



# Connections



CORNELL UNIVERSITY ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM  
FALL / SPRING 2008 - 2009

## IN THIS ISSUE

Letter from the Director Viranjini Munasinghe	3
AASP Comparative Race Workshops	
The Darker Proletariat Asians in the Post-Emancipatory Period Cheng Cheng	6
The Methodology of Comparison Professor Chris Lee Presents Ramya Kasturi	7
Shedding Light and Striking Chords Denise Uyehara and the Definitions of Identity Lawrence Lan	8
Perspectives	
Pushing Forward Asian and Asian American Initiatives During the 2007-2008 Academic Year Caroline Hugh and Ri Turner	4
Programming Your Day East Coast Asian American Student Union Clara Ng-Quinn	10
Looking Back and Looking Forward Reflections on the Sichuan Earthquake Erin Chu	11

Editor  
Erin Chu

Contributors  
Erin Chu, Cheng Cheng, Caroline Hugh, Ramya Kasturi,  
Lawrence Lan, Clara Ng-Quinn, Ri Turner, Ann Lui (layout)

Photography courtesy of Tina Chou. unless otherwise noted.  
COVER: Denise Uyehara, courtesy of the artist.

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

VIRANJINI MUNASINGHE

The academic year 2007-08 was an extraordinary one for the Asian American Studies Program. In my previous Director's letter (Spring 2007) I wrote about how that particular year (2006-07) students, staff and faculty had mobilized around the recommendations of the Asian/Asian American Task Force Report of 2004. Their determination to improve the climate for Asian/Asian American Students at Cornell University, I'm happy to report, has paid off. This Spring, President Skorton and the administration agreed to implement the two primary recommendations of the Task Force; first, to establish an Assistant Dean position to address the needs of Asian/Asian American students at Cornell; and second, to create a new Asian/Asian American Center. It was the vision, commitment and dedication of many students, staff and faculty, who doggedly kept pushing for what seemed at most times a hopeless cause that made this feat possible. Devoted students spent countless hours strategizing, organizing meetings, and writing letters in order to educate and garner support from the larger Cornell community. The Task Force members did painstaking research to present a complex and nuanced analysis of the Asian/Asian American student group, which powerfully conveyed that their specific needs be immediately addressed. Dedicated staff also weighed in on the issue, drawing on their own expertise to lend support. It is also important to remember and acknowledge that similar recommendations had been presented well before 2004 by students who have long since graduated and by the former Director of the Program, Professor Shelley Wong, all of whom recognized the urgent need for certain non-academic forms of support for Asian/Asian American students. The Asian American studies program, which is an academic program, will now be complemented with a student service component. The hope is that we improve not just the Cornell experience for Asian/Asian American students but for all students by taking these measures.

This year has been a very active one for the Program. The highlight was the East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU) conference that Cornell University hosted this spring. Cornell has hosted the conference twice before in 1988 and in 1998. The conference was entirely organized by students and Andrew Lee and Helen Tsang were the co-directors of the ECAASU committee. Professor Gary Okihiro (professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University) gave a splendid keynote and the conference, it was agreed, was a tremendous success. Cornell's Student Activities Office confirmed appreciation for ECAASU and its organizers by presenting the 2008 committee with the following awards: 1) Program Award Showcase; 2) Outstanding Event that Celebrates Campus Diversity; and 3) Outstanding Publicity Campaign.

We had an exciting group of scholars visit for the Comparative Race Workshop. In the fall, Professors Lisa Yun (English, Binghamton University—"The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves of Cuba") and Vicente Diaz (Asia/Pacific American Studies Program, University of Michigan—"Navigating the Moving Islands of Sovereignty") presented their work to faculty and graduate students. Professors Moon-Ho Jung (History and American Ethnic Studies, University of Washington, Seattle—"Outlawing 'Coolies': Race, Nation and Empire in the Age of Emancipation") and Chris Lee (English, University of British Columbia—"Enacting the Asian Canadian" and "The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies") were our guests in the spring semester. The public lectures in the spring, which were primarily geared toward undergraduates, attracted a lot of interest and were very well attended.

Congratulations are due to two of our faculty. Professor Derek Chang was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure—a most deserved recognition of Professor Chang's scholarship and dedication to teaching and commitment to the Asian American Studies program and students. Professor Clement Lai was awarded a fellowship at UCLA and will be away next year working on his book. This year we will be welcoming Visiting Assistant Professor, Dr. Ryan Canlas, who received his doctorate from Cornell. Professor Canlas will be teaching three new courses for the Program and the "Introduction to Asian American Studies (AAS 110) our gateway course to the Minor. Professor Thuy Tu who has been with the Program for three years will be leaving us and joining the faculty at NYU. We will sorely miss this exciting scholar, generous colleague, and good friend. We wish her only the best.

Before closing, as always, my deepest thanks go to Stephanie Hsu and Vladimir Micic for their dedication and hard work.

Sincerely,  
Viranjini Munasinghe  
Director, Asian American Studies Program

The 2007-2008 academic year was a milestone year for the Cornell Asian and Asian American (AAA) community.

First, in February 2008, Cornell hosted the East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU) conference for the third time in ECAASU's thirty-one year history. It was a record-breaking gathering, with over 1,500 AAA students from across the country in attendance. There were also performances with open and free admission that Cornell students and local residents could attend. In addition to the cross-campus collaboration that the conference facilitated, ECAASU helped foster Cornell's own AAA student community. Students who had not previously been involved in AAA campus organizing energetically participated in the organizing effort for ECAASU, and veteran leaders were happy to see that some of them continued their involvement throughout the semester in other AAA student efforts.

The second major AAA campus effort of the year was the launch of the A3C, which is the Asian and Asian American Center planning organization. Thanks to the efforts of the A3C, the Cornell administration has convened a committee to create the Center. The committee consists of undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff, and it is co-chaired by Dean of Students Kent Hubbell and Human Ecology undergraduate Caroline Hugh '10. The committee aims to create an AAA center on campus, a hub that would offer space for community-building, cultural celebration, and the development of an AAA consciousness—similar to what spaces such as the Africana Studies and Research Center, the Latino Studies Program, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Resource Center currently do for other marginalized populations on campus.

The Center has been a long time coming. The most recent developments began in 2004 with the publication of the Asian and Asian American Task Force Report. The report examined the recruitment, retention, and satisfaction of AAA students and concluded that the AAA community was being underserved at Cornell\*. Specifically, the report placed high priorities on two recommendations: first, that an assistant dean position be created in the Office of Student Support to oversee institutional efforts to meet the unique needs of the AAA population; and second, that a community center space be established on campus for the AAA community. The Assistant Dean position was created last October, and Associate Dean



### PUSHING FORWARD: ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN INITIATIVES DURING THE 2007-2008 ACADEMIC YEAR

by Caroline Hugh and Ri Turner

“As always, we end the year  
**pushing forward—**  
there is always more work to do.”

of Students Tanni Hall is currently coordinating the search for candidates to fill that position. However, in response to the slow-footed progress on the community center space, a coalition of students created the A3C organization to encourage institutional compliance with the second Task Force Report priority recommendation.

Student efforts for the A3C began during the fall semester of 2007, when leaders asked the undergraduate Student Assembly to support Resolution 8. The resolution cited findings in the 2004 Task Force Report as the main justification for an AAA center and declared that it was time the university followed up on this initiative. After a thoughtful discussion, the Student Assembly passed Resolution 8 on November 8, 2007, officially lending student government support to the creation of the Center. During the spring semester, A3C focused on encouraging upper levels of administration to comply with the Student Assembly resolution. On March 31, 2008, a panel of administrators including President David Skorton, Vice President Susan Murphy, Deputy Provost David Harris, and Dean of Students Kent Hubbell expressed to a packed audience their commitment to make the proposed center a reality.

President Skorton and Vice President Murphy then called together a committee specifically for the development of the A3C. The committee met weekly for the remainder of the spring semester. Most of the meetings focused on revising A3C's program definition, objectives, and programming ideas. The discussions built on the rough proposal that student committee members had drafted for the Center. The last two meetings focused especially on prospective spaces for the center. Currently, Dean Hubbell favors a space in one of the lower levels of Willard Straight Hall. The committee recognizes that such a space would be useful temporarily in establishing an interim center, but in the long term, the committee agrees that it is essential for the Center to have its own building.

Now that the 2007-2008 academic year is over, AAA campus community organizers look back with mixed feelings: we have seen a marked increase in the closeness, consciousness, and empowerment of the AAA community and its allies. However, we have also faced significant delays from the administration in acknowledging our unique needs and strengths as a community. As always, we end the year pushing forward—there is always more work to do. •

A3C is a coalition of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We welcome feedback and involvement from all walks of Cornell life.

Caroline Hugh is a junior in the college of Human Ecology. She can be reached at [ch455@cornell.edu](mailto:ch455@cornell.edu).

Ri Turner is a senior in the college of Arts and Sciences. She can be reached at [rjt23@cornell.edu](mailto:rjt23@cornell.edu).

## FALL 2008 COURSES OF STUDY

AASP is pleased to announce that we now offer a MINOR in Asian American Studies that is acknowledged across all colleges!

AAS 2820 Voiding the Popular: Asian America and the Politics of Culture  
R. Canlas, 4 credits, TR 2:55 - 4:10 pm  
Rockefeller Hall 429  
also ENGL 2820 / AMST 2822

AAS 3030 Asians in the Americas: A Comparative Perspective  
V. Munasinghe, 4 Credits, TR 1:25 - 2:40 pm  
Uris Hall G26  
also ANTHRO 3703

AAS 3150 Asian America: Violence and the Horizons of Cross-Ethnic Solidarity  
R. Canlas, 4 credits, TR 11:40 - 12:55 pm  
Rockefeller Hall 429  
also ENGL 3622 / AMST 3152

AAS 4530 Twentieth Century Women Writers of Color  
S. Wong, 4 Credits, T 10:10 am - 12:05 pm  
Carl Becker House G32  
also ENGL 4530 / FGSS 4530 / AMST 4530

AAS 495 Independent Study  
Staff, 4 Credits  
Permission of instructor required



Above: The Chinese Students Association of James Madison University performs "Miracle."

Left: tudents flock to Bailey Hall for a lecture on Day 2 of ECAASU

\* For the full version of the 3ATF, visit <http://www.gannett.cornell.edu/downloads/campusinatives/mentalhealth/AAATReport2004.pdf>.

## COMPARATIVE RACE WORKSHOPS CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA

### THE DARKER PROLETARIAT: ASIANS IN THE POST-EMANCIPATORY PERIOD by Cheng Cheng

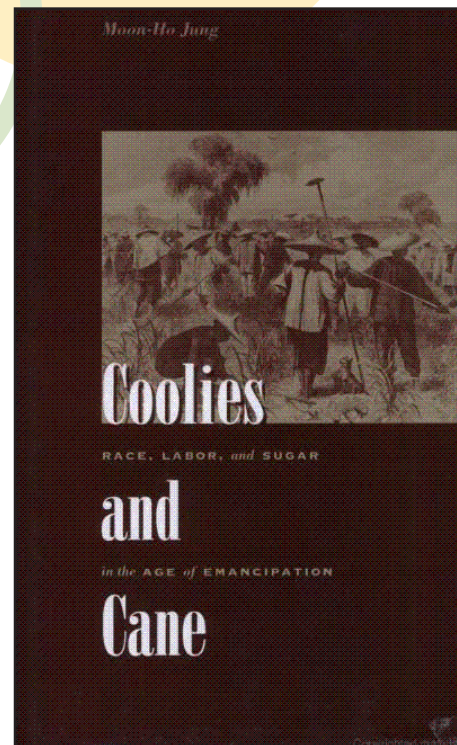
Dr. Moon Ho Jung, author of *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), received his Ph.D. in History from Cornell University in 2001. Jung, a renowned expert specializing in Asian American Studies, is currently an associate professor at University of Washington. His lecture, on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at Cornell University's A.D. White House, focused on the complexities between emancipation and the installment of Chinese coolies during the post-emancipatory Reconstruction period.

In his lecture, Jung made the claim that a major part of American history is the emancipation of the "darker proletariats," which supposedly includes laborers of African, Latino, and Asian descent. He stated that the very basis of emancipation, ironically, was based upon the racial exclusion of Asians. Throughout periods of American history, several examples can be cited to support the notion that American inclusion has rested on Asian exclusion. For example, following the end of the Civil War, an influx was seen of Chinese laborers in the hopes of replacing of African American laborers to work on plantations in the South. Many planters highly favored the new group of Asian "coolies," given that not only would they work for lower salaries than African American laborers, but were also devoid of many political rights, thus rendering them permanent, non-negotiable laborers. However, in 1862, the Coercive Labor Law, in addition to the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was introduced, in support of the complete abolition of slavery; it forbade the use of forced Asian labor in the United States. It was then proposed to make these "coolies" into immigrants, similar to the Irish or the German immigrant populations, to relieve the title of "forced laborers." This idealization failed because of the fundamental notion that Asians were not included in the immigrant populations; instead, they were represented as perpetually foreign. This was further illustrated upon the introduction of the Page Act (which virtually forbade the entrance of Chinese women into the United States) in 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 in this supposedly pro-immigration period where large influxes European immigrants were encouraged.

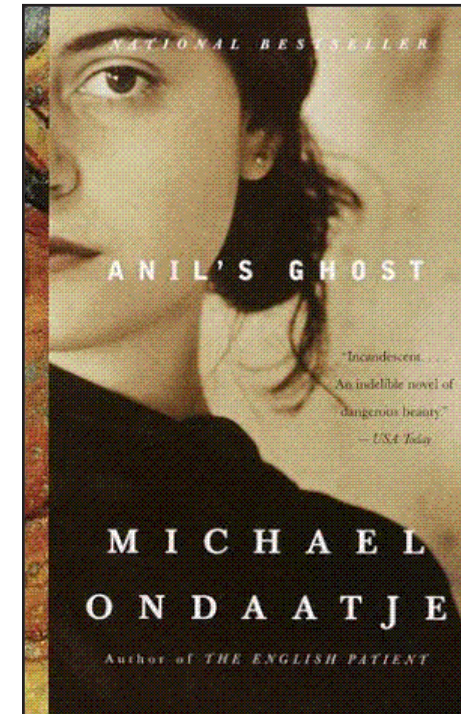
Jung's talk concluded that progression of Asian American history has always, therefore, been closely linked

to the struggle of Asians in the face of this racial exclusion. The lecture was highly interesting in the sense that he introduced the new concept that American inclusion relied on Asian exclusion. The very fact that U.S. as a pro-immigration country rested on the idea that Asians were not part of the immigrants. The examples cited in support of his idea were similarly convincing and insightful that the emancipation of African Americans was contrasted to the denial of citizenship to post-emancipatory Asian laborers despite both groups' similar status as the "darker proletariats." •

Cheng Cheng is a junior in the College of Engineering. She can be reached at [cc462@cornell.edu](mailto:cc462@cornell.edu).



### THE METHODOLOGY OF COMPARISON ASIAN CANADIAN PROFESSOR CHRIS LEE PRESENTS by Ramya Katsuri



On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Professor Chris Lee, an Assistant Professor of English at the University of British Columbia, engaged Cornell students and faculty with the fourth and last presentation in the Asian American Studies Program's Comparative Race Workshop Series: "The Asian Canadian/American Border and the Work of Comparison." The workshop series aimed to rethink

the concept of race and the methodology of comparison; Lee discussed in an abstract manner the process of comparison by examining Asian American and Asian Canadian culture. To further his arguments regarding comparative practices, he drew upon *Anil's Ghost*, a book by Sri Lankan Canadian author Michael Ondaatje.

Lee's unique approach to comparative studies is best explained by his previous education and work. Lee grew up in Vancouver and completed his undergraduate education in English at UBC. He then earned his Ph.D. in English from Brown University in 2005. From 1997 to 1998, Lee studied at the Asian American Studies department in the University of California at Irvine (UC Irvine) and, while enrolled at Brown, he spent a year in China at the Inter-University Programme in Chinese Language Studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Lee has, therefore, built up an elaborate background in both English and Asian American Studies.

Lee began his talk with a brief anecdote unveiling the subtle problems of comparison. He described a student in one of his classes at UC Irvine who spoke of "Japanese Americans in Canada." Rather than speaking of Japanese Canadians, this student failed to address any differences that may exist between the two cultures. Lee stated that, given

the ongoing process of globalization which has overtaken today's society, it is necessary to reframe Asian American studies in a transnational context: one can no longer focus on the nation-state. However, in describing what lies outside of one's own borders, one inevitably faces judgments and misrecognitions perpetuated by differences in values and customs. According to Lee, comparative encounters are inherently unequal. Because the border between Canada and the United States is unequal, and because the United States is regarded as the dominant of the pair, any comparison of Asian Canadians and Asian Americans will be grounded in this inequality.

Lee went on to discuss Ondaatje's work, *Anil's Ghost*, to argue that the comparative process is marked by two concepts: semblance, and shame. Briefly, *Anil's Ghost* portrays a Sri Lankan woman who has lived abroad for fifteen years and returns to her mother country for her work as an archaeologist. While there, Anil, the protagonist, uncovers her own shame through observations of semblance and comparison with symbols and social facts that she encounters in Sri Lanka. Lee explained that no comparative relationship could exist without shame. He expounded, "[shame is] when two things start to form a relationship, and something interrupts it." Asian Americans may feel shame in their recognition of the superpower status of the United States and make an effort to downplay any advantages they may have. Canadian Asians may feel shame in their own knowledge of the inferior global power status of Canada. Lee noted that the uneasiness created by shame is fundamental to all social comparisons. He explained that this should not stop efforts of comparison, but that the emotional dimension of comparative studies must be recognized.

Lee wrapped up his lecture with a Question and Answer session, during which he reflected on the differences between racial relations in Canada and in Asia, particularly concerning the Asian American and Asian Canadian identities. He also defended his argument regarding the notion of shame as audience members asked for further clarification. While some continued to disagree with him, Lee succinctly stated, "Shame overtakes you. You can't escape it." •

Ramya Kasturi is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences. She can be reached at [rk262@cornell.edu](mailto:rk262@cornell.edu).



# SHEDDING LIGHT STRIKING CHORDS

Denise Uyehara and the  
Definitions of Identity

by Lawrence Lan

In partnership with Cornell University's Council for the Arts; Departments of Theatre, Film, and Dance and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and the Asian American Studies Program, Ithaca's Kitchen Theatre Company welcomed performance artist Denise Uyehara to Ithaca as a part of its Kitchen Counter Culture series. She was also welcomed as a guest lecturer on the Cornell campus.

In addition to a lecture demonstration ("Shedding Light: Performance and Illumination") on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Uyehara led a three-hour solo performance workshop entitled "Finding Voice" on Saturday, March 1<sup>st</sup>. Over the weekend of February 29<sup>th</sup> to March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Uyehara performed three showings of her piece "Big Head" at the Kitchen Theatre, each followed by a discussion led by the artist herself.

Just before 4:30 PM on Wednesday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, I walked into Room 124 of the Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, wondering which of the people in the room was Denise Uyehara, Japanese-American performance artist, writer, and playwright.

I found out soon enough: after a quick introduction, Denise Uyehara leapt up and began the story of her childhood neighbors, the Abrams, and their adopted Mexican daughter who rebelled against her parents' Jewish background by running away with a biker. Uyehara then described an encounter with Mrs. Abrams and peculiar blue marks on her arm, vestiges of concentration camps. By the end of the piece, Uyehara had drawn blue markings down the inside of her forearms as if drawing a map. This scene, "Blue Marks," is one piece of many in Uyehara's "Maps of City and Body," a 1999 solo performance piece that explores identity through stories about people of diverse backgrounds.

Based in Tucson, Arizona and Los Angeles, California, Uyehara is a self-proclaimed "Jill of All Trades;" for the past fifteen years she has involved herself in interdisciplinary work—work she performs with words, props, and body movement—that examines individual and collective memory, as well as the issues of the body.

Her award-winning work has been presented across the United States as well as internationally in London, Helsinki, Tokyo, and Vancouver. She is also the co-founder of Sacred Naked Nature Girls, a multi-ethnic experimental performance collective. Uyehara holds a B.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of California at Irvine, and an M.F.A. from the Department of World Arts and Culture from the University of California at Los Angeles.

"Our identities are constantly shifting."

- Uyehara

During her guest lecture and demonstration on Wednesday, Uyehara performed scenes from her solo pieces, old and new. She also explained some of the "behind-the-scenes" processes involved in crafting her performance pieces. Her grandmother's suicide has inspired much of her earlier works. Her later work, however, breaks from conventional Asian American theater, as shown by her second and most well-known performance to date, "Hello (Sex) Kitty," which investigates themes of women, sexuality, and identity. Since then, Uyehara has been working on pieces that explore identity and other issues.

Uyehara uses her body in performance to redefine such concepts as identity and authenticity in a historical and cultural context. She uses her body as a powerful form of expression.

Uyehara's most recently completed performance, "Big Head," is a multimedia piece based on Japanese American internment during World War II and inspired by post-9/11 treatment of Muslim Americans, Arab Americans, and South Asian Americans. In it, she "mixes media," weaving text, "Claymation," movement, and visual images into a captivatingly non-linear work, a piece of which Uyehara performed during her lecture and demonstration.

Uyehara also discussed her recent in-progress performance installation "The Senkotsu (Mis) Translation Project," a response to the U.S. military occupation in Okinawa. Uyehara spoke of some ideas she has about this piece.

Instead of re-enacting senkotsu, the Okinawan tradition in which the bones of the dead are washed long after the body has decayed and then buried in above-ground tombs (haka), Uyehara's new piece allows for "mistranslation" in the cycle of life and death.

By performing "Senkotsu," Uyehara wants to clarify that identity is not fixed but is instead shaped by our interactions with one another. "Our identities are constantly shifting," she said to her audience.

Moreover, Uyehara's art celebrates "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity," terms attributed to an article of the same name by Dr. Lisa Lowe, a comparative literature professor at University of California at San Diego. Lowe has published essays on race, culture, and immigration in the context of globalization. Indeed, Uyehara's work attempts to cater to the complicated—to say the least—definitions of race, sexuality, and ultimately, identity.

In the Question-and-Answer session following the lecture, Uyehara emphasized the fact that the audience is crucial to her art. She typically evaluates audience dynamics, and interacts with members as she sees fit.

Uyehara, then, is a key example of how difference and diversity play key roles in the Asian American community. Not everyone needs to be a politically active field organizer in the community. Each of us has skills and interests that allow us to contribute to the community in our own way. According to Uyehara, her work is about "being an Asian American woman, a bisexual woman, and a human being...not necessarily in that order."

Her innovative style and voice have dispelled the tropes of the authentic "Asian American" experience, and her boldness and creativity have brought about newer pieces that touch on controversial issues. "These issues create the tension we need in our art-making," Uyehara said. Clearly, Denise Uyehara and her art-making have struck resonating chords within the Asian American community and beyond. ●

Lawrence Lan is a sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences. He can be reached at [lcl48@cornell.edu](mailto:lcl48@cornell.edu).

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CUAASP COMMUNITY

### PROGRAMMING YOUR DAY EAST COAST ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENT UNION by Clara Ng-Quinn

I became involved with ECAASU my freshman year, when I attended ECAASU 2007 at Yale. Shortly after that trip, I joined the ECAASU 2008 Planning Board, and then became the Programming chair in my sophomore year. The whole process of ECAASU—ECAASU 2007, forming a committee, becoming committee chair, the organization of ECAASU 2008—was a learning experience for me. Before ECAASU, I had very little experience with planning large-scale events, but the conference presented an interesting challenge for me.

I chose to work with programming because I was more interested in working with the content of the conference, rather than the logistics. Furthermore, since I am no good at math, finance did not coincide with my interests. In a nutshell, the responsibilities of the Programming committee consisted of organizing workshops and panels. But, in this task whose description takes up just four words (organizing, workshops, and panels) came a multitude of little steps. I spare my readers the long story and, instead, present some of the lessons I've learned and discoveries I've made:

One: start early, really early, because deadlines can always be pushed back. The Programming committee started sending out inquiries to potential workshop facilitators early in the fall semester of 2007. We didn't receive as many replies as we would have hoped. It was only later in the semester and even winter break that ECAASU began to attract attention. Suddenly, people were contacting us, and we still had the time to organize workshops for all of these replies.

Two: be explicit about everything, because somebody out there will misinterpret your words and create more work. Many a late email was spent clarifying our policies with workshop facilitators because the wording wasn't clear enough. However, sometimes these emails were due to number three:

Three: people don't read emails when they're supposed to, something that brings more trouble than naught. I think that's pretty self-explanatory.

Four: don't take classes that have prelims right before and after ECAASU. Unfortunately, the timing of ECAASU coincided with the first round of prelims, something that decreased my hours of sleep by too much.

Five: everyone in the Asian and Asian American



A student at the "I Represent My Race All the Time: A Discussion About Institutionalized Racism" workshop.

advocacy community seems to know each other. Workshop facilitators from various nonprofit organizations attended school together, or have worked with each other before. It's a small community, after all.

In the end, we organized a large group of workshops and panels, at first about 60 workshops, but after last-minute cancellations, the number dwindled down to 55. We offered topics ranging from Asian American Heterogeneity to Cultural Activism. Some workshops were interactive, some were "lecturette" style.

And now, we've passed the torch on to Rutgers University for ECAASU 2009, and it seems like they're going to have a great conference. Good luck Rutgers! See you next year! •

Clara Ng-Quinn is a junior in the College of Arts and Sciences. She can be reached at [csn7@cornell.edu](mailto:csn7@cornell.edu).

## LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD THE SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE by Erin Chu

At 2:24 PM on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, I was walking towards my house in Shunyi, a district on the outskirts of the city of Beijing, China, when every bus, car, and tiny white "mien bao chi," named for their resemblance to loaves of bread, began honking their horns nonstop. The sound was deafening—as it should have been. For three minutes, the whole of the People's Republic of China emitted what was called a "wail of grief" in mourning for the Sichuan earthquake, which had occurred exactly one week before.

The Sichuan province is located only 1,500 kilometers southwest of Beijing—in fact, my mother was instructed to walk down the 23 flights of stairs to safety when the tremors reached Beijing, and her office building began to sway. The earthquake hit a 7.9 on the Richter scale, the worst tremors to hit China in over 30 years. As of June 18<sup>th</sup>, the death toll is named with terrible precision at 69,172 people. Over 220,000 people have been injured, and over 4,000 children have been orphaned. China estimates the cost of the earthquake's damage to buildings and businesses to be \$9.5 billion.

Three days of national mourning were observed, and on the same day I walked through that palpable wall of auditory grief, 2,600 people watched in Tianamen Square as the Chinese flag was ceremonially lowered to half-mast. Furthermore, the Chinese government has recently announced that it will make an exception to the one-child policy, in place since 1979, for parents who lost their only child beneath the rubble of shoddily built schools: among the dead are an estimated 2,000 students and teachers.

However, I do not wish to merely reduce natural disasters to numbers completely removes faces from the dead, and from the bereaved. Large-scale efforts are pouring in: China has formally asked for and received aid from Singapore, Russia, the United States, Japan, and Taiwan—to name a few.

IBM-China immediately dispatched SAHANA, a free and open source disaster management system. Not only does it identify and record those who have been recovered, dead or alive; and those who have yet to be found, also dead or alive; it keeps track of official refugee camps, as well as the location and number of troops and NGO volunteers.



Rescue workers and volunteers bow their heads in the three minutes of mourning on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Courtesy of USA Today.

Finally, for ways the individual can help, a detailed list of organizations and contact information can be found on the New York Times website. You can also contact the Red Cross or the nearest Chinese Embassy: don't forget that the best gifts can come in the smallest of packages.

I might also point out that Cornell University's Asian and Asian American (AAA) community teems with resources, experienced leaders, and best of all, enthusiasm. I look forward to the fall semester, to see just what we can do. •

Erin Chu is a junior in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. She can be reached at [etc23@cornell.edu](mailto:etc23@cornell.edu).

Asian American Studies Program  
Cornell University  
420 Rockefeller Hall  
Ithaca NY 14853-2502

Deliver to:

