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Asian American Pop Culture + Giant Robot:

Interview with Martin Wong and Eric Nakamura (Founders)

By: David Mei

How would you describe *Giant Robot* to someone that has never heard of it?

EN: Something they need to read, an Asian pop culture magazine that is aimed at anyone and everyone.

MW: We didn't just write the same thing over and over, like just becoming the ultimate toy magazine, or a music-geek magazine, or nothing but anime-otaku stuff. That's not interesting. It becomes so specialized that you forget everything else. We try to provide a bigger picture, a fuller view of culture rather than just geeking out on one particular thing. You get to see the influence between the different categories too. Like if there is one person who only listens to Japanese pop, hopefully that person discovers something new in *Giant Robot* and finds out that Thai design is cool. We try to open people's eyes including our own.

Why did you create *Giant Robot*?

MW: Just because it's stuff we're into, it's fun. It's one of those things where there were other magazines out there and we thought they stunk. We thought we can do better, and we thought our own interests were more interesting than what those magazines covered.

EN: We made our own magazine what we wanted to read. Asian magazines were writing about Asian CEOs or whatever. There was all this other cool stuff going on, but no one else was writing about it.

Do you think there is a difference between "Asian American pop culture" and "Asian pop culture"?

MW: They're completely different. I think Asian American pop culture is just a weird mix of what's here in America already and what's from Asia. There is some kind of mix in between, whereas Asian pop culture is just from Asia usually. I think it changes around a bit here. In the end I think they're very different. One is a hybrid American thing and one is a little bit more pure from Asia.

Having to run a magazine do you guys find yourself becoming critics of pop culture or pop culture enthusiasts?

EN: Both, I like to think we're both. You have to be really into it, you have to be critical. You can't just absorb everything—like the crap. You have to know what's crap, even if you're the hardest core fan of something, you have to admit a lot of it is very shi*ty.

MW: You'll be a magazine that's out of business. You can't do it that way, it won't work. I think that was the problem with other Asian American magazines. They weren't critical of anything. They just covered everything and they basically covered crap 95% of the time.

You have interviewed many notable people, who was your favorite?

MW: Stephen Chow. On screen he seems really funny and hilarious; he's a very serious smart guy, really thoughtful, everything he said was very shrewd. He still has that regular "dude" personality, but very different off screen. That's kind of a cool thing that



not everyone gets to see, so it's pretty exciting to meet someone like that.

EN: I like Yoshitomo Nara—he was an artist we covered way back. He's this great artist that was a really good interview. I would like to interview him again, it's been a while.

Who are your Asian American role models?

MW: I think the cool thing about doing a magazine like *Giant Robot* is that you get to meet people who influence you every day. Sometimes they're not always the movie stars or rock stars of art or whatever. They're just regular people that say things that are interesting to you. You know, Eric interviewed the gas meter reader once, and his approach of life was really cool. The main point is that it's not always the famous people that capture or inspire you, but sometimes it's the unknown people or everyday guys or girls that we can learn the most from. In the end it's just people around you that influence you most.

To learn more from *Giant Robot* attend their talk: (See Calendar p. 3-4)

PERSON ON THE STREET: WHAT DID YOU LIKE MOST WORKING AT AARCC?



Melissa Gaba
Campus Outreach

I liked all the new people I got to meet, and everything I learned about Asian American issues. I also liked staff meetings...especially when there was food!

Advice: Bring plenty of bug spray at the summer retreat!



Aaditi Dubale
Community Outreach

I liked the balance of working together and individually.

Advice: Plan a lot, and plan ahead!



David Mei
Publications

I really liked interviewing the incoming speakers for the newsletters. They really are interesting people. Best interview to date, Giant Robot.

Advice: Get a recorder, save time on writing.



Winnie Chan
Graduate Assistant

Working at AARCC is the best because we are helping to create an Asian American community on campus and of course, I love the birthday cakes.

Advice: Be flexible, there are always surprises at AARCC.

NEED A JOB? JOIN US AT AARCC: STUDENT POSITIONS FOR 08-09

Campus Outreach Coordinator

The Campus Outreach coordinator will be the liaison between AARCC and UIC's Asian American student organizations. This will involve attending organization meetings, getting to know organization officers, and coordinating the Asian American Student Leaders Council. We are looking for an enthusiastic student with strong communication skills who has experience working with UIC student organizations, as well as publicizing events. Applicants should be comfortable taking the initiative to meet new people, and be able to attend occasional student organization meetings in the early evening. *Note: We would prefer that this position start in the summer.*

Community Outreach Coordinator

The Community Outreach Coordinator will be responsible for assisting with AARCC projects connected to Chicagoland Asian American communities, including special events and service projects. We are looking for an organized student with experience coordinating events. Applicants should be creative, resourceful, and comfortable working with community members as well as students. Familiarity with Chicagoland Asian American communities is helpful but not required.

Publications Coordinator

The Publications Coordinator will be responsible for writing/editing AARCCConnections, the AARCC newsletter, as well as the Asian American Resource Book. This person will also design fliers and other print publicity. We are looking for a creative student with strong writing and editing skills who is able to work independently. Graphic design skills and previous publications experience is a plus.

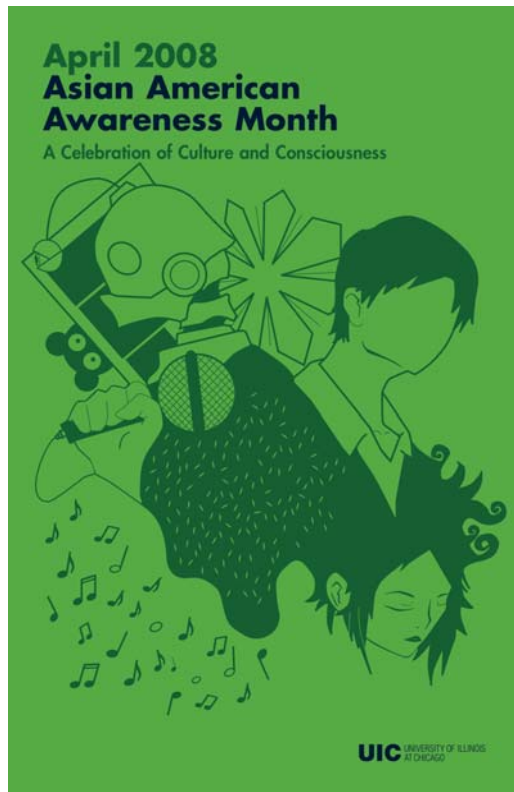
All positions may assist with Asian American Awareness Month in April, as well as general outreach and publicity for AARCC events. We expect these positions to require approximately 10-15 hours per week. These positions pay \$8.01/hour and are open to both work-study and non-work-study students. These positions will start in August 2008 except for the Campus Outreach position which we hope to start in May 2008.

Application deadline is Friday, April 11th

APRIL 2008

Asian American Awareness Month Calendar

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2 AAA Month Kickoff with Beats, Rhymes, and Rice	3	4 Sayawan: FIA Formal	5
6	7 Coming Soon to a Home Near you: The Filipino Supermaids Asian American Studies Social	8	9	10 Asian American Spirituality	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Jennifer 8. Lee & Patrick Rosal	18 Imaginasian	19
20	21	22 The Continuing Significance of the Model Minority Stereotype	23 Asian American Pop Culture + Giant Robot	24 Blood and Bone Marrow Donor Drive	25	26 UPROOT: A Cultural Showcase of Our Generation
27	28	29 Chinese Cultural Festival Mr. Asian Sensation	30 Asian American Perspectives on Mental Health			



April is officially UIC's Asian American Awareness Month, so AARCC and other Asian American campus organizations are sponsoring a wide range of activities to celebrate.

For more details pick up an Asian American Awareness Month calendar from the Asian American Resource and Cultural Center (101 Taft Hall) or visit our website at aarcc.vcaa.uic.edu. Also, attend events and get your own limited edition Asian American Awareness Month t-shirt!

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- April 2. Asian American Awareness Month Kickoff Featuring: Beats, Rhymes, and Rice.** 4:00 p.m. Student Center East - Illinois Room. Spoken word all-stars Bao Phi, Kiwi, and Giles Li unite for a powerful performance. For info, contact 312-413-9569.
- April 4. Sayawan: FIA Formal.** 7:00 p.m.–12:00 a.m. Meridian Banquets in Rolling Meadows. Filipinos in Alliance's annual formal will be filled with FIA members showcasing their skills, and a King and Queen will be crowned! Tickets: \$30/single, \$55/couple. For more information, contact Kathleen Guinid at kguini2@uic.edu.
- April 7. Coming Soon to a Home Near You: The Filipino Supermaids.** 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. Institute for the Humanities (Stevenson Hall, Lower Level). The Asian American Studies Lecture Series presents a talk by Anna Guevarra, Ph.D who is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Gender and Women's Studies at UIC. For more information, contact Justin Joyce at justinajoyce@ameritech.net.
- April 7. ASAM Social.** 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. Institute for the Humanities (Stevenson Hall, Lower Level). Come to a reception to learn about the future of Asian American Studies at UIC. Raffle prizes for students. For more information, contact Justin Joyce at justinajoyce@ameritech.net.
- April 10. Asian American Spirituality.** 5:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m. Student Center East - Room 713. Ever wonder why so many Asian Americans seem to go to church? Come and explore with us how being Asian American actually enhances our understanding of the God of the Bible. For more information, go to http://www2.uic.edu/stud_orgs/religion/aaiv/. Sponsored by Asian American InterVarsity.
- April 17. Jennifer 8. Lee, author of the Fortune Cookie Chronicles and Patrick Rosal, author of My American Kundiman.** 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m. Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Hear from Jennifer 8. Lee, author of a fascinating new book that explores the origin and evolution of Chinese Food in the U.S. Patrick Rosal, the author of two full-length poetry collections, professes his conflicted feelings for America, while celebrating and lamenting his various heritages. For more information, visit hullhousemuseum.org.
- April 18. Imaginasian.** 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Student Center East - Illinois Room. Asian American Students in Alliance present their annual fashion and variety show, Imaginasian. Tickets: \$3 in advance \$5 at the door. For more information, contact Bernadette Casaclang at bcasac2@uic.edu.
- April 22. The Continuing Significance of the Model Minority Stereotype.** 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Lecture Center A1. The Asian American Studies Lecture Series presents a talk by Stacey Lee, Ph.D, Professor of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For more information, contact Justin Joyce at justinajoyce@ameritech.net.
- April 23. Asian American Pop Culture + Giant Robot.** 4:00 p.m. Student Center East - Room 302. Eric Nakamura and Martin Wong will talk about how their magazine has evolved along with the exploding Asian and Asian American pop culture scene. For info, contact 312-413-9569.
- April 24. Blood and Bone Marrow Donor Drive.** 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Student Center East - Fort Dearborn. Donors with diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds are especially needed to join the National Marrow Donor Program Registry. Sponsored by the University of Illinois Medical Center Blood Bank. For more information, contact Samantha Dimaggio at 312-996-1344 or sdimaggi@uic.edu.
- April 26. UPROOT: A Cultural Showcase of Our Generation.** 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Student Center East - Illinois Room. Filipinos in Alliance proudly presents the seventh annual UPROOT, an evening of performances meant to convey the Filipino American experience. Tickets: \$5 at the door. For more info visit: fia.pages.uic.edu.
- April 29. Chinese Cultural Festival.** 11:00 a.m - 3:00 p.m. Student Center East – Cardinal Room. The Chinese Students and Scholars Association present the Chinese Cultural Festival, with the theme of 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. Free souvenirs. For more information, contact Sicheng Liao at sliao2@uic.edu or visit <http://cssa-uic.org>.
- April 29. Mr. Asian Sensation.** 6:00 p.m. Student Center East - Inner Circle. Chi Sigma Tau Fraternity brings back the talent show Mr. Asian Sensation for its 5th year to showcase Asian American men in a different light. Contestants will participate in an evening of stereotype-breaking performances ending in the crowning of Mr. Asian Sensation. For more information, contact Matt Jung at mjung6@gmail.com.
- April 30. Asian American Perspectives on Mental Health.** 3:30 p.m. Institute for the Humanities (Stevenson Hall, Lower Level). A panel of UIC faculty and staff will share their expertise on Asian American mental health issues, resources, and the cultural issues that impact help-seeking. Hosted by the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Asian Americans. For more information, contact ccsaa@uic.edu.

AARCC ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!

It is a great pleasure to introduce the two winning essays for this year's inaugural Kamal Kishore Kapur Memorial Prize. AARCC launched this new essay contest from a contribution by a donor who wanted to honor her grandfather and his commitment to academic excellence and to an education that helps one find one's voice in the world and use it. The goal of the prize is to foster student engagement with social and political issues as a way to create new ways of knowing and being that will transform our community.

The Kamal Kishore Kapur Memorial Prize will be awarded annually to an undergraduate student at UIC for an essay sharing a perspective on Asian American experiences. All essay submissions were judged anonymously by a panel made up of members representing the AARCC Advisory Board, AARCC staff, Asian American Studies faculty, and the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Asian Americans. We were especially pleased to see that this year's essay question: "What Does 'Asian American' Mean to You?" inspired submissions from diverse Asian American ethnic backgrounds.

Both "Reluctant Ambassador" and "Here and There" offer us unique points of view that merge the personal with the political in ways that encourage us to reflect on what it might mean to be Asian American. Please join us in congratulating the winners and all of the essay contest writers who honored the spirit of this award by taking seriously their voices as students and the vital role that they as students play in shaping our society. – Karen Su, AARCC Director

The Reluctant Ambassador

By: Somaiyya Ahmad—Junior—History and English (First Place)

Being watched.

In a post 9/11 world, where news of Benazir Bhutto's assassination follows advertisements for fashion trends involving Batik prints from India, being an Asian-American means being watched. Though mostly innocuous, these eyes make me feel like I am on a stage in a darkened auditorium with a single spotlight aimed at me. Every move, every gesture, every word uttered from my mouth is magnified. The audience watches, enraptured. They find meanings in my actions that I didn't even know were present. Some are intrigued and sympathetic while others are not. I'm left bearing a heavy burden; a responsibility to myself, my family, and my people.

I am an ambassador of my race, though an incredibly reluctant one. I resent that everything I do and say will be applied as a generalization to the Asian-American population at large. Those part of the supposed "majority" do not have such concerns. They are the norm that everyone is compared to, the standard that all else is defined against. *We* are the Others.

At the same time, though, this ambassadorship is an opportunity. Through my actions, actions that are watched with unwavering attention, I can obliterate stereotypes. Every time I have a conversation with a person, I can slowly chip away at harmful preconceived notions they have about my identity as an Indian-American Muslim woman. I can show them that I embrace my culture; one that does not – despite popular belief – require me to have an arranged marriage and stay at home. I can show them that I am proud of my religion; one that is actually about peace, despite inflammatory individuals and news stories that report the contrary.

Most importantly, I will make my identity open to discussion. Only through discussion will people be more comfortable with who I am as an individual and, consequently, who I am in terms of my race. Then, through a slow chain of events, they can come to see all Indians, all Asian-Americans, and all members of the supposed minority as individuals and not groups of people. Hopefully, there will be a day when my little cousins or my children or my grandchildren won't have to be ambassadors for their race. They can just be ambassadors for themselves.

Second Place: Here and There

By: Anand Sandesara—Sophomore—History (Second Place)

I was the only student of color when I entered my elementary school at age five, and I did not speak a word of English. The term Asian-American was foreign to me, although I knew very well that something in particular differentiated me from my peers.

All too familiar with that struggle, my experience as an Asian-American came full circle at UIC in giving back to the community which defines me and to which I am inextricably linked. As the coordinator of UIC's volunteer ESL program, I pair trained tutors and international students seeking English assistance, helping integrate the Chinese into Chicago or the Ahmedabadis into America.

I give back, and I also have pride. I live to see an Asian American rise up to become a governor, a CEO, a Nobel Prize winner, or a professional athlete, but I am just as proud with the simpler things that do not receive fortune or the front page and still represent the Asian-American experience.

But for all the pride and strides, I do not forget the missteps of history. Discrimination against Asian Americans represents dark deviation from this country's ideal; I forgive, but I also educate myself and others. I am not ashamed by the endless list of social or political problems that seem to be exacerbated "over there" in comparison to "over here", nor do I feel a sense of superiority over the East to which I owe so much. As a fused individual, I have accepted both "here" and "there" as my home, equally concerned and proud of both.

I know that being Asian American is significantly more difficult than the simple reconciliation of two continents as is suggested by the term, but it requires constant connecting. I can feign optimism, but I know that with each forthcoming generation, the Asian half of the identity will inevitably become diluted until it is a distant memory, confused and drowning in its American counterpart. Regardless, it is vital to retain ties as an Asian American and represent communities here and 10,000 miles away on the other side of the ocean.

**ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE
AND CULTURAL CENTER**

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To learn more about AARCC events, join
our listserv AARCC-News by contacting
aarcc@uic.edu



AARCC RESOURCE BOOK COVER DESIGN CONTEST

Want to win \$100?

Design the next Asian American Resource and Cultural Center's Resource Book cover.

Deadline: April 25th **Dimensions:** 5.5" x 8.5"

Cover must include the following:

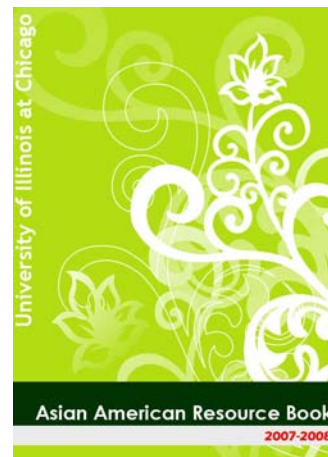
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****For complete details visit:** aarcc.vcaa.uic.edu or
contact Corinne Kodama at 312-413-9653 or
ckodama@uic.edu.

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