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Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies by Khatharya Um



"The program has been steadfast in keeping alive the flame of its founding values, such as anti-racism, gender equality, community building, activism, pan-ethnic alliance, and social justice."

- Professor Emerita Sau-Ling Wong

Over the last 50 years since its formation, the Asian American Studies program, now renamed Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies (AAADS), has not only shaped the teaching and research on race and Asian American communities at Berkeley, but also the fields of Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies nationally and internationally. AAADS has produced, and continues to seed and nurture, generations of scholars, thought leaders, and changemakers whose contributions span all sectors of American society including the academy, the arts, politics, science and technology, law, education, medicine, and civil society.

A flagship program in the nation and an invaluable intellectual home for many Berkeley students, the vision and vitality of AAADS rest on the research, teaching, and mentorship of the faculty featured on this page. The trailblazers spotlighted here not only broke new grounds in their respective fields; they helped form those fields. They are also pioneering women both in and beyond the academy who faced challenges on multiple fronts, and thrived, in their path to excellence.

Collectively and across generations, AAADS women faculty have carried forward the legacies of the program and contributed not only to the continued growth of Asian American Studies but also to the advancement of Berkeley's intellectual and public mission.

In these turbulent times of resurgent anti-Asian racism and violence, and in our 21st century that holds both promises and perils, their scholarship is now more important than ever.



Professor Emerita Elaine H. Kim

First Asian woman to earn tenure at Cal & founding member of Ethnic Studies Department and the Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies Program

Elaine Kim on a Reckoning With Race Many Years in the Making

A conversation with Berkeley's first tenured Asian woman By Laura Smith

Before Elaine Kim came to Berkeley as a Ph.D. student in 1968, she was used to being the only Asian person in the room. Kim, who is Korean American, was born in New York and raised in a predominantly working class white suburb of Washington, D.C., the daughter of a migrant farmworker mother and waiter-turned-diplomat father.

Elaine Kim was the first Asian woman to get tenure at Berkeley. She would go on to be the University's first Asian woman to get tenure and a founding member of both the Ethnic Studies Department and the Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies program.

At Berkeley, while she wasn't alone, she didn't feel she belonged. Non-white students didn't see themselves reflected in the curriculum or the faculty. In 1969, Kim joined the Third World Liberation Front protests demanding that the university acknowledge the contributions of communities of color to history and scholarship. "Our motto was, 'if something you want does not exist, you can try to create it,'" she says. The result was the founding of the Ethnic Studies Department.

It was not all roses from there. When she became a lecturer in 1971, teaching a remedial English course, she told her supervisor that policies about who would be required to take the class—which students were required to pay for but which earned them zero credits—were racist and unfair. She was fired from the program. The director’s husband told her she had “a history of deviousness.”

The questions of who is represented and how define Kim’s career. In the years that followed her academic career, she wrote books and produced films documenting the Asian American experience, whether it be in Hollywood or the 1992 Los Angeles riots in the wake of the Rodney King verdict.

Once again, as we encounter more examples of widespread Asian hate in America and find ourselves in a place to reimagine our country’s relationship to race, California magazine spoke to Elaine Kim about what we can learn from those early fights and where we might be headed. The discussion has been edited for length and clarity.

Much of your career has been devoted to correcting representations of the Korean community and Asian American/Pacific Islanders (AAPI) more generally. What were we missing when you started your career?

In the early days, one person would be designated as the spokesperson for the entire group. So for example, after Amy Tan published *Joy Luck Club*, the news media asked her about Tiananmen, and then when Chang-Rae Lee wrote *Native Speaker*, they asked him about Korean unification because they didn’t know who to ask. So it’s a real problem for communities to have one voice represent the whole to begin with. It’s much better now.

I just asked you to speak for a very large group. I imagine that’s frustrating.

I appreciate that, but I don’t feel like I’m speaking for anybody but myself right now. Have you read that book *Buddha in the Attic* by Julie Otsuka? What’s really great about that book is she uses both the first person plural and the first person singular. She writes, “We all arrived as picture brides.” She represents both their individual experiences and the collective experiences they shared with thousands of other picture brides as they disembarked from their ship to see their picture husbands for the first time. Some were really happy about it. And some were not. “I got raped on my wedding night,” “My husband was really nice to me,” “My husband was a no-show, I picked somebody else”—all these different realities under one umbrella. And I thought she was really making a comment on how you can’t have “the group is the group.”

Along those lines, what do you think about the term AAPI, as a catch-all for a really diverse group of people? Is it too big?

Politically, it has to be that way, because you can't get anything done for Hmong people, unless they're in a group of Southeast Asians. In that unity and with those numbers, we're able to have more political clout. But now [people acknowledge the differences] saying, "We have a really diverse community. I'm just one person speaking."

Did you grow up feeling represented in your community?

I grew up in the D.C. area, and schools were desegregated when I was in junior high school. My brother and I were the only Asians, I think. And then there was one Puerto Rican kid and then maybe 12 Black kids. It was very Jewish and Anglo working class. I went to the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia. I was used to being the only Asian American. They always thought I was foreign and about to return to my home country. And they said that I spoke English really well. So I was definitely made to feel like I was temporarily here. I didn't really know that many Asian Americans until I got to Berkeley.

How did that feel to suddenly be surrounded by people who looked like you?

I looked at Asian Americans the way I think white people probably looked at Asian Americans because I was used to being the only Asian American. When I got to California, I saw all these very American [Asians]. There were many kinds of Asian Americans, including very cool ones, including really fashionable ones and ones who dressed like gangsters. I was so shocked. I felt really self-conscious to approach them. Other students have told me that, when they grew up in a totally white community and got to UCLA or Berkeley, they felt the same way. In the old days, I'd have a class that had 200 students in it, all Asian Americans, and they might have looked like they were all cut from the same cloth, but they were all different, of course. Some of them felt strange being in a whole room full of other Asian Americans.

Is this what got you interested in questions of representation?

One of the big things back in the day, was stereotyping in Hollywood. I would say very early on, everybody was interested in representation and felt the importance of films and television in our fate. And so all the students could relate to the fact that, for men, there was only Charlie Chan. Bruce Lee wasn't even a possibility because they wouldn't let him play in the roles. And then for women, it was just as bad—Madame Butterfly and Dragon Lady. And then there were all the faceless hordes that obey the communist dictator.

And how did you start getting into activism and community organizing?

One of the premises of [the Third World] strike was that instead of bringing education to your ghetto, or your reservation, or your Chinatown, we were encouraged to get away from those

communities and live a successful life away from them. And we did not want to be educated away from our communities; we wanted to work for and in them. Many of the really important nonprofit organizations that exist today exist because of that group of people: the Asian Law Caucus, Asian Health Services, East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation.

We had the advantage of mainstream society being so shocked that they didn't know what to do about our protests—and so we did get money to start these organizations. It's like Martin Luther King: People think that we all graciously named all our schools and streets after him, but they forget that he was actually stabbed with scissors and spit on. They might think that all these things were granted. But actually, they were struggled for.

In response to the very disruptive student strike, the administration agreed to fund the ethnic studies programs.

We're in a similar stage right now, where buildings are having their names removed, but it's contentious. And it's hard. Generations from now, people may think that it was very smooth, that it was never uncomfortable for anyone.

Or even that the university administration said, "Oh, let's rename the buildings!"

Right. So you were one of the founders of the Ethnic Studies Department, and you've talked about the resistance you faced in implementing a curriculum that wasn't just about white male scholarship. You also experienced structural and more explicit racism. I don't know if I would have stuck around to see how things turned out, if I were you.

We were very segregated; nobody wanted joint classes with us, or joint appointments or anything. We were not asked to participate in policy planning or decision making in the university. They still thought that image from 1968 prevailed in 1990. It's kind of amazing. But we were together. I thought the University was hostile, but Ethnic Studies wasn't hostile. We had each other. Because of that, it wasn't really that bad.

Going forward, will this reckoning we're experiencing now—both in terms of awareness of anti-Asian sentiment, but also on race more generally speaking—will this stick?

I really felt with Black Lives Matter that it might be different this time. Five years ago, I used to hear comments from white women at my gym like "I don't understand why they don't just do what the police say?" or "Look, they're killing people in East Oakland. I'm so glad the bad guys are killing each other and not us." I never said anything, but I always thought, "Oh, it's really good that I came here so I could hear these conversations." I really do think that there are people who might not have really believed that if you're Black and breathing, or Black and sleeping, you might get killed for that. Or just if you're in the car, you've got to stick both hands out, and

you've got to do everything you can to avoid being killed. And I think they believe it now. They believe it and they don't like it.

There have always been lots of white students who supported ethnic studies. All along there have been allies, of course, in the faculty and also with the students. Now people are volunteering to escort elderly Asian ladies down the street. I keep seeing now that there's more credit given to Black talent than there ever was before. That's amazing. So I think the moment is here, again. I think that we can do it, and maybe do it better. There's more understanding of what's possible and what to ask for than there used to be. I think people your age are going to do it.



Professor Emerita Sau-ling C. Wong

Pioneer in critical scholarship on Sinophone literature in diasporic context and Chinese immigrant writing courses, whose work laid the theoretical foundation for transnationalizing Asian American Studies at UC Berkeley

The Asian American Studies (AAS) Program was founded in 1969. In 2010, it changed its name to the Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies (AAADS) Program. This renaming is a marker of how our Program's intellectual, political and pedagogical concerns have developed in the last half-century. As a native of Hong Kong who immigrated to the U.S., I experienced the sweeping global and domestic forces that compelled a paradigm shift in the field. (My 1995 essay, "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," offers an in-depth analysis of these changes. It remains a key theoretical document in the literature.) It was the manifold repercussions of these transformations that drove my academic career of almost three decades.

My early years at Berkeley saw rapid demographic shifts in UC Berkeley's student body after the 1965 immigration reforms. To serve the hitherto neglected language needs of Asian American students, I revised, taught in, and trained instructors for the AAS Reading and Composition series for a number of years. I published articles on Chinese ESL learners and co-edited two volumes on second-language groups in the U.S. In 1996, "Multiple Discourses, Multiple Identities" (with Sandra L. McKay) appeared in *Harvard Educational Review*. It has been cited numerous times since then for its attention to both the learners' subjection to complex discursive forces and their agency in shaping their identity as language users.

A second area in which I contributed to AAADS is through teaching and research on Asian American literature. Drawing on my bilingual, bicultural background, I published extensively on Anglophone Asian American literature as well as Sinophone Chinese American literature. My *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*, first published in 1993, still in print and still being taught, establishes a theoretical foundation for studying Asian American literature as a "textual coalition" beyond its documentary value, as amenable to critical methods as anything in "the canon," yet sensitive to Asian American groups' unique historical and cultural experiences.

As for Sinophone Chinese American literature, I was among the first U.S. scholars to offer courses on Chinese immigrant writing (read in Chinese) and film; to publish critical (as opposed to descriptive) studies of Sinophone literature in the diasporic context; and to introduce this type of criticism to mainland China. I worked closely with critics in Taiwan, where Asian American literary studies has become a thriving field. From interacting with international scholars, I developed an interest in the global "traveling" of Asian American texts; in comparative reception studies; and in theorizing what the shifting definitions of Sinophone diasporic writing means in terms of cultural claims, nationalism, and geopolitics, in particular in the context of the rise of China. *Huamei: Essays on Chinese American and Sinophone Diasporic Literature*, a two-volume collection of my essays translated into Chinese, just came out in Taiwan in 2020.

In 2014, I received the Asian American Studies Association Lifetime Achievement Award for excellence in scholarship and mentorship. I am proud of having "grown up" with this vibrant and ever-morphing academic discipline, and having played a role in AAADS's intellectual endeavors and institution-building. Name change notwithstanding, our Program has been steadfast in keeping alive the flame of its founding values, such as anti-racism, gender equality, community building, activism, pan-ethnic alliance, and social justice. Interestingly, these ideas are now being "discovered," and the need for ethnic studies recognized, by an increasing number of Americans, in response to undeniably worsening racial inequality and anti-Asian violence. These are, we should note, precisely what AAADS has been engaged with through its curriculum, research, publications, and advocacy for the last fifty years.



Professor Emerita Evelyn Nakano Glenn

Inaugural Director of the Center for Race and Gender, the first center at Berkeley dedicated to issues of race and gender

Evelyn Nakano Glenn is a scholar of cultural discourse, comparative historical studies of race, and the relationship between class gender, race, and labor markets. She completed her B.A. at the University of California, Berkeley and Ph.D. at Harvard University. Glenn was hired in 1990 to fill a joint position in the AAADS program and the Gender and Women's Studies department; she split her time teaching between Gender and Women's Studies, the AAADS program, and Ethnic Studies doctoral program until retirement in 2015. Below is an interview with the professor for the 50th anniversary of the AAADS program.

How has the program changed in that span of time?

Perhaps the most significant change was in the name and focus from "Asian American Studies" to "Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies." In the earlier period, there was a felt need to assert the "Americanness" of the Asian American experience and to emphasize the commonalities in the experiences and treatment of Asian Americans and other communities of color (African American, Native American, and Latinx). We used concepts such as "third world minorities" and "internal colonies" to characterize these commonalities. Framing our situations in these ways fostered political solidarity among these groups who demanded that the University create Ethnic Studies programs and departments. Also, it seemed important in that early period to claim an "American minority" identity, rather than transnational identity to counter the dominant trope of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. By the early 2000s, however, it became clear that Asian American Studies needed to recognize the global dimensions of Asian migration and the value of exploring the connections and aporias in the experiences of Asian communities across the globe

What are your proudest contributions to the program and field?

I am proud of my leadership as founding director of the Center for Race and Gender, which nurtured research and writing on women of color, undocumented students, and helped foster a sense of community among faculty and students of color.

How do you characterize your intellectual, social, political work within the field of Asian American studies?

My early research focused on gender, race, and labor, specifically Japanese American women in domestic work, based on oral history interviews. I coined the term « racial division of women's work » to describe the concentration of women of color in paid domestic and caring labor. My later work focused on comparative histories of Asian Americans, Mexican American, and African American labor and citizenship. My community involvement has focused on redress for Japanese Americans who were unjustly interned during World War II, on the extension of rights to household workers, and support for for undocumented immigrant student at Berkeley and elsewhere.

What are the most pressing questions or critical issues facing Asian Americans today, and how can AAADS address them?

Two issues come to mind. First, especially relevant for those of us in the academy, is the question of what can we do to counter the efforts of anti-affirmative action activists to use Asian Americans as stalking horses to undermine affirmative action in college admissions? More generally, how can we continue to strengthen alliances with other groups of color and to challenge white privilege?

Second, is what can be done to stem the rising tide of violence directed at Asian Americans ? Though linked to the present-day Covid 19 epidemic, anti-Asian violence is, in a sense, an American tradition. Historian Jean Pfaelzer has documented large scale mob attacks, arsons, and lynching that drove Chinese out of Seattle, Tacoma, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Modesto and scores other cities and towns during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Contemporarily, Asian Americans have reached a critical mass such that they have some political voice. Thus, they have successfully lobbied Congress to pass legislation classifying violence directed at Asian Americans as hate crimes that are tracked and monitored by the federal agencies. Here too, organizing and forming alliances with Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans and others fighting violence against people of color and women seems important.



Associate Professor Khatharya Um

First Cambodian American woman to receive a PhD and to join the UC faculty & the first Cambodian woman political scientist in Cambodia's history

Khatharya Um is Associate Professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies and Coordinator of the Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies Program. She received her B.A. and M.A. in Political Science at the University of California, San Diego and PhD in Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley where she was also a Chancellor's Distinguished Postdoctoral Fellow. She is an internationally acclaimed scholar whose research and publications center on migration, diaspora, and critical refugee studies, Southeast Asian and Southeast Asian American studies, postcolonial studies, and genocide studies with a particular focus on the politics of memory and post-conflict healing. She has published extensively in these areas including the recent books *Southeast Asian Migration: People on the Move in Search of Work, Refuge and Belonging* and *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora*, a groundbreaking study that illuminates the enduring legacies of war, genocide, and exile.

Professor Um's scholarship is foundational to the fields of Southeast Asian American Studies and Critical Refugee Studies. She co-founded the UC-wide Critical Refugee Studies Collective that works to reframe refugee discourse and recenter refugee voices and perspectives, and is Co-Editor of the UC Press Critical Refugee Studies Book Series. Her groundbreaking contributions are also in the field of Southeast Asian American Studies. Through her scholarship and courses that are among the first in the nation to address the relational and comparative histories, cultures, and experiences of Southeast Asian Americans, she effectively built a thriving Southeast Asian American Studies program at Berkeley, and contributed significantly to the growth of the field nationwide.

She also helps advance Berkeley's internationalization mission as Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies Program, and in her leadership roles on various initiatives of the International Alliance of Research Universities, including as Chair of the Global Transformation Strategic Working Group. She also works with United Nations agencies on migration issues and peace promoting initiatives, including leading an international team of scholars, researchers, and teachers in the development of a secondary school curriculum on Southeast Asian shared histories that has been integrated into the national curricula of numerous Southeast Asian countries. As the long serving Faculty Director of Berkeley Study Abroad program, she effectively promoted the participation of students of color, first-generation students, and transfer students in study abroad. In addition to her field-forming scholarship, Professor Um is also a long-standing advocate who has helped shape state and national policies in the US, particularly on issues of educational access and inclusion. Her research on Southeast Asian American educational experiences was instrumental in pushing for disaggregation of the Asian American data. Professor Um was a founder of the National Cambodian American Organization, and has led many national refugee serving organizations. In recognition of her work and leadership, she received the Chancellor's Award for Advancing Institutional Excellence and Equity. She was the first Cambodian American woman to receive a PhD.



Associate Professor Carolyn Chen

Scholar on Ethnicity, Immigration, Race, Religion

Carolyn Chen is an associate professor in Ethnic Studies and the Program in Asian and Asian American Diaspora. Her research and teaching focus on religion, work, immigration, race, and ethnicity in the United States. She earned a Ph.D. in Sociology from UC Berkeley in 2002 and A.B. in Sociology at Brown University. Prior to teaching at Berkeley, she was Associate Professor of Sociology and Asian American Studies at Northwestern University, where she served as Director of the Asian American Studies Program. Chen is the author of *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience* (Princeton 2008) and co-editor of

Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation (NYU 2012). Chen's new book, *The Dharma According to Google: When Work Replaces Religion in Silicon Valley*, examines Asian spirituality in Silicon Valley firms and is forthcoming with Princeton University Press.



Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy

Scholar on Gender, Migration, Nursing, Philippine and Filipino American Studies

Catherine Ceniza Choy is Professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley. The daughter of Filipino immigrants, Catherine was born and raised in New York City. She received her Ph.D. in History from UCLA in 1998 and her B.A. in History from Pomona College in 1991. She chaired Cal's Department of Ethnic Studies (2012-2015, 2018-2019), served as Associate Dean of College of Letters & Science's Division of Undergraduate Studies (2019-2021), and was a member of the Faculty Leadership Academy's inaugural cohort in 2019. Her scholarly specialties include Asian American history, Filipino American studies, race, gender, and migration, nursing history, and adoption studies. She is the author of the book, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (2003), which explored how and why the Philippines became the leading exporter of professional nurses to the United States. *Empire of Care* received the 2003 American Journal of Nursing History and Public Policy Book Award and the 2005 Association for Asian American Studies History Book Award. It is included in the Social Science Research Council's #coronavirussyllabus.

An engaged public scholar, Catherine has been interviewed in many media outlets, including ABC 20/20, The Atlantic, CNN, Los Angeles Times, NBC News, New York Times, ProPublica, San Francisco Chronicle, Time, and Vox, on the disproportionate toll of COVID-19 on Filipino nurses in the United States, anti-Asian, coronavirus-related violence, and racism and misogyny in the March 16 Atlanta murders. Her second book, *Global Families: A History of Asian*

International Adoption in America (2013), unearths the little-known historical origins of Asian international adoption in the United States beginning with the post-World War II presence of the U.S. military in Asia.

Catherine is the editor of the Brill book series Gendering the Trans-Pacific World, which explores the gendered nature of the Pacific World by focusing on diaspora, empire, and race. Its inaugural volume is the anthology, Gendering the Trans-Pacific World (2017), which Catherine co-edited with Judy Tzu-Chun Wu. Catherine teaches Asian American history courses at UC Berkeley and beyond, having served as an Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lecturer (2017-2020) and a Fulbright Distinguished Lecturer at Yonsei University (2015-2016). She is writing the book “Asian American Histories of the United States” (Beacon Press, under contract), and a book featuring biographies of Filipino American women, tentatively titled “In No Man’s Shadow: The Filipino Woman in America and the World.”



Associate Professor Lok Siu

Scholar on Chinese Diaspora, Cultural Citizenship, Politics of Food, Ethnography

Dr. Lok Siu is a cultural anthropologist and Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies and Asian American/Asian Diaspora Studies at UC Berkeley. She is also the Chair of Berkeley's Senate Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Campus Climate, as well as an affiliated faculty in Anthropology, the Center for Race and Gender, the Center for Chinese Studies, the Center for Latin American Studies, and the Berkeley Food Institute. Siu completed her Ph.D. in Anthropology at Stanford University in 2000 and undergraduate studies in Anthropology with minor in Ethnic Studies at Cal in 1993. Her specialization includes Asians in the Americas; belonging and citizenship; comparative and relational studies of race/gender/class; and the cultural politics of food.

Siu's books include *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (2005) and co-edited volumes *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (2007), *Gendered Citizenships: Transnational Perspectives on knowledge Production, Political Activism, and Culture* (2009), and *Chinese Diaspora: Its Development in Global Perspective* (2021). She is a two-time recipient of the Social Science Book Award from the National Asian American Studies Association. Siu also publishes in journals, anthologies, and various media platforms. As a regular public speaker, she contributes and appears in national and international media, including CNN, NYT, WSJ, Bloomberg, CBS, WNYC, VOX.com, Le Temps, and the Spanish Agency EFE.