

Asian American Media Networks

Lori Kido Lopez, Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.1264>

Published online: 15 September 2022

Summary

When investigating the structures that support Asian American media, previous scholars have centered the role of Asian American media arts organizations and their yearly film festivals. Longstanding institutions such as Visual Communications, the Center for Asian American Media, and Asian CineVision have played an important role in shaping the rise of Asian American cinema through providing exhibition opportunities, funding, education, preservation, and advocacy. At a broader level, they have also created and maintained connections between Asian American media organizations and communities, facilitating the flow of Asian American media texts, resources, and communication within maker communities and outward to wider participants. But it has been less clear how these organizations and their events now fit into a broader Asian American media system. In analyzing participants such as filmmakers, media professionals, staff, and media audiences, but also components such as funding programs, distribution systems, and digital platforms, research has charted the evolution of these networks over time.

Keywords: Asian American, Asian American media, film festivals, media arts, media arts organizations, media networks, media organizations, minority media, networks, race/ethnicity

Subjects: Race, Ethnicity, and Communication

Asian American Media Arts Organizations

The history of Asian American media has largely centered on the media arts organizations that supported the production and exhibition of Asian American cinema as part of the rise of the Asian American movement in the 1970s. While there were certainly Asian American media producers and cultural products prior to this moment and existing outside of established organizational structures, these Asian American media arts organizations have been understood as the basis for the rise of a distinctly Asian American cinema (Chong, 2017; Shimizu, 2017). The oft-told historical narrative includes the founding of Visual Communications in Los Angeles in 1970, Asian CineVision in New York in 1976, and the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA) in San Francisco in 1980 (which later became known as Center for Asian American Media, or CAAM, in 2005). These nonprofit organizations focused on growing Asian American political power through media because they understood that marginalized communities should have the ability to tell their own stories, and more important, that control over media representation is an important component to the fight for liberation and justice (Lopez, 2016). Within the context of a broader U.S. mainstream media landscape that systematically underrepresents and misrepresents Asian Americans and other minority communities, self-representation through media offers both artistic and political agency. The rise of Asian American media was also intimately connected to the creation of Asian American

identities as a politicized formation in the 1970s and the struggles to create the academic field of Asian American studies, alongside other ethnic studies disciplines (Maeda, 2009; Umemoto, 1989; Wei, 1995).

The three major media arts organizations named here continue to thrive by supporting Asian American media production and distribution, facilitating educational opportunities, documenting the histories of their communities, and mounting yearly film festivals. The term “media arts” here is used to describe photography and moving images, including film, video, and digital storytelling. In Stephen Gong’s (2002) history of Asian American media arts organizations from 1970 to 1990, he asserted that they are “arguably the best organized of any alternative media arts by people of color in the United States, yet too fragmented to constitute an effective national network” (p. 101). While this may have been an accurate description of the Asian American media landscape up to 1990, many changes have been seen in the years since then. What exactly does an effective national network for Asian American media look like, and how has its impact changed over time? It is clear that any concept of an Asian American media network needs to be based on the strength of the connections and linkages that support Asian American media. But the broad category of media includes processes such as creation and distribution, individuals ranging from media producers and professionals to audience members and consumers, and texts such as films, digital content, music, and other creative performances. In order to understand the contours of Asian American media networks and how they have developed, the way that each of these components connects to other components, facilitates movement across spaces and communities, and shapes Asian American politics must be carefully mapped out.

This article theorizes the rise of Asian American media networks as distinct from previous understandings of Asian American media organizations that highlighted their fragmented and localized nature. It builds from communication theories of networks and circuits to define and assess the idea of an Asian American media network, and expands beyond previous scholarship that primarily focused on the connections fostered by film festivals. In this expanded view, Asian American media networks extend far beyond film festivals and media arts centers to include professional organizations, production collectives, and the digital platforms that facilitate community connections. Such networks augment the central functions of Asian American media as a political force by promoting, supporting, distributing, and exhibiting media arts all across the United States rather than limiting their focus to urban coastal cities. This understanding of Asian American media networks serves to bridge gaps between legacy media and newer forms of digital media shared through online platforms and creates a new roadmap for tracking mediated power relations in the contemporary Asian American media landscape.

Understanding Media Networks

Communication scholars have used the concept of a network to describe media systems in many different contexts and forms. Within the realm of mass media, a media network has been understood as a powerful corporate entity that distributes media texts to mass audiences. Such industrial formations provided the basis for early television broadcast companies like CBS, NBC, and ABC, which together constituted “network television.” Their dominance over the airwaves

starting in the 1940s and 1950s defined the medium of television itself (Lotz, 2014). As the number of broadcast outlets and viewing options proliferated in the transition from the network era to the post-network era, television networks started to become massive media conglomerates that combined multiple broadcasting entities under one corporate owner. Media technologies have continued to evolve and challenge the power of legacy television networks, bringing new technologies and frameworks into an understanding of how media reach audiences. Amid the concurrent rise of streaming television and social media, there are now media networks defined by their ability to distribute online content through peer-to-peer structures (Christian, 2017). This evolution shows that media networks have always been a fluid and flexible formation, but they have always been connected to the function of distributing media texts to audiences.

The term “network” is also used outside of media corporations to more generally describe the array of decentralized and distributed power relations that create linkages through communication and technology. This can include the use of digital technologies, as in the case of social media networks, but can also describe more general connections that create social structures. Manuel Castells has produced a theory of “global network society” that describes the way that contemporary social structures have been completely transformed by information and communication technologies (Castells, 2010). Access to these information networks is necessary for exercising power over others, and the position of individuals within information networks determines their ability to use the network to achieve their desired goals and outcomes (Castells, 2011). These understandings of networks and their relationships to power build from Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory. Latour argued that both human actors and nonhuman, non-individual entities play important roles in networks due to the effects of their associations (Latour, 2005). Applications of actor-network theory and understandings of network society enable a better understanding of the way that social change and activism operate through disrupting traditional power networks and striving to reprogram them in ways that empower those who had previously been marginalized and oppressed.

Media studies scholars have deployed these sociological understandings of how networks shape power relations to then make sense of media cultures and organizations. These frameworks have been effectively applied to the study of film festivals to better understand the connections between an array of media events. Marijke de Valck (2007) examined film festivals using a network approach in order to center the interconnections between different national cinemas, rather than seeing cinematic texts as singular entities that reflect individual auteurist impulses or national contexts. The application of actor-network theory to film festivals also reveals how roles like filmmakers, film critics, and sales agents are connected to structures like accreditation systems, festival locations, and festival calendars. Skadi Loist (2016) agreed that film festivals can be understood as a network, as they comprise a complex system within which different actors can interact and form connections. This is distinct from the common description of film festivals as a circuit, as in “the film festival circuit,” which has been used to describe the way films and filmmakers travel from one premiere festival to another in the quest for business purposes. Loist pointed to the many roles that these festivals play in business negotiations—including

distribution revenue, film production funds, market discussions, and workshops. Film festivals are often thought of as sites for facilitating distribution deals and supporting filmmakers in their quest to find industry partners who will help them with future exhibition and circulation.

The concept of a “media network” deployed in this article builds from these different understandings of what a network is, how it functions, and what role it can play in shifting power for Asian Americans through media. It is rooted in the idea that Asian American media have always been supported through individual Asian American media arts organizations, as there are important connections between these organizations that facilitate the flow of information, resources, media texts, and individuals. Much like a national broadcasting system or a cable network, Asian American media networks expand across geographic space so that Asian American content and media texts can extend beyond single cities and their local communities to be accessed widely. But, building from the research on film festival circuits, it can also be recognized that media networks do more than move texts—they also produce pathways for bodies to travel, as can be seen in the way Asian American artists tour the country to engage with audiences about their works. The role of discrete nodes in the network is then to help these bodies and resources flow outward and become more widely available. This study of Asian American media networks must consider both human and nonhuman actors in order to better understand the structures that facilitate and inhibit flows and connections—including filmmakers, media professionals, staff, and media audiences, but also funding programs, distribution systems, and digital platforms. Analyzing these different components can lead to better understanding of the strength of Asian American media networks over time and the ability of these networks to achieve the goal of empowering Asian Americans through media.

Asian American Film Festivals as Network Nodes

As mentioned at the outset, one of the central functions of Asian American media arts organizations is to mount a yearly film festival that exhibits brand new content made by Asian American media artists. The artists themselves are frequently in attendance so that they can interact with audiences during Q&A sessions, as well as participate in professional development via networking and attending workshops (Hu, 2017). The three premiere Asian American film festivals are the Asian American International Film Festival presented by Asian CineVision, the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival presented by Visual Communications, and CAAMfest presented by the Center for Asian American Media.¹ In many ways, each of these events is deeply localized and connected to its particular geographic region in a way that may seem to limit its participation in a wider network.

In Erin Hogerle’s (2019) study of the Center for Asian American Media and what role it plays within film festival networks, she pointed out many ways that they are firmly grounded in space. For instance, programmers frequently highlight films that are not available on international film festival circuits, which creates distance between the flow of traveling films and this single event. Moreover, she argued that one of the key attributes of CAAMfest is how embedded it is within its urban locale. This includes how it interacts with the city of San Francisco, how it curates specific San Francisco venues for screenings, and how it thematizes local ethnic enclaves and activist

organizing as a way of centering its geographically specific community. The same is certainly true for the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, which thoughtfully integrates connections to the historic location of Visual Communications in Little Tokyo through both its storytelling and its particular events. Vanessa Au (2017), director of the Seattle Asian American Film Festival (SAAFF), noted that it is a “challenge to attract attendees out of their homes to attend a film festival” (p. 76) and that programmers must compete with the wide availability of online content in order to create a successful local event. She explained that in order to survive, the SAAFF has carefully expanded its offerings in a way that highlights live in-person events that go beyond just film screenings—incorporating popular celebrities and local youth makers, extra credit opportunities for local students, accessible outdoor events for senior citizens, parties with live performances, and engagements with community organizers and activists. In this way, each of these individual film festivals becomes indelibly tied to its specific community’s needs, and each festival develops a unique identity that sets it apart from a more generic sense of Asian American film culture.

While it is important to recognize the local specificities and regional identities that mark each of these individual events, there are also many ways in which these three Asian American film festivals clearly constitute a distinct network—namely, they play a key role in anchoring what is known as the “Asian American film festival circuit.” Asian American film festivals have been linked across cities since their very founding, with Asian CineVision’s New York Asian American Film Festival creating a “traveling festival” in 1981 that toured the United States. It was this partnership with the National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA) from 1981 to 1984 that eventually led to the creation of NAATA’s own event in 1986, the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival (SFIAAFF). Similarly, in 1983, the premiere of 20 films from Asian CineVision’s traveling edition served to inaugurate Visual Communications’ annual film festival. Cindy Wong (2016) argued that this traveling festival constitutes multiple public spheres that have generative possibilities due to the fact that they call attention to an identity that has been marginalized within mainstream public spheres, and that viewers are attracted to participate in these events as a way of envisioning a new political identity. This analysis helps to identify the political impact of this media network.

Yet the linkages created between festivals are situated within a larger circuit that has come to include dozens of other Asian American film festivals across the United States. Asian American filmmakers and their works physically travel across the circuit every year to similar events in cities like Seattle, Philadelphia, Chicago, Honolulu, Boston, Austin, San Diego, Eugene, D.C., Houston, Dallas, and many others. Many of these Asian American film festivals have existed for numerous decades and have come to be quite prestigious institutions, such as the San Diego Asian Film Festival organized by Pacific Arts Movement. Others are newly developing or are held less consistently, depending on the availability of the largely volunteer staff who work to produce these time-consuming events. But when taken together as a network, the Asian American film festival circuit provides a fairly robust route for Asian American filmmakers to travel, depending on which events their works are accepted into.

An important aspect of this circuit is that these events represent not just an opportunity for exhibition, but also for communication between Asian American filmmakers, media professionals, programmers, and scholars. This discursive exchange takes place through informal conversations between screenings, as well as through more structured opportunities like workshops. For instance, since 2010, Visual Communications has organized an event called C3: Conference for Creative Content that provides professional development for Asian Americans working in digital entertainment media. These conversations have been facilitated through more focused gatherings such as film festival programmers' meetings. Vincent Pham's ethnography of the 2009 Film Festival Programmers' Meeting at CAAMfest (2011) described how representatives from 13 festivals across the United States gathered to discuss the state of film festivals and the goals of their events, to troubleshoot common struggles, and to reify a sense of a larger Asian American media arts organizing community. These meetings, initiated by Chi-Hui Yang, continued in the years that followed. During this particular conversation, Abraham Ferrer from Visual Communications in Los Angeles reminded the other programmers that film festivals have never been the sole purpose of their organizations. Rather, it is the case that their central goals of cultural recovery and intercultural understanding can be partially achieved through conspicuously visible events like a film festival. As Pham stated:

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. (p. 180)

This conversation was further evidence that the Asian American film festival circuit provides an important vehicle for fostering connections across geographic distance rather than operating in isolation. These connections then benefit the film festival programmers who create these opportunities, the media professionals who travel alongside the exhibition of their content, and the local audiences who attend each event.

In a recent example of this particular communication network in action, Asian American film festival programmers collectively strategized in 2020 about how to respond to the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and anti-Asian racism. Programmers considered how they could work together to spotlight Asian American storytelling as a way of combating the rise in discrimination, specifically by expanding beyond their "local microcosm of cultural events and film festivals . . . to build and connect communities" (Ramos, 2020). One of the outcomes of these conversations was that Asian American film festivals that were presented virtually in 2020 and 2021 offered a mix of both geo-blocked programming and nationally available programming. This decision underscores the role of Asian American film festivals in addressing local communities while simultaneously fortifying a national—and in some cases, global—network through increasing conversations about Asian American media even in areas that do not have their own film festivals.

Asian American Documentary Network (A-DOC)

This analysis of how Asian American film festivals constitute a network shows that these connections have been in place for many decades, encouraging and facilitating the circulation of media and conversation about media outside of limited regional locations. It reinforces that these specific Asian American media arts centers play an outsized role in Asian American media networks because they are both highly connected and highly influential. That is, Asian American media arts organizations cultivate connections to dozens of other individuals and institutions throughout the country, and their associations lend authority and legitimacy due to their longstanding respected role in their communities. It would be unusual for an Asian American filmmaker to traverse the Asian American film festival circuit without first submitting their film to one of the premiere festivals. If they are accepted, the prestige of screening at one of these events can significantly increase the visibility of an individual film. Yet, as Abraham Ferrer pointed out in the programmers' meeting, there has always been far more work to be done in supporting Asian American media beyond mounting a festival. Asian American media arts organizations are also responsible for education in both media production and media literacy, preservation and archiving, distribution, as well as media advocacy. In this analysis of media networks, it is important to note that two distinct categories of flow—the flow of Asian American media to audiences, and the flow of resources such as funding, education, and advocacy to Asian American media makers—are being examined. How the flow of media to audiences is accomplished through film festivals has already been discussed. This kind of flow also takes place through media distribution, such as through CAAM's educational distribution catalog that allows educational institutions to purchase Asian American film and video for classrooms.

But there are also many ways in which media arts organizations facilitate the flow of resources to Asian American media makers. For instance, they offer funding opportunities such as the CAAM Documentary Fund, which supports independent producers through providing between \$10,000 and \$50,000 for production and post-production funding. Visual Communications' Armed with a Camera Fellowship for Emerging Media Artists cultivates Asian American artists through a nine-month program that provides mentoring, training, networking opportunities, and a \$1,000 cash stipend. These organizations serve as central hubs for Asian American filmmakers across the country through facilitating dialogue that extends far beyond their city limits, and using their powerful, respected voices to advocate for change in media industries. For instance, in 2018, CAAM co-sponsored a convening in Durham, North Carolina, called "Beyond Borders: Diverse Voices of the American South." This event specifically focused on Asian American documentary filmmakers located in the South, and provided them with an opportunity to connect with each other, as well as with local community organizations, activists, and media arts organizations. Visual Communications has also long served as a member of the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition, which is an umbrella organization that combines media activism with civil rights and was originally coordinated through Asian Americans Advancing Justice in Washington, D.C.

It is also important to look beyond Asian American media arts organizations to consider the ways that newer collectives and organizations are augmenting, challenging, and expanding Asian American media networks. One example of an emerging participant is the Asian American

Documentary Network (A-DOC). A-DOC is a collective that started in 2017 with the goal of helping Asian American documentary filmmakers increase their visibility and deepen impact. In 2016, filmmaker Grace Lee had been invited to keynote the International Documentary Association's Getting Real Conference in Los Angeles. She took the opportunity to carry out an idea that she and others had been talking about for years—the need to gather Asian American documentary filmmakers together and organize as a professional community. With support from CAAM and the Ford Foundation, Grace and fellow documentary filmmaker Leo Chiang facilitated a convening with more than 60 Asian American filmmakers in attendance, and the Asian American Documentary Network was born. Outside of its two founders, A-DOC came to have a core group of 10 members who spearhead initiatives and two part-time staff members. Its primary mode of operation is through a workspace on the digital communication platform Slack, where nearly 1,000 members engage in daily conversations. They discuss what projects they are working on and share information, resources, advice, expertise, and support.

In many ways, A-DOC builds upon the Asian American media network described here while also significantly expanding and strengthening it. The activities of A-DOC remain deeply connected to the three Asian American media arts organizations in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York, as the majority of A-DOC's members are located in these three cities and they rely heavily on the Asian American media arts organizations there. Films made by A-DOC members are routinely funded by the CAAM Documentary Fund and exhibited at the three premiere Asian American film festivals, and members in these three cities regularly gather for in-person meetups. But A-DOC's hundreds of members also extend far beyond those geographic locations, with members in more than 20 states and 12 countries. By using the digital platform Slack to communicate with members, this community has been open to anyone who is interested in participating, regardless of geographic location. This dispersed membership importantly reflects a more accurate understanding of Asian American identities, challenging the mistaken belief that Asian American communities exist only within urban coastal cities to acknowledge that Asian Americans live in every city in the United States and have global connections as well. The global positioning of Asian America has always been reflected in film festival programs, as Asian American content is commonly featured alongside content representing the national cinemas of Asian countries like Japan, China, India, Korea, Thailand, and others. But there has been less acknowledgment that Asian Americans media makers themselves also blur national boundaries, embodying diasporic and transnational identities (Ang, 2005; Cunningham & Sinclair, 2001).

A-DOC has also capitalized on the geographic diversity of its members by expanding the locations where in-person Asian American media gatherings take place. One of A-DOC's most frequent modes of interaction is through creating gatherings at filmmaker spaces where Asian Americans are distinctly in the minority. This can be seen in the moment of their founding, as Grace Lee's highlighted presence at the International Documentary Association's Getting Real Conference called attention to how few Asian American documentary filmmakers usually attended that event. In the years since then, A-DOC has hosted gatherings at a wide range of events: South by Southwest (SXSW), the Full Frame Documentary Festival, Sundance, the Tribeca Film Festival, Hot Docs, and many others. Members also create gatherings at events that are specifically for Asian Americans but that are not necessarily focused on filmmaking—including the Association

for Asian American Studies Annual Conference, the Advancing Justice Conference, and the Asian American Journalists Association Conference. In doing so, A-DOC serves to shift away from geographically rooted hubs in service of a network that is dispersed, decentralized, and flexible. Its participation within this Asian America media network reflects the digital sensibilities of a millennial Asian American media movement that can more nimbly adapt to the needs of its members.

While this discussion about the pathways through which Asian Americans exhibit their works has primarily focused on film festivals, the activities of A-DOC's members reveal the many ways in which exhibition circuits extend beyond festivals. Specifically, documentary filmmakers also travel the country exhibiting their films to college campuses and other academic audiences. Since almost no Asian American documentary films find theatrical distribution, college campuses provide an important venue for these works to circulate and encounter audiences. Given the historical connections between the rise of Asian American filmmaking and the rise of Asian American studies as an academic field, it makes sense that educational audiences are particularly important to these documentary filmmakers. Filmmakers fly across the country to screen their films in classrooms, at cinematheques, as part of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month celebrations, alongside student activist organizations and community organizations, and at other events. These university screenings then constitute an additional set of nodes to add to the map of Asian American media networks.

Kollaboration and International Secret Agents

If the concept of “media” is expanded beyond traditional films and other festival fare, many other forms of media can be added to this discussion about the connections that link Asian Americans through media. Indeed, the concept of a “tour” that brings Asian American artists all across the country has been taken up by many professionals beyond filmmakers—including musicians, social media influencers, comedians, and dancers. There are two key Asian American organizations that have focused on coordinating and supporting these efforts—Kollaboration and International Secret Agents (ISA). While both organizations are headquartered in Los Angeles, their role as a central hub for organizing Asian American media professionals in traveling or connecting with organizers in different cities contributes a new dimension to this understanding of Asian American media networks. In the case of Kollaboration, media and media makers are expanded beyond “film” to include those whose work is centered on music, dance, comedy, and social media posts. ISA (and its later incarnation, ISAtv) helps reveal the role of Asian American media networks in facilitating collaborative media production.

As this mapping of Asian American media networks is extended and includes different kinds of participants, it is important to note that there is not a single or monolithic Asian American media network that can be identified but, rather, multiple overlapping Asian American media networks. Well-established and longstanding Asian American media arts organizations have played an outsized role in one understanding of the pathways traversed by Asian American media and those connected to it, but there are other models, maps, and conceptions that might decenter or even exclude those particular organizations. In the analysis that follows, the networks that are

described have connections to all of the institutions and individuals mentioned earlier, but they also significantly expand notions of an Asian American media network to include different forms of media and participants who may have no connection to the world of traditional “filmmaking.”

Founded by stand-up comedian Paul “PK” Kim in 2000, Kollaboration is a nonprofit organization that started with the project of producing Asian American talent shows. While the very first show highlighted 13 Korean American rappers and hip hop dancers in Los Angeles, Kim quickly set his sights on Asian American entertainers more broadly. Eventually Kollaboration developed chapters in 14 cities—Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto, and Washington, D.C. Many of their performances were in the genre of a talent show, where amateur performers competed against one another for prize money based on audience responses. ISA followed a similar trajectory to Kollaboration by creating live concerts starring a wide range of Asian American talent. Founded by the video production group Wong Fu Productions and the hip hop music group Far East Movement, International Secret Agents launched its first concert in 2008 with a show at the San Gabriel Valley Playhouse featuring musicians, filmmakers, and dancers. For the next three years, they continued adding more shows in new cities, first expanding to San Francisco and then New York, in a move that parallels the rise of Asian American media arts centers in cities with large Asian American populations.

While both groups originally focused on bringing live performances to cities across the United States, their work was always explicitly connected to the goal of transforming mainstream media through diversifying representation. As the founders of Kollaboration state on their Facebook page, “Kollaboration is an official non-profit organization, annual talent showcase, and grassroots movement to disrupt the status quo of mainstream media.” The performers sought support from Asian American communities to enhance their media careers, whether that meant increasing their followings on YouTube, gaining access to film and television roles, or selling more musical albums. These efforts paid off, as Kollaboration shows included successful on-screen stars such as Daniel Dae Kim, Grace Park, and John Cho, but also helped to support the careers of performers such as musicians Kinna Grannis and Jane Lui, dance groups like Jabbawockees and Quest Crew, comedians Jimmy O. Yang and Jenny Yang, and rappers Awkwafina and Izzy Man. A scan of the contents of the blog on the Kollaboration website makes the organization’s role within Asian American media networks more evident. While one might imagine that an organization centered on producing live performances might use its blog to highlight those specific events, the blog is more centrally used for promoting the connections Kollaboration has built with other Asian American media organizations. For instance, it contains posts about a panel called “Asian Americans Break the Silence and Stereotypes” they co-sponsored at the SXSW festival, their co-sponsoring of the Asian Pacific Filmmakers Experience in Park City during the Sundance Film Festival, and many interviews conducted with actors who will be starring in upcoming films and TV shows. This close connection to media makers can also be seen in the creation of KollabCast, the official podcast of Kollaboration. In this weekly podcast that ran from 2015 to 2019 and included over 200 episodes, hosts Marvin Yueh and Minji Chang would discuss issues within Asian American popular culture, and most of these discussions focused on media, such as TV shows, film festivals, or interviews with media professionals. Each

of these events and conversations extends far beyond the realm of their live performances and links the efforts of Kollaboration to the Asian American media network described thus far that sees film festivals and educational events as central to the overall project.

The work of ISA was always explicitly connected to media because co-founders Wesley Chan, Ted Fu, and Philip Wang of Wong Fu Productions are professional digital content creators. Wong Fu Productions itself is a media production company, and the three founders have been creating videos together since 2003. Their YouTube channel has over 3 million subscribers and hosts the bulk of their creations, which range from short comedic sketches to long-form romantic dramas, as well as many behind-the-scenes features that help audiences get to know the creative team more intimately. Together as Wong Fu Productions they also have a long history of building their fan base through traveling to college campuses across the country for screenings and speaking engagements, as well as meeting with audiences and selling branded merchandise. As recently as 2019, Wong Fu Productions was touring college campuses to promote its latest web series, called *Yappie*. These interests directly converged with ISA in 2013, when the concert series pivoted to become a new platform called ISAtv. ISAtv is a digital platform that centrally focuses on content creation in the same vein as Wong Fu Productions. But ISAtv represents a much larger network of Asian American collaborators, performers, and artists. Rather than centering the voices and perspectives of Wong Fu Productions' Chan, Fu, and Wang, it more clearly serves as an organizing hub for multiple voices within Asian American media communities. In many ways ISAtv is simply another YouTube channel that hosts Asian American content, but its contributions are also rooted in the same values and roles of the Asian American media networks described throughout this article. Namely, both Wong Fu Productions and ISAtv emphasize collaboration in media production.

In some ways it may seem counterintuitive or even backward to end a discussion about support for Asian American media with production, but the reality is that Asian American media networks do not always foreground media production in their activities. Historically, it is certainly the case that Visual Communications started as a media production collective that centered training in film arts and resulted in many canonical Asian American documentaries. Its collective mode of film and video production mirrored the collectivities and solidarities of the Yellow Power Movement itself, which de-emphasized individuals in order to foreground the collective. Yet Visual Communications also famously almost went bankrupt after independently funding and producing the narrative feature film *Hito Hata: Raise the Banner* in 1980 (Okada, 2020), and since then it has not taken on any projects of a similar scale or approach. The activities mentioned earlier that provide support for media production (such as funding initiatives and filmmaker fellowships) center on supporting individual filmmakers, rather than conflating media arts organizations with media production collectives. For these reasons, ISAtv can be recognized as offering a meaningful intervention in Asian American media networks because it brings together dozens of media producers to populate the ISAtv YouTube channel with Asian American content. In creating a YouTube channel that mirrors the style and content of a more traditional television channel, ISAtv created a platform that required the participation of content creators with a shared a vision for how they would create their own representations of Asian America.

Conclusion

The project of creating a platform for Asian Americans to work together producing images of their communities for widespread audiences returns us to the political project that unites Asian American media networks. While all media creators and consumers have needs that deserve to be met—such as access and opportunity—Asian Americans and other systematically marginalized communities have always seen media as particularly meaningful in their struggle for political empowerment. There are a wide array of explicitly political efforts that Asian Americans have organized around, such as decreasing racial violence and discriminatory behaviors, increasing participation in voting and other forms of civic engagement, supporting immigrant rights and refugees, improving working conditions and labor protections, and uplifting women, nonbinary folks, and queer communities. While many forms of media exist as artistic expression and are not necessarily oriented toward these kinds of activist efforts, Asian American activism has always included media representation and mediated visibility as an important pillar in its political movement (Lopez, 2016). This analysis shows that these social justice goals are being achieved, in the way that Asian American media organizations and collectives work to create pathways for Asian American media to travel and reach new audiences, and for Asian American creators to sustainably participate in media production. These structures have been fundamental in shaping the rise of Asian American cinema in its early days, and have continued to shape its trajectories today.

This research has forwarded the definition of an Asian American media network as a set of geographically dispersed institutions and communities that facilitate both the flow of Asian American media to audiences and the flow of resources that strengthen and sustain Asian American media makers. Resources include support for production—including opportunities for funding, networks for connecting media professionals interested in collaborating, and opportunities for cultivating talent. There has also been an emphasis on the kind of support needed after media have been created—such as opportunities for exhibition, mechanisms for distribution, and strategies for identifying and growing audiences. The geographically rooted Asian American media arts centers that originated in the 1970s have always played more of a role in facilitating national networks than they have been given credit for. But there has also been distinct growth in these very same Asian American media networks due to the rise of geographically dispersed artistic communities that rely on digital tools to cultivate and champion Asian American media. As new forms of media and organizations centered on media develop and flourish, this model for Asian American media networks will undoubtedly continue to expand and change form in response.

Further Reading

Balance, C. B. (2012). How it feels to be viral me: Affective labor and Asian American YouTube performance. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40(1–2), 138–152.

Christian, A. J. (2012). The Web as television reimaged? Online networks and the pursuit of legacy media. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36(4), 340–356.

- de Valck, M., Kredell, B., & Loist, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Film festivals: History, theory, method, practice*. Routledge.
- Ishizuka, K. (2016). *Serve the people: Making Asian America in the long sixties*. Verso.
- Kim, Y. (2011). *Transnational migration, media and identity of Asian women: Diasporic daughters*. Routledge.
- Loist, S. (2011). Precarious cultural work: About the organization of (queer) film festivals. *Screen*, 52(2), 268–273.
- Lopez, L. K., & Pham, V. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Routledge companion to Asian American media*. Routledge.
- Mimura, G. (2009). *Ghostlife of third cinema: Asian American film and video*. Minnesota University Press.
- Nishime, L. (2014). *Undercover Asian: Multiracial Asian Americans in visual culture*. University of Illinois Press.
- Noriega, C. (2000). *Shot in America: Television, the state, and the rise of Chicano cinema*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Okada, J. (2015). *Making Asian American film and video: History, institutions, movements*. Rutgers Press.
- Ono, K., & Pham, V. N. (2008). *Asian Americans and the media*. Polity Press.
- Shankar, S. (2015). *Advertising diversity: Ad agencies and the creation of Asian American consumers*. Duke University Press.
- Sun, W. (Ed.). (2009). *Media and the Chinese diaspora: Community, communications and commerce*. Routledge.

References

- Ang, I. (2005). *On not speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. Routledge.
- Au, V. (2017). Using the tools of the YouTube generation: How to serve communities through Asian American film festivals. In L. Lopez & V. N. Pham (Eds.), *Routledge companion to Asian American media* (pp. 74–82). Routledge.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society*. Wiley.
- Castells, M. (2011). A network theory of power. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 773–787.
- Chong, S. (2017). What was Asian American cinema? *Cinema Journal*, 56(3), 130–135.
- Christian, A. J. (2017). The value of representation: Toward a critique of networked television performance. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 1552–1574.
- Cunningham, S., & Sinclair, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Floating lives: The media and Asian diasporas*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- de Valck, M. (2007). *Film festivals: From European geopolitics to global cinephilia*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Gong, S. (2002). A history in progress: Asian American media arts centers, 1970–1990. In P. X. Feng (Ed.), *Screening Asian Americans* (pp. 101–110). Rutgers University Press.
- Hogerle, E. (2019). Networks, locations and frames of memory in Asian American film festivals. *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 11 (1), 39–47.

- Hu, B. (2017). The coin of the realm: Valuing the Asian American feature-length film. In L. Lopez & V. N. Pham (Eds.), *Routledge companion to Asian American media* (pp. 63–73). Routledge.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Loist, S. (2016). The film festival circuit: Networks, hierarchies, and circulation. In M. de Valck, S. Loist, & B. Kredell (Eds.), *Film festivals: History, theory, method, practice* (pp. 49–64). Routledge.
- Lopez, L. K. (2016). *Asian American media activism: Fighting for cultural citizenship*. New York University Press.
- Lotz, A. (2014). *The television will be revolutionized*. New York University Press.
- Maeda, D. J. (2009). *Chains of Babylon: The rise of Asian America*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Okada, J. (2020). Representation, recognition, and the possibility of a radically transformed future: The Asian Americans series. *Film Quarterly*, 71(1), 11–20.
- Pham, V. (2011). *Mobilizing “Asian American”: Rhetoric and ethnography of Asian American media organizations* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Ramos, D. R. (2020, April 13). Coping with COVID-19 crisis: Postponed Asian American film festivals work together to champion representation in wake of anti-Asian incidents. <https://deadline.com/2020/04/coping-with-covid-19-crisis-postponed-asian-american-film-festivals-caamfest-los-angeles-asian-pacific-film-festival-san-diego-asian-film-festival-diversity-inclusion-representation-asian-american-1202903911/>. *Deadline*.
- Shimizu, C. P. (2017). Gnawing at the Whiteness of cinema studies: On Asian American media now. *Cinema Journal*, 56(3), 119–124.
- Umemoto, K. (1989). “On Strike!” San Francisco State College strike, 1968–69: The role of Asian American students. *Amerasia*, 15(1), 3–41.
- Wei, W. (1995). *The Asian American movement*. Temple University Press.
- Wong, C. H.Y. (2016). Publics and counterpublics: Rethinking film festivals as public spheres. In M. de Valck, S. Loist, & B. Kredell (Eds.), *Film festivals: History, theory, method, practice* (pp. 83–99). Routledge.

Notes

1. These festivals have gone by different names throughout their histories. The Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival was formerly known as the Los Angeles Asian Pacific American International Film Festival, the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film and Video Festival, and the Visual Communications Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film and Video Festival (VC Film Fest). CAAMfest was formerly known as the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival.

Related Articles

Media Constructions of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity

Chinese Diaspora and Social Media: Negotiating Transnational Space