

history courses and other courses with Asian content have consistently attracted significant numbers of Asian Americans. While Asian American students have always been active in the Asia Club, today they dominate in numbers and increasingly assume positions of leadership. In the past, their interests gravitated more toward participating in programs and events that highlighted the wonders of traditional Asian cultures. But this past February they initiated something new and in the future I will encourage their celebration, both Asian American as well as Asian.

As visible as the Asian American students were that evening in February, Asian America has been invisible in our curriculum. We've known for years that there was demand for Asian American courses, and the mission statement for the ASLC includes Asian America. The ASLC has sponsored Asian American programs and workshops for years, but not courses. And so my sabbatical for Spring 2005 will focus on the creation of an Asian American history course and related activities.

While CSB/SJU is clearly not cutting-edge in this regard, its orientation reflects the general trend across the United States. Asian American students, much sought after and flocking to America's campuses in ever greater numbers, have discovered that they are absent from the curriculum. And they are demanding change. Of the 43 undergraduate Asian American Studies programs, the one at the University of Minnesota began in 2003. The growth has been such that American colleges and universities are hiring a record number of scholars specializing in Asian American subjects. But as with African American History in the '60s and '70s, there are not yet enough Asian American specialists—and certainly not enough Asian Americans—to meet the demand. To quote from a recent article, "And with the increased demand for scholars to teach the new courses, some institutions are hiring adjunct professors without advanced degrees, or academics who once specialized in Asian subjects like postcolonial Indian literature..."² Why not someone like me, well versed in the American setting, experienced in researching and teaching American immigration history and U.S. race relations, and deeply interested in Asian and Asian American studies? Certainly small liberal arts colleges like ours will once again have to find ways to serve our students in the absence of the kind of resources the University of Minnesota has. The only question, it seems to me, is this: Will Asian American studies be housed in departments, Asian Studies programs, ethnic studies programs or somewhere else? It is, in fact, not a question of "if," but "when" and "where."

¹For an overview of the ASLC, see Lynda Fish, P. Richard Bohr, and David Bennetts, "Asia Beyond the Classroom: The Asian Studies Learning Community at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University," *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 10.2 (Winter 2002):22-25.

²Somini Sengupta, "More Students Increase Demand for Scholars," *The New York Times*, June 9, 1999.

The Asian American Experience and Asian Studies: Viewpoint from My Life Journey **Chia Ning** **Central College**

The separation of Asian American studies from Asian studies has the potential to create an uncomfortable place for Asian Americans. My life of twenty years in the United States explains this well. Today, if I need to decide whether my experience belongs in Asian American studies or in Asian studies, I tend to struggle with the "choice" and often see no hope for a resolution. The struggle seems as if I have to divide myself culturally in order to fit into one of two academic fields; defined as *either* "American" or "Asian."

Twenty years ago, I came to the United States from Beijing as a graduate student in history. After completing my Ph. D. at The Johns Hopkins University in 1991, I began teaching Asian studies courses at Central College, a Midwest liberal arts college. When I teach Chinese culture, I feel that I am teaching a culture of my own. My teaching pedagogy, however, is American. Such a combination has laid the foundation for my teaching career in U.S. higher education. From a foreign student to a permanent resident, and then a U.S. citizen, I place my life experience in both Asian Studies and in American studies. Only when I find myself included in both fields do I find my heart at ease from this struggle to choose.

From my observations in the classroom, second generation Asian American students still play an active role as Asian culture "insiders" in many cases. When we learn about Confucian culture, for example, students from Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and Laotian families, many of which are of Chinese origin, usually treat Confucian culture as their own. They place themselves in that culture voluntarily and use their family relationships when speaking of Confucian principles. They appear to the American students as an existing cultural model, and their comments are recognized as authentic and convincing. Whenever I have one or two of these students in a classroom which is otherwise overwhelming populated by Anglo-American students, I find the teaching and learning that occurs is more effective because Eastern and Western perspectives are both alive in comparison and in dialogue. This class observation has proven to me that the life of both first and second generation Asian Americans can add much to the teaching and learning of Asian culture, even though these students' life experiences are exclusively American. If Asian American and Asian studies were clearly separated, and the Asian American experience was treated only as "American," a fundamental part of their life experiences, based on their Asian origin and culture, would be marginalized.

The last twenty years of my life journey in the United States has been accompanied by a dramatic change in the larger picture of U.S.-Asian connections. As a result of rapid globalization, more Asian people are participating

in American life than twenty years earlier. The main form of participation for many Asian immigrants has also changed from one of obtaining permanent residency and settling down in the United States to actively making various connections between United States and their home countries, with or without obtaining permanent residency or citizenship. New forms of participation have emerged from economic cooperation, opportunities such as increased trading, educational exchanges and projects, cultural programs, short visits, temporary travel plans, and the like. Changes in American life have resulted not only from these new forms of Asian participation in American society, but also with the growing American participation in the Asian world, and for similar reasons. Geographical relocation of people, frequent travel in both directions, better and faster communications, new international job opportunities, intermarriages, and changing economic, cultural, and diplomatic interactions have brought American and Asian cultures closer than ever. The line of distinction between American and Asian lifestyles has become blurred in many aspects, just as in certain ways the Asian-American experience blurs the division between Asian American studies and Asian studies. These two academic fields have been facing, in Richard Bohr's words, a "new front" in the ongoing process of globalization.¹ Some recent studies have added a greater depth to discussions of this "new front." Influenced by globalization and/or internationalism, these studies have been working at redefining how Asian-American studies relate to Asian studies as well as to American studies. Jonathan Y. Okamura's article "Asian American Studies in the Age of Transnationalism: Diaspora, Race, Community"² and Stephen H. Sumida's "The More Things Change: Paradigm Shifts in Asian American Studies"³ are just two of many examples.

The intent of my personal opinion, as discussed above, is not meant to diminish the differences between Asian-American studies and Asian studies. Asian-American studies highlights people of Asian origin and their interaction with Americans in the United States. In Sumida's words, "Asian Americans are living and making a history that their counterparts in Asian nations do not experience."⁴ On the other hand, Asian studies primarily emphasizes Asian cultures, societies, and history. Along with a greater percentage of Asian population moving back and forth between their American and Asian homes more freely and frequently, their degree of "Americanization" or "acculturation" takes a different form from previous generations of Asian Americans. Compared to older generations, who were more, if not completely, settled in their American homes, newcomers are the stronger carriers of Asian cultures, not only because of their recent arrival in American society but also because of the constant "refreshment" of native cultures they receive through their continued and close ties to Asia. The life experience of these Asian-Americans is, therefore, more suitable to teaching and learning within the Asian studies framework. Placing Asian-American studies in this context, it no longer seems strange that Sumida writes: "...a shift began from the

question, How do Asian-Americans affect and reflect American history and culture? to the question, How are Asian-Americans related to and influenced by their Asian origins?"⁵

The "Asian **or** American" choice easily causes internal conflict for new Asian-Americans. The "Asian **and** American" approach comforts the hearts of many, if not all, recent Asian U.S. residents and citizens, who have brought Asian cultures to a new and different geographical location and social/cultural environment. Even if we take into full account the form of acculturation in which Asian cultural carriers have engaged in while interacting with other cultural carriers in American society, they have been under the direct influence of American culture. This acculturation, no matter to what degree, will not separate Asian-American studies completely from Asian studies. The existing Asian heritage of Asian-Americans will always contribute to Asian studies in some way. It gives Asian-American studies a foundation for understanding the Asian experience in the United States. Tu Wei-Ming, editor of *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford University Press, 1994), has presented a successful example by connecting the study of Chinese identity and culture in the home country with the study of overseas Chinese. This is an example that includes Chinese studies in Chinese American studies⁶—effectively compromising the strict boundary between Chinese studies and the study of overseas Chinese, including Chinese-Americans. If Asian-American studies is contextualized within Asian Studies, many, if not all, Asian Americans will find their own cultural place in American life.

Audience discussion with the panel at the "The Role of Asian-American Studies within Asian Studies: The Liberal Arts Curriculum from a Midwestern Perspective" session at the ASIANetwork Annual conference on April 3, 2004 indicated that my classroom observation of Asian-American students in Asian studies courses corroborates much of what occurs at other small liberal arts institutions, especially in Midwest. This Midwest experience can inspire us to do further research on many important issues regarding Asian-American studies in relation to Asian studies. Among the widely varied Asian-American experiences, the Midwest experience is dramatically different from Asian life in U.S. coastal/urban centers, where the Asian population has a longer history than only first and second generations, and where the cultural environment is much more diverse. The Asian-American experience at Midwest small liberal arts institutions is also very different from that at large urban-based universities and research institutions, where Asian-American and Asian Studies Centers/Departments are often distinct in both structure and academic approaches. As we are certain that the Asian-American experience can benefit teaching and learning in Asian Studies courses, it is worth exploring and thinking about whether this experience itself can be categorized as neither fully "Asian" or fully "American" but as an independent academic discipline. Okamura's discussion of "Asian Pacific American" is an example which explores this line of thought.⁷ Among the Asian-American popu-

lation, self-identity can reflect a variety of expressions ranging from affirmation of one's Asian origins to denying them. This self-identity can also change at different stages in a person's life depending on individual experiences.

As boundary changes between Asian-American studies and Asian American studies continue to shift, a definitive answer for many important issues will depend on how American culture is defined with respect to diversity. If American culture is defined as a mixture of diverse cultural components and Asian culture is one of the components, will there be a time when Asian Americans identify themselves only as "Asian" but not "American"?

The "new front" of Asian-American studies in relation to Asian studies creates many challenging tasks to academics and educators in these fields. I am hopeful that my life journey experience will provide a helpful voice in further discussions.

Works Cited

¹Dr. Richard Bohr's Introduction for the panel "The Role of Asian-American Studies within Asian Studies: The Liberal Arts Curriculum from a Midwestern Perspective" at the ASIANetwork Annual conference on April 2-4, 2004.

²*Amerasia Journal*, 29:2 (2003):171-193.

³*American Studies International*, XXXVIII: 2 (June 2000):97-114.

⁴*American Studies International*, XXXVIII: 2 (June 2000):104.

⁵Stephen H. Sumida, "The More Things Change: Paradigm Shifts in Asian American Studies," in *American Studies International*, XXXVIII: 2 (June 2000): 98.

⁶Particularly see chapter 9 "Roots and the Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States" by L. Ling-chi Wang and chapter 10 "From Qiao to Qiao" by Victor Hao Li.

⁷*Amerasia Journal*, 29:2 (2003):172.

Asian Culture Comes Home: Local Communities Teach Asian Culture to the First-Year Seminars

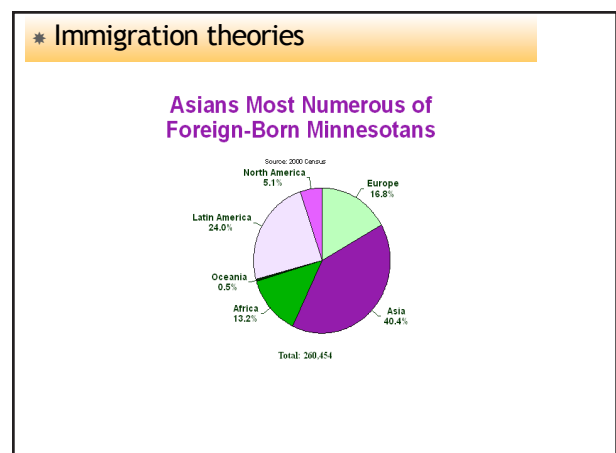
Diane Clayton, Hamline University

Diane Clayton, Professor and Co-Director of the Bush Library at Hamline University, has provided a powerpoint that is available on the ASIANETwork website at: <http://www.asianet.org/2004Conference> that interested readers can download later. Here are a selected few:

Organizing structure

- * Immigration theories
- * Literary voices of immigrants
- * Immigrant panelists and class visitors
- * Field trips to immigrant sites organized by students
- * Research and poster presentation

Presentation Themes



Minnesota Immigration Data