

Introduction

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Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits does not set out to reject a U.S. nation location for Asian American writing. Rather, this collection of essays sees the nation-formation themes, often intrinsically tied to language strategies and formal features, as one subject rising from a set of historical dynamics that traverse and explain the collective body of Asian American literature. A second set of dynamics comes from the diasporic, mobile, transmigratory nature of Asian American experience, a history characterized by disparate migratory threads, unsettled and unsettling histories churned by multiple and different Asian ethnic immigrant groups each with a different language and cultural stock, different value and belief systems, and different notions of literary aesthetics, albeit most largely mediated through the English language. This continuous narrative of Asian American entry, reentry, expulsion, remigration, and movement across and between borders, what Aihwa Ong (1999) had partly captured in the phrase “flexible citizenship,” which nonetheless does not successfully express the open-ended and sometimes exhausting nature of “temporary” societies and characters. These “immigrant” subjects are not always fugitive and furtive like the *manong* in Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946), or queer as in Lawrence Chua’s *Gold by the Inch* (1998). In our use of the phrase “sites and transits” in the volume’s title, “site” also denotes attitudes and postures, the arrested moment of identity in a place and time, while “transit” denotes, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, that “instance of passing or journeying across.” A transit is also the passage of a celestial body over the meridian of a place or through the field of a telescope. In analogous manner, Asian American transit may be said to be the passage of Asian bodies through the field of an American-bounded lens, or the passing of Asian stories and images over a U.S. literary place. Asian American representations are sited in U.S. nation discourse, but representations of Asian American transits are less place-bound and more sensitive to time

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dimensions: the different histories of various collectivities and individuals; the intersection of variable, even conflictual, forces rising from social, class, gender, nation ideologies all in the same fraught moment; predicaments and losses brought on by time's passage; inexorable change and movement; and so forth. The title for this book thus gestures to the complex, dialogical national and transnational formulations of Asian American imaginations as figured in their texts.

As a number of critics have noted, Asian American literary studies may be in a moment of crisis because of the very values of multiplicity and heterogeneity that had placed ethnic-identity literatures in sight in the United States. Asian American imagination, unlike that in African American writing, has no single unifying grand narrative to organize the vast materials that Asian American writers call on; it possesses no single linguistic Other, as in Latina/o writing, on which to hinge a counter tradition of stylistics. Instead, what Asian American works of imagination manifest in full are a plethora of seemingly separate threads. Threads leading to distinctively different national origins, first languages undecipherable to other Asian Americans, and cultural signs and codes of signification unintelligible to those identified as "the same" by census and academic disciplinary discourses.

Although the novels, plays, poems, and memoirs of Asian American literature do not always mark these cultural cognitive dissonances self-reflexively, it is also accurate to note that Asian American literary critics often ignore those textual sites in which such dissonances are acutely recorded. Examples might include the role of Chinese gambling houses in Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946), or the Japanese American narrator in Hisaye Yamamoto's short story "Wilshire Bus" *Seventeen Syllables*, (2001) who remains silent as the Chinese American couple, on their way to the veterans hospital, is verbally abused by a white man, drunk on spirits and triumphal anti-Asian racism. These evident imagined moments of "Asian American" cross sightings may be represented as failed, sordid, and painful. However, as Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997) also imagines, there are other ways to represent these moments when ethnic identity may be confirmed, interrogated, destabilized, undermined, or blurred, as it is teased out not only in between the ethnicities that are conflated as Asian American but also in those moments that activate relations between and among other communities of identity—Jewish, Anglo-Saxon, black, or Latino.

From the inception of Asian American critical production, a number of conflicting impulses resulted in contradictory, sometimes bewildering, positions. A major formative influence on Asian American cultural discourse is the notion of a U.S. location: that Asian American literature is

above all a U.S. nation-identified production. The site of narrative perspective, albeit a narrative set in the Philippines or India or Brazil or Korea or a dystopic future, it is always assumed, is that of the United States of America. And for some time, despite some textual evidence to the contrary, many critics read Asian American literature as charting a linear developmental model of identity, plotted from immigrant entry to successful integration, with points of conflict, reversals, epiphanies, and so forth along the narrative route.

Increasing pressure of new immigrant national groups, the increasing presence of transnational Asian communities to whom U.S. residency may be simply one of a number of possible choices—a temporary and provisional matter or permanent condition—the growing complex dynamics of postcolonial flows and globalization in which the United States as economic, cultural, and media player may be present in non-U.S. territory and Asian presence marked in U.S. borders: these and more associated phenomena are represented in Asian American experience and imaginations, and in like manner critical theory and readings follow on these representations. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, in her introduction to *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology* (1989), noted that “As a first-generation ‘Asian American woman,’ for one thing, I knew there was no such thing as an ‘Asian American woman.’ Within this homogenizing labeling of an exotica, I knew there were entire racial/national/cultural/sexual-preferenced groups, many of whom find each other as alien as mainstream America apparently finds us. . . . [T]he experience of being ‘an Asian American woman’ is an exemplar of living in difference” (10). Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* (1996) makes the case for Asian American difference through theorizing the markers of “heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity” in Asian American texts, not as rhetorical terms but as “the material conditions that characterize Asian American groups” (67). She argues, for instance, that “the making of Chinese-American culture—the ways in which it is imagined, practiced, and continued—is worked out as much ‘horizontally’ among communities as it is transmitted ‘vertically’ in unchanging forms from one generation to the next,” and suggests Asian American identity, instead of being essentialized and fixed, is produced in a complicated, unstable fashion by “Asian American cultural productions”; that is, it is constructed and imagined.

Kandice Chuh’s *Imagine Otherwise* (2003) is the most recent formulation of these explorations into rearticulating Asian American subjects and the interdisciplinary practices established under the term Asian American studies. Organized around the thesis that Asian American studies need to be retheorized as a subjectless discourse, her argument would appear to evacuate subjects already given or assumed covered in the multiple

disciplinary practices established under an Asian American studies rubric. Her critique of the partial and reifying institutional understandings of what constitutes Asian American studies and its subjects include a criticism of approaches that take Asian American studies as part of a U.S. national project or as participating in multicultural studies or as an ethnic-identity-based discourse, or as social-science-based activism for material and political justice. Chuh's book establishes a claim for a total theory by which to frame the interdisciplinary practices undertaken and underwritten by diverse Asian Americanists. Although not denying the usefulness of sociological and empirical studies nor earlier concepts that rallied Asian American scholars around major community projects, Chuh posits instead a comprehensive response to late twentieth-century intellectual undermining of identity-based knowledge. Thus the incorporation of postcolonial, postnational, transnational, poststructuralist, and postmodernist ways of thinking—what she might call epistemes of knowing—into her radical rejection of fixed, essentialized, identity politics as characterizing the Asian American subject. Her project formulates a postsubject theory for Asian American studies; that is, what happens when we radically query the stability of unitary identity in imagining the “Asian American”? This query not only recognizes multiplicity and difference but tries to account for difference as interfaced with other differences—when difference meets itself, as Chuh says—rather than collapsed, foreclosed, and resolved into identity and sameness with the U.S. nation. The original amalgamation of the discipline being no longer appropriate, what then should replace it? Chuh takes her cue from Lisa Lowe's (*Immigrant Acts*, 1996,) and seeks to move from cultural or national identity discourses to focus on economic and social justice. This drive to move beyond cultural identity politics to economic and social justice politics motivates her study; hence, the prior position of legal judgments and legal language and the sometimes secondary position of literary works as objects of study in her book. The emphasis on difference rather than on identity allows for a new discursive space in which, while no subject is unnatural, no subject is naturalized either; that is, where the constructedness of subjects rather than their representations is analyzed. “Asian American” is therefore above all a literary sign and an abstract signifier whose signified contents are so shiftable, provisional, and undecidable that attempts to contain them will always result in incomplete narratives.

In contrast to theorizing “Asian American” as a subjectless signifier, this book reads “Asian American” as a multiplier signifier, attributed with political, social, and cultural value particularly by U.S. institutional forces such as state and federal governments, legal, educational, and cultural systems and organizations, capitalist apparatuses like banks and corporations, and so forth, whose significance in a literary and critical domain is

at once capable of incorporating fresh immigrant subjectivities as well as recuperating historical multilingual texts. Its capaciousness is constructed, invented if you will, in the way that all social-cultural identities, including those now accepted as “white” and “American,” are constructed, out of a combination of canny political agendas, individual imaginations, communal histories, erasures and elisions, provisional arrangements, and contingencies. “Asian American,” in the literary sphere, offers a way of understanding and constructing identity mediated by textual power—that is, how language operates in these works as an agent for novel imaginaries and social transformation. This volume takes up an opening gambit, of reading Asian American writing as located and locatable in U.S. territory, sited on a discourse of nation, whether immigrant or citizen, and integrated into the dominant forms, genres, and aesthetic traditions of U.S. literature. At the same time, this critical opening acknowledges that even from the earliest outset of scholarship on Asian American writing, a nation-bounded siting was never inflexible. King-Kok Cheung and Stan Yogi’s valuable *Asian American Literature Annotated Bibliography*, published in 1988, while stating its focus on “literature by Asian Americans in the United States and Canada,” cautioned that “national and regional allegiances, which often vary with time, cannot be easily determined,” and so included in its references the works of “overseas Chinese—be they sojourners or immigrants,” “expatriates,” or “regional writers” (v). Such bibliographical comprehensiveness suggests and invariably must lead to frames and theories that support a non-U.S. incorporation, which may be viewed as undermining the U.S.-claiming agenda that a number of authors and scholars like Sau-ling Wong projected for Asian American literature and studies.¹

Before proceeding to discuss the chapters of this volume, it may be useful to contextualize the collection in a literary history. Asian American literature, covering over a century of production,² has shown an exponential increase in publication in recent decades. Similarly, Asian American literary criticism has expanded significantly in the past two decades. The work of literary critics has been crucial to the ways that Asian American literatures have been defined, archived, reissued, and taught at universities in the United States and internationally. Asian American literary criticism may be said to fall into distinct, although not wholly partitioned, periods and thematic categories: critical work produced prior to 1982, between 1982 and 1995, and from 1995 to the present, with thematic categories prominently shaped in the third period. The major thematic clusters that generally concern Asian American critics include the problematics of definition, particularly the relation of Asian American literature to discourses on nation, transnation, and globalization; studies on gender and sexuality; examinations of genre

and form; single-author studies; and metacritical approaches in which Asian American literary criticism itself becomes the focus of study. A sixth category may be said to lie in the work of edited anthologies that cover a range of themes and deploy myriad critical strategies.

Introductions to anthologies of creative writing by Asian Americans offered the first examples of Asian American literary criticism prior to 1982. Initiating the debate on what constitutes an Asian American identity, the anthologies defined Asian American literature through the inclusion or exclusion of certain Asian American national groups. The published work was limited then to what the editors considered worthy or had access to; in the 1970s this literature was primarily by writers of Chinese or Japanese descent, with some attempt to reach Filipino American writers. The first anthology, *Asian-American Authors* (1972), edited by Kai-Yu Hsu and Helen Palubinskas, referred to only three Asian American national groups: Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans. *Aiiieeeee!* (1974), a pioneering collection of Asian American writing, limited the composition of Asian American writing to these ethnic groups. Moreover, the *Aiiieeeee!* preface, distinguishing between a legitimate U.S.-born Asian American subject and a foreign-born immigrant/diasporic Asian subjectivity, valorized a cultural nationalism and argued for separatist politics. The editors (Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong) legitimization of U.S.-born Asian American sensibility and consequent delegitimization of immigrant Asian American imaginations, while providing a rallying self-conscious call to the struggle for visibility in white-dominant U.S. society, have been widely critiqued. Indeed, the crucial value of difference as strategic theory and the many identity-based formulations it helped generate—ethnic, feminist, postcolonial and subaltern, queer, others—have not permitted such an egregiously anti-immigrant reading practice to stand. The editors' masculinist approach to defining Asian American cultural discourse, however, influenced later debate on the works by major Asian American women authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. David Hsin-Fu Wand's *Asian-American Heritage: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (1974), elaborating further on Asian American literature, added Korean American authors to the mix.³ Aside from these anthologies and their introductions, the period before 1982 is relatively scant of Asian American literary criticism, reflecting the small number of Asian American writers visible in the United States then and what appears now as an unreceptive publishing industry and public.

Between 1982 and 1995 a number of Asian American literary critics began to articulate critical strategies that later critics would pick up (see King-Kok Cheung [1997], Elaine H. Kim [1982], Shirley Geok-lin Lim [1992], Amy Ling [1990], Stephen H. Sumida [1991], Sau-ling Cynthia

Wong [1993], and others). Their essays and books pushed the debate on what should constitute Asian American identity and broadened the notion of an Asian American canon. Elaine H. Kim's pioneering work, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), initiated this fertile period in Asian American literary criticism; for example, her chapter examining gendered representations in Chinese American writing has provided an introduction to the contentious debates that have swirled around the reception of Frank Chin's and Maxine Hong Kingston's works. In this book-length study of Asian American literature, the first of its kind, Kim framed a field of study that foregrounded Asian American history to contextualize the authors and their works. Kim notes in her preface, "I have defined Asian American literature as published creative writings in English by Americans of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino descent," and goes on to admit that "this definition is problematical" (*Asian American Literature*, 1982, xi). This admission underlines the controversy then and now concerning the composition of the canon, a controversy that may be seen to operate itself as a methodology and major mode of inquiry in the field. Two other pioneering works appeared around the same period. Houston A. Baker's *Three American Literatures: Essays in Chicano, Native American, and Asian-American Literature for Teachers of American Literatures* (1982) was one of the first critical texts to include Asian American literature as part of a literature curriculum. Baker's collection included a reprinting of the *Aiiiiieeee!* preface as well as essays that usefully explicated Japanese American literature and Frank Chin's plays⁴ for a classroom context. At the same time, Baker's collection demonstrated how Asian American literature can and should be read in a comparative frame with other ethnic productions.⁵

Toward the second half of this period, Asian American critical monographs began to appear. Stephen H. Sumida's *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i* (1990), which looked at Hawaiian pastoral impulses as different phenomena from Western traditions, opened Asian American discourse to the significance of regionalism in its examination of Hawaii's colonial and postcolonial history. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993) examined the role of food, the operations of the *doppelgänger* as a racialized construct, and the theme of mobility in Asian American works. Offering an excellent interethnic literary study, Wong's study refigured archetypal images, myths, and themes, even those with Western resonance, in a specific Asian American history and cultural frame, and so produced an alternative and particularized rendering of Asian American subjectivity. Amy Ling's *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990) and King-Kok Cheung's

Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa (1993) focused on analysis of gender in Asian American women's literature. Ling's study covered prose narratives written by women of Chinese or Chinese American ancestry published in English within the United States. Using feminist theories, Cheung argued that the trope of silence, which is common in a number of Asian American women's writing, reflected not only cultural specificity but also represented strategies for survival deployed by Asian American women characters. These silences thus can also be read as constitutive and formative rather than singularly destructive.

Also between 1980 and 1995, scholars began editing general collections and critical collections centering on the oeuvre of individual writers. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling's *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (1992), divided into four thematic sections—the “Ambivalent Identities” of Asian American subjects, “Race and Gender” in Asian American literature, “Borders and Boundaries” of national and cultural identities, and “Representations and Self-Representations” from early to contemporary Asian American texts—was the first edited volume on Asian American literary criticism to be published, and it illustrated the growing multiplicity of inquiry and critical strategies in the field. Franklin Ng and his coeditors' collection, *New Visions in Asian American Studies: Diversity, Community, Power* (1994), while devoting a section to the study of literature with essays on Cathy Song's poetry and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, focused chiefly on the ties between literary and cultural studies, thus underlining the interdisciplinary nature of Asian American literary criticism, where texts are examined as historical artifacts, political narratives, and social constructions. Shirley Geok-lin Lim provided a useful pedagogical tool with the publication of the edited volume *Approaches to Teaching Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior* (1991), devoted to the explication of a single Asian American work. Elaine H. Kim and Norma Alarcón's *Writing Self, Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha* (1992), like Lim's edited collection, established the unique achievement of a single work in the Asian American canon.

Asian American criticism may be said to have entered a metacritical phase after 1995, when younger critics, contextualizing their analyses in the discursive tradition established by an older generation of scholars, created a field referentiality that enabled them to elaborate, refute, and reexamine texts in new and different ways. Contemporary Asian American criticism is traversed by theories associated with postmodernism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and discourses on globalization, diaspora, transnationalism, and postcolonialism. Critical modes and strategies in place during the first and second phases have been modified

and rearticulated. Today we find studies on form and genre, pioneering works on queer sexuality, and metacritical texts that examine Asian American literary criticism as its own subfield. The proliferation of directions in which Asian American criticism is being taken suggests that subfields need to be considered to understand the recurring critical strategies that have appeared over the course of the past quarter century. While this brief review of the field has mapped some of the themes that recur in Asian American critical studies, it does not attempt to recount the approaches found in every critical study nor does it seek to delimit certain books in a narrow analytical framework.

Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996) continued the debates on the constitution of Asian American identity as represented in literature. Because a number of her chapters appeared prior to the publication of this volume, Lowe's work bridges the periods we have been charting. Her study queries Asian American canon formation and analyzes cultural productions to illuminate socio-historical issues significant to Asian American discourse. In Lowe's 1991 article "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences," her notion of the "heterogeneous and multiple positions" occupied by Asian Americans nicely sums up the varied methods and strategies Asian American critics had deployed to define an Asian American identity and literature. Susan Koshy's "The Fiction of Asian American Literature" (1996) takes up this notion in asserting that "Asian American literature" as a term is collapsing under the weight of its very heterogeneity. Other critics working in this metacritical fashion also view Asian American identity as changeful and shifting and track these transformations through the literature. In *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (1997), David Leiwei Li examines narratives that represent the predicament of Asian American subjectivity in a nation where that subjectivity is viewed as foreign. Sheng-mei Ma's *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures* (1998), in contrast to the cultural nationalist model set up by the *Aiiieeee!* editors and prefiguring the position taken by David Palumbo-Liu in *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), argues for a more expansive understanding of Asian American literature and identity to include immigrant subjectivity. Palumbo-Liu tracks the fluctuating formations of Asian American identity from the modernist period to the current deterritorialized and globalized era in which bounded notions of Asian American identity have begun to collapse. His use of the slash in the term "Asian/American" marks these oscillating aspects of Asian American identity. Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (2000), focusing on the importance of acknowledging and confronting racialized grief (rather than grievance),

takes up psychoanalytic theory to study Asian American identity and cultural productions.

The popularity of studies on women, gender, and sexuality in Asian American critical discourse follows on the movement of third-wave feminism. Weaving feminist theories into their readings, these studies examine representations of Asian American women as they are complicated by patriarchal symbolic systems. Some studies situate the female body as the location of struggle and through which discourses on the family and nation are allegorized. Phillipa Kafka's *(Un)Doing the Missionary Position: Gender Asymmetry in Contemporary Asian American Women's Writing* (1997) explains Asian American women's identity as it is negotiated through U.S. cultural and ideological structures and specific Asian ethnic value systems. In *Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing* (1999), Wendy Ho, looking at the historical and material contexts for the prose narratives by Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Fae Myenne Ng, analyzes the generational tensions between the mother and daughter characters to argue that these texts resist patriarchal and totalizing discourses. In *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (1999), Rachel Lee, positing the varying intersectionalities of Asian American identity, notes "that gender and sexuality remain instrumental to the ways in which Asian American writers conceive of and write about 'America'" (3). For Patricia P. Chu, in *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America* (2000), Asian American novels and memoirs often confront the dissonance between the U.S. ideal of democratic inclusion and the material reality of exclusionary politics, and gender plays an enormous role in texts as authors deploy different narrative strategies to compose their subject positions. Leslie Bow's *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* (2001) examines how Asian American women's bodies and sexualities are symbolically tied to discourses on the nation-state to render these women as either traitors or patriots. Like Anne Anlin Cheng's study of melancholia and race, David L. Eng's *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2001) makes use of psychoanalytic theory to understand the strategies deployed in representations of Asian American men and the intersections of gender, sexuality, and racial identity formation. Suturing Asian American diasporic identity to queer identity, his study draws together restrictive Asian American immigration policies and their deterrence to the dispersal of Asian American sexualities in the United States to render Asian American identity as a kind of queerness. In contrast, Laura Hyun Yi Kang's *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (2002) examines the constructions of Asian American women's identities as they have been shaped, reconstituted,

and contested in various Asian American cultural productions; and like Palumbo-Liu, she uses the slash in her title to foreground the role of immigrant subjectivity in these identity formations. Helena Grice's *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing* (2002), a broad-based study that contextualizes the history of Asian American women's writing over the course of the twentieth century, surveys the thematics of genre, mother-daughter writing, biraciality, and citizenship, while Patti Duncan's *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech* (2004) builds on Cheung's 1993 monograph to examine the role of speech and silence in relation to race, gender, sexuality, and national identity in works by Kingston, Cha, Kogawa, Nora Okja Keller, and Anchee Min.

Recent critical work on form and genre includes the study of Asian American performances and drama. Scholars are also beginning to explore photography, painting and other visual arts, and staged works. Josephine Lee's *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (1997), one of the first Asian American genre studies, examines themes such as masculinity, realism, and reappropriations of stereotypes in plays by Frank Chin, David Henry Hwang, Wakako Yamauchi, Genny Lim, and others. According to Rocío Davis's *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short Story Cycles* (2001), the formal use of the short-story cycle by Asian American and Asian Canadian writers underlies their desire to maintain control over representations of identity. Extending the Asian American canon to compare Asian American and Asian Canadian texts, Davis argues that the fragmented short-story cycle mirrors the works' transnational, globalized, and multiethnic complexities. Her thesis seeks to revise the perception of the short-story cycle as a European invention and to study it as an Asian American and Asian Canadian form that requires the reader to participate in the process of generating meaning. In *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (2002), Karen Shimakawa argues that since the introduction of the term "Chinaman," the Asian and Asian American body in the United States has been envisaged as the "Other" and thus incapable of cultural and social integration. Following on Lee's study of Asian American drama, Shimakawa's monograph contributes to the growing scholarship on Asian American staged productions to look at the importance of Broadway musicals as well as performance politics. In contrast, Elena Tajima Creff's interdisciplinary and multimedia study, *Imaging Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation, and the Body* (2004), an analysis of photography, graphic novels, and media representations of Japanese Americans, focuses also on literary texts, chiefly in the chapter on Mine Okubo's *Citizen 13660*.

Among studies that seek to problematize and revise earlier readings, Jinqi Ling's *Narrating Nationalisms: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature* (1998) contends that critics had interpreted early Asian American narratives primarily through a politico-historical lens. In contrast, unifying study of form with political content and addressing a gap in the field, Ling critiques Asian American literature published before 1980 according to its formal characteristics, particularly the features associated with social realism and cultural nationalism. Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (2002) and Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian American Critique* (2003) are more metacritical in approach. Arguing that Asian American intellectuals have tended to overread resistance into Asian American writing to privilege oppositional politics, Nguyen notes how such readings have mistaken or inappropriately obscured the complexities in particular narratives. Chuh, focusing her argument on legal discourse in Asian American narratives, contends that essentialist nation-based ethnic identities, expunging particularities to construct a unified identity, are nonetheless collapsing in an age of globalization.

This same period has seen an increase in single-author studies, particularly studies on Maxine Hong Kingston's oeuvre, many of which have been written to serve as useful pedagogical tools. In *The Art of Parody: Maxine Hong Kingston's Uses of Chinese Sources* (1998), Yan Gao surveys the Chinese myths, folktales, and customs in Kingston's work to complicate readings of diasporic and Asian American identities. Laura E. Skandera-Trombley's edited book, *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston* (1998), an extensive collection of original and archived essays on Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, *China Men*, and *The Woman Warrior*, including reviews and historical context, reinforces Maxine Hong Kingston's preeminent position in the canon. Sau-Ling Wong's edited volume, *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook* (1999), covers issues and debates surrounding the memoir, genre and gender studies, explorations of Chinese American traditions, and an interview with the author. Diane Simmons's *Maxine Hong Kingston* (1999), a collection of essays and interviews, also includes a brief version of the "Ballad of Mulan," a biographical essay, and a bibliographic history of Kingston's work. E. D. Huntley's *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion* (1998) reviews Tan's career and life and offers interpretations of *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. Given the growing scholarship on Winnifred Eaton, Jean Lee Cole's *The Literary Voices of Winnifred Eaton: Redefining Ethnicity and Authenticity* (2002) is a timely addition to the field in its reviews of Eaton's literary career and analyses of the shifting interpretations of her oeuvre.

Recent edited collections tend to take the form of cultural studies texts. David Palumbo-Liu's *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions* (1995), recalling the multiethnic scope of Baker's 1982 collection, includes criticism of works by Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang. Wendy Ng and her co-editors' *Reviewing Asian America: Locating Diversity* (1995) offers two critical essays on Kingston's work. In *Between the Lines, South Asians and Postcoloniality* (1996), Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva focus on South Asian and South Asian American writing, while Geoffrey Kain's *Ideas of Home: The Literatures of Asian Migration* (1997) examines the complex and deeply formative concept of "home" in narratives by Asian American and Asian transnational authors and the linkage between constructions of self and home in the immigrant psyche. King-Kok Cheung's edited collection, *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (1997), the first comprehensive collection covering the range of nation groupings in Asian American writing since the publication of Lim and Ling's 1992 volume, historicizes Asian American literature and theorizes the field as a whole. While *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora* (2001), edited by Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa, explores theories of Asian and Asian American postcolonialism, diaspora, transnationalism, hybridity, and border crossings, Rocío G. Davis and Sämi Ludwig's edited collection, *Asian American Literature in the International Context: Readings on Fiction, Poetry, and Performance* (2002), places Asian American literary criticism further in a globalized context. Davis and Ludwig's volume reflects the growing numbers of studies of Asian American literature outside the United States, especially in Europe and Asia. The internationalist frame is also evident in the publication of *Crossing Oceans: Reconfiguring American Literary Studies in the Pacific Rim* (2004), edited by Noelle Brada-Williams and Karen Chow. Russell Leong's *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of Gay and Lesbian Experience* (1996) offers one of the first collections on queer Asian American identity, including an essay on Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. *Q & A: Queer in Asian America* (1998), edited by David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom, continues the examination of queer Asian American sexualities with essays on Frank Chin and on sexuality in Sui Sin Far's writing.

These queer-, transnational-, cultural studies-oriented volumes demonstrate that even as contemporary Asian American literary criticism focuses on works by a handful of Asian American writers, critics must press on to forge new critical strategies and lenses with which to examine emerging literatures and thematics. As the critical terrain shifts, reading practices will multiply, and newer critics will refute and revise positions taken by earlier scholars.

Today, a generally accepted canon of Asian American literature has emerged that includes, but is not restricted to, works by Kingston, Frank

Chin, Theresa Cha, David Henry Hwang, Amy Tan, Carlos Bulosan, Siu Sin Far, Hisaye Yamamoto, and Joy Kogawa, just to name a few. That so much attention is focused on these authors suggests that Asian American criticism continues to be dominated by East Asian American writing. However, Asian American critical scholarship is expanding with the increasing visibility of authors from different Asian American ethnic groups—South Asian, Korean American, Vietnamese, and South-East Asian American, for example. Bahri and Vasudeva's *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (1996), for example, underlines the necessity to examine other national regions in Asian America. Although inclusion in the canon cannot be based simply on the need for representation of all ethnic groups, Asian American critics nevertheless must open their readings to more recent works: works by writers such as Lawrence Chua, Lan Cao, Le Thi Diem Thuy, Kien Nguyen, Lydia Kwa, Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla, Sigrid Nuñez, and others.

Dana Takagi, addressing the neglect of queerness in Asian American criticism, notes, "while there has been a good deal of talk about the diversity of Asian American communities, we are relatively uninformed about Asian American subcultures organized specifically around sexuality" ("Maiden Voyage," 2000, 547). Russell Leong's (1996) and David Eng's (2001) collections have begun to address this neglect, but more critical inquiry is called for, considering the increasing representations of queer characters in works by Catherine Liu, Larissa Lai, Willyce Kim, T. C. Huo, Bino Realuyo, Justin Chin, Norman Wong, Helen Zia, Ameena Mair, Shyam Selvadurai, and others. Critical examinations of representations of class in Asian American writing have also been largely absent. Further, while the focus on novels and memoirs and to some extent drama has resulted in probing analyses, similar attention has not been given to Asian American poetry and visual texts. Finally, Jinqi Ling's work on the formal presentations of Asian American narratives points to the need for more studies on aesthetics in Asian American literature. Asian American literary criticism is in a fertile moment, when intersecting disciplines, identities, genres, and histories all suggest productive tensions that trouble, complicate, and multiply meanings and interpretation.

This book taps into this moment of crisis and opportunity to foreground the dense and dynamic complexity of evolving bodies of texts that, as much as they are insistently categorized as Asian American, are simultaneously interrogated and categorized as Other: Filipino, Vietnamese, South Asian, Hmong, Korean, Southeast Asian, and so forth. When the first Asian American literature anthologies appeared in the 1970s, their editors had no compunction in dividing the map of the field into Chinese and Japanese American writing, with Filipino American as a hardly visible minority, occupied by two authors, Carlos Bulosan and Jose Garcia Villa.

Today, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, no editor of a comprehensive Asian American anthology could possibly omit Korean American writing, with its rich range of talents such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Chang-rae Lee, Myung Mi Kim, and more recent authors such as Suki Kim and Susan Choi. Among South Asian American authors, Bharati Mukherjee is now accompanied by writers such as Meena Alexander, Chitra Divarakuni, and Agha Shahid Ali; and Filipino American writing, besides the novels of Jessica Hagedorn and Han Ong, displays an energetic diversity of its own in anthologies such as *Brown River, White Ocean: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Philippine Literature in English* (1993), *Returning a Borrowed Tongue: Poems by Filipino and Filipino-American Writers* (1995), and *Flippin': Filipinos on America* (1996). The publication of Southeast Asian American collections such as *Tilting the Continent: Southeast Asian American Writing* (2000) and *Bamboo Among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans* (2002), and a number of South Asian American anthologies, for example, *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora* (1993), *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers* (1995), and *Bolo! Bolo!: A Collection of Writing by Second Generation South Asians Living in North America* (2000), testify to the desire to make visible that particular thread that had, prior to the millennium, been subdued to a Chinese plus Japanese anthological construction of the Asian American imagination.

Some of these anthologies enact other kinds of crosswriting, such as this book is proposing, for example, the transnationalism that has become more commonplace as globalization expands to encompass once territorially separated discourses into a hubbub of exchanges. *Babaylan: An Anthology of Filipina and Filipina American Writers* (Nick Carbo and Eileen Tabios, 2001) places literature by national authors of the Philippines together with writing that comes specifically out of a U.S. location. The special issue of *Manoa, Two Rivers* (Summer 2002), explicitly includes “New Vietnamese Writing from America and Vietnam” and points to a strong emergence of Vietnamese American writing currently with the authors Monique Truong, Le Thi Diem Thuy, Kien Nguyen, and Alex W. Pham. What Gore Vidal had famously termed the United States of Amnesia is clearly not what is constructed in these collections, which maintain diasporic frames, binational perspectives, and shifting, provisional, and processual dialogics. Such expressions were, of course, present from as early as Edith Eaton’s reinvention of herself as Sui Sin Far in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912). These inherently multiple sensibilities and her complicated, subtly psychological, and still resonant exposition of her identity as an Eurasian, prefigure what is now more popularly termed “Hapa” identity. *Intersecting Circles: The Voices of Hapa Women in Poetry and Prose* (2000) is only one such production of the texts that

foreground these particular intersections. New anthologies about queer Asian American writing suggest that the intersections of sexuality and ethnic identity must be confronted and critiqued. *Q & A: Queer in Asian America* (Eng and Hom, 1998) and *Take Out: Writing from Asian Pacific America* (Bao and Yanagihara, 2001) are part of a growing trend within Asian American writing to explore thematics of queerness and sexuality.

This book focuses broadly on Asian American literary productions published between 1890 and 2001 and examines textuality, stylistics, literariness, semiotics, poetics, narrativity, and critical language theories as inflected by ethnic, gender, class, national, diasporic, or linguistic identities. Together the chapters in this collection offer an impressive range of scholarship, chiefly from younger scholars, that shows exciting new work from U.S. and international universities that addresses both earlier and very contemporary Asian American works of imagination. The volume aims to place Asian American literary studies in a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century context, taking into account the archival and interdisciplinary work that has produced fresh texts and interpretations since the earliest anthologies appeared in the 1970s.

Theoretical intersectionalities, largely invisible prior to 1990, are now crucial modes of operation in considering the discursive powers of these ethnically identified texts. Intersections of the imagination are contextualized in a historical specificity of location—viewed simultaneously as local and global, national and transnational—and they generate vibrant complex activations of forms, stylistics, temporality, thematic representations, and even an undecidability of language and identity. As well, the Asian American canon has been opened to fresh productions; they include visual representations, documentaries, videos, films, and performances. The conventional focus on novelistic narratives has been enlarged to include concerns with the strategic tactics in postmodernist and experimentalist works.

Clearly there is a need to examine transformations in the aesthetics and reception of Asian American cultural productions. After all, much has changed and is changing about the terrain of this field of study, not simply in the numbers of successful authors and types of texts that win recognition, but in the historical horizon of their reception. Asian American writing is increasingly viewed as both U.S. bounded and situated in global, transnational, and diasporic matrices. In an increasingly globalized world, students of Asian American texts must be conscious of other borders that shape ethnicity and cultural identities. In addition, while these writers are publishing in the United States, many of them are first-generation immigrant rather than U.S.-born authors (see, e.g., Li-Young Lee, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Lawrence Chua, Jessica Hagedorn, and others), and their works require postcolonial and postmodern conceptualizations as

well as the normalizing, historicizing embedding of texts in U.S. political and social science contexts.

This book is arranged in three sections, each focusing on a major genre, as we believe that such organization will prove the most useful classification for teachers and students. The first section, on Asian American prose narratives, examines canonical or foundational texts—the prose narratives of Maxine Hong Kingston, Winnifred Eaton, Carlos Bulosan, and Hisaye Yamamoto—as well as novelistic innovations in the works of critically significant younger Asian American authors such as Chang-rae Lee and Karen Tei Yamashita. The second section examines memoirs and autobiographies; besides the usual interest in Maxine Hong Kingston’s memoirs, the section surveys the autobiographical focus on childhood and the experimental “autobiographies” of Therese Cha and Winnifred Eaton. The third section looks at emergent poetic talents: Korean American Myung Mi Kim, mixed-race Korean American Kimiko Hahn, Pakistani American Agha Shahid Ali, and immigrant Mainland Chinese American Ha Jin. Together these essays expand the arena of Asian American literary criticism, moving such criticism away from the bounded cultural nationalism that ruled the anthologies of the 1970s and 1980s, and taking on the unstable, transformative, shifting identities that arise and collapse in response to forces of nationalism as well as transnationalism and globalization.

The volume begins with Cheryl Higashida’s essay, “Re-Signed Subjects: Women, Work, and World in the Fiction of Carlos Bulosan and Hisaye Yamamoto.” Exploring marginal women figures in Yamamoto’s short story “Yoneko’s Earthquake” (1951) and Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946), Higashida is particularly interested in the representation of seemingly silent women whose peripheral positions figure histories of oppression under patriarchal domination. The chapter gives an alternative understanding of agricultural and domestic labor in these narratives, in which women, even while apparently overshadowed by the homosocial bonding of working-class Asian American, Mexican, Mexican American, and Caucasian men, are seen to have an integral role. Higashida situates Bulosan’s and Yamamoto’s narratives firmly in a history of Popular Front politics and a framework of resistance, while simultaneously deploying Roland Barthes’ notion of readerly and writerly texts to contextualize Yamamoto’s heretofore overlooked experimentalism and Bulosan’s social realism. Higashida’s work contributes to an Asian American critical discourse on representations about or written by women. Clearly working within the framework of Cheung’s *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa* (1993, and Gary Okihiro’s *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (1994), Higashida’s chapter is concurrent with recent Asian American gender

studies that include critical works by Phillipa Kafka, Rachel Lee, Wendy Ho, Patricia Chu, Leslie Bow, Patti Duncan, Helena Grice, Laura Hyun Yi Kang, and others.

In his chapter, “Just Another Ethnic Pol’: Literary Citizenship in Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” Liam Corley, exploring the ramifications of English language usage in Asian American writing, examines how the Asian American native speaker of English can still be marked as foreign. The primacy of the visual overshadows the ability of Asian American subjects to stake their claim on English as their native language and consequentially on America as home nation. His chapter urges that language, as a contested site, must lose its association with a specific ethnicity and be recognized as offering different modalities for individuals who claim it as native. Corley makes his argument paratextually, illuminating Chang-rae Lee’s position as an author who inscribes Asian American experience into the very fabric of nationhood. Lee’s *Native Speaker* thus makes the claim that the U.S. nation is dependent on acknowledging the heterogeneity of U.S. citizens both in political and literary terms. Corley’s extensive analysis of Chang-rae Lee’s publication trajectory and the text’s positioning in the market echoes Patricia Chu’s argument in *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America*. While Chu emphasizes the different narrative strategies that Asian American authors deploy to counteract stereotypical gender presentations, Corley’s chapter argues that the publisher’s foregrounding of *Native Speaker* as Asian American works to elide the different valences and essentializing categorizations of Asian American identity that the narrative simultaneously supports and subverts.

Ruth Hsu, in “The Cartography of Justice and Truthful Refractions Found in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*,” examines the representations of Los Angeles as city space in Yamashita’s novel. Hsu’s use of images of mapping and cartography offers a new mode of reading Yamashita’s narrative and provides an alternate mapping of urban space that moves the interpretation of the novel beyond Eurocentric concepts of cartography. Although the characters attempt to ground themselves in a definitive truth about the city, the novel’s swift pacing from one episode to another denies the existence of a single reality. Hsu argues that the novel’s kaleidoscopic construction discourages an essentialist reading of Los Angeles as city space, even as, amid the chaos of the dystopic metropolis, characters still find a way to connect to one another.

In “Valuing’ Transnational Queerness: Politicized Bodies and Commodified Desires in Asian American Literature,” Stephen H. Sohn takes up the spectacle of male prostitution in a novel set in the Southeast Asian city of Bangkok. Chua’s text provides a complex portrayal of the queer Asian American individual who, although quite politically cognizant,

nevertheless engages in an exploitative relationship with a prostitute named Thong. Following Viet Thanh Nguyen's theoretical positioning, Sohn argues that the novel presents a challenge to Asian American Studies in the way that the text refuses to be categorized as a resistance narrative. While the queer Asian American protagonist struggles against the commodification of his own body as an adolescent and young adult growing up in the United States, he finds himself as an adult indulging both in sex tourism and constant drug use in Bangkok. In Southeast Asia, as an "American" subject, the protagonist is located in an inescapable loop of exploitation, replication, and hedonism where his progressive knowledge of history and politics remains inefficacious.

Drawing on the research of social scientist Zygmunt Bauman, Gita Rajan's "Ethical Responsibility in Intersubjective Spaces: Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Interpreter of Maladies' and 'A Temporary Matter'" examines Lahiri's short stories through the lens of pragmatic ethics. Rajan argues that, by placing characters in uncomfortably challenging ethical conundrums, Lahiri's fictions illustrate the permeability of socially constructed codes of ethics. The stories imply that these codes have become more slippery in the age of the simulacrum in which people imagine that they are detached from their actions. According to Rajan, Lahiri's focus on "responsibility grounded in reciprocity" is part of a growing emphasis on ethics in contemporary critical research. That is, in emphasizing "the need to act ethically at every stage of life," Lahiri's works are to be read as contemporary U.S. texts distinct from earlier postcolonial or diasporic writing in which memory is engaged primarily in terms of victimization and loss.

In her chapter on abjection, masculinity, and violence, Eleanor Ty, comparing Brian Roley's *American Son* and Han Ong's *Fixer Chao*, explores the predicament of transmigrancy in the narratives of Filipino immigrants and their children. Her work is an exemplar of the discourses on globalization and its relation to representation currently ascendant in much of Asian American criticism. Arguing that Filipino immigrants and their children experience dissonance when they observe material wealth in the United States but are trapped in laboring class positions, Ty queries the troubling theme of gender subjectivity when young Filipino men find themselves stripped of masculinity in America. Attempting to gain a measure of agency, characters in these novels participate in destructive acts that place them in a temporary position of power. However, these acts cannot obtain for them the objects of wealth and power they desire, and they are finally left bereft of any sense of community and fulfillment.

Part II opens with "Begin Here: A Critical Introduction to Asian American Childhood," in which Rocío Davis notes that the sheer number of Asian American autobiographies focusing on childhood (Davis

identifies at least twenty) warrant an investigation into the function of recollected narratives of childhood in Asian American autobiography. Drawing on autobiographical genre theories, particularly on Richard Coe's "myth of childhood," Davis examines Asian American autobiographies from Yan Phou Lee's *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887) to contemporary memoirs to refigure what is usually perceived as a Eurocentric approach to genre studies. She analyzes the historical development of these autobiographies as they move from native informant sociological texts to works that problematize Asian American identities. The portrayal of childhood in these autobiographies exemplifies the invasion of the private sphere by the public as well as the process of enculturation that all immigrants experience, be they children or adults.

Katherine Hyunmi Lee's chapter, "The Poetics of Liminality and Mis-Identification: Winnifred Eaton's *Me* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," argues that these Chinese American women's autobiographies challenge and subvert masculinist preconceptions of the autobiography. Addressing identity politics represented in the autobiographies of marginalized females, Lee's chapter forms part of a larger move to explore valences of feminism in Asian American literature, using, for example, the reading strategies that characterize Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1995) and Sheri Benstock's essay "Authorizing the Autobiographical" (1997). Tracing the lineage between Eaton's and Kingston's works, she reads Kingston's memoir against Eaton's autobiographical novel *Me* (1915) to locate Eaton's work in a broader U.S. canon. Lee uses both genre and feminist critical theory to unpack the different, formal, often fragmented techniques—Eaton's text anticipating narrative strategies later used in *The Woman Warrior*—that these Asian American women autobiographers deployed to represent their lives.

In "Nation, Immigrant, Text: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*," Srimati Mukherjee investigates the ways in which Cha aligns herself with Korean nationalist Yu Guan Soon to highlight the tensions between (post)colonial and immigrant identity and to reinscribe Soon's resistance to Japanese imperialism as a way of underscoring, through analogy, the trauma of immigration and the resilience needed to voice the ethnic self in the United States. Drawing upon Kumari Jayawardena's *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Mukherjee argues that in *Dictee*, active revolutionary work is gendered as female. Cha rejects the static female nationalist that Spivak and others have critiqued and instead positions women as "superobjects" in opposition to diverse manifestations of oppression. Mukherjee's chapter looks at silence and absence in the text to analyze how these gaps represent the slow loss of ethnic identity stemming from colonization and immigration. These absences are countered,

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