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## **AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community**

### **Title**

Reflection on Ten Years of AAPI Nexus: Vision, Realities, and Challenges

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/31158578>

### **Journal**

AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community, 11(1-2)

### **ISSN**

1545-0317

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### **Publication Date**

2013

### **DOI**

10.17953/appc.11.1-2.1172kj81687mh355

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Message from the Editors

## Reflection on Ten Years of AAPI Nexus: Vision, Realities, and Challenges

Paul M. Ong, Marjorie Kagawa Singer,  
and Melany De La Cruz-Viesca

*AAPI Nexus* was established more than a decade ago as a part of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center's (AASC) credo and commitment to bridging the town-gown divide and to dismantling the barrier separating the academy and larger community. AASC is a product of the ethnic studies struggle of the late 1960s, whose aims were to incorporate the history, current experiences, and voices of people of color in the United States into the curriculum; increase diversity within the student body and faculty; and redefine relationships between the university and ethnically diverse communities. These core principles remain relevant to the journal, whose mission is to create a body of cumulative knowledge with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) through research, policy, and practice in order to improve the well-being of AAPIs.

The codification and transmission of such knowledge is essential to breaking the pernicious cycle of "reinventing the wheel." The journal has specialized in problem solving and applied research for the Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander communities as well as the diverse Asian American communities. The struggle to implement this vision has been rewarding and trying, for there is still much more work to be done to address political, social, and economic inequalities. To this end, *AAPI Nexus* was founded on three principles that continue to guide its operations. The first is that knowledge is critical in guiding action to ensure effective agency that generates desired social change. For too long, the lack of data has hampered advocacy efforts and policy change. Evidence-based understanding of the nature and magnitude of the problems facing AAPI communities is also fundamental to effective policies, programs and practice. For example, informed advocacy is facilitated by the authoritative statistics in the journal's resource papers. But knowing the problem is not enough. Discov-

ering causality is a critical step in identifying possible points of feasible intervention and greatest leverage. The journal's research articles provide scholars with an opportunity to report empirical findings based on analytical techniques and methods widely accepted as state-of-the-art science within academic fields. Because real-world problems are shaped by multiple factors not bounded by a single intellectual discipline, we continue to seek insights from a wide range of fields, for refining epistemological approaches with an interdisciplinary and multilevel perspective is equally important. Established research practices provide a foundation for scholarly work, but unmodified application to the study of AAPIs ignores cultural, linguistic, societal, and institutional differences. We publish methodological-oriented resource papers and research articles that address these limitations.

The second principle is values are important. Our normative position is tied to beliefs about what should and could be a better future. These values embody aspirations and hopes for social justice, political equality, and economic fairness. These subjective ideas are not easily objectively verified, but have concrete consequences for individual behavior, collective norms, and policy decisions. Conflicting values are at the core of many political impasses, such as the "cultural wars" of recent decades. Within the academy, normative values influence which research questions are socially acceptable, supported by public and private funds, and privileged for publication. Once the research questions are selected, the research is conducted as objectively as possible, adhering to established professional ethics. However, this normative scientific behavior is based within a monocultural framework. *AAPI Nexus* challenges the selection biases within the mainstream by publishing research outside the prevailing norm to answer questions more salient to our communities. We still, however, uphold scientific integrity and quality with rigorous research standards through careful reviews, including blind peer reviews.

Normative values are important in giving subjective meaning and priority to policy choices; however, whose norms guide the research question and data interpretation should always be transparent, and a multi-cultural perspective should now be the evolving lens of scientific inquiry. For example, cost-effectiveness and efficiency are the "bread and butter" of policy analyses, however, the outcomes cannot be just those easily quantified and monetized.

Such narrow criteria, in particular, may continue to disadvantage marginalized communities. Value-based priorities as a consensus across diverse groups should be an integral element of political and policy discussions, and the journal honors this through the publication of practitioner's essays where those on the front line have an opportunity to express opinions and to advocate based on beliefs and firsthand experience working on the ground—in the town, not the gown of the theoretical Ivory Tower.

The third principle is that the generation of knowledge is not limited to those within the academy. The strengths of research in higher education are also its weaknesses. Academic scholars are highly specialized, grounded in abstract theories and concepts, trained to use sophisticated analytical tools, and embedded within closed intellectual communities too often segregated along disciplinary boundaries. Membership is exclusive, requiring years of education, training, and testing using monocultural criteria. The dominant approach is to simplify the real world by eliminating, controlling, or ignoring confounding factors outside the narrowly prescribed prevailing paradigm. This silo approach has yielded an impressive body of knowledge, but is inappropriate for studying the complexity of real-world problems facing AAPIs, whose causes are multidimensional, complicated, linked, and dynamic. This mismatch privileges the restrictive disciplinary perspective of the researcher, which is often partial and naïve when applied in a community unfamiliar to the researcher or to the existing body of knowledge. Those outside the academy, particularly practitioners, are much more attune to real-world complexity and, therefore, less likely to be intellectually myopic. Moreover, an increasing number of community organizations are generating independent research on their own or collaborative research in partnership with a university. One of the advantages of this approach is a greater access to local insights and knowledge, and stronger tests of external validity. *AAPI Nexus* fosters the production of knowledge outside the academy by seeking and publishing community-based research.

*AAPI Nexus* also informs policy debates and arenas with research on understudied populations and topics related to Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. The majority of research that we publish has featured deductive quantitative data that complements other sources of knowledge, such as inductive, qualitative, and historical voices from community leaders, in

order to offer fuller, contextualized, more nuanced, and relevant explanations of real-world situations. It is vital that we use and document these multiple frameworks (e.g., research, organizing, and advocacy) to improve access and knowledge both from and for underserved AAPI communities. In addition, we are filling the gaps to better understand the position and experiences of AAPIs by publishing data disaggregated by ethnic groups or subgroups.

The ten-year journey of *AAPI Nexus* has been fraught with enormous difficulties and hurdles in implementing its vision. Financially supporting the enterprise has been daunting. *AAPI Nexus* has been extremely fortunate to have had the unwavering support of the AASC, which has provided staff time and funds despite the center's budget cuts. This started with Professor Don T. Nakanishi, who was the AASC's director when the journal was conceived, and continues with Professor David K. Yoo, the Center's current director. Numerous UCLA faculty members and colleagues in the Asian American studies field, AAPI community leaders, and members of our advisory board have also been supportive by contributing and donating their time and energy for editorial services, serving as guest editors, reviewers, and cosponsors. Individual and institutional subscribers support the journal through their payments. Finally, we have been able to partner with other organizations to sponsor thematic special issues, such as the one with the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI). The *Forging the Future* special double issue is arguably the most comprehensive publication to date on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. In this volume, more than fifty leading AAPI scholars, applied researchers, and community leaders from all over the nation covered the most current demographic data trends and federal policy—including policy briefs on civil rights, economic development, education, health, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

Answering President Barack Obama's call to increase participation by AAPIs in federal programs, *Forging the Future* spotlighted ways to improve education, health care, and housing for traditionally underrepresented groups, such as Native Hawaiians and Hmong Americans, with this pioneering special issue. The release of the journal coincided with the second anniversary of the WHIAAPI, established on October 14, 2009, when President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13515: "Increasing the Par-

ticipation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Federal Programs.” The special issue included activities of the WHIAAPI from 2009 through 2011, and research presented at a WHIAAPI convening on research and data collection in December 2010.

Despite the power of our publications in informing policy, our operating resources have been piecemeal and far from being sufficient, in part because *AAPI Nexus* faces a structural problem of not having a natural audience. While the journal prides itself in working at the intersections of disciplines and societal problems, this approach also places the journal at the margins of each. Most of the time, readers are only interested in the articles related to their specific field; consequently, they are unlikely to pay for a journal that mostly falls outside their particular interest and orientation. In trying to serve a disparate set of academic and community stakeholders, *AAPI Nexus* is not central to any, but is central to the natural partnership of each of the audiences. Each of the constituents not only live their professional lives in partnership with the other groups to effect change, but also conduct their lives separately to survive financially within their individual realms. This dilemma is real, and structural changes are needed to foster the natural nexus of our audiences to more effectively reach their mutual goals.

Despite these shortcomings, the journal has developed ambitious plans for the future. There are a few near-future objectives worth noting—a wish list of possible accomplishments over the next few years. One, the journal should reach out beyond its social sciences base to academic and public scholars in the humanities and cultural studies for alternative ideas that enhance problem solving. Two, the journal should move more visibly into policy arenas inadequately covered within Asian American studies, such as the emerging environmental crisis highlighted in this volume, and three, the journal should seek opportunities to partner across ethnic and racial lines in order to explore commonalities and differences with Latinos, African Americans, and American Indians.

Our future efforts must also include sharing knowledge with elected officials and policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels, so that we can continue to make a significant contribution to promote and strengthen policy and applied research on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. Of course, none of these objectives is achievable unless the journal becomes intellectually and financially sustainable and is more widely rec-

ognized as relevant to community, policy, and practice. Greater access to the journal and the specific articles of interest to each audience is now available and readily accessible over the Internet at very little cost. Ideally, knowledge should be a widely and easily available public good. Information can be made available, but the reality is that there are huge costs to doing so.

We continue to pursue the vision, however, that the mission of the journal is still essential. Collaboration across disciplines and domains is fundamental to elevating the visibility and well-being of the AAPI population in the United States, and we believe that *AAPI Nexus* is the unifying voice. We invite you to join and support our effort by using and citing the papers in the journal and building the networks of support so that The NEXUS of disciplines and communities is the reality within the next ten years.

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MARJORIE KAGAWA SINGER, PhD, MA, MN, RN, FAAN, is a professor in the UCLA School of Public Health and Department of Asian American Studies. She has been the senior editor of *AAPI Nexus*; is actively involved in research, teaching, and community engagement focusing on the elimination of health disparities; and coordinates the concurrent program between the Asian American Studies Department and Community Health Sciences for the dual master's degree. She participates on numerous boards and committees at the local, state, and national level for cancer control and public health, such as the LA County Women's Health Policy Advisory Board, the Board of the National American Cancer Society, the Intercul-

tural Cancer Council, and the Foundation for Psychocultural Research. Her research expands the traditional behavioral research paradigm to operationalize culture in the incidence and experience of cancer and other chronic diseases. She also focuses much of her work with communities to build their capacity to reduce the unnecessary burden of disease in their communities through direct services and policy advocacy with the goal of health equity.

MELANY DE LA CRUZ-VIESCA is the Assistant Director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center (AASC) and the Managing Editor of *AAPI Nexus*. She also serves as the Director of the AAPI Community Development Census Information Center, a joint partnership between AASC, the National Coalition of Asian Pacific American Community Development, and the U.S. Census Bureau. Her research and publications focus on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander demographics, in relation to the racial wealth gap, housing policy, community and economic development, and access to higher education. She was appointed by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in 2008 and recently reappointed by Mayor Eric Garcetti to the City's Human Relations Commission. She holds a master's degree in urban planning from UCLA and a bachelor's degree in ethnic studies and urban studies and planning from UC San Diego.