

Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha Oren (Eds.), **Global Asian American Popular Cultures**, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016, 400 pp., \$30.00 (paperback.)

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There is a long history of Asian Americans either being nonexistent from or problematically portrayed within mainstream popular culture. While there has been substantial research on media representation of Asians and Asian Americans within the Hollywood machine and within the U.S., ***Global Asian American Popular Cultures***, an edited volume by Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha Oren, contains 22 essays by scholars who interrogate the presence of Asian American creative works and the position of Asian Americans in both the U.S. and global contexts. The various essays, for the most part, take a critical/cultural perspectival approach and bring a diasporic and transnational perspective to bear on the discussions of how individuals and communities of Asian descent negotiate their identities through art, music, and culture. Moreover, the authors consider the complex dynamics of power that are present in the act of Asian Americans making and being represented in various media and situations.



Given the relative dearth of literature that considers the Asian American identity on a global scale, these essays represent a valuable contribution to our understanding of the position of Asian American popular culture in a modern society that increasingly functions in a context of constant transnational flows of people, media, and culture (Appadurai, 1996). The book brings together different scholars with different perspectives that cover a wide diversity of what *Asian American* means. The collection starts with examinations of the role of Asian/Asian American stars and celebrities in popular culture, with pieces on Bruce Lee (Daryl Joji Maeda), Manny Pacquiao (Constancio Arnaldo), James Shigeta (Celine Parreñas Shimizu), Amy Chua (Julia H. Lee), KevJumba (Vincent Pham and Kent A. Ono), and David Choe (Wendy Sung). It then moves to the other end of the spectrum into consideration of the role that communities play in the creation and consumption of media from the ground up, from media content like Pakistani radio programming (Ahmed Afzal) and recipe food blogs (Lori Kido Lopez) to creative works like Cambodian rap (Cathy J. Schlund-Vials), the graphic narrative *Vietamerica* by G Tran (Timothy K. August), and the Smithsonian initiative for online exhibitions of Asian American life (Konrad Ng). The pendulum swings back the other way to projects that explore the role of Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream, traditionally produced media, such as Hawaiian tourist films (Camilla Fojas), *Battlestar Galactica* (LeiLani Nishime), indie rock (Douglas Ishii), the National Spelling Bee (Shilpa Davé), and competitive cooking shows (Tasha Oren). Finally, the last section tackles migration and transnational popular culture, containing complex pieces that address intersectionality and globalization through the racialized code of curry (Madhavi Mallapragada), Bollywood's Muslim masculinities within terrorism

narratives (Deepti Misri), the prevalence of black musical styles in popular Korean music (Crystal S. Anderson), the popularity of circle contact lenses in Asia (Linda Trinh Võ), gendered and racialized dynamics of virtual fashion (Christopher B. Patterson), and queer Filipino diaspora (Robert Diaz).

The delightfully diverse depictions of Asians, with pieces that covered East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian experiences, contain rich research that elegantly weaves descriptive narratives of subjects' lived experiences. What comes with this diversity is the ability to think about global Asian Americans as existing in nuanced and complex spaces that deal with identity, migration, space and place, history, representation, personal experience, and trauma. The research here nicely delves into conversations around Asian diasporic communities and Aihwa Ong's (1999) ideas around "flexible citizenship" and migration, along with the important work done on Asian American presence and representation in the media and arts such as Kent Ono and Vincent Pham's (2009) comprehensive textbook *Asian Americans and the Media*; Deborah Wong's (2004) and Grace Wang's (2015) independent explorations of Asian American music and musicians; Darrell Hamamoto's (1994) examination of the politics of Asian Americans in television; Lisa Nakamura's (2002, 2008) considerations of racial dynamics on online digitized platforms; and David Eng and Alice Hom's (1998) intersectional work around being Asian American and queer, taking into consideration the global and international implications of such complex identities. In addition, the individual chapters can be read as separate works or be useful together for audiences within and outside of academia. While the experience of reading the book would be enhanced by a fundamental understanding of the conversations around Asian American popular culture, as provided by the aforementioned scholars, it is not necessary. The book maintains an accessible tone (granted, a rather erudite one) for the general public.

With the repeated erasure of Asian American experiences both domestically and globally, the essays in this collection do crucial work in teasing out the ways in which Asian Americans negotiate their position within racialized power structures through their own creative works, mainstream media representation, engagement with their communities, their own familial experiences, and the relatively new digital landscape. Moreover, given the importance of foregrounding intersectionality in today's political and social climate, it was heartening to see a number of the pieces address how the experience of being or portraying Asian American interrelates with other identifying factors, such as gender and sexuality, especially near the end of the collection. While a sustained conversation around intersectionality throughout the book would have been desirable, as well as addressing non-gender-conforming and trans individuals, artists, and communities, the relative dearth of both research on and representation of the globalized aspects of Asian American identity makes this edited volume an important entry point for future research that can potentially fill these gaps.

In a world of increased transnational flows of media, information, and bodies, *Global Asian American Popular Cultures* is a highly welcome addition to scholarship that is increasingly considering the ways in which Asian America participates in a globalized perspective of identity and culture. The distinction between Asian and Asian American as identities has been fairly rigid in its commitment to separation, and understandably so, given the tendency to relegate individuals with Asian faces to a perpetual foreign

position within American society, regardless of nation of birth or immigration status.<sup>1</sup> Even as recently as the 2016 Oscars, Chris Rock made a joke at the expense of three Asian American kids, giving them stereotypically foreign Asian names and playing into the *model minority myth* by mocking the children as accountants for the Academy Awards, emphasizing the adherence within the dominant American consciousness to relegate Asian into the category of Foreign. As such, conversations around the negotiation and construction of an Asian American identity and the assertion of belonging through rejecting the narrative of foreignness remains urgent work. However, such a move often does not tend to leave much wiggle room for negotiating identities and making space for the benefits of a flexible and transnational perspective that is equally grounded in the history of Asians in America. Hence, this volume opens up conversations about the ways in which Asian American identities cross national borders through transnational flows of culture, thereby infusing the field of Asian American studies with a breath of fresh air.

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<sup>1</sup> David Palumbo-Liu (1999) and Darrell Hamamoto (1994) address this in their respective discussions around the history of Asian Americans and the portrayal of Asian Americans in mainstream media.