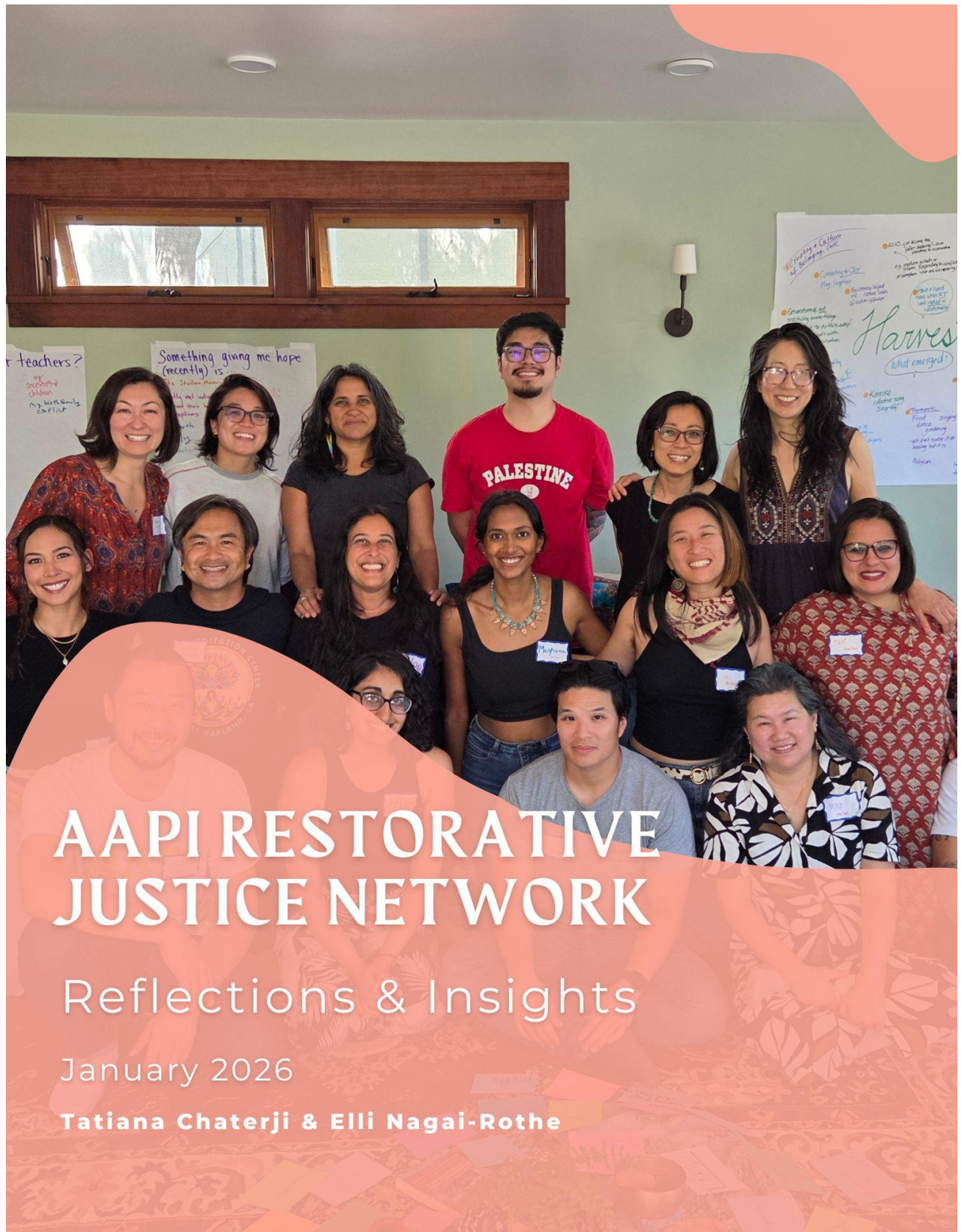




AAPI RESTORATIVE JUSTICE NETWORK

Reflections & Insights

January 2026

Tatiana Chaterji & Elli Nagai-Rothe

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Overview

In this document, we share our journey of co-creating and stewarding the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Restorative Justice (RJ) Network over the course of December 2023 - December 2025, the emergent themes and reflections from our collective conversations, and our insights as network co-stewards. We share this document with deep gratitude to all members of the AAPI RJ Network. This is by no means a complete collection of our collective conversations, though our intention is to share what we have learned to a wider audience with the hopes that our conversations may continue and contribute to ongoing and future efforts at the intersection of AAPI cultural experience and RJ practice.

A note about terminology:

We understand that the linguistic markers of “Asian/Asian American” and “AAPI” are imperfect, obscuring the vast diversity and power inequities among the communities they attempt to encompass. At the same time, these terms have played an important role in collective organizing and movement-building, including a long history of AAPI civil rights advocacy and racial justice solidarity work in the United States.

Our network does not currently reflect the full range of Asian and Pacific Islander communities, and we know not everyone from these communities identifies as “AAPI.” In particular, we acknowledge the current absence of Pacific Islander practitioners in this network, and that some Pacific Islanders have specifically made the request not to be included in “AAPI” as they identify more strongly with “Native” or “Indigenous.”¹

We began our project using “AAPI” for consistency with the Asian Law Caucus, our grant-holder, and continued under this name to remain inclusive of Pacific Islanders who may have wished to join at any point from 2023-2025. As we transition away from grant funding and into a new chapter of the Network, we are moving towards shifting our name to Asian American RJ Network to more accurately represent who we are, with care and awareness of the fraught and evolving nature of how we ascribe language to identity.

¹ For more on this topic, please see [How Inclusive is AAPI?](#) and [Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Children Are Not a Monolith](#).

Who We Are

As co-stewards of the AAPI RJ Network and co-authors of this document, we want to begin by sharing our positionalities: how our multiple and intersecting identities, life experiences, and worldviews inform our perspectives and ultimately our RJ practice.

Elli Nagai-Rothe (she/they)

My ancestors are from Japan, China, Korea, and Germany. I am a Yonsei (4th generation) Japanese American descendent of racialized incarceration on my mom's side. My grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, along with over 120,000 Japanese Americans were unjustly imprisoned during WWII in US concentration camps—an act that severed families, and shuttered thriving neighborhoods and communities in the name of US security. My family was removed from their homes in Oakland and Pasadena, detained in the horse stalls of Tanforan and Santa Anita race tracks, and ultimately incarcerated in Gila River (Arizona) and Topaz (Utah) from 1942 to 1945. My family's experience of racism and injustice—and the resulting generational trauma—has deeply impacted my personal and professional path as a conflict transformation practitioner, racial justice advocate, and restorative justice facilitator with deeply rooted social justice values.



As a co-founder of The Ripple Collective, I currently support social change organizations and communities to move through conflict in generative and racially just ways, often repairing relational rupture. I am a mama to an energetic 10-year-old and as a family, we are actively engaged in an unschooling journey, liberating ourselves from oppressive and coercive educational systems. I live in a multi-generational family village on occupied Lisjan Ohlone lands in the East Bay.

Tatiana Chaterji (she/her)

I am the daughter of Bengali and Finnish immigrants, the mother of two small children, educator, and comrade to working people across the globe. My ties to my homelands are strong – growing up in Berkeley, California, formerly known as “Finn Town;” visiting through my younger years and finally living for longer stretches as an adult in Kolkata, West Bengal, where all of my paternal relatives (outside of my baba) reside.

My work in restorative justice is informed by my experience of disability, race, class and caste. My white relatives are working class, many of them trade unionists who shaped my political understanding of labor. My brown relatives carry Brahminical and land-owning privileges. I support caste abolition and am a student of Ambedkarite scholars and activists in unlearning casteism and challenging Hindu supremacist and state-sanctioned violence.

In restorative justice, I have worked in institutions (schools, carceral and probation settings), community organizations, and families/informal kinship networks. Victim offender dialogue and surrogate repair have been a big part of my personal journey. I am passionate about drama therapy, Theatre of the Oppressed, psychodrama, martial arts, fight choreography/stage combat, playback theater, bicycling, creative writing, and moving meditation.

Context

The AAPI RJ Network was created in the shadow of COVID-19, against a political backdrop of anti-immigrant and Sinophobic sentiment. Several high profile crimes against people of Asian backgrounds or perceived as Asian heightened the sense of fear within Asian and Asian American communities—fear of being physically harmed and assaulted. Many organizations began developing more robust systems for rapid response and support, including a special focus on approaches that did not rely on police or the criminal-legal system. In this time period, restorative justice emerged as a prominent alternative to carceral responses for safety. Several AAPI community groups were trained in the principles of RJ, practiced facilitating restorative processes, and adapted the techniques for their contexts.

At the center of these efforts² were working-class monolingual immigrants, thus foregrounding language justice, labor, and structural power. While this population sometimes lacked knowledge of specific historic flashpoints in the United States context – the lasting legacy of slavery, for example – they resonated deeply with the principles of interdependence, compassion, humility and collective care. Tatiana was involved in this work: *For me, this was one of the most inspiring experiences in political education that I have ever encountered. We began with the heart: personal stories of home and family, and then slowly moved into dynamics in their neighborhood, city, and society at large. I witnessed intuitive alignment in the way many elders understood the world, and the philosophies undergirding restorative justice. This lifted my spirits and set the stage for the AAPI RJ Network, which would come together in the next two years.*

The idea for the AAPI RJ Network emerged in this context, recognizing the need for a space created by and for AAPI RJ practitioners. The Network confronts the reductive narrative and moral superiority that we have witnessed when non-Asian people in restorative justice, particularly White practitioners, assume that Asians are racist against Black people and unequivocally support police. We have encountered non-Asian people in RJ whose biased attitudes make us wonder if they understand xenophobia and anti-Asian racism. While anti-Blackness and other forms of bias exist in Asian communities, both mainstream and ethnic media outlets amplify a carceral logic that doesn't reflect the reality of people on the ground.

In one high-profile incident, a young African American man physically harassed and beat an elderly Chinese man in San Francisco's Chinatown. Leaders from Black and Asian community organizations who had already shown up in solidarity for each other were able to coordinate a

² For more on this work, please see the July 2023 white paper, [Racial Healing and Community Safety through Restorative Justice](#).

crisis response. They listened to the elder, who said something that is familiar to many people who have been violated or victimized by crime: *"I don't want this to happen again, ever, to anyone."* This sentiment was echoed in the circle that Tatiana later convened to bring AAPI crime victims and survivors together. Circle participants reflected on the intricacies of holding an identity that is not understood as marginalized by the wider world, in the context of urgency and visibility of state violence against Black bodies, and equity-washing that makes only symbolic gestures toward challenging white supremacy. Racial harm against people of Asian descent sometimes happens in subtle ways that may be unrecognizable to many, even in anti-racist solidarity movements.

This gap in recognition, where AAPI experiences are often sidelined or dismissed, creates a sense of isolation for many AAPI RJ practitioners. It highlights an important paradox: while Asian Americans increasingly became the focus of public discourse regarding hate crimes, our specific cultural needs and internal community dynamics remain largely misunderstood by the broader social justice landscape. This lack of nuanced understanding is mirrored in the U.S. restorative justice space, where there is little to no AAPI cultural visibility or representation. We understand this as a direct reflection of the wider racial landscape in which Asians are simultaneously hyper-visible as victims of hate crime or "model minorities" and invisibilized with specific community needs and nuances overlooked or erased. Some of our first teachers in RJ are Asian and Asian practitioners have existed in the RJ field for decades. However, "Asianness"—the explicit, meaningful connection to Asian homelands, ancestral practices, and traditions—has been notably absent from the mainstream RJ narrative.

Background

With a spotlight on anti-Asian hate alongside a wave of enthusiasm for RJ and alternatives to policing, we saw an opportunity. What if we could bring together current Asian RJ practitioners, folks who are often working as a minority within RJ spaces, to uplift our unique perspectives and approaches? What if we could skill-up folks working in adjacent fields, and service-providers already working with AAPI communities to implement healing-based modalities for addressing conflict and harm?

The AAPI Restorative Justice Network was birthed after months of deep conversation, planning, co-creation and intentional relationship-building. Our journey was ultimately made possible through a partnership between The Ripple Collective and the Asian Law Caucus—supported by a California State grant to address AAPI-targeted violence. This network represents a collective commitment to stewarding a future rooted in restorative alternatives to the carceral system. Alongside other partners of the California Transformative Grant, we hope to increase awareness of and comfort with restorative justice practices in Bay Area AAPI communities and provide pathways for these communities to access restorative justice processes as an alternative to the carceral system, and as a culturally-aligned pathway for healing.

As the only known gathering of its kind in the San Francisco Bay Area and likely the nation, the AAPI Restorative Justice Network is a groundbreaking space for practitioners to build community, share knowledge, and offer deep peer support. We elevate our unique perspectives by weaving traditions and rituals of peace, justice, and healing from our ancestral homelands into our practice of restorative justice. By centering our AAPI identities and lived experiences, we are reclaiming our cultural ways of being to transform how we address conflict and harm response. This has been a rare opportunity to consider our holistic selves in our RJ work, including family upbringing and points of origin that are otherwise invisible or unknown to others. We cherish this unique and important space to integrate the Asian parts of ourselves into our professional, personal, and spiritual work in restorative justice.

The goals of our network include:

- Build community with Bay Area Asian RJ practitioners.
- Establish mutually-supportive and reciprocal relationships of learning and peer support, both for emerging and established practitioners.
- Explore our Asian ancestral and cultural traditions, practices, ways of being—bridging our cultural knowledge and lived experiences with restorative justice and our work as practitioners.

- Skill-up people who work in AAPI communities to implement healing-based modalities for addressing harm.
- Create a network of practitioners available for case referrals or emergent needs within our communities.

Our intention is to cultivate a spirit of care, generosity, and community. The Network currently includes 38 current and emerging practitioners. We are conflict workers, facilitators, healers, educators, community workers, service providers, therapists, nonprofit directors, students, culture keepers, activists, parents, Asian food enthusiasts, and visionaries of a world that centers collective care and healing.

Our Shared Values

As in many RJ circle spaces, we began our time in the AAPI RJ Network by uplifting our individual and shared values, and what anchors and guides us in our work. Many of our values are also grounded in our Asian ancestry. Here are some of those values:

- *Kapwa* (you are part of a community, togetherness)
- *Anekantavaad* (infinite paths to truth)
- Inter-dependence/interconnectedness
- Listen to your elders
- Abundance
- Care
- Mindfulness
- Group harmony
- Creative expression
- *Gaman* (persevering amidst suffering with grace and dignity)
- Kung fu
- Honor the divine in each being (everyone matters)
- Belonging
- *Kintsugi* (transforming something broken into something beautiful)
- Collective action
- *Metta*
- *Opo Manong* (deep respect, blessing from elders)
- Creativity
- Community
- Connection
- Family
- *Anatta* (no-self) / *sunyata* (emptiness)
- Resilience
- *Bodhichitta* (wish to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings)
- Empathy (seeing and caring for others in their full humanity)



Our Journey

Since our inception in Fall 2023 through foundational dialogues with the Asian Law Caucus, the AAPI RJ Network has evolved through several phases, building a momentum that carries us into 2026 and beyond. Below we share some of the key moments of our journey thus far.

1. Outreach

May-July, 2024

We shared information about the emerging network via the Ripple Collective website, flyers, direct email outreach, through Asian Law Caucus partners, Asian-affinity community spaces, and our own social and professional networks. In addition to folks filling out an interest form, we held informational calls with interested folks to answer questions, build relationships, and uplift the spirit of reciprocity by inviting folks to reflect on what they wanted to receive from the network and what they could offer.



2. In-Person Practitioner Gathering

August 30, 2024

14 current RJ practitioners gathered in Oakland, CA for an afternoon of connection and meaningful conversations with fellow practitioners about what it means to practice RJ from an AAPI lens. One of our members led a water ritual to center our ancestral connections to water and to each other—a ritual which later became a shared touch point for several of our subsequent gatherings. We shared the values that we hold from our cultures that we bring to our



restorative justice work, played community-centered games, and had conversations in affinity groups about how our Asian identity shows up in our work.

We see food as a form of community connection and care, so we also centered our gathering around a shared meal, and enjoyed a delicious lunch prepared by a local Palestinian chef via [Oakland Bloom](#). We are grateful to [Canticle Farm](#) and the land there for hosting and holding us. Canticle later became our in-person “home” when we gathered several more times over the course of 2025.

3. Practitioner Virtual Follow-Up Sessions

October 15, 2024; November 26, 2024; December 13, 2024

To continue our conversations with current practitioners following our in-person August 2024 gathering, we held three 2-hour sessions via Zoom. We explored what it means to each of us to be AAPI in doing RJ work, lifted up specific cultural practices in more concrete and grounded examples that we would like to try out in our work. We also talked



about doing RJ work specifically with AAPI communities and within AAPI contexts. During the November 2024 session, we invited several guest service providers and AAPI community workers to join us, to learn from each other about the needs, opportunities, and challenges of doing RJ work within AAPI communities from our various perspectives and roles. We offer our thanks to Janice Li ([Coalition for Community Safety and Justice](#)); Alvina Wong and Sky Liang ([Asian Pacific Environmental Network](#)) and Joyce Lam ([Chinese Progressive Association](#)).

4. Restorative Justice Training for Emerging Practitioners

February 22 & 28, 2025

We held a two-day Introduction to Restorative Justice intensive training (10am-5pm), intended for new and emerging practitioners, and/or community-based service providers working directly with AAPI communities. 20 participants joined this training. A long-term goal connected to the grant is to increase the number of AAPI-identified RJ practitioners in the Bay Area. In the

short-term, we supported practitioners to integrate RJ principles and practices into their current work. We incorporated themes and insights from the August 2024 in-person practitioner gathering and virtual follow-up sessions into the training, to share forward the emerging insights from our network's conversations. Following this training, participants opted-in to join the AAPI RJ Network.



We are grateful to CURYJ who hosted us in their Fruitvale Youth Power Zone space for the training.

5. Referrals & Community Offerings

January - September 2025

Originally, one element of the Network included referrals from Asian Law Caucus' Legal Clinic. We established a Google group to stay connected, share resources, ask for support, and share requests for referrals from the ALC Legal Clinic. However, due to funding challenges, ALC unfortunately had to shut down the legal clinic. So we did not continue developing this phase, connecting practitioners with cases through the Legal Clinic. However, the Google Group is still active, and members on occasion post community requests for referrals and community-based needs.

In December 2024, ALC also set aside funds to support AAPI community members who have experienced harm to engage in restorative justice processes and interventions as an alternative to the carceral system. These funds were intended to support practitioners in the AAPI RJ Network in covering the costs of providing RJ support to impacted AAPI community members and/or repairing harm at the community level. ALC invited network members to submit proposals and encouraged collaborations between existing and emerging RJ practitioners. Several network members were able to offer proactive community interventions and offerings. Sacred Roots founder, Yu-Shuan Sho, co-organized "Restorative Justice Across Lineages" – a 7-week community series led by BIPOC healers, cultural workers, and restorative justice practitioners. Each week offered a unique theme weaving ritual, storytelling, and hands-on-tools to transform conflict, repair harm, and reconnect with ancestral wisdom. Tatiana

Chaterji, a survivor of violent crime leading to traumatic brain injury, convened a space for other AAPI survivors of crime and violence to connect and heal through witnessing each other in shared struggle.

6. Community of Practice Monthly Meet-Ups

June 10, 2025; August 8, 2025; September 2, 2025; October 24, 2025; November 18, 2025 + ongoing

The final phase is a community-of-practice space that weaves together both existing and emerging RJ practitioners. We meet monthly via Zoom for 1.5 hours to continue building relationships and continue our conversations about bridging our cultural knowledge and our work transforming conflict and harm. We also serve as peer-support for one another in our RJ work—bringing questions we’re grappling with, sharing success stories, or sharing challenging cases or situations we are working on and making requests for input, feedback, and support. While most of our sessions are held virtually, we met in-person in October 2025 at Canticle Farm, for a potluck lunch of our favorite Asian comfort foods and community connection—a grounding experience amidst growing ICE presence in Oakland.



We hope that this space is supportive both for existing practitioners and also folks who are new to practicing RJ. While the community-of-practice space was set to finish in October, network members expressed strong desire to continue meeting. Folks have volunteered to co-facilitate the upcoming community-of-practice sessions, which are currently scheduled through April 2026.

Surfacing the Cultural Foundations of our RJ Practice

Through our collective conversations, both in person and virtually, we discovered several overlapping threads that connect our culture and RJ practice. This list encompasses complex concepts, textured cultural practices, and rich traditions that are deeply rooted in ancient Asian philosophies, lineages, and ways of being. Including them in a list form does not allow us to reflect and unpack the complexity and nuance that connects each practice to those lineages. We include two first-person narrative stories, “Healing through Kintsugi” and “Practicing Anekantavada and Forgiveness,” that bring more context to some of these cultural practices and our connection with RJ.

- Spiritual practices
 - *Anekantavaad* अनेकान्तवाद (In Jainism, infinite paths to truth, multiple truths)
 - Non-duality (Taoism)
 - *Wu wei* 無為 (In Taoism, effortless action, living in harmony with natural flow)
 - Sati सति (Pali word—mindfulness, present moment awareness)
 - *Vipassana* (To see things as they really are, mind-body connection)
 - *Metta* मेट्ता (Loving kindness)
 - Asian shamanism
- Forgiveness practices
 - *Kadaw* ကန်တော့ (Burmese tradition of seeking forgiveness from elders for harm caused, whether intentional or unintentional)
 - *Tawbah* توبة (In Islam, the act of repenting, changing behavior, and seeking forgiveness)
- Radical hospitality and collective care
 - Offering food as an act of love and care: “have you eaten?”
 - Food as a care and healing practice
 - Bringing people who are in conflict together, to prepare a shared meal
- Community well-being—creating a culture of care and belonging
- Emphasis on relationships: collectivism over individualism
 - Weaving the threads of our relational experience
 - Expanding RJ beyond a circle (eating food, creating art, and playing together)
- Artistic practices
 - Kintsugi 金継ぎ (Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold or silver)
 - Dance
 - Taiko
 - Folding origami paper cranes
 - Karaoke and singing
 - Gardening

- Kung-fu
- Honoring elders and ancestors
- Ritual and ceremony
- Nature as our first RJ teacher: relationship, interconnectedness, balance, harmony, and collective healing
- Interdependence
- Intergenerational healing
- Solidarity and activism work
 - Examples: Tsuru for Solidarity, Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality
- Compassion
 - Avalokiteshwara and Guanyin (Bodhisattvas, enlightened beings, of compassion)

Healing Through Kintsugi

Elli Nagai-Rothe

The deep intergenerational trauma of WWII incarceration continues to impact the Japanese American community, and my family. Though I didn't directly experience "camp," I hold a visceral feeling of loss and grief in my body. One way that trauma manifested for my grandparents was to assimilate into Whiteness, to hide Japanese cultural markers out of a deep and paralyzing fear of being detained again. After navigating their way out of prison camps through a racist process of proving their "loyalty" to the US, my grandparents moved to an all-White neighborhood outside of Chicago, stopped speaking Japanese, and raised my mother to hide Japanese foods or rituals.

My healing journey involves metabolizing my family's intergenerational trauma by reclaiming Japanese cultural practices and traditions that U.S. xenophobic laws stripped away. While I work to heal these wounds, I also honor the gifts of resilience that my family passed down to me—specifically the spirit of gaman, which teaches me to face great hardship with dignity and grace as an active choice rather than passive suffering. A stepping stone on my healing journey is my reconnection to the art of Kintsugi. This ancient practice of repairing broken pottery with urushi (tree lacquer) and powdered gold or silver aligns significantly with



my restorative justice work, as both seek to find beauty and strength in the process of repair. Kintsugi is a process of deep care, time, and attentive mending, ultimately transforming a broken dish into a work of art—something that is even more beautiful and resilient than it was before being broken. Restorative justice work feels akin to the kintsugi process, a reminder that our brokenness or our mistakes don't define us. Through our cracks and imperfections, we can heal, grow, and transform into a version of ourselves that is more resilient and ultimately more beautiful than we were before the trauma of being broken. Relational repair transforms our shared scars into a source of collective strength.

I had the great privilege of traveling to Japan with my family in April 2025. While I was in Tokyo, I took a kintsugi class with Sensei Michiko Preyer Kado. I experienced the process of repairing a plate using a combination of traditional and modern techniques. I learned how much time, care, and patience is required in this process. Which is true of restorative justice processes as well. Michiko Sensei provided traditional Japanese tea and sweets as part of the kintsugi experience. A reminder to me that the entire process, not just the end goal of a repaired plate, is intentional and important. It's important to pause, reflect, sip tea, and enjoy both the sweetness and imperfection of our lives amidst the work of relational repair. Each piece is unique, as is each of our experiences of healing and repair.

Shilpa Jain³

Practicing Anekantavada and Forgiveness

Anekantavada starts with the acknowledgement that reality is quite complex and multifaceted, and therefore, no single viewpoint could ever represent the complete truth, and by extension, no one could ever have a monopoly on the truth. To practice Anekantavada, I need to be humble, to see the limitations of my own knowledge, while also embracing the existence of multiple perspectives, both known and unknown to me. It's quite a cool principle and truly sits at the foundation of most of my bridge-building, community-healing, and conflict transformation work in this world. Both/and is what makes not just co-existence, but also co-creation and co-learning possible, because it makes space for everyone to participate and belong.

In restorative justice and conflict transformation work, both/and gives space to all the parties involved, to honor intentions and impacts, and to recognize the complexity of reality and of each of us as beings — that we can show up to the same moment and experience it very differently. I've also heard a variation of it in improvisational theater or comedy. It's called Yes/And and speaks to flow and collaboration. Rather than cutting off a storyline or a sketch with No/But,

³ Read Shilpa's full piece, [Light up the Lighthouses: Now is the Time for Both And](#), and [Flowing with Forgiveness](#).

players are encouraged to expand the realm of possibility by taking what's there and contributing to its growth. Yes, I see you, And, I add a bit to it. Like the most delicious infinitely layered cake.

Paryushan is the Jain festival of atonement, repentance and forgiveness. It's a nine-day period where we reflect on the fact that we hurt others, unintentionally and intentionally, unknowingly and knowingly, unconsciously and consciously, with our thoughts, words and actions. It is also an opportunity to reflect on how we are practicing other core principles of Jainism, like anekantavaad. At the end of Paryushan, usually after a period of some fasting, Jains ask forgiveness from everyone, and offer it to all who ask us.

I think about Paryushan as a concentrated time period in which to acknowledge a year-round, life-time truth: As a human being, I will cause pain and suffering to other human beings (and other beings in general, including myself); it is unavoidable and inevitable, regardless of my intentions, knowledge, and/or consciousness. Therefore, it is vital for me to practice offering and asking for forgiveness.

I see forgiveness as a core element of self- and collective- growth and healing, a vital practice for existing as a human and for participating in relationships and community. I actually don't know how to flow through life without regularly forgiving myself and others, and asking others to forgive me. For me, forgiveness is a lubricant for life. In seeing the polarization and entrenched conflict in so many movements, organizations, families and community spaces, I sense that strengthening forgiveness practices is more than just helpful; it is necessary if we are to survive and thrive, and find ways forward that include everyone and all parts of ourselves.

Key Themes and Questions

Throughout our time together, over many group conversations (both virtual and in-person), circles, and shared meals, it became clear that for us RJ is not merely a set of tools, but a living dialogue between our ancestral pasts and our vision for a future rooted in collective care and healing. This section outlines some of the key questions and themes that emerged from our shared journey—an exploration of what it means to practice restorative justice while navigating the complexities of AAPI identity, the weight of intergenerational trauma, and the immense possibility of cultural reclamation.

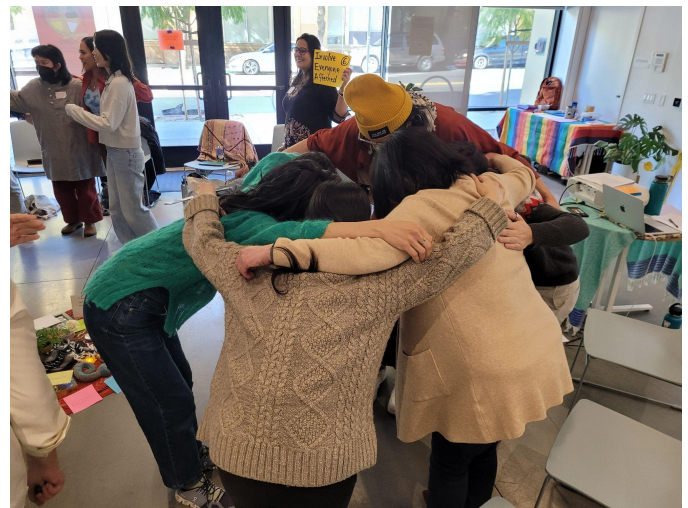
What Does it Mean to Do RJ Work as an AAPI Practitioner?

Many people expressed again and again that our RJ work is less a professional practice and more a profound journey of ancestral reclamation and healing. Doing this work means operating from a place of deep interdependence, where the well-being of the individual is inseparable from the community and the natural world. One member shared *“I practice with the knowledge that my people bring a consideration for others into all things, including plant and animal beings. Interdependence is not an idea, it is how we live and breathe.”*

Remembering and Reconnecting

When it comes to our identities as Asian practitioners, many of us resonate with the concept of remembering and reconnecting. Intentionally unearthing and rediscovering pre-colonial practices and wisdom that were often suppressed throughout history. We see this as ancestral healing work. Many of us feel a responsibility to raise awareness of the richness of those who came before us, weaving the stories and experiences of our elders and ancestors into our current restorative practices. This connection is often expressed through cultural arts, such as:

- Traditional dance and music.
- Martial arts.
- Babaylan practices (spiritual healers in pre-colonial Philippine indigenous cultures)



See a fuller list in our earlier section, [“Surfacing the Cultural Foundations of our RJ Practice.”](#) These aren't just art forms—they are the blueprints for how our ancestors navigated and thrived through struggle and oppression.

We acknowledge that as culture-holders, we have a responsibility both to hold our traditions with care, while also actively making space to grow, evolve, adapt our cultural practices and traditions. While we remember and reclaim, we also play and have fun with these practices, and remind ourselves not to hold them so rigidly.

Navigating Grief, Trauma and Healing

For many of us, intergenerational trauma informs our connection and access (or lack thereof) to our cultural practices. There is a collective sense of grieving for the ways war, colonialism, and oppression severed ancestral ties and disconnected many of us from our cultural rituals and traditions. However, grief is part of our ancestral healing and keeps us *“tender, humble, and open when holding space.”* Given the realities of oppression and disconnection, we continue to ask ourselves, *“how do we practice in ways that feel truly authentic to us?”*

Proximity to Whiteness

A question we grappled with was “what does it mean to be in proximity to whiteness as RJ practitioners?” One member shared: *“Sometimes I find that my AAPI identity allows me to steward multi-racial spaces because I may appear to folks to be less “threatening” and therefore easier for me to challenge white folks.”*

Several folks also spoke about feeling protective of our ancestral traditions and practices, particularly in racially mixed or non-Asian RJ spaces. We recognize that many of our cultural practices (like mindfulness) are already taken out of context, appropriated, and often disconnected from the deep ancestral philosophies and ways of being from which they originate and are practiced. We hold a desire to more deeply access our cultural wisdom, while also making choices about which of our ancestral gifts we are willing to share and in which spaces, discerning whether they will be received and held with care.

Relationality and our Cultural Connective Tissue

Typically, Restorative Justice is often invoked when conflict or harm has occurred. From our ancestral traditions, we know that RJ does not begin only when there is a breakdown or rupture. Our cultural connective tissue is built on interdependent and interconnected ways of

living and being in relationship with one another. Relationality is at the core of our communities, and thus at the core of how we practice RJ. We believe that RJ should be integrated within our wellness and healing frameworks. So that when conflict does inevitably arise, it isn't seen as a failure or the *start* of a process, but rather as a reflection of the interconnected healing that we've been practicing together all along. If practiced this way, RJ becomes a practice of health rather than just a response to injury.

Rituals

Throughout our time together, whether gathering virtually or in-person, we intentionally wove ritual into the fabric of our communal space. Through rituals such as collective breathing, meditation, somatic movement, the creation of altars, honoring 5 elements, and calling in our ancestors, our rituals embodied the essence of our network—our relationships with each other,



our ancestors, and our communities. These rituals did more than just ground us; they served as a living bridge between our diverse Asian cultural heritages and our restorative justice practice. They were a constant, powerful reminder that the heart of our work is not merely a response to rupture and harm, but a commitment to the very way we relate to one another and the world around us.

What Challenges Do We Face in Practicing RJ Within AAPI Communities?

While not all of us work within AAPI communities, doing so carries a specific set of considerations and challenges that we explored. Practicing RJ within AAPI communities and contexts involves navigating a complex landscape of cultural expectations, political polarization, and deep-seated trauma. The challenges we discussed together highlight that the work is as much about internal community healing as it is about systemic change. The AAPI community is not a monolith, the vast diversity in language and culture means there are both shared and differing challenges and opportunities across each community.

Political and Media Misinformation

A significant hurdle is the dominance of conservative and traditional media, which often circulate misleading information about RJ and abolition. This creates a difficult environment for

some of us who must constantly work to dispel extractive and racist narratives pushed by influential AAPI leaders and politicians. This political climate, compounded by fears of anti-Asian hate and geopolitical tensions (such as US-China relations), often leads to a carceral-minded approach in many spaces. We see this through the election of local officials who prioritize punitive measures over diversion programs, reflecting a deep-seated lack of trust in alternative justice pathways.

Cultural Barriers and Epigenetic Trauma

Deeply rooted cultural norms often conflict with the vulnerability required for RJ. Many of us face the challenge of shaming within our communities, where survivors of domestic violence or incarceration feel pressure to hide their trauma to maintain "face." Furthermore, the hard work ethic that's common in many AAPI households can sometimes come at the expense of emotional communication. Additionally, unhealed wounds can reduce a participant's capacity for restorative dialogue, making it difficult for them to tolerate the uncertainty or emotional intensity of a circle process.

Structural and Coalition Hurdles

We also experience some external challenges in the broader progressive landscape. Mainstream organizations often stereotype AAPI groups, making it difficult to build the coalitions necessary to support alternative pathways to justice. Within the community itself, some folks expressed a need for training that is specifically grounded in AAPI cultural contexts, rather than relying on Westernized RJ models. A need that we see being addressed, in part, through the training we provided to emerging practitioners in our network.

What Opportunities Exist for Practicing RJ Within AAPI Communities & Beyond?

Despite the challenges expressed in the earlier section, we also see many opportunities—not just about addressing conflict and harm, but about narrative shifting and building a new kind of community power.

Electoral Power and Political Education

We recognize an opportunity in the growing electoral influence of AAPI communities. As more community members engage in the democratic process, there is a fertile ground for organizing and education. Many see the circle as a vital tool for political education—specifically as a safe space to teach the history of slavery, colonialism, and anti-Black violence in the U.S. By

grounding AAPI community members in this historical context, RJ practitioners can help them become more resilient against the misinformation campaigns that often target AAPI voters.

Language Justice and Intergenerational Bridging

We also see an important opportunity to move beyond simple language interpretation toward true Language Justice and intergenerational bridge-building. This involves:

- Developing RJ facilitation in multiple languages to ensure cultural nuance is preserved.
- Training interpreters to feel confident and fluent in RJ principles.
- Engaging bilingual and bicultural facilitators to act as bridges between immigrant elders and younger generations.
- Creating a shared vocabulary that allows our communities to discuss harm and healing in ways that feel linguistically and culturally authentic.
- Translating and adapting English-language concepts in ways that are culturally aligned, context specific, and accessible.
- Storytelling as a way to connect across generations and cultural contexts.
- Connecting RJ with healing generational and ongoing collective trauma.
- Understanding historical and geopolitical forces and how these impact families across generations: “we’re in this together.”

Restore Oakland is working on a Healing Justice Glossary to address this opportunity.

Expanding Inclusivity and Coalition Building

We see an opening to broaden the AAPI umbrella to be more inclusive of those on the margins. There is a specific desire to create safer spaces for systems-impacted and unhoused individuals, queer, disabled, and poor working-class community members. By centering these voices, folks see a path toward authentic multi-racial and cross-organizational solidarity and narrative shifting. For example, the ongoing collaboration between Restore Oakland and APEN (Asian Pacific Environmental Network) provides a model for connecting public safety concerns to real-world economic impacts, helping the community see how their struggles are intertwined with those of other marginalized groups.

Relational Infrastructure

We see an opportunity and a need to shift away from transactional models toward a more sustainable, relational infrastructure—centering the long-term health of both practitioners and the communities we serve. We see restorative justice fundamentally as culture work, and therefore we see a deep need for permanent spaces that community members can rely on for ongoing connection and consistent trust-building, rather than single circles. This consistency is

vital in building the deep, relational trust required to navigate complex harm both within the AAPI community and beyond.

We also see a need for dedicated spaces designed to metabolize and bear witness to grief. In many current settings, the intensity of the work only allows time for venting or commiserating. We see an opportunity for deeper, more transformative processes that allow folks to truly digest our experiences and work toward transformative collective healing.

Sustainability and Radical Rest

To prevent burnout in a field that is emotionally and spiritually demanding, we discussed the necessity of rest and recharge, particularly as RJ facilitators—sabbaticals, spaces for us to rest, recharge, and reignite. We also lifted up the importance of joy, play, and laughter in order for our work to be sustainable.



Creativity & Embodied Expression

Creativity, somatic movement, and embodied play practices were a common thread woven throughout our time together. Whether through Theater of the Oppressed exercises, Qigong (Chinese practice of deep breathing and slow movement), Shintaido (Japanese martial art), community building games, or image collaging, we incorporated various modalities to explore topics of collective care and to deepen our connections. We see opportunities to weave more of these non-verbal ways of being into our RJ practice, deepening our relationships with each other and with the groups we work with.

Closing Thoughts

As we reflect on the journey of the AAPI Restorative Justice Network from 2023 through late 2025, we are grateful for the opportunity to connect and build relationships with such an amazing group of facilitators, community-workers, and care-centered humans. We are grateful for the profound process of collectively remembering, reconnecting, and reclaiming our ancestral practices and building a bridge to our restorative justice practice. Grounded in our cultural values like *kapwa* and *metta*, we are building cultural connective tissue that moves beyond transactional models of justice toward more sustainable and relational ways of being.

We see several areas of opportunity to continue the work we started together within the Network:

- Develop a practitioner base and envision a rapid-response network for addressing harm.
- Continue expanding the number of AAPI restorative justice practitioners in the Bay Area.
- Expand the Network to include other regional hubs beyond the Bay Area.
- Uplift Asian heritage and cultural practices in conversations about conflict and harm within RJ spaces.

Through our time with Network, we have been surprised and heartened by the members' enthusiastic, sincere, and joyful participation. This has been a refreshingly innovative space – there is nothing new about our Asian identity or our RJ practice, and yet, by integrating them in a community setting, we stumbled into shared revelations. We reflected on our own private experiences, and voiced them to the group, and through the process of witnessing each other, uncovered further stories within ourselves.

The high level of creativity in this group allowed for experimental, embodied, and artistic expressiveness. Tatiana captures this element of our work in the narrative piece below.

Mirrors of Each Other **Tatiana Chaterji**

To prepare for our closing ritual, I pull a small table with a candle and incense from the back of the room into the circle. "This is our last in-person gathering, and we want to end with



building a collective altar for the future of RJ that is rooted in the wisdom of our Asian cultural lineages. Please think of an offering to make this vision a reality.” I explain that we use our imaginations to sculpt the air in front of us, shaping it into the essence of the offering, as I have done in prison with incarcerated artists who create textures and depth of story without material props, supplies, or the frills of theater production on the outside. I volunteer to go first and model how this is done.

Standing and walking towards the altar, I bring my fingers to the center of my chest and pinch an imaginary ball of thread. “I want to deepen my understanding of Bengali peacemaking and justice traditions,” I say, pulling the thread in a vertical motion, stretching up and down to create a cord of groundedness. Realizing there are actually many dimensions, I also pull the thread forwards and backwards in a lateral direction, saying “This means looking to the past and dreaming the future.” I hold this gridded net, gather it around my body and ceremoniously place it on the altar.

Others echo the desire for bringing forward parts of their Asian lineage that aren’t accessible to them. People create shapes with their bodies, making offerings to the altar that symbolize taking up space; staying grounded in a world that is shaky; reciprocity with the earth, ancestors and descendants; bringing in more ancestors; permission to create and play; forgiveness to self and others; timelessness, with the earth as a mirror; and patience.

sujatha closes her eyes and forms an image for us through stream-of-consciousness: “I see Indra’s net, infinite, with shimmering diamonds at each point.” I notice the goosebumps raise on the skin of my arms as she continues: it is as if she has reached inside of me, pulling from the sutra of Avalokiteshwara which was part of my childhood. It is a piece of scripture and a spiritual concept that deeply grounds my practice in RJ as an adult. I see her hands, which she has raised, and fingers, trembling, glimmering, ever so slightly. She speaks slowly, carrying us with her in a visualization, “Dew drops, mirrors. I cannot be who I am meant to be unless you are who you are meant to be. RJ is the material of the web.”

This was a rare moment of belonging, for me, as I was seamlessly reflected in the speech and cultural symbols of a peer. Seamless, this integration as South Asian and as an RJ practitioner. Seamless, being able to hang onto a reference from religious traditions that are hidden in the diaspora or distorted by mainstream social messaging.

