National Park Service
Department of the Interior

Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science

2016 National Park Service CENTENNIAL

LGBTQ AMERICA

A THEME STUDY OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, and QUEER HISTORY

Edited by Megan E. Springate

Published online 2016
www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqthemestudy.htm

LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History is a publication of the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service.

We are very grateful for the generous support of the Gill Foundation, which has made this publication possible.

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Washington, DC

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INCLUSIVE STORIES

Although scholars of LGBTQ history have generally been inclusive of women, the working classes, and gender-nonconforming people, the narrative that is found in mainstream media and that many people think of when they think of LGBTQ history is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, male, and has been focused on urban communities. While these are important histories, they do not present a full picture of LGBTQ history. To include other communities, we asked the authors to look beyond the more well-known stories. Inclusion within each chapter, however, isn't enough to describe the geographic, economic, legal, and other cultural factors that shaped these diverse histories. Therefore, we commissioned chapters providing broad historical contexts for two spirit, transgender, Latino/a, African American Pacific Islander, and bisexual communities. These chapters, read in concert with the chapter on intersectionality, serve as examples of rich, multi-faceted narrative within a fuller history of the United States.

11 BREATHING FIRE: REMEMBERING ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN ACTIVISM IN QUEER HISTORY

Amy Sueyoshi

On July 1, 2015 the Respect After Death Act (California Assembly Bill 1577) took effect in California enabling transgender people to record their chosen gender on their death certificates. At least three Asian queers stood at the center of the passage of this bill. When Chinese and Polish American Christopher Lee who identified as a transgender man killed himself in 2012, the coroner listed him as female on his death certificate. Troubled by their friend's misgendering, Chinese Mexican Chino Scott-Chung, also a transgender man, brought the death certificate to the attention of the Transgender Law Center, which initiated and lobbied for the passage of AB 1577. Three years later, Japanese American Kris Hayashi stood at the helm of the Transgender Law Center as its executive

director when the organization celebrated the passage of the bill.[1] Yet when CBS reported on the victory, they lauded Masen Davis as the organization's executive director. A statement from Davis, rather than Hayashi, evocatively defined the historic moment, "It brings us one significant step closer to making sure that all transgender people are able to live – and die – authentically in accordance with who they really are."[2]

Notably, Asian Pacific Americans have also played central roles in what many political scientists mark as the two most important issues in gay politics of the twenty-first century—the repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" and the fight for marriage equality.[3] Korean American Dan Choi embodied the movement to repeal "Don't Ask Don't Tell"[4] when he came out on the Rachel Maddow Show in 2009 and a year later handcuffed himself to the White House fence in protest of the law that disallowed gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military (Figure 1).[5] Stuart Gaffney, whose mother is Chinese American, was one of

Figure 1: Lt. Dan Choi, 2014. Photo courtesy of Dan Choi.

[1] "Remembering Christopher Lee as Respect After Death Act Takes Effect," Transgender Law Center website, July 7, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, http://transgenderlawcenter.org/archives/11746. The Transgender Law Center is located at 1629 Telegraph Avenue, Oakland, California.

[2] Jan Mabry, "'Respect After Death' Act Takes Effect Giving Transgenders Right to Have Chosen Gender on Death Certificates," *CBS San Francisco*, July 1, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2015/07/01/respect-after-death-act-takes-effect-giving-transgenders-right-to-have-chosen-gender-on-death-certificates. Masen Davis had in fact been the previous executive director whom Hayashi succeeded.

[3] Stephen M. Engel, "Development Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Politics: Fragmented Citizenship in a Fragmented State," *Perspectives on Politics* 13, no. 2 (May 31, 2015): 287-311.

[4] "Don't Ask Don't Tell" is formally known as Department of Defense Directive 1304.26. It was issued on December 21, 1993 and was in effect from February 28, 1994 through September 20, 2011.

[5] A West Point graduate, an Arabic linguist, and an Iraq war veteran, Choi remains dishonorably discharged from the military even though "Don't Ask Don't Tell" has been repealed. He handcuffed

several plaintiffs in the 2008 lawsuit that held that California's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Gaffney would invoke the legal ban on interracial marriage and how it affected his own parents' white and Asian union in advocating for marriage equality.[6] Despite these and many more instances of queer Asian Pacific American (APA) activism and engagement, their existence remains largely invisible.[7]

Structural operations of homophobia and racism have diminished if not erased the significance of queer APA genders and sexualities. Foundational writings in Asian American studies explicitly derided same-sex sexuality in the 1970s establishing a less than queer friendly beginning to the movement and the field.[8] Whiteness in queer studies too, has stunted the growth of publications on the queer APA experience.[9] In fact, the professional field of history for nearly a century perceived sexuality broadly as a private matter and not worthy of intellectual inquiry.[10] In the midst of forces that deny the existence of LGBTQ Asians and Pacific Islanders in history however, queer intimacies most certainly existed in even the earliest APA communities in the United States. And, since the 1980s queer Asian Pacific Americans have become increasingly "out and proud," engaging in activism at the intersection of race, gender,

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himself to the White House fence on April 20, 2010. The White House is located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC. It was designated an NHL on December 19, 1960. Maria Streshinsky, "Dan Choi," *Atlantic Monthly* 306, no. 4 (November 2010): 88; Gabriel Arana, "The Passion of Dan Choi," *The American Prospect: Longform*, February 9, 2014, accessed July 23, 2015, http://prospect.org/article/passion-dan-choi.

[6] "Stuart Gaffney," *Huffington Post*, accessed July 29, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stuart-gaffney.

[7] I use the term Asian Pacific Americans to signal people who are in the United States who come from or have ancestors from Asia or the Pacific Islands. Because of the history of APA migration, the queers documented here before 1965 are largely Chinese and Japanese. I include in a more abbreviated form Koreans, Filipinos, Indonesians, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Okinawan, Samoan, and Indian activism mostly after 1965.

[8] Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan, "Racist Love," in *Seeing Through Shuck,* ed., Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 65-79; Amy Sueyoshi, "Queer Asian American Historiography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, eds. David K. Yoo and Eiichiro Azuma (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 267-278.

[9] David Eng speaks to the dearth of scholarship on queers of color generally in queer studies, which includes APAs. David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now," *Social Text* 23, nos. 3-4 (2005): 2.

[10] Susan Lee Johnson, "'My Own Private Life': Toward a History of Desire in Gold Rush California," *California History* 79, no. 2 (July 1, 2000): 316-346.

and sexuality. APA queers have often occupied the leading wave of social transformation within the Asian Pacific American community.

Early Queer APA History

Likely, countless queers came to America during the first wave of Asian migration in the nineteenth century. Historians though have rendered their stories invisible through a heteronormative recounting of history. Chinese men languished painfully in "bachelor societies" in cities such as San Francisco and New York. The miniscule number of women immigrants existed only as prostitutes to serve these men deprived of "normal" heterosexual contact.[11] In nearly all of the existing literature, "queer" Chinese in America existed only as a discursive device in public health records and leisure culture that painted them as morally deviant in the 1860s and 1870s.[12] Same-sex intimacies and sex acts themselves seemed completely absent in early Asian American history.

Yet, same-affairs did exist among Asians and Pacific Islanders in America or in territories later to be become part of the United States even as those engaged in these intimacies may not have had a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. White missionaries and imperial zealots wrote often of the prevalence of same-sex intimacies in the Pacific, as they sought refuge from the stigma of their own same-sex proclivities at home. In a letter to Walt Whitman, writer Charles Warren Stoddard who had become famous for his travel logs from the 1870s described the Pacific Islands as a sexual utopia that not even "California where men are tolerably bold" could

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[11] Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909); Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Yuji Ichioka, *Issei; The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Yuji Ichioka, "Ameyuki-san: Japanese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Amerasia Journal* 4, no. 1 (1977): 1-22; Lucie Cheng Hirata, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs* 5, no. 1 (1979): 3-29; George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[12] Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

provide.[13] Stoddard became disappointed when one of his young lovers from Hawai`i named Kahele came to San Francisco for a visit and immediately began to "sow his heterosexual oats." Days after his arrival, Kahele deserted Stoddard to move to Los Angeles with his new Mexican wife.[14] Pacific Islander men rendered faceless by authors who merely penned them as "savages" crucially informed how white men came to understand their sexuality through widely popular travel publications on the "South Seas." According to literary critic Lee Wallace, Pacific Islander same-sex sexualities so powerfully informed nineteenth-century western imaginings of masculinity that "male homosexuality as we have come to understood it… was constituted in no small part through the collision with Polynesian culture."[15]

For the unlucky ones, the criminal court system etched their illicit activities into historical record. In the 1890s, authorities in San Francisco arrested a number of Chinese men impersonating women to attract fellow countrymen for sex work.[16] Across the bay in Oakland, Chin Ling in 1908 dressed as a "handsome Chinese maiden of the better class" in hopes of obtaining his husband.[17] Ten years later in downtown Sacramento, California, two South Asian men, Jamil Singh and Tara Singh, separately sought out male intimacy from two men in their late teens, one white and the other Native American.[18] So threateningly did reports of South Asian men sexually pursuing young white men loom in the American imagination that criminal courts in the 1910s and 1920s began to blame "Oriental depravity" for promoting degeneracy among America's transient white

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[13] Amy Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 16. See also Gregory Tomso, "The Queer History of Leprosy and Same-Sex Love," *American Literary History* 14, no. 2 (2002): 747-775. For more on Stoddard, see Roger Austen, *Genteel Pagan: The Double Life of Charles Warren Stoddard,* ed. John W. Crowley (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991).
[14] Austen, *Genteel Pagan*, 92.
[15] Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
[16] See "*Emporia Daily Gazette,* 25 July 1893, 1," in Peter Boag, *Re-dressing the America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 149.
[17] See "*Oakland Tribune,* 22 July 1908, 3" in Boag, *Re-dressing the America's Frontier Past*, 148.
[18] Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 75-76.

youth.[19] Alaskan canneries at which Japanese and Chinese immigrants labored also became productive sites of business for male sex workers, most often Chinese, African American, or Portuguese in the 1920s and 1930s. Sex workers divided their earnings equally with cannery foremen who occasionally "pimped" for them.[20] These early immigrant men and their pursuit of frequently interracial same-sex affairs sheds a different light upon existing historical narratives that presume compulsory heterosexuality and little racial mixing between Asian immigrant men.

Chinese immigrants accustomed to homosocial spaces in their homeland may have actively enjoyed all-male spaces and forged meaningful same-sex relationships as they gathered for mahjong or benevolent association events as "bachelors" in America. Without the imposition of a western lens that assumes heterosociality as the ideal, men from China, steeped in a tradition of same-sex social interaction, may not have been as deprived as more insistently heteronormative histories have declared.[22] In fact, male gold seekers during the

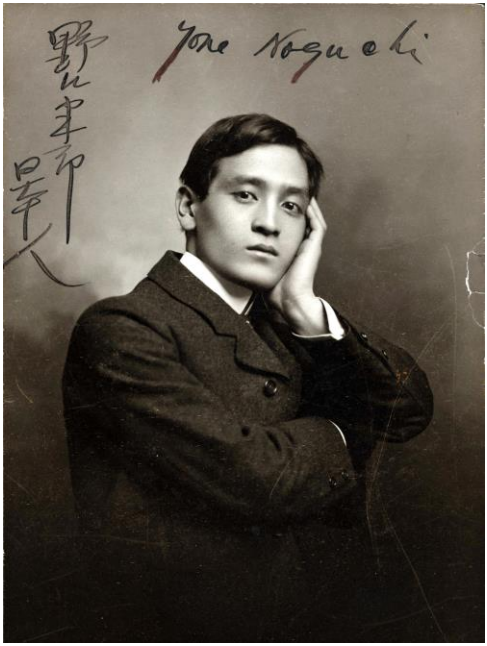

Figure 2: Yone Noguchi, 1903. Photo by Charles W. Hearn. Miscellaneous photographs collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.[21]

[19] Nayan Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates': Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 703-725.

[20] Jack Mason and Donald Guimary, "Asian Labor Contractors in Alaska Canned Salmon Industry, 1880-1937," *Labor History* 22, no. 3 (1981): 391; Lauren Casady, "Labor Unrest and the Labor Movement in the Salmon Industry of the Pacific Coast," PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 1938, 79, 201, 240. Chris Friday summarized the content of the above two citations and added his own analysis of "homosexuality" in the canneries in his book *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry, 1870-1942* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 45-55, 114.

[21] License: Public Domain. http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/yone-noguchi-2851

[22] Madeline Y. Hsu, "Unwrapping Orientalist Constraints: Restoring Homosocial Normativity to Chinese American History," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 2 (2003): 230-253.

1850s in the Southern Mines of California—including Chinese—created multiracial families of cooperation and consent as they forged new forms of cross-ethnic male intimacy. The influx of white women in the 1860s and its accompanying valorization of "civilized" families—code for white heterosexuality—would later fuel the formation of rigid racial hierarchies.[23]

In some cases, individuals did identify themselves as explicitly queer. In 1899, Kosen Takahashi, an illustrator for *Shin Sekai* [24] one of San Francisco's earliest Japanese American newspapers, declared himself an "utmost queer Nipponese" to journalist Blanche Partington.[25] Takahashi who had earlier shared kisses with fellow *issei* Yone Noguchi missed him sorely when Noguchi went tramping from San Francisco to Los Angeles (Figure 2).[26] Noguchi, a poet in his own right who would later become better known as the father of acclaimed Asian American artist Isamu Noguchi, had struck up an affair with the aforementioned writer and one-time lover of Kahele, Charles Warren Stoddard.[27] At the turn of the century, Noguchi would collect bouquets of wild flowers in California's Oakland Hills and blow kisses to Stoddard's "bungalow" on M Street in Washington, DC.[28] When Noguchi heard that Stoddard took walks atop Telegraph Hill in

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[23] Susan Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).

[24] The *Shin Sekai*, founded in 1894, functioned as the house organ for the San Francisco Japanese YMCA until 1897. The San Francisco YMCA was located at 121 Haight Street. See Brian Niiya, "Shin Sekai (newspaper)," *Densho Encyclopedia,* accessed October 4, 2015, http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Shin_Sekai_%28newspaper%29; *Langley's San Francisco Directory, 1895* (San Francisco, CA: J. B. Painter Co., 1895). In 1906, at the height of the newspaper's circulation, *Shin Sekai's* San Francisco office was located at 948 Geary Street. Japanese American History Archive, Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, San Francisco, California.

[25] Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions*, 83.

[26] Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions*, 83. "Issei," which means first generation in Japanese, refers to the first wave of immigrants from Japan who arrived in the United States before the 1924 passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act. See "Issei," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed May 7, 2016, http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Issei.

[27] Yone Noguchi was the father of Asian American artist Isamu Noguchi. He carved his name in Japanese into the wall of the Carmel Mission during his tramp to Los Angeles. Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions*, 54. The Carmel Mission, also known as Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, is located at 3080 Rio Road, Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. It was listed on the NRHP on October 15, 1966 and designated an NHL on October 9, 1960.

[28] Stoddard lived at 300 M Street at the corner of Third and M Streets in a two-story red brick house with six rooms and one bath. Ethel Armes, "Aloha, Wela, Wela!" *National Magazine* 21, no. 3 (December 1904): 308; Austen, *Genteel Pagan*, 134.

San Francisco, he raced there to look for his footprints. Charles Warren Stoddard, touted as San Francisco's first gay writer, cofounded the Bohemian Club, an elite fraternal order that former President Richard Nixon later declared in 1971 as, "the most faggy goddamned thing you could imagine with that San Francisco crowd."[29] At the same time that Noguchi was writing letters of love to Stoddard, he impregnated editor Léonie Gilmour and became engaged to journalist Ethel Armes who herself preferred relationships with women rather than men.[30]

Noguchi would not be the only Asian in America hobnobbing with well-known whites in queer circles long before the 1970s. Western writer Joaquin Miller particularly favored hosting Japanese "boys" whom he referred to as "brownies" as live-in domestics in his home in California's Oakland Hills.[31] Miller attracted such a following that, shortly after his death in 1913, Yone Noguchi—who had since returned to Japan—sailed back to the United States and organized a group of Japanese men to pay their respects at his home. Miller, also an active member of the San Francisco Bohemian Club, frequently declared his love of men, even as he remained married to a woman.[32]

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[29] Austen, *Genteel Pagan*. The Bohemian Club Clubhouse was located at the northeast corner of Post Street and Grant Avenue. Bohemian Club, *Certificate of Incorporation, Constitution, By-Laws and Rules, Officers, Committees, and Members* (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Company, 1904). For Richard Nixon's quotation see Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions,* 149.

[30] Yone Noguchi's more famous son Isamu Noguchi was born in Pasadena, California on November 17, 1904. Ethel Armes would become famous as Alabama's first historian. Amy Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012). For more on Isamu Noguchi, see Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey Without Borders* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[31] Miller's residence address is listed as "Upper Fruitvale" in the 1899 Oakland Directory. His home is located within Joaquin Miller Park at 3590 Sanborn Drive, Oakland, California. It was listed on the NRHP on October 15, 1966 and designated an NHL on December 29, 1962.

[32] When Miller first met Noguchi he called him a "beautiful Japanese flower," see Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions.*

In 1899, the same year Kosen Takahashi pined away over Yone Noguchi's absence as he tramped to Los Angeles, Ah Yane gave birth to her first child, Margaret Chung, in Santa Barbara, California. By the 1920s, Chung would become a successful physician, the first American surgeon of Chinese descent (Figure 3).[33] Chung, known for wearing mannish attire, drove a sleek blue sports car around San Francisco and led many of her contemporaries, including lesbian poet Elsa Gidlow, to speculate that she might be a lesbian.[34] Gidlow actively courted Chung, drinking bootleg liquor at a local speakeasy of Chung's choosing in San Francisco's North Beach, an Italian community neighboring Chinatown. Later in the 1940s, Chung may have had an intimate relationship with actor Sophie Tucker as Chung hosted grand parties in her home for soldiers traveling through San Francisco during World War II.[35] Chung served as "Mom Chung" to American soldiers by inviting them into her home while they were on leave in San Francisco. She also raised funds for the war and

Figure 3: Portrait of Margaret Chung. Courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (Lisa Gidlow Collection 91-16).

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[33] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards: The Life of a Wartime Celebrity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). The 1929 San Francisco city directory lists Chung as living at 340 Stockton Place (now demolished). See *Crocker-Langley San Francisco City Directory, 1929* (San Francisco, CA: R. L. Polk and Co., 1928).

[34] Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards*.

[35] In 1942 Chung's home was in the Telegraph Hill neighborhood of San Francisco; from 1943 to 1945 she is listed as living in what is now the Lone Mountain neighborhood, according to the city directory. Her medical practice was located at 752 Sacramento Street, in San Francisco's Chinatown. See *Polk's Crocker-Langley San Francisco City Directory, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945* (San Francisco, CA: R. L. Polk and Co.).

supported the formation of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). In order to join the US Navy herself, Chung initiated and lobbied congressional legislation to establish the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES). Ironically, after the establishment of WAVES, government officials would never accept Chung's application to join due to her race as well as rumors about her lesbianism unearthed by the Naval Intelligence Service. In 1943 the Professional Women's Club of San Francisco asked Chung to resign from their membership under suspicions around her sexuality.[36]

Meanwhile, more than seven hundred miles away in the Utah desert, the United States government had incarcerated *issei* Jiro Onuma in the Topaz War Relocation Center—not for the crime of being a homosexual, but for being an "enemy alien."[37] Authorities forcibly removed Onuma and 120,000 other Japanese Americans who had made homes along the Pacific coast to desolate camps in the nation's interior during the 1940s. Government officials claimed that Japanese living along the West Coast posed a threat to national security as the nation embarked on a war with Japan.[38] Throughout his life, Onuma had collected homoerotic kitsch. And, while Japanese Americans could only bring what they could carry into the incarceration camps, Onuma made it a point to pack the patriotic 1942 "Victory Issue" of male physique magazine *Strength and Health* and a medal of completion awarded by Earle Liederman, a professional muscle man who ran a popular twelve-week mail-order bodybuilding school

[36] Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards*.

[37] The Topaz War Relocation Center, also known as the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz), was built in 1942 in Millard County, Utah. It was listed on the NRHP on January 2, 1974 and designated an NHL on March 29, 2007.

[38] Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1971); Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

throughout the 1920s and 1930s.[39] While incarcerated at Topaz, evidence suggests that Onuma had a lover named Ronald.[40]

Clearly queers among Asian Americans existed in early Asian American history. As they sought out same-sex intimacies, they too contributed to the changing face and social dynamic of America. A number of them more specifically shaped American modernism, the US military, and Hollywood. Nearly all interacted with whites in unexpectedly intimate ways. They have also only recently appeared as queer or possibly queer due to the work of largely LGBTQ scholars attuned to forging a history relevant to their own lives. While many may perceive Asians in America as "closeted" in this earlier part of APA history, historians who privilege heterosexuality and whiteness more likely rendered them irrelevant and therefore invisible in America's past.

Literary critic Andrew Leong has proposed an "epistemology of the pocket" as opposed to queer theorist Eve Sedgwick's "epistemology of the closet" for those in America unable to afford their own room with a closet. Leong describes the pocket as a smaller space that "due to its proximity to the body, ought to be more 'private,' but because of its placement on the body, is subject to public view." It accommodates only partial concealment, since "you can hide a body in a closet but not in a pocket." Leong added, "For propertied, Anglo-American men with rooms of their own, the closet might be an appropriate figure for the possession of a hidden identity. The pocket might be more fitting for the countless others with more precarious relationships to individual property and identity: colonized peoples who have had their property taken from them; people who have been treated as property; aliens ineligible for citizenship; migrant workers…."[41] For queer Asians who sought to keep their desires private particularly before

[39] Tina Takemoto, "Looking for Jiro Onuma: A Queer Meditation on the Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20, no. 3 (November 2013): 241-275.

[40] John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Homefront: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Takemoto, "Looking for Jiro Onuma."

[41] Andrew Leong, "The Pocket and the Watch: A Collective Individualist Reading of Japanese American Literature," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1, no. 2 (2015): 76-114.

the rise of a nationally visible LGBTQ movement, Leong's pocket serves as a useful metaphor for their all-too-small shelter which more likely exposed rather than concealed their indiscretions from their contemporaries.

Being "out" would always be complicated for APA as for other queers of color. Political scientist Cathy Cohen has detailed how, in the late twentieth century, gay African Americans have also been out in less public ways to not risk losing their ethnic communities in racist America.[42] APAs too would not have felt at liberty to be out in a society that already villainized and marginalized them for their race. Ironically, even when obviously queer Asians such as Yone Noguchi and Margaret Chung initiated significant action alongside history-making whites, their activities still remain barely visible in history.

Radicalism on the Rise

In the mid-1950s when Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first lesbian civil and political rights group in the United States formed, Filipina Rose Bamberger played a crucial role in gathering a handful of women including Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon who would later become known as the founders. Bamberger invited a group of six women including Martin and Lyon to join her and her partner Rosemary Sliepen for drinks and dinner at their home in San Francisco on Friday, September 21, 1955. A second planning meeting took place on October 5 again at Bamberger's home, at which time the group decided that she along with her partner Sliepen would bring fried chicken to the first official DOB meeting to be held two weeks later.[43] Yet, the purpose of DOB— a secret group of women gathered for private events versus a public organization pushing for political reform—divided the group. Bamberger left DOB in early 1956, refusing to be a part of an organization that hoped to welcome men and

[42] Cathy Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999).

[43] In 1955, Rose Bamberger or "Rosalie Bamberger" appears in the city directory as living in San Francisco's Silver Terrace neighborhood. See Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), 4, 5.

heterosexual women working publicly towards legislative changes. No doubt, an outward facing DOB would increase the possibility that her own lesbianism would become more public.[44]

Bamberger had reason to protect herself from instability that public knowledge of her sexuality might bring. During the 1950s she had a different job nearly every year as a machine operator, brush maker, or factory worker and additionally changed residences at least five times. Without job security and little residential stability, the consequences of coming out for Bamberger would have likely been unfathomable to bear.[45] Ironically, as DOB grew during the 1950s, a number of the officers including Phyllis Lyon, one of the original founders who pushed for the group to be more public, in fact used pseudonyms in their newsletter called *The Ladder* to protect their identities.[46]

Ten years after Bamberger left the group, Chinese American Crystal Jang attended a few San Francisco DOB meetings in search of other lesbians and still found the group, as well as the lesbian bars she frequented, to be "all white." When she turned to leftist groups working for Third World liberation, the broader Asian American movement seemed "very male."[47] Jang would not be alone in her sense of alienation. Activist Gil Mangaoang described himself as being in state of "schizophrenia" during the 1970s, trapped between his involvement in a homophobic Asian American political community and his intimate life in a racist LGBTQ community.[48] He matriculated into the City College of San Francisco in 1970 after being discharged from the US Airforce. On campus Mangaoang joined the Filipino Club, became an officer on the student council, and worked with other student groups of color to establish an ethnic studies

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[44] Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 8.
[45] *Polk's San Francisco City Directories, 1950-1959* (San Francisco, CA: R. L. Polk and Co.)
[46] Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 31.
[47] Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California. For more on the Asian American movement see Daryl J. Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
[48] Eric C. Wat, *The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 102.

program. He and other student activists negotiated with the administration to ensure that courses in Filipino history and Tagalog be included in the curricula.[49] Mangaoang, impatient for change within the college, soon after began doing volunteer work at the International Hotel (I-Hotel), a low-income residence hotel at the corner of Jackson and Kearny Streets in San Francisco, which housed many *manong* or elderly Filipino men.[50] It stood as the last bastion of the San Francisco's Manilatown before the city tore it down in 1979 as part of urban renewal.[51]

Countless other Asian gay and lesbian activists and writers such as Daniel Tseng, Kitty Tsui, and Helen Zia have reported on how people of color and queer progressive spaces remained unable to accommodate queer people of color in the 1970s.[52] In 1974, at the Third World People's Solidarity Conference in Ann Arbor, Tseng vividly remembers a group of largely African Americans growing angry over antigay sentiments expressed at the podium by "otherwise radical leaders." The most incendiary comments ironically came from Angela Davis who mocked founding father George Washington for his "sissy shoes" decades before she would come out.[53] The rise of the Asian American movement as well, owed much of its ideological origins to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist beliefs that devalued same-sex sexuality as a product of bourgeois decadence and

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[49] Gil Mangaoang, "From the 1970s to the 1990s: Perspective of a Gay Filipino American Activist," in *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience,* ed. Russell Leong (New York: Routledge, 1996), 102-103.

[50] The International Hotel was home to thousands of seasonal Asian laborers in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly Filipinos. It was added to the NRHP on June 15, 1977.

[51] The demolition took place despite a fight that began in 1968 and continued for more than a decade between the residents of the hotel and the city. See Estella Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

[52] Daniel Tseng, "Slicing Silence: Asian Progressives Come Out," in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment,* eds. Steve Louie and Glenn K. Omatsu (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001); Kitty Tsui, *The Words of a Woman who Breathes Fire* (Argyle, NY: Spinsters Ink, 1983); Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000).

[53] Tseng, "Slicing Silence," 228.

believed homosexuality would be eliminated with the eventual demise of capitalism.[54]

Still, APA queers remained committed to social justice and forged their own paths for community engagement. In the 1960s, Crystal Jang and her women friends began a petition at the City College of San Francisco calling for women students on campus to be allowed to wear pants and successfully changed the dress code. On their way to and from City College and their homes in Chinatown, they also defiantly rode cable cars hanging off the side when the law still mandated women to sit safely inside.[55] In 1978, Jang publicly spoke against the Briggs Initiative to a news reporter who interviewed her at her workplace, the schoolyard of Benjamin Franklin Middle School.[56] The Briggs Initiative would have legalized the firing of all LGBTQ teachers and those who supported them.[57] When she appeared in the local newspapers as a result, she became one the faces of the anti-Briggs Initiative movement, participating in a rally with the United Educators of San Francisco even as she feared losing her job.[58] For Jang, self-acceptance of her same-sex desires came through her investigations in the stacks at the public library. In 1960 at the North Beach branch, Jang, still an eighth grader, read about the Kinsey Scale just seven years after sexologist Alfred Kinsey published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*.[59]

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[54] Wat, *The Making of a Gay Asian Community*, 93.

[55] Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California. Ocean Campus, the main campus of the City College of San Francisco, is located at 50 Phelan Avenue, San Francisco, California. In May 1965, Mona Hutchin, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, more formally challenged the unofficial ban against women standing on the "outside step" of cable cars. Associated Press, "Women Start Riding 'Outside Step' of Frisco's Old Dinky Cable Cars," *Ocala Star Banner*, May 13, 1965, 8.

[56] Benjamin Franklin Middle School is located at 1430 Scott Street, San Francisco, California.

[57] Karen Graves, "Political Pawns in and Educational Endgame: Reflections on Bryant, Briggs, and Some Twentieth Century School Questions," *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (February 2013): 1-20.

[58] Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California; Crystal Jang, e-mail message to author, October 17, 2015.

[59] Alfred C. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 1953). The North Beach branch of the San Francisco public library

Gil Mangaoang too forged a space where he could be both queer and Asian in his activism for social change. Through his work at the I-Hotel, Mangaoang became a member of the Kalayaan Collective, and would become one of the early members of Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP), memorialized as the first revolutionary Filipino nationalist group in the United States. Headquartered in Oakland, California, KDP appeared to be the only organization within the Asian American movement that accepted queer members. At least ten lesbians and two gay men comprised the membership and leadership of the organization.[60]

On the East Coast, bar patrons at New York City's Stonewall Inn in 1969 fought back against police harassment, marking what many historians cite as the beginning of the gay rights movement. Yet, three years earlier in 1966 in San Francisco's Tenderloin District, sex worker and activist Tamara Ching of Native Hawaiian, Chinese, and German descent fought back against police harassment with other street queens at Compton's Cafeteria. The twenty-four hour restaurant on the corner of Turk and Taylor streets had attracted a regular late-night crowd of drag queens, hustlers, and runaway teens. One weekend night in August, the management called the police to expel a particularly noisy crowd of queens lingering too long at one table while spending little money. When a police officer grabbed the arm of one of the queens to drag her away, an insurrection ensued. Dishware and silverware flew through the air, tables and chairs were upended, and patrons pushed the police out into the street. The Compton's Cafeteria revolt in which Ching and other queens participated, initiated new transgender advocacy programs within the San Francisco Police Department and the city's Department of Public Health.[61]

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recently re-opened at 850 Columbus Avenue, San Francisco, California. This new construction replaces the previous building, constructed in 1959 on an adjacent lot.

[60] Gil Mangaoang, "From the 1970s to the 1990s,"103-109; Trinity Ann Ordona, "Coming Out Together: An Ethnohistory of the Asian and Pacific Islander Queer Women's and Transgendered People's Movement of San Francisco," PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2000. The KDP National Headquarters was located at 4704 Shattuck Avenue in Oakland in the 1970s and moved to 526 Thirty-Second Street in Oakland in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, the office moved to 3600 Lincoln Way in Oakland. Trinity Ordona, e-mail message to author, December 16, 2015.

[61] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 63-66, 74, 75. The uprising at Compton's Cafeteria, 101 Taylor Street, San Francisco was the first known militant action by LGBTQ

In the wake of Stonewall too, queers in New York and soon after across the nation organized to form the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) to demand sexual liberation for all people. As GLF branches popped up across the country, Japanese American Kiyoshi Kuromiya cofounded the Gay Liberation Front–Philadelphia on May 29, 1970 when a group of approximately fifty people met at Gazoo, a gay collective at 230 South Street.[62]

In the arts as well, Asian lesbians took to the stage in the form of a feminist Asian women's performance group in 1979 called Unbound Feet. Kitty Tsui, Merle Woo, and Canyon Sam formed three of the six women. Their very presence as performers proved radical due to the fact that few, if any, Asian American women appeared on stage at the time.[63] Tsui and Sam had previously met at Asian American Feminists, an Asian women's rap group initiated two years earlier by Doreena Wong and Canyon Sam.[64]

Unbound Feet's first show took place at the James Moore Oakland Museum Theater and proved to be immediately successful. As the group continued to perform over the next two years, audiences of up to six hundred flocked to their shows. While the performances of Tsui, Sam, and Woo did not address lesbianism, the program explicitly stated their sexuality. Unbound Feet thus exposed prominently and without shame the

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people against police harassment. The building is a contributing resource to the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District, added to the NRHP on February 5, 2009.

[62] Interview with Kiyoshi Kuromiya, conducted by Marc Stein, see Marc Stein, "Kiyoshi Kuromiya, June 17, 1997," *Outhistory.org*, 2009, accessed July 14, 2014, http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/philadelphia-lgbt-interviews/interviews/kiyoshi-kuromiya. Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

[63] Trinity Ordona, "Asian Lesbians in San Francisco: Struggles to Create a Safe Space, 1970s–1980s," in *Asian/Pacific Islander Women: A Historical Anthology,* eds. Shirley Hune and Gail Nomura (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 327. Merle Woo is of both Chinese and Korean ancestry.

[64] Members of Asian American Feminists would share food and talk about racism and sexism in a group of nearly all queer Asian women. The first session of Asian American Feminists took place in Sam's Castro neighborhood San Francisco apartment, see Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 128-132; Canyon Sam, e-mail message to author, November 24, 2015.

real existence of lesbians within the Asian American community and drew a significant Asian lesbian following.[65]

After performances, women crowded into the home of Zee Wong which became a popular gathering place and for meeting lesbians of color generally. Wong, a master of party planning with a wide network, later initiated a series of Asian lesbian potlucks in which large groups of women would gather to share food and build community for the first time. Wong simultaneously began organizing multiracial BBQs. While the potlucks took place in Wong's home, the BBQs ironically convened at Joaquin Miller Park, a public space upon which Joaquin Miller, the lover of "brownies," had hosted countless young Japanese men in his home. By 1982 Wong had over seventy women on her list of people to invite. A year later, Lisa Chun who had earlier in 1978 cofounded Asian Women, an Oakland-based nonpolitical support group for Asian lesbians, combined her list of contacts with Wong's and the number of APIs grew to 112.[66]

Figure 4: Unbound Feet Three, 1981. Left to right: Nellie Wong, Kitty Tsui, Merle Woo. Photo by Cathy Cade, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley.

In 1981, Unbound Feet would disband over one member Merle Woo's grievance against University of California, Berkeley's refusal to renew her contract as a lecturer in Asian American Studies. Woo hoped Unbound Feet would publicly support her position when she

[65] Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 134-135.
[66] Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 142; Stephen Stewart, *Positive Image: A Portrait of Gay America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985), 181.

charged that the university had discriminated against her as a lesbian and for her radical political ideology.[67] The group, unable to come to an agreement on whether they should make a public statement, splintered. Half of the members stood opposed to using Unbound Feet as a platform for workplace grievances that would put them in direct conflict with the Asian American community. Four years later in 1985 when three of the original members regrouped as Unbound Feet Three, they more actively brought lesbian content to the stage (Figure 4).[68]

In the same year that Unbound Feet, in its original grouping, drew audiences to their radical performances, queer Asians from across the nation gathered in Washington, DC, at the first National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference. The conference, organized by the National Coalition of Black Gays, took place at Howard University in October 1979.[69] According to poet Michiyo Cornell, the meeting was "the first time in the history of the American hemisphere that Asian American gay men and lesbians joined to form a network of support."[70] Cornell, who would later change her last name to Fukaya, would go on to organize Vermont's first queer pride celebration called "Lesbian and Gay Pride" in 1983.[71]

Asian lesbian and bisexual women organized the first West Coast Asian Pacific Lesbian Retreat in Sonoma, California in 1987 drawing eighty people, mostly from the San Francisco Bay Area. Five months later in October, fifty Asian lesbian and gay men from across the nation gathered to form the first Asian contingent at the 1987 March on Washington for

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[67] After a two-year legal battle, in 1984, the University of California, Berkeley reached a settlement with Woo of $73,584 and two years' reinstatement. See Stewart, *Positive Image*, 115.
[68] Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 136-137. Unbound Feet Three comprised of Kitty Tsui, Nellie Wong, and Merle Woo performed on Friday, October 16 at La Peña Cultural Center. Margaret Krouskoff, "Unbound Feet Three," *Off Our Backs* 11, no. 11 (December 31, 1985): 25. La Peña Cultural Center is located at 3105 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, California.
[69] Tseng, "Slicing Silence," 231. Howard University is located at 2400 Sixth Street NW, Washington, DC.
[70] Michiyo Cornell, "Living in Asian America," in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 83. See also Gwendolyn Shervington, ed., *A Fire is Burning, It is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya* (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996).
[71] Shervington, *A Fire is Burning, It is in Me,* 145; Chuck Stewart, ed., *Proud Heritage: People, Issues, and Documents of the LGBT Experience* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015), 1208.

Gay Rights on the National Mall. As a national network of Asian lesbians solidified, the Asian/Pacific Lesbian Network (APLN) sponsored their first national retreat titled "Coming Together, Moving Forward" in Santa Cruz, California September 1-4, 1989. The event drew over 140 API lesbians from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.[72] For Asian lesbians, the 1980s marked a time of momentous community building. A burgeoning network of individuals created newsletters, held potlucks, and formed softball teams, coalescing into what sociologist Karin Aguilar-San Juan characterized as a "movement."[73]

What might be the first Asian American lesbian newsletter, *Phoenix Rising,* began in the mid-1980s, its title referring to these women's resilience and beauty, rising out of the ashes that racism, sexism, and homophobia might otherwise leave behind.[74] Their mailing list at one point counted eighty-seven women.[75] For Helen Zia, who as a community organizer hid her lesbianism, *Phoenix Rising* served as a lifeline while she lived in New Jersey, a vibrant symbol of how her all her identities as a woman, Asian, and lesbian could coexist.[76]

Unbound Feet also laid the groundwork for Kitty Tsui to publish her poetry four years later in 1983.[77] Her book, *The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire,* has inspired countless queer Asian women across two

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[72] Christy Chung, Aly Kim, Zoon Nguyen, and Trinity Ordona with Arlene Stein, "In Our Own Way," in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 91; Alice Hom, "Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures,* eds., George Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2000), 72-75. Likely bisexual and transgender people also participated, though firsthand accounts only mention gays and lesbians.

[73] Karin Aguilar-San Juan, "Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians," *Signs* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 37.

[74] For additional details on community discussions on the naming of the newsletter see Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 151-153. *Phoenix Rising* maintained a post office box in Oakland for correspondence and met in people's homes.

[75] *Phoenix Rising* mailing list, Private Collection of Crystal Jang.

[76] Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams*; Interview with Helen Zia, conducted by the author, November 16, 2013, San Francisco, California. In New Jersey, Helen Zia lived in an apartment in downtown Jersey City. Helen Zia, e-mail message to author, December 7, 2015. Zia currently resides in Oakland, California.

[77] Interview with Kitty Tsui, conducted by author, December 21, 2014, Long Beach, California; Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 134-135.

decades.[78] Tsui's work offered, in the words of Aguilar-San Juan, "an image of a 'proud, defiant, no bullshit woman, the dyke we all wanted to be.'"[79] While Kitty Tsui was the first Chinese American lesbian to come out with a book, Korean American Willyce Kim broke significant ground as the first published Asian American lesbian with *Eating Artichokes,* printed by the Woman's Press Collective nine years earlier in 1972.[80] In the 1980s, however, more than a handful of poets and writers including Merle Woo and Chea Villanueva began publishing their own single-authored books—a trend that continued into the 1990s.[81] In addition to publishing with established feminist publishers like Firebrand Books, the Women's Press Collective, and Spinsters Ink, queer writers of color also initiated their own printing houses, including Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, founded in 1980 by Black lesbians Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde.[82]

Tsui, known not just for her poetry, additionally took up bodybuilding and won bronze in 1986 and gold in 1990 at Gay Games I and II, held respectively in San Francisco and Vancouver. Her muscled body also prominently appeared in the renegade lesbian erotica magazine *On Our*

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[78] Kitty Tsui, *The Words of a Woman who Breathes Fire* (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters Ink, 1983). In 1981, Sherry Thomas, editor of Spinsters Ink, worked out of her San Francisco apartment. The press moved to a warehouse location in 1985 until it moved to Duluth, Minnesota in 1993. From 1985 to 1986 Spinsters Ink was located at 803 DeHaro Street. From 1986 to 1992 the publishing company was located at 223 Mississippi. Spinsters Ink, Fall Catalogue 1993, GLC 105, Box 13, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, California; *San Francisco Telephone Directory,* 1981-1992.

[79] Aguilar-San Juan, "Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians," 936.

[80] Willyce Kim, *Eating Artichokes* (Oakland, CA: Women's Press Collective, 1972). The Women's Press Collective was located at 5251 Broadway, Oakland, California. Kim additionally published *Dancer Dawkins and the California Kid* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1985); Tseng, "Slicing Silence," 236; Interview with Kitty Tsui, conducted by author, December 22, 2014, Long Beach, California. Kim self-published an earlier book of poetry in 1971 titled *Curtains of Light.* See "Kim, Willyce," Encyclopedia.com website, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3403600274/kim-willyce.html.

[81] Tsui, *Woman Who Breathes Fire*; Tsui, *Breathless*; Merle Woo, *Yellow Woman Speaks: Selected Poems* (Seattle: Radical Women Publications, 1986); Chea Villanueva, *Jessie's Song and Other Stories* (New York: Masquerade Books, 1995); Chea Villanueva, *Bulletproof Butches* (New York: Hard Candy Books, 1997). Queer Asian women writers also contributed individual essays, poetry, and prose to anthologies dedicated to women of color in hopes of changing the heteronormative discourse around race, inequality, and gender. See Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981); Asian Women United of California, eds., *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

[82] Barbara Smith, "A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 3 (1989): 11-13.

Figure 5: Kitty Tsui on the cover of On Our Backs 5 no. 1 (Summer 1988). Photo by Jill Posener, courtesy of Kitty Tsui.

Backs in 1988 and 1990, as well as in New York City's *Village Voice* (Figure 5).[83] Tsui may have been the first Asian lesbian to appear on the cover of both publications. In 1995, she published *Breathless*, a book of SM erotica in which sex mingled with fermented bean curd, beef tendons, and bitter melon. Tsui created intense scenes of pleasure, pain, and Chinese food, and won the Firecracker Alternative Book (FAB) Award for *Breathless* in 1996. [84] The fact that Tsui wrote of explicitly desiring Asian lesbians became content worth noting to a white lesbian community.[85]

During the 1980s, many queer Asians sought to find each other. In New York City, two mixed heritage Asians, Katherine Hall and Chea Villanueva, formed Asian Lesbians of the East Coast in 1983.[86] In Los Angeles, queer Asian American activists formed Asian Pacific Lesbians and Gays (A/PLG) in 1980, the first organization of its kind in Southern California (Figure 6).[87] The group would later become over run with "rice

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[83] *On Our Backs* was located at 526 Castro Street in San Francisco. See *On Our Backs* 5, no. 1 (Summer 1988); *On Our Backs* 7, no. 2 (November-December 1990).

[84] Interview with Kitty Tsui, conducted by author, December 22, 2014, Long Beach, California. Kitty Tsui, *Breathless* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1996). Firebrand Books was located in offices at 141 The Commons, Ithaca, New York.

[85] Writer Judith Stelboum, who reviewed Tsui's book for *The Lesbian Review of Books,* commented with surprise, "the narrator is especially attracted to Asian lesbians." See Judith Stelboum, "Catching Your Breath," *The Lesbian Review of Books* 3, no. 1 (October 31, 1996): 24.

[86] Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 219; Emi Minemura, "Asian Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women in North America: Activism and Politics," master's thesis, Michigan State University, 1996, 10.

[87] A/PLG was established in the home of Morris Kight in Los Angeles. An early gay rights activist, Kight cofounded the Los Angeles branch of the Gay Liberation Front, the Stonewall Democratic Club, and the Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center of L.A., now known as the Los Angeles LGBT Center. Well known for his "love" of Asians, Kight initiated the formation of A/PLG due to concern that his Asian partner Roy Z. would not have Asian friends and would not have community after the older Kight passed. Karen Ocamb, "Morris Kight, 1919-2003," *The Advocate* 884 (March 2003): 16; Wat, *The*

queens"—a term used to describe white men interested in relationships with Asians based largely on their ethnicity.[88] Four years later in 1984, Steve Lew and Prescott Chow formed the Gay Asian Rap Group (GARP) in Long Beach, California. Though GARP did not initially form in direct response to the A/PLGs internal divisions—debates around whether it should be a space that nurtures gay Asian leadership or serve primarily as a social network for white men to meet Asian men, early members of GARP organized the group to avoid what they perceived as mistakes in A/PLG. As more gay API men within A/PLG defected to GARP, the two organizations became distinctly different. GARP would later become the Gay Asian Pacific Support Network (GAPSN) in 1989 to create a space specifically for API men.[89] David Hong hosted many of the meetings in his home in West Hollywood. Monthly rap sessions took place at the Chinatown Service Center Annex in Los Angeles.[90]

Figure 6: Asian/Pacific Lesbians marching in the 1989 San Francisco LGBT Pride parade. Photo by Cathy Cade, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley.

Queer South Asians contributed significantly to the explosion of queer API community groups in the 1980s. In 1985 and 1986, queer South Asians first in Brooklyn, New York, and then second in the San Francisco

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Making of a Gay Asian Community, 110, 115. Morris Kight lived in the Westlake neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. See "Morris Kight Residence," Los Angeles Conservancy website, accessed December 6, 2015, https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/morris-kight-residence.

[88] Wat, *The Making of a Gay Asian Community*.

[89] Wat, *The Making of a Gay Asian Community*, 166-167. Chow and Lew later moved back to the San Francisco Bay area, where they helped to form important Asian Pacific Islander groups for gay men, including Gay Asian Pacific Islanders (GAPA) and the GAPA Community HIV Project (GCHP).

[90] David Hong's home was located just off Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, California. The Chinatown Service Center Annex was located at 300 West Cesar E. Chavez Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. Alex Fukui, e-mail message to author, January 7, 2016.

Bay Area formed two different groups, Anamika and Trikone respectively, to address the specific needs of LGBTQ people of South Asian descent from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar (Burma), and Tibet. The two organizations would be part of a half dozen groups that emerged in the following years across North America, the United Kingdom, and India.[91]

Other queer Asian Pacific Americans played key roles in community organizations not specifically queer as well as queer groups not exclusively APA. Mini Liu who worked extensively in the New York-based Organization of Asian Women (OAW) and the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) pushed hard to include sexuality in the organizations' mission and priorities. She sought to bring a more intersectional approach to existing racial justice activism.[92] In San Francisco, Donna Keiko Ozawa cofounded the first and still largest queer youth organization called the Lavender Youth Recreation & Information Center (LYRIC). A dance at the Women's Building celebrated their formation in 1988.[93] In 1991, the group transitioned from an autonomous collective to a service provider with financial support from the San Francisco Mayor's Office, and two years later purchased their permanent home at 127 Collingwood Street in the Castro District of San Francisco.[94] Lia Shigemura of Okinawan and Japanese heritage too played a foundational role in establishing the Asian Women's Shelter (AWS) in 1988 to provide services for limited and non-

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[91] Trikone's current address is 60 Twenty-Ninth Street, #614, San Francisco, California, see "Contact Us," Trikone website, accessed December 29, 2015, http://www.trikone.org/index.php/about-us/contact-us. The other four organizations that formed in the 1980s are Khush Kayal in Canada, Shakti Khabar in the United Kingdom, Freedom in India, and Bombay Dost in India as well. Nayan Shah, "Sexuality, Identity, and the Uses of History," in *Q&A: Queer in Asian America,* eds. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 141.

[92] Liu was a member of both organizations from 1984 to 1997. Alice Y. Hom, "Unifiying Differences: Lesbian of Color Community Building in Los Angeles and New York, 1970s-1980s," PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2011, 114-115. CAAAV is located at 55 Hester Street, New York City, New York.

[93] The Women's Building is located at 3543 Eighteenth Street, San Francisco, California. The Women's Building was the first women-owned community center established in 1979 in the Mission District of San Francisco that advocates self-determination, gender equality, and social justice. See "History & Mission," The Women's Building website, accessed October 31, 2015, http://womensbuilding.org/about/mission-history; Sushawn Robb, *Mothering the Movement: The Story of the San Francisco Women's Building* (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2011).

[94] Ozawa cofounded LYRIC with Beth Kivel, see "History," LYRIC website, accessed August 1, 2015, http://lyric.org/history.

English speaking refugee and immigrant survivors of domestic violence in the San Francisco Bay Area. Two years later in 1990, AWS implemented its Lesbian Services Program to increase accessibility.[95] From 1989 to 1992, South Asian American LGBTQ activist and attorney Urvashi Vaid served as the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) now known as the LGBTQ Task Force. Filipina American activist Melinda Paras, former founder and national leader of the KDP, also served as the organization's executive director from 1994 to 1996.[96]

The 1980s simultaneously marked mass devastation for the gay male community due to the US government's non-response to the AIDS epidemic.[97] Populations of color found themselves in a particular public health crisis due to disparate funding for services and education as well as presumptions within their own communities that HIV/AIDS was only a "white disease."[98] Queer activists of color across the nation quickly organized to provide support. On the West Coast, Asian American Recovery Services (AARS) in San Francisco established the Asian AIDS Project (AAP) in 1987, the first organization to target APIs for HIV/AIDS prevention.[99] In the same year, AARRS would call Asian American city leaders to initiate the Asian AIDS Taskforce (AAT), a group committed to mobilizing community-wide resources in the fight against AIDS. The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California hosted these early meetings in Japan Town.[100] The following year, the Gay

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[95] Interview with Lia Shigemura, conducted by author, July 31, 2015, Oakland, California. "Timeline – Achievements and Milestones," Asian Women's Shelter website, accessed June 4, 2016, http://www.sfaws.org/about-us/history/timeline-%E2%80%93-achievements-and-milestones.aspx.

[96] Website of Urvashi Vaid, accessed August 1, 2015, http://urvashivaid.net/wp/?page_id=578; "NGLTF's Paras to Leave; Lobel Appointed ED," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force press release, September 30, 1996, http://www.qrd.org/qrd/orgs/NGLTF/1996/paras.to.leave-09.30.96.

[97] Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[98] Nancy E. Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 63-79.

[99] The Asian American Residential and Recovery Services (AARRS) project housed the Asian AIDS Project when it first began in 1987. AARRS' office was at 2041 Hayes Street, San Francisco, California.

[100] The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California was located at 1840 Sutter Street in San Francisco. Letter from Davis Y. Ja, July 14, 1987, Folder Meeting Minutes:

Asian Pacific Alliance (GAPA) implemented an informal support group for HIV-positive gay Asians later called GCHP.[101] Chinese American Steve Lew, served a critical role in these early efforts as a key organizer, educator, and role model for other HIV-positive men.[102] In 1990 when Vince Crisostomo left New York and traveled across the country with his Jewish boyfriend to live in San Francisco, he found community and family with GAPA, the Asian AIDS Project, and particularly Steve Lew. Crisostomo's boyfriend who had AIDS could also access the organization's services and AAP offered Crisostomo a job in their theater program after he had applied for seven other jobs without success.[103]

Asian Pacific Americans also took formative roles in AIDS activism in other parts of the United States as well as the world. In 1989, just two years after the formation of the Asian AIDS Project in San Francisco, Kiyoshi Kuromiya who earlier formed the Philadelphia branch of Gay Liberation Front, founded Critical Path, one of the earliest and most comprehensive resources available to the public for treating

Figure 7: George Choy. Photo courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (George Choy Papers 94-35).

General, 1987, Carton 1, Asian/ Pacific AIDS Coalition 96-14, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, California.

[101] The support group often met at the Metropolitan Community Church located at the time at 150 Eureka Street in San Francisco or people's private homes. M. J. Talbot, e-mail message to author, November 23, 2015. The group would later grow to include women and youth and grow into what is today the Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center (A&PI Wellness Center). The center is located at 730 Polk Street, San Francisco, California. "History," A&PI Wellness Center website, accessed August 1, 2015, http://apiwellness.org/site/history.

[102] Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 64.

[103] Crisostomo had already been volunteering for AAP as a peer counselor before he was hired. Interview with Vince Crisostomo conducted by Toby Wu, November 13, 2013, San Francisco, California.

HIV.[104] Crisostomo, who was Chamorro, would also become the first publicly out HIV-positive Pacific Islander at World AIDS Day in 1991 and become directly involved in bringing increased HIV/AIDS awareness and education to Guam. In 2000, Crisostomo would return to Guam to become the executive director for the first funded community-based organization to do AIDS work in the Pacific.[105] GAPA board member George Choy would collaborate with OCCUR, Japan's first gay rights group that would successfully bring a discrimination suit against the Tokyo city government in 1990 (Figure 7).[106] In the same year, Chinese American Choy had also persuaded the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to pass Project 10, a teen youth counseling program within the San Francisco Unified School District.[107]

AIDS organizing in the 1980s and 1990s both gathered and nurtured countless community-minded APA activists committed to promoting Asian Pacific American health and well-being in the queer and transgender communities as well as eradicating broad-based fear based on gender, sexuality, or HIV status. Tamara Ching from the Compton's Cafeteria revolt worked as an AIDS education outreach worker for the AAP and oversaw a support group for the API transgender community for GCHP as the "God Mother of Polk [Street]" (Figure 8).[108] Transwoman Nikki Calma, better

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[104] The current address for Critical Path is 1233 Locust Street, Fifth Floor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At its founding Critical Path was located in Kuromiya's home in Philadelphia's Fitler Square neighborhood. See Interview with Kiyoshi Kuromiya, conducted by Marc Stein, http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/philadelphia-lgbt-interviews/interviews/kiyoshi-kuromiya; "History," Critical Path Project website, accessed October 5, 2015, http://www.critpath.org/about-us/history; Alyssa Richman, e-mail message to author, October 7, 2015.

[105] Interview with Vince Crisostomo, conducted by Toby Wu, November 13, 2013, San Francisco, California.

[106] George Choy Papers, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, California. For more on the discrimination suit in Tokyo see Wim Lunsing, "LGBT Rights in Japan," *Peace Review* 17, no. 2 (2005): 143-148.

[107] Choy was also a member of ACT UP and organizer for GCHP. Just two years later, in 1993, Choy died of AIDS. George Choy Papers, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, California. The three most important prevention and service organizations for APAs at the time in Northern California were the GAPA Community HIV Project, Asian AIDS Project, and Filipino Task Force on AIDS, all run by gay or bisexual men. See Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*, 66.

[108] Tamara Ching, "Piece of Mind: Stranger in Paradise," *A. Magazine* 3, no. 1 (March 31, 1994): 85.

known as "Tita Aida,"[109] who also worked at the Asian AIDS Project in 1990s became a community icon through her advocacy work, a host to countless fundraisers, as well as one of three women to be featured in the first API transgender public service announcement in 2008.[110] Transman Willy Wilkinson who was active in HIV work with Inner City Community Health Outreach and served as a founding board member of GCHP would go on to become a leading transgender public health advocate in San Francisco.[111]

Figure 8: "God Mother of Polk" Tamara Ching, by Tanya Wischerath in San Francisco's Clarion Alley. Photo by Aaron Muszalski, 2013.[112]

Historian Marc Stein has characterized the outpouring of community engagement in response to the conservatism of the 1980s as a "renaissance." Queer cultural productions and community activism flourished in the fight against AIDS and moral condemnation of LGBTQ people. The 1980s, however, was also a time of mounting anti-Asian sentiment and violence as the US automobile industry crumbled in the face of Japanese car manufacturers. The Vincent Chin case became a

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[109] "Tita Aida," translated as Auntie AIDS in Tagalog, is a fantastical transmogrification of AIDS from a deadly disease into a familiar feminine figure. For more on the sociopolitical use of "Tita Aida," see Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[110] Anonymous, "PSA Targeting API Transgender Communities for World AIDS Day," *AsianWeek,* December 5, 2008, 17; Celeste Chan, "Tita Aida – A Community Icon," *Hyphen Magazine*, July 26, 2014, accessed June 5, 2016, http://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2014/7/26/tita-aida-community-icon.
[111] Steve Lew, e-mail message to author, June 5, 2016; Willy Wilkinson, *Born on the Edge of Race and Gender: A Voice of Cultural Competency* (Oakland, CA: Hapa Papa Press, 2015).
[112] License: CC BY 2.0. https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfslim/8734532068

flashpoint for organizing against Asian American violence, regardless of gender and sexual identities. On June 19, 1982 in Highland Park, Michigan, two white autoworkers with a baseball bat bludgeoned to death twenty-seven-year-old engineer Vincent Chin after hurling racial epithets at him and accusing him of taking away their jobs.[113] Chinese American lesbian Helen Zia, who was a community organizer at the time and would later become an award-winning journalist and editor of *Ms. Magazine*, cofounded and led the fight for justice for Vincent Chin as the president of American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), the first explicitly Asian American grassroots community advocacy effort with a national scope.[114] Indeed, an explosion of the Asian literary and arts culture as well as community groups in the 1980s becomes particularly notable as queer Asian Pacific Americans came together during a time of extreme socioeconomic repression, moral conservatism, and anti-Asian sentiment.

On April 6, 1991 on Broadway in New York City, queers of color, leftist Asian Americans regardless of sexual orientation of gender diversity, antiracist white gays, bisexuals, and lesbians, and the Actors' Equity Association joined hands with Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC) and Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY) to protest two LGBTQ institutions' use of Cameron Mackintosh's musical *Miss Saigon* as their annual fundraiser extravaganza. ALOEC and GAPIMNY had long been in conversation with the two hosts— Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and New York City's Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center—to cancel their fundraiser at this musical that promoted damaging images of submissive "Orientals" and the use of yellow face in the casting

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[113] While prosecutors charged the murderers Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz with second-degree murder, the father and stepson pair pleaded to manslaughter. The judge, Charles Kauffman in March 1983, sentenced the two men to a three-year probation and a fine of $3,780. A federal trial the following year determined that the murder had been a hate crime, convicting only Ebens of violating Chin's civil rights. However, a retrial in 1987 acquitted Ebens and both men would never spend a day in jail for their crime. Robert S. Chang, *Disoriented: Asian Americans, Law, and the Nation State* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). See also Henry Yu and Mai Ngai eds., "The Politics of Remembering," special issue, *Amerasia Journal* 28, no. 3 (2002).

[114] The first community meeting that would later formally become American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) took place on March 20, 1983 at Golden Star Restaurant at 22828 Woodward Avenue in Ferndale, Michigan. The founding ACJ meeting took place on March 31, 1983 at the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council building at 3153 Cass Avenue in Detroit, Michigan. See Zia, *Asian American Dreams,* 64-66.

of one of the actors.[115] While the fundraiser took place as scheduled, the protest marked the formation of an incredible coalition of various communities publicly denouncing racism, misogyny, and Orientalism. Organizer Yoko Yoshikawa remembers, "James Lee taped a neon pink triangle to his leather jacket, emblazoned with the words: 'San Francisco-born Gay Man of Korean Descent.' On any other night, he could have been bashed for that. But that night, his back was covered. Gray-haired Japanese American wives and mothers and brash young white men from Queer Nation marched side by side. Dykes in dreads, campy queens, leftists of all persuasions: we owned Broadway."[116]

Queer API publications too flourished through the 1990s. Asian Pacific Islander lesbians and bisexual women produced *The Very Inside,* an anthology of over one hundred pieces edited by Sharon Lim-Hing in 1994.[117] Lim-Hing began thinking about producing the book in the summer of 1990 as she walked home in Somerville, Massachusetts in defiant anticipation of the local teenagers calling her "Chink."[118] At the time, except for *Between the Lines,* a short anthology of Asian American lesbian writing that was out of print and hard to obtain, Asian women's writings had only appeared in small numbers as part of women of color anthologies or as tokens towards diversity in white anthologies.[119] Lim-Hing sought to create something as large as Gloria Anzaldúa's and Cherrie Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* to speak to Asian Pacific bisexual and lesbian women's strength, beauty, creativity, and rage so that these

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[115] Yoko Yoshikawa, "The Heat is on Miss Saigon Coalition: Organizing Across Race and Sexuality," in *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, 41-56; Alex Witchel, "Actor's Equity Attacks Casting of 'Miss Saigon,'" *New York Times*, July 26, 1990, accessed June 5, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/26/theater/actors-equity-attacks-casting-of-miss-saigon.html.

[116] Yoshikawa, "The Heat is on Miss Saigon Coalition," 55.

[117] Sharon Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women* (Toronto, Ontario: Sister Vision Press, 1994).

[118] After arriving home, in the heat of her apartment and with the neighbor's dog barking incessantly, Lim-Hing in her discomfort decided that Asian and Pacific Islander lesbians should have a book of their own.

[119] C. Chung, A. Kim, and A. K. Lemeshewsky, *Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, California* (Santa Cruz, CA: Dancing Bird Press, 1987).

women would be more than just "a blip on the graph at the intersection of 'race' and sexual preference, nor… the hub of triple oppressions."[120]

Six years later, Quang Bao and Hanya Yanagihara published *Take Out,* an anthology produced with the support of the Asian American Writer's Workshop in New York that brought gay Asian men into a growing number of works that largely featured queer women.[121] More artistry and less activism motivated their publication, which the editors hoped would force readers "to reevaluate [their] conceptions of gay Asian America." The collection comprised mostly of men since the editors decided to not "worry too much about gender equity" since it was "far better to sacrifice quantity for quality."[122] With the editors' less than feminist impulse, *Take Out* might serve as the cap to a literary movement started by radical Asian lesbians thirty years earlier.

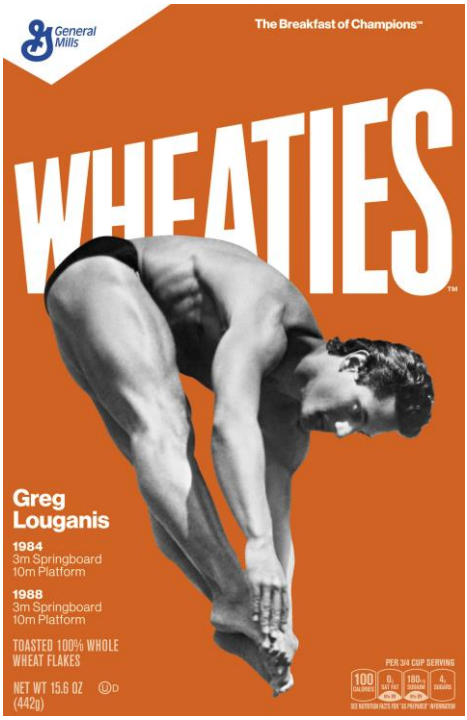

Figure 9: Greg Louganis was the first openly gay athlete to appear on a Wheaties box, part of the Wheaties Legends series, announced April 5, 2016. Image courtesy of General Mills[123]

The most widely read queer API writing of the 1990s, however, was Olympic medalist Greg Louganis' autobiography titled *Breaking the Surface* in which he publicly came out as HIV positive after nearly a decade of rumors in professional sports that he was gay. Louganis, who is of mixed Samoan and white

[120] Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*, Introduction.

[121] The Asian American Writer's Workshop was located at 16 West 32nd Street, Suite 10A, New York City, New York. See Quang Bao and Hanya Yanagihara, *Take Out: Queer Writing from Asian Pacific America* (New York: Asian American Writer's Workshop, 2000).

[122] Bao and Yanagihara, *Take Out*.

[123] LicenseL CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 https://www.flickr.com/photos/generalmills/26161871682

ancestry, endured a childhood of racial and homophobic persecution and name-calling. He went on to win four gold medals in diving—the three-meter springboard and the ten-meter platform in 1984 and 1988 (Figure 9). *Breaking the Surface* became a New York Times #1 Best Seller in 1995, initiating his public persona as a gay rights activist. As the first prominent athlete to come out as gay, Louganis faced tremendous challenges in professional sports that impacted him emotionally and lost him millions of dollars in endorsements.[124]

Other activists published landmark texts on not exclusively queer APAs. In 1991, mixed heritage Lani Ka`ahumanu co-edited *Bi Any Other Name* with Loraine Hutchins and the anthology has become recognized as the "Bi-ble" of the bisexual movement.[125] When Ka`ahumanu and Hutchins could only submit their book in the "lesbian anthology" category of the Lambda Literary Awards, BiNet, an umbrella organization for a network of bisexual communities, protested and initiated the creation of a "bisexual" category in the book awards.[126] Ka`ahumanu had long been recognized as the mother of the bisexual movement with her role in the founding of BiPOL in 1983, the first and oldest bisexual political organization.

The 1990s further marked an expansion of queer Asian American activism with the development of the Internet. A swell of South Asian queer groups formed outside of California such as SALGA in New York City, Khush in Washington, DC, Trikone in Atlanta, MASALA in Boston, as well as internationally. Online forums such as KhushList, SAGrrls, DesiDykes,

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[124] Greg Louganis, *Breaking the Surface* (New York: Random House, 1994); Larry Reibstein and Gregory Beals, "Public Glory, Secret Agony," *Newsweek* 125, no. 10 (March 6, 1995): 48. See also Richard Sandomir, "Movement Builds to Honor Greg Louganis on a Wheaties Box," *New York Times*, August 22, 2015, accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/sports/olympics/movement-builds-to-honor-greg-louganis-on-a-wheaties-box.html?_r=0. See also Schweighofer (this volume).

[125] Ka`ahumanu was born Lani Farrell and took the last name Ka`ahumanu in 1979 at the suggestion of her mother. Trinity Ordona details Ka`ahumanu's heritage as the following, "[her] maternal grandmother was part Native Hawaiian, her maternal grandfather was Eurasian. Her mother Minerva Helani, was born in Japan and raised in Japan and later Hawaii. Her father, a man of Irish and Polish ancestry, married her mother in Hawaii where they met." Ordona, "Coming Out Together," 292. See also Hutchins (this volume).

[126] "BiNet USA," GLBTQ Encyclopedia Project website, accessed June 4, 2016, http://www.glbtqarchive.com/ssh/binet_usa_S.pdf.

GayBombay, and Khushnet.com multiplied as the web become more accessible.[127] A queer Vietnamese American support group in Southern California called Ô-Môi also took advantage of the Internet to grow significantly from its initial six members in 1995 to fifty-four members by 2000.[128]

Organizations within the ethnic mainstream also increasingly recognized LGBTQ members within their communities. In 1990, when much of the nation feared to even breath the same air as gay men because of the AIDS epidemic, the San Fernando, California chapter of the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) elected Takenori "Tak" Yamamoto as president. Yamamoto became the first openly gay president in any chapter of the JACL and played a critical role in the organization's endorsement of gay marriages at their national convention four years later in Salt Lake City.[129] In 1994, as AIDS became the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four, Pine United Methodist Church in San Francisco, one of America's earliest Japanese American churches, became the first reconciling or queer-friendly Asian American church in America.[130] In the same year Cherry Blossom Festival organizers in San Francisco invited more than one hundred LGBTQ women and men to march in the April parade, after hearing that a similar contingent had just marched in San Francisco's Chinese New Year's parade in February. Vice President at Union Bank and community leader June Sugihara led the Cherry Blossom contingent declaring, "It is so very

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[127] Mala Nagarajan, "Queer South Asian Organizing in the United States," *Trikone Magazine* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 4-7.

[128] Gina Masequesmay, "Becoming Queer and Vietnamese American: Negotiating Multiple Identities in an Ethnic Support Group of Lesbians, Bisexual Women, and Female-to-Male Transgenders," PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001.

[129] Harold Kameya, "Asian American LGBT Pioneers Recognized," San Fernando Valley JACL website, July 27, 2012, accessed July 14, 2014, http://sfvjacl.weebly.com/1/post/2012/07/apa-lgbt-pioneers-recognized.html; "Tak Yamamoto, Pioneer Nikkei Gay Activist, Dies at 74," *The Rafu Shimpo,* November 19, 2012, accessed July 14, 2014, http://www.rafu.com/2012/11/tak-yamamoto-pioneer-nikkei-gay-activist-dies-at-74.

[130] "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," AIDS.gov website, accessed July 14, 2014, http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline; "Pine is Proud to be a Reconciling Church," Pine United Methodist Church website, accessed July 14, 2014, http://www.pineumc.org/reconciling.htm. Pine United Methodist Church is located at 426 Thirty-Third Avenue, San Francisco, California.

important to recognize and support the lesbian and gay people in our Japanese American community."[131]

The 1990s also marked a period when more API parents publicly vocalized support of their gay, lesbian, and bisexual children. In 1990, two years after their daughter came out to them as gay, Okinawan American Harold and Ellen Kameya became actively involved in Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) as the first known Asian parents in America to publicly advocate for their gay children. They first began attending PFLAG meetings at the Westwood United Methodist Church and the two informally functioned as an API PFLAG for more than a decade as the only Asian parents they knew in PFLAG. In 2012, the Kameyas along with other API parents would more formally cofound the first API PFLAG chapter in the San Gabriel Valley.[132] In Northern California, the API-PFLAG Family Project, later known as API Family Pride, formed in 1996. Filipina lesbian Trinity Ordona played a central role in collaboration with the API-PFLAG Family Project to produce the first documentary film of Asian parents discussing their queer children titled *Coming Out, Coming Home*.[133] In 1997, Al and Jane Nakatani in collaboration with writer Molly Fumia, published *Honor Thy Children,* a memoir of the loss of their three sons, two of whom were gay. The oldest and youngest of the Nakatani sons died from AIDS-related illnesses and the middle son died from a gunshot wound in an altercation. The father, Al Nakatani, later attributed his middle son's inability to walk away from the fight to his own mandate to maintain an inflexible prideful masculinity in raising him. Though the father had pushed his oldest son out of their house at the age of fifteen

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[131] Linh H. Pham, "Another First: Lesbian and Gay Asian Americans to March in Cherry Blossom Parade," Gay Asian Pacific Alliance, Asian/Pacific Sisters, and Older Asian Sisters in Solidarity press release, Google Groups website, April 13, 1994, accessed July 14, 2014, https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/bit.listserv.gaynet/0n2kPOFp7_s; Elisa Lee, "Lavender Godzilla," *Third Force* 2, no. 2 (June 30, 1994): 7.

[132] The Kameyas live in the Granada Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles. The Westwood Methodist Church is located at 10947 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. The San Gabriel Valley API PFLAG meets at Sage Granada Methodist Church in Alhambra at 1850 West Hellman Avenue. Harold Kameya, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2015. Harold Kameya, "A Sansei Family's Unexpected Journey," *Pacific Citizen*, December 2001.

[133] "First Person: Trinity Ordona recently helped make a video aimed at opening discussion between Asian parents and their gay children," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 26, 1996, A-8.

when he found out he was gay, after the death of his second son, he and his wife came to actively support their youngest son in his final struggle against AIDS.[134] These early works laid the groundwork for a flurry of publications and memoirs by queer APIs or their parents in the decades that followed.[135]

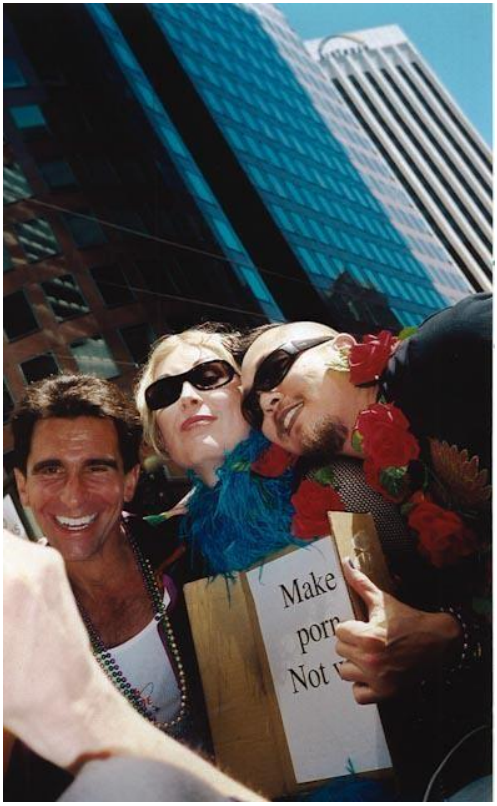

Figure 10: Christopher Lee (right) with Shawna Virago and Senator Mark Leno. Christopher and Shawna were the first transgender Grand Marshals in the San Francisco Pride parade, 2002. Photo courtesy of Alex Austin.

Queer Asian America continues to grow tremendously in the twenty first century. Countless blogs from queer Asians fill the Internet expounding upon the importance of community engagement and queer empowerment. Artists and community organizations have initiated the recognition of queer and transgender APAs for their historic activism, further shedding light on their previously hidden presence. Christopher Lee, the Asian American FTM whose death certificate motivated the Respect After Death Act was

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[134] Molly Fumia, *Honor Thy Children: One Family's Journey to Wholeness* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1997); Harold Kameya, "Our Journey," Network on Religion and Justice website, accessed July 19, 2014, see archived web page at https://web.archive.org/web/20150530060824/http://www.netrj.org/?p=library&id=2; *In God's House: Asian American Lesbian and Gay Families in the Church,* directed by Lina Hoshino (Berkeley, CA: PANA Institute, 2007).

[135] For examples of memoirs by Asian Americans see Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2006); Thomas Beatie, *Labor of Love: The Story of One Man's Extraordinary Pregnancy* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008); and Marsha Aizumi, *Two Spirits, One Heart: A Mother, Her Transgender Son and Their Journey to Love and Acceptance* (Bronx, NY: Magnus Books, 2012).

also cofounder of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival in 1997 and was elected as the first openly transgender man to be Grand Marshal in the 2002 San Francisco Pride Parade (Figure 10).[136] The aforementioned Tamara Ching, who revolted against police at Compton's Cafeteria in 1966, won a number of honors including the Community Service Award from the Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club in 2006.[137] In 2012, artist Tanya Wischerath recognized her and other transwomen activists of color in a mural along Clarion Alley in San Francisco (Figure 8).[138] In 2013, San Francisco Pride honored retired school teacher Crystal Jang as Grand Marshal in recognition of her contributions to the LGBTQ community as the first openly gay Asian lesbian teacher within the San Francisco Unified School District. Not only had Jang first spoken out publicly against the Briggs Initiative, decades later in the early 1990s officials appointed her the middle school coordinator for the Office of Support Services for Sexual Minority Youth and Families, the first office of its kind in the nation. For the following ten years, she assisted in creating K-12 curriculum for district wide staff trainings to address issues of bullying, antigay discrimination, safe schools, and sensitivity to alternative families.[139] More recently in 2014, San Francisco AIDS activist George Choy was honored with a sidewalk plaque in the Castro District's Rainbow Honor Walk, memorializing twenty "heroes and heroines of LGBT history."[140] Countless other activists such as Native Hawaiian Kumu

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[136] "Remembering Christopher Lee as Respect After Death Act Takes Effect."

[137] The Harvey Milk Democratic Club honored Ching at their annual dinner on May 25, 2006 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel on 1231 Market Street at Eighth Street in San Francisco, California. See Cynthia Laird, "News in Brief: Milk Club dinner tonight," *Bay Area Reporter,* May 25, 2006, accessed November 2, 2015, http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?article=868&sec=news.

[138] Caitlin Donohue, "Trans activists honored in Clarion Alley mural," *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online,* October 24, 2012, accessed November 2, 2015, http://www.sfbg.com/pixel_vision/2012/10/24/trans-activists-honored-clarion-alley-mural (web page no longer online, see archived link at https://web.archive.org/web/20150911001552/http://www.sfbg.com/pixel_vision/2012/10/24/trans-activists-honored-clarion-alley-mural).

[139] Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California; Crystal Jang, e-mail message to author, October 17, 2015.

[140] The plaque is located in front of 468 Castro Street. Bill Lipsky, "Rainbow Honor Walk: Passionate Activist George Choy," *San Francisco Bay Times,* accessed August 1, 2015, http://sfbaytimes.com/rainbow-honor-walk-passionate-activist-george-choy; Rainbow Honor Walk website, accessed August 1, 2015, http://rainbowhonorwalk.org; Queerty Editor, "San Francisco's New 'Rainbow Honor Walk' Littered with Offensive Typos and Misinformation," *Queerty*, September 3,

Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu have been transforming people's lives daily without formal recognition by teaching love, honor, and respect for indigeneity and gender diversity in classrooms, workshops, and public spaces.[141]

In universities across the nation, queer and Asian student groups are cropping up. In the San Francisco Bay Area alone, four institutions of higher education—University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, and Stanford—all have student-run organizations by and for LGBTQ Asian Pacific Americans.[142] More recently in 2014, the University of Pennsylvania formed its first queer and Asian student group called Penn Q&A.[143] Larger numbers of APAs in California as well as perhaps a more open attitude to diverse sexualities set the stage for more robust queer APA organizing in the West than other parts of the United States.[144] Most notably, a younger generation of queer APIs are taking interest in the histories of their LGBTQ predecessors. In the past three years, chapters of the queer advocacy organization API Equality in both Northern and Southern California have initiated oral history projects (the "Pioneers Project" in Los Angeles and "Dragon Fruit Project" in San Francisco) and have sponsored educational workshops on API queer

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2014, accessed August 1, 2015, http://www.queerty.com/san-franciscos-new-rainbow-honor-walk-littered-with-offensive-typos-and-misinformation-20140903.

[141] *Kumu Hina: The True Meaning of Aloha*, directed by Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson (Qwaves, 2014).

[142] Cal Q&A at UC Berkeley originally called CAL B GAY and Q&A at Stanford formed in the 1990s. AQUA at San Francisco State University and Q&A at San Jose State University began later in the 2000s. See Cal Q&A web page, accessed October 2, 2015, http://calqanda.tumblr.com; Q&A at San Jose State Tumblr page, accessed October 2, 2015, http://qnasjsu.tumblr.com; See Queer and Asian at Stanford web page, accessed October 2, 2015, http://web.stanford.edu/group/queerasians/index.html; Asians and Queers United for Awareness Twitter page, accessed October 2, 2015, https://twitter.com/AQUASFSU; Tiffany Chen, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2015; Joseph Lee, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2015.

[143] Victoria, "Queer, Asian, and Proud," *South Asian Americans Leading Together* (blog), October 6, 2014, http://saalt.org/queer-asian-and-proud.

[144] For history of Asian Americans settling dominantly in the Western United States see Chan, *Asian Americans.* For the West and specifically San Francisco as a place of sexual freedom see Kath Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 3 (1995): 253-277; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

history as well as Wikipedia Hackathons.[145] At the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco as well, the first of its kind in the nation, curators have mounted four exclusively queer APA exhibits since its opening in 2011.[146] Queer APA organizing and community engagement has consistently occurred at the intersection of race and sexuality even as much of the mainstream LGBTQ movement attempts to erase the significance of their race and ethnicity in what many Americans believe to be a post-racial America.[147] For these APA activists, sexual freedom, economic justice, and gender and racial equity are inextricably intertwined in their fight for a more compassionate and inclusive world.

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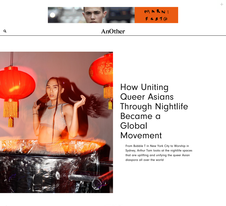
[145] API Equality-LA website, accessed August 1, 2015, http://apiequalityla.org; API Equality-Northern California website, accessed August 1, 2015, http://www.apiequalitync.org. API Equality-LA is located at 1137 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. API Equality-Northern California is located at 17 Walter U. Lum Place, San Francisco, California.

[146] Jessica Kwong, "SF Gay History Museum Finds Home, Identity," *SFGate,* January 12, 2011, http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/SF-gay-history-museum-finds-home-identity-2478991.php; Win Mixter, "All About the Castro's GLBT Historical Society and Museum," *Hoodline,* February 9, 2015, http://hoodline.com/2015/02/all-about-the-castro-s-glbt-historical-society-and-museum.

[147] For more on post-racial America see David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 1-57.



How Uniting Queer Asians Through Nightlife Became a Global Movement

From Bubble T in New York City to Worship in Sydney, AnOther Turn looks at the nightlife spaces that are uplifting and unifying the queer Asian diasporas of over the world

FEBRUARY 21, 2021
TEXT Sofia Tan
LEAD IMAGE A Light at Mak by Bubble Tea, Toronto – Reggie Lim for an AnOther Magazine by Yee Nguyen

The last party I attended before the pandemic rendered nightlife nonexistent was Bubble Tea's Lunar New Year Party at Mak in Toronto. It was February 2020 in Toronto, the city I'd lived in for a long-thing Bay for almost eight years – and it felt like it would be one caught by its surprise. It was Bella Mar – Hong Kong's legendary diva – blowing from the surround sound in a packed-out bar, and it felt like it would be the last time I would see my friends for a long time. Guests were asked to wear a lot of colour at Bubble, providing comfort in the form of nostalgiated tools into my status as an American minority. The night carried an under a sense of urgency, as if we knew that we would need to hold onto this feeling for dear, and we arrived a mouse-lead and earned Valentine-inspired ensembles spread to the sound of Clara Lu's accompaniment on the other. This was before transmitting the 2 metre rule, before the Asian Hate Crime Bill, before the Atlanta shootings, before the Asian drag stars just beginning, the long-shot moment around the world had provided, the year of the not-would be one of dramatic changes.

The most obvious change being the pandemic, but discussions concerning the dynamics of race, oppression and belonging have again bubbled to the surface. This is where Bubble Tea, a Toronto-based Asian-inclusive nightlife collective, comes in. Bubble Tea's mission is to combatize a conscious thread across a disparate multiethnic community. Hence the name – Bubble Tea is a drink that is Asian, but also Taiwanese, and it's also a drink that is a mixture of tea, milk and tapioca, a combination of ingredients that are all different.

In fact, University of California Berkeley graduate Jessica Tan and Yu Lin Chen, who joined the term "Asian-American" to build solidarity against the Vietnam War, and in a time when Asian-American was a term that was unknown to most, the duo felt that it was time for patterns to distinguish between different Asian ethnicities, and so the queer Asian-inclusive collective was born.

The force of the Asian-American experience has shifted since then. Instead of true "they" lies as, there has been a rebirth in how "we" also see ourselves, which encompasses the resurrection and acknowledgement of the LGBTQ+ community.

Bubble T had its first party in 2017, and now it's grown to become a representation of an Asian-inclusive community, with parties in Toronto, Los Angeles and Sydney. Founded by the Asian Designers with whereabouts in Contiguous Indian cities, Tim Pham R&B and Hip Hop, and Lunar Pong Dai in a studded boy rap. "Self-expression was no longer a requirement to be a part of the community," says Tan. "Bubble Tea's mission is to celebrate of queerness within the Asian community, but a large part of judging if that has happened or not, is knowing how you, as Asian and queer, carry so, living yourself – something that's different for everybody and everybody's journey. It's not for me to imagine that possibility and provide a platform for visibility and celebration."

A Light at Mak by Bubble Tea, Toronto – Reggie Lim

QWA, Los Angeles

"It has become homogeneous to assert your heritage to contain the racism spurred on by Trump," says Zahawaal Lowal, artist, filmmaker and creator of vanda Arabian Princess Hwang, who is most well-known for its work with BLK and PEG lounge. Recently, we are seen increasing the representation of Black culture in the UK, but Asian brands should be more than just a "token" Asian, and Hwang's work with BLK and PEG has been powerful, but also because discuss stories of the Asian immigrant experience. Since the Pandemic, Hwang has mostly being LIVE – making a series, Thug at an ultra-bar at the Hollywood Bowl, and performing at Coachella, Hwang's work has been.

I had the opportunity to interview Hwang a few years ago when she released her first narrative short in years, *Kite of the Rabbit Doll* – a literary story combining historic Japanese folklore with the modern day experience of a young woman in the Asian-American Asian book. The film accomplishes a feat important Hwang is acknowledged that a queer Asian societies, there is a deep history of queerness and homosexuality that has long been ignored, and Hwang's work has been a part of the movement to bring that legitimate the element of queer Asian in the mainstream. Hwang has brought these queer characters to the forefront without adherence to a limited gaze. In the UK, Hwang's work with BLK and PEG, she has brought a "Black" lens to the Asian, and Hwang's Cue's is "unique." To which she explained, "I have to see that in-style position as a period."

Kite of the Rabbit Doll has received awards from the Japan Asian community, in Los Angeles, there was a sold-out screen of the Hwang's short, and Hwang and photographer Phui Le spoke to a packed house about the reclamation of their sexual narrative. Hwang's work has been a queer Asian of series. We reactions to see that conversion again.

For Wong, the need to create a dedicated queer Asian nightlife space was essential as a means not only to celebrate the monopoly of the arts, but also to provide a sacrificial space for the community to be able to be "free." Wong's Asian-inclusive nightlife collective, "My Ayre Sunrise Blossoms." But there was something still missing, a feeling of isolation when solving the crowds and dwarving sounds. "I couldn't connect to a space culturally."

So, attempting to fill the void, QWA set off and officially launched in 2019 during the Lunar New Year. Wong's vision for QWA was to create a space that celebrated the queer, celebrating different aspects of Asian culture with theatrical nights dedicated to genres like Burlesque, Filipino mythology and Shibari – the ancient art of Japanese bondage. "We thought about getting bondage," Wong says.

A Light at Mak by Bubble Tea, Toronto – Reggie Lim

Worship, Sydney

"Years ago, it was known" sounds musician and unknown artist Ryan Tan, who has made a name for himself in Sydney's Asian-inclusive nightlife scene. Tan's music is well-known, referring to Detroit Brown, where predominate gay nightlife culture. "There was the year, then there were these white people performing on gentlemen."

As a citizen of the world, Tan is acknowledged that only was he one of the few Asian seen many Asian diasporic, but also Asian-inclusive, and he is also a pioneer of sexual Asian and Asian-inclusive nightlife in Sydney.

As queer Asians, the dating scene can be demoralizing and exclusive. We are either desexualized and reserved for simply being Asian, or we are constantly hypersexualized, objectified and fetishized for being Asian. Tan's music is a means to combat this, and Asian drama. It is a sound theory that many the Tan band had to "contend" but he will claim that many of his queer Asian pieces have accounted for the pressure of breaking in and overcoming in ways that will endangering his Asian identity.

Determined to carve out an alternative space for QTIPOC artists and performers, Tan created Worship, a nightlife space that "celebrates the Asian diaspora." Tan's music can "heighten celebrity and empower the community, especially queer Asians who need to see other people like themselves on stage." His drag artists will be on the stage when Tan's music plays the Queer Asian Nate Nate Dawson, who celebrates the holiday in style and in celebration.

"Much of the queer Asian movement is just starting in Australia," says Tan, who feels the country has a historical moment. "I've never seen such representation before in Sydney," he says. This is while we know that the queer Asian movement has started to take off and we have other that we supporting our room." he says.

A Light at Mak by Bubble Tea, Toronto – Reggie Lim

Bitten Peach (London)

"It is the family I didn't know I needed," says co-founder Lilly Sokolchiyan, who along with co-founder Sasha Sokolchiyan, has been hosting Bitten Peach, a collective celebrating the Asian identity through music, burlesque/boudoir, comedy, singing and drag.

Sokolchiyan – who prefers her drag artist name for privacy – was born of all the Stamos that born most Asian stereotypes to the ground. "Someone actually came up to me and said, 'I thought you were Asian,' and I thought, 'I don't look Asian at all.' I mean, I wasn't until she looked at me and said, 'Oh, I assumed that you were Asian because you sounded very,' Sokolchiyan. The only people perceived her heightened the importance of the Asian-inclusive community, and Sokolchiyan's experiences with racism, and the Asian community, the belonging of confirmed Asian women as submissive and demo. "When I'm in a big, I get scared," she says.

"I was a teenager living in Chinatown, and I always felt like a minoritarian kinda," she says describing the opening of her language"But I also realized that I can assume the role of a masseuse or nail technician. For the latter, Sokolchiyan lip syncs to Alexis Jordan's "Happiness" and Ariana Grande's "Bang Bang" and performs a burlesque routine. Sokolchiyan's skills and impressionists & Vietnamese nail salon owner Alexis Jordan and has signed and is the face of social group Bitten Peach and performers work confirmed, Sokolchiyan's "Bang Bang" is a "Bang Bang." Sokolchiyan's Asian-inclusive nightlife collective gathering Asian and Southeast Asian performers to organise shows that depict the other gaze and pierce the dragonic's multidimensional layers. Now the collective breaks over the Asian-inclusive community is a meaningful program called Peach Face to similarly dark and cultivate new talent.

For singer-songwriter Sonia Kaur, Bitten Peach, not only provided a platform for performance but it allowed her to "finally understand what it's like being worldwide, queer and Asian. Before we had to be straight and maybe Asian." Kaur left Hong Kong – where she was a pop star – to come to London to study at Goldsmiths University and she called Now, after living in the UK for 12 years and discovering Bitten Peach, he found a chosen family with which he can communicate and a family with whom he can grow and thrive. Kaur's music is a means to combat the "Asian" stereotypes and to provide a resource to humans and struggling LGBTQ+ youth. "Sex, ideas of intercommunities and intersexuality is the core of Bitten Peach."

"I didn't come out until I was 25," says Sokolchiyan. "Even then, I didn't really come out – I didn't realise how queer I was and how much I was still hiding. But now, I don't have to."

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New Ho Queen, Toronto

"Historically, Asian people in the West are expected to uphold the model minority myth, and that's a very, very, very,

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THE MARGINS

In Search of Queer Ancestors

Pauline Park, Mitsu Narimatsu, and Sun Pham talk to Miyako Inoue

OCTOBER 2, 2018
DECEMBER 4, 2019

By Sarah Ngo

"If we didn't move to America, you wouldn't be like this," my mom told me casually, one afternoon a few years ago. We were chatting together while walking down the streets of Manhattan.

She was referring to a number of things: my abandonment of conservative Christianity, my lack of deference to my parents compared to my peers who stayed behind in Malaysia, and most obviously, my decision to be a celebrant in a queer church.

"I'm sure my attraction wouldn't have changed," I objected.

Her response: "You might have still felt a certain way, but you probably would not have chosen your path. That way not even have been in your life. You would just go along with what everyone else did."

Her implication was specific: Not that America made me "gay," but rather that embracing my attraction—identifying with it and acting upon it—was an American, or Western, phenomenon.

It was a familiar but largely false argument. Queerness has historically been accused, even respectably, within society. Indigenous Native American communities have long been aware of how much of that acceptance has been erased over the past century due to a confluence of factors, including Christian colonization, the imposition of Western gender binaries, and AIDS. For example, Spanish colonizers reported to Native American communities that Native women were considered of both women and "effeminate men" who appear as women and marry other men. In contrast, a Hopi "male's heart" in Europe and in western Christian societies, is associated with femininity and sodomy with devilcraft and pagan.

Yet, my mother was not entirely wrong. Much of Asia's queer historical and cultural traditions did not fit neatly into the individualistic constructions of L, G, B, and T. The queer figures of Asia were, and are, to extreme, genders—generally understood as fluidity with transitions, shamans, healers, their gender and sexuality were mutually intertwined with each other, and also with their ceremonial and spiritual roles. Though they were not categorized by a modern, Western vocabulary.

Sociologist and Asian Pacific Islander (API) queer historian Miyako Inoue is not widespread—it's not taught in most schools or mainstream media. But queer life within Asia may find displaced or alternated within their families, or geographically, in the diaspora, in search of others who belong to their kin and culture. I interview three trans API Americans—of Korean, native Hawaiian, and Vietnamese ethnicity respectively—to explore how they did or did not adapt their "Asian" selves, and how a queer ancestral lineage? How does this knowledge inform their queerness, or how they see themselves as a whole?

Pauline Park, an Asian Pacific Islander, in her New York City kitchen

Pauline Park, 47, is a prominent trans activist in New York City known for her work in passing the nation's first transgender-inclusive civil rights legislation, and in founding several organizations, including Queens Pride House. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was eight years old from Seoul, South Korea. Her parents were both educated in Korea, but they were not congenial to her identity, which, she recalls, they attributed to her being "Korean." Park's family was Christian, and her parents were the south side of Mississippi's Baptists, the same, shortly after the Korean War ended.

As an adopted child, Park grew up without a sense of what she would look like when she got older. Even her understanding of what Asian adults looked like was remote, culled mostly from Hollywood movies. Her family, she said, "didn't have Asian friends or Asian friends were the period into movies—including the model of the public, Asian."

Park at Queens Pride House (2017)

It was early, and Park had recently begun her doctoral degree at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, when 9/11 occurred. Her family, she said, "didn't have any connection to social science library, one of the largest libraries in the country. Every day, she walked in and noticed something that had ended her up before at the center of the library was an entire section devoted to Asian and Asian Americans, which was a great deal.

Curious, she took out the self-others work on Asia and started flipping the page, eventually making her way to the section on Korea. Korea had three distinct traditions, which I, as a Korean, had never heard of: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. Shamanism was the tradition that most her ancestral lineage would have practiced.

Part of an ancient, indigenous tradition that dates back to the Siberian homeland from which the Korean people originated, "mudangs" are spirit mediums who communicate between the spirit world and the world of the living, sometimes through dance, and are also, or occasionally, take on the role—they are called "shamans" in English—healers and seers. Some practitioners adopt feminine attire and appearance when performing ritual rituals, some do so consistently, some outside of the classroom.

Learning about the pakso mudang—a "proto-transgender," religious, and Korean figure—struck Park. "It felt like a revelation," she explained. "I was seeing Korea for the first time as a place that had a culture and a history and a worldview that I didn't know about, and that I felt between some bodies with. I felt I had found a place in Korean culture."

Park's parents, who had never been the case for White Mississippi, were—first as a gay man, and then later as a trans woman—in a predominantly white world. The only Asian groups she knew within the queer world primarily were gay men, and their ethnicity was, "to my sparse."

The queer elder is because chosen to her learning about the pakso mudang and other queer figures in Asia wasn't just important as a personal level for people like her. It was also a politically significant way to "at least, expose Asian and Pacific Islanders into the historical narratives of their contemporaries of origin. She explained to me how that work, to her, "a totally transgressive function. It's the only strength I have in the Asian community, which is a monophobic formation, which constructs APIs as queer only because we hang around white people too much."

Mitsu Narimatsu, Sun Pham, Pauline Park, Yoshiko Tsuchiya, and Miyako Inoue, at Queens Pride House (2017)

The contrasted, "The grain of truth is that GLBT identity as it's configured (in the U.S.) is a specifically Western construction, but that doesn't mean there weren't and aren't queer people in other cultures (in Asia)."

Continuing to the pakso mudang has informed not just Park's ethnic heritage, but also her spirituality and activism. Many of her queer friends are Christian, and she has created a group of the homophobic and transphobic Christian community, Queens Pride House, which has always maintained a spiritual view of the world. Although she had long disowned the institutional Christian, she said, she felt it was important to have the queer modified to guardian school, she began diving into astrology, tarot cards, and occult practices.

"In what I come across this encyclopedia of homosexuality, [the retaliation of the pakso mudang] was so fertile ground," she said. "All of this comes together, because I sometimes call myself a Christian, but maybe my work is a pagan, and I feel like, the figure of the pakso mudang helps her imagine a place for herself in pre-Christian, pre-colonial Korea.

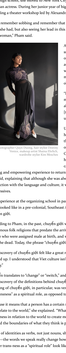
The sense of spiritual connection, but realize I was a mudang in a previous life," she said, then pausing to recalibrate: "Maybe I'm kind of a modern mudang."

Park's work with Queens Pride House is an extension of her work in the Asian community, and while she acknowledges that learning about the pakso mudang may have, in an abstract sense, informed her current work, she focuses on the tangible, contemporary, and practical.

Mitsu Narimatsu, 60, is "far" in physical proximity, years in time, and in a variety of ways, from Park. Narimatsu, who identifies as a "Japanese-American," and who, like Park, was adopted, then fathers a child, that is some significant distance from Park's family. Among their siblings, Mathias was always the most interested in Hawaiian culture, from learning to surf to picking up Kanaka Maoli language.

Starting at 19, Mathias became the most religious kid. Raised as a nominal Christian, they underwent what they describe as a "Nam Spiritual" phase, and then their father passed away.

"Christianity satisfied my deepest longings," they explained. "It told a story in my mind where I came from, what I was doing here, why I'm alive, and where I'm going," they explained. Two years later Mathias realized they were queer. Narimatsu, who, at that point, identified with the sex they were assigned at birth (female), then posed a problem within the church.



Mathias Narimatsu, Hawaii, 1990s

Embracing Christianity within the white suburban context of Florida meant adopting what they described as "patriarchal whiteness," believing that women should be subordinate to their husbands or transgenders was sinful, and that any ethnic heritage should be dismissed in favor of a white, Christian, and conservative life.

After a decade of dipping in and out of conversion therapy, Mathias decided to affirm their sexuality and reconnect with their faith during their senior year at a Christian university in South Carolina. Coming out as "gay" and affirming their sexuality meant losing the home Christ Mathias had built for themselves in South Carolina, so they moved to Topeka, Kansas to take a job at an LGBT nonprofit.

A year later, they took a new job in Topeka, Mathias heard about an LGBTQ film festival at Sony's drive-in theater in Kansas City. During the last day of the festival, Mathias walked into a theater to watch a documentary, Karen Ono, which they didn't know anything about.

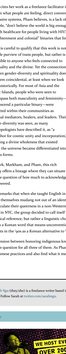
Karen Ono's film tell the story of Ono, Hawaii's first Japanese-American school teacher and cultural practitioner who identifies as a transgender woman and ex-mahu, a word that means "the middle." Mathias recounted to the film, "Hawaiian culture was more accepting of men who were as women, but somewhere in the middle, having qualities of both men and women. Before Western missionaries introduced homophobic and transphobic ideas, mahu were seen as the most respected as teachers and keepers of cultural traditions and rituals in temples. They held the responsibilities of passing down genealogy and naming children.

Watching Karen Ono felt like a second "born again" experience. It presented to Mathias a world of where they had come from, how to make sense of themselves as a queer person, and how to accept this the story was specifically rooted in their ethnic origin. It felt like coming home.

"[The movie] plugged me in this spiritual cosmological journey in a way that felt like a gift to me," said Mathias. "I was raised in Christianity, but I felt like I was different, I felt like I was queer and gender. Same with gender. At the time I thought it was about my sexuality."

It would be a decade after Mathias's conversion that they would come out as transgender, and they explicitly credit discovering the mahu tradition with helping them come out. The "spiritual cosmology" that Mathias referred to in the "transgender discovery" in a way that was centered in their own cultural context.

"I completely removed myself from my Christian upbringing and started to identify as Christian. So when it came to exploring gender identity, I was not about to do that again," they said, explaining why American transgender discourse did not initially resonate with them. Mathias described observing how other people would point selfies on social media. "I was like, I don't connect with this," they said. Before watching Karen Ono, the transgender experience seemed to me entirely a concept of self expression."



Mitsu Narimatsu, Sun Pham, Pauline Park, Yoshiko Tsuchiya, Miyako Inoue, and Karen Ono, at Queens Pride House (2017)

Being mahu made sense to Mathias because it presented a way to frame gender that "wasn't about my sexuality, it wasn't about what I do, it's not just about how you express yourself. It's about plugging a role in your community, not just your individual identity," they said.

If gives a choice, Mathias would identify as mahu over any other gender marker. "It gives me a sense of belonging, I feel like I belong," they said. Mathias, who identifies as a queer man, now goes by English, "man literally," still implies that a binary exists, evoking a static understanding of gender. But in Native Hawaiian and Asian and Pacific Islander cultures, gender is not fixed.

"I feel mahu serves a similar function that the word 'queer' does, it can be an umbrella for gender. Forever," said Sun Pham, 38, who identifies as a transgender woman and a queer man. Sad, I just think it's an incomplete way to think about gender diversity."

Learning about mahu opened Pham to possibilities of thinking about gender for Mathias—as well as learning about chapelle gifts for Xuân Pham.

Pham, 33, is a Vietnamese trans writer and digital media coordinator at the Transgender Law Center in New York City. Born in Ho Chi Minh City, Pham's family was Pham was raised in Westminster, Orange County. Everyone was Mexican or Vietnamese, so everyone looked similar to me. It was really cool," she said.

But while she felt a sense of belonging in terms of her ethnic identity, she remembers also feeling like she was the only queer person in town. "I remember being very, very, very,