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## The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans

### *Controversies, Questions, Convergence*

CHRISTIAN COLLET AND PEI-TE LIEN

On Olympic Street in Los Angeles, four hundred Filipinas are leading a march through the historic downtown district. Their hope, ostensibly, is to end American involvement in Iraq, but the action, they say, is part of a broader indictment of the “victimization of women in war-stricken countries.” Among their targets is one of the few female heads of state in the world: President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines, the protesters contend, has been weak in prosecuting “military rapists, sex abusers and traffickers,” taking too many cues and bowing down to the Bush administration and the U.S. military. Viewed from a local lens, it might seem a modest event, finding coverage only in the local Filipino press. But it is not merely that. There are sister protests going on in New York and San Francisco. The epicenter of the movement is across the Pacific. For weeks, tens of thousands of Filipinos have been gathering around universities throughout metropolitan Manila in record-breaking antigovernment demonstrations. “As Filipino Americans,” says Annalisa Enrile, one of the Los Angeles organizers, “we are taking our rightful place in the political discourse of the United States, on issues that impact our lives on a daily basis.” As the marches continue, Migrante International, an organization headquartered in Quezon City, takes a different strategy for undermining the Arroyo regime. Throughout cyberspace, it calls for “zero remittance days,” urging Filipino workers in Hong Kong, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and throughout the world to withhold the money they send “back” to the Philippines, estimated to be \$30 million per day (Makilan 2008; Pascua 2008).

On Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., Mike Honda rises to introduce House Resolution (H.R.) 121, calling on the government of Japan to offer an “official apology” for two hundred thousand “comfort women” kidnapped in Korea, China, and Southeast Asia by the Imperial Army during World War II (see Figure 1.1). A Sansei, Honda invokes the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, America’s apology to Japanese Americans: “As someone who was put into an internment camp at a young age, I know firsthand that we must not be ignorant of the past and that reconciliation through government actions is long-lasting.”<sup>1</sup> As the *People’s Daily* of Beijing reports the bill as a major embarrassment for Japan and the *Chosun Ilbo* tells its readers, “Korea Needs Heroes like Congressman Honda,” in Kasumigaseki, Tokyo, bureaucrats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are befuddled. On “many occasions” since the early 1990s, the government insists, it has “expressed its sincere apologies and remorse.” When H.R. 121 is approved, Dutch and Filipino legislatures debate similar resolutions. It is hailed as “the culmination of a months-long grassroots lobbying effort by the Korean American community,” although the backers of H.R. 121 include a pan-ethnic coalition of groups such as the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of World War II in Asia, based in Honda’s multicultural San Jose district (“Korea Needs Heroes” 2007; Tiron 2007).<sup>2</sup>

In a staid real-estate office back in Honda’s district, buried in a vast Silicon Valley industrial park, thirty-three-year-old John Quoc Duong, a former executive director of the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, is addressing a small group—first in Vietnamese, then in English. He is a Republican running for mayor of Irvine, the rapidly growing ethno-burb about four hundred miles south, and he would like your support. It is his first run for office, and Duong, one of the thousands of “boat people” who fled persecution and corruption in the early 1980s, explains that integrity will be at the centerpiece of the campaign. There is a problem, however. His opponent, the incumbent Beth Krom, “traveled to China and authorized a backroom deal with the communist regime” and is “selling out American allies like the democratic nation of Taiwan.” Later, as Duong prepares to file his candidacy papers at Irvine City Hall, two hundred Taiwanese Americans march in opposition to a sister-city agreement with the Xuhui District in Shanghai that prohibits Irvine officials from attending “National Day” celebrations in honor of another relationship—with Taoyuan, Taiwan. As protestors sing “We Shall Overcome,” Alice Hsueh, who drove down from Alhambra, waves three American flags. Thanks to those attending the San Jose meeting, and the buzz in the Vietnamese and Chinese press, Duong raises a record \$200,000 for the race. His largest benefactor is a developer known as the “Godfather of Little Saigon,” whose “global strategy” includes projects ranging from the Asian Garden Mall in Westminster to Vietnamnet, a private-sector subsidiary of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Carcamo and Smith 2006; Gittelsohn 2006).

Three disparate, complex, even ironic, stories across America. What is the common thread? What binds the street-level activism of an Annalisa Enrile and

# THE TRUTH "COMFORT WOMEN" ABOUT WOMEN



That the Japanese government has never fully accepted responsibility for their suffering or paid compensation is bad enough; that Mr. Abe would retreat from previous statements is a disgrace for a leader of a major democracy.

— WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL  
March 24, 2007

The Japan Federation of Bar Associations dispatched members to the related countries to look into damage reports, and it publicized the results. Based on its findings, the federation has four times urged the prime minister to make a formal apology and extend compensation to individuals.

— OP-ED by KOKEN TSUCHIYA, FORMER PRESIDENT  
of the JAPAN FEDERATION OF BAR ASSOCIATIONS in  
ASAHI SHIMBUN, April 16, 2007

Historical records show that the Japanese government organized the enslavement and rape of 200,000 girls and women during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands from 1932 through the end of World War II. The victims were referred to as "comfort women," but they were mostly girls under eighteen, some as young as twelve. They were kept in military "comfort stations" and were subject to inhuman and degrading forms of sexual violence. They endured repeated rape — up to 50 times a day — mutilation, and disease. Many did not survive the brutality and horror of their captivity. Others were executed after the war or never made it home. Those who did survive lived in shame and obscurity for decades, until reports of organized rape camps during the war in Bosnia prompted survivors to begin coming forward in the early 1990s.

In response to sworn testimonies of the survivors, as well as irrefutable historical documentation, Japanese officials have issued ambiguous statements that fail to acknowledge the precise nature of these crimes in order to sidestep legal obligations resulting from violations of international law. In short, Japan has never taken full responsibility for this crime, and it has never made a clear apology. Recently Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe alarmed the international community by retreating from previous statements of contrition and launching a campaign to deny that the government was directly involved.



It's understandable, then, that Mr. Abe's statement earlier this month that there was no evidence that the wartime military had coerced the women into sexual service was met with outrage throughout the region. Japan was once again playing fast and loose with the truth. The outrage even reached Washington, where Michael Honda, a California Democrat of Japanese descent, introduced a nonbinding resolution in the House of Representatives calling on Japan to make an unambiguous apology.

— WALL STREET JOURNAL EDITORIAL  
March 28, 2007

There is a large amount of well documented evidence and careful research detailing the official sanctioning of the "Comfort Women" system by the Japanese government. The Japanese government's hollow apologies and continued denial of responsibility add to the suffering of survivors. A full apology would include Japan accepting full responsibility for the crimes by acknowledging that the actions against the "Comfort Women" amount to crimes under international law, acknowledging the harm suffered by survivors, denouncing all forms of sexual violence against women, and expressing sincere remorse to survivors.

— AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA  
LETTER TO PRESIDENT BUSH, April 19, 2007

Ad sponsored by  
Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues,  
Greater New York Support 121 Coalition,  
Greater Washington Support 121 Coalition & 121 Coalition  
For information: [www.support121.org](http://www.support121.org)

**FIGURE 1.1** Support121.org advertisement that appeared in the *Washington Post*, 26 April 2007. This full-page ad in the main news section of the *Post* was an effort to mobilize American policymakers and the public behind House Resolution 121, introduced by Representative Michael Honda. The measure called on the government of Japan to offer an "official apology" for treatment of women during World War II. A pan-ethnic and transnational effort, passage of H.R. 121 was praised in China and South Korea and led to similar resolutions in the Philippines, Canada, the Netherlands, and the European Union. Tokyo maintains that it has apologized repeatedly for the episode and notes its contributions to a fund intended to provide compensation to those women victimized during Japanese occupation. (121 Coalition. Used with permission.)

an Alice Hsueh? The legislative savvy of a veteran Democrat such as Mike Honda and an aspiring conservative such as John Duong?

All are Asian Americans, of course, participating in different ways in the political life of the United States. But what their acts share is something more basic. All are intertwined with—and carry implications for—the Asian Pacific: its political affairs, its economic emergence, its bilateral and multilateral relationships with the United States. Simply put, they are political acts that transpire in America but transcend American borders.

A phenomenon that holds the potential to unite and divide Asian Americans, to forge coalitions and invite the perpetual charge of “foreigner”—the phenomenon that helps to make Asian American activism unique in our multiracial milieu—is what we call transnational politics. Exploring this much talked about but still poorly understood idea—how it has evolved throughout Asian American history, how it is altering domestic identities and Asian Pacific governments, how it is inspiring political change and new forms of activism—is the purpose of this book.

## Controversies

Don T. Nakanishi has played an important role in establishing a scholarly niche for Asian American politics through numerous writings, as well as through the *Asian American Political Almanac*, the only compendium of Asian American officeholders and election data in existence. But it was an article he published more than twenty years ago in *Amerasia*, titled “Asian American Politics: An Agenda for Research,” that helped to put the field in motion. “Agenda” not only appeared at a time of growing speculation and controversy about Asian American educational and socioeconomic successes—giving impetus to scholarship identifying and dispelling the model-minority myth—but coincided with a period of intensified anti-Asian violence, marked by the savage killing of Vincent Chin. Chin’s murder, it has been recalled, had broader origins in what was then a deteriorating relationship between the United States and Japan.

“Agenda” takes the uncommon step of coupling an extensive, cross-disciplinary literature review with new empirical findings: the results of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Asian Pacific American Voter Study—one of the first “organic” sources of information about the extent, and partisan leanings, of the Asian American electorate. It is a prescient work that foreshadowed several of the tensions that were to come as this field developed in the 1990s and 2000s. Two of the three approaches Nakanishi identifies—“micro/macro” and “electoral/non-electoral”—have largely foreseen the research that has followed. It is the third—and, ironically, the one to which he gives the most prominence in the essay—that is of interest to us: “domestic versus non-domestic political phenomena.” In spite of the numerous citations of the article, Nakanishi’s admonition that “Asian American involvement should not be confined to the domestic scene” has continued to be overlooked.

Urging scholars to focus on “the ways in which international processes and policies involving the flow of people, money, goods and ideas impinge on the political behavior and status of Asian Americans,” Nakanishi argues that transnational politics may be not only the quality that distinguishes Asian American politics from other racial and ethnic communities, but the key to providing a more accurate representation of the community’s political behavior.<sup>3</sup> As such, he believes, a closer examination of transnational politics can help to dispel prevailing stereotypes:

By conceptualizing Asian American politics in terms of both domestic and non-domestic dimensions, our research agenda differs from what is usually undertaken under the rubric of minority politics. A broader view which recognizes the extensive history of protest and non-domestic political activities would prevent us from making unwarranted assumptions about the seemingly low level of past participation in electoral politics. (Nakanishi 1986: 6)

After “Agenda” appeared in 1986, the study of Asian American politics took a decidedly domestic course, focusing on group relations as well as the micro-level analysis of, and legal barriers inherent in, electoral behavior. In doing so, the emerging field generally conformed to paths cut earlier by African American and Latino politics (e.g., McClain and Garcia 1993) around questions of domestic representation and racial equality. The question posed by Bruce Cain (1988)—whether Asian American power was “imminent or illusory”—not only underscored the youth of the population. It also suggested that scholars, as well as the community itself, was heading into uncharted empirical territory (at least outside Hawai‘i). The mainland population was growing rapidly, and the Supreme Court’s decision in *Thornburg v. Gingles* was encouraging to voting-rights advocates who recognized the challenge of attaining representation in the face of polarized voting, geographic dispersion, and group competition. Japanese Americans, led by the efforts of its longtime members of Congress, Robert Matsui and Norman Mineta, had won a historic apology and compensation for the U.S. government’s role in wartime incarceration (e.g., Hatamiya 1993). But as of 1990, just ten Asian Americans had been elected to Congress in American history, and just five had been elected to the California Legislature since the state’s founding in 1854 (Takeda 2001). At the local level, the lack of representation was equally bleak (Alozie 1992; Espiritu 1992: 70).

### *Ethnicity Matters*

The first empirical work to appear after the UCLA study juxtaposed the Asian experience to that of whites, blacks, and Latinos, resulting in a relative yardstick for the community’s incorporative progress and partisan mien. A series of papers by Cain, Carole Uhlaner, and D. Roderick Kiewiet, based on the 1984 Minorities in California survey (Cain et al. 1991; Uhlaner et al. 1989) revealed three important aspects about Asian American involvement that helped to shape future

research. First, when judged against what were then the standard socioeconomic approaches to participation, Asian Americans are “something of a puzzle”: With higher levels of education, income and homeownership, they find Asians registering and voting at considerably lower rates than other groups. At the same time, Asians engage in other activities—donating money, for example, and working in community organizations. Second, their “acquisition” of party affiliations is inconsistent: Unlike Latinos, who become increasingly Democratic over time and across generations, Asian Americans, according to Cain and his colleagues, show no linear progress toward strong partisanship. The third point to emerge from the research were differences between ethno-nationality groups—particularly those migrating from countries that had experienced communist regimes. In retrospect, this does not seem to be particularly compelling and the small Asian sample in the study precludes them from exploring it deeply. But at the time, social science was not only tentative about attributing different levels or styles of participation to race, but scholars were grappling with how to treat Asian Americans as units of analysis—as a group bound by the racialization experience in America or as individual ethnicities who remained shaped by, and tied to, Asian nations. That Asian Americans were not conforming to basic hypotheses that otherwise explained white, black, and Latino political behavior was a finding in and of itself—and suggested a deeper exploration of what Cain and his colleagues termed “past political experiences,” or PPEs in their notation.

Subsequent work failed to specify PPEs but underscored the broader theme: ethnicity matters. Pei-te Lien (1994) reexamined the Cain, Uhlaner, and Kiewiet data, arguing that there is in fact “a common structure” to Asian American and Mexican American participation owing to the fact that ethnicity is shaped by underlying experiences of alienation, group identification, deprivation, acculturation, and “ethnic ties”—connections to countries of origin or ancestry. According to Lien, such connections play a significant role in participation. Wendy Tam, considering a different source of data (surname-coded voter-registration figures akin to the UCLA study) concluded similarly that Asians are not, in fact, “a monolithic voting bloc.” As she puts it, “Sensitivity to the concept that the Asian ethnicities may be very distinct entities is of utmost importance. For academics, lack of sensitivity may confound one’s research and cause its results to be meaningless” (Tam 1995: 247).

A series of telephone surveys conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* between 1992 and 1997 provided the scholarly community with more data for exploring the potential similarities and differences between Asian ethnicities. The studies, conducted “in language” among separately drawn samples of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese living in Southern California, helped to reveal the unique experiences and political qualities that persist within Asian America.<sup>4</sup> In 1994, the Current Population Survey (CPS), a large-scale telephone survey conducted by U.S. Census Bureau, expanded to include questions for deriving the nativity and ancestry of respondents that had previously only been classified as “Asian and Pacific Islander.” The “Voter Supplement File,” merely one section of

the massive CPS, contains a handful of questions about voter registration and turnout. Although limited, this allowed for a national-level accounting of electoral involvement among Asian Americans. Studies based on the CPS have revealed how some groups—particularly those with higher proportions of new arrivals—face greater barriers to participation. At the same time, they have found that problems lie in citizenship and registration; once registered, Asian Americans often vote at rates that are comparable to, if not higher than, those of other groups (Lien 2001a: 184–186; Lien et al. 2001).

### *Movement from the Domestic in Asian American Studies*

As social scientists were focused on sketching the outlines of the Asian American voter, and legal scholars were focused on the systemic hurdles preventing their access to the ballot (e.g., Ancheta 1998; Aoki 2002; Magpantay 2000), Asian American studies was moving toward a more global, critical perspective. In 1995, *Amerasia* published a special issue, “Thinking Theory in Asian American Studies,” that contained two works that have bearing on the transnational approach to community politics that we argue for here. The first, Sau-ling C. Wong’s critique “Denationalization Reconsidered” (1995), takes stock of the increasing transnational movement in Asian American literary and cultural studies. Noting that recent work has been marked by a “relaxation between what is Asian American and what is Asian” and a decided shift from the domestic to the diasporic, she argues that “too celebratory a stance” toward such an approach may not only overshadow the international roots of the Asian American movement, but also risks losing sight of the structural aspects of American society and global capitalism that create conditions for Asian exploitation. Wong is also concerned that a focus on diaspora over coalitions may “exacerbate liberal pluralism’s already oppressive tendency to ‘disembody,’” a condition that “would leave America’s racialized power structure intact” (Wong 1995: 139). Because transnational identities carry “the potential to glamorize a noncommittal stance in one’s land of principal residence,” and because nation-states remain relevant political entities, she argues, instead of “reclaiming America,”

to Asian Americans, the term “roots” could evoke contradictory meanings: either “origin,” where one or one’s family hails from in Asia, or else commitment to the place where one resides. The second meaning, on which Asian American Studies was founded, is what today’s Asian Americans must not lose sight of amidst the enthusiastic call for denationalization. (Wong 1995: 140)

The second, Ling-chi Wang’s “The Structure of Dual Domination” (1995), develops an alternative conceptual prism for the Chinese diaspora, one that conforms neither to the predominant American paradigm of “assimilation” nor to the predominant Chinese model of “loyalty.” Instead, Wang argues, Chinese in America are subject to a situation where “racial exclusion or oppression and extraterritorial domination converge and interact . . . by creating a permanent

structure of dual domination that [creates] its own internal dynamics and unique institutions” (Wang 1995: 155). The overriding purpose of Chinese Americans should therefore be to liberate themselves from this condition, making the study of the condition itself—and the liberation strategies of all Asian Americans—the crux of Asian American studies. Recasting transnational community politics as defiance emerges as a key point, but Wang’s argument is as much methodological as it is theoretical. For it was only after recognizing “the inadequacy and inaccuracy of published Chinese and English language sources” that he concluded that “to fully understand the structure of dual domination . . . requires the incorporation of the perspectives, feelings and voices of Chinese Americans” (Wang 1995: 159). “With rare exceptions, the voices, aspirations and activities of the non-English speaking worlds of Asian America, both old and new, remain marginalized, if not neglected” in Asian American scholarship (Wang 1995: 149).<sup>5</sup>

Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* (1996) is also instructive, as it was an “early” call to reclaim the narrative of Asian American immigration as “the site for the emergence of critical negotiations of the nation-state,” which gives emphasis to the community’s “acts of labor, resistance, memory and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification.” Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, she writes, “have not only been ‘subject to’ immigration exclusion and restriction but have also been ‘subjects of’ the immigration process.” As such, argues Lowe, Asian Americans “are agents of political change, cultural expression and social transformation” (Lowe 1996: 8–9). What Lowe finds is an explicit, if theoretical, “place” for Asian American politics of which the American is only one part. “‘Becoming a national citizen,’” she continues, “cannot be the exclusive narrative of emancipation for the Asian American subject. Rather, the current social formation entails a subject less narrated by the modern discourse of citizenship and more narrated by the histories of wars in Asia, immigration, and the dynamics of the current global economy” (Lowe 1996: 33).

### *Transnational and Immigrant Politics Take Center Stage*

Three events in the 1990s—the Los Angeles riots, the fundraising scandals involving the Democratic Party, and the incarceration of the nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee—at once put a spotlight on the role of Asian Americans in domestic affairs and raised questions about transnational politics. The targeting of Korean American shopkeepers, first in Brooklyn and then in Los Angeles, prompted a reconsideration of the black–white paradigm in inner-city race relations (e.g., Kim 2000; Park and Park 1999); for others, the conflicts underscored the economic struggles of recent Asian immigrants (e.g., Min 1996) and brought to the fore political perspectives rooted in pre-migratory experiences and ongoing “homeland” ties with Korea (e.g., Abelman and Lie 1995). The spectacle surrounding John Huang and Yah Lin “Charlie” Trie, two high-profile Asian American fund-



**TABLE 1.1 INDICATORS OF ASIAN AMERICAN PROGRESS IN DOMESTIC ELECTORAL POLITICS, 1994–2004**

	1990	1992	1994	1995	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
<b>Voter Participation</b>									
% Foreign-born	—	—	78	—	79	78	79	79	76
% Citizens	51	53	55	—	57	59	58	62	69
% Registered	28	31	29	—	33	29	31	31	36
(among citizens)	(56)	(62)	(52)	—	(58)	(49)	(52)	(49)	(53)
% Voting	20	27	22	—	26	19	25	19	31
(among registered)	(72)	(88)	(76)	—	(79)	(66)	(83)	(63)	(85)
<b>Elected Officials</b>									
Federal	2	—	—	8	7	7	8	—	7
State	111	—	—	66	66	67	70	—	170
Local	185	—	—	157	181	187	231	—	378

Sources: Geron and Lai 2002: 49; Lien 2001a: 115, 2006a.

raisers for the Democratic National Committee who had Asian business ties, had even broader implications for transnational politics within the community. One was the media conflation of Asianness with alienness that stirred the nativist tendencies of American society and its longstanding fears of “foreign connections” and “intrigue.” But the second dimension, raised forcefully by Ling-chi Wang (1998), concerned the interrelated ideas of citizenship and extraterritoriality. Where U.S. campaign-finance law prohibits donations from “foreign nationals,” exceptions remain for permanent residents, including those who work in the United States for Asian-based parent corporations. Why did the investigation focus selectively on “Asian connections”—and why not on the murky area of the law as it applies to multinational corporations? “Are [Huang, Trie, and others who were implicated] representative of what Asian America has become in an age of transnational capital?” Wang (1998: 168) asked.

As Nakanishi (2001) points out, the racialization of the fundraising controversy not only threatened to have a “chilling effect” on community activism but overshadowed important achievements by candidates in the 1996 elections. Gary Locke’s victory in the Washington gubernatorial race—the first top-of-the-ticket success for an Asian American candidate outside Hawai‘i—was perhaps the most notable. Yet, as Table 1.1 shows, the 1996 election saw a slight decline in turnout from the previous presidential election year in 1992 (from 88 percent of registered voters to 79 percent), even as a slightly larger proportion of the population was naturalized and registered to vote. Locke’s win (along with Honda’s election to the California Assembly) notwithstanding, the total number of Asian elected officials remained consistent through the 1990s. When Lee’s battle with the U.S. government against the false charge of Chinese espionage became a pan-ethnic cause célèbre in late 1999, there were eight Asian American members of Congress—including the newly elected Representative David Wu of Oregon, the first person of Chinese ancestry to be elected to the House.

As Washington continued to place Asian Americans at the intersection of political controversy, communities in California, New York, Texas, and elsewhere were showing dramatic transformations as a result of Asian immigration and the influx of capital. Community-based studies of cities such as Monterey Park revealed the political pressures coming as a result of demographic change; they also suggested strategies for how Asian Americans might overcome nativist politics and attain local representation (e.g., Saito 1998). When the 2000 U.S. Census revealed continued growth from immigration and greater diversity, the political role of “new” groups—South and Southeast Asian Americans, in particular—took on greater prominence in research and introduced complexities into the “pan-ethnic question” and the efforts by groups such as the newly formed 80/20 Initiative to deliver an Asian American bloc vote. There was greater push, however, for Asian representation in the redistricting process. By 2004, it seemed to be bearing fruit with the number of local and state elected officials at unprecedented levels.

The research undertaken since 2000, with few exceptions, has continued to focus on domestic sources of Asian American political engagement and, more often than not, revolved around electoral politics.<sup>6</sup> With the proportion of the foreign-born in Asian America remaining profound, it is our contention that research on Asian American politics must broaden to consider the incontrovertible fact of immigration—and the role that transnational factors may play in forming a more holistic conception of Asian American political life.

### Why “Transnational”?

Throughout this book, you will see the term “transnational” used to describe activities of Asian Americans that, in a multiplicity of ways, have interrelationships with the political affairs of the Asian Pacific. Like the ongoing efforts by Asians to attain equal political standing in America, the use of this term has itself been met with controversy—at least within scholarly ranks. It is worth taking a moment to briefly describe these tensions to clarify what we mean by “transnational politics.” Doing so will help us to better position the chapters that follow.

Although the origins of “transnational” have been dated to a 1916 essay in the *Atlantic* magazine—“Trans-national America,” by Randolph Bourne—the term owes at least partial debt to political science in the 1970s, when studies in the field of international relations and political economy began to challenge what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1971) referred to as a “state-centric view of world affairs” and consider those elite institutions—burgeoning multinational corporations, the Catholic church, and so on—that transcend the power of national governments. The contemporary use of “transnational” to describe border-crossing activities “from below”—by immigrants, migrants, sojourners, and the like—became popularized by a workshop whose proceedings were published by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc as *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration* (1992). *Nations Unbound* (Basch et al.

1994), by the same team of anthropologists, would grow out of this project and would serve as a theoretical starting point for what can be considered a movement toward the transnational in race, ethnicity, and immigration studies.

Glick Schiller and her colleagues formally define transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1994: 6). For them, it is “a process by which migrants, through daily life activities and social, economic and political relations create social fields that cross national boundaries.” Most significantly, they argue that those who engage in transnational activities are “confronted with and engaged in the national building processes of two or more nation-states.” As such, “their identities and practices are configured by hegemonic categories, such as race and ethnicity, that are deeply embedded in the nation building processes of these nation states” (Basch et al. 1994: 22). In the view of *Nations Unbound*, the immigrant is no longer a subject forced to choose. Instead, she is an inherently political catalyst, driven by capital and information flows, capable of forging reconciliation out of the complex strands of cross-national social life and competing political pressures. For Glick Schiller and others, this reconciliation is built from common practices that keep networks alive: sending a remittance, chatting casually on the phone, attending cultural events, joining a local group, following the news.

This broad conceptualization of modern immigrant life has since been met with enthusiasm as well as skepticism (e.g., Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). The roots of both, to some extent, lie in differing disciplinary perspectives, for *Nations Unbound* was steeped in anthropological methods and critical theory; as it migrated quickly across the social sciences, the work seemed to both intrigue and frustrate sociologists, economists, and political scientists who wanted systematic data from which to draw more formal hypotheses and empirical tests. In a series of papers, Alejandro Portes attempts to “establish types” and “necessary conditions” for transnationalism (see, e.g., Portes 2001; Portes et al. 1999), arguing ultimately that “for the purposes of establishing a novel phenomenon”—keeping up social ties during or after migration was, as many were coming to note, nothing new—“it is preferable to delimit the concept of transnationalism to occupations and activities that require *sustained* social contacts over time across national border for their implementation” (Portes et al. 1999: 219; emphasis added). For Portes, practices that maintain one’s transnational social or political field, such as attending a rally or watching news about homeland politics, would not be considered transnational.

Thus, we are left with what one might consider “broad” and “narrow” conceptions of political practices that may be deemed transnational. The essays in this volume more often describe and analyze activities that adhere to a “broad” conception—the role of state-driven and diasporic “long-distance” nationalisms, domestic lobbies on behalf of homeland interests, and neighborhood groups that use homeland networks to forge change in local American politics. You may note further that we generally avoid the term “political transnationalism,” which,

following an important survey by Portes and Luis Guarnizo (Guarnizo et al. 2003), may imply a concrete and rigorous set of organizational activities. Rainier Bauböck's expanded notion that "political transnationalism is not only about a narrowly conceived set of activities through which migrants become involved in the domestic politics of their home countries [but] also affects collective identities and conceptions of citizenship among the native populations in both receiving and sending societies" (Bauböck 2003: 720) comes closer to ours.

The limitation in application to the Asian American experience, as we see it, is with the *-ism*: the implication that today's cross-border practices and multiple identities of (im)migrants may constitute a mass movement or emergent ideology akin to nineteenth-century and twentieth-century nationalism. We opt for "transnational politics," placing the emphasis on the latter term: the study of power relationships, among institutions and individuals, and the formation and role of attitudes, ideologies, and identities in the course of such interactions as they involve multiple nation-states. Given the long history of movements across the Pacific, we endeavor to bring current trends and resources in scholarship to bear on an improved description and understanding of such activities and relationships as they have existed, and continue to exist, for Asians in the United States. Such seems a necessary precursor to determining whether Asian American "political transnationalism" is an appropriate or fruitful avenue for future research.

## Questions

As scholars continue to grapple with the terms, meanings, and implications of race and globalization, we believe that the theoretical developments in migration studies by anthropologists and sociologists following the *Nations Unbound* project, and the cultural criticism in Asian American studies,<sup>7</sup> combine to forge an opportunity for returning to Nakanishi's admonition and viewing the participation of racial and ethnic groups in America in a more holistic way. Such a view not only refreshes unresolved questions about the antecedents of contemporary political behavior and roles played by states and institutions (helping to think again about the long-running idea of distinction: What, in fact, is "Asian" about Asian American politics?) but conjures a host of new ones concerning its systemic and recursive implications: how a politics that, thus far, has been discernibly local and often non-electoral may be linked to the broader political development and dynamics of the Pacific. Emphasizing the grassroots, it shifts elite-centered and unidirectional inquiries (e.g., What role do Asian Americans play in U.S. foreign policy?) into a broader rubric (e.g., What role are Asian Americans playing in the future and shape of democracy and political change?).

Although we hope that this volume can serve as a turning point, it is also somewhat of a maiden voyage. As such, it cannot address all of the areas of inquiry that a transnational lens compels. Given the growing diversity of Asian America, we also cannot claim to represent politics from every ethnic, national, or state perspective. The focus here is on transnational political activities that

involve Asian Americans, broadly defined, and involve sites that are in the United States. Two scholars of the Japanese American experience address politics before 1965, a landmark juncture in Asian American history, given the passage of the Immigration and Nationality (Hart–Celler) Act and the Voting Rights Act. The bulk of the essays focus on present-day politics. In doing so, we have sought to concentrate on what is “new” about Asian American transnational politics—namely, political attitudes, behavior, and styles that are manifesting from the modern abilities of Asians, through technological advances, policy reforms and economic development, to sustain country engagements at a higher frequency and lower cost and with the aid of potentially expanded networks.<sup>8</sup>

This book introduces original, contemporary—and what we believe to be representative—takes on the transnational political experiences of Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, and Vietnamese Americans, as well as interspersed discussion of the Korean and Cambodian American communities. Addressing a broader need for systematic, comparative data on U.S.–Asian transnationalism, we also offer two new analyses of rare, multiethnic surveys on Asian American political attitudes.

The ten contributions to this book cluster around three broad themes. Imbedded within each, readers will find multiple questions about the meaning and significance of transnational politics for Asian Americans:

### **What role do Asian states and nationalisms play in the politics of Asian Americans?**

The state, writes Margaret Levi (2002: 40), “is a complex apparatus of centralized and institutionalized power that concentrates violence, establishes property rights and regulates society within a given territory while being formally recognized as a state by international forums.” Yet such definitions, at the backbone of political science, remain incomplete for those studying racial and ethnic politics because they neglect three fundamental roles played by states: How they, to use Bill Ong Hing’s (1993) terms, “make” and “remake” their populations through their immigration policies, as well as their fundamental contribution to the broader socio-historical construction of race (Omi and Winant 1994). Moreover, as Ling-chi Wang (1995) points out in the case of China and America, states fundamentally contribute to the push–pull pressures on personal identities. While the transnationalism literature has been keen to question the Weberian “monopoly” of state power—giving emphasis to the new authority of the grassroots—it has also considered how states are persisting and transforming: how, in the face of globalization, they attempt to maintain a significant presence in the lives of their increasingly “flexible” and empowered citizens.

In the chapter that follows, Eiichiro Azuma challenges the idea that states—even those as formidable as imperial Japan at the turn of the twentieth century—ever possessed the capability to impose a singular “political will” on emigrants to America. Rather than as agents or pawns in geopolitical schemes, the Issei, Azuma argues, are better seen as an example of a racialized minority under attack

in America—and a group caught up in the exigent dilemma of local politics. Lacking power and in search of tactical resources, Azuma shows, they turned to transnational politics and formed a “strategic alliance” with Japan’s government and social elite to respond to one of California’s defining acts of institutional racism: the Alien Land Law of 1913. Although the public-relations “campaign for the education of white America” was able to temporarily house the community interests of Issei and the diplomatic concerns of Tokyo, officials worried about a rising anti-Japan sentiment, this “immigrant–state” partnership eventually faltered after California voters passed a follow-up to the law in 1920. Showing how immigrants may rely on homeland governments as “the only sovereign entities that [can] speak out and stand up for their subjects’ interests and welfare in America,” Azuma also provides a case study in the fragility—and perils—of such coalitions: how they can invigorate the charge of Asian “foreignness,” and how they may fracture when nation-states fail to see a compelling, long-term interest in the parochialized, and arduous, fight for their diaspora’s domestic civil rights.

Benedict Anderson’s idea of “long-distance nationalism” (Anderson 1998) has become a widely used framework for explaining the political loyalties that endure among migrants and immigrants, regardless of the state, place, or era in which they reside. Seeing such sentiments as facilitators of democracy and change, Augusto Espiritu tells a more recent story: of the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino* (KDP), or Union of Democratic Filipinos, a key element in the organized opposition to President Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s and 1980s. The KDP was founded on a “dual-line” agenda—one that treated equally the commitments to democracy in the Philippines and to socialism in the United States—but the group began to experience tensions when American-born members were treated by the Communist Party apparatus as Filipino nationals rather than as individuals with more complex, transnational interests. The strains between their “homeland” and American agendas, Espiritu notes, compelled a major debate over the movement’s identity, causing activists to reflect on their own position between the struggles taking place in both countries. As some took sojourns back to the Philippines, “journeys of discovery” retold movingly by Espiritu, KDP members found themselves pondering not only the future of the Philippines, but the global events of the time: the meaning of the war in Vietnam and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, two events that highlighted, particularly in the West, the nationalistic cracks within world socialism.

Today, the rapidly developing Socialist Republic of Vietnam—and the reactive, “long-distance” nationalism of Vietnamese Americans—offers a case study of transnational politics when the interaction is with a former adversary to the American state. As Hiroko Furuya and Christian Collet explain, the overseas Vietnamese community, politically re-centered in California, has built a grass-roots movement (“Saigon nationalism”) in congruity (and in diametric response) to the Communist Party’s own nation-building efforts following the collapse of

the Vietnamese economy in the early 1980s. The result: an ongoing debate on both sides of the Pacific about what it means to be Vietnamese. Unlike other groups, Vietnamese Americans have had limited success in Washington, in recent years seeing such “defeats” as diplomatic relations with Hanoi and American facilitation of Vietnam’s entry onto the global stage through the World Trade Organization. Yet at the same time that Vietnam emerged as a “tiger” economy, Vietnamese in America attained their own political teeth. As Furuya and Collet describe, the manifestations include frequently attended protests, but also the successful election of candidates who, at the behest of a growing bloc of older, immigrant voters, have used local resolutions honoring the flag of the former South Vietnam as a secondary form of transnational political expression. Yet as 1.5 generation representatives further this nostalgic vision of a “new nation,” the authors nonetheless find signs of change in the community: a growing willingness to peacefully recognize the Vietnamese state even as they assertively engage it through protest.

**What are the practices and sites of Asian American transnational politics—and how do they help to construct a more complete and unified portrait of community politics as a whole?**

Shaped by major surveys in the 1940s and 1950s, it was not until the 1970s, as the antiwar movement and the Civil Rights Movement converged into dramatic displays of collective action, that scholars began to take protest seriously as a form of democratic expression. At the time, demonstrations were still considered to be “anti-system” tactics on the periphery of democracy, a characterization that is perpetuated today in distinctions between “conventional” and “unconventional” or “electoral” and “non-electoral” modes of (what political science calls) “political participation.”<sup>9</sup> As we noted, only recently has this literature begun to recognize Asian Americans as active, democratic participants or acknowledge that non-citizens may engage in democratic politics, sometimes in unique ways and with greater vigor than citizens themselves. But equally rare is a consideration of what Doug McAdam (1998) calls the “international origins of domestic political opportunities”: the idea that participation by individuals and groups can be accounted for by variables that transcend states or national contexts. Along with expanding the literature on the Asian American experience, one of the goals of this volume is to broaden the way in which we think about American “participation”—and consider how common practices, by citizens and non-citizens alike, can be driven by, and have implications for, politics in the Asian Pacific and around the world.

Running for office may be one of those less common practices for politically inclined individuals, but candidates play a central role in Asian America, representing the passions and interests of a diverse community while articulating ideas for policy reform. Candidates are also the most visible form of leadership, and their successes are often hailed as marks of progress both in America and abroad. As Peter Kiang and Shirley Tang find in their comparative study of two Asian

American path breakers in Boston—Chanrithy Uong and Sam Yoon—transnational politics can play a significant role for candidates as individuals: the formation of their political ambitions as well as the development of their domestic-policy strategies once they have attained office. While the successes of Uong and Yoon were, in the broadest sense, made possible through global events and state policies (postwar migration from Cambodia and Vietnam and American admission policies), they were, echoing Azuma, facilitated by local issues and the immediacy of discrimination and representation. But Uong and Yoon possessed far greater legal resources than did California's Issei—namely, protections under the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act that seek to prevent language discrimination in public schools and in the distribution of voting materials. Such, Kiang and Tang find, were crucial factors in allowing a potential Asian American electorate to emerge and from which the two candidates could find a potential base of support.

Tritia Toyota takes the discussion across America to Los Angeles, where she introduces us to “New Chinese Americans” whose families fled China during the Cultural Revolution and eventually became part of a dramatic transformation in the political life of Southern California after 1965. These first-generation activists, Toyota points out, were not always so; their early impressions of politics were marked by the fear of exile and searing memories of violence. Yet after a period of American idealism—one in which many chose to naturalize—their ambivalence turned into “radicalization” and then action. She tells the story of “Stanton,” a frequent commuter to Taiwan, who questions his identity and fears “being dragged in” between the world's two superpowers, the United States and China, after a confrontation with FBI agents during the 1996 fundraising scandal. And then there is “Veronica” who, after seeing distance build between her children and their white schoolteachers in South Pasadena, organized with other parents to offer the teachers free trips to China to integrate more of the “local” into their school curriculum. As these new participants face their own marginality, Toyota says, their assertion of “Chinese-ness” has become “an aggressive strategy and a political statement intended to alter relations of power at home” in the United States.

A common line of criticism against those who participate in transnational politics is that such activities seek to manipulate American foreign policy toward the interests of one's home country—in some instances, going so far as to encourage the United States to undertake military action to satisfy the political pressure imposed by small “ethnic lobby” groups (e.g., Smith 2000). Looking at Indian American involvement in the India–U.S. Civil Nuclear Deal—an important event that represents a fundamental shift in America's strategic engagement with Asia—Sangay Mishra provides a different view of diaspora politics in the Beltway, showing how an “ethnic lobby” can agitate for peace as effectively as it can for conflict. Mishra also provides a portrait of Indian America that is less often seen in the media: one that is new but diverse, and a community that



effectively balances the strong ties to “home” with a fundamental commitment to American incorporation. But while much of Indian America remains mobilized by (and their leaders themselves employ) the nationalist rhetoric of the Indian state, Indian Americans, he argues, ultimately yearn to attain a political status in American democracy that compares to their socioeconomic status. Recognition in Washington is therefore fundamental. He terms this “creating space in U.S. politics.” But where the successful nuclear deal represented “maturity” and brought many Indian Americans together in politics for the first time, Mishra raises concerns about a strategy that places a heavy reliance on elites and projects Indian America as an untapped source of campaign donations. Nationalist rhetoric may be useful for short-term mobilization at the nation-state level, he concludes, but may ultimately be less effective than the broader-based South Asian coalitions that formed at the grassroots in response to anti-Asian hate crimes after 9/11.

In the end, as Michel Laguerre points out, transnational lobbies may be among the fastest ways for a new group to “create space” but are hardly the only effective strategy for diaspora to effect change. Taking a broad survey of contemporary Asian America, Laguerre argues for a “network governance” approach to community politics—one that, as he writes, emphasizes that today’s political arena is global, constitutive of a diasporic system with hubs located in “multiple sites.” Vietnamese American protests and Filipino American “overseas voting,” he argues, are emblematic of such network processes, working as they often do to draw diaspora and resources from different sites. Also important for Laguerre is the site itself. The United Nations, the White House, local consulates, even city hall: All attract diaspora politics because of their ability to draw attention to transnational political causes. “Sister-city politics”—the largely ceremonial relationships between American and Asian cities—may be the most intriguing form of all. According to Laguerre, these ties give transnational politics a certain “permanency,” providing the infrastructure for the regularized flow of resources and information. But more important, Laguerre argues, the relationships provide “a formal means to conduct these activities without raising eyebrows about one’s loyalty to one’s place of residence of country of adoption.” They are, at the core, exclusively local acts that call into question another of the state’s traditional roles: the conduct of foreign relations.

### **How are the political behavior and identities of Asian Americans shaped by their transnational ties?**

Even with protections secured under the Voting Rights Act, transnational politics remains a highly controversial act—one that is commonly seen by Americans as reflecting the inability of immigrant groups to, as John Quincy Adams once wrote, shed the skin of their history and “never to resume it.” But does engagement with the politics of one’s country of origin, or more generally in the Asian Pacific region, represent ambivalence toward America and signal a lack of interest

in its domestic politics? Does it, as Samuel Huntington (2004a, 2004b) and others have argued in the case of Latinos, weaken the ability of the newly arrived to become incorporated into American society?

Pei-te Lien and Janelle Wong offer a detailed response. Presenting evidence from the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey, and drawing hypotheses derived from work on Latinos, they find that transnational politics not only varies in style for immigrants from Asia but is linked to activism in the United States in forms that, as we noted earlier, have not always fit into scholarly conceptions of political engagement. Aside from Vietnamese Americans, few, in fact, engage directly in activities related to their “home” countries—a finding parallel to those found among Latinos—but many more engage in what Lien and Wong consider a broader form of transnational political behavior: keeping up with current affairs in Asia. Both types of engagement, they find, have little direct influence on the registration and voting patterns of Asian Americans; they are instead part of a wider incorporative process that is undergirded by organizational activity. Lien and Wong find, moreover, a positive relationship between the time an Asian immigrant has spent in America and her participation in transnational politics, suggesting that domestic institutions may have a role to play in facilitating cross-border engagement along with lingering cognitive attachments and extant social networks.

“The question of identity,” writes Mary Waters (1999: 44), “has always been particularly salient for the immigrant.” For Asians arriving in America, however, the question “Who am I?” takes on an even more complex meaning, as multiple races, nations, and ethnicities converge on a response that is not only dependent on situation and context but, as Lisa Lowe, along with David Palumbo-Liu (1999) and Arif Dirlik (1999), notes, is rooted fundamentally in domestic political struggle. If we are to reposition the study of Asian American politics toward a more transnational perspective, it therefore becomes important for us to consider how transnational engagements may influence the identity formation—and transformation—of Asian Americans themselves. Where Azuma, Espiritu, Kiang and Tang, Toyota, and Mishra touch on the regions of conflict that transnational politics imposes on Asian American identities, it is negotiation and reconciliation in identity choice that anchor the final two chapters in this book.

How have Asian Americans reconciled transnational linkages with “Americanness”? Hiromi Monobe looks back to early-twentieth-century Hawai‘i and two Hawaiian-born Nisei, Shunzo Sakamaki and Masao Sakamoto, for answers. The two men came from considerably different backgrounds, writes Monobe, but were shaped by a sentiment prevalent among Issei at the time: that the second generation serve “the great mission” of bringing better understanding between the nations across the Pacific. For Sakamaki and Sakamoto, and the rest of the Nikkei community on the islands, the daily exercise of Japaneseness, not to mention frequent exchanges with Japan, was not only compatible with, as one slogan put it, “100 percent Americanism,” but it posed a direct challenge to the deep-seated “new nation” view of American assimilation. Yet in spite of their ideals,

both men saw the scourge of structural racism in Hawai'i and were themselves shaped by a competing notion of racial and nationalist expansion: that promoted by Imperial Japan. The reconciliation lay in successful and sustained American incorporation—a process that, if necessary, demanded the renunciation of Japanese citizenship. As they saw it, incorporation would earn respect in Japan by showing the unique ability of Nikkei to contribute to the development and cultural “education” of Americans; at the same time, such accomplishments would earn respect for Japan within white America.

Is Hawai'i—the “paradise of the Pacific,” as Monobe writes, and the site of the most Asian American political success—unique in this regard? What has changed since Sakamaki and Sakamoto? Are members of the “new” first generation, in fact, living more transnationally than those of the past? And if so, how is this affecting their sense of self and their affiliations with Asian America? With such questions lying at the heart of recent discussions in Asian American studies, Collet and Ikumi Koakutsu provide a response, using the results of a San Francisco Bay Area survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the *San Jose Mercury News* in 2004. Finding that most Asian Americans, including those who have yet to naturalize, use some form of pan-ethnic identification—an inherently political identity, as Collet and Koakutsu argue—the analysis reveals that few can be labeled transnationals, making frequent trips to the country of origin. But akin to the widespread cognitive attachments to Asian affairs found by Lien and Wong, the survey shows that a large majority of Asian Americans have in fact made at least one sojourn “home.” Transnationalism, thus strictly defined, tends to erode the first generation's use of the “American” label, they conclude, but it is an activity driven in part by the experience of American racism. As such, the findings underscore the transnationalism-as-response-to-exclusion current that runs through many of the essays in this book.

### Convergence: Asian Americans as Transnational Political Actors

We are writing at what is both a dynamic and precarious juncture in Asian Pacific democracy and in American democratic politics. A “great powers” era symbolized by Richard Nixon's classic toast of Zhou Enlai in 1972 has given way to an era in which Asia's most recognized political figure in America is not a head of state but a transnational activist: the Dalai Lama. As the cause of Tibet increases pressure on China to democratize, Malaysian bloggers with ties to Silicon Valley led the first change in party government in nearly fifty years. In Singapore, the government of the Philippines “beta-tested” a web-based system that will eventually allow its diaspora around the world to vote in national elections—a move that could have a considerable impact on the country's growing opposition movement. In Seoul, newly elected President Myung Bak Lee is battling to keep his pro-Washington government alive following donations gathered and promises made about citizenship reform during his campaign—in Los Angeles. Even

in Japan there are rumblings of change after gains by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the 2007 upper-house elections suggested the rise of a competitive party system. With regard to an Asian American Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, or Madeleine Albright, as Evelyn Hu-DeHart (1998: 20) put it a decade ago, little has seemingly changed—even as tense issues such as the development of nuclear weapons in North Korea might oblige the emergence of just such a celebrity.<sup>10</sup> But today, the question is arguably as much about American and global public opinion as it is about state-to-state relations. In the ashes of the discredited neoconservatism of Francis Fukuyama (2007) has arisen the cosmopolitanism of a Fareed Zakaria (2008); Asian intellectuals such as Kishore Mahbubani (2008) are gaining followers in Washington by explicitly confronting “Western Triumphalism” and the “end of history” thesis that enticed American policymakers in the 1990s. The basis of political power, to put it simply, is widening—and it is through a wider, more democratic perspective that we are better able to observe signs of change in democracy itself. Whether it is the billions of dollars sent in remittances from America, the millions of hits on Asian news websites,<sup>11</sup> or the thousands of votes cast by overseas residents in Asian elections, it would seem as if the ability of Asian Americans to participate in—and influence—the affairs of the Asian Pacific today is unprecedented.

Such could be said, too, for politics in America. YouTube, Facebook, and other social networking sites are not only transforming how candidates are running for the presidency but are on the verge of bypassing the “mainstream media” as the choice for a new generation to learn, express, and contribute. More voters are going to the polls; more are paying attention to debates. Record amounts of money are being raised online in small donations. But where transnational politics may offer a certain sense of efficacy for the cosmopolitan activist, the 2008 election in the United States has seen in this democratic revival reminders of some of the country’s more disturbing tendencies: the baiting of China for working-class votes, the mockery of India, the rigidity of the black–white paradigm in its racial dialogue, broad questions of patriotism and loyalty that seek to distinguish “them” from “us.” The perspectives of Asian Americans would seem to be crucial in such an environment. But when they are considered, they remain distorted by poor data; more often, they are overlooked. In spite of the dramatic avenues opening for “new” types of participation in American politics, many of the “old” barriers remain.

It is such an environment—of dynamism and of distortion—that compels the study of Asian American politics and, we would argue, necessarily draws its students back to Nakanishi’s admonition. To paraphrase Shirley Hune (2001: 235), we believe the transnational dimension should not be treated as a privileged location *per se* but as an “enlarged terrain of analysis whereby the national and international dimensions of Asian American experiences are recombined to rethink and reconceptualize the complexities” of the contemporary political world. Or, as Portes (2003: 874) succinctly puts it, “Transnationalism represents a novel perspective, not a novel phenomenon.” But given

the controversy that has consistently surrounded the idea of a politically active Asian America, not to mention a transnational politics practiced throughout history by American immigrants, we would be remiss if we did not return to Hu-DeHart's broader concerns. Does globalization in the end, she asks, contribute to a broader place for Asian American politics? Or does it merely condemn the community to a politics that is "forever foreign"? On the heels of Locke's landmark victory, she wrote:

In short, can Asian Americans such as Gary Locke claim what Schell calls "ethnic nationalism" without jeopardizing their cultural and political citizenship in the United States? Can these two sources of pride, identification and belonging be compatible, or must they ultimately clash, at least where Asian immigrants and their descendants in America are concerned? If Asian Americans are to assume the role of "bridge builders" across the Pacific, helping to link the United States more closely to Asian countries, what are the opportunities and the risks, the promises and the perils? Is this even a "natural" role for Asian Americans to undertake? (Hu-DeHart 1998: 3)

Our view remains cautious. What a transnational framework may aid to an academic's perspective, transnational activism itself may prove risky to the practitioner. But while we ask you to consider these overarching dilemmas for today's Asian American politics as you read this book, we also ask that you not be burdened by them. Such questions cannot inspire a search for answers until scholars and students accept the fundamental role played by Asian Americans as transnational political actors and dissolve the conception that even the most prosaic, localized activism is defined by, or confined to, the locality itself. Perhaps even more important, such questions cannot be addressed until more Asian Americans are able to participate effectively in the American political system. As all of these essays point out, transnational politics has indeed been a source of peril, but it has also been a source of opportunity—and ultimately a resource for a population that will continue to navigate political systems, in the United States and abroad, that remain structured around the principle of exclusion.

## Extending the Bridge

The metaphor of the bridge, as Monobe's story of Sakamaki and Sakamoto reminds us, has been an enduring one in studies of migration and politics across the Pacific. This volume not only seeks to extend the idea by applying a broad, transnational frame to the study of Asian Americans in the political life of the United States, but endeavors to extend the bridge a bit further. What tools are available, and what changes are required for us to analyze Asian American politics in such a way? The implications of applying a global framework to a politics that has typically been viewed through a American-centered prism of local, state, and federal not only asks for a reconsideration of vocabulary. It suggests certain practicalities. Political science, to cite the discipline with which we are most

familiar, has not only struggled mightily with the idea of race in American society, as Rogers Smith (2004) points out, but has grappled with understanding the active role of states in the promotion of population design (e.g., Zolberg 2006), as well as a recognition of the larger empirical problem of methodological nationalism (e.g., Glick Schiller 2006; Johansson and Vifell 2006; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Throughout the social sciences, more generally, is the age-old tension between advocates of qualitative methods and those who see quantification as the fundamental basis of science. These divisions become particularly manifest when the social sciences encroach on newer, integrative fields such as Asian American studies, where the humanities—history and literature, in particular—are deeply rooted.<sup>12</sup> Despite a mutually shared concern for voice, barriers imposed by jargon remain.

The two Nisei, as Monobe describes, were part idealist and part pragmatist—dreaming of Hawai‘i as a haven for Pacific integration but, in the meantime, undertaking the grunt work of empowerment—in Sakamoto’s case, compiling what may have been one of the first data sources on Asian American voter registration: the *Nisei Nenkan*. In somewhat the same way, we believe that Asian American politics, viewed transnationally, offers a gathering place for working through some of the strains between theory and practice between the disciplines and, perhaps more crucially, between American and Asian scholarship. It is our wish that this collection, with contributions by Japan- and U.S.-based researchers in the fields of history, anthropology, education, political science, American studies, Asian American studies, and Asian studies—many of whom are anchored by their own “lived simultaneity” in Asia and America (to borrow phrasing from Glick Schiller 2005) and employ source material in multiple languages—will serve as a step in such a direction: toward a more focused research agenda; toward a richer dialogue among those who pursue it; toward, ultimately, a greater public understanding of Asian America.