MOBILIZING "ASIAN AMERICAN": RHETORIC AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF ASIAN
AMERICAN MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS


BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Historically, Asian Americans have been seldom represented, or if so negatively, in the mainstream media and not through their own accord. As a result, popular images of emasculated or villainous Asian American males, submissive or sexually threatening Asian American females prevail as the most salient representations. However, Asian American media organizations have been formed to address the dearth of representation by producing their own media or confronting the Hollywood media industries. While the term "Asian American" refers in large part to the people of Asian descent in the United States, what does it mean to be an "Asian American" media organization and who is included as part of the community of people categorized as "Asian American?"

Through a multi-sited ethnography, this dissertation examines the rhetoric of three Asian American media organizations: the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA), and the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM). These three organizations are dedicated to issues of Asian American media organizations. CAAM exhibits independent media through their annual film festival, funds films, and produces and distributes independent media for a national audience through their work with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. MANAA engages the Hollywood television and film studios to challenge the production of questionable media representations in mainstream media. FAAIM holds a grassroots Asian American film festival. By conducting participant observation research, this dissertation analyzes interviews, field notes, speeches, and textual and visual artifacts and reveals the multiple and complex modes by which these organizations mobilize a notion of "Asian American." This study of Asian American media organizations and its rhetoric offers an interdisciplinary perspective on the efforts to

construct a pan-Asian American community within an increasingly diverse and changing Asian

Pacific Islander American population.

*To my nieces and nephews.*

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I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the many people who have made this project possible. Although time and space do not allow for an individual "thank you" to all involved, I hope that this short section will express my gratitude for all those who have accompanied me on this journey.

First, I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Communication at University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign. Their support throughout my graduate school career helped make an incredibly difficult journey a bit easier to navigate. I would have never envisioned conducting a project on Asian Americans, rhetoric, and media organizations in the cornfields of the Midwest but the department's collective openness made it possible.

Second, I would like to thank the Asian American Studies program and its Jeffrey Tanaka Research grant for providing financial assistance to conduct my research as well as a place to share my work. I am happy be a part of such an innovative and interdisciplinary community of scholars.

Of course, this project would not be possible without the organizations: the Center for Asian American Media, the Media Action Network for Asian Americans, and the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media. These organizations do valuable, and sometimes unappreciated, work and deal with changing circumstances, fickle audiences, fluctuating resources in both human and financial ways. These organizations continued existence is a testament to their members' passion and dedication to changing how Asian Americans are perceived in the media. I would like to recognize the organizations and their members who have allowed me into their space, meetings, and events during the beginning of the project and through the end. The ethnographic content of the project was made possible by the leadership

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACV | Asian Cinevision |
| CAAM | Center for Asian American Media |
| CPB | Corporation for Public Broadcasting |
| FAAIM | Foundation of Asian American independent Media |
| ITVS | Independent Television Service |
| MANAA | Media Action Network for Asian Americans |
| MC | Minority Consortia |
| NAATA | National Asian American Telecommunications Association |
| NPO | non-profit organizations |
| SAIC | School of the Art Institute |
| SDP | Student Delegate Program |
| VC | Visual Communication |

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2008, a coincidental overlap of business and pleasure worked in my favor, and I was able to attend the Chicago Asian American Showcase, the annual Asian American film festival organized by the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM). After presenting a paper, I made my way to the screening of the independent film maker Michael Kang's gritty crime drama *West 32<sup>nd</sup>*. Walking into the Gene Siskel film center on Chicago's well-known State Street directly across from the illuminated Chicago Theater, I proceeded through the red double doors, up the stairs, and encountered a bustling lobby full of people escaping the chilly April night and excited to see this new film. With a group of friends, we purchased tickets and waited in the lobby to enter the theater. The line stretched from the concession stand, around the corner, passing bathrooms on the side, and ending near the windows facing the street. The film screening was sold out; the audience was primarily Asian American, although there were other film enthusiasts, ranging in age from approximately late teens to the early 40s. As we walked through the doors and the hallway into the cinema space, there was a staircase on the other side leading to stadium style seating with plush red chairs. The cinema space itself was cozy and small, the chairs well-kept, and the floors free of dried soda. We took seats in the back of the cinema overlooking the audience.

After the film ended, Tim Hugh, the Chicago Asian American Showcase organizer, and FAAIM's director, took the stage. A young looking early 40s Chinese American male donning black-rimmed glasses and a black hooded sweatshirt, with a long beard hanging from his chin, Tim Hugh thanked the audience for coming to the "only Asian American film festival in the United States!" He paused briefly and, although slightly nervous, passionately explained, "You see. All those other film festivals also have international films. But not here. Here, you get to

see an Asian American film stand on its own.  Those are different films, but this is for you all."

The audience clapped loudly, apparently receptive to Hugh's description of the festival.

I open with this anecdote because it raises significant questions regarding Asian Americans, film, and how such spaces constitute valuable communicative labor.  So what does Tim Hugh mean when he says "Asian American?"  What is the Asian American community that Tim and the film festival implicitly constitute, both as patrons and possible agents of change?  I had unexpectedly encountered a rhetorical performance by Hugh and recognized his call for an Asian American media community supportive of Asian American media production.  Hugh made a distinction between Asian American and Asian films, cognizant as he was of the lack of Asian Americans in the mainstream media.  Hugh's speech after the film screening constituted difference by highlighting the "only Asian American" aspect of this film festival, establishing that Asian American is not to be conflated with, nor automatically connected to, Asian International, as other film festivals and mainstream media might imply or state.  Indeed, his rhetorical performance highlighted and made explicit the central role Asian Americanness plays in the festival and the film.  Where one might focus on the "Showcase" or "Chicago" aspect of the event, the importance of Asian Americanness in the constitution of the event, the organization, and the broader Asian American community within Chicago was emphasized.  In his short post-film screening speech prior to the question and answer Session, Hugh's rhetorical performance is seemingly a constitutive one, beckoning an audience to act, discursively constructing an Asian American community, and calling into being a consciousness around a racial and political identity that is ambiguous and dynamic, despite also being known as a U.S. Census category: Asian American.

While Hugh's constitution of Asian Americans and an Asian American media community through what rhetoricians might call a public address speech,[1] what is intriguing to me is that his speech is not the only act that ultimately constitutes Asian American identity. Although rhetoricians have often approached a speech like Hugh's to investigate the rhetorical constitution of identities and publics, the films themselves, the discourse surrounding and publicizing the films, and the space and locale of the film festival also assist in defining Asian American identity and how Asian Americans call themselves into being thereby constituting "community." Asian American identity and community are linked in a dynamic relationship with social, political, and environmental contexts, in which rhetorical practices occur, are weaved in, and are drawn out. Although Hugh's rhetoric addresses the public and the community, it is not an act that operates within a vacuum, constructing a meaning where there was none before; rather, it organizes the experiences of those listening to it.

Furthermore, while Hugh speaks as a singular rhetor, as if he himself constitutes Asian American identity and community, he also works within an organizational framework. Hugh's address to the audience is under the guise of being the festival organizer, FAAIM's director. Not only is he a man who enjoys film, but he also runs an organization whose goal is to promote Asian American media to multiple communities. Hugh's rhetorical performance is implicitly linked to organizational efforts of FAAIM and its film festival; it is a rhetorical performance not devoid of the context of the film festival surrounding it and the organizational alliances and collaborations with FAAIM. Thus, what we often forget is that rhetors speaking alone are not speaking singularly but as constitutively articulated subjects, bolstered by the organizations they operate, embody, and represent, while also being both restricted and enabled by the historical

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[1] Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Aristotle would likely describe Hugh's speech as a form of an epideictic rhetoric, a rhetoric of "either praise or blame" (48).

and present relationships, alliances, and (both successful and failed) collaborations. Although Hugh's performance raises important questions about the rhetorical nature of constituting community, it also raises complex organizational questions about the role and communicative power of an organization to constitute communities.

I start with this anecdote because it illustrates the rhetorical practice and performance occurring at a moment when scholars and general audiences may not be seen as "rhetorical" but rather as organizational. Instead, rhetoric is rather viewed as an organizational product meant to serve organizational ends and goals. For instance, in rhetorical studies, most scholars overlook the role of organizations in producing rhetoric. For example, McGee refers to the community and "the people" as primarily a fictional, rhetorical, and political gesture, one that we can never see actually materially yet is publicly referenced but is also how the "people" become employed as a rhetorical construct for rhetors and groups.[2] On the other hand, Charland's work regarding the *Peuple Québécois* calls attention to a White Paper, which is a document that articulates the reasons for Quebec's independence, as the centerpiece of constitutive rhetoric for the *Peuple Québécois*.[3] Charland's study of *Peuple Québécois* touches on, although never quite focuses on, the presence and role of the *Mouvement Soveraintete-Association* (MSA) and its successor organization, the *Parti Québécois* (*PQ*) in the constitution of the people, even though the *PQ* was the organization that released the White Paper. Charland states, "With the *MSA*, a national identity for a new type of political subject was born, a subject whose existence would be presented as justification for the constitution of a new state."[4] Indeed, the *MSA*'s existence as an

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[2] Michael Calvin McGee. "In Search Of "The People": A Rhetorical Alternative." In *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, edited by John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit and Sally Caudill, 341 - 56. New York: Guilford Press, 1999.
[3] Maurice Charland. "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987): 133-50.
[4] Ibid, 134.

organization allowed for the *PQ's* release of the White Paper, ironically illustrating the organizational basis for the production of a rhetorical document that discursively constituted a "people." Charland's treatment of the organization simultaneously highlights the potential of analyzing the organizational foundations of rhetorical practice but also the ease in assuming rhetoric is something an organization produces and not the very thing that constitutes the organization. Thus, McGee and Charland accurately emphasize discursive dimensions of constitutive rhetoric, yet pass over the organizational foundations of rhetorical practice.[5]

Even in organizational communication, where the focus is on communicating within and outside the organization, while communicatively constituting the organization, one would hope to find some discussion about identity that explains how organizations are discursively formed and how they constitute audiences internally and externally. Although Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick define organizational discourse as "the languages and symbolic media we employ to describe, represent, interpret, and theorize what we take to be the facticity of organizational life," which takes into account the constitutive and the social organizing role of discourse, what we find is an increasing emphasis on the instrumental function of organizational rhetorical discourse. This emphasis on the instrumentality of rhetoric focuses on what discourses the organization produces for its members or the general public, such as in the cases to benefit managerial interests through persuading workers and employers or to manipulate the organizational image in times of crises. For example, much early organizational rhetoric work focused on crisis communication or pure means and methods the organization used to

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[5] Michael Calvin McGee,. "In Search Of "The People": A Rhetorical Alternative." In *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, edited by John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit and Sally Caudill, 341 - 56. New York: Guilford Press, 1999; Maurice Charland. "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987): 133-50.

communicate public personae.[6]  Benoit's study of crisis image management emphasizes how

organizations manage their public personas during times of crisis, such as the Exxon Valdez oil

spill.  Boyd's work on the rhetoric of the Standard Oil Trusts of the early 20th century beckons

organizations to recognize publics and their opinions and to speak frankly to them.[7]  Thus, the

focus of previous organizational rhetoric research is on an organization's persuasiveness.

Organizations convince members to understand organization-related materials and to take part in

the larger organizational goals.

     While most organizational communication research on rhetoric focuses on the

instrumental, some work takes into consideration the role of the organization in constructing and

communicating identity through rhetorical discourse.  Most notably, Cheney's work on

organizational rhetoric incorporates Burke's work on "identification" to see the purpose of

rhetoric as not just a persuasive act but as an act of identification[8] and applies it to organizational

communication studies.[9]  Thus, Cheney's theory of organizational rhetoric has opened up

studies of organization rhetoric to be able to address issues of identification and not just public

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[6] William L. Benoit. *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies:  A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies. Albany*:
State University of New York Press, 1995; William L. Benoit . "Richard M. Nixon's Rhetorical Strategies in His
Public Statements on Watergate." *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 47 (1982): 192-211; Josh Boyd.
"Organizational Rhetoric Doomed to Fail:  R.J. Reynolds and the Principle of the Oxymoron." *Western Journal of
Communication* 68, no. 1 (2004): 45-71;  Josh Boyd. "The Rhetoric of Arrogance:  The Public Relations Response
of the Standard Oil Trust." *Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 163-78; Susan L. Brinson and William L. Benoit.
"Dow Corning's Image Repair Strategies in the Breast Implant Crisis." *Communication Quarterly* 44 (1996): 29-41.
Susan L. Brinson and William L. Benoit. "The Tarnished Star:  Restoring Texaco's Damaged Public Image."
*Management Communication Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1999): 483-510.  Jill J. McMillan. "In Search of the
Organizational Persona:  A Rationale for Studying Organizations Rhetorically." In *Organization* <--------->
*Communication:  Emerging Perspectives II*, edited by Lee Thayer, 21-45. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1987.
    [7] Josh Boyd. "The Rhetoric of Arrogance:  The Public Relations Response of the Standard Oil Trust."
*Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 163-78.
    [8] Kenneth Burke. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
    [9] George Cheney. ""It's the Economy, Stupid!" A Rhetorical-Communicative Perspective on Today's
Market." *Australian journal of Communication* 25, no. 1 (1998): 25-44; George Cheney. *Rhetoric in an
Organizational Society:  Managing Multiple Identities*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991; George
Cheney. "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication." *Quarterly Journal of
Speech* 69, no. 143-158 (1983); George Cheney and Lars Thoger Christensen. "Organizational Identity:  Linkages
between Internal and External Communication." In The *New Handbook of Organizational Communication:
Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, edited by Frederic M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam. Thousand Oaks:
Sage Publications, Inc, 2001.

relations. As a result of Cheney's work, recent communication literature on organizational

rhetoric has typically, though not exclusively, focused on issues of organizational identification

and commitment.[10]

Although there is some organizational work that addresses identity as it is rhetorically

communicated, none of it looks specifically at racial identity; moreover, none focuses on Asian

Americans. While a number of organizational scholars study race and organization and situate

their studies within dominant or mainstream organizations where race is often silenced, not

discussed, or regarded as a problem, a study on the function of race as an organizing principle

within a race-based organization remains unexplored.[11] Rather, organizational communication

scholarship often draws upon social identity theory to explain the role of race in intergroup

relations in the organization, instead of taking into account the rhetorical implications of race

within and due to organizations.[12] Ashcraft and Allen note that while organizational scholars

have looked at organizations as "gendered," they have seldom looked at organizations as

"raced."[13] Thus, they beckon organizational communication scholars to "engage race as a serious

theoretical matter," in part by "demonstrating the relevance of race across theories" and

"developing complex theories of the ways in which race gets organized and organizations

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[10] George Cheney. *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society: Managing Multiple Identities*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991; George Cheney. "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 143-158 (1983).

[11] Stella Nkomo. "The Emperor Has No Clothes: Rewriting "Race in Organizations"." *The Academy of Management Review* 17, no. 3 (1992): 488. According to Nkomo, organizational scholars "continue the traditions of ignoring race and ethnicity in their research and excluding other voices" and it is scholars in other disciplines that call attention to the omission of race and ethnicity in organizational studies.

[12] Jos Bartels. "Organizational identification and communication: Employees' evaluations of internal communication and its effect on identification at different organizational levels." Ph.D. diss., Universiteit Twente (The Netherlands); in Proquest Dissertations And Theses 2006. Section 0237, Part 0459 128 pages; [Dr. dissertation].Netherlands: Publication Number: AAT C826698. Sheryl Lindsley. "Communicating Prejudice in Organizations." In *Communicating Prejudice*, edited by Michael Hecht, 187-205. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998.

[13] Karen Lee Ashcraft and Brenda J. Allen. "The Racial Foundation of Organizational Communication." *Communication Theory* 13, no. 1 (2003): 6.

become raced."[14]  Indeed, Tim Hugh's speech and his association with FAAIM highlight the prevalence of race-based and racially-focused organizations, specifically Asian Americans media organizations.

Only lately has rhetorical studies paid attention to Asian Americans specifically as rhetorical actors and figures.  Ono looks at how contemporary scholars have rhetorically configured the concept of "Asian American" and how we either might have to retire or re-sign the term Asian American.[15] More recently, rhetorical scholars have theorized Asian American rhetorical practices.  In the first edited book on Asian American rhetoric, LuMing Mao and Morris Young theorize an "Asian American rhetoric," situating it as a rhetoric of becoming, as a constant process of negotiating with and adapting to the identity of being Asian American.[16] However, this rhetoric of becoming neither excludes nor emphasizes rhetorical practices which call "Asian American" community and identity into being or any organizations or institutions whose rhetorical and organizational practices seek to construct what it means to be "Asian American."

Beyond the race-based organization and its rhetorical practices, these organizations and its members do not exist in a political, social, cultural, and economic vacuum.  Indeed, organizations, particularly those associated with a social movement, operate and function during specific historical times, in conjunction with other organizations, in tandem within cultural and social issues of the time. Indeed, as strange as it may be, most work on the rhetoric of social movements overlooks the role of organizations, often arguing that institutionalization of a social

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[14] Ibid, 31.
[15] Kent A. Ono. "Re/Signing "Asian American": Rhetorical Problematics of a Nation." *Amerasia Journal* 21, no. 1 & 2 (1995): 67 - 78.
[16] LuMing Mao and Morris Young, eds. *Representations:  Doing Asian American Rhetoric*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2008.

movement into stable organizations marks the end of the social movement.[17] However, other

literature on Asian American organizations suggest that formal organizations play a crucial role

in organizing and mobilizing Americans for social justice and to gain political voice. For

example, in Espiritu's study of Asian American panethnicity, the Asian American Health Forum

(AAHF) organization and Asian/Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) were able

to lobby Congress successfully to collect separate health data on individual Asian subgroups.[18]

Thus, the institutional power allocated to formal organizations has facilitated Asian Americans

productive social, political, and legal changes. In that vein, this dissertation offers Asian

American centered theorization of organizing and organizations. This project explores and

interrogates the role of the rhetorical practice of Asian American media organizations at a current

stage of the Asian American media movement. I assert that organizations do not inherently

mean the end of a social movement but rather points to a different social critique that calls for

institutional and long-term change.

Since little research has been done specifically on Asian American organizations, it is

important note that some organizations define themselves explicitly as Asian American and

foreground the "Asian American" aspect as crucial to the identity of the organization. Shim's

dissertation focuses on how race and culture are either in the foreground or in the background, as

changes occurs in non-profit Asian American organizations in the New York City area.[19] In

addition, Thomas Syzmanek has explored the effects of No Child Left Behind policies on

Chicago's Asian American community-based organizations and their reactions to the policy

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[17] Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton Jr. *Persuasion and Social Movements.* Third ed. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc., 1994. Stewart et al state that "social movements are totally successful" and imply that their end or failure often comes in the form of being subsumed by larger institutions or by converting into "pressure groups, philanthropic organizations, political parties, or social watchdog groups" (84).

[18] Yen Le Espiritu. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

[19] Bo-Seon Shim. "Race and Culture in Nonprofits: The Transformation of New York Asian American Arts Organizations, 1971-2004." New York City: Columbia University, 2006.

effects on community organizing.[20]  Jun Okada's dissertation is perhaps the closest to what I

have done.  It focuses on the National Asian American Telecommunications Association

(CAAM's former name therefore one of the organizations I study in the dissertation as well) and

takes into consideration the relationship between minority moving image culture and the state.

Okada's dissertation situates Asian American film within the context of social movements,

public sphere theory, and historiography and explores the ways that films, within the institutional

context of media production, "disseminate the logic of the Asian American media institution and

the style of marginalized, independent, and grassroots filmmaking as well as how 'Asian

Americans' mobilize historical narrative, national identity, and personal politics within the film

themselves."[21]  These studies illustrate how race is part of the fabric of the organization, yet is

simultaneously reconstructed and reconstituted through organizational and rhetorical discourse

and action.

What the opening anecdote illustrates is that race is indeed tied to an organization, but

that it is also constituted and communicated in discourse by members within an organization

speaking for an organization but also for and about themselves. Scholars have yet to address and

theorize the intersection of race, rhetoric, and organizations, possibly because of the general

tendencies within each field to view field-specific concerns and questions in a taken-for-granted

fashion.  Rhetorical studies is well-equipped to look at discourse with both instrumental and

constitutive purposes as well as the cultural, social, and political constraints but often overlooks

the organizational constraints placed upon rhetorical action and discourse.  On the other hand,

organizations emphasize the persuasive aspects of rhetoric, often overlooking the constitutive

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[20] Thomas Syzmanek. "Don't Leave My Asian American Organization Behind:  How Asian American
Community Based Organizations Respond to the NCLB Policy." Paper presented at the Association of Asian
American Studies, Chicago 2008.

[21] Jun Okada. "History and Memory:  Asian American Film and Video in Its Institutional Contexts." PhD
diss.  University of California, Los Angeles, 2005:  13.

aspects and the prevalence of cultural notions of race that exist within organizations.  Both fields,

in general, overlook race as interconnected to rhetorical and organizational action.  However, as

this short anecdote illustrates, rhetoric, race, and organizations, particularly in a media

organization, are tightly intertwined and interconnected, and influence how rhetorical practice is

performed publicly and organizationally and how rhetorical practice influences the constitution

of race-based organizations.

Rhetoricians have historically looked at speeches, popular culture, and more recently new

media as sites of rhetorical practice.  As a result, rhetoricians have emphasized the effectivity of

individual texts. In addition, studies of rhetorical history emphasize period, time, and context

where the speech occurs.  On the other hand, another area of scholarship, based on a Foucauldian

approach to discourse, analyzes the generative capabilities of discourse as a whole instead of

discursive power of an individualized text.  Literary analyses that emphasize narrative and

linguistic aspects of discourse have existed, particularly with the onset of postmodernity

theorizing.  However, a theory that accounts for multiple dimensions across history, sociology,

literature, and in this dissertation, ethnography, have not been fully developed.  Stuart Hall's

notion of articulation offers one theoretical framework that allows rhetoricians and

organizational scholars to account for a more complex set of variables that impinge upon the

production of rhetorical texts. Hall defines articulation in two ways: to "utter, to speak forth, to

be articulate" with a focus upon expression but also to be connected, linked, joined yet flexible at

one point between multiple objects.[22] Hall continues that "an articulation is thus the form of the

connection that *can* make a unity of two elements, under certain conditions."[23]  Although these

connections are not guaranteed, the possibility exists under certain conditions and thus can serve

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[22] Lawrence Grossberg. On Postmodernism and Articulation:  An Interview with Stuart Hall. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no.2 (1986):53.
[23] Ibid, 53.

to explain how organizations come into being and how they are maintained by expected and unexpected linkages that articulate or link them together and that allow for people to organize around and work toward a particular goal. Thus, when social variables align, the identity of the organizations and groups become possible, but are never guaranteed.[24] In essence, what we are able to do once an identity forms becomes meaningful with regard to the potential for agency, because it allows the organization and individual actors to recognize that agency is not an essential characteristic but rather one that is made possible because of a variety of factors.

I would add that a theory of articulation helps us recognize these organizations are intertwined, constrained, and enabled by historical, social, and ideological contexts with the past and present, along with alliances with other organizations, modes of thought, and cultural institutions. Whereas Hall and Grossberg argue that linkages are constraints and enable cultural and rhetorical practices, my conception of a theory of articulation also takes into consideration how these linkages not only affect the present but appear across time and how current linkages continue to influence and get pulled into diachronic conceptions of the organization. Focusing on articulation allows one to take into consideration the narratives of the organization and its origin and situate it within the context of its many linkages, allowing the scholar to see organizations and rhetorical actors within a larger social and cultural context and therefore to understand how their agency is both constrained and enabled by articulating factors. It also allows one to theorize beyond identity politics of marginalized populations, while taking into account important and multiple contextual variables. Thus, the theory of articulation provides a theoretical foundation for connecting and articulating between organizations, activism, and the changing mediascapes, industries, and social norms. In an effort to understand both

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[24] Grossberg reiterates that Hall's notion of articulation foregrounds that agency is nonessentialist and a "product of the articulations of particular social positions into chains of equivalences, between experiences, interests, political struggles and cultural forms, and between different social positions" (65).

organizations and rhetoric, the theory of articulation allows me to understand both of these within a specific as well as broader context.

However, articulation is more than simply context, association, or connection. Articulation emphasizes the situation of an organization within a place, context, and association, and considers its relationship, connection, and linkage to discursive, social, and material variables that allow for the existence and understanding of the organization and its discourse. Articulation allows one to take multiple contextual variables into consideration and theorize how these variables link and articulate with the organization and its members. It is more than "context." Context typically refers to historical setting where actors and organizations exist but do not necessarily interact. However, by thinking about articulation, one views context as a way to theorize how context is not only situated but is linked to the organization's emergence and continuation. Context is not a passive background but rather is dynamic in the ways it links up to and enables and constrains the organization. Indeed, articulation does not look at a single contextual variable but to multiple ones in order to make sense of and understand origins of the organization and its future actions. Although context and association are components of articulation, articulation allows for a focus on how context and social variables allow for certain ideas and actions to have particular meaning. For example, the term "Asian American" arose from the post-Civil Rights and anti-imperialist Third World movements. However, these contexts and variables led to the creation of the first Asian American media organizations, which linked to those movements while articulating with independent cinema movements. As these organizations evolved, they carried along with them these older linkages and articulations, in addition to articulating, or sometimes disconnecting, with other organizations and the changing cultural contexts of pluralistic multiculturalism and more currently an idea of a post-racial

society.  Thus, articulation is primarily focused on the relationship and subsequent linkages that

context has upon the organization, rather than just the ephemeral context that an organization is

operating within.

Articulation also allows one to see the historical foundation along with the evolution of

an organization and how these impact each other across time and within specific moments in

time. As it relates to organizational linkages, a theory of articulation helps us understand the

relationship among historical, social, political, and economic variables as well as ones that

transcend time, constraint, and that hinder an organization.  On the other hand, the linkages and

alliances with other organizations, people, and groups can be seen synchronically, meaning

relationships exist within a particular point in time, but not necessarily across time.  Diachronic

linkages can remain a part of an organization across time; whereas, synchronic linkages are often

a product of time and are situated within a specific temporal context.  Importantly though,

articulation provides a mechanism, and perhaps a strategy, for "shaping intervention within a

particular social formation, conjuncture or context."[25]  Thus, articulation is not just about

connections but about the very *process* of connecting in relation with time.[26]  Articulations and

linkages with different politics and people can contradict or reinforce ideology.[27]  Hall put forth a

theory of articulation as a heuristic and methodological tool to approach the context of a social

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[25] Jennifer Daryl Slack. "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies." In *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, 112-27. New York: Routledge, 1996. Jennifer Daryl Slack argues that the theory of articulation has much to provide epistemologically, politically, and strategically.  Epistemologically, articulation provides a way to thinking in terms of "correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities" (112).  Politically, articulation foregrounds structure and power in relations of domination and subordination.

[26] Slack iterates the potential for the theory of articulation both as a method and theory for attending to social movements but also as a means of inserting oneself into a political project too, providing a means of "articulating" and "rearticulating" the questions and concerns of social movements.

[27] John Fiske and Jon Watts. "An Articulating Culture -- Hall, Meaning and Power." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 104-07. John Fiske and Jon Watts argue that the theory of articulation denies a monosemic view of ideology, instead arguing that ideology "works through cultural forms whose meanings and political effectivity are determined by how they are articulated with other forms" (106).

movement or a cultural practice radically. It is radical in the sense that a theory of articulation attempts to incorporate so many factors, avoids essentialized ideas, and recognizes how a concatenation of forces may play into and simultaneously constrain and enable the possibility for agentic action.

This approach to articulation helps address one of the problems rhetoric has, as suggested by Biesecker: that rhetoricians have assumed individual agency, privileged the persuasive capability of individual rhetoric texts (speeches), and overstated the agentic dimension of rhetoric – all of which then support a humanist and specifically modern notion of communication. Several scholars, all of whom cross between rhetoric and another field – whether it is social movement studies, environmentalism, anthropology – recognize the exterior social and structural forces that impinge upon, constrain, and enable rhetorical production in ways beyond a Bitzerian rhetorical situation. Thus, articulation becomes useful to think about a rhetorical theory that is useful for examining the complexity of social and cultural relations and the emergence of rhetoric. My dissertation explores articulation to understand the idea that rhetorical discourse is best understood in terms of multiple relations that account for its existence.

Thus, articulation theory provides a theoretical grounding for examining the creation and maintenance of organizations, in light of both environmental and internal changes. It also has been adapted in ways that look at rhetorical performances, maneuvers, and the circulation of ideologies, discourse, and arguments, while being cognizant of social, historical, cultural, and political context and how discourse might relate, activate, or ground itself in either the past and present or both. Thus, the theory of articulation provides a tool and perspective that takes into account the various sites, events, and environment that spur the creation of organizations, their

mission, and identity.  The theory of articulation allows me to analyze an organization's focusing

on social, historical, cultural, political, and economic factors in an effort to understand the

context of constraints and liberties that would allow for rhetoric produced by organizations.  In

doing so, I adapt a theory of articulation to explore and analyze an organization's identity, what

it says about itself, and the activities and discourses it produces while recognizing that this is all

dependent on who is involved in the organization, what is happening in the community, and the

historical and contemporary purposes that drive a given organization.

Importantly, how does an organization and the act of organizing employ rhetorical and

organizational discourse, in this case one that calls into existence an Asian American community

and appeals to and emerges out of grassroots activism in relation to the dearth of complex Asian

American roles in mainstream media and in relation to the film festival organization?[28]  In

addition, how does one understand how this "Asian American only film festival" came to be,

what it means, and how it requires an understanding of Asian American experience, the role of

media in constructing and shaping it, and the complex world that occurs beyond the public,

discursively, yet helps shaped the organization and public life?

In general, I am interested in how a notion of Asian American identity is communicated

through rhetorical and organizational practices and how these organizations and their practices

also, in turn, construct and communicate, whether purposefully or inadvertently, what it means to

be part of an "Asian American" community, which articulates with external social, political, and

organizational environments.  I further intend to situate these questions within what I call race-

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[28] Although these are important rhetorical questions, they are also complex organizational ones about the
role and communicative power of an organization to constitute communities?  What role does an organization play
into organizing and constructing a community around race and social activism?  What is the rhetorical strength of an
"organization," and how does the organization constrain or encourage social and grassroots activism?

based organizations, which are organizations with an explicitly racial component or identity.[29]

For example, I am interested in how FAAIM communicates a pan-ethnic Asian American

identity through their speeches at the film festival and their selection of films to screen, but also

how these discourses construct how one participates and becomes a part of an Asian American

community embedded in media politics and action.  In addition, I am interested in the

communication of media organizations, whose business is communicating representation, and

how they communicate identity and community to multiple audiences who are subject to

multiple (or non-existent) representations of Asian Americans that relate to the organization.

Finally, I am interested in an organization's call for community, particularly when the impetus

for community is driven by a social movement and organization-specific conceptions of race and

racial identity, because the organization's survival depends on a community of people who

subscribe to or at least do not vehemently disagree with a particularly notion of racial identity in

a specific cultural, political, and social time.

However, it is well-acknowledged that the term "community" is a slippery one at best.[30]

In recognizing its slipperiness, I focus on a "rhetorical" community, specifically on Asian

Americans.  "Asian American" is as much a political identity as it is a racial identity, first used

by activist Yuji Ichioka to voice the kind of concerns Asian American students had about the

political position of people of Asian descent living in the United States.[31]  Thus, I am interested

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[29] Peggy McIntosh. "White Privilege:  Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." *Independent School* 49, no. 2 (1990): 31-36.  Although, one can argue that if it is not "explicitly racial" or different, then it is implicitly white. Peggy McIntosh addresses this through the concept of "white privilege," stating that one of the benefits of white privilege is that white people often do not have to view themselves as the "other."

[30] Ralph Cintron. *Angels' Town:  Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997; Roger Rouse. "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism." *Diaspora* 1, no. 1  (1991): 8-23; Edward Sapir. "Cultural Anthropology and Psychiatry." In *Culture, Language, and Personality:  Selected Essays*, edited by David Mandelbaum, 140-63. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949.

[31] 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;  Ryan Kim, "Yuji Ichioka . . . Asian American studies pioneer. *SFGate*.  Thursday, September 12, 2002; Yen Le Espiritu. *Asian American*

in how an "Asian American community" is rhetorically constituted through media productions, organizing around media, and in organizations. This dissertation expands studies of Asian American community outside the confines of the university and into the everyday acts of media activist organizations along with their occasional reactions to anti-Asian representations in the media.  In addition to the theoretical aspect, the dissertation is focused on the deployment of "Asian American" as a term and what it currently, and possibly in the future, means for Asian American communities, organizations, and politics.

Indeed, the presence of community is central to the field of communication and Asian American Studies.  "Community" and "communication" are closely linked, even etymologically sharing the Latin prefix *com-*, which means "together."  Asian American Studies was founded with the premise that the knowledge produced should ultimately benefit and serve Asian American communities.[32]   In organizational studies, the study of "community" is often relegated to the organizational culture, as part of the meaning making that occurs through the process of communicating organizational values, beliefs, and assumptions, or subsumed within organizational identification, where organizational affiliation assumes a present community.[33]

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*Panethnicity:  Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.  However, the term "Asian American" has come under critique and has expanded to include Pacific Islanders, thus leading to the acronyms of APAs and APIAs.  However, there is also contention over the lumping of the Pacific Islanders into Asian American, who argue that their differences resemble more of the colonial aspects of Native Americans. Vincente Diaz's article "To P or not to P" addresses these concerns.  Needless to say, the term "Asian American" is by no means clearly defined or agreed upon but utilized as means of converging political interests.  More recently, Espiritu argues that "Asian American" is employed to assert "pan-ethnicity" across the diverse ethnicities of Asia as means of attaining political power.

[32] Russell Leong. "Lived Theory (Notes on the Run)." *Amerasia Journal* 21, no. 1 & 2 (1995): v-x; Martin F. Manalansan IV. "Introduction:  The Ethnography of Asian America: Notes toward a Thick Description." In *Cultural Compass:  Ethnographic Explorations of Asian America*, edited by Martin F. Manalansan IV, 1-13. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000;  Linda Trinh Võ. "Performing Ethnography in Asian American Communities:  Beyond the Insider-Versus-Outsider Perspective." In *Cultural Compass:  Ethnographic Explorations in Asian America*, edited by Martin F. Manalansan IV, 17-37. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.  Indeed, Asian American Studies and the field of Ethnic of Studies in general were focused on decolonizing the research process and contributing to the lived experiences of the communities that traditional fields studied but did not contribute back to or recognize the experiences of those in the communities.

[33] Edgar H. Schein. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Second Edition, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992;  Patricia Anne Davidson."Exploring the sense of community at the College of New

Despite the centrality of "community" to conceptualizing communication, the majority of rhetorical scholars privilege the term "public" over "community." However, the notion of public focuses on rhetorical circulation of often identity-based counterpublics as opposed to rhetorical production based in identity and that takes place within communities. Indeed, one must question whether the public should be the rightful locus for rhetorical inquiry more generally.[34] It is important to recognize that Asian American media organizations and their interactions with mainstream society arose out of identity politics situated within the Asian American community.[35] What might draw people to these organizations is a common experience of being Asian American, or at least a notion of what it means to be Asian American. What these organizations might tap into with their rhetoric is what Dewey calls "the community of experience," where shared experiences link people together. Dewey conceptualized the relationship between the public and the community, arguing that the public arises from the community. Although the presence of a community does not guarantee a "democratically effective Public,"[36] Dewey argued that the decline of the public is in part because of the decline of the community, the "loosening of the bonds which holds persons together in the immediate

Caledonia". M.A. diss., Royal Roads University (Canada), 2003. In Dissertations & Theses: Full Text [database on-line]; available from  http://www.proquest.com/ (publication number AAT MQ77822; accessed August 26, 2008) ; Caroline Anne Bartel. "Strengthening the bond of organizational identification through volunteerism". Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1998. In Dissertations & Theses @ CIC Institutions [database on-line]; available from http://www.proquest.com/ (publication number AAT 9909845; accessed August 26, 2008).

[34] John Durham Peters. *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.  John Durham Peters posits that communication is viewed in three different ways: as an act of receiving by partaking in a social ritual that links one to another, like the example of partaking in holy communion for Catholics; as a "transfer of psychical entities such as ideas, thoughts or meanings," like in the case of public relations; or as an exchange, like in dialogue (7-8).  Often in communication, we focus on the one-to-many model, most in line with Peters view of the second view of communication as an act of transference.  Peter states, "Dissemination is far friendly to the weirdly diverse practices we signifying animals engage in and to our bumbling attempts to meet others with some fairness and kindness. Open scatter is more fundamental than coupled sharing; it is the stuff from which, on rare, splendid occasions, dialogue may arise" (62).  Thus, rhetorical communication scholars often look at the one-to-many model but not its possible transition to a dialogic model.

[35] Although some of the organizations still hold tight to identity politics, many of these organizations have expanded beyond identity politics into what they consider to be the social justice arena.

[36] John Dewey. *The Public and Its Problems*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927/1954:  157.

community of experience."[37]   However, Dewey also recognized that the community is not innate

to humans; rather community is constructed by educating the young to the rituals of tradition,

perspectives, and interests through the "give-and-take of communication," which develops a

sense of community membership.[38]

The feeling of "community of experience" might aptly be described in public sphere as

counterpublics.  Fraser, Felski, Squires, and Asen and Brouwer conceive of counterpublic

spheres as a shared experience of marginalization leads to a formation of smaller publics.  Fraser

posits that counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social

groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their

identities, interests, and needs."[39]  Asen and Brouwer suggest that the counterpublic spheres exist

by "affirming specificity of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or some other axis of difference."[40]

Felski advances the claim that counterpublic spheres, specifically feminist ones, exist through

their circulation of ideas into society as a whole.[41]  According to Felski, counterpublics are

primarily interested in what Warner describes as the fundamental concern of publics: the issue of

circulation.[42]  For Warner, the public "exists *by virtue of being addressed*" and "comes into

being only in relation to texts and their circulation."[43] This conception of the public views the

public as "a relation among strangers," mediated by circulating texts that address others.[44]

Finally, by looking at African American publics, Squires argues that marginalized publics relate

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[37] Ibid, 214.

[38] Ibid, 154.

[39] Nancy Fraser. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by C. Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993:  123.

[40] Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, eds. *Counterpublics and the State*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001:  2.

[41] Rita Felski. Politics, Aesthetics, and the Feminist Public Sphere. In *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989:  167.

[42] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002:  14.

[43] Ibid, 66-67.

[44] Warner, 74.

with dominant publics and the state through genres of discourse: "enclaved, oscillating, counterpublic, and parallel."[45] Thus, the literature on counterpublics emphasizes concerns regarding circulation for marginalized groups which also engage with dominant publics.

Although the public might be viewed in terms of circulating discourses, this perspective does not adequately address what may be the foundation of the public and counterpublics: the community. Thus, I choose to employ the concept of "community," as opposed to publics, to conceptualize this dissertation because it is often where the public originates. Currently, the public perspective conceives of political life as separate from community life, even though Dewey clearly linked the public to community. However, a public sphere approach does not address how "community" itself is communicated. By thinking of political life in terms of community, we can see how communities simultaneously contribute to and constrain the formation of organizations, such as FAAIM. In addition, the majority of the rhetoric from organizations does not circulate in the public sphere but often within the organization and related communities. Thus, to approach organizations and their rhetoric in terms of publicity risk overlooking the communities where rhetoric is produced and circulated.

However, the concept of "community" is not without its difficulties. Iris Marion Young states that "radical theorists and activists appeal to an ideal of community" and that we should shift away from the ideal of community and instead toward a politics of difference. [46] However,

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[45] Catherine Squires. "The Black Press and the State: Attracting Unwanted (?) Attention." In *Counterpublics and the State*, edited by Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, 111-36. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2001: 112. An "enclaved" discourse would shield itself from outside critique yet produce lively debate within while "oscillating" discourse would engage with the outside in order to test ideas; meanwhile "counterpublic" discourses confront the dominant publics and "parallel" discourses engage side by side and on equal footing with dominant publics (132).

[46] Iris Marion Young. "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference." *Social Theory and Practice* 12, no. 1 (1986): 1. She criticizes this over-idealization of "community," arguing that it "denies difference by positing fusion rather than separation as the social ideal" (7), denies and devalues temporal and spatial difference by "promoting a model of face-to-face as best" (2), and thus sets up an opposition of authentic and inauthentic social relations.

she recognizes that community is not always thought of in the same way by theorists and activists and states, "In ordinary speech for most people in the U.S., the term community refers to the people with whom I identify in a locale. It refers to neighborhood, church, schools. It also carries connotations of ethnicity or race" (12). Despite its problems, this everyday understanding of "community" makes it useful to think about ways to build from the ground up, from the organization's processes and discourses. Young's critique of community provides both the reasons why "community" is useful but also alerts us to the dangers of employing such a vague and idealized concept, which implicitly favors certain modes of communication and social relations. Nonetheless, the concept of "community" and its ideals allow for a reconfiguration of communities in an age of new media that compresses notions of time and space, challenging scholars, activists, and organizations to rethink how community currently exists, is constructed, and maintained. In essence, looking at "community" allows for insight into discourses and situations that are often not public yet, or may never be public, but are still relevant for the construction of a public.

Finally by centering an Asian American community, I also seek to provide useful insights about marginalized communities and their communicative practices more broadly, answering Ashcraft and Allen's call to address racial foundations of organizational communication. Indeed, there exists a fair amount of research on Asian American communities. For example, Espiritu's study of Asian American pan-ethnicity argues that Asian American communities evolved from ethnic enclaves and entered a political community by responding to anti-Asian violence and legislation.[47] Fong's study of what he calls a "suburban" ethnic enclave in Monterey Park, California, takes Espiritu's findings further and recounts how race and ethnicity become constituted in organizing against anti-Asian policies in a suburb eight miles from Los Angeles

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[47] Yen Le Espiritu. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*.

where Asian Americans are the majority.[48]  Recent studies of Asian American communities

focus on Asian American religious groups,[49] complicating, and moving away from, political

organizing,[50] to understanding how Asian American college groups cultivate a community that

fosters a critical Asian American consciousness.[51]  However, this dissertation seeks to remedy

the lack of research on Asian American media organizations and communities.[52]

Thus, this dissertation project explores the rhetorical construction of "community,"

through a study of Asian American media organizations in an effort to see why, despite the wide

diversity of the Asian American demographic, the idea of a pan-ethnic "Asian American

community" remains prevalent.[53]  First, it focuses on the rhetorical strategies of Asian American

media organizations, centering communication among Asian Americans and within Asian

American contexts.  Second, the project interrogates the simultaneously fluid and stable idea of

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[48] Timothy P. Fong. *The First Suburban Chinatown:  The Remarking of Monterey Park, California.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

[49] Elaine Howard Ecklund and Jerry Z. Park. "Asian American Community Participation and Religion: Civic Model Minorities?" *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 1 (2005): 1-21.

[50] Prema A. Kurien. "To Be or Not to Be South Asian: Contemporary Indian American Politics." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 261-88; Shilpa Dave, Pawan Dhingra, Sunaina Maira, Partha Mazumdar, Lavina Dhingra Shankar, Jaideep Singh, and Rajini Srikanth. "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.

[51] Keith Osajima. "Replenishing the Ranks: Raising Critical Consciousness among Asian Americans." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): 59-83.

[52] Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, eds. *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.  Thus, importantly this dissertation centers media as the loci of organizing but simultaneously overlooking the discursive formations of communities around media and media texts.  The fields of anthropology and media studies have recognized the presence of "media communities" and have explored how media facilitate and organize community but have not necessarily explored how these communities are rhetorically constituted and how they communicate to those outside their communities.  In addition, there is some rhetorical work that focuses on communities and social movement organizing.  Recently, Pezzullo's work on the grassroots efforts of communities who conduct toxic tours, noncommercial tours into areas polluted by toxins, as rhetorical strategies, recognizes the importance of centering marginalized communities' rhetoric and the collective and community-specific nature of their rhetoric.  See Phaedra C. Pezzullo. "Performing Critical Interruptions: Stories, Rhetorical Invention, and the Environmental Justice Movement." *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 1 (2001): 1-25l; Phaedra C. Pezzullo. "Touring "Cancer Alley," Louisiana:  Performances of Community and Memory for Environmental Justice." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2003): 226-52;  Phaedra C. Pezzullo. *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*. Edited by John Louis Lucaites, Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

[53] Indeed, the demographic of Asian American spans East Asians, like Japanese and Korean Americans; South Asians from India; and Southeast Asians like Vietnamese Americans. Each of the ethnicities have different histories coming to the United States and often drastically different experiences within the United States too.

"Asian American" and analyzes how this term of identification varies in different contexts but how it may work similarly across contexts when employed as a means of constituting community. Third, this dissertation project centers Asian American organizations and looks specifically at how Asian Americans organize to address media representations, shedding light on Asian American organizing in the face of multicultural politics and globalization.

I posit a conceptual approach to discourse that contributes to both organizational communication and rhetoric in an organization centered approach to social movement rhetoric that focuses on what I term the "organizational vernacular rhetorics." I look at community-based non-profit Asian American media organizations and their "organizational vernacular rhetorics" in order to address the complex relationships of grassroots community supporters, organizational structure, and organizational membership. The concept of "organizational vernacular rhetorics" is rooted in both organizational and rhetorical approaches to communication, drawing from both subfields in order to provide a theoretical tool for analyzing the shifting, blurring, and often overlapping domains of rhetorical and organizational discourse. By invoking the concept of "organizational vernacular rhetorics," I emphasize the three components of the "organizational," "vernacular," and "rhetorics" but also the possibilities of merging them into a single theoretical idea. The "organizational" refers to the sense that the organization and organizing are at the heart of analysis. It refers simultaneously to the context of the organization but also to the idea and process of "organizing," recognizing that the context of the organization is also a product of the organizing itself and that we should attend to processes of both an organizational and organizing nature. While organizational communication has increasingly paid attention to the processes of organizing, the way I conceptualize the vernacular directs us to the everyday, the colloquial, informal, non-institutionalized, and often marginalized voices that circulate in the

environment.  Finally, rhetorics points to the multiplicity of rhetorics that may arise from a

situation or context and circulate in multiple directions, whether intentionally or not.  In addition,

it also refers to the multiple notions and understandings that rhetoric evokes, like that of cookery

and of social consensus, as well as to its multiple functions, both instrumental and constitutive.[54]

However, I view the individual parts in tandem, terms such as "organizational

vernacular," "vernacular rhetorics," and "organizational rhetorics" before elucidating an

"organizational vernacular rhetorics" approach.  Organizational rhetoric often refers to the

rhetoric that an organization produces for its members or the general public, such as in the cases

to persuade workers and employees of the benefits of managerial interests or to manipulate the

organizational image in times of crises.[55]  From this perspective, organizational rhetorics refer to

the dominant and public discourses produced by or about the people and structures in power and

have power over discursive production.  However, Cheney et al states "*organizational rhetoric is*

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[54]Aristotle. *On Rhetoric:  A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by G. A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Maurice Charland. Constitutive Rhetoric:  The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no.2 (1987):133-150; Thomas B. Farrell. Knowledge, Consensus, and Rhetorical Theory. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62, no.1 (1976) :1-14; Plato. *Gorgias*. Translated by W. Hamilton and C. Emlyn-Jones. Revised ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. Original edition, 1960.  The everyday understanding of rhetoric is one of manipulation or bluster, much like one that Plato explicated in the *Gorgias*. However, Farrell sees rhetoric as the means of establishing and understanding social knowledge.  Within rhetorical studies, rhetoric is seen as instrumental, drawing upon Aristotle's understanding that rhetoric was using the "available means of persuasion," or as constitutive, pioneered by Charland's notion of a "constitutive rhetoric" that calls an audience into being as opposed to speaking to a formed audience.

[55] William L. Benoit. *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies:  A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995;  William L. Benoit. "Richard M. Nixon's Rhetorical Strategies in His Public Statements on Watergate." *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 47 (1982): 192-211.  Josh Boyd. "Organizational Rhetoric Doomed to Fail:  R.J. Reynolds and the Principle of the Oxymoron." *Western Journal of Communication* 68, no. 1 (2004): 45-71; Josh Boyd. "The Rhetoric of Arrogance:  The Public Relations Response of the Standard Oil Trust." Public Relations Review 27 (2001): 163-78; Susan L.Brinson and William L. Benoit. "Dow Corning's Image Repair Strategies in the Breast Implant Crisis." *Communication Quarterly* 44 (1996): 29-41. Brinson, Susan L. and William L. Benoit. "The Tarnished Star:  Restoring Texaco's Damaged Public Image." *Management Communication Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1999): 483-510; Jill J. McMillan. "In Search of the Organizational Persona:  A Rationale for Studying Organizations Rhetorically." *In Organization <--------> Communication:  Emerging Perspectives II*, edited by Lee Thayer, 21-45. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1987.  For example, much of the early organizational rhetoric work focused on crisis communication or pure means and methods that the organization used to communicate public personas.  Benoit's work on crisis image management emphasizes how organizations manage their public personas during times of crisis, such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill.  Boyd's work on the rhetoric of the Standard Oil Trusts of the early 20th century beckons organizations to recognize publics and their opinions and to speak frankly to them

*embedded in or implied in interaction* that deals with contingencies, uncertainties, and

ambiguities" and are further complicated by the removal of messages from the sources and

where the boundaries of audience are "unclear and shifting."[56]  This approach applies to what I

might see as one of "organizational vernaculars."  However, before explicating "organizational

vernacular," I want to first attend to "vernacular rhetorics" since it is important to how I employ

and combine vernacular with other terms.  Ono and Sloop view "vernacular discourse" as

constructed out of pastiche but often as used by those who are marginalized in order to resist or

reify hegemony.[57]  Hauser has also theorized vernacular discourses as a way of understanding

how everyday discourse affects institutions.[58]  Both are concerned with the ground level and the

bottom-up as opposed to the top-down model of rhetoric and the somewhat elusive and hidden

discourses that are nonetheless important to understanding culture and change, whether it is in

the organization itself and/or in the broader community known as the public.

  Having discussed vernacular discourse, I now turn my attention to what I call the

"organizational vernacular." Organizational communication scholars often mention Grant,

Keenoy, and Oswick's concept of "organizational discourse," which is "the languages and

symbolic media we employ to describe, represent, interpret, and theorize what we take to be the

facticity of organizational life."[59]  However, "organizational vernacular" can also refer to the

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  [56] George Cheney, Lars T.  Christensen, Charles Conrad, and Daniel J. Lair. "Corporate Rhetoric as Organizational Discourse." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 79-104. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004:  82.

  [57] Kent A. Ono, and John M. Sloop. The Critique of Vernacular Discourse. *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995):19-46.

  [58] Gerard A. Hauser. *Vernacular Voices:  The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.

  [59] David Grant, Tom Keenoy, and Cliff Oswick. "Introduction:  Organizational Discourse:  Of Diversity, Dichotomy, and Multi-Disciplinarity." In *Discourse and Organization*, edited by David Grant, Tom Keenoy and Cliff Oswick, 1-13. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1998:  1; David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick, and Linda L. Putnam. "Introduction:  Organizational Discourse:  Exploring the Field." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 1-36. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004.  Grant et al refers to organizational discourse as "the structured collections of text embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual

discourses drawn from and produced by the marginalized members within the organization, those whose discourse helps constitute the culture of the organization either by resisting or by reifying ideological and hegemonic discourses. It focuses on the marginalized within the organization and within organizing who may organize through a pastiche of texts and discourses from within the organization, prior to joining the organization and outside of the organization.

Indeed, organizational vernacular rhetorics beckon us to observe the role of organizational discourse intertextually as it is operates within and outside the organization. An organizational vernacular rhetorical approach to discourse draws from both meso- and Grand Discourse perspectives – mesodiscourse extends beyond the text and Grand Discourse encompasses ideologies – and recognizes both the intertextual nature of discourse and the ability to constitute social reality and the discursive process of "organizing."[60] By looking at the meso-level of discourse in organizations, one also examines the intertextual nature of discourse by analyzing a variety of texts, from public address to conversations and meetings, to documents meant for the public, recognizing context-specific and situated discourse in everyday life that produces, constitutes, and draws from discursive resources in order to further produce, sustain, and constrain modes of engagement in organizational and extra-organizational settings.

However, my theoretical approach to studying organizational rhetoric recognizes the rhetorical and discursive strengths of "organizations" and of "organizing" and is concerned with

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representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed."

[60]Mats Alvesson and Dan Karreman. "Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organizations through Discourse Analysis." *Human Relations* 53, no. 9 (2000): 1125-49. Alvesson and Karreman also categorize four different versions of discourse analysis, which understand discourse as operating differently. First, there is the micro-discourse view which focuses on in-depth studies of language in a specific context, looking at the units of language that make up the discourse. Meso-discourse approaches extend beyond the specific text and generalize to other contexts. On the other hand, a Grand Discourse approach looks at "an assembly of discourses, ordered, and presented as an integrated frame" and may refer "to/constitute organizational reality" such as corporate ideologies. Finally, a Mega-Discourse approach sees discourse as "an idea of a more or less universal connection to discourse material" and often address how organizational phenomenon are discursively referred to or constituted (1133).

issues of organizations, issues of dominant and non-dominant publics, and with the porousness and permeability of private and public borders concerning organizations.  It is focused on the marginalized within the organization and within organizing, those that are often organized through a pastiche of texts and discourses from within the organization, prior to joining the organization, and outside of the organization. In the end, focusing on organizational vernacular rhetorics allows one to connect the everyday experiences and discourses of the marginalized, one that most likely requires ethnographic and qualitative work that is still uncommon to the field of rhetoric, to the larger articulations for social justice that extend beyond the borders of the organization that could be addressed in traditional rhetorical criticisms of public address, while simultaneously connecting internal organizational discourse with larger public and civic discourses.

By elucidating a theory of articulation that takes into consideration historical and synchronic cultural linkages of organizations and their rhetorical production, organizational communication and rhetorical theories alone would have difficulty conceptualizing how organizational rhetorical processes circulate organizationally and publicly.  By reading Asian American media organizations through the lens of articulation, I illustrated how articulation theory helps understand how organizational histories affect rhetorical actions today, while recognizing that rhetorical production and constitution are still occurring now, just as linkages and articulations.  Thus, studying organizational vernacular rhetorics helps understand current processes and contextual factors, while complicating notions of how organizational discourses may circulate outside into the broader public and community.

In applying a theory of articulation to rhetorical studies and organizational community, I assert that at any given point in the organization's life the rhetoric of the organization is also a

product of circumstances, of variables, that help explain but do not necessarily predict what rhetorical and organizational action is taken.  Thus, this organizational rhetorical approach is not unlike a neo-Aristotelian who is concerned about the context of a speaker's speech or a Bitzer-like approach to the rhetorical situation; however, it is more about the context and its *relationship* to rhetoric. By employing a multi-sited rhetorical approach, I look at the deep contexts of the performance of rhetoric and the cultural, social, and organizational contexts of its production. While Pezzullo's rhetorical ethnography highlights the importance of being in the space and place of rhetorical production, I also emphasize the individual people's involvement with the broader organizations' rhetorical project, while attending to how the rhetoric changes (or does not change) according to circumstances. Indeed, I am less interested in the finished products of rhetoric but rather on the processes that lead to rhetorical production. Finally, I locate this attention to rhetoric within and part of the organization. Whereas Karlyn Kohrs Campbell asserts that rhetoric is both ephemeral and enduring,[61] I explain how rhetoric is both a product of change and circumstance through the continuity of organizations, even as this rhetoric builds on organizational histories while being cognizant of the future to produce new organizational rhetorics.

**Multi-siting Asian American Media Organizing**

I turn my attention now to the three media organizations I study:  the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA), the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), and the Foundation of Asian American Media (FAAIM).  I have chosen these three organizations for many reasons, and the chart (Figure 1) below highlights the major similar and different functions of these organizations.  First, all three organizations focus on the media representations of Asian

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[61] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Criticism: Ephemeral and Enduring. *Communication Education* 23 (1) 1974:9-14.

Americans.  MANAA primarily monitors depictions of Asian Americans in mainstream media; whereas, both CAAM and FAAIM exhibit independent films that present an alternative or more complicated representation of Asian Americans for mainstream and independent audience consumption.  In addition, CAAM also produces and distributes Asian American media.  Thus, these organizations allow for a study that crosses many levels of organizations, from volunteers to paid staff, as well as the interface with the general public, targeted communities, and also other organizations.  Finally, despite having many commonalities, each organization plays a different role in changing the representation of Asian Americans in the media, whether it's MANAA's role within a multi-ethnic media coalition or CAAM's capacity to distribute media in the educational video arena or FAAIM's presence in the Midwest that is avowedly and unabashedly Asian American.

To answer my broad research questions about community, organizations, and rhetorical practices, I primarily employ two types of methods: rhetorical close textual analysis and rhetorical ethnography influenced by communication perspectives.  Each of these approaches provides me a way to obtain and address the variety of discourses used by these organizations.

As a scholar of rhetoric, one method I employ is close readings of available rhetorical artifacts, or "close textual analysis," situating discourse within the historical, political, and social contexts of its creation and reception. Close readings recognize the complexity and agency of texts, how texts work as "unified or completed discursive products,"[62] seeking to "unpack the text" by ruminating over "words, verbal images, elements of style, sentences, argument patterns, and entire paragraphs" to see how the texts work instrumentally but also how the texts operate

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[62] James Jasinski. *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001: 92.

conceptually and theoretically.[63] Perhaps the most well-known rhetorical scholars who employ

close reading are Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Michael Leff.  Campbell closely reads, for

instance, early feminist rhetorics in order to explain the practices of early 19th century women's

rights advocates in the United States while conceptualizing a "feminine style" of rhetoric.[64]  Leff,

for instance, closely reads Lincoln's "House Divided" address, highlighting how temporality is

configured in discourse.[65]  Like Campbell and Leff, I provide close readings of rhetorical

artifacts, applying a mainstream rhetorical approach and methodology to visual and textual

artifacts to demonstrate the agency of texts.  I will engage the public texts of the organizations in

terms of more traditional rhetorical criticism, such as analyzing CAAM's and FAAIM's film

festival programs and MANAA's press releases, using both close textual analysis of texts in an

attempt to thicken and enrich rhetorical understanding of organizations.

Despite the usefulness of close textual analysis, a traditional text-centered rhetorical

analysis alone might not serve as the best method for analyzing contemporary organizations and

the people within the organizations, because organizations are continually producing texts and

discourse in relation to previous texts.  To complement a historically situated textual

methodology, I employ the method of rhetorical ethnography to analyze the collective and

community-specific rhetorics of Asian American media organizations, to take into account the

everyday discourse, continual occurrences within, and workings of socially activist media

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[63] Ibid, 93; Cara Finnegan. "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument:  Photographic Representation in the 'Skull Controversy.'" *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37, no. 1 (2001): 133-49; Cara Finnegan. *Picturing Poverty:  Print Culture and Fsa Photographs*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003.  For example, Cara Finnegan provides an excellent example of a historical situated textual analysis of visual artifacts in her analysis of depression era photography.  Her study reveals how visual culture pictured poverty while simultaneously conceptualizing how photography works enthymematically

[64] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*. Vol. 1. New York: Greenwood, 1989.

[65] Michael Leff. "Rhetorical Timing in Lincoln's 'House Divided' Speech. Van Zelst Lecture in Communication. Evanston, Northwestern University; Michael Leff. "Dimensions of Temporality in Lincoln's Second Inaugural." *Communication Reports* 1, no. 1 (1988): 26 - 31.

organizations that may not be captured in formal or public texts, and thicken the analysis of the organizations, allowing for access and analysis of discourses that are often forgotten and providing a way to study rhetorical production of community. Although they are not public or formalized, everyday discourses help structure the organization but would not be accessible to rhetorical critics using traditional close textual criticism.  Phaedra Pezzullo and Ralph Cintron provide good models of ethnographic work within rhetorical studies in their studies of toxic tourism environmental movements and Latino/a American communities, respectively.[66]  Despite both conducting rhetorical ethnographies, Pezzullo's and Cintron's research questions differ and thus influence the level of participant-observer involvement required in their ethnographies. Pezzullo's study explores the rhetorical strategies and social critiques of toxic tourism; thus, Pezzullo herself becomes a participant-observer and interviewer at many different sites.[67] Although she does not immerse herself in the communities of those afflicted by environmental pollution, she does align herself with the environmental movement overall and considers herself an activist-scholar and a tourist.  On the other hand, Cintron's rhetorically focused ethnography is concerned with what he calls the rhetoric of public culture or the rhetoric of the everyday.[68]  In his study, Cintron immerses himself in the Latino/a community in Chicago in order to explore the "ordering" of a text and how "one creates respect under conditions of little or no respect?"[69] Both provide examples of how to become more reflexive about one's role in communities, whether it is immersing oneself in the everyday activity or as an occasional participant-observer. Overall, a rhetorical ethnographic approach allows me to study texts not publicly documented or

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[66] Ralph Cintron. *Angels' Town:  Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday*. Boston: Beacon Press,1997; Phaedra C. Pezzullo. *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*. Edited by John Louis Lucaites, Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.
[67] Phaedra C. Pezzullo. *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*.
[68] Ralph Cintron. *Angels' Town:  Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday*.
[69] Ibid:  x.

offered, produce texts that would not otherwise exist, and see an organizational community grow and change and hence study a living organization.

However, there are different perspectives about how one enters the community as an ethnographer. Although the history of ethnographic research is one associated with colonial appropriation and exploitation, there are critical ethnographers, standpoint feminists, qualitative researchers, and Asian Americanists who examine their own positionality in relationship to their research. Thus, I align myself with Dwight Conquergood, Ralph Cintron, and Phaedra Pezzullo within communication, because their ethnographic research provides a model of a particular kind of ethical and moral interpretive research. For example, Conquergood argues that we should rethink the "world as performance" and that ethnographers should move from being "observers" to ethnographers "listening and speaking" and, thus, centering dialogue and communication as key to being effective ethnographers.[70] Cintron's work is an example of ethnographic dialogue and move beyond the objective empirical traditions of ethnography.[71] Using Pezzullo's work as a model, I also situate my work as a critical and cultural scholar who seeks not to separate oneself from the political, social, and activist work that may be needed, despite maintaining a scholar's distance.[72] I offer an ethnographic concept of "affinity" in order to reflect upon and articulate one's own multiple positions and subjectivities in relation to the communities and field sites where one researches, while recognizing the interconnectivity of the communities and organizations. Hence, this concept of "affinity" helps understand researchers as performers with ethical and political positions and with stakes in the research process, much like Conquergood,

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[70] Dwight Conquergood. "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics." *Communication Monographs* 58, no. 2 June (1991): 179-94.

[71] Ralph Cintron. *Angels' Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday.*.

[72] Ruth Behar. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996; D. Soyini Madison. *Critical Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005. D. Soyini Madison's work on "critical ethnography" and Ruth Behar's work on being a "vulnerable observer" is relevant to my positionality as an activist-scholar.

but also seeks to provide a theoretical perspective to make sense of one's own multiple

subjectivities in the research process.

Since I am engaging in ethnographic work with genuine conversation in mind, this means

I have to recognize both the constraints of the method and my own method of collecting data.[73]

When addressing the classic method of ethnography, James Clifford states that participant

observation requires the oscillation between the "inside" and "outside" of events, from being in

the events to analyzing and situating them in historical, political, and social contexts.[74]  Thus, we

must be quick to recognize that cultures are not scientific objects but rather historically,

politically, and socially situated and constructed.  Another part of my fieldwork requires

interviews.  Oakley states that we have to recognize that an interview is a "pseudo-conversation"

and that traditional conceptions of the interview/interviewee relationship is one laden with issues

of power, of superior/subordinate relations, of hierarchy and the extraction of information from a

subject.[75]  Despite the fact that interviews are pseudo-conversational, in-depth interviews can

move beyond rote questioning or surveys and into personal narratives and their recollections of

how people make sense and meaning of their lives.[76]  In addition, we have to recognize that

interviewing is historical, political, and contextual and that it is a socially constructed action

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[73] Although these organizations differ drastically from each other, each of these organizations has its own nuances, as one would expect in a multi-sited project.  Living in communities, Fong could witness the daily activities of the community.  However for me, the activities of the organizations are diffuse and occasional.  Thus, the nature of the social movement and the activities of an organization in different cities lend themselves to a multi-sited ethnographic approach.

[74] James Clifford. "On Ethnographic Allegory." In *Writing Culture:  The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 98-121. Berkeley: University of California, 1986: 127.

[75] Ann Oakley. "Interviewing Women:  A Contradiction in Terms." In *Turning Points in Qualitative Research:  Tying Knots in a Hankerchief*, edited by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin, 243-63. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003:  245.

[76] Susan Chase. "Taking Narrative Seriously:  Consequences for Method and Theory in Interview Studies." In *Turning Points in Qualitative Research:  Tying Knots in a Hankerchief*, edited by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin, 273-96. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003:  274-278.

between two people.[77] In so doing, I recognize people's narratives and accounts within a contextually-situated and relevant setting and how the social interaction, the political atmosphere, and the historical knowledge triangulate to create meaning. Despite the ethical challenges ethnography provides, it can reveal narratives as public discourse, filling a void in public discourse which was previously absent.

However, this project is not ethnography in the traditional sense, where a lengthy stay, often a year or more, in the field is required to gain entrance and insight into a community.[78] Rather, my project, which draws upon George Marcus's concept of a multi-sited ethnography, does not emphasize a single locale or culture, but rather the phenomenon of a social movement.[79] Indeed, social movements do not always locate themselves in specific sites for observation. Instead social movements address the society in different locales and under varying and site-specific contexts. Thus, analyzing a social movement is both an imagination constructed by the researcher to study phenomena at multiple levels and in different apparent and sometimes publicly unknown sites. Focusing on a "research imaginary," Marcus beckons for "strategically conceived" ethnographies to address the multiplicity and macro-structure of the phenomena at hand.[80] Indeed, Manalasan has already argued that the "ethnography of Asian America is always

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[77] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey. "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement." In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 695-727. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005.

[78] Timothy P. Fong. *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California*. As Timothy Fong states, prior to his study of the first suburban Chinatown in Monterey Park, California, "short visits were not enough; I knew my research efforts would not be viable unless I lived in the community I was examining" (11).

[79] Herbert W. Simons. "On the Rhetoric of Social Movements, Historical Movements, and 'Top-Down' Movements: A Commentary." *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 94-101. Charles J. Steward, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton Jr. *Persuasion and Social Movements*. Third ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1994. Simons defines social movements as "struggles on behalf of a cause by groups who core organizations, modes of action, and/or guiding ideas are not fully legitimated by the larger society" (100). Stewart, Smith, and Denton Jr. identify the essential characteristics of a social movement as consisting of a minimal amount of organization, an uninstitutionalized collectivity, large in scope, and proposes or opposes change in social norms and/or values.

[80] George E. Marcus. *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998: 52.

and already a multi-sited process" that requires researchers to look at "diasporic contexts and the forms of mobility of marginalized peoples, communities, and technologies."[81] My multi-sited approach is fitting for a rhetorical project, as it does what McGee encourages critical rhetoricians to do, which is to gather fragmented texts together and hence produce a text for analysis.[82] This rhetorically focused ethnography emphasizes communication, arguments being put forth, and how discourse is constructed, which in turn affects culture. I serve as a participant observer using interviews and discourse analysis of actual conversations and those on website comment boards, in addition to the more traditional text-centered analyses of artifacts. Due to the different organizational structures of these three organizations, expediency of goal, and daily organizational struggles, discourse is often not documented. Thus, I use an ethnographic approach to explore and analyze undocumented discourse that highlights the difficulties, challenges, and success of a social movement.

Finally, this ethnographic work is focused on organizations and thus within an organizational setting. Thus, I draw upon literature that addresses specific organizational discourse, helping to understand discourse in an organizational setting with organizing and organizations in mind. For example, Grant et al refers to organizational discourse as "the structured collections of text embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects

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[81]Martin F. Manalansan IV. "Introduction: The Ethnography of Asian America: Notes toward a Thick Description." In *Cultural Compass: Ethnographic Explorations of Asian America*, edited by Martin F. Manalansan IV, 1-13. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000: 5.

[82] Michael Calvin McGee. "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture." *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 274-89.

into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed."[83]  Thus, this literature

provides a foundation for conducting ethnographic work in the organizational setting.

**Chapter Map**

Chapter 1 focuses on FAAIM and the rhetorical possibilities and constraints of the

concepts of "organization" and "Asian American" when coupled together.  Through an

ethnographic study of FAAIM during the planning and execution of the 15th anniversary

Chicago Asian American Showcase, I illustrate and argue that the rhetorical possibilities

provided by the "organizing" body of FAAIM works in dialectical tension with the rhetorical

constraints of the term "Asian American," which has changed and continues to change for

members that identify with it in the past and present. The 15th anniversary is an important

moment in the history of the organization, calling for organizational self-reflection, yet

beckoning the organization and its leaders to visualize what the future of the festival will or can

be in the midst of competing film festivals. The organizational survival and success of FAAIM

and the showcase depend on a community-based notion of support, anchored in a dynamic Asian

American identity.  As a result, I posit that the static structure of an "organization" has produced

discourses and practices that have yet to meet the changing identities of a Midwest Asian

American community, while limiting how the Asian American community understands what it

means to be Asian American through media arts. I argue that FAAIM's rhetoric of re-

nationalization posits an "Asian *American*," which emphasizes the "American" subject position

of Asians in America, despite the formal and institutional designation of "American."  This

chapter explores how the organization seeks to revitalize community support and embed cultural

capital within a modern conception of the Showcase, while dealing with historical relationships

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[83] David Grant,, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick, and Linda L. Putnam. "Introduction:  Organizational Discourse:  Exploring the Field." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 1-36. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004: 3.

that have allowed the Showcase to exist in its current form, such as its collaborative relationship with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.[84]  Thus, I am interested in how the organization constructs meanings around Asian American that align with previous notions of Asian American, while differing from current and changing Asian American identities and how the organization deals with such changes in the community and within its own organization.

Chapter 2 focuses on MANAA and its mission to serve as an Asian American media watchdog.  Since 1992, the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA) has monitored U.S. media representations of Asian Americans and organized petitions and protests in response to offensive or inaccurate representations of Asian Americans. In addition, MANAA participates in a Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition, which meets annually with the major networks to discuss issues of racial diversity in their shows.  As an activist media organization, MANAA operates at the ground level, organizing protests but also engaging in mainstream media in the boardroom.  This chapter explores, through texts and personal interviews, the organizational vernacular rhetorics present in MANAA and how it rhetorically constitutes an "Asian American" identity in an effort to rectify representational wrongs in the media. To situate this case study, I focus on MANAA's response and protest in the summer of 2009 surrounding the pending release of Paramount Studio's film, *The Goods,* in order to highlight how the environment, context, and mainstream culture affect the organization and its activities. Whereas social movement literature has tended to shy away from the prevalence of institutionalized and organizational efforts of social movements, this chapter takes a look at the organizational underpinnings and choices made due to institutional pressures applied by MANAA.  This chapter focuses on MANAA's organizational efforts to mobilize a protest against Paramount Studio's decision to air the trailer

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[84]  This relationship between FAAIM and the SAIC is an important, which spans back to the inception of the film festival.  The SAIC has provided cinema space and staff to support the festival in the difficult financial times but it may also hold some stipulations on what films may be shown by FAAIM.

for the 2009 Paramount film *The Goods*, while looking at implicit notions of Asian

Americanness that are organized around mainstream media representation of Asian Americans.

Chapter 3 shifts from activism that counters mainstream media discourse about Asian

Americans to film festivals and media production, particularly through CAAM, its film festival,

and CAAM's other organizational objectives, such as supporting independent film making. I

explore the notion of "community" and its rhetorical deployment and centrality in Asian

American rhetoric, particularly in organizing an Asian American independent media community

through multiple modes and forums, through a broad ethnographic and rhetorical study of the

organization and the film festival. Specifically, I center the case study on the events and

discourses surrounding CAAM's flagship event, the San Francisco International Asian American

Film Festival. By participating in the festival as primarily a participant observer in 2009 and

2010 film festivals, I explore the multitude of discourses employed in the racialization and

politicalization of the organization. By analyzing the discourse surrounding the films exhibited

at the SFIAAFF and in the organization outside of the film festival, accumulated through

participant observations and interviews, I direct my attention to the role of the rhetoric of

community via a shared film experience and independent media production. I argue that an

Asian American independent media community is rhetorically organized by framing a shared

film experience by the discourse prior to and after the film screening and through production and

distribution of Asian American independent media meant for an Asian American community and

broader publics. Thus, I study the way CAAM's rhetoric of Asian American media which

organizes and constitutes community through a mediation of experience and provides a space for

this community to produce, share, and reconstruct Asian American independent media through a

notion of mutability..

Chapter 4 concludes the dissertation with a rumination on how organizations, pan-ethnic Asian, and Asian American communities articulate with each other in various ways to reconfigure notions of what Asian American means. This reconfigured notion does not strictly adhere to the Asian American as a U.S. Census category. However, even as it simultaneously de-politicizes Asian American identity, it also maintains a space to take up a politicized version of Asian American identity through reconfigured media activist politics. It draw together fragments of previous the chapters' case studies and its ethnographic components in order to theorize how Asian American organizations reconfigure Asian American media activism and the role of organizations within post-millennium politics. I argue that pan-ethnic Asian American identity in regard to media representations is communicated as actions of support of the organizations, whether it is attending films or participating in protests. Thus, Asian American activism becomes reconfigured as organizationally-based actions of consumerism, participation, economics, and production. Thus, organizations become central to the social movement regarding Asian American media activism, and Asian American identity becomes attached and articulated to varying degrees with the organization. I theorize how the culture influences the organization which in turn attempts to influence culture.[85] Specifically, I argue that these organizations reconfigure the relationship between Asian Americans and the media partially by redefining what it means to be organizations and redefining what it means to be activists.

By linking rhetorical functions of race within an organization and its organizing efforts, I theorize how rhetorical theory, organizational communication, and media studies via Asian American studies overlap to answer questions about race, rhetoric, and organizing. I highlight how cultural notions of Asian Americanness come to affect organizations and organizing, which

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[85] David Carlone and Bryan Taylor. "Organizational Communication and Cultural Studies: A Review Essay." *Communication Theory* 8, no. 3 (1998): 337-67. Carlone and Taylor highlight the variety of ways in which organizational communication and culture studies overlap and relate.

change and adapt in response to their members.  In addition, I explore how negotiated notions of Asian American ultimately become part of the organizational vernacular rhetorics before being recirculated into the public and mainstream culture. Overall, my dissertation asserts that the rhetoric of organizations and organizing should cause rhetoricians and critical organizational communication scholars to rethink the role of race within their respective fields and to understand how race is utilized within a rhetorical and organizational setting.  Race-based media organizations respond to an abstractly hostile media environment, constitute and construct their own rhetorical identity, and importantly fashion both an organizational and racial identity through visual images, textual artifacts, and bodily performances in part through film festivals, protests, and organizational meetings, and the organizations that sustain them.

In the end, this dissertation crosses disciplinary boundaries asks two questions: "how do organizational communication studies change when viewed from the rhetorical tradition and when taking an ethnic studies perspective on race and vice versa?" and "How does rhetorical studies change when considering organization, community formation, and ethnographic methods for activism seriously?   By framing the dissertation around theoretical and disciplinary questions, I seek to fill in the gaps concerning race, rhetoric, and organizing and contribute to rhetorical and organizational communication theory.

*Figure.1* Characteristics of the Organizations

|  | **MANAA** | **CAAM** | **FAAIM** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Function** | Monitor Advocacy Education | Educate, Fund, Produce, Exhibit, and Distribute | Exhibit, Education |
| **Type of organization** | Nonprofit | Non-profit | Non-profit |
| **Member relationship** | Volunteer, Board of Directors | Volunteer and full time staff positions | Volunteer |
| **Etc** | Part of the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition and Asian Pacific American Media Coalition which regularly meets with the top four television networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox) to encourage diversity in their programming. | Largest Asian American film festival in the world that screens both Asian American and Asian International films. Major distributor of Asian American educational documentaries. Funds Asian American media projects. | Major Asian American festival in the Midwest. Screens only Asian American films. |

CHAPTER 1:

FAAIM'S DO-IT-YOURSELF "ASIAN AMERICAN": RHETORICS OF RE-

NATIONALIZATION AND ORGANIZATION

In this chapter, I focus on the discourse of "the only Asian American film festival" and

"for you all" deployed by Tim Hugh to explore simply what is meant by these phrases within the

Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM)'s rhetorical production. Indeed, the

notion that the Chicago Asian American Showcase (hereafter referred to as the Showcase) as the

"only Asian American" film festival in the United States is a puzzling one, as it argues for the

Showcases' exceptional nature in the landscape of media exhibition. Hugh's phrase, "The only

Asian American film festival," alludes to the lack of international films featured in the

Showcase, even though other Asian American film festivals include and even feature Asian

international films as part of their programming. "For you all" directly addresses the audience

present at the Showcase, yet also implies an audience beyond those physically present – the

community of Asian Americans and those who seek the nuances and complexities of Asian

American media, film, and arts. Nonetheless, these two phrases – the former, which encapsulates

the notion of an Asian American subject, and the latter, which assumes the presence of

communities – are central themes of FAAIM's rhetoric. I use these two phrases as a starting

point to explore FAAIM's rhetoric, its organizational histories and context, and the articulating

factors on which members of FAAIM base their rhetorical practice and conceptions of Asian

American.

I assert that FAAIM's notion of Asian American is situated within ideas of a local

community, subject to the geographic isolation of the Midwest from the coasts and devoid of the

histories that brought Asian Americans to the Midwest, and attempts to assert its *active* presence

in the Chicagoland area through the production of media arts.  In addition to the local

community, FAAIM's rhetoric deploys a national notion of community, one dedicated to the

Asian American media maker, artists, and filmmaker.  Importantly, FAAIM seeks to resituate

Asians within the United States to take up a subject position that identifies clearly as "American"

– in effect, FAAIM's rhetoric of re-nationalization seeks to strip away the foreign "other" that

Asian Americans inhabit through their racially marked bodies. Instead of being an "other,"

FAAIM positions Asian Americans as "Americans" with a unique point of view, one which de-

emphasizes the diasporic and transnational idea of "Asian American" and assumes that Asian

Americans have and will always be a part of the American imaginary.

Although I recognize that organizational discourse can help elucidate the internal affairs

and structure of an organization, I conclude with the public discourse produced from private

organizational discourses; specifically, I draw upon ethnographic data collected from fieldwork

conducted from December 2008 until June 2010, spanning the 14th Showcase to the conclusion

of the 15th Showcase in 2010.  Data gathered includes 18 months of observation; four formal

interviews ranging from 28 minutes to 55 minutes with the executive director of FAAIM Tim

Hugh, the development director Kimberly Turley, the website and technical do-it-all person

Emily Wang, and the art show curator Larry Lee; and analysis of speeches, organizational

emails, and other assembled relevant texts.  Although this study is informed by extensive time

conducting fieldwork, I do not attempt to analyze every textual artifact or organizational

meeting. Rather, I selected artifacts, discussions, and meetings related to the 15th Anniversary

Showcase, especially since the 15th Anniversary Showcase reflected upon FAAIM's

organizational past, present, and future and the meetings and texts leading up to the Showcase

are attempts at negotiating FAAIM's 15th Anniversary celebration.  I focus on the history of

FAAIM and my interactions with and participant shadowing of Tim Hugh before shifting my attention to the organizational discourses of FAAIM, in particular an organizational meeting regarding the Showcase's art show and interviews with the three other organizing members. I conclude with an analysis of the welcome speech at the opening of the 15th Anniversary Showcase, a critical self-reflection over a co-constructed call for short films I was involved with that was distributed to the Chicagoland Asian American community, and an analysis of local, yet nationally known, artist Laura Kina's blog regarding FAAIM's role within the Chicagoland arts community.

**The History of FAAIM**

Founded by Sooyoung Park and William Shin, the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM) was formed in 1994, in part to help produce and present the Chicago Asian American Showcase. However, the creation of FAAIM is not isolated to just the Chicago Asian American Showcase but is related to a larger political project of Park. Both Park and Shin were part of the well-recognized Chicago indie rock band, Seam. In the mid-1990s, Seam was well-received by critics and fans alike and was lumped in with other well-known independent rock bands of the time, such as Slint and Yo La Tengo. Rick Reger, reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, called Seam "equally talented, if far less known" to bands such as the Smashing Pumpkins and Liz Phair.[86] The early origins of FAAIM started with Park's side project *The Ear of the Dragon,* which is the compilation released by his record label Fortune 5.[87] Jointly produced with *A. Magazine*, Fortune 4's first and last album release *Ear of the Dragon*

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[86] Rick Reger. "Seam Pulls It All Together." *Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 1998.
[87] Oliver Wang. *DeclarAsians of Independence* (vo. 17, no 38), May 17-23 1996, accessed June 23 2009, http://www.asianweek.com/051796/RockAsians.html. At the time of starting, it was most likely that the Ben Kim was a co-founder of Fortune 5, which had changed its name to Fortune 4 by the printing of this article.

featured music from Asian American and Asian Canadian bands.[88]  Park's side project was intended to shed light on Asian American and Asian Canadian artists, to deconstruct the model minority stereotype, and to expand notions of what Asian Americans could do both for Asian American audiences and for non-Asian American audiences.  Park states, "The idea was to put out a CD to show younger Asian-American kids, and mainstream America as well, that Asian Americans don't just sit at computer terminals, do kung-fu and shit like that."[89]  In essence, Park states, "our goal was to showcase Asian American artists"[90] and thereby providing role models for Asian Americans interested in the arts.

The reasoning behind the political and musical project to showcase Asian American artists and media work can be constructed from Park's accounts growing up without Asian Americans in the media.  In an interview in 1995 with Aidin Vazir, Park relates, "I think back to when I was growing up and the lack of role models and the affirmation you get from someone that looks like you doing something you're interested in. . . .  The lack of that definitely led to a sense of inferiority."[91]  He laments the lack of strong Asian American role models in the media and the presence of dehumanizing characters, such as Long Duk Dong from *Sixteen Candles*.[92]

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[88] Julie Shiroishi.  "Alternative Asian:  Seam Tours to promote a 19-band disc, Ear of the Dragon - the first all-Asian American rock compilation." *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, May 10 1995, accessed June 23, 2009. http://seampage.tripod.com/sfbg_eotd.html. The original name of the record label was Fortune 5 but Park had to change when there were copyright issues with another label known as Fortune 5.  As a result, Park changed the name to Fortune 4.

[89] Aidin Vaziri. "Seam." *Detour*, September 1995, accessed June 23, 2009, <http://seampage.tripod.com/detour995.html>.

[90] "Indie music's Seam breaks race barrier." *China News*, February 12, 1999, accessed June 23, 2009. http://seampage.tripod.com/chinanews.html.

[91] Aidin Vaziri. *Seam*. Detour.

[92]Alison Macadam. "Long Duk Dong: Last of the Hollywood Stereotypes?" *NPR All Things Considered*, last modified May 30, 2008, accessed June 27, 2011. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88591800 Released in May 1984, director John Hughes' film, *Sixteen Candles*, was a well-known film and considered one of the seminal films of the 1980s. This coming-of-age film follows the life of teenager Samantha Baker (played by actress Molly Ringwald) leading up to her 16th birthday, as she navigates her feelings on the most popular boy in school while the geekiest boy and her best friend has romantic feelings for her.  One of the subplots of the film featured a foreign exchange student, Long Duk Dong (played by actor Gedde Watanabe), who lived with Samantha's family. Long Duk Dong's character was portrayed as an irreconcilable and different other and emasculated male.  Since the presence of Asian Americans within films

Park commented that the lack of Asian faces in media and entertainment was a disadvantage for him being an Asian American musician or artist. He states, "I figured that it wasn't something I was supposed to do."[93] It was not a material or physical resistance but rather a psychological one, cultivated by the media environment. Thus, Fortune 4 and the *Ear of the Dragon* were trying to counter the isolating effects of living as an *"other"* in a predominantly white society, while simultaneously constructing a community of Asian American artists to help combat the psychological and perceptual disadvantages put forth by the mediascape and the general paucity of Asian American representation.[94] Indeed, Park states that, "Fortune 4 is something that we do as a labor of love. . . . It's not something that makes money at all or something that we're going to take over the world with."[95] Fortune 4 sponsored the first annual Chicago Asian American Showcase at the School of the Art Institute and eventually turned into FAAIM. The shift from Fortune 4 to FAAIM occurred because Park decided to stop releasing records and changed the record label to a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization (NPO).[96]

Park, Shin, and Kim co-founded FAAIM and eased its transition into an NPO that worked closely with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and eventually the Gene Siskel Film Center branch of the SAIC to sponsor the annual Chicago Asian American Showcase, first held in 1995. The Chicago Asian American Showcase initially started as a music, literary, and film festival that showcased the talents of Asian Americans across the nation with a

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was relatively scarce, the character of Long Duk Dong became a prevailing stereotype for Asian American men of this generation. Graphic novel artist Adrian Tomine published a one-page comic, "The Donger and Me," portraying the uncomfortable relationship Asian American men of his generation have had with the remnants of Long Duk Dong.

[93] Rich Masio. "Love, Asian-American Style: SEAM." *Pandemonium Magazine* 1995, accessed June 23, 2009, http://seampage.tripod.com/pande.html.

[94] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham. *Asian Americans and the Media*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009. Ono and Pham define mediascape as "a section or area of media" that "includes texts that make up a significant part of the broader media environment, and useful observations about media discourse" (191).

[95] Melissa Hung. *The Godfather* 1997 [cited June 23, 2009]. Available from http://seampage.tripod.com/relicc.htm.

[96] Kerwin So. *SooYoung Park: The Interview to End All Interviews*. The Official Seam Fansite, May 9 1999 [cited June 23 2008]. Available from http://seampage.tripod.com/kerwins_interview.html.

focus on local Chicago artists.  In 2001, however, co-founding directors Sooyoung Park and

William Shin stepped down; Ben Kim remained the executive director, and Tim Hugh emerged

as the new assistant festival director.   In 2002, Tim Hugh took over as the festival director, and

Ben Kim remained the executive director of FAAIM until 2004, when he became a director

emeritus, allowing Hugh to serve as the executive director of FAAIM and its Showcase.

Over the course of its history, FAAIM has contributed to and collaborated with many

Chicago-based institutions and groups that also contribute to Asian American culture in Chicago.

For example, in 2004, FAAIM collaborated with the now-defunct Asian American Artists

Collective.  As a result, the Asian American Artists Collective produced and performed the

closing show of the Showcase, titled "Mars, Marriage, and Mass DistrAction," which addressed

the role of Asian American voting and politics prior to the 2004 Presidential election.[97]  In

addition, FAAIM has collaborated with local universities such as DePaul University to hold

events, such as a discussion with Martin Wong and Eric Nakamura of *Giant Robot* magazine.

Although the literary events and poetry performances have decreased in recently years, FAAIM

still sponsors the Chicago Asian American Showcase with an opening art show and musical

showcase during the span of the festival.  The 2010 year was the Chicago Asian American

Showcase's 15th year anniversary and the ninth year for Tim Hugh as the festival director.

FAAIM's relationship with the Gene Siskel Film Center is a unique one compared with

many other film festival organizations.  Where other festival organizations arrange to rent out

local cinemas and sometimes projection equipment for the film festival, FAAIM uses the Siskel

Film Center without charge but with the stipulation that they split the revenue from the ticket

sales with the Siskel Film Center.  Whereas the economic recession of 2008-2009 caused many

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[97] I was involved with *Mars, Marriage, and Mass DistrAction*, co-hosting this show as a member of the
Asian American Artists Collective.

film festivals to cut costs, often by downsizing the festival venues, screenings, and duration, FAAIM was able to function as usual. However, because of the split revenue arrangement, a drop in attendance to the festival may burden FAAIM's relationship with the Gene Siskel Film Center.

On the other hand, FAAIM's relevance as a media arts center and organization operates on a relatively small scale. FAAIM's main relevance lies in being one of the only Asian American-specific film festivals within the United States and also serving the Chicago cultural landscape, where cinema, festivals, and the talent are arguably becoming more relevant for mainstream media industries.[98] Institutionally, FAAIM works closely with the School of the Art Institute and its accompanying Gene Siskel Film Center and has collaborated with the Japanese American Service Committee. However, FAAIM also struggles with the dispersed Asian American community in Chicago, which resides in different neighborhoods throughout the city and extends into fragmented areas of neighboring suburbs. Thus, the original values of FAAIM and its Chicago Asian American Showcase – to provide role models of Asian Americans in the media- and arts-related fields and educating the general Asian American and non-Asian audience – are still driving the organization while simultaneously providing constraints on how it adjusts to the changing understanding of race and racism in the mainstream media, where Asian Americans more prominently appear. The difficulty of FAAIM in current times is to define its relevancy, especially with the changing position of Asian Americans in the mainstream media and the prevalence of Asian Americans in new media.

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[98] For example, Saturday Night Live is known to scope Chicago's premier sketch comedy and theatre group, The Second City, for new talent. In addition, the filming of the new Batman series, *The Dark Knight*, has brought attention to Chicago. Thus, Chicago is not a large media market, like New York or Los Angeles, but it is definitely not a small one and is considered the premier city of the Midwest.

**FAAIM AS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION**

FAAIM's shift into an NPO whose organizational mission is to "promote film, video, and other media by and about Asian Americans, and to support the artists who create them," is an important one.[99] On the one hand, it is a simple and clear goal – to use media to educate people about Asian American histories and issues and to introduce and center Asian American perspectives. On the other hand, the mission's side effect ultimately cultivates Asian American culture within Chicago, while bringing Chicago into prominence as a place for Asian American culture. Thus, the films, music, literature, and performances that are part of FAAIM's Chicago Asian American Showcase seek to meet these goals. It is an NPO that is exclusively dedicated to Asian American media arts in the perceived-as-predominantly-white landscape of the Midwest.[100]

However, the status as an NPO also affords FAAIM with institutional benefits as well as symbolic capital. Technically, as a 501(c)3 NPO with tax exemption status, FAAIM is regarded as a charitable organization and therefore has limited political lobbying capabilities; however, more importantly it may not be organized or operated for the benefit of private interest, nor have its profits benefit a private shareholder or individual.[101] In addition, FAAIM receives funding from a variety of sources, such as from the public, grants, individual donations, and corporations, but it may not receive an overwhelming amount from any one source; thus reiterating its support materially from the community and public. Even as this is the only formal description of a

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[99] "About Us," FAAIM, accessed June 28,2011, http://www.faaim.org/about-us/
[100] According to the U.S. Census race data for 2009, the Midwest population of Asian Pacific Islanders is 1,900,700. Since the total U.S. population of Asian Pacific Islanders is 16,615,806, the Midwest has roughly the 11.4% of the total Asian Pacific Islander population of the United States of America.
[101] *Exemption Requirements - Section 501(c)(3) Organizations* 2011. Internal Revenue Service of the United States Government, November 15, 2010 2010 [cited January 2 2011].

501(c)3 NPO, there are many different types of NPOs.[102] FAAIM might best be categorized as a philanthropic and/or an advocacy NPO, advocating for Asian American independent media causes, yet also serving to address a public concern over the lack of diversity in media.[103] However, FAAIM can also be understood as one of many of what Hyde calls "social movement agencies": "hybrid organizations in which the explicit pursuit of social change is accomplished through the delivery of services."[104] FAAIM seeks to deliver Asian American media as a cultural product, one that is meant to address the dearth of Asian American media representations and media producers in the mainstream media, as well as entertain and educate audiences and provide a space for like-minded media arts enthusiasts and organizers. FAAIM can be seen as an organization that also deploys alternative media representations of Asian Americans as a form of "collective action," which refers to the process of organizing utilized by organizations to identify and connect "people who share a common private interest(s) in a public good" as well as communicate to them and coordinate, integrate, or synchronize their individual contributions.[105] Thus, public service or advocacy-oriented NPOs may engage in particular types of collective action, such as organizing an event (i.e. festival). Regardless of FAAIM's formal

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[102] Laurie K. Lewis, Stephanie A. Hamel, and Brian K. Richardson. Communicating Change to Nonprofit Stakeholders: Model and Predictor of Implementers' Approaches. *Management Communication Quarterly* 15 (1) 2001: 5-41. Lewis et al explicate the many types of NPO, from philanthropic organizations that address a variety of public concerns, mutual benefit organizations such as professional organizations or unions that exist primarily for its members, and finally advocacy organizations that promote particularly causes, such as political parties.

[103] Ibid, 8. However, the designation of 501(c)3 non-profit encompasses many different types of organizations. Lewis et al. explicate three of the many types of NPOs, from philanthropic organizations, which focus on a variety of public concerns, to mutual benefit organizations such as professional organizations or unions that exist primarily for its members, and finally advocacy organizations that promote particular causes and factions, such as political parties.

[104] Cheryl Hyde. "The Ideational System of Social Movement Agencies: An Examination of Feminist Health Centers." In *Human Services as Complex Organizations*, edited by Yeheskel Hasenfeld, 121-44. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992: 122. Hyde does not use "hybrid organization" in the same way that Minkoff does, which refers to the new type of organizational form that draws from traditional and new social movement organizations. See Debra C. Minkoff. "The Emergence of Hybrid Organizational Forms: Combining Identity-Based Service Provision and Political Action." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2002): 381

[105] Andrew J. Flanagin, Cynthia Stohl, and Bruce Bimber. "Modeling the Structure of Collective Action." *Communication Monographs* 73, no. 1 (2006): 32.

categorizations, it serves as an organizational site for collective action, advocacy, and (implicitly) social change regarding Asian American independent media arts in the Chicago area.

Symbolically, the common assumption regarding NPOs is that they are dedicated to a cause – volunteers donating their time for something bigger than themselves and paid employees sacrificing opportunities to make more money. Although economic sustainability matters, accumulating as much capital and profit as possible should not be the driving force of such an organization. Rather the organization's primary motivators should be its mission and goals, with profits specifically (and legally bound) to be reinvested into the organization.[106] One of the defining characteristics of an NPO is that it does not "coerce participation" and thus relies on "freely given labor, patronage, and participation."[107] That is the case of FAAIM, since it is primarily an organization driven by volunteers, nearly all of whom have full-time jobs outside of their duties organizing the Showcase.[108]

FAAIM's history reads as an ideal story of a small group of dedicated individuals, coming together to form a longstanding NPO for the Chicago (Asian American) arts community and Chicagoland community as a whole. Eventually, however, the organization was passed on to the dedicated enthusiast and film festival regular, Tim Hugh, who was called upon to serve the organization against his choosing. Since the original founders left, FAAIM was primarily run by

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[106] Such examples of such NPOs can be seen in the well-known Big Brothers Big Sisters organization, which matches volunteer adult mentors to at-risk children, or a lesser-known The Bike Project of Urbana Champaign, for instance which provides educational programs on bicycle maintenance through the help of volunteer bicycle mechanics.

[107] Peter Frumkin. 2002. *On Being Nonprofit: A conceptual and policy primer*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: quoted in Laurie Lewis, 2005. The Civil Society Sector: A Review of Critical Issues and Research Agenda for Organizational Communication Scholars. *Management Communication Quarterly* 19 (2):243.

[108] Hugh's primary profession is a car mechanic, a job that many people find surprising. Kim Turley works as full-time job as at search engine marketing firm. Larry Lee is a faculty member and the associate director of admissions at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Emily Wang was an undergraduate at the SAIC and does freelance work. I, during the time of the fieldwork, was a doctoral student at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, which is roughly two and a half hour drive south of Chicago.

Tim Hugh, who states that he's been "officially running it for 10 years, by default."[109]  This is

its defining narrative – one that is important to recognize as part and parcel of FAAIM's identity.

FAAIM was formed out of a crisis in representation, notably the lack of Asian Americans in

front of and behind cameras in the U.S. media.  The founders, specifically Sooyoung Park,

perceived the social location of Asian Americans in mainstream society and cultural life in

Chicago to be marginal, at best. In addition, it was born out of a love of music and the arts and

with an attempt to cultivate a community of artists within the Chicagoland landscape,

particularly since it grew as a side project of the band Seam. The shift to an NPO allowed

FAAIM to tap into resources, such as grants, tax-exemptions, and partnerships with other NPOs

and most importantly the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and its Gene Siskel Film

Center,[110] which were less accessible to profit-based institutions and organizations. Also, the

NPO status institutionalized the charitable and seemingly noble mission FAAIM was focused on

serving – the promotion of Asian American artists and their work. While this history and current

formal designation sheds light on the organization at a distance, I shift my focus to the process of

*organizing* in relationship to its designation as an NPO, particularly since the formal designations

do not adequately capture and explain the occurrences within the FAAIM.

**A DIY Rhetoric of Community**

Up to this point, this chapter has focused on FAAIM's history as an organization and its

current institutionalized and formal designation as an NPO. Often the informal organizing

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[109]  "By default," refers to the process by which he became the director of the Showcase and FAAIM. Hugh joined FAAIM as a volunteer, back in 1998.  He stated that he "would just buy tickets for everything and watch everything and eventually, I guess, the founders took note of me" and eventually started to ask him to take tickets, sit at the table, or take pictures during the question and answers after the screenings.  When two of the founders left Chicago to pursue other endeavors, they asked Hugh if he would "look after the Showcase for them with the one remaining director, Ben (Kim), who was still in Chicago."  Eventually Kim also left Chicago to attend school, thus leaving Hugh as the sole person running the Showcase and FAAIM.

[110] Both the SAIC and the Gene Siskel Film Center are part of the Art Institute of Chicago. The Gene Siskel Film Center is considered a public program of the SAIC. The Art Institute of Chicago has two branches, one which is the Museum and the other is the SAIC.

processes and the formal organizational structure are not aligned harmoniously. The official and formal designations of structures exist on one vector; whereas, what the organization actually does and how it organizes exist on another vector, aligning or differing from the intentions and purposes of formal structure. In this section, I focus on the process driven by FAAIM's executive director but also negotiated by the members that constitute FAAIM's organizing. I start by identifying the overlying ethos permeating its organizing process stemming from its executive director, Tim Hugh, and conclude with a short overview of FAAIM's sometimes singlehanded and single-minded organizing of the festival, which has led to the recruitment of people who were influential in producing FAAIM's celebratory 15th annual Showcase.

During an interview, I asked Kim Turley, the new director of development, to describe the organizational structure of FAAIM. She giggled and asked, "What structure?" in a cordial and friendly way and noticeably without judgment.[111] Turley's reaction to the question of "structure" is telling, both in challenging commonly understood notions regarding organizational structure and in understanding FAAIM's particular seeming lack of formal organizational structure. Turley's ironic comment "what structure?" points to FAAIM's lack of commonly-held ideas about organizational structure, especially defined roles and clearly delineated jobs for organizational members. Despite their formalized organizational hierarchies, most organizations do not always have what we envision to be a formal organizational structure – meaning that all organizations have elements of informality that belie a formal organizational structure. Tim Hugh's role as the executive director of FAAIM remains the clearest defined role for FAAIM, as decisions concerning the organization ultimately conclude with him. As the executive director of FAAIM, Hugh is the driving force of FAAIM and the Showcase. However, the lack of overt

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[111] Kimberly Turley (development director of FAAIM). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham, May 22 2010.

structure, responsibilities, and obligations often means people, especially Tim Hugh, pick up the slack. Lee, the longstanding art curator for the Showcase, replied to the same question asked of Turley by stating, "out of expediency or convenience sometimes the organization has to trim fat.[112] In this case, a skinny man (Tim Hugh) - metaphorically speaking - is getting emaciated to fit through some spots." Thus, Lee highlights both the positive and negative aspects of informal and unstructured organizing practice: FAAIM operates efficiently and informally but often at the expense of its main member and organizer, Hugh, as the responsibilities and challenges of running the festival overwhelm one person.  Nonetheless, Lee and Turley point to possible changes in the organizational structure that might help to "preserve Hugh's sanity and to help the Showcase grow and continue from a position of strength" according to Lee, who commends Hugh on his ability to maintain the relationship between FAAIM and the Gene Siskel Film Center.[113]

On the one hand, FAAIM abides by the NPO structure, particularly the "for the community" charity aspect of NPOs, as well as the institutional and legal responsibilities that 501(c)3 status requires.  On the other hand, there are organizational practices that do not fit the designation of formal structures and roles, most notably Hugh's commitment to a "do-it-yourself (DIY)" organizational practice and ethos that Lee and Turley point out as being taxing, yet sometimes needed, to get the job done.[114]  This DIY approach emphasizes a low-cost, do-what-is necessary to get the job done approach, often out of the need for accessibility, creative control,

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[112] Larry Lee (art show curator for the Chicago Asian American Showcase), phone interview by Vincent N. Pham, September 21, 2010.
[113] Larry Lee interview 21 September,2010.
[114] DIY is most often associated with indie culture, such as zines, music, and other craft and arts related endeavors.  In Azerrad's book on the early independent music scene from 1981-1991, he documents the influential bands of the time who lived and performed a DIY and independent music live style.  These bands applied their own interpretations of the literal "DIY" imperative and impinged upon them a moral and ethical meaning

and necessity due to a lack of resources.[115]   These aspects of the DIY culture seemed to undergird the founding of FAAIM, especially since the founders were also musicians, and became part of FAAIM's ethos.[116]   Most importantly, the DIY aspect became part of how FAAIM survives through Hugh, especially since the founders unexpectedly left him with the responsibility of FAAIM when they decided that they wanted to pursue other endeavors. In part, FAAIM's current survival as an organization, even in its grassroots state, is due to Hugh's enthusiasm for and dedication to the Showcase.

To understand FAAIM's current condition on the eve of its 15th anniversary, I shift my attention to Tim Hugh, since he is its main organizer, public face, and possibly most influential member.  Understanding his conceptions and ideas about Asian America and his own biography allow me to analyze subsequent FAAIM speeches, organizational meetings, projects, and surrounding discourses in this chapter. Informed by informal interactions but drawing greatly from two formal interviews, I start with a short biography and description of Hugh before analyzing responses to formal interview questions. From these responses, I elucidate the notions of Asian America and community relationships to FAAIM that underpin FAAIM's rhetoric of Asian America. I conclude this section with an analysis of Tim Hugh's introductory speech for the opening night film of FAAIM's 15th Annual Showcase.

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[115]Michael Azerrad. *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001: 60. Greg Ginn of the influential band *Black Flag* , states that DIY meant the "do whatever is necessary" and "respecting the people should conform to some narrow aspect" (60). Often, DIY was an issue of necessity, accessibility, and control, especially if publicists were not seeking out a band's services while affording the bands access to audiences and creative freedom often restricted by a major label (170).  For others, such as the band *Butthole Surfers*, DIY was a just a means to an end; the end being a mainstream audience and DIeY as a bridge to such an audience (170).

[116] Michael Azerrad. *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001; Kaya Oakes. *Slanted and enchanted: The evolution of indie culture*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2009;  Amy Spencer. *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. New York: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., 2005.  Recently, authors Michael Azzerad, Amy Spencer, and Kaya Oakes have all address the DIY culture in numerous ways. Azerrad addresses it from the music perspective whereas Spencer and Oakes also look to its progression into arts, crafts, and other DIeY aesthetics and practices.

Tim Hugh is a direct and sometimes truthfully blunt man. Often driving the conversation with a variety of stories and insights, Hugh is chatty and friendly and lives a relatively simple life working as a mechanic in his father's automobile repair shop while running FAAIM in his spare time and organizing the Showcase into the late hours of the night when the opening approaches. From participant shadowing, informal conversations, and impromptu invitations to meals, I notice that Hugh's hobbies outside of his job as a mechanic and volunteer service running FAAIM primarily consist of taking his doting dog Helga to the dog park, meeting with friends at the local coffee shop, and frequenting Vietnamese sandwich shops and Korean barbeque joints in the area.  A popular culture aficionado, his place is decorated with Asian American literature in neatly packed shelves, framed screen-prints by local artist Jay Ryan of his favorite indie rock bands, and little *Ugly Dolls* and other *Giant Robot*-approved toys (see Appendix A).

During a formal interview, which was eventually split into two parts, I conversed with Hugh about his coming-of-age as someone who identifies as Asian American and his relationship to FAAIM, prior to becoming its executive director.   Growing up in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago with his American born Chinese parents, Hugh considers himself a born and bred Chicagoan, except for his short stint in the suburbs during high school, which played a pivotal part in his identifying as being Asian. Moving from the multicultural melting pot of Albany Park, Hugh soon found himself not only a city kid in a suburban town, but also one of the few Asian kids in his high school during the time when the regretful character of Long Duk Dong from the popular movie *16 Candles* was making its way into mainstream popular culture. As Hugh recalls, Long Duk Dong was "the role model that set the example of Asian Americans, or Asian kids, in film and media" and became the template for ridiculing Asian American males in high school.  When asked if *16 Candles* and the character of Long Duk Dong affected his

experiences in high school, he replied "Oh, it made it worse." When I followed up with "how so?" Hugh replied "Long Duk Dong. Come on. Yeah, it was just a bad time being one of four Asian kids in a suburban high school."[117] Hugh's sardonic "come on" followed by "it was just a bad time" emphasizes the sense of cultural damage Long Duk Dong inflicted upon Asian American males, like Hugh, in the everyday life by its hyper-exoticized otherness performed by a most memorable Asian American character in an incredibly popular media text. The ghost of Long Duk served as an impetus to Hugh's continued involvement with FAAIM and its existence. The original intention of the Showcase was literally to "showcase" Asian American and Asian Canadian artists as a means of counteracting their ridicule or invisibility in the mainstream media. For both FAAIM co-founder Sooyoung Park and FAAIM's current executive director Tim Hugh, "Long Duk Dong" appears as a character that has forever tainted Asian Americans, particularly males, during the 1980s. Importantly, the character of "Long Duk Dong" was a *foreign* exchange student whose representation drastically affected Asian *Americans* who did not share Dong's false-foreign linguistic features or behavior; what they shared was a racial background and phenotype.

Hugh's life in Chicago's suburb with geographical relocations, coupled with a popular film of a ridiculous Asian character, helped him recognize his racial otherness as "Asian American." When I asked Hugh "what does the term Asian American mean to you?," he replied "it's being able to take from two cultures" and recalls growing up in an "American" type of household with Hugh's parents rebelling against the Asian culture during the 1960s and eventually being raised in a "meatloaf and fried chicken and the Beatles" cultural milieu[118]. But upon reflecting on his move from the multicultural Albany Park neighborhood to the

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[117] Tim Hugh (executive director of FAAIM). Interview by Vincent N. Pham. Chicago, IL. May 8, 2010
[118] Ibid.

predominantly white northwest suburbs of Chicago, he noticed his racial difference from others. Thus, for Hugh, "Asian American" is a term that allows one to negotiate the notion of American as "white" with his racial otherness positioning him outside the norm of whiteness.

However, Hugh did not begin to self-identify as Asian American until he started attending the Showcase. He described the featured films as different from mainstream films, specifically since the films had " personal history being shown."[119] This personal connection spurred him to realize that he and his family have a history within the United States.[120] Hugh's involvement with the Showcase started with his love of music, especially since the Showcase and FAAIM were started by the well-known Asian American indie band Seam at the time. Indeed, it was music, the band-turned-founders of FAAIM, and their Chicago show that drew Hugh to recognize Asian Americans arts and artists. Hugh recalls, "I had seen the last show of the tour in Chicago, and I've seen bands that had Asian Americans in it before, but it was seeing all the bands at once, on one stage. It was cool. That's when it really started to hit me to see Asian American musicians."[121] After the music tour, the Showcase was started to feature a multitude of Asian American artists, such as writers, visual artists, musicians, and most importantly films and filmmakers. Hugh recalls the first films and images he encountered, thinking that they would be "foreign and subtitled," only to find out that "all these people are just like me" and that it was "cool" that "they were American, but by chance Asian."[122] Hugh's engagement with FAAIM counteracted the "uncoolness" of Long Duk Dong in the mainstream media. Hugh states that he "self-identified with a lot of the issues and things they were talking

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[119] Ibid.
[120] For Hugh, being Asian American is a process of self-awareness but also being conscious of how others perceive you, that is "not looking at Asians as Asians but looking at them as Americans first, then Asians."
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

about in some of the films,"[123] which led to his eventual involvement with FAAIM and its Showcase. When I pushed further and asked why he became involved with FAAIM, he continued on to say "I was just really into what it represented."[124]

Less noticeable is the effect of geography and location upon FAAIM's origins. Although the founders of FAAIM do not speak of the geographical isolation from the Asian American dense West Coast, their collaborations arose within the city of Chicago. In addition, the Showcase was meant to unite Asian American artists from Chicago as well as bring in other Asian American artists into Chicago simply as a means of exposing the local community to the talents and skills of Asian American filmmakers, artists, and musicians. For Hugh, surviving his teenage years in the suburbs of Chicago as one of the few Asian students informed his conception of Asian American where being "American" was of utmost importance and being perceived as "foreign" was undesirable.

Coupled with the presence of FAAIM within the Midwest, in the heartland of the United States and east of California where Asian Americans were plentiful, it seems fitting that Tim Hugh emphasized the "Americaness" of the Showcase. The emphasis on avoiding the "foreign" and communicating the "Americanness" of the films encountered at the Showcase, that is, showing films that did not have subtitles and with characters who conveyed to Tim Hugh that "all these people are just like me" and "were American, but by chance Asian."[125] FAAIM and the Showcase became a space where Asian Americans were represented in their fullness; most importantly, it was work created by Asian American artists and media makers.

For Hugh, FAAIM represents a space and place for connecting arts, media, and their producers with a community and audience that will appreciate and support such work. When I

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

asked Hugh about what he saw as the relationship between FAAIM and the Asian American community or the film community, he answered thoughtfully, situating FAAIM and the Showcase as a place for up and coming filmmakers and for reshaping representations of Asian Americans. Hugh's answer to the question about the relationship between FAAIM and its community separates and situates two distinct communities: those attending the Gene Siskel Film Center to watch films and the Asian American communities within Chicago.

For the film center, the Showcase is, as Hugh said, "an opportunity to show new work by new filmmakers,"[126] a benefit to the mission of the Siskel film center which sought to serve a film going audience. Quite simply, Asian American filmmakers are a relatively new and untapped cultural resource for the Gene Siskel Film Center, and the collaboration with the Showcase allows the Siskel Center to show such work to their own film center constituents easily while attracting audiences who might not usually come to the film center. Hugh states that "we have non-Asians who are there every year to see what we have to bring to them every year" and who are amazed and pleased with the features and documentaries that are shown.[127] During my participant observations, I noticed a mix of elderly Caucasian movie goers, which Hugh pointed out were part of the regular Siskel viewing community. He describes this community as people who will often see movies just because the Siskel is showing it. There was also a middle aged white male that Hugh greeted with enthusiasm.[128] When I inquired, Hugh replied, "Oh, he's a regular. He comes every year and he drives from Indiana because he knows he can't see movies like this where he lives." Hugh then positions "community" as both a subject and object of education; FAAIM educates non-Asian communities but also helps shape the Asian American

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Indeed, the non-Asian, often white, audience of the Siskel is also diverse, ranging from cinemaphiles, art kids, and the elderly retirement community that reside in downtown Chicago.

community to "who and what Asian Americans are or are about." The non-Asian community is informed about the "multiplicity, heterogeneity, and hybridity"[129] of Asian Americans; however the local Asian American community is an object of education, as it is constituted and shaped by the features and documentaries by Asian American artists within Chicago and filmmakers outside of it. Even while the non-Asian community is learning about Asian Americans, the local Asian American community is also being constituted and shaped by Asian American artists and filmmakers, both who use their media to redefine and reconstruct what "Asian American" can be. Thus, the local Asian American community is simultaneously an object and subject of education depending on the audience.

FAAIM represents Asian Americans to the Siskel community with an explicitly educational manner. Although Hugh doesn't necessarily see the complications and problematic nature of having a fascination with Asian Americans among white audiences, he emphasizes the educational component of the Showcase, of revealing the possibilities of Asian American independent media through visual, literary, and cinematic exposure. On the other hand, he is cognizant of the cultural caché of the "International" film and purposely distinguishes FAAIM from them by positing the Showcase as an "Asian American" event.

For Asian American communities, the Showcase and FAAIM seek to represent distinct groups to each other through the exhibition of films of members from those communities or films about those communities. Hugh emphasizes the diversity of the Asian American community, highlighting Asian Americans often overlooked when compared to East Asians.

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[129] Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996: 67. Lowe contends that the Asian American community is marked by its heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity. Heterogeneity refers to the "existence of differences and differential relationships within a bounded category." "Hybridity" refers to the "formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsympathetic power relations." Finally, "multiplicity" refers to the determination of subjects by the ways they are located within multiple axes of power within a specific historical moment.

Hugh encourages multiple interpretative frames that come with engaging with media texts.[130] Hugh stated that "if you come with political in mind, that's what you'll find" but also reiterates this within singular films themselves.[131] The space of the film festival allows for the possibility for these different relationships to, interpretations of, and readings of a film to come together. Ideally, the space of the film festival allows for distinct and separate groups of the pan-ethnic Asian American community to come into contact with others who are interested in their stories and experiences. Hugh's response to the questions regarding community acknowledges the fluidity of community and the difficulty of constituting a unifying pan-ethnic conceptualization of Asian America, while encompassing the many diverse communities that make up Asian America.

Hugh envisions FAAIM as an organization that serves the Asian American community and the film and arts community of Chicago and the United States as a whole. Hugh situates FAAIM as an organization dedicated to serving multiple communities, one that is predominantly Asian American and is also part of the Gene Siskel film center viewing community. However,

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[130]John Fiske. Television: Polysemy and popularity. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3, 1986:391-408; Celeste Condit. The rhetorical limits of polysemy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (2) 1989:103-122; Dana L. Cloud. The Limits of Interpretation: Ambivalence and the Stereotype in *Spenser for Hire*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9 (4), 1992:311-324. Indeed, what Hugh unknowingly reiterates is John Fiske's argument about the polysemic nature of media, which argues that media, specifically television, is an "open text that allows various subcultures to generate meanings from it that meet the needs of their subcultural identities" (392). Fiske's article spurred a debate amongst rhetorical scholars, most notably between Condit and Cloud. In opposition to Fiske, Condit posits a theory of polyvalence, where audience members may share denotations of the media text but disagree on the valuation of that denotation which leads to different interpretations (106). Cloud disagrees with Condit and argues against an open number of interpretations to say that media text operate within binary systems and hence can be viewed as ambivalent as opposed to polyvalent. Nonetheless, Hugh sees the Showcase as a media event and the media texts within the Showcase allow for multiple engagement based on the individuals' selection of the films.

[131] For example, during the 15th Showcase, I introduced and ran the question and answer session for the film, *Going Home,* with the director and producer of film. The director, Jason Hoffman, was also the Korean transnational adoptee featured in the film, as he was "going home" to Korea to meet his birth mother. The producer, Mikyung Kim, was his partner, as well as interpreter in the documentary. During the question and answer period, I asked Mikyung about the difficulties of filming, directing, and translating these different interpretations as well as her positionality as the partner. Thus, I read the film as part of an exercise in the ethics of filmmaking and the politics of representation. However, a large contingent of the audience was made up young white females, who were a part of a Korean transnational adoptee parent group, and clamored to talk to Jason Hoffman after the film. They wanted to thank Jason for making this film, but their interest was in his cultural experience.

the rhetoric produced for each audience differs. Hugh's vision of FAAIM seeks to assert a mode of Americanness, one in which Asian Americans are not foreigners but are citizens who have had a long history within the U.S. cultural, political, and economic landscape. For Asian Americans, however, FAAIM asserts the possibility and potential of Asian American artists, while affirming their American presence within the United States. In the next section, I turn my attention to the opening night of the 15th annual Showcase. In doing so, I highlight the very public rhetoric of FAAIM, as performed and embodied by Tim Hugh and the verbal exchanges between him and FAAIM's membership.

**Exposure to the Asian American director**

On a warm Friday night, April 2, 2010, I drove from the desolate cornfields of Champaign-Urbana two and a half hours north through the bustling city traffic of the loop in Chicago to attend the opening night of the Chicago's Asian American Showcase (hereafter known as "Showcase") at the Gene Siskel Film Center in downtown Chicago. This year's Showcase marked the 15th anniversary of its sponsoring organization, the Foundation for Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM). The 200 person lobby was vibrant, filled with a mix of young and old, ranging from professionals arriving from work to students from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the old guard of Asian American media arts supporters, along with first time attendees from the National Association of Asian American Professionals (NAAAP). Along the street side windows were aluminum tin trays on buffet tables, lined with row upon row of baos – white steamed dough filled with vegetables and meats of Chinese origin - from *Wow Bao*, a Lettuce Entertain You corporate franchise located around the corner that previously catered food for opening night audiences.

I greeted Tim Hugh. Dressed in a simple navy blue *Giant Robot* t-shirt and khaki pants,

he handed me a laminated Showcase festival badge that matched his before greeting festival

frequenters and newcomers alike in the lobby and cultivating a pre-screening atmosphere in a

friendly way.[132] People filled the lobby space and crowded the ticket booth area.  Ticket takers

were serving people interested in either the festival opener and Chicago premiere of Quentin

Lee's *The People I've Slept With* or the animated feature (yet unrelated at the Showcase) *The

Secret of Kells*. Quizzical looks graced the faces of those there for *The Secret of Kells* as they

crowded around the program table of the Showcase, slowly picking up programs before

volunteers encouragely said, "feel free to take one!"

Soon after, a sign was posted on the ticket window: "*The People I've Slept With* at 8:00

p.m. is SOLD OUT.  *Tickets are available **now** for **April 4th at 5:30**."  As the crowd for the

opening art gala slowed down and people shuffled into the larger of the two theatres in the Siskel

Film Center, the lobby space thinned out.  A comfortable 197-person theatre with ample space

between plush seats filled with people that, despite a sold-out screening, gave the illusion of a

slightly under-filled theater.  Standing in the aisle bordering the entrance of the seats, I took

photographs of the audience and of Hugh as he took the stage (as he does every year at the start

of the festival prior to the opening film) to address the audience in front of him and in the theatre

seats with a welcome speech.

Hugh waited for audience members still funneling in as they scanned the packed theatre

for friends and looked for seats.  As the public face and main organizer of the Showcase, Hugh

nervously welcomed the audience, stating the following:

It's really great to see you know, everyone to come out to support what I feel is a very

important component to our community. We are basically the only festival in the country

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[132] *Giant Robot* is an Asian/Asian American pop culture magazine based out of Los Angeles.

that specifically features Asian American directors, film makers, and artists. Ya know, we don't show Wong Kar Wai films or Johnny Kill Films or anything thing like that. Ya know, our concern is being able to give exposure to the Asian American director. If you're a film maker, you know how hard it is to just to make a film and then to be a minority in a non-minority business; it's tough.

Hugh thanked the audience for coming out to support the Showcase and the Gene Siskel Film Center for its longstanding partnership. Then he launched into a brief history of the Showcase. Hugh asked the audience to "bear with me for the past 10 years, I've just been winging this. Seriously," before Larry Lee, curator of the Showcase's art show, interrupted him from the audience, yelling "What the hell are you doing now?" spurring audience laughter.

Midway through the speech, Tim thanked the people who had made the 15th anniversary festival possible, saying, "Without the help of Larry Lee, he's right there. Kim, where's Kim Turley? Kim's right there! Vincent Pham. Vincent Chung. Emily! The most super awesome person in the world. This year would not exist." Unexpectedly, he had mentioned my name along with the important volunteers. While the other volunteers lived in Chicago and volunteered on a more regular basis and dealt with the day-to-day activities needed for the Showcase, I was surprised to hear my name among them since I would consider my involvement minimal except for some social networking, being present at meetings and the Showcase, taking occasional photographs, and helping put forth the Call for Community Shorts program (that I will discuss later).

Hugh then transitioned into the theme of the 15th anniversary and short history of the filmmakers, stating:

But um, (laughter!) seriously we just do this for the love of what we do and it's basically

supporting the artist. And again, thank you for coming out! Um. Our catchphrase for

the year, was kind of accidentally, um, "honoring our past and embracing our future."

When we were looking at the films we had, we had noticed that there was history to what

we were doing this year, even though we've been doing this for 15 years. Like um

Quentin Lee who was here right now, ya know we showed his first film back in 1997,

along with Justin Lin, they had shot this film called *Shopping for Fangs*. Ya know that

was like 13 years ago, your first movie.

He then provided a preview of other films being shown, such as adoption documentaries,

emphasizing the "Asian American" aspect of it, stating that the Showcase shows more "Asian

American films each year than say San Francisco or New York, because we're *only* showing

Asian American films." From there, Hugh's speech shifts into a critique of the mainstream

media:

It's a very specific thing. Hollywood and distributors, they'll tell you like, they don't

know how to market an Asian American film. It's not like these films are no good….

But ya know, the problem is again foreign looking characters on the stage, but they're not

speaking foreign languages.

Importantly, the speech highlights the presence of Asian American cinema, easily found in this

film festival but difficult in mainstream media venues, stating that "Ya know on Netflix, we're

listed under special interest group. It's like okay, let me find an Asian American film. It's like

okay. Special interest . . .  yoga whatever . . . extreme sports yeah . . . Asian Americans."

Hugh concluded by thanking the small sponsors who had contributed, such as *Giant Robot* magazine, the volunteers, and this Showcase's featured artists Laura Kina and Anida Yoeu Ali. He commended Kina and Ali and linked them personally to himself, stating:

> I've known them for at least 10 years and to see how involved and how invested they are in our communities; not just artistically but politically, educationally, and they're both mothers and they do all this stuff; it's just um, it really inspires to make a difference with what we do with our showcase, which is why it's actually our honor to be able to feature them this year.

Larry Lee interrupted Hugh one more time, jokingly prodding Hugh to introduce the movie. Hugh thanked the audience, the Gene Siskel Film Center, and then the Illinois Humanities Council. Quentin Lee gave a final word, and then Hugh provided a preview of the Q & A before making one last call to the audience beckoning them to continue supporting of the festival, since "every ticket sale means a big deal to us because we have no federal funding, we don't have corporate sponsors. So, we rely on ticket sales to support our festival." Kim Turley, FAAIM's newly appointed development director, interrupted Hugh and whispered loudly to Tim and the audience: "Donate!" After the introductory speech, a short two minute promotional trailer about FAAIM played before the feature film. Unlike mainstream movie showings, there were few advertisements and trailers before the feature film.

Hugh's opening speech thematically offered that a notion of community is critical to the organization. The speech highlighted the organization's non-profit and volunteer nature and emphasized the value of selflessness for the community, both the Asian American community in Chicagoland that directly benefits from the Showcase and also the Asian American filmmaking community, whose films have the opportunity to be screened and their art and technical skills

developed.  In addition to director Quentin Lee, the speech highlighted the difficulties of the filmmaking business, commending those who stick with it, like Patrick Epino, and rewarding them with a space to exhibit their work.  Hugh stated that Patrick Epino is "one of those directors that we see his short films every year and we're like 'hey this guy's really talented.  Ya know he should make a feature,'" before revealing that Patrick Epino, in fact, did create a feature length film, *Mr. Sadman,* which was being shown at that year's Showcase. Thus, the Showcase exists simultaneously for the filmmakers and for the audience.  It exists in relationship to the Film Center, and Hugh made a point of this throughout his speech, stating with seriousness that "without support of the film center, which is again one of the finest theaters in the country, if not the world, our Showcase would not exist."  He then said, "We cannot, I cannot tell you how important they are to us and what we do."  Community becomes the overarching idea in the Showcase, as the Film Center, the filmmakers, the diverse audience, and independent cinema being shown are woven together through FAAIM's rhetoric.

On the organizational end, Hugh's declaration of "just winging" the fulfillment of his responsibilities as the executive director of FAAIM reveals his DIY aesthetic and mode of organizing. It also conveys an incorrect notion to the audience that such an event like the Showcase is easily accomplished by one person. On the other hand, Lee and Turley's interjections, although somewhat disruptive of the speech, call to attention the collaborations and other organizational members that allow the Showcase to exist.

Interestingly, FAAIM's discourse of an "Asian American" film making community is sometimes problematized by the films shown at the Showcase. For example, the 2009 closing film, *Treeless Mountain*, was titled as a "USA/International" film and shown in Korean with English Subtitles. The film takes place in Korea and uses Korean actors. However, this

contradictory instance is negotiated by emphasizing the local, the "American" that seemingly overrides the predominant "international" aspect of the film. For *Treeless Mountain*, director So Young Kim was an SAIC alumna who has previously attended the festival. Thus, her vision of Korea via the "USA/International" film is rhetorically framed by FAAIM to be influenced by her "American" experience. She is discursively constructed to be part of the Asian American independent media community through the erasure of her foreignness and emphasis of her "Americanness," even though the film is more like an international film than a domestic one.

On multiple occasions, Hugh deploys a notion of community that attempts to reach multiple audiences, from the filmmakers to audience members, and unite them under an ideal of sharing quality films and of the potential for having more complex representations of Asian Americans. In addition, this opening speech is a performance representing FAAIM as an organization even as it indicates the presence of organizational processes and tensions and their effects on rhetorical production.

In the next section, I discuss the influence of other organizational members on FAAIM's overall rhetoric and organizing by exploring their notions of Asian American community. While Tim Hugh is the most influential member and public figure for FAAIM, there are also other FAAIM members who engage with Tim Hugh. In this next section, I shift my attention to these members as they digest FAAIM's organizational discourse. By doing so, I illustrate that despite FAAIM's public rhetoric, its internal organization actions attempt to make space for various notions of Asian American community, which may reinforce, expand, and sometimes challenge the predominant rhetoric of re-nationalization, especially as its members put forth their own ideas about the organization and its relationship to Asian America.

**From DIY to Do-it-Ourselves**

Since the original founders left, FAAIM was primarily run by Tim Hugh. Hugh's "do-it-yourself" organizational approach can be incredibly taxing and sometimes inefficient, particularly when Hugh's strengths as a curator and welcoming persona get burdened by managing the administrative end of FAAIM. Having faced attendance challenges during the 2009 Showcase, whose dates overlapped with the Midwest Asian American Student Union (MAASU) conference and Easter Weekend (both of which competed for the attention of Asian American and non-Asian American audiences), Hugh was concerned about the welfare of FAAIM going into the 15th Anniversary of the Showcase in 2010. It was a critical juncture in which FAAIM could not operate solely as a one-man show under DIY auspices, especially as it strived for a larger event to celebrate its 15th anniversary. Thus, in early June 2009 and after the end of the 14th Annual Showcase, Hugh informed me of an organizational meeting to start planning the 2010 Showcase. Emily Wang (a young recent graduate of the School of the Art Institute), Kimberly Turley, Larry Lee, Tim Hugh, and I were present at this meeting, which took place on a sunny summer day. We sat at the outside tables of the local coffee shop in the Andersonville neighborhood of Chicago. This cursory planning meeting brought together the core group of five people who would be involved with the 15th Anniversary Showcase from its initial planning stages in June 2009 to May 2010 when the post-15th anniversary recap began. Although I do not analyze or go in-depth into the meeting, this group of people would remain involved with the planning of the 15th Anniversary Showcase. Instead, I turn my attention to a meeting in late 2009, which involved the planning of FAAIM's corresponding visual arts show component of the Showcase before discussing the interviews I conducted with Emily Wang and Kimberly Turley

Two days before Christmas in 2009, Hugh, my sister, and I rushed over to the only

Baker's Square on the northside of Chicago for an organizational meeting for FAAIM.[133] It was

Free Pie Night at Baker's Square, which happens every Wednesday.  I sat across from my sister,

who sat next to Hugh, and next to an empty seat, which was being reserved for a late guest Larry

Lee.

Larry Lee, an old friend and art curator for the Showcase and who also works for the

SAIC, arrived late to the meeting. A self-described "old Chinese American codger," whose main

job is to be the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions at the School of the Art Institute

of Chicago, Lee's duty for the Showcase is to curate the art show. Larry is an enthusiastic man,

with salt and pepper hair and fashionable Donna Karan black and blocky eyeglasses. Tim

describes Larry's way with words, both the written and oral, as ""Larry Lingo"; that Larry Lee is

able to say everything and nothing at the same time. A master of spin, but never dishonest or

manipulative, Larry is a man who thinks big and likes to get people involved in large-scale

projects.

As the triple berry pie and four cups of coffee were ordered and brought out, Lee and

Hugh began discussing the 15th anniversary activities.  Lee stressed the nature of the Showcase

and in getting others involved, emphasizing that "it's a soft sell, about getting people together"

and that, "It's not about competition, it's about the consolidation of networks" when encouraging

Hugh to pair FAAIM with other Asian American arts groups.  The main focus of this meeting,

however, was the planning of the art show.  Hugh described the original plan of celebrating

*Giant Robot*'s 15th anniversary during FAAIM's 15th Showcase. This plan was not possible now

mainly because *Giant Robot*'s art pieces were either too big to deliver or had been sold already.

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[133] My sister, who is four years my elder, occasionally joined along for FAAIM events. She had little involvement with the planning of events but occasionally helped with the administrative end and some menial tasks, such as dropping off materials, like flyers or programs, at the Gene Siskel Film Center.

A new idea therefore must be decided. Hugh posited another idea: getting local people involved and doing a retrospective of local Chicago artists. Lee excitedly jumped onto this, immediately thinking of "the hook, the theme." He began to rattle off a list of catchphrases: "Highlight Chicago. Spotlight Chicago. 15 Years of Anida, of Laura Kina." Hugh liked the idea because the theme highlighted the idea of "Chicago bred" and therefore would make the art show about community by putting a focus on Chicago's own artists like Laura Kina and Tatsu Aoki. Hugh stated, "Chicago is about community" before doubling back "Or at least that's what it should be about." Lee emphasized that we should spotlight "contemporary," but we should also design a timeline of FAAIM's major events in relationship to Chicago History, local Asian American achievement, and the SAIC. Lee emphasized that we had to "pound home the point of history and tie FAAIM into the history."

This meeting also emphasized the "community" based aspect of FAAIM in ways that were meant as a means of mobilizing local community members to be excited about the Showcase. Not only was it about community, it was also about the history of the artists' community and FAAIM and the Showcase's pivotal role in this history. FAAIM also sought to educate and bridge communities, sharing new ideas about "community," while encouraging the reflection and understanding of the older communities. Both endeavors of educating and bridging new and old were recognized as increasingly difficult challenges in the current model of organizing.

Indeed, Hugh noted the difficulty of bringing out new audiences and fresh faces and showed his frustration with being the sole public face and organizer of the Showcase. Collaborating with Lee on the art show, working with the Film Center, trying to procure sponsorship, screening the films, and writing up program booklets were only a handful of the

responsibilities that Hugh takes up as the executive director of FAAIM.  Hugh commented that he would much prefer doing the behind the scenes work of curating and leaving the responsibilities of organizational development, leadership, and public speaking to others. Lee blurted out "that's why we need a new front person."  Hugh responded, "No, we need a new front woman.  People like women."  Lee's comment was not necessarily a call to remove Hugh from leadership of FAAIM but rather a call to inject newness into an old organization.  While Lee called out for the need for new energy and enthusiasm via a new public face, Hugh gendered the role, foregrounding the need for a woman to take the helm of publicity, community, and organizational development.  The role of being in charge, leading aspects of the organization, and its outreach efforts are seen as a rhetorically gendered.  That is, Hugh's comments indicate that a female should be the public face of FAAIM, due to the rhetorical possibilities and potentials he is unable to access due to his gender as a male and his racial identification as an Asian American.  Hugh rejected the idea of just any new person of publicly representing FAAIM; he specified a "women" because "people like women."  Although this can be read as an objectification of women as a marketing tool for the Showcase, it can also be read as a self-subjugation of the Asian American male in which Hugh recognizes the uncommon (although increasingly common) leadership position that Asian American males take within cultural production and organizational action, considers its effect on the success of the organization, and deploys women, preferably Asian American, as a means to popularize the Showcase while putting women in a position of public face in a non-sexualized way.

The only two women actively involved with the planning of the Showcase were Kimberly Turley and Emily Wang.   Although Turley was not mentioned in the previous conversation, Emily Wang was mentioned as a person who could possibly take more of a

prominent role in the organization.  However, she preferred to do the behind-the-scenes work and as little of the "public face" work that Tim Hugh envisioned. And although Lee and Hugh have articulated "community," Wang and Turley who are also involved with the organization had their own sense of community and identity.

Emily Wang is a young looking 25 year old Taiwanese national who has lived in Chicago for the past five years.  Wang played a pivotal role in the 15th Anniversary as the jack-of-all-trades, getting the website working, editing the trailer for FAAIM, and doing whatever needed to be done at the last minute.[134]  Although audience members during the Showcase would see her running around with a camera taking photographs, she operated primarily behind-the-scenes of the Showcase.  I was curious to learn how an Asian international student came to be involved with the unabashedly "proud to be Asian American" Showcase.  When I asked her about this, she said she first learned about FAAIM through a friend but became involved with FAAIM through the recommendation of Larry Lee, who was her instructor at the SAIC.  For the 13th Annual Showcase, she curated the SAIC Student Shorts Showcase and helped with website.  She played these roles again for the 15th Anniversary, playing a large role with the website and other technical behind-the-scenes work. In addition, she curated the Student Shorts and edited FAAIM's opening trailer.  She first became involved with FAAIM as a filmmaker but began to shift to the behind-the-scenes work, because she was really interested in working for a film festival and she was "lucky to have a chance" to do so when Lee gave her an opportunity with the Shorts program.[135]

Nonetheless, her involvement with FAAIM has influenced her understanding of Asian America and its relationship to FAAIM.  Back in Taiwan, Wang referred to Asian Americans as

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[134] Wang is also a visual artist who said in her interview with me that she has "a hard time describing things with words."

[135] Emily Wang (volunteer for FAAIM). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham, July 28, 2010.

"ABC," better known as American-Born Chinese but learned about the history of Asian America when she took a class with Lee at the SAIC. However, throughout our interview, Wang grappled with verbally articulating what Asian American meant, particularly in relationship with herself and FAAIM. For FAAIM, Asian American referred to a "community of Asian Americans" but also one related to Asians in general. She stated that to her and her friends, "we always have the question of our involvement in Asian America," because they always thought of the term as referring to "Asian in America," which would include her. However, when she asked other Asian internationals to become involved in the Showcase, she said that at first they would say that and they would doubt how they fit into the group of Asian Americans.[136] She states, "if you want to be exact, we're not Asian American," but she continues to think "we're Asian, we're in America, we're in a similar community as well, we all look Asian" before exclaiming, "Oh my God, I really don't know."

Emily Wang's difficulty with the term Asian American highlights the flexibility of the term that is both exact in its demographic potential but abstract in its definition of who is included in the symbolic, cultural, and community based notions of it. These tensions are foregrounded in her decisions of what to screen. Wang recalls a point Hugh made about films with subtitles, stating that, "Tim brought up this interesting point about Asians being on the screen but speaking English" since subtitles indicate foreignness in a film.[137] Thus, in comparison to Asian American film festivals that also screen international films, Wang feels that "FAAIM is really showing what Asian American is."[138] However, Wang's involvement in FAAIM has expanded her notion of how to *be* Asian American and given her the vocabulary to express it while also being Taiwanese. FAAIM's conception of an Asian American foregrounds

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid
[138] Ibid

Wang's education at the SAIC, recognizing that this short yet informative experience is part of her cultural identity.

The other main female involved with FAAIM is Kimberly Turley, who joined FAAIM to help with grant writing, fundraising, and general development work. A mixed race Japanese and Caucasian woman in her late 20s, Turley is experienced working within the non-profit and Asian American community organizing world in Chicago, since her previous job was with the Japanese American Service Committee (JASC). Thus, she might be seen as a person who can assume a leadership position within FAAIM, despite her own aversion to public speaking and disinterest in curatorial duties associated with the Showcase. When asked about how she became involved with FAAIM, she told a story about meeting Hugh, recollecting that Hugh's enthusiasm and vision attracted her into FAAIM. She states, "He's really great at creating a vision and kind of sharing that enthusiasm and vision and as soon as I saw that and all the potential that FAAIM has and all the different places where it can go and what it can be and what it can provide for communities like JASC."[139] Tapping into her experiences and recalling the difficulties and frustrations of working with and organizing pan-ethnic Asian American communities and organizations within Chicago, Turley recalls the problem of "community," stating that "the JASC is so segregated from the Korean American community and other ethnic groups that something like FAAIM is really important, providing a place where everyone can come together, and it's not like this cheesy Lunar New Year hoity toity event."[140] She refers to those "hoity toity" events as political, in the sense that people show up to save or publicize face, not the

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[139] Kimberly Turley (development director of FAAIM). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham, May 22, 2010.

[140] Ibid. When speaking about her own mixed raceness, Turley often notes that she is the "Asian American one" out of her family, referencing her work with Asian American organizations and activities in Chicago. Turley has not commented on her own mixed raceness in terms of being marginalized within Asian American organizations but noted that her realization of "otherness" and "Asianness" appeared in high school.

"political" activism that one might assume. She quickly follows up by saying "They're not an event for people to get together and share each others' stories."[141] Thus, her critique of typical Asian American events in the city of Chicago is that that they do not allow for the communication and the sharing of one's experiences and stories which helps create a pan-ethnic community; whereas, the very purpose of FAAIM and the Showcase is to share diverse stories that Asian Americans commonly are not able to see on television or in mainstream movie theatres.

Turley's conception of FAAIM as a place to share honest stories and a resource for Asian American organizations in the area is not a drastic departure from the FAAIM's explicit organizational objectives, specifically concerning educating others. Instead, it fits within FAAIM's goals and spirit of serving the (Asian American) community. FAAIM centers media representations and media artifacts as the focal point where stories and experiences, as well as face-to-face social interaction, can occur. It is also an implicit critique of the Asian American organizations within the area and their narrow focus on the ethnic-specific endeavors and goals that blind them from seeing the possibility and potential of a larger, pan-ethnic Asian American community in Chicago.

Turley's conception of FAAIM and community envisions FAAIM as a place where people can come to share honest stories beyond the politicking; whereas, Wang recognizes FAAIM's ability to acclimate her to working film festival duties. Importantly, Wang and Turley's entrées into and continual involvement in FAAIM differ from Hugh's conception of FAAIM and its role.

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r own mixed raceness in terms of being marginalized within Asian American organizations but noted that her realization of "otherness" and "Asianness" appeared in high school.
    [141] Ibid.

In essence, FAAIM's organizational rhetoric did not accomplish its instrumental job to singularly persuade Wang and Turley that  FAAIM's role in the community is strictly focused on media representation. Rather, their ideas about why FAAIM is important go beyond the explicit organizational objectives, allowing them to project their own ideas about the idea of Asian Americans.  So while the organizational rhetoric did not work as intended, the rhetoric of the organization did, suggesting that the presence of an organization, like FAAIM, is valuable as an entity onto which members can imprint themselves and help re-create into an organization they see fitting. In addition, the organization discourse of Tim Hugh and Larry Lee, when juxtaposed with Kimberly Turley and Emily Wang, highlight the gendered nature of FAAIM's film festival organizing. While this dissertation does not explicitly engage in a gender analysis, it is important to note that the sublimation of gender and the work it does within the organization internally and its purposes outside of the organization, even while the racialized aspects of the film festival organizing is obvious. Women in this organization and in non-profit organizations, whether intentionally or not, provide much of the labor, in this case intellectual labor as exemplified by Kimberly Turley's development work and Emily Wang's technical work. Nonetheless, they are also considered as part of the public face of the organization, even as they resist doing so.

The next section focuses primarily on Larry Lee, as his remarks illustrate what I might deem as a charitable challenging of FAAIM, one that is cognizant of the struggles and difficulties of running an Asian American media arts NPO in Chicago but also that attempts to address and importantly challenge how FAAIM conceptualizes community. I devote this section to him due mainly to my experience co-constructing with Lee one of FAAIM's documents that I also analyze. Thus, I look at Lee and his experiences and thoughts regarding FAAIM before transitioning into an analysis of the process of constructing the Call for Community Shorts

proposal, which was a new yet ultimately failed FAAIM outreach project. This outreach project sought to mobilize small groups of students from local universities and community organizations to make a short film as part of the Showcase's program. The Showcase would then compile the short films into a program that would be screened to the audience at the Showcase.

**Writing Community**

Although Lee's main job with FAAIM is to curate the art show, Lee's involvement with FAAIM spans back to 2004 when he co-curated the art show "Coming Soon" with Eric Nakamura of *Giant Robot*. A talkative man, well-versed in art theory and art criticism as well as the organizational aspects of running a non-profit arts collective which he did in the earlier part of the 1990s (named Destinasian), Lee is knowledgeable about the representational politics of art and of the work that goes into community arts organizing. When asked about FAAIM's efforts to reconnect with the community, Lee corrected me, replying, "I wouldn't say reconnection. I would say clarification that permits redefinition."[142] Indeed, FAAIM's organizing principle and mission grew out of a commitment to Asian American artists. Lee suggests he would like to see the borders expand in terms of what is a viable Asian American subject. Nonetheless, Lee is quick to clarify his position that "it's not fair to brand FAAIM as regressive or stuck in the mud" but to view the organization as one that admittedly "operates in a mom and pop fashion" and is in a "constant grassroots state, despite being around for 15 years."[143] Through this grassroots, mom and pop, and DIY ethos, FAAIM seeks to redefine itself within the community for the community, as more than just a film festival but also as Lee envisions, a "resource that is available for all these other organizations, whether it's arts, community based, social advocacy --

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[142] Larry Lee interview, 21 September 2010.
[143] Ibid.

we're all cut from the same cloth and we're all working toward the same goal so we can collaborate and develop those partnerships and make it more accessible."[144]

Prior to this part in the interview, Lee was explaining the challenges of grassroots organizing in conjunction with Hugh's position regarding an "Asian American" film festival. Lee mentioned that he saw the Showcase as a festival that is not willing to "blatantly exploit certain international celebrities just to make a film festival more popular."[145] Lee's commented about the exploitation of international celebrities draws attention to the conflict between capital and culture present at the Showcase. Indeed, Lee's comment and FAAIM's "Asian American only" film festival is an implicit critique of other film festivals that unknowingly and/or unreflectively conflate "Asian International" with "Asian American." Lee's comment highlights the culture industry that the Showcase operates within, recognizing that "Asian American" cultural productions and films are not as highly valued as "Asian International" ones, recognizing that certain Asian directors or actors from abroad can carry cultural appeal and hence capital. Following the comment about the exploitation, however, is Lee's comment about the "grassroots" and "Mom-and-Pop" organizational fashion in which FAAIM operates. Indeed, this sequential order of the comments calls attention to the ability that a "grassroots" organization operating on low-overhead is allowed to do, which is more creative freedom in terms of programming. However, this organizational autonomy is also juxtaposed against being a "resource for the community," since being a resource also requires having resources to share. Lee's comments about FAAIM underscore the ongoing yet often unspoken contentiousness among arts, culture, and capital within a media arts organization. Lee's conceptualization of community and organization is fluid, but he recognizes the FAAIM's challenges in serving the

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

dynamic and changing Asian American community, particularly because he is cognizant of FAAIM's mission.

The differences between the formalized organizational voice and the members who constitute the organization also suggest the productive possibilities that may come into being as new members (or older ones who decide to speak out) involve themselves in the organization. For example, FAAIM's focus on the media and FAAIM's relationship with the community have the possibility to change, depending on the leadership, those involved within the organization, and how differences and goals become negotiated in the process of organizing the Showcase and its accompanying programs. However, how and if these differences become incorporated and mobilized within the organization or ignored only to fade away or reappear later remains to be seen.

Lee's conception of FAAIM and community complicates its rhetoric by bringing up the issue of bridging the gap between public perceptions of FAAIM versus accomplished actions of FAAIM. While my presence as a researcher and as a former member of the local Chicago Asian American arts community influences my own view of Lee's comments, my geographic and professional distance from the arts' scene since 2004 also gives me some perspective. The questions asked of Lee beckoned him to articulate verbally what he sees as FAAIM's role in the community, a question that I never asked nor even considered asking while I was a young adult in the Asian American arts scene in late 2003 and early 2004. Revisiting this idea of community now in 2010 I wonder how does FAAIM communicate its values to the community in its attempt to organize and constitute a community appreciative of Asian American media work, arts, and artists? In order to answer this question, I discuss the process of constructing FAAIM's rhetoric in the writing of the call for community shorts program proposal. By tracking the multiple drafts

of the proposal and the beginning stages of its construction, I highlight how community is discussed as it is simultaneously represented in the proposal. I conclude with an analysis of the final draft of the community shorts proposal and assert that it resituates the Asian American community through a rhetoric of activity.

**Calling for Community**

On a wet winter day, January 5, 2010, Larry Lee and I met at Calo's, a well-established Italian restaurant on the northside of Chicago. We met to talk about the "community short films proposal" project that was to be a part of the 15th anniversary Showcase programs. The premise of this meeting was to construct the call for short films that would be distributed to the colleges and youth organizations in the area. Originally conceived as (what Hugh described as) an "Iron Chef" type competition between local colleges, the scope of the program expanded to include local community groups; at this point, we needed to put out a call for short films that addressed some theme or utilized some keyword within the short film with a length ranging from four to ten minutes long. Beyond this conceptualization of the project, it was up to Larry Lee and me to come to terms and flesh out what this might look like before Hugh looked it over for the go ahead. Overall, the proposal went through three working drafts before the final draft was put on FAAIM letterhead and sent out. I was the primary organizer of this call, drafting the first round before handing it over to Lee, who eventually sent it to me after clearing it with Hugh and providing me with the letterhead to put together the final call for films and sending it out to FAAIM's contact list. In the following section, I summarize the process, drawing attention to the various ways that this rhetorical product – a call for films – employs a notion of community in connection with FAAIM. Indeed, I am implicated within this project, although I am not the sole person and not one with much power. This document illustrates the multiple ways

FAAIM's organizational rhetoric became constructed and deployed, from informal conversations between Hugh and me, working dinners with Larry Lee, cooperative exchanges between Lee and Hugh without my presence, and finally distributing the proposal as a final community call for short films to Chicago colleges, universities, and community organizations. It highlights the fact that FAAIM's organizational rhetoric is not a singular, linear process within the organization but one that often, although not always, comes with meetings and dialogue, as well as various levels of organizational member involvement. Before I start, I want to clarify that prior to sending out my drafts or versions, I let Lee and Hugh know that I would not be offended if the versions changed or if parts were cut and indeed they were.

Lee and I developed a working draft during a working dinner meeting. After Lee and I got acclimated and ordered our food, we began to discuss the draft (see Appendix B) I sent to Lee. My conceptualization of the proposal developed out of the discussions I had with Hugh, who often emphasized the community nature and the outreach he wanted to accomplish using FAAIM, the Showcase, and short films. Admittedly, the first draft of the proposal was a conglomeration of ideas drawn from informal conversations I had with Hugh. The first draft focused on its history, starting with a short history of the organization and its role as a beacon of Asian American media arts for the local community that founders originally intended to assume. After the history section, the proposal went into a short description of the project and the logistics of submission and judging that were yet to be determined. Although I purposely did not mention nor highlight the aspect of community within the proposal and at our meeting, Lee quickly brought up the "community aspect" of the proposal, stating that the first paragraph was "just credentials, that's all it is," when it was meant to be an exposition of FAAIM's history. Lee emphasized, "we have to make a declarative statement first" and "sell it!" emphasizing a

marketing-conscious approach to attract more submissions and organize the younger and possibly more inexperienced filmmakers.  As much as Lee and I were collaborating on this project, Lee began to take the helm and framed the proposal guided by the question, "what are we asking you to do and why is it important?"  Lee saw this proposal as beckoning the community to "push beyond the mission statement" of FAAIM, to recognize that "we see film as entertainment and that there's nothing wrong with that but we have an additional purpose."  Quite simply, Lee saw this project as a means of letting community "play around with the idea of community" and subsequently pushing how and what FAAIM saw the community as, not just one that was receptive but also interactive and supportive of FAAIM.  Our discussions during the dinner emphasized ways to highlight the community aspect to Chicagoans, particularly focusing on Chicago as a city of neighborhoods and small communities.  Lee brought up that "we've seen how Hollywood sees our community" but wanted to emphasize how people in their own communities viewed their community.  I jotted down notes and kept it on file, sending them to Lee before drafting a second draft (see Appendix B).

Lee was responsible for drafting the final version of the Call for Community Shorts (see Appendix B).  Later, when I asked Hugh about the progress of the proposal, he mentioned that it was a bit too "academic" and that Lee would spice it up a bit with his "Larry Lingo."  I was pleased to hear this, particularly since I was curious about what Lee and Hugh would agree upon as the final call for films.  Lee's final draft of the proposal centered community and used colorful language, describing typically Asian American activities such as "singing karaoke, or shooting the breeze with friends drinking bubble tea."  I provide a close textual reading of the final call for the community shorts program in order to see how Asian American community is envisioned

through a rhetoric of activity that avoids the issue of determining one's "Asian Americanness" but rather allows that to be self-identified by its participants.

The call for community shorts is a short and concise document – 443 words and eight paragraphs.  While I analyze two of the eight paragraphs, I also provide a brief overview as to the structure of the whole document.  The first paragraph celebrates FAAIM's 15th anniversary and "invites those within the community" to address the question of "how does film create and document who we are, what we do, or we live?" The second paragraph is a single word question in all caps – "WHY?"  The third paragraph answers that question.  The fourth paragraph adds further explanation to the third paragraph.  The fifth paragraph raises the question, "what is community?" The sixth paragraph builds off the question in the fifth paragraph and serves as the "invitation" to submit a film and participate.  The seventh paragraph lays out the logistics of the film submission, and the last paragraph is a final call to join the community organized by FAAIM.

The third paragraph which I title "justification" is short and states the following. Because it is our mission, always, to promote how film unites our common causes, our larger community. Because it is our passion to support, serve, and see Asian American film flourish in our community. Because it is, after all, OUR lives even though full of complications that usually ends up being funny and stranger than fiction shaping community.

There are two major rhetorical devices at play here: anaphora and antistrophe.  These are both rhetorical devices of repetition, where anaphora is the repetition of "Because it is our" at the beginning where antistrophe is the repetition of "community," which ends the three sentences. "Because it is our" links FAAIM to film and action to "community." Indeed, "community" is

implied to be "Asian American" at this juncture, and "community" is embedded within activities of supporting other filmmakers or partaking in it yourself.

The sixth paragraph consists of two sentences – one long and one short. The first "invites" but more appropriately calls those to "expand, create, reflect, and share" "what is community beyond the neighborhood and houses." The second beckons them to envision what "community means to Asian America" from the grassroots level, since we already know how Hollywood sees "us" as Asian American. In this paragraph, the text explicitly names the community of interest and calls them to rearticulate what "community" means and how it is represented. Indeed, it is calling to film makers to create an imaginary community, one structured by and articulated to a notion of "Asian America."

"Community" is delineated from the academic drone, one to which I might have originally contributed. Rather, "community" becomes connected with the city life of Chicago, one that FAAIM beckons the people to take part in. The proposal states that "We've seen how Hollywood thinks about our communities but let's return to our roots and share what 'community' means to Asian America." Afterward, the logistics of the shorts are laid out, and the proposal concludes with a simple line, "Now be a part of the 15$^{th}$ Annual Asian American Showcase at the Gene Siskel Film Center among friends you didn't know you had." This proposal situates an Asian American community within a mode of activity, asserting the ability to create, to meet up with friends for bubble tea, and to make a film together are part and parcel of being an Asian American.

This program is a departure from the Showcase's usual programming, as it is an attempt to reach out to local colleges and youth organizations on a larger scale than they have yet to do and with little knowledge of how to best build and maintain these connections, while educating

these organizations and groups on the sometimes mystical nature of filmmaking.  Usually, the Showcase's short film programs are an assemblage of shorts made by students, often for their own classes, and submitted by the usual call for films. This community shorts proposal is an outreach attempt, an example where, as Lee states, FAAIM "extends its hand" to the community by involving them within the very production and exhibition of the festival.  After receiving the community short films proposal, I sent it out to local Asian American youth organizations and colleges in the area, specifically targeting cultural centers, student organizations, and professors who might know of interested students.  However, from Hugh's account, there were not many submissions, a failing that could be attributed to the lateness of the proposal.  However, it can also be attributed to the newness of this outreach effort in which FAAIM was not prepared for.  Since many of the groups interested may not have film experience, the Community Shorts Program would require constant attention to and relationship building with the groups interested, which may be difficult to accomplish through a DIY approach.   Nonetheless, the community shorts proposal is a document that demonstrates the commitment to community but also the difficulty of organizing when dealing with race, arts, and a community that may be uninterested in all three.

**Organizing in a DIY Community**

I conclude with an analysis of Laura Kina's blog posting about FAAIM's 15th Anniversary celebration to focus on how it constructs FAAIM within the Chicago arts community, the current state of Asian American media arts organizations in Chicago, and the difficulties of doing such work in Chicago.  Kina, an internationally known artist of mixed race descent as well as faculty member at DePaul University, was the featured visual artist of the 15th

Showcase and has had her work displayed during the Showcase in the past as well as having co-curated the Showcase art shows.

The blog posting first appeared on Laura Kina's Art blog (laurakina.blogspot.com) on Sunday, March 21, 2010.[146]  The blog post began with a simple declaration that "FAAIM is celebrating 15 years of presenting and supporting Asian American film, art, literature, and music in Chicago."  It provides a short history of who started FAAIM and her involvement with FAAIM as curators as well as multitude of other Asian American arts organizations in Chicago. She states, however, that "FAAIM's not the only Asian American arts organization in town but it's been a consistent part of my life for the past 15 years."

The blog posting is devoted to the Asian American arts organizations in Chicago in general and the changing tenor of these organizations from an "old community arts movement" involving multiple generations to a "decidedly young" movement, one focused on transnationalism and diaspora.  In addition, she mentions that the "face of who was involved with Asian American arts" began to shift, with Koreans, Cambodians, Vietnamese, and others joining the well-established Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans of Chicago.

She adds that the "tensions and fault lines" between groups have more to do with discipline, the extent of political action in relationship with art, and whether or not "to be defined under the umbrella of 'Asian American,'" than ethno-racial issues.  Up to this point, Kina has recounted the past 18 years of her involvement with the Asian American arts organizations within Chicago and states the following:

> Depending on how you look at things, Chicago's Asian American art scene has been
>
> blessed and burdened by its unique characteristics.  Too little funding and

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[146] Laura Kina. "FAAIM- celebrating 15 years of Asian American film, art, literature and music," modified March 3, 2010, accessed June 27, 2011, http://laurakina.blogspot.com/2010/03/faaim-celebrating-15-years-of-asian.html

institutionalization has instilled an underground DIY culture of volunteerism (and burn

out and maxing of your personal credit cards for the sake of art). . . Where are the funders

and collectors? This all makes us tough and a little skeptical of the marketplace.  We are

perfectly at home curating a show in a gritty alternative space as well as a polished

gallery.  We can be the directors and have no qualms about making lunch for the crew.

We'll be on stage and run the AV and PR and check your coat!

She concludes with the fact that on March 20, 2010, FAAIM held their first ever fundraiser

before thanking Tim Hugh for "directing the Showcase for the past 10 years" and concludes the

blog post with photographs of the fundraiser.

Although the blog posting is titled "FAAIM – celebrating 15 years of Asian American

film, art, literature and music," there is surprising little to say about FAAIM in the blog posting.

Rather, Kina situates FAAIM within the multitude of Asian American arts organizations in

Chicago. She simply talks more about the arts than FAAIM itself, serving as a retrospective

acknowledging the good that comes from difficult circumstances. However, the posting does not

include FAAIM as part of the Asian American arts programs that are ethnic specific or discipline

specific.  Rather, the posting implicitly locates FAAIM as a pan-Asian American

interdisciplinary arts organization, although it does not provide the context to explain why it is

important.  Nonetheless, her involvement with FAAIM over a continual period of time is a

testament to FAAIM, one that is cultivated in a "DIY culture of volunteerism" that Kina speaks

of that has earned her trust and support.  The posting also signals that FAAIM is at a crossroads

within the Asian American arts movement, since it is neither an "old community arts

movement," "decidedly young," or "transnational or diasporic."  At this juncture however,

FAAIM is at a crossroads as it attempts to reconfigure itself organizationally to continue to be

relevant for the local community as well as expand on its mission.  This post alludes to the critical juncture FAAIM and the broader Asian American arts community faces, which is the changing circumstances and the generational shift of the Asian American community. As a result, DIY is a default organizing practice, born out of the 1990s independent music and movie scenes and wellspring of public arts funding, may not be as relevant or the most effective means within the neo-liberal, corporate sponsorship, and donation-based landscape of Asian American arts festivals. However, organizational changes are difficult to make.

At the end of spring and heading into the summer, Turley, Wang, and I met at Hugh's place on a May 8, 2010.  In this meeting, we reminisced about the end of the 15th anniversary Showcase, breathing a sigh of relief while reliving the nostalgia of events that led up to Showcase opening and closing.  This meeting was a strategic planning meeting for the summer. With Turley bringing coffee and Hugh providing pastries from the local Swedish Bakery, we managed to get together on a Saturday morning.  The main drivers of this conversation were to build upon the momentum of the 15th anniversary, to secure more stable volunteers and a more active board, and organize some events to get the community together before planning the 16th Showcase which was to begin in the fall and winter.  However, as the seasons were changing, so was the organizational make up of FAAIM. Emily Wang was returning to Taiwan at the end of the summer, and I was devoting more of my time to completing my dissertation.  Kim Turley seemed to be dealing with a non-stop flurry of emergencies from her job, and it seemed that Tim Hugh wanted a little break from the work of organizing FAAIM again.  Nonetheless, the ideas that were being promoted were ones that sought to organize folks together, to engage in the community, and mutually help others with their events, while doing low-key, low-pressure events such as film screenings for children or a rock show with out-of-town guests like Goh

Nakamura. But as the Chicago summer and the members' personal and professional responsibilities slowly took over, FAAIM's collective projects fell to the wayside. The immediacy of the 15th anniversary Showcase concluded along with the organizing around the public event.

**Conclusion**

Hugh's rhetorical and organizational discourse drives the organization, framing its mission and vision. Lee describes it as "a single vision . . . sustaining the organization" at the moment.[147] However, FAAIM as an organization, in its sporadic intensity when the film festival arrives to its relative inaction following the times after the festival, seemingly lets the community, the ones that FAAIM is meant to serve, forget about its presence and importance until the next year. While Hugh's notions of community as bifurcated by the Gene Siskel and the local Asian American community is present, its residues also lie with its organizational members, like me, Turley, Lee, and Wang, who engage with these notions of community as we seek to address and construct a media organization meant to provide representations for Asian Americans. FAAIM's rhetoric of re-nationalization, of the anti-international Asian American, privileges the "American" side. This rhetorical move provides a space for a seemingly "international" Asian, like Emily Wang, to self-identify as an Asian American and submit her work to such festivals. On the other hand, other organizational members may not necessarily fully subscribe to a narrow view of Asian American and FAAIM's relationship to the community. However, despite their differences, members like Kimberly Turley and Larry Lee see the potential of FAAIM, both in spite of and because of its DIY approach, and configure and deploy FAAIM in ways that can expand and hopefully change FAAIM's approach to Asian America.

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[147] Larry Lee interview, 21 September 2010.

CHAPTER 2:

MANAA'S STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM AND MANAGEABILITY IN MEDIA

ACTIVISM

During the course of my fieldwork studying MANAA, which ran from November 2008 to July 2010, MANAA staged two public protests over Hollywood films, *The Goods* (in 2009) and *The Last Airbender* (in July 2010). This chapter will focus on two incidents spanning the course of my fieldwork studying MANAA, which ran from November 2008 to July 2010. I chose these two incidents, as opposed to the issue of Joe Jonas's slant eye photograph or the impending remake of *Red Dawn*, which cast Chinese as the yellow peril, or casting issues in *The Weapon* comic book film adaptation, as they illustrate two different sides of the organization: one that mobilizes quickly as a reaction to the perceived wrongs brought on by the media industry and another that deals with a longstanding and drawn out interaction with a movie studio over *the Last Airbender.* In addition, these two incidents took up the majority of the 2009 MANAA newsletter, thus, emphasizing the level of attention given to these derogatory media representations.

In addition, this chapter is primarily organized into four different sections. First, I start with a history of MANAA to elucidate the context in which it arises from, and the linkages made with, the social, political, and cultural settings of their founding and subsequent actions. Afterward, I shift my focus to the present, addressing the terms Asian American and community and how they become strategically essentialized in MANAA's public documents, such as in the organizational mission statement, historical documents, and public statements to the Hollywood industry in general; then, I provide an in-depth snapshot of MANAA from January 2009 to August 2009, addressing the protest of the film, *The Goods*, in one section and then beginning

discussions of concerns regarding the casting of the film, *The Last Airbender*, in another section

as illustrations of the boundaries of rhetorical strategic essentialism and manageability. I situate

the chapter around these events to illustrate MANAA's rhetoric of strategic essentialism, which

can also become a rhetoric of manageability. Whereas the public rhetoric of MANAA in general

on the website and specifically in response to *The Goods* demonstrates a site- and situation-

specific strategic essentialism, MANAA's engagement with *The Last Airbender* demonstrates

the limits of the strategy of the use of essentialism as it becomes more about manageability than

about efficacious politics.

This chapter is organized according to two key themes: the essentialist rhetorics of an

Asian American identity and the manageability discourses of Asian American media

representations.  I explore how MANAA conceives and communicates a strategic essentialist

notion of what an Asian American community is to the public and to the mainstream media,

which produces representations for the general public, in order to address concerns of

mainstream media representation.  Contrary to Spivak's noteion of a situation specific awareness

and mobilization of essentialism, I explore how MANAA deploys "Asian American" across

multiple contexts from protesting casting issues to "negative" representations of Asian

Americans.  I argue that MANAA's strategic essentialist Asian American rhetorics act as a

means to construct an Asian American community as participants in the larger struggle for social

justice, multiculturalism, and diversity.  Although this term allows for incremental changes to,

and inclusion into, the mainstream media, the slippage of this strategic essentialist rhetoric

allows for misrepresentation of a dynamic Asian American community.  In addition, it places

MANAA in a position of manageability when interacting with a media system, which often

operates according to a standard of white normativity as it is intertwined with capitalistic structures.

**Strategic Essentialism or Manageability?**

In 1988, renowned and well-regarded post-colonial critic Gayatri C. Spivak put forth the notion of strategic essentialism, which assumes that a group ascertains and asserts a temporary "essentialism" in order to act in favor of "a scrupulously visible political interest."[148]  Theorized from her analysis of Subaltern Studies, Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism is predicated upon the "awareness of strategy – the strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword" by the group, person, people, or movement to conduct a situation-specific yet persistent critique even if "it is counterproductive" in its essentialism.[149]  Spivak emphasizes the strategy at the moment, specific to the situation that is necessary to launch a critique as one that is essentialized; one consciously takes up being essentialized, participates in the "essentializing moment," to criticize based upon the assumptions that are present in essentialism, employing the critical force of essentialism to rupture the essentialist ideas themselves.[150]  The essentializer projects what they perceive to be the "essence" of the person, people, or movement; whereas, the essentialized is subject to how the essentializer acts in accordance this "essence."  Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism" plays with this dynamic: it demonstrates an awareness of the strategic move to essentialize by the essentialized and its fruitful response and critique at a specific moment. While elucidating the possibilities for post-colonial work for communication and rhetorical studies, Raka Shome reiterates this focus on awareness, specifically for the

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[148] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988: 205.

[149] Gayatri Spivak with Ellen Rooney. "In a Word. *Interview*." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (1989): 127.

[150] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." In *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, edited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 197-221. New York: Methuen, 1987: 205.

rhetorical critic, stating "the critic always remains aware that she or he is essentializing only in order to realize certain political goals."[151]  Shome reminds us that Spivak "warns us against the temptation of really essentializing and carving a fixed and "authentic" identity for a particular racial group that we, as critics, claim is being misrepresented."[152]  It is the crisis, Spivak notes, that must be present or else the strategy may solidify into an "essentialist position."[153]

Indeed, this stagnation into an essentialist position can be seen as a slippage into Spivak's concept of the manageable other.  In her interview with Terry Threadgold and Frances Bartkowski, she speaks of the "Third World" label and its framing capacity to "reflect the site of desire for people in the First World to have a manageable other." [154]  If one considers Spivak's notion of "manageable other" as one in which the other becomes managed through labels and categories of otherness, such as color, race, or gender, that the dominant or the mainstream see as "essential" to their otherness, then the "manageable other" would be Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism" without boundaries; an identity that becomes intertwined with a hegemonic process of manageability via essentialism.

The preoccupation with identity as an "authentic" idea caused Spivak to abandon the term strategic essentialism. Spivak commented that strategic essentialism was often misinterpreted and mistakenly used as a "union ticket for essentialism."[155] Spivak is disappointed with, and Shome reiterates, the emphasis upon "essentialism" and the ignorance of "strategy."

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[151] Raka Shome. "Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An "Other" View." *Communication Theory* 6, no. 1 (1996): 47.
[152] Shome 47.
[153] Spivak; 1989; 127.
[154] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "The *Intervention* Interview with Terry Threadgold and Frances Bartkowski." In *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, and Dialogues*, edited by Sarah Harasym, 113-32. New York: Routledge, 1990.
[155] Sara Danius, Stefan Jonnson, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *boundary 2* 20, no. 2 (1993): 35.  In response to a question about strategic essentialism, Spivak states that she is more interested "in seeing the differences among these so-called essences in various cultural inscriptions" (36).

Spivak states, "what is meant by strategy, no one wondered about that."[156] What little focus on

strategy is located within the moment of strategic essentialism, one that is consciously taken up

to disrupt the essentialist meanings and one that is located in the utterance, but overlooks the

possibilities and dangers of the burden of time and prolonged crises. Since the person, people, or

movement are inherently essentialized, the question of whether this is taken up as part of a

strategy or as a constraint levied upon them over the course of time and the goals of a movement

remains unexplored. In addition, Spivak's states that "the emphasis falls on being able to speak

from one's own ground" as opposed to strategy.[157] However, what if the strategy itself is

speaking from one's own subject position? In addition, at what point does strategic essentialist

rhetoric cease being strategic and slip into manageability?

Whereas Shome focuses upon the strategy of rhetorical critics to be critics with a post-

colonial perspective and Spivak has all but abandoned the notion of strategic essentialism, I

foreground strategic essentialism and the (un)intentional strategic aspects of it within the battle

for media representations for Asian Americans, while noting its potential slippage into

manageability. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the Media Action Network for Asian

Americans (MANAA) and its strategically essentialist rhetoric of Asian American to upend

essentialist portrayals of Asian American. By doing so, I explore the overlooked questions of

strategic essentialism and manageability discourses by asking if MANAA's discourse is a

strategically essentialist rhetoric or a rhetoric of manageability? Although MANAA's moniker

affirms the presence of Asian Americans and its identity as a viable sphere of agency, Spivak

warns that simply affirming identity is not a strategic use.[158] Rather, I am interested in how the

term Asian American becomes employed, as Lisa Lowe states, "for the purpose of contesting and

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[156] Danius et al, 35.
[157] Gayatri Spivak with Ellen Rooney,128.
[158] Danius et al, 43.

disrupting the discourses that exclude Asian Americans, while simultaneously revealing the internal contradictions and slippages of Asian American so as to insure that such essentialisms will not be reproduced and proliferated by the very apparatuses we seek to disempower." [159] That is, how are strategically essentialized discourses within the organization publicly used to protest mainstream Asian American media representations while negotiating the possibility of slipping into a field of manageability – which, at the least, does little to help Asian Americans participate in the mainstream media or, at the worst, support the very exclusion of Asian Americans within the mainstream mediascape?

To explore the rhetoric of strategic essentialism and manageability, I conducted a study that would best be described as a rhetorical ethnography, one located within a larger multi-sited ethnographic project on Asian American media organizations. Unlike a typical ethnography in which the researcher is outside the community they study and involves him/herself in an extended stay within the community, the majority of my fieldwork was performed at a distance through electronic communications with the president and members and with sporadic physical meetings. I attended three general meetings, flying from the cornfields of central Illinois to the metropolitan sprawl of Los Angeles, CA, in May 2009, Aug 2009, and March 2010. Prior to the May 2009 general meeting, I met with MANAA president Phil Lee and Secretary Guy Aoki in November 2008 to formalize my role both as an ethnographer studying MANAA and as a participant observer of the organization. I followed up this meeting with a teleconferenced general meeting in January 2009. I also had access to recordings of two general meetings that I did not attend (October 2009 and November 2009). In addition, my fieldwork also incorporated interviews of five members – two current board members, one former board member, one former

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[159] Lisa Lowe. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." In *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, edited by Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood, 505-25. New York: New York University Press, 2007: 520.

general member and one general member.  Given the size of the board, which fluctuated from five to seven members during the period of my fieldwork, and the small active membership and regularly attending members to the meetings, even the small number of interviews provided further insight into the organization beyond participant observations.  The sheer fact that I was based in central Illinois versus MANAA's home base of operations in the Chinatown Public Safety Association building in Los Angeles made my participation sparse, thus complicating my positionality in relationship to the organization.  My position within the organization, however, is not simply an outsider.  Indeed, I entered the organization as an outside member to the organization but not the larger community of Asian American media activists.  I paid membership dues from a distance and kept up-to-date with their endeavors.  However, my visits and interactions with the organizational members expanded my position within the organization. I became a supporter of their mission, although not quite a full-on member, more akin to those members who attend a MANAA meeting once or twice, assess the situation and the organization, and decide whether or not to stay.  Finally, in addition to the ethnographic fieldwork, I was also privy to the internal communication of the organization via email from November 2008 to December 2009, had access to MANAA's newsletter archive from the fall 1994 issue to the winter 2009 issue, and culled texts from MANAA's website.  Before addressing MANAA's strategically essentialist rhetoric, it is important to consider what type of organization MANAA is and is not and the numerous articulations in the past that have led MANAA to the organization that it is today.  This next section focuses specifically on MANAA's founding, its historical context, and its current rhetoric.

**The Eyes and Ears of Asian America: Monitoring Media**

> *Think of how it was before MANAA came along in April 1992. When you saw yet another*
>
> *dehumanizing depiction of an Asian on a screen, in the paper, or heard one on the radio,*
>
> *you had to grit your teeth in private. Since then, we have offered a mechanism by which*
>
> *your voice of outrage can be transmitted to the makers of those images, in an effort to*
>
> *stop them from offending again." – Guy Aoki, in the Fall 1994 Eyes & Ears MANAA*
>
> *Newsletter – President's Message.*

MANAA is a non-profit advocacy group that monitors media – television, motion

pictures, print, advertising, radio, etc – for negative depictions of Asians and Asian Americans

while simultaneously advocating for "balanced, sensitive and positive portrayals of Asian

Americans."[160] The all-volunteer, non-profit group was formed in April of 1992 by Guy Aoki

and George Toshio Johnston to address the derogatory images and characterizations plaguing

Asian Americans in the media.

Aoki did not just fall into creating MANAA. Rather, Aoki's drive to create an

organization like MANAA was a culmination of diverse experiences, some unique to Aoki while

others were common with politically involved Asian Americans. Aoki was born and reared in

Hawai'i, only to first move to the mainland U.S. to attend Occidental College in California in

1980.[161] Being from Hawai'i informed Aoki's understanding of "Asian Americans," especially

since the term "Asian American" did not occur to him before moving to Los Angeles (since the

majority of the Hawai'iian population is Asian American). He states that the default assumption

in Hawai'i was that "everyone is American, so no one has to put an American tag at the end of

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[160] "About MANAA," MANAA, accessed October 27 2010. http://www.manaa.org/about_us.html.
[161] Aoki subsequently moved back to Hawai'i in 1982 to attend the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, only to
return to Occidental College in 1983 and has since stayed in the mainland U.S. and the Los Angeles area.

their ethnicity."[162]  But, since coming to the mainland, he understood Asians in America in three different categories: "there were the Hawai'ian born Asians; there were mainland born Asians; and there were Asian born Asians."[163]  Furthermore, he states that because of the influx of exchange students and immigrants, he noticed that there "was a need to say American because there are a lot of people who just weren't really seeing the difference between Asian immigrants or Asian nationals and Asian Americans."[164]  Finally, he began to understand Asian American when, through his work with Asian American organizations, the general public did not make the distinction between "Japanese" and "Chinese," so that "the stuff that was said about Chinese people impacted you even if you were Japanese and vice versa."[165]

Although MANAA's name does not explicitly include Pacific Islanders or South Asians, it is inclusive of those groups and, as Aoki states in a personal interview, "anyone who would have been considered in the old term Oriental."[166]  The term Oriental is conflated with the *Other* as not native and as foreign to the United States. Thus, MANAA would include Pacific Islander Americans or South Asian Americans, who may not phenotypically look like white Americans but like foreigners to people in the United States into the "Asian American" designation. However, this also, in one broad sweep, overlooks the nuances, complexities, and differing histories of each ethnic group within the United States, thus foregoing the complexity of the Asian American community in order to represent the broader Asian American interests when dealing with media representations.

The experience of growing up in Hawai'i and moving to the mainland United States provided a different vision of Asian America. Aoki sees a distinct difference between what he

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[162] Guy Aoki (MANAA co-founder). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham. June 25, 2010.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

describes as "mainland born Asians" and "Hawai'ian born Asians." He states that "Hawai'ian born Asians have a lot more spirit to them, they have more personality"; whereas mainland born "were more suppressed" and "acted 'white' as far as the way they talk."[167] He's lived in Glendale, a town outside of L.A. for the past 26 years since 1985. Interestingly, his relocation to the mainland spurred the recognition of an "Asian American" identity, noting that "American" was implicitly assumed in Hawai'i; whereas the mainland didn't see "the difference between Asian immigrants or Asian nationals and Asian Americans."

Although his experiences coming from Hawai'i greatly informed his understanding of race and ethnicity in the United States, his work with Asian American organizations in college informed the formation of MANAA, particularly by allowing him to connect his concerns with a larger organization and collective good. Aoki's involvement with Asian American based activism originated with the Asian Pacific Students Union (APSU) during his college years and continued afterwards, when he was an organizer from 1984-1988. Serving as a network of different college Asian American groups, APSU would meet at a conference to have workshops and talk about Asian American related subjects. In 1984, Aoki started working with the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR), whose mission was to pressure the U.S. government to pay reparations for Japanese Americans who were relocated to internment camps during World War II. Eventually, Aoki became one of the 15 leaders that led the lobby of Congress in July of 1987 leading to the $20,000 reparation checks to those affected.[168]

The impetus for MANAA's formation was the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1991. As the duties of the NCRR became reduced to issues of monetary disbursement,

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[167] Ibid.

[168] The National Coalition for Redress/Reparations changed its name in 2000 to the Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress since the major battles. In a personal interview, Aoki described his work with the NCRR as one of its young leaders as "the most important thing I thought I did in my life."

Aoki found that the NCRR was not equipped to deal with the onslaught of media hype leading up to the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Aoki stated, "they're going to do stories for six months leading up to November and most of the stories weren't giving us anymore insight into why the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor."[169] His fear was that, by December, there would be hate crimes against Japanese Americans, especially since, in his opinion, news coverage consisted of "sticking mics in the faces of old people and saying 'How did you feel when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?'"[170] After long discussions with his cousin and time spent complaining about derogatory images of Asian Americans and the media, Aoki made a commitment to himself that he would start a group if the NCRR did not.  In the end, NCRR did not form a group and Aoki began looking to other organizations, such as the JACL and the Asian American Journalists Association. In this quest to work with other organizations, he was referred to George Toshio Johnston. Johnston was a person who Aoki described as "always talking about this stuff" relating to the media; similar to Aoki's constant concerns over Asian American media representation.  They agreed to meet each other with the stipulation that successfully forming a group depended on their agreement.  In this meeting, Aoki recalled that, "we agreed on everything."  As a result, on April 9, 1992, Guy Aoki and George Toshio Johnston held MANAA's first general meeting.

The "core issues" that united Aoki and Johnston were that both saw stereotypes of media representations a degrading to Asian Americans, specifically that "Asian men are never seen as romantic or never the heroes"; "Asian men know kung fu and martial arts but the white guy knows it better and beats them up and walks into the sunset with the Asian woman"; "we're

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[169] Guy Aoki interview, 25 June 2010.
[170] Ibid.

foreigners who speak with accents." They agreed that the cumulative effect of these stereotypes was that they influenced society negatively by misrepresenting Asian Americans.

MANAA linked itself the dynamic and often hostile social, political, and economic climate of 1992. Race relations in Los Angeles were once again tense in the early 1990s.[171] The most notable example of the tense race relations was the Los Angeles Urban Riots. For five days in late April 1992, thousands of L.A. residents took to the streets in protest of the injustice of the first verdicts of the Rodney King police brutality trial.[172] While the Rodney King trial related specifically to African American injustice, a previous criminal case also added to the building racial tensions of south central Los Angeles. Two weeks prior to initial circulation of the Rodney King police brutality videotape, an incident between an African American teenager and a Korean grocer occurred in the Empire Liquor Market in Compton, California, which resulted in the death of Latasha Harlins, an African American teenager. In the end, Du, the Korean store owner, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter, having shot the unarmed Harlins in the back of the head, while Harlins was leaving the store after a short altercation and conflict with Du. However, Judge Joyce Karlin defied L.A. county tradition by not sentencing Du to serve any jail time but rather gave her a suspended 10-year state penitentiary term, 5 years of probation, 400 community service hours, and a $500 fine, in addition to having to pay for the cost associated with Harlin's funeral and medical expenses.[173]

Aoki commented on the Soo Ja Du case, saying that representations of Du "encouraged black people to loot and vandalize Korean businesses during the riots," because it illustrated a false but plausible cause-and-effect relationship. Aoki states that the Korean shop owners were

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[171] Back in 1965, the Watts Riots occurred in the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles, spurred by tense relations between police and the community and led five-day race riot.

[172] Brenda E. Stevenson, "Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin: A Case Study of Multicultural Female Violence and Justice on the Urban Frontier." *Journal of African American History* 89 (2004): 152.

[173] Ibid, 165.

being represented to "look like they didn't like black people."[174] Aoki recalls that time as a very scary period. He received a phone call from Jimmy Takeshi, the head of the JACL in the L.A. area. Aoki recalls the conversation with Takeshi:

> Those buildings burning. I go yeah. They're Korean owned. And I go "aw fuck." And that's when I began to realize, oh man this is bad. This is like this is like… this is not just the theoretical that images of Asian-Americans affect the way we're treated. This is like proof of it. And I felt so helpless. And I was so angry and I was afraid at the same time.

Thus, the images of Koreans on television became MANAA's concern, as it directly affected their Korean American businesses, livelihoods, and safety. That is, negative images of Koreans on television directly led to the violence against Korean American businesses as opposed to an indirect effect where the negative images might just lead people to think negatively of Koreans generally.

MANAA's genesis in 1992 and protests against the film *Rising Sun* in 1993 can be seen within the context of Asian and Asian Americans media representation. MANAA's primary role is to monitor the media and communicate with the television networks and movie studios to help address negative portrayals, while making recommendations for more positive and complex characters. When needed, MANAA would stage protests of movies, radio programs, magazine articles, and televisions shows. So for instance, MANAA helped stage a protests of the film *Rising Sun*, the radio program *The House Party,* the television show *Banzai*, and the *Details* magazine article, "Gay or Asian?"[175] However, many of the protests occurred after MANAA sought to resolve the issues in behind-the-scenes negotiations and meetings with executives, directors, and media networks. Thus, MANAA often seeks to come to agreement and change

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[174] Guy Aoki interview, 25 June 2010.
[175] "About MANAA," MANAA, accessed October 27 2010. http://www.manaa.org/about_us.html.

with the networks through backstage pressure and meetings as opposed public acts of protest, although it is receptive to such acts of protest when other strategies fail.  In addition to its own separate meetings with network producers and media professionals, MANAA is also part of the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition and Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, both of which meet regularly with networks such as ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox.[176]  By working within the framework of coalitions and organizations, MANAA attempts to make changes to institutionalized TV and media programming as a whole, albeit sometimes slowly. Thus, MANAA has institutional power unique among Asian American institutions and individuals.[177]

In addition to monitoring negative media portrayals and working with networks, MANAA also provides awards to Asian Americans who have contributed to changing the face of Asian American media representation for the better.  MANAA holds an annual image awards ceremony, commending those who have contributed to positive representations of Asian Americans.  For instance, past recipients of the awards include acclaimed Chinese American playwright David Henry Hwang, Japanese American filmmaker Renee Tajima-Peña, Korean American stand-up comic Margaret Cho, and the creators and writers of television drama *Lost*.

Aoki establishes that MANAA is the voice of Asian American concerns amongst the burgeoning coalition of activists who began to mobilize against the absence of people of color in prime-time.  Network meetings were established back in the summer of 1999 when the top four networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) released their fall lineups, with none of the lineups starring a person of color. As Aoki recounts, "so the NAACP got really upset and threatened a boycott unless the networks changed their way of doing business, because what happens when

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[176] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham. 2009. *Asian Americans and the Media*. Malden, MA: Polity Press: 165.
[177] Ibid.  Ono and Pham address the ability of organizations to impact institutional and longstanding change, when coupled with more reactive modes of protest and action.

you let them do what they usually do, you always end up with white people. They don't get together in a room to conspire against us. It's just what happens when they do what they do."[178] Thus, the status quo of the media and networks defaults towards privileging white people over people of color, signaling that the industry and the institution itself is problematically racist, albeit implicitly through their status quo disenfranchisement of people of color.

MANAA met with the East West Players (an Asian American theatre group in Los Angeles) and the National Hispanic Media Coalition and agreed to join the NAACP boycott. They held a press conference covered by the *Los Angeles Times* and as a result the networks agreed to meet with the groups and sign a memorandum regarding the problems with the lack of people of color as writers, producers, directors, and actors on television. Aoki described this process like "pulling teeth at first," but they eventually signed the memorandum, which led to annual meetings with the networks.[179]

At first, people of color were bolstering, supporting, and fighting for each other. Aoki stated that initially "Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American groups. . .were going in together, and that was effective because we all fought for each other."[180] Aoki looks back upon this time fondly, remembering when Alex Nogales, head of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, brought Aoki into a meeting with the West Coast president of NBC in 1999, to speak of Asian American concerns. He states, "it was technically their meeting, but we also talked about Asian American concerns."[181]

However, as the needs of the specific groups diverged, so did the need for meeting together as a collective. As a result, the NAACP, Asian American groups, and the National

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[178] Guy Aoki interview, 25 June 2010.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

Hispanic Media Coalition would meet separately and even issue separate report cards, grading the networks on the diversity of their television shows and the writers, directors, producers, and actors and actresses behind those shows.  Although MANAA has annual meetings with the networks, some networks, in particular NBC, suggested that they meet more often to address issues in a timely manner, instead of waiting once a year for problems to pile up.

Finally, MANAA has a record of public rhetoric, particularly through their staging of protests but also through their website, which tracks organizational histories and events.  By analyzing MANAA's public goals and objectives, one can see how it views itself within the Asian American community and what it strives to be as an organization.[182]  First, its goals and objectives emphasize MANAA's responsibility to monitor negative depictions, educate the public about representation and its effects, discourage negative stereotyping, and importantly advocate for positive representations.  However, MANAA does also seek to organize a network for Asian Americans and for more relevant news coverage of Asian American issues.  Indeed, MANAA's rhetoric seeks to center MANAA within a larger Asian American community as a place for the Asian American media activist community to unite, while providing those away from Los Angeles with the tools to address issues in their own towns.  Indeed, the educational dimension of MANAA is becoming more prominent over time.  For example, Ono and Pham provide an analysis of MANAA's "Memo from MANAA to Hollywood:  Asian Stereotypes." This memo appeared as early as 1998 in the winter issue of MANAA's *Eyes &* Ears newsletter and is featured under the "All-Time Popular Articles" in the footer of the MANAA homepage. It argues that the open memo format sets up a list of "Stereotypes" and then challenges the stereotype by simultaneously addressing the historical transgressions against Asian Americans by the Hollywood media industry.  The open memo format provides simple answers to the

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[182] "Goals & Objectives." MANAA accessed June 29, 2009. http://www.manaa.org/goals_objectives.html.

stereotypes that Hollywood so often employs in the production of movies. This format educates both the public and the television networks and articulates the many concerns of Asian American media activists in an easily understood format.

More recently, MANAA was engaged with Paramount Studios over their adaptation of the cartoon series, *The Last Airbender*, in which white actors were cast to play ethnically Asian characters. MANAA openly published the letters that went back and forth between MANAA and the producers of *The Last Airbender.* Thus, MANAA opened up the process of media activism and the reactions of the networks to the general public and particularly the Asian American community whose opportunities to act in the movie were denied in the casting of the film.

MANAA currently serves primarily as a media watchdog group, monitoring media, critiquing objectionable representations, and advocating for Asian American positives. By working with media institutions, such as the television networks and film studios, through network meetings and contacts within the studio, MANAA works to intervene into the rhetorical process of media industries. It also serves to advocate by offering itself as a resource to studios when dealing with issues. For example, the winter 2009 newsletter recounts that Phil Lee offered themselves as a "resource or sounding board for other production aspects" for Randy Greenberg from Platinum Studios. As a representative of MANAA, Phil Lee is responding specifically to the casting controversy regarding white actor David Henrie being cast as the Chinese American character Tommy Zhou in the live action adaptation of the comic book *The Weapon*. Although MANAA monitors the media, it is not always with the intention of protesting, although that is one tool it has at its disposal, but also with the intention of educating and making space for Asian Americans working in the entertainment industry.

MANAA inhabits what literary scholar James F. English describes as the "middle-zone" of cultural production, the space where artists and consumers do not necessarily reside but rather where gatekeepers, proponents, and administrators of culture work do.[183] Thus, MANAA occupies this middle-zone, neither solely creating nor simply consuming media but primarily monitoring and advocating for particular types of media and media content; thus, MANAA does some gatekeeping but often in the interest, although sometimes narrow and sometimes in opposition to the fluid and dynamic Asian American community as a whole.

MANAA also serves as community space for those interested in Asian American media representation. It holds open-to-the-public general meetings the third Thursday of every month, except December when the meeting is moved to the second Thursday. Current president, Jeff Mio, recalled that he was invited to join MANAA when he engaged in an email debate with Guy Aoki over the casting and representation of Asian Americans in the network television show *Hawaii* in the fall of 2004. Thus, MANAA is an organization that allows local community members and those who choose to contact MANAA through email and the hotline a space to voice their concerns regarding representations of Asian Americans.

MANAA plays varying roles as a media watchdog. Importantly, when MANAA notes an objectionable representation, and plays the role of a consultant, MANAA employs its voice as representative for Asian Americans to engage as media activist and to mobilize more as a social protest group, picketing outside of the studios, attracting media attention, and securing support of the local community. In short, MANAA is a both a public advocacy organization but also one meant to serve the interests of the Asian American community, employing roles as sometimes educator, sometimes advisor, and protest group as needed. These occasionally contradictory

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[183] James F. English. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005: 12.

roles as educator and protest group arose from MANAA's history, one that was based in protest but evolved to incorporate formal and informal meetings with television networks and film studios, while simultaneously fluctuating between educational and social movement-based goals.

MANAA's current relevance revolves around its continuing mission to monitor and advocate for positive Asian American representations in the media. MANAA members, particularly Guy Aoki, continue to be major spokespersons regarding issues of Asian American negative representations and major advocates for positive change. For example, Guy Aoki spoke out against Adam Corrolla when Corrolla used mock Asian "ching chong" speech, and praised the Pixar film *UP* for casting Japanese American Jordan Nagai in a non-stereotypical Asian American character. MANAA's relevance in the current media environment is bolstered by its position in Los Angeles, which allows for a back-and-forth interaction with the studios that has been cultivated over the period of MANAA's history.[184] For example, MANAA was sought out by Paramount Studios to provide commentary about Mickey Rooney's yellowface character, Mr. Yunioshi, for the 2009 DVD release of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Thus, MANAA's longstanding commitment to Asian American media advocacy and activism and its impact on the media industry in Los Angeles help position MANAA as the default organization to help deal with issues of Asian American media representation. Other large Asian American organizations, such as the Asian American Justice Center and Organization for Chinese Americans (OCA) are primarily civil rights and/or social justice organizations that at times become involved politically, taking stances and supporting particular policies. These organizations only dabble in issues of media representation when the issue is

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[184] A list of MANAA's milestones can be found here: http://www.manaa.org/about_us.html. They include the protest early in MANAA's history against the film "Rising Sun" to getting Joel Schumacher to air a public service announcement because of his film "Falling Down" (1993). It also lists meeting with presidents of film studios and organizing against radio stations, such as KKBT and Power 106-FM to the more recent Adam Corolla.

incredibly salient or when they are called in by media oriented groups like MANAA.  On the other hand, MANAA focuses specifically on these issues and also provides resources to help the general public understand Asian American media issues.  For example, MANAA provides a video guide, media contacts, and a stereotype buster list to educate people on issues but also to equip them with the tools to become involved themselves.[185]   Thus, MANAA's current relevance still revolves around meeting with networks and applying pressure to the networks to diversify the roles of Asian Americans in the media.

MANAA has a record of public rhetoric, particularly through its staging of protests but also through their website, which tracks organizational histories and events.  To explore these multiple roles that MANAA plays and its deployment of strategic essentialist rhetorics directed at those outside the organization, I turn to two artifacts: the website and an open memo directed to Hollywood on "Restrictive Portrayals of Asian Americans and How to Balance Them." I choose these two artifacts as the public face of MANAA and as a way to understand how the organization rhetorically constructs and positions itself within the media industry. For instance, the website becomes the site where those who are not involved in the organization, but who may have heard of one of MANAA's many protests come to know in-depth the goals and mission of MANAA.  By analyzing MANAA's goals and objectives as located within the website as a public face, one can see how it positions itself within the Asian American community and what they strive to be as an organization.

Within the website, I turn my attention to the "About MANAA" link, since it provides a short synopsis of MANAA, along with further information about the "Board of Directors" and "Goals & Objectives."  In the "About MANAA" page, there is a 17 minute embedded video of MANAA's history, followed by three paragraphs and a list of key milestones.  Narrated by well-

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[185] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham. *Asian Americans and the Media*: 166.

known radio personality and Arab American deejay Casey Kasem, the video splices clips of

television shows and movies that have spurred MANAA to action, such as Brooke Shields' 1996

promotional commercial for the sitcom *Suddenly Susan*.[186]  It includes interviews of members, as

well as famous Asian American actors such as George Takei.  The last section highlights

MANAA's nationally televised battle with Sarah Silverman over the use of the word "chinks"

)culminating in MANAA president Guy Aoki and Sarah Silverman appearing on Bill Maher's

"Politically Incorrect" television show) and concludes with a call to the community to join in

MANAA's fight by supporting and joining their efforts.  The first two paragraphs situate

MANAA's history as the first Asian American-specific media watch group and one operated by

volunteers, whose interests were initially spurred on by their concerns about Asian American

representations in the media.  The third paragraph explains MANAA's standard procedure to

address derogatory media representations, which is to follow up on concerns from the

community and "if appropriate" contact the sources responsible.[187] Finally, the list of milestones

summarizes the battles that MANAA has won when engaging in media activism, including

getting Joel Schumacher to release a public service announcement trailer for his film *Falling

Down* (1993) and meeting with the Executive Vice President and head of casting at CBS

Television to reconsider their failures to cast Asian Americans in their television shows in

1997.[188]

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[186] In the promotional trailer for *Suddenly Susan*, Brooke Shields dressed up in a karate outfit and clumsily performed mock Asian karate moves with an exaggerated buck-toothed grin. This performance was perceived to be mocking Asian Americans through a badly mimicked imitation.

[187]"About MANAA," MANAA, accessed October 27 2010. http://www.manaa.org/about_us.html.

[188] In the film *Falling Down* (1993), William Foster (played by actor Michael Douglas) goes on a rampage of Los Angeles after a traffic jam and annoying  fly push him over the edge on the way to his daughter's birthday party at his ex-wife's house. MANAA protested the movie due to the film's treatment of minorities, specifically a Korean American grocery store owner. In the one scene, the Korean American grocery store owner refuses to give William Foster change unless he purchases an item.  Discontent with this answer, Foster becomes enraged and destroys the store with a baseball bat.

The "About MANAA" page rhetorically frames MANAA as a longstanding representative of and advocate for Asian Americans in the media. The "all-volunteer, non-profit group" connotes a dedication from its members, one not driven by money but rather the commitment to social justice and the better treatment of Asian Americans. "Asian Americans" become strategically mobilized as a community, a group with an interest in media politics, and one that *needs* and *deserves* representation. However, the "About MANAA" does not clearly define "why" it needs and deserves representation when it comes to the production of images and discourses over Asian Americans. Rather, this explanation is best served through the "Restrictive Portrayals" memo.

I turn my attention to the "Restrictive Portrayals" memo for two reasons. First, it publicly lays out MANAA's approach to acceptable and non-acceptable media representations in a concrete fashion through a point-counterpoint method. Second, it has been a longstanding document within MANAA, appearing as early as 1998 in the winter issue of MANAA's *Eyes & Ears* newsletter, and is featured under the "All-Time Popular Articles" in the footer of the MANAA homepage. The document is a list of 16 "restrictive portrayals" of Asian Americans in the media, each with a short paragraph explaining how and why each representation is restrictive, and concludes with a simple "stereotype buster" that encourages the media to expand its notions of Asian American representations.[189] Ono and Pham summarize what the stereotypes are: "the portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans as forever foreigners and yellow peril, of women as Lotus Blossoms or Dragon Ladies, of the model minority myth, and of Orientalism" and argue that this format highlights "the ease of changing or solving the problem" of Asian stereotypes in the media and that it is up to "Asians and Asian Americans to hold the dominant media

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[189] See appendix C.

accountable."[190]  Therefore, MANAA exists to help change the mainstream terrain of Asian American media representation by working with or against the networks regarding these restrictive portrayals and strategically essentializing "Asian American" as a minority group that is misrepresented, stereotyped, and excluded from mainstream society through the media.

"Asian American" becomes strategically essentialized as a victim to mainstream representations.  That is, the term "Asian American" is strategically used and the people characterized as "Asian American" become essentialized, albeit strategically, into a minority group that is misrepresented, stereotyped, and excluded from mainstream society by the media MANAA's rhetoric positions it to represent Asian American media interests and facilitate change in the mainstream terrain of Asian American media representation by working with or against the networks regarding these restrictive portrayals.

In addition, MANAA's public rhetoric demonstrates that MANAA exists in order to represent Asian American interests in the face of mainstream media ignorance but also as an Asian American community that exists contemporarily with a long history in U.S. society.   One of MANAA's roles is to undermine the notion that, as Aoki states, "people look at us (Asian Americans)" as "being foreigners."  However, this runs counter to the reality, where 31,107,889 Asians in America were foreign born according to the U.S. Census Bureau.[191]  Thus, the impetus then, Aoki states, is to "humanize them so that people relate to them and don't just look at them as foreign people who we can just make fun of."   In addition, current president Jeff Mio relinquishes the Asian international possibilities, stating that MANAA seeks "to be supportive of

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[190] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham. *Asian Americans and the Media*.: 167.  Ono and Pham also provide an analysis of the rhetorical form of the memo and how it communicates the difficulties of Asian Americans in the media.
[191]The information can be found at the following link:
http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFIteratedFacts?_event=&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=01000US&_street=&_county=&_cityTown=&_state=&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_2&ds_name=DEC_2000_SAFF&_ci_nbr=012&qr_name=DEC_2000_SAFF_R1010&reg=DEC_2000_SAFF_R1010%3A012&_keyword=&_industry=

Asian American issues in the media and so therefore it's not supposed to be involved with

foreign Asian types."[192] That is, MANAA's responsibility is to Asian *Americans*, not necessarily

Asian Internationals in the United States, Asian International film stars, or misrepresentations of

Asia. Board members Mio and Aoki's notion of an Asian American community represented by

MANAA are ones clearly based within the United States and with access or aspirations to U.S.

citizenship.

Thus, the Asian International or Asian American diaspora becomes overlooked. In a

personal interview with current MANAA president Jeff Mio, he states MANAA's mission is "to

be supportive of Asian American issues in the media, and so therefore it's not supposed to be

involved with foreign Asian types." Mio emphasized MANAA's avoidance of addressing

"foreign Asian types," mainly because he believes that "their governments can take care of

themselves but our mission really is to look out for Asian American issues." Thus, MANAA's

involvement in issues of Asian international media affairs might be seen as one that dilutes the

efforts of Asian Americans in the media.

MANAA employs a notion of "Asian American" as very specific to Asians in the United

States and not Asians in general. Sylvia Pham (no relation), a former board member and one of

the younger volunteers in her early 20s states, "They only see the community as Asians living in

the United States," and thus emphasize a community that erases the differences, like accents, that

become the subject of Asians and Asian Americans' ridicule[193]. However, Silvia Pham fears that

MANAA establishes an "Asian American identity in the media, where what white people would

accept us or see us as positive or something in their criteria," thus re-establishing a manageable

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[192] Jeff Mio (MANAA president). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham. March 3, 2010
[193] Sylvia Pham (former MANAA board member). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham. July 5, 2010.

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other.[194] Sylvia Pham's concern is that the only acceptable Asian American representation that MANAA supports is one that is non-threatening to the white supremacist power structure. Sylvia Pham noticed that MANAA would try to "not put Asian-Americans in stereotypical roles. If there is an Asian role, they like to have the Asian identity expressed."[195] This quotation operates on two levels. First, it draws attention to MANAA's reactive response to "stereotypical roles" as worthy of addressing. Second, the latter part highlights the emphasis of "Asian identity" expression that MANAA advocates for. That is, if they look Asian and act Asian American (such as through fluent American English speech), MANAA would advocate for an Asian American storyline or narrative. Mio supports this sentiment, stating that "part of our frustration [sic] are when biracial individuals pretend to be white or they have character names that are white, and the studios get to count them as Asian as if they have more Asian American actors than is public perceived; but you know if the public doesn't perceive them, then it does the Asian American community no good."[196] Although Mio's sentiment can be read as an indictment of mixed race actors who simply do not recognize their mixed race ethnic background and its effects upon monoracial/Asian American actors, it also calls attention to the production of characters as ethnically ambiguous, thus complicating the visual politics of MANAA. Silvia Pham states, "They (MANAA) like roles where the Asian identity is recognized."[197] Thus, MANAA would prefer that Asian identity and issues of Asian American identity become addressed in the production of storylines and characters. However, the networks may choose to employ mixed raced actors in order to add to their numbers. Television producers may insert these mixed raced actors into roles where their racial ambiguity is used mark them as phenotypically white and thus

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[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Jeff Mio interview, 3 March 2010.
[197] Sylvia Pham interview, 5 July 2010.

have white characters, but then use their mixed race heritage to increase the numbers of people of color in the media.

One issue that is occurring here is the threshold, the shifting and blurring line between strategic essentialism and manageability and how MANAA's notion of Asian American allows for either to occur.  MANAA strategically essentializes Asian Americans to be a community that is historically marginalized, "the other," and excluded:  Asian Americans are represented in the media in one-dimensional ways that belie the heterogeneity of the community, deserving and needing representation, and inseparable from the goals of racial justice within a multicultural society.  However, these strategic essentialist rhetorics are public enactments and products of discussions of what are acceptable and not-acceptable notions and representations of Asian Americanness.  In addition, these rhetorics have been prevalent over the course of time, as far back as 1997; thus, where is the threshold for situation-specific strategies of essentialism before they become a hegemonic.  At what point do they begin to reproduce unequal power relations within the media and help manage the term "Asian American" that was initially used to fight for power and change?

In the next sections, I look at the May 2009 and August 2009 meetings specifically in order to examine the problematic deployment of strategic essentialisms and the slippage into manageability during the early stages of dealing with *The Last Airbender* and the trailer of *The Goods*.  I focus primarily on two general MANAA meetings that I attended in the year 2009 concerning *The Goods* and *The Last Airbender*, after *The Goods* was released and while activity regarding *The Last Airbender* had already begun to simmer. These meetings are not meant to be "representative" of all the meetings of MANAA but to provide a snapshot of the organization at this particular point in time when media offenses took hold to a level of offense that called for

direct action.  These decisions and discussions are when the organizational members must deal with organizational and political, yet fruitful, tensions within MANAA as they move into the realm of publicity.

I focus on general meetings for a multitude of reasons. First, they were a place where MANAA conducts its business, such as voting and discussing issues with members who are not part of the Board.  Second, meetings are also the place where newcomers come into contact with MANAA as an organizing body. Although MANAA has a website built in, it was modeled under a late 1990s style of web design, which was text-based, with the goal of disseminating information such as announcements, with little to no social networking presence until it was updated in early 2009.  Finally, the meetings serve as a social and communicative space where the organization is made through discursive action, and no place is that more evident than in an organizational meeting for a group that meets regularly once a month on the third Thursday of every month, excluding December during which it is held on the second Thursday.

Indeed, the organizational discourse is an important part of this organization, since MANAA members do not physically meet daily, and the responsibilities to MANAA are extracurricular to their day jobs.  Grant et al refers to organizational discourse as "the structured collections of text embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed."[198]  Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick, describe organizational discourse as "the languages and symbolic media we employ to describe,

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[198] David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick, and Linda L. Putnam. "Introduction:  Organizational Discourse: Exploring the Field." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 1-36. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004: 3.

represent, interpret, and theorize what we take to be the facticity of organizational life."[199]  Other

scholars have broadened what organizational discourse means.  For example, Ainsworth and

Hardy draw from Foucault, stating that discourse is the "interrelated set of texts that

'systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p49)."[200]  This approach

takes a *constitutive* approach to discourse, suggesting the effect of discourse is taken for granted

even as discourse constructs the objects themselves. Indeed, the link between an organization's

identity and its discourse is so strong that organizational communication scholars' primary

concern with and approach to discourse is dictated by the relationship between discourse and the

organization.  Mumby and Clair state, "organizations exist only in so far as members create them

through discourse … that discourse is the principle means by which organizational members

create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are."[201]  Weick goes on to say

that "to treat discourse *as* organization does not mean that discourse *is* organization."[202]  Mumby

and Clair and Weick recognize that the discourse is not the only thing that constitutes the

organization, recognizing that the organization is both a combination of policies, people, and

various social structures, but they are clear to foreground the point that discourse is essential to

the constitution of an organization.  Both understand that the organization is more than a

"container" and a context where discourse occurs but one that is also active in producing and

framing discourse, even as it is constructed and constituted by discourse.  Broadfoot, Deetz, and

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[199] David Grant, Tom Keenoy, and Cliff Oswick. "Introduction:  Organizational Discourse:  Of Diversity, Dichotomy, and Multi-Disciplinarity." In *Discourse and Organization*, edited by David Grant, Tom Keenoy and Cliff Oswick, 1-13. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1998:  1.

[200] Susan Ainsworth and Cynthia Hardy. "Discourse and Identities." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 153-74. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004: 154; Foucault, Michel. *The Archaelogy of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, 1972.

[201] Dennis K. Mumby and Robin Clair. "Organizational Discourse." In *Discourse as Structure and Process: Discourse Studies Vol. 2 - a Multidisciplinary Introduction*, edited by T.A. Van Dijk, 181-205. London: SAGE, 1997:  181.

[202]Karl E. Weick. "A Bias for Conversation:  Acting Discursively in Organizations." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 405-20. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004:  409.

Anderson suggest that "conceptualizing the relationship between discourse and organization as mutually constituted allows scholars to explore the productive duality in both."[203]  Thus organizational discourse may constitute MANAA as an organization, just as MANAA mutually shapes the discourse present.  Thus, one of the places where MANAA, as an organization which is both a producer and product of its organizational members, is constituted is within its general meetings.

Due to space constraints, I am unable to convey the existential experience of being in an organizational meeting, with all the emotional ups and downs of meetings as well as the dialogue and tangential conversations of group members. Nevertheless, I will try to convey the tensions that arose during specific, and what I see as important, points in the meeting and that serve to highlight the tensions among members and the group, politics and tactics, and differing notions of the role that MANAA plays within the larger struggle for better representations of Asian Americans in the media.

I begin by describing a typical meeting, before jumping forward to the "Asian Spotting" section of the May 2009 meeting to elucidate what issues are "representable" for Asian Americans in the mainstream and how MANAA decides what to focus its attention on.  Then, I fast-forward to the August 2009 meeting, when MANAA discusses the mobilization effort made to protest offensive comments found in *The Goods* trailer.  I shift into a discussion of the *Last Airbender* in the May 2009 meeting to highlight the difficult aspects of networks and the dangers of manageability that come with strategic essentialist rhetorics.  I conclude by drawing attention to the issues of representation that come in to play with MANAA's handling of the film *Gran Torino* when criticized by the Critical Hmong Studies Collective.

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[203]Kirsten Broadfoot, Stanley Deetz, and Donald Anderson. "Multi-Leveled, Multi-Method Approaches to Organizational Discourse." In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*, edited by David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda L. Putnam, 193-212. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004:  194.

The May 2009 meeting was, for me, as much as an introduction to the organizational dynamics of MANAA as it was an ideal meeting to learn about tensions and assumptions existing within the organization. At that point in time, it was also early in *the Last Airbender* controversy; whereas, the previous analysis of MANAA's rhetoric presupposes a cogent and clear end and purpose, this account shows the organizational dialogue over the tactical shifts of MANAA's rhetoric, demonstrating how rhetorical production is at times incoherent, not cogent, dialogical, and not necessarily linear. MANAA's debate regarding what to do regarding *The Last Airbender* demonstrates the messiness of race-based protesting, the non-linearity of organizing, and the tensions over manageability and social change.

MANAA's general meetings take place in the second floor meeting room of the Chinatown Public Safety Association Center in Los Angeles' Chinatown neighborhood. The room is at the end of a corridor and is illuminated by fluorescent lighting and large windows that run parallel to the driveway leading to a back parking lot. In the middle of the room are four long white folding tables, placed parallel and side by side, to create a large rectangular table where the nine members convene.[204] Indeed, there is plenty of space around the table for all the members, new and old, at the meeting I attended. Sitting at the head of the table facing the door was Phil Lee, the current president (but not the founder) of MANAA. A tall man with slightly floppy black hair and wire rim glasses, Lee graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Ethnic Studies and from UCLA's Law School with a Juris Doctorate. Lee has been involved with MANAA since 2006 and currently has a day job as an administrator at California State University Fullerton. Between Lee and me was Jeff Mio, the vice-president of MANAA. A

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[204] MANAA's meetings fluctuate in terms of membership, although the Board generally attends all the meetings. When I appeared to the March 2010 meeting, I noticed five new faces, although only two were new to organization itself. Guy has expressed the difficulty of attracting people to the organization and retaining them, saying this could be a part of MANAA's problem. He recalled a conversation with Edwin Zane, a former MANAA president, who said "you know, MANAA is not a social group. It's not a fun group. You have to do a lot of work."

professor of Psychology at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, he specializes in multicultural psychology and, as noted previously, became involved with MANAA after getting into an email disagreement with Guy Aoki back in 2004 over the Aoki's critique of the series *Hawaii*. To the right of me and opposite Lee at the other end of the table, with his back to the entrance, were former MANAA president and actor Aki Leong and his wife, Conchita. On the other side of the table were Eric Kitayama, Sylvia Pham, Ken Kitayama, Guy Aoki, and Johnny Lam. Eric Kitayama is a recent college graduate who now has a full time job at University of California, Irvine (UCI), as a neuroscience researcher. Sylvia Pham is a student at UCI, and Ken Kitayama is an undergraduate at NYU visiting from out of town. They were the youngest members at the meeting. Aoki appeared in a slightly disheveled state, indicative of his work pace and style more so than out of laziness, sporting a mustache and slightly graying hair on his sides. Johnny Lam rounded out the last of the members present when the meeting started and was there as part of General Electric's "affinity groups," which serve to connect people of color with other people of color within the organization and subsequently to community work; Lam helped redesign MANAA's new website that was launched in February 2009.

As president, Lee serves as the main facilitator in meetings, making sure MANAA stays on task and stays with the agenda. Recognizing that there are some new people, myself as well as Ken Kitayama, Lee asks everyone to introduce themselves and their occupation before moving into a description of MANAA's organizational mission as "trying to represent and advocate for Asian Americans in the media. Not just actors and actresses but production, writing, and the way we're covered in the news." Afterward, Lee discusses the first agenda item.[205]

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[205] The Agenda of the Meeting went as followed:
1.  OCA "You Oughta Be in Pictures" panel selection
2.  East West Players
3.  Kollaboration Tickets

Of the three meetings I attended in person and the one I teleconferenced into, the last part of the meetings were dedicated to "Asian Spotting."  In this part of the meeting, members are assigned to watch a show to track the way Asian Americans are represented, note concerns about such representations, and then return with a report for the MANAA general meeting about the television show.  Often, there are visible concerns over what is represented as "Asian American" and what should be done when Asian Americans are targeted via the media or through representations, and this part of the meeting is where the members decide on what to do about it. The conversations and dialogue are generally civil, with no harsh disagreements.  However, the conversation was dominated by Aoki, Lee, and Mio.[206]  In one discussion, Aoki brought up a *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* sketch where the word "chinaman" was used in one scene.  Aoki begins the discussion of SNL by stating that he was "a little perturbed" with Norm McDonald, as a guest of the SNL, appeared on this Jeopardy parody show and asked for the category "famous chinamen."  Mio's comments dove-tailed with Aoki's, finishing by stating "what Will Ferrell said was 'my God, there is no character and we would never have such an offensive category anyways?" After showing the clip at the meeting, Aoki says, "To me, I'm offended that they would even have a guy say 'Chinamen.' So, how do you guys feel?  Reactions?"  Phil Lee comments that it seems like it's more of an indictment, a satirical critique of Burt Reynold's character as played by Norm McDonald.  I interjected w/ a question, "are we finding offense with the fact that Chinamen was said?"  Here, a quick debate between Aoki and Mio then ensued.  Aoki expressed his objection to the very use of the word "Chinamen" being spoken by

4.      Last Airbender issue
5.      Asian Spotting
6.      Fox Meeting
[206] In a personal interview, I found out later that Eric Kitayama did not watch television or mainstream movies and thus often felt alienated during the meetings and conversations about media representation, although he enjoyed the space of MANAA as a place to discuss issues of race.

Norm McDonald; whereas, Mio replied that "Chinaman is not the same as Chink." After the discussion, the group voted on the whether or not to take any sort of action regarding SNL's use of the word "chink." The end vote resulted in taking no action and without much disagreement among MANAA members.

The mere mention of "Chinaman" raised a flag for Aoki, because of its historical associations with ridicule and racial targeting. However, others, particularly Mio, disagreed about the level of offense, maintaining that "Chinamen is not the same as Chink," and such ruminations over detail may be more harmful to the larger goals of MANAA. For this issue, it was not damaging enough; nor did it have enough publicness to comment on, and any protest by MANAA of it may draw attention and publicity to SNL, which would contradict the intended effect of negatively affecting the NBC network's ratings for their offenses. In addition, the use of "Chinamen" within the context of the media, specifically the SNL skit, was unclear, and if the debate over the very use of "Chinamen" was not easy to understand amongst like-minded members, how would MANAA be able to convince the wider Asian American community and mainstream public to take up the cause? Nonetheless, the word "Chinamen" was the issue, since it discursively referred to and stood in for "Asian Americans." Although this instance of "Chinamen" was not acted upon, the following incident in which the word "Japs" was used spurred MANAA to act quickly and mobilize an Asian American community to protest "Japs" and its use within the trailer of the film, *The Goods*, was.

**"*The Goods* are Bad!"**

In August 2009, Paramount Vantage began a large-scale marketing campaign to promote white actor Jeremy Piven's new film, *The Goods*. Part of the large-scale marketing campaign was a promotional trailer that was shown in movie theaters, television commercials, viral video

channels such as YouTube, and even integrated into the reality television show, *Big Brother*. One version of the promotional trailer depicted Korean American actor, Ken Jeong, as a part of a sales crew.[207] In this trailer, Jeremy Piven's character, the star salesman was brought in to sell off all the cars for the dealer. In that capacity, he attempted to inspire the car salesmen group by saying "Don't get me started on Pearl Harbor - the Japs flying in low and fast. We are Americans, and they are the enemy! Never again!" Starting with an email message, MANAA protested the trailer of *The Goods* and its rampant marketing, with the intention of affecting the film overall. Email exchanges over a period of two weeks sought to lay out the terrain of action and how one rhetorically engages both individually and organizationally. The August 2009 meeting is subsequently the only meeting after the email exchanges and the day before the protest.

When I greeted Phil Lee for the August 2009 meeting, he mentioned to me, "seems like you came to a good meeting" for two reasons. For one, it was the first meeting after an organizational retreat that occurred roughly a month before on July 18, 2009. In addition, Aoki was staging a protest of Paramount Studios in response to trailer of the movie, *The Goods,* the next day. Thus, the meeting was a follow up to the organizational issues discussed at the strategic retreat and to the email discussions, which I was privy to but did not participate in, over *The Goods* that happened a week prior to this meeting.

However, the majority of the meeting focused on the logistics of protesting *The Goods*. Once again, Aoki divulged his information and involvement so far; the offensiveness of the trailer and its symbolic value as a trailer, the cross-marketing within *Big Brother*, the lack of response from Paramount Studios, and the conflicting and often ambivalent relationship

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[207] It is unclear if MANAA has access to rough cuts and my impression is that they do not. They sometimes get a chance to prescreen the film but usually, by that point, it's too late for the work they want to do which generally deals with issues of casting.

MANAA has with the news media. Aoki, wearing a grey ribbed shirt and looking tousled and tired, says that it's a "really hard to scene to watch" and is offended that Paramount "chose the scene of him (Ken Jeong), about him getting beaten up in their 30 second trailer; that's what they thought was very funny in order to get people to see the movie." Aoki mentions this, in addition to CBS's permission to allow the movie to be integrated and cross-marketed within the *Big Brother* reality show.[208]  Indeed, the symbolic value of the trailer offended Aoki the most, arguing it communicated that hate crimes against Asians (and subsequently Asian Americans) would be an acceptable form of patriotism. He was appalled that this poorly executed satire, which included politically incorrect language and violence, on this "hate crime-as-patriotism" idea would be perceived as the funniest and most marketable facet of the movie has to offer to the widespread audience who, for the most part, did not or will not see the movie.

Aoki rattled off the list of failed media contacts.[209]  When speaking about Tim Swanson of the *Los Angeles Times*, Aoki grew frustrated, recalling that during their conversation, Swanson replied that "my attitude is if you don't like something, you can just turn off the TV,"

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[208] Jeremy Piven came into *Big Brother,* and the prize for the contestants would be a chance to see *The Goods* before general audiences. The trailer was part of promoting the television show.

[209] Although the list he rattles off during the meeting is extensive, he sent an email earlier that outlines who. Here is an abridged version:

LA Times:  I called Betsy Sharkey and Tim Swanson and left basically the same message  explaining the whole trailer and CBS and "Big Brother.  Both called me back.  Betsy to tell me she no longer oversees movies but only reviews them.  Swanson was a disappointment. Spoke with George Larrimore, exec producer of "Access Hollywood."  Was about to go into a planning meeting in half an hour and was going to raise it.  Didn't hear back from him but he said the film looked dumb and appeals to mostly guys and their show cares more about women.  If it did well over the weekend, they might want to do something on it Monday. Called Cher Calvin at KTLA 5.  she was going off to D.C. tomorrow (Thursday) and couldn't do the story.  She returns Monday and could still do it but she forwarded the letters to Paramount; Spoke to Bob Strauss at L.A. Daily News.  He felt there needed to be a trend to do a story.  I mentioned the "white-washing" angle of "21" and "Last Airbender" but he felt they were too far apart. Entertainment Weekly:  Left the same message for Adam Vary as well as some guy who supposedly oversees everyone.  No response. Called the VA USA Today film editor, Sue Kelly, and left a message, no response. Called Bob Long, news director at NBC4.  No response. Left a message for David Ono at KABC 7, no response.

thus revealing to Aoki why they have a lack of media coverage, because "this is the guy's attitude about when we complain about something."[210]

Introducing the background information of the protest, Aoki stated that he then emailed the APA Media Coalition, who now knows that MANAA talked to CBS. He said he received a positive response from the APA Media Coalition, also adding that the Imada-Wong Group – a communications marketing company – also pushed for a protest. Aoki also stated that the head of the JACL from DC volunteered support from their membership in Los Angeles. In doing so, Aoki provided the information that this concern over the trailer is not just noticed by MANAA but by other Asian American organizations that support MANAA's leadership to mobilize a protest. As a result, the next 20 minutes of the meeting were devoted to planning the logistics of the next day's meeting, such as coordinating the signs, media contacts, print materials, and coming up with a chant list. After the immediate business of the protests were taken care of, the meeting shifted to more organizational matters, particularly reporting on the status of a grant application, a film scholarship, and eventual board elections.

Thus, the mobilization against *The Goods* was predicated on a strategically essentialized notion of Asian Americans as a community marginalized by mainstream representations, representations which symbolically justifies material marginalization and violence against Asian Americans. Regardless of which ethnic group one belongs to within the pan-ethnic "Asian America," the targeting of "Japs" can also affect Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian ethnic groups. According to Aoki, his experience working on Asian American issues informed him that "it didn't matter that much if you're Japanese-American or Chinese-American, because the rest of the country look at you as being the same" and that "the stuff that was said about Chinese people

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[210] Aoki recalled how Nikki Finke, an entertainment reporter for the LA Weekly and Deadline.com, lambasted Swanson for being too close to the studios (see the article here: http://www.deadline.com/2007/08/tim-swanson-new-la-times-film-editor/#more-2994)

impacted you even if you were Japanese and vice versa." Thus, the essentialized idea that "All Asians look the same" becomes a strategically essential moment and a discursive tool for MANAA, who uses it in order to highlight pan-ethnic unity. Based on MANAA's actions, "Japs" is a dangerous signifier for "Asian." *The Goods'*s portrayal of a satirical physical beating of Ken Jeong's character and his public declaration of "I'm Korean" cannot be reconciled nor does it justify its use in the full movie. Thus, MANAA becomes the organizing body that brings together the Imada-Wong, Japanese Citizens League, and eventually members from Racebending.com – an international grassroots organization that organized to address casting issues of *Last Airbender* – to protest the studios under a pan-ethnic Asian American label and on behalf of a pan-ethnic community.

The protest of *The Goods* points to a mobilization and rhetoric of a pan-ethnic "community" MANAA seeks to serve. In the next section, I explore how this notion of Asian American has affected MANAA's relationship with the media. By doing this, I show how MANAA occupies a dangerous space of manageability when working with Paramount over the issue of *The Last Airbender*.

**Press Releasing or Mailbombing?**

I return to the May 2009 meeting, at which the majority of the meeting, roughly 50 minutes of the two hour long meeting, revolved around a discussion of what should be done regarding Paramount Studio's adaptation of the cartoon series, *The Last Airbender*, in which white actors were cast to play ethnically Asian, Inuit, and indigenous characters. Spurred on by fans of the television show, MANAA worked with the fan group, Racebending, and pressured Paramount Studios to justify their casting procedures and choices. MANAA openly published the letters that go back and forth between MANAA and the producers of *The Last Airbender* on

their blog and made transparent the process of media activism and the reactions of the networks

to the general public and particularly the concerns of Asian American actors and actresses whose

opportunities to act in the movie were affected by casting in the film.[211]  Over the course of six

months in early 2009, MANAA contacted and attempted to work with the producers of *The Last*

*Airbender*.  I provide an analysis of MANAA's letters to Paramount concerning the casting in the

movie. Then, I give a brief overview of the trajectory of what occurred during this 50 minute

period in order to focus on two incidents that arose: the questioning of MANAA's end goal and,

at the core, MANAA's relationship with the mainstream media.

In the first letter sent February 11, 2009, MANAA bolstered its own credibility within the

industry and took a non-confrontational approach, arguing that the producers have an

opportunity to cast Asian American actors in prominent lead roles and would be making a

breakthrough movie by doing so.  MANAA first positions itself as an ally, stating that they

would "like Avatar: The Last Airbender to become a successful movie trilogy" but fear the

"outcry over the lack of Asian/Asian American actors in the lead roles" would prevent its

success, and any subsequent opportunities to provide Asian American actors "a chance to shine

in a big-budget film franchise which would bolster their careers for future projects."  Here,

MANAA positions itself as an ally and concerned media organization, not necessarily a protest

group.  MANAA's rhetoric also positions Asian American actors as a group not afforded the

opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities to cultivate their careers.  MANAA's subtle

critique, subsequently, is that *The Last Airbender* is not just visually problematic but also

exclusionary; the producers' and directors' active choice to cast non-Asian actors also

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[211] Although MANAA is fighting for the roles of Asian American actors and actresses, my involvement in the group did not reveal many actors and actresses who were involved with MANAA on the membership level, one notable exception being former president Aki Leong.  Nonetheless, Asian American actors and actresses have voiced their support for MANAA and their work, such as George Takei in the MANAA video.

marginalizes Asian Americans actors by excluding them from the ability to showcase their skills and thus inhibiting their ability to build careers. MANAA concludes by implicating themselves with the success of previous shows, stating that the Avatar television series benefited from former MANAA vice president, Edwin Zane, who "served as its cultural consultant for the first two seasons and helped the producers avoid ethnic missteps." Thus, Paramount has the opportunity to do the same, as MANAA invites Paramount to "please take advantage of us as a resource."

Unfortunately, Paramount's reply on March 25, 2009, brushed off MANAA's concern,[212] emphasizing the global reach of the film, without recognizing of the social cultural politics of representation in the United States. Their letter justified the casting, stating "the four nations represented in the film reflect not one community, but the world's citizens" and that it would be "cast from a diversity of all races and cultures." Paramount's letter placed a global community over an Asian American one. It frames MANAA's concern over the lack of Asian American actors as contradictory to the representation of the "world's citizens" and repositions Paramount and the film as representing a grander version of global diversity.

MANAA's final letter to Paramount on April 9, 2009, took more of a confrontational tone, questioning Paramount's dedication to diversity, and listing the general historical discriminatory practices against Asian American actors in Hollywood cinema. MANAA states that one of their many concerns is "the outdated and discriminatory practice of casting white actors to depict Asian characters."[213] MANAA's letter recalls the "justifications used to cast white actors instead of actors of color," which are often couched in the language of diversity by

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[212] You can find the letters between MANAA and Paramount in MANAA's blog (http://manaa.blogspot.com/) dated Saturday, April 18, 2009 and Wednesday, February 18, 2009.
[213] Guy Aoki. *MANAA's Response to Letter from Paramount on The Last Airbender*, April 9 2009, accessed July 2, 2009, http://www.manaa.org/labmanaaresponse.html.

casting actors of color in supporting roles instead of lead roles, thus linking *The Last Airbender* to the historical representations and the parallel marginalization of actors of color.

The May 2009 meeting follows a month of waiting to hear from Paramount Studios. The first 30 minutes of the meeting was dedicated discussing the collaborative program with the Organization of Chinese Americans, specifically to brainstorm a possible third candidate to fill in the last panel slot to fill the "You Oughta Be in Pictures" panel on Asian Americans in the media. After another 10 minutes of announcements regarding *Kollaboration* Asian Pacific Islander American entertainment tickets, the next item on the agenda was *The Last Airbender.*[214] In a straightforward and blunt manner, Aoki provided a recap of the situation to update the group about what had happened since the previous month's meeting: a film based off a cartoon series with an estimated budget of "*$250 million* across three films*, I think."* Aoki explains the casting situation - there are four nations of Asian or Inuit background whose background plays directly into the narrative of the show, purposefully representing indigenous and ethnic populations. However, the director of the live action adaptation, Indian M. Night Shyamalan, originally cast four white actors (although one was replaced by Dev Patel from *Slumdug Millionaire* fame after Jesse McCarthy – another white actor – dropped out of the project). Before launching into the work he's done contacting the news media, as the MANAA representative, Aoki says that he sent a letter to Paramount, and it took them a month and a half to reply. He also called the *Los Angeles Times* and *Entertainment Weekly*. Frustrated and annoyed with the lack of response from the three different editors at the *Los Angeles Times* and the back and forth emails with Nicole Sperling from Entertainment Weekly, Aoki uttered, "we have a very legitimate issue and the white press doesn't care," referring to the intentional erasure

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[214] *The Last Airbender* was previously known as *Avatar: The Last Airbender* but was changed to *The Last Airbender* in order to reduce confusion with the James Cameron film *Avatar*

of Asian characteristics and the missed opportunity to cast Asian American actors. Attempting to look on the bright side, Lee mentions that *Last Airbender* fans have been supportive of MANAA's stand on the issue and suggests using the fans as a means to get the news media's attention.  Shortly thereafter, Sylvia, one of the younger members of the group and active contributor, inquires if MANAA could "ask the fans to, like, mailbomb and googlebomb the places and say we want this to be on the paper?" Aoki wonders what they would do and Sylvia responds, "have them call all day, all night," because she has seen this tactic used before as a form of protest.  The conversation that followed simmered in a disagreement, albeit a civil one. Being no stranger to protests and having been the prime organizer of many of MANAA's previous protests and often serving as its media spokesperson, Aoki agreed with Silvia Pham's tactic. However, he posited a different idea to incorporate *Racebending.com*, the fan-based organization that initiated the *Last Airbender* protests and was dedicated specifically to address the whitewashed casting issues of the adaptation. Aoki suggested contacting Marissa Lee to link MANAA's press release off of Racebending's website with instructions to forward it to their local newspaper so as not to "harass them but do it in a certain way that they'll take interest in the story and do it and let us know if see them doing it (taking interest in the story)."  However, I quickly followed up, confused by the apparent difference between what Sylvia Pham was suggesting and Aoki's subsequent idea, inquiring "so you don't want to harass them?"

At that point, Leong, a 75 year old man with a hairless smooth top with trails of salt and pepper hair on sides of his head and animated physical gestures, politely yet forcefully involved himself in the conversation, asking a question, "Can I throw in what I'm thinking very honestly is that the newspapers is going to wait to get advertising from this movie and there is an unfortunate conflict of interests?"  He follows up by adding, "That's why Variety dropped out,

that's what we have to overcome" and emphasizes the blockbuster potential from the film and fact that Variety gets ad revenues from the film since it is "gonna be a big, big film." Leong understands the relationship between the local newspapers and entertainment magazines as one of an "unfortunate conflict of interests"; the same can be said of MANAA's relationship with the entertainment industry and news media. This "conflict of interests" between news media and the local Hollywood industry was a recurring theme. News media were a constant obstacle and challenge for MANAA when discussing tactics of the protesting. Mio states, "It's a bit touchy here. Paramount just released the DVD of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (in which MANAA was part of the special features)." Lee added, "and I just emailed saying 'hey, I'd like to get permission to share *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on our website. Hopefully, two parts of Paramount are not talking to each other." Thus, MANAA must negotiate its relationship with the mainstream media and balance the multiplicity of relationships and actions with movie studios so as not to offend the studio and jeopardize its longstanding working relationship since it started meeting with movie studios, like 20th Century Fox in 1993. Even though MANAA has the delicate balance of supporting films it wants to promote and critiquing others, MANAA is not purely a movie review site, like *RottenTomatoes.org*; nor is it a purely political organization, which are often uninterested in issues of media representation. MANAA makes the political decision to support a film, while balancing it with artistic and critical assessment of the film. Sometimes this is easier when the films are well-done. Such is the case with Pixar's *Up* and its casting of a Japanese American boy as the voice of one of its lead characters, but arguably it is a bit more complex in the case of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Later on, Leong pushes the conversation a bit further, testing the group's opinion on the severity of the *Last Avatar'* s casting gaffe by asking whether or not MANAA, but in particular

the younger members, would boycott the film. Neither agreeing or explicitly disagreeing with Leong, Lee reminds us that *The Last Airbender* is not just an Asian American issue but an issue across the board for fans of the television show that have a connection and expect authenticity from the show. However, Leong launches into a lengthy diatribe. I quote this speech in its entirety in order to show the depth of Leong's critique, while drawing attention to the length of the very silence that ensued and the rapt attention paid to Leong while he was speaking:

> *Leong*: Ya know what I'm looking for is the fact, as an older Asian, we have not stepped to the plate. Because we played the in-between banana game. I'm interested in young Asian Americans and how much venom they have in terms of responding. Okay, I've been doing this for 54 years man. And I've never been casted, and I've been discriminated against. So I know about this. I've done over 200 movies in television okay? And I'm still being discriminated. And I made a movie wherein I broke the line and I'm using non-white people and Asians, real Asians. You never mentioned once Reggie Lee's name. Not only my movie but a whole lotta movies. Okay, his name was never mentioned because he's not in the loop. So then we have to start thinking outside the box instead of reinventing the same old people, over and over and over again. There are Asian producers and directors here that you guys don't know about that can step to the plate, but they're not in the loop because they're not playing the game. We are reinventing the wheel with the same garbage and it doesn't take us any place else. So I am interested in, when I chair of the EEOC and had an Asian American, and I started the Asian American Subcommittee and a 125 Asian American kids say where the hell are the damn jobs? I went to SAG and we couldn't get anything and I'm on

the (slams his hand down) board of SAG. So this is (slams hand again) bullshit! Excuse me, over and over again and Guy has been, thank God he's been doing this for 14 years. I've been a member now for what, 7, 8 years. And it's been a struggle. We've got to break in somewhere but we don't have a name. We don't have anybody that can piledrive this shit. We're looking for someone just to do notes of this meeting here and we can't even get somebody. We're talking about a multi-million dollar movie. We're talking about a multi-million dollar *business* and we have to step up to the plate in a different manner. And I'm using the word manner and I'm just saying to you we cannot just be the same. Ya know excuse me, I'm sorry for getting upset but that's – I'm calling the shots like it is and it's still continuing even in my lifetime. And I hope maybe before I die, I'm 74 years old, 50 years (slams hand down) in this business.

Leong's inquiry turned invective. In four separate sections, the speech first questions and criticizes the current Asian American movement when it comes to issues of media representation. Then it moves in to an indictment of the "game" between media distributors and media makers. Following that, it exposes the racism present within the current media industry. Finally, it concludes with a sobering description of the capitalist system.

The speech indicts MANAA specifically (but Asian Americans generally) for not stepping "up to the plate," or more appropriately meeting the challenge that the media industry sets forth by playing the "in-between banana game," the back-and-forth decision-making between acting and not acting in regard to the media wrongs incurred against Asian Americans by the mainstream media industry. The speech then distinguishes between Leong and others, like Reggie Lee, who have not played "the game" and rather decided to operate outside

mainstream media by producing their own work but are yet overlooked by MANAA, because they do not meet an acceptable level of publicity and star power. However, they can, according to Leong, "step up to the plate" and meet the challenges of creating an Asian American friendly media environment while recognizing the challenges of the mainstream media environment. The speech beckons MANAA to think "outside the box instead of reinventing the same old people, over and over and over again," since this is not working for MANAA, as indicated by the lack of media coverage and respect MANAA is receiving. The speech elucidates Leong's role within the mainstream media industry, particularly acting as a representative to voice the concerns of Asian American actors to the Screen Actors Guild. The speech absolves MANAA and Guy Aoki, thanking him for "doing this for 14 years," and switches from an indictment of MANAA and Asian Americans to venting his frustration with the lack of progress and a need to "piledrive this shit" and forcefully make MANAA's concerns known. The speech concludes with a clear-headed insight that "We're talking about a multi-million dollar movie" and "We're talking about a multi-million dollar *business* and we have to step up to the plate in a different manner." Indeed, the speech reminds us that it is not just a movie, producers, and studio that MANAA is up against, but rather an industry involved in circulating millions and billions of dollars.

Leong's second impassioned monologue embodies decades of anger and frustration from being an Asian American actor within a media industry that has for so long and so often marginalized him while efforts to "play to game" when dealing with such an industry has, in his eyes, made minor improvements at best. Slamming his hand into the table, exclaiming that "this is bullshit," and saying "excuse me" all bring attention to Leong's disdain for "the game," "being in the loop," and "thinking outside the box" when it comes to dealing with the mainstream media. Leong's forceful comments indicates that he does not want MANAA to play the

"manageable other." His passionate comments encapsulate his frustration with the lack of change, the unused strategies of protest, and the sometimes lame duck role that MANAA effectively plays.

Importantly, he once again highlights the "*business*" aspect of their endeavor and that, regardless of MANAA's letters or emails, the movie will continue on. MANAA plays a role in its own manageability. MANAA abides by this market ideology, often as an obstacle when it has the capacity to jeopardize its relationship to the news and film industry but also as a tool to disrupt the studio's ability to procure more profits. However, MANAA's decision at this point to avoid offending the news media and movie studios, or even deciding on an end goal regarding the film, offends Leong greatly. Leong's furor and the disagreements about the value of network meetings highlights a key point over the lack of activism from the community: who exactly is this community and how does MANAA envision and represent a community of Asian Americans dedicated to media reactions?

The strategic essentialist rhetorics of MANAA and its issues of manageability with the networks highlight that MANAA seeks to serve and represent a pan-ethnic Asian American community through a rhetoric of community. However, it does little to show how strategically essentialist discourses disrupt notions of community when members of the pan-ethnic community disagree and resist the discursive interpellation of Asian American. Nowhere more is this conflict more evident than in the disagreement over the film *Gran Torino*.

**Grading *Gran Torino***

When it comes to issues whose Asian American voice it to represents, MANAA's rhetoric of a strategically essential Asian American community is fraught with potential spaces of disjuncture, where disagreements over who is considered "Asian American," which groups

within the diverse pan-ethnic label are represented, and how a community being represented by MANAA agrees with what MANAA says on its behalf. To explore these questions, I turn to the conflict that emerged between the Critical Hmong Studies Collective (CHSC) and MANAA. When Clint Eastwood's film, *Gran Torino*, was released, MANAA posted a blog entry generally praising the film, stating "the film takes its educational responsibility seriously, offering up cultural tidbits on how to survive a Hmong BBQ" and, despite Clint Eastwood's role as a "white man savior," "the movie is compelling and earnest, and it tells a story about one of the most underrepresented groups in our country that leaves us hoping for a brighter future."[215] However, not all of the Asian American community agreed with this reading or with MANAA's praise of the film, in particular the Hmong community represented by the film as "perpetual warriors," in need of the archetypal white man savior, and as one absent of productive Hmong men.[216]

MANAA's praise of the film caused a small rift within the organization, as the CHSC (an organization unaffiliated with MANAA) disagreed with MANAA's laudatory review. Schein and Thoj highlight that the blog posting was authorless, "presumably to convey that it is the official statement of this watchdog organization."[217] Schein and Thoj revisit the exchange between the CHSC and MANAA, in which MANAA went "strangely silent" in response to CHSC's formal requested letter, co-signed by actor Bee Vang, and their protest of MANAA's "laudatory" review. [218] According to Silvia Pham, "they wanted us to supplement their criticism of the movie into our entry on the MANAA blog, which you know celebrated the movie and talked about how it did a great job of representing the Asian American, the Hmong community

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[215] "Movie Review: Gran Torino," MANAA, modified January 26, 2009, accessed September 12 2010, http://manaa.blogspot.com/2009/01/first-test-post.html.

[216] Louisa Schein and Va-Megn Thoj. "*Gran Torino*'s Boys and Mens with Guns: Hmong Perspectives." *Hmong Studies Journal* 10, no. Dec (2009): 1-52. Schein and Thoj provide an in-depth and astute analysis of Gran Torino as well as the CHSC interactions with MANAA as an organization and its review of it.

[217] Ibid, 23.

[218] Ibid, 25.

and bringing Asian Americans into prominent roles in the film or something." Silvia Pham also

recalled that MANAA "dismissed the argument as being too nitpicky or something like that."[219]

Indeed, Schein and Thoj stated that MANAA "smugly refused to entertain any of the Collective

concerns, deftly producing its own minoritizing discourse in the process of protecting the

integrity of their own speech."[220] Independently from Schein and Thoj while also a member of

the CHSC, Jalao states, "MANAA's failure lies in its inability to suture the stereotyping of a

largely ignored sub-group, the Hmong, with the larger history of an embattled Asian

America."[221] In this instance, MANAA's ability to serve as the representative of "Asian

American" media interests, one consolidated within a strategically essentialized notion of Asian

American identity born out of mid-1990s media representations of Asian Americans, is at odds

with a changing Asian American community. In current times, the new subgroups of Asian

Americans, like Hmong Americans, are at the forefront of Asian American mainstream media

representation, such as the case of *Gran Torino*, yet differ from MANAA in their histories within

the United States and their view of representational politics. The CHSC brought to the forefront

the invisibility of Hmong Americans in the United States. It also exposed problems with

MANAA's goals and its status as a pan-ethnic Asian American organization. By doing so,

CHSC complicated MANAA's strategic essentialism of "Asian American" as MANAA came to

be seen as reinforcing hegemony and managing Asian Americans. The issues of whose interest

within the Asian American community at other's expense within the community are increasingly

highlighted when MANAA gives its "stamp of approval" on representations that do not fit the

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[219] Silvia Pham mentioned that this was one of the last straws that caused her to leave MANAA, although it wasn't the single reason.

[220] Schein & Thoj, 25. This indictment of MANAA is within ethnotextual reading of *Gran Torino* from multiple Hmong perspectives to engage the film in terms of social and political engagements with the politics of production in mind.

[221] Ly Chong Thong Jalao. Looking Gran Torino in the Eye: A Review. *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement* 5. 2010: endnote.

"positive" or "negative" binary but rather elucidate the complicated and gray areas of Asian American representation. For the *Gran Torino* incident, it could be read that MANAA's interest and its notion of Asian American, illustrated by Schein and Thoj's indictment of MANAA's drawing "a line in the Asian American sand," took precedence over Hmong Americans.[222] Nonetheless, MANAA's organizational discussions attempted to reconcile the needs of it as an organization with the needs of the larger community, slipping into a notion of Asian American that has long sustained the organization and its very mode of determining what representations to protest.

**Conclusion**

When I asked Aoki about *The Goods* protest in hindsight, he stated "So this is a Monday and we had the protest on Friday with 43 people. It was amazing. I never put together anything that quick." However, the difficulties securing media attention can be summed up by his discussion with a person from *The Daily Variety*, a Hollywood trade newspaper. Aoki recounts that when he criticized the person for not covering MANAA when they addressing *21*, the person said "'well to tell the truth Guy, Asian Americans are not the most downtrodden group. You guys do pretty well for yourself." Aoki interprets this by saying "because we do so well, unlike black people, unlike Hispanic people, we got no reason to complain," thus giving him insight in to why MANAA has a media issue. And, although *The Goods* protest brought out a large amount of protesters, and the trailer was eventually pulled, Eric Kitayama states, "I don't know where the victory was afterwards," in terms of larger anti-racist change in the media industry.[223] Indeed, change within a multi-billion industry is a slow process, and the role MANAA plays is

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[222] Schein and Thoj, 25.
[223] Eric Kitayama (former MANAA volunteer). Phone interview by Vincent N. Pham. July 28, 2010.

necessarily from the perspective of those who are involved in such a movement and their own notions of community and identity politics and their own strategies for social change.

MANAA's engagement with the mainstream media industry and the Asian American community it seeks to represent is laden with potential for change but also fraught with being co-opted by the institutions they seek to change. MANAA employs a strategically essentialist rhetoric, using a generalized but not always inclusive notion of what Asian American is and means. MANAA understands Asian Americans as having or occupying a geographic location within the United States. It also views Asian Americans as marginalized and subject to the media and their stereotypes. MANAA's deployment of this rhetoric helped organize a protest of multiple organizations and applied needed pressure against Paramount Studio, challenging the stereotypes in the trailer of the film *The Goods*. However, this strategic essentialist rhetoric and notion of Asian American became problematic when representations of Asian Americans that were previously unseen, such as the Hmong in the film *Gran Torino*, appear. MANAA's strategic essentialist rhetorics here belie the complexities of being a pan-ethnic Asian American organization when groups within pan-ethnic Asian America are doubly marginalized, both within the mainstream arena and larger Asian American community. This signals the possible slippages of strategic essentialism into manageability and complicity with hegemonic processes. *The Last Airbender* signaled the complex relationship between MANAA and the industry, in which the cultivation of this relationship can also put MANAA into a position to shift between strategic essentialism and manageability as MANAA negotiates its protest and pressure on the network.

When I attended the March 2010 meeting, I noticed the attendance was higher than the previous meetings and mentioned this to Mio, who replied, "yeah, there were a lot of people there; I'm not exactly sure to what extent they have been involved enough to really talk about

these types of issues."  New members may not be accustomed or knowledgeable about the issues

of Asian American media representations, nor familiar with the term "Asian American" beyond

that of a box they check on a survey.  However, MANAA's meetings demonstrate the complex

and ambivalent relationship media organizations, often connected to histories of social change

and media protest, have with the very institutions they seek to change and affect. Even as

MANAA is addressing the television networks and movie studios, it is also negotiating change

within its own organizational structure in ways that can empower Asian Americans or inhibit

future discussions of the possibilities of Asian American media activism.  In addition, their

public rhetoric also communicates a notion of Asian American that is simultaneously authentic

in its complexity and difference but exceptional in its essentialization of being Asian and having

an Asian cultural background that should be adequately represented and addressed in the media

representation.

Since the end of *The Goods* incident and my research involvement with the organization,

little has changed in terms of what they originally set forth in the strategic retreat.  However, the

organization was dealt a blow, both professional and personally, when Phil Lee decided to step

down from his role as president due to a family emergency in December, 2009. An

organizationally minded man, Lee clearly envisioned the needs for a structure of growth, both for

the organization but also for its members who can easily get burned out in the thick of doing all

the work MANAA requires for its continuing activism. Both Sylvia Pham and Eric Kitayama

walked away from the organization in 2010 because of their differences with MANAA.[224]

 Although their critiques may sound harsh at times and despite their differences, they explicitly

stated their appreciation of MANAA's work along with the influence MANAA had upon

understanding notions of Asian American identity. Pham noted, even after leaving MANAA, "I

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[224] The interviews with Sylvia Pham and Eric Kitayama occurred after they left the organization.

do respect them as organization."[225] Since her experience with MANAA helped her make sense

of the explicit racism she had encountered in the past, but at this juncture in her life, as a student,

other concerns became more prevalent.  Kitayama echoed the same sentiment about MANAA as

"a safe space where people can relate their experiences, where Asian Americans can get a sense

that their struggles are legitimate, where their concerns are legitimate"; whereas, other spaces

and places may not validate concerns of Asian Americans in general.[226]

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[225] Sylvia Pham interview, 5 July 2010.
[226] Eric Kitayama interview, 28 July 2010.

CHAPTER 3:

"MUTABLE" ASIAN AMERICAN AND ARTICULATING FESTIVITY: CAAM AND

THE TACTICS OF FESTIVAL SPACE

From March 12 – 16, 2009, and March 11 – 23, 2010, I was present at the San Francisco

International Asian American Film Festival (SFIAAFF), sponsored by the Center for Asian

American Media (CAAM). During these two short – yet intensely packed – periods of fieldwork,

I attended film showings, opening night galas at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum,

impromptu gatherings in the Guest Services Lounge, closing night festivities, after hours

SFIAAFF-sponsored social events, the Asian American Film Festival Programmers meeting, the

"Meet and Greet" Sunday Brunch with Directors and Filmmakers, and various industry-related

workshops and panel discussions for Asian American media makers and interested lay people.

Looking back on my field notes after completing my study, transcribed from my voice

recorder, as my voice slightly trembles as it tries to make sense of my emotions: of excitement

and nervousness as I walk into the Japantown neighborhood where the film festival is held; of

being alien to the festival yet familiar and comfortable within the sea of people who look like

me; and of wonder and critical observation as I see a theatre filled with Asian people, young and

old, as they are publicly addressed prior to the film by the Center for Asian American Media's

(CAAM) representative to recall how their own subject position relates to the documentary film

and its subject, Patsy Mink.   And, although I have been to film festivals before, this particular

experience and encounter somehow resonates with me on an affective level, drawing attention to

my ambivalent feeling of nervousness and excitement and my complex positionality as a

researcher, tourist, and Chicago Asian American film festival and FAAIM affiliate.[227]

Whereas the previous chapters focus on the organizations' relationship to community via

organizing (in regards to FAAIM) and the organizations' sometimes problematic representation

of a community (MANAA), this chapter focuses specifically on the simultaneous envisioning

and attempted re-constitution of an Asian American community by an organization, the Center

for Asian American Media, and its most public event in San Francisco, the well-known San

Francisco International Asian American Film Festival.  Drawing upon de Certeau, Charland, and

Okada's work, I argue that SFIAAFF transforms cinema into a community space of Asian

American political and cultural action, deploying a tactic of organizational affiliation and media

consumption to reconfigure the audiences' relationship to media.  In line with Brian Larkin, I

recognize that the materiality of cinema theatres provides "new modes of sociability" in which a

notion of "Asian American" can be reconfigured and reconstituted.[228]  Ultimately, CAAM's

rhetoric reconstitutes a notion of Asian American into one of "constitutive mutability" – the

individualized and *reconstitutionalized* understanding of a community, specifically an Asian

American community and what it means to be "Asian American" – in order both to consume and

produce media for CAAM's survival and the well-being of a U.S. democratic project.  By

*reconstitutionalized* , I mean the process by which an individual's meaning of community

becomes challenged and/or reinforced as they come into contact with CAAM's notions of Asian

American and community, eventually becoming refashioned and reconfigured, allowing the

individual to come into his/her own notion of community while being informed by CAAM's.

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[227] The film festivals that I attended tend to be smaller in scope than SFIAAFF, notably the Chicago Asian American Showcase and Roger Ebert's Overlooked Film Festival in Champaign, IL.

[228] Brian Larkin. The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria. In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by F. D. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod and B. Larkin. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2002: 319-320

Although it may be similar to the pre-CAAM notions of community, it is nonetheless informed and reconfigured post-CAAM, a deconstructed and eventually *reconstitutionalized* understanding of "Asian American."

In order both to explore the film festival and its sponsoring organization, I draw upon my own ethnographic experience and fieldwork conducted from my two excursions to the SFIAAFF in 2009 and 2010, my first contact with CAAM in the fall of 2008 to my last visit of this project in March 2011. The bulk of the data came from participant observation of the opening weekends of the 2009 and 2010 festivals and the closing weekend of the 2010 festival. In addition, I conducted 12 interviews with organizational members of CAAM, incorporating and taking into account a diverse range of members' voices from the new volunteer to returning seasonal employees, a new hospitality and guest manager, the executive director of CAAM, interns, a member of the Student Delegate Program, and the major planners and organizers of the film festival over this two year period. These interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 68 minutes. I also compiled primary texts from the organizations, such as film festival programs, publications distributed by CAAM, as well as transcribed speeches from the film festival and personal field notes. In this study, I primarily focus upon the rhetoric of the film festival in relation to CAAM, particularly surrounding CAAM's 30th Anniversary celebration in 2010 and the series of short films known as *30 Years in 30 Seconds*, a short film compilation solicited and funded by CAAM to commemorate the 30th anniversary of CAAM during the 2010 SFIAAFF. In addition, I pay particular attention to the organizational and industry events sponsored by CAAM during the SFIAAFF, specifically the Student Delegate Program and the Asian American Film Festival Programmers' Meeting.[229]

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[229] Tim Hugh from FAAIM referred to this meeting as "The Summit."

Although I spent much time at the festival, my presence at SFIAAFF is a complex one. On the one hand, I truly was like a tourist, participating in film festival activities, going to movies, and experiencing the film festival for the first time in 2009 and then again in 2010. On the other hand, I was allowed industry access as a university-affiliated researcher. I was given a lanyard with a name badge, indicating my name and the institution I was affiliated with, along with a slip of paper that informed me of the benefits of being "industry accredited," like free access to social events after the screenings and access to the guest lounge. In addition, film festival director Chi-Hui Yang often made a concerted effort to introduce me to people, often saying "This is Vincent Pham; he's doing his dissertation on the film festival." Even though I experienced the festival as a first time attendee in 2009, I was being perceived by others as a person of special importance beyond a regular festival attendee; simultaneously unfamiliar with being at the festival yet being treated as if I had a privileged knowledge of it.

**"Richness and diversity…to the broadest audience possible"**

The history of CAAM is a complex one. I therefore begin the story of its founding prior to its official formation, beginning with factors and instances prior to its creation as the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA) in the early 1980s. By doing so, I illustrate CAAM's longstanding presence within the Bay Area, the Asian American media arts organization scene, and more mainstream media venues, particularly the Public Broadcasting Service. According to Stephen Gong's accounts, Asian American media centers were founded out of the spirit of the 1960s and 1970s activism, which allowed for the creation of foundations for pan-ethnic Asian American movement.[230] While Gong admits to not being part of that

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[230] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers." In *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*, edited by R. Leong. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991; Yen Le Espiritu. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

movement, he was aware and knew that Loni Ding, one of the major catalysts for the creation of

NAATA, was working in the community and emerging Asian American groups.  Indeed, the San

Francisco State University Third World Strike in 1968 was followed by the emergence of current

ethnic studies programs, such as Asian American Studies, and set the stage for the term "Asian

American" to come into existence as a socially constructed and political term.  Activist Yuji

Ichioka first used the term to voice the kind of concerns Asian American students had about the

political position of people of Asian descent living in the United States.[231]

Stephen Gong, the current executive director of CAAM, recalls being at the original three

day conference, organized by Loni Ding, which led to the founding of CAAM.  He describes it

as "an amazing watershed moment" that changed his life.[232]  Gong's presence, however, was not

as an organizer but rather as a program officer for the Media Arts program of the National

Endowment for the Arts. Gong's role was to help fund organizations that would then eventually

fund independent filmmakers; however he noticed that very few Asian American filmmakers

applied for a grant. Thus, Gong's involvement with what would eventually become CAAM was

through his role and experience funding early works, such as Wayne Wang's *Chan is Missing*, or

organizations like Visual Communications. Recalling his seminal essay on Asian American

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[231] Ryan Kim, "Yuji Ichioka . . . Asian American studies pioneer. *SFGate*.  Thursday, September 12, 2002; Yen Le Espiritu. *Asian American Panethnicity:  Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992; 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.  However, the term "Asian American" has come under critique and has expanded to include Pacific Islanders, thus leading to the acronyms of APAs and APIAs.  However, there is also contention over the lumping of the Pacific Islanders into Asian American, who argue that their differences resemble more of the colonial aspects of Native Americans. Vincente Diaz's article "To P or not to P" addresses these concerns.  Needless to say, the term "Asian American" is by no means clearly defined or agreed upon but utilized as means of converging political interests.  More recently, Espiritu argues that "Asian American" is employed to assert "pan-ethnicity" across the diverse ethnicities of Asia as means of attaining political power.

[232] Stephen Gong (executive director of CAAM). Phone Interview by Vincent N. Pham. October 6, 2010.

media organizations, Gong emphasizes that "what was significant for us was that we also had developed a network of organizations," with what are known as media arts centers.[233]

Gong suggests a "media arts center" generally refers to "several types of non-profit organizations which provide services to support media activity, generally in production, exhibition, distribution, and advocacy" that serve "constituencies of artists and producers working in film, video and radio" but also present works to larger audiences.[234] Media centers operated under the two main assumptions of, first, a pan-ethnic Asian American experience that transcends ethnic specific concerns and, second, of a belief in the "power of the media to effect social and cultural change."[235] Indeed, these two assumptions changed the nature of how Asian Americans could act within the United States context. Although ethnic groups within Asian America might identify other Asian Americans by ethnic group, the conception of a pan-Asian American consciousness provided an understanding of Asian American as a politically driven group and articulates Asian American identity with a shared experience of being Asian in America as opposed to isolated ethnic enclaves. In addition, this new understanding of Asian American community experience could be translated into political and social power; however, how this power could be wielded might not have been realized until the burgeoning presence of media centers that emphasized the importance of self-representation and the role the media played in affecting social and cultural change.

[233] Ibid.
[234] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers." In *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*, edited by Russell Leong, 1-9. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991.
[235] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers." In *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*, edited by Russell Leong, 1-9. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991, 2.

The first media centers that dealt with Asian American issues were Asian CineVision (ACV) in NY and Visual Communications (VC) in Los Angeles.[236] Both of these media centers approached the mediascape as an area where the oppositional politics of media representation needed to be battled. For VC, it was very much about media literacy and thus served as a place where Asian Americans could equip themselves with the skills to produce Asian American centered media that addressed issues within the Asian American community.[237] The current mission of VC is to "promote intercultural understanding through the creation, production, presentation, preservation and support of media works by and about Asian Pacific Americans."[238] Indeed, the decreasing cost of audio-visual and film producing technology allowed for these media centers to take root. It was now possible and somewhat affordable, in comparison to previous technologies, and this new accessibility allowed these media centers to purchase needed technologies to produce new media products.[239]

Whereas VC helped Asian American filmmakers develop their art and craft, ACV provided an exhibition space for such work, sponsoring the first major festival to display Asian American independent media."[240] ACV's work primarily consisted of hosting a film festival and producing a print magazine. ACV's film festival was among the first to incorporate an important component of traveling and touring films: other organizations or media centers could rent movies from ACV's catalog to show films in its city. Instead of pulling together a film festival from

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[236] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham. *Asian Americans and the Media*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009. Ono and Pham provide a short history of the Asian American film festivals, which were sponsored by the early Asian American media centers.

[237] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers." According to Gong, many of the VC members originally went through UCLA's Ethnocommunications Program, where they first made their films there and contributed to the development of UCLA's Asian American Studies Center (3).

[238] Ono and Pham, 160.

[239] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers." Gong comments that the "tools of media production were becoming affordable and available for community and individual use in a way not possible earlier" (2). One might think of the recent developments in user-generated media, such as YouTube, along with the drop in pro-sumer merchandise is another occasion of decreasing technology costs that is allowing for new possibilities and constraints in media activism.

[240] Ono and Pham, 160.

scratch, ACV allowed for an easily accessible catalog of vetted Asian American that then could be compiled to organize a make-shift film festival (for a price of course, with limited accessibility).

Despite the geographic separation between the two organizations, ACV's presence in the film festival circuit provided additional spaces and extended the audience boundaries beyond just the West Coast for Asian American media. Indeed, the presence of a burgeoning Asian American media centered national network was coming into place, and the presence of already-founded media centers and a new Asian American ethos provided a context for NAATA/CAAM's creation.[241] In San Francisco, there was no formal organization, but a group of filmmakers and producers who were experienced with commercial and public television, but who were also frustrated with the industry, particularly with the lack of equal access on public television and radio.[242] Whereas Asian American film festivals were helping to bolster community support and create a large scale movement for the future, they did not necessarily cater to large audiences at the time. Thus, after a three-day conference that united Asian American film makers and producers in Berkeley in 1980, they laid the groundwork for what would become NAATA, which would advocate "against racist and stereotyped images of Asian Americans and support and encourage greater participation by Asian Americans in public broadcasting" by acquiring, packaging, and distributing Asian American centered television and radio programs.[243]

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[241] According to Gong, there was a national network of Asian American media arts centers by 1979, spanning LA (VC) and NY (ACV) but also incorporating smaller centers in Seattle, Boston, and Washington D.C.

[242] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers."

[243] Ibid, 7. NAATA was formally established late in 1980 in SF with James Yee as its founding executive director and conceived as a national organization with nationwide involvement through regional representatives making up the board (8).

NAATA was established in 1980 as part of the Minority Consortia (MC), which aimed to "direct minority films toward public television and to create more funding opportunities for minority filmmakers."[244] The participation and alliance with the Minority Consortia provided NAATA with financial funding, especially since the MC was formed to "direct minority films toward public television and to create more funding opportunities for minority film makers."[245] Public television's role was to address commercial television's inability to serve the "broader, cultural, informational, and educational functions of a democratic mass communication station."[246] However, Okada comments that bringing diversity to public programming did not lead to an "increase in representations of people of color on public television," and this inequality remained so until 1978, when an independent Task Force on Minorities in Public Broadcasting found a lack of representation, both in programming and employment.[247] As a result, the MC was formed, with NAATA being one of the last to form and join.[248] Thus, the reassessment of the role of public television, coupled with the increased engagement of minority and identity politics with media, provided a context in which NAATA could be formed and linked to other media organizations as a means of organizing Asian American media politics and activism.[249]

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[244]Jun Okada. "The PBS and NAATA Connection: Comparing the Public Spheres of Asian American Film and Video." *The Velvet Light Trap* 55, no. Spring (2005): 41.

[245] Ibid, 40.

[246] William Hoynes. Public Television for Sale: Media, the Market, and the Public Sphere. Boulder, CO: Westview Publisher, 1994: 1.

[247] Okada, "The PBS and NAATA Connection: Comparing the Public Spheres of Asian American Film and Video." 40.

[248] The other groups that formed the core of the MC were the National Latino Communications Consortium, Native American Public Television, and the National Black Programming Consortium (Okada 40).

[249] April Elkjer. "Naata's 25th: Celebrating Asian Pacific American Film." *The Independent*, accessed June 29, 201, http://www.independent-magazine.org/node/343. In addition, CAAM is part of the Ninth Street Independent Film Center, sharing the building with other independent film organizations, such as the Film Arts Foundation, Frameline, which is LGBT media organization, and the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. Together, they bought the building at 145 Ninth Street.

NAATA's relationship with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the MC was incredibly important to its status as an organization. Gong recalls that the MC was already in place before NAATA was founded; so NAATA's founding was predicated upon its status as a non-profit organization. Gong states, "it was understand, kind of behind the scenes was one of the outcomes of this three day meeting was that you were going to have the formation of a steering committee and it was going to call for the creation of an Asian Pacific American Consortium and that, in fact, is exactly what happened." It was the creation of the board, consisting of academics, filmmakers, and members from other organizations that initially was NAATA. Gong states that the early board members of NAATA "were trying to be both strategic and very pragmatic" in their creation of a board and that NAATA could not exist in isolation as, Gong states, "doing an 'Asian American' thing" enterprise but one within the larger social and cultural fabric – one connected with CPB and the larger independent film movement.

These two relationships, of being connected to two other institutional entities besides an ethnic studies or Asian Americanist one, is a pragmatic move by NAATA/CAAM. As Gong notes, "the board members came with that understanding of their work." Gong states, that "we've always been embedded here in San Francisco with other film and media arts organizations," emphasizing that "we were always historically closely aligned with the Film Arts Foundation," even sharing a facility and building space within the Ninth Street Independent Film Center. By working with the larger media arts field, Gong states that NAATA tapped into the energies that drove and created Independent Television Service (ITVS) and larger independent film scene. While Gong stresses that the partnership with CPB both ideologically driven and also "driven by the pragmatic, the practicality that CPB gives a good chunk of operating money," he also states that they "existed as kind of partners in a landscape that emphasizes diversity." Gong

argues that CAAM occupies a role to "celebrate and demonstrate the importance of diversity as a foundational principle in American democracy, in American culture, in American society." Indeed, the ideology of CAAM is one that supports a notion of U.S. democracy and the importance of diversity, by demanding that Asian American communities have voice and representation. CAAM sees the lack of Asian American representation in media as the lack of representation in U.S. society, democracy, and culture and sees their relationship with CPB as aligning to their goals and CPB goals of an educated U.S. public.

NAATA's original role was to "acquire, package, and distribute independent Asian American films"[250] but that has extended into a larger overall mission, split between educating mass audiences about Asian American films and distributing such films. In 2005 and their 25th anniversary, NAATA changed its name to the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) in order to better reflect what NAATA currently does and what they would seek to do in the future. As executive director Eddie Wong states, "We've outlived our name. I think in the 1980s, when the word 'telecommunications' meant satellite broadcast, it meant a new era for communications. Today, telecommunications means cell phones, PDAs; it just doesn't mean the same thing anymore, so we decided to go with a streamlined name that actually goes with what we do."[251] CAAM's missions are to fund, produce, distribute, and exhibit media that convey the diversity of the Asian American experience to the largest audience possible.[252] To accomplish these missions, they have a wide variety of departments, one being the San Francisco International

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[250] Okada, "The PBS and NAATA Connection: Comparing the Public Spheres of Asian American Film and Video," 41.
[251] April Elkjer. "Naata's 25th: Celebrating Asian Pacific American Film."; "NAATA Changes Name to Center for Asian American Media." *Asian American Journalists Association*, accessed June 30, 2011, http://www.aaja.org/news/community/2005_11_07_1/.
[252] "About CAAM," CAAM, accessed March 4, 2011. http://caamedia.org/about-caam/.

Asian American Film Festival (SFIAAFF).[253]  Originally, CAAM's mission was to "counteract

negative images and stereotypes of Asian Americans in mainstream media by providing Asian

American programming for broadcast on public television."[254]  Thus, Asian American

representation in historical and contemporary media came to CAAM's attention.

For CAAM, the mission statement provides a good overview of what frames the

organization and the identity of the organization today.[255]  CAAM has an overall mission

statement, which is bolstered by the purpose of the separate departments on the website.

CAAM's overall mission statement states the following:

> The Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) is a non-profit organization dedicated to
> presenting stories that convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences
> to the broadest audience possible. We do this by funding, producing, distributing and
> exhibiting works in film, television and digital media.

Implicit in this mission statement is that there are many stories and media representations

that do not fully "convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences."  Indeed,

CAAM's original mission was to "counteract negative images and stereotypes of Asian

Americans."[256]  Absent from CAAM's mission is a statement that takes on publicly explicit

activist endeavors, like protests, or publicly criticizing the mainstream establishment. Rather,

CAAM's mission implicitly argues that Asian American media representation issues are best

addressed by working with and producing film and media that counteract what is out there now,

and by working with institutions like PBS and filmmakers directly, the widest audience can be

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[253] CAAM also has a media literacy program and a media library from which educational institutions can purchase and rent their films.  They also provide grants to filmmakers to help fund Asian American specific media projects.

[254] "History" CAAM, accessed June 29, 2011. http://caamedia.org/festival/history-timeline/

[255] "About CAAM,"  CAAM,accessed March 4, 2011. http://caamedia.org/about-caam/.

[256] Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*, 161.

served and the best filmmakers can be cultivated. Gong reiterates that "a significant portion of our movement is not about trying to call out or put energy into trying to stop a stereotype, what may be construed as stereotyped commercial programs. It's to construct an alternative, more authentic, more nuanced, or more complex, more truthful depiction of the experiences of Asians in America."[257] CAAM's separate departments include the Educational Distribution department which focuses on providing a catalog and distributing films to libraries and schools, and the Media Fund, which provides funding and support to start or complete a film (see figure 1.1). Finally, CAAM sponsors the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival (SFIAAFF). Thus, the organization can be seen as one that helps in the production of alternative Asian American media representations to mainstream media representations. He continues, "there are so many bad commercial works and it's just better to let it go."[258] Thus, CAAM's organizational rhetoric situates CAAM as one that counteracts negative stereotypes by promoting and presenting complex representations and stories of Asian American experiences by working with PBS to air stories to the mainstream public.

CAAM's overall mission in the present is to "fund, produce, distribute, and exhibit media that convey the diversity of the Asian American experience to the largest possible audience."[259] CAAM is able to do such work through its multiple departments, which each serve a different organizational function in their overall mission. For example, CAAM has an educational distribution department, from which schools and libraries often purchase films and documentaries for their collection, and a Media Fund Department, which offers awards and funds to help start and/or complete films and works-in-progress.[260] Importantly, CAAM

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[257] Stephen Gong interview , 6 October 2010.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ono and Pham. *Asian Americans and the Media*, 163.
[260] Ibid, 163-164.

sponsors the largest Asian American film festival in the nation, the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival (SFIAAFF), which spans San Francisco, Berkeley, and San Jose over a period of two weeks in March.  Thus, CAAM's role is to promote Asian American independent media in smaller spaces, such as in film festivals and schools, but also to connect with and work with PBS and its sphere of influence.  By working with PBS, CAAM is able to exhibit Asian American independent media to a large public audience.  However, Okada argues that CAAM's position as an intermediary for Asian American independent film documentaries and PBS particularly constrains the types of Asian American issues that are shown to the mainstream public; whereas, CAAM's film festival serves as the counterpublic space to PBS that allows for marginalized Asian American issues and experimental film, providing a space for response and dialogue.[261]  As I have argued with Ono, I agree with Okada's critique of CAAM's relationship but also ask us to conceive of a larger televisual public sphere, where PBS is also marginalized within mainstream media and that the relationship between CAAM and PBS is indeed "complex and nuanced," one that "introduces a change and a different representation" of Asian Americans, while simultaneously constraining it within the institutional relationship between the two organizations.[262]  Nonetheless, CAAM has been influential in providing money for Asian American documentaries to be produced, such as *A.K.A. Don Bonus*.  However, CAAM is also beginning to assist in the production of Asian American fictional narratives, not just the standard documentary fare of independent media, such as the San Francisco-based musical, *Fruit Fly*, by San Francisco local director and Filipino American H.P. Mendoza.  In addition, their relationship with PBS has allowed for multiple documentaries to be shown, historically through their longstanding series *P.O.V.*, which originally featured Asian American

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[261] Jun Okada. The PBS and NAATA Connection:  Comparing the Public Spheres of Asian American Film and Video. *The Velvet Light Trap* 55 (2005):39-51; Ono and Pham, 164.

[262] Ono and Pham, 165.

seminal works such as *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* However, more recently in the 2009, PBS and

CAAM's alliance provided the opportunity for the 2009 documentary winner of SFIAAFF,

*Mosque in Morgantown*, to be shown on PBS's *America at the Crossroads* documentary series.

Thus, one might consider CAAM as the premier Asian American media arts center today,

building both institutional and community support within the United States and Bay Area of

California and extending its influence in both localized film festivals and large-scale public

broadcasting.

**Binding Ties – CAAM's SFIAAFF as a Rhetoric**

I first contacted Chi-Hui Yang, the film festival director of SFIAAFF, on October 17,

2008. Over a series of email exchanges, we arranged to meet in person on November 26, 2008,

the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving. It was a bleary day in San Francisco, overcast and with

drizzling rain. I entered the Ninth Street Independent Film Center, a grey multi-level building

CAAM shares with a variety of other independent media organizations.[263] After passing through

a glass security door, I arrived in the main offices of CAAM. I waited in the reception area of

the office, sitting in a corner seat with a couch and chair to the left and right of me and a coffee

table in the center. I focused on the movie posters of *Better Luck Tomorrow* and other Asian

American independent films that lined the walls before CAAM's executive director Stephen

Gong arrived to greet me at the reception area. He seemed excited to meet me and welcomed me

warmly. After that, Donald Young, the director of programs and the person in charge of

CAAM's relationship with the Public Broadcasting Service and the Corporation for Public

Broadcasting, and Chi-Hui Yang, the film festival director arrived. My email contact up to this

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[263] CAAM's main office is located within the Ninth Street Independent Center near the San Francisco Civic Center in downtown San Francisco. The other independent media centers that also inhabit this center are Frameline, the SF Jewish Film Festival, National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, SF Cinetheque, Canyon Cinema, and the Global Film Initiative.

point was with Yang primarily, as he provided access to the SFIAAFF.  Yang, a Chinese American man in his early 30s, who I found later to be charismatic and articulate as well as popular with the general film festival attending audience, was relatively reserved, as was Young, during our first meeting.  On the other hand, Gong was both excited and interested that I was including CAAM in my dissertation.  I sat in a corner seat, with Yang to the left, Young to the right, and Gong across from me on the other side of the coffee table.  As I introduced my project and said I was interested in CAAM's rhetoric, Chi-Hui suggested that I should come out during the film festival.  After the short impromptu meeting which my visit prompted, Gong led me on a short tour of CAAM's main offices, while CAAM was in the midst of a move. As he led me through the narrow hallways with barely enough room for two people to squeeze by each other at the same time, I noticed the walls were lined with framed movie posters of famous movies, which I recall being seen at film festivals, as well as on DVD, such as Justin Lin's film, *Better Luck Tomorrow*, and former SFIAAFF co-director Paul Mayeda Berges co-written film, *Bend It Like Beckham*, in addition to former SFIAAFF posters. The reception area where we met led into to a small hallway with a spacious room in the right corner, housing the development department where Shelly Kim – the member services and donations manager – and student interns and workers reside.  The narrow hallway had smaller private offices branching from the corridor where Stephen Gong, Donald Young, and Chi-Hui Yang each had their own offices.  Despite the small space of the office and the relatively lean staff, the offices were seemingly divided by department.  And although the majority of my fieldwork at CAAM did not focus upon activity in its central office, understanding the relationship between CAAM, its organizational space, and its relationship to the festival is an important starting point for understanding CAAM's organizational rhetoric.  And since it was the event at which Yang openly extended an invitation

to, as well as provided a guest industry accreditation, SFIAAFF and its rhetorical and organizational connection to CAAM is the focus of this chapter.

Jun Okada's dissertation "History and Memory: Asian American Film and Video in Its Institutional Context" looks specifically at the institutional, organizational, and cultural ties among Asian American film, video, and media and the deployment of "Asian American" as a term for orienting media.[264] Okada focuses on Asian American media organizations, mainly the Visual Communications and National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA which is now known as CAAM), as the starting points or epicenter for Asian American media, to argue that Asian American film and video is:

> a genre based on the greatly varying perceptions of what is meant by the descriptor "Asian American" as well as on the complex histories of media producers, activists, organizations, and most importantly, on the rise of the institutions as a benchmark for the history of minority self-representation in the moving image.[265]

In other words, Okada is interested in the material and institutional foundations for the cultural production of "Asian American film and media" and recognizes the political and cultural associations that the term "Asian American" provides when studying the construction of media artifacts.

Konrad Ng comments that the Center for Asian American Media, Visual Communications, and Asian Cinevision "have been the premiere curators, advocates and provocateurs of the Asian America experience for decades" and have "provided unique opportunities for critique, expression, promotion, and coalition building on behalf of Asian

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[264] Jun Okada. "History and Memory: Asian American Film and Video in Its Institutional Context."
[265] Ibid, 5.

America."[266] Indeed, Ng identifies these media organizations as important cultural gatekeepers of Asian American cultural products and projects and exists in what James English describes as the "middle-zone" of cultural production, the space where gatekeepers, proponents, and administrators of culture work reside.[267] However, Okada takes a more critical stance, problematizing NAATA's relationship with PBS, recognizing that, although the relationship between NAATA and the PBS provides a fruitful avenue for Asian American film and video distribution and exhibition onto national public television, it can also constrain and restrict the viewing of Asian American media through the bureaucracy inherent to the CAAM-PBS partnership, leaving a least some Asian American films in distribution limbo. Okada argues that the relationship between PBS and NAATA has led to bifurcation of Asian American documentary into historical drama and social-political documentaries.[268] However, she also argues that CAAM's film festival, SFIAAFF, serves as a counterpublic space to PBS's public sphere and allows a setting for marginalized voices and film styles to exist in comparison to public television Asian American documentary broadcasts.[269] She suggests that "SFIAAFF is an example of how institutions have tried to instill a genuine minority media culture that appeals to a greater part of its varied constituency of audience activists, and independent film makers."[270] Thus, Okada's study draws attention to the ambivalent relationship CAAM has with PBS, while situating its film festival, SFIAAFF, as an alternative space for minority media culture. And, although Okada recognizes the valuable work that SFIAAFF does for NAATA/CAAM, her

[266] Konrad Ng. Thoughts from Oslo, Norway: Film Festivals and Expanding the Moral Imagination. *Flow* vo.11 no.4 (2009):http://flowtv.org/2009/12/thoughts-from-oslo-norway-film-festivals-and-expanding-the-moral-imaginationkonrad-ng-university-of-hawaii-manoa/.

[267] James F. English. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005: 12.

[268] Jun Okada. "The PBS and NAATA Connection: Comparing the Public Spheres of Asian American Film and Video":45.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid, 40.

study does not pay particularly attention to *how* SFIAAFF serves this function, besides its airing of experimental, abstract, and outside-the-binary documentaries she illustrates in her study. Thus, I seek to illustrate the relationship CAAM has with its film festival before shifting my attention the SFIAAFF more thoroughly.

While CAAM's arguably most important and influential work comes with its relationship with CPB and PBS and its educational distribution, the film festival is its most public, community-oriented, and large scale organized event. First, according to Chi-Hui Yang, the festival is where CAAM showcases the titles acquired for educational distribution along with other new media works; in essence, it showcases "all the work the organization has done." Thus, the film festival is more than just an opportunity to exhibit films; it is part of the organizational rhetoric put forth by CAAM, weaving CAAM's media work into a larger context to help make Asian American film and cinema to make sense to those unaffiliated with CAAM. Second, SFIAAFF is part of, if not the, public face of the organization, becoming an incredibly popular festival and critical to the cultural fabric of San Francisco.[271] In fact, SFIAAFF may be more famous than CAAM itself, at least in San Francisco. For example, Michella Rivera-Gravage, the director of digital media for CAAM, mentioned that focus groups and surveys conducted by CAAM during the 2009 festival found that people "knew who the festival was but didn't know who CAAM was."[272] Gong mentioned that CAAM is "now being seen as leaders, innovators, in the broader public media space that used to be anchored by the public television." And while he commended me by the fact that I watched *P.O.V. and Independent Lens*, he stated that it was "a bit unusual" and that "most 20 year olds aren't watching that (public television)," thus

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[271] Michael Guillen. "Diaspora by the Bay: SFIAAFF - Interview with the festival director Chi-Hui Yang." *Twitch*, modified October 2 2009, accessed November 8 2010, http://twitchfilm.com/interviews/2009/10/diaspora-by-the-bay-sfiaaf--interview-with-festival-director-chi-hui-yang.php.
[272] Michella Rivera-Gravage (director of digital and interactive media for CAAM). Phone Interview by Vincent N. Pham. April 23, 2010.

downplaying CAAM's brand recognition outside the industry of PBS and its associated non-profit media makers.[273]  Finally, since SFIAAFF is such a large event, it has its own department during the festival season, which runs from the November prior to the film festival to roughly a month after the closing.  Organizing a film festival requires work and foresight; securing space, rights to films if needed, bringing in filmmakers and others on the production and distribution side, raising money, marketing, employing temporary staff, mobilizing and organizing volunteers, dealing with sponsors, organizing outside events, addressing complimentary programs, handling guest filmmakers and industry people, and other miscellaneous and minute details.  Indeed, the SFIAAFF costs money, and CAAM's organizational status, its funding by CPB, and large donor and notable corporate sponsorship base, which include Toyota and Comcast, allows SFIAAFF to flourish.

SFIAAFF's function as a public relation event, a popular cultural activity, and organizational showcase involves volunteers and paid staff; thus, the organization and its festival is situated as an ideal place for the studying intersection of rhetoric and the organization.  To look at SFIAAFF also requires one to recognize that they are also inherently rhetorical.  A film festival is a collection of films, often presented within a theater or a set of theaters orientated around a theme or premise. In planning a film festival, Svenson states that there are three phases: pre-production, production, and the festival.  In the pre-production phase, Svenson suggests "you research, gather, dream, write and edit your narrative structure for the event."[274]  Thus, the organizers of a film festival recognize that the film festival and the films selected communicate a narrative to the audience and thus choose the films, corporate sponsors, and affiliates with this in

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[273] In my own explanations of this dissertation project to non-academics, most people are unfamiliar with CAAM even though they watch PBS; however they are familiar with the works that CAAM does release and the documentaries that appear due to CAAM's relationship to the film.

[274] Michelle Svenson, "How to Start Your Own Film Festival," http://www.koreanfilm.org/startfest.html (accessed December 10, 2007).

mind.[275]  SFIAAFF does not stray from this; it creates a narrative of Asian American media,

CAAM's relationship to it, and media's relationship to the Asian American and non-Asian

American audience. SFIAAFF is employed as part of CAAM's rhetoric about Asian American

media and also serves as a performative place where CAAM's rhetoric is embodied and

reproduced.

Thus, SFIAAFF is not just a rhetorical artifact but it is also, like many other film

festivals, serves as a site of rhetorical production, cultural production, and identity construction.

Recently, cinema studies have paid attention the growing phenomenon of film festivals as an

important area of study.[276]  B. Ruby Rich coined the term "New Queer Cinema" which identified

the arrival of gay and lesbian films and their film festivals into popular culture in the early

1990s.[277]  Gamson explores how these early and mid 1990s lesbian and gay film festivals in

New York as spaces of the organizational mediation of collective identity.[278]  Czach argues that

film festival programming, such as *Perspective Canada* series at the Toronto International Film

Festival attempts to build a "national cinema" by constructing what Benedict Anderson calls an

"imagined community."[279]  Konrad Ng's recent research highlights the film festival as "a

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[275] Michael Jones, "Rising film festival stress - Entertainment News, Film News, Media - Variety," December 7, 2007, http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117977355.html?categoryid=13&cs=1&query=film+festival (accessed December 15, 2007).  Michael Jones, from *Variety* magazine, writes about the increasing competitions over sponsors and funding for film festivals and states that the increasing number of film festivals are beginning to make it difficult for film festivals to survive.

[276] Dina Iordanova and Ruby Cheung, eds. *Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities*. St. Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2010; Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne, eds. *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*. St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies (with College Gate Press), 2009; Konrad Ng. Thoughts from Oslo, Norway: Film Festivals and Expanding the Moral Imagination. *Flow* vo.11 no.4 (2009):http://flowtv.org/2009/12/thoughts-from-oslo-norway-film-festivals-and-expanding-the-moral-imaginationkonrad-ng-university-of-hawaii-manoa/.

[277] Ragan Rhyne. The Global Economy of Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12 (4), 2006: 617-619; B. Ruby Rich. The New Homosexual Film Festivals. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12 (4), 2006:  620-625.

[278] Joshua Gamson. "The Organizational Shaping of Collective Identity: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in New York." *Sociological Forum* 11, no. 2 (1996): 231-61.

[279] Liz Czach. "Film Festivals, Programming, and the Building of a National Cinema." *The Moving Image* (2004): 76-88.

tradition that has defined the industry of cinema, yet remains an understudied form of cultural and political engagement,"[280] and suggests that "the film festival can trace moral waypoints through the constellation of films selected for screening and acts as a useful exercise in community organizing and activism." He cites Asian American film festivals as an example, stating that "curatorial activity, watchful commentary, and community organizing of Asian American film festivals embody political and cultural engagement" and assist in the "moral engagement" of multiple and alternative perspectives. Although Ng is optimistic about the cultural and political possibilities of the film festival within the democratic and civil project of the United States, he implicitly locates such possibilities within the Asian American community that is partly represented by Asian American media organizations. Okada situates SFIAAFF as a counterpublic space, where marginal voices via experimental, abstract, and/or queer films would still be screened to an audience of viewers even though it would not be shown on PBS. Thus, film festivals are not just sites for movie consumption; they also serve key rhetorical functions for organizations, construct and constitute a notion of identity for communities, and attempt to build "imagined" communities where they may not have existed before through discourse of the organization, its members, and the movies it ultimately shows, as well as how those movies are framed.

Indeed, SFIAAFF largely serves a rhetorical function of CAAM, of putting forth an image of CAAM as well as persuading the audience to support the work of CAAM. However, SFIAAFF's rhetorical function is more than serving the instrumental goals of CAAM, although

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[280] This lack of scholarship could be because of disciplinary biases, particularly since film festivals are often read through cinema studies as opposed to an ethnic studies or Asian American studies perspective. Ng's previous research from his dissertation "explored diasporic formations of Chinese cultural identity in narrative and experimental film and video" **http://www.hawaii.edu/acm/faculty/ng.shtml.** So while Ng's research was interested in the representations of cultural identity in film, his more recent research situates the Asian American film festival film festival as a mode of political engagement.

that is a large part of it; SFIAAFF also serves a constitutive function. I draw upon Charland's

theory of constitutive rhetoric to analyze the SFIAAFF's rhetorical appeal. Charland uses a

narrative account of the *peuple Québécois* as an example of constitutive rhetoric "for it calls its

audience into being."[281] Charland states:

> The ideological "trick" of such a rhetoric is that it presents that which is most rhetorical,
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> the existence of a people, or of a subject, as extrarhetorical. These members of the
>
> people whose supposed essence demands action do not exist in nature, but only within a
>
> discursively constituted history. Thus, this rhetoric paradoxically must constitute the
>
> identity "*Québécois"* as it simultaneously presumes it to be pregiven and natural, existing
>
> outside of rhetoric and forming the basis for a rhetorical address."[282]

Thus, constitutive rhetoric presumes an identity while simultaneously constructing an identity or

supplementing one through rhetoric.[283] Charland specifically focuses on the text and public

address, using the example of a "white paper" as means of constituting a community identity.

James Jasinski argues that textual interiors and exteriors of text exhibit constitutive force

"intentionally" and "extensionally" – intentionally through "various discursive forms" and

extensionally through "the cultural circulation and discursive articulation of its textual forms in

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[281] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 134.

[282] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 137.

[283] Bonnie J. Dow. "AIDS, Perspective by Incongruity, and Gay Identity in Larry Kramer's "1,1112 and Counting"." *Communication Studies* 45, no. 3 & 4 (1994): 225-240; Robert Terrill. "Colonizing the Borderlands: Shifting Circumference in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86 (2000): 67-85. Dow, in her extension of Charland's constitutive rhetoric, argues that a Burkean "perspective by incongruity" reconfigures a community's understanding of a situation and thus reconstituting the community's identity in relation to the new understanding. Thus, "perspective by incongruity" works as a constitutive rhetoric by de-constructing and re-constructing the gay identity in relation to the ongoing AIDS epidemic. Thus, as Dow has stated, "rhetoric can work to create its constituency rather than simply appealing to pre-existing, 'transcendent subjects" (239-240). However, Terrill, in his analysis of Malcolm X's constitutive rhetoric, problematizes Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric by suggesting that constitutive rhetorics from marginalized citizens and groups of people may differ from the majority *Québécois* that Charland describes.

ways that enable and constrain subsequent practice."[284]  Jasinski and Mercieca summarize the

constitutive approach to rhetoric as guided by "(1) analyses of textual interiors (particularly

narrative structures) which warrant interpretive claims regarding presumed discursive effect that

(2) emphasize identity constitution."[285]  Charland, Jasinski, and Jasinski and Mercieca's attention

to the constitutive function of rhetoric are situated within a study of the textual artifact. However,

if we think about Jasinski's "textual exterior" literally as "outside the text," (instead of

extensional or beyond the text), then we can consider space and place as part of the constitutive

rhetorical process. That is, what else outside the text influences the constitutive power of rhetoric

at the *moment* of rhetorical production, such as place of reception, the community where it is

situated, and the smells, sights/sites, and affective presence of very place where the people are

called into being and are addressed.

This constitutive function does not occur through discourse alone, however. Phaedra

Pezzullo's study of toxic tours emphasizes the importance of "presence" as banal places of

everyday life are transformed into spaces of environmental activism.[286]  Anthropology of media

has long recognized the materiality of the media.  Brian Larkin recognizes the materiality

inherent in cinema theatres, arguing that cinema theaters in post-colonial Nigeria have "created

new modes of sociability that challenged existing relations of space, gender, and social

hierarchy."[287] Larkin states that while Hollywood, Bollywood, and other national cinemas strive

for a homogenous viewing experience through the erasure and a disconnect of textual, and in my

case oral, address, the on-the-ground cinema experience is "profoundly local" and an "emotional

[284] James Jasinski. "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of 'Constitution' in *The Federalist Papers*,". In *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, edited by K. J. Turner. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998: 74.

[285] James Jasinski and Jennifer R. Mercieca. "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics: The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and the "Principles of 98". In *The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address*, edited by S. J. Parry-Giles and J. M. Hogan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010: 317.

[286] Phaedra C. Pezzullo. *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*.

[287]Brian Larkin. "The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria": 319-320

experience based on the environment regulated by specific relations of lighting, vision, movement, and sociality."[288] Thus, Pezzullo and Larkin recognize the importance of presence, the impact of place, and the emotional experiences resulting from such interactions of presence, place, and public address.

For CAAM and SFIAAFF, part of the constitutive rhetorical process and its reconstitution of Asian American (media) community occur through the festivities connected with the SFIAAFF and the transformation of the place of the cinema into a space of Asian American media consumption.  Here, I draw upon de Certeau's definitions of *place* and *space.* De Certeau distinguishes "place (*lieu*)" and "space," defining "place" by the characteristic that "the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines."[289] That is, "place" is an ordered and often formal phenomenon with specific and understood roles which lend itself an "indication of stability," according to de Certeau.[290]  However, "space" differs from "place" in that space is "a practiced place … space produced by a practice of a particular place" and is unhindered by a notion of stability or a "proper" designation of programs or proximities.[291]  Thus, "place" is often configured into "space" by the people engaged with the place or within the place in ways that the "place" and its roles did not intend or expect. De Certeau argues that objects that can be reduced to "*being-there*" characterizes a "place"; whereas, the *"operations"* of objects and its actions to specify a notion of "space."[292]  Thus, "places" can become "spaces" through operations that are articulated with objects, ideas, people, etc.  CAAM's constitutive rhetoric simultaneously

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[288] Ibid, 321
[289] Michel de Certeau. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press: 117.
[290] Ibid, 117.
[291] Ibid, 117.
[292] Ibid, 118.

redefines the place of the movie theatre into a space for Asian American media consumption, while reconstituting the very contours and boundaries of what it means to be Asian American.

In the upcoming sections, I explore the simultaneous reconfigurement of place into space, of rhetoric about Asian American community and the media which represents and re-presents it to itself and an outside audience, and the organization which is at the center of this process with its event, SFIAAFF. I focus my attention on two separate aspects of SFIAAFF: first its programmatic aspect, one which focuses on the industry of Asian American film festivals, and the other which focuses on the enthusiastic students who work at the festival as representatives of CAAM as well as its mentees; second, its discourses surrounding its film screenings in the very space of the film festival and the place of the cinema and its captive audiences.

**The Film Festival Programmers' Meeting and the Student Delegate**

*"CAAM should be the destination point for anyone interested in the creation of Asian American media to utilize our resources, contacts, knowledge, and technology. We also wanted to provide a community where filmmakers, writers, producers, artists, donors, and business professionals can gather to exchange ideas, solve problems, and help each other with their projects and careers." - Board Chair's note - Michael Hsieh – 2007 Annual Report[293]*

As I entered the SFIAAFF's Guest Service Lounge on the second floor of the Hotel Tomo, volunteers greeted me and other guests, while sitting behind a long desk, lined with programs and envelopes stuffed with complimentary tickets for the guests. I was asked "is this your first time at the festival?" by Japanese/Chinese American Jadene Wong, a fifth year returning volunteer.[294] She cordially explained the benefits of the guest accreditation pass, while

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[293] Michael Hsieh. Board Chair's note. In *2007 Annual Report*. San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2007: 4.
[294] Jadene Wong (SFIAAFF volunteer). Interview by Vincent N. Pham. San Francisco, CA. March 14, 2009.

handing me a folder and bag full of samples and coupons from festival sponsors. Along the wall near the entrance door were tables topped with complimentary tea, coffee brewing in the percolator, and bagels laid out for easy access. Movie posters from the festival adorned the walls, as a spring California sunshine brightened the room. Large nylon fabric bean bags sat near the couches near the couches, opposite the check-in table and away from the bustle of people coming in and out, checking in, grabbing refreshments, or just stopping by to say "hello." The Guest Service Lounge became the rendezvous point for guest and industry folk and the unspoken place to run into old friends and colleagues, accessible by those who are accredited by CAAM, either invited or requested and granted.

Guest and industry accreditations are often given to filmmakers, journalists, and accredited media industry organizations. The majority of media organizations were other film festival organizers across the country, such as the DC APA Film Festival, Visual Communications from Los Angeles, and FAAIM from Chicago, as well as from Canadian locations such as the Vancouver Asian Film Festival and Toronto's Reel Asian film festival. The guest and industry accreditation also imparts special perks onto its recipients. It provided me with complimentary passes to three films a day (depending on complimentary ticket availability), free access to the SFIAAFF after-the-film-screening social events, access to the Opening Night pre-Reception and Gala, the Sunday filmmakers gathering, and access to the Guest Services Lounge.

While SFIAAFF is first and foremost a film festival, there are many other activities and events that coincide with SFIAAFF and are held in conjunction with SFIAAFF. These consist of panels geared toward industry concerns, such as "From Sucker Free City to Watchmen: An Afternoon with Screenwriter Alex Tse," or more behind the scenes events, like an "Ang Lee in

Conversation with Linda Williams." These events were free, open to the public, and brought Asian American media makers into the forefront, highlighting their racial and ethnic heritage for the audience, and serving the general public and the organizers of Asian American media.

Despite the presence of these industry-focused panels and events, there was another event that was privy to a select group of people: the Film Festival Programmers' Meeting (hereafter known as the Programmers' Meeting). This meeting, held on Friday afternoon of opening weekend, was a gathering of representatives of Asian American/Asian Pacific American-themed film festivals throughout the nation. Since SFIAAFF was the first Asian American film festival of the year, it also served as a grounds where other festivals would watch films prior to decide which ones to present at their own respective festivals.[295] More importantly, however, the festival programmers meeting also served as a community within the larger Asian American media movement, where people discussed their trials and tribulations of planning. Initialized by Chi-Hui Yang, the programmers' meeting was not in my folder of official events and was generally privy only to the film festival planners. However, I was invited by Tim Hugh, the executive director of FAAIM, and later on by Chi-Hui Yang, who was open to and pleased with my interest in attending the Programmers' Meeting. I attended both the 2009 and 2010 programmers' meetings and touch upon both meetings. First, I discuss the 2009 meeting before focusing on the 2010 meeting, both held in the lower level conference rooms of Hotel Kabuki. I address the 2009 meeting first, since another CAAM representative, Michella Rivera-Gravage, was present.[296] The 2010 meeting provides an opportunity to observe the very "state of the film festival" from the perspective of the organizers and how they see the film festival as a rhetorical tool in a larger battle over media representations.

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[295] Before the era of inexpensive reproduction of screening materials, it also became a space where the film reels would be passed on from festival to festival instead of being shipped.

[296] The 2010 Programmers' Meeting did not have another CAAM representative beyond Chi-Hui Yang.

**"Hard Economic Times" and 2009**

Chi-Hui Yang started out the meeting by providing a preview of the meeting along with a short agenda. We were all seated around the tables, which were arranged in a large square, lending a spacious yet simultaneously disconnected feel from the other organizations. Since all the members sat on the outside of the table separated by large empty space in the center of room, occasional shouting was needed in order to be heard from across the room.[297] Although not an official part of CAAM's events for SFIAAFF, the Programmers' Meeting was an annual gathering which placed SFIAAFF and CAAM at the center and the organizers of other film festivals around them. CAAM's involvement, its informal organization of this meeting, and the participants of this meeting who are enthusiasts, purveyors, and organizers of Asian American media in their local and regional areas inadvertently provides CAAM with a connection to and information about the specific and localized concerns of Asian American media production and exhibition across the nation, especially with the theme of the 2009 Programmers' Meeting which was "Hard Economic Times." With the 2009 economic recession, the goal was to share tips and stories of how each film festival was dealing and adapting to the recession and subsequent loss of income and sponsorships – in essence, the Programmers' Meeting generated collective knowledge and cultivated a support system for like-minded people involved with planning the circuit of Asian American film festivals.

After Yang introduced himself and the agenda, the people around the table introduced themselves, their position, and the film festival they represented. There were 13 festivals represented overall from throughout the United States; some emphasized programmatic aspects of showing "only narratives" or highlighting screening days, such as "15 days of a festival" for

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[297]The room setup differed for the 2010 meeting, consisting of smaller round tables that sat about 8-10 per table.

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the San Diego Asian Film Festival, which elicited a reaction of "that's scary" from Chi-Hui Yang. Yang described CAAM's status with SFIAAFF, stating that SFIAAFF is about 20% smaller this year with a larger amount of documentaries being screened, before leading into the questions of "what to cut back" and what have people done to cope with the economic recession. The answers ranged from simply decreasing overhead costs by cutting venues, programming, screening days, and printing or increasing revenue by having submission costs, linking sponsors to their websites, getting grants specifically related to their educational programs.

The funding issue led into issues of collaboration, particularly the relationship between the festivals and the local Universities. One film festival attempted to partner with local university students but that just "inspired them (students) to do their own thing" and thus become a detriment to the festival that is meant to do more than just serve the university community. Indeed, the challenge of working with the university was that it would take away consumers from the market, which the festivals depend upon for attendance: namely college student audiences. However, another film festival was always wary of being titled "a university thing" if they partnered with a university, especially since there were multiple universities near this film festival. Thus, being stigmatized as a "university thing" would, in their eyes, take away from the festival's commitment to the larger community beyond the university. Interestingly, this film festival also saw it as their duty to socialize students in ways to remind them that they are not only students but also members of multiple communities. Their take away point was that their duty was to create, develop, and nurture an audience outside of school by cross programming with other institutions and providing university audience slots and programming to insert themselves into the film festival, without co-opting the film festival.

Although one festival representative expressed this sentiment about reconstituting a community, like the student community, into a larger community sphere, the sentiment is shared among other media organizations. Indeed, the history of Asian American media organizations, like CAAM, grew from an organization like Visual Communications, whose primary goal was not to hold film festivals but rather to provide a space where Asian Americans could engage in making films and learning about media literacy.[298] Noticeably absent from the Programmers' Meeting, however, are organizations from the production side of media, most likely since the Programmers' Meeting is directed toward organizations which deal with the traditional mode of film exhibition through film festivals.[299] Visual Communications was represented at the Programmers' Meeting but primarily in terms of its film festival. Other representatives also have short film projects on the side, such as Masashi Niwano from the Austin Asian American Film Festival. Thus, the production and film maker side was not necessarily absent from the conversation but bracketed and set aside in order to have discussions regarding the film festival exhibition.[300]

Nonetheless, the Programmers' Meeting concluded with a presentation by Michella Rivera-Gravage, the director of digital and interactive media. In line with the theme of "Hard Economic Times," Rivera-Gravage shared CAAM's experience with being awarded with a grant from the Wallace Foundation. This award was used by CAAM to target underrepresented communities at SFIAAFF, specifically the mixed race, Filipino American, and South Asian

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[298] These organizations include community groups, such as the Vietnamese Youth Development Lab run by Spencer Nakasako and the Frank A. Watase Media Arts Center at the Japanese American National Museum, and renown graduate film studies programs, such as the UCLA Center for Ethnocommunications and the UCSC Social Documentation program.

[299] However, they are not absent from the exhibition side of SFIAAFF. Many films came from the UCSC Ethnocommunications program and Spencer Nakasako was present running the panel with Alex Tse, the screenwriter for the Hollywood film, *The Watchmen*.

[300] Indeed, this might be seen as a public sphere in Habermasian terms where parts of identities are set aside in order to engage in rational discussion.

populations, over the next three years. She continued speaking specifically about CAAM's experience working on the project for this year that focused on the mixed race population. This project, titled Hapas.us, was a collaborative one between CAAM and well-known mixed race film maker Kip Fulbeck. The website Hapas.us was meant to emphasize media sharing while providing a space to talk about the mixed race experience within a social media network, combining features from YouTube, Facebook, and MySpace, with the intention of encouraging participants to produce new work by providing them the tools to share it in a safe space organized and "powered by CAAM."[301] Rivera-Gravage continued by stressing that this social media-oriented project requires getting people involved immediately, where a community liaison is needed. She recalled that the traditional way of using electronic media was to do an "e-blast," notifying email subscribers, twitter followers, and Facebook "friends" of an event, but noted that this approach sacrifices the interactivity of social media. Rivera-Gravage affirmed that the goal is more about "cross pollination," bolstering both the SFIAAFF and CAAM. Representatives from the San Diego Asian Film Festival (SDAFF) proffered their experience of tweeting promotional coupons for the SDAFF which allows them to brand simultaneously the SDAFF as a social media oriented organization as well as maintain their identity as a brick-and-mortar film festival. Rivera-Gravage concluded with a warning regarding what to know about social networking – "it's time-consuming to do and there's little in the way of measuring return."

It is important to note CAAM's role as an organization which seeks to articulate itself to SFIAAFF and outside organizations. Rivera-Gravage's presence and Yang's duty in organizing a meeting of film festival organizers serve as organizational representatives within the space of the SFIAAFF and the Film Festival Programmers' Meeting. Although SFIAAFF is at its core a

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[301] The tagline below "Hapas.us multi-racial/multimedia" is "powered by Center for Asian American Media."

film festival, it is also an event that is organizationally articulated with CAAM and serves much like a convention of Asian American media organizers and makers as well as an exhibition space. The Programmers' Meeting is directed toward those who organize for the film festival, providing a service to both the media makers and the community who are interested in meeting the media makers and viewing their work. Organizing events are not without its difficulties and challenges and not many people know the work that goes into organizing such events. Thus, the Programmers' Meeting becomes a space where old friends rendezvous and where new festival organizers can meet and speak face to face with the old guard of film festivals with whom they might have only had occasional email contact.

Nonetheless, the Programmers' Meeting is not a neutral space but one organized by and thus connected to CAAM. The Programmers' Meeting becomes another space within the SFIAAFF where CAAM reasserts its organizational prominence and leadership.[302] The Programmers' Meeting is only one of the many events geared toward media makers, but it is one of the few closed events, not intended for the general public or other interested parties. It is a space for Asian American media organizers simultaneously to vent their frustrations, such as the cost of procuring space or difficulty of gaining sponsors, and to share their enthusiasm for their efforts. For example, Peter Leung from Vancouver Asian Film Festival noted that the presence of the 2010 Winter Olympics made it difficult for the festival to gain sponsors and find hotel space, since all of the city's attention was dedicated to the Winter Olympics. Importantly, CAAM and SFIAAFF did not impinge upon other organizations' autonomy when it came to programming and activities but rather shared their experiences dealing with such problems. In one instance, during the 2010 Programmers' Meeting, members of the Programmers' Meeting provided their

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[302] Indeed, many of the other organizations often operate on volunteer labor. Many of these other organization do not have such large scale funding, sponsorship, or grant funding so CAAM is in the minority since it has a small group of paid staff and somewhat stable funding from the CPB.

experiences and difficulties organizing volunteers for their respective film festivals, even with one film festival recalling how they had to tell two volunteers that "their services were no longer needed." Another film festival mentioned that the majority of their volunteers came from English-as-a-second-language programs. On the other hand, SFIAAFF's large volunteer base predicates the use of database software called Shiftboard, in which Yang praised its helpfulness. The 2010 Programmers' Meeting built upon the discussions of social media, particularly with the large time commitment needed to maintain those avenues of promotion and keep the attention of often fickle internet audiences.

**"The State of the Film Festival"**

The Programmers' Meeting becomes a stage where these media arts organizations simultaneously discuss "the state of film festivals" as well reuniting to remind themselves of their organizations and film festivals end goals. Ultimately, they show good work by and about Asian Americans despite their differences in how they view the borders of Asian Americanness and what constitutes good or bad work. During the 2010 Programmers' Meeting, there was a discussion about the difficulty of filling screening spots. One representative from a film festival asked, "Are our communities making a lot of films? Are they actually good?" and suggested having the difficult conversations with filmmakers about the strengths and weaknesses of a film. Tim Hugh from FAAIM recalled his programming experience, reiterating that "The quality of work has to be there, we can't just show anything" when one community group attempted to pressure him to show a film. Yang reiterated the dangers of tokenism when the expertise in curating a program may not be present yet and the relationships with that community are not developed. He cited the example of SFIAAFF's collaborative relationship with the 3rd I South Asian Film Festival, stating that SFIAAFF developed that relationship because they would not

attempt to do South Asian programming in their current capacity (such as having a dedicated program) if they did not feel that they had the "support of the community and the curatorial integrity to pull it off." The "state of the film festivals" theme was reiterated by the final item on the 2010 agenda, which was "what is the role of the Asian American film festival? Specifically media arts organizations? How can we work more with broadly based organizations, like Sundance?" Although this item was last on the agenda and nearly passed over at the closing of the Programmers' Meeting, I raised this question, while adding "Does Sundance even want to work with us or not?" Abraham Ferrer, from Visual Communications, took the helm, by saying "I hope I'm not speaking out of line on behalf of Chi-hui" before historically situating Visual Communications, Asian Cinevision, and CAAM as organizations that were not founded for the sole purpose of putting on a film festival but rather to address the major absence of Asian Americans in the mainstream, emphasizing that "Even though it's probably the most conspicuous event that we do, it represents a drop in a bucket in the three ring circus that we do all do in terms of cultural recovery and intercultural understanding whether it's through a distribution service or through our past background of actually producing work." Ferrer made it clear that not all organizations operate under nor came from this model of distribution and production but that the film festival circuit grew out of these core organizations. He continued, saying that now film festival organizers and media arts organizers are together in this room united by common interest but with little relation to each other, just like when media makers who did not know each got together to form what is now known as NAATA 30 years ago. However, Ferrer advocated that "community building with the audience is the same kind of thing that all of us doing here" and that "the name of this game is enfranchisement and enfranchisement happens when people in our communities are able to be a participant and player in Sundance film

festival." Ferrer's comments serve as a reminder of what film festivals actually seek to accomplish and that exhibition is not the only goal but part of a larger mission that connects geographically separated, yet ideologically aligned media arts organizers to each other and brings them all into one room to discuss, share, debate, and organize Asian American media arts exhibitions and work toward the continued sustainability of an Asian American media arts organization.

Thus, the Programmers' Meeting is an important event that serves many functions. It reinforces a sense of community among media arts organizers. It is a space that requires those involved to identify or dis-identify with goals of a larger Asian American media arts organizing community. It reminds those involved to continually reflect on their own positionality and privileges as media arts organizers, especially when encountering differing opinions. It is organizationally associated with CAAM, inhabited by a larger community of Asian American media makers, and a space created by the discussions that occur during the meetings. Not only does CAAM provide specific programs for the media makers, CAAM also does have a competitively selected program for students as viewers known as the Student Delegate Program (SDP). The SDP also creates a community, much like the Programmers' Meeting; however, it is geared toward students as Asian American film enthusiasts. In the next section, I focus on the SDP as another means by which CAAM directs attention to cultivating Asian American media connoisseurs through a mode of mutability.

**Being "passionate about film"**

During the 2009 Programmers' Meeting, one film festival representative warned that one unintended danger of reaching out to college and university students was that they would take what they learned from the collaboration, create their own on campus film festival, and then

disconnect themselves from the larger community which initially inspired them to create it. SFIAAFF seemingly created a program that seemed to incorporate students while retaining their connection to the festival. Thus, coinciding with the film festival, CAAM runs a special program titled the "Student Delegate Program" (SDP). This program was modeled after existing student symposiums at other festivals and is intended for undergraduate and graduate students in their formative years. The inaugural program was started in 2009 and was directed by Christine Kwon, the program coordinator and managing director of the festival, in an effort to connect with the already existing large student constituency, which regularly attends the film festival. Recognizing that SFIAAFF is often students' first exposure to Asian American and Asian works, Kwon states, "the idea was that we were going to select students that were passionate about Asian American community and or film."[303] In addition, the SDP was not limited to film students or Asian American students but was open to students "interested in Asian American media and/or the community." Kwon sees this as remaining true to the origins and mission of CAAM, stating "I think what we wanted to have students because CAAM started off with educators, activists, and academics and we want to engage students on that level," the level of community activism and education. Indeed, this project is much in line with Asian Cinevision and Visual Communication' programs which emphasize media literacy. The SDP was meant to create a cohort of interested students who collectively and intensively engaged with Asian American media and the filmmakers.

In order to find a group of students who were knowledgeable, interested, and still in their formative years, the SDP requires that interested students send in a formal application. The process of applying to the SDP and accepting an offered position entails writing a 400-500 word

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[303] Christine Kwon (Festival Managing Director for CAAM). Interview by Vincent N. Pham. San Francisco, CA. March 17, 2010.

essay about Asian American cinema[304] and obtaining a letter of reference.  If accepted, the student agrees to assume the cost of housing and travel to the festival, attend screenings and meetings at the festival, and develop media content such as blogs about the SDP experience for the CAAM and SFIAAFF websites.  In return having their travel and housing paid for, student delegates are granted access to screenings, media makers, and the behind-the-scenes experience of the SFIAAFF.

Kwon illustrates CAAM's programmatic interest in creating a community of Asian American media activists, although leaves open how a student delegate perceives "Asian American" in the scope of media politics and representation.  Kwon states that she can "see the change, like the wheels turning in their minds," although she does not continue on what this change is, besides an experience they enjoy.[305]  This "wheels turning in their minds" effect is what SFIAAFF's SDP attempts to do: reconstitute and reconfigure how student delegates see themselves in relationship to the Asian and Asian American media they are encountering. In addition, the SDP also requires that student delegates also represent their thoughts on CAAM's blogs. While CAAM seeks to provide the avenue of individual change through the media shown at SFIAAFF, Kwon's comment iterates that the change is a personal one, albeit implicitly connected with their experience in the SDP.

I turn to an interview I conducted with one of the 2010 student delegates to explore how SDP functions to facilitate their personal engagement with media and Asian American issues. Chinese American Lisa Ly, a student from the University of Colorado, looks like an ideal candidate for the SDP.  She applied and was one of the eight people selected as a delegate. An

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[304] The essay prompt featured the question, "What do you find interesting, problematic or inspiring about Asian American cinema today, and how would you like to see it develop in the future?"

[305] Christine Kwon (Festival Managing Director for CAAM). Interview by Vincent N. Pham. San Francisco, CA. March 17, 2010.

enthusiastic woman, we conducted our interview in the Japantown Plaza on the Monday, March 27, 2010, after opening weekend. She reiterates the idea that CAAM serves to "provide ideas and let the audience or whoever interpret what they want to get out of being Asian American" and is "okay with it because Asian American is this huge thing and it is what you make of it."[306] However, the SDP asks students to engage in the very notion of Asian American, giving them questions such as "how is Asian American defined in this film?" and "what do you make about documentaries (sic)?"

As a program, the SDP seemingly achieves its intended goal of bringing in dedicated and passionate students into the fabric of the film festival, including but also beyond simple viewing experiences. They meet with filmmakers, bond with other students interested in issues of media and/or Asian American, and importantly engage in the very question of what makes Asian American media in both aesthetics and content. Even though some of the students are not primarily interested in "Asian American" film but more so in media in general, their involvement with the SFIAAFF puts them into conversation with students who passionate about Asian American media and an organization like CAAM which is dedicated to Asian American media. CAAM organizes the students' experience but also their engagement with media in an effort to create a community that associates media with CAAM during their formative years as a young adult. The rhetorical value of the SDP is the mediated and organizational engagement with notions of Asian American - for instance Ly recognizes that CAAM serves to "provide ideas" as part of the interpretive practice of re-imagining and re-articulating Asian American identity and experience. However, this individualized experience of engaging in "Asian American" media also seems counter to the productive and political possibilities of "Asian American," as it is

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[306] Lisa Ly (SFIAAFF 2010 Film Delegate). Interview by Vincent N. Pham. San Francisco, CA. March 14, 2010.

relegated to individual experiences with the hope of communicating to and dialoguing with others and separate from the larger struggles of Asian Americans in the mainstream media. Instead of CAAM providing students with a clear understanding and vision of Asian Americanness, the SDP situates the students as capable of individually constituting Asian Americanness as it simultaneously mediates this constitution through cohort groups and meetings.  Thus, SDP's effectiveness allows students to articulate their own experiences individually and construct their own understanding of Asian American based off the concatenation of CAAM's questions, the students' engagement with the questions and films, and their own verbal and written communication about the very media they saw and engaged in during the festival but re-represented on the CAAM's sponsored blog.

CAAM's Film Programmers' Meeting and the SDP are two organizationally affiliated events and programs that constitute a community of the film festival organizers and connoisseurs of those film festivals and media products.  Charland argument implies that discourse plays the primary role in the constitution of the community, particularly in the form of the White Paper; however, these programs indicate that the constitutive rhetoric also occurs through presence within a space, such as the Programmers' Meeting, and the participation within an event or program, like the SDP. The Film Programmers' Meeting highlights the sometimes tenuous relationship that film festivals have with university communities but also the media market they participate in to survive and the collective modes of organizing to survive in such an environment. SDP illustrates an organizationally supported, yet financially insecure, effort to connect college students in a way that expands their notions of Asian Americanness but in a way

that includes CAAM.[307]  Indeed, such a program like SDP seemingly thrives because of CAAM's

reputation, its presence within a multicultural city where college students can access the benefits

of a large city, instead of the typical land grant universities located elsewhere, and the full-time

paid staff to coordinate such an intensive program.  Both programs highlight the levels of film

festival: the community of film festivals as well as the community of highly enthusiastic students

whose future careers and viewpoints can be shaped by such an experience of engaging with

Asian American media and contributing to the SFIAAFF as an event.  CAAM's initiation and

continuance of the SDP and the Programmers' Meeting reiterates their commitment to being the

"destination point" interested in Asian American media as well as providing the community for

producers and consumers.

While these two organizational programs – the Film Festival Programmers' Meeting and

the Student Delegate Program – provide a space for a group of film festival organizers and a

selected cohort of students to engage in questions of community and Asian Americanness, they

are still peripheral programs to the two major screenings of the SFIAAFF's opening weekend,

which are the Opening Night Screening on Thursday and the Centerpiece Film on Sunday night

and effectively ends the opening weekend festivities of the festival.  For those involved with the

Programmers' Meeting and SDP, the place of the film festival is known to be more than just

about media but about a deeper engagement with media beyond consumption purely for pleasure

– SFIAAFF is a space safe for addressing the difficult questions regarding Asian American

media organizing and asking and discussing the questions about Asian American and Asian

International cinema. However, the majority of the film festival attendees do not access

programs such as the Programmers' Meeting and the SDP.  Thus, CAAM and SFIAAFF must

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[307] The 2011 SDP was sponsored by Verizon and was known as the Verizon Student Delegate Programs. Verizon provided smartphones, which allowed student delegates to tweet, blog, and Facebook during the SFIAAFF. Students were also allowed to keep the phones after their tenure at the festival was completed.

effectively construct the viewing experience itself in the cinemas and theaters as a space for what I call "constitutive mutability" using film screening itself through discourses in the cinema, program, and outside the viewing. The following section focuses specifically on the SFIAAFF's major focus – the film screenings and the discourses surrounding them in print and new media.

**Putting the "I" in "SFIAAFF"**

Although CAAM operates as a non-profit media arts organization and has a long history in the Bay Area of California, their flagship event, the most publicly noticeable and popular program is the SFIAAFF, which is held annually in March. The origins of the SFIAAFF began in 1982 as part of the Asian Cinevision (ACV) sponsored traveling film festival known as the Asian American International Film Festival (AAIFF).[308] The National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA) originally hosted the AAIFF National Tour from 1982 to 1984 before starting its own film festival in 1984, which eventually became SFIAAFF. Currently, SFIAAFF roughly screens 130 works of Asian American filmmakers or Asian American themed films per year and is considered one of the largest Asian American film festivals, encompassing the cities of San Jose, San Francisco, Berkeley, and surrounding locales.

The SFIAAFF went through many changes throughout its history, particularly in name and in leadership. The year 1986 marked NAATA's first festival known as the New Chinese Film Series. Then in 1990, the first full-time film festival director, Bob Uyeki, secured the AMC Kabuki theaters for an annual festival and thus secured a stable spot with screening theaters for a

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[308] *Asian CineVision* (ACV) was also founded to face problems in both "representation in the media and access to the means of media production and distribution." Started in 1976 in New York and building off the momentum of the social activist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, ACV sought to improve social and cultural awareness for both Asian American and non-Asian American audiences. The ACV also have their own film festival, currently known as the *Asian American International Film Festival* (AAIFF). ACV's AAIFF is the first place of Asian American media independence and is dedicated to "screening works by media artists of Asian descent."

sustainable and repeatable festival.[309] After an explosive showing of 80 films in 1993, the film

festival changed its name to the current SFIAAFF in 1994.[310]  In a period of "Maturation and

Expansion"[311] from 1995-2001,  the co-directors Corey Tong and Paul Yi incorporated

international and diasporic films into the program; subsequent co-directors Kayo Hatta and Linda

Blackaby emphasized documentaries in 1996.[312]  In 1999, Brian Lau took over as festival

director until he was succeeded by Chi-Hui Yang in 2001, the youngest SFIAAFF director at the

time.  Chi-Hui Yang served as film festival director until 2010. In the fall of 2010, CAAM

announced that Mishashi Niwano, the film festival director of the Austin Asian American

Independent Film Festival, would be returning back to the Bay Area to serve as the new

SFIAAFF director.  Thus, SFIAAFF has had a long-storied history within the Bay Area and in

connection to CAAM, continually adapting to meet the changing needs of the Bay Area, CAAM,

and Asian American community.

Throughout its history, SFIAAFF has undergone many name changes, most publicly and

noticeably changing to the current name of "San Francisco International Asian American Film

Festival" in 1994. From the outside, the name of the SFIAAFF conflates Asian American and

International film and blurs the lines between Asian, Asian American, and International film.

Specifically, Asian American film and International film are not separated within the title and

narrative of the film festival but are pushed together into an encompassing film festival that does

not publicly seek to separate the two.  It is not the "San Francisco International *and* Asian

American Film Festival."  Rather, it is an "International Asian American" film festival.  The

seemingly fluid transition between "International" and "Asian" and "American" do not separate

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[309] "History" CAAM, accessed June 29, 2011. http://caamedia.org/festival/history-timeline/
[310] "Timeline," CAAM, accessed June 29, 2011.  http://caamedia.org/festival/history-timeline/timeline/
[311] "History" CAAM, accessed June 29, 2011. http://caamedia.org/festival/history-timeline/
[312] Ibid.

the three but rather converge into a single definition of an "International Asian American," suggesting that Asian American is partly transnational. Beyond the name, the film descriptions also conflate "Asian" and "Asian American" and Asian American film and International film are not separated nor defined. "International" film might simply be "Asian," or transnational, but when the boundaries of Asian and Asian American are viewed in dialogic and diasporic terms, this strategic ambiguity seeks not to limit either Asian or Asian American film but to blur and bridge the boundaries between the two.

In 2008, the 26th SFIAAFF film program sought to clarify the presence of "international" within the name of SFIAAFF. In the "Hey! It's a letter from the festival director" welcoming note of the program, Chi-Hui Yang wrote, "Folks have often asked what the 'international' means in the Festival's (long!) name, whether it is redundant or contradictory, or how it qualifies "Asian American." It's a great question, and the answer lies in the complex relationship that Asian America has with Asia, and how culture, ideas, and financing flow back and forth, allowing the two to define each other."[313] Using the programming selection of films for this year, Yang states that "the Festival's Centerpiece Presentation, *West 32nd,* directed by Michael Kang (*The motel*, SFIAAFF 05) explores this global dynamic further," highlighting that it is a collaborative project bringing together Korean financing to a U.S. made film which stars Korean and Korean American actors in what Yang calls a "fascinating look at the future of international co-productions."[314] When I asked Chi-Hui Yang about the "international" in SFIAAFF in a 2009 personal interview, he argued that it's part of CAAM's intent to "challenge people's notion of what Asian America is, to expand their notion of what Asian America is, to address the idea of what Asian America is but also to validate what people understand to be

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[313] Chi-hui Yang. "Hey! It's a letter from the festival director." In *26th San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival Program*. San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2008: 19.
[314] Ibid, 19.

Asian American, too," thus situating the "international" as part of the Asian American experience as well as one that disrupts the "American" –only aspect of "Asian American." Thus, the space of the film festival mutates "International Asian American" as a variation of "Asian American," one that includes diaspora and transnational flows within "Asian America."

On the financial level, the "I" allows for the inclusion of international films, which often prove to be financially successful for an Asian American film festival. However, on a symbolic level, the name of the SFIAAFF signifies a transition from International to Asian American film and blurs the lines between Asian, Asian American, and International film. This poses a problematic rhetorical dilemma for CAAM – simply put: why "international," and how does CAAM negotiate the blurred lines between Asian American and Asian International? I argue that CAAM presently deploys a constitutive rhetoric of "mutability" that simultaneously encourages and situates an understanding of "Asian American" within a constant mode of "constitutive mutability" – a personalized understanding of community, specifically an Asian American identity and community in this case, which is adapted to one's own experience yet asserted outside one's experience via communication.

A theory of constitutive rhetoric "calls its audience into being" through an ideological trick, presupposing the apriori existence of a people and community. It does so by simultaneously constituting the notion of the people while embedding it within an understanding of what meaningful characteristics constitute the community and people themselves.[315] The notion of "community," being transhistorical and transindividual in Charland's case, is imbued with static meaning and understanding. Thus, to take part in the *peuple Québécois* requires the audience to take part in the history constituted by the White Paper and identify with the *peuple Québécois*. However, CAAM's constitutive rhetoric of "mutability" complicates Charland's

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[315] Charland, 137.

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constitutive rhetoric. Much like Charland, CAAM's constitutive rhetoric assumes the audience as extrarhetorical, in effect constituting the audience of the film festival as "Asian Americanist" – people who appreciate Asian American contributions and recognize the needs of Asian Americans. However, CAAM's constitutive rhetoric functions by its attention to mutability and its ideological effect of "constitutive mutability," where one's notion of community is a constituted individually, adapting and shifting to one's own ideas in the context of seemingly commonly understood ones. Charland's example of constitutive rhetoric via the *peuple Québécois* situates the *peuple Québécois* as transhistorical and transindividual; in essence as universal to the *peuple Québécois* and always connected to the past. CAAM's deployment of a constitutive rhetoric situates the Asian Americanist as adaptable and agentic, as deeply cognizant of "community," yet CAAM asserts its own notion of community. CAAM's constitutive rhetoric of mutability operates by assuming (and in effect constituting) an audience as Asian Americanist, who views "Asian American" as diverse, changing, malleable, and articulated with CAAM, yet puts forth his/her own vision and assumption by constituting media that shapes CAAM and the future public CAAM engage. Unlike the constitutive rhetoric of the *peuple Québécois*, CAAM's constitutive rhetoric is not static but is rather "mutable," adapting to the needs of its audience. The subjectivity of the audience qua people is not fixed in a moment of time or series of values; rather, it is inherently mutable. Thus, the notion of "Asian American" becomes mutable in ways to empower (or disempower) Asian American mediated experiences.

This notion of Asian American as "mutability" became apparent to me during my interviews with Chi-hui Yang, Christine Kwon, and Michella Rivera-Gravage – all influential organizational members of CAAM. When asked "what does the term Asian American mean to you?" Yang responded after a long pause by saying

Let me think about that. Let's see. I think most of all, it probably means ... I think it primarily means community to me. Asian American … to me means an identifier that people can organize themselves around. And that could be around culture, can be around politics, it can be around labor ... And I think that's what the power *of it is that it's very mutable*. And it can be flexed and bent and used in however people want. I think that one of its greatest strengths and it could be an attribute which makes it a complicated and tricky definition too.[316]

Yang's response negotiates the fine line between the "community" based traditions and understandings of "Asian America" to the personalized "mutability" of one's own experiences. It is "undefinable" by its sheer diversity but its undefinability allows for individual agents who can "define it in a way that suits who I am." It begins by locating "being Asian American" within the concept of community. In a separate personal interview, Michella Rivera-Gravage highlights the term's usefulness for organizing, stating that "communities under the umbrella of Asian and Asian American can come together to pull resources and gain political power."[317] Furthermore, she sees the festival as an embodiment of organizing stating, "it's just great to have this sort of Asian, Asian American festival to pull the content together and also the communities of folks together."[318] However, "community" remains undefined beyond those who identify as "Asian American." To identify with "Asian American" requires one to recognize it as a term for organizing. CAAM's notion of Asian American builds upon the shared experiences of past Asian American pan-ethnic movements. In a personal interview, Gong reminded me that the "Asian American media arts field is fundamentally a political movement," Gong added in his interview

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[316] Chi-hui Yang (Festival Director for CAAM). Phone Interview by Vincent N. Pham. San Francisco, CA. February 11, 2010.
[317] Michella Rivera-Gravage interview, 23 April 2010.
[318] Ibid.

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that a pan-ethnic identification often comes into being when there is a "critical mass" of concerned people who are organized.[319] On the other hand, CAAM's current deployment of Asian American as an organizing heuristic relies on the constitutive capabilities that reside in the term's "mutability" to adapt to diverse communities while being simultaneously adaptable for individual use, gain, and identification. Whereas the beginning of the answer and indeed the traditional understanding of "Asian American" initially locates it within notions of community and organizing, the latter part of the answer and CAAM's current deployment emphasizes individual agency and constitutive mutability to make "Asian American" fit one's needs.

While CAAM's constitutive rhetoric of mutability is the theme, a purely mutable subject does not help CAAM's organizational mission. CAAM attempts to articulate a mutable Asian American subjectivity to notions of community, albeit one defined by the very mutable subjectivity that the community engages in. When I asked Christine Kwon, the program coordinator for the SFIAAFF, about CAAM's relationship to the community, she explained, "CAAM brings together people that help define so the festival brings together filmmakers educators producers students and that kind of collective conversation helps talk about the definition of what's Asian-American ... so that they can have that conversation."[320] While CAAM was founded under the political identifications and foundations of "Asian American" in alignment with the politics of Ethnic Studies, they viewed CAAM as a space for dialogue, a cultural arts organization whose politics and commitment to diversity and activism appeared and were evident in its production of Asian American-centric media. It is the "sharing of stories" itself that is the political embodiment of Asian American media politics. In the next section, I

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[319] Stephen Gong. "A History in Progress: Asian American Media Arts Centers": 8. Stephen Gong did not initially associate with the Ethnic Studies part of Asian America during his time at UC Berkeley but slowly picked it up from the people, like Loni Ding, whom he worked with during CAAM's beginning years.
[320] Christine Kwon interview, 17March 2010.

turn my attention the three stories woven into SFIAAFF that situate a mutable Asian American subjectivity within the larger democratic project of the United States, the complexity and aesthetic of media production, and the differences between CAAM and Hollywood. These stories put forth by CAAM simultaneously reify CAAM's connection with, and a space for reconstituting, "Asian America."

**Spacing the Cinema**

*"I can't believe how amazing this theatre is. You're so lucky and blessed to have such a beautiful historic place to see cinema." – Lillian LaSalle – producer of the 2010 SFIAAFF opening night film Today's Special*

On Thursday, March 11, 2010, I was in the Castro district for the opening night festivities of the annual San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival (SFIAAFF). The reception area was on the 2nd floor of the Castro Theater, an early 1920s cinema with Art Deco, Spanish, Asian, and Italian architectural influences.  Windows facing the street let the sunset light shine in, lighting up the reddish carpet beautifully and adding a warm atmosphere to the reception area, which bustled with volunteers and patrons walking by walls lined with old framed movie posters.  As the reception ended, people slowly moved downstairs to fill the 1400 seat theatre. The packed audience was chatting, while an organist played on stage before the screening. Soon after, the organist slowly lowered below the stage, signaling the beginning of the night's events. The burgundy red curtains opened fully and the lights dimmed, signaling the beginning of the opening night's film program, *Today's Special,* starring Aasif Mandvi.

I begin with a short description of the Castro Theater and a quotation from the producer of *Today's Special*, Lillian LaSalle, to draw attention to and emphasize the physical place of the film festival: the theater itself. Earlier in this chapter, I focused on the film festival's program and

industry events as a means of organizing and reconstituting ideas of an Asian American community via media activism. However, those venues are relatively limited as to who can participate and are exposed to it. Thus, I turn my attention to the opening night of the film festival, specifically the 2010 SFIAAFF. The 2010 SFIAAFF coincided with the celebration of CAAM's 30th anniversary. On the other end of the spectrum, the Asian American independent media arts community was saddened by the unfortunate death of one of its founders, Loni Ding on February 20, 2010. On a bittersweet note, it was also Chi-Hui Yang's last SFIAAFF, who was stepping down as the film festival director to pursue other projects and endeavors. Besides the memorial and celebratory events of the 2010 festival, the opening night of the film festival was, is, and continues to be a popular event, where corporate sponsors and partners come out, ticket holders wait in line extending down the block, and eventually filling up the Castro Theatre. Also, there is an after the film screening opening night gala event, which is open to the public with admission, at the Asian Art Museum, with dessert, libations, and access to the museum as well as shuttle service from the Castro Theatre to the Asian Art Museum. In essence, the opening night of the SFIAAFF is a huge and well-attended event meant to stir up excitement for the festival, welcome new and old audiences to SFIAAFF, celebrate CAAM's accomplishments, and recollect the instances and events that have shaped CAAM over the past year.

As the night's opening program began, the movie screen stopped its slideshow, which had advertisements from corporate and community sponsors, and went into the 28th SFIAAFF trailer and a series of short films titled, *30 Years in 30 Seconds*. The house lights turned on and board member, Dipti Ghosh, a portly South Asian queer woman with short graying hair, a jovial smile, and clear squarish glasses took to the stage, welcoming the audience. She started her opening speech, referring to the SFIAAFF trailer and the short films "30 years in 30 seconds"

which CAAM commissioned to commemorate their anniversary. She recalled her longstanding involvement with CAAM since her arrival to the Bay Area in 1993, weaving in her approval of CAAM's mission, remarking that CAAM has done an "excellent job of presenting our stories to the broadest audience possible." She emphasized that CAAM has always and will continue to "play an important part in telling our stories in all the complexity and nuance." Although public address is epideictic in nature, praising CAAM for its entire good works, the space of the theater, of the film festival, of CAAM's affiliation lends a jovial atmosphere. After a rustling of papers, she continued to speak, only to realize that she has lost her place and is repeating the same words of her introduction, before catching herself mid-sentence with "no no no, that's not right" with welcoming audience laughter. The audience is receptive, waiting to be entertained and unoffended by the time taken for such speeches before screening of the film. Indeed, they seem to *enjoy* it, as if the people around them, the decadent theater, and fact of being addressed by the leadership of CAAM are important and relevant. She plugs the 30th Anniversary Gala and availability for the tickets.

Dipti Ghosh introduced Stephen Gong, the executive director of CAAM. A 58 year old Chinese American with wire rimmed oval glasses and salt and pepper hair, Gong took the stage, commenting that he usually takes this time to make some jokes but begins with a rather serious tone, bringing the audience to attention as he recounts the history of CAAM. He focused specifically on Loni Ding, who recently passed away, acknowledging her significant contribution creating CAAM and dedicating this year's festival to her memory. The audience is rapt with attention and the chatter that was present during Ghosh's speech was eerily silent. Gong shifted away from the solemnity of commemoration as he lists off the sponsoring organizations. Afterward, he welcomes Chi-Hui Yang onto the stage. He then gave a meta-speech, reflecting on

what he usually does at this point, "This is where I introduce Chi-Hui Yang, the festival director. And he shares with us an overview of the festival." Gong continued, "He's done this for 10 years as the festival director and some as you know, this will be Chi-Hui's final festival, final night doing this." The audience lets out an audible "aww," a sigh of collective melancholy. "And although it's hard for me to do this," Gong divulges, he states his gratefulness and appreciation for Yang's "creativity and passion and vision and hard work he's brought to making this festival an important part of the community and for that we thank you." The audience roared with applause and cheers of "Chi-Hui!!!" for 22 seconds, overlapping and muffling out Gong's attempt to move the evening along. As the audience applause subsided, Gong introduced David Chiu, president of the Board of Supervisors of the city of San Francisco, to come up and a make an official proclamation from city hall. Chiu wondered publicly, stating "as I was watching 30 seconds in 30 years, I wondered what my life was before CAAM, and before the Asian American film festival, when you were depicted as Orientals and Gooks and Geeks or not depicted at all." Chiu dramatically brought forth his proclamation from city hall, speaking about "the man, the myth, the legend known as Chi-Hui Yang" to audience laughter. Recognizing the typically dry language of bureaucratic language, Chiu paraphrased the proclamation, stating:

> "Whereas Mr. Yang joined the Center for Asian American Media as a festival intern in 1998 and became the youngest person to hold the position of the Director of the SFIAAFF (full) in 2000; whereas during his tenure as director, the film festival has grown enormously in its size, breadth, and stature, making it the largest Asian and Asian American film festival in Northern America; and whereas Chi-Hui Yang is the most recognizable face of the film festival, in large part due to this leadership and commitment to emphasizing the importance of diversity, multiculturalism, and being depicted in the

works of Asian Americans and Asian American cinema. Let it be resolved that today, March 11th, 2010, is Chi-Hui Yang Day in San Francisco."

Once again, the audience roared with applause as Chi-Hui Yang takes the stage, greeted David Chiu, and begins fulfilling his duties as the film festival director with his annual review of the festival. The welcoming speeches of the 2010 SFIAAFF highlight CAAM's constitutive rhetoric within the place of the Castro Theater, transforming it into a "community" space cognizant of the struggles of Asian American media representation while centering CAAM's role as a corrective in this larger struggle. The speeches prior to the film screening effectively transformed the place of the theater into an "Asian Americanist space." De Certeau defines space as a "practiced place ... space produced by a practice of a particular place."[321] The place of the Castro Theater becomes a location for the practice of Asian American constitutive rhetoric. Although de Certeau argues that space is unhindered by a "proper" designation of programs or proximities, the only "proper" designation of the film festival is that it is a place to see film; how the audience takes up this designation, whether politicizing their relationship as a viewer-citizen[322] or simply a cultural consumer is dependent upon the competing circulating discourses of the film festival. Nonetheless, the speeches prior to the film screening, as Althusser states "interpellate" the audience into a mode of Asian Americanist subjectivity. For example, David Chiu interpellated the audience into an Asian Americanist subject position when he wondered what his relationship to the media was like before CAAM and SFIAAFF, addressing the audience as "you" and as being depicted as "Orientals and Gooks and Geeks or not depicted at all." For the ethnically Asian audience member, it is a call to identify themselves as one misrepresented in the media. For non-Asians, it is a moment of education, a call to recognize the historical transgressions

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[321] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*: 117.
[322] L.S. Kim. Be the one that you want: Asian Americans in Television, Onscreen and Beyond. *Amerasia Journal* 30 (1) 2004:125-146.

against Asians and Asian Americans by the media. The audience is called to inhabit as de Certeau suggests a notion of "being there" as an Asian Americanist as they sit in the place of the Castro theater, or any other theater, associated with the SFIAAFF and CAAM.[323]

The speeches by Ghosh, Gong, and Chiu engage in the epideictic, the "rhetoric of praise and blame,"[324] as characterized by Aristotle, as it praises CAAM's efforts and the community leaders, like Dong and Yang. Importantly, this occurs within the place-turn-space of Asian American-friendly media and cultural consumers, where the chances for negative reactions, like "boos," are low and the affective and celebratory claps and screams dominate the space. The public address acts in conjunction with the place, turning into a space where all are seen as supporters of CAAM, and the audience seemingly responds favorably through their interaction with the speakers in simultaneously epideictic and constitutive mode.

While each speaker inhabits different roles within the opening program, they each embody an ethos of CAAM, performing its role as a mediator, organizer, and distributor of Asian American (media) community. They each engage the audience, recognize the occasion for speaking, implicitly understanding that the public address and space do not act separate in from each other; rather, there is an occasion for the gathering to view film and media itself. In the next section, I focus on the *30 Years in 30 Seconds* short films which Dipti Ghosh referred to in her opening speech.

**"30 years in 30 Seconds"**

While both 2009 and 2010 had their respective film festival trailers and the perfunctory introductions by festival staff, the 2010 had another short film that preceded the film screenings. For CAAM's 30th anniversary, CAAM commissioned a series of six short films titled *30 years in*

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[323] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life,* 118.
[324] Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 48.

*30 seconds*, made by a variety of Asian American filmmakers; many who had some previous relationship with CAAM. Deploying a format that resembled a television commercial timeslot, Chi-Hui Yang states that the purpose of the short films was to "find a way to sort of publicly celebrate that (CAAM's 30th anniversary), to involve filmmakers, and to find fun ways to share (that) with our audiences."[325]  Recognizing the limits of the essays, articles, and galas to reach and inform a large audience about the history of CAAM, they thought that a novel and fun way to reach people was "through the screenings so let's do something that people can watch before, because everyone is going to see these."[326] Indeed, Chi-Hui Yang and CAAM recognized prior to the film screenings, CAAM has a captive audience awaiting the film screening.  Providing filmmakers with a small honorarium, they approached about "10 or 15 filmmakers" who happened to be involved with the festival over the years, either by exhibiting their films, distributing their work, or even funding their films, and gave them a simple prompt to make a film: "think about CAAM's history and what it means to you?"  In the end, Yang stated, "we just waited to see what they came up with...and we were really happy with what came."[327]

The *30 Years in 30 Seconds* is a performative embodiment of CAAM's constitutive rhetoric of mutability. CAAM's selected filmmakers produce the films; these filmmakers however, have worked with CAAM in some capacity before. Before they create their own piece of work driven by their interests; now they are asked to directly articulate themselves with CAAM by replying to the prompt "What does CAAM mean to you?" As a result, they create a work meant to represent an aspect of CAAM. The selected shorts were then promoted by CAAM, premiered and screened at the festival, and finally available to view after SFIAAFF's closing on CAAM's YouTube channel. The *30 Years in 30 Seconds* is prompted by CAAM,

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[325] Chi-hui Yang  interview, 17 March 2010.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.

constituted by filmmakers and aired by CAAM to audience members who are negotiating the filmmakers' own voice and CAAM's organizational affiliation. Thus, the *30 Years in 30 Seconds* is a symbolic representation and embodiment of CAAM's mission to air stories which encapsulate the diversity of Asian American experiences, allowing filmmakers to air what CAAM means to them for others to see; in essence, reconstituting the mutable subject of Asian American media through a recursive means of reconstructing community.

    *30 Years in 30 Seconds* circulates SFIAAFF in a deliberate fashion as part of CAAM's larger organizational rhetoric. During the film screenings, one of these films would be played after the trailer but preceding the main film screening. Thus, a person may attend three screenings but may see only one of these six films if it was repeated for the screenings but up to three different short films for each screening. However, for opening night and the Centerpiece, the six films were shown in their entirety, one after the other without transitions between the films. Thematically, the short films runs the gamut of CAAM's organizational mission, from its dedication to sharing stories ("Document your life" and "Because"), the recognition for the need of Asian American filmmakers ("And Action" and "What I'm Not"), and the very complexity of being an "Asian American" media maker ("Christine Choy: A Loud Minority"). Although each short film can elicit an in-depth and extensive analysis, I focus my attention to the final and longest short film of the series, titled "Hollywood versus CAAM" (hereafter known as HVC).[328]

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[328] "Document Your Life" was the first film, depicting what looks like grainy found footage spliced together to visually depict a South Asian father story that recounts his immigration to the United States. Afterwards, "And Action" a simple stop-action humorous short using toy action figures to portray a white filmmaker directing his Asian American actors and actresses to act in stereotypic fashion, followed the documentary style of the first film. Jason Luz's film, "Because," juxtaposes spoken word text over mainstream media images of directors and actors at a rapid pace before slowing down to emphasize the power of cinema and narrative from a community perspective. Adele Pham's film, "Christine Choy: Loud Minority," is a humorous yet sharp informal interview and short snippet into the personality of the well-known documentarian. The last short film was the "Hollywood versus CAAM."

At 57 seconds, HVC only the SFIAAFF 2010 trailer runs longer. While the trailer is the first film independent of and prior to the series of shorts, HVC concludes the series before welcome speeches and subsequent film screening. HVC is packed full of independent media stars. Directed by well-known Asian American filmmaker and the pioneer of the video diary genre Spencer Nakasako, HVC also features actors Roger Fan and Sung Kang, stars of Asian American independent films *Better Luck Tomorrow* and *Finishing the Game.* CAAM (played by Sung Kang) is holding a microphone in one hand and a paper script in the other hand, dressed in a grey blazer, untucked white v-neck shirt, with black slacks and bashfully introduces himself.[329] Hollywood (played by Roger Fan) is stage right of him, dressed in a black suit, a button up white and grey vertical striped collared shirt, unbuttoned at the top and without a tie, confidently yet arrogantly introduces himself. While CAAM offers Hollywood the microphone during the introduction, Hollywood waves it away and scoffs publicly, "So how long is this going to take?" as if Hollywood has more important business to attend. CAAM looks down at the script and assertively states "30 Seconds for 30 years" and whispers "just follow the script" to Hollywood. What begins to unravel next is a comparison between the two through friendly, yet competitively tinged verbal exchanges from Hollywood to CAAM, with Hollywood scoffing at CAAM's "3000 friends" on Facebook to Hollywood's "like over a billion"; Hollywood's "ownership" of particular Asian American filmmakers and actors like Justin Lin and Sandra Oh, while disavowing of others like "Curtis Choy" or dismissing unknown-to-the-mainstream directors like "Spencer Nakasako." CAAM tries to counter, in these exchanges, stating that he prefers "quality over quantity" and listing of Asian American actors, and filmmakers who had their earlier career works shown at the festival or sponsored by CAAM. The short concludes with Hollywood mockingly stating "this is taking longer than 30 seconds" to which CAAM responds, "we're a

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[329] See Appendix E for the transcript of the short film.

non-profit" before stating "Asian American cinema." The short film ends with a black and white photo of Loni Ding gesturing with her hands out, as if she were teaching or explaining a concept to a student, and looking toward the audience but not directly so, and the text of "Loni Ding, pioneer of Asian American cinema."

This short film was the most complex out of the short films and ended with a photo of Loni Ding, memorializing a beloved community member's recent passing.  Whereas the previous films quickly conveyed what CAAM meant to them through text and visuals, this film primarily relied on the verbal interplay between the actors with minimal changes in camera perspective, except for quarter profiles as if the characters were talking directly to you in full front view. The characters anthropomorphize the abstract "Hollywood" and organizational "CAAM" into human personalities, conveying Hollywood as slightly pompous and "business only," juxtaposed against the bashful, charming, and supportive environment of CAAM.  Hollywood takes "ownership" of the well-known actors and filmmakers; CAAM reminds us that they were there from the beginning, before they "made it." In addition, for filmmakers that Hollywood discards or ignores, like Curtis Choy and Spencer Nakasako, CAAM continues to be the space for them to support, show, and distribute their work to educational and community audiences alike.

However, this film could be read differently, especially given the amount of time that audiences get to interact with it during the screenings. I posited a different reading of the short to Yang, stating, "CAAM mentions all these Asian American film directors and Hollywood mentions that they have them already.  Is that ... the role that CAAM plays, it's a stepping stone in a way?" Yang replied "it's ... the kind of curious relationship with what we do, which is not really related to Hollywood, and the way that Hollywood is starting to pay attention."[330]  Yang explains the relationship between commercial and independent cinema, positioning the Asian

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[330] Chi-hui Yang  interview, 17 March 2010.

American media maker and actor within it as "people who kind of flirt with that world but that world hasn't fully accepted them." But rather for CAAM, "they'll always belong." While these quotations refer to Asian American media makers, this feeling of acceptance and belonging characterizes the West's relationship with Asia and its effects on Asian Americans. Robert G. Lee states that "desire and revulsion are the dialectic that defines America's cultural engagement with Asia."[331] For Asian American media makers, they attempt to enter the world characterized by mainstream Hollywood, as Lee deems the West. However, CAAM will always be present as a community. They are the community that will desire their work when Hollywood rejects it and provide additional support when Hollywood desires it, recognizing that many filmmakers who participate in SFIAAFF and CAAM are aiming to gain widespread distribution.

Yang concludes that the video is "meant to contrast what CAAM does and what Hollywood does; that there is a difference but a curious interdependence between the two."[332] Yang's explanation of the film highlights CAAM's role cultivating a community of learning and exploration for Asian American media makers, while providing a possible pipeline into Hollywood's media industry, which often problematically commodifies popular culture. So while "Justin Lin" is part of Hollywood's media industry, he will forever be a part of CAAM's community of media makers.

**Conclusion: Tactics of Media Consumption and Production**

CAAM's overall mission to present stories which "convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences to the broadest audience possible,"[333] participating in an ambivalent mode of engagement of what de Certeau calls "strategy" and "tactic." De Certeau describes a

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[331] Robert G. Lee, Foreword. In *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, edited by S. Dave, L. Nishime, T. G. Oren and R. G. Lee. New York: New York University Press, 2005: XI.
[332] Chi-hui Yang interview, 17 March 2010.
[333] "About CAAM," CAAM, accessed March 4, 2011. http://caamedia.org/about-caam/.

"strategy" as a "calculus of force-relationships, which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'."[334] In CAAM's case, the SFIAAFF is part of a larger strategy of creating spaces for Asian American media, designating the time and place of San Francisco's Castro Theatre, Camera 12 Cinemas, Landmark Clay Theatre, Montgomery Theater, Pacific Film Archive Theater, Sundance Kabuki Cinemas,  and Viz Cinema. Chiu comments on mainstream media representations and Gong's commemoration of Loni Ding's work and the history of CAAM position the space of the cinema and SFIAAFF as the center with the mainstream media institution as exterior.

Tactics, on the other hand, do not count on the spatial or institutional location but rather depend on the *timing* of actions for opportunities.[335] Whereas strategies are about the cooptation of space, tactics utilize time.  Strategies are generally located within institutions of the powerful; whereas tactics are the "art of the weak."[336] SFIAAFF's allows for a tactic of consumption and production, where the kairotic choice to consume Asian American media simultaneously allows for a reconfiguring and possible re-production and reconstitution of Asian American (media) community.

However, Meaghan Morris warns us that "these terms need clarification, since it is not just a matter of opposing major to minor, strong to weak, and romantically validating the latter."[337] Just as Morris's anecdote about the memory of Australians' first encounter with Lucille Ball as "television came as Lucy, and Lucy *was* television," Asian American media came as

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[334] de Certeau, xix.
[335] Ibid, xix..
[336] Ibid, 37.
[337] Meaghan Morris. Banality in Cultural Studies. In *Logics of Television: Essays in cultural criticism*, edited by P. Mellencamp. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990: 29; Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop. The Critique of Vernacular Discourse. *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995):19-46. Indeed, Ono and Sloop's critique of vernacular discourse highlights that the weak and marginalized are not inherently resistant against the dominant in their discursive practices

CAAM and thus CAAM *is* Asian American media.[338] CAAM's occupation as a default

representative of "Asian American" media, whether through educational distribution, public

broadcasting, or SFIAAFF, occurs through a tactic of organizational affiliation – constructing

discourses which articulate CAAM with "Asian American media" but in ways which allow for a

continual reconstitution of Asian American community. Through its constitutive rhetoric of

mutability, CAAM exists only to convey other experiences, while articulating the organization to

those experiences.

SFIAAFF occupies the space where CAAM's constitutive rhetoric of mutability

intersects with experiences of Asia and Asian America via film. Opening speeches, program

notes, and visual trailers and short films before the film festivals all frame and intersect with the

selected films of the SFIAAFF program, beckoning the audience to engage with the film in ways

that they may overlook while watching at home or a cinemaplex in the city. In addition to the

cinematic aspects, the SDP and the film festival Programmers' Meeting transform SFIAAFF

from a standard film festival to structured engagement with cinema and an organizational

activity regarding the state of the film festival for the community respectively. In both contexts

however, a notion of an Asian American community is continually evolving in a way that, as

Gong states in a personal interview, "overrides any possibility or any of our strategic decisions"

and that "it would be a big mistake to kind of reduce the Asian American community to any kind

of fact or staple or unchanging entity because it is changing so rapidly." Rather, what CAAM

provides, what SFIAAFF serves, and what its events, programs, and films allow for is the place

of San Francisco – the discursive origin of the term "Asian American" – and the movie theatre to

be converted into a space to continually revisit, with an eye towards mutability, the question of

"What is AA community and experience at this moment and how can CAAM best facilitate

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[338] Morris, 15.

conveying this to the widest audience possible, including and especially those who consist of this

community?" While this is a question with no clear answer, CAAM's constitutive rhetoric of

mutability suggests it lies within the back and forth of CAAM and the community of individual

media makers, which present and represent their experiences for a broad audience.

*Figure 2*. CAAM's Organizational Departments

| *Department* | **Educational Distribution** | **Digital Media** | **Film Festival** | **Media Fund** | **Public Broadcasting** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Function* | Catalog of films for educational use | Showcase new media projects to educate and entertain | Organizes and runs SFIAAFF | Provides funding and support for Asian American related media projects | Presents Asian American related work to the PBS for national broadcasting |

CONCLUSION:

RE-ARTICULATING ASIAN AMERICAN ORGANIZING

*"We think about Asian, Asian American identity or what Asian Americans means so what we're doing as an organization might change and those have to be linked in some ways" - Michella Rivera-Gravage, the director of new media at the Center of Asian American Media[339]*

According to the Washington Post, the blog *AngryAsianMan.com* is "a daily must-read for the media-savvy, socially conscious, pop-cultured Asian American."[340] In a discussion with the well-known blogger Angry Asian Man, Korean American Phil Yu mentioned that his first job after completing undergraduate college education was working for the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA), which is now known as the Center for Asian American Media. Looking for a purpose, like many college graduates, Phil moved back to the multicultural, diverse Bay Area of California, where many cities like Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose exist within a 45 minute radius of each other by both car and public transport. He worked on websites for NAATA, while blogging under the Angry Asian Man moniker as a side hobby. As NAATA was going through changes with Asian American independent media, the emergence of the Internet, and a growing film festival, so too was Phil Yu, who explicitly states, "my involvement with NAATA directly influenced how I approached Asian American politics at the time and the voice of my blog."[341] Indeed, Yu's story illustrates the unique role that organizations play for its members, often occupying both time and space for

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[339] Michella Rivera-Gravage interview, 23 April 2010.
[340] Jose Antonio Vargas. "Incensed and Empowered: Angry Asian Man, Only Half Joking." *The Washington Post* Accessed April 15, 2009, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/08/AR2005100801286.html: October 9, 2005.
[341] Phil Yu. Personal communication with Vincent N. Pham. April 13, 2010.

those involved.  For Yu, what NAATA stood for, particularly in Asian American media politics, and those other members as supervisors and peers influenced how he approached Asian American issues, both media-related and otherwise, in his now famous blog.

However, it is overly simplistic to assume that being in the sheer space and context of the organization leads to the emergence of a public figure like Angry Asian Man.  Although, time and context are important, the communication between people, the attachment of person and identity to organizations and ideas, the people with whom Yu interacted, the discourses that circulate around him in narratives; this rhetorical and social environment beckons Yu to connect to, link with, and articulate around particular notions of Asian Americans and organizations.  In addition, it is naïve to believe that organizations have always existed as they are now and continue to be relevant despite the changing contexts in which they exists.  Organizations, their activities, and their environments constantly change but also are constrained or enabled by their histories.

The previous example illustrates many difficult problems of analyzing organizations and their rhetorical and organizational practices.  First, how does one analyze organizational rhetorical practices as a situated historical, social, economic, and cultural practice, while recognizing the dynamic nature of rhetorical practices as it relates to specific individual and organizational characteristics?  Second, how does one pay attention to how discourse from the organization, one that may not be public or part of everyday life, impact or overlook the organizational member?  Finally, how does one theorize, connect, and analyze multiple discourses within an organization; from the official organizational public relations to the narratives and jokes shared amongst members?

This dissertation seeks to answer these questions within the context of Asian American media organizations, while addressing the very question of "how does the term Asian American operate as an organizing rhetoric for Asian American media organizations?" Michella Rivera-Gravage's opening quotation is an answer to my question about CAAM's relationship to a wider notion of a pan-ethnic Asian America and the roles it plays within and in relation to a simultaneously abstract yet visible community. Rivera-Gravage's rumination on Asian American identity and CAAM as an organization underscores the mutually constitutive relationship between organizations and the dynamic communities they serve, especially as the people within and involved in communities also change. The organizations are constituted by its members. However, these members come to the organization with preconceived notions of what it means to be "Asian American" in addition to expectations about the role that an organization will have in relationship with this notion and idea of "Asian American." Importantly, these organizations, while constituted by members, also constitute and shape the members themselves, especially since these organizations actively engage in the deployment of "Asian American" in the everyday practice of the organization and its organizing practices leading up to affiliated and sponsored events, activities, and actions.

In this dissertation, I bring an attention to and retheorize articulation theory for rhetorical and organizational studies. Articulation theory, at its fundamental level, is about observing how linkages become made and expressed for specific modes of action; it is about how linkages emerge out of contextual factors and the effects resulting from those linkages. However, I look at organizations across time and at multiple events in which these organizations engage and link to. The organizational linkages across time and their residual effects lead to redefinition and affect subsequent articulations and linkages. In certain ways, rhetoricians often thinks about

articulation theory built around a social movement, such as DeLuca and the environmental

movement or Charland's nationalist movements.[342] However, articulation theorists have not

afforded themselves to look at the organizations involved post-movement, as these organizations

address, deal, and re-articulate with linkages made or broken during the movement.

Thus, articulation theory may provide a way to look at the long-term institutionalization

as not necessarily a mode of accommodation but rather embracing it in order to avoid

disappearing into the ether. Instead of contradictory extremes of radical change or disappearing,

the purpose is slow progress towards change on the ground. While one may ask, "can you

dismantle the master's house with the master's tools?" maybe a more apt question is "what tools

do you use to rebuild a house after dismantling it?"  That is, can one address the Hollywood

media industry that has long operated with degrading representations of Asian Americans by

working with the media or should one create another media industry that works with and next to

the Hollywood media industry? The new face of activism may not necessarily be anti-institution

but rather institution building. So, while articulation theory allows one to theorize how to adapt

to changing contexts, exigencies, and circumstances as a process over time, it allows for us to see

how organizations de-constitute and re-constitute themselves over time if they decide to do so.

Central to this de-constitution and re-constitution are the everyday discourses within the

organization, discourses situated within an organizational context but also that seek to articulate

the organization with aspects outside the organization and thus re-constitute and reconstruct what

are within its jurisdiction and what the organization stands for.  Indeed, the organizational

vernacular rhetorics of "Asian American" permeate the organization, whether it is

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[342] Kevin DeLuca. "Articulation Theory:  A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32, no. 4 (1999): 334-48; Kevin DeLuca. *Image Politics:  The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. Edited by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Celeste Michelle Condit, Revisioning Rhetoric. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999; Maurice Charland. Constitutive Rhetoric:  The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (2) 1987:133-150.

institutionalized in awards as part of the organization, repeatedly told through organizational narratives by the executive director, or debated backstage in board meetings about activities and protests in which the organization should engage. Although it is difficult to "measure" the permeability and circulation of organizational vernacular rhetorics, it is important to realize that these everyday discourses purposefully or sometimes unintentionally serve to persuade, constitute, reinforce, challenge, include, and even exclude constituents who may or may not identify with the organization, simultaneously upholding what may be seen as a discursive boundary.

Yet this dissertation is not solely about the mutual constitution of an organization and its members but also about the rhetorical imaginings of "Asian American" when practiced, organized, and communicated by organizations and their rhetorical activities and how the rhetorical imaginings attempt to address the mainstream media representation of Asian Americans, whether purposefully in a direct action type of protest or by happenstance. Indeed, these three organizations all operate publicly in some fashion, whether by exhibiting film at festivals or engaging in direct protest actions on the sidewalks in front of a film studio. Thus, by embarking on a multi-sited rhetorical ethnography of three Asian American media organizations, I sought to conceptualize a "research imaginary" around the macro-phenomena of Asian American media activism, whether by studying direct action groups or indirectly by examining ways of fostering spaces for exhibition and production. My intent in constructing this research imaginary was not only to focus on one organization but rather to trace the different ways Asian American media organizations address issues of media representation, while drawing attention to their own media usage and deployment of representational politics of Asian America. In constructing a "research imaginary," I am engaging in what rhetorical scholar Michael McGee

calls constructing a "text suitable for criticism" out of the discursive fragments of culture and, in

effect, taking up Bonnie Dow's perspective that the "text that a critic purports to analyze is a

purposeful creation of the critic, not a pre-existing entity."[343] Indeed, I selected a variety of

organizations to constitute this research imaginary, focusing on the local, national, and

transnational flows (or borders) of media representation and the representations of media and

Asian Americans as well as the diverse missions that differ, yet overlap, between the

organizations.  FAAIM is a Chicago-based media arts organization, which sponsors the Chicago

Asian American Showcase, a media arts festival that centers on the film festival but includes

musical, visual, and performing arts. Explicitly committed to the local, FAAIM is situated as a

Chicago and Midwestern institution. MANAA represents media watchdog advocates who often

engage in direct action. However, MANAA is also privy to direct contact with the Hollywood

media industry, positioning it as a both an agitator and a mediator of Asian American

representation to these industries.  CAAM is the main distributor and producer of Asian

American content via film and also sponsors the largest Asian American film festival in the

nation. Its relationship with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Bay Area, and transnational

film industries locates CAAM as a major gateway to notions of Asian America in the media,

independent, mainstream, and possibly global.

For these three Asian American media organizations, the ability to (re)form an Asian

American identity (contemporarily) is a challenge and cannot fully be redesigned, given the

historical, contemporary, and cultural currents which helped create the organizations. These

organizations formed from the history of the post-1968 Third World Ethnic Studies Strikes,

whether it occurred directly, such is the case of CAAM, or indirectly through the solidification of

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[343]Bonnie J. Dow. Response:  Criticism and authority in the artistic mode. *Western Journal of Communication* 65 (3) 2001: 340; Michael Calvin McGee. Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture. *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (3) 1990: 287-288.

a pan-ethnic Asian American identity, like MANAA and FAAIM. In Ono's collection "Asian Americans after Critical Mass," the first phase of Asian American Studies was a nationalist one, and the second phase addresses the transnational, diasporic, intersectional, and identity formation that is not linked to the ethnically strategically essentialist notions of self present in the first phase. Rather, I argue for a third phase that embraces radical incommensurability as anti-racism. However, these organizations operate within the liminal space between the first and second phase and are couched within their histories of asserting Asian American rights to the United States. On the other hand, they also recognize (or sometimes resist) a changing Asian American community of the transnational, diasporic, and intersectional identity.[344] Thus, this study over these three organizations explores how organizations, on the ground, envision and address "Asian American" as it is historicized and evolving.

Although each chapter is focused separately on a specific organization, I pay special attention to the history of the organizations, contextualizing their origins in relationship to their current relevance. However, the history is not intended to be a purely descriptive account of the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which the organizations originated. Instead, by taking an approach that centers a theory of articulation to the organizations and their histories, I argue that, while these three media organizations may appear similar in their goals in shifting the terrain of Asian American media representation, the contexts of their origins greatly differ, which affects their organizational missions, the members they have, the communities they serve, and in essence the rhetorical production that occurs. CAAM's history is deeply embedded in the diverse communities of the Bay Area, encompassing Asians with multi-generational histories in the United States to newly immigrated ones and spanning the wide breadth of class issues.

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[344] *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*. Edited by K. A. Ono. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Spawned in the wake of the Third World Strikes and with an understanding of the power of the media and the burgeoning interests to deploy it as a source of empowerment, activism, and counter-narratives, their activities focus on the distribution and production of Asian American stories to the largest audience possible, including the mainstream public television market. On the other hand, MANAA is conveniently located in the sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles, home to the mainstream Hollywood industry. MANAA's origins are rooted in disgust with mainstream representations of Asian Americans in mainstream popular culture as well as news media coverage and its effect on the everyday lives of Asian Americans. Recognizing the unstable race relations present during the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and re-emergent discourses of yellow peril with the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor in 1941, MANAA articulated itself with discussions of social justice and media representation advocacy, subsequently building coalitional ties with other media watchdog groups in the early part of the 21st century. In the Midwest periphery, away from the West Coast, and ingrained with a cultural ethos of punk rock and DIY organizational politics, FAAIM's history grew from a noticeable lack of Asian American artistic role models, as its founders became aware of the lack of Asian Americans in the art scene, while being simultaneously called into being part of a burgeoning "Asian American indie rock" scene. FAAIM's collaboration with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Asian American independent media arts scene on the national level has allowed it to situate Asian Americans artists and media within the city of Chicago, arguably the Midwest's largest urban center with a storied history of arts and culture. Nonetheless, despite their complex histories, these organizations still (seek to) remain relevant in the contemporary public sphere and within the communities they serve, whether they are local, national, or in some cases transnational.

In the first chapter, I focused on FAAIM and its processes of discursively organizing a community within Chicago. For FAAIM, its organizational survival is driven by selfless people giving to the community in the spirit of sharing, and a DIY ethic of "this needs to happen" embodied by its executive director, Tim Hugh. I emphasized the discourses that circulate within the organization, centering the rhetoric of Tim Hugh, the executive director. In addition, I addressed discourses from the periphery, drawing on organizational meetings and interviews with other organizational members and those associated with or having worked with members of the organization. In addition, I drew upon my ethnographic experience working with the organization, despite being separated by geographic distance. I centered my experience at organizational meetings leading up to the 15th anniversary Chicago Asian American Showcase as well as the participant observations during the 14th and 15th Chicago Asian American Showcase. In doing so, I asserted that FAAIM's rhetoric emphasizes the "American," asserting the history of Asians in America and the cultural right to be here through their production of arts, film, and culture. FAAIM constitutes itself as an organization whose purpose is to serve, unite, and empower the community, while maintaining some organizational autonomy about what type of music, movie, and arts programs it exhibits and the nature of its working relationships with other organizations in Chicago, whose DIY style of personalized relationships may deter the possibilities of widespread and institutional collaborations outside other arts organizations. Importantly, FAAIM's conception of community, like so many organizations, is at a juncture of rediscovering, reconfiguring, and resituating what "community."

Chapter 2 moved away from conceptualizing what the "Asian American" community is to centering the strategic and rhetorical deployment of "Asian American" itself as part of media representation activism and discussions. Applying Spivak's two concepts of strategic

essentialism and manageable other, I focused on MANAA's organizational mobilization to protest the film, *The Goods*, in August of 2009 and the organizational meetings and discussions over what to do regarding the white-washed casting decisions of the *Last Airbender* in the May 2009 general meeting. By reading the activism and mobilization against the cross-marketed trailer of *The Goods* through Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism, I am able to provide a clear account of the effectiveness of strategically essentializing "Asian American" to organize, mobilize, and act against well-known and easily understood transgressions against Asian Americans. However, when dealing with the phenomenon of white washed casting and the inability to change the casting process at the production level of the film industry, MANAA must negotiate its position as representatives of "Asian American" acceptability and outrage to the industry, deciding on whether or not to protest and how to best voice their concerns or remain silent on issues in order to maintain relationships with the very institutions they seek to change. Not only is MANAA working with (and sometimes working against) the Hollywood networks, their interactions with the Hollywood industry convey what are acceptable representations for Asian Americans writ large including subgroups, such as southeast Asian Americans, sometimes despite the concerns of those subgroups who disagree with MANAA's interpretation. Circulated through their newsletters, web documents, and expressed in interviews, MANAA's dominant organizational vernacular rhetorics about Asian Americans conceive a notion of Asian American identity and community as one essentialized through a history within the United States and located within the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. In doing so, MANAA's conceptualization of an Asian American community is entrenched within mid-1990s notions of media representations and shields itself from transforming the Asian American demographic.

What is striking about MANAA is its ambivalent mode of reactive and pro-active approaches to Hollywood, which is encapsulated by Leong's unhappiness with MANAA, or any other Asian American institution he has been involved with, to affect the dominant representation of Asian Americans in mainstream media in ways that can directly translate into jobs for Asian American actors. Indeed, a moment of organizational inertia of the tactics of write, protest, and praise or blame seemingly overcomes the organization of MANAA as it negotiates a position of manageability and strategic essentialism when working with the Hollywood industries and networks. Importantly, the history of MANAA as a Los Angeles-based organization seemingly overdetermines its ability to engage Hollywood in a new media environment. To some extent, it is surprising that the MANAA as an organization still exists, as the on-the-face perception might view it as ineffective. Yet, as Aoki reminds us, there are few to no organizations that unite Asian Americans to directly address Hollywood. So while the Asian American community continually changes and how now includes mixed race, transnational, and South and Southeast Asian concerns, these changes have not drastically transformed the organization.

The last chapter, "'Mutable' Asian American and Articulating Festivity," focuses solely on the Center for Asian American Media and its annual San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival. Through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork from a position akin to a privileged tourist entitled with an industry accredited film festival pass, I argue that CAAM produces an intertexual rhetoric of community, communicating through the distribution and exhibition of media, which re-imagines what Asian America is from the ground up by letting the "community" of media makers speak for itself about how they see Asian America. This intertextual rhetoric of community includes critical reflexivity over the term "Asian American,"

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recognizing its political usage and mutability as a rhetorical term to account for the diversity of the Asian American community and its experiences, while mobilizing college students and other Asian American film festivals. It links this notion of community and Asian American media to issues of media production and distribution itself, reconfiguring both of those processes as political ones that have previously excluded Asian Americans. However, this intertextual rhetoric of community via film, community activity, film festival events, and organizational affiliation belies the difficulties and privileges inherent the process of making media for the mainstream events of the film festival. And while the mutability of "Asian American" assumes an anti-essentialist position, it simultaneously, strategically, yet ambiguously, essentializes in order to subsume and remain open to the possibilities of others redefining "Asian American experiences" within acceptable limits of the racial markers of Asian Americanness.

Through a rhetorical multi-sited ethnographic approach, I analyzed the collective and community-specific rhetorics of Asian Americans within the context of three media organizations. Most importantly, it also provided me with the opportunity to be *present* in the very space and place of rhetoric. As a result, I was not only examining rhetorical texts but also rhetorical *processes*, whether it is the improvisation that occurs during a public address or the writing of a call for short programs to be distributed among the community. While Pezzullo clearly aligns herself with the people in her study, her work within the organizations is separate from her study, but nonetheless informed by it. Cintron's involvement in the rhetoric of the everyday still maintains a critical distance, as he is not involved as a community member as are Pezzullo and I. Nonetheless, Cintron, Pezzullo, and I contend that an ethnographic approach to the study of rhetoric provides insights textual analysis typically does not and cannot provide –

particularly into the conditions and contexts for rhetorical production and practice that are influenced by the physical and affective.

Also, taking a multi-sited ethnographic study allows me to document and analyze rhetoric which may not be documented in formal texts. The impromptu speeches of what is considered "Asian American" film worth showing, the discussions within a meeting which seek to persuade others to take direct action, and the organizational discussions about who should represent an organization are not always readily available for analysis. Nonetheless, these events and situations are important in understanding the process by which rhetoric is produced and understanding the final textual artifacts or public performances of speeches.

The multi-sited nature of my project also adds a comparative aspect to the project, despite the recognition of each organization's specific social, cultural, economic, and political conditions. The intention of such a multi-sited project is to analyze the macro-phenomena of a social movement while providing specific insights into the individual sites of the macro-phenomena, whether it is in Los Angeles, San Francisco, or Chicago. While a multi-sited approach is limited in the depth it can provide of single site, it has many advantages, particularly in my case where these organizations have sporadic action, except for CAAM. For example, a single sited study of FAAIM would not allow for the engagement with politics of representation in the mainstream, which is afforded by my study of MANAA. In addition, it would not allow for me to compare and contrast the film festivals of FAAIM and CAAM, which have also had a collaborative history. Thus, a multi-sited ethnographic study allows a scholar to see possible connections these groups themselves may not see or other scholars may overlook when studying in a single-site. A multi-sited ethnographic study allows for such a "research imaginary" to be constructed out of seemingly disparate yet related fragments of a social movement. While each

of these sites are engaged in politics over media representation, analyzing them within a multi-sited ethnographic study permits an understanding at the numerous ways in which media organizations address media representation in both the local and national level, even while the organizations may not see the connections.

However, the limitations of a multi-sited study are the choice of the sites and the time spent at each site – in essence balancing the pros and cons of choosing each site and the abilities at each site. While serving as an intern at CAAM may have allowed me to see more everyday organizational activities at CAAM, it would have detracted from my ability to explore the film festival with a fresh critical lens. A multi-sited approach requires reflection upon one's own positionality and limitations as a researcher and upon one's personal involvement with the organizations and sites. For example, I was unable to involve organizations, especially those like Visual Communications in Los Angeles, California, which focuses on media literacy that are also important and influential in addressing the lack of media representation. And as noted earlier, the depth of study afforded by a single-site allows for larger claims to be made regarding that one site, but has the danger of compromising critical comparisons. Thus, as any academic study, a multi-sited ethnographic approach can be summed up in terms of which compromises one is willing to make in order to analyze the macro-phenomena of a social movement.

I want to emphasize that the issues illustrated in each chapter are not issues solely existing in that respective organization but are rather more prevalent, salient, and relevant to those organizations. FAAIM serves as an example of organizational processes that belie such a grassroots organization with few resources but with strong connections and unwavering personal passions. MANAA's case accentuates the difficulties in engaging in representational politics, especially when addressing the very perpetrators of representational wrongs, and the challenges

of inter-organizational actions and coalitions.  CAAM foregrounds the community construction

and constitution, while backgrounding the cultivation of an organizational community.  While

this is a multi-sited study of three specific media organizations, I suggest that these three

organizations represent the perils of doing such work. FAAIM and CAAM also engage in

strategically essentialist rhetorics, and MANAA has to take into account what communities it

serves and how it even envisions an "Asian American" community.  What all these organizations

have in common is that they have lasted a long period of time, across and within different

periods, and have adapted to their cultural, social, and regional conditions but are also limited by

their geography, politics, history, culture, demography, and community in very important ways

that affect, constrain, and enable their rhetorical practice and organizational evolution. What

accounts for their continuity and longevity, however, is their purposeful need to respond to the

"lack": the lack of Asian American artists and role models in the Midwest, the lack of Asian

Americans in Hollywood, the lack of stories featuring Asian and Asian American viewpoints for

national audiences.  Despite the fragmented nature of a "multi-sited ethnography," which

emphasizes the diversity of multiplicity versus the comprehensiveness of one, these

organizations share similar challenges although to different levels of saliency and priority such

non-profit organizations vying for volunteers, representing the dynamic community and identity

of "Asian American," and defining what is acceptable as "Asian American media."

On the other hand, they do not encompass the wide diversity of Asian American media

organizations that exist. There are organizations devoted to media literacy, such as community

groups like the Vietnamese Youth Development Lab run by Spencer Nakasako and the Frank A.

Watase Media Arts Center at the Japanese American National Museum. These organizations fill

the role of equipping and developing the art of cinematic story telling for communities that may

have little exposure to the filmmaking arts and culture scene.  In addition, organizations like the

Asian American Justice Center and their collaboration with the Asian Pacific American Media

Coalition combine the social justice with media representation. There are many types of Asian

American media organizations and their sheer presence begs the question of "Why?" and "Why

now?"

**The State of the Asian American Media Organization**

After the 2010 Film Festival Programmers' Meeting at the San Francisco International

Asian American Film Festival, I overheard a conversation between two affiliates of two separate

festivals. One asked "Do we even need Asian American film festivals anymore?" The veteran

programmer next to him said, "no, we don't." I chose to keep these names anonymous, mainly

because the conversation is more important than the people involved – important not because of

its emphasis on film festivals but more because of what it represents for Asian American media

organizations in general. If members within the Asian American media arts organizations are

cognizant of their own position within the mediascape, what does this mean for the state of Asian

American media organizations and their rhetorical and organizational activities? After

conducting this multi-sited ethnography of Asian American media organizations, I assert that

Asian American media organizations, with all their faults and virtues, still need to exist, if not

more so in a seemingly post-racial world.  Importantly, their relevance exists primarily through

their rhetorical function moreso than their organizational effectiveness.

One of the main purposes of Asian American media organizations is to change the

mediascape in which Asian American representation exists and takes place. Ono and Pham assert

that changes in media representation do not necessarily come naturally, over the course of time,

and as part of the evolution of anti-racism and progressive politics as some might assume but

rather through sustained attention to social change.[345] So on the one hand, Asian American media organizations have made some important progress through their organizational actions. For example, MANAA has increased attention to the positive acts of Hollywood studios, drawing attention to positive portrayals of Asian American characters, such as the star of *Up!*, when it may have been easily overlooked by the mainstream media. CAAM's former employee and the former SFIAAFF director, Chi-Hui Yang, was influential in initiating and programming Comcast's "Cinema Asian American" video-on-demand movie series. FAAIM brings Asian American actors, artists, and filmmakers into the Gene Siskel Film Center where they would most likely be absent.  In addition, these organizations work on both the production of Asian American alternative media images as well as monitoring the mainstream. Ono and Pham argued that solely protesting mainstream media images without producing alternative images or vice versa is not adequate in changing the media representations of Asian Americans in the mediascape but a combined effort on both ends is needed.  Thus, the diverse presence of Asian American media organizations, of these and many other Asian American media organizations, have made progress on where and how Asian Americans are portrayed in the media.

On the other hand, if their organizational effectiveness is judged by their impact on the mainstream media, the fact remains that Asian Americans are still underrepresented on television. Instances of whitewashing films (i.e., casting white actors in ethnic roles) are still prevalent; such is the concern over the live action adaptation of the anime *Akira*. In addition, Asian American media organizations and networks, most notably AZN Television and ImaginAsian, have shut down. As recent as March 22, 2011, the *Dave Ryan In The Morning Show* performed an adaptation of Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven" song, replacing its lyrics with derogatory descriptions about the "sardine-like" conditions Hmong people live in. All these

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[345] Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham. *Asian Americans and the Media*.

events occurred despite the work done to protest previous incidents of whitewashing, such as against the *Last Airbender*, derogatory music lyrics, and holding workshops for working and breaking into the Hollywood industry at the SFIAAFF.

However, as I stated earlier, Asian American media organizations remain relevant because of their rhetorical significance. The rhetoric of Asian American media organizations is potentially powerful, utilizing Asian American experiences with the mainstream media as a means of mobilization. They simultaneously draw attention to the experience of exclusion, the lack of complex representations, and the prevalence of ridicule as the basis for their very founding. However, the challenge is how does it connect to those who no longer subscribe to the idea that Asian Americans are marginalized in the media, to those who did not grow up with Long Duk Dong but rather John Cho in *Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle*, to those who believe we live in a post-racial world?[346]

In its current configuration, the rhetoric of Asian American media organizations emphasizes community as part of an organizational mission.  However, the Asian American media organizations must be critically aware and cognizant of "who is part of this community" they seek to constitute.   In addition, the rhetoric of Asian American media organizations also recognizes that they not integral only to Asian Americans but also the United States as a whole. Danielle Allen comments that democracy requires a trust among strangers, and for many rhetoric is about building trust. Asian American media organizations, like CAAM and FAAIM, provide stories and insights into what might be perceived as the "strange" and "foreign" Asian American citizenry. Asian American media organizations, like MANAA, hold the mainstream media

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[346] *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) is a highly popular buddy movie featuring two Asian American actors as the lead. Harlold (played by John Cho) and Kumar (played by Kal Penn) are two friends on a search for late night White Castle fast food burgers. The movie is lauded for featuring Asian American actors as the lead in non-stereotypical roles as well as addressing racism through humor.

accountable for what they say or represent, about the Asian American citizenry. To remain relevant within the changing mediascape, they should remain vigilant upon whom they are trying to serve as well as informing the overall public.

**The Elephant in the Room: New Media Technology**

While an analyses of new media is noticeably absent from these chapters on three Asian American media organizations, they are by no means absent from the trials and tribulations of organizational goals and life. Truly, the "elephant in the room" for these media organizations are new media, both in terms of how best to deploy new media technologies and capitalize on their potential, while addressing their very ability to disrupt organizational processes and challenge the reasons for the organizations' existence. These organizations were founded, cultivated, and organized to address a media environment devoid of interactive social media and Web 2.0 technologies and marginally acquainted with simple Web 1.0 and its asymmetrical dissemination of information in a traditional website style. User-generated media content, such as KevJumba and Nigahaga on YouTube, are incredibly popular, and social media networks, like Facebook, have become a part of everyday life, far moreso than has public television. Indeed, the media terrain these organizations now inhabit can be seen as increasingly hostile on one end and ignorant on the other hand to media products, organizations, and communities that do not have an active web presence or activity. Simply put, if one does not Facebook, post, blog, share, or even have a pleasant and accessible website, how can one be seen as a player in the battle regarding media issues for Asian Americans? Their credibility and relevance in terms of media politics and representation may be tremendously jeopardized.

With that said, these organizations have each attempted to address the gaps in their new media usage. FAAIM redesigned their website for the 15th anniversary Showcase, publicly

archiving their programs over the past 15 years, and incorporating social media marketing

through Facebook, in addition to the traditional news print and magazine coverage in the main

Chicago entertainment weeklies.  MANAA redesigned their website to incorporate Facebook

while also maintaining a more active and regular blogging presence. CAAM, with a large grant

from the Wallace Foundation, uses new media technologies to reach out to what they diagnosed

as underrepresented groups at the film festival.  In 2009, it was social networking website

devoted to mixed raced Asian Americans called "Hapa.us." In 2010, they incorporated the

festival program into an Iphone application as well as creating an Iphone game titled "Filipino or

Not?" where users would read facts about a racially ambiguous artist and then decide if the

person was "Filipino or not."  In addition, the film festival already incorporated student blogging

and previous sponsorships with FLIP cameras allowed for festival goers to film themselves and

link it to CAAM's YouTube channel in 2009.  Their collaboration with the Corporation of Public

Broadcasting has also ushered in a space for a select number of documentaries to be shown.

Still, these technologies require members to be well-versed in such technologies in addition to

the sheer people power to maintain regular activity, as well as the organizations to continue and

regularly do work for members to post, share, and blog on. CAAM's activity is a testament to the

work needed, since they are the only one with a paid staff member to direct, oversee, and launch

new digital media programs, such as CAAM's in-house webisode creations.  On the other hand,

FAAIM and MANAA's online activity seeks just to maintain their presence, although they have

difficulty blazing new ground.

　　　Overall, these media organizations hold an ambivalent relationship with new media.  On

one hand, new media technologies allow for further outreach, such in the case of FAAIM, new

programming opportunities, which is what CAAM has utilized it for, and new ways of recruiting

members and enthusiasts, while collaborating and connecting with other organizations in ways that bring together groups like Racebending with MANAA.  On the other hand, it also threatens the very existence of the organizations.  FAAIM's presence as an organization dedicated to promoting new works and showing folks that Asian Americans exists as artistic role models is rendered less pertinent as individuals can engage in YouTube's capability to self-promote and easily see and share what others have created.  Individuals can send emails to networks, organize online, and make their voices heard in their own blogs and collective online petitions instead of meeting in a group, discussing what representations may be "problematic," and mobilizing.  Instead of attending a costly film festival in the Bay Area, individuals can wait to see it aired on PBS or for online distribution via Netflix.

Despite the changing new media environment, organizations like CAAM, FAAIM, and MANAA still exist. As Ono and I have argued before, while new media has the potential to unite Asian Americans across time and space, it also has a tendency to be individualistic, self-serving, reactive, and often hit or miss.[347] The new media landscape has changed much, even since  Ono and I addressed recently in 2007.  But as the opening anecdote on blog star AngryAsianMan shows, organizations play a vital role engaging in the racial identity and awareness of their members. Nonetheless, new media technologies have changed the mediascape and whether or not these organizations can adapt to the very ways that the new media technologies change organizational members' ideas of how media, technology, and the process of organizing itself remains to be seen.  New media technologies have shifted people's attention to media in ways that the organization may not even consider.  Thus, organizations must continue being open to new media not just as tool but also as a way of reworking ideological concerns over issues of representation needs to be considered.

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[347] Ono and Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media.*

**"Asian American is...what you make of it."[348]**

While the term "Asian American" has become common in everyday language, media organizations rhetorically deploy the term as it seeks to represent this abstract term and idea in issues over media representation.  Nonetheless, this dissertation seeks to interrogate the usage of "Asian American" when coupled with ideas of organizations that deploy it for a variety of political, cultural, and media-related issues.  While "Asian American" is often seen as Lisa Ly states, "what you make of it," what these organizations make of Asian American is incredibly important as they are often seen as representatives of the Asian American community writ large by outsiders and as sites of contestation by the very members and supporters who constitute the core of the organization.

Central to the examples that these organizations demonstrate is the sometimes lack of critical reflexivity over the use of the term "Asian American" and what it affords and does not afford?  Quite simply, who are those included within the term "Asian American" as deployed by the organization, and what does it mean to be "Asian American" as a cultural and rhetorical practice and not just as a marker of Asian descent.  Also, who and what comes to be called "Asian American" that was not even imagined as part of the original conception and use of the term?  So while Hmong Americans are included as part of the larger Asian American community, their histories, concerns, and current presence in the United States differs greatly from Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans.   The challenge becomes how does one understand and include such groups and the larger Asian diaspora as part of the larger battle over media representation without ignoring their concerns and specificities.

While academia has theorized Asian American beyond geographic locations and fixed and/or essentialized identities, the term's application to the study of organizational vernacular

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[348] Lisa Ly interview, 14 March 2010.

rhetorics often holds to such ideas. In essence, this dissertation argues to reconfigure "Asian American" away from a fixed notion that has often plagued use of the term and to think of "Asian America (n)" as an articulating practice and thus continues to re-articulate and re-link, and to disconnect and reconnect as is needed; to recognize that its mutability is a strength as well as a weakness; and to be critical reflexive over its usage.

In the opening salutation at the front the 2011 SFIAAFF program booklet, Chi-Hui welcomes the audience, with the following statement.

Perhaps a little known fact: the Festival has the distinction of having presented all of its 28 years in 3D -- not in a technological sense, of course, but in a real sense, where the characters you see are so richly dimensional they could be sitting next to you, and the live, communal experience of it all (lining up, conversing with fellow audience members, Q&A's with filmmakers, etc.) engage the senses in ways that no regular movie-going can. In a time of great technological feats, we're pleased to be presenting something even more astounding: good old-fashioned storytelling, and live human interaction.

Yang's statement is a reminder to all those attending the festival that although technologies enrich our lives and experiences, they may also detach us from the communal experiences that remain with us as audiences and media consumers and critics. Indeed, individual experiences are important, and new media proponents are correct about the game-changing nature of social media and Web 2.0 technologies. However, it is also important to recognize that organizations are influential and that collective action is also needed in the form of "community" that extends beyond "individual consumerism." And while there are the frustrations of waiting in line for a film festival in the wet San Francisco spring, sitting through an excruciatingly long meeting and debating the merits of a media representation on a Thursday night in Los Angeles' Chinatown, or

listening to a film festival director ramble on during a film introduction, they are all part of a

communal experience of organizational association and affiliation and connecting oneself to

something outside and larger than an individual act of agency via protest, critique, and

production.

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APPENDIX A:

PHOTOGRAPH OF TIM HUGH'S BOOKSHELF

APPENDIX B:

CALL FOR COMMUNITY SHORTS PROPOSAL NOTES

Founded in 1995, the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM) in a non-profit 503© organization whose mission is to promote film, video, and other media by and about Asian Americans and to support the artists who create them. Working closely with Gene Siskel Film Center and the School of the Art Institute, FAAIM has annually exhibited Asian American media with their annual film festival, the Chicago Asian American Showcase. Over the years, FAAIM has pioneered the multi-media aspect of the film festival that has spread to other film festivals, such as curating a visual arts fest and organizing an Asian American independent music concert.

The upcoming year of 2010 celebrates the 15th anniversary of the Chicago Asian American Showcase and the efforts to provide a space for Asian American independent media to flourish within the Chicago community.  Founded by local Chicago music artists, SooYoung Park, William Shin, and Ben Kim, they created FAAIM in order to address the lack of Asian American role models in the media arts field and to provide Asian Americans artists a space to show their work.
For this year, FAAIM seeks once again break new ground on innovative events while emphasizing the roots of its festival and its connection to community by calling upon local community and university student groups to write and produce a short film of any genre that would incorporate a keyword decided by FAAIM.  FAAIM is presenting an opportunity for local community groups and university student groups to produce and contribute to the larger Asian American media movement by sharing their stories, visions, and creative work.  For FAAIM, it would allow for a much-needed collaboration with the local communities that FAAIM seeks to serve along with promoting stories and people from their community.

The short films produced by groups would be within the length of 4:00 to 10:00 long.  The genre of the short film is flexible.  Thus, groups can produce short narratives, documentaries, animation, music video, etc.  The only requirement is that the short film contains the keyword in a verbal, physical, and/or visual form.  Most importantly, the best short film of this program will be voted upon by the audience (and by a panel from the FAAIM).  There will be a variety of awards given to the films in this program.  We ask that the groups be limited to 3-4 and importantly be overseen by a faculty or community advisor to help oversee the project and liaison with FAAIM.

Although there might be hesitancies with advising a small group of aspiring filmmakers, this ???? provides many opportunities for the group.  First, this project can be incorporated with a course assignment or a long-term project for the local community group, providing an opportunity for their films to be shown in a world-class film center while working towards a common goal for the group or the course.  Although there may be concerns regarding the nature and accessibility of film making technology, this is no longer as pressing a concern as it has been in the past.  Home consumer video equipment or simple handheld video equipment, such as the Flip, would be more than sufficient.  Also the format would allow for much flexibility, such as

still photos arranged in a slide show with voice narration.  As the project starts, we would be more than happy to assist in the beginning stages to get the groups started.


The Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM) was formed in 1995 by SooYoung Park, William Shin, and Ben Kim.  Struggling with being one of the few recognizable Asian American artists and the lack of Asian American role models in the media arts field, Park, Shin, and Kim organized the first Chicago Asian American Showcase in order to provide Asian Americans artists a space to show their work.

SECOND DRAFT OF COMMUNITY SHORTS PROPOSAL

To mark the 15th anniversary of the Chicago Asian American Showcase, the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM) invites all those within our community to pick up a camera and shoot your stories to add to our rich tradition and to answer, in a short film, the question "How does art, in specific film, create and document our communities?"
WHY?
Because it is our mission, always, to promote how film unites our common causes, our larger community. Because it is our passion to support, serve, and see Asian American film flourish in our community. Because it takes neighborhood to raise a child but it takes a community to create a neighborhood.
Chicago is a city of neighborhoods.  Neighborhoods demarcated by streets, sounds, cultures, and communities. However, what is community? This time-honored question remains pertinent and pressing when the Internet keeps us apart physically yet connected virtually.  In following the documentary tradition, this idea is our impetus to invite many communities, from the local neighborhood youth organizations to university estates, to create new stories (or new takes on old stories), to look at ourselves again, to share, to think about how we interact with others, how we collaborate, and expand what is community beyond the neighborhood and outside our houses. We've seen Hollywood think about our communities but let's return to our roots and share what "community" means to Asian America.
We ask that short films produced by groups would be within the length of 4:00 to 10:00 long. The genre of the short film is flexible.  Groups can produce short narratives, documentaries, animation, music video, stop motion, anything that you can come up that honestly considers and incorporates "community."   In fact, the only requirement is that the short film contains "Community" in a verbal, physical, and/or visual form.  Most importantly, the best short film of this program will be voted upon by the audience (and by a panel from the FAAIM).  There will be a variety of awards given to the films in this program.  We ask that the groups be limited to 3-4 and importantly be overseen by a faculty or community advisor to help oversee the project and liaison with FAAIM.
We've been thinking about this for 15 years and have seen Hollywood represent our community. So, join the 15th anniversary party by picking up a camera, shooting honestly, and sharing with us and others in the space of the Gene Siskel Film Center among friends you didn't know you had.
*The Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM) is a non-profit 503© organization whose mission is to promote film, video, and other media by and about Asian Americans and to support the artists who create them. In 1995 local Chicago music artists SooYoung Park, William Shin, and Ben Kim, founded FAAIM in order to address the lack of Asian American role models in the media arts field and to provide Asian Americans artists a space to show their work.  In partnership with Gene Siskel Film Center and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), FAAIM has annually exhibited Asian American media with their annual film festival, the Chicago Asian American Showcase. Over the years, FAAIM has pioneered the multi-media aspect of the film festival that has spread to other film festivals, such as curating a visual arts fest and organizing an Asian American independent music concert. Join us for another year of promoting, creating, and exhibiting Asian American independent media.*

**Addendum:**
Although there might be hesitancies with advising a small group of aspiring filmmakers, this short film provides many opportunities for the group.  First, this project can be incorporated with a course assignment or a long-term project for the local community group, providing an opportunity for their films to be shown in a world-class film center while working towards a common goal for the group or the course.  Although there may be concerns regarding the nature and accessibility of film making technology, this is no longer as pressing a concern as it has been in the past.  Home consumer video equipment or simple handheld video equipment, such as the Flip, would be more than sufficient.   Also the format would allow for much flexibility, such as still photos arranged in a slide show with voice narration.  As the project starts, we would be more than happy to assist in the beginning stages to get the groups started.

## Some general notes from the meeting

look at ourselves for others to see and  for us to share and carefully
  Looking at ourselves for others to see and for us to share.
Community, film, projects
Pitch the idea, who are we? Why are we asking you? We've been doing this, now we want you to join the party b/c we're happy about what we've done
Stress the democracy of the project → not stressing the professional, but not the amateur. We are looking for honesty, projects on film that carefully/humorously consider
Man on the street is afraid of the word art and film is democratic, that allows everyone to pick up a camera and simply shoot, that has a message, that projects a vision and that's what we're interesting in.  We'd love to show that. (this is the program thing)

FINAL DRAFT OF COMMUNITY SHORTS PROPOSAL



Presents the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Chicago Asian American Showcase
@ The Gene Siskel Film Center   April 2-15, 2010

Dear

To mark the Crystal Anniversary of the Chicago Asian American Showcase, the Foundation of Asian American Independent Media (FAAIM) invites all those within our community to pick up a video camera and shoot our stories to add to our rich tradition that addresses the question, "How does film create and document who we are, what we do, or where we live, whether it involves playing video games, singing karaoke, or shooting the breeze with friends drinking bubble tea?"

WHY?

Because it is our mission, always, to promote how film unites our common causes, our larger community. Because it is our passion to support, serve, and see Asian American film flourish in our community. Because it is, after all, OUR lives even though full of complications that usually ends up being funny and stranger than fiction shaping community.

These are the charming moments of our lives that other folks forget make up our communities. And by "community", we mean not something dry, academic and boring with subtitles—no, just the opposite.

Remember Chicago is the Windy City, the City of Broad Shoulders, of Neighborhoods--- demarcated by streets, buildings and people full of sounds, smells and tastes... But just what is community? Is it about that special place made of certain memories and friendships you live, love and die for?  Or is it more about your customs, your beliefs, and your cultures?
So our impetus is to invite those from these many and different communities to create new stories (or new takes on old stories), to look at ourselves again, to share, to think about how we interact with others, how we collaborate, and expand upon what is community beyond the neighborhood and outside our houses.  We've seen how Hollywood think about our communities but let's return to our roots and share what "community" means to Asian America.

We ask that short films produced by groups be within 4 to 10 minutes long.  The genre of the short film is flexible.  So go ahead and make short narratives, documentaries, animation, music video, stop motion, anything that you can come up that honestly considers and incorporates how your groups views itself, others, the way both interact or not that expresses something "fun". Most importantly, the audience (and a panel from FAAIM) will get to vote on the best film with

a variety of awards given to these film projects. Plus no more than 3-4 people per group with a faculty or community advisor to help oversee the project and liaison with FAAIM.

Now be a part of the 15th Annual Asian American Showcase at the Gene Siskel Film Center among friends you didn't know you had.

*The Foundation of Asian American Independent Media's mission is to promote film, video, and other media by and about Asian Americans and to support the artists who create them. In 1995 local Chicago music artists Soo Young Park, William Shin, and Ben Kim, founded FAAIM in order to address the lack of Asian American role models in the media arts field and to provide Asian Americans artists a space to show their work.  In partnership with Gene Siskel Film Center and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), FAAIM has annually exhibited Asian American media with their annual film festival, the Chicago Asian American Showcase. Over the years, FAAIM has pioneered the multi-media aspect of the film festival that has spread to other film festivals, such as curating a visual arts fest and organizing an Asian American independent music concert.  Join us for another year of promoting, creating, and exhibiting Asian American independent media.  FAAIM is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Your donation may be tax-deductible per federal regulations.*

ABRIDGED "OPEN MEMO TO HOLLYWOOD"

The list can be seen in its entirety here http://www.manaa.org/asian_stereotypes.html.  I've edited out the explanations for space and provided the abridged version below:

1. Asian Americans as foreigners who cannot be assimilated. *Stereotype-Buster:* Portraying Asians as an integral part of the United States. More portrayals of acculturated Asian Americans speaking *without* foreign accents.
2. Asian cultures as inherently predatory.  *Stereotype-Buster:* Asians as positive contributors to American society.
3. Asian Americans restricted to clichéd occupations.  *Stereotype-Buster:* Asian Americans in diverse, mainstream occupations: doctors, lawyers, therapists, educators, U.S. soldiers, etc.
4. Asian racial features, names, accents, or mannerisms as inherently comic or sinister. *Stereotype-Buster: Stereotype-Buster:* Asian names or racial features as no more "unusual" than those of whites.
5. Asians relegated to supporting roles in projects with Asian or Asian American content. *Stereotype-Buster:* More Asian and Asian American lead roles.
6. Asian male sexuality as negative or non-existent.  *Stereotype-Buster:* More Asian men as positive romantic leads.
7. Unmotivated white-Asian romance.  *Stereotype-Buster:* Interracial romances should be as well-motivated and well-developed as same-race romances.
8. Asian women as "China dolls."  *Stereotype-Buster:* Asian women as self-confident and self-respecting, pleasing themselves as well as their loved ones.
9. Asian women as "dragon ladies."  *Stereotype-Buster:* Whenever villains are Asian, it's important that their villainy not be attributed to their ethnicity.
10. Asians who prove how good they are by sacrificing their lives.  *Stereotype-Buster:* Positive Asian characters who are still alive at the end of the story.
11. Asian Americans as the "model minority."  *Stereotype-Buster:* The audience empathizing with an Asian character's flaws and foibles.
12. Asianness as an "explanation" for the magical or supernatural.  *Stereotype-Buster:* Asian cultures as no more or less magical than other cultures.
13. Anti-Asian racial slurs going unchallenged.  *Stereotype-Buster:* If absolutely necessary for a film or TV project, anti-Asian racial slurs should be contextualized as negative and insulting.
14. Asian arts as negative when practiced by Asians but positive when practiced by whites. *Stereotype-Buster:* Culturally distinct Asian skills positively and realistically employed by Asian people.
15. Lead Asian roles labeled "Amerasian" or "Eurasian" solely to accommodate white actors.  *Stereotype-Buster:* Until the proverbial playing field is truly level, Asian roles--especially lead roles--should be reserved for Asian actors.
16. What, no Asians?  *Stereotype-Buster:* Virtually any project--especially one with a contemporary setting--can make room for Asian characters. And just because a part isn't explicitly written as Asian doesn't necessarily mean that it can't be cast with an Asian actor.

APPENDIX D:

LIST OF MANAA'S PRESIDENTS

Here is a list of MANAA's presidents and vice presidents as culled from their newsletters spanning back to 1994:

1994 -1997:  Guy Aoki (president), 1994: Leslie Ishii (vice-president), 1996: Jeff Hollingsworth (vice president)
1997-1998:  Toshi Yang (president)
1999: Kent Kawaii (president)
2000 - 2002: Guy Aoki (president), 2002: Ken Kwok (vice-president)
2003:  Aki Leong (president), Ken Kwok (vice-president)
2003-2005: Jennifer Kuo (president starting Sept 2003)
2006 - 2009: Jeff Mio (vice president)
2007 – 2009:  Phil Lee (president)
2009 – present: Jeff Mio (president)

TRANSCRIPT OF "HOLLYWOOD VERSUS CAAM" FILM SHORT

*Sung Kang (CAAM):* Hi, I'm CAAM

*Roger Fan (Hollywood)*: And I'm Hollywood.  So um, how long is this going to take

*CAAM*: 30 seconds for 30 years.  Just follow the script

*Hollywood*: Okay. How many Asian friends do you have on Facebook.

*CAAM*: That's not on the script. Like 3000.

*Hollywood*: I like have over a billion.

*CAAM*: Well, I go for quality over quantity.

*Hollywood*: Who do you got?

*CAAM*: I've got Justin Lin.

*Hollywood*: Fast and the Furious? He's mine.

*CAAM*: Sandra Oh!

*Hollywood*: Grey's Anatomy. She's mine.  John Cho, Wayne Wang, Jessica Yu.  Mine mine mine mine mine!

*CAAM*: I've got...Curtis Choy.

*Hollywood*: Oh my God, he's a pain in the ass.  You can have him.

*CAAM*: What about Spencer Nakasako?

*Hollywood*: Who the fuck is that?  Hey CAAM, this is taking a little longer than 30 seconds.

*CAAM*: We're a non-profit. Asian American Cinema.

"For Loni Ding, pioneer of Asian American Cinema"

CURRICULUM VITAE

## Vincent N. Pham

**Education**

Ph.D.  University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Communication (Rhetorical Studies, Organizational Communication), 2011 (Successfully defended: May 2, 2011)

Dissertation Title:  Mobilizing "Asian American": Rhetoric and Ethnography of Asian American Media Organizations

Dissertation Committee: Kent A. Ono (Chair and Adviser), Cara A. Finnegan, Marshall Scott Poole, and Phaedra C. Pezzullo

M.A.  University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Speech Communication (Rhetorical Studies, Organizational Communication), 2006

Advisor:  Cara A. Finnegan

B.S.  University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Biology and Speech Communication, 2003

**Publications**

Ono, Kent A. & Vincent N. Pham (2008).  Asian Americans and the Media.  Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008.

Pham, Vincent N. and Kent Ono (2008).  "Abercrombie and Fitch and 'Artful Bigotry & Kitsch': A Study of Stereotype, Mimicry, and Satire of T-Shirt Rhetoric about Asian Americans." In LuMing Mao and Morris Young (Eds.) Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric. Logan: Utah State University Press. 175-197.

**Publications in progress**

Pham, Vincent N. (accepted - revise and resubmit). "An unfortunate conflict of interests": Strategic essentialism and manageability in Asian American media activism. Critical Studies in Media Communication.

Pham, Vincent (submitted for copyediting) Zack Furness. One Less Car: Bicycling and the politics of automobility.  Book Review. Quarterly Journal of Speech.

**Book Reviews**

Pham, Vincent N. (2009) Lu-Ming Mao. Reading Chinese Fortune Cookie: The Making of Chinese American Rhetoric. Book Review. Quarterly Journal of Speech 95 (3): 356-359.

Ono, Kent A. and Vincent N. Pham (2006). Morris Young. Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship. Book Review. Quarterly  Journal of Speech 92 (4): 429-432.

**Honors and Awards**
National Communication Association Doctoral Honors Seminar (2010), Salt Lake City, UT.

Summer Dissertation Fellowship (2010) University of Illinois, Department of Communication

Jeffrey S. Tanaka Grant (2009) University of Illinois, Asian American Studies Program

Stafford H. Thomas Award (2008) University of Illinois, Department of Communication

Campus Excellent Teacher (ranking list published by University of Illinois, Center for Teaching Excellence), Spring 2007, Spring 2008, Spring 2009, Spring 2010, Fall 2010.

**Conference Presentations**
Pham, Vincent N. "Articulating 'Asian American' Community." National Communication Association Convention, San Francisco, CA.  Nov. 15, 2010.

Pham, Vincent N. "Remember *Requiem:* Re-Visualizing Vietnam War Collective Memory." National Communication Association Convention, San Francisco, CA.  Nov. 14, 2010.

Pham, Vincent N. "Constituting Temporary Community, Mediating Experience: The Rhetoric of Asian American Independent Media."  Rhetoric Society of America Bi-Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN. May 23, 2010.

Pham, Vincent N. "Mainstream Media Terrains, Asian American Mediascapes: Organizing Media Spaces through Asian American Media Organization."  Association of Asian American Studies annual conference, Austin, TX.  April 9, 2010.

Pham, Vincent N. "Boardroom Meetings and On-Line Protests: Organizing an Asian American media activist community." National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL. Nov. 12, 2009.

Pham, Vincent N. "Digital Self-representations:  Asian American identity rhetorics on YouTube." Rhetoric Society of America Bi-Annual Conference, Seattle, WA.  May 25, 2008.

Pham, Vincent N. "Real Americans, Imagined Communities:  YouTubing Asian American Political Empowerment."  Association of Asian American Studies annual Conference, Chicago, IL.  April 19, 2008.

Pham, Vincent N.  "Failing Asian Bodies and Fractured Speech: Lily Chin's Rhetorical Affectivity."  National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL.  Nov. 15, 2007.

Pham, Vincent N. "Visual Rhetoric:  A Skeptical Introduction."   Visual Communication Division, National Communication Association Convention, Boston, MA.  Nov. 19, 2005.

Pham, Vincent N.  "The Influence of Place on the Virtual Third Place."  Paper accepted, presented at Association of Internet Researchers 6.0, Chicago, IL. Oct. 8, 2005.

**Conference Activities**
Conference Paper Reviewer: Asian Pacific American Communication Studies Division of the National Communication Association, 2009-2010.

Organizer, "Asian Americans and the Media: Mapping contemporary anti-Asian American discourses and charting new resistances" panel at the 2010 Association of Asian American Studies annual conference, Austin, TX.

Roundtable Participant, "Organizational Rhetoric: Where are we?" panel at the 2009 National Communication Convention, Chicago, IL.

Organizer, "De/Re-stabilizing Rhetoric and Contemporary Social Movements" panel at the 2009 National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL.

Organizer, "A Most Painful Performance: The Intersection of Performance and Pain in Embodied Rhetoric" panel at 2007 National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL.

Paper Reviewer and Conference Organizer, "Emerging Critical Scholarship on Asian Pacific American Issues: A Graduate Students Conference," A National Conference by the UIUC Asian Pacific American Graduate Students Organization, Aug. 2005-May 2006.

**Invited Presentations and Panels**
"*Better Luck Tomorrow* Today" lecture for Professor Soo Ah Kwon's class, "Asian American Youth in Film." Oct. 4, 2010.

"Bridging Asian American Media Texts" panelist for the *New Communities: A Symposium on Exploring, Challenging, and Negotiating Contemporary Asian American Identity* at Purdue University. April 13, 2010.

"(Mediating) Asian America(n) Community: Rhetorical disseminations of Asian American Media Organizations." University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program 2010 Jeffrey Tanaka Grant Talk. April 1, 2010.

"Asian Americans and the Media" for the "Food for Thought" series at the Asian American Cultural Center at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Jan. 19, 2010.

"Asian American public protests and criticisms" lecture for Professor Kent A. Ono's class, "Asian Americans and the Media" Oct. 27, 2009.

"Mobilizing Asian American media organization" lecture for Professor Kent A. Ono's class, "Asian Americans and the Media" April 21, 2009.

"Artful Bigotry and t-shirt rhetoric" lecture for Professor Kent Ono's class, "Asian American Popular Culture," Sept. 7, 2006.

Panelist, "Food for Thought:  A Panel on Asian American Studies" for the Asian American Cultural Center, April 5, 2006.


**Teaching Experience**
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Asian American Studies 120:  Introduction to Asian American Popular Culture:
     *Teaching Assistant*: Fall 2010 – present

Communication 212: Introduction to Organizational Communication:
     *Head Lecturer:* Fall 2009
     *Teaching Assistant*: Spring 2008, Summer 2008, Fall 2008, Spring 2009, Summer 2009, Spring 2010

Oral and Written Communication I:  Speech Communication 111
     *Teaching Assistant*: Fall 2007, Fall 2004

Asian American Popular Culture: Asian American Studies 120
     *Facilitator*: Summer 2007

Introduction to Public Speaking:  Speech Communication 101
     *Teaching Assistant*: Fall 2006, Spring 2007

Oral and Written Communication II:  Speech Communication 112
     *Teaching Assistant*: Spring 2005

Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Heights, IL
Introduction to College Skills: College 101
     *Instructor*: Summer 2006

**Research Assistantships and Academic Appointments**
Research Assistant, Professor Soo Ah Kwon, Asian American Studies Program and the Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois, Fall 2009 – present.

Research Assistant, Professor Debra Hawhee, Department of Communication, University of Illinois, Fall 2008 – Spring 2009.

Film Screener for Professor Lisa Nakamura's "Asian Americans in the Media" course, Spring 2007.

Research Assistant, Professor Kent Ono, The Institute of Communication Research and Asian American Studies Program, University of Illinois, Fall 2005 – Spring 2006.

Research Assistant, Professor Cara Finnegan, Department of Speech Communication, University of Illinois, Fall 2004 – Spring 2005.

**Service**
Manuscript Reviewer: <u>Critical Studies in Media Communication</u>, 2010.

Manuscript Reviewer: <u>Critical/Cultural Studies in Communication</u>, 2010.

Manuscript Reviewer: <u>Journal of International and Intercultural Communication</u>, 2008, 2009, 2010.

Manuscript Reviewer: <u>Men and Masculinities</u>, 2009, 2010.

President for the Rhetoric Society of America – Student Chapter Registered Student Organization, University of Illinois, Fall 2010 – present.

Founder of and Treasurer for the Rhetoric Society of America – Student Chapter Registered Student Organization, University of Illinois, Fall 2008 – Spring 2010.

Workshop Facilitator for Asian American Association program "Asian American Ambassadors: Contemporary Issues in Asian American Media Representation." 2008, 2010.
Student Advisory board for the "Inclusive Illinois" campaign.  Fall 2007 – Spring 2008.

Search Committee for Clinical Counselor with Asian American student focus, Feb 2007 – May 2007.  University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.  John Powell (Committee Chair).
Workshop Facilitator for Asian American Association program "Asian American Ambassadors: Contemporary Issues in Asian American Media Representation." Dec 2006.

Vice-President, Asian Pacific American Graduate Student Organization (APAGSO) at the University at Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Aug 2006 – May 2007.

Panelist on "Teaching Experiences at the University of Illinois" for Department of Speech Communication "Welcome Weekend for Graduate Student Candidates," Mar. 2005.

Graduate Employee Organization Department Steward, Aug 2005- May 2007.

**Membership in Professional Organizations**
Association of Asian American Studies – 2008 – present
National Communication Association 2005 -2006, 2007 – present
Rhetoric Society of America – 2008 - present

**Selected Work Experience**
Coordinator of Pop Culture Programs, May 2009 to May 2010, the Asian American Cultural Center, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Coordinator of New Student Orientation , May 2006 – Aug 2006, Dec 2006 – Jan 2007,

New Student Orientation Training and Development Consultant, July 2007 and December 2007, Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Heights, IL.

Research Associate, the Aslan Group consulting firm, Oct 2004 – April 2007.

**Community Service**
"Outstanding Asian American Graduate Student Leader Award" from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Asian American Cultural Center. April 25, 2011.

Guest Interview and roundtable panelist for APA Compass radio program on Kboo.fm Community Radio program APA Compass, 11/5/2010. http://www.kboo.fm/apacompass. Available to listen on http://kboo.fm/node/24821

Steering Committee, Bike Project of Urbana-Champaign, August 2009 – present.

Quoted in the "The Asian *Jersey Shore*" by Joyce Tang, The Daily Beast. http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-08-03/the-asian-jersey-shore/

"Angry Asian Reader of the Week," May 14, 2010 for AngryAsianMan.com. http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/05/angry-reader-of-week-vincent-pham.html

Writer, Director and Actor - *"Artists, Activists, and Authors After Hours event: The Exotic and Mysterious Other"* Performance for *The Public Square at the Illinois Humanities Council* – Sept 13, 2006.

Member, Asian American Artists Collective in Chicago, IL.  2003, 2004.

**Languages**
Vietnamese (conversational)

**References available upon request**