

Foreword

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When the “Bridges” project was first conceived in 1994, it was with a notion that two striking trends were affecting life in the United States at the close of the twentieth century. These two trends needed to be studied together. It had been generally acknowledged that many countries in the Asia Pacific region were quickly becoming growth models for the world and were playing an increasingly important role in the international economic and political arenas. The second phenomenon related to the explosive growth of the Asian American communities in the United States. Although both of these trends had been widely known and reported, there was not much discussion of the relationship between them. As we assembled our advisory committee and began working with our co-organizers, Leadership Education for Asia Pacifics (LEAP) and the Asian American Federation of New York (AAFNY), it became very clear that the increased economic power of many Asian countries, combined with the more visible presence of Asian Americans, affected the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of Asian Americans at home and abroad. Much of the complexity of this reality, however, found limited exposition in academic circles and was conspicuously absent from public discussion.

Keeping in mind this need for further discussion and new scholarship, the Asia Society launched a major initiative entitled “Bridges with Asia: Asian Americans in the United States,” consisting of regional roundtable discussions, research studies and essays, a national conference, and print and electronic publications. From its very inception, taking into account the diverse patterns of immigration and distinct histories of Asian countries with the United States, the project was intended to highlight the experience of the individual ethnic communities as well as to focus on those topics that may transcend national and ethnic boundaries. To illuminate the complexities of the Asian American experience in a transitional context, and the permeability of identity issues in the globalizing arena, the project was designed to be

multidisciplinary, bringing together historians, policy experts, artists, and community leaders.

Another unique feature of the project was its national dimension. As we assembled our advisory committee, it became evident that we needed to take into account not only the ethnic and cultural variations within the Asian American communities, but also the distinct regional nature of these communities' American experience. In other words, Asian connections of a particular Asian American community and the relationships among the diverse groups at the domestic level would be quite different in Houston from those in Los Angeles or New York. In order to understand these regional differences, we organized a series of meetings in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. These meetings were held in addition to our ongoing discussions with the advisory committee in New York. All of the scholars who have written for this publication went to most of these cities to meet with the local Asian American leaders, and with scholars and activists in related fields, to gain insight into the regional differences of the Asian American experience.

One of the most striking features of these gatherings was the enthusiasm and willingness of the local participants to engage in the international dimension of their experience, which they felt had often been lacking in the more typical Asian American discussions. Similarly, the scholars were often surprised to hear the local variations of the hypotheses they had begun to develop. They were also genuinely pleased to participate in a more community-based dialogue that could help expand their more specialized academic pursuits. A number of articles in the volume refer to these regional discussions.

As a leading organization dedicated to fostering better understanding between the United States and the Asian countries, the Asia Society has increasingly played a vital role in creating connections between Asian Americans and Asia and among the various Asian American communities. In addition to developing a stronger focus on programs dealing with Asian American themes and issues at all of its locations, the Asia Society has made a special effort to serve as a catalyst in creating a national forum for Asian American issues. Recognizing the need for a more nuanced understanding of Asian societies and Asian American complexities, the Asia Society has developed a series of initiatives ranging from art exhibitions to national conferences. "Bridges" was an integral part of this overall objective to infuse the institution with the spirit of Asian American issues and to better understand their role in the multifaceted connections that have been, and continue to be, established between the United States and Asia.

Clearly, such an unprecedented undertaking would have been beyond the expertise of the Asia Society staff; nor would we have presumed that we

could proceed on our own. The active collaboration among the Asia Society, LEAP, and AAFNY at all levels of the project was crucial to the conference's successful outcome. Both J. D. Hokoyama of LEAP and Cao O. of AAFNY were invaluable in their advice about the potential reaction of the communities to the proposed program. With their help and input, we were able to organize an impressive list of members for a program advisory committee. It was one of those unusual committees in which people were not simply lending their names, but were committed to participating fully and were active in helping us shape the agenda for the national project. All of them are acknowledged in the report on the national conference, which was published by the Asia Society in 1997.

"Bridges" was an unusually complex project, involving extensive planning meetings, regional discussions, a national conference, published reports, and this important volume. It is doubtful that we could have gone ahead with this ambitious task had it not been for our major supporters and funders. I would especially like to thank the Ford Foundation for providing major support for the research-oriented aspects of the project. Dr. Mahnaz Ispahani was not simply a program officer, reacting to what we applied for and giving us the necessary funds; she was an active member of the advisory committee, giving us valuable feedback at the conceptual and intellectual levels as well as suggesting names of scholars and topics for potential inclusion in the project. We benefited tremendously from her insightful observations and critical comments as she shepherded the project through the Ford Foundation. The Starr Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation also provided early support for the national conference, and we are deeply grateful for their willingness to become engaged with a project that, at the time of its inception, seemed futuristic. Our special thanks also go to AT&T for providing corporate sponsorship for the project.

A number of people have worked hard to make the "Bridges" project a great success. At the Asia Society, I would like to thank Dr. Marshall Bouton, our executive vice-president, who was an early champion of programs dealing with Asian Americans at our institution. His keen intelligence and his expertise on sociopolitical and economic issues were crucial in our formulation of the project. Sayu Bhojwani and Sunita Sunder Mukhi in their respective positions as program managers worked hard to bring the project to full fruition. All of the writers who were commissioned to write for this volume have been active supporters of our efforts and have participated fully in all aspects of the project, from traveling throughout the country to conduct regional meetings to presenting papers at the national conference. We are grateful for their commitment and patience as we prepared the volume for publication. Most important, our deepest gratitude goes to

Evelyn Hu-DeHart, the academic editor of this volume who has worked tirelessly to make it conceptually cohesive and organizationally attractive. I also would like to acknowledge our partners at Temple University Press, who saw the value of the publication and made an early commitment to publish it as part of their Asian American series.

When we began this project in the fall of 1995, we had a palpable sense that we were ahead of the curve: most long-active members of the Asian American communities were not quite sure how the international issues would really help the cause of creating a greater presence of Asian Americans on the national front. The international policy and business experts, on the other hand, were aware of the potential of Asian Americans to provide special connections to the so-called Asian miracle. Much has changed in the ensuing two years. Controversy over campaign financing has brought the connections between domestic Asian American issues and their international context to a new level of concern and interest. On the economic front, the Asian “miracle” is beginning to have more of a “meltdown” feel in the current economic climate. Professor Hu-DeHart has elaborated on these issues in her introduction.

Arguably, the need to understand the complexities inherent in the experience and aspirations of Asian Americans has never been greater. It is our hope that this volume will open doors to new forms of inquiry and further exploration of the multiple facets of the Asian American experience.

INTRODUCTION

Asian American Formations

in the

Age of Globalization

EVELYN HU-DEHART

TRANS-PACIFIC ARTICULATIONS

Less than one year after his election as governor of the State of Washington in the Pacific Northwest, Chinese American Gary Locke undertook an official journey to China that included a brief stop at tiny Jilong, his ancestral village in Taishan County, Guangdong Province, in south China (Postman 1997c, 1997d, 1997e). This triumphal ceremonial homecoming of the immigrant's son who had made good in America can easily be the emblematic performance for all Asian Americans at the end of the second millennium, for it captured in a brief script all the conflicting thoughts, beliefs, and expectations by Asian Americans of themselves, and of Asian Americans by others, on the crowded world stage.

Key among those family members who accompanied Locke was his savvy 80-year-old father, the immigrant from the village, who long ago adopted the quintessentially American name Jimmy and Anglicized his Chinese surname to remove any obvious trace of ethnic accent. Patriarch Jimmy publicly lamented not having insisted more forcefully that young Gary learn Chinese from his

grandmother in Hong Kong, to whom he had been sent when he was ten and from whom he fled after only a short stay. Jimmy knew that his son's lack of fluency in the Chinese language severely weakened the connection to his Chinese culture (Postman 1997a).

Then there is the large Asian American community, represented by those such as Daphne Kwok, executive director of the Organization of Chinese Americans. This community was also justifiably proud of one of its own. To Kwok and other representatives of Asian American organizations, Locke's election elevated him to a symbol of minority success in America. For Asian Americans specifically, he represented a "tremendous role model." Furthermore, Kwok was curious to find out after Locke's mission to China whether, when he returned, he really was "able to do more in China than someone who is not necessarily Chinese American" (Postman 1997a).

Echoing Daphne Kwok but in a different way, Orville Schell, one of America's leading China observers and currently dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, pronounced Locke's history-making trip to China part of the recent surge of Asian economic and commercial power around the Pacific Rim, representing "another piece to the whole Pacific Rim puzzle being repossessed by ethnic Asians, particularly by Chinese." To drive home his point about "race and pride" exemplified by Locke and other prominent Asian Americans, Schell named the phenomenon "ethnic nationalism" (Postman 1997a).

China could hardly contain itself, its glee and pride illustrated by the simple headline reclaiming the "dutiful son" on the cover of a national government-published magazine: GARY LOCKE, DESCENDANT OF TAISHAN, TO RETURN. President Jiang Zemin expressed his "personal pride," and local Taishan officials hoped out loud that Locke's ethnic roots would bring an economic boom to the area (Batsell 1997).

Finally, an exuberant Gary Locke, first Asian American elected governor outside Hawaii, registered distinct reactions to these varied comments. First, he simultaneously paid homage and reconnected himself historically to his roots by remarking that "the people of Taishan, the Chinese people, have given their blood, sweat and tears to the prosperity that America now enjoys." He also delighted in displaying his cultural competence about how things are done "over there," explaining to a non-Asian American reporter that his mission "was very successful in helping establish the personal relationships that are so important to conducting business in Asia" (Batsell 1997; Postman 1997b). While in his ancestral village, in what was probably a less-guarded moment, he expressed consternation at the open sewers, with their stench of "garbage and human waste," and thanked his immigrant father for making possible his more comfortable life in Washington State (Postman

1997e). But most resoundingly, he declared in no uncertain terms: "I am proud to be Chinese. But I am thoroughly American" (Postman 1997a).

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? Should someone like Governor Locke, just because he happens to be of Chinese descent and heritage, be expected to take a larger-than-usual role in this enterprise, and what cultural capital is he presumed to possess that would make him more successful in this endeavor than non-Asian Americans if he does not even speak Chinese anymore? Would Gary Locke be equally effective if he were to lead a mission to any other Asian country simply because he is Asian American? Are his Chinese cultural roots and competence transferable from one Asian context to another? Would Asian political and economic leaders be more likely to see him as a successful Chinese or Asian American with some natural or primordial affinity to them, or as another powerful American politician with pragmatic interest in the Pacific Rim?

One of Asian America's preeminent role models at the close of the twentieth century, Governor Locke appears to guide his fellow Asian Americans to cast their gaze spatially across the Pacific, thus temporally projecting themselves into the next century, which has already felicitously been dubbed the "Pacific Century." This is our future, he seems to proclaim, because as Asian Americans, we have the cultural attributes and personal connections to lead the way. To be fair, Governor Locke has also reminded Asian Americans not to forget past struggles in America, to dignify their roots, and to validate their history.

When the Asia Society convened a national conference in New York City in May 1996 to discuss the issue of Asian Americans as physical and metaphorical bridge builders to the Pacific Rim and the next century, it was following up on a theme first articulated at the society's 1991 national meeting in Los Angeles. In fact, it was none other than Mike Woo, then a Los Angeles city councilman and Democratic Party activist, who extolled his fellow Asian Americans as "translators" and "go-betweens" for the Asian and American cultures, thus projecting a "hybrid role" for Asian Americans (cited in Ong 1993: 768) in the Pacific Century of the New World Order. This theme has been picked up repeatedly by Asian Americans and others in the 1990s,

more recently echoed by another prominent Asian Californian politician—this time, the Republican Matt Fong. In January 1996, Fong pronounced California, with its large Asian American population, poised to become the “capital of the Pacific Rim” (Fong 1996).

Actually, Woo, Fong, and the others have picked up and are renarrating an already well-articulated theme concerning certain Asian populations around the Pacific Rim, including those in the United States, who have been variously dubbed “Sons of the Yellow Emperor,” alluding to the Chinese (Pan 1990); “global tribes” and “global diasporas,” referring to Chinese, Japanese, and South Asians (Cohen 1997; Kotkin 1992); and, within certain academic circles, “postcolonials” and “transnationals” living in a state of “postmodernity” (Ong and Nonini 1997). These are Asian cultural and ethnic groups that, over the course of the past three centuries or more, have dispersed themselves and settled in many locations around the Pacific Rim, from Asia to North and South America. In many cases, their arrival predated the advent of European colonialism; they then interposed themselves between colonial masters and colonized natives by functioning as traders and entrepreneurs, and occasionally as government contractors and civil servants. Finally, they lived through national liberation movements to witness their “adopted homelands” becoming independent countries and modern nation-states.

Even after independence, however, these highly mobile cosmopolitans have continued in the role of “essential outsiders” (Chirot and Reid 1997). Incompletely integrated into the newly independent states carved out of colonial empires, they have become the “Jews of the East” (Kotkin 1992: 170). Shut out of politics, which has reverted to the control of indigenous groups, they have gravitated toward commerce and finance, building on “primordial” ethnic ties, networks, and webs to gain competitive advantage. Their collective identity and mutual trust allows for an easy flow of personnel, technology, and, most important, capital across regional and national boundaries around the Pacific Rim (Chirot and Reid 1997; Kotkin 1992; Pan 1990; Seagrave 1995; Weidenbaum and Hughes 1996).

In the post-Cold War era, when the world became a more harmonious whole, according to this narrative—and as Southeast Asian countries positioned themselves to enter the new global economy and join Japan, then South Korea, as smaller economic “tigers” or “dragons”—the diasporic groups, especially the “overseas Chinese,” seemed best poised to lead the move toward this New World Order. With their deterritorialized social identities—meaning that they identify first with their co-ethnics wherever they are rather than submit to the hegemonizing claim of exclusive citizenship demanded by a single country or nation-state (Cohen 1997: 157)—they are a perfect match for the postmodern global capitalist ideology: both hold

an equal disregard for national boundaries, especially where trade, labor, and capital are concerned. As Robin Cohen, the British sociologist of global diasporas, notes: "There is no longer any stability in the points of origin, no finality in the points of destination, and no necessary coincidence between social and national identities" (Cohen 1997: 175). This deployment of "flexible citizenship," to borrow a term coined by the anthropologist Aihwa Ong (1993), does not serve as a liability; rather, it explains these groups' success. "Chronically insecure" because they are "constantly uprooted," they carry permanently a "refugee mentality" and thus expect little of the state or society in which they settle. Instead, they depend largely on family and kin, on "self-reliance," and on a deep reserve of personal connections (*guanxi* in Chinese) (Kotkin 1992: 185).

Most Western observers have focused on the Chinese, the largest and oldest diasporic Asian ethnic group. In the past few years, a spate of books have been published in the United States by academics and journalists attempting to capture the particular ethos of these hard-driven global capitalists. These sensationalized titles reflect a kind of admiration, to be sure, but they are also prone to exaggeration and betray fear; they can also engender loathing. Two examples stand out and illustrate the point: *The Bamboo Network: How Expatriate Chinese Entrepreneurs Are Creating a New Economic Superpower in Asia* (1996), by the business professors Murray Weidenbaum and Samuel Hughes, and *Lords of the Rim: The Invisible Empire of the Overseas Chinese* (1995), by the journalist Sterling Seagrave.

These books have helped popularize a rearticulated and now oft-repeated neo-Confucian notion to explain Asian successes in the newly globalized Pacific Rim economies. The best spokesmen for these culturalist arguments are none other than Asian leaders themselves, notably Singapore's founding premier and current elder statesman, Lee Kuan Yew, and his neighbor Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the long-time prime minister of Muslim Malaysia. Ironically, these leaders once blamed Confucianism for stifling the entrepreneurial spirit, holding it responsible for Asia's backwardness and failure to modernize (Woo-Cumings 1993: 138). Today, Lee Kuan Yew and company are recycling Confucianism to form the basis of a regional ideology about "Asian values" that have created an "Asian model" or "Asian spirit" of capitalism. Lee, Mahathir, et al. are fond of subjecting the Western "ethos of individualism" to unfavorable comparison with the Asian "communitarian ethos," where family duties and community obligations come first. Asian culture is first and foremost a "culture of discipline": discipline in politics, in the family, and at the workplace (Jayasuriya 1997: 19). Discipline in turn leads to order, and order leads to productivity. In the words of the eloquent Lee Kuan Yew: "The expansion of the right of the individual to behave or misbehave

as he pleases has come at the expense of orderly society. In the East the main object is to have a well-ordered society so that everybody can have maximum enjoyment of his freedoms. This freedom can only exist in an ordered state and not in a natural state of contention and anarchy" (Wong 1994).

Hard work, self-sacrifice, delayed gratification, and love of learning are other important components of Asian values. Again, listen to Lee Kuan Yew in his pointed analysis of why the United States is perceived in Asia to be morally weak and economically vulnerable: "If you have a culture that doesn't place much value in learning and scholarship and hard work and thrift and deferment of present enjoyment for future gain, the going will be much slower" (B. Wong 1994). In case Lee Kuan Yew did not make his point clearly enough, one admiring Western observer drives it home this way: "For the first time since the beginnings of the industrial revolution, the superiority of Western standards of organization, production and technological development have been called into question by the success of a distinctly alien form of capitalism" (Kotkin 1992: 117). Asian neo-Confucianists would flatly and unabashedly claim not only that the Asian model of capitalism is superior by virtue of its cultural underpinnings, but also that disciplined Asians enjoy ethnic and cultural superiority over the decadent West as personified by the United States (Pan 1990: 245). Fortunately for the United States, these Asian values have been carried across the Pacific by generations of Asian immigrants.

If Jimmy Locke, the family patriarch and small shopkeeper, represents an example of the original Asian America—an identity that arose during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, when young Americans of Asian descent claimed their rights and their place in this society after a long history of social and legal exclusion—his son the governor heralds the new Asian America. This Asian America has been replenished and revitalized by a tremendous wave of new immigration from Asia, because the Civil Rights movement also reopened the doors of the United States to racialized Third World peoples. For the first time in American history, immigrants from Asia have been given full access to naturalized citizenship; furthermore, they and their children are welcomed into an America that has been newly constructed as multicultural and pluralistic. As a result, the U.S. government has formally adopted what was at its inception an oppositional political concept and converted "Asian American" into a public-policy and census category to measure American diversity, along with "African American," "Hispanic," "Native American," and, of course, "white."

From fewer than one million all told in 1965, the number of Asian Americans in the United States has grown to exceed ten million in the waning years of the twentieth century, making Asian Americans the country's

fastest-growing racial-ethnic population. This also means that the vast majority of the Asian American population—70 percent or more—are of the immigrant generation; that is, they are not U.S.-born. If that alone is not enough to make this one of the most dramatic postwar demographic stories, the growing complexity and diversity within this category truly makes it noteworthy. No longer just Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese, the group is enhanced by a long list of post-1965 immigrants distinguished by ethnicity and nativity, such as South Asians, Koreans, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Thais, Hmong, Pakistanis, Indonesians, Malaysians, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, Burmese, Okinawans and “others,” to catch all those not numerous enough to merit their own name yet (LEAP/UCLA 1993: 64; this list is presented in order of numerical size according to the 1990 census).

The Japanese are no longer immigrating to the United States in a significant way. The other original immigrant groups—Chinese and Filipinos—however, have continued to come in ever-larger numbers. In the case of the new Chinese immigrants, the designation “Chinese” increasingly signifies merely an ethnic identity rather than nationality or nativity, for these immigrants now come from a variety of places, such as Taiwan, Southeast Asia (Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia), and Hong Kong, not to mention the Caribbean and Latin America. The same is true of many identified as “South Asians,” for they may have been multigenerational residents of various African countries before settling in the United States, and “South Asian” is itself a broad category masking sharp distinctions among Hindus, Ismailis and other Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, and others (Kotkin 1992: 205).

Families and children now characterize most new Asian immigrants, resulting in a population that—along with Hispanics, the other large new immigrant group—is younger than the rest of American society and enjoys a good gender balance. Generational distinctions within communities that have both old and new immigrants are stark and signify other differences, such as degree of assimilation into mainstream society. And although Asian immigrants were once almost uniformly poor and rural in origin, and were relegated in the United States to the working class or agricultural and small commercial sectors, today’s new immigrants are more likely to be middle class and urban in origin and to make cities their choice for settlement. In addition, many are equipped with considerable education and other human capital that is serving them well in post-Civil Rights America, which officially does not condone racial and ethnic discrimination (Liu and Cheng 1994). Furthermore, these highly skilled, talented, and motivated Asian immigrants were perfectly positioned to benefit immediately from affirmative action—originally enacted in the mid-1960s to help African Americans overcome centuries of slavery and racial segregation—because eligibility for the program

was extended to all other “minority” groups just as these Asian immigrants were arriving in large numbers. Consequently, many new Asian Americans have managed to attain the American Dream in far less than a generation’s time.

Certainly, collectively and as an aggregate, these immigrants have an impressive profile backed up with strong statistics, even when compared with white Americans. According to the March 1996 “Current Population Survey,” Asian Americans are younger and better educated than the rest of America: a whopping 41.7 percent have a college degree, compared with only 23.6 percent for the rest of America. Asian Americans also have stronger “family values,” as measured by their much lower divorce rate, which is just 3.8 percent, compared with 8.9 percent for other Americans aged fifteen and over (*AsianWeek* 1997b). While they make up only 3 percent of the U.S. population overall, Asian Americans make up 5 percent of college and university students. Even more impressive, at the most selective institutions (e.g., Stanford, the “ivies,” the top University of California campuses), this number rises as high as 30 percent or even more. A recent audit of the Small Business Administration (SBA), an affirmative-action program, disclosed that Asian American-owned small businesses accounted for nearly 24 percent of the total contracts awarded in 1996 (Sharpe 1997). It stands to reason that mainstream America, duly impressed by these indications and abetted by an eager media hungry for success stories in the midst of persistently failing long-time U.S. minorities, would anoint Asian Americans the “model minority.”

For those Asian Americans who have even a cursory knowledge of the history of Asians in the United States, the “model-minority” construction stands in sharp contrast to the stereotype of the disease-ridden, racially inferior, inherently unassimilable nineteenth-century coolie, a group that was collectively captured as a “yellow peril” that had no place in a dynamic society characterized by robust republican ideals. But today, although many are clearly uncomfortable with unsolicited attention paid to their successes, it would be disingenuous for Asian Americans to dismiss all evidence of their rapid upward mobility in American society as simply renewed racist fabrications. Perhaps the more appropriate question and concern is how best to manage these images and explain Asian American behavior and practices to the rest of American society, mainstream and marginalized communities alike.

One thing is clear: the perception of Asian Americans’ success is inextricably linked to the group’s largely immigrant nature. Asian Americans are touted for their discipline and hard work, devotion to family, communitarian ethos, and reverence for learning—the same Asian values that Lew Kuan Yew has been so effectively propounding as essential “Asianness.” Furthermore,

this success came at a time when the Asian economic tigers were “driving the engine of world growth into the 21st century” (Bello 1998) and China had opened up to foreign investment; a time when foreign investment was flowing into Asia unfettered, and exports were flowing out unrestricted, creating impressive growth rates. These two narratives, which accompanied, respectively, the arrival of new Asian immigrants in America and the extension of globalization to the Asia Pacific region, converged to produce the articulation of a new narrative: Asian Americans as transnationals and bridge builders on the Pacific Rim. As a grand, new narrative, it also posited an articulation between Asia and America, with Asian Americans as the primary instrument of this linkage and connection.

Transnationalism can be defined generally as the “process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement . . . [and] whose social fields . . . cross geographic, cultural and political borders.” Furthermore, these particular immigrants make decisions, develop identities, and experience life in a “network of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states” (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994: 4–22). Given modern technology and communications systems, most immigrants today are probably transnational to some degree in that they do not pick up all roots and sever all ties—physical, emotional, economic, social, cultural—to one place before forming new ones in another; nor do they immediately transfer their allegiance from one to the other. Modern transnational migration is inextricably linked to the forces of global capitalism, as capital and labor move, and are moved, constantly across borders.

Certainly, it is within this context that so many Asians have migrated to the United States and continue with many transnational practices. The term “bridge-building transnationals,” however, refers mainly to middle-class and upper-class immigrants who establish ties, and sometimes citizenship, in two or more places out of desire and necessity. These privileged immigrants, some of whom are already practiced diasporics such as the Chinese, “have the resources to negotiate and exploit the varied conditions of commerce and family residence” in different countries (Ong 1993: 753). The most amusing characterization of Asian transnationals are the aptly named “astronauts,” in reference to the inordinate amount of time and energy these people spend in “orbit,” vaulting across the Pacific to monitor their transpacific investments (S.C. Wong 1995; Ong 1993). More common are well-educated, professional, and technically trained Asian Americans—who may be U.S.-born but are more likely immigrants with Asian-language skills—who work for U.S. companies in Asian countries, or, conversely, who work for Asian companies in the United States. Many others follow the flow of mobile capital as part

of the Pacific “brain flow” (Asia Society 1997: 28, 68). Another kind of transnational Asian American is represented by Jessica Elnitiarta, the daughter of the ethnic Chinese global capitalist and Indonesian national Ted Sioeng, who like many Thai and Indonesian Chinese uses a “native” name. She immigrated to the United States and has established residence in that important Pacific Rim node Los Angeles, where she can better take care of her father’s manifold investments, which include a Chinese-language newspaper in the new “Chinatown” of Monterey Park (Risen 1997).

Transnational or otherwise, model minority or not, middle-class, upwardly mobile Asian Americans do desire respect and acceptance from mainstream American society. In a recent column, the print journalist Bill Wong frankly suggested that many Asian Americans aspire to capture the attention of, and seek validation from, mainstream or white America “at some point in our lives.” Of course, he also hastened to add, Asian Americans and other “non-whites” would also relish seeing a brown-skinned young person, such as the self-described multiracial (but mostly Asian) Tiger Woods “[whupp] the butts of the white establishment, and [do] it with aplomb, style and elan” (Wong 1997). The prodigious Democratic Party fund-raiser John Huang also cited as motivation the need to increase the influence of Asian Americans “within mainstream American society” (*AsianWeek* 1997a).

Precisely to gain entree into mainstream American society, a parade of Asian American “advocacy” groups have appeared over the course of the past decade, most with “inside the Beltway” offices in Washington, D.C. These organizations bear names such as National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, Organization of Chinese Americans, National Korean American Social and Education Consortium, American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, Filipino Civil Rights Advocates, and, the most visible of them all, the bipartisan (but mostly Democratic) Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Institute, best known by its acronym CAPACI.

These organizations’ major goal during the Clinton administration, especially after his reelection, was to place at least one Asian American in the cabinet, building their strategy around an “ascent to the Capitol” (Wu 1996). On the top of a wish list that was actually quite realistic was placing someone such as Chang-lin Tien, at the time the outgoing chancellor at Berkeley, in the cabinet as secretary of energy or education. Among Tien’s many achievements was the distinction of having raised more money for the prestigious campus than any of his predecessors, in large part by tapping into his many lucrative Asian connections. Tien has often noted that Asian Americans are “best positioned” to break down “cultural barriers” standing in the way of U.S.–Asian political and business relations. “Versed in both the American mainstream culture and in an Asian ‘home country’ tradition,

Asian Americans are uniquely poised to promote understanding,” he has said (Asia Society 1997: 17–18).

Indeed, the Asian American advocacy groups veritably demanded a presidential appointment at the highest level of the federal government as their well-deserved reward for raising and contributing millions to the president’s reelection campaign. Tien’s ascendance to the cabinet would be the strongest signal yet that Asian Americans had arrived on the American national political scene, a validation of the calculation that they must seek political clout in order to protect their economic and civil-rights gains in this society and guard against continuing anti-Asian bias, stereotyping, and violence. It would also challenge the glass ceiling that has presented an obstacle to professional, well-educated Asian Americans’ reaching their full potential, denying them leadership opportunities in America’s institutions and businesses, a point that Tien is also fond of noting (Asia Society 1997: 18).

For successful Asian Americans, it would seem, there is enormous promise in assuming the bridge-building role and in engaging America with Asia. It is as if the frightful old “yellow peril” has been transformed into an overachieving “homo economicus,” a version of the model-minority formula (Ong 1993: 764–65) refurbished by “Asian values.” But old barriers to Asian American integration into American society remain, and new ones are still being erected. If opportunities arise to boost Asian American centrality in American society and culture, hidden dangers and incalculable risks may also lurk in the wings.

The essays presented in this volume explore the relationships and interactions of Asian Americans in the international context of the Pacific Rim, examining new meanings and practices of Asian Americans in “postality” (San Juan 1998: 157)—that is, the post–Civil Rights, post–Cold War, post-modern, and postcolonial era. Or, in short, in the new era of globalization. They open the discussion but in no way exhaust the topic. They should provide some answers to the field of Asian American studies, which has been both energized and troubled by recent trends toward transnationalism and diasporic studies, and which in other ways has been internationalizing its focus. They should also address some questions for the field of Asian studies, whose practitioners are now wondering out loud how, precisely by internationalizing themselves, Asian Americans, given their biculturalism and transnationality, might help frame new approaches to the study of Asia and its subjects. They also probe into what the commentator and Howard University Law School professor Frank Wu calls the “contradictions of transnationalism” (Wu 1997b), and what Sau-ling C. Wong, professor of Asian American studies at Berkeley, warns of as the “denationalization” of Asian Americans and the increasing “permeability” between Asians and Asian Americans

(S.C. Wong 1995). They interrogate old, and speak to new, Asian American formations in this age of globalization, when the Asia Pacific—David Palumbo-Liu suggests—may have become a “transnational imaginary” (Palumbo-Liu 1999).

Arif Dirlik examines competing orientations facing most Asian Americans today, informed in part by contrasting self-images—that is, whether to look toward the Pacific and hence the “future,” or toward their historical legacies in the United States. He sees the new spaces created by globalization and transnational Asian capital at the root of this dilemma between the present and the past, challenging the original ideal that community played in the formation of Asian American consciousness. Changes in the subject matter of Asian American studies, from community-based to diasporic orientations, reflect these changes in Asian American subjectivity. He argues that “the idea of Asian America needs a remapping of the United States, Asia, the Pacific, and the world that is different from the one that produced the original formation of Asian America less than three decades ago.” Ultimately, the question is a matter not of ethnic destiny, but of political choice.

In her essay, Lucie Cheng inquires into the impact of the much-touted arrival of the Pacific Century—the rise of the little dragons, the formation of the Pacific Rim economy—on the Chinese in America, their objective condition as well as their changing self-perceptions. She examines the pivotal role that Chinese Americans are playing in the restructuring of U.S.–China relations, not so much in terms of foreign and diplomatic relations as in terms of economic, social, and cultural ones. In this transpacific economy, Chinese Americans are both beneficiaries and victims and can simultaneously contribute and pose challenges to global capitalism.

Le Anh Tu Packard narrates several case studies of Vietnamese Americans engaging with the newly opened economy of their former homeland, then assesses the significance of this engagement to determine whether policies are affected—for example, whether such engagements present the possibility of influencing U.S. economic policy toward Vietnam. Although the relationship between Vietnamese Americans and Vietnam is based primarily on economic exchange, noneconomic considerations of a powerful personal and emotional nature often matter more. Packard also provides interesting comparisons between the perspectives of Vietnamese in Vietnam and their Vietnamese American “cousins.”

Paul Watanabe examines Asian American activism in U.S. foreign policy, in part to test the thesis that immigrants and the immigration process are the most important determinant of American foreign policy. In other words, he poses the questions: Are Asian Americans motivated and equipped to become more involved in influencing U.S. foreign policy regarding their

homelands? To what extent are they successful? Where are the opportunities, and what are the constraints? He emphasizes that transformations in both the domestic and international contexts may promote or retard Asian American efforts to influence U.S. foreign-policy-making and are crucial in shaping eventual outcomes.

With the passage of California's Proposition 187 in 1995, immigration once again entered the American political scene as a hotly contested issue; the ensuing nativism once again became a troubling phenomenon. Neil Gotanda examines the history of anti-Asian nativism through the series of immigration and naturalization laws, as well as Orientalist constructions of Asians in the United States, framing his analysis within the methods and theories of critical race theory. Throughout, he demonstrates how domestic and foreign policies in the United States mutually act on and influence each other.

Beginning with the premise that Asian Americans—visible as a racial minority yet forever perceived as “foreign”—are vulnerable targets at the intersection of international and domestic tensions, Setsuko Nishi analyzes how U.S.–Asian tensions, when linked to domestic strains, put Asian Americans at risk when there are outbreaks of anti-Asian sentiments and behavior. Nishi's essay studies the interplay between international events and domestic anxieties as they affect American attitudes toward Asian Americans, based on content analysis of a large sample of U.S. newspaper articles from 1989 to 1995.

For Luis Francia, the notion of “home,” fundamental to all cultures, begins as a specific site anointed as the matrix of a particular culture. But with global transformations resulting from the movement of people and capital, and the rapid advances in communication, old notions of home and roots have been rendered old-fashioned and meaningless. We close this volume of essays with Francia's critical reading of some well-known Asian American literary works—from the pen of firmly established, canonical writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Carlos Bulosan to lesser known, emerging writers such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and R. Zamora Linmark, and many in-between—where a consistent theme has been the imaginative, often painful, rethinking of what and where home is, both for the original immigrants and for their American offspring.

THE MORNING DELUGE

Since the end of 1996, events have overtaken the United States and Asia in ways that had not been foreseen. When these essays were originally conceived, and the first drafts were completed in fall 1996, both Asian America and the

Pacific Rim were riding high; since then, both have crashed. First, several Asian American individuals were accused of illegal campaign fund-raising activities, influence-peddling, and complicity with Communist China to infiltrate and corrupt the American presidency. Then, almost a year later, severe currency devaluations, rapid withdrawal of foreign investment, and overproduction in once-vibrant Asian economies led to near-meltdowns and impending misery for untold millions of common people around the Pacific Rim.

All hopes of seeing an Asian American in Clinton's cabinet were dashed, especially when the leading candidate, Berkeley's Chancellor Tien, was tied by his own fund-raising for the university to Mochtar and James Riady—Asian donors to the Democratic Party whose money was deemed illegal (Rosenfeld 1996). The advocacy groups, which until recently felt flush with arriviste fever in the nation's capital, scrambled angrily and frantically to defend themselves against the unfortunate fallout affecting all Asian Americans—which often scapegoated them in a grossly unfair way—from the well-publicized misdeeds of a few individuals identified as Asian Americans.

How did it happen that Asian Americans were fund-raising at such a frantic pace for President Clinton's reelection? The campaign-finance scandal revealed that the White House had targeted the prosperous, increasingly middle-class Asian American community for money and votes. By taking a softer position on immigration issues, the Democrats expected to swing considerable Asian American support in their direction, and away from these voters' previous propensity to support Republicans (Rogers 1997; Kranish 1997). The Democrats had set their sights even higher when it came to prying money loose from Asian Americans, targeting them for \$7 million in campaign donations (Weiner and Sanger 1996).

The plan misfired, however, when ordinary Asian Americans did not step up to the donation plate in anywhere near the numbers projected (Squitieri 1997). In a survey conducted in June 1997 of the Chinese in Los Angeles, a predominantly immigrant community (87 percent), 84 percent said they had never given to political parties, and 60 percent of those indicated that they were unlikely to do so (Kang 1997). This posed a big dilemma to those designated to raise the \$7 million, led by John Huang of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and aided by Asian Americans such as Maria Hsia, a long-time Democratic Party activist in southern California (Sterngold 1997). The money gap also created space and opportunity for self-appointed fund-raising freelancers, such as Johnny Chung and Charlie Trie, to step up their efforts and thereby gain favor with the president and party in power (Johnston 1998).

While their personal histories were different in significant ways, these individuals shared a background of having immigrated from Taiwan in the

1970s and 1980s, and each in his or her own way exemplified the practices and subjectivities of transnational Asians in the United States. As the Berkeley professor and Asian American activist Ling-chi Wang pointedly noted at the outbreak of the campaign-finance scandal, the individuals involved were virtually unknown among established Asian American groups working for Asian American empowerment, especially at the grassroots and community levels, until trouble broke (Wang 1996). John Huang—undersecretary of commerce before moving to the DNC—was, however, acquainted with the Beltway Asian American advocacy groups, especially CAPACI, which represented appointed Asian Americans in the federal government. Moreover, he was a member of the exclusive, if not exactly secretive, Committee of 100, formed by some of the most prominent Chinese Americans after the Tiananmen Square massacre to act as a watchdog group on how the U.S. media and the U.S. government deal with China and U.S.–China relations (Asia Society 1997: 63–64).

Mostly on their own and without coordinating all their efforts, these largely Chinese American fund-raisers tapped into “overseas,” or transpacific, connections, calling on *guanxi* (personal relationships) to raise the millions of dollars from mostly ethnic Chinese capitalists in places such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Macao (Cooper 1996; Gerth and Labaton 1996; Lowry 1997; Sanger 1997; Sun and Pomfret 1997). As for the now-infamous Riady family of Indonesia who employed John Huang before he catapulted into the upper echelons of the Clinton administration and the DNC, President Clinton had maintained a long-time association with them dating back to his earlier political career in Little Rock—a significant source of *guanxi* (Adams 1995, 1996). Smaller amounts were raised from Asian immigrants in the United States, including from nuns who presumably had taken a vow of poverty (Rempel 1998).

While influence-peddling and selling access to high government officials and political leaders are part of the American political game (Polsby 1997; Van Natta and Fritsch 1997)—as Roger Tamraz, another immigrant entrepreneur, so gamely testified before the Senate hearings on the fund-raising scandal (Rosenbaum 1997)—the Asian American fund-raisers for the Democrats unfortunately accomplished their task in ways that were often clumsy and unsophisticated. Untutored as they were in necessary skills to finesse the intricate web of U.S. campaign-finance laws and regulations, they were charged with illegal solicitation methods and with soliciting from illegal sources. Ultimately bit players in the big drama of America’s corrupt system of moneyed politics, these foreign-tinged, transnational Asian American fund-raisers garnered more than their share of blame and media attention—much to the chagrin of a larger community of Asian Americans eager, ironically,

to shed their image of “foreignness” by becoming more active in mainstream American politics.

Not long after the campaign-finance scandal broke, with Asian American fund-raisers and Asian money at its center, the Asian miracle began to unravel fast over in Asia itself. Whatever the immediate reasons for the collapse—too much foreign borrowing, too little reinvestment of profits into the domestic consumer market—pundits and analysts now soberly acknowledge that Asia’s “fast-track capitalism” had been a ticking time bomb (Bello 1998; Borosage 1997; Richburg and Mufson 1998). Bruce Cumings, the noted scholar of modern Asia who coined the amusing term “Rimspeak” for all the hype that had surrounded the rise of Asia’s economic power, warned even before the collapse that the Pacific Rim was a “capitalist archipelago,” with Asia functioning primarily as the “workshop of the world,” using cheap and efficient labor to manufacture exports for regions with vast consumer buying power, notably the United States. In this archipelago, some nodes on the rim—Singapore, Hong Kong, and Los Angeles, for example—formed the capitalist elite of “transnational power . . . intertwined in various networks and educated in top U.S. and British universities.” At the bottom was the majority of the population in Asia, who “are either out or participate only as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers” (Cumings 1993: 33–34).

Another perceptive analyst of the Asian miracle, Bruce Koppel, distinguished between the “buoyant” sector, characterized by “high growth, increasingly modern consumption patterns, and significant dependence on critical resources (labor and savings),” and the “other” Asia, which he depicted as the “reservoir of human resources for national development but characterized by low economic growth, traditional low productivity problems, and patterns of exclusion which prevent extensive productive crossover into the buoyant sector” (Koppel 1997: 5; emphasis added).

To put it mildly, global capitalism has been uneven (San Juan 1998: 8, 13–14, 198–200, 221–25). In fact, for the vast majority of Asian peoples, it has been exposed as a cruel hoax, as desperate, laid-off female Thai factory workers recently confided to the *New York Times* reporter Seth Mydans, whose article carried the stark headline: THAILAND ECONOMIC CRISIS CRUSHES THE WORKING POOR (Mydans 1997). Calling it an “underside to the boom,” Mydans reported that fully 60 percent of the country’s 60 million people remain poor, while half of the nation’s wealth is in the hands of the richest 10 percent, producing one of the sharpest gaps between rich and poor in the world. One Thai economist frankly admitted that “the role of the poor in the boom has been to create the wealth. . . . Now when the boom turns to slump, some of them will be cast aside, and they have nothing to cushion them at all.”