

MORE THAN WE IMAGINED

*A Reflection on the First 25 Years of the Journal
of Asian American Studies*

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the Asian/American Studies Collective*

In the inaugural introduction of the *Journal of Asian American Studies* (JAAS) in February 1998, co-editors John M. Liu and Gary Okihiro outlined the prospects for the newest journal in the field of Asian American studies. Arriving thirty years after the founding of the first academic programs in the field, Liu and Okihiro called the journal “a testament to the power of the original vision of Asian American studies” and a “fruition of decades of struggle towards a more inclusive and equitable future.”¹ They proclaimed that JAAS, affectionately pronounced “jazz,” was a place where scholars could present their latest intellectual developments and demonstrate a diversity of perspectives while offering space for critical dialogue. At a time when the field of Asian American studies fought for legitimacy, recognition, and consistency in academia, Liu and Okihiro described their projections of JAAS’s future goals as “lofty” but hopeful in stating, “our heady past and collective actions have shown that we can indeed accomplish more than we might have ever imagined.”²

As we wrap up the journal’s twenty-fifth year, it is important, then, to reflect on Liu and Okihiro’s remarks and consider the extent to which the imaginings of the journal’s inception have been realized. The journal encapsulates the many shifts, changes, and tensions of the field and how, as the June 2022 issue raised, we reckon with the interdiscipline that is Asian American studies. In many ways, questions of institutionalization continue to shape how we view, engage, and participate in academic spaces. What are the costs of institutionalization,

recognition, and legitimacy? In the wake of its activist past, what purpose does Asian American studies (hereafter ASAMST) serve and to whom is it accountable?

Whether the answers were clearer twenty-five years ago is debatable.³ The establishment of the journal in 1998 offered the academic legitimacy and institutional recognition that ASAMST scholars sought after a tumultuous beginning. Born out of the racial justice, Third World liberation, and student activism movements of the 1960s, the field of ASAMST established its foundations amid institutional challenges to acknowledge marginalized and minoritized experiences.⁴ Early studies sought to rectify institutional erasure by emphasizing identity and histories often ignored in the traditional disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies. The establishment of the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) in 1979, and its annual conferences since 1982, helped to legitimate and, for many, professionalize ASAMST as a distinctive field of academic inquiry.⁵ By the 1990s, at least thirty universities and colleges hosted ASAMST or ethnic studies programs on their campus, with the field's first bachelor's program at a major research university at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1995, initiated by Sucheng Chan.⁶

Maintaining degree programs, however, required more than the virtue signaling of academic visibility; it required the precedent of publishing. Prior to JAAS's inception, UCLA's *Amerasia Journal*, initially established by Asian American students at Yale University in 1971, advanced knowledge in the field in important ways as the main academic journal.⁷ Additionally, Washington State University Press published several edited volumes and AAAS conference proceedings in the late 1980s and mid-1990s that chronicled central conversations that further shaped the field.⁸ After a number of volumes, however, Washington State University Press discontinued their publication noting that poor sales did not justify their production.⁹

The growth of the field in the 1990s and departmental demands to publish in peer-reviewed journals necessitated additional avenues for academic publishing, which raised the possibility of creating an official journal for the Association. Led by Gail Nomura and Kenyon Chan, AAAS presidents in the mid-1990s, and Gary Okihiro, discussions on pursuing a *Journal of Asian American Studies* began. Relying on preestablished connections at John Hopkins University Press (JHUP), Nomura and Okihiro met with editors and a contract was settled between the Association and JHUP in 1997.

Coordinating a journal to meet the needs of a growing field raised logistical questions around issues of consistency, involvement, and public reception. JAAS followed a standard approach of many academic journals, publishing three issues per year, featuring largely research-based articles and scholarly reviews. Rather than being housed in one location, JAAS would "travel" to the

home institutions of its editors, including Columbia and UC Irvine, Lakeland College (Wisconsin), Truman State University (Missouri), Boston College, Miami University (Ohio), University of Washington, and UC Santa Barbara, where it is presently housed. While ASAMST, in general, would not lose sight of its activist origins, the journal sought to serve the interests of the field by presenting the latest academic developments.

Many of these initial choices, however, required adjustments to keep pace with the field's rapid expansion. Under the leadership of Gary Okihiro (1998–2002), John M. Liu (1998–2003), Tony Pepper (2003–2009), and Huping Ling (2009–2012), electronic submissions replaced mail-in manuscripts, the cover changed from plain text to color (Figure 1), and a professional copyeditor and process of proofing were introduced. Since the 2010s, under the leadership of Min Hyoung Song (2012–2015), Anita Mannur (2015–2017), and Rick Bonus (2018–2020), JAAS increased the number of pages to allow for more content, introduced the use of a workflow management software called ScholarOne, and garnered funding for an assistant editor position. The current editors, Diane C. Fujino and Lisa Sun-Hee Park (2021–present), introduced a new section on “Critical Pedagogy and Activist Scholarship,” launched a NewBooksNetwork podcast organized by Reviews Editor Christopher B. Patterson as well as social media accounts, and oversaw the journal's second cover redesign which displays the vibrant contributions of Asian American artists, such as Shyama Kuver's artwork featured in this image.



Figure 1. JAAS covers through the years. The cover featuring black, white, and red (left) demonstrates the first cover design from 1998–2014. The first redesign in 2015 introduced the use of images and color (middle). The most recent redesign in 2022 (right) allowed for the journal's name to be featured more prominently and also highlights the work of Asian American artists, such as Shyama Kuver's artwork featured in this image.

The editors' strong presence in the field, as well as recognition as the official journal of the Association, has garnered over three hundred and fifty unique essays and articles in the past twenty-five years. In 2001, the first year JAAS became available online, readers viewed articles 13,443 times.¹⁰ By 2010, article views grew to 42,555. Twenty years later, in 2021, article views reached 56,123, placing JAAS in the top 10 percent of journals viewed on Project MUSE.¹¹ In addition to publishing excellent scholarship, JAAS's frequent special issues garnered much attention by filling important gaps, representing major scholarly shifts, and offering critical reflections on Asian America.¹² The journal owes its successes to the authors, contributors, editorial team, and countless anonymous reviewers who donate their time and efforts to sustaining JAAS, as well as the editorial board members who provide guidance on important decisions regarding the journal, and the JHUP staff who execute the process of publication.

But at what cost? Moving from campus to campus may diversify the editorial team, but there are no guarantees that the academic institution it will be housed in offers the resources to sustain them. Our contract with JHUP makes JAAS accessible to over two thousand academic institutions digitally via the Project MUSE package, but the possibility of open access for articles, at least presently, is financially placed on individual authors. On average, JAAS publishes roughly twenty percent of the articles received each year. The journal's focus on publishing key interventions in the scholarship has, at times, ostracized the communities rooted at the center of our discipline and emerging scholars grappling with understanding the breadth of the field. Increased academic relevance and rigor also begs questions of accessibility and transparency.

As the demographics of Asian America evolve, we are also challenged to evolve our theoretical understandings along with it. The growth of South and Southeast Asian populations in the US expands the field's ideas of racialization while broadening our consideration to Canada and Mexico has challenged our understanding of who Asian Americans are.¹³ The September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, and the subsequent state violence against those racialized as Muslim, accelerated and complicated the field's understanding of the (de) privileged positions of Arab and South Asian Americans.¹⁴ These discussions crystallized in a special issue in 2003 about Arab Americans and will continue in our upcoming June 2023 special forum on Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) studies.

Further, critiques on race and space challenged the now-established foundations of area and ethnic studies, pushing us together to rethink the global. While initial contributions to JAAS seemingly prioritized transnational studies, submissions taking a "global Asias" framework have increased in the last five to seven years. Following critiques and concerns of the 2002 AAAS proposal to

include “Pacific Islander” in the Association’s name, JAAS more carefully explored the intersections of Asian Americanness and Pacific Islander studies in a special issue in 2004 and through numerous articles on Asian settler colonialism published since 2010.¹⁵ These issues provide a platform to critique Asian Americans’ positionality as settlers in places such as the Pacific and the US interior. While the aforementioned topics identify areas of growth, long-established topics such as empire, race/racism, and LGBTQ+ Asian Americans remain vibrant and generative fields of study, as demonstrated in this issue’s state of the field essays by Moon-Ho Jung and Martin F. Manalansan.

Though questions about purpose have not, and arguably, should not, ever disappear from our field, JAAS offers potential avenues through which to stay nimble in this ever-dynamic discipline. Reckoning with the interdiscipline means opening our journal to the “widest array of subjects possible,” such as performance and media studies, poetry, and visual arts to take seriously how open we can be, while continuing to showcase innovative studies based in history, literature, and social sciences.¹⁶ Current events, such as the attacks on critical race theory and the constant budget cuts of ethnic studies programs, forces us to rethink how ASAMST is situated in academic spaces more generally. Since 2021, JAAS has offered opportunities to address these issues through special sections dedicated to critical pedagogies and activist scholarship.¹⁷

As it is clear in constant debates within the field, the tension between our activist origins and institutional maintenance does not escape us. As I write this, the University of California system, where JAAS is currently based, is in the midst of the largest higher education strike in US history. I am regularly reminded that the origin of ASAMST was forged in the fires of the longest student strike in US history at San Francisco State College from November 1968 to March 1969. Fueled by this strike, the Asian American Movement sought to expose the links between racism, sexism, and capitalism at home and abroad through a transformation of higher education which, subsequently, “challenged and changed the racialization of Asian Americans.”¹⁸ It should not be a surprise that our present struggle parallels the concerns and needs of disabled, international, parent, and racialized students of the past. As UC academic workers, such as myself, fight for a fair contract, the question remains how this activism may influence academic understandings of Asian America and higher education in the future.

As we continue to think about how the field shifts and who it serves, perhaps there is potential to think about the possibility for academic and social spaces to develop organically to meet the needs of its scholars. ASAMST developed from a need to create space for scholars displaced from their institutional homes and JAAS supported this by raising awareness of the relevancy and contributions of our communities, while providing another outlet for ASAMST scholars’ input

to be valued. The Asian/American Studies Collective at UCSB, whose graduate student members currently support the JAAS podcast and assisted in editing/reviewing this essay, illustrates how the collective capacity for community care is not only central to the Asian American political project but to the sustenance of the field itself. Organizing and community, rather than institutionalization as such, is at the heart of the ASAMST project and is the foundation on which JAAS was built.

The benefit of being in a field that constantly shifts and changes indicates the promise of our future. In the next twenty-five years, JAAS can, like Huping Ling projects, “continue to reflect its original missions in promoting the understanding and closer ties between and among various sub-groups within ASAMST, in advocating and representing the interests and welfare of Asian Americans, and in educating American society about the history and aspirations of Asian Americans” so long as those who are invested in furthering ASAMST sustain it.¹⁹ Grappling with the field’s growing pains is the framework in which JAAS operates, and, in the words of Anita Mannur, “provide(s) new directions and possibilities for academic research,” while, as Rick Bonus mentions, “giv[ing] space to providing alternative definitions to what it means to be Asian American.”²⁰ To break new ground in the field, Gary Okihiro notes, requires moving “away from the essentialism of race” to “imagine new languages and ideologies (discourses) not of the master’s creation.”²¹

Lofty goals indeed. While it often seems that the solutions to the questions of institutionalization or who we serve shifts too quickly for us to keep up, marking these important developments and creating an archive of our growth is the task and purpose of the *Journal of Asian American Studies*. As the journal has demonstrated in our first twenty-five years, we, as Asian American studies scholars, should aspire to pursue goals always, at least slightly, out of reach because when we do, we can accomplish and become more than we ever imagined.

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NOTES

1. John M. Liu, and Gary Y. Okihiro, "Editors' Introduction," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 1–3, doi:10.1353/jaas.1998.0010.
2. Liu and Okihiro, "Editors' Introduction."
3. For further engagement on this debate see: Timothy Yu, "Has Asian American Studies Failed?" *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2012): 327–29, doi:10.1353/jaas.2012.0026; Minh Ha T. Pham, "A Success Worse Than Failure," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2012): 330–334, doi:10.1353/jaas.2012.0028; Celine Parreñas Shimizu, "Asian American Studies Must Be Defended!" *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2012): 342–346, doi:10.1353/jaas.2012.0021.
4. "About," Association for Asian American Studies, May 9, 2022. <https://aaastudies.org/about-aaas/>.
5. Liu and Okihiro note that the Association's meetings were held first in 1982 (UC Berkeley), 1984 (UCLA), and 1987 (San Francisco State University) before adopting annual meetings in 1988.
6. Mitchell J. Chang, "Expansion and Its Discontents: The Formation of Asian American Studies Programs in the 1990s," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999): 181–206, doi:10.1353/jaas.1999.0016; Angie Huynh, Jarel Park, Matthew McPherson, Teralyn Evans, and Victoria Wang, "Transformation of Asian American Studies at UCSB," Department of Asian American Studies - UC Santa Barbara, accessed December 10, 2022, <https://www.asamst.ucsb.edu/community/history/asian-american-studies-1990>.
7. *Amerasia Journal* 1:1 (March 1971); Don T. Nakanishi, "Amerasia Journal@45: More Than a Soliloquy," *Amerasia Journal* 41:3 (2015): viii–xxi.
8. Anthologies published under Washington State University Press includes works such as Gail Nomura, ed., *Frontiers in Asian American Studies: Writing, Research, and Commentary* (1989); Linda Revilla, ed., *Bearing Dreams, Shaping Visions: Asian Pacific American Perspectives* (1993); Shirley Hune, ed., *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives* (1994); Franklin Ng, ed., *New Visions in Asian American Studies: Diversity, Community, and Power* (1994); Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies* (1995); and Wendy L. Ng, ed., *Reviewing Asian America* (1995) edited by Wendy L. Ng. Email to Gary Okihiro, September 13, 2022.

9. Email to Gary Okihiro, September 13, 2022.
10. JAAS did not collect subscription data before it became available online in 2001.
11. According to data collected by JHUP, JAAS ranked 42nd out of 708 academic journals published on Project MUSE in 2021.
12. In its twenty-five years, JAAS has featured sixteen special issues featuring the following topics: Comfort women, guest edited by Kandice Chuh (2003), Pacific Islander Studies in Asian American Studies, guest edited by Davianna Pomaika'i (2004), Arab American Studies, guest edited by Sunaina Maira (2006), On the Virginia Tech massacre and campus experiences, collected by Min Hyoung Song (2008), Asian American Midwest, guest edited by Pawan Dhingra (2009), "Challenging Inequalities," guest edited by Johnathan Y. Okamura and Mary Yu Danico (2010), "Epistemologies of the given," guest edited by Susie J. Pak and Elda E. Tsou (2011), Mixed Race Studies and Interraciality between Asian-Latinos, guest edited by Rudy P. Guevarra Jr. (2011), "Debt" and the Cultural Logics of Owning/Owning, guest edited by Cynthia Wu and Kritika Agarwal (2015), On Filipino "feelings" and emotions, guest edited by Martin F. Manalansan IV (2016), Transpacific Futurities, guest edited by Christine Mok and Aimee Bahng (2017), Transnational labor and migration, guest edited by Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (2019), COVID-19 and Viral Racisms, guest edited by Aggie J. Yellow Horse, Karen J. Keong and Karen Kuo (2020), #WeToo, guest edited by erin Khue Ninh and Shireen Roshanravan (2021), "Reckoning with the Interdiscipline" by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Lily Welty-Tamai, and Paul Spickard (2022), and "Dimensions of Violence, Resistance, and Becoming," guest edited by Eric Tang and Lily Wong (2022).
13. See Erika Lee, "Orientalisms in the Americas: A Hemispheric Approach to Asian American History," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3 (2005): 235–56, doi:10.1353/jaas.2005.0051; Wei Li and Lucia Lo, "New Geographies of Migration?: A Canada-U.S. Comparison of Highly Skilled Chinese and Indian Migration," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 1 (2012): 1–34, doi:10.1353/jaas.2012.0005; Rachel Lim, "Racial Transmittances: Hemispheric Viralities of Anti-Asian Racism and Resistance in Mexico," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 441–57, doi:10.1353/jaas.2020.0034.
14. See Shilpa Dave et al., "De-Privileging Positions: Indian Americans, South Asian Americans, and the Politics of Asian American Studies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 67–100, doi:10.1353/jaas.2000.0003; Lalaie Ameeriar, "The Gendered Suspect: Women at the Canada-U.S. Border after September 11," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2012): 171–95, doi:10.1353/jaas.2012.0014.
15. Tony Peffer, "Editor's Preface," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7, no. 3 (2004): v–vi, doi:10.1353/jaas.2005.0022; Vicente M. Diaz, "'To 'P' or Not to 'P'?": Marking the Territory Between Pacific Islander and Asian American Studies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7, no. 3 (2004): 183–208, doi:10.1353/jaas.2005.0019.

16. Email to Rick Bonus, September 30, 2022.
17. See our full call for submissions on critical pedagogies and activist scholarship on “Journal of Asian American Studies,” John Hopkins University Press accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/journal-asian-american-studies>.
18. Diane C. Fujino, “Who Studies the Asian American Movement?: A Historiographical Analysis,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 127–69, doi:10.1353/jaas.0.0003.
19. Email to Huping Ling, September 27, 2022.
20. Donna Doan Anderson and Anita Mannur personal Zoom interview, September 26, 2022; email to Rick Bonus, September 30, 2022.
21. Email to Gary Okihiro, September 13, 2022.