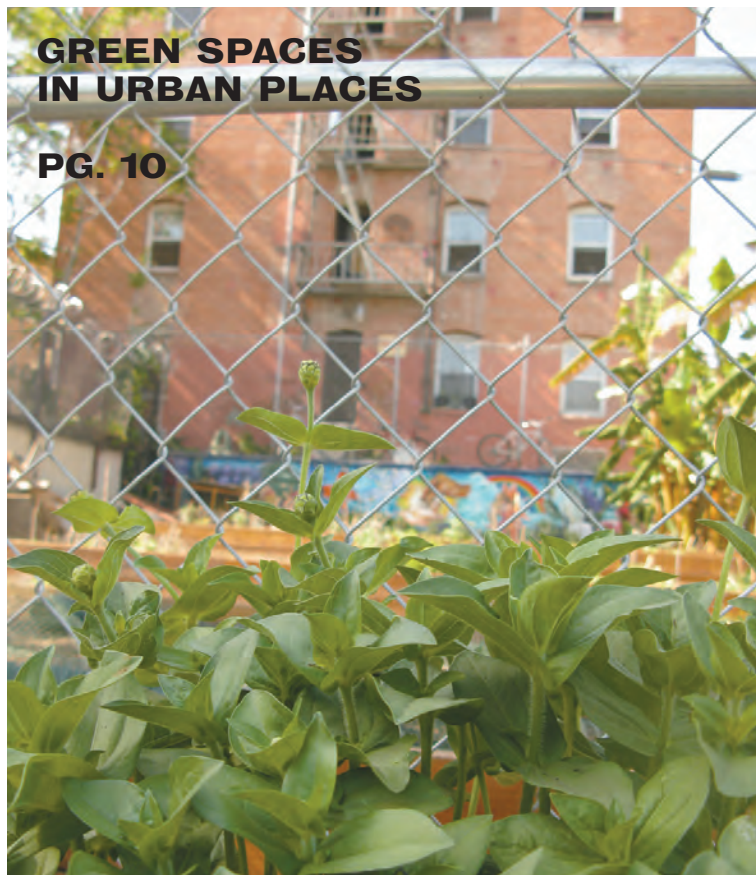
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## Letter from the Editor

Last year, when I first joined Pacific Ties as a layout designer, the previous EIC had planned to do a Grassroots issue, with stories about environmentalism, knowing your roots and digging under the surface of stories to get to the heart (root) of the matter. Unfortunately, this issue never came to fruition and was placed in the backburner for an indefinite period of time.

This quarter, Pacific Ties took that theme, revived it and brought it to life with stories about community gardens in the urban landscape of L.A. (pg. 10), the origins of dragon boat racing (pg. 12), connecting to our roots through the stories we share during culture nights (pg. 7), the viral nature of student driven action (pg. 5 and pg. 14). All these and more that tell of an Asian American Pacific Islander community that continue to navigate the thin line between American life and their cultural roots. Perhaps they discovered that it is possible to live lives - in the plural sense - that identity is not an either or situation.

We discovered, in this past year, that it's the people that matter the most. It's their stories that we're telling, and that's what grassroots is all about: from the people, by the people.

As I wrap up my last issue of Pacific Ties, after spending more than 30 hours in our office over the past few days - designing, editing, hanging out with my trusty PT staffers, I can't help but think of myself at this time last year. I accepted the job as Editor in Chief because I wanted to ensure that the newsmagazine tradition lives on. I believe in the power of the word, the idealism of the student journalist, and the ability of writers and artists to create change. All the newsmags who call their home in this little hallway - Al Talib, Fem, Ha'am, La Gente de Aztalan, Nommo, Outwrite - all need the support of their communities and across all communities.

It may be a surprise to know that all 20+ people who work on this magazine every quarter are all unpaid volunteers. We devote our time, sleep, and energy into this little magazine printed on newsprint in the hopes that people will pick it up, read it, and learn something new or get inspired to do something positive in their community. Everyone here is a reporter, writer, artist, techie, sales rep, and editor - and it's our teamwork that makes all this possible. Thank you all (YEAH PACTIES STAFF!) for one of the most challenging and amazing years of my life.

MARIA IU  
Editor-in-Chief

### PACIFIC TIES IS ONLINE!

While we have our loyalties to the printing press, we are kicking up dust in the blogosphere. Be sure to check us out our website:

**[pacificties.org](http://pacificties.org)**

Here you'll find everything you see in this newsmagazine and more. Find exclusive calendar listings, updates on local, national and international news about the AAPI community and opinionated blogs by our staff. You can comment on an article, enter a photograph to our quarterly PHOTO CHALLENGE or drop by to see photos of happenings around the campus and in Los Angeles submitted by readers like you ... and so much more. You won't regret it.

Also join our FACEBOOK GROUP and FAN PAGE. Follow us on TWITTER!

Make Pacific Ties a part of your life.

### JOIN PACIFIC TIES

We've been around since 1977, and we want talented people like you to join our staff. If you would like to express your opinions, voice community issues or hone your writing skills and gain experience, then join Pacific Ties! No experience necessary!

Positions available in writing, editing, photography, design and illustration.

Apply the beginning of Fall Quarter 2009 at

**<http://apply.studentmedia.ucla.edu>**

Questions? Comments?  
Contact: [pacificties@media.ucla.edu](mailto:pacificties@media.ucla.edu)

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The UCLA Communications Board has a media grievance procedure for resolving grievances against any of its publications. For a copy of the complete procedure, contact Student Media UCLA at 118 Kerckhoff Hall, 310.825.2787, or [director@media.ucla.edu](mailto:director@media.ucla.edu).

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## GRASSROOTS NETWORK

**From the people to the people.**

At PACIFIC TIES, we believe that establishing a community network should be one of our most important goals. That's why we've devoted a great deal of time cultivating relationships with you online.

Find us FACEBOOK, TWITTER, WORDPRESS, and FLICKR...

The only way we can grow as an AAPI community is to share our ideas, criticisms, hopes, fears, dreams, and solutions to today's most pressing issues. So be our friend, follow us, stalk us, and we'll return the favor by giving you the best content on or off the web.

Go to [PACIFTIES.ORG](http://PACIFTIES.ORG) to find out more

## YOUR VERY OWN GLOSSARY

We cover so many topics and issues here at PacTies that language often gets technical. Here's a handy little glossary to help you out while reading through the issue.

You should know that whenever we talk about APAs, APIs, AAPIs, etc., we are often referring to - Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans who are living in the U.S., unless otherwise noted.

**AA:** Asian American  
**APA:** Asian Pacific American  
**API:** Asian Pacific Islander  
**APIA:** Asian Pacific Islander American  
**AAPI:** Asian American Pacific Islander

# NEWSPRINT

FEEDING YOUR APPETITE WITH SHORT NEWS ITEMS THAT YOU CAN REALLY SINK YOUR TEETH INTO + IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF CAMPUS AND LOCAL NEWS FOR THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY FOR MORE

## Eating Soy Early in Life May Reduce Breast Cancer Among Asian Women

BY ATHALIA NAKULA

Women's breast cancer risk may be reduced with regular soy intake. A study of Asian American women reported in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention* suggested that eating soy throughout life was associated with lower risk of the disease. However, the most visible protection was provided with childhood soy intake. Women who had consumed soy at least once a week in childhood were around 60 percent less likely to develop the disease compared to women with lower soy intakes. In adulthood, the risk was reduced by 25 percent.

Isoflavones, estrogen-like soy compounds, are suspected to afford some breast cancer protection by helping to destroy abnormal cells and reduce the body's inflammation. Early exposure to soy's isoflavones may be crucial in protection against breast cancer. Research on animals demonstrated soy's contribution to boost earlier maturation of breast tissue and increased tissue immunity to cancer-promoting substances. The link between high soy consumption and lower breast cancer risk remains ambiguous as the study is still at an early stage and insufficient for a public health recommendation.

## Finding a Home: Fewer Children Up for Adoption in China

BY TOMMY CHEN

In China, the landscape of child adoption is changing. New regulation on international application has made it harder for prospective parents outside of China to adopt. According to the U.S. State Department, Americans adopted 7,906 Chinese children in 2005, a number that dropped to 3,909 children in 2008.

However, Melody Zhang from Children's Hope International said that the changing number is not because there are fewer parents who want to adopt, but because more Chinese parents want to adopt.

"In the past, Chinese people would not consider adopting someone out of the family, but more and more people are educated, and they understand the important part is to raise the child, not necessarily a blood tie," she said.

Also, the growth of the economy in Asia has given people more means to raise a child and less likely to give up their children. Chinese parents are more comfortable in raising a daughter than before, which may contribute to the decreased number of orphans at adoption centers.

There are currently 30,000 international applications waiting to be processed in China. One American couple, Chris and Tammy Watkins are in the process of adopting a new child. "They need a family to love them," said Tammy Watkins.

## Asian Americans Less Likely to be Victims of Violent Crimes

BY HUONG PHAM

According to Justice Department statistics, Asian Americans suffer the least amount of violent crimes relative to other racial groups.

The government study defined Asian-Americans as a group whose ethnic background can be traced to the Far East, Indian subcontinent, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders.

The figures in this government study show that only approximately 11 out of every 1,000 Asian-Americans ages 12 and older are victims of non-fatal violent crimes per year, whereas roughly 24 out of every 1,000 non-Asian Americans are victims of these types of crimes each year.

Studies show that in 2006, 360 Asian Americans were murdered, accounting for two percent of all U.S. homicides, but four percent of the entire population.

## Visa Rules Widen the Rift Between Vietnam and U.S. families

BY HUONG PHAM

As Luong Vu lies on a hospital bed, fighting a losing battle to prostate cancer, he asks his daughter Kimberly when his two sons from Vietnam are coming to visit. She replies that they are still waiting, although given the difficulties in obtaining visas, it's unlikely that her brothers will come anytime soon.

Obtaining a temporary visa to visit the U.S. is tough since American and Vietnamese officials fear that people won't return to their home country. According to the Department of Homeland Security, more than 12 million illegal immigrants are those who came on temporary or work visas. Yet, at the same time, Vietnamese families in the U.S. feel that visa policies are restrictive and rigid. They firmly contend that visiting relatives from Vietnam do not intend on leaving their own families and business to live illegally in the U.S. That's the case for Luong Vu's two sons.

## Troubling Health Issues Among the AANHPI Community

BY STEPFANIE AGUILAR

Paul Ong, UCLA professor of public policy, social welfare and Asian American studies, and Ninez Ponce, UCLA professor of health services, recently wrote "The State of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Health in California Report," which is the first to use statewide health data on this population and split into subgroups by ethnicity.

Among the professors' findings is that California's AANHPI population numbers more than 5 million and accounts for more than 14 percent of the state's total population. For them, liver cancer, cervical cancer and prostate cancer are the leading causes of death. They also suffer the most compared to other races in tuberculosis and hepatitis B as diabetes overwhelmingly increases among the population.

The report also states that Adult Filipino males have a higher percentage in smoking than the state average for all adult males. Koreans have the highest uninsured rate of 33 percent compared to the state average of 15 percent. Vietnamese and NHPs experience the highest rate of mental distress among the AANHPI population, while Vietnamese hold the highest in lacking mental health coverage.

This study is beneficial to providing insight to policymakers and health care providers to create programs that will improve this situation, according to California Assemblyman Mike Eng. "By providing disaggregated data, it provides necessary insight for policymakers and health care providers to design and implement programs that will improve the health of this vital population," he said.



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA LI

## Asian-Americans Blast Texas Congressman's Call for 'Easier to Deal With' Names

BY SHIRLEY MAK

Republican Representative Betty Brown, a lawmaker from Austin, Texas, has been accused of being a racist following the culturally insensitive comments she made at a House Elections Committee meeting.

Ramey Ko, an associate member of the Organization of Chinese Americans, testified before the Texas House Elections Committee on voter identification legislation. He said that people of Asian descent often have trouble voting because their legal transliterated names and the English names shown on their drivers' licenses don't match.

Brown then suggested that voters of Asian descent adopt names that are "easier for Americans to deal with" at the polls, angering many Asian Americans.

Russell Leong, an adjunct professor of Asian American studies at UCLA, said that the incident highlights "anti-immigrant xenophobia" in the United States.

Others have called her comments insulting to the Asian American population and displaying insensitivity toward minorities.

Brown said she had called Ko to apologize.

"We're ready to work with any of these people who are having problems and have them educate us on anything that might be going on that we're unaware of," she said.

## Obesity Rates Differ Among Racial/Ethnic Groups

BY ELIZABETH PARK

In *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine's* April issue, a study led by Sarah Anderson at Ohio State University and Robert Whitaker of Temple University found that among the nation's four-year-olds, American Indian and Native Alaskan children have an obesity weight of nearly double that of white or Asian preschoolers.

The study analyzed reports in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) of 8,550 children born in the United States in 2001 and the data on their heights and weights collected in 2005. Calculating the body mass index (BMI) of these children, the researchers found obesity rates of 31.2% for American Indian/Alaskan Native, 22% for Hispanic, 20.8% for Non-Hispanic black, 15.9% for Non-Hispanic white, and 12.8% for Asian.

However, the study does not provide explanations for these percentages, but the results may point beyond that of race and ethnicity to different culture and community-related factors instead. Further research on different racial/ethnic groups is needed to help emphasize the fact that obesity prevention efforts must start early in life as the research suggests.

## Hollywood Film Casts Caucasians for Asian Characters

BY MARLA GOODMAN

A live action version of the popular cartoon *Avatar: the Last Airbender* is opening in theatres in 2010. Though this film takes place in a predominantly Asian setting, Caucasian actors play many of the characters, including the two protagonists.

This trend of casting Caucasian actors in Asian roles has been illustrated in several recent films including *21* and *Dragonball: Evolution*.

The use of Caucasian actors to play Asian roles has caused a great deal of controversy. UCLA alumnus and activist Marissa Minna Lee has helped this initial grassroots protest evolve into a fully-fledged movement against this development.

"Appropriating elements of Asian culture to make a fantasy setting, yet locking out ethnically Asian actors to play the heroes, perpetuates the Orientalism that the animated series so artfully avoided in the first place," she said. "When white actors play Asian characters, it sends the message that to play Asians on screen, white actors are more qualified and more entitled than actors who are actually of Asian descent."

Lee discussed her experience growing up as a Taiwanese American in Irvine, California. "They say that kids don't notice race, but believe me, when you're the only one, it's hard to forget it," she said. She went on to explain how Americans' perception of race often comes from what they see in TV and movies, so making positive representations of Asian characters, like those in the *Avatar* cartoon is important. According to Lee, the lack of diversity in the live action movie is detrimental to diversity.

Lee, along with other protestors have created the website [www.racebending.com](http://www.racebending.com) that discusses the controversy surrounding this film. In addition to the website, over 200 paper letters have been sent to the *Avatar* producers.

## MAY IS ASIAN PACIFIC HERITAGE MONTH!

Navigating your way through the greater Los Angeles area is not an easy feat. When exploring Asian Pacific Islander enclaves, we find that there lies more in Chinatown and its neighbors - Little Tokyo, Thai Town, Korea Town, Little Saigon, Historic Filipino Town (just to name a few) - than meets the eye. These ethnic communities tell stories of the people that work, live, and make their lives there. Although we are often drawn to their culinary offerings, we must be reminded of other contributions made by the Asian Pacific Islander community that promote social change and social justice.

We too have leaders and heroes who are our educators and peers!

Yes! Let us celebrate! May is Asian Pacific Heritage Month (APHM). The idea was first introduced in 1977 was originally designated for the first 10 days of May. In 1990, the month of May was dedicated to celebrating APAs. May was chosen to commemorate the first Japanese immigrant to move to the United States on May 7th, 1843 and honors the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10th, 1896.



In celebration of APHM, we're offering customized made Pacific Ties t-shirts of our favorite APA heroes. To find out how to get one for yourself and celebrate APHM everyday, visit [pacificties.org](http://pacificties.org).

## DREAMING BEYOND BORDERS

BY MALINA TRAN // [mtran1@media.ucla.edu](mailto:mtran1@media.ucla.edu)

When C. Juarez was less than eight months old, he migrated to the United States from Sinaloa, Mexico. The region's economic downturn had forced the family to seek a better living situation. With a limited understanding of English and American culture and laws, Juarez's parents decided to settle in South Los Angeles and worked low-paying jobs. Nonetheless, they raised Juarez to understand the importance of earning good grades and attaining a college degree.

"College is expensive. Work hard to get good grades so you can make it there with scholarships. Hechale ganas," said Juarez, reflecting on the advice offered by his parents.

A quintessential immigrant story – with time, the Juarez family could move up in society, and their son could pursue a college degree and pursue a middle-class career. But there was one problem that undermined this process of social mobilization: Juarez is not a citizen.

Juarez's non-citizenship status restricts many aspects of his life. He cannot apply for financial aid, scholarships or jobs. He cannot register to vote, get a driver's license or a California ID. Despite pursuing double degrees in sociology and Chicano and Chicana studies at UCLA, Juarez realizes that all his efforts might go to waste after graduation. Without a Social Security number, undocumented immigrants are barred from legal job opportunities. Many students across all communities find themselves in a similar situation as they discover that their non-citizenship status will prevent them from actualizing their career goals.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act will provide undocumented students with permanent residency and later citizenship, given their good standing and enrollment in college or service in the military. For Juarez, the passage of the

DREAM Act means actualizing his own dreams.

According to the University of California Office of the President, 40 percent of undocumented undergraduates are Asian Pacific Islanders. In total, there are approximately 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school each year. In California alone, there are 181 APIs who receive AB540 tuition exemption in 2008. The Assembly Bill 540 grants undocumented students an exemption from paying international or out-of-state tuition fees. While AB540 minimizes financial costs, undocumented students are still unable to access many forms of financial aid. Students like Juarez must pay from their own earnings, despite coming from working class families.

Undocumented students must find other ways to cover their tuition; some have worked several jobs and will enroll only during certain quarters that they can afford to.

To mobilize undocumented students and allies, a coalition of student entities formed as the Alliance of Dreams to support the DREAM Act's passage.

To spread awareness on campus, the Alliance of Dreams launched DREAM ACTION Week to provide information and support for the federal DREAM Act. Throughout week 5 of Spring quarter, UCLA students dressed in all-black and masks to represent silent identities and held teach-ins about the act and the issue of citizenship in the Asian Pacific Islander community. Spoken word and art exhibits allowed artists to express thoughts, stories and experiences of undocumented students. And a mock graduation ceremony in Meyerhoff Park symbolized the plight of undocumented students who must face the harsh realities of their future.

Featured guest speaker at the teach-in, Professor Kent Wong of the Center for La-



PHOTO BY MISHA TSUKERMAN

UCLA student wearing a mask during Dream ACTION Week to symbolize the silent identities of undocumented students throughout the United States.

bor Research and Education understands the significance DREAM Act's passage and acknowledges the efforts of UCLA students to actualize the bill.

"The students at UCLA are playing a leading role in a national movement," said Wong. "In my opinion, this is the threshold Civil Rights battle of this generation."

A supporter of the DREAM Act, Misha Tsukerman, a fourth-year history major and director of Asian Pacific Coalition, recognizes the disparity between American citizens and undocumented students.

"Today there is a group of people who are working just as hard and have the same commitment to education. They are being shut out from the promise of America, the promise that if you work hard enough you will succeed, simply because they are 'undocumented,'" said Tsukerman.

Gaining citizenship status is not easy.

"One way [of being a citizen] is to get a green alien card and that normally happens through refugee or political asylum. Another way is through sponsorship or family reunification. Recently, the economy is down and there is a big misperception that immigrations steal other people's job. Having immigrants and underpaid workers actually keep inflation down," explained Suza Khy, a third-year environmental science student and member of Critical Asian Pacific Islander Students for

Action.

Second-year biology student Chris Santos of IDEAS (Improving Dreams Equality Access and Success) explained that oftentimes, immigrants without families in America have a far difficult time since they are not sponsored. Whereas marriages between Americans and non-Americans are expedited, people without family must wait as long as 15 years. For this reason, the DREAM Act would uphold equal opportunity and justice, while implementing an immigration system that sets certain criteria for citizenship.

Juarez remains hopeful of the DREAM Act's passage as it gains nationwide momentum. UCLA graduate and former IDEAS member Matias Ramos was a featured guest on CNN Live, Microsoft and the College Board announced support, and several DREAM Act resolutions have been passed.

Currently, the Federal DREAM Act is expected to be voted by Congress during Fall of this year. Congress will announce their stance on legislation. Currently, 54 House members and 22 Senate members are co-sponsoring the DREAM Act.

"If signed to law, the barriers that prevent me from making a positive contribution to this country will be lifted," said Juarez. "The fears that come along with being undocumented will cease, and I will finally be able to make a change for this country as a citizen."

# CONCERT BRINGS LIGHT TO BURMA

From the roots of the conflict: an exiled journalist speaks

EVELINA GIANG // egiang@media.ucla.edu

**M**in Zin found himself running for his life and then exiled from his country after he launched a nation-wide student union at his high school in 1989.

At UCLA, students are free to form unions or organizations to promote their heritage, stand for a cause or protest the unjust. In Zin's country, Burma, exercising this basic human right to expression is considered a felony.

"If you are a member of a student union, according to the law you will be arrested and imprisoned for four years minimum," said Zin, now a Burmese journalist at Mighty Mic's Human Rights Awareness Concert: Benefit for Burma. "In Burma, the student union is illegal."

Invited to tell his story at the concert, which was held at UCLA's Ackerman Grand Ballroom on April 21, Zin spoke about how his political efforts protesting the military regime in Burma have forced him to live life as a fugitive. Since 1989, he has been in hiding from the Burmese government. He has since then found refuge in the United States, but his efforts to bring awareness to the struggles for human rights in this Southeast Asian country have not stopped.

"I'll definitely tell my colleagues in Burma, 'Don't worry. UCLA is linking arms with us.' Please use your liberty to promote ours," said Zin, who revealed at the concert that almost every member of his family has been arrested because of his cause. Many of his friends and fellow students who allied with him have also

been killed.

"In Burma, the military shoots bullets into student crowds," said Zin.

Any type of demonstration in Burma, even the peaceful ones, is illegal and those who participate are subject to imprisonment and persecution. Buddhist monks of the All-Burma Monks Alliance have experienced this violence firsthand. Pyinya Zawta, Gawsaita, and Agga Nya were among those that attended the concert.

The religious leaders of the Saffron Revolution are known to demonstrate peacefully against the military government, which has deprived its citizens of sufficient food and healthcare. As they sat on the stage of the Ballroom, safe from the persecution they would face in Burma, a slideshow of photographs showed images of Gawsaita's bleeding head, a dead monk facedown in water, and civilians hiding while bullets flew through the air.

Attendees were shown these vivid images and other videos about Burma throughout the concert, which featured performances from Blackalicious, Daphne Loves Derby and Audible Mainframe. The concert was free to UCLA students, but signs of support for the cause became evident throughout the night as students donated money and purchased "Free Burma" T-shirts and raffle tickets for the cause.

Mighty Mic's third annual concert, an event not possible in Burma, raised \$3,000 for Doctors Without Borders and the U.S. Campaign for Burma.



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA LI

Gawsaita, a Burmese monk, is often dubbed as "The Face of the Saffron Revolution" and makes multiple media appearances to bring awareness to the conflict in Burma.

## Q&A with PAN-ASIAN QUEERS by RAY LUO

**Pan-Asian Queers (PAQ)** is a safe haven on the UCLA campus for queer Asian Pacific Islander students. We sat down with a panel of officers from PAQ to discuss the goals and progress made by the organization, as well as the current political and social environment for API queers.

**PAQ:** It's a much less accepting environment, because we also suffer from the model minority myth that we have all these high expectations placed on us by family and society to succeed, and anything that deviates from the norm is deemed a failure. Asian cultures can be inherently homophobic, because they tend to be traditional and hierarchical, so gender roles tend to be very well defined.

**PT:** Do you think Asian cultures are more or less accepting of being queer?

**PAQ:** We're a minority within a minority, being Asian and queer. That intersecting idea of identity is something that isn't addressed in other groups. APIs get lumped into a group even though they have their own issues of interest.

**PAQ:** The majority should not be able to vote on the fate of a minority. Until the courts rule on this issue, Prop 8 is still undecided. It looks like more Americanized APIs have an easier time accepting our sexuality. Prop 8 shows that we're not making as much progress as we thought, but a lot of support for equal rights came out, so that's encouraging.

In the 2008 general election, voters in California approved Proposition 8, which changed the state Constitution to define marriage as a union between opposite-sex couples.

**PT:** What is different about PAQ compared to other queer organizations on campus?

**PT:** How do you think Prop 8 has changed the political outlook for gay rights?

**PT:** Are your parents accepting of your sexual orientation? Have you come out? How have they handled your coming out?

**PAQ:** A lot of us have come out here, but not at home. It's all up to the individual. Some of us have families from rural Vietnam with very conservative views. Others have tested the waters by asking them about Prop 8 during phone banking.

**PT:** How did you feel when Prop 8 was passed?

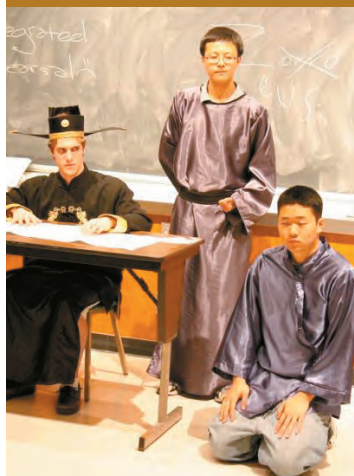
**PAQ:** In the beginning, when we were campaigning against the Prop 8 people, it was very unifying and inspiring. But when Prop 8 was passed, we were in mourning... I was crying for several days, and felt betrayed by my state and my home. There was massive defriending going on facebook when I realized certain friends had voted yes.

**CHINESE CULTURE NIGHT**

"Two sworn brothers have the exact same name and academic ambitions, but one failed the civil service exam. He engages in actions that he believes justifies the means to an end, which leaves his brother permanently unable to communicate with the world.

For the past three years, Heritage Night has focused on love stories and star-crossed lovers. In our fourth year, we felt that there are other very important values from ancient China that are still alive and prolific today: the ancient civil service exams. Scholars dedicated their whole lives to studying for [these exams], something that students can certainly understand. But exactly how far will one go to attain academic success?"

-Kattie Lam, Second year international development studies student, Heritage Night Producer of the Chinese Student Association



**SAMAHANG CULTURE NIGHT**

"This year's show is entitled 'The Brave Makahiya.' The Makahiya is a type of plant grown in the Philippines that is known to retreat upon being touched, and then blooms when no one is touching it. 'The Brave Makahiya' is a metaphorical oxymoron that we used to portray our theme of staying true to who you are as a Pilipino American, and breaking out of the common Filipino trait of being ashamed of who you are because of a fear of disappointing your family.

We want our audience members to get a better idea of what [...] second-generation college students struggle with as Filipino Americans. Sometimes, instead of focusing on being a doctor, lawyer or engineer, we'd rather fight for issues affecting our community, such as justice for Filipino American veterans or LGBT rights."

-Kimi Gutierrez, fourth year civil engineering student, Samahang Pilipino Culture Night Coordinator 2009

**HONG KONG CULTURE NIGHT**

"[As] time goes by, our childhood [memories] become strangers to us, [a place] where we have left numerous footprints, shared uncountable smiles, bared many tears. It is such a sad thing if our collective memories vaporize one day. Collective memories may not have monetary value but do occupy a significant space.

This year's story takes place in 2003, when Hong Kong was daunted by [the] SARS [epidemic]. A never-anticipated sickness had quietly invaded [Hong Kong] in just a month's time, including the family in our drama. In other words, this year's show is about caring for others. It urges people to stand together and face upcoming challenges, [similar to] how Hong Kong people overcame SARS. Things might not be as easy as they look; however, if we can ease off these obstacles, our future can be much brighter."

-Chio Kwan, third year business economics student, Creative Director of Hong Kong Cultural Night 2009



**CULTURE NIGHTS AT UCLA, 2009**

**BY ELIZABETH PARK**

A quick look at the culture night circuit of SPRING 2009.

Due to the extraordinary number of CN events, **PACIFIC TIES** may have overlooked some important ones. We apologize in advance :)

**TAIWANESE CULTURE NIGHT**

"We came up with this year's theme with the intention of showing the people here what Taiwanese culture is really like. We noticed that a lot of people don't really know the difference between Taiwan, China and Hong Kong and why we have different clubs on the UCLA campus. We are not separating ourselves from the others because of political reasons or historical conflicts. We simply have different cultures and we want to present that uniqueness that Taiwanese people have derived from the past 100 years.

Two years ago we brought a Taiwanese folk story on stage, and last year we presented the Taiwanese American ambiguity. This year we are focusing on the present state of Taiwan. We hope that after watching our show, the audience can understand what Taiwan is like right now and [will] want to experience the culture themselves."

-Esther Jou, third year economics-international area studies student and film minor, Director for Taiwanese Culture Night 2009



**UNITED KHMER STUDENTS CULTURE NIGHT**

"This year, we wanted to do a show based on a topic we've never previously wanted to touch because it hits so close to home within the Cambodian community. However, we felt that doing a show based on the Cambodian Genocide was something worth taking the risk because it is an integral part of Cambodian history and reveals the fates of millions of Cambodians living today both here and abroad.

We wanted to show that what our parents and grandparents went through will never be forgotten and that we, with all of our hearts, understand and appreciate their struggles and sacrifices during this dark period in their lives. We want to acknowledge that their will to survive and their never-ending hope during those trying times made it possible so that we, the new generation, can live a more peaceful life here in America. "

-Sotheara Chhay, fourth year, comparative literature student, film minor, United Khmer Students Culture Show Coordinator



## KOREAN CULTURE NIGHT

Beloved Upon a Time

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PHOTO COURTESY OF JASMINE CHOI

On April 15, Korean Culture Night presented its 17th annual performance at Royce Hall. Sponsored by big names such as *Korean Air* and *Korea Times*, as well as by local businesses in Los Angeles' Koreatown, the show, titled "Beloved Upon a Time," is entirely produced and run by UCLA students.

Featuring traditional "poongmul" drumming along with songs and modern dance styles to narrate the storyline, the show's executive producer, Jasmine Choi, fourth year history and art history student, acknowledged that theater is a medium that brings people together. This year's event showcased the talents and efforts of 80 UCLA students and two alumni.

For Jean Jung, fourth year Korean student and director of the show, the personal relationships that developed from working on the show was the highlight of her experience.

"Production as a whole gets routine, [but] each time it's played over, it's different," Jung said, in regards to the diverse personalities of the performers, who always manage to bring something new to the show.

The show's set coordinator, Antonio Anfiteatro, a graduate student in African American studies, looks at the experience as giving back to the UCLA community.

"Everybody at UCLA is in their own department, [it] tends to be homogeneous," he said. For Anfiteatro, Korean Culture Night was an opportunity to develop friendships and emphasize the need to build interaction between different campus communities. "I was trying to break that barrier and develop bridges and bonds."

Closing the gap between oneself and others was a primary focus of the show, in which its characters faced a daunting quest but more importantly, developed relationships with those they met along the way. The protagonist, Dale, and his companion, Peony, embark on

a journey to find the fountain of youth but soon find a journey filled with all kinds of characters—mythical creatures like nymphs, goblins, talking animals, as well as ordinary villagers.

Well-known Korean folktales such as the disobedient frog, the wicked stepsister and the kind woodcutter were fused with modern twists, tying them together with themes of friendship, redemption and acceptance. Whether the quest was for youth, riches or second chances, each character found the importance of seeking his or her meaning with those around them, different as they seemed from each other.

Much of the story sympathizes with the less conventional heroes: the tiger and the less-favored stepsister, traditional villains in Korean myths. The story revolves around these two unlikely figures seeking meaning and acceptance beyond what others see in them.

"We all relate to those characters—we can be antagonistic too," said Jung. "That can change."

Despite setbacks, Dale and Peony eventually reach their destination with humor, joy and even pain. Each character strives on, realizing the quest is not about the object but the journey itself. Some continue the quest to new places, from east to west, and others stay where they are and find that they do, indeed, belong.

In retelling each separate folktale as an integrative whole, Korean Culture Night created a new story for a new generation. The often over-used phrase, "once upon a time" is transformed to "beloved upon a time," where traditional folk characters find that the significance of their stories are taken out of their familiar contexts and told to a modern audience.

*Hanoolim is the Korean Cultural Awareness Group at UCLA and hosts Korean Culture Night, "Beloved Upon a Time" was its 17th annual production.*

Silvie Suriyany felt like she was magically transported to Indonesia. As the third year neuroscience student from Indonesia entered the UCLA Ackerman Ballroom on May 9, the rush of her home country's familiarity greeted her.

The colorful and meticulously decorated *wayang* puppets reminded her of her childhood days when her parents used to take her to *wayang* puppet shows in Indonesia. She was also reminded of the several *batik* paintings she had created in her primary school's art class in Indonesia as she perused the assortment of intricately woven *batik* textiles.

"Although I've stayed [in the United States] for around three years now, I still miss Indonesia badly," said Suriyany. "Seeing the exhibitions, the performances, and meeting other Indonesians really helps me to keep in touch with the Indonesian culture."

"It's the Indonesian people here that makes a difference," Suriyany said, "Without them, this event wouldn't have the authentic ethnic flavor to it."

Reconnecting the Indonesian community in the United States to its ethnic roots was one of the goals of the Indonesian Culture Night 2009 event, which was hosted by the Indonesian Bruin Student Association.

IBSA Event Coordinator and fourth-year chemical engineering student Wira Sutanto believed that this would help remind

the Indonesian attendees who are living overseas what defines them as Indonesians as well as how to deal with the rapid Americanization of incoming Indonesian students.

"It's not necessarily a bad thing to embrace the culture here, but if you throw away the culture you come from, I don't think that's a good thing either," said Sutanto.

Hendra Wibowo, a IBSA public relations officer and fourth-year neuroscience student who immigrated to the United States seven years ago, said he is still a proud Indonesian.

"I believe in the importance of knowing where you're coming from. You just have to be reminded of Indonesia's cultural diversity and richness, and you will be amazed and proud of your identity," Wibowo said.

The event aimed to reconnect Indonesians to their ethnic roots by showcasing the nation's various unique cultural gems to an international population.

Freddie Bii, a third-year communications studies student from China, was enthusiastic about attending the event because he is interested in learning more about Indonesian culture. This event would help him prepare for his upcoming trip to Indonesia during the winter holiday. Bii believes it is impossible to learn many aspects of Indonesian culture without being personally submerged in it. His knowledge of Indonesia had previously

been limited to vast paddy fields, Borobudur and Bali.

"Then I found out that the people are very friendly and helpful too," Bii said. "It's a cultural thing called *gotong royong*."

Another attendee from Hong Kong, third-year communications studies student Carman Chan, was also excited to gain more cultural understanding of a fellow Asian community. Chan's previous exposure to the Indonesian community and culture fueled her curiosity. Her several Indonesian friends in Hong Kong had introduced her to *tari yampang*, a traditional Indonesian dance, and she has since then become a fan. Chan said the main reason she came to the event was to watch the dances.

"When I saw *yampang* was going to be in it, I knew I had to be there," Chan said.

The event's main attraction was a drama of one of the nation's favorite folktales, an Indonesian Cinderella story *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*. As the actors delivered their lines, Suriyany recited some of the lines along. She said she is familiar with the tale as her mother often read this folktale to her as a child. Her mother would end the tale with a reminder that Suriyany should be like the helpful and patient protagonist Bawang Putih.

"This story is important to me," Suriyany said, "And if [...] school work [wasn't] in the way, I would have auditioned to be in it."

## INDONESIAN CULTURE NIGHT

Connecting a community to its roots

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## OPINION

## MORE SPECIFIC TIES

BY TOM NGUYEN

Let's be specific Islanders. We all know where we come from, but not exactly how we got here. Yet we're all here, so let's be specific about where we are, both geographically and historically.

All lands are islands, but let's be specific: some islands are small, like Hawaii, and some are bigger, like Madagascar; some we call continents, like Australia and South America, while others are simply land masses surrounded by water, like Eurasia. At some point, the land was separated from the sea. In the beginning, there was the world, and the world was good. And the world was with geographically ordered devices, and the world WAS geographically ordered devices. Let's take a moment to be thankful for that. Now let's be specific about what ties us together, as people. To do this, we have to go back to the roots.

We were all born of a Mother, from the Earth, and we share experiences of history on this Earth together. For my Asian American and Pacific Islander brothers and sisters, Black April, the fall of Saigon to Communism, and the fall of Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge, were historic events that impacted all of our families and can probably explain why you ended up here in America. If not that, then our families shared the experience of colonial occupation and World War II before that. That might explain why a lot of our parents and grandparents may not speak English very well, had tough lives and want us to succeed.

It's been a struggle to get here. It's still a struggle to live here; in 2009 we're dealing with climate and economy, health care and flu pandemics, education and a debted loan system... Buddha figured out a long time ago that life is a struggle, and that never-ending struggle ties us together on this island.

But hold up, Pacific Islanders aren't the only ones struggling. Struggle is universal. America is a country built from immigrants, from pilgrims, to serfs, to slaves, to refugees, to Native Americans and Chicanos (who were here before the arrival of Western "civilization"), to people from anywhere looking for work,

freedom, and opportunity. The nation will become a majority-minority society; it's just a matter of time. But at this particular time, every immigrant community has, and will continue to have, a story.

So let's talk about racial divisions real quick. We know race is a social construct, and that communities are held together (and kept apart) by intangible means, such as imagination. Here's a rhyme spree: society has quietly divided thee, which has lasted, provided we be passive, acting mildly as the last kid. I would be massively disappointed if people don't realize that our divisions lay not in race, but in classes. Racial distinctions (rather than stereotypes) exist, of course, but what we experience in America is a class division. I could discuss this in more detail, but it's a heavy topic and I would rather move on.

Now let's localize and be specific about this notion of struggle by looking at community orgs at UCLA. Organizations from Samahang Pilipino, to ME-ChA, to ACA, to ASU, to VSU, MSA, NSU, and all the many, plenty community orgs that remain, have a story of where their people came from and how they came to be presently, carrying on the legacy of their family's history. This is where we all stand historically, fighting for something different because we all experience a different struggle. Whether it is veterans' rights, students' rights, citizens' rights, or marriage rights, we have to acknowledge that we all share in a certain fight and a struggle. We must acknowledge that some fights cannot be won by a single sub-community within a divided society. However, a collaboration of communities could leverage a majority onto the same page.

Power still lies within the people. But the people are divided into "island communities" by imagined constructs that separate our communities like bodies of water, while the only thing that cannot be divided is the individual.

Let me tell you in annoyingly vague terms where we are, geographically and historically, in space and in time: we are here, and the time is now. Annoying, right? So...

In other words, our ancestors may have all started on different islands, but we are all on the Pacific coast, on this part of the North American island, together, at a place called Los Angeles. We're here for more than just school, we're here for class. The stories of migration are over, and we are settled on this island, making us all Pacific Islanders in the most literal sense of the word. The stories of the intellectual class in the 21st century are just beginning. So that's our Pacific tie. And within our community, we all got specific ties together.

And yo! If your feet were tied together, then one can't make big moves without the other.



## OPINION

## THE BIG MIGRATION

BY TOMMY CHEN

It was late Thursday night during spring break. The customers at a local bar have already wound down and begun to disperse. With a pitcher of Bluemoon on the table still, my friends and I continue our night with casual talks.

As graduating seniors preparing to dispatch from family support and take on independent lives, we tried to connect the dots all the way back to when our parents were our age. What started as a heated, drunken debate about who was more spoiled led to a full expedition of our parents' struggles as immigrants to the United States.

The following weeks, I sought out more stories from immigrant parents. They all confirmed what I have always believed: every parent worked hard to get us where we are today. Of course, everyone's own story is different. I hope, however, that the two stories below are inspirational and provide a different perspective on life.

I invited my friend Janet Kwon for a cup of coffee to talk about how her parents immigrated from Korea. Kwon is a third-year chemical biology student at UCLA.

"A lot of what I do today is inspired by my parent's strong determination to succeed," Kwon said.

After high school, Kwon's parents left Korea for a better life. Through family sponsorship, they were subsequently brought to America and settled in downtown L.A. in a predominantly Korean community.

As immigrants, Kwon's parents had to endure constant changes of small business models to accommodate the changing economies. One of the first businesses Kwon's father put up was a "Swap Meet" shop, where miscellaneous items were exchanged for cheap prices.

"My parents went through multiple jobs and businesses. They always had two jobs, too," said Kwon.

Kwon's parents now run a restaurant in downtown L.A. where Kwon helps out on weekends. Being from an immigrant family has made her an independent woman.

"I want to carry the weight for my family, too," she said.

Another weekend, I interviewed my friend Bryce Yeh's father, David Yeh, over dinner. Yeh left Taiwan and entered the UCLA graduate school of engineering through a scholarship. With less than five dollars in his pocket, Yeh worked for catering services at UCLA to reduce his tuition cost. On top of academics and research, Yeh would work in the catering kitchen on weekends.

"There was no leisure time for me. Most of it was just work," said Yeh.

From washing dishes and cutting vegetables to marinating meats, Yeh attributes everything he knows about food preparation today to his first job in the United States.

"I think it's important to try out for all kinds of jobs. In the end, those knowledge and skills will be with you forever," Yeh said.

Reflecting on these stories, I noticed that immigrant parents often left their homeland to find a place where they can provide for their families. This desire came from their obligation to themselves and their future children, allowing them to endure the hardships and loneliness in a foreign land.

Today, I hear parents tell their kids, "You are so lucky today. With a college degree, shouldn't it be easy for you to get a job?"

Compared to my parents during their college years, I do have a lot more freedom, both financially and socially. But I feel lost, too.

When asked for his thoughts on graduating seniors, Yeh showed concern and sympathy. "With the current economy, your generation has a different kind of struggle today. Before, we never experienced the so-called leisure time, so we were willing to do the ground and dirty work. But young people might not be used to that today."

The stories of immigrant parents show us that perseverance and hard work will lead to success, but are we ready to take off yet?

Our parent's big thing was to provide us an opportunity for education.

What is our big thing?



# Communal Roots

## How a group of L.A. residents learned to grow together

STORY BY THIENVINH NGUYEN // PHOTOS BY MARIA IU

The 14-acre farm was teeming with life—its many plots, which grew over a hundred species of plants, fed over 350 families. From cacti to fruit trees to herbs to flowers to corn, the land was bursting with vegetation and produce. Among the fruits, bananas, guava, passion fruit, and papaya could be found. Plants unheard of in a typical American grocery store were grown. Families treasured the plots like heirlooms; kids felt safe running around in the labyrinth of foliage and vines. This farm was nestled in the middle of a metropolis, surrounded by factory warehouses, with a skyline of tall buildings, in South Los Angeles.

This former oasis, known as the South Central Farm, has been bulldozed—devoid of life—after a contentious legal battle. It had been around since 1994, with farmers and protestors being forced off the farm in 2006. In a nutshell, the city decided to resell the land (which failed to be used as the site for a waste incinerator)—in a closed session deal—back to land developer Ralph Horowitz, for a little over five million dollars. With little notice, the farmers were told to leave the property. They fought back, and fought hard. Politicians, activists, and celebrities came out to show their support—Daryl Hannah stayed in a tree for weeks. However, in the end, all they could do was buy the land from Horowitz. His price tag? \$16.3 million. They were able to raise the money, with a pledge from the Annenberg Foundation. But Horowitz said it was too late—it was after his deadline.

Present now is barbed wire, wild dry grass, random advertisement placards, and a metal door with the words “Save the Farm” graffitied on it.

Despite the widespread support garnered for Michelle Obama’s White House food garden, the struggle for green space, specifically for community gardens and farms, is still in full force at the local level.

With the case of Los Angeles, people of color and those living in low-income communities have a limited number of green spaces available to them, as compared to those living in affluent neighborhoods. And in the case of the South Central Farmers, their community-used land might also be borrowed or leased, thus, they can be at risk for losing their space.

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust (LANLT), founded in 2002, is a non-profit that strives to create community green space such as parks and gardens “to address the inequity of open spaces in Los Angeles’ underserved neighborhoods.” Moreover, public green spaces aren’t necessarily magnets for crime. “With people feeling connected to a [community] space, parks actually make people feel safer,” said Hillary Larsen, a UCLA alumna and LANLT’s Director of Operations.

### A Thriving Community Garden in Koreatown

The Francis Avenue Community Garden, which was founded in the early 2000s, and then became a project of the LANLT a few years later, is a haven in Koreatown. The garden, which is 0.15 acres (4,396 square feet), consists of a front communal area and a back area with private garden beds. In the front area, sugar cane is grown on the side, with peach and apple trees growing in the center of the space. In the backspace, about 30 farmers use the plots to grow their own food garden; they pay about \$30 per year for part of a bed.

Roosters and rabbits roam the front space, and measures are taken to ensure that they don’t enter the beds and eat potted plants. The Garden’s doors are open from dawn to dusk, and people are entitled to eat from the fruit trees in the front. Yet, there’s not really a free-rider problem. Larsen asserted, “as people feel like they’re stewards of the land, abuse is completely out of the issue ... that’s why the community involvement piece is so important.”

The idea of ownership is what motivates Marta Servin to go to the Francis Garden everyday for the past eight years. As an overseer of the garden and aspiring community organizer, Servin enjoys going to the garden to eat fruit, mingle and cook with regulars, take care of the garden, and work on her small private plot. Growing up in Michoacán, México, Servin says she always wanted to garden like her grandmother. The Francis Garden provides Servin with the space to get her hands dirty and grow things, like her grandmother did back in México. She has successfully managed to grow many different vegetables and fruits over years.

“I learned from the people who work here before. These two guys who knew a lot, they taught me some, and then I practiced,” explained Servin.

Her practice has enabled her to learn how to grow a wide number of vegetables, some unfamiliar to her in México, like broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, radishes, pumpkin and green beans. Currently, she’s growing cilantro, epasoté (an herb used in Mexican foods such as soups, black beans and chilaquiles), and yerba santa (a leafy plant used to wrap Oxacan tamales).

By the late afternoon, the Garden is alive with neighbor-

hood folk who come every day and bring their kids. They gather around, under the shade of the trees, to drink coffee or tea, and to eat some fruit (with salt and chili powder). Meanwhile, neighbors living in nearby complexes shout greetings from their balconies. At times, the families come together to cook as well. Since the Garden is located in Koreatown, families from diverse ethnic backgrounds use the garden, from Koreans to Colombians to Peruvians to Mexicans. Children use the vacant field next to the garden to play soccer, though in time, the people in the community hope to lease or buy it if possible.

The Garden provides the people in the community with a space to relax, mingle, eat some freshly grown foods, and get in touch with the land. The space is valued in the neighborhood: the place has never been vandalized, even though graffiti can be found all over Koreatown. “People in the neighborhood use it, it’s a respected safe space; even gangs respect it,” said Servin.

Although community gardens/farms would be an asset in different neighborhoods, whether or not they provide people with subsistent farming, at times, these spaces are impacted or not available.

“With more people starting to realize that we need to take care of this planet called Earth,” said Larsen of the LANLT, “it’s not out of the question [for there to be community gardens all over Los Angeles] since it’s not that there’s not space, but it’s how that space is utilized.”





## “Start digging”

Some L.A. residents, like Jenni Kuida, took the initiative to push this community garden movement even further. After hearing social activist Grace Lee Boggs speak at UCLA in 1998 about the Detroit Summers movement to turn vacant homes and empty lots to community gardens, Kuida and her husband flew to Detroit to help out. Kuida estimates that there are about 200 gardens in Detroit, some of them are small pocket plots, shared by neighbors. After helping for a few consecutive summers, Kuida was inspired to “start digging” and create her own little backyard garden, which grows a few crops.

Both Kuida and her husband Tony Osumi come from a family of farmers. Before World War II, many Japanese Americans were farmers, including Kuida’s grandparents. Indeed, early farm labor in California consisted of the work done by Asian immigrants, from the Chinese to Japanese to Filipinos. However, for Japanese Americans, farming wasn’t available like it was before WWII, thus they had to adjust to working on very small plots of land.

As Kuida asserts, “Since not everyone had farms to go back to, they had their own gardens.” Although she was accustomed to seeing her grandma garden, Kuida’s impetus for gardening on her own was her work with Grace Lee Boggs and Detroit Summers. For Kuida, eating locally is important in the context of the greater movement to make our world greener. Food doesn’t have to travel as far, and local organic produce isn’t grown with chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

In reflecting on the future of community gardens, especially urban ones, Kuida is hopeful. She maintains that more people are interested in community gardens now than a few years ago, and it’s becoming a bigger thing every day.

“With more people starting to realize that we need to take care of this planet called Earth,” said Larsen of the LANLT, “it’s not out of the question [for there to be community gardens all over Los Angeles] since it’s not that there’s not space, but it’s how that space is utilized.”

## Getting involved

Following a dinner and screening event in Kerckhoff Grand Salon of “The Garden,” an Academy Award nominated documentary about the South Central Farmers’ struggle, leaders of the movement stayed around to encourage the student audience to get involved with (environmental) social justice work. Currently, some of the farmers have relocated to a farm in Bakersfield, where they, now as a cooperative, continue to grow high-quality organic vegetables, to sell at places like Farmers’ Markets. They also educate various communities about the importance of local and organic produce, in the context of the current environmental movement.

The farmers in attendance applauded the efforts of the Ecology, Economy, and Equity (E3) club at UCLA, with many members in attendance. The club has worked to create community gardens on campus, among its many environmental efforts. On Earth Day in 2006, E3 established a community garden with four beds in the Sunset Canyon Recreation Center near the dorms.

Through a contact at the dinner and film event, Jaynel Santos, a third year environmental science student and E3’s garden coordinator, was able to obtain a truck full of fresh, rich soil for the Sunset garden at a cheap price. Moreover, the cooperative is likely to donate some seeds to the community garden. Such a partnership is part of what makes community gardens and farms so unique.

Students have the opportunity to “start digging” by coordinating with E3. In terms of gardening advice, Kuida and Servin have specific tips, but their main contention is that people learn to grow things by practicing and experiencing the act of gardening personally.

Aside from personally growing vegetables or getting involved with a community garden, an effective way to support local farmers like the South Central Farmers is to go to Farmers’ Markets and/or participate in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. CSA provides people who don’t have the means to grow their own vegetables with the opportunity to get seasonal produce directly from a farmer. In this manner, a relationship is established with the farmer and the nature of food growing. The UCLA community can participate in the South Central Farmers’ CSA program with three pick-up locations at Weyburn Terrace, the Office of Residential Life, and University Village. A box of vegetables can cost as low as \$15, and can be ordered at <http://www.scfcoop.southcentralfarmers.com/categories/CSA-Boxes/>.

Through these various efforts, perhaps someday, an oasis like the former 14-acre farm that was bursting with produce, or the Francis Garden that’s teeming with activity and life, could be everyone’s backyards—even in a sprawling city like Los Angeles.



ON PAGE 10 Recent Korean immigrants, Kyung Jin Byeon, his wife, Sung Ja Byeon, and their two young daughters at the Francis Garden.

PAGE 12 - TOP Marta Servin, the official Francis Garden Master Gardener, shows off her plot of land where she grows many different vegetables. MIDDLE The 14-acre farm in South Central L.A. is now a desolate, undeveloped piece of land. Sandwiched between garment factories, its empty space is a reminder of how little green space their is in an urban city. LEFT Neighborhood children play in the vacant lot next the garden.

# DRAGON BOAT, THE EVOLUTION

SHIRLEY MAK // smak@media.ucla.edu

Imagine. The sun is hot on your back. Your hands tightly clutch a paddle, a wooden extension of yourself. A drummer's spirited chant fills the air. In the distance, the finish line grows closer with each passing second, perpetrating the feeling of adrenaline coursing through your veins.

Yet all of that is second to the movement of the boat itself. A heavy wooden vehicle, it glides swiftly through the water as twenty paddles hit the water at the same moment, their fluid motions guiding the boat to its ultimate destination.

Such is the world of dragon boating.

There is no other water sport that produces quite the same experience. Hailing from southern China, dragon boating is now the fastest growing international water sport today, with race festivals held all around the world.

## DRAGON BOAT'S ORIGINS

The history of dragon boat racing goes back 2,000 years to its origin in the southern provinces of China. Legend has it that Qu Yuan, an advisor to the emperor of the Chu Kingdom, jumped into a river to protest against government corruption. In their attempts to save him, local fishermen raced out in their boats, beat drums, pounded their paddles on the river's waters, and threw rice dumplings wrapped in lotus leaves into the river to distract the fish from eating Qu Yuan's body. Dragon boating first evolved from reenactments of this legend at annual festivals.

Today, however, dragon boat racing is a competitive sport in addition to being a cultural tradition. From its roots in China, it has involved into an international sport celebrated all over the world. International dragon boat races are organized by the International Dragon Boat Federation and are becoming especially popular not only in the United States but in Canada and Europe as well.

## DRAGON BOAT AT UCLA

UCLA did not have a dragon boat team until its founding in 2004 by then-physiological science student Derrick Chan. Chan was inspired by competition in high school to start the team at UCLA.

"It didn't make sense for UCLA, having as big an athletic tradition as it does, to not have a dragon boat team," he said.

Putting together the first dragon boat team in the history of UCLA wasn't easy.

"Even just starting it was a big challenge because dragon boat was not very well known, and it's difficult to pitch an idea about a club sport when [people] don't

even know what it's all about," Chan said.

After over a year of planning and getting advice from teams in other schools, Chan managed to put together a team of 20 paddlers. Today, the UCLA dragon boat team has nearly 50 members and is undefeated in the college division, winning championships in major festivals such as the International Dragon Boat Festival in Treasure Island and the Viewsonic Dragon Boat Festival in Long Beach.

The real prize, however, isn't in the gold medals but in the way the team is able to come together both on and off the boat. This sense of working together for a common goal, after all, is what attracted so many people to the sport in the first place.

"It's like a second family to me," Chan said. "You bond really well with your teammates. And because you're all so determined, you find a lot of similarities in your personalities. You find that it's easy to get along with other people who kind of struggle with you, and that's what all dragon boat members can emphasize with and share in that emotion."

Indeed, there is no other sport where teamwork plays such a key role in the team's success.

"If you watch a dragon boat race and you watch the paddlers, the paddles all hit the water at the same time," said William Wu, a third-year physiological science student and the current president of the UCLA dragon boat team. "But it's much more than that. You need to trust your team, and that's the biggest thing. You can be the best paddler in the world, and you can put 20 of the best paddlers in a boat, but if they're not working together, if they don't trust one another, you're not going to win."

In the world of dragon boating, how well a team is able to work together is what separates the professionals from the amateurs. Though strength is important (which tends to be the case whenever a 1,750-pound boat is involved), a dragon boat team is only as strong as its weakest paddler. As a result, a paddler's dedication to the sport is in some ways more crucial to the team's performance than to himself.

"If you're missing from a practice ... then an essential part of the boat is gone and that affects the whole team. You have to really dedicate yourself to being there all the time and not letting everyone down," said Julia Kong, third-year biology student and UCLA dragon boat's vice president.

As demonstrated by their numerous championship wins, the UCLA dragon boat team is not lacking in team effort. What binds the members together seems to be their shared passion for the sport, which resonates in the entire dragon boat community.

According to Amanda Chu, a third-year psychology student, what keeps her coming back to the team year after year is seeing the hard work pay off in people's faces after each race. Having witnessed their spirit and their dedication for the sport makes it hard for her not to love it, even when the team doesn't place first. Other members feel the same way.

"Every team I've been on has been really welcoming, really friendly," said Lona Zhao, second-year psychology student and team historian. "Out of all the things I've ever done, [dragon boat] was more about the sport than about competition. I feel like it breeds the best kind of people."



The DRUMMER: is responsible for the timing and rhythm of the strokes, calling sequences of powers (short surges of powerful strokes) and for boosting morale.

A full boat consists of 22 people - 20 paddlers, a drummer, and a steerer. The paddlers are divided into three groups: the stroke, engine room, and rockets.

A typical dragon boat weighs 1,750 lbs!

PHOTO COURTESY OF UCLA DRAGON BOAT

UCLA Dragon Boat paddles its way to victory at the 2009 Long Beach College Championships.

Derrick Chan

UCLA DRAGON BOAT FOUNDER

"It's the ultimate team sport. I can't think of another sport that uses that many people doing the same thing at once and that's what's really unique about it."

William Wu

UCLA DRAGON BOAT '09 PRESIDENT

"[We] have genuine athletes who aren't just strong, aren't just out there to practice, but they care about each other. You feel this bond with everyone that you just cannot describe."

Julia Kong

UCLA DRAGON BOAT '09 VP

"You might not be the best athlete out there, but in Dragon Boat it doesn't really matter... Every person on the boat matters to what you do as a whole."

Alexander Bae

UCLA DRAGON BOAT '08 PRESIDENT

"I think what keeps me coming back, especially back to UCLA Dragon Boat, is that the team is so oriented in bettering itself that it helps me achieve my goals both outside and inside of Dragon Boat."



PHOTO COURTESY OF UCLA DRAGON BOAT

## DEBUNKING THE ASIAN STEREOTYPE

Despite its growing reputation as a dominant and versatile water sport, many people still see dragon boating as a sport exclusive to Asians. In California especially, many dragon boat teams, both at the professional and college level, consist of predominantly Asians.

UCLA's team is no exception. Out of the 49 members on the team, the majority are of Asian descent—a fact that many of them find puzzling.

"I think sports aren't limited to race," said Wu. "We choose our athletes by their performance [and] dedication. Having been an officer for two years and having to make cuts, [I can say that] nowhere in the criteria do we look at race."

Many of the misconceptions that label dragon boating as an Asian sport may stem from the name of the sport itself.

"We've been trying to spread the word but it's hard because when you tell people it's called dragon boat, they make assumptions," said Lisa Zhao, a fourth-year anthropology student who has been paddling with the team for four years. "I'd like to see it [become] more diverse, but it's hard."

A general lack of knowledge about dragon boating may be another barrier preventing other ethnicities from participating. At first glance, the sport looks Asian because so many Asian people do it.

"I haven't seen a team that isn't predominantly Asian. [Dragon boat] attracts a diverse crowd but ... people from the outside, because they haven't spoken to us before, they'll look at us and be like, 'Oh it's only for Chinese people; I probably shouldn't do it. I won't fit in.' It's what other people stereotype us to be," said Lona Zhao.

But the stereotypes couldn't be further from the truth.

"The fact that I am white is very obvious, but it's not a negative issue because there are definitely white people who do dragon boat," said Davin Blekeberg, a second-year international economics student and one of the few non-Asian members on the team. "I get more comments on my facial hair than I do on the color of my skin."

Lona Zhao

**UCLA DRAGONBOAT HISTORIAN**

"It would be really cool to get out our name out there and [to get] anyone out there who hasn't been on our team before to have their minds open up and see that it's not an Asian sport. I think more people should be open-minded to it."



Davin Blekeberg  
**2ND-YEAR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS STUDENT**

"There's a lot to offer in the sense that it's different enough where people [who] want to try something new [can], but it has similar concepts to other things such as canoeing and outriggering."



Amanda Chu  
**3RD-YEAR PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT**

"In terms of personality [on the team], I'd say there's a wide spectrum, and I think that's also what makes it unique because so many different kinds of people can share this one passion."



"I think my most memorable [race] was my very first race with UCLA. We didn't get number one but we worked hard out there, and the spirit was just there, and compared to everyone else you could definitely tell UCLA's presence was there. I don't think I've ever gotten that feeling from my high school team or another college team I was in."

Lisa Zhao

**4TH-YEAR ANTHROPOLOGY STUDENT**

## FACT OR FICTION?

### FICTION

It's only for Asians.

### FACT

Dragon Boat originated in China but is now the fastest growing international team water sport. Each year, race festivals are held around the world in Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States.

### FICTION

It's easy.

### FACT

At first glance, a bunch of people paddling together on a boat doesn't look that intimidating. However, competitive dragon boat paddlers condition themselves not only in strength but in endurance, form, mental focus and timing. Having 20 paddlers hit the water at the same time with the same stroke is no easy task. The stroke technique is hard to master, and teams with well conditioned paddlers have near perfect synchronization.

### FICTION

It's like crew.

### FACT

Unlike crew which involves rowing, dragon boating uses paddling to get the boat across the water. Competitive crew teams generally consist of one, two, four or eight rowers. Dragon boat teams consist of 20 paddlers, a drummer and a steerer.

“...there is nothing inherently Asian about dragon boating, other than perhaps its name. In fact, many of the qualities that the sport values, such as teamwork, perseverance and determination, are universal in nature.”



# HIP-HOP AWAKENS AAPI CONSCIOUSNESS

STEPHANIE AGUILAR // saguilar@media.ucla.edu

D'Lo showed up to her interview in the parking lot behind Broad Art Center, looking nonchalant, hiding her shaved head under a black hoodie, and wearing baggy jeans. Though her clothes may seem ordinary, D'Lo is part of the influential hip-hop scene flourishing in the AAPI community.

She's a 30-year-old Tamil Sri Lankan-American who earned a bachelor's degree in ethnomusicology at UCLA and graduated from New York's School of Audio Engineering. A solo theater performance artist, writer and music producer, D'Lo counts hip-hop as her main musical genre.

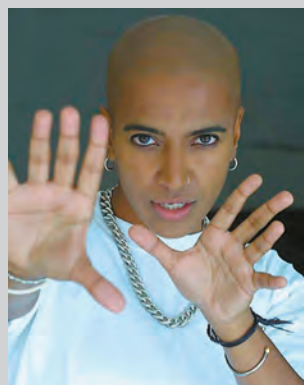


PHOTO BY DAVID BEELER

D'Lo, a UCLA alum, says hip-hop is a big part of her life.

"The reason why hip-hop is a big part of my life is [because] it was my influence in writing, my influence in

style, in culture, clothing, and not just rhymes but the content is politically conscious," said D'Lo. "It was more than just the music but the message behind it. When I grew up in Lancaster, there was a sea of white, which made it difficult for me to navigate like other people of color my age."

For D'Lo and other minorities, hip-hop is a source of comfort. It is easy to relate to the message in hip-hop music, especially in songs about coping with one's own identity.

"The Asian community has taken [hip-hop] in and owned it themselves," said D'Lo. "The immigrant community embraces hip-hop because of their similar experiences of hardships throughout history."

Hip-hop has gone beyond the music to become a form of self-expression, a language made from art and dissent.

One arena where the language of hip-hop has flourished is dancing. At UCLA, the Association of Chinese Americans (ACA) Hip Hop Team, is bringing a new meaning to the genre.

Fourth-year students Amy Kim, Jennie Kim and Randy Lau are co-coordinators for this year's team. For them, ACA Hip Hop not only emphasizes teamwork and dedication, but represents a chance to express themselves. Dance teams like ACA Hip-Hop provide the community with an art form that will inspire others to express themselves creatively.

Hip-hop involves intricate styles of movement such as popping, locking, and breaking, but most performers believe that hip-hop dancing cannot be defined. Hip-hop has evolved to include many other styles of dance, and performers generally integrate different themes to provide more meaning to their choreography.

Since its birth in New York City in the 1970s, hip-hop culture has become a medium in which to build community and support, especially among urban youth. It has since become a global phenomenon, with people from all over the world integrating the art form into their music genres.

"When I first started, I felt like I had a mission," said Kublai Kwon, the Korean-American founder of the Asian Hip-Hop Summit, an annual event that brings together Asian hip-hop artists.

Kwon's mission is to raise political and social consciousness by mobilizing AAPIs in the hip-hop scene. The first Asian Hip-Hop Summit commemorated the 10th anniversary of the L.A. riots.

Kwon categorizes AAPI hip-hop into two main schools. One group is career-driven, and uses their roles as artists primarily to make money and gain fame. They use words like "hoes" and "gangbanging" in their lyrics to draw attention to their songs. D'Lo calls people who have this desire "rich kids who don't know what they're talking about."

In contrast, others view hip-hop as an art form. For them, hip-hop is an artistic pursuit rather than a career. Hip-hop as art is best seen in its various modes of expression. Its diverse forms include dancing, DJ-ing, graffiti, rhymes, spoken word, and beat-boxing among others. It takes just as much hip-hop skill to write spoken words or lyrics as dancing. The way artists use a simile, a metaphor, a symbol, or a consistent rhyme scheme is a difficult craft to master.

"They can flip a beat and that's a craft," said D'Lo. "I've heard some emcees who can't even spit on beat and that's terrible."

Kwon believes that hip-hop is a strategic way of promoting AAPI consciousness because people are attracted to it as a creative medium. Through hip-hop, audiences gain a broader view of the world it is meant to represent.

"We've created a living breathing subculture in L.A. – the Asian community didn't have something like that years ago," said Kwon. "We're creating a platform to voice their message."

Hip-hop culture is and will continue to be an ally for the AAPI community. It continues to grow as its members find sanctuary from the struggles of immigrant and working class life and seek to find an outlet for their creativity.

## VIETNAMESE INT'L FILM FESTIVAL 2009

THIENVINH NGUYEN // tnguyen1@media.ucla.edu

A son tells his mom that the camcorder he had just bought cost a few hundred dollars, while in fact, it was a few thousand, and that he was studying hard in his pre-med studies though he's dropping out. His sister, raised in their strict Catholic family, is too afraid to announce that she's marrying a Buddhist. Another sister of theirs gave up music to focus solely on her studies in medicine. Another brother is mysterious about his potential girlfriend, who happens to be white. All these stories weave together in 24-year-old Mark Tran's "All About Dad," a humorous yet solemn film that portrays a somewhat autobiographical tale of a generational and cultural clash between a Catholic Vietnamese-American father and his children.

This full-length feature, along with other films that ranged in length, theme, and style, was one of about 60 from around the world that was screened at the 4th biennial Vietnamese International Film Festival (ViFF). In addition to showcasing films, panel discussions were organized with certain filmmakers being flown in for the festival. The film festival spanned eight days over two weeks, with the venue primarily based in Orange County, specifically at UC Irvine, and at UCLA.

"ViFF has grown bigger and bigger—with more new films presented at each edition. The filmmakers are younger, too!" said Ysa Le, the co-founder and reigning co-director of ViFF.

The festival has been able to remain true to having "international" in its title—the films are coming from more diverse regions of the world. Moreover, Le carries on the tradition of teaming up and co-directing with former UCLA Vietnamese Language and Culture (VNLC) directors, like this year's Quyen Lam. In addition, Mai Hong, a third-year political science student, sat on this year's executive committee.

Hong, who served as VNLC External Relations Officer last year, helped organized the Cinema Symposium—an event that brings together Vietnamese-American filmmakers and actors to showcase their work. The Cinema Symposium continues to be held at UCLA every other year when ViFF isn't taking place.

Hong was excited to work on both events. She was skeptical of how good Vietnamese-American film could be until she saw Ham Tran's "Journey from the Fall," whose showing at ViFF—pivotaly helped it find a distributor.

"Film is a very powerful medium to tell stories. And Vietnamese communities from all over the world have a lot of stories that have not been told. ViFF is also a great place to bridge the generational/cultural gaps," said Le.

The screening committee comprised of five individuals with different affiliations, is briefed by organizers to keep an open eye and mind when watching the films, especially since there's no set quota or censorship that takes place. They simply want quality films that tell stories about Vietnamese people.

"ViFF helps filmmakers network as well as provide[s] them with a specific venue, the only one of its kind in the world," said Hong.

In the future, the organizers hope to continue the festival and give cash prizes to award recipients and provide more scholarships for filmmakers. ViFF will continue to provide a space for filmmakers to tell stories about Vietnamese communities in the hopes that youth today might be inspired to get involved in film and the cycle of storytelling that takes place, from generation to generation, irrespective of where Vietnamese people happen to find themselves in the world.



PHOTO BY NATHAN HIEP TRAN

Opening night at Edwards University 6 Theaters in Irvine attracted hundreds of regular movie goers as well as supporters of the arts in the Asian and Vietnamese community.



PHOTO BY NATHAN HIEP TRAN

Dustin Nguyen is interviewed at the opening night of ViFF on his growing success in the film industry. Nguyen was awarded ViFF's Spotlight Award this year, and his film "Little Fish" with Cate Blanchett was screened.

# (You)Tubers Rise from Underground

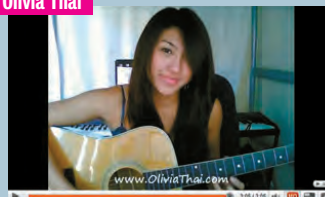
BY MELODY YAN

Rin on the Rox



hiphopRinRox @ YouTube

Olivia Thai



oliviathai @ YouTube

Jason Chen



miniachilles @ YouTube

**R**in on the Rox, otherwise known as Erin Perey and Roxanne Ilano, a pair of Filipina American girls from the Bay Area, never imagined the stardom they would attain through simply uploading a video of themselves singing in their bathroom onto YouTube.com.

"It kind of just hit us. We grew and we got so many fans and views off of it," Ilano said.

From initially only receiving a couple hundred hits, Rin on the Rox has now accumulated over 40,000 subscribers on YouTube in addition to thousands of followers on MySpace and Twitter. Due to their huge YouTube success, Perey and Ilano have made appearances on the Ellen DeGeneres Show, the 2009 Grammys and the KRON 4 Bay Area News, and live performances all over California.

Other young Asian American YouTube artists such as fellow UCLA Bruins Olivia Thai and Jason Chen have also found fame through similar methods of distribution. YouTube not only allows them to broadcast their music, but also to connect with other creative individuals. With the tagline, "Broadcast Yourself," YouTube has transformed artists' lives in ways they never thought possible.

Through the global nature of YouTube, these Asian American artists have gained lo-

cal, national and international popularity. Rin on the Rox has achieved recognition not only at home but also internationally in the Philippines.

"We hear that we're the big buzz over there on news stations. Daily or weekly, they'll be talking about us," Perey said.

Though their fame has skyrocketed, they are still extremely humble about their achievements.

"It's still shocking to us because we're still trying to take it in. We are still regular girls," Perey said.

"It's still not normal to us that people want to have our autographs or pictures," Ilano added.

Perey and Ilano have released their first single on iTunes and are now in the process of building their own sound and writing their own songs in the hopes of creating an original track.

Thai and third-year business economics student Chen also use YouTube as a means to broadcast their songs. In addition to performing solo at schools, charity benefits and other events, Thai participates in a theater group, teaches private vocal lessons and offers private tutoring sessions to kids who are struggling in school. Nevertheless, with her passion for music, Thai prioritizes singing first on her list.

"I didn't really expect anything. People

just started watching it and linking it. I was actually really surprised," said Thai on using YouTube for the first time.

The four years before she uploaded her first video onto YouTube, Thai tried pursuing her singing career through the traditional way of printing headshots, going to auditions and finding an agent and a manager.

"It was just not working," Thai said.

But YouTube changed that for her, opening new doors and finding what she needed most - support.

"YouTube is a really great place to find support. Everyone on YouTube is just so real and so raw," explained Thai.

YouTube assisted Thai by launching her singing career, bringing her recognition not only at UCLA but all over Los Angeles. She is currently working on an album with people who discovered her through YouTube. Thai is taking time off from school in order to dedicate herself to her singing career, but she plans to return to UCLA in the future to get a degree in music education.

But for Chen, uploading YouTube videos is mainly a hobby.

"I don't put up videos for the purpose of getting views," Chen said.

After collaborating with Olivia Thai, his number of subscribers rapidly increased, bringing him invites for performances outside of UCLA. Though Chen has no previ-

ous professional vocal training, he has participated in the UCLA Taiwanese American Union's a capella choir for two years.

Though Chen tries to remain low key about singing covers on YouTube, he receives much support from his friends, floormates and coworkers. His greatest support, however, comes from his parents.

"They're my biggest fans. I emailed some of my songs to my mom and she forwarded it to all her friends, but then she accidentally forwarded them to me too," he said, laughing.

Using YouTube as a means of distribution is unique from typical channels of distribution. It empowers its users to be completely self-reliant. Even more significantly, an artist's fans play a large role in this process, giving requests and commenting on their videos with not only compliments but critiques.

Though YouTube is a form of do-it-yourself distribution, artists still face challenges such as receiving harsh criticisms and achieving fame outside of the YouTube realm. Achieving mainstream success is equally as difficult for YouTube artists as it is for those who achieve their success the "traditional" way. Nevertheless, the nature of YouTube is viral and readily accessible, providing Asian American artists with unimaginable opportunities and a means for individuals to connect in a large creative community.

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## FILM

### **TOKYO SONATA:** *A bleak yet unique outlook on family dynamics*

SHIRLEY MAK // smak@media.ucla.edu

For a film titled “Tokyo Sonata,” Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s latest feature has very little to do with music. There’s some piano playing on the side, but the notes that ring true with audiences are not of a musical nature.

On the surface, the story is simple: a man loses his job in the struggling economy and lies to his family about it.

But like a sonata, Kurosawa’s film has varying degrees of complexity, starting first and foremost with its tone. “Tokyo Sonata” flows very erratically, going from family drama to dark comedy to love story and back again, always with a slightly jarring quality that keeps audiences on the edge of their seats, unable to predict when the credits will roll.

At the heart of “Tokyo Sonata” is a dysfunctional family (even by today’s standards) whose relatively banal existence is uprooted with an unexpected event that changes their lives forever.

The film’s key characters seem reminiscent of the stereotypical Asian family at its best: there’s the douche-bag (but still somewhat lovable) dad (Teruyuki Kagawa), the complacent and loving mom (Kyoko Koizumi), and two rebellious kids, one of whom is clearly more grounded than the other (Yu Koyanagi and Inowaki Kai). Japan’s version of “The Simpsons?” Perhaps. I’d buy a Kagawa action figure any day.

But Kurosawa, having directed horror hits such as

“Pulse” and “Cure,” is unable to resist adding dark nuances to each of his characters, fully fleshing them out to be the people we’d know and recognize in our own families—or at least what could be our families in their darkest and most genuine moments. “Tokyo Sonata” boasts a number of stellar performances, but Koizumi’s portrayal of a sweet but spineless housewife coming unglued at the seams is painfully honest and a joy to watch on-screen.

Perhaps resulting from a promising director’s eagerness to explore genres outside familiar territory, “Tokyo Sonata” shifts from comedy to suspense in a matter of moments, sometimes quite literally, mixing ordinary events with extraordinary ones in a way that’s almost too bizarre to be believable. But that’s exactly what keeps us convinced; full blown family catastrophes are rarely mundane or predictable.

The dad’s formerly quirky antics eventually turn violent; the mom, having lost both her identity and will in the patriarchal marriage, fumbles for stable footing outside the familiar; and each of their two sons embark on personal journeys, only some of which will lead them home. In all three instances, the notion of family becomes a scapegoat for the trauma that befalls each of them, tying them down to routine and rigidity without the promise of something better.

The film, however, does just the opposite: it not



PHOTO COURTESY OF REGENT RELEASING

Teruyuki Kagawa plays a manipulative and browbeat dad in Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s latest hit “Tokyo Sonata.”

only moves, it flees, jumping from scene to scene like a particularly commanding crescendo. Kurosawa packs layer and layer of emotional punch, as well as new plot developments, into one basic storyline, culminating in a final scene that seems oddly out of place in its quiet solemnity.

“Tokyo Sonata” doesn’t go out with a bang but rather ends with a moment of silence. The music has finally stopped and we’re watching the characters exit the stage, holding our breath as the curtains come to a close. Like the majority of the film, it’s neither completely funny, nor completely dark, but still emotionally powerful in its own way.

## ARCHITECTURE

### **SUZHOU MUSEUM:** *A meshing of two worlds*

RAY LUO // rluo@media.ucla.edu

When confronted by the past histories of our hometowns, do we embrace it or look beyond it?

The mayor of Suzhou—a historic city just west of Shanghai in China, wanted Chinese American architect I. M. Pei to design a museum near the Lion Grove garden once owned by Pei’s family. Instead of embracing the opportunity Pei declined repeatedly, citing as his reservation the pressures of creating something permanent in his home town.

Pei, a world renowned architect of works like the Mile High Center in Denver, the John Hancock Tower in Boston, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, is best known for his elegant design of the Glass Pyramid at the entrance of the Louvre in Paris.

Born in Guangzhou, southern China in 1917, Pei moved with his family to Suzhou, though his father later took up the duties of the director of the Bank of China, and they had to move. Pei went to school in Hong Kong and the University of Pennsylvania, before getting a degree from MIT in 1940. Unable to return to China due to the start of World War II, he stayed to teach at Harvard before joining the architectural firm of Webb and Knapp. After starting his own firm with James Freed and Henry Cobb, Pei became famous for his urban geometric designs at the JFK International Airport in New York and the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.

When Pei was approached again in 2001 about work on the Suzhou museum, it had already been over ten years since he built the Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong. His previous foray into designing for a home town that employed his father had not received the unanimous acclaim that he had hoped for. The triangle-tessellated design was meant to resemble bamboo shoots, but the practitioners of feng shui in Hong Kong were shocked at the bank’s angular look. Feng shui experts, who believed that a building and its inhabitants’ well-being rested on a harmonious relationship with their environment,

thought the tower looked too much like a meat knife, and predicted impending doom for the construction. Despite his own skepticism, Pei had forgotten that in Hong Kong, feng shui holds sway.

After much prodding from the Suzhou authorities, Pei saw that the possibility of creating a modern landmark in a rapidly booming mainland China outweighed the threat of any criticism that he would receive. He embarked on the Suzhou project with a greater concern for native sentiment than he had for the Bank of China project. It also took him three years longer to complete.

The geometric style that Pei brings to the Suzhou museum comes from a particularly Western influence. The windows in the museum, for example, embed intricate patterns in its tiles that resemble the structures of the Louvre pyramid. But layered above this functional Western look are Chinese influences. The window tiles are circumscribed by oval or octagonal frames that look like traditional Chinese windows found in a Qing dynasty house. West and East meet at the junction of the tiles and the frame that holds them together.

A visitor to the Suzhou museum is struck by the sounds evoking nature even within the hallways. A water fall can be heard in the west wing and only grows louder as one makes her way to the paintings. The building seems to shape the environment, in contrast to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Kaufman House—Falling Water, where the environment seems to shape the building. The harmonious meshing of two styles bespeaks the Chinese trait of avoiding contrasting clashes. Compare this to Pei’s Bank of China tower, a razor-like entity that sticks out like a bamboo shoot in a corn-field.

The most famous area of the Suzhou museum is a small footbridge that crosses a pond lined with a mountain landscape reminiscent of a classical Chinese water painting. The minimal color selection and the white wall that separates the pond from the trees outside both give the walk across the bridge a sense of Chinese seclusion.



PHOTO COURTESY OF I.M. PEI ARCHITECT WITH PEI PARTNERSHIP ARCHITECTS

The Great Hall at the I. M. Pei designed Suzhou Museum.

On the other hand, the arrangement of rocks on the pond and the symmetry of the footbridge give the landscape proportion and functionality, looks valued by the West. It’s as if the modernized bridge stands above a well-illustrated book of watercolors. The structure is Western, but the medium is Eastern.

Pei’s trademark angular style that permeated the Bank of China Tower persists in the Suzhou museum. The entrance is a geometric design using triangles, rectangles, and trapezoids of white walls, glass, and brown roofs. The select use of colors keeps the museum from looking like an “explosion in a shingle factory,” a phrase used to describe Marcel Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase,” one of the best examples of abstract art whose angularity made it inaccessible. Pei’s Suzhou museum is still abstract, but its expressiveness comes out of a balanced exterior.

The window of varied geometric shapes bound by a Chinese oval frame encapsulates the Suzhou museum, just as I. M. Pei’s Western architectural education seems to be bringing him home to his native land.

Pei’s museum invites us to conclude that one goes to America to make her name, but comes home to China to experience life.





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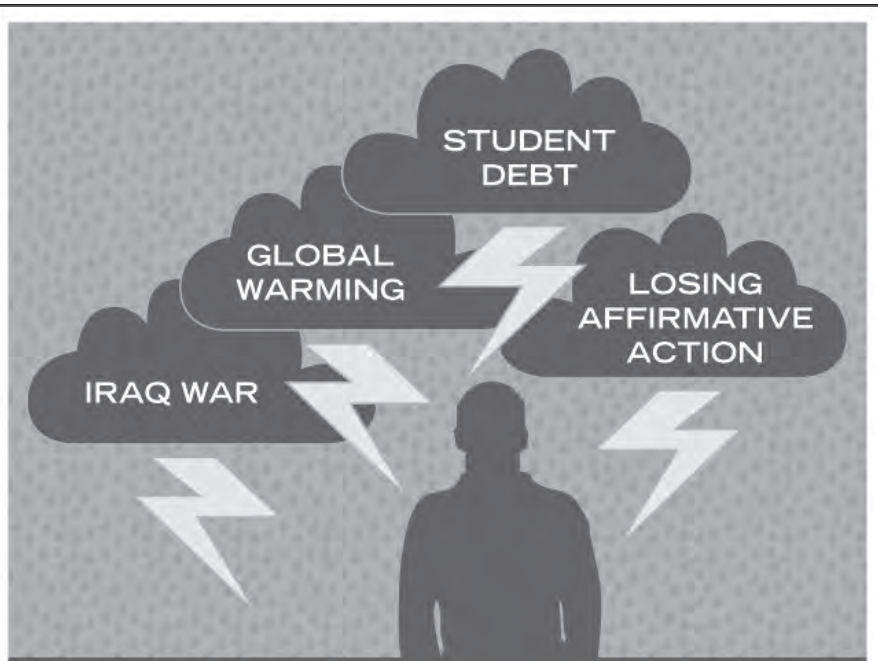
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**EAST WEST PLAYERS**  
TIM DANG, PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
PRESENTS

# MARRY ME A LITTLE

Songs by **STEPHEN SONDHEIM**  
Conceived and Developed by **CRAIG LUCAS & NORMA RENE**  
Directed by **JULES AARON**

An evening of 2 one-act musicals!

# THE LAST FIVE YEARS

Written and Composed by **JASON ROBERT BROWN**  
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## BOOK UNACCUSTOMED EARTH

SHIRLEY MAK // smak@media.ucla.edu

May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. For starters, I'm guessing this involves thinking about what it means to be Asian American.

When I was younger, I didn't like being Asian. I wanted pizza instead of rice. I preferred Saturday morning cartoons to the martial arts dramas that my grandmother would stick in the VCR player. When we took a family trip to China in the seventh grade, seeing the old historical palaces of Beijing and walking along the Great Wall didn't enthrall me. I felt no connection, only the thin line of sweat dripping slowly down my back.

Being Asian was something inherently connected to my parents and their history; it had nothing to do with me. I was Asian by default, not by choice. And yet now, though my "American" identity is still very much intact, I can't deny my Asian roots any more than I can change the blood in my veins or the names of my not so distant ancestors.

It took me some time to see that having roots is more than just the food, language and history of a specific ethnicity. Though it involves all these things to some extent, having roots is, ironically, not grounded in anything particularly concrete or easily definable.

Jhumpa Lahiri's latest collection of short stories, aptly titled *Unaccustomed Earth*, deals with this elusive nature of identity, both ethnic and otherwise, in a manner that asks all the right questions and yet, as prevalent in her previous works, offers no definite answers.

Lahiri's eight stories follow the lives of a myriad of characters that all have different roots. Some leave their native homeland in search of a new beginning – whether out of a desire to escape the familiar or because they have no other choice. Building upon a common idea found in many immigrant stories, America is seen as a land of opportunity, a country with fertile enough ground to plant the seeds of the next generation.

But what results isn't paradise.

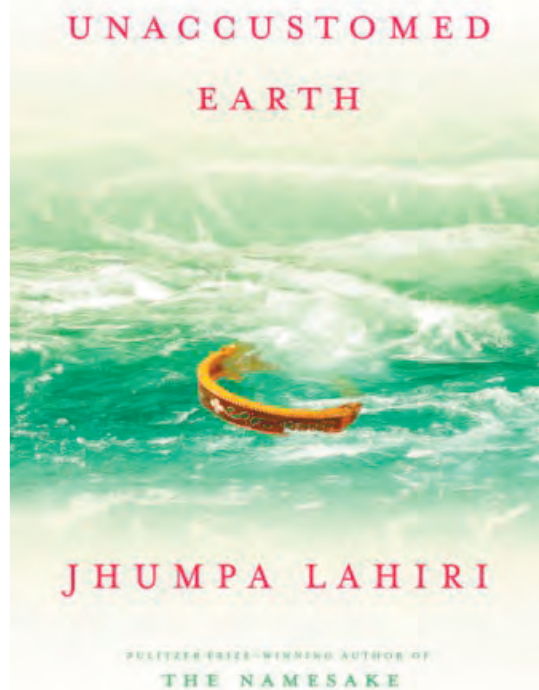
Many of Lahiri's first-generation characters, the children of those immigrants who first uprooted their lives for the sake of their future families, struggle with the rift that develops between the old traditions that their parents want them to follow and the paths that they themselves want to take.

Lahiri, through careful use of detail and lyrical storytelling, conveys the conflicting nature inherent in having one's roots in more than one place.

In the title story "Unaccustomed Earth," Ruma and her father's misunderstandings regarding each other's lives lead to a distance that can only be bridged by their love for Ruma's four year old son, Akash. In this particular story, family plays a defining factor in locating one's roots. Despite the disagreements and misunderstandings that arise among its members, they are, as Ruma's mother tells her, "made from your meat and bone." Lahiri parallels this innate familial bond with the garden that daughter, grandfather, and son help grow.

Lahiri skillfully explores the nuances in the ties her characters have with their families, their nationalities, and their past, as well as the transformations they undergo as their roots grow, change and eventually mature into fully formed lives, some ready to support latter generations, others content to thrive on their own.

Though each story is distinctive, the common thread running through all is the notion of being bound, whether it is to one's homeland, one's fam-



ily, or something else altogether.

While each of the eight stories is enjoyable to read, it is the last three, grouped together as "Hema and Kaushik," that resonates most with a perfect balance of both grace and novelty.

The story begins with the two protagonists in young adulthood, both distant from the Bengali-driven world that their parents occupy. Years later, their journeys intertwine once more when the two find themselves abroad in Rome, Hema now a researcher at an esteemed university and Kaushik a renowned photographer. Curiously, both jobs deem their ethnic origins "irrelevant." And yet it is their shared history, their reluctant desire to become attached to any one place, that draw the two of them together in a place that is both foreign yet familiar.

As Hema and Kaushik walk in and out of each other's lives, their tangled journeys lay the foundation for one of the story's most pressing questions: exactly how irrelevant are our roots, our ties to people, place, history, and love, when it comes to shaping who we eventually become?

As I reflect on Asian Pacific American Heritage month, this question constantly comes to mind, especially when thinking about my own Asian American identity. But it's not the answer that interests me.

Rather, it's the journey that really matters, and every journey begins somewhere, a story with compelling yet often indeterminate roots.



Jhumpa Lahiri is the author of "Interpreter of Maladies" as well as "The Namesake."

## ALBUM INLAND TERRITORY

EMILY HO // eho1@media.ucla.edu

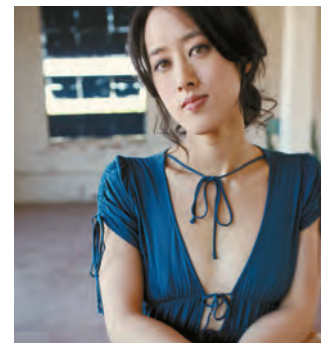


PHOTO BY KELLIE KANO

Somewhere in the world the voice of the ocean rumbles a reminder of its looming and unstoppable presence.

Elsewhere, a grandchild is chastised for chasing dreams that don't ensure a secure future. A suicide bomber targets a San Francisco street and a desperate American family moves to Mexico, an alternate universe's land of opportunity.

*Inland Territory*, Vienna Teng's latest display of her knack for storytelling, shares these tales and more with her personal life and observations as muses. Despite her Stanford-stamped degree in computer science, this Taiwanese American pianist left the field to pursue music, and she is far from struggling, as evidenced by the accomplished maturity in *Inland*. But this quality is nothing new for Teng. What is new is her risky deviation from the piano-driven sound of her three previous albums.

An electric guitar drives "White Light," providing a surprising burst of energy early on. Other atypical genres are found in the swing jazzy "In Another Life" and the country folkish "Grandmother Song," with steady hand claps and a use of strings that echoes of bluegrass. For "The Last Snowfall," Teng brings in a polyphonic choir, giving the song an old-fashioned feel reminiscent of a crackling fire on a winter night. Each twist in style works for her, and every line still reverberates of Teng's attention to detail.

Inspired by a Barack Obama rally, "Stray Italian Greyhound" exemplifies this new blend of hearty instrumentals and riveting lyrics. Teng sings of an uncontrollable flood of optimism that seems to creep into one's soul, but these feelings are completely unwelcome; her jaded cynicism is far more comfortable and familiar. With every chorus in "Greyhound," the music swells, mirroring the burning desire to resist the "inconvenient fireworks" and the "ice-cream-covered screaming hyperactive thought." Despite the song's origins, "Greyhound" works on many levels and can be understood from the viewpoint of someone who is unwillingly whirling into lovesickness.

Teng not only writes lyrics that transcend multiple interpretations, she also demonstrates the ability to address potentially charged subjects without seeming preachy. Her music puts the listeners in someone else's shoes, inspiring them to reconsider their feelings toward a given issue.

"No Gringo" presents the perspective of an American child whose family illegally immigrates to Mexico in the hopes of attaining a better life. Despite their hard work, they live in constant fear of discovery. Teng portrays the conspicuous and heavy sense of ostracism in the compellingly ballad-like piece.

In contrast, "Radio" contains an upbeat tempo, allowing for a jarring but effective contrast against the song's subject matter. By illustrating a suicide bombing on the streets of San Francisco, Teng reminds her listeners that horrible events are easier to ignore when they occur overseas. No true sympathy or shock is felt unless the attack occurs on one's homeland. As suggested in the chorus, people tend to brush off the awful stories they hear on the news or the radio. The narrative's bouncy tune deceptively makes the subject seem much lighter than it really is, thus mirroring people's attempts to pretend that all is right with the world.

Regardless of the style, lyrics, or message of each song, one thing is certain: *Inland* still carries the quiet strength that characterizes Teng's musical prowess and ability to relate to others. Her honeyed voice evokes a multitude of emotions, even if the listener cannot personally relate to the songs. Though she can be compared to singer-songwriters Tori Amos, Regina Spektor and Sarah McLachlan, Teng remains a category all her own, and *Inland* is a captivating embodiment of her refined style and incredibly wide range.

# BACKPAGE AROUND TOWN

CLAUDIA LI  
STEPFANIE AGUILAR  
MARIA RENTERIA

Photographs of the happenings in and around UCLA



PHOTO BY NATHAN HIEP TRAN

**AT ViFF |** Le Van Kiet, Legendary Vietnamese Actress Kieu Chinh, and Alan Vo Ford. Alan is the executive producer for "Journey From the Fall." This year, he is one of ViFF's sponsors.

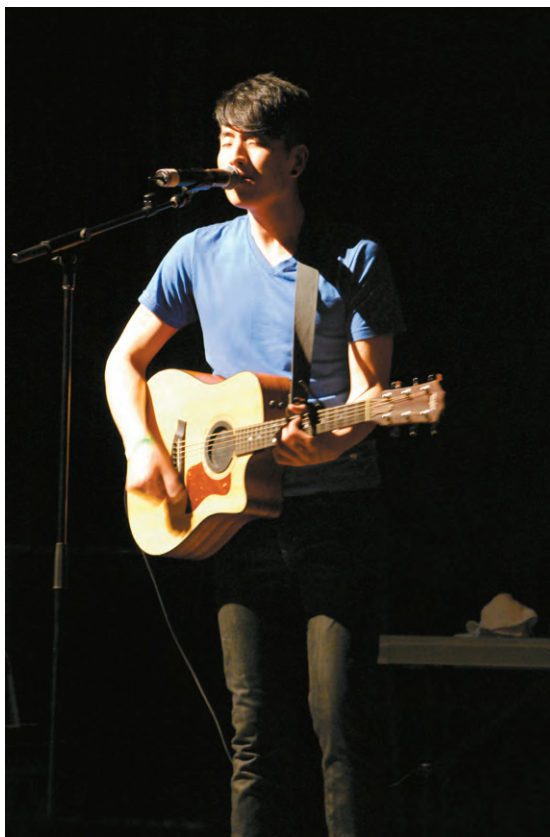


PHOTO BY STEPFANIE AGUILAR



PHOTO BY STEPFANIE AGUILAR



PHOTO BY STEPFANIE AGUILAR

**PEACE BABY |** The hunger for peace is universal to young and old at a local anti-war demonstration on Wilshire Blvd.

**AT MIGHTY MIC |** Daphne Loves Derby, Blackalicious, and monks from the Saffron Movement were the main attraction at this year's Mighty Mic - Benefit for Burma. Attendees had the opportunity to look at exhibits about Burma during the event.



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA LI



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA LI

**BONE MARROW DRIVE FOR MATTHEW NGUYEN |** 327 people registered over three days in the National Bone Marrow Registry. Nguyen, a UCLA alumni, has myelogenous leukemia. The Asians for Miracle Marrow Matches could help him find a match.



PHOTO BY MARIA RENTERIA