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*On Intersections, A Podcast on Forgotten Asian American Intersectionalities*

In the current social, political, and academic climate, Asian American identities are garnering an increasing amount of attention. In popular media, we see the release of box office successes like *Crazy Rich Asians*, accompanied by the emergence of famous Asian American actors, including Korean American Ken Jeong and Chinese Korean American Awkwafina. In the political sphere, we see Chinese American Andrew Yang emerging as a strong contender for the 2020 Democratic primaries. In academia, we see increasing attention placed on the distinction between Asian and Asian American Studies, as well as an overall desire for courses on marginalized groups to be taught by in-group faculty. The proliferation of the Asian American narrative is tremendous. But whose story, exactly, are we tuning into when we think of Asian Americans? Unfortunately, it is a specific one: one that paints Asian Americans as the successful, high-achieving model minority. *Crazy Rich Asians* proliferates the idea that Asians and their American-born offspring are wealthy, Andrew Yang touts a “MATH” campaign pin and continually pokes fun at his “Asian-imbued” mathematical skills, and Asian American Studies departments across the country focus on dominant East Asian American narratives: those of people transplanted from Japan, China, and Korea.

So what, then, does *Intersections*, a podcast published by Pomona College’s Brandon Tran `21 and Sabina Kou `21, have to offer to this specific atmosphere? Quite a bit, they assert, alluding to the fact that the barreling growth of Asian American representation has left a plethora

of intersectional identities in the dust. For Brandon, what of the Vietnamese American narrative: one ridden with an oppressive communist regime, ships capsizing while holding hundreds of refugees, and fathers and sons being executed in their homes? And to that, what of the queer Asian—if not queer Southeast Asian—American narrative: one that subjects gay men to the same submissive roles often assigned to Asian women in heterosexual settings? For Sabina, where are the stories detailing the clash between parents of different Asian descent? Where are the stories of the Asian Americans who never completely came to terms with their Asian identities? Sabina and Brandon's *Intersections* sheds new light on stories often glossed over in the broader Asian American narrative, pushing for listeners to not necessarily strive to learn everyone's story, but to keep an open mind to intersectionality and the idea that—as with any broad group of people—there exists no one true narrative for the community as a whole.

The podcast's first season is a mere teaser, with only two full-length, forty-five-minute episodes. The first addresses Brandon and Sabina's personal lives and how they have been affected by the fragments of their identity. Yes, perhaps their voices are not the most engaging at times, and when Sabina speaks, I may occasionally fear that she will never stop. But aside from that and the occasional clattering in the background (perhaps invest in some higher quality sound equipment?), I find the amount of content they are able to cover within such a short timeframe to be very impressive. Sabina brings to light how being raised by parents of different Asian descent has left her feeling unfit for either of her cultures. An amalgamation of Chinese, Singaporean Indian, and American, she feels like rather than choosing one identity (as some multiracial people do), she has chosen all of them, but has thence become only, say, part Chinese, part Singaporean Indian, and part American. This is shocking, at least to me, for I had never considered that someone of full Asian descent could be faced with such inadequacy: with

not feeling Asian enough. Myself a Vietnamese American, I fear I have inadvertently made others feel as if they were not “well enough” in tune with their own cultural identities, and the fact that Sabina has befriended predominantly white friends in order to feel like she has the higher cultural ground suggests more work must be done to address multiraciality within the Asian American narrative.

Brandon brings to light refreshing points as well, citing a general lack of representation of queer Asians—specifically, Southeast Asians—in media that hilariously led to his mass coming out on social media, unbeknownst of the potential repercussions. He speaks largely of his Vietnamese parents and the broader Vietnamese community that surrounded him in high school, a whole community whose voices have yet to rise amongst the ranks of the more elite, “model minority” space that is currently dominated by East Asian identities.

These lovely narratives carry into the second episode of *Intersections*, where both explore their parents’ immigration to the United States and how their parents’ parenting styles have affected their own outlooks on life. Both come from relatively disparaging, yet hopeful backgrounds, and their sentiments about having to do well for the sake of their families is one I am sure will reverberate with listeners. The dominant narrative today is that Asian American youth take care of their elders due to cultural norms, and while that may be true, Brandon and Sabina add a strain of pure financial necessity to the picture. Often, in the model minority narrative, quality traits (like taking care of one’s own parents) are highlighted without recognizing the true weight that each responsibility carries. This allows for the continued, systematic indifference towards making the nation more equitable for Asian Americans, and in order to dismantle this myth, stories like Sabina and Brandon’s must be spread, understood, and merged into the larger Asian American narrative.

What I enjoy most about Sabina and Brandon is that the stories they tell are purely their own; aside than advocating for a general increase in awareness, they are not constantly trying to push an agenda, let alone suggesting that their stories speak for anyone other than themselves. They merely hope that their own stories add to the larger collection of narratives that shape the nation's understanding of what it means to be an Asian American. It is through this sort of storytelling, I believe, that the model minority myth will be debunked, and a more inclusive image of Asian American diversity will take center stage across media, academia, and the political sphere in America. It is for these reasons that I suggest *Intersections* to interested viewers with little hesitation.