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UCSB ADDS TO ASIAN AMERICAN ARCHIVES

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A playwright, a poet, and a San Francisco arts organization have donated their papers to the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives (CEMA) at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

"Over time, playwrights of color find themselves unremarked, relegated to footnotes without context, without place in our American cultural history, even though we paint it and strive to change it. So this library and the archiving of theatre artists of color is an important and crucial step in the chronicling of a truer, more honest, and richer cultural landscape," said Elizabeth Wong, a Los Angeles-based playwright whose personal papers now reside in CEMA.

The collection has drafts of Wong's plays and teleplays, correspondence files, videos, programs and reviews, research files, and photographs. Wong's plays include "Let the Big Dog Eat," on golf and Ted Turner's $1 billion donation to the United Nations; "Letters to a Student Revolutionary," a response to the Tiananmen Square massacre; and "The Happy Prince" and "The Play Formerly Known as the Happy Prince," adaptations of an Oscar Wilde short story commissioned by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Her latest play, "China Doll," won the 1998 Jane Chambers Award and is about the tragic and glamorous life of 1930's actress Anna May Wong (no relation). Wong, who grew up in Los Angeles's Chinatown, was a

writer for the ABC sitcom

"All-American Girl" and an editorial writer for the Los Angeles Times. She also teaches playwriting at UCSB's College of Creative Studies and at the University of Southern California.

Poet and union activist Nellie Wong, who is related to neither the playwright nor the actress, has also donated her personal papers to CEMA. They consist of drafts of her published and unpublished works, correspondence files, lectures and interviews on video and in print, ephemera, and personal journals. Wong, who began writing poetry in her mid-30's, gives voice to the experiences of Asian immigrants, particularly to issues of leaving "home" behind. Her poem, "Song of Farewell," was chosen by the San Francisco Arts Commission to be part of the city's Waterfront Transportation Project Historic and Interpretative Signage Program. One of the anthologies her work appears in is the American Book award-winning "The Forbidden Stitch," co-edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, fellow poet and chair of UCSB's Women's Studies Program. Wong, who grew up in 1940's Chinatown in Oakland, Calif., has published three collections of poetry: "Death of Long Steam Lady," "Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park," and "Stolen Moments."

"I wanted to be a part of CEMA as soon as Sal Guerena described the project to me. I care about the roots of Asian American culture---the how and why they came here. Legacy is so important," said the poet, who recently retired as a University of California, San Francisco affirmative action senior analyst and now devotes herself to socialist and feminist organizations. "I am 63 years old now, it's time to take care of business."Also new to the CEMA collections are other pieces of 20th-century Asian American history---the archives of the nonprofit agency Kearny Street Workshop (KSW). The oldest existing multidisciplinary Asian American arts organization in the United States, KSW was founded in 1972 in San Francisco's Chinatown/Manilatown neighborhood. The struggles of the neighborhood defined the art produced by KSW members: low-income housing, strikes by garment and electrical union workers, and eviction of the elderly tenants of the International Hotel. Now in South Park, the community-based organization supports the efforts of Asian Americans in the visual, performance, and literary arts, and encourages intergenerational, cross-cultural activities that highlight Asian American culture and history. Characteristically events organized by KSW, such as the Asian American Jazz Festival, are an eclectic mix of poets, musicians, and performance artists.

"We have 25-years worth of local Asian American history---posters, publications, and photos, including the International Hotel tenant struggle," said Nancy Hom, executive director of KSW. "Because CEMA's collections include people and organizations whose histories are intertwined with ours, UCSB was a natural place for our documents.""Time is running out. People are getting older, things are getting lost, memories are fading. Time is of the essence to do something historically significant now, while we still have a chance," said CEMA director Sal Guerena. "And gauging from the enthusiastic response I've received, it looks like we have been doing the right things."

CEMA's archivists collect primary resource materials to ensure that future scholars researching the history of 20th century California will have access to information on the experiences of African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicano/Latinos, and Native Americans. Located in the Special Collections department of UCSB's Donald C. Davidson Library, CEMA has the archives of the Asian American Theater Company; the papers of Iris Chang, author of "The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II" and "The Thread of the Silkworm;" archives of the Chinese American Democratic Club, chartered in 1957 by the California State Democratic Central Committee and the California Democratic Council in response to violations of Chinese American civil rights; and the personal papers of playwright, performance artist, and poet Genny Lim, author of the play "Paper Angels" included in the Asian American component.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.