

AfroAsian encounters: Culture, history, politics. Edited by Heike-Raphael Hernandez and Shannon Steen. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

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tion reform has been and can continue to be socially responsible when citizens, immigrants (regardless of legal status), and foreign governments dependent upon immigrants' financial remittances mobilize effectively to demand greater accountability and humanity from the U.S. federal government and its agencies. One must not lose hope.

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Note

1. Preston, Julia and Marjorie Connelly, "Immigration Bill Provisions Gain Wide Support in Poll." *New York Times* 25 May 2007.

AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics. Edited by Heike-Raphael Hernandez and Shannon Steen. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

In *AfroAsian Encounters*, Hernandez and Steen set out to "examine AfroAsian interconnections across a variety of cultural, political, and historical contexts in order to examine how the two groups have interacted, and have construed one another, as well as how they have been set in opposition to each other by white systems of racial domination" (1). Although this is a lot to tackle, the two editors generally pull it off. Joining Bill Mullen's *Afro-Orientalism* and Andrew F. Jones and Nikhil Pal Singh's special issue of *positions* entitled *The Afro Asian Century*, this wide-ranging, ambitious project spans both centuries and continents, covering everything from Indo Caribbean art to African Canadian identity, Asian American hip hop to the swing *Mikados* of the late 1930s.

This breadth is the volume's major strength and chief weakness. On the one hand, the essays engage with several disciplines: anthropology, ethnic studies, American studies, pop culture studies, sociology and history, and multiple mediums: literature, film, painting, music, martial arts. On the other hand, that eclecticism threatens the volume's coherence, giving it a somewhat amorphous feel. I suspect this is due in part to the fact that these essays broadly share a common topic, but they do not share a methodological, intellectual or ideological approach that helps frame them.

AfroAsian Encounters is divided into four sections: "Positioning AfroAsian Racial Identities"; "Confronting the Color Hierarchy"; "Performing AfroAsian Identities" and "Celebrating Unity." If each section's contents at times feel arbitrary—many essays could go in multiple sections—that is because these topics inevitably bleed into one another.

Since his *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting* is a clear influence, it is fitting that Vijay Prashad's Foreword opens the collection. "Bandung is Done" situates the essays in the context of the 1955 Asian-African Conference where 29 countries met to declare Third World independence and anticolonial solidarity. In the wake of deadly cultural nationalisms—including the U.S.' "War on Terror"—and structural adjustment, the Bandung dream might seem both naïve and hopelessly outdated. And yet, Prashad argues, if we wish to combat global inequality and "corporate multiculturalism," we need work like *AfroAsian Encounters* to unearth the "epistemological and historical archive of solidarity" (xxi) needed to forge new anti-imperial, anti-racist and anti-capitalist visions.

Though every essay does not live up to Prashad's ambitions, several begin to fill in that archive. In Part I, Sanda Mayzaw Lwin's essay on the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision explores how Justice Harlan's dissenting opinion appealed to nativist sentiment by decrying the fact that the "absolutely excluded" "Chinaman" (21) could legally cross the color line while black citizens could not. In "Crossings in Prose: Jade Snow Wong and the Demand for a New Kind of Expert," Cynthia Tolentino shows how early sociology, known for pathologizing its black objects of study, simultaneously defined a "process by which Asian Americans could become knowledge producers of exotic information" (39). Intervening in race(ist) discourse, Wong positioned Chinese Americans as "transnational subjects," moving them from object to subject status.

Central to *AfroAsian Encounter's* historical archive is the theme of racial passing and performance, with two essays handling the topic particularly well. Steen's "Racing American Modernity: Black Atlantic Negotiations of Asia and the 'Swing Mikados'" is a rich and fascinating look at how black performers impersonating feudal Japanese represented Asia as a "site through which the United States would create a modern status distinct from that of Europe" (169). Blackness then became "the vehicle through which Asia could be Americanized" (169). In the more contemporary example of the Jackie Chan–Chris Tucker *Rush Hour* films, Mita Banerjee argues that Chan's "straining of the confines of the minstrel form is enabled by [Tucker's] adhesion to and his entrapment in minstrelsy" (205). Their AfroAsian partnership functions to both flatten multicultural L.A. and expand the cultural space afforded to Asians and Asian Americans on screen. In each case, racial minstrelsy enables one side of the AfroAsian binary to slip the bonds of racial stereotype at the other's expense.

Of all the essays, however, it is David Stowe's " 'Jazz That Eats Rice': Toshiko Akiyoshi's Roots Music" that best encapsulates the kind of AfroAsian "kung fusion" celebrated by Prashad. For many, Stowe's essay will be an introduction to Japa-

nese big band leader and pianist Akiyoshi who combines Japanese instruments, Noh vocals and jazz inflected by Charles Mingus and Duke Ellington to produce musical suites that “mourn the impact of technology and war on the daily lives of ordinary people” (289). Stowe makes us see the cultural and political possibilities fusion enables without reducing it to only an instance of cross-racial borrowings. If Hampton Hawes once said of an Akiyoshi performance: “That little chick in a kimono sat right down at the piano and started to rip off things I didn’t believe, swinging like she’d grown up in Kansas City” (279), that is only part of the story and not even the most interesting part.

The strength of Stowe’s contribution highlights the fact that some of the essays complicate the black/white binary without sufficiently exploring why and how this changes the political and/or intellectual calculation. They still seem to center the dominant paradigms, the hegemonic centers of power, even as they show exceptions to or deviations from them. Gary Okihiro’s excellent Afterword “Black Pacific” highlights this failure as he pushes scholars to “widen the purview of our scholarship across racializations, nations, and fields,” to see how the U.S. is also a “periphery and a fluid space of movements and engagements that resist closure and inevitable or final outcomes” (315). In illustrating his point, Okihiro reconfigures the Pacific as Oceania, a “sea of islands” (316) unmoored from the imperial boundaries that were later established. Following his example, scholarship in AfroAsian Studies will need to dissect how complicated power interests and criss-crossing networks undo various ideological, political and geographic constructs even as they seem to set them. To say that this volume is provocative rather than definitive, however, is hardly an indictment; in fact, what critical anthologies do best is to present, rather than work through, a set of questions or problems. And *AfroAsian Encounters* does that, considering how, why and when various Asian and African identities in the Americas and the Caribbean—Europe is largely absent here—are or have been triangulated with whiteness in ways that pit them against one another but also provide opportunities for solidarity and coalition.

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***Filthy Fictions: Asian American Literature by Women.* By Monica Chiu. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004.**

Filthy Fictions is a nimbly-argued, interdisciplinary, and idiosyncratic study of Asian American literature by women. Monica Chiu combines literary criticism