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Special Issue Editors' Introduction

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Special Issue: Forty and Forward¹: Research on the New Second Generation of Southeast Asian American Students

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Special Issue Editors' Introduction

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, which led to a mass exodus of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong refugees from Southeast Asia. Many of these individuals eventually settled in the United States. This special issue of the Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement (JSAAEA) focuses primarily on the education of the children of these refugees. We are pleased to feature some of the best new research and thinking that aims to improve the education of the “new second generation” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006) of Southeast Asian American students.

In Fall 2012, sixteen AAPI education scholars, including the guest editors of this issue, met at the University of Hawaii–Manoa for a week-long summit to examine the state of our field and discuss the past, present, and future educational research that informs research, policy and practice for AAPI individuals and communities. An outcome of this event was the formation of the [Asian American and Pacific Islander Research Coalition \(ARC\)](#). The sixteen ARC scholars hail from various US states, possess expertise across K-12 and higher education, and represent various AAPI ethnic communities. Among the most pressing needs identified at the ARC summit was advancing high quality research on Southeast Asian American education. This special issue of JSAAEA speaks directly to that need.

Southeast Asian American students are often invoked in discussions about disparities within the AAPI category but are rarely the focus of empirical analysis. However, the past decade has witnessed an impressive growth of studies that examine Southeast Asian American students both as separate ethnic groups (Khmer, Lao, Hmong, and Vietnamese) and as a collective Southeast Asian subgroup. One reason for this growth is the coming of age of a

¹ We borrow this phrase from the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (searac.org), a national organization that advances the interests of Southeast Asian US communities. “Forty and Forward” recognizes the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon which led to the largest refugee resettlement in US history.

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number of 1.5 and 2nd generation Southeast Asian scholars in education including Bic Ngo, Phitsamay Uy, Rican Vue, Malaphone Phommasa, and Ketmani Kouanchao. Among others, these younger scholars are establishing new, exciting areas of inquiry, extending the seminal work of earlier non-Southeast Asian scholars such as Peter Kiang, Stacey J. Lee, Carl Bankston III, Min Zhou, and Wayne Wright.

Another reason for the growth of studies on Southeast Asian American students is the JSAAEA, which is celebrating its 10th year anniversary. Since its inception, the journal has served as an important forum, critical for propagating research on Southeast Asian American communities. JSAAEA has also been an important mentoring and publishing space for up and coming Southeast Asian American scholars.

The articles that comprise this issue represent some of the best new empirical work on Southeast Asian American students as well as promising directions for research and practice for serving these communities.

In their articles, Bic Ngo and Phitsamay Uy look to out-of-school spaces to understand the education of Southeast Asian American students. In her ethnographic study, *Hmong Culture Club as a Place of Belonging: The Cultivation of Hmong Students' Cultural and Political Identities*, Ngo observes the problems and promises of ethnically-based student clubs. This research problematizes notions of multiculturalism and subtractive schooling by zooming in on Hmong youth constructed cultural spaces.

In a similar vein, Uy's policy brief entitled, *Supporting Southeast Asian American Family and Community Engagement for Educational Success*, pushes back on deficit perspectives of Southeast Asian parents including the popular, albeit implicit, assumption that these parents do not care about their children's schooling. Drawing on research on parent involvement and student engagement as well as examples of effective community based programs, Uy's policy brief highlights the critical role that community-based organizations can play in engaging parents and students. This brief is a call to policymakers to integrate culturally relevant strategies with research-based knowledge about Southeast Asian communities into school programs and policies.

The next two articles by Kristen Surla and Oiyan Poon, and Malaphone Phommasa explore higher educational landscapes for Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Filipino students. In *Visualizing Social Influences on Filipino American and Southeast Asian American College Choice*, Surla and Poon argue for a more collective understanding of Southeast Asian and Filipino students' college choice decisions. Their high school youth participants explicitly identified the value of familial and peer networks in considering which colleges to consider. The authors also identify gender as a significant factor, as some of the women had to negotiate familial expectations of staying close to home with desires of "going away" for college and independence.

In *Expanding Definitions of Family: Influences on Second-Generation Lao American College Students' Aspirations*, Phommasa explores the role of familial influences on the aspirations of 2nd generation Lao American young people. These findings point to students' interpretation of their parents' refugee narrative as significant for future goals. She also argues that while parents and siblings matter, the experience and advice of extended family members often carry just as much weight. This study is one of the only empirical studies of Lao American college students as a unique ethnic group.

In the final article of the special issue, Loan Dao brings readers in close to her experiences as a Vietnamese American woman scholar working within a coethnic community. In

Replanting our Roots: Vietnamese American Studies for the Millennial Generation, Dao reflects on her successes and challenges in building relationships with first and second generation college students and community members in a New England immigrant community. Dao describes Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) as a more Freirean model of education for millennial Vietnamese American students. Her study noted the delicate balance for Southeast Asian scholars “not to reproduce the expectations [of me] in the community based on [my] intersectional identities and access to resources through the university.” This professional and ethical tightrope is not unusual for Southeast Asian American researchers and perhaps for scholars of color in general.

The five articles highlighted in the special issue seeks to provide a more complete picture of Southeast Asian American students than is often depicted in the extant literature. Southeast Asian Americans are unfortunately discussed as essentialized groups (“cultural explanations”), a simple, dichotomous group (“high performers versus dropouts”), and/or outliers (“not all AAPIs are successful, look at Southeast Asians”). The collection of papers in this issue seeks to portray Hmong, Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese students as who they are rather than who they are not. Altogether, the authors contribute both theoretical and practical recommendations for policy debates on Southeast Asian American education. We agree with Lee (2001) who noted years ago that Southeast Asian American students are more than “model minorities” or “delinquents.” They are neither of these. And they are everything in between and more.

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