

Asian Australia and Asian America: Making Transnational Connections

Jacqueline Lo, Dean Chan, and Tseen Khoo

As this special issue of *Amerasia Journal* is being finalized, President Obama's office is still planning his first official visit to Australia and Indonesia, after two previously postponed trips. The planned visit to Jakarta has been portrayed as a homecoming of sorts for the President, who spent four years in the world's largest Muslim country as a boy when his mother married an Indonesian man, Lolo Soetoro. The young Barry Soetoro, as he was then called, did not have the typical expatriate experience, but rather lived among local children and attended a state-funded primary school. This perception of his cultural affiliation with Indonesia/ns and his openness to cross-cultural dialogue as the result of his multiracial and multicultural heritage contributed to Obama's transnational appeal, as indicated by his popularity in the Asian media in the lead up to his historic election. According to his former primary school classmate and now Indonesian Member of Parliament, Dewi Asmara Oetoyo, Obama "can be a bridge for the West to understand people in the East. I think that it will make him different from other American presidents."¹

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in the U.S. context with a view to how these tensions are manifest in similar as well as different ways to our situation. By bringing Asian America and Asian Australia together in conversation in this volume, we hope to produce new insights into the study of Asian diasporas in western developed societies that go beyond the dominant perspective of Asian diasporas as domestic(ized) racialized minority subjects within the nation-state. This is not to say, however, that we are denying the *realpolitik* of institutionalized racism experienced by many Asians in the U.S. and Australia. As the discussion below elucidates, engagement with race and racism remains foundational to Asian Australian and Asian American Studies. However, by shifting the focus from the national to the transnational, and specifically, by bringing the different histories of settlement, race relations, immigration, and community politics in the U.S. and Australia into dialogue with each other, we hope this special issue will offer new comparative and contextual knowledge about diasporic Asian cultures.

Locating Asian Australian Studies

Race plays a crucial role in the construction of Asian Australian identity, but as we stressed in *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia*, the concept of race is not deployed as biological "fact," rather, it is used strategically to unite people of various Asian ethnicities in Australia thereby enabling a degree of political solidarity and critical purchase.² In order to fully grasp the deployment of race in Asian Australian cultural politics, it is necessary to take a historical view of the management of cultural and racial difference in Australia. It is widely acknowledged that race has played a foundational role in the establishment of Australia as a (post)colonial nation. The influx of European migrants from places like Greece and Italy after World War II necessitated a redefinition of the white nation, famously imagined as united by "the crimson thread of kinship" to Britain. With the introduction of official multiculturalism in the 1970s, there was a shift to a new emphasis on the productivity of cultural difference located at the level of ethnicity. As we have argued elsewhere, hegemonic multiculturalism is essentially a culturalist response to dealing with the threat of political instability in the face of changing demographics (first the Europeans—still technically considered white—but later Asians and, more recently, people from the Middle East).³ "Culture" is located at the site of ethnic communities that are always imagined as self-contained monocultures. State multiculturalism is the management of cul-

Asian Americans and Asian Australians are, of course, familiar with the metaphor of the bridge: we have long been identified, for better or worse, as bridge-builders between so-called "host" countries and Asian homelands. What is interesting in the Obama case is that his transnationalism has arguably served to enhance, rather than diminish, his iconic national status both within and beyond the United States.

This vignette suggests that we have come some way from the debates around the "transnational turn" in Asian American Studies in the 1990s. Sau-ling Wong's important 1995 essay in this journal, "Denationalization Reconsidered," played a central role in clarifying the conceptual and political stakes. Wong sets up a tension between a diasporic/transnational approach that "emphasizes Asian Americans as one element in the global scattering of peoples of Asian origin" and a domestic approach that "stresses the status of Asian Americans as an ethnic/racial minority within the national boundaries of the United States."⁴ While not presenting the two approaches as antithetical, she warns against an uncritical participation in the push to globalize Asian American Studies, asserting that "if claiming America becomes a minor task for Asian American cultural criticism and espousal of denationalization becomes wholesale, certain segments of the Asian American population may be left without a viable discursive space."⁵ Wong describes the difference between nationalization and transnationalism in terms of modes rather than phases. Hence "an indigenizing mode can coexist and alternate with a diasporic or a transnational mode, but the latter is not to be lauded as a culmination of the former."⁶

Jonathan Okamura in his 2003 assessment of the debate observes that a problem with the differentiation between domestic and transnational perspectives is that "they are often presented as though they are the only two approaches possible as the dominant theoretical paradigm, which is hardly the case."⁷ He usefully reminds us that a diasporic perspective is necessarily transnational, but a transnational approach is not necessarily diasporic. He observes that while there has been a transnational theoretical shift in the field of Asian American Studies, "it has been based on the more general concept and processes of transnationalism rather than diaspora, although the latter term continues to be invoked often indiscriminately."⁸

As scholars of Asian Australian Studies with an interest in diaspora and transnationalism, we have been following the debates

Australians. On the contrary, these groups were collectively racialized by Hanson in order to single them out and amass them as the Other that threatened the national Self.¹⁴ Arguing that Asian culture was culturally un-absorbable into the national culture—that Asianness was incommensurate with Australianness—Hanson invoked traditional binaries of Self/Other, Australian/Asiatic, but presented these binaries in philosophical and cultural terms rather than resorting to racial biology.

This newly racialized environment in the mid- to late-1990s politicized and radicalized many scholars working on ethnic and cultural politics. The inception of Asian Australian Studies in 1999 as a field of cultural analysis is located within such a moment of heightened racism and politicization. This is why we maintain that the critique of race and racism is fundamental to "doing" Asian Australian Studies, and that the category of Asian Australianness is an identity category that enables political solidarity rather than an essentialist mode of identification. The Asian-Australian Identities conference in Canberra in 1999, and the Alter/Asians conference in Sydney that preceded it that same year, brought together researchers working from a range of disciplines with a common interest in critiquing the relations between Asian racialization and cultural production in ways that transcended nation-based methodologies afforded by Australian multicultural studies. Whereas multicultural studies focused on ethnicity, biculturalism, migrancy, and modes of arriving into Australian-ness, Asian Australian Studies focuses on tropes of diaspora, hybridity, heterogeneity, and transnationalism. Rather than Australianness as a single and final destination (however contested), Asian Australian Studies emphasizes mobility and travelling as major tropes for unpacking the identity formations and knowledge productions of diasporic communities with cultural allegiances and political connections across a number of sites within and beyond the nation.

Asian Australian Studies remains an emerging field in the wider landscape of Australian academia, and will continue to be so for years to come. Donald Coellnicht discusses Asian Canadian literature and the way in which "the academy seem[s] to operate in an almost perpetual state of *announcing* its arrival" and, for Asian Australian Studies in the past decade or so, this has also been the case. As Lo noted in 2006, the field is largely propelled by the energies of a growing community of early career researchers and a few senior scholars.¹⁵ That said, local and international interest in the field is highly significant, with ris-

tural difference based on the premise of unity in diversity; difference is represented as the supplement that enriches the national (white) culture. State multiculturalism is therefore inherently conservative and ethnic differences are used to redefine the center, but there is little attention given to the promotion of intercommunal dialogue (between various Asian communities, for example) and the formation of minority coalitions (such as Aboriginal-Asian alliances). As Ien Ang and Jon Stratton point out, multiculturalism is a policy that recognizes and confirms cultural diversity; it is not specifically designed to combat racialism.¹⁶ Chassan Hage goes even further to argue that state, or "white multiculturalism" as he calls it, perpetuates racist structures of power by continuing to position the ethnic Other as national objects to be moved or removed according to a white national will.¹⁷

The sublimation of race in multicultural discourse hindered the potential for Australians to critically engage with our colonial past and the continuing presence of racism in society. As Andrew Jakubowicz argues, multiculturalism functions as an ideology by appearing to act on behalf of the disadvantaged migrants, though in reality it leaves essential social relations and an unequal distribution of power in Australia unaltered.¹⁸ Despite the repression of race in official multicultural rhetoric, it continued to surface intermittently in the public domain, particularly in relation to indigenous rights and Asian immigration. The two most notable instances of the latter are the immigration controversy in the mid-1980s that was fueled by historian Geoffrey Blainey's comments that "too many Asians" would endanger the social, cultural, and political structures of Australian society, and the emergence of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation political party in the mid-1990s. What is important to note in both these cases that led to periods of heightened and sustained racial tensions is the refiguring of racism in culturalist terms. According to Stephen Castles, "Fixation on older definitions of racism as notions of biologically based hierarchies allows more subtle racisms based on cultural markers to claim to be benign and progressive."¹⁹ Following Etienne Balibar, he describes this "new racism" as "racism without race," one that no longer speaks of superiority, but rather of immutable differences that make coexistence between varying cultural groups in one society impossible.²⁰ When Hanson referred to Asians and Asian culture, she was not invoking multiculturalism's ethnic diversity, a diversity that, at least on the surface, appeared to distinguish between Vietnamese Australians, Thai Australians, and Bangladeshi

politically relevant to the Australian context, while simultaneously maintaining transnational links and global perspectives.

While Asian American Studies has been an important referent for Asian Australian Studies, we would caution against seeing the latter merely as a less advanced or more "junior" version of the former. Although Asian Australian Studies shares many similar theoretical and political concerns with its American counterpart, there are also significant differences and objectives based on different histories of (post)colonial settlement, race relations, and immigration. Rather than assuming a shared teleology, it might be more productive to imagine Asian Australian Studies as sharing modes (following Wong), rather than phases of Asian diasporic subjectivity with Asian American Studies. Such a framework contests the dominance of the American model as the master-narrative of Asian diasporic studies and recognizes the possibility of coexisting modes of academic engagement as well as lines of discontinuities and rupture. More importantly, such a relational approach would open up spaces for a specifically Australian inflection to, and extension of, current theorizations of transnationalism and diasporic subject formations.

Making Transnational Connections

The different way in which an Asian Australian political consciousness has developed means that research on community groups, locality, and the politics of place is a relatively recent field within Asian Australian Studies. While analytical work dating from the late 1960s existed, it was most often about Asian communities rather than by or with them. For the most part, this work looked at the sociological aspects of Asian groups in Australia, focusing on migration and settlement experiences, or engagement with community services.¹⁷ They were discipline-focused and often positioned minority groups as positive but supplementary parts of Australian society. Recent work complements earlier quantitative and demographic research with more nuanced, qualitative, community-level studies.¹⁸ That said, studies focused on Asian Australian communities not well-represented in research literature thus far continue to develop.¹⁹

Similarly, earlier studies in Asian Australian history mostly presented linear narratives in which accepted understandings of Australian history were enriched, but rarely challenged, by Asian Australian additions. Contemporary Asian Australian history, particularly that of Chinese Australians, is now a burgeoning area

ing rates of academic publication, strong audience attendance at Asian Australian Studies events and conferences, collaborative activities with national academic associations, as well as keynotes and invited presentations at prime international conferences (including the Association for Asian American Studies). The main body for the promotion and development of Asian Australian Studies is the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN), founded in 2006. Again, as with the foundational threads of Asian Australian Studies, there were well-established informal networks, resources, and groups that were already in operation. These came together in a formal way to develop the AASRN. An organization that aims to build research capacity and sustain momentum in Asian Australian Studies, with a clear agenda to encourage connections and discussions among those from academia, various community groups, and arts/creative cultures networks. The research network is an umbrella under which a broad range of activities takes place. Its membership, currently running at about 157, is truly national and international (with about 20 percent of AASRN members based overseas) and also increasingly multidisciplinary. The opportunities afforded by a peak representational body, which AASRN aimed to become, cannot be overstated. Politically and institutionally, it has given Asian Australian Studies a voice, and affirms the field's valency in contemporary Australian scholarship. That said, at only four years old, the AASRN is still very much in a consolidation phase and continues to build its profile and membership.

The lines of kinship between Asian Australian Studies and Asian and Australian Studies also extend towards other Asian diasporic studies communities in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Asian Australian Studies has benefited greatly from critical engagement with the theoretical as well as political developments of its international counterparts. One of the ways in which Asian Australian Studies might receive institutional approval as a legitimate area for undergraduate teaching is to associate the field with better-established Asian diasporic fields, most notably Asian American and Asian Canadian Studies. Although a comparative methodology drawing on theories of diaspora, globalization, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism would be highly productive, it is important not to be dominated by theories that are abstracted from history and local politics. Asian Australian Studies must continue to develop locally specific approaches that are grounded in Australian histories and spaces in order to remain

wider attention. With several major national research projects and a rich range of postgraduate theses underway,²² the immediate future for the area of community cultural research in Asian Australian Studies appears promising.

That said, significant silences remain, and we have written previously of the importance of working to fill these gaps, and to continue developing research into the complexities of Asian Australian identities and cultures.²³ Jacqueline Lo has underscored the need to be "more vigilant about the politics of exclusion that come with defining the parameters of Asian Australian identity and culture,"²⁴ and this persists as an open challenge for all scholars who engage with Asian Australian Studies.

One important topic that deserves further research is the social and cultural history—as well as the contemporary dimensions—of interactions between Indigenous and diasporic Asian communities. Preliminary research, especially in the fields of history and cultural studies, has laid some vitally important foundations, but there is a lot more work to be done.²⁵ Unlike the situation in the U.S., there have been two distinct but related public and intellectual debates connecting the significance of descent, belonging, and culture in Australia. As Ann Curthoys points out: "One revolves around the cleavage between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and especially the status of indigenous claims deriving from a history of colonization.... The other debate... is about cultural diversity, ethnic politics, and immigration policy."²⁶ The debates are rooted in our history of colonial race and space management and most clearly articulated in terms of what Annette Hamilton calls the "empty heart and fragile boundaries" of (white) Australian consciousness, whereby Aboriginal Australians were to be controlled and subjugated within the national borders and Asians were to be kept outside.²⁷ There remains an unequal tripartite system of racial categorization operating today, with whiteness located at the centre of the national imaginary and mediating Aboriginal and Asian Australia separately. Thus, debates around the national Reconciliation and Native Title continue to be described in terms of rapprochement between Aboriginal and White Australia, while discussions around immigration and multiculturalism tend to be dominated by purported differences between whites and "ethnics," with the latter category excluding Aboriginals.

There are, however, new scripts and dialogues emerging that challenge these dominant racial calibrations. In this volume, Lo's discussion of the recent theatre production of *Burning Daylight*

that has expanded significantly since the 1990s. This field of research has often concentrated on the important task of reclaiming or preserving primary sources and documenting community regional histories; more recent scholarship provides tandem momentum for archival and primary source work as well as that which provides a broader theoretical scope for the positioning of Asian Australian histories as integral parts of extant national and transnational narratives. Published in 2007, John Fitzgerald's *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* stands as a key example of reconfiguring Australian historical lives and connections. His Chinese Australians' intercontinental lives and connections, pioneering use of Chinese language sources and insightful overview of racial minority positioning in Australia (historically and today) makes the book "a truly transnational history."²⁸

For the fields of Asian Australian community studies and history, the momentum in scholarship that addresses transnational and circulatory migration dynamics has increased appreciably since the mid-1990s. Characterized by the established work of social scientists (such as David Ip) and historians (including Fitzgerald, and, more recently, Keir Reeves), this research finds itself aligned increasingly with comparative studies of diasporic Asian communities in the region (particularly New Zealand, Taiwan, and Hong Kong/China). Ashley Carruthers's essay in this volume reflects this enmeshment of local/global networks and the flexibility of everyday Laotian diasporic identifications. Such anthropological work is important to the process of writing newer groups into the Australian social context, and emphasizing the simultaneous and (dis)connected nature of diasporic living. Engagement with emerging communities is very much a facet of contemporary Asian Australian Studies, with scholars—many of them early in their careers—expanding the coverage of "Asian Australian" to include less well-represented groups.²⁹ Research concerned with various Asian Australian communities' cultural lives and political engagements remains at an early, albeit active, stage. Focusing on the community/creative interface, the included essays by Audrey Yue, and Scott Brook and Caitlin Nunn consider diasporic identifications and connections, cultural activism and localized community dynamics. These works adeptly connect their theoretical framing to global scholarly and industry developments, often looking to the U.S. and/or Hong Kong and Vietnam for points of contrast and comparison, while examining artists and their texts in Australia which are only now attracting

At any rate, the seemingly anomalous position of Australia—geographically “South” in latitude but “North” in terms of national wealth and development—can become a reflexive point of difference, particularly for Asian Australianists such as Audrey Yue and Francis Maravillas. In their widely-cited essay entitled “Going South,” Yue and Gay Hawkins argue that this cartographic trope broadly infers the “southern” trajectory of Asian migration to Australia and functions as “a critical trajectory as well as a geographical distinction.”²⁰ Unlike the counter-hegemonic project of the “Global South” incisively discussed by U.S. scholar Arif Dirlik,²¹ “going South” is valued more so as a critical process from an Asian Australian standpoint. Maravillas deploys this theoretical precept in his examination of the role of regionalism in the practice and presentation of Asian Australian visual art.²² Accordingly, as Yue posits, “going South” not only serves as a symptom of Australia’s complex geographical and geopolitical regionalism, but as a critical marker that fundamentally “differentiates the Asian diaspora in Australia from Asian diasporas elsewhere.”²³

Although southern theory and intra-southern dialogues generally strive to fulfill multipronged ideological, interrogative, and coalition-building roles, they nonetheless ultimately risk reiterating North/South binarism. They also run the risk of privileging certain axes of dialogic engagement over others—and potentially excluding other conversations, pedagogies, and coalitions. The work of Yue and Jolly nonetheless alludes to the possibility for simultaneously making connections and conducting broader dialogues beyond prescribed cartographic imaginaries and geopolitical referents. The inter-diasporic dialogues initiated by Olivia Khoo, Kim Cheng Booy, and Iyko Day in this volume proffer additional possibilities—and three distinctly different analytical models—for comparative research.

Khoo’s essay in this issue examines how the sense of regionalism—specifically, Australia’s symbolic position “South of the West”—is central to the formulation of what she terms the Asian Australian “Shrimp Western,” a form of transnational diasporic cinema that draws together the multiple influences of Australia, Asia, and America. The interwoven discussions of salient similarities and differences between Asian Australian and Asian American cinematic paradigms are constitutive of a comparative approach that is attentive to contextual knowledge, differing historical regimes of meaning making, and the cultural politics of locality. Booy, likewise, focuses on the importance of locality in

points to the recuperation and celebration of intimate relationships between Aboriginals and Asians in the far north coast of the continent, while Mayu Kanamori’s poignant photo-essay exemplifies the kind of careful place-making that Asian immigrants enact in relation to Aboriginal Australia’s history of dispossession. We are also privileged to feature the art works of Jason Wing and Vernon Ah Kee on the cover of this volume. Wing and Ah Kee examine issues associated with their mixed Aboriginal and Chinese descent in some of their recent art, and their works reference, in very different ways, the complexities of contemporary Aboriginal identity and life in an increasingly multicultural Australia. These visual arts, photography, and performance projects collectively highlight the multifaceted dimensions and ongoing negotiations of Indigenous-Asian relations that have arisen at a particular locale and from a specific history. In *ABC (Aboriginal Born Chinese)*, reproduced on the front cover, Wing plays with the term “ABC” (which, depending on one’s frame of reference, can stand for either American or Australian Born Chinese) and proffers a mixed-race perspective using the backdrop and colors of the Australian Aboriginal flag. Specifically, it would seem, is not necessarily static or a given, rather it is an ongoing process of negotiation.

What, then, are the possibilities for developing a comparative study of Asian diaspora cultures? Any such transnational project invariably runs the risk of reproducing asymmetric power relations and cultural perspectives. Yan Haiping cautions that, without due critical vigilance, “studies of global diasporas . . . could be turned into another chapter of north-privileged studies of marginalized others . . . whereby the geopolitical centrality of America and Europe . . . and their identificatory systems of intelligibility are maintained as the defining reference.”²⁴ The prominence of “north-privileged studies” across many academic disciplines has been an ongoing concern for many eminent Australian scholars such as Raewyn Connell (in sociology), Margaret Jolly (in anthropology and gender studies), Ross Gibson (in contemporary arts), and others who are currently affiliated with the Southern Perspectives research network and online project aimed at promoting “a south-south dialogue of ideas.”²⁵ At the same time, however, as Jolly acknowledges, “notions like ‘North’ and ‘South’ like ‘West’ and ‘East’ uneasily connect geographical cardinal points with geopolitical potencies,” thereby prompting further questions about the usefulness of continuing to deploy “cartographic referents which themselves betray a deep imperial history.”²⁶

Notes

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1. Aubrey Helford, "Ex-classmates in Indonesia Applaud Obama," *The Age* (November 5, 2008): <http://news.breitbart.com.au/world/exclassmates-in-indonesia-applaud-obama-20081105-51b6.html>
2. Sau-Ling C. Wong, "Deterritorialization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," *Amerasia Journal* 21.1&2 (1995): 1-2.
3. *Ibid.*, 16.
4. *Ibid.*, 17.
5. Jonathan Y. Okamura, "Asian American Studies in the Age of Transnationalism: Diaspora, Race, Community," *Amerasia Journal* 29.2 (2003): 176.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Jacqueline Lo, Tseen Khoo, and Helen Gilbert, "New Formations in Asian Australian Cultural Politics," Helen Gilbert, Tseen Khoo, and Jacqueline Lo, eds., *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000): 2.
8. Jacqueline Lo, "Beyond Happy Hybridity: Performing Asian-Australian Identities," Ten Ang et al., eds., *Alter/Asians: Asian Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2000): 159.
9. Ten Ang and Jon Stratton, "Multiculturalism in Crisis: The New Politics of Race and National Identity in Australia," Ten Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007): 104.
10. Ghasan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998): 117-118.
11. Andrew Jakubowicz, qtd. in Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994): 4.
12. Stephen Castles, "The Racisms of Globalization," Ellis Vasta and Stephen Castles, eds., *The Limits are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia* (St. Leonards Allen and Unwin, 1996): 29.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ang and Stratton, 107.
15. Donald Goellnicht, "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 2.

all its differing registers (real, remembered, and imagined) via his direct comparative study of "the poetics of return" in the poetry of Ee Tang Hong and Shirley Lim Geok-lin. Day provides an expanded frame of reference for comparative analyses by bringing the Canadian context into discussion. By linking the experience of Japanese wartime internment in Australia, Canada, and the U.S. with (white) Pacific settler colonialism and indigenous dispossession, Day's essay is an indictment of the living legacies of transcolonialism, which Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih elsewhere characterize as "the shared, though differentiated, experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism (by the same colonizer or by different colonizers), a site of trauma, constituting the shadowy side of the transnational."³¹

By critically engaging with a range of types of transnationalism (for example, regional or southern transnationalism), we can advance new dialogues and offer a more finely grained analysis of transnationalism beyond narrowly prescribed comparative methodologies. The creation of inter-diasporic Asian dialogues is vital in this regard. The essays by Ten Ang and Henry Yu in the *Commentaries* argue for the myriad possibilities, and indeed necessity, of maintaining a transnational ethic. Ultimately, however, they caution against losing sight of the contextual politics of culture and history, and the unique confluences of the local. This intellectual position is echoed in the research canvassed elsewhere in this volume, including the creative writings of Simone Lazaroo and Merinda Bobis. Matt Huynh's illustrations that preface each section also vividly encapsulate and dialogue with the inherent tensions of global influence and local enmeshment. Drawing on the work of Yuko Shimizu and Paul Pope, Huynh's focus remains staunchly on "personal / community / cultural identity" and "suburbia."³²

This volume is but a starting point for further work in this field. To this end, initiatives are underway to expand and cultivate inter-diasporic networks of intellectual and creative exchange. These include the editorship of the "Diasporic Asia" section in *Asian Studies Review* (by Lo and T. Khoo), the 2009 launch of the International Network for Diasporic Asian Art Research (INDAAR, convened by Chan), and a special issue of *Australian Historical Studies* that focuses on re-interpreting diasporic Chinese histories (edited by T. Khoo and Keir Reeves). These multiple interventions should result in increased scholarly connections and additional infrastructural possibilities for creating and retaining transnational conversations across a range of areas.

16. Jacqueline Lo, "Disciplining Asian Australian Studies: Projections and Injections," *Journal of Interpersonal Studies* 27:1-2 (2006): 19.
17. Earlier examples of this work include the pioneering research of C. F. Yong, *The New Gold Mountain: The Chinese in Australia 1901-1921* (Richmond: Rael Arts, 1977) and C.Y. Chou, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975), and more recently James Coughlan and Deborah McNamara, eds., *Asians in Australia: Patterns of Migration and Settlement* (South Melbourne: Macmillan Education, 1997); Nancy Viviani, *The Indochinese in Australia, 1975-1995* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996); Christine Inglis, ed., *Asians in Australia: The Dynamics of Migration and Settlement* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992); and Lakshmi Jayasuriya and Kee Pooking, *The Assimilation of Australia?: Some facts about the Myth* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1999).
18. See Gay Ramsay's work on Asian/Indigenous intersections (e.g., "Cherbourg's Chinatown: Creating an Identity of Place on an Australian Aboriginal Settlement," *Journal of Historical Geography* 29:1 [2003]: 109-122); Christina Ho on Muslim women and Australian Islamophobia (e.g., "Muslim Women's New Defenders: Women's Rights, Nationalism and Islamophobia in Contemporary Australia," *Women's Studies International Forum* 30:4 [2007]: 280-298), and Jon Kwok on Asian Australians and politics (e.g., "Clientelism in the Ethnopolis: Ethnic Contribution Networks and Political Fundraising under Late Multiculturalism," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32:4 [2008]: 467-479).
19. For example, demographers at Monash University, Dharma Arinachalam and Ernest Healy, are developing a definitive, quantitative project about contemporary Tamil communities in Australia.
20. Klaus Neumann, "Review of Big White Lie," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 44:4 (2009): 744. Fitzgerald's work is not without its controversies. Critics have challenged his underscoring of immigrant Chinese values as comparable with those of "real Australians" (and Western notions of modernity).
21. More specifically, see the work of Zakir Hossain (research on the media consumption of Bangladeshi-Australians, currently unpublished), Rose-Anne Misajon and Teon Khoo on Filipino Australian identities ("Pony TV: Imagining the Filipino-Australian Community," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32:4 [2008]: 455-466), and Takeshi Hamano on contemporary Japanese Australians ("Authorising Nikkei [Overseas Japanese] identity," *Online Proceedings of 'Sustaining Culture' (2008) Annual Conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia (CSAA) UniSA, Adelaide, Dec. 6-8, 2007*, available online at unisa.edu.au/csaa/onlineproceedings.htm).
22. Current large Australian Research Council Discovery grants have been awarded to Lo, T. Khoo, and Chan for "Being Asian in Australia and the United States" (2008-2010); Audrey Yue, Olivia Khoo, and Belinda Sewall for "The History of Asian Australian Cinema" (2009-2011); and Wenche Chunmansen, Paul Sharad, and Alison Bromowski for "Globalising Australian Literature: Asian-Australian Writing/Australian Writing in Asia" (2008-2010).
23. See Dean Chan, "The Poetics of Cultural Theory: On Hybridity and the New Heterarchies," in *Diapores*, 52-57; Lo, T. Khoo, and Gilbert, 2009; Lo, Jacqueline Lo, and Jacqueline Lo, "AsianHome: New Directions in Asian Studies," *Journal of Australian Studies* 32:4 (2008): 425-432.
24. Jacqueline Lo, 2006, 14.
25. For example, Regina Carter, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2006); Pam Oliver, *Empty North: The Japanese Presence and Australian Reactions 1608 to 1942* (Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2006); and Peter Stephens, *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007).
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Asian Australia and Asian America: Making Transnational Connections

GUEST EDITORS: Jacqueline Lo, Dean Chan, and Tseen Khoo

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Cover Art—Eisenstein: *AME (Aboriginal Men of America)* by Sam Wong, 2007. Back cover: *The Green Tree* by Jason Wong in collaboration with Vietnam Ab Kim, 2009. (Please see page 166)

Lessons From Asian Australia

Don T. Nakanishi

I really did not know much about Australia when I made my first trip there in 1993 to speak at a historic "Asia-Pacific Migration Affecting Australia" conference in Darwin, the small capital port city for the Northern Territory, located in the north central part of the country closest to East Timor, Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Of course, my mind was filled with iconic images of kangaroos, koala bears, the Sydney Opera House, shrimp on the barbie, the Great Barrier Reef, and Crocodile Dundee. I had read about Aborigines, as well as the infamous White Australia Policy, but knew very little else.

My experience at Darwin, as well as a short stopover in Sydney afterwards, served as my introduction to the beautiful and complex country-continent of Australia, and its rapidly growing, highly visible, and increasingly participatory population of Asian immigrants and their descendants. The conference itself provided me with a glimpse of a highly contentious national political controversy that would erupt in 1996 in the aftermath of a traditional "first speech" delivered by a newly elected member of the federal Parliament, Pauline Hanson, and later with her One Nation Party, focusing on curtailing Asian immigration, abolishing special programs for Aborigines, and challenging public policies promoting multiculturalism.

For over fifteen years during a remarkable period of change for Asian Australians, I have pursued a modest longitudinal research project on their political representation and participation in Australian politics. Although I have explored this topic over many years, I have done so with far less fieldwork and data collection than I would like because of my duties as Director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center during this same stretch

DON T. NAKANISHI was the director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center 1990-2010, and is professor emeritus in the UCLA Graduate School of Education.

Asian Australia and Asian America: Transnational Connections

Several historians, including Henry Yu in this special issue, have analyzed the nearly parallel and interrelated histories of migration, gold mining and laboring, and racist opposition to and exclusion of the Chinese, Japanese, and other Asians from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries in Australia, Canada, and the United States. Commentaries also have explored how these three countries lifted decades-old immigration restrictions towards Asians during a relatively short period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and subsequently experienced a dramatic growth and diversification of their Asian populations. In all three countries, the majority of Asians are now foreign-born.

Numbering over 1.6 million, Asian Australians are about eight percent of Australia's total population of 22 million. Their percentages are higher in the major cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, and Adelaide, which are located along Australia's coastline. Each city has a downtown Chinatown with restaurants, shops, group headquarters, cultural sites, offices, and apartments, as well as ethnic enclaves in the outlying areas like Sydney's Cabramatta and Melbourne's Box Hill, which have large communities of diverse Asian ethnicities and social classes. The Chinese, with a population of 670,000 in 2006, have been since the nineteenth century and continue to this day to be the largest group, and are now followed by Indians (239,000), Vietnamese (175,000), and Filipinos (160,000). There are also substantial numbers of Malaysians, Indonesians, Koreans, Cambodians, and Japanese, along with communities from all of the Pacific Islands. Tourists and foreign students from Asia are heavily recruited and quite numerous. Geographically, Australia is "closer" to Asia than is the United States, with Sydney being 4,586 miles from Hong Kong, whereas New York is over twice as far (10,279 miles). Its land mass is equivalent to the United States, minus Alaska.

The Asian American population, in contrast, is much larger at 16 million, although it represents a smaller percentage (five percent) of the total U.S. populace of 308 million. This population is also concentrated in major cities, and yet also dispersed throughout all 50 states. The three urban regions of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York each has over a million Asian Americans, and the three states of California, New York, and Texas account for nearly half of the total group population. There

of time. At most, I have spent about ten days annually in Australia interviewing elected officials, community leaders, journalists, political party officials, and scholars, observing political events, and doing library, document, and archival research. I still do not consider myself an expert in the Asian Australian experience or in Australian politics at a level comparable to my four decades-long attention to Asian Americans, especially in the context of American domestic and international politics and race and ethnic relations. And yet, in an unexpected and deeply rewarding way, I have synchronized my empirical and theoretical inquiries in terms of both Australia and the United States, and find myself constantly entertaining new questions, sharpening my analytical insights, and challenging seemingly settled empirical findings and normative assumptions by applying the knowledge to the one country to the other, as well as one Asian population to the other. My scholarship and activism, which remain predominantly focused on the American situation, have benefited enormously from this comparative international project. Below, I will share one meaningful example of what I have learned from stepping in and stepping out of these different sites.

I am very pleased and honored that three stellar pioneering scholars of the field of Asian Australian Studies—Jacqueline Lo of Australian National University in Canberra, Dean Chan of Edith Cowan University in Perth, and Tseen Khoo of Monash University in Melbourne—serve as guest editors of this special issue of *Amerasia Journal*. They, together with *Amerasia* editor Russell Leong, have reviewed and selected through a peer-review process an amazing collection of articles that illustrates the important and exciting scholarship and creative works that are being produced on Asian Australians. Their introductory essay provides an engaging overview of the birth and rapid development of the relatively new field of Asian Australian Studies, and raises profound questions about the paradigmatic linkages and boundaries, as well as the levels of similarity and difference, between Asian Australian Studies and other related fields of inquiry, including Asian American Studies. I hope this special issue will encourage Asian Americanists and others to read and learn from the works of our colleagues in Australia, and spur mutually beneficial collaborative activities in the future. Please explore the field of Asian Australian Studies by visiting the web site for the Asian Australian Research Network at: <http://asianaustralianstudies.org>.

the highly popular Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Australia's second largest city. And finally, in both cases, it appeared that international and transnational political issues and events in Asia, especially those involving homelands and countries of origins, continued to have an impact on their internal community politics and on their external relations within their respective societies and globally.

Although there are many levels of commonality, it became clear to me on my second and subsequent visits to Australia that I could not or should not naively, or perhaps arrogantly, assume that Asian Australia was just like Asian America, or nearly so, and that I could simply apply my theoretical, empirical, and normative insights and findings from the Asian American experience to understanding Asian Australians. Lo, Chan, and Khoo caution against doing so in their introductory essay because of, among other things, "different histories of (post)colonial settlement, race relations, and immigration." Indeed, I eventually came to realize that uncovering what made the Asian Australian experience different from the Asian American experience—and then empirically probing deeper into understanding those differences—often times led to a number of fresh and provocative ways of looking at both groups.

One of those differences involved voting, one of the most contentious and long fought civil rights issues in American community life and history, and a major concern of Asian American community leaders and organizations. Over the years, I have written and spoken extensively about the challenges that Asian Americans have had in transforming their extraordinary recent population growth, fueled by unprecedented immigration, to increased voting power. In California, Asian Americans are 12 percent of all adults who reside in the state, and yet account for about 7 percent of those who typically turn out to vote during an election. This declining representation is usually attributed to three interrelated challenges: (1) Many immigrants have still not become naturalized citizens (and may be waiting for many years to meet minimum residency and other requirements); (2) many of those who are citizens have not registered to vote; and finally, (3) many who are registered voters do not necessarily vote. Asian Americans can groups have launched nationwide campaigns for many years, especially during presidential elections, to encourage and assist with naturalization, to register voters, and to get out the vote during elections. For decades, they also have joined with civil rights

are Asian American residential, cultural, and business districts "downtown," "uptown," in the ethnoburbs, as well as in rural areas. The Chinese, with 3.6 million in 2008, are now the largest group, followed by Filipinos (3.09 million), Asian Indians (2.73 million), Vietnamese (1.73 million), Koreans (1.61 million), and Japanese (1.30 million). There are also 1.1 million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. In 1960, before immigration laws were revamped, Japanese Americans were the largest group and accounted for nearly half of all Asian Americans.

Scholarly habit and personal curiosity led me in 1993 to take my initial look at the political status of Asian Australians, an extension of my long attention to the political experiences of Asian Americans and other American racial and ethnic groups. My first intellectual and policy guide and teacher of Australian politics was Dr. Pookong Kee, who had invited me to speak at the Darwin conference that he had helped to organize as the Assistant Director of Australia's federal Bureau of Immigration and Population Research. A psychologist by training, Kee shared his keen analytical and community-based knowledge and insights about the *realpolitik* of contemporary Asian Australia and arranged some of my first interviews with Asian Australian politicians. He is now a Professor at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Japan.

On the surface, the political conditions, trends, and challenges facing Asian Australians seemed to be comparable to those of Asian Americans. In both cases, the Asian populations had increased enormously in recent decades because of changes in immigration laws, and they appeared to have elevated themselves from being small, nearly inconsequential political actors to potentially large, influential blocs of new voters and campaign donors. Concentrated in politically important big cities—and even more importantly, living in large numbers within certain neighborhoods and areas of those cities—Asian Australians and Asian Americans appeared to have additional strategic advantages and resources to attract the attention of the major competing political parties, as well as to elect their own to public offices. Indeed, in both cases, there appeared to be a continuous increase in the number of elected officials. Many were touted as being political "firsts": the first Vietnamese Mayor, the first Asian woman elected to state office, etc. The historic election and re-election of Gary Locke as the Governor of the state of Washington dovetailed with the pioneering election and re-election of John So as

officials are immigrants versus the vast majority of high-ranking Asian American politicians who are second and third generation, and that they have been elected to federal and state parliaments as well as to Lord Mayoral positions for two of the country's largest cities (Melbourne and Adelaide); and the appointment in 2007 of the extraordinarily talented Senator Penny Wong, the first Asian and first openly gay federal cabinet minister.

With the recent change in government from Australia's first Mandarin-speaking prime minister, Kevin Rudd, to its first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, Australia is moving forward in charting its future directions under challenging global and economic conditions. Asian Australians will surely seek to participate and to provide leadership for domestic and international issues and relationships. Pookong Kee and Jen Isen Kwok have written outstanding pioneering works on Asian Australian politics, and hopefully more multidisciplinary and community-based research will be undertaken to document, analyze, and provide vision and guidance for this important dimension of the Asian Australian experience. I believe these political studies could be highly beneficial for scholars, students, community leaders, and the public in Australia and elsewhere, especially in revealing and learning from the largely unwritten and little known activities and achievements of what Asian Australians have done collectively and purposefully in the past and present to advance their concerns and to confront societal and global issues that are damaging to their interests. The past two decades have provided a storehouse of extraordinary examples of mobilization and leadership.

I encourage you to take a closer look at the Asian Australian experience, and to explore the highly relevant and stellar scholarly and creative work that is being done in the field of Asian Australian Studies. I think you will benefit greatly from taking this important transnational journey.

organizations and leaders from other ethnic and racial groups to seek legislation, to file countless law suits, to engage in mass mobilization efforts to secure voting rights, and to guard against illegal and discriminatory tactics that prevent or make it unreasonably difficult for registered voters to vote during elections.

In Australia, in contrast, voting rights are not debated or contested. Voting is a right that every citizen is required to exercise. This means that every citizen, native-born or naturalized, is required by law to register to vote and is required by law—and with the threat of a fine or even jail time—to vote during elections. Compulsory voting leads to turnout rates over 95 percent, which are unheard of in the United States. In the last presidential election, less than 60 percent of adult Americans voted. Naturalization in Australia also usually takes less time. Until 2007, the residency requirement was only two years. It has since been increased to four years, which is still less than the five or more years that is required in the United States. As a result, voting is not a particularly compelling concern for the Asian Australian community and elected officials like it is for their Asian American counterparts. They assume that the percentage of Asians voting during elections is similar to their proportion of the population, and does not decrease like it does for Asian Americans. Indeed, it has been extremely eye opening and a bit sobering to learn about voting rights and procedures in Australia in contrast to the United States. I frequently have asked myself how different America's long history of civil rights litigation, advocacy, and organizing would have been if voting rights were not so vigorously contested and denied? How different would American politics and race relations have been?

Asian Australians, despite what may seem to be more favorable conditions, have yet to develop a reputation as a formidable new force in Australian electoral politics. However, they have had some notable achievements, which would impress many Asian American leaders and observers. These include the role that Asian voters played in defeating John Howard, the former Prime Minister of Australia, in his 2007 bid for re-election; the multi-pronged manner in which the Asian Australian community responded to Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party, which demonized Asian immigrants; the establishment of a minor political party, the Unity Party, which encouraged hundreds of individuals to seek local offices, and elected its leader to a state parliament; the fact that nearly all of the Asian Australian elected