



Introduction

Counting money had become almost a hobby to [Wang Chi-yang], and he enjoyed it as much as he did attending his miniature garden. After he had counted the total sum, he sorted the bills according to their denominations, then sorted them once more according to their degree of newness, putting the brand-new ones on one pile, the newer ones on another and the old ones on a third. . . . He would spend the old ones first and the new ones later; as for the brand-new ones, he would save them in an exquisitely carved sandalwood box locked in one of his desk drawers.

—C. Y. Lee, *The Flower Drum Song*

This passage, published in 1957, depicts an extraordinary moment of Chinese American alienation. Wang Chi-yang, representative of first generation Chinese American immigrants in the novel, sorts his money alone. What is striking about the passage is neither his careful counting of bills nor the copious amounts of currency. Instead, we realize what is odd about the scene is his alternative valuation of money—not according to what the bills might

purchase, but in terms of their “newness,” their time of entry into economic circulation. Wang Chi-yang’s removal of money from circulation parallels his own isolation in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Depicted as an old-fashioned relic from a pre-Communist, Confucist society, he wears long gowns, employs obedient servants, and expects filial piety from his sons. He also hoards most of his considerable fortune in a large trunk in his home. Impervious to pleas from his family to deposit the money in a bank, Wang Chi-yang instead converts a one-hundred-dollar bill each week into smaller denominations and stacks, categorizes, and organizes the various denominations, like a collector with prized artifacts.

Money, however, as George Simmel reminds us, stands as the symbolic marker for the exchange of objects; money in essence represents exchange. He explains, “Money has acquired the value it possesses as a means of exchange; if there is nothing to exchange, money has no value. . . . Money has no place where there is no mutual relationship, either because one does not want anything from other people, or because one lives on a different plane—without any relation to them as it were—and is able to satisfy any need without any service in return” (156). Money then becomes a means of marking Wang Chi-yang’s outsider status, his existence “on a different plane,” one defined by Chinese artifacts and ancient customs. His use of money—one that denies its role as a symbol of exchange, even as his fetishism of it impossibly imbues it with value outside of exchange—only reinforces his foreignness, his alienation from not only the larger economic structures that surround him, but the social ones as well. As Wang Chi-yang strolls down Grant Avenue and across Bush Street, the borders of San Francisco’s Chinatown seem to mark not only the essence of “Chineseness” but also the boundaries of an alternative economic realm. From this perspective, there is no “mutual relationship” between Chinatown and a non-Chinese America.

And yet, as Pardee Lowe notes in describing his father’s business expansion in his 1943 memoir, *Father and Glorious Descendant*, “A new economic activity was born” (8). Written less than a decade apart, set in Chinatown and equally reflective of the

anxieties of Chinese Americanization, *Father and Glorious Descendant* and *The Flower Drum Song* also share a surprisingly disproportionate focus on the circulation and exchange of commodities. Replete with images of money, commodities, buying, lending, banking, and selling, these narratives and others from this era, ones that have traditionally been dismissed because of their exoticizing of Chinatown and Chinese culture, ultimately belie their assimilationist rhetoric. They instead demonstrate that despite the promise of economic exchange as a means toward social integration, Asian Americans are in the end unable to escape the economic circuits that keep them as tightly contained as Chinatown's boundaries.

Questions over money determine the narrative trajectory of a number of Asian American texts published in the last fifty years—what money can buy, how money is lost, how money is circulated, and what labor or objects are worth. Works such as Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), C. Y. Lee's *The Flower Drum Song* (1957), Virginia Chin-lan Lee's *The House that Tai Ming Built* (1963), Wawadee Larsen's *Confessions of a Mail Order Bride* (1989), David Mura's *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei* (1991), Lydia Minatoya's *Talking To High Monks in the Snow* (1992), Pang-Mei Natasha Chang's *Bound Feet and Western Dress* (1996), Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves: The Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1998), and Winberg and May-lee Chai's *The Girl From Purple Mountain* (2001)—works I examine in *Economic Citizens*—have been primarily read as narratives of alienation, assimilation, and the assertion of ethnic and gendered identities. I argue instead that it is actually the narratives of economic circulation that make the paradoxical nature of those other processes fully visible. It is through the language of economic exchange, in fact, that we can locate underlying anxieties about the relationship between Asian Americans and the larger American nation, and recurring doubts over the ability to convert difference into sameness, disenfranchisement into universality, the racial minority into the abstract citizen.

Economic exchange offers an illusory means of entering into these larger communities. Not only does a belief in money signify

a communal agreement over the value of a piece of paper or coin (an object that has no value beyond that agreement), but the act of exchange itself at the very least signals an albeit brief relationship between two parties. In speaking of the relationship between agents of exchange, Karl Marx argues, “Each of the subjects is an exchanger, i.e. each has the same social relation towards the other that the other has towards him. As subjects of exchange, their relation is therefore that of equality. It is impossible to find any trace of distinction, not to speak of contradiction, between them; not even a difference” (*Capital*, 241). Of course Marx’s point is that they are not truly “equal”; the contradiction of capital, however, necessitates that that exchange be based on equality, a presumption that in fact disguises the unequal class relations that exist.

As other critics have noted, however, Marx’s theory fails to account for the ways that race impacts and further intensifies the contradictions of capital. These texts—largely written for mainstream audiences—vividly reveal the contradictory effects of race not only on the production of capital but also on economic exchange in general. And, in fact, we find in these works that the anxiety surrounding economic equivalence and the faith in Americanization, universality, and the transcendence of their racialized bodies is marked by a “hyper-Asianness”—an elaborate conjuring of Chinese customs, Japanese roots, or Thai culture. In these works, written for mainstream audiences and often published by major publishing houses, one’s essential Asian heritage is presented as an exotic and yet easily digestible experience. Although it is not surprising that these texts use readers’ assumptions about the alien and alienated Asian as a means of celebrating a universality of struggle and beliefs, I would argue that a closer examination of this process is needed beyond condemning the consumption of these works. We see in these critically ignored or dismissed narratives the complex and paradoxical nature of visibility and the possibilities for how we might read the recent appearances of Asian Americans within the larger public sphere. Beyond the identification of stereotypes that proliferate within the texts, this project instead bears witness to how the racial surplus of

the Asian body works against, negotiates, and capitulates to its own expansion.

Mapping race along the axis of economic exchange enables the articulation of a striking narrative of Asian American identity formation—one that demonstrates the power and ubiquitousness of the economic realm as a means of bringing people into relation with one another, and one that maps the strict and confining limits of economic circulation for racialized Americans as a pathway into abstract citizenship. Asian Americans have overwhelmingly been imagined through the rhetoric and logic of economics, defined as agents of vast economic profit or loss. Economic exchange, however, is supposed to function as a fixed, contained, and stable relationship in which goods are traded for other goods with equal value. The very premise of economic transacting depends on a “homogenous field of goods”; that is, every object and person must stand in calculable relation to every other object and person.¹ Furthermore, such a system functions on the assumption that such exchanges are transparent and are enacted between fully formed subjects. Authors such as C. Y. Lee, Jade Snow Wong, Lydia Minatoya, and Adeline Mah demonstrate, however, the endless work that is needed to make these equations, to calculate and manage and negotiate the terms and rates of exchange. Ultimately these texts, which themselves are highly commodifiable, call into question the logic of these exchanges, while unveiling the unstable and unclear terms of their actualization. We discover that economic exchange both produces and reflects the fluid and fraught nature of racialized identity construction.²

It seems crucial in this era—defined almost overwhelmingly by economic exchange—that we consider how such transactions determine Asian American subjectivities and in turn how race rewrites such exchanges. Such a paradigm enables us to see that the other conditions and oppositions that we have historically used to theorize Asian Americans’ position vis-à-vis the U.S. nation-state—*inclusion/exclusion, invisibility/visibility, silence/voice, alienation/assimilation*—are in fact not as clearly divisible or opposed as we

might have originally imagined. What I am arguing here is that visible, or even seemingly wholesale, entry into the state's apparatuses and its institutions and corporations does not necessarily mean that racial difference has been contained, co-opted, and managed. Instead we see in these texts an anxiety that permeates all exchanges between margin and mainstream—the presence of a racial excess that can neither be specifically quantified, exactly accounted for, nor fully erased.

Such a project—one that looks more closely at how Asian Americans enter and appropriate U.S. mainstream culture and ideologies—seemingly moves against the grain of current critical work in Asian American Studies. Originally grounded in a nation-based battle for community empowerment, Asian Americanists have in the last decade seriously interrogated both their foundational definitions of *community* and the field's reliance on nation-based models of identity and empowerment. Critics have instead demonstrated that analyses and conceptualizations of “Asian America” cannot be located solely within the borders of the United States. Not only do such earlier theories fail to take account of the pressures of globalization and the recent decline of the nation-state's centrality, but they also elide the complex relations between the United States and Asia that have determined U.S. policies toward and cultural constructions of Asians in the United States.³ Critics have thus argued that Asian Americanists' efforts to “claim America” and to achieve inclusion into the larger national body necessitate a corresponding acknowledgment of the United States' imperial history in Asia (see Chuh and Shimakawa, *Orientations*, 278). And finally, while the field's political grounding in the United States has previously depended on a necessary distancing from all things Asian, recent scholarship has instead reoriented the field *toward* Asia and the Asian diaspora.

The object of *community* has undergone equally important scrutiny. If external relationships among Asian America, the United States, and Asia have been theoretically remapped, boundaries within the Asian American community have also been redrawn. Defined by a diverse group of Asian ethnicities—which themselves have

complex political, economic, and social relationships within Asian American Studies as well as within the larger national and global arenas—earlier evocations of an Asian American community have become significantly destabilized. Critics have also demonstrated that the establishment of an Asian American subjectivity revolved initially around masculine and heterosexual norms. At the same time, the increased institutionalization of Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies at elite institutions even as conditions for racial minorities have worsened, seems to suggest that the field and its original goal of radical Asian American community empowerment have only been partially successful.⁴ And finally, critics have begun to deconstruct what have been, up until now, basic and universal assumptions about the coherence of the Asian American subject and the disciplinary fields within which he has been traditionally studied. Kandice Chuh and Laura Hyun-Yi Kang, respectively, have instead called for a “subjectless” discourse and an interdisciplinary means of reading and theorizing Asian American culture and politics. Asian American Studies’ fragmentation and reformulation have coincided with an emphasis on hybridity and heterogeneity (Lowe) and more multiethnic and interracial approaches to reading an Asian American history and present (Song and James Lee). King Kok Cheung summarizes the recent developments as follows: We have moved “from seeking to ‘claim America’ to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America; from centering on race and on masculinity to revolving around the multiple axes of ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality; from being concerned primarily with social and communal responsibility to being caught in the quandaries and possibilities of postmodernism and multiculturalism” (quoted in Ty and Goellnicht, 1).

Such reconceptualizations of Asian American Studies and of Asian America have been necessary and path breaking not only for critics in our own field but also for theorists of American Studies and critical race and ethnicity studies. While much of the recent scholarship has focused on reimagining, resituating, and deconstructing definitions of Asian American identity as well as on mapping the constantly shifting and contested grounds on which that identity

currently maneuvers (whether across continents, ethnicities, histories, disciplines, methodologies, or epistemologies), this project instead takes as its focus a conceptualization of Asian America as it is more concretely, wholly, universally, and even stereotypically constructed. Although I fully support—and hope this book contributes to—Asian American Studies critics' efforts to resist dominant ideologies and imperialist histories, to dissect carefully our own critical methodologies, and to imagine new ways of practicing Asian American Studies, I would argue that is equally important—especially in this era of global capitalism, mass commodification and consumerism, and widespread co-optation and institutionalization of all forms of resistance—to explore more fully Asian American culture's production of not only difference but sameness, nativization, assimilation, and belonging. Such a project does not ignore or discount the history of racialization, exclusion, and alienation of Asians in the United States—on the contrary—instead, it charts more fully how Asian Americans make an appearance in the American imaginary. Far from being an easy process of reiteration and mimicry, such moments of assimilation actually make visible the impossibility of abstract citizenship. Through the lens of economic exchange, a system that brings all people and objects in relation to one another, we see not only the promise and limits of economic activity as a means of achieving social relations, but also the anxiety and slippages inherent in the production, circulation, and translation of Asian Americanness. In these texts, in other words, texts that repeatedly assert sameness and universality, we are made acutely aware that such declarations of belonging ultimately are only one moment in a chain of Sisyphean efforts to make incomprehensible and incomparable social, economic, and symbolic equations add up.

This project thus engages with the notion of economic exchange in three primary contexts. First, Asians and Asian Americans have been represented historically and even more so in the current era as agents of capitalism gone awry. In other words, it is the possibility of Asia's economic expansion (more often characterized as domination) and the specter of billions of Asian buyers, laborers, and sellers

that has most often recently characterized Asians' (and by extension Asian Americans') appearance in American culture. Second, the economic sphere has been and continues to be directly linked, as Jürgen Habermas explains, to the rise and subsequent decline of the public sphere. Any analysis of how Asian Americans are imagined and negotiate their own position in U.S. culture and society necessitates a clearer sense of how their role as the conduit—or alternately the threat—to U.S. economic wealth informs their own cultural constructions. Conversely, Asian American culture offers a means for a clearer understanding of how the economic and social spheres function in tandem with one another especially with respect to racialized bodies. Although economic activity has been generally regarded as a means toward or substitute for social participation—a history I discuss in greater detail shortly—we see in the texts I name above an ongoing anxiety over the pathways of economic and social circulation. For far from being a steady and reliable means of abstraction in which Asian Americans might stand as an undifferentiated node in the circuits of economic exchange or as disembodied national citizens, these routes of economic and social circulation paradoxically only ensure the reverse—the hyperembodied racialized subject.

Third, this project implicitly addresses the underlying question of how we as critics might “value” Asian American literature, given the twin impulses in recent years toward on the one hand, the institutionalization and commercialization of race and race studies, and on the other hand, the deconstruction of all forms of value and value-making. As Asian Americanists like Kandice Chuh have moved boldly toward “subjectlessness,” (see Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*) the hypervisible, commodified, assimilated, and excessive Asian stands in extreme at the opposite end of this trajectory for how critics might imagine the Asian American as functioning within the U.S. cultural imaginary. The narratives and structures of economic exchange offer a critical means for mapping these presumably normalizing circuits across a range of local, national, and transnational spaces, spaces in which the Asian American's various metamorphoses—her disembodiment or

hyperembodiment—ultimately disrupt and render extraordinary these basic routes of circulation.

U.S. Capital Formation and the Specter of Asian Americans

Historically, Asians have been defined in the United States as exceeding the acceptable limits of capital.⁵ They earn too much money (in the United States), they earn too little money (in Asia), they work too much (China and India), consume too few American products (China) or too many American properties (Japan), and in short represent the United States' greatest economic threat and opportunity. In the nineteenth century, Asians in the United States were rendered symbolic of the overexploitation of labor, while at the beginning of the twentieth century, they embodied the seduction of consumption. By the century's end, they were representative of upward mobility and the expansion of multinational capital. While Asian American critics have demonstrated that Asians have historically been utilized to reinforce national ideologies regarding whiteness, class, gender, and sexuality, I particularly highlight here that it has been the logic of capital and the threat that Asians present that has enabled the consolidation of the white, middle-class family identity.

In the late nineteenth century, the "coolie" was defined as "un-free" and "servile," a designation of exploited and exploitable labor against which a white working class could be created (Robert Lee, 61). In March of 1876, the *Marin Journal* offered a resolution against Chinese residents in California, the first of which reads, "*That* he is a slave, reduced to the lowest terms of beggarly economic, and is no fit competitor for an American freeman" (Robert Lee, 62). Although the "coolie" threatens the white laborer in that his labor value can be purchased for less money, what I find striking about this quotation is that the *Marin Journal* asserts that the problem of the Chinese in California is precisely that he is "no fit competitor," in other words, that he does not function as a *suitable* threat. The resolution instead, in an effort to expel Chinese peoples from California,

imagines a community whereby one's unsuitability to circulate economically becomes the prohibiting factor for social inclusion.

Throughout the twentieth century, "the lowest terms of beggarly economic" are transformed into threats of economic excess. In his analysis of Cecil B. De Mille's *The Cheat* (1915), Robert Lee links the character of the Japanese merchant (named "Tori" and played by Sessue Hayakawa) to the dangers of overconsumption for the new middle-class white woman at the turn of the century.⁶ The popularity of "oriental" art and commodities during this time combines with anxieties over Japan's dominance in Asia and U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii to once again locate the Oriental outside social and familial norms by casting him as the agent and object of excess desire and addiction, one that dangerously tempts the middle-class white woman from traditional duties within the family. Lee writes, "At a moment in which the reproduction of the national family is threatened by bourgeois over-civilization, Tori represents both the seductiveness of Oriental luxury and the danger of over-consumption" (124).

In the second half of the twentieth century, we can once again see the evocation of Asians as representations of capital that has overrun its boundaries. The explicit articulation of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans as model minorities in 1966 provided a counterpoint to anxieties and rationalizations of economically disenfranchised African Americans and confirmed the continued propagation of the American dream. If one hundred years previously, Asians were deemed "no fit competitor," they now were imagined as hyperfit, predetermined by "Confucist" and other inherent cultural values to achieve economic success. In his analysis of William Petersen's "Success Story, Japanese American style," widely acknowledged as the inception of the "model-minority myth," David Palumbo-Liu points to the link Petersen makes between Japanese Americans' "phenomenal economic and social success" and Japan's ability to modernize. If Asian Americans previously embodied the economic threat that served to consolidate the white working class and then later to remind white middle-class women of the dangers of overconsumption, they now modeled economic overachievement and

adaptability, whether to America or to modernity in general. The very nature of their excess, however, would once again render them alien to the American body (*Asian/American*, 179).

Certainly in the last quarter of a century, we have witnessed the full-blown identification of Asia with capital. In the eighties, media attention and books focused on the rapid economic growth in Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and more recently, anxiety has crystallized around the economic rise of China and India. Robert G. Lee notes the emergence of a racial discourse that constructed Asian Americans as agents of Orientalized capital. “In this construction of the Oriental, it is not only the Asian American who is Orientalized; multinational capital itself is imbued with oriental cultural difference” (205). The threat of Asian economic dominance was particularly made manifest in a 1987 *Time Magazine* article entitled “For Sale: America.” The epigraph reads:

“EVERYTHING HERE IS SO CHEAP.”

—a Japanese real estate agent visiting Manhattan

In the article Stephen Koepp sounds the alarm: that foreigners—Japanese, British, Canadian, South Korean, West German, and Swiss peoples and companies—are buying corporations and brands like Doubleday, Brooks Brothers, Smith and Wesson, Carnation Foods, and General Tires; and prime urban real estate in Manhattan, Los Angeles, the District of Columbia, and acres of forests in Washington and Oregon, mines in Montana and Nevada, and vineyards in Northern California. Although Koepp is careful not to single out the Japanese as the only foreign investors, his language about them echoes the predominant rhetoric characterizing Japan during that time—that their unidimensional appetite for investment is voraciously and indiscriminately consuming the multifaceted history and culture of the United States, its Manhattan skyline, Las Vegas casinos, heartland factories, and Hawaiian resorts. Koepp writes, “Japan, the world’s largest creditor country . . . has the mightiest bankroll of all to engage in buying America,” and quotes a director of McKinsey

consulting firm, “In the next two or three years, Japanese investments here will build up very rapidly. It’s going to become a torrent.”

Fears of a torrent of Japanese imports and investments were also heightened during the eighties by claims of Japan’s homogeneity and alien culture. Unlike British or Canadian investments, Japan’s purchasing of U.S. companies and real estate was imagined as both an economic and cultural invasion, an assault that coincided with the changing demographics of the United States. The influx of Latino and Asian immigrants and of Asian investments, combined with a downturn in the U.S. economy, led to a violent reconsolidation of “American” from calls to “Buy American” to the televised destruction of Japanese products, to actual violence against Asian Americans.⁷

The threat of Asian capital and Asians *as* capital seems to have morphed in the last decade into an overall anxiety about global capital in general.⁸ With special attention to China and India, we have seen recent media reports that have highlighted the outsourcing of jobs, the influx of imports, and the consumption of Asian culture, and the rising economic growth of the world’s two most populous countries has raised questions about how the United States is poised to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Recently, *Newsweek* announced a series of reports on China, the first featuring actress Ziyi Zhang on its cover and announcing, “China’s Century” (May 9, 2005). In it, editor Mark Whitaker writes, “There’s no question that China’s astounding growth, vast and industrious population and rapid embrace of new technology and education have put it on a glide path to challenging U.S. pre-eminence” (6).

Unlike previous constructions of Japan as economic threat and enemy, the implication now is that China represents a global economic future, one that Americans need to meet fully. Correspondingly, the issue includes articles about American high school students who astutely take Chinese language classes, or alternately, local tensions in China surrounding preparations for the Olympics (to be held in Beijing in 2008), and columns entitled, “What America Needs To Do.” Fareed Zakeria advises:

The answer for Western countries cannot be to shut themselves off from this new reality. After all, they benefit from the expansion of global commerce. . . . [C]ountries that have tried to wall themselves off from the rest of the world in the past—to maintain their economy or culture—have stagnated. Those that have embraced change have flourished. China is simply the biggest part of a new world. You cannot switch it off. (39)

Economic engagement with China seems imperative and also extremely daunting. What threatens us, however, is not only that we will lose the battle for global economic preeminence, but also that we will be overwhelmed by Asians and by economic activity and excess itself. Asians have historically symbolized economic imbalance, an association that reveals certainly that racialized identities are constructed through the machine of capital but also that economics itself is racialized.

Economic Citizenship and the Public Sphere

The now-ubiquitous representations of Asians' and Asian Americans' robot-like and hypercompetitive natures serve to emphasize their foreignness, their inability to achieve the humanity necessary for full Americanization. Aihwa Ong notes the efforts of Chinese diaspora members in the United States to shift from economic to social participation. She writes, "Chinese developers who live in San Francisco are trying harder to erase the image of themselves as 'economic animals' who build monster houses, as well as the perception that they lack a sense of civic duty and responsibility" (*Flexible Citizenship*, 103). The leap from the economic to the social, however, can be more complex than the developers imagine, as economic exchange is open to outsiders in ways that social circulation is not. George Simmel explains that it is precisely because of their exclusion from an established community that the alienated have historically turned to economic trade. Speaking specifically of the Jewish

diaspora, he writes, “Dispersed peoples, crowded into more or less closed cultural circles, can hardly put down roots or find a free position in production. They are therefore dependent on intermediate trade which is much more elastic than primary production, since the sphere of trade can be expanded almost limitlessly by merely formal combinations and can absorb people from outside whose roots do not lie in the group” (225). Despite economic exchange’s capacity for absorption, the role of money as a stimulus for social acceptance has historically been a subject for debate. Early philosophers such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas criticized any exchange that occurred beyond that needed for sustenance and self-sufficiency. Exchange for the accumulation of money or profit, in other words, was considered “contrary to nature” and created an imbalance in the relations between households (Parry and Bloch, 2).

Money as the means for a community’s expansion or alternately its breakdown has historically functioned as a central theme in debates surrounding the societal benefits of economic exchange. Critics Karl Marx and George Simmel, for example, differ in their assessments of the effects of economic exchange (*ibid.*, 4). Marx argues that market exchange not only alienates the laborer from his product but also isolates members of the community from each other. Money, in effect, adversely affects communal identity. Simmel, on the other hand, sees economic exchange as a means of widening existing social circles and transferring an adherence to one’s community to a larger dependence on an abstract system of exchange (*ibid.*, 4–5). Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry explain, “The impersonality and anonymity of money, it is argued, lends itself to the impersonal and inconsequential relationships characteristic of the market-place and even to a complete anonymity in exchange. Destructive of community, money depersonalizes social relations” (6). The “depersonalization of social relations,” as I demonstrate in the following chapters, presents both opportunities and obstacles. Even as economic exchange enables the inclusion of Asians into a more largely defined community, Asian Americans resist and attempt to transcend their largely impersonal and anonymous roles in those exchanges. We see throughout these works the hyperestablishment of

identity, the almost frantic effort to first, emphasize distinctive characteristics and meaningful moments of social contact, and second, abstract those differences into a narrative of national and humanistic belonging.

Despite these critiques of money's impact on nuclear communities, Charles Taylor demonstrates that in the development of Western modernity, economic relationships of production, exchange, and consumption came to be seen as the dominant theory of how society best operates. Moving away from premodern notions of warfare, society began to believe in economic security and prosperity as the ideal means of achieving the greater common good and a more "civilized" existence. Taylor writes, "Conceiving of the economy as a system is an achievement of eighteenth-century theorists . . . but coming to see the most important purpose and agenda of society as economic collaboration and exchange is a drift in our social imaginary, which begins in that period and continues to this day" (105).

The expansion of circles of economic exchange in fact directly enables, as Jurgen Habermas demonstrates, the creation of the public sphere. Habermas explains that as early as the thirteenth century in Europe, economic trade began to signal a new social structure that existed outside of the strictly contained feudal hierarchies. Through such gatherings as trade fairs and organizations, long-distance trade allowed for new relationships and "dependencies" to extend beyond (without initially threatening) the traditional estate system. By the sixteenth century, however, the mercantile network had as its goal the expansion of capital rather than just subsistence, and their more aggressive efforts to enter new territories and markets subsequently prompted the beginnings of the nation-state and its clearer delineation of its economic, political, and military borders. Capitalism abroad also affected the operation of the domestic economy, as the market and the state imposed new means of taxation to fund these expeditions and new regulations for production—structures necessary for meeting the demands of consumption. The number and range of news outlets also expanded during this time, and the news became a commodity in its own right, seeking a wider readership beyond agents of the marketplace. And the wider circulation and

definition of *the news* in turn created an audience that the state could identify and address (14–25). We see here that the expansion of economic trade opened routes of social and cultural circulation and contributed to the creation of the nation-state. The economic constitutes a means for community, a possibility that constitutes the conundrum of many contemporary Asian American texts.

By the late nineteenth century, however, the public sphere began to decline, as issues that had traditionally been debated and resolved in the public arena moved under state control and the private arena was transformed into a space for consumption. Free trade became more constrained as capital and power concentrated among fewer participants; and that imbalance and the desire to protect national economic interests prompted the state toward increased controls and influence over economic trade both nationally and internationally. The media also made a parallel shift from the world of public rational debate to that of commodification and consumption. Here Habermas is particularly critical of the media's tendency to render its material "ready-made convenience, patterned, and predigested" (169), and to present it in a way that discourages response, disagreement, and debate.

Even as Habermas charts the decline of the public sphere, however, critics have raised questions about his theories, debating the existence of rational public debate, interrogating the inclusive nature of the public sphere, questioning his historical contextualization, and asking whether his pronouncements against mass media and culture have been overly pessimistic. Nancy Fraser in particular has argued that the bourgeois public sphere worked in fact to institute new economic hierarchies.⁹ I primarily invoke Habermas' work, however, as a means of pointing to the dominant narratives operating in these mainstream Asian American texts. We see there a similar opportunity for economic trade to break down fixed hierarchies, and the effort by Asian American bourgeois classes to transform their economic participation into civic responsibility. We also are witness to the state's interest in expanding economic trade while preserving national interests, and Asian Americans' struggles to narrate their own economic and social circulation given the state's

imperative. And finally we see that Asian Americans are ultimately unable to escape the commodification of their own stories even as all of these texts testify to the unreliability of the economic realm as a means of locating their identities. These works, in fact, question the notion that equivalence in economic exchange is achievable, much less sustainable, belying those who have argued that mutual economic benefit constitutes the ideal social state.

The relationship between the economic and racial (and other forms of) identities and subjectivities are further elaborated on when we consider how the circulation and consumption of commodities can reproduce and reiterate hegemonic structures and discourses of race. Arjun Appadurai argues that the circulation of objects is itself defined by and defines contestations of power within communities. He writes:

It is in the interests of those in power to completely freeze the flow of commodities, by creating a closed universe of commodities and a rigid set of regulations about how they are to move. Yet the very nature of contests between those in power (or those who aspire to greater power) tends to invite a loosening of these rules and an expansion of the pool of commodities. This aspect of elite politics is generally the Trojan horse of value shifts. ("Introduction" to *The Social Life of Things*, 57)

Circulation is thus described here not as a closed system in which value is uniformly and permanently agreed upon, but one which is instead destabilized, subject to the inevitable entry of new commodities and interests. Appadurai's conclusions also make clear that a means of gaining power is through entry into the circulation of commodities, a strategy that I demonstrate in subsequent chapters has been deployed repeatedly by and within Asian American texts, with mixed results. In understanding the circulation of commodities as connected to and, in fact, inseparable from contestations of power, Appadurai provides for us a means of reading the circulation of Asian American objects, identities, and texts as already meeting

immediate resistance upon entry into the flow of commodities. What might seem to be the smooth exchange of commodities instead conceals the disruptions that characterize that movement, disruptions that we might read as the traces of racial difference.

Critics in race studies have long been ambivalent about economic exchange as a means for social advancement, and theorists have generally approached the intersection of race, culture, and economics through either Marxist analyses or critiques of the consumption of minority cultures. Both investigations reveal that capital has almost exclusively functioned to exploit and disenfranchise peoples of color. I agree with these arguments and simultaneously raise questions about how to read texts that benefit from capitalism and commodification. It is not surprising, for example, that most of the texts I study focus on middle and upper class Asians and Asian Americans, those who have profited by economic exchange and who subscribe faithfully to the system as a means of well-being and prosperity. I suggest that beyond concluding that these texts are exploitative and co-opted, we might also read them as a means of further comprehending how Asian Americans and other racial minorities are made visible and function in the national public sphere. Critic bell hooks contends that such visibility is ultimately destructive of peoples of color, that consumption of racial otherness only succeeds in erasing difference altogether. Reflective of the predominant scholarship on the consumption of minority cultures, she argues that such consumption provides disaffected whites a means of experiencing the exotic, dangerous, and out of the ordinary, even as those experiences serve to confirm fairly ordinary, persistent, and often imperialist fantasies of the “primitive” Other. Even as she regrets that such consumption can often be seductive to those who are being consumed, because such acts offer “the promise of recognition and reconciliation” (347), she leaves no doubts that “consumption” of racial otherness is nothing short of the wholesale erasure of that racial other’s history and subjectivity.¹⁰

At the same time, others have argued that it is only through consumption and economic exchange that peoples of color can achieve social empowerment. If Asian Americans have been represented

largely as the machines of economic exchange, African Americans, as Regina Austin explains, have generally been perceived as alien to economic circulation. Austin begins her essay by arguing

In so very many areas of public life, blacks are condemned and negatively stereotyped for engaging in activities that white people undertake without a second thought. Among the most significant of these is buying and selling goods and services. Despite the passage of state and federal antidiscrimination and public accommodations laws, blacks are still fighting for the right to shop and the right, if not the reason, to sell. (229)

For Austin, economic empowerment—which is not defined primarily by class status but more by the assertion and acceptance of African Americans’ performance as producers, exchangers, and consumers—is narrated through the language of “rights.” Unlike Habermas, Austin defines the public sphere as encompassing the marketplace. Such a collapse of the economic and social realms not only demonstrates how economic exchange situates racial minorities in a larger national community but also raises questions about whether stronger economic participation in fact leads to ascendancy in the public sphere. For Austin, greater economic circulation within the black community raises the community as a whole. The narratives I examine in *Economic Citizens*, however, complicate significantly these assumptions. While the writers share Austin’s assumptions about the translation of economic rights into civil rights, the paths of economic circulation that they trace rarely run smoothly. Instead, their anxiety about economic exchange opens anew questions of the viability of abstract citizenship for U.S. racial minorities.¹¹

The Economic and Literary Criticism

The question of how the economic and the literary function together has lately been the focus of a number of critical investigations, and this project both contributes to and offers new challenges to that

body of scholarship. The field of economic criticism as a whole is committed to several fundamental approaches. As the editors of *The New Economic Criticism* summarize, economic critics might assume an “extratextual” approach, one that analyzes the economic context surrounding the production of a literary work, the economic or class status of the author, the author’s attitudes toward money or the marketplaces that sell her work. Another methodology concentrates on the “intratextual,” the analysis of the metaphors of monetary exchange within a text itself. “When applied to narrative works, such criticism usually begins by analyzing the actions and interactions of the characters—their exchanges, debts, purchases, losses, gifts, etc.—to show how they embody this internal tropic economy” (Os-teen and Woodmanse, 36).¹² Economic critics might also question the economy of literature and literary value, that is, questions of canonization, consumption, or aesthetic value. And, finally, economic critics might consider and theorize the practice of economic criticism itself. In short, economic criticism encompasses a wide field of investigation; it has analyzed the simultaneous rise in the eighteenth century of the novel and the science of political economy; the discourse of economics from the early modern period onward and what it reveals about the culture of a particular period and place; and the economics of authorship itself, from early models of patronage to contemporary questions surrounding high art and mass consumption.

Economic Citizens to some extent takes all of these approaches. It pinpoints the ways Asians and Asian Americans have been represented through the lens of capitalist excess. It explicates the role of economic exchange in Asian American literature. It unravels Asian American criticism’s ambivalent relationship to the consumption of Asian and Asian American culture. And finally it asks economic critics to consider how race complicates our reading of economics in literature.

The connection between linguistic representation and monetary representation lies at the heart of economic criticism, which has posited in different ways exactly how the two might be linked. Marc Shell identifies a number of different theories—that words

and money each possess value; that words themselves function like credit-money or they work as commodities; that both words and coins transmit meaning. F. Ross-Landi, for example, applies Marx' theories of use and exchange value to language, arguing that the "message-content" of words stands as their use-value, a value that can only be calculated after exchange has occurred (see Osteen and Woodmansee, 14–15). Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee argue, however, that Ross-Landi's strict translation of use- and exchange-value serves primarily to demonstrate "that the structures of linguistic and economic systems are not identical, and so distinctions of definitions that hold for one 'economy' do not hold for another" (15). Critics like Shell, Osteen, and Woodmansee object to the uncritical pairing of words and money and to incautious attempts to substitute economic metaphors for linguistic ones. Instead they highlight research that focuses on structural similarities, shared histories and origins, or "homologies between language and money" (Osteen and Woodmansee, 15).

Jean-Joseph Goux is particularly notable for his claims of an "isomorphic" relationship between various systems (*Symbolic Economies*, 21).¹³ Tracing carefully Marx's development of the money form, he recalls Marx's analysis of the four stages that take place. The first consists of the generalized form of exchange in which one object is made equivalent to the next. The second development is the move toward an "extended form of value," in which all objects are placed into relationship with all other objects. Such an arrangement is unsatisfactory, as both Goux and Marx explain, as the infinite number of relationships is not ordered in any manner. Goux writes, "[The commodity] is caught in the interminable contradictions of a *relativism* in which no one component prevails, which has no 'unitary phenomenon form'" (*Symbolic Economies*, 15). In the third stage, the chaos is resolved through the naming of a "general equivalent," which in the commodity world is gold. And in the fourth stage, the general equivalent is consolidated as "the manifold world of commodities becomes centered, centralized around what confers a value—a fixed worth, or price—on each commodity" (*Symbolic Economies*, 16). What makes Goux's work so ambitious, however, is

his tracing of these four stages in systems involving not just products but signs, subjects, and objects. In a strategy that will not be persuasive to all readers, he carefully draws comparisons between the hierarchies that structure psychoanalysis, social systems, and religious systems, arguing that each and all evolve through the same four stages that Marx ascribes to the commodity world. They begin with the moment of identification, and progress from the creation of a chain of identification, to the naming of a general equivalent, and the consolidation around that equivalent.

Like economic critics who make visible the shared histories, structures, and logic between diverse systems such as economics, linguistics, and social organizations, I too argue for a link between economic circulation and the social circulation and definition of Asian Americans.¹⁴ While I am not claiming that the two systems are analogous or that the terms of one might be substituted for the other, I do argue that the two systems share a logic and a language of loss, gain, compensation, excess, abstraction, reconciliation, equivalence, and equality. The literature that I examine depends on the system of economic exchange to articulate abstract citizenship and to construct an idealized relationship to the nation-state. Monetary exchange and the structures and social agreements that enable that exchange to take place offer an overt and acceptable means for Asian Americans to assert their membership within the imagined American community. Perhaps even more importantly, it also suggests a logic by which representation and social equivalence can be made manifest. What is seen as foreign, alien, unassimilable, and invisible is thus, seemingly, through the logic of universal equivalence, rendered the same, comprehensible and translatable. We see here the very moment in which “Asian Americanness” appears—a moment that is only possible because of its articulation in relation to something else.

Economic Citizens also calls into question how race might challenge traditional applications of economic criticism. The most common intersections between critical race theory and economic criticism revolve around slavery and the appropriation of black bodies as property. My work argues that not only have racialized peoples

functioned as property or labor in the production of capital, but race itself exposes the contradictions and the intense effort behind effecting economic exchange and uniformity, thus undermining rather than supporting the logic of universal equivalence. And it also demonstrates that the economic realm is itself culturally and racially determined. Defined as alien to African Americans even as it comprises the sole terrain and occupation of Asian Americans, economic exchange does not operate in uniform ways for all peoples. In short, how does our understanding and reading of money as sign change when the agents of commodity exchange are racialized or when we realize that racialized peoples have themselves functioned as a symbol of money's circulation?

In the texts I examine we find two parallel narratives—an economic one alternately vacillating between an equitable and controlled circulation of goods and services and anxiety over stolen money, undervalued objects, and wasted labor power, while a more visible “racialized” narrative revolves around loss, social or familial alienation, cultural conflict, transformation, and resolution. By demonstrating the dependence of the more visible narrative of Asian American difference on the less noted but, I would argue, more central story of economic upheaval, *Economic Citizens* argues: 1) that economics play a significant role in mainstream constructions of Asians and Asian Americans while also structuring the logic of universal equivalence and wholeness within Asian American narratives themselves; and 2) that mainstream Asian American literature offers a compelling economic undercurrent that undermines the texts’ presumed messages of racial healing as well as much larger assumptions regarding the predictability of economic exchange and the ability to move easily between the economic, social, and symbolic realms.

Asian American Literary Studies and the Logic of Economic Exchange

The logic of economics has also played a role in the reading of Asian American literature. In the last three decades the growth of Asian

American culture has been seen as a primary means of establishing American identity and presence. It has been an important counterhegemonic strategy and a founding premise of the field that the production of Asian American art politically empowers the larger Asian American community. Seen as a response to the silencing and erasure of Asian Americans' histories in the United States, the appearance of Asian American cultural production has largely been heralded as a sign of progressive change. Particularly in the 1990s, critics pointed to the positive attention that Asian American writers had received from publishers, newspaper editors, awards committees, and anthology editors. In her foreword to *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, Elaine Kim notes:

At the moment, we are experiencing the start of a golden age of Asian American cultural production. Beginning around 1983 and continuing into the present, Asian American writers of diverse ancestries have burst into the U.S. cultural scene with novels, poetry, plays, short stories, and book-length critical studies written from a wide array of perspectives that reflect the increasing heterogeneity of contemporary Asian American communities. (xi)

In the same volume, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling add, "Asian American writers have been extremely productive, often garnering national awards and international recognition" (3). Sau-ling Wong also begins her important book-length study, *Reading Asian American Literature*, by establishing the active work of Asian American writers and critics.

A number of book-length studies by Asian American critics have appeared or are forthcoming, and recent publishing projects to broaden the canon of American literature have all, to varying extents, included Asian American authors. . . . In the half decade preceding the writing of this study, there have appeared a large number of first novels, most of them well received; new novels by established writers;

several award-winning short story collections; many other interesting additions to Asian American literature; anthologies of Asian American writing, especially by and/or about women; a Broadway hit; and many volumes of poetry, several of which garnered national honors. (3)

While Asian American critics like Kim, Lim, Ling, and Wong reference this Asian American “renaissance” as a means of signaling a new era in Asian American literary history and of questioning how Asian American critics might respond to these new developments, I would argue that the prodigious production has not waited for critics’ interpretation but has instead lent itself easily and immediately to the writing of a new literary history, one determined by the prominence of Asians in the global economy. In their respective anthologies of Asian American literature, editors (and authors) Shawn Wong and Jessica Hagedorn each construct a narrative in which the past exclusion of Asian Americans has given way to a new global reality. In his introduction to *Asian American Literature*, one of a series of anthologies devoted to multicultural literature published by HarperCollins, Shawn Wong outlines repeatedly the history of discrimination and racism that Asian Americans face, and frames his anthology selections within that history. Situating Asian American literature in both a national and global context, Wong details the history of anti-Asian sentiment from the early exclusion acts to World War II and to the Korean War, detailing what he terms the trajectory from “yellow peril to red menace” (2). Wong notes that such a hostile climate toward Asian Americans allowed for only a narrow range of Asian American literature to reach mainstream audiences. Such a climate, he argues, has since undergone substantial shifts, and although anti-Asian violence persists, the United States’ changing demographics as well as the new global economy demand that Americans be educated within a multicultural framework:

The business community, advertising and marketing agencies, and all levels of education are in desperate need of resources, people, and books that can educate workers and

management, teachers, and executives about our changing cultural identity. . . . American corporations have been competing on a global and multicultural level for years while much of America's educational curriculum remains monocultural." (4)

Wong's creation of an Asian American anthology thus addresses a variety of deficits: It challenges the lack of Asian American cultural representation, or the limitation of those representations to stereotypes, as well as Americans' needs for an education that addresses more adequately current economic realities. Wong's introductory narrative replicates a similar logic to that found in Asian American literature itself. It is permeated with the language of loss and surplus, deficiency and excess. His juxtaposition of Asian American cultural representation with the insistent demands of businesses rushing to adapt to the new global economy demonstrates that such cultural production is most clearly understood within the framework of production in general—the need for corporations to employ a diverse workforce, to attract a multicultural audience, to compete within a global marketplace. The creation of an Asian American anthology that relies on the logic of economic equivalence reiterates the link that Asian American writers themselves assert: The creation of an Asian and/or Asian American culture and identity depends on and in turn constitutes economic circulation and community.

Jessica Hagedorn's anthology *Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction* depends on a different but related logic—that excess itself stands as a sign of social equality. Published in 1993, *Charlie Chan Is Dead* proclaims itself as “the first anthology of Asian American fiction by a commercial publisher in this country” (xxviii). Hagedorn, like Wong, introduces the anthology with a discussion of how Asian American culture has historically been perceived. Explaining the anthology's title, she writes, “Charlie Chan is as much a part of the demeaning legacy of stereotypes that includes Fu Manchu, Stepin' Fetchit, Sambo, Aunt Jemima, Amos N' Andy, Speedy Gonzalez, Tonto, and Little Brown Brother” (xxi–xxii). The list of stereotypes is only one of a number of inventories

that Hagedorn makes (others include itemizations of “canonical” literatures—works by writers of color, Asian American writers, and finally the forty-eight writers included in *Charlie Chan Is Dead*) and the themes of abundance, excess, and diversity define the essay. Hagedorn makes it clear that the anthology itself is not bound by a narrow set of criteria.

The writers selected for this anthology are exhilarating in their differences; there is an array of cultural backgrounds, age range, and literary styles gathered here. No “theme” was imposed on the writers when they were invited to submit. I let it be known that I was definitely more interested in “riskier” work, and that I was eager to subvert the very definition of what was considered “fiction.” (xxviii)

She continues to emphasize the diversity of the selections, and the anthology’s resistance to singularity by citing the authors’ varied geographic and ethnic backgrounds. “Some were born in the Philippines, some in Seattle. A few in Hawaii. Others in Toronto or London. Some live in San Francisco. Oakland. Stockton. Los Angeles. New York City. Santa Fe. Family in Panama. Singapore. Tokyo. Manila. Pusan. Chicago. Hayward. Boston. Brooklyn. Beijing. Min-doro. Washington, D.C. Seoul. Greeley, Colorado. India. Penang. Moscow, Idaho.” She concludes by arguing, “Asian American literature? Too confining a term, maybe. World literature? Absolutely” (xxix–xxx). Sau-ling Wong has pointed to Hagedorn’s embrace of transnationalism, and has questioned the efficacy of loosening Asian American literature from its national moorings.¹⁵ While I agree with Wong’s questioning of a transnational framework for situating Asian American Studies, what is equally of interest to me here is Hagedorn’s dependence on the profusion of Asian American literature and authors, an extravagance that works to counteract the proliferation of narrow stereotyping. While Shawn Wong suggests that knowledge of Asian American culture is necessary to compete effectively in today’s global economy, Hagedorn instead uses the language of global excess to remap Asian America. Her naming of the

numerous and diverse places of Asian American authorial origin, even as it disrupts any assumptions that “Asian America” can be reduced to a handful of ethnic identities, essentially replicates the language of global transit, and suggests that Asian Americans—like other peoples, commodities, and information—are moving easily across cultural and geographic borders. Hagedorn’s claim to the title of “world literature,” I would argue, not only slips the national boundaries that have traditionally defined Asian American literature, but it also implicitly grounds this literature within the general logic of global capitalism. The proliferation of Asian American literatures—in terms of genre and/or ethnic or regional diversity—becomes simply another realm in which the rapid production of global commodities signals the arrival of a new economic era.

If Asian Americans had previously been erased from what had traditionally constituted “American” history or culture, the rise of Asian economies, the larger numbers of Asian immigrants to the United States, and the increasing visibility of Asians in U.S. political and cultural institutions has enabled a narrative of Asian American literary production and consumption that moves from lack to surplus, or to use Sau-ling Wong’s paradigm, from “necessity” to “extravagance.” Although certainly it is true that Asian American writing is being published and read more now than ever, I am questioning how this narrative from “less” to “more” coincides with other forms of referencing Asian economic surplus, whether in terms of class or the late twentieth-century vivid imaginings of the large number of Asian workers, Asian immigrants, Asian monies, and Asian commodities. And finally, I suggest that surplus becomes a common means of establishing Asian American subjectivity, one that only underscores and enables the language of American equivalence.

If Asian American critics have read the production of Asian American literature as a largely positive move, the consumption of Asian American works has been greeted with far more skepticism.¹⁶ Asian American critics have mainly shared bell hooks’ concerns that consumption occurs only through the erasure of difference. In her careful and illuminating essay on the phenomenal success of Amy Tan’s books, Sau-ling Wong writes of Tan’s second novel, *The*

Kitchen God's Wife, that the ethnographic comparisons between “the” Chinese and U.S. cultures that the main (Chinese) character offers her daughter are “not empirically grounded contrast, but the kind of cultural tidbits Orientalist readers enjoy—decontextualized, overgeneralized, speculative, and confirmative of essential difference” (“Sugar Sisterhood,” 198). Essentialism and decontextualization reappear in Sunaina Maira’s comments about the current consumption of what she calls “Indo-chic.” She writes, “Ethnic difference, specifically coded as the essence of South Asian ‘culture,’ can be consumed and made safe, in a sense, its threatening foreignness now neutralized.”¹⁷ Perhaps most well-known, however, are the arguments made by Frank Chin, Jeffery Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong in the preface to the first anthology of Asian American literature, *Aiiieeeee!!!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*. The editors frame their selections against the specter of mass consumption and explicitly note that the works included in *Aiiieeeee!!!* have not enjoyed the kind of mainstream success that other Asian American writers (mainly Chinese American) have found. They denounce writers like Pardee Lowe, Jade Snow Wong, C. Y. Lee, Virginia Lee (the writers on which I focus in the first chapter), and Maxine Hong Kingston for their widespread popularity, accusing them of fulfilling white readers’ fantasies of an exotic Orient and of portraying Asians as foreign, alien, and unassimilable. In their preface, they argue that writers like Lin Yutang and C. Y. Lee “consciously set out to become American, in the white sense of the word, and succeeded in becoming ‘Chinese American’ in the stereotypical sense of the good, loyal, obedient, passive, law-abiding, cultured sense of the word. It is no surprise that their writing is from whiteness, not from Chinese America. Becoming white supremacist was part of their consciously and voluntarily becoming ‘American’” (x). In their introduction to Chinese and Japanese American literature, they explain that writers like John Okada were ignored by the publishing industry and mainstream audiences because “authentic” Asian American literature relied on unfamiliar tropes, structures, and languages to describe Asians’ experiences in the United States. In a jibe against C. Y. Lee’s *The Flower Drum Song*, which was

adapted into a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, the editors write of John Okada's *No-No Boy* that "Depression, despairing, death, suicide, listless anger, and a general tone of low-key hysteria closed inside the gray of a constant overcast and drizzling Seattle pervade the book. Definitely not the stuff of a musical" (Aiiieeeee!!!, xxxix).

Asian American literary criticism has been divided on exactly how Asian American literature operates within mainstream and dominant ideologies and institutions, and on the level of resistance it might offer. In her discussion of Asian American literature and its relationship to the larger U.S. canon, Lisa Lowe argues that an Asian American aesthetic by its very definition resists resolution and assimilation. Despite differences in form, content, and voice, Lowe reads Asian American literature as a whole as an aesthetic "defined by contradiction, not sublimation, such that discontent, nonequivalence, and irresolution call into question the project of abstracting the aesthetic as a separate domain of unification and reconciliation" (44). Working against critics who question the consumption of literature by writers of color, and who suggest that such consumption results in the erasure or essentializing of otherness, Lowe, as I read her, argues instead that literature by writers of color inherently defies such incorporation.

If Lowe argues that Asian American literature is defined by "nonequivalence"—an argument that my own readings support—other Asian American literary critics have argued that we have not yet recognized fully our complicity in reading and valuing Asian American literature through the logic of capital. In other words, while Lowe's work offers us a means of understanding Asian American literature in fundamental opposition to exchange, critics such as Viet Nguyen and Tomo Hattori suggest instead that we need to be more cognizant of how our criticism cannot escape cooptation, institutionalization, and the imperative of capitalist exchange. Nguyen writes, "For the Asian American intellectual class, it is racial identity as a mode of resistance to capitalist exploitation that accrues symbolic rather than economic capital" (5). Hattori argues similarly that "The *jouis-sense* of Asian American resistance, the moment in which it materializes its resisting subject, is the moment in which

Asian American criticism enjoys its own trauma, produces it as excess and surplus, and coins it as ethnic cultural capital" (232). Hattori characterizes his own project this way: "My method of reading, then, looks 'for the money' and 'for the bottom line' in Asian American literature and criticism to expose, confirm, and value the discourse of being Asian in America that emerges from the Asian American subject's undeluded and pragmatic manipulation of herself as a human form of racial capital" (231). For Hattori, Asian American critics have failed to realize that idealized notions of a resistant minority only support the hegemonic structures already in place and ignore the ways that global capitalism has inexorably and powerfully defined the Asian American subject. I am sympathetic to Hattori's arguments, and I too look for "the money." My project, however, focuses not so much on the need to recognize our own cooptation by capital, but to look more closely at how Asian American writers depend on and yet disrupt the logic of economic exchange as a means of constructing and rewriting their own racialized identities. Here I echo critic Miranda Joseph, when she remarks, "As I see it, the issue here is not so much the commodification of discourse, of media, art, and information, but the discursivity of the commodity" (34).

It seems to me then that the question of whether Asian American culture operates according to principles of nonequivalence or equivalence can only be answered in the affirmative; that by reading Asian American culture through the logic of economic exchange, we can see that nonequivalence *and* equivalence are always happening simultaneously. Asian Americanization is a tale of abstraction, exchange, universalization, circulation, and embodiment, but it is also a narrative of alienation, difference, and disenfranchisement. As Karen Shimakawa writes, "For what characterizes Asian Americanness as it comes into visibility . . . is its constantly shifting relation to Americanness, a movement between visibility and invisibility, foreignness and domestication/assimilation; it is that *movement between* enacted by and on Asian Americans, I argue, that marks the boundaries of Asian American cultural (and sometimes legal) citizenship" (3). The logic of economic exchange not only makes

that movement particularly *visible*, but we can see in the works of Asian American writers and in the consumption of those works by mainstream readers that it is the logic that makes that movement *possible*.

Economic Citizens thus constructs the history of that relationship, tracing the characterization of Asians as symbolic of excessive or inappropriate exchange and unveiling the deployment of economic exchange within Asian American literature itself as an ultimately futile means of constructing identity and writing Asians into the larger American community. It also offers a way of reading and contextualizing the consumption of Asian American culture in a manner that acknowledges the economic and discursive structures that make “Asian American” comprehensible, and suggests that readings of Asian American literature can recognize its tendencies toward equivalence even as the specter of nonequivalence constantly looms. The book moves largely chronologically, structured by the most visible economic threats that Asians have posed to the nation over the last fifty years. As such, the project primarily focuses on Chinese and Japanese American texts. I have chosen to use the term *Asian American* in my title, however, not to erase unconsciously the differences and histories that are contained and contested within Asian America, but because “Asia” as a whole has been imagined to represent the threat of cheap labor, excessive consumption, and global capitalism run amuck. What is being negotiated in terms of identity is not an articulation of ethnicity but one of race and even more specifically of difference in general. For when Jing-mei Woo pronounces at the end of Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, “And now I see what part of me is Chinese” (331), we understand that what she has recognized is not anything that references a specific Chinese ethnicity or history, politics, or culture, but instead calls forth a more comprehensive and essential difference and “humanity.”

In a time during which Chineseness signaled the specter of communism, popular Chinese American texts of the 1950s and 1960s—Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, C. Y. Lee’s *The Flower Drum Song*, Pardee Lowe’s *Father and Glorious Descendant*, and Virginia Lee’s *The House that Tai Ming Built*—all assertively

position Chinese labor and products as vital elements of a vigorous and growing ethnic and national economy. These texts are the focus of my first chapter, in which I investigate how Chineseness has been marketed and produced. I focus particularly on the circulation of cultural commodities as a means of defining Chinatown's geographic boundaries, thereby marking the economic and cultural position of Chinese Americans within the United States. Crowded with objects, food, furniture, merchants, and servants, Chinatown stands as a symbol of gentility and old world traditions, even as each narrative is filled with and dominated by efforts to produce, exchange, and consume products, labor, and capital. The mainstream reader's consumption of Chinese American difference and exotica thus in fact marks a process by which Chinese Americans articulate their Americanness through the establishment of an alternative marketplace in which Asian American identity can be assessed, valued, and made commensurate with other U.S. commodities.

The "tsunami" of Japanese capitalism in the late eighties forms the backdrop for the works I examine in Chapter 2, in which I read the travel narratives of Japanese American writers who "return" to Japan. Looking at works by David Mura and Lydia Minatoya, I trace the embodiment of value within everyday objects, and assess the economic exchange effected in their journeys across Japan and other Asian countries, exchange that ultimately enables healing and homecoming. Blurring the boundaries between the local and the global, countries such as Japan, China, and Nepal, as well as art itself, are transformed into sites of resistance as well as universalization against which the past conflicts between the United States and Asia and Asian America (e.g., the Vietnam War, the internment of Japanese Americans) can be resolved. The cultural versatility that is gained when Minatoya and Mura cross historical, geographical, and national boundaries becomes a sign of simultaneous global universality and national acceptance, and a confirmation of the United States as a symbol for a multicultural and international community.

In Chapter 3, I look more carefully at how the language of capital overdetermines the creation of specifically female Asian American subjectivities. Examining the rhetoric of exchange that dominates

discussions about Asian mail-order brides, I argue that mainstream media representations of the growing practice of mail-order marriages repeatedly voice anxiety about the presence of money—the brokers' fees, the groom's payments, the bride's poverty—while the international matchmaking organizations themselves use the logic of global capital to naturalize the immigration of Asian women into the U.S. home. I contrast these representations with that of Wanwadee Larsen's memoir, *Confessions of a Mail-Order Bride*. Larsen romantically underscores Asian "values" as a means of escaping the concrete economic valuing of her labor as wife; nevertheless, she cannot avoid entirely the logic and language of exchange as a means of defining the Thai American woman's identity.

In the final chapter, I move from U.S. citizenship to global citizenship and explore how multinational belonging is rendered possible through a locating of value within Chinese women's bodies and histories. Contextualizing the works within the twenty-first century threat of China's exponential economic expansion, and examining such works as Adeline Yen Mah's bestselling *Falling Leaves: The Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, Pang-Mei Natasha Chang's *Bound Feet & Western Dress*, and May-lee Chai and Winberg Chai's *The Girl from Purple Mountain*, I interrogate the current fascination with works that posit the resilience of Chinese women against the traumatic events of twentieth century Chinese history. These memoirs—all written in English, published by mainstream U.S. presses, and sold in U.S. markets—almost all uniformly tell the story of the path of capital gone astray. Thus, although the works in unison make mention of historical events such as the Boxer Rebellion, the creation of the Republic, the Japanese invasion of China, the rise of the Communist Party and of cultural practices (that highlight a repressive Chinese patriarchy), such as the binding of feet and the taking of concubines, the plots themselves revolve around the circulation, loss, and recovery of monies and objects. The figure of the (suffering) Chinese woman expatriate thus offers us a means of demonstrating the links between female and feminist subjectivity, twentieth century Chinese history, global citizenship, and the circuits of (global) capital.

In the texts of *Economic Citizens* we can see the strict boundaries that separate exotic Chinatown from mainstream America, that define the tragic (but triumphant) masses of China against a U.S. modernity, that delineate Japanese worldliness in the face of American provincialism, that position “third-world” need against first-world generosity. And yet, all of these works are obsessed with circulation; and the movement of objects, people, and money gestures toward their own attempts at social border crossings even when actual transfer might be impossible. The narratives’ progress and tensions often also depend on the circulation of women, an emphasis that reveals the gendered dynamics underlying the creation of Asian American subjectivities through capital. Women’s efforts to keep monies and objects moving, along with their own navigation within patriarchal systems of exchange, make visible the necessity of preserving the ideals of family and nation as a means of ensuring the development of capital. They in fact can often ensure that such circulation remains mappable and controllable, a means of delineating the boundaries of “home,” even one that spans continents. As the project of tracking the circulation of capital, commodities, and people has become increasingly difficult, as capital itself has become more flexible and adept at manipulating global, local, and national interests for its own benefit, mapping the circulation of and within Asian American texts enables a clearer sense of how movement itself can be effected between the realms of race, nation, and “world.”