

Guest Editors' Introduction

In putting together this issue on Asian transnationalities, we began with the premise that transnationalism could not be charted in a unitary and definitive fashion. The terms *transnationalism*, *transnational practices*, and *transnationalities* also suggest the heterogeneous nature of this concept.¹ Whereas *transnationalism* turns the phenomena into a set of practices that signify a movement,² *transnational practices* suggests heterogeneity and difference,³ and *transnationalities* can be understood as those meanings and practices that produce linked and specific cultural formations in late capitalism.⁴ The meaning of the term *transnational* diverges according to the phenomenon being analyzed. Thus an understanding of the term derived from an analysis of global finance differs substantially from another interpretation based on the examination of the exchange of biogenetic materials. In addition, what counts as transnational appears very different in distinct geographical and spatial settings. Finally, it holds various meanings for diversely situated

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groups of people. In this issue we investigate the situated character of Asian transnationalities by focusing on the circulation of people, goods, and images to and from East and South Asia. Through topics as diverse as Korean immigration from Latin America to the United States, the links between Hmong immigrant communities in the United States and the Miao minority in China, the circulation and reception of a documentary about Tiananmen Square, the marketing of Barbie dolls in India, and the changing representations of diasporic Indians in Hindi films, we examine how material that connects Asian and Asian American migration, media, and markets helps us understand Asian transnationalities. Our contributors are concerned not only with immigration, but with gendered representations of immigration; not only with goods, but with what goods signify; and not only with transnational formations and practices, but with their imbrication in, and impact on, nationalism. In other words, we seek to move beyond the sweeping character of some of the pronouncements about the transnational in the contemporary world by attending to its situated and conjunctural nature.

We begin with a quick overview of the chief questions and problems regarding the transnational that are of particular concern to us in this volume. We then consider three major themes that the articles in this volume explore in their theorization of this concept. The first theme has to do with operations of media in representing migration; the second deals with the circulation of "America" as signifier in contemporary transnational movements; and the last topic concerns the implications of transnationalism for nationalist affect. Employing the contributions in this volume as a point of departure, at the end of this introduction we offer some brief reflections about the impact of transnational scholarship on disciplinary boundaries within the U.S. academy.

Theorizing Transnationalism

In identifying the transnational as a distinctive marker of the last quarter of the twentieth century, theorists have paid much attention to the accelerating speed and volume of global transactions in finance, capital, and images. At the same time, some scholars have raised doubts about the new-

ness of these processes, pointing out that current levels of world trade and finance as a proportion of total economic output are hardly unprecedented as a global phenomenon. However, even if the volume of these transactions has historical parallels, their speed does represent a qualitative shift. When one looks at the ubiquitous presence of mass media, both the saturation that it has achieved and the speed with which news and entertainment images travel the globe is historically unprecedented. Rather than presenting a balance sheet that might definitively help decide whether transnational phenomena are indeed new or not, we think it is more productive to focus on something rather obvious that is sometimes lost in the debate.

If we compare, for example, the speed at which global flows of finance, images, goods, capital, technologies, ideas, biogenetic resources, and people circulate, what is termed transnational indexes some very uneven processes. Movements of finance capital across borders are remarkably fast compared with movements of people as labor migrants or immigrants. The differential rate of such flows, combined with spatial unevenness and differentiation, and further complicated by divergent positionings of groups of people in gender, class, race, and sexual hierarchies, demand a more intricate matrix for our analysis. The essays in this collection attempt to come to grips with precisely this more complicated picture of the transnational, one that pays close attention to the degree and kind of shifts taking place because of global transactions among migrants, media, and markets in and from East and South Asia.

Although transnational flows exhibit what Arjun Appadurai has termed “disjunctures” in the global political economy, it is the effects of media, markets, and migration on one another that are of interest to us.⁵ For example, the relative ease with which images now crisscross the globe has significant implications for the experience of immigration, as well as for citizenship and belonging for those people who have not migrated. These uneven and unequal exchanges and effects generate new modes of subjectivity and political activity in the contemporary world. As the articles in this volume reveal, such asymmetrical exchanges are reconfiguring not only migrant subjectivities but also gendered national subjects, global and national consumers, and interlinked material cultures.

Media and Migration

The essays on the experiences of South Asian and Chinese immigrants bring into focus new questions about the working of media in relation to the movement of labor and the mobility of capital.⁶ The important role played especially by film and television in creating closer links between diasporic communities and their homelands has often been noted; however, what has been less appreciated is the critical importance of these media in representing the relation between diaspora and homeland to people in both sites. Novels, magazines, music albums, televisual material, and films themselves become the sites for the renegotiations of the relation between, for instance, nationalism and immigration, or sovereignty and global capitalism. Purnima Mankekar's essay on the blockbuster Hindi film *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* [The lover wins the bride] demonstrates how representations of overseas Indians as bearers of foreign investment have altered the meaning of being Indian in the period since the "liberalization" of the nation's economy imposed by the International Monetary Fund. Whereas earlier films often represented the act of settling abroad in terms of the loss of one's cultural authenticity, this movie proposes a model of portable cultural nationalism that travels easily with the expatriate Indian bearers of a footloose global capital. Made with an eye toward diasporic markets, this film proved to be an enormous hit both domestically and in the diaspora. Similarly, Lydia Liu's analysis of the popular serialized novel *Beijing Sojourners*, which was turned into an enormously successful television serial, *Beijing Sojourners in New York*, watched avidly in China and in the Chinese diaspora all over the world, represents immigration in terms of the struggle between Chinese and U.S. national capitals in the global economy. A revisionist narrative about the immigrant dream in the United States is transposed in the television serial into a story of conflict between an entrepreneurial immigrant and a European American factory owner, a conflict doubly contentious because it is interwoven with rivalry about Chinese and white, U.S. women. Simultaneously a travelogue with glossy shots of New York City, a cautionary fable about America as mirage rather than haven for immigrants, an allegory about global economic rivalry between a powerful nation and its rising challenger, and a narrative

for the reclamation of (national) masculinity, *Beijing Sojourners in New York* represented the immigrant experience to people in China as well as in the Chinese diaspora.

Media representations of migration, themselves shaped by the need to address diasporic markets, then significantly influence the reimagining of the nation and its inhabitants. Diasporic populations, because of the growing importance of emerging markets and of remittances and investment to newly liberalized national economies, create new categories of belonging. Transnational media and capital reshape the nation while they are transforming the diasporic experience.⁷ Louisa Schein's article demonstrates how Hmong refugees in the United States are reimagining the homeland itself. Instead of longing for a return to the place of their origin, Hmong have developed intensive ties to the Miao minority in China, with whom they trace an ancestral connection. This relationship to their imagined homeland is enabled crucially by audiovisual media, which are used to circulate eroticized images of women and romantic depictions of the landscape. Videos of (unnamed) Miao women in traditional dress circulate amongst the refugee communities in the United States. Sometimes these videos become means to arrange marriages between Hmong men in the United States and Miao women in China. Thus, material practices of marriage, investment, tourism, and politics mediate the ethnic identity of the Miao as a minority in China and of the Hmong as a minority in the United States.

Looking for America

In these essays on Asian transnationalities, "America" appears as a recurring and sometimes phantasmal signifier: the assumed destination of migrants; the origin, but more often the destination, of consumer goods; a giant image factory; the last remaining superpower; a place of democratic politics and free markets; a culture that espouses multiculturalism and minority ethnic identities; the source of global speedup; and finally a nation where even immigrants can make and lose fortunes. Our contributors demonstrate the multiple ways that America enters an analysis of Asian transnationalities, attempting a retheorization of global economic, political, cultural, and sym-

bolic inequalities that moves considerably beyond a simple reiteration of the negative impact of U.S. imperialism.

Transnational movements of capital, labor, and media have changed the experience of cultural citizenship in a transnational world, altering notions of home and belonging critical to citizenship. America as a destination of migrants from many different parts of the world presents a particularly interesting example in that the American ideology of a nation of immigrants intersects with the changing geopolitics of race, class, gender, and older imperial ties. We cannot examine migration simply as a process in which people move from sending countries to receiving countries when immigrants travel to and fro; when their nationalism and political efforts are directed also to the home country, whose day-to-day affairs they monitor through television, newspapers, and the Internet; and when they are explicitly treated as dual citizens with economic and political privileges in their home nation-states. While it has probably never been true that immigrants who came to the United States stayed put or cut off significant relations with their homelands, as John Bodnar's work on immigrants from Europe reveals,⁸ the image of losing the old culture and becoming American continues to dominate the ideology of immigration in the United States today.⁹ America as the terminus of immigrant narratives continues to structure the ideology of citizenship whereas the reality of an increasing number of migrant lives is that the United States functions as one transit station among many through which an ever-increasing number of people shuttle. Although it is commonly assumed that such travel is restricted to a privileged elite involved in finance, corporations, or knowledge industries (such as the Hong Kong "astronauts" studied by Aihwa Ong),¹⁰ transnational shuttling is common among unskilled and skilled workers of various classes. In fact, such circuits of migration often accompany the movement of finance and capital; as the latter become more mobile, the demand for labor changes rapidly and increasingly is met by contract work often done at the highest and lowest ends of the labor spectrum. However, these labor contracts, which may require extended or periodic residence in a country, are often separated from legal and cultural citizenship. We thus have the phenomenon of guest workers or contract workers, one of the fastest-growing visa categories in many First World nation-states, who are increas-

ingly denied the legal protections and rights enjoyed by citizens. In this situation, positing the United States as the host country of transnational migration rather than as one site among many in a wider circuit of transnational mobility is a mistake.¹¹

Many of the essays suggest that we need an understanding of migration to the United States that can explain flexible and partial belonging to the nation-state. For Latin Koreans described in Kyeyoung Park's analysis, as well as for Central American and Mexican migrant laborers, migration and national identity need to be conceptualized in new ways. Park's fascinating piece on Koreans from Latin America who migrate to the United States poses some difficult questions for the American model of migration, because it so clearly illustrates the separation of ascribed identities from the specific history of Latin Korean migration. This floating population of immigrants, as Park terms it, problematizes many of the assumptions of American immigration. The lives of multiple migrants cannot be accommodated by the language and politics of citizenship and multiculturalism within a single nation.

Multiple migrants also pose acute analytical problems for the conceptualization of migration in terms of diasporas. To think of a diaspora is to inevitably refer back to a homeland from which migrants are dispersed. However, it is clear that most Latin Koreans in the United States see various Latin American nation-states, rather than Korea, as their homeland. Similarly, Schein's analysis indicates that many Hmong Americans see the Miao region of China, rather than Laos, as their homeland. Precisely this intense longing for return, transposed into sexual and romantic registers, to a land that was not their place of birth or migration leads to the "unfixity" of the homeland. Schein proposes the term *disjunctive diaspora* to conceptualize situations where there is no single nation-state that can be conceptualized as home. Put differently, disjunctive diaspora may be a useful way of thinking of the gap that sometimes separates a people's place of belonging from their homeland.¹²

Schein's article suggests the ways in which U.S. multiculturalism is both employed and reconceptualized by the Hmong. Hmong men and women appropriate and reconfigure multiculturalism to carve a vision of a Laotian state in which they would play the role of partners and coalition-builders at

its highest levels, rather than be considered simply minority clients of the state, as they are in the United States. Similarly, Inderpal Grewal's article suggests that North American-style multiculturalism becomes a useful way to market Barbie in Asia, as Barbie acquires an Indian dress, a "classic sari with exotic borders," so as to be "totally at home in India." Here we find that Barbie is repackaged for global markets by a uniquely American formula of multiculturalism, within which local differences can be acknowledged and represented; indeed, Grewal's work shows that the globalization strategies of multinational corporations also employ diversity in terms of producing gendered, classed, and age-differentiated markets. The Miss Hmong pageant and Barbie in a sari are two ways in which Americanness moves in transnationality as multiculturalism. Thus America is not only the site where racialized Others experience the anxiety of belonging as citizens; it is also, and very importantly so, a transnational fantasy of belonging that can cross the boundaries of a nation-state.

Grewal's piece reveals that becoming and being American is an imaginary that emerges from U.S. nationalist formations that are transnationalized particularly through consumer goods. Subjects in India or China, for example, are constituted through new forms of consumption and the lure of lifestyles that are seen as American. Here the term *American* differs from what it may mean to individuals living in the United States (which is also heterogeneous), as it is transcoded and translocalized into other social and economic formations.

This function of America as transnational imaginary is not restricted to products and images associated chiefly with consumption and style; it becomes a means by which, for instance, notions of democracy propagated by the U.S. government achieve global hegemony.¹³ It is through the grid of American democracy as the goal of transnational desire in civil societies all over the world that the American media present events such as the 4 June 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising. As Ralph Litzinger suggests in "Screening the Political," politics must be reconfigured when media and the image become the major site of political culture. The documentary *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* is overdetermined both by this notion of democracy and political action (in which state socialism is viewed negatively) and by a conceptual framework that casts viewers (and Internet users) as judges of his-

torical process. The site of pedagogy in a U.S. university forms the arena for the author's examination of this film. Litzinger's article reveals the constraints of teaching about China in a cultural milieu where students have so thoroughly imbibed images of American democracy as the natural goal of all nation-states.

Modernity and Nationalism

Transnational media, markets, and migration are altering the constitution of subjects by changing how nations are imagined, citizenship is experienced, and identities are formed. Much of the literature on the transnational is actually about the movements of finance, commodities, images, ideas, and people across *state* borders, and not so much about the *nation* as an imagined community or as one of the prime loci of identity in the modern world.¹⁴ The implications of transnational movements and practices for the territorial state are profoundly consequential for subject formation, because so much of the constitution of the subject and the regulatory practices of states in the modern world is tied to the idea of territoriality.

Since transnational flows are creating a fresh set of problems for the territorial sovereignty of states, some observers have declared the demise, or at least the decline, of nationalism.¹⁵ Nationalism has not, and is not likely to, wane or disappear. But it is very likely to undergo change as it is imbricated in the transnational flow of images, ideas, commodities, and people in a different manner. As Roger Rouse has observed, "The transnational has not so much displaced the national as resituated it and thus reworked its meanings."¹⁶

There are several ways in which nationalism is invoked, reiterated, and recuperated as affect in transnational media, markets, and migrations. First, as a critical site of existing subject formation, nationalism is often utilized for the marketing of commodities by transnational corporations. As Grewal's article on the marketing of Barbie makes evident, nationalism is seen not as an obstacle but as an opportunity in the global struggle for the control of markets. Segmenting this market by addressing subjects who see themselves as unique by virtue of their nationalisms and nationality is an effective strategy in capitalist competition. Second, as noted in the preced-

ing section, America as an example of a transnational idea creates subjects through national difference. Liu's examination of *Beijing Sojourners in New York*, Litzinger's analysis of the idea of democracy in *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, Park's discussion of ascribed Korean or Korean American identity for migrants from Latin America, and Schein's examination of the Miss Hmong competition in Fresno all reveal how national subjects are formed in transnationality. Third, the nation itself is being reimagined in light of transnational flows of capital and people. Mankekar's article shows how a new official category of Indianness has been constructed expressly to mobilize the flow of hard currency and investment in the nation through the term NRI (Non-Resident Indian). Fourth, as Schein reveals, diasporic populations have become important consumers of commodities, images, and ideas produced in the homeland, generating what she calls an "erotics" of home within a gendered hierarchy. This has important implications for the production of nationalist affect, as the meaning of nationalism itself is rewritten to appeal to this large market abroad. The homeland is thus reinterpreted at the very moment that its appeal *as* a homeland is reinscribed.

Territorially mobile populations, footloose capital, and rapidly circulating images are all making the well-realized fiction of the citizen-subject of the nation-state a less plausible form of identity.¹⁷ What are the implications of this insight for the disciplinary boundaries that now exist in the academic arena in the United States? In particular, we wish to ask how the work collected here enables us to rethink the nationalist foundations of both Asian studies and Asian American studies.

Rethinking Area Studies

The essays in this issue indicate that the conjunctural character of the transnational can be understood outside the familiar and deeply troubling model of comparative studies, which depends on the ever-present, pregiven distinctiveness of different areas or peoples.¹⁸ Although an analytical position of the comparative studies mold has given us useful insights into certain phenomenon, it has also proved limiting by depending on, naturalizing, and reproducing the nationalist basis of modernist scholarship.¹⁹ We would like to ask how a more interconnected, transnational mode of analy-

sis focusing on media, markets, and migration might question the distinctness of areas presupposed by the comparative framework but respect the specificities of historical and cultural conjunctures.

Beyond simply reasserting the primacy, analytical or political, of the local or the global, in which nation-states and distinct areas function as local sites, the essays here examine the circulation of discourses of nationalism, consumption, migration, and immigration across national boundaries. While the globalization of media has become the most obvious example of the need for research that goes beyond one particular area, quite often the global framework has overlooked articulations that are specific to particular sites yet are linked to others through globalizing connections. For instance, Schein's essay examines Hmong cultural nationalism in Fresno, making sense of its gendering practices through its links to homelands in Laos and China. Park's analysis of floating populations in Los Angeles who are identified quite often as Korean but have moved from Latin America requires a framing that connects Asian American identities to Latin American politics and to Korean nationalisms. Once again, the analysis of a particular site, Los Angeles or Fresno, properly the object of American or Asian American studies, only makes sense through connections to multiple other areas.

An interconnected, transnational mode of analysis consequently has important implications for the configuration of area studies, on which the comparative model of scholarship is built. All of the phenomena examined in these essays exceed the nationalist origins of area studies by problematizing the compartmentalized, national frameworks in which citizenship is still studied and imagined.²⁰ For instance, how does Grewal's analysis of the circulation of America as transnational imaginary change our analysis of Asian markets, citizens, and media? What is the proper realm of study of the essays by Liu, Schein, Litzinger, Park, and Mankekar? Are these properly American studies or Asian studies or Asian American studies?

While important claims about the nation can and should continue to be made by individuals studying phenomena within the borders of particular nation-states, yet as the essays in this volume reveal, many factors disseminate, sustain, and recast nationalisms. Diasporas, traveling academic experts, Internet discussion groups, tourists, marriage seekers, and filmmakers—

those whose audiences, interests, and markets exceed the boundaries of nation-states—have much to say about nations and nationalisms. Moreover, diasporas and migrants display multiple and partial belongings to nation-states that cannot be completely understood through comparison of distinct sites but must address how these sites are multiply connected through movements of media, markets, and labor. A transnational approach, as exemplified by the interdisciplinary methodologies of the essays collected here, provides a means to study these postsocialist and late capitalist phenomena.

Finally, we cannot place our knowledge production outside the context of hierarchical transnational formations that are discussed in this volume. Power relations in transnationality are both produced by and reflected in the methodologies and disciplines within and against which research and teaching is carried out. Conjunctural and situated, linked and distinct, the Asian transnationalities described in these essays delineate not only new forms of expertise and knowledges but also the difficulties of academic identifications, given that nationalisms and nation-states continue to provide a sense of belonging and of home within disciplines, diasporas, and nations.

Inderpal Grewal, Akhil Gupta and Aihwa Ong, Guest Editors

Notes

- 1 We chose the term *transnationalities* to suggest that as with *modernities*, the rearticulation of this cultural formation is historically specific to particular locations and thus quite various.
- 2 See Akhil Gupta's discussion of such movements in "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism," in *Culture Power Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 197–199.
- 3 Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, introduction to *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1–33.
- 4 For another definition of the terms *transnationality* and *transnationalism* see Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

- 5 Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47; see also Aihwa Ong, "'A Better Tomorrow'? The Struggle for Global Visibility," *Sojourn* 12, no. 2 (Oct. 1997): 192–225.
- 6 For clarifications regarding the difference between the terms *exile*, *diaspora*, and *nomadism* see Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996). Also see John Durham Peters, "Exile, Diaspora, and Nomadism: Mobility in the Western Canon," in *House, Exile, Homeland: A Media Studies Reader*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).
- 7 Nina Glick Schiller, "Transnational Lives and National Identities: The Identity Politics of Haitian Immigrants," in *Transnationalism from Below*, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 130–161.
- 8 John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
- 9 Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo, "The Locations of Transnationalism," in Smith and Guarnizo, *Transnationalism from Below*, 16.
- 10 Aihwa Ong, "Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 134–162.
- 11 See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- 12 In nationalist narratives the two are identical; in fact, part of the difficulty of even conceptualizing this gap is our own imbrication in an age of nationalism.
- 13 See Mary Layoun, "A Capital Idea: Producers, Consumers, and Re-producers in the Merchandising of Our Type of Democracy," in *Streams of Cultural Capital*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 97–110.
- 14 Some notable exceptions include Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, and Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).
- 15 In our judgment this conclusion rushes too soon from a statement about *states* to one about *nations*; the interchangeability of these terms in popular and academic discourse betrays the hegemony of the nation-state form as a modern order of rule.
- 16 Roger Rouse, "Thinking through Transnationalism: Notes on the Cultural Politics of Class Relations in the Contemporary United States," *Public Culture* 7 (winter 1995): 353–402.
- 17 We are aware that this has never been a well-realized fiction for some nation-states; however, for nation-states in the capitalist core of the world economy, this fiction has had considerable plausibility, at least in the last fifty years.

- 18 For more on this topic see Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and Cultures of Travel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 17–19.
- 19 For more discussion on the comparative in literary studies see the essays in Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
- 20 Tani Barlow, “Colonialism’s Career in Postwar China Studies,” in *positions* 1 (spring 1993): 224–267.