

# Introduction

RAJINI SRIKANTH AND MIN HYOUNG SONG

Beginning in the eighteenth century, Asians in America have been considered abstract representatives of a faraway and exotic civilization, bodies supplying labor, a corrupting presence, an unwelcome “invasion,” and, when their numbers increased, a peril.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this discursive history, many writers, artists, and activists have had to invest much effort in making manifest the alternative figure of the Asian American as a complex being with multidimensional motivations and histories that resist simplistic understanding. Asian Americans are, in this counterdiscourse, an assemblage of diverse geographies, journeys, and experiences. The term *Asian American* at the time of its provenance referred to Asians within the United States. Today, the field of Asian American literary studies draws on a wider terrain than just the United States. “Americans” refers to the Americas, a vast region including Latin America and Canada.<sup>2</sup> The field works, as well, with a more complex understanding of “Asian,” its referents spanning more than the countries of China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. The field of Asian American literary studies uses the term *literature* in a generous way, to think about the complex array of expressive modes many Americans of Asian ancestry have adopted to give form to their lived experiences, disappointments, and aspirations.

This literary history raises the following questions: What pressures does the birth of a novel racial and political consciousness bring to bear on established ways of communicating ideas, expressing values, and conjuring beauty? How might an emergent literature alter our ideas about what should count as literary? In what ways might such a literature have to come up with its own traditions, and, in the process, set itself up as a distinct set of literary texts with its own sets of conventions and prescriptions? The payoff for assaying such questions is a renewed sense of the literary borne out of a constant interrogation and examination of forms of articulation, and a simultaneous embrace of craft and context. Such an approach to literary study that privileges both aesthetics *and* context is made necessary by the ways in which Asian

American literature arose as a creative endeavor out of a specific generative moment. The current historical moment is particularly appropriate for a history of Asian American literature. The writings are abundant, the field of Asian American literary studies is robust and vibrant, and there is a clear sense of an aesthetic trajectory covering more than one hundred years.

A literary history is different from a history of events, or ideas, or institutions. The focus of a literary history is on the ways in which literary works build upon each other in deep communication: formal innovations and codifications of convention inspiring further innovation and codification; mediums, modes, genres, and subgenres dancing into and out of existence as each generation of writers and the masters of each generation leave their mark on what came before; a tracing of lines of development out of an otherwise vast and possibly incoherent mass of writings that suggest rationales for the choices authors make; and an examination of the equally immense body of scholarly writings that have sought to illuminate, make sense of, order, and even prescribe what we think of as worthy of aesthetic appreciation. This is an incomplete listing of the tasks that a literary history can assign itself. What is common to all of these efforts is the sense that the “literary” has an internal reason that might be in communion with the social (in which we include the political, cultural, and economic) but is also separate from it. They are two worlds.

The space between literary and social worlds grows thin, and the two worlds may even intimately intrude upon each other, when what becomes identified as literature is inextricably linked with a political context. Such is the case with Asian American literature, which has unavoidable political origins and makes only incomplete sense without an understanding of these extraliterary beginnings. The category “Asian American” emerged from the social and political movements in the United States of the late 1960s and 1970s. Those involved in these energetic and robust struggles were individuals with ancestries from the countries of East Asia (China, Korea, and Japan) and the Philippines. Groups from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and West Asia – the Middle East – were later additions that vastly complicated and enriched the terrain of Asian American writing. The early Asian Americans (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino/a) demanded full membership in the U.S. body politic and an acknowledgment of their many contributions to the country. One mode in which the men and women directly connected to these movements gave expression to their demands was literature. In doing so, many felt frustrated by the extant creative traditions available to them. Such traditions seemed unable to give shape to the concerns they were trying to explore, and,

in some instances, available literary conventions seemed to hinder and actively exclude the range of experiences they wished to illuminate. In response, these budding writers advocated for the invention of a different kind of literary tradition founded on a system of values that ran counter to what was dominant at the time. Asian American literature as we understand it today makes no sense without a broad appreciation of what came before this generative moment and what was – for some practitioners, problematically – made possible after.

More than other kinds of literature, Asian American literature's history demands attention to forces that lie beyond the boundaries of what we most typically consider as literary. The reason is that the central early innovators of this body of writing, the ones who gave us the category to work with in the first place, defined literature in a capacious manner to encompass not only the written word in its novelistic and poetic varieties but also as connected to music and theater. Always at the forefront of such a definition, and the reason for its elasticity of meaning, was the rejection of the aesthetic as a category solely preoccupied with its own formal brilliance. Art had to be about something else. It was supposed to do something in the social world. It served a purpose greater than itself. It was a companion to the political, not something that stood above and removed.

What made the idea of Asian American literature revolutionary – made it a rejection of the dominant thinking about literature at its time of invention – was precisely its refusal to view literature as a set of formal properties defined outside the flow of social concerns. Looking back at what has become of this legacy, Chris Iijima, the lead singer of an influential Asian American musical group called Yellow Pearl (or alternatively A Grain of Rice) and later in his life a law professor, observes: "Asian American culture is too often defined backwards. That is, we tend to define it in terms of what artists do – poets, playwrights, filmmakers, jazz musicians, actors, and graphic artists – rather than in terms of the collective and shared experience of people. I've always believed that artists, despite what they themselves believe, are really just reflections of the time."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in a deeply sensual paean to Asian American poetry where she compares the experience of reading a poem to the act of drinking and savoring a full-bodied wine, the poet and literary essayist Eileen Tabios offers excerpts from a range of Asian American poets – Arthur Sze, Marilyn Chin, Erik Chock, Janice Mirikitani, Meena Alexander, Vince Gotera, Mitsuye Yamada, and Christian Langworthy – and expertly intertwines a focus on aesthetics with social and political concerns. She writes, "[W]hen it comes to poetic form, the Asian American poet's concerns – to the extent that one understands that such factors as racism and objectification have afflicted Asian

America – might also lead to the rupturing of traditional poetic forms which predominate in the literary mainstream. I, for one, am interested in disrupting narrative in my poems as a result of exploring issues of colonialism and postcolonialism.”<sup>4</sup> But, she also recognizes, because she is a poet, that “before poets come to write something that is later labeled ‘oppositional’ they may have intended something else, including simply trying to develop their craft.”<sup>5</sup> This volume on the history of Asian American literature seeks to maintain the productive and rich tension between craft and context. We do not see them in opposition to one another or even in a relationship of asymmetrical power, but as equally valuable contenders for the writer’s and the reader’s attention.

For example, Julie Otsuka’s novel *When the Emperor was Divine* (2003) embodies the seamless melding of aesthetics and politics in Asian American literature. The mainstream reviews of the book laud her finely chiseled prose, likening it to an exquisitely cut gem or meticulously executed miniature, even as they acknowledge its subject matter, which is the highly political and historically fraught interlude in twentieth-century U.S. history of the Japanese American internment, or incarceration, as many scholars have started referring to this historic event. In a provocative essay on Otsuka’s novel, Tina Chen (a contributor to this volume) takes up the question of ethics in how we read or respond to this work. She asks whether it is ethical to read Otsuka’s use of generic identifiers – woman, girl, boy, and father – for the Japanese American family as a universalizing move to gesture to any group of people having to confront arbitrary displacement, loss of home, and removal of loved ones from families. In her argument she notes that though the bulk of the novel may be constructed as a universalizing move to erase “Japaneseness,” the author abandons this technique in the final chapter and forces the reader – through the use of the second-person mode of address “you” and a marked shift in tone – to respond to the father as a person of Japanese descent and to confront and engage his deep sense of betrayal and rage as he accuses the U.S. government and the American people of their racism against, and hostility toward, him.<sup>6</sup>

In organizing this history of Asian American literature, then, we have sought to foreground what is innovative about it by following the lead of historian Gary Okihiro. In *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, he advances the notion that it is Americans on the margins who challenge the nation to live up to its professed ideals. From this perspective, Asian Americans have from very early times demanded that the United States match practice to rhetoric. They have asserted their presence, performed their resistance, and articulated their complex experiences and longings. More than

a century of writings by Asian Americans have generated a richly textured body of literature worthy of analysis for complexity of form, range of thematic concerns, and undeniable contribution to the cultures of the United States. What makes these writings unique is the ways in which they hinge on the political.

Even as they challenge their relegation to the margins of U.S. history, politics, and culture, however, Asian American writers are not free from the tendency to draw boundaries of their own. Given that the beginnings of the Asian American movement in the late 1960s featured as its central players Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans, these groups became the unquestioned members of the recently articulately political identity. Yet, ironically, as Michael Omi has pointed out, precisely at the moment when the immigrant landscape of the United States was being profoundly changed by the repeal of exclusionary immigration laws, Asian America was articulating its identity and proclaiming its membership as largely East Asian and Filipino/a.<sup>7</sup> The boundaries of Asian America were being tightly delineated even as immigrants from other parts of Asia, such as South Asia (comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were arriving. The arrival of these groups would soon challenge the limits of Asian America.

In the discussion that follows, we take up a few works that are considered central to the understanding of Asian American literature. We engage them briefly so as to provide the framework for the literary assessment of these writings and to acquaint readers with their impact on the field. Our contributors examine these and other writings more fully in this volume. The literary history we wish to recount is one of creative invention. Literary works became fashioned through the fire of a specific political movement into a type of expressive articulation that would inform the shape of future work, even if writers in subsequent decades rejected some of the movement's core assumptions. It is helpful to consider these core assumptions as providing writers with the type of aesthetic scaffolding that literary scholar Alastair Fowler describes in a classic study of genre: "Far from inhibiting the author, genres are a positive support. They offer room, as one might say, for him to write in – a habitation of mediated definiteness, a proportioned mental space, a literary matrix by which to order his experience during composition."<sup>8</sup> Many aspiring self-fashioned Asian American writers understood all too well during the movement days that they were both forging a new literary tradition and reshaping an existing American tradition. We are all heirs to their invention, whether we consider ourselves Asian Americans or not, and

we are beneficiaries of the range of creative expressions that this inventing has enabled. Helena Grice, in her monograph on Maxine Hong Kingston, explains that Kingston saw herself in *China Men* as continuing in the vein of William Carlos Williams, creating a mythic voice and reshaping American literary expression, experimenting “with a way to tell the story of a culture of story-tellers”<sup>9</sup> and doing so in “an American language that has Chinese accents.”<sup>10</sup>

### Asian American Literature and the Nation-State

The permanent physical presence of Asians in the Americas can be traced back to more than two hundred and fifty years ago, to at least as early as 1763. This is when Filipino sailors working on the Spanish galleons of the Manila trade arrived on the coast of Louisiana and, jumping ship, established the first continuous Asian settlement of St. Malo.<sup>11</sup> In the same century, Indians from India were manumitted from slavery in the British colonies of North America. Indians from India also marched in the Fourth of July parade of 1851 to celebrate the fact that these colonies no longer existed, having been replaced by an independent nation.<sup>12</sup> There are historical documents that show that these events occurred, although their particulars have not come to us from the individuals who participated in them. Certainly none of the historical records can serve as evidence of these individuals’ attempts to give aesthetic shape to their thoughts, longings, or disappointments. Asian bodies occupied the physical terrain of the New World and were present as the Americas were carved up into a series of nation-states, but Asians lacked the opportunity to contribute to the national literatures – and especially the most dominant of these, the U.S. national literature – that would eventually spring from this long history.

It is no wonder that when writers connected to the Asian American movement began to consider what it meant for them to write as Asian Americans, their conversations were most urgently directed to the nation-state to which they felt they belonged but by which they were not recognized as belonging. In 1972, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong published a literary manifesto in the guise of an introduction to their coedited collection *Aiiiiieee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*. They declared that they were rejecting “[s]even generations of suppression under legislative racism and euphemized white racist love.”<sup>13</sup> They were casting off the destructive effects of Asian Americans’ internalized racism. No more “self-contempt [and] self-rejection” (xii) for them. They were writers of a “whole voice” (xii) entirely their own, a new language forged from the

depths of their seven generations of experience on U.S. soil – the hardships, resistance, resilience, and triumphs. Asian Americans are, they said, “not one people but several – Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and Filipino Americans” (xi).

This thematic proclamation, while troubling in several ways (and which future writers and critics would significantly revise), offers a productive starting place for a consideration of what makes Asian American writing unique. The coeditors in their introduction disdain the writing of those authors whose narratives and representations of the Chinese American experience – they are especially critical of Chinese American writers – pander to white readers’ expectations to create the formulaic “Chinatown book” whose “essence . . . was, ‘I’m American because I eat spaghetti and Chinese because I eat chow mein’” (xvi–xvii). They conclude their introduction with the assertion:

The Asian American writers here are elegant or repulsive, angry and bitter, militantly anti-white or not, not out of any sense of perversity or revenge but of honesty. America’s dishonesty – its racist white supremacy passed off as love and acceptance – has kept seven generations of Asian American voices off the air, off the streets, and praised us for being Asiatically no-show. . . . [I]t is clear that we have a lot of elegant, angry, and bitter life to show. We know how to show it. We are showing off. If the reader is shocked, it is due to his own ignorance of Asian America. We’re not new here. (xxii)

The Asian American creative voice that this document describes is one of anger and pride. This voice demands recognition of the Asian presence in the United States and acknowledgment of Asians’ contributions to the building of the country. It rejects the ways in which Asians in the United States are socialized into being passive and compliant, perceived as being effeminate, made to forget their own manly history in constructing the transcontinental railroads, and unappreciated for their endurance through challenges like lynching by nativist groups and laws that made it impossible for Asian women to join Asian men, resulting in the emergence of large bachelor societies.

The robust claiming of a “whole voice” found in *Aiiiiiiii!* is also evident in Frank Chin’s plays *Chickencoop Chinaman* and *The Year of the Dragon*, which were staged in 1972 and 1974, respectively. Tam Lum, the Chinese American writer-filmmaker protagonist of *Chickencoop Chinaman*, declares, “[I]n the beginning there was the Word! Then there was me! And the Word was CHINAMAN. And there was me. I lipped the word as if it had little lips of its own. ‘Chinaman’ said on a little kiss. I lived the Word! The Word is my heritage.”<sup>14</sup> The emphasis in this soliloquy is on how language has shaped,

and confined, what the speaker can imagine himself to be. He is reduced to a single word: CHINAMAN. The word becomes an agent capable of speech, made singular and formal through capitalization as if it were a surname of some sort. The “Word” enunciates into being Tam, who is thus reduced to what is spoken. Language speaks its racist meaning through Tam, and Tam is merely the effect of language. In response, the soliloquy in its verbal play and dazzling discombobulation seeks to undo the limited meaningfulness of such language, ripping a hole in ordinary speech in order to make it possible for a different meaning to be spoken.

Chin’s later novel *Donald Duk* (1991) continues and refines this assertion of a voice that has systematically been voided of possibility; it lambasts the U.S. public school system as the instrument of state socialization and compliance that keeps the country ignorant about the accomplishments of its racial and ethnic minorities. The Word’s power is maintained, then, by institutions like the school that determine what can and cannot be said. The protagonist is Donald Duk, a twelve-year-old boy who in his dreams resurrects the contributions of the Chinese American railroad workers. His father is impatient with Donald’s complaint that his teacher is ignorant about the Chinese contribution to the railroads and the history books’ silence about this valuable labor. His father exhorts Donald:

History is war, not sport! You think if you are a real good boy for them, do what they do, like what they like, get good grades in their schools, they will take care of you forever? . . . You believe in the goodness of others to cover your butt, you’re good for nothing. So, don’t expect me to get mad or be surprised the *bokgwai* never told our history in their books you happen to read in the library, looking for yourself. You gotta keep the history or lose it forever, boy. That’s the mandate of heaven.<sup>15</sup>

Notably, the emphasis in this passage is not on the power of the limiting dominant Word to define who the protagonist is. Rather, the protagonist is called upon to speak forcefully back, to found his own institutions for maintaining a history and a story that is precariously on the verge of being lost. The developmental trajectory of the novel consists of Donald’s being able to convert his dreamscapes into powerful daytime articulations, of his acquiring the confidence to assert his unrecognized and uncelebrated history into his own and his classmates’ waking life. If a strictly enforced “Word” defines, or even denies, the existence of a character like Donald as an Asian American person, this passage speaks to the need to insist on one’s own capacity to make meaning, shape stories, remember in a way unencumbered by what has been sanctioned by extant systems of authority.



The same idea occurred to other Asian American writers of this period, although they found themselves contending not only with racism but also sexism. When we consider the development of Frank Chin's, and his peers', critical and metafictional reflections on the need to develop a "whole voice," it is difficult not to notice the ways in which their articulations are informed by a masculinist strain of thought that is focused on the rejection of the stereotypical image of the effeminate Asian male. In contrast to such a preoccupation is Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir *The Woman Warrior* (1976). The publication of this book and its enthusiastic reception by all readers – Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans alike, but, most particularly, women of all race and ethnicities – was a powerful contribution to feminist writings. It brought mainstream feminism into dialogue with feminists of color. It also launched one of the most celebrated debates in Asian American literature, between Kingston and Chin. The details of this debate are discussed in Chapter 16, which is focused on Kingston. Chin's vituperative attacks on what he perceives to be Kingston's capitulation to white readers' expectations of Asian female oppression and exotic Asian cultural landscapes find a spirited rejoinder in Kingston's fiction and other creative nonfiction. She is resolutely confident in her position, making no apologies for her championing of female power in her own family and in Chinese mythology.

At the same time, Kingston does not shy away from the challenge of being Chinese in the United States or the vulnerabilities she has to overcome as a young girl to find her voice and assert herself. She was born in "the middle of World War II," she writes, and her childhood was marked by airplanes in the sky, machines she must learn to "fly between."<sup>16</sup> In fact, she says,

America has been full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts. Once upon a time the world was thick with ghosts, I could hardly breathe; I could hardly walk, limping my way around the White Ghosts and their cars. There were Black Ghosts too, but they were open eyed and full of laughter, more distinct than White Ghosts. (96–7)

As any reader of *Woman Warrior* will know, the idea of "Ghosts" comes from the narrator's mother, who uses the word consistently to demarcate the lines between the Chinese and everyone else. When the narrator uses the word, however, it becomes repurposed. It becomes a trope for imagined fears that nonetheless have a powerful hold on the author. Combining the physicality of machines and the corporeality of people with the insubstantiality of Ghosts, this passage demonstrates Kingston's skillful way of diminishing the control

of Ghosts by foregrounding the writer's imagination and expressive facility as having the power to make the Ghosts vanish. Kingston's expressive power comes from her drawing on family history, Chinese history and mythology, and her own inner resources.

Unlike Chin, Kingston offers her reader a less oppositional and more syncretic approach to addressing the problem of Asian American absence. Kingston's memoir closes with the story of Ts'ai Yen, a poetess of second-century China who is captured by one of the Southern "barbarian" tribes of the region, and who spends twelve years in captivity. During this time, Ts'ai Yen "sang about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger" (209). When she returns to her homeland, "[s]he brought her songs back from the savage lands." One of these is "a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments," Kingston writes, because "[i]t translated well" (209). This story dramatizes how specific forms of creative expression can travel across different lands and, in the process, acquire new dimensions and textures. Individuals who endure physical hardships and transform these experiences into songs, stories, and poems speak in powerful emotional ways to one audience and, to other audiences in other places, offer innovations that alter the forms as they are practiced in their places of origin.

This culminating story in *Woman Warrior* clearly points to the more generalizable experience of migration and power asymmetry, and of the ways in which creative expression endures and flourishes as a result of movement between lands and interaction among diverse peoples. If there is a way to read this ending to *Woman Warrior* metafictionally, it is as a promise that Asian Americans do not have to invent a "whole voice" from scratch but can fashion what exists into something new and useful, creating a new literary form that is as complex and beautiful as what came before. The fact that Ts'ai Yen returns to China speaks, as well, to how Kingston's eclectic sensibility, her embrace of multiple influences, signals a desire for a voice that dissolves boundaries, and is not focused, as Frank Chin's is, on the United States exclusively. While obviously *Woman Warrior* is specifically focused on China and the United States, the closing story suggests that the relationship between, in this instance, China and other lands is a fluid one. Kingston reminds us that the conventional use of language like "barbarian" fails to capture diverse peoples and their rich modes of expression. In the phrase "translated well," we can perhaps glean an early idea of the diasporic and transnational turns that will come increasingly to define what we think of as Asian American literature's key attributes.

Together, the works of Chin and Kingston gesture toward at least two noteworthy strains of thought about what Asian American literature endeavors to become, aspirations that emerged out of the same historical period that gave birth to the Asian American movement. Whatever their disagreements about gender, myth, or culture, what we might notice in this all too brief discussion of Chin's and Kingston's contributions to the development of Asian American literature is how they find common ground in the need to write as Asian Americans who have unique stories of their own to tell. While neither might agree about what it means to write as an Asian American, for both that imperative means more than writing as a person who happens to live in the United States and have Asian ancestry. It is, rather, a specifically political act, one that calls attention to a history of oppression – whether just racial or combined with other kinds of inequalities of power – that informs the act of creating aesthetic objects. As Kingston writes in *Woman Warrior*, “I have so many words – ‘chink’ words and ‘gook’ words too – that they do not fit on my skin” (53). Everything, even the language of racism – “chink” and “gook” – becomes transmuted into creative expression.

### Inventing a Tradition

Asian American literature refers to more than simply any aesthetically crafted text by American writers of Asian ancestry. It also refers to a tradition of resistance that writers can claim as their own. It makes sense, therefore, that some writers from the past – who wrote before the 1968 zenith of the Asian American movement – have been reclaimed and celebrated. These include Sui Sin Far, Carlos Bulosan, and John Okada. It also makes sense that other writers, such as Onoto Watanna, Jade Snow Wong, and later Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee, have had a more complex reception in critical evaluations of Asian American literature. The former set of writers was involved in acknowledging a racial difference, directly confronting injustices, and using the written word as tools for fairly explicit political ends. These writers thus seemed to construct a tradition to work with. Writers who came after could embrace this early political history, steer clear of its imperatives, or recast its particular details. Regardless of what the later writers do, they are aware of this tradition and recognize that they are not working in isolation.

Bulosan's part-fictional memoir *America Is in the Heart* (1946) traces a journey from the Philippines to the United States and is structured in four parts. The first is located in the Philippines when the author is a child, the second in the United States as a young man who endures great hardships because of his

race and class, the third as a slightly older man who learns to interpret what he has endured, and the fourth as an activist issuing a call to arms to turn learning into action. The catalyst for these transformations is the experience of having his initial idealistic anticipation of life in the United States shaken by the racism and class oppression he encounters, and the resulting deprivation of opportunity he suffers in depression-gripped America. He becomes involved in labor organizing work among migrant farmworkers and finds release from his frustration in this fashion. What marks Bulosan's narrative as quintessentially American, an attribute asserted prominently in the title, is that he discovers a new identity as a writer while undergoing treatment for tuberculosis. He devours works of white male writers like Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Hart Crane, nonwhite writers like Richard Wright and Younghill Kang, and other esteemed male writers from beyond the United States' borders, including Maxim Gorky, Lu Xun, and Federico Lorca. He thus absorbs, and insists upon, a sense of literature and history that is simultaneously American and cosmopolitan, boundless, and, yet disappointingly, restricted in its gender dynamics.

Bulosan's narrator goes on to shape a voice for himself that buoys his hopes and helps him recover from the pain of his prior immigrant experiences. In hospital, a fellow patient asks the narrator to write a letter to his mother in Arkansas to tell her he's "okay." The young man has never learned to write, and so Bulosan writes for him:

I was writing to her what I had had in my mind and heart for years. The words came effortlessly, I was no longer writing about this lonely sick kid, but about myself and my friends in America. I told her about the lean, the lonely, and miserable years. I mentioned places and names. I was not writing to an unknown mother any more. I was writing to my own mother plowing in the muddy fields of Mangusmana: it was the one letter I should have written before. I was telling her about America. Actually, I was writing to all the unhappy mothers whose sons left and did not return.<sup>17</sup>

The invention, or reinvention, of self is a uniquely American literary tradition, and Bulosan's articulation of his own newfound self aligns easily with assertions of earlier Americans like Benjamin Franklin, William Apress, Frederick Douglass, and Whitman. But in this passage, Bulosan also seems to outdo all of these writers. His narrator claims an all-encompassing and ludic sense of self that can speak not only for his fellow illiterate patient but also as himself and, in the final lines, for all "sons" who "left and did not return." The audience of his letter likewise shifts between a specific mother, the patient's mother, his own mother, and "all the unhappy mothers." The kinds of slippages found

in this passage are indicative of the way the book as a whole effortlessly slips between Bulosan's individual experiences and the experiences of other Filipino immigrants. It is as if the narrator is seeking to contain in a single person's life story the story of an entire group and its encounter with the United States. This umbrella narrative, in turn, is meant to stand in for a much larger story about collective struggle and aspiration among all the working peoples of the world.

In John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957), the yearnings of the native-born Japanese American son to be wholly and exclusively American is challenged by his immigrant mother's refusal to distance herself from Japan and terminate her allegiance to it. The shock of internment/incarceration, the sense of betrayal felt by those of Japanese descent that the United States had violated their constitutional rights and treated them as potential traitors, is in this novel intertwined with a deep, almost painful, yearning to belong and be marked unequivocally as American. The protagonist Ichiro expresses in long internal monologues his ambivalent feelings both for his mother and for the country. She forbids him from fraternizing with other Japanese American men who fought in the U.S. military during World War II, reminding him that to be Japanese is the ultimate gift. Okada writes,

Through his anger crept up a sudden feeling of remorse and pity. . . . Was it she who was wrong and crazy not to have found in herself the capacity to accept a country which repeatedly refused to accept her or her sons unquestioningly, or was it the others who were being deluded, the ones . . . who believed and fought and even gave their lives to protect this country where they could still not rate as first-class citizens because of unseen walls?<sup>18</sup>

What caught the attention of Chin and his cohort, and what has sustained the attention of many readers since, is the raw intensity of the emotions that are expressed in passages like this one. Okada has his character feel anger, rage, depression, self-pity, and loathing. These are powerful negative emotions that spill over the confines of good behavior, civility, and accommodation. These latter sentiments are those that Ichiro strives for as a safe haven, a refuge, from his troubles, but they are beyond his reach because of his conflicted feelings. The overt injustice of the internment is a topic that won't go away in this novel. It leads the narrator to question the values of a country that could have condoned such a policy and then just as quickly pretended that the deleterious consequences of such a policy did not exist.

We can compare this depiction of the postwar Japanese American community in Seattle with the portrait of Japanese American life found in Monica

Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953), a memoir about the author's growing up in pre-war Seattle and the life she leads after. The war years are sandwiched into two short chapters, each beginning with a sense of the tragedy of what is happening to her and her family and her community before veering sharply off into another direction, into happier memories that almost erase from view where the events the book recounts are taking place. It is surprisingly easy for readers to engage this book and not recall any mention of mass incarceration. We can also compare *No-No Boy* to Hisaye Yamamoto's "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (1950). This short story is set entirely in an internment camp during the war, but the characters never mention this fact as they focus instead on what seems like an idyllic small-town life. Miss Sasagawara, who had been a dancer before the war, has trouble with her mental health, and is eventually sent to a mental asylum. The characters look at her increasingly odd behavior with befuddlement, while the story subtly asks the reader to consider who is more insane: Miss Sasagawara, who explicitly acknowledges how out of place they are in the camp, or the others, who resolutely refuse to acknowledge that anything out of the ordinary is occurring to them. Both *Nisei Daughter* and "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" speak powerfully to the unspoken, which remains unspoken because of a cheerful affect. *No-No Boy* is incapable of being cheery, and as a result can feel to readers despite its overwhelmingly heavy mood like a necessary corrective, the kind of hard-hitting "honesty" that the introduction to *Aiiieeeee!* championed.

Through these examples, we can begin to reconstruct the reasons why some texts were held up as part of a literary tradition that informed the development of an Asian American creative expression that would, in the early 1970s, become distinctly visible as a recognizable literature. Since then, readers and scholars alike have sought out similar kinds of works with the same kind of criteria in mind: an emphasis on resistance, the claim of belonging to America and in the process a desire to redefine what America means, an unflinching willingness to examine injustices, and a championing of social causes that leads one outward from the self to one's community and beyond.

### Expansion in Historical Context

Profound national changes were beginning to take place in the 1970s, just as Asian American literature began to be established as a distinct tradition. A period of unprecedented economic growth in the United States that had started with the end of World War II ran into a period of stagflation, the

neologism conjuring a sense not only of industries and commerce failing to produce wealth but also of a society that was no longer certain about its path ahead. The old confidence began to feel misplaced. A once mighty and apparently impregnable fortress of industrial might crumbled rapidly and became a belt of rust. Cities faced budget crises, illicit drug use became pervasive, and violent crimes marred daily urban life. Immigrants from all around the world began to arrive in large numbers (and continue to do so right up to the present). Meanwhile, manufacturing jobs were being moved elsewhere, to countries whence the new arrivals were coming, as industry relentlessly pursued increased profits by reducing the cost of labor, finding ways around stringent environmental protections, and recruiting friendly despots and corrupt bureaucrats to look the other way at practices that would have been severely scorned in the United States. A renewed Asian immigration was thus an integral part of larger historical trends remaking the United States' economy, society, and culture.

Nonetheless, the number of Asians in the United States would remain for the rest of the century a small fraction of the overall population, but as the years between the start of the 1970s and middle of the 1990s unfolded they began to become potent symbols of both promise and threat. Asian Americans were first imagined as a model minority, one that major news publications would characterize as deserving racial Others whose self-sufficiency and up-by-the-bootstraps pragmatism was held up as a sharp contrast to African Americans, who were characterized as demanding government aid to sustain their communities. Several scholars have written about this economically conservative use by politicians and policy makers of the Asians' apparent ability to rise above misfortune without government assistance. The often-repeated pejorative comments about Asiatic character were, in the light of this emergent thesis, reinterpreted to provide a paradigm that was held up, especially to Latino/as and African Americans, as desirable and something to emulate. Asians were compliant; they didn't make a great deal of noise in the public sphere. They were secretive; they relied on their own and didn't expect the government or outsiders to solve their problems for them. They worked for too little, and undermined the wages of free white labor; they were industrious, and they could demonstrate to pampered union workers how to be more entrepreneurial. Asians in the United States were cast as the "model minority," a seemingly complimentary, but in reality a devastating and pernicious, label that once again grossly simplified the experience of vast numbers of Asian Americans and drove a wedge between Asian Americans and other groups of color.<sup>19</sup>

The late 1970s and 1980s saw the influx of refugees from Southeast Asia – Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The latter were countries devastated by U.S. military campaigns conducted there. These refugees were different from the immigrants who came as a result of the Hart-Celler or Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that lifted restrictions on immigration from Asia and sought the entry of highly qualified individuals in order to provide the United States with necessary expertise for a competitive edge during the Cold War. By contrast, refugees from Southeast Asia as well as immigrants from South Asia who came through the Family Preference system were not as highly qualified as the earlier professionals, but they were frequently “lumped” into the model minority category, with no attempt made by government and social service agencies to understand their particular socioeconomic challenges.

In the 1980s, the children of recent Asian immigrants began to make headlines for excelling in schoolwork. Soon after, they began to change the racial composition of prominent colleges and universities, their enrollments quickly exceeding their share of the overall population. This was a noteworthy trend at a time when political reaction against affirmative action programs resulted in a shrinking of other racial minorities attending these same schools. It was also at this moment that many schools began to hire professors to teach Asian American studies, especially in places where students and faculty had a hard time making a distinction between Asians and Asian Americans. The study of literature in particular benefited from this situation, as many schools, especially east of California (as some academics called the huge swath of the U.S. mainland that has historically not seen as large an influx of Asian Americans as this one western state) seemed more willing to hire professors who specialized in Asian American literature than in sociology, history, or psychology. Perhaps we can attribute this willingness to literature’s perceived status as a largely academic and theoretical endeavor, disconnected from the on-the-ground realities of democratic politics and power. Literature was viewed as less threatening than the other disciplines, in large part because of the way it had been taught – as an aesthetic artifact. However, the gradual but steadily accumulating influence of multicultural and postcolonial approaches to the study of literature from the late 1970s onward (Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was first published in 1978) gave to literature and literary studies a social and political relevance. Literature could no longer be considered simply as an object of textual craft. Its value lay in its serving as a complex entryway into a landscape of multiple significances – aesthetic, political, economic, and social.

A complete history of the impact of Asian American literature on literary studies as a whole has yet to be written, in part because this history is still very



much ongoing. What we can say, though, is that as the ranks of those who taught Asian American literature grew, the figures that had once enlivened the Asian American movement came alive once again in classrooms. Sui Sin Far, Okada, Bulosan, Chin, and especially Kingston found their way onto college syllabi, as well as works by other writers whose names were uncovered through careful scholarly research. Debate began to flourish about authors not included on such lists. As many scholars have pointed out, a selective tradition-making had left out prominent Asian American writers who were judged not to be true to a narrowly defined political agenda. Hence, critics of the narrow political agenda have pointed out the imbalance in celebrating the work of Sui Sin Far, a self-described “Eurasian” woman named Edith Maude Eaton who foregrounded the racism against the Chinese in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States, while rejecting the much better known work of Onoto Watanna, the pen name of Winnifred Eaton (who also happened to be Edith’s sister). As Emma Jinhua Teng explores in greater depth in her chapter, Onoto Watanna’s writings were not political, unlike those of her sister; her works offered mainstream readers an exotic and easy-to-consume Oriental landscape. Similarly, there has been a growing reevaluation of works by authors like Monica Sone, C. Y. Lee (author of *Flower Drum Song*, which went on to become a popular Rodgers and Hammerstein musical and Hollywood film), and Jade Snow Wong, authors who were considered to be pandering to mainstream audiences by giving them a taste of the exotic Asian that white readers craved. At the same time, Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee remain troubling figures for scholars, as they seem to embody, in different ways, the very kind of literary sensibilities that the field of Asian American literature was founded to resist. Sau-ling Wong has written powerfully and effectively about the reasons for Tan’s popularity among mainstream readers and critiqued the narrative strategies that Tan uses to render the unfamiliar alluring and intriguing.<sup>20</sup> Other literary scholars have been equally caustic in their assessment of Mukherjee and her Orientalist depictions of women’s experiences in Asia in contrast to their “liberated” selves in the United States. However, Mukherjee has also been acknowledged to be narratively bold, showing in her characters’ experiences how Asia and the United States are inextricably linked.<sup>21</sup>

### A Complex Literary Terrain Elicits Questions

These debates have led to a sharp rethinking among scholars and writers alike about what counts as Asian American literature, and what it means, if

anything, to write as an Asian American. Long-standing questions have gained renewed urgency, such as: Who constitutes Asian America? What works fall under the category of Asian American literature? How far can this category be expanded before it loses its value? To these were added: What kind of autonomy should the literary maintain from the political? What kind of formal qualities have we failed to attend to? Have we defined the political too narrowly, to encapsulate only progressive ideals found in a fraction of literary works by Americans of Asian ancestry? Have we reached a historical point when we should give up on the term *Asian American* all together? In other words, should we be investigating, as Kenneth Warren has done with African American literature, what it *was*, rather than what it *is*?<sup>22</sup>

It is noteworthy that such questions have gained prominence just as we are witnessing the emergence of writings by Asian Americans that command attention both from their Asian American peers and from the mostly white literary establishment. Perhaps Maxine Hong Kingston was one of the earliest such writers, but many soon followed. To name just a few: David Henry Hwang, whose play *M. Butterfly* (1988) was a Broadway success and would eventually be adapted to film by the director David Cronenberg; Jessica Hagedorn, whose *Dogeaters* (1991) became a symbol alongside *Woman Warrior* of a post-modern style in American fiction; Chang-rae Lee, whose *Native Son* (1995) was published to widespread acclaim and would lead to his being selected by the *New Yorker* as one of the most important young authors working in America; and Jhumpa Lahiri, who would be the first, and so far only, Asian American to win the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for her collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999).

We briefly turn to two of the most recent of these landmark works to consider their relation to concerns that prior generations of Asian American writers had made legible. In *Native Speaker*, Lee features an ambitious Korean American politician who is an impressive speaker and confident in his negotiation of electoral politics. The title's highlighting of the ability to speak, foregrounding voice as a weapon of influence and a means of assertiveness, continues one of the most emphatic and persistent themes of Asian American literature. The claiming of voice, the means to speak, the content of expression, and the language in which one voices one's presence and one's contributions – these are pervasive concerns. The novel is also a cautionary tale about too zealously pursuing the allurements of success and too readily making compromises with one's better judgment as part of the quest for "belonging" within the United States as a fully recognized member of the social and political fabric, themes that allow this novel to sit comfortably alongside other earlier works of Asian American literature.

Still, there is also a great deal of ambivalence about being too closely connected to an ethnic or racial group in *Native Speaker* that militates against its easy inclusion in a narrowly defined Asian American literary tradition. While Kwang, the politician, builds his career by turning to Korean American communities in New York City, and especially in the borough of Queens, his shadow, the novel's narrator Henry Park, chooses to betray his ethnic community and minimize any connections to larger racial causes. Both ethnic community and racial causes seem to Henry intrinsically suspect, and in response he becomes increasingly private in his self-making and retreats from the public stage: working for a private-sector firm that is taking on jobs that were once done exclusively by the government, and eventually giving up this work so as to stay at home and to work only intermittently alongside his wife as a kind of independent consultant on educational matters. While the narrator of Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* moves outward in ever more public commitments to various political causes, the self literally expanding to encompass all, Henry in *Native Speaker* seems to shrink ever more decisively from the public, engaging in acts of privatization that eschew the political all together. If anything, Henry seems to embody an individualism that at its best is tolerant of differences of every kind, but always at the expense of any aspirations for togetherness and greater belonging and collective striving for a common good.

Jhumpa Lahiri, by contrast, is emblematic of a secure and confident subset of a post-1965 generation of Asian American creative writers. This generation is comfortable negotiating the cultural landscapes of the United States, ancestral homelands, and dispersed diasporic destinations. The narratives they weave almost effortlessly make no apologies for the multiple allegiances of their protagonists. These are writers who don't worry about having to prove their Americanness. They simply assume it is so, and in some cases seem interested in a cosmopolitanism that would exceed the restraints of belonging to any one nation-state. In "Third and Final Continent," the story that concludes *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri compares the many migrations of her protagonist (from India to England to the United States) to the courage and adventurous energy that propels the astronauts of Apollo 8 to the moon. The story is set in Massachusetts at the historic moment of the first moonwalk by Neil Armstrong. The protagonist is a tenant in the home of an imperious ninety-year-old woman. Her authoritative and directive attitude toward him does not trouble him in the least. He sees her as vulnerable and in need of gentle handling. She is enthralled by the accomplishment of the astronauts, and she

repeatedly impresses upon her Indian tenant the magnitude of what they have achieved, commanding him to say “Splendid!”

The protagonist, however, as he reflects on his life in the United States years later, likens his experiences to that of the astronauts:

While the astronauts, heroes forever, spend mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.<sup>23</sup>

He clearly considers his journey every bit as worthy of praise as that of the astronauts, even if the astronauts are “heroes forever” while his accomplishments are more “ordinary.” Nevertheless, in the word “mere” the passage seems to suggest that he does not value the moon landing as much as his old landlady demanded. The ordinary becomes extraordinary as he considers the many years he has been on his journey, and the great distance he has traveled from where he was born to fashion a life in the United States. Because his journey has been quiet and understated and therefore less filled with the triumphalism that marked the moon landing, he seems to intimate that it is also a much greater accomplishment, something that stretches the bounds of “imagination” because it is at once so easy to overlook and so difficult to appreciate. There is a sense of enchantment that infuses the ordinary in this passage, in which the Asian immigrant’s experience is transmuted into something heroic.

While a novel like *No-No Boy* looked upon the first generation of immigrants with pity and disgust, Lahiri’s story looks at the experiences of the first generation with wonder. These immigrants are intrepid adventurers, the courageous few who have left what was familiar and expected in favor of something unknown and self-expanding. In comparison, her second-generation characters are repeatedly depicted as lost, stuck in ruts of their own making, preoccupied by casual sexual encounters that leave them unsatisfied and even more disgruntled with their lives. They are often upper-middle class, highly successful, so competent that they rarely have any trouble getting into the schools of their choice and the jobs they apply for – but all of this leaves her second-generation characters incapable of the very kind of enchantment that allows the narrator of “Third and Final Continent” to look back on his life with such awe and appreciation. Lahiri’s U.S.-born South Asian American characters display all the angst of the so-called Generation X and Millennials as they

attempt to juggle professional ambition with emotional attachments to family and friends. It is important to note that the deep darkness of the narratives of her second collection, *Unaccustomed Earth*, do not stem from the characters' sense of exclusion from the fabric of the United States. They are comfortably of the United States, secure in its embrace, and, at the same time, restless with themselves and the expectations they are both called upon and desire actively to fulfill. Lahiri writes exclusively of the middle and upper-middle class, and this tight focus can be seen as her strength as well as her limitation.

What is striking is how these contemporary literary works both continue themes that have been constant for many Asian American writers and simultaneously depart from these themes in subtle and overt ways. This echo of early themes in the writings of recent authors should not be surprising because Asian Americans, regardless of their differences, continue to share a common predicament forged by history and maintained by deeply embedded forces in our society. At the same time, many differences persist, emerge, and alter in shape, so it is difficult to generalize over much about any individual work, which contains within it complex textures of meaning and self-awareness that make it singular and irreducible.

### Into the Twenty-First Century

A history of Asian American literature provides a complicated surface upon which to view the United States' changing character and shifting preoccupations. In its development, this invented literary tradition offers insights about this country's past and present: from a fledgling republic to a nation increasingly assertive about territorial conquest both within North America and beyond; from a nation selectively welcoming some immigrants while cruelly excluding others to a nation growing in confidence on the global stage as the self-proclaimed arbiter of ideals of freedom and democracy; and from a nation concerned solely with its own destiny to a grudging acknowledgment of the need to imagine the realities of unfamiliar others. Even as Asian American writings have resisted the characterization of Asians in the United States as foreign and invasive, they have also just as significantly upended the pejorative meaning of the "foreigner" and "outsider." In doing so, such writings recast this position as one of strategic advantage and enriched vision.

There has been a growing sense among scholars and activists that to be perpetually foreign does not have to be simply an attribute of weakness. Rather, Asian Americans are uniquely positioned to mediate a conversation between the United States and the world beyond, as well as to mediate a conversation

about the way this country used to be and what it is quickly becoming. They enable the United States to break free from its insularity and engage the global community in meaningful and transformative ways. A focus on the transnational makes the study of Asian Americans a way to deepen understanding of the United States' changing social landscape, and simultaneously an invitation to understand what is beyond this landscape's boundary markers – that is, to acknowledge the nation's involvement in the world outside its borders. Rather than seeing the history of Asian Americans and their literary endeavors as comprising a constant struggle for recognition, a shift toward the transnational enables a way of reading this literature so as to turn an apparent liability into an asset.

At the risk of being prescriptive, we suggest that an ideal reading of Asian American literature recognizes how this literature has the ability to engage *both* the United States and the world beyond its borders. It does not uncritically embrace American exceptionalism. Even as it absorbs the seductions of exceptionalist thinking and seeks to recapitulate it, it is also alive to and profoundly aware of the limitations of a worldview that gives scant attention to the global community and all that sustains it. The multiply situated nature of this Asian American consciousness – anchored in the United States and elsewhere – serves as a necessary corrective to national insularity. It challenges the decision makers and power wielders in the country to recognize the diverse realities of peoples' lives in Asia (East, South, Southeast, and West Asia) principally, but also in Africa and Latin America. Such dispersals of peoples of Asian descent alter the usual geography we employ to navigate our sense of the world, and this altered understanding makes visible the potential to knit together the world we share with others. While the ideal we outline is obviously extraliterary, it is congruous with the propensity of Asian American literary scholars to think of the literary as politically significant. Asia is pluralized, as one of our contributors writes, and Asian America can no more ignore the imperatives and experiences of West Asian (Middle Eastern) Americans, particularly in the years since September 11, 2001, than it can the Japanese American mass incarceration.<sup>24</sup> The scope of this literature is, therefore, necessarily ambitious and the forms of its expression richly multifarious.

### The Structure: Sections and Chapters

The thirty-three chapters in this book are organized into six sections; they show how Asian American literature engages crucial issues of voice, visibility, identity, resistance, representation, aspiration, longing, belonging, justice,

allegiance, cross-racial alliance, transnational citizenship, and solidarity; and they illuminate the complexity of American creative output and its array of literary strategies in the elucidation of motivation, action, and setting. The sections and the chapters within them follow a chronological trajectory, beginning with the earliest Asian American writings and moving systematically to the present.

Section 1 explores the ways in which nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writers of Asian descent living in the United States sought to write about their experiences and to give aesthetic shape to their writings. Its chapters seek to illustrate some moments that scholars have identified as the earliest extant writings by Asian Americans. In Chapter 1, Floyd Cheung illuminates autobiographical writings by Chinese international students in the United States more than one hundred years ago. He also reflects on what it means to recover such early works, and the problematic ways in which we might weave them in to a story about origins. In Chapter 2, Josephine Lee examines the forces that brought actual Asian bodies onto the nineteenth-century stage and how they troubled “yellow face” representations of Asian bodies for popular audiences, who had long accepted these stereotypical markers as attributes that made bodies conventionally “Asian.” She reminds us of how abundant these presentations were, and of how phantasmagorical. Chapter 3 presents Sunn Shelley Wong’s discussion of poems written in Chinese by early-twentieth-century immigrants stalled on Angel Island, basically in prison awaiting verdict as to whether they would be allowed to enter the country or be deported back to their country of origin. She calls attention to how the poems gain richer meaning when considered *in situ*, as literary works specific to the surfaces upon which they were inscribed. In Chapter 4, Emma Jinhua Teng trains her attention onto the early twentieth century and to the Eurasian (English father and Chinese mother) sisters Edith Maude Eaton and Winnifred Eaton who wrote under the pen names Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna, respectively, as well as giving much needed attention to two other sisters (Sarah Bosse and Grace Harte) who also lived remarkable lives and left substantial records of their experiences. All four sisters were notably cosmopolitan. Edith, for instance, was born in England, moving with the family to upstate New York, growing up in Quebec, and working in Jamaica for a short time before settling in different parts of the United States for relatively longer periods of time. Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna in particular wrote substantially and interestingly about what it meant to be Asian in the United States in the early twentieth century, and their divergent ethnic claiming also marks an important early form of pan-ethnic tension resulting

from the policies of the state. The chapters in the first section all speak to an important tension that has gone into the organizing of this history, namely both attention to ethnic historical specificity (the ways in which each Asian ethnic group has very particular trajectories of migration and settlement and reception) and consciousness of the various genres in which Asian Americans have excelled, ranging in this section from autobiography and memoir to the stage, short stories, novels, journalism, and poetry.

Section 2 plays out this same tension. It looks at the crucial period that spans the early twentieth century to the 1950s. These years are often known by Asian American historians as the Exclusion Era, which can be said to be in full swing after 1924, when the major piece of immigration legislation of that year decisively halted most forms of immigration to the United States from Asia as well as many other parts of the world (including Ireland, Italy, and large parts of Eastern Europe). This era formally came to an end after the end of World War II, as racial criteria were lifted from laws that govern immigration and naturalization through a series of congressional acts. These legal reforms began with the McCarran-Walter Act or the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act and culminated in the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act or the Hart-Celler Act. The years contained by this era were marked both by ethnic struggles against racism and accommodations that allowed one to exist in a nation openly hostile in law and custom to the presence of Asians on its soil.

The chapters in Section 2 examine a series of authors who stand out as memorably navigating the tension between struggle and accommodation, with each chapter emphasizing a particular ethnic group. The identification of the literary figures in this section by their ethnicity highlights the reality that writers in this era did not think of themselves as belonging to a larger Asian American category. There are thus chapters that examine the Indian, Korean, Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese literatures written in English in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, roughly the years between 1924 and 1968. Chapter 5 presents Sandhya Shukla's discussion of the memoirs of Dhan Gopal Mukerji and Dalip Singh Saund, two writers from India who achieved recognition in very different spheres. Mukerji succeeded in winning a literary award for a children's book, and Saund became the first person of Asian origin to win election as a U.S. congressman. In Chapter 6, Joseph Jonghyun Jeon gives a historically rigorous discussion of two writers of Korean ancestry – Younghill Kang and Richard E. Kim – whose works present a simultaneous concern with the homeland from which one has departed even while one is learning to adjust to a new home in the United States. This



was a time of the Japanese colonization of Korea, and both writers found themselves looking back to their ancestral nation in their U.S.-based literary creations.

In Chapter 7, Denise Cruz examines Filipino and Filipina writers of the pre-Asian American movement years to understand their ambivalences about the United States as it culturally colonized the Philippines and treated Filipino/a in the United States as inferior brown brothers and sisters. These works were “transnational” in their concerns, before the term gained currency. Cruz offers us a rare analysis of the writings of Filipinas Felicidad Ocampo and Yay Palilo, while also providing us new ways of understanding well known Filipino writers Jose Garcia Villa, Carlos Bulosan, and Bienvenido Santos. In Chapter 8, Patricia P. Chu examines the work of H. T. Tsiang, Jade Snow Wong, and C. Y. Lee, who offer complex depictions of Chinatown life in the United States, as men and women employ strategies of survival, solidarity, and success under conditions of suspicion and racism by the mainstream community. Wong’s memoir *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and C. Y. Lee’s novel *Flower Drum Song* were very well received by mainstream readers, and *Flower Drum Song* went on to become a successful Broadway musical and Hollywood film. Chu helps us understand the context for this success as well as the importance, though lower visibility, of Tsiang’s novel. In Chapter 9, Traise Yamamoto provides us with a sweep of important writings on Japanese American mass incarceration by those who had undergone the concentration camp experience. We are introduced to the works of Miné Okubo, Monica Sone, Hisaye Yamamoto, John Okada, Mitsuye Yamada, Daniel Okimoto, and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. She discusses their literary strategies of coding, masking, and ellipsis against the backdrop of Okada’s bare display of his characters’ anguish and rage.

Chapter 10 provides us with an important meditation on genre, with Jinqi Ling examining the rise of short fiction within the Asian American literary landscape and discussing the reasons for its status as the genre of choice for many Asian American writers in the pre-1968 years. The writers he treats are Toshio Mori, Hisaye Yamamoto, Carlos Bulosan (whose short stories are seldom discussed), and Bienvenido Santos. Chapter 11 closes this section with Cynthia Tolentino’s examination of Robert E. Park and the Chicago School of Sociology. These scholars, through their study and analysis of immigration and generational change, affected the way Asian American writers of this period understood race, with long-reaching consequences for the present. This chapter is crucial for helping us to demarcate the tension between ethnicity and race, and how this tension will come into play as the term *Asian American* becomes employed to categorize a class of literature.

Section 3 explores the emergence and growing strength of the Asian American movement as a time of awakening and mounting political consciousness. This movement took inspiration from both domestic and international sources. Domestically, the movement was spurred on by the claim to political equality and social justice that formed the basis of the civil rights movement, and led to the rise of black power. Internationally, Asian Americans looked admiringly at the decolonization struggles of Asia and Africa. The anti-Vietnam War protests shaped the Asian American activists' understanding of themselves as Americans, and they demanded an end to an unjust war of intervention, while working through an analysis of how Asians in the United States were bound historically and racially to "the enemy."

In Chapter 12, Daryl Joji Maeda examines the manifestos and speeches of the pioneering activists of the movement – such as the student strikers of San Francisco State University (whose activism led to the formation of the first ethnic studies department in the United States), the literary records of antiwar protesting, and the rise of second-wave feminism and its articulations as it affected how Asian American writers understood themselves racially and ethnically. In Chapter 13, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns turns a spotlight on Asian American music and theater, as these became significant avenues during the Asian American political empowerment movement for establishing presence and resisting injustice and imperialism. She discusses Chris Iijima and the musical group A Grain of Sand (also known as Yellow Pearl) and the theater performances of Sining Bayan, the cultural arm of the Filipino American political movement, to show how their "agitational" performances thrust the Asian American body onto the stage and into visibility, thereby asserting and claiming power.

Chapter 14 discusses the role of literary anthologies in shaping an Asian American identity and an Asian American literary tradition. Donald Goellnicht both analyzes the usefulness of such anthologies as articulations of what constitutes Asian American literature and cautions against relying too much on such prescriptions, particularly because Asian American literature was forged precisely to resist representational prescriptions. Chapter 15, the concluding chapter of this section, examines the work of Maxine Hong Kingston, who emerged out of this era as one of the most important and possibly the most well-known Asian American writer. Stella Bolaki examines the extraordinary influence of Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, which urban legend deems to have been the most widely taught work of literature in American universities and colleges in the 1980s. Bolaki treats other writings in Kingston's *oeuvre*, helping

us absorb the significance of this author and establishing her contribution to American, Asian American, and postmodern literature.

Section 4 takes up the question of an Asian American literary canon, a profoundly problematic attainment for a body of writing that drew its strength from being at the margins and challenging the complacency of the center. It is odd, in other words, to consider Asian America as referring to anything but a margin. This is because, as the previous section reveals, the term emerged in the midst of antiracist, anti-Vietnam War, anticapitalist populist movements of the 1960s. As a result, the literature that was organized around this term gave birth to a core of thematic concerns: resistance; solidarity with struggles against oppression; belonging, performing, or claiming “Americanness”; challenging dominant culture and critiquing U.S. imperialism; unraveling claims of simple and culturally / racially coded intergenerational division; and debating gendered norms. In time, as activism led to more (but still far from complete) institutional inclusion, especially in higher education, a canon of Asian American writing developed that spotlighted these themes. Several questions related to this development include: How did the canon come to be established? What is included in the canon? What does the canon leave out? What kind of resistances to the canon are there, and have they spawned alternative canons? As Section 4 examines, several key works that might be said to belong to this literary canon are: Sui Sin Far’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (recovered and illuminated by Amy Ling, Annette White-Parks, and Elizabeth Ammons), Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart*, John Okada’s *No-No Boy*, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, and Frank Chin’s *Chickencoop Chinaman*. More recent works would include the plays *M. Butterfly* (by David Henry Hwang) and *The Sisters Matsumoto* (by Philip Gotanda) as well as Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*. We should also add here that the canon crosses genres – drama, poetry, and memoir are as dominant as fiction (with the canon encompassing writers such as Mitsuye Yamada, Garret Hongo, Lawson Inada, Miné Okubo, Velina Hasu Houston, and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston). What is the significance of these works to the field?

The chapters in this section do not embrace the canon as an uninterrogated concept. In thinking about canon formation, it is important to consider as well how literary studies have driven these debates. There are some key figures who have influenced the emergence of a canon, and other key figures who have articulated the risks of pursuing canon formation and the untenable exclusions that follow as a consequence. In Chapter 16, Viet Thanh Nguyen provides an important narrative analysis of the emergence of Asian American literature as an academic field. He addresses the contributions of the early

literary critic Elaine Kim, particularly her role in establishing Asian American literature as a significant body of work worth studying. He illuminates the importance of Sau-ling Wong and her introduction of sophisticated literary critical analysis, as well as her caution against the allure of transnationalism as a literary theme. Nguyen takes up, as well, King-Kok Cheung and her widening of Asian American literature to include the terrain of Canada, and he situates Lisa Lowe and her transformative perspective of Asian American experiences as marked by heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity (Lowe's work is more fully examined in Chapter 18). Other Asian American literary critiques are also discussed in Nguyen's substantive discussion of the field's steady acquisition of solidity and prestige. Chapter 17 examines the impact of Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha's work *Dictee* and its contribution to the foregrounding of theory in the analysis of Asian American literature. Timothy Yu explains how *Dictee* seized the imagination of Asian American literary scholars and shifted the terms of analysis from cultural nationalism to postcolonialism and poststructuralism as well as to a transnational lens.

In Chapter 18, Anita Mannur and Allan Punzalan Isaac engage the multiple significances of literary and cultural critic Lisa Lowe's scholarship, particularly its transformative impact on the field of Asian American literary studies. Lowe's reinterpretation of Asian Americanness opened up the landscape to draw in the intersectional axes of gender, class, sexuality, and transnationalism and made it possible for the field to consider writers and works that had hitherto been deemed to be inadequately U.S.-focused or insufficiently "Asian American," as the term was narrowly defined. Chapter 19 poses the necessary challenging question: whose Asia are we talking about when we use the word *Asian* as an adjectival descriptor? Samir Dayal compares the Asias of the United States and Britain and reminds us that Asia must be complicated and pluralized so as not to reduce this immensely vast continent with its diverse populations and histories into a simplistic playing field for Western colonial and imperial powers. By discussing the writings of Salman Rushdie, Hari Kunzru, Mohsin Hamid, and Bharati Mukherjee, Dayal shows how risky it is to position Asian American literature too rigidly within the ambit of the United States, and what might be gained by enlarging our consciousness to take in the various global geographical locations that these writers feature in their novels.

Chapter 20 focuses on South Asian American writing. Asha Nadkarni discusses how the presence of South Asians and their claim to be Asian American drastically troubled the previous terrain of Asian America that had predominantly comprised Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino/a Americans, with

Southeast Asian Americans (from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) as newer additions. South Asians (individuals with ancestries from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) seemed not to belong within the United States' conception of "Asia." Her chapter shows how U.S. writers and literary critics with ties to South Asia rejected the narrow understanding of "Asia" as articulated by earlier Asian Americanists and thrust their work forward to be seriously considered as a challenge to how "Asian America" should be defined. The prominent writer she takes up is Jhumpa Lahiri. Chapter 21 ends this section with Eleanor Ty's discussion of contemporary Filipino/a American writers, including Cecilia Manguerra Brainard, Tess Uriza Holthe, Gina Apostol, Evelina Galang, R. Zamora Linmark, Bino Realuyo, Jessica Hagedorn, and Brian Ascalon Roley. She shows how these writers respond to the legacy of U.S. imperialism within the Philippines and in the Filipino/a American experience. South Asians and Filipinos, in particular, challenge the field to consider the role of global colonization and its impact on the development of literature written in resistance to this force. Their focus is never exclusively on claims of power within the United States, and their writings challenge the field to consider the intersections between ethnic and postcolonial writings. This section shows how Asian American literary artists looked both inward nationally and outward globally, and provided expansive geographical, cultural, and historical landscapes with protagonists whose sensibilities and attachments were multiply situated.

Section 5 provides compelling evidence of the full flowering of Asian American writing. There is remarkable output in the years since 1965, driven by a restless creative energy and the entry of growing numbers of immigrants from Asia after the lifting of immigration bans that were first put in place in the late nineteenth century. The United States' military involvement in Asia – in Korea, Vietnam, and Cambodia – also led to refugee influxes, transnational adoption, and racial intermixing, which in turn led to articulations of a relationship to the United States that is characterized by complicated ambivalences. These sentiments find expression in creative experimentation, which led in this emerging period to bold innovations. Chapters in this section both focus on aesthetic experiments and treat individually the complex array of subethnic particularities within Asian American literature.

In Chapter 22, Seri Luangphinit explains the complicated and unique ethnic dynamics of Hawai'i and the impact on the literary output of these relationships. She also helps us understand the conflict between the indigenous people of Hawai'i and the settlers, including Asian American settlers, as this tension is manifested in fiction and in the literary politics that accompany the

publication of writings. Her chapter illuminates the racial formations unique to the islands, and the creative ways in which writers seek to give expression to experiences that are largely invisible on the mainland. Chapter 23 presents the robust landscape of Asian American drama. Esther Kim Lee's analysis charts three waves of contemporary Asian American drama, beginning in 1973, with the founding of the Asian American Theatre Workshop. She spotlights the playwrights, dominant themes, and aesthetic strategies of each wave, as well as the types of audiences each wave of playwrights reaches, and enables us to see how certain trends might continue into the twenty-first century.

In Chapter 24, Tina Chen addresses the rising prestige of fiction within Asian American literature, and the significant accomplishments by certain Asian American writers who have won or were finalists for acclaimed literary prizes. She asks how writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Cynthia Kadohata, Julie Otsuka, Chang-rae Lee, and Karen Tei Yamashita change the framework of American literature, and how their work and writing differ from "yellow face" literary creations like those of Robert Olen Butler. In Chapter 25, Dorothy Wang offers a provocative analysis for the relative invisibility of Asian American poetry and the inability of mainstream critics and publishers to appreciate the aesthetic strategies of Asian American poetry. She provides extended considerations of the poetry of Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge and Prageeta Sharma to show how these poets challenge conventional expectations by the mainstream literary establishment.

Chapter 26 confronts us with the "forgotten war in Korea." Josephine Park engages the work of Richard Kim, Susan Choi, and Chang-rae Lee to show how these Korean American writers resurrect and incorporate the Korean War, a conflict that appears to have all but disappeared from public consciousness. She presents the literary strategies of these writers as they attempt to give form to the war in Korea, particularly as it affected the lives of Koreans and their descendants. Chapter 27 gives us an analysis of the literary productions resulting from the United States' involvement in Vietnam and its disastrous consequences for those Vietnamese people who lived through the war as well as the subsequent generations of their offspring. In this chapter, Anh Thang Dao-Shah and Isabelle Thuy Pelaud focus on diasporic Vietnamese writers of the 1.5 and second generation, who are located in the United States, Canada, France, and Australia. The 1.5 generation of Vietnamese Americans are those individuals who arrived in the United States as young children or adolescents. Dao-Shah and Pelaud's analysis treats "the work of a generation of writers whose works are influenced by the first generation's mourning of the past, while actively promoting alternative memories

that connect the experiences of Vietnamese refugees in the diaspora with those of immigrants and other people of color” in the receiving countries. The writers they engage include Monique Truong and Andrew Pham of the United States, Nam Le of Australia, Kim Thuy of Canada, and Linda Lê of France. Chapter 28 is devoted to the writing of Cambodian American, Laotian American, and Hmong American refugees who settled in the United States. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials discusses their works within the framework of refugee aesthetics, comparing the writings to renderings of other traumas such as holocaust narratives. The tribunals trying the Khmer Rouge leaders form the backdrop to her chapter, and the authors she engages include Vaddey Ratner, Loung Ung, Bryan Thao Worra, and Kao Kalia Yang. This section foregrounds a body of literature that has come into its own, whose practitioners are confident in their creative maneuvers. The full complexity of Asian American literature and its boundless ambition are evident here. And yet, as the very next section reveals, this is not a body of literature that can comfortably rest on its own accomplishments.

Section 6 returns us to the uncertainties and flux that have been at the core of Asian American literature throughout its development. September 11, 2001 unsettled Asian American writers – and forced them to examine boundaries yet again. Scholars like Moustafa Bayoumi, Sunaina Maira, and Magid Shihade have challenged the field of Asian American studies to consider its links with Arab America. Their provocative assertions remind us that Arab Americans and South Asian Americans are easy targets of the “global war on terror.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to their exhortations, Japanese Americans, with memories of the internment, are also charging Asian Americans to consider their responsibility to Arab America and Muslim Americans. Asian American studies has been self-interrogative – understanding its potential and limitations, seeing the value of its initial boundaries and expanding and disrupting these to account for ever-changing realities. It is a space that both coheres and threatens to fragment – an uneasy but sometimes profoundly powerful aggregation of multiple subethnicities and groups. It teaches us a great deal about strategic politicization at the same time that it reassesses the coalescing of its fragments.

The chapters in Section 6 disclose the conversations of activists, artists, and writers about this current historical moment of the twenty-first century and what it augurs for the future of Asian American literature. What do the literary productions after 9/11 say about the possibilities of Asian American “inclusion” of Arab Americans? Several texts – novels and plays – by Muslim Asian Americans have emerged to engage the relationship of the state to Muslim Americans. Can Asian America engage Islam in its national and

global contexts? Will Asian American literature return to its original political thrust and abandon explorations of identity? Will it once again proclaim solidarity with struggles for independence and liberation beyond the borders of the United States? Scholars like Richard Gray, Elizabeth Anker, and Rachel Greenwald Smith express their disappointment that mainstream writers such as John Updike, Don DeLillo, Lorrie Moore, Colum McCann, and Amy Waldman do not sufficiently use the traumatic moment to reimagine the United States' relationship with the rest of the world or even with its own diverse populations. By contrast, many Asian American writers have plunged into the rupture of that moment to fashion powerful alternative expressions of pain, hope, commonality, optimism, pessimism, and possible rebirth.

In Chapter 29, Junaid Rana considers the ways in which racism and religion are "intertwined," particularly with respect to the figure of the Muslim in the United States, and how the narrative of the Arab and Muslim who can be identified "phenotypically" and is also a member of a culture perceived to be problematic is overturned by writers like Mohja Kahf and Bushra Rehman, who provide "complex portrayals of Islam and Muslims." Rana also discusses Pakistani writer Mohsin Hamid and Pakistani American H. M. Naqvi. In Chapter 30, Samina Najmi provides a reading of the aesthetics of war as found in the literary strategies employed by Arab American poet Naomi Shihab Nye and poet and performer Suheir Hammad. In addition, she examines the challenge posed by artist Wafaa Bilal's memoir *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life, and Resistance under the Gun* and the electronic artistic installation that it draws on in which Bilal "confines himself within a gallery space the size of a prison cell trying to escape the paintball shots fired at him remotely by Internet users." Najmi is interested in how Arab American writers depict the aggressions Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims experience in a United States after September 11, 2001.

The boundaries of Asian America that a consideration of Arab American writings necessitates are expanded southward in Chapter 31, in which Kandice Chuh engages the writings of Karen Tei Yamashita. Through an aesthetics of "thick time and space," Chuh shows how Yamashita's vision encompasses Central and Latin America and demands readers to engage "the relationships between natural and human-made worlds, the distribution of resources and channeling of raw materials by both state and commercial forces." Yamashita forces us to see the interconnections within the wider global ecosystem and to appreciate the beauty in the "quotidian." In Chapter 32, Konrad Ng takes up Asian American creative expression on new online formats – Twitter, blogs, and curated wikispaces. He shows how Asian Americans who use these



formats refuse to accept mainstream representations of their experiences. In this defiant imperative, the newest Asian American online creative voices resurrect the bold assertions of the writers who emerged from the 1968 movement. They articulate with confidence and skill, insisting on the complexity of their humanity. These writers offer an alternative and expansive rethinking of the United States' connections to other nations and other peoples and look outward and forward for the generations to come. Ruth Maxey's chapter deepens the complications attending what is Asian American literature by taking up in the final chapter of the volume, Chapter 33, a writer like Amitav Ghosh, who refuses categorization along U.S. ethnic lines and identifies more readily with his Indian Bengali heritage, even as his work is global in scope and ambitious in its historical trajectory.

### Closing Considerations

What are the future trajectories of Asian American literary productions likely to be? Significant moments of trauma stand as landmarks of the Asian American experience: these include the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Asiatic Barred Zone laws of the early twentieth century, the denial of citizenship in 1922 and 1923 to Takeo Ozawa and Bhagat Singh Thind, respectively, the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the Vincent Chin death by beating of 1982 and the travesty of justice that followed, the 1992 Los Angeles uprising following the first verdict of "not guilty" in the trial of the police officers who beat Rodney King, and the detentions and deportations of South Asian, Muslim, and Arab Americans following 9/11. Wars and imperial ventures of conquest beyond the borders of the United States demarcate other sites of traumatic memories for Asian Americans: the colonization of the Philippines and Hawai'i; the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the Korean War; the American War in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; the first Gulf War of 1991; and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Any prognosis of the future directions of Asian American literature will have to consider the degree to which these traumas both inform and are absent from creative output.

The current generation of writers and those that come in future years will likely experience less of the existential tension of what it means to be Asian American than did their predecessors; these writers are comfortably bicultural and/or binational, and they have come of age at a time when the United States can no longer see itself as separate from the global community. Their creative efforts draw on Western and non-Western traditions, and they demand to be received as serious artists, not as informants of unfamiliar

social communities. They see themselves as more or less tied to their ancestral heritage, but they also see themselves as autonomous writers, beholden to no coercions – neither those of the mainstream audience and publishing industry nor of the Asian American political or ethnic communities. The deep and textured landscape of Asian American literature that the last one-hundred-plus years has established provides them the rich tradition to draw on, play with, and expand upon.

### Contributors

In selecting the contributors to this volume we have been mindful of the heterogeneity of the field. The contributors span different ethnicities within Asian American studies; they are recognized and senior scholars, for the most part, with some rising voices who are fast becoming noted figures in the field. Almost all of our contributors are literary scholars, with one or two exceptions whom we approached for the significant impact of their work on the field of Asian American studies. Among the chapters' authors are those who embrace with fervor the category "Asian American" as politically and culturally valid, as well as those who question its value and challenge its boundaries. In making our choices, we were driven by the overriding objective of providing a comprehensive and complex history of Asian American literature. We approach writers whom we consider to be in conversation with one another, to show how the internal debates and contradictions within Asian American literary studies animate and profoundly enrich our understanding of American literature and of the United States as a geographical entity crisscrossed by the world of which it is an inextricable part. We wish to close this introduction by acknowledging the pioneering work of two university presses – the University of Washington Press and Temple University Press – for their early, and continued, recognition of the value of Asians within the United States and the necessity for studying their contributions to the nation.

Rajini Srikanth

*University of Massachusetts Boston*

Min Hyoung Song

*Boston College*

### Notes

- 1 See Karen Cardoza and Banu Subramaniam, "Assembling Asian/American Naturecultures: Orientalism and Invited Invasions," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 16. 1 (February 2013): 1–23.

## Introduction

- 2 Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, Rajini Srikanth, and Leny Mendoza Strobel, eds., *Encounters: People of Asian Descent in the Americas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) features the experiences of Asians in all of the Americas.
- 3 Chris Iijima, "Pontifications on the Distinctions between Grains of Sand and Yellow Pearls," in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, ed. Steve Louie and Glenn Omatsu (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2006), 6.
- 4 Eileen Tabios, "Absorbing and Being Absorbed by Poetry," in *Bold Words: A Century of Asian American Writing*, ed. Rajini Srikanth and Esther Yae Iwanaga (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 73.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Tina Chen, "Towards an Ethic of Knowledge," *MELUS* 30.2 (Summer 2005): 168–9.
- 7 See Michael Omi, "Out of the Melting Pot and into the Fire," in *The State of Asian Pacific America: A Public Policy Report. Policy Issues to the Year 2020*, ed. Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1993), 205.
- 8 Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 31.
- 9 Maxine Hong Kingston, quoted in Helena Grice, *Maxine Hong Kingston* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), 44.
- 10 Ibid., 43.
- 11 See the film by Loni Ding, *Ancestors in the Americas* (1997–8).
- 12 S. Chandrasekhar, ed., *From India to America: A Brief History of Immigration; Problems of Discrimination; Admission and Assimilation* (La Jolla, CA: A Population Review Book, 1982), 12.
- 13 See the 1973 preface of Jeffrey Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, eds., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writing* (New York: Meridan, 1997), xii.
- 14 Frank Chin, *Chickencoop Chinaman and The Year of the Dragon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 6.
- 15 Frank Chin, *Donald Duk* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 1991), 123.
- 16 Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 96.
- 17 Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 247.
- 18 John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 104.
- 19 See esp. ch. 2 in Daryl Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 40–73. See also Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- 20 Sau-ling Wong is scathing in her critique of Tan in her essay "Sugar Sisterhood: Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," which appears in David Palumbo-Liu, ed., *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 174–210.
- 21 Criticisms of Mukherjee abound, even as she is also recognized for the boldness with which she conceives her characters. See especially the early collection by Emmanuel S. Nelson, *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Garland, 1993). See also Guiyou Huang, *Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature since 1945* (New York:

- Columbia University Press, 2006), 146–7, for an extensive listing of essays that treat Bharati Mukherjee’s writings.
- 22 Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
  - 23 Jhumpa Lahiri, “The Third and Final Continent,” *Interpreter of Maladies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 198.
  - 24 See esp. the challenge posed to Asian American studies by Moustafa Bayoumi, “Our Work Is of This World,” *Amerasia* 33.1 (Spring 2005): 6–9 and “Staying Put: Aboriginal Rights, the Question of Palestine, and Asian American Studies,” *Amerasia* 29.2 (2003): 221–8.
  - 25 See Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the US,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9.2 (2006): 117–40.